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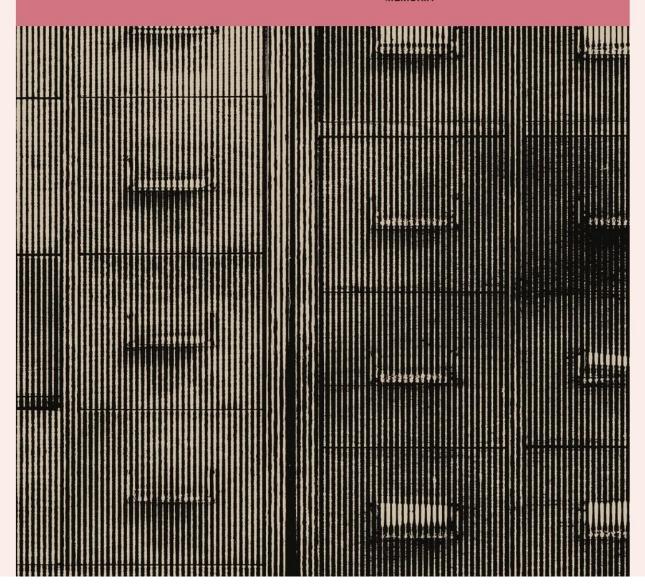
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#### DOSSIÊ ACERVOS E PRÁTICAS DE CONHECIMENTO SABERES E HISTÓRIAS DA ANTROPOLOGIA

Navegar no Arquivo da Ciência
One Anthropologist's Adventures
in the Archives
Conexões Afro-Atlânticas
Ruy Coelho e os Arquivos de Honduras
A Fogueira, a Vitrine e o Pintor
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# DOSSIÊ: ACERVOS E PRÁTICAS DE CONHECIMENTO

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MARIO ZANINI'S ART AND LIBRARY IN MAC USP COLLECTION: A COUNTERPOINT BETWEEN COLLECTION AND DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE.

LAUCI BORTOLUCI QUINTANA

Abstract: The text brings the library of Mario Zanini, which has been donated to MAC

USP in 1971 by the family, along with 108 art works. It works on the question of

identifying an intrinsic relation between the process of formation of the library and the

artist's production through three books: two monographs of artists, Paul Cézanne and

Vincent Van Gogh, and Lhote's book on landscape theory. It concludes with the question

of imminent modernity in artistic production (especially in the landscape genre) and in

the conceptual process of the library's formation.

Keywords: Library art; Mario Zanini; MAC USP

Introduction

The library of Mario Zanini (1907-1971) and its relationship with the artist's

landscape painting brought us to the Colloquium on Heritage Assets in São Paulo

Collections, held in November 2018 at the Brasiliana Mindlin Library, in which the

bibliographic heritage was addressed within the scope of collecting practices, integrating

academic initiatives with interdisciplinary interest. The library donated by the Zanini

Family to the Museum of Contemporary Art of the University of São Paulo (MAC USP),

in 1971, was recently the object of research in a thesis defended at the Graduate Program

in Aesthetics and Art History (PGEHA USP), showing that the painting made by the artist

is in intrinsic relationship with the content of his Library, established from the 1930s to

1971. The points of consonance between the artist's pictorial expression and its reflective

aspects, provided by the historical process of formation of this Library, were researched.

Thus, we will see some aspects of the Santa Helena Group and the artist Mario

Zanini himself, as a painter, collector and library founder.

THE SANTA HELENA GROUP

The generation of artists from the Santa Helena Group, active in the plastic arts in

São Paulo's city, was characterized by the absence of an international erudite education

and information about the vanguards of the world great artistic centers. His knowledge of

the craft of painting came from the vocational courses of the Lyceum of Arts and Crafts

and its masters. The Group was formed in the 1930s by workers and artisans, who performed other jobs to earn a living. The financial situation was a hindrance, often felt in the precarious conditions in access to modern art from abroad. The members of the Group were Aldo Bonadei, Alfredo Rizzoti, Alfredo Volpi, Clóvis Graciano, Francisco Rebollo, Fulvio Pennacchi, Humberto Rosa, Manuel Martins and Mario Zanini, and its characteristic themes were urban and semi-rural landscapes, as well as popular interior scenes or parties.

About the members of the St. Helena Group, art critic Alice Brill states:

All these artists had in common the repudiation of academism and the valorization of technical-artisanal learning. Its aesthetic orientation depended on the precarious possibilities of access to modern art through books and magazines belonging to educated colleagues, until Sérgio Milliet created the Arts Section of the Municipal Library1.

Alice Brill comments that there was a dependence of access to periodicals and books that some artists had on others, holders of their own sources of information. Although not mentioned by name, Paulo Rossi Osir, plastic artist and cultural producer, was one of the intellectuals who possessed these sources and is inherent to the social function he played in the spontaneous circulation of books among his acquaintances. The aesthetic culture of Rossi Osir awakened the awareness of the components of this association for the deepening of the knowledge of art. According to Walter Zanini, the artist's nephew and also an art critic, "some of them (Bonadei, Graciano and Zanini), in their effort of ascension, formed small libraries. The Gracianos's library, now owned by his son Jose Roberto, had been growing since those years. When they became closely connected with Paulo Rossi Osir, it is evident that they consulted his books, catalogues and magazines"2.

Walter Zanini is emphatic that "his plastic culture was linked to his personal effort"3. Thus, the artists of the Santa Helena Group lived on modest handicrafts, dedicating themselves mainly to works such as decoration or wall paintings. In the midst of these works there was a silent artistic research. This aspect becomes important, since this production is distinguished from the culture of the generation that participated in

<sup>1</sup> BRILL, 1976.

<sup>2</sup> ZANINI, W., 1991, p. 118.

<sup>3</sup> Id., 1976. p. 9.

the *Week of Modern Art 1922*, coming from the elite of society. The works produced by the members of the *Week of Modern Art* received immediate solidarity from the privileged representatives of the artistic environment. Writers and actors from this milieu guaranteed these artists recognition and prestige, legitimizing their actions, unlike what happened with the Santa Helena Group.

#### MARIO ZANINI AND THE SANTA HELENA GROUP

The 1920s were notable for the effervescence of modernism. However, with this second generation of modernist artists, the 1930s constituted the time of maturity of the movement. The theme of landscape was not a peculiarity of the Brazilian modernists, since these members considered it a non-central theme. In addition, these artists were linked to a formal experimentation, resisting to develop a naturalistic relationship with this theme. The members of the Santa Helena Group chose the São Paulo landscape as the main subject of their expression, that is, the landscape of popular taste, the common landscape, without monumentality. Counterpoint between these two groups, the theme of landscape will give the tonic to the santelenista painting and sediment the question of its identity.

In the landscapes painted by the artists of Santa Helena, according to the historiography, the origin and formation of the painters are present, one as a product of the other. The identity of these artists is defined by a look that starts from the artist, and this look, this new attitude, informs us who these artists are and what they seek4.

The origin of these artisan artists was in the migratory wave of foreigners who would make up the working class of São Paulo. If an intellectual atmosphere hung over *the Week of Modern Art 1922*, now a professional atmosphere enveloped the members of the St. Helena Group.

In an article for the Revista de Italianística, Walter Zanini refers to the social origin of the artists of the Santa Helena Group:

Coming from working-class or petty-bourgeois strata, they belong to families of Italian immigrants. Their origin is important to explain the intense psychological proletarianism of the work they produce, according to Mário de

<sup>4</sup> FREITAS, 2012, p. 168.

Andrade, one of their main critics, who considers them, at the time, as the most especially important formation of the São Paulo School5.

It was not the ambition of the Saint Helena Group to belong to an artistic avant-garde. However, these artists were active and proposed new meanings to art, as opposed to the groups officially endorsed by formal academic institutions. In their figuration is the presence of the proletarian origin, which takes up the social extract to which they belonged, and the empirical training of these artists. There was, in the Santa Helena Group, no intention to follow the language produced by the generation of the *Week of Modern Art 1922*.

What remains to be mentioned in the performance of the Santa Helena Group is the fact that the artists modeled rigorous ethical and professional principles, away from promotional games, with independence of spirit, finding a form of solidarity expression, which marked the art of the 1930s.

Mario Zanini, who had always been inclined to paint the landscape of São Paulo, deepened his interest in the 1930s, collecting visits from the banks of the Tietê and Canindé, from the working-class neighborhoods of Cambuci, Aclimação and Penha, from cities in the interior, and from the beaches of Santos and Itanhaém. His compositions are ordered with rigor, denoting an impressionistic confluence, in the graphic register and in the color, with predominance of coloration and gray and earthy tones, later evolving to a more luminous atmosphere.

As there was a public preference for academic artists, the artists of the Santa Helena Group encountered some resistance to hold their exhibitions. The opportunities to participate in art shows were few, since there was a lack of knowledge of criticism and an absence of formal education that led them in the atmosphere of the artistic environment. However, these artists have the proposal to re-signify the space in which they operate, with the landscape being used as the image of the expression of their sensibilities, which revealed a way of feeling and expressing the new faces of the Brazilian landscape.

Until the 1950s, these artistic productions of the Santa Helena Group were figurative and, on occasion, expressionist. However, the paths would be divided after

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<sup>5</sup> ZANINI, W., 1995, p. 105.

1950, when a new influence driven by the United States enters the scene, bringing the abstractionist tendency.

# MARIO ZANINI AND HIS LIBRARY

The Mario Zanini Library, composed of 226 books, was donated to MAC USP by the Zanini Family in 1971, as well as 108 works of art, which are now part of the Museum's collection. The Library includes authors related to art history, such as Henri Focillon, Raymond Cogniat and Pierre du Colombier, as well as titles that reference Egyptian, Greek and Japanese arts, the Renaissance and modern art. Books related to painting, sculpture and engraving techniques, texts on Leonardo da Vinci, impressionists, post-impressionists, Latin American artists and Mexican muralists are also part of this collections.

Mario Zanini makes his painting the result of a mental process, within a reflective and instrumental intellectual dimension, since the artist's Library is an accurate construction of his interests, experiments and experiences, resembling a living organism that accompanies him in his artistic path, portraying his ideals of art and his role as an artist. We can understand that the interest in the Renaissance is reaffirmed by listing two books on El Greco, both published in London. The reading of the Renaissance was an activity that accompanied Mario Zanini for many years, a fact that we noticed in the analysis of the dates of edition of the books. Titles on the Greek and Italian arts of 1923 and 1936, as well as a book dedicated to Rubens from 1949, were acquired during his trip to Italy with Paulo Rossi Osir in 1950. From the time, there is the acquisition of a book that references Sandro Botticelli, containing biographical essay of the Renaissance master.

Mario Zanini was a reader who showed interest in pictorial technique, evidencing his search and research on the foundations of painting. His research dates from years earlier, in 1944, with the acquisition of the *Anthology of Painting in France from 1906 to the present day*, a book published in 1927 and written by Maurice Raynal, evidencing his interest in a theoretical work, produced almost twenty years before its acquisition. The book on Amedeo Modigliani, dated 1926, may have been purchased later, along with other biographies from the 1940s. At this time the artist acquired and read *The Art of the Far East*, a book published in Paris.

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<sup>6</sup> PECCININI, 2007, p. 41.

The contribution of the circle of friends also occurs in the process of forming libraries. In 1944, Paulo Rossi Osir presented Zanini with the book *Filosofia da arte*, by Hippolyte Taine. These were the years of the artist's work at Osirarte, when Rossi Osir had the habit of taking friends to the library of his residence for reading sessions.



(Fig. 1) De Sikkel's books

Zanini's work remained faithful to the direct composition by apprehending reality, painting navies, houses, laundresses, streets, dunes, urban or rural aspects. This is due to the technical resources with which he worked and the refined sensitivity, seen in the balance of the colors used, making the pigments are not only coatings for the shapes. The colors highlight the consistency and real aspect of the forms, resulting in an art with a similar approach of Cézanne, when he observed nature.

To understand the point of support of Zanini's landscape painting, we will turn our gaze to the landscape that represents the outskirts of the city of São Paulo, so that, from this approach, we have the concept that defines it. This landscape that Zanini experienced, lived, read and finally painted is the one that defines the production carried out during the years of the Santa Helena Group. This clipping will provide us with the inputs to understand the conceptual basis of this production, and will allow us to situate a horizon of the artist's performance.

Zanini was able to show us the change of the object "landscape", being sensitive to identify São Paulo with its bucolic atmospheres, so that we could then apprehend the industrialized city. His concept of landscape is an understanding that situates the city with

the nuances of the watercourses of the Tietê River, with the aspects of its economy to, at the end of this same decade, show us the urban landscape of the Anhangabaú Valley.

The landscape of Zanini, the cutout of the object represented and the cutout of the horizon are images that present us with a perenniality. Its language of representation has the primacy in showing us the landscape of the transformation from rural to urban, in an irreversible landscape process of the city. To the extent that nature is being modified by the action of man, the natural world becomes apparently moldable, plannable, becoming an urban occupation, a cultural landscape. In the midst of this process, artists are recording, representing and acting on the landscape, producing an art that is related to the space that surrounds us7.

The Library of Mario Zanini and its formation process are drivers of evocation of a new look for the construction of aspects of the language and aesthetics of the painter. Not only the Library is a primary factor, but the training process itself reflects the reader's research method, evidenced in aspects of the works of art. The art scene was shaped as the transmutations in artistic ideals occurred. The result obtained is a consequence of long learning, because Zanini has always positioned himself as a researcher. His investigation for new ways of expression is constant, always reluctant to let himself be dominated by artistic waves that could interfere with his meticulous work.

To comment on the relationship of the library with the work of Mario Zanini, we have chosen three books for the study. The monographs on *Cézanne* and *Van Gogh* are related to biographical aspects, while the book authored by André Lhote presents a theory about the landscape.

CÉZANNE (FRANCIS JOURDAIN), TRATADO DEL PAISAJE (ANDRÉ LHOTE) AND VAN GOGH (FRANÇOIS MATHEY)

The book *Cézanne*, published in 1948, authored by Francis Jourdain, brings ten illustrative plates, seven landscapes, a portrait and two still lifes. Jourdain had met Cézanne on the occasion of a visit to the painter in 1904, an episode that Jourdain reported in 1946, in the magazine *Arts de France*, in the article *A proposito de um pittore difícil: Cézanne*.

In this book, Jourdain looks back at the writings about Cézanne, exercising his criticism and countering his own judgment about the artist. Jourdain mentions an

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. NICOLAU, 2009.

erroneous analysis of Cézanne, long in force, as being a painter of heavy and formless works. The author states that this criticism demonstrates the ease with which Cézanne's work is judged by artists, and questions whether his lesson was understood by painters influenced by the French artist.

Jourdain questions the merits attributed to the artist's work, when he states that "Cézanne wished to express his will to reduce an object to a scheme, to extract from any type of object its geometric synthesis, therefore, to dematerialize it"8 This view lasted for years, without a precise analysis being made, when it was necessary to resort to Cézanne's correspondence to arouse a distrust of any kind of abstraction. For Cézanne, abstraction was the domain of literature, while painting concretized, through drawing and color, its sensations. He saw in nature "the necessary basis of every conception of art," and going out to study nature had a value equal to or greater than his visits to the Louvre9.

According to Walter Zanini, in the decade ending in the 1950s, Mario Zanini knew how to liberate the formal components, reorganize the space and create contexts of a disciplined structure, without losing spontaneity, within a conception that takes advantage of all the teachings of Cézanne. However, this context brings some variants, in which the movement is always the dominant datum, proper to its expressionist temperament 10.

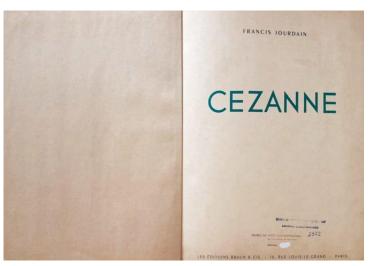
The figurative representation was for Mario Zanini a vital factor from the content point of view11. However, Cézanne's words "to interpret nature in terms of the cylinder, the sphere and the cone, to put everything in perspective, so that each side of the object recedes towards a central plane" were the geometry solution that allowed Zanini, while accompanying the newest trends in painting, not to sacrifice thematic objectivity.

8 JOURDAIN, 1948, p. 1.

9 Ibid., p.2.

10 ZANINI. W., 1976, p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> BERNARD, 2009, p. 23.



(Fig. 2) Francis Jourdain. Cezanne. Paris: Braun, 1948.

André Lhote's *Traité du paysage* was originally published in 1939 by the French publisher Floury. The version belonging to the Library of Mario Zanini was released in Buenos Aires four years later under the title *Tratado del paisaje*, translated from French into Spanish by the Argentine painter and art critic Julio Eduardo Payró. In the book, the starting point for illustrating the landscape as a reconstruction of reality is drawing. According to the author, "all artistic expression implies a primordial and tyrannical choice of one element in spite of others, dealing first of all with the organization of a system of preferences"12.

The treatise discusses in its chapters themes such as the historical importance of landscape, colors, the composition of the canvas, light, drawing, the impressionist revolution and pictorial technique.

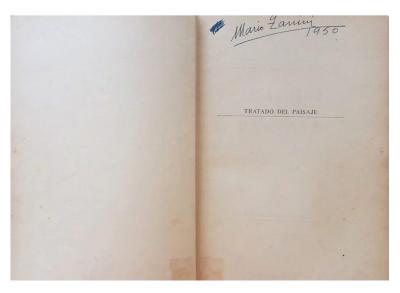
Mario Zanini faced the questions about figuration, trying to establish what the value, at that time in the 1950s, would have the existence of a figurative model. We perceive twice a revolutionary Mario Zanini: the first time when he made his paintings before nature, in the early 1930s, and the second, in 1950, returning to figuration, contrary to abstractionist tendencies.

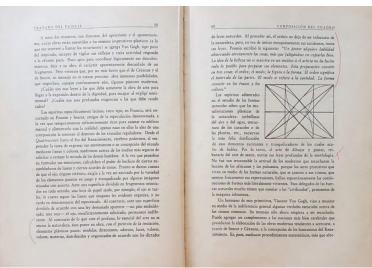
In *Tratado del paisaje*, Zanini reads about the need to respect the laws of nature, without subordinating oneself to it, and there should be no imitation, but rather an ordering of the pure elements. The idea is not born of motive, but the arrangement of the balance of the elements and the preferences of the forms would have to fulfill a certain order (relationship of the parts to the whole) in a perfect game. The first works of Mario

<sup>12</sup> LHOTE, 1943, p. 55.

Zanini, in this line of formal research, follow this way of thinking. In the 1950s, Zanini continued his research towards a more personal expression, in which geometric shapes allowed the artist to conserve expressionist gesture, movement and color, in the search for the formation of a new research, of a new artistic synthesis.

Mario Zanini followed the new directions of art in the 1950s, in practical and theoretical terms. From Lhote's book, let us recall the highlighted part of a schematized geometric drawing, which demonstrates that the artist was in consonance with his historical moment of performance, without practicing sacrifices in his own way of seeing and feeling his figurative world. Thus, even in contact with abstract, geometric and cubist theorems, Zanini sought to portray the emotion that connected him to his theme, bringing to his observers the ability to evidence the landscape that generated his production.

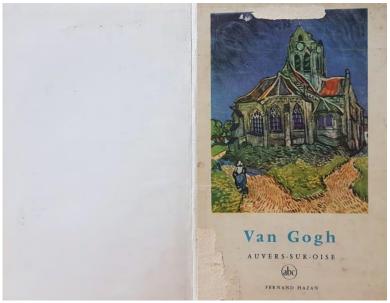




(Fig. 3 and 4) LHOTE, A. *Tratado de paysage*. Buenos Aires: Poseidon, 1943. p. 69 reproduction

The book on Vincent Van Gogh, written by François Mathey, is part of the *Petite Encyclopédie de l'Art* of 1956, a collection published by Hazan Editor. The author curated art exhibitions and wrote other books on Impressionism.

We can affirm some traces of Van Gogh's influence on Zanini's work, such as the symmetrical lines and the balance of the composition. The work of the Dutch artist suggests a dynamic effect of movement, which also became a poetic not only of Zanini, but also of other painters of the Santa Helena Group, from the mid-1930s.



(Fig. 5) MATHEY, François. Van Gogh. Paris: Hazan, 1956.

#### CONCLUSION

Mario Zanini's trajectory can be defined in relation to the development of his creative potentialities gradually conquered, through an artistic and intellectual effort. The artist has always attached importance to the theoretical basis of his work and to the constant work, in the conquest of a personal figurative language. Zanini was the example of an artist who, rooted in an artisanal tradition, followed the paths of art in the direction of the predominance of the formal and intellectual over his tradition, that abandoned this research and had opting for isolation. His recollection in his last years of life is the result of this conscious gesture of return, irreversible, to his figurative origin.

His legacy carries greater weight in his landscape expression, but we must also consider the full scope of his production and his library, which anchored this artistic production. Interested in the reality around her and the present moment, Zanini's art acquired the value of testifying to the ideas and landscape of her time, leaving a decidedly modern heritage. Zanini is anchored in the framework of an aesthetic concern, permeated by the valuation of nationality, between the 1920s and 1930s. The landscape of São Paulo, observed by a painter of humble origin, descended from immigrants, constitutes an important bias of the performance of artistic life and of every historical moment. The landscape for Zanini, in view of the intensity with which it is born, the roots it plants and that determines a whole routing of creative expression, could not fail to be the constant and continuous tonic of his researches, in a field that revealed itself with infinite possibilities for the artist and that constituted his greatest legacy in artistic expressiveness.

It was our purpose to overcome any assumption of an art library formed by arbitrariness or randomness. From this cohesion, found in the Zanini Library, we listed three units that could unveil the agglutinating element, which would bring together the titles in consonance with their historical time, in the environment of strengthening modern art. Therefore, our reflection of a counterpoint between this collection, qualifying its own collection as cultural heritage is effective, since in addition to documentary cohesion, it is the artistic works themselves that demonstrate the relevance of the collection.

The Library of Mario Zanini works the analysis of the modern art of the 1930s and 1940s and the supremacy of the landscape genre for these painters who joined the Santa Helena Group. We have the concept that the library is composed of titles that indicate a new artistic and autonomous position, in relation to the academic art of the nineteenth century. it was thought and built by Mario Zanini, an artist who had the perception of recreating urban and suburban landscapes, as well as the daily life of the populations that lived on the outskirts of the big city. Its merit was to unveil a modern poetics of the São Paulo landscape and contribute to a new perception that showed, both in books and in works, a new way of thinking and expression.

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