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Dear Douglas,

it was for me a great pleasure to make your acquaintance. It is not a very usual occurrence to meet people with which one can, at once and on so many varied subjects, find common intellectual interest and points of view. The one thing I regret is that time was so scarce, and did not enable us to go more thoroughly into many of these subjects.

According to what I promised you, as soon as I got back to Ulm, I re-read attentively the letter and memorandum you sent me in December. I have also tried systematically to go over all the documents which I still have, and bring up to date all my recollections concerning Argentine Art in the years which interest you. In doing so, you have obliged me to relive things that I had comfortably managed to wipe from my memory. Reflecting on these past experiences, doubts have assailed me as to if they were really so important as your keen intelligence and curiosity would lead you to think. By no means however, do I wish to interfere with your aims as a historian and critic. I shall therefore now try to give you a synthesis of the evolution of Concrete Art in Argentina, and of the role I played in that movement. I am not completely sure of all the data, but they are the result of what I have been able to find or reconstruct through whatever documents I still possess. If errors have crept in, I think you will find they are not fundamental.

1941

In February I made a trip to Montevideo. I was at the time a "restless" student of Fine Arts. I stayed two or three weeks in that city frequently visiting Torres García. He made a very strong impression on me. Once more back in Buenos Aires I gave up the some times expressionist, some times cubist paintings I had been doing until that time. I began then to work on non-figurative and strictly geometric paintings. The colours I used were only red, blue, and yellow. The influence of Torres García was noticeable. I can imagine that these may have been the paintings Connie saw at the time but I cannot remember with absolute certainty.

1942

At the beginning of the year I went back to figurative painting. I painted

many portraits, nearly without colours, mostly in greys, and in which the influence of Torres García was again obvious. At the end of the year, I suffered a deep crisis regarding painting and gave it up. I started studying systematically in public libraries history of the Arts. I was chiefly concerned with Prehistoric Art, Mycenaen Art, Early Cristian Art in the Catacombs and Trecento Art.

1943

About the middle of the year I made the acquaintance in Buenos Aires of the brazilian-uruguayan poet Carmelo Arden Quin. He was also an admirer of Torres García and a great friend of a young uruguayan painter named Rhod Rothfuss who was a dissident disciple of Torres García. Arden Quin tried to interest me in the paintings of Rothfuss which he showed me in photographs. These were still-life cubist paintings "à la manière de" J. Metzinger, A. Gleizes and in a lesser degree J. Gris. In all these paintings however there was something distinctive. They did not have the usual rectangular or square shape. The outlines were irregular. This irregularity was the result of an absolute adequacy of the outline to the requirements of the composition. This technique, which we later called a "cut-out technique", fascinated and intrigued me. I could perceive the possibility that existed to "objectify" the painting theme: or to put it more clearly for the picture to stop being a theme on a background to become just one whole theme. What I could not accept was that this interesting solution, which I considered so progressive, should be placed at the service of a late cubism. I started searching in what measure this "cut-out" technique could be applied to non-figurative painting. This problem made me go back to painting. I then started working on what we would today consider abstract-expressionism. They were mostly inspired in Kandinsky's works (principally of the period 1910-12), which through the reproductions I had seen had aroused my enthusiasm. My concern with prehistoric painting was also evident, because in some of the themes one could find forms similar to those of the boulders at Mas d'Azil. In all these pictures I continued working on Rothfuss' tentative and applied the cut-out method. At the end of 1943 we started planning with Arden Quin, my brother Edgar Bayley and the painter Lidy Prati the publication of an avant-garde magazine which was to be named "Arturo".

1944

During the first months of that year the first and only number of that magazine appeared. The authors who wrote on it were: Vicente Huidobro, Edgar Bayley, Murillo Mendez, Torres García, Rhod Rothfuss and Gyula Kosice; it also included reproductions of paintings by Lidy Prati, Rhod Rothfuss, Vieiry da Silva, Torres García, Kandinsky, Mondrian and myself. This is the first time that the name Gyula Kosice appears. At the time he was included in the magazine as a poet and not as a painter or sculptor. During all that year my painting evolved towards geometrical abstractionism. I also systematically took up the research of all documents existing in Argentina on the evolution of Abstract Art. Thus I found in the library of an exiled German named Clement Moreau, many documents, books, manifestos, and magazines of the russian abstract movement, of hungarian constructivism, all the Bauhaus publications and the entire collection of "Abstraction Création, Art non-figurative". Among all this mass of material I also

discovered Theo van Doesburgh's manifesto "Art Concret".

1945

This was the decisive year of enlightenment for Concrete Art in Buenos Aires. But also the year of personal conflicts and scissions. By the middle of 1945 two groups had formed. On the one side Arden Quin and Kosice in Buenos Aires and R. Rothfuss in Montevideo, and on the other Lidy Prati and myself. During this period however, a number of new figures, mainly former fellow-students of mine at the Fine Arts Academy, began to join our group. Both groups were using the name "Arte Concreto - Invención". In October of 1945 Arden Quin's group puts on a private exhibition at Dr. Pichon Rivière's house.

1946

The "Asociación de Arte Concreto - Invención" is founded, and its first public exhibition takes place in October at "Galeria Peuser". Manuel Espinoza, Antonio Caraduje, Lidy Prati, Primaldo Monaco, Enio Iommi, Alfredo Hlito, Obdulio Landi, Raúl Lozza, R.V.D. Lozza, Alberto Molenberg and myself all took part in it. The "Manifiesto Invencionista" of which I was the author was then published.

The group Arden Quin - Kosice - Rothfuss takes the name of "Movimiento Madi".

In August 1946, the first number of the magazine "Arte Concreto - Invención" appears in which I write an article about "Lo abstracto y lo concreto en el arte moderno". (Abstract and concrete in modern art.) Torres García starts publishing in Montevideo attacks on Argentine concrete-art. In the second issue of the said magazine I publish another article of a polemic character refuting Torres García.

1947

During this year avant-garde exhibitions take place in which every tendency is present (Salon Kraft - "Arte Nuevo"; and "Galería Payer"). In these two exhibitions appear for the first time J. Mele, V. Villalba and G. Vardanega.

Raúl Lozza, R.V.D. Lozza and O. Landi separate from the abstract group and form the "Grupo Perceptista" (Perceptionist Group). In the course of this year I publish in the "Revista de Arquitectura" an article entitled "Volúmen y dirección en las artes de espacio" (Volume and direction in the arts of space).

1948

I go to Europe. In Milan I become acquainted with concrete artists more specially with Max Huber. In Switzerland I make my first contact with Max Bill, Richard P. Lohse, Camille Graeser and Verena Loewensberg. In Paris I get to know and often visit Georges Vantongerloo.

1949/50

Back in Buenos Aires, my main concern is the relation between Concrete Art, industrial design and architecture.

1951

My first pedagogical experience takes place at Teresópolis (Brazil) where a course on concrete art is given. I become closely acquainted with the

brazilian artists Geraldo Barros, Almir Mavignier, Ivan Serpa, Waldemar Corderio. In December, the magazine "Nueva Visión" of which I am editor, is published. This magazine continued appearing until 1957. It was concerned with arts, industrial design, architecture and typography.

1952

Painters and sculptors of different tendencies form a group called "Artistas Modernos Argentinos". Their first exhibition takes place in June at the "Galeria Viau". In this exhibition appear for the first time associated with the concrete artists some of the abstract expressionist, such as: Miguel Ocampo, Sarah Grillo, and Fernandez Muro. This same group then make the exhibition named "8 Artistas Argentinos" in the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam.

Your question about Max Bill I shall try to answer as objectively as is nowadays possible for me.

1

Max Bill never exercised any influence whatsoever either directly or indirectly on the first phase (1941-44) of argentine abstract art.

2

I was familiar with Max Bill's work (through reproductions) since 1942. If I remember correctly I have read his first articles around 1943. However I did not then attach as much importance to them as I did later.

3

The designation "Arte Concreto" which we adopted for our movement was not taken from Max Bill but from van Doesburgh's manifesto, and from an article by Kandinsky in the french magazine "XXième Siècle".

4

My real interest in Max Bill's work began in 1947.

5

Max Bill's influence on argentine art is undeniable, but it only began to make itself felt timidly in 1947, and openly since 1948-49, and even then nearly exclusively on the sculptors E. Iommi, C. Girola and J. Souza. Some are of the opinion that Hlito's painting after 1952 was directly influenced by him. This however is only partly true. What really happened was that both Max Bill and Hlito directly experienced Vantongerloo's influence.

6

I believe that a great part of the diffusion given to Max Bill's work, is due, especially after 1948, to southamerican artists.

Dear Douglas, here ends this autobiographical torture. I must confess that this has been one of the most difficult letters I have ever written, but I suppose anyone who must write about himself always feels an absolute fool. I am enclosing copies of the various documents from which I have reconstructed this memorandum and hope that all this material may prove to be of some assistance in your work.

- 5 -

With Maia, we are both looking forward to meeting you again soon, this time with more leisure to enjoy your company, and discuss intensively the many subjects which interest us.

Yours sincerely

(Tomás Maldonado)