Showcasing one of the nation’s strongest collections of Latin American art, UT’s newest museum redefines the museum experience and makes art accessible.

¡VIVA EL BLANTON!

“WE HAD THE BONES AND THE COMMUNION WAFERS.” GABRIEL Pérez-Barreiro, curator of Latin American Art at the Blanton Museum on the University of Texas campus, is discussing Missão/ Missões [How to Build Cathedrals], an installation by Cildo Meireles. “We had cared for the painting slabs, the bones, and the structure on which it is hung. We also had to buy the money—$6,000 in pennies, which is 600 pounds in coins. In every country, you put the lowest denomination coin.” With cattle bones dangling above the giant oasis of pennies, this piece exploring the economics of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Jesuit missions is massive—so big it has its own gallery in the Blanton’s new Mari and James A. Michener Gallery Building.

Supervising the reassembly of this complicated piece was only one of Pérez-Barreiro’s preparations for making the collection comfortable in its new home. The Blanton’s collection of Latin American art includes more than 2,000 works by more than 600 artists, including Fernando Botero, Eugenio Dittborn, Armando Morales, Antonio Segui, and Joaquín Torres-García. The Barbara Duncan Collection, consisting of nearly 300 works, comprises the core of these extraordinary holdings. The Blanton’s collection is particularly strong in Mexican graphics of the early twentieth century and post-1970 paintings and drawings from South America. As the curator of Latin American Art, Pérez-Barreiro was the person charged with culling the pieces and planning the galleries.

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Publication of all the ancillary materials, including a comprehensive part of the permanent collection, Pérez-Barreiro also oversaw the around the state and deciding which pieces would be installed as really have this American and Latin American dialogue. “Our collection kind of stopped acquiring contemporary pieces. In addition to bringing the collection in preparation for the opening. Lately, Pérez-Barreiro has focused on In the past three years, the collection has added almost 200 new works collections to be easily viewed by the public. The prints and drawings study room holds over 15,000 works on paper. Operating just like a viewing library, visitors can pull out any work that interests them. Paintings not on display in the museum are housed in racks in the museum’s storage rooms, and with some notice almost any work can be obtained for viewing in one of the Blanton’s specially designed classroom. “Say you wanted to teach a class on New Figuration, and the works are not on display—we can pull them out,” says Pérez-Barreiro. “[The classrooms] have racks on the side, so you can lay out a bunch of work and the students can see the original works.”

A Museum for Art and Scholarship
This foresighted toward the integration of art and scholarship is one of the most compelling things about the Blanton. It’s not just a museum—it’s part of a world-class university. The works in its collections are continuously studied and are available to students, teachers, and the general public. In addition, the museum’s creative outreach programs bring art and art education to the university, the Austin community, and the world. Being a part of the University of Texas is also helpful as the curators travel the world and make requests for new acquisitions. “When I say UT, it rings bells,” Pérez-Barreiro says. “It’s definitely important. We’re in a position to provide interpretation and scholarship on these pieces. It just gives another dimension to the artwork.”

The Blanton
On April 29, 2006, the doors were officially opened to the Blanton Museum of Art on the UT campus. The turnout was impressive—during the 24-hour grand opening weekend, lines stretched around the block at 2 o’clock in the morning. Attendance records show that close to 22,000 visitors came to the museum in that first weekend alone. With over 17,000 works in its collections, planning the museum’s buildings and curating its galleries was a project three years in the making. When its second building is finished in early 2007, the Blanton will be the largest university art museum in the country. Finally, the collections have a permanent home, and based on the initial response, it’s certain to have lots of guests.

Art and Partnerships
Pérez-Barreiro’s office is currently housed in the Fine Arts Build- ing, and it’s a comfortable spot. “We collaborate very closely with the art and art history departments,” he says. “I’m on dissertation committees. I also run a graduate seminar in conjunction with the Cisneros Foundation in Caracas that’s specifically designed to provide a crossover of curatorial and academic.”

Pérez-Barreiro’s work depends heavily on partnerships—with donors, with other curators, with different departments at the university, and with the Blanton’s multitude of visitors. The Blanton’s Workspace Series is an excellent example of the partnerships that the museum is building with living artists. The series features site-specific works commissioned from contemporary artists from around the world. Exhibits change every 10 weeks and are accompanied by critical texts and public programs designed to connect the art and artist to the community. For its opening, the Workspace gallery features The Invisible Jump by Argentinean Daniel Joglar, who was recently named one of the “50 International Emerging Artists” by Contemporary magazine.

When Joglar came to Austin to complete the installation, he was introduced to local artists in the community. “He didn’t just come and only meet the curators and the museum,” says Pérez-Barreiro. “It’s all about this collaborative spirit. Trying to find hundreds of people who can take it further than we can.”

Completing the Collection
In the past three years, the collection has added almost 200 new works in preparation for the opening. Lately, Pérez-Barreiro has focused on acquiring contemporary pieces. In addition to bringing the collection up to date, he focused on representing all of the important schools and movements in Latin American art. “Our collection kind of stopped at 1980, and I felt really strongly that we needed to bring it up to date. I was very specifically thinking of the new museum and where we had particular weaknesses. Almost everything in the Minimalist and movements in Latin American art. “Our collection kind of stopped at 1980, and I felt really strongly that we needed to bring it up to date. I was very specifically thinking of the new museum and where we had particular weaknesses. Almost everything in the Minimalist

The Blanton Museum of Art


Viver a los saltos [To Live: By Leaps and Bounds] Rómulo Maccio, 1964

The Invisible Jump by Argentinean Daniel Joglar, who was recently named one of the “50 International Emerging Artists” by Contemporary magazine.
The Blanton

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