

The Museum of Modern Art

MoMA ANNOUNCES THE FIRST MAJOR US MUSEUM EXHIBITION TO FOCUS ON MODERN LATIN AMERICAN DESIGN

***Crafting Modernity: Design in Latin America, 1940–1980* Will Present Highlights of Modern Domestic Design from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela**

NEW YORK, October 31, 2023—The Museum of Modern Art announces ***Crafting Modernity: Design in Latin America, 1940–1980***, the first exhibition by a major American museum to examine modern design in the region on a broad scale. On view from March 8 through September 22, 2024, the exhibition will focus on six countries—Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela—that spearheaded the development of modern domestic design in Latin America. Through some 150 objects, including furniture, graphic design, textiles, ceramics, and photography, drawn from MoMA's collection and from public and private collections across the US, Latin America, and Europe, the exhibition will demonstrate how the field of design in Latin America provides a valuable platform for examining and understanding larger political, social, and cultural transformations in the region. *Crafting Modernity: Design in Latin America, 1940–1980* is organized by Ana Elena Mallet, guest curator, with Amanda Forment, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Architecture and Design, The Museum of Modern Art.

The exhibition focuses on the postwar era in Latin America, a period of dramatic transformations characterized by great economic growth and rapid modernization. In the 1940s, as World War II raged in Europe, countries in this region replaced goods that had traditionally been imported with domestically produced products. These readily available materials led to the exponential rise of national industries, generating professional opportunities for local designers. By the late 1970s, a series of economic crises echoed throughout the region, marking the end of an era of developmentalism in Latin America, when it was widely believed to be the state's role to promote modernization and to foster a strong internal market for domestic goods.

“With this exhibition, we hope to introduce audiences to the ways in which the field of design in Latin America, especially design for the domestic sphere, reflects the multivalent and complex visions of modernity taking place in the region,” said Ana Elena Mallet. “Through the study of objects, material culture, and other forms of expression, a more nuanced vision of Latin America can emerge.”

The exhibition will critically examine MoMA's engagement with Latin American design, starting in 1940 with the Museum's Industrial Design Competition for the 21 American Republics. Winning entries were later exhibited as part of MoMA's *Organic Design in Home*

Furnishings exhibition, which opened the following year and was organized by Eliot Noyes, director of the Museum's Department of Industrial Design. Latin American designers were encouraged to "engage their local materials and construction methods," thus presenting a vision of Latin American design as the evolution of local traditions of craftsmanship. Winners of the competition, such as Clara Porset and Michael van Beuren (both from Mexico), merged modernist influences with local craft traditions in their designs. Highlights of this section include archival material from the 1941 exhibition, as well as some of the winning designs, such as van Beuren's Alacran lounge chair (c. 1940).

Another focus of the exhibition will be domestic interiors, sites of experimentation for modern living that were paramount for fostering design in the region. Several case studies of important homes will underscore their significance, such as Lina Bo Bardi's Casa de Vidro (Brazil, 1951) and Alfredo Boulton's house in Pampatar, whose furniture was designed by Miguel Arroyo (Venezuela, 1953). Another thematic focus will be the emergence of the profession of designer in Latin America by examining the creative circles that helped to foster new opportunities for industrial growth in the region. The role of designers as entrepreneurs will also be examined, as will designers' involvement with international brands such as Knoll and Herman Miller. Throughout the exhibition, the role that women and immigrants played in shaping professional design and developing a national design vocabulary in Latin America will be emphasized, including the work of designers such as Clara Porset in Mexico, Cornelis Zitman in Venezuela, and Susi Aczel in Argentina.

Crafting Modernity will consider the development of national industries in several countries of the region, particularly Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, and the impact of the Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) in the postwar era, when models of production responded to specific market conditions and local tastes. Finally, the exhibition will explore the intersection of local and craft traditions with modernism, using such key examples as Joaquim Tenreiro's Three-legged chair (Brazil, 1947) and Jaime Gutierrez Lega's *Silla Oveja* (Colombia, 1972). This section will also center on designers of vernacular objects who, although they were part of Latin American modernity, were not credited at the time. Many households lived with these meaningful pieces—such as the textile work of Luis Montiel (Venezuela) and Madalena Santos Reinbold (Brazil)—but these designers and techniques were not recognized in their time. Throughout the various crises Latin America faced, craft remained as a resilient and persistent practice in the region, and became in itself a form of identity.

In the period addressed by the exhibition, Latin America was by no means a homogenous territory, and designers active in the region proposed sometimes conflicting visions of modernity. For some, design was an evolution of local craft traditions, leading to an approach that combined centuries-old artisanal techniques with machine-based methods. For others, design responded to market conditions and local tastes, and was based on available technologies and industrial processes. They proposed designs rooted in new visual repertoires using their own technologies that had developed as a result of the growing national industries. They rejected historicism and embraced international avant-garde movements. *Crafting Modernity* will chart these differences between countries, and explore

how designs for domestic environments reflect ideas of national identity, models of production, and modern ways of living.

SPONSORSHIP:



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