



The **SAMPA** beat

São Paulo – Sampa to its friends – has a dynamic art scene, from the graffitied streets to the palaces of culture. Paul Richardson rounds up the galleries to visit and the artists to look out for

Photographs by Carol Sachs

A rt has been one of the great beneficiaries of Brazil’s decade-long economic boom. The statistics are remarkable: a recent report suggested that two-thirds of the country’s galleries opened their doors in the past 15 years, and that almost three-quarters of international collectors own work by Brazilian artists or intend to do so.

Artistic creation has always been important in Brazil, says Fernanda Feitosa, director of São Paulo’s annual art fair, SP-Arte. In the 1960s, movements such as neo-concretism established a specifically Brazilian current within 20th-century art, and the past two decades have witnessed an exceptional flowering of talent.

Art is now being made here in every possible format and medium, and photography, installations, performance art and video have moved out of the avant-garde into the mainstream. The same might be said of Brazil’s dynamic street-art movement, which is finally gaining admittance to the circuits of ‘conventional’ contemporary art.

And most of this is happening in São Paulo, a sprawling city of 20 million people that is intractable in some respects but pulsing with febrile energy – a New York City for the new century.

Most of Brazil’s influential collectors are based here, among them Credit Suisse CEO José Olympio da Veiga Pereira and his wife Andrea, Regina Pinho de Almeida, Cleusa Garfinkel, Eduardo and Camilla Barella – and Feitosa, who has amassed a sizeable stash of contemporary Brazilian art with her husband Heitor Martins. Martins is a former president of the Bienal de São Paulo, which was founded in 1951 and is therefore the oldest such event in the world after Venice.

Sampa, to call the city by its nickname, is well provided for in public institutions specialising in contemporary art: there’s the Pinacoteca do Estado, the Contemporary Art Museum (MAC), the Museum of Modern Art (MAM), the Itaú Cultural centre, and the prestigious São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP).

Galleries, however, dominate the scene, and a tour is a fast track to the excitements of contemporary Brazilian art. The São Paulo Art Map (www.mapadasartes.com.br), available from the tourist office, locates the galleries and introduces their exhibitions. The pink dots are clustered around two main areas: well-to-do Jardins, and bohemian Vila Madalena (with brief incursions into Higienópolis, Itaim Bibi and Barra Funda). The concentration of galleries in these two neighbourhoods means that total immersion in the simmering waters of São Paulo’s art scene is possible during even a short stay.



Above, from left, Rafael Carneiro, *Untitled*, 2015, and Leandro Erlich, *Rowing Boat (captive reflections)*, 2013, both at Luciana Brito Galeria. Opening pages, from left: the courtyard at Mendes Wood DM; detail of Eduardo Coimbra, *Natural Light*, 2015, at Galeria Nara Roesler

Luciana Brito

Luciana Brito is one of a select group of São Paulo galleries that possess genuine gravitas as well as international prestige. It works closely not only with the estate of Lygia Clark (1920–88), co-founder of the neo-concretist movement, but also with the representatives of her fellow concretists, Waldemar Cordeiro and Geraldo de Barros. The reigning queen of contemporary artists, Marina Abramović, is also represented by Luciana Brito, and it was here that she showed her video *Art Must Be Beautiful/Artist Must Be Beautiful*, as part of the 2015 São Paulo Art Fair. Currently somewhat out on a limb in Vila Olimpia, the gallery is opening a new space in the Jardins art hub, set in a marvellous modernist house designed by Rino Levi (1901–65), with landscaping by the great Roberto Burle Marx. *Rua Gomes de Carvalho 842, Vila Olimpia*. www.lucianabritogaleria.com.br



Left, Alex Katz, *Ulla in Black Hat*, 2010, at Luciana Brito. Below, Yuri Oliveira and Julia Brito with, from left: Rochelle Costi, *Acervo*, from the series *Vende-se Tudo*, 2004–6; Delson Uchôa, *Soleira*, 2004–7; Thomaz Farkas, *Presidente Juscelino Kubitschek no dia da inauguração de Brasília, 21 de abril, 1960*, and *Populares sobre cobertura do palácio do Congresso Nacional no dia da inauguração de Brasília, 1960*; Regina Silveira, *Quimera*, 2003–11

Choque Cultural

With its all-over black-and-white patterned livery, Choque Cultural doesn’t look like your standard modern art gallery. And Baixo Ribeiro and Mariana Martins don’t have much in common with their counterparts in upmarket Jardins. Their discourse defiantly pits ‘urban’ against the bourgeois constructs of ‘conventional’ contemporary art.

‘Culture Shock’ avoids certain aspects of the traditional gallery, although Ribeiro does go to art fairs now that the stock of Brazilian street art has begun to rise. The art sold here is affordable (Daniel Melim, the most expensive artist, prices his biggest pieces at just US\$12,000), making it an attractive proposition for novice collectors. In the gallery’s sizeable talent pool are Tec, Jaca, Rafael Silveira and stencil artist Matias Pinto. ‘I choose guys who are really good painters,’ says Ribeiro blithely. *Rua Medeiros de Albuquerque 250, Vila Madalena*. www.choquecultural.com.br



São Paulo cityscape with Pacaembu Stadium, seen from a rooftop next to Galeria Vermelho



10 of Brazil’s best artists

Miguel Rio Branco (b. 1946)
Though best known for powerful photography, his work also incorporates painting, assemblage and installations

Cildo Meireles (b. 1948)
Leading conceptual and performance artist, politically engaged, whose richly suggestive pieces often invite physical interaction with the viewer

Saint Clair Cemin (b. 1951)
Virtuoso sculptor working in steel, marble, concrete and bronze; associated with the New York art scene of the 1980s

Tunga (b. 1952)
Prolific ‘total artist’ whose densely allusive, poetic works feature sculpture, painting, photography, video and music, often all at the same time

Beatriz Milhazes (b. 1960)
Paints colourful abstracts with superimposed geometric forms; influenced by Delaunay, Kandinsky and Brazilian modernism founder Oswald de Andrade

Vik Muniz (b. 1961)
Muniz works mainly with recycled and recovered materials. *Waste Land* is a moving film of his work with trash collectors at a Rio landfill site

Ernesto Neto (b. 1964)
Modern classic artist whose large-scale installations uncannily evoke sensory experiences, including those of a sexual nature

Adriana Varejão (b. 1964)
Highly regarded painter, sculptor and photographer, fascinated by Brazil’s colonial history and the relationship between spirit and flesh

Berna Reale (b. 1965)
Reale uses performance and installation – and sometimes her own body – to reflect on contemporary social reality

Osgemeos (b. 1974)
Identical-twin graffiti artists famous for their huge mural paintings of hip-hop culture and Brazilian folklore



Vermelho

Higienópolis is an upper-middle-class area noted for its cult modernist buildings. Vermelho ('Red') opened here in 2002 when Brazil was just getting into its stride, with a newly flourishing economy and an optimistic national mood. The gallery, renovated by Pritzker prizewinner Paulo Mendes da Rocha with José Armenio de Brito, forms an urban oasis among the newly built housing blocks.

Vermelho was born as a photography gallery then swivelled its focus onto young Latin American art. Its roster of artists features a Mexican, a Portuguese and three Argentinians; the rest are Brazilian. The biggest name is probably André Komatsu, who represented Brazil at the Venice Biennale last year. But Vermelho's main focus is the new generation. At its 2006 show, *This is Not a Love Song*, 25 young local artists reflected on the 'social, philosophical and political ruin of today' with installations combining burned-out windows, shanty-town references and a bathroom overgrown with vegetation. *Rua Minas Gerais 350, Higienópolis. www.galeriavermelho.com.br*

Nara Roesler

Nara Roesler operates on a level that few can match. Her gallery space, formed from two adjoining houses in the Jardins district, is bigger than many public museums. The ground floor houses temporary exhibitions; upstairs, Roesler has gathered a 'greatest hits' selection of her artists' work. In the absence of a permanent, visitable collection of contemporary Brazilian art in São Paulo, this is a good place to get your bearings.

Roesler's list of artists runs from historic pioneers such as Hélio Oiticica and Tomie Ohtake through established names like Berna Reale, Cao Guimarães and Paulo Bruscky to a new generation of Brazilian creators: Bruno Dunley, Rodolpho Parigi and Virginia de Medeiros. But her biggest star is Vik Muniz, currently Brazil's top artist and a celebrity to rival David Hockney. His hilarious vision of Venice is in the upstairs gallery, part of his *Postcards from Nowhere* series. *Avenida Europa 655, Jardim Europa. www.nararoessler.com.br*

Above, from left, Sergio Sister, *Fio Terra*, 2015, and Lucia Koch, *Showcase - Acrylic/mirror*, 2012, both at Galeria Nara Roesler

© Sergio Sister, © Lucia Koch; both courtesy the artist and Galeria Nara Roesler, Carlos Cruz-Diez © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2016. © Sérgio Esmeraldo, courtesy the artist and Galeria Raquel Arnaud. Opening pages: © Eduardo Coimbra, courtesy the artist and Galeria Nara Roesler



Raquel Arnaud

This grande dame gallerist has devoted her 40-year career to a particular strand of modern Brazilian art: essentially neo-concretist, kinetic and op art as practised by both 20th-century masters and their 21st-century successors. Dealing with 28 artists, some no longer alive, allows her to keep her focus relatively narrow. She represents just a handful of younger artists, among them Carla Chaim and Carlos Nunes.

Having previously occupied various premises, she has finally alighted in Vila Madalena, in a purpose-built 2011 building by Felipe Crescenti that is a masterpiece of rational and elegant design. The gallery is a shrine to the kind of art Arnaud cares about – namely the geometrically inspired, futuristic work of Waltercio Caldas, Carlos Cruz-Diez, Jesus Rafael Soto and Amilcar de Castro. *Rua Fidalga 125, Vila Madalena. www.raquelarnaud.com*

Left, Raquel Arnaud at her gallery with detail of Carlos Cruz-Diez, *Physichromie 1877*, 2013

Below, Galeria Raquel Arnaud, showing Sérvulo Esmeraldo, *Discos*, 1978–2015



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Left, view of Maria Nepomuceno exhibition, *Universe in Expansion*, 2015, at Baró Jardins

© Maria Nepomuceno, © Eduardo Stupia, © Daniel Arsham; all courtesy the artist and Baró



Above, Maria Baró at Baró Jardins with, from left, details of Eduardo Stupia's exhibition, *Paisaje*, 2015, and Daniel Arsham, *Three Ash*

Eroded Payphones, 2014. Right, a view of Eduardo Stupia's exhibition, *Scenes of a Journey*, 2015, at Baró Galpão

Baró

Since arriving from Barcelona in 1997, Maria Baró has delighted in the energy of São Paulo and the expanding universe of the city's artistic community. She was among the first Sampa gallerists to bring in art from elsewhere in Latin America, promoting established creators such as Felipe Ehrenberg (from Mexico), Roberto Jacoby (from Argentina) and Iván Navarro (from Chile), whose use of neon light in garish fluorescent colours makes him the natural heir to Dan Flavin. Baró was also the first Brazilian gallery to show French artist Christian Boltanski.

Baró's monumental *galpão* (warehouse) has hosted such grand designs as the Chinese banquet held by artists Song Dong and his wife Yin Xiuzhen as part of their mega-installation, *Regenerate* (2014); the gallery now also has a bijoux space in Jardins. *Rua Barra Funda 216, Santa Cecília, and Rua da Consolação 3417, Jardins. www.barogaleria.com*



Millan

It's a characteristic of São Paulo's galleries that they represent a broad range of artists. Among the youngest signings of this 30-year-old gallery in Vila Madalena are the painters Ana Prata and Rodrigo Bivar, and designer/sculptor Felipe Cohen. Among its most brilliant creators is the photographer, director and multimedia magician Miguel Rio Branco. And among its most prestigious figures is the designer, sculptor and performance artist Antônio José de Barros de Carvalho e Mello Mourão, aka Tunga. *Rua Fradique Coutinho 1360, Pinheiros. www.galeriamillan.com.br*

Fortes Vilaça

Fortes Vilaça is currently the hippest gallery in São Paulo, with a modest site in Vila Madalena and a 1,500-square-metre space in Barra Funda. It specialises in blue-chip Brazilian artists including Adriana Varejão and Beatriz Milhazes; Ernesto Neto – he of the touchy-feely sculptures in stretchy fabrics – is another major name. But its brightest sparks are Osgemeos ('the twins') Gustavo and Otávio Pandolfo, who came from the mean streets of São Paulo to become an international phenomenon: remember their giant redecoration of Tate Modern's front wall in 2008? *Rua Fradique Coutinho 1500, Vila Madalena. www.fortesvilaca.com.br*

Luisa Strina

The elder stateswoman of the São Paulo art scene, Luisa Strina has watched the city’s once strictly local art market turn into a global affair awash with money and talent. She opened São Paulo’s first commercial modern art gallery in 1974, intending to sell local work and give foreign trends (especially US pop art) exposure in Brazil. Her epoch-making 1978 show, *Uma Linha Dura*, has passed into legend as a brave act of dissent against the military dictatorship then in power.

Now, Strina is happy to represent both established figures like the great conceptual artist Cildo Meireles (born 1948), whose epic *Babel*, 2001 (a tower constructed of 800 radios each tuned to a different frequency), is now part of Tate Modern’s permanent collection, and the much younger ‘visual artist, researcher and critic’ Beto Shwafaty (born 1977). *Rua Padre João Manuel 755, Jardins*. www.galerialuisastrina.com.br



Left, Michael Dean, *n_ (Working Title)*, 2013. Below, a view of Adriano Costa’s exhibition, *Every Camel Tells A Story*, at Mendes Wood DM with, clockwise from left: *Chair When Coffee Table/Little Trophies*, 2015; *MAC Balls*, 2015; *Osso em Ovo*, 2015; *Sad Samba*, 2015; *Pie*, 2015; *Dragon*, 2015. Opposite, Patricia Leite, *Atol III*, 2014, at Mendes Wood DM



© Michael Dean, courtesy the artist. © Adriano Costa, Patricia Leite; both courtesy the artist and Mendes Wood DM



Mendes Wood DM

Ask around for São Paulo’s hottest galleries, and Mendes Wood DM will surely be mentioned. Founded in 2010 by Pedro Mendes, Matthew Wood and Felipe Dmab, MWDM is both highbrow and high-flying, as well as an agreeable place to visit, with an exhibition space in a courtyard full of trees and tropical plants.

At Mendes Wood DM you might encounter delicate and poetic paintings on recycled wood by Celso Renato (1919–92), a leading member of the Brazilian neo-concretists; Paloma Bosqué’s austere beautiful minimalist sculptures, elegant meditations on space and structure; the fabric fantasies of Sonia Gomes; or Solange Pessoa’s accretions of earth, blood, hair, clay, bronze and natural pigments. The gallery shows works by both established figures such as US conceptual artist Lawrence Weiner and whippersnappers like Amsterdam-based sculptor Adriano Amaral, as well as Paulo Nazareth, a collectors’ favourite who documents his walkabouts in Africa and Latin America in photographs, video, drawings and installations. *Rua da Consolação 3358, Jardins*. www.mendeswooddm.com

Emma Thomas

A sense of humour is plainly important to Juliana Freire and Flaviana Bernardo, partners at one of São Paulo’s most ingenious and forward-thinking galleries. The fun starts with its name (a pun on ‘haematomas’) and continues with its façade, a panel of rough, shanty-town brick. Freire and Bernardo worked as fashion designers before they became gallerists, and they enjoy the process of art-making as much as its product. Perhaps that’s why they consider themselves as much ‘producers’ or ‘cultural agitators’ as dealers in art.

In the ground-floor show space, Erica Ferrari recently built *De tudo aquilo que não nos representa*, her model of a decrepit São Paulo monument, converting the gallery into an impromptu building site and inviting the viewer to consider themes of urban development and decay (recurring motifs in the new Brazilian art). On the upper floor, Freire and Bernardo organise concerts and talks, and a work-in-progress room allows artists to reveal and comment on their work. *Rua Estados Unidos 2205, Jardim Paulista*. www.emmathomas.com.br ♦

Getting there

Paul Richardson travelled as a guest of the luxury travel consultancy Miraviva, which can arrange tailor-made art trips to São Paulo, including visits to the galleries mentioned. +44 20 7186 1111, www.miravivatravel.com. The author’s guide to the São Paulo art scene was Flavia Liz Di Paolo (info@flavializ.com)