

## MEMORIES OF THE ACADEMY: THE TEACHING OF ART AT THE BEGINNING OF THE REPUBLIC

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### ABSTRACT

The years of 1880 in Brazil are troubled, not only in the political plane, but also in the cultural plane - the Empire of Dom Pedro II agonizes. The final blow to the Brazilian Monarchy occurs in November 1889, with the proclamation of the Republic. On the cultural level, the final years of the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts followed the course of the Empire. With the advent of the Republic a longed-for reform of the Academy became a reality, leading to the institution's transformation into a National School of Fine Arts. The Reform of 1890 brought about effective changes to the institution's artistic education system, many of them in full harmony with the new precepts adopted by the Republican Government, via the Ministry of Education.

**Keywords:** School of Fine Arts. Brazilian Republic. Teaching of Art.

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## 1. INTRODUÇÃO

The 1880s in Brazil are extremely troubled, not only politically, but equally culturally. The empire of Dom Pedro II agonizes over the criticisms made by the abolitionists and the republicans. The final blow to the Brazilian Monarchy occurs in November 1889, with the support of the military, who are dissatisfied with the lack of prestige of the military career, are those who will effectively proclaim the Brazilian Republic and take command of the country. In cultural terms, we find that the final years of the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts followed the course of the Empire. It is not unknown to those who study Brazilian art in the nineteenth century that during the 1880s the Academy was subjected to criticism by art critics and also some of its professors, students and directors. The criticisms that demanded an urgent renovation of the structure and teaching methods of the institution were multiplied, just as a political restructuring of the country was required. With the advent of the Republic the longed for reform became a reality, with the implementation of the so-called Reform of 1890 and the transformation of the institution into National School of Fine Arts. 10

The article that the reader now reads has one main purpose. Believing that the Reform of 1890 - which ended the Academy of Fine Arts and instituted the National School of Fine Arts - was not only a change of the name of the institution, we propose to understand how the Reform was conceived by the artists who were with it involved and to see to what extent the proposals presented at that time were in tune with the changes arising from the new regime so in effect - the Republic.

Our attempt is not unfounded, because what is verified is that despite its significant importance, the role played by the National School of Fine Arts, as well as that of its teachers, during the 1890s, did not merit the which it is due. How to explain the lack of interest in the period?

Such a historiographical limitation can be elucidated, mainly, thanks to the notorious antiacademicism that until very recently was practiced in the Brazilian artistic scene and that propagated the recurrent idea of generalized passivity of the

School in relation to modernity. Especially after the Reform of 1890, the institution was always presented as a place of conformism, homogeneously resistant to change.

Popularized since the late nineteenth century, especially in the speech of art critics, this anti-academicism associated the National School of Fine Arts with the image of a retrograde institution, averse to any aesthetic innovations and alienated from the Brazilian reality. This image, forged by the critics of the institution, became, in the early decades of the twentieth century, one of the central elements of what we could call the "founding myth" of Brazilian modernism, which did nothing more than incorporate the "idea force of French modernist ideology, that is to say, the demand for a revolt against artistic institutions, against the mandarins of the Salons". (Marques, 2001: 21-23).

The tendency is noticeable in the few critical fortunes of the School during the first three decades of the twentieth century. In order not to go too far, we can cite here two prominent names in Rio's artistic milieu: the painter Modesto Brocos, who, in his book *The Question of Teaching Fine Arts Followed by the Critique of the Bernardelli Direction and Author's Justification*, stated that the teaching in the institution "continued to be in its background, teaching and disciplines, more or less than it was in the time of the Empire or, to speak frankly, the same thing" (Brocos, 1915: 44-45); and the art critic Gonzaga Duque, who in his famous book *Contemporains*, claimed to have been the Reform of 1890 a mere "label question". (Duque Estrada, 1929: s/p).

These statements, however, as we shall attempt to demonstrate, are quite unilateral and should not be taken as "absolute truths" by researchers interested in the history of the School. In addition, we must consider the fact that such criticisms, which served as the basis for others that followed, were written years after the events that surrounded the 1890 Reform, when the institution had already undergone other reformulations, such as those of 1901 and 1911, in addition to that which took place in 1915.

## 2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND BENJAMIN CONSTANT

In the First Republic, the evolution of pedagogical ideas was characterized by two ideological movements: "enthusiasm for education" and "pedagogical optimism" (Nagle, 1974: 35). These movements attached increasing importance to instruction at the various levels. With distinct characteristics, they have developed through political-social movements and programs of different organizations. In this sense, they served political purposes, hence the importance that was attributed to education as a solution to the serious national problems.

Vigorous discussions and statements about the precarious conditions of Brazilian school education were already present in the last decades of the Empire, inheriting the Republic, in rich legacy, proposals that aimed to rethink the educational problems of the country. The "enthusiasm for education" was born in this context and brought to the fore the content of educational disengagement of the public power, emphasizing the need for expansion of the primary school literacy. After the first years of implementation of the republican regime, the fervor of the discussions cooled down. (Oliveira, 2006: 1-10).

The Benjamin Constant Reform, 1890/1891, was the first educational reform of the republican period, being at the height of conjunctural changes arising from the Proclamation of the Republic, and thus becoming the resonance of an environment marked by political rearrangements, new ideologies and, undoubtedly, cultural transformations.

Benjamin Constant was minister of Business of Public Instruction, Posts and Telegraphs, during the provisional government presided by Deodoro da Fonseca, position that served for Constant to undertake the Reform of the Primary and Secondary Public Education of the Federal District and the Reform of Higher Education, besides of the creation of the Higher Education Council of the Federal District.

The Ministry of Business of Public Instruction, Post and Telegraphs, which had a very short duration, from 1890 to 1892, was created through Decree n. 346, dated April 19, 1890. For this new portfolio, the subjects related to Public Instruction, Education and Special or Vocational Education, were transferred from the Ministry of Justice and Internal Affairs to the Institutes, Academies and Societies dedicated to the Sciences, Arts and Letters, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Commerce and Public

Works, the services of Posts and Telegraphs. Already since the end of the Empire, the institution of such a folder was requested, and his Majesty, in his last speech of the throne, requested a commitment for the constitution of a ministry destined to the business of Public Instruction.

Both Benjamin Constant and the Ministry of Business of Public Instruction, Post and Telegraphs had a rapid passage in the history of education, but this was not very expressive. The proposals for reform that were in force in the final years of the nineteenth century are particularly significant in order to understand the pedagogical thinking of the years 1889, 1890 and 1891, at which time the 1890 Statutes of the National School of Fine Arts were conceived.

Certainly, in this context, the teaching of the fine arts could not be left aside, being incorporated, by means of the approval of the Statutes of the National School of Fine Arts, signed by Benjamin Constant on November 8, 1890.

Having as its primary source period documents, it is possible to identify a series of relations between the 1890 Statutes of the National School of Fine Arts and the Benjamin Constant Reform of Education. Therefore, we believe that it is fundamental to think of the Reform of the Academy of 1890 within the broader context of which it was part, that is, the reform put in place by the Minister of Business of Public Instruction, Post and Telegraph in 1890/91. The Reform of the Academy can't, therefore, be analyzed in isolation from the rest of the educational reforms that have taken place in the country. Indicating points of a series of relations between the principles that guided the formulation of the Statutes of 1890 of the National School of Fine Arts and those that led the Benjamin Constant Reform of the Education. Among them are: teaching thought serially, the systematic use of the intuitive method, the importance attributed to intellectual preparation and the end of precepts and doctrines in education.

### **3. THE EDUCATION IN THE OLD ACADEMY ACCORDING TORODOLPHO BERNADELLI**

Rodolpho Bernardelli was the first Director of the National School of Fine Arts and was appointed in November 1890. A sculptor, trained at the old Academy, Rodolpho was one of the founders of the 1890 reform project. Understanding the changes through which the institution passed, without a shadow of a doubt, equally

understand the way Rodolpho Bernardelli thought of the artistic teaching of his time, since he had been in charge of the institution as director for more than a decade. It is not difficult to perceive, from the reading of period documents, that Rodolpho had a thought about education that approached that of Benjamin Constant. In the 1891 Report, we find some explanations for the changes contemplated in the 1890 Reform.

Rodolpho Bernardelli proved to be in tune with the discontent of a significant portion of European (and North American and South American) artists and intellectuals as to the way artistic instruction was conducted within academies. 'Academic' became a pejorative word, synonymous with sclerosed tradition and outdated pedagogy. The growing importance attributed to authenticity and originality led the teaching in the academies to be understood as too regularizing, inhibiting the individuality of young artists. (Bouillon, 1990: 35).

From this perspective, it was understood that the 'old system of official education' needed to be reformed. Louis Vitet, in his article published in the *Revue des deux mondes* in 1864, stated that the basis of the decree of 1863, which had reformed the *École des Beaux-Arts*, was to develop personal originality in young people.

The decree of 1863 placed the old educational system in the role of an immovable power, inflexible and inimical to all independence, devoid of space for the individual feelings of each of the students who entered the institution before the Reform.<sup>2</sup>

Still in this sense, there is another passage in the Report of Rodolpho Bernardelli to the Minister who deserves to be highlighted and who justifies the absence of the teaching of aesthetics, pointing to the criterion of "what is beautiful or not" as something individual. There should therefore be no assumption. In the new School, there was no space for a thought such as that recorded by Ernesto Gomes Moreira Maia in 1888, when he was appointed director of the Academy, according to which the mission of the institution should not be "other than to vote exclusively to

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<sup>2</sup> Alain Bonnet also puts that «L'originalité fut le mot d'ordre de la réforme», em seu livro **L'enseignement des arts au XIXe siècle**. La réforme de l'École des beaux-arts de 1863 et la fin du modèle académique. p. 281.

the true cult of the aesthetic purity of classical art and its propagation". (Maia, 1889, s/p).

Another significant point in the report of the director of the National School of Fine Arts is the way he opposes teaching previously taught at the Academy to that formulated in the Reform Project of Bernardelli and Amoedo and which was maintained in the Statutes of 1890, which proposed a serial structure of progressive education.

Rodolpho Bernardelli (1891: 14-15) recalled the disorder that prevailed in the Academy in relation to the systematization of teaching. There seems to have been great concomitance between disciplines in the 1880s when the artist acted as a professor of sculpture at the Academy.

The disciplines, which in the 1890 Statutes preceded teaching in the painting studio, could be taken simultaneously to the classes of historical painting and landscape painting in the old Academy since they were not prerequisites. It is evident, therefore, the lack of order that prevailed before the Academy was reformed. Things in the School became different.

It is possible to read from Rodolpho Bernardelli's own hand the explanation for joining in a single course all the specializations of painting that had previously been in the Academy. Certainly this is the most notorious example of the attempt not to restrict the personality of the artist in formation, the possibility of allowing access to all artistic trends. Freedom, this is a word that we often see in Rodolpho Bernardelli's report. And while words such as systematization and serialization seem to not combine very well with freedom, we must keep in mind that reforming the Academy's "sclerotic teaching" meant, in those years, organizing the teaching system itself, abolishing disciplines that directed the way of seeing students, like that of aesthetics, and merging others that delimited the artistic capacity. The idea of freedom, of free access to the arts, also extended to the administrative sphere. The 'freedom of teach' in the school also expanded to teachers.

In fact, in Europe the conception of an artistic education having greater "freedom" was widely diffused, and we see this concept appear in different texts. The climate of freedom of direction with regard to the Ecole des Beaux-Arts can be felt in a report by Senator Lambert de Sainte-Croix when he was part of a

commission to reorganize the administrative departments of Fine Arts in 1878, ten years after the Reform of 1863.

The report by Rodolpho Bernardelli clarifies other positions that guided the intentions of young artists; one of them refers to the exclusivity of the public professorship of the plastic arts to the holders of diplomas of the National School of Fine Arts.

We verified, then, that the National School of Fine Arts did not only propose to train artists, it was proposed to train teachers for acting in the public schools of the Republic. Rodolpho Bernardelli, as perceptive as he was, knew that there was no vast art market in Brazil for all the artists who graduated from the National School of Fine Arts, as well as he knew of the government's plans to establish the teaching of drawing in schools. In fact, some disciplines that appear in curriculum presented in the Statutes of 1890 (Decree 938) were directed in this sense, that is, of the performance of artists as teachers in primary, secondary and normal schools.

An expressive point of the 1890 Statutes is the recognition that the student needed a significant body of theoretical knowledge before actually arriving at the classes of sculpture and painting. There was an imminent preoccupation with the intellectual preparation of those who are destined to the artistic profession. And this was a point that mobilized artists and intellectuals to reform the artistic education system in Europe and in Brazil.

We also know that the importance attributed to the intellectual cultivation of the artist was echoed in the words of critics who dedicated themselves to the fine arts of the time, such as Gonzaga Duque.

Still in this sense, we know that the education system of the Paris École may have been one of the sources of inspiration for the great importance that came to be attributed to the intellectual formation of artists in Brazil. As Monique Segré put it, the teaching of general culture at École was only more prominent in the 1880s and assumed that the artist should not only acquire the perfect technical mastery but also possess an exceptional culture: «L'artiste doit être a homme cultivé ". (Segré 1993: 116). This phrase, which then prevailed, demonstrates a change of conception. Certainly the most innovative point of the Statutes of 1890 is the conception of teaching thought serially. But the perception of how innovative this proposal only

arises from the comparison with the previous proposal of teaching, which was in force in the Academy until 1890. To do so, it is necessary to analyze the changes that occur between the Statutes of 1855 and those of 1890.

We know that the Statutes of 1855 were modified between the year that was in force and that of 1890 - an interval of 35 years. And while the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts education system has been labeled as 'stationary', the changes have taken place. There is, however, some difficulty in tracking these changes, as quoted in an excerpt from the aforementioned Report of 1891, written by Rodolpho Bernardelli (1891: 16).

The most significant of these changes, added to the Statutes of 1855, was that of 1859, established by Decree No. 2424 of May 25, which divided the teaching of the institution into two courses, one night and one day, the evening being directed towards formation specific of artisans.

Let's see how the Academy was structured in 1855, after the Pedreira Reform. The teaching was divided in 5 sessions: Architecture. Sculpture, which included: sculpture of ornaments, engraving of statutory medals. Painting, which included: figurative drawing, landscape, flowers and animals, historical painting. Science advisory, which included: mathematics, anatomy and physiology of the passions, art history, aesthetics and archeology.

Already here it is possible to find a point of divergence in relation to the Statutes of 1890, that thought the course by cycles that prepared the student for the final objective, that is, the courses of painting, sculpture and architecture. The Preparatory Course, after the 1890 Reformation, was compulsory for all students and took a considerable amount of time to complete, in all three years, and only after its completion could the student reach the workshops of the Special Course. The question that arises from the comparison between the two proposals, that of 1855 and that of 1890, is: after the Pedreira Reform did the student begin his studies directly with painting? It was not necessary before, as in the traditional French teaching system, has the domain of drawing?

The students' progression, before and after the Quarry Reform, was far from being as systematized as that which came into force with the Statutes of 1890.

As we can know from the Statutes of 1855, all pupils were obliged to attend the "1st grade" of the discipline of geometric and industrial design before

deciding on an artistic branch. This series lasted one year, and the teacher was to teach drawing of geometric figures, three Greek orders and shadow theory. If the student did not show up, he would repeat all this year. Simultaneously the student was obliged to attend the applied mathematics class, responsible for teaching stereotomy, trigonometry and perspective, forcing the students to perform practical and graphic exercises; plant lifting exercises and land leveling. Only after these studies could the student choose between painting, sculpture, architecture and engraving.

The second step in the formation of the student who wanted to take, for example, historical painting was to attend the class of figurative drawing. According to Section VIII, the figurative drawing was divided into two series: the copy of prints and the copy of the natural, that is, the contrast between light and dark. The teaching of this subject had no time limit, that is, it had no specific duration, depending on the student's ability to move to other classes, which would be determined by the academic body. Its prerequisites: applied mathematics and geometric design.

Thus, to follow to the class of historical painting, it was sufficient for the student to have been approved in these three disciplines: geometric drawing; applied mathematics and figurative drawing. To proceed to the landscape painting class the process was even simpler, it was enough to pass in the applied math class and geometric drawing. The student was not obliged to take a figurative drawing to do this discipline, although he could take both at the same time, if he wished.

With Decree No. 2424 of May 25, 1859<sup>3</sup>, the formation of artists (painters and sculptors) did not undergo many changes, in fact, the Decree of 1859 intensified the possibility of students simultaneously attending classes that would be thought in a chained way to from 1890. The most significant change was the extinction of the chair of geometric and industrial design. The industrial design became a specific discipline for the night course and the geometric design was diluted in mathematics, which now consists of two divisions.

Let us see how the system of enrollment in the courses and the qualifications became compulsory since 1859 (Decree 2424). For the student to enroll in figurative drawing or landscape painting there was no need to have

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<sup>3</sup> Decree No. 2424 of May 25, 1859 amending various provisions of the current Statutes of the Academy of Fine Arts.

previously attended even the math classes. Taking classes in landscape painting became even simpler after the Decree of 1859. In order to study historical painting, one more requirement was made that was not previously required: besides the habilitation in applied mathematics and in the figurative drawing, the student should simultaneously study the classes of physiology of passions. The living model was not an obligation, although the Decree determined that "whenever necessary, there will be a living model in classes of historical painting and statuary".

What we verified is that most of the disciplines which were made compulsory in the Statutes of 1890, could be, in the old Academy, simply not studied, as is the case of figurative drawing, which was obligatory in the structure of the 1890 Statutes during three consecutive years. Or, disciplines that in the Statutes of 1890 preceded the teaching in the atelier of painting could be simultaneously taken the classes of historical painting and painting of landscape in the old Academy, since they were not prerequisites.

We must remember here the words of Rodolpho Bernardelli in his Report (1891: 14-15), about the disordered concomitance between disciplines in the Academy, in which the sequence was not thought "in an evolutionary series", being, according to Rodolpho, improvisation the only factor that determined the students to follow the course. Thus, "it happened that the study of figurative drawing was proffered within the law for the first application of the activity of the students, how could that of historical painting be preferred within the same law?".

#### 4. CONCLUSION

By way of final conclusions, we believe that the text brings significant contributions. We were able to shed light on significant documents written by the first director of the National School of Fine Arts, Rodolpho Bernardelli: especially the Report of 1891. His analysis was fundamental to elucidate the importance attributed to intuitively developed teaching, as well as the disorder that prevailed in the Academy before its renewal and the consecutive systematization and seriation of teaching that were imposed after the Reform. We also show how the Reform of the Academy was part of the Benjamin Constant Reform, which occurred between 1890 and 1891, the first educational reform of the Republican period. We believe,

therefore, that it has conferred on the process of transformation of the Academy into a National School of Fine Arts the importance due it, rescuing its historical relevance as one of the main measures of artistic-cultural transformation in the advent of the Republic and reaffirming the forgotten authority that the School, as the main artistic teaching institution of the country, represented for the newly inaugurated Republican government.

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