

PIPA and the artistic scene at the start of the 21st century: history and challenges

The PIPA Institute was initially created to manage the PIPA Prize. That was in 2009. However, when we conceived the format of the award, we knew that it would be essential to go beyond the ephemeral around the exhibition of the finalists at MAM-Rio and the award-winning artist. The catalogue with all the nominated artists, the website with a page for each of these artists, the linking of the Award to a prestigious international residence and the online awards would serve to complement the package, in an effort to make a more substantial contribution to the Brazilian contemporary scene.

From 2016 (after leaving the curatorship of MAM-Rio), when I became the curator of the PIPA Institute, we began to develop a collection, going beyond the works of the artists who win the award. We took as a guiding concept for the collection the idea of *displacement*, which seemed to permeate many poetics at the start of the 21st century. We focus on artists who have passed through PIPA (whether as nominees, finalists or award-winners), and we seek, within the limitations of the budget, to acquire specific works from them and also to commission projects of mutual interest.

Since 2017, we have held exhibitions of this collection at the Villa Aymoré gallery, in Gloria, shared with Jacarandá¹. We are creating a small technical area and, from 2019 onwards, the exhibition of the finalists will take place in this space and no longer at MAM-Rio. The PIPA Institute is developed around these proposals. I will seek to explain a little more about this, with regard to the Brazilian cultural context, in this presentation.

Why create a contemporary art award in 2010? When I took over the curatorship of MAM-Rio, in 2009, Roberto and Lucrecia Vinhaes came to see me at the museum. They wanted to hear about my plans and to analyze opportunities to help. After a long and friendly chat, two stipulations were presented as fundamental, regardless of what

¹ An artists' club led by Carlos Vergara, Raul Mourão, Jose Bechara, Iole de Freitas, Chelpe Ferro, among many others, and coordinated by João Vergara. The principal idea is that it be a space by artists and for artists, with conversations, exhibitions, debates and multiple exchanges yet to be devised: a space for oxygenation beyond the commercial and institutional circuit.

we were going to do: (1) to maintain control of the management and the coordination of the project to be implemented; (2) to invest directly in the project without using the museum's tax exemption. The relationship between the two aspects seemed highly logical and yet unusual in Brazil. We are aware of the importance of tax exemptions to the viability of cultural projects in Brazil. However, it is important to appreciate those who wish to invest in cultural projects without this tax benefit, believing this to be an essential investment for the development of Brazil and for the formation of a culture of freedom and pluralism.

We came out of this first conversation with the idea that the creation of an art award could perhaps be a worthwhile objective, on the basis of these two guidelines. The *Turner Prize* was an example, particularly due to its link with the Tate. I have an ambivalent relationship with awards: on the one hand, they stimulate competition which can be harmful in the art world – already so destabilized by the pressure of the market and the lack of public policies. On the other hand, an award like PIPA gives prominence to artists (and consequently to their works), museums and the art world as a whole. In addition, of course, to greatly help the winning artist.

Out of this ambivalence came the need to tie the PIPA award to certain initiatives that would give it cultural legitimacy: publishing a catalogue, creating a bilingual website that could serve as a research platform for all those interested in art, producing small videos via Skype with the nominated artists, staging an exhibition at MAM-Rio, linking participation in the exhibition as a finalist to the donation of a work to the museum's collection and associating the principal award to an international three-month residence (initially a partnership was established with Gasworks, of London, and then with Residency Unlimited, of New York).

In this respect, it is worth noting that the donation made by the finalist artist to the museum would occur in common accord between the parties. Highlighting the lack of acquisition policies and in view of the importance of museum collections to the education of the public and for the historical recognition of the artist, was a justifiable strategy. This was not a question of replacing an acquisitions policy with a donations policy. That would be a distortion. But the museum needed this joint engagement (of the award and the artists) to strengthen its collection and legitimize its insertion into the

contemporary scene. Anyone who felt uncomfortable, either with the idea of the award or with the counterpart of the donation, could choose not participate if nominated. Some artists expressed this view and such disagreement is healthy and has always been respected. Regardless of this, it is worth noting that the PIPA Institute, in turn, initiated its own acquisitions policy, which has been strengthened since 2016.

A question posed at the start regarding this model of an award was whether we would be open to artists freely registering – in a kind of bid process – or if we would establish a nominating committee, as comprehensive as possible, with the participating artists emerging from this. We chose the second option. Firstly, the nominations served as a filter, emphasizing that they were the product of the vision of people who follow the contemporary art world, from different perspectives. Secondly, in order to have a publication and for it to serve as a portrait of a moment in our world, it would be important to have some filter for the nominations and for there to be a limited number of artists. As it is already hard work to update the website and produce the videos in view of the number of artists nominated, if the award were open to all those who wanted to participate in it, these other products and initiatives, which so interested us, would be absolutely impossible. Every choice implies gains and losses. Making choices implies defending one path, whilst knowing that others are possible. In this respect, it is worth noting the complementary nature of the PIPA, the Marcantônio Vilaça Award and the *Rumos Visuais* (Visual Tendencies), of Itaú. Decisions are made based on what already exists and seeking to contribute within this context.

Looking back over these ten years of the PIPA Prize and Institute, their relationship with a series of artists who have shaped the current state of art is striking. I'm not just talking about the winners, but of them and the finalists. If we take the whole set of nominated artists, we have a panoramic photograph of contemporary art and the micro-scenes that operate within it. This combination of the effect of PIPA on the hegemonic scene and also on the other peripheral scenes that are a constituent and vital part of it, greatly interests us. For this reason, we seek, every year, through the indicators, to have representatives from the different regions of Brazil, from the north to the south, as well as the foreign perspective, the perspective of the urban margins, the indigenous scene, which is to say, of the many Brazils that are part of the same country. Obviously, there is

a focus (artists embarking on new but already significant careers) and there would be no way to have symmetry between the different scenes. However, through the website and the online award, we can see that these micro-scenes have gained prominence and are being naturally strengthened. This is a crucial point concerning the online award – through it, artists with less space and prominence are represented and occupy a space that seems important to them in reaching an audience to whom they were invisible. Of course, at the time of the voting, there is a rush for votes that does not guarantee high visibility. But passing through this stage and winning lots of votes makes their names visible and the visits to the website end up validating this effort – for those artists who win the online awards this increase in prominence is even more significant. In addition, these artists are always well rewarded by the result from the point of view of entering a circuit from which they were absent. Over the years, we have been refining the PIPA Online voting system, studying ways of making voting more secure and fair. If until last year it was necessary to have a Facebook account to vote, in 2019 we are investigating the possibility of linking the voting to a new platform, following the changes in the tendencies of people on the Internet. What remains is the model of a minimum of three votes, put into practice to encourage voters to visit more artists' pages.

The fact that we have also left MAM-Rio and will stage the exhibition of the finalists at Vila Aymoré, forced us to rethink the model of the Award. We have long listened, especially to the artists, regarding the suggestion that the four finalists win a more balanced amount and that there be less asymmetry between finalists and winners. So, we have decided that each of the four finalists will now win R\$30 thousand, without having to produce new work and will donate a work to the PIPA Institute, in common agreement between the parties. The winner selected by an awards committee will win a further R\$30 thousand, with this sum intended to render a viable project of the artist, presented in a letter to the jury. It may be a publication, a residence, a course, or the realization of a specific project, something that the artist views as positive to their career.

What has been demonstrated is a greater connection between the award, the finalists' exhibition and the PIPA Institute. In view of our goal of validating the contemporary scene, we now see the Institute's broad scope extending beyond the award, which will

pursue this new objective at full sail. But it is equally important to continue to maintain the website - an online platform for the presentation and research of contemporary art - with the weekly *newsletter*, the staging of expository projects, and, little by little, the consolidation of its own collection, one of whose focuses is the commissioning of artistic projects which interest both the artists and the Institute. Over these past two years, we have commissioned a video installation from Daniel Beerstecher and funded Alice Micelli's journey to Angola to complete the *Minefields* series. We already had in the collection the part concerning Cambodia, and we acquired the two other parts already produced which we did not possess - Bosnia and Colombia -, concluding now with Angola. Finally, we commissioned a *site-specific* work by Henrique Oliveira in the Villa Aymoré space, transforming and reinventing the ladder that provides access to the galleries. A ladder-sculpture-installation. As can be seen in this book, other works were acquired from artists nominated for the PIPA Prize – Arjan Martins, Berna Reale, Luiza Baldan, Barbara Wagner, André Grifo, Sofia Borges among others.

For all this, we believe that if there are controversies regarding aspects of the award, the result of these ten years of hard work and dedication has been extremely positive for the circuit. We have always been attentive to criticism, sometimes assimilating it, and sometimes defending our positions. Internally, we talk and debate extensively, in a healthy atmosphere, and with a view to the constant improvement of the Award and, increasingly, of the Institute.

Finally, I would like to thank all the friends, colleagues and artists who have contributed to this book, answering certain questions that we formulated, and whose opinions and brief reflections will serve to cast further light on these themes. All the subjects addressed and the contributors invited represent, in some way, aspects of this moment in Brazilian contemporary art and, for this reason, we believe will lend more substance to this publication. We were not simply interested in producing a self-congratulatory book, published to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the award and the formation of the Institute's collection, but rather one which explores the discussions that permeate the day-to-day experience of those who live within the world of contemporary art. These are short answers, for light reading, but with some reflective element. A bit of criticism in the Twitter age.

I am proud to be part of this project and hope that the ten years celebrated by this publication serve as a stimulus for many more years to come.