

A Focal Point for Art: UT's Center for Latin American Visual Studies

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THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A CENTER FOR Latin American Visual Studies at the University of Texas at Austin is an initiative that is as natural as it is necessary, for many reasons.

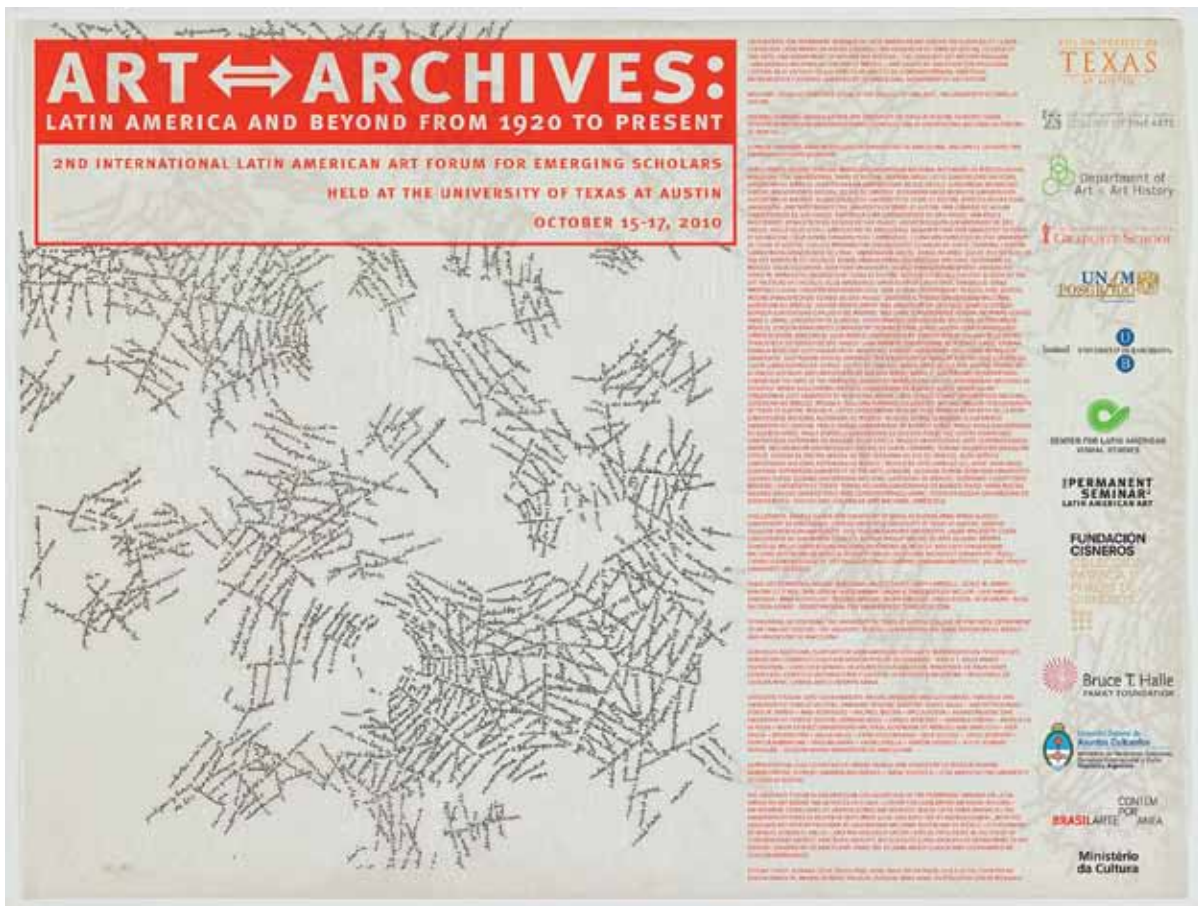
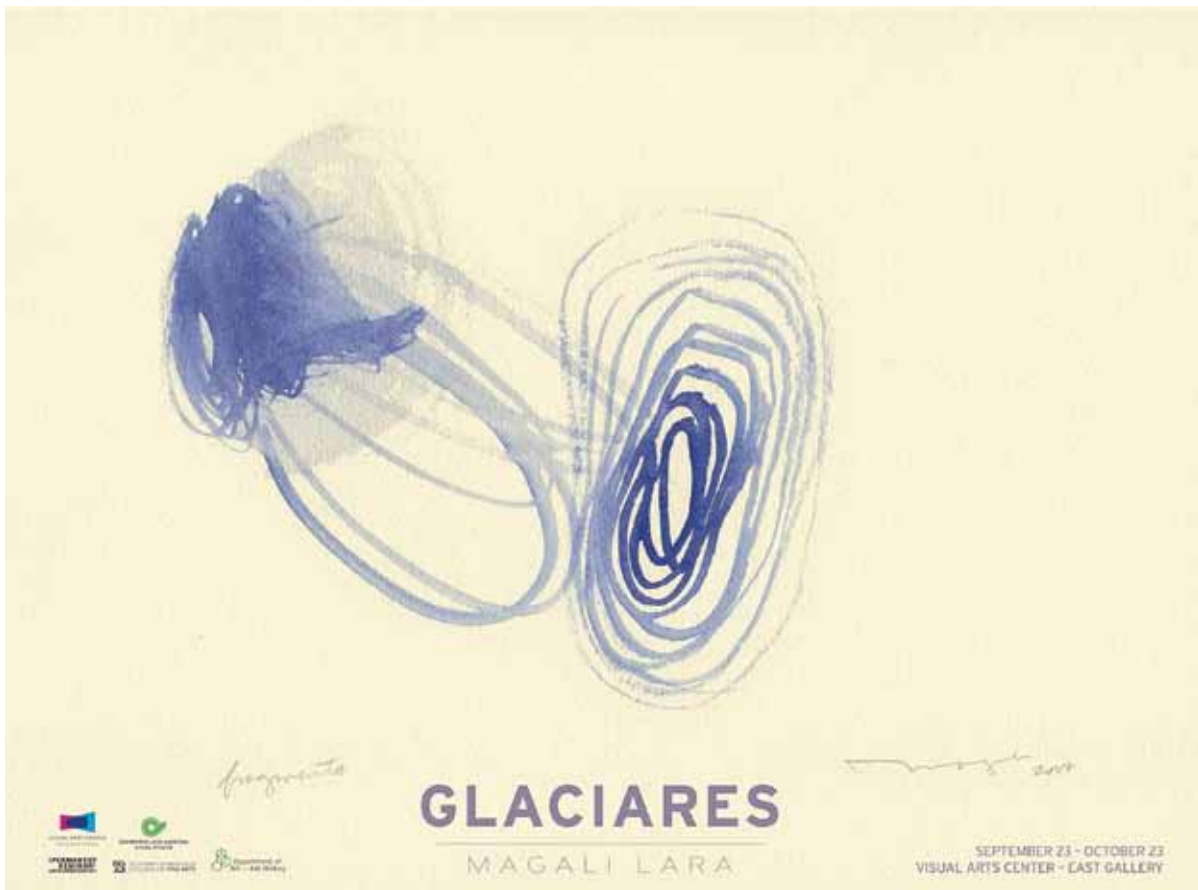
It is natural because UT is the university with

the longest tradition of Latin American Studies in the United States, with the most extensive collection of archives, libraries, and works of art in this area. In this sense, an overview of the spaces that host its vast collection of resources deserves mention: the Art and Art History program in the College of Fine Arts; the Blanton collection of Latin American art; the Benson Latin American Collection; the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies; the Mesoamerica Center; the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center; the University of Texas Press; and the Museum Studies program in the College of Fine Arts. For any investigator in Latin American art, contact with the University of Texas produces amazement: in the Benson Library, collections of magazines, periodicals, and other documents that cannot be accessed in any other academic center are available, and the Blanton's collection brings together exemplary pieces of Latin American art.

What makes it necessary to create a research center for the visual arts? In the first place, because articulation at an institutional level was necessary in order to give visibility to a pre-existing tradition that has been reconfigured in recent years in relation to an expanding field of research and exhibitions. A brief genealogy on this point

will be useful. During the 1960s, Latin American art (both Latino and Latin American) generated a cycle of interest in the United States that found expression through a group of exhibitions that reached an apex in 1966: *Art of Latin America since Independence* (curated by Stanton Catlin and Terence Grieder for the Yale University Art Gallery and the University of Texas Art Museum) and *The Emergent Decade. Latin American Painters and Painting in the 1960s* (curated by Thomas M. Messer for Cornell University). These exhibitions evidenced an interest in the history of Latin American art from the nineteenth century onward, and the moment in which experimental avant garde movements exploded during the sixties, respectively. Along that same curve of interest, the creation of the Center for Inter-American Relations (today the Americas Society) in New York in 1966 can be inscribed, with its agenda of exhibitions of Latin American art. Interest in collecting, exhibiting, and studying Latin American art was also represented in depth by the Museum of Modern Art in New York from the very beginnings of its collection and in its agenda of activities—in this regard, we should recall that in 1931 the MoMA's second exhibition dedicated to a single artist featured Diego Rivera's work. The coherence and articulation of this cycle of interest diminished during the seventies, held in check by being a challenge to U.S. cultural policies in Latin America as well as the context of dictatorships throughout Latin America.

Since the 1960s, the University of Texas has carried out a group of initiatives that delineated its pioneering role in the academic



Posters for the exhibition GLACIARES – Mexican Artist Magali Lara and the 2nd International Latin American Art Forum for Emerging Scholars.



Talk by Magali Lara at the Permanent Seminar in Latin American Art.

field. Here we will list a brief chronology for the reader. Between 1963 and 1978, when Donald Goodall was director of the Huntington Archer Gallery, the collection of Latin American art was assembled. In 1966 the previously mentioned landmark exhibition curated by Stanton Catlin and Terence Grieder was organized. From 1973 to 1976, Damian Bayón was hired as Visiting Professor of Latin American Art, and in 1975, along with *Plural* magazine and the periodical *Excelsior* from Mexico, he co-organized a historic symposium on Latin American art (in which Marta Traba, Juan Acha, Aracy Amaral, Jorge Alberto Manrique, Rita Eder, and Kazuya Sakai participated, among others). In 1983, the university created the first tenured position dedicated to the research and teaching of Latin American art, occupied by Prof. Jacqueline Barnitz; in 1988 the Huntington Archer Gallery was established, as well as the first curatorial position in the country devoted to Latin American art, for which Dr. Mari Carmen Ramírez was hired. For many years, the University of Texas was the only university where graduate studies in modern and contemporary Latin American art could be undertaken, and it was also one at which exhibitions that

investigated new chapters in the history of Latin American art were organized. In this regard, it is worthwhile to point out two of these pioneering exhibitions: in 1985 Jacqueline Barnitz and her graduate seminar prepared *Latin American Artists in New York since 1970* (on display in 1987), and in 1991 Mari Carmen Ramírez curated *The School of the South*, the first exhibition to research the impact of Torres-García's painting and teaching in Montevideo and Buenos Aires. Research then expanded by way of two projects directed by Mari Carmen Ramírez that received support from the Rockefeller Foundation during the nineties. Starting in 2004, with Curator of Latin American Art Gabriel Perez-Barreiro of the Blanton Museum (previously the Huntington Gallery) and with support from the Cisneros Foundation, the project investigating abstract art was developed that would culminate in the exhibition *The Geometry of Hope: Latin American Abstract Art from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection*.

This entire tradition has been inscribed within the University of Texas's role of leadership in Latin American art studies, continually redesigned on the basis of current challenges, thus renewing its leading position. In a field

of academic research that has expanded in depth and complexity during the past ten years (in U.S. universities as well as in Latin America and Europe) and in an ever-broadening context of Latin American art collecting (in terms of private as well as public collections) and exhibitions, it was absolutely indispensable to generate a sphere of academic research capable of both consolidating existing traditions and of redirecting them in response to new challenges. It is essential to operate as a space for the visualization of new lines of investigation, to promote spaces for academic exchange, and to create an arena of excellence for critical debate in order to provide formation for our graduate students. In this sense, the first initiative consisted in the formation of the Permanent Seminar in Latin American Art, a space for discussion of research projects in progress created in 2008 by Prof. Roberto Tejada and myself when we were hired by the UT Department of Art and Art History. With its weekly meetings, the Permanent Seminar is an arena for the analysis of ongoing projects and for presentations by invited artists and professors. In 2009, the first initiative of CLAVIS centered on organizing the *1st International Research Forum for Graduate Students and Emerging*

Scholars, held at the University of Texas at Austin—a collaboration between the Permanent Seminar in Latin American Art (UT) and Meeting Margins (University of Essex and the University of the Arts, London); in 2010, the *2nd International Latin American Art Forum for Emerging Scholars, Art ⇔ Archives: Latin America and Beyond: From 1920 to Present*, was organized by the Permanent Seminar and CLAVIS, together with the graduate program of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and in association with the Universidad de Barcelona. These forums included the participation of sixty papers that gave visibility to a new generation of investigators. CLAVIS generated an active policy of obtaining grants from international collections and institutions, as well as from the universities that participated in organizing both forums. These encounters constitute the ultimate expression of one of CLAVIS's primary objectives: to contribute to the creation of knowledge and exchange of ideas between Latin American investigators and institutions.

Along with their individual research projects, graduate students in Latin American art from the University of Texas participated in two investigation projects that are currently in progress. The first is on art in Latin America during the nineteenth century and will culminate in the organization of a reader that will bring together new voices in research on this topic for the first time, through investigations carried out across the continent. The second is an investigation of women artists' radical contribution in Latin America from 1960 to 1980. This is a joint project being developed with the Museum of Latin American Art in Los Angeles and its curator, Cecilia Fajardo-Hill, and it will come to fruition in an exhibition that will reunite previously unknown works by pioneering women artists for the first time. Both projects represent new lines of investigation and manifest collaboration between institutions, a practice that it is essential to consolidate in today's environment.

CLAVIS also promotes policies of representation in images in the University of Texas's

academic life. By way of support and curating exhibitions—among them *Magali Lara: Glaciers* at the Visual Arts Center and *Familias Mexicanas / Mexican Families* by Óscar Sanchez at the Fine Arts Building—notions of nation, family, gender, and frontiers have been revised.

During 2010, the academic environment underwent unprecedented expansion in the United States: ten art history departments opened new positions for professors in Latino and Latin American art. The University of Texas, with its cutting-edge projects and the solid backing of a long, consolidated tradition, is positioned as the best graduate program in Latin American art in the U.S. academic system. CLAVIS, as an initiative that stimulates investigation, exchange, and the generation of new knowledge, is a central piece in the continuing reconfiguration of this outstanding leadership. ☀

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Exhibition *GLACIARES* of works by Mexican artist Magali Lara, curated by Dr. Andrea Giunta and Dr. Roberto Tejada.