

THE PEAK

HONG KONG

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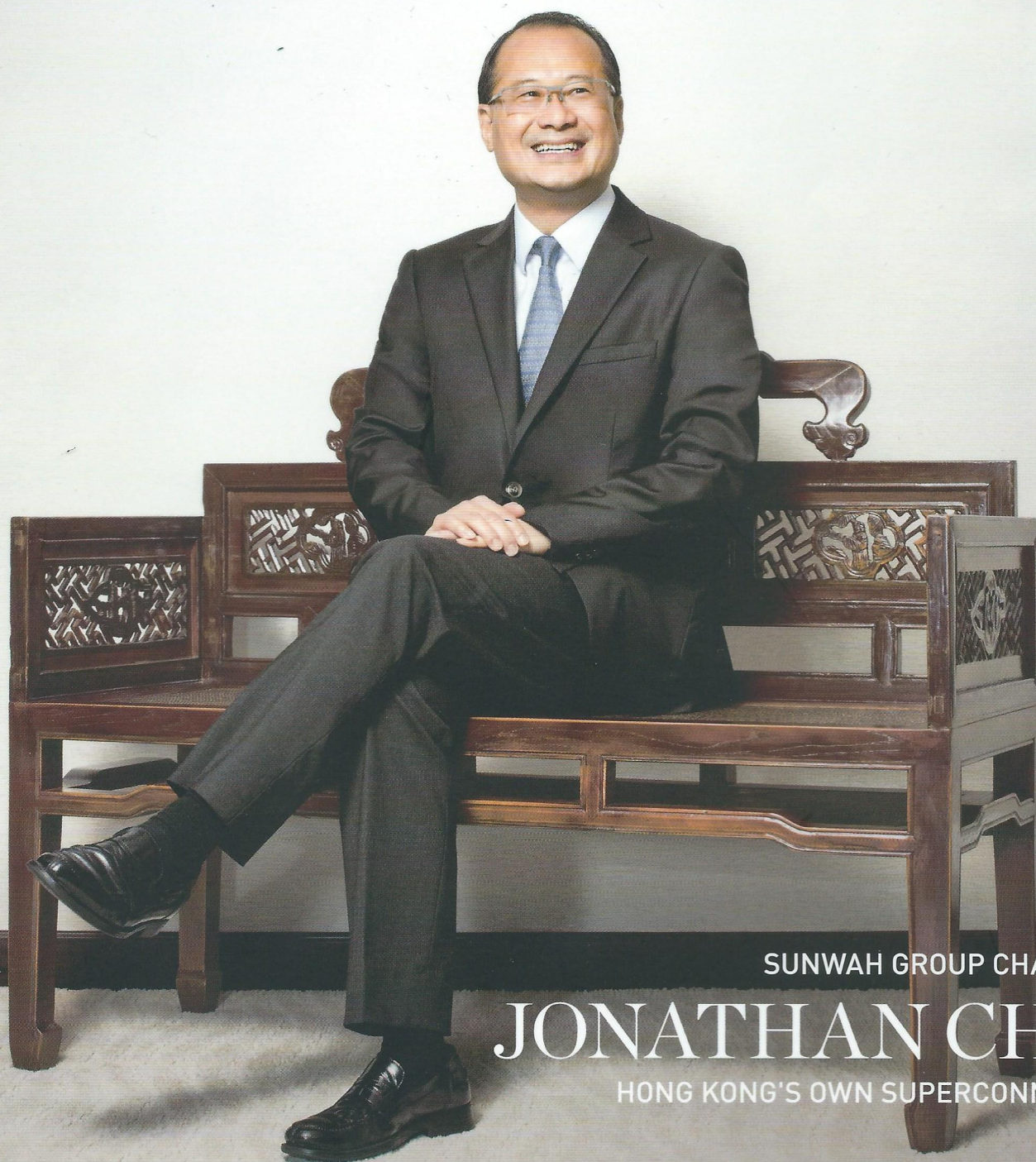
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CONSERVING
CHINA'S
HERITAGE
BUILDINGS

THREE GREEN
VENTURE
CAPITALISTS IN
HONG KONG

WHAT'S BEHIND
THE DRIVE FOR
AMERICAN RANCH
PROPERTIES

HONG KONG'S
CLASSIC CAR
SEASON
KICKS OFF



SUNWAH GROUP CHAIRMAN

JONATHAN CHOI

HONG KONG'S OWN SUPERCONNECTOR

THE RISE OF LATIN AMERICAN ART - BEYOND CLICHES

While Latin American art might have been synonymous with Fernando Botero, Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera a decade ago, collectors and art enthusiasts are dipping their toes into previously obscure — but by no means less influential — names.

STORY **CHRISTIE LEE**

On a sweltering Sunday in May 2013, a huge white cloth unfurled on smack dab in bustling Central. Suddenly, a sea of heads pierces through random cuts in the cloth, the chorus of black bobs bouncing gently up and down.

A young couple searched for each other's hands under the cloth, a smartphone-wielding girl tried to snap a selfie, someone struggled to stay 'afloat' as her head disappears beneath the white, velvety surface momentarily. The march begins.

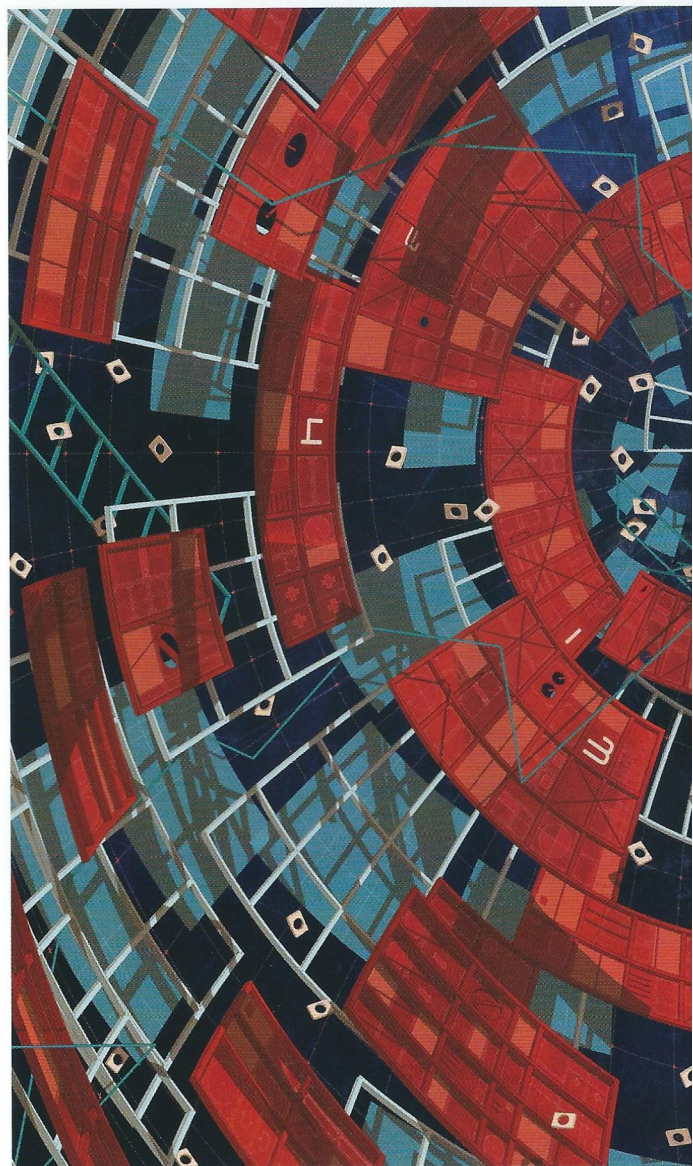
To the untrained eye, it's nothing more than a bizarre ritual. To fans of Lygia Pape, it was a rare opportunity to participate in a re-enactment of the Brazilian artist's

Divisor, a performance art piece first staged on the streets of Rio de Janeiro in 1968. In the absence of wall text, what we are left with the curious feeling of being isolated from everyone else, yet having to march in tandem with the whole procession. One is tempted to classify Divisor as minimalist, but that nuanced exploration of the tension between the individual and collective is anything but, and a far cry from usual impressions of Latin American art.

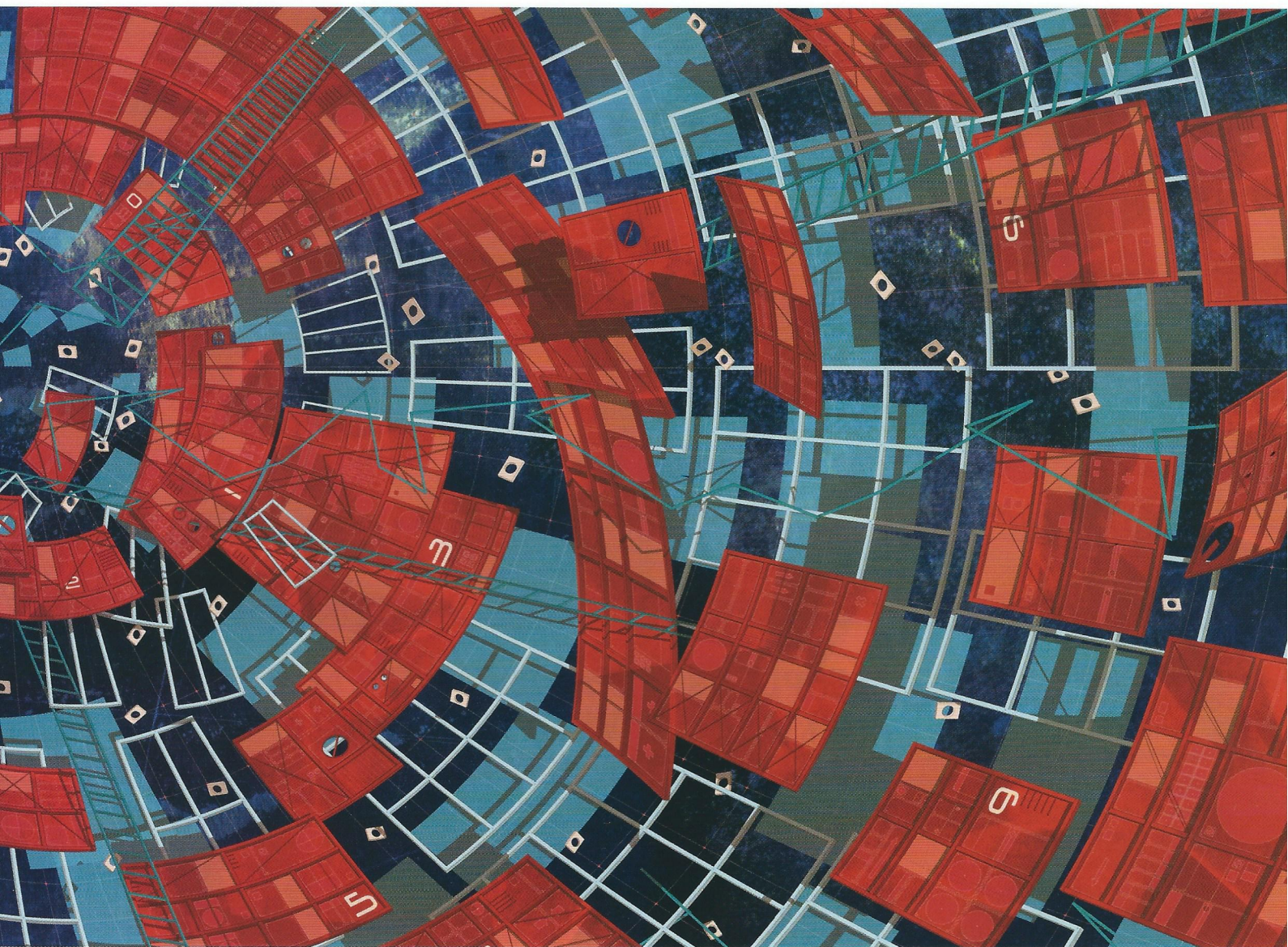
RISE OF LATIN AMERICAN ART

The Latin American art market has been on a steady climb in

the last few years. According to Deloitte's Art and Finance Report 2016, overall sales for modern and contemporary Latin Art are up by 11 per cent. There has been a slew of record-breaking deals at the major auction houses: Christie's Latin American art auction in Autumn 2016 nabbed a total of 7 records, including Cuban artist Carlos Enríquez's Héroe criollo (1943), which went under the hammer for \$US 967,500; during the same season, Phillips hammered down four auction records, including Os Gemeos's Untitled (2009), which soared past its US\$120,000 (HK\$ 936,800) to US\$180,000 estimate to notch US\$310,000.



COURTESY PUERTA ROJA



ABOVE
Space Explosion
by Mariasun
Salgado.

All of these have aligned with an institution-wide effort to re-evaluate Latin American artists who were under the radar.

Last year, Wilfredo Lam had a long overdue retrospective at the Whitney, which then travelled to Tate Modern and Museo Reina Sofia. The Met Breuer mounted a Pape exhibition the same year - the Brazilian artist's first major US retrospective. Meanwhile, Carmen Herrera's minimalist abstractionist works were put on glorious display at the Whitney Museum of American Art last Autumn.

Yet, collectors who are entering the fray might find the market hard to navigate. After all, given the

geographical and cultural diversity of the region, how does one begin to define Latin American art?

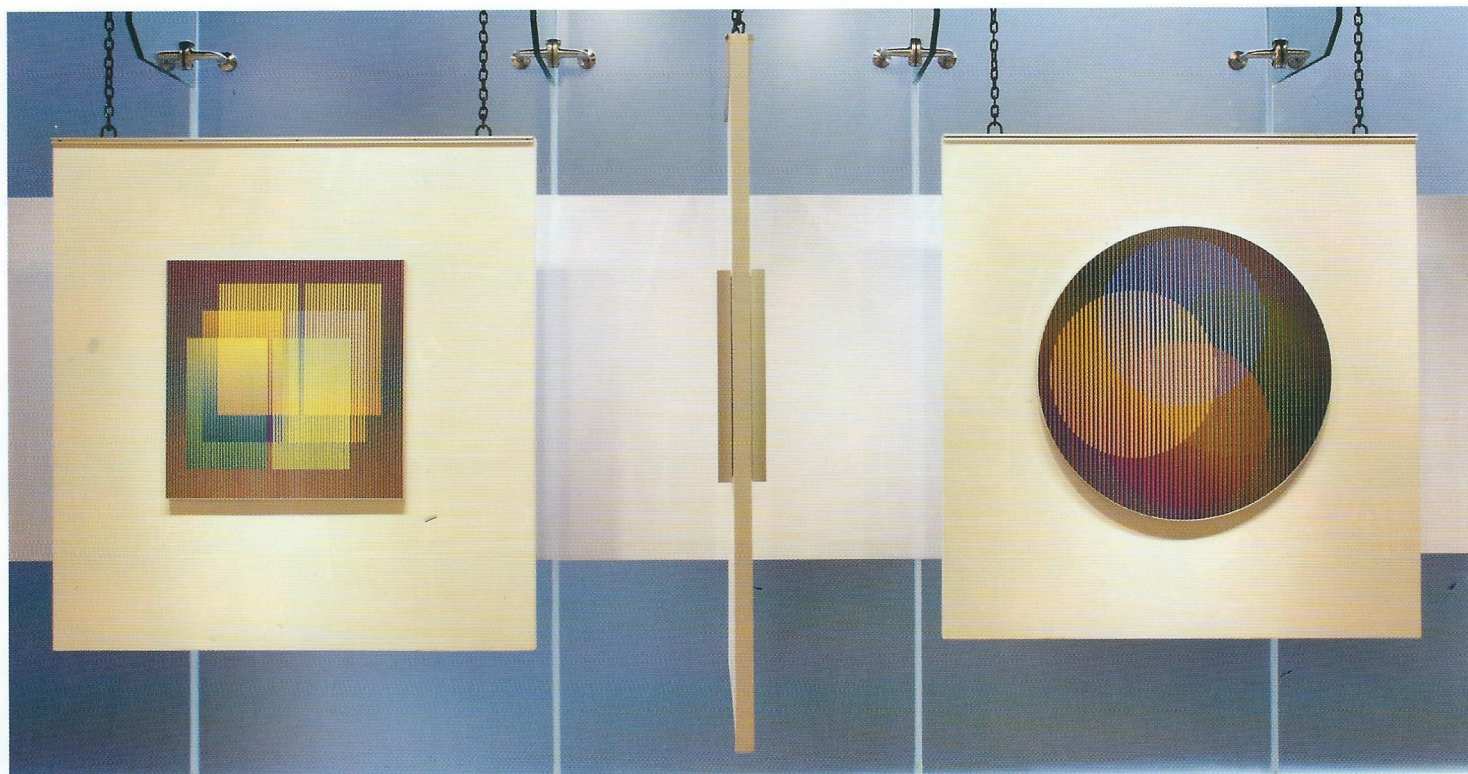
A SHARED COLONIAL PAST

According to Adriana Alvarez-Nichol, founder of the HK-based Puerta Roja gallery, Latin American art is divided into three regions: Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, and South America. "Brought together by a colonial past, these regions share a Spanish- or Portuguese-speaking history, and strong Catholic traditions."

Broadly speaking, the development of modern Latin American art followed two very different trajectories. The first

- the one that the amateur art viewer is more familiar with - is art heavily grounded in the region's colonial history.

"This is especially prevalent in Mexico, where there is a strong historical and visual baggage. During the 20th century, many artists turned to social and magical realism to address issues related to sovereignty," notes Alvarez-Nichol. Shining examples include Frida Kahlo, who leveraged a naive folk art style to questions issues relating to post-colonialism, gender and race, and Diego Rivera, whose gigantic murals chart the history of Mexico itself, from the Mayan age to post-independence times.



Then, there are Cruz-Diez, Carmen Herrera, Wilfredo Lam and Leonora Carrington - artists who either relocated to America during WWII or who travelled extensively, drawing influences not only from their Latin American roots, but also from the United States and Europe.

"Countries down South, including Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela are populated by immigrants from Europe, so visual expression tends to be more universal - less about national identity, more about shared goals and a vision that people had for art after the world wars," says Alvarez-Nichol.

Interestingly, many of these artists worked in relative obscurity during their prime, and are only getting their due now.

Sotheby's, who inaugurated its Latin American Art auctions at the end of the 1970s, was one of the firsts to experience this shift. "[When we first started], works on offer were primarily figurative and Mexican. With the emergence and recognition of contemporary

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— Diana Bramham, Latin American Art specialist at Christie's

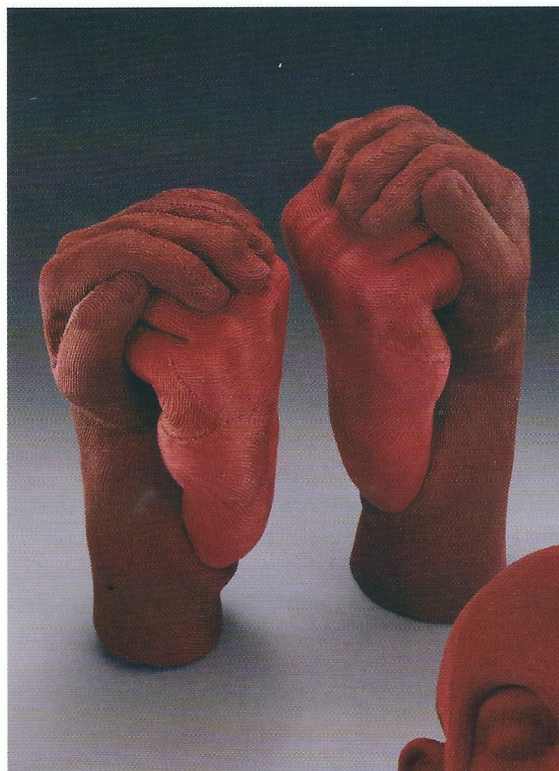
artists in Mexico, Brazil, Venezuela, Cuba, Colombia, and Argentina, amongst others, a new interest has developed in the marketplace much in parallel to numerous surveys by important museums/institutions and world class galleries in the US and Europe," notes Axel Stein, Senior Vice President and Head of Sotheby's Latin American Art Department.

"People usually associate Latin American art with its socialist-realist agenda. But more and more people are paying attention to other movements that arose during the mid-20th century, including Geometric Abstraction,"

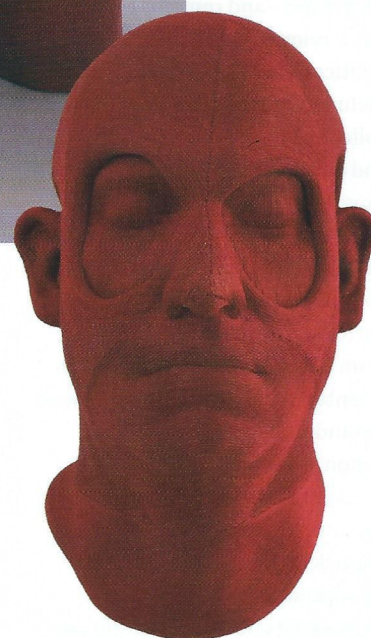
says Diana Bramham, Latin American Art specialist at Christie's. She points to Carmen Herrera, the Havana-born, New York-based artist known for her formal simplicity. "She worked all the way from the 1950s and up, but she's only getting noticed now."

Another example is the Franco-Venezuelan Cruz-Diez, touted as the founder of kinetic and op art. For his *Physichrome* (1959) series, vertical coloured bands are arranged into multiple geometric planes according to strict mathematical principal, resulting in an optical illusion, so that the image shifts as the

ABOVE
Works by Carlos Cruz-Diez on display at his show *Maturing Colour* in Hong Kong.



FROM LEFT
Babel Stairs
 by Mariasun
 Salgado; *Hands of*
Héctor Velázquez
 by Héctor
 Velázquez;
Double Self
Portrait
 by Héctor
 Velázquez.



position of the viewer changes.

“If you look at a Diego Rivera mural that references a specific moment in time, be it in Mexico or the States, you are going to lose something if you are not aware of that historical background. But there are plenty of artists who weren’t looking into tying their works to a specific history. Cruz-Diez is a good example, as his works is about activating the viewer. It’s something universal.”

Alvarez-Nichol, who mounted a well-received solo of the artist during Art Basel 2017, adds, “Even though the artist started producing in the 50s, it is really the experience of the works, which only exists in the present, that is the most important aspect of the work. In a way, this interactive aspect has a lot to do with what youths are facing today. No longer content to be on the receiving end, they want to be relevant. The ideas that gave birth to the kinetic and optical art movement are still very much relevant today.” She also shares that the market for the artist grew by 2000 per cent since 2002.

UNIQUE EXPRESSIONS

While it’s useful to keep the above in mind when first approaching the genre, Alvarez-Nichol emphasises that contemporary Latin American art artists rarely think in such dichotomies.

There has also been an effort to avoid clichéd interpretations of Latin American art, as evidenced by the current edition of Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA. Led by the Getty Foundation, the exhibition aims to explore the multifarious artistic links between Latin America and Los Angeles. Brazilian artist Anna Maria Maiolino is getting her first US museum retrospective at MOCA Grand

WHILE LATIN AMERICAN ART WAS TRADITIONALLY COLLECTED LOCALLY, RECENT YEARS HAVE SEEN A SURGE IN INTEREST FROM COLLECTORS FROM AROUND THE WORLD.

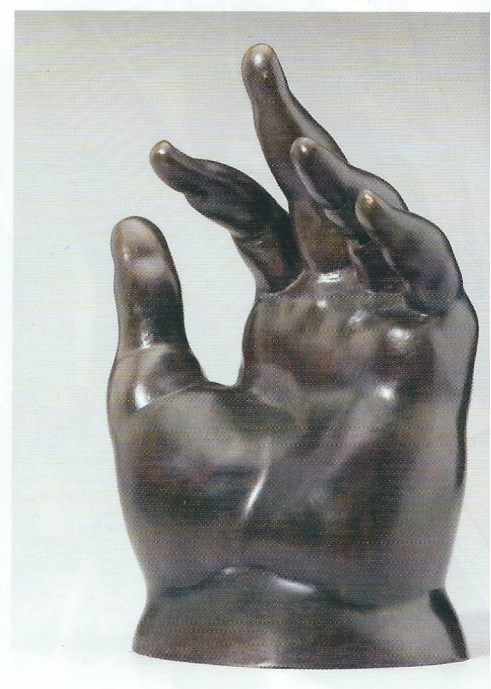
Avenue. The Hammer Museum's *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985* includes works by Judy Baca, Paz Errazuriz and Lourdes Grobet. Activist art is a highlight - and remains ever more relevant, with the current political climate. Highlights include a piece by Sao Paulo-based collective Frente 3 e Fevereiro, and collaboration between Los Angeles-based Sandra de la Loza and Buenos Aires-based Eduardo Molinari. The wide-ranging format, comprising wall art, installations, performances, music, frees it from devolving into a nationality-oriented survey, as exhibitions with a mandate to 'rediscover an art region' are wont to do.

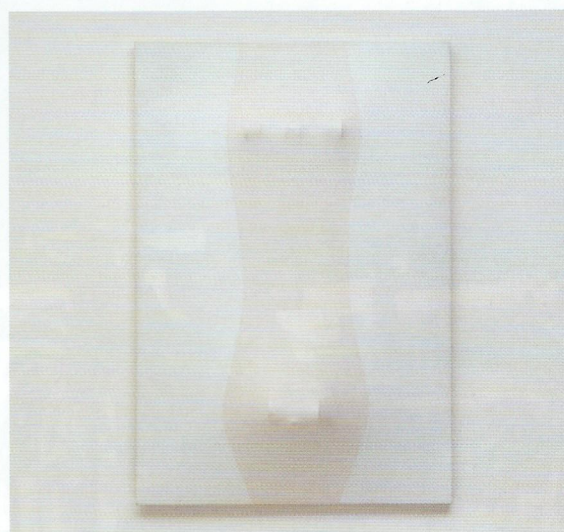
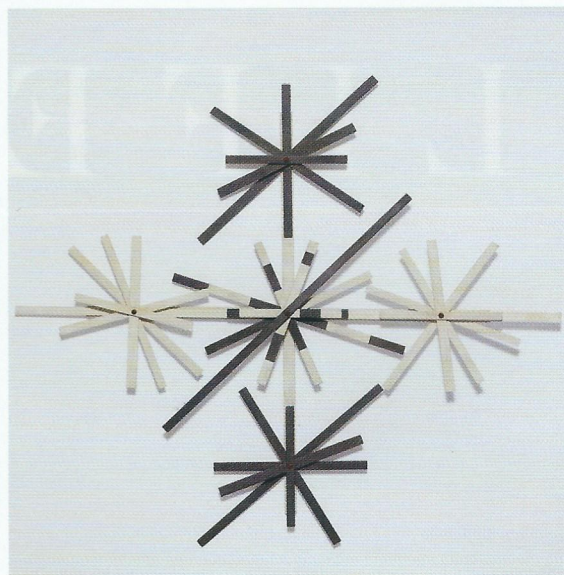
Joan Weinstein, Deputy Director of the Getty Foundation, is quick to point out its bottom-up approach, "each museum proposed its own topic within our overall framework, and applied for grant support from the Getty Foundation. The results are more than 70 exhibitions with topics ranging from luxury objects in the pre-Columbian Americas to 20th century Afro-Brazilian art, alternative spaces in Mexico City in the 1970s, and boundary-crossing practices of Latino artists."

Back on our shores, interest in the sector is only starting to take off. "People didn't know much about Latin American art at all when I started *Puerta Roja* in 2010, so it's been a steep learning curve," notes Alvarez-Nichols. As with all learning curves, Chinese collectors started with the big names. And the one to trump

them all? Fernando Botero, the Colombian figure known for his voluminous figures. Aside from being ubiquitous at art fairs, Botero's reputation got a further boost in 2015, thanks to a large-scale retrospective that debuted in Beijing before travelling to Shanghai. The artist's influence in China stretches back two decades, according to Juan Montano, director of Botero in China. "It all began in 1995 really, when Chinese art scholar Xing Xiaosheng published an essay on the artist. Many artists started studying his paintings, including Liu Xiaodong, who explicitly stated that he was influenced by Botero's style."

In Hong Kong, Latin American art-focused shows are sparse, but when they do happen, offers of glimpse of the sector's modernity. Recent shows have included Beatriz





ABOVE
Crepúsculo by
Jorge Jiménez
Deredia.

LEFT
After Raphael
(far left) and *The
Big Hand* by
Fernando Botero.

**TOP RIGHT FROM
ABOVE**
Sandu Darié's
Untitled (from
the *Formas
Geométricas
Móviles* series);
*Topologías
Eroticas* by Zilia
Sanchez.

Milhazes at White Cube, Vik Munis
at Ben Brown Fine Art and Los
Carpinteros at Edouard Malingue.

HOT NAMES

It's often said that hardship
and social upheaval - and Latin
America has had an abundance
of those - produces the best art,
but the impact that political and
economic instability have on the
Latin American art market is
harder to gauge.

While short-term impact is
inevitable, Kaeli Deane, head of
Latin American Art, Americas
at Phillips, notes, "interestingly,
[political instability] is occurring
at the same time as such a strong
increase in international demand.

More and more Latin American
art is selling to non-Latin buyers,
where the market was previously
very focused within countries like
Mexico, Brazil, and Venezuela.
So, we're seeing the market shift,
rather than contract."

And indeed, while Latin
American art was traditionally
collected locally but recent years
have seen a surge in interest from
collectors from around the world.
At Phillips' Latin American art sale
in May 2017, 80 per cent of works
were sold to non-Latin collectors.
The auction house has also made
a concerted effort to strengthen
the sector in recent years, by
including lesser-known names like
Herrera and Mira Schendel in its

contemporary evening sale last
Autumn and appointing Candida
Sodre as Regional Director for
Brazil. For its upcoming Latin
American art sale in November,
Phillips is presenting a group of
Cuban art, including a work from
Sandú Darié's *Formas geométricas
móviles* series and one from Zilia
Sánchez's *Topologías eróticas* series.

Old Latin American masters
like Botero and Kahlo remain hot
collectibles. For new collectors,
Branham from Christie's suggests
works on paper by Lam and Riveria.
"These artists have stood the test of
time. Works on paper are good for
those who are more comfortable
with collecting a big name, yet want
a lower entry point." @