In Mexico City in February 1933, David Alfaro Siqueiros denounced “folk art for export [. . . ] produced in industrial quantities” that “manifests itself in the tendency to paint the typical picture that the tourist wants.” The following year in Montevideo, Joaquín Torres-García urged artists not to “exchange what belongs to us for the foreign (which is unpar-donable snobbery) but, on the contrary, convert the foreign into our own substance.” This reflected his claim that “the epoch of colonialism and importation is over (I am now referring to culture more than anything else)” and that if an artist “didn’t learn a lesson from Europe at the right time, so much the worse for him, for that moment has passed.” These enunciations indicate how intimately tied understandings of art were at this time, in the region sometimes known as Latin America, to the importation and exportation of raw materials and goods. That entanglement forms the armature of this book, which, from different angles, explores the relationship between art, trade, and the trade in art from Latin America between 1933 and 1945.
During the period in which Siqueiros and Torres-García uttered these words, the world was in flux. Among other developments, the Great Depression was sending tremors through the international economy; fascism began to seize Europe; and the increasingly undeniable position of the United States as a superpower on the world stage—which would be fully consolidated by the end of World War II—rearranged international circuits of trade, culture, communication, and sovereignty. In the Americas, the Good Neighbor Policy (1933–45), initiated by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, promised nonintervention in the hemisphere, instead cultivating greater political, commercial, and cultural interdependence. As nations in Latin America increasingly embraced industrialization as the path to modernity, autonomy would be sought, but what would become known as “development” in Latin America often involved collaboration with private enterprise in the United States. Latin America’s cultural, economic, and political futures were all enmeshed in these conjunctures. This book argues that the field of Latin American art, as it exists today, emerged as a negotiation of this reconfiguring landscape.

**IMPORTED CULTURE AND EXPORTABLE PRESTIGE**

As these statements by Siqueiros and Torres-García symptomatize, art in Latin America developed in relation to a discourse, stretching back at least as far as the early nineteenth century but arguably extending back to the late fifteenth-century arrival of Europeans, that I am calling imported culture. This discourse analogized culture—a specific book, a particular coiffure, a peculiar way of speaking or dangling a cigarette or decorating one’s carriage—to the exchanges materializing commercial ties between Latin America and its trading partners. Since the Conquest, New World raw materials—such as precious metals and subsequently sugar, coffee, oil, cotton, meat, and rubber—were exchanged for manufactured goods from Europe. Once nations declared independence from Spain and Portugal over the course of the nineteenth century, the theory of comparative advantage in international trade governed the approach to export-led development in what has become known as Latin America’s “export age” (1870–1930). Following the precepts of David Ricardo, John Stuart Mill, and others, this theory was founded upon the concept of a commodity lottery—bananas versus petroleum versus rubber—that enabled different countries to occupy variegated positions as producers and consumers in the world market. No matter that some of these commodities were not autochthonous—sugar and coffee, for instance, had been brought by Europeans to the Americas as agricultural
specimens that took root there, in turn transforming the landscapes, economies, labor relations, and populations of the Americas, not least through slavery. While exportation has been the dominant term through which Latin America’s position in the global economy has been understood, increasing attention to the directly proportional role of and desire for imports in Latin America has enriched our understanding of how commerce and culture came to intersect. This desire for imports, from steam engines to the latest accoutrements, in the decolonizing republics of the Americas typified a schism between political independence (at times more aspirational than concrete) and a persistent dependence at once economic and cultural.

The specter of imported culture proceeded to haunt nineteenth- and twentieth-century intellectuals, including artists, as the republics of the region grappled with the invention of national cultures while the conjointly cultural and economic dynamics of empire—prizing the European good (predominantly French) over the local—persisted. As early as 1846, one Brazilian critic wrote: “Europe, which sends us back our cotton spun and woven . . . is telling us the best way to write the history of Brazil.” In this analogy, New World raw material (cotton, a newsworthy event) becomes a finished product (textiles, national history) manufactured abroad. As literary theorist Roberto Schwarz extrapolates from this quotation: “The nexus between economic exploitation (i.e. the export of raw materials and import of manufactures) and ideological subordination was beginning to dawn in our consciousness.”

How could an artist from Latin America negotiate such a cultural field? Take, for instance, a painting by Juan Manuel Blanes, the most acclaimed Uruguayan artist of the nineteenth century, called *Demonio, mundo y carne* (*The Devil, the World and the Flesh*) (1886) (figure 1). A female figure appears nude, apart from a metal bracelet on her right wrist and a colorful fringed textile covering her head. She reclines on a rumpled divan, whose gilded frame is smothered by luxurious green fabric. Behind her, ornate wallpaper glimmers with chinoiserie blue silk. On the floor where she rests her foot, a leopard skin is strewn with cast-off objects—among them a golden pitcher, a string of pearls, a tiara, a theatrical mask, and even more textiles of varying textures. A heavy curtain occupies the left edge of the composition; the nude’s contorted hands, raised to cover her eyes, suggest that it has just been pulled back to reveal her to the day. She is (temporarily?) blinded by the light.

Blanes produced this painting decades after Uruguay had achieved political independence from Spain but at a moment when British informal empire dictated the growth
IntroductIon

and operations of the country’s economy, which predominantly relied on the export of meat and animal hides to Europe in exchange for finished goods. We might surmise that Blanes’s nude is surrounded by the material traces of imported culture. Indeed, the gaudy excess of the leopard rug and the tiara, among other details, suggests the decadence of the Latin American elite, addicted to foreign luxuries—not only European but also bearing traces of Africa, Asia, and “the Orient.” Yet Blanes’s fair-skinned figure is naked, appearing to have rejected these accoutrements of global commerce, or at least to have devalued them. Among the items of detritus are playing cards, perhaps a nod to the international stock market, whose unpredictability could be allegorized as a game of chance governing the trade in meat and manufactures, orchestrating the booms and busts of the late nineteenth century. Notably, Blanes himself had not discarded that luxury good the easel painting, continuing to take stylistic cues from Europe, but he manufactured it himself.

FIGURE 1. Juan Manuel Blanes, *Demonio, mundo y carne (The Devil, the World and the Flesh)*, 1886. Oil on canvas, 106 x 156 cm. Museo de Bellas Artes Juan Manuel Blanes, Montevideo, Uruguay. Wikimedia Commons
If the painting’s title most readily summons the sins of earthly existence, it is difficult to dismiss that the carne of the title—suggesting flesh—might apply equally to the woman’s body as to the meat exchanged at market for the luxury objects that surround her. It is tempting to consider that the painstaking detail with which Blanes depicts her skin—a thin encasement for veins and blood—suggests a slab of beef awaiting inspection on a butcher’s block. What of that flank that she presents to us, what of this contorted pose? Blanes has given us the silhouette of Latin America, the negative space between her resistant yet submissive arms and breast—the Gulf of Mexico.

Blanes was not alone in imagining a Latin America that had seen the light and rejected the trappings and strangleholds of imported culture. Cuban writer José Martí—peripatetic across the hemisphere—likewise saw political, economic, and cultural independence as inextricably linked projects. In his germinal essay “Nuestra América” (1891), Martí wrote: “The frock coats are still French, but thought begins to be American. The youth of America are rolling up their sleeves, digging their hands in the dough, and making it rise with the sweat of their brows. They realize that there is too much imitation, and that creation is the key to salvation. ‘Create’ is the password of this generation. The wine is made from plantain, but even if it turns sour, it is our own wine!” Martí here betrays some ambivalence—the wine is both “bitter” (aesthetically unpleasant, the taste is literally bad) and “made from plantain” (produced incorrectly); its virtue is that it is “ours.” Rather than selling raw materials in exchange for French frock coats, Martí proposed that New World nature be converted into New World culture, without the need of a European refinery, anticipating later practices that would become known as import substitution industrialization. However, reliance upon Europe and its goods was not the sole concern. Reporting from the first Pan-American congress two years earlier, Martí had cautioned his readers that “Spanish America” must “declare its second independence”—this time from “the powerful United States, replete with surplus products and determined to extend its dominion over the Americas.”

Likewise asserting a regional identity in opposition to the encroaching hegemony of the Colossus of the North, as the United States was sometimes known, in 1900 Uruguayan writer José Enrique Rodó adapted Shakespeare’s The Tempest, already an allegory for the “discovery” of the New World, recasting Ariel as a Latin American aesthete and as the rightful heir to the Americas, increasingly tyrannized by Caliban, now a surrogate for the
While Rodó’s book provided Latin Americans with grist for the anti-imperialist (specifically anti-US) mill over the course of the twentieth century, the fact that Rodó used a classic British play as the referent for his text raises further questions, not least considering the role of the United Kingdom as informal imperialist in the Americas at the moment when Ariel was written.

Even those who sought to industrialize at home, manufacturing products that would replace imports, still preferred the finer things that were made elsewhere, from hats to shoes to carriages to works of art. As Mexican sociologist Andrés Molina Enríquez observed in 1909: “The foreigners and creoles who are the owners of our textile factories do not use the cloth that their factories produce. For the most part their clothing is of European cloth; they wear European or American-made hats, and walk on American-manufactured shoes. They ride in European or American carriages, and they decorate their houses with European art. In short, they prefer everything foreign to everything that is Mexican, including their taste in paintings, literature, and music.” Following this logic, cultural products (including paintings, literature, and music) were grouped with the imported luxuries and manufactured goods that were exchanged for Latin America’s raw materials.

Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century artists and intellectuals from Latin America, Blanes among them, might themselves be compared to raw materials processed and packaged abroad, as a voyage to Europe, primarily to Paris, proved de rigueur for a young Latin American seeking to accumulate cultural capital. As Michele Greet chronicles in her recent book Transatlantic Encounters: Latin American Artists in Paris between the Wars, Paris provided young artists of the Americas with avant-garde culture, an infrastructure of academies, exhibition opportunities, and commercial depots sorely lacking back home. During the 1920s, Latin Americans both imported aesthetic strategies back to the Americas that they could use so as to depict local “content” and, in their time living in Paris, became more aware of what was distinctively Ecuadorian, Peruvian, Mexican, Argentinian, and sometimes even Latin American about their place of origin.

It was in that decade that the Brazilian avant-garde poet Oswald de Andrade proposed a movement of poetry “for export” based on a metaphor of the pau brasil tree, the export commodity after which the country had been named. While Andrade has been celebrated for the radicalism of his ideas, especially his “Manifesto antropófago,” which suggested a way that imported culture might be cannibalized, it bears mentioning that his operative metaphors remained embedded in the import/export paradigm—metaphors
that found their grounding in export commodities as well as in primitivizing notions of indigenous peoples, to whom Andrade bore no relation. It likewise bears mentioning that Andrade’s project, alongside that of his collaborator and partner, the painter Tarsila do Amaral, was elite and funded by the profits of the coffee business that formed one side of Brazil’s economic dependency, wealth that historically had been built off the backs of enslaved peoples. Here too the discourse of imported culture, exchanged for raw materials from Latin America, proved remarkably resilient and persisted in haunting the artists who are the focus of this book.

Artists such as Siqueiros and Torres-García were among those who trained in Europe and were conscious of negotiating these asymmetrically transnational discourses of distinction, originality, localism, and universalism. But if Europe had represented the training zone for those Latin Americans seeking to embody the modern artist during the interwar period, by the turn of the 1940s the primary market for the art that they produced was decisively New York. Even as these artists sought to break free from the yoke of imported culture, the United States emerged as the key site for framing art produced in Latin America as a rarefied form of export commodity. Indeed, the New York–based Lincoln Kirstein, who amassed a collection of art from the region for the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in 1942, argued that Latin American art represented a crucial form of “exportable prestige.” If artists required a trip to Europe to mint them as moderns, Kirstein’s formulation suggests that Latin American art could itself operate as a symbolic currency when shipped to New York. Much as the United States became an indomitable world power during this period, so too had its art market become the most auspicious for artists from Latin America, especially when few opportunities existed to sell one’s work at home (Buenos Aires and Mexico City being the only cities in Latin America with commercial galleries prior to the 1940s). With the Paris art world hushed by Nazi occupation under Vichy (and its leading lights having emigrated), New York emerged as the center of art commerce during World War II, a position it would continue to occupy in the post-war period.

A shift had taken place; the specter of imported culture had been in certain ways eclipsed by the understanding that cultural goods produced in Latin America should aim to be “exportable.” As this book explores, this did not necessarily liberate art from a cultural discourse of dependency, as art’s exportability placed it in the symbolic position of a raw material seeking a market abroad. Sometimes works of art made during this era engaged their status between imported and exported good—between raw material and...
manufacture—through metapictorial strategies. Over the course of this book, I will argue that these paintings performed their analogical relationship to export commodities, not least as pictorial objects rendered mobile across the same routes of inter-American commerce traversed by raw materials in search of their markets—the oil, meats, metals, hides, coffee, rubber, and sugar to be exchanged for the imported manufactures and machinery promising to usher in the modern.

This dynamic in the field of art was contemporaneous with what is known as the Good Neighbor Policy, initiated by Roosevelt at the Seventh International Conference of American States, held in Montevideo in December 1933. Under the aegis of this initiative, nations of the hemisphere pledged to cooperate and to peacefully coexist without recourse to military intervention, signaling the end of the US military occupation of Nicaragua and Haiti and precipitating the repeal of the Platt Amendment governing relations with Cuba, among other developments. Political solidarity and campaigns of antifascism would become paramount during World War II. In his role as president of MoMA beginning in 1939 and as coordinator of Inter-American Affairs beginning in 1940, Nelson Rockefeller entangled political, commercial, and cultural objectives, not least relating to the circulation, exhibition, and collection of art from Latin America or what was increasingly being called Latin American art. These efforts in the artistic arena were consistent with, if not always officially tied to, a cultural program of inter-American exchange developed in tandem with transformations and reroutings of communication networks organizing the movement of information, people, materials, and goods. The 1930s and early 1940s were marked by the expansion of aviation, the construction of the Pan-American Highway, and the diffusion of radio and cinema technologies. That Latin American economies were cut off from both European markets and goods during this era, especially after the commencement of World War II, motivated the production of infrastructure that would grease the tracks of exchange across the hemisphere. The dependence of the United States on Latin America’s raw materials, especially those required for the war industry, further fueled the thickening of this inter-American network and hastened the process I am calling hemispheric integration.

In spite of these expanded circuits of interconnection, works of art proved relatively cumbersome to transport. At one extreme, Mexican murals—the first form of art that became internationally recognized as a specifically Latin American contribution to twentieth-century art—proved ontologically resistant to circulation and collection, connected
as they were to particular sites from which they were immovable. Nevertheless, as Anna
Indych-López has explored, Mexican muralist Diego Rivera would develop a series of
portable murals for MoMA. Works of art by Siqueiros, Brazilian painter Cândido
Portinari, and Cuban artist Mario Carreño, analyzed in the pages that follow, likewise
adapted to the demands for mobility and exchange, seeking a scale somewhere between a
mural and a conventional easel painting.

Ultimately, the ability to ship a work of art internationally relied on substantial fund-
ing. Rockefeller and his various partners and delegates in the cultural realm, including
Kirstein, possessed the capital necessary to facilitate the circulation of exhibitions across
the hemisphere and to collect works of art from Latin America for MoMA. Siqueiros
became briefly dependent on Rockefeller’s patronage for his own mobility across the
hemisphere in 1942 and 1943. Torres-García, by contrast, lacked the funds; instead, light-
weight publications did the work of hemispheric diffusion when the cost of shipping
paintings proved prohibitive. Here materiality and mobility came to intersect.

Why mobilize works of art, then, if they were so hefty and also so singular, compared
to the mass-reproduced periodicals published and disseminated by Rockefeller’s Office of
Inter-American Affairs or the broadcasts transmitted by new radio networks across the
hemisphere? As Kirstein saw it, “exportable prestige” was one means of understanding
the particular value of art and exhibitions. Cultural diplomacy and its symbolic imbun-
ing of particular objects also factored into MoMA exhibitions such as Twenty Centuries of
Mexican Art (1940) and Portinari of Brazil (1940).

If, over the course of the 1930s and early 1940s, cultural exchanges were framed as
inter-American, by 1945 Latin American art was to be understood as a discrete field of
collecting, study, and making. This book argues that this field was a geocultural product
of the recent acceleration of communication and intensification of exchange, a version
of what David Harvey terms “time-space compression.” I contend that this compres-
sion manifested within works of art themselves—namely, in images that sought to bring
the Americas closer together, sometimes within the dimensions of a single canvas. Thus,
hemispheric integration was both the brief of political and economic strategy and that
of artists and specific works of art. As I argue more indirectly throughout this book,
American art, in its triumphantist postwar guise denotative solely of US praxis, would also
be produced therein, though in the following chapters we will focus on the mutual entan-
glement of North and South prior to their Cold War scission.

The 1930s and early 1940s marked a transition between centuries of economic depen-
dency, which proved continuous in many ways from the imperial through the early
Republican eras, and a postwar moment characterized by accelerated industrialization and optimism concerning its potential to transform Latin America politically, economically, and culturally. After decades of uneven attempts at modernization across the region, new pressures were placed upon industrialization with the dawn of the global Great Depression, which affected national economies to varying degrees. The precarity induced and fully revealed by the economic crisis lent unprecedented urgency to this project, which would become formulated as import substitution industrialization in the early years of the postwar period, tied to the ideology of developmentalism. Developmentalist ideology—most pronounced in Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil—would come to mark the artistic field with the efflorescence and profusion of Concrete art in cities such as Buenos Aires, São Paulo, and Caracas. In this period, Latin American art would be repositioned not as imported culture nor as a vehicle of “exportable prestige” but as autonomous—a corrective to centuries of imperialism that could be delivered only by industrial modernity. But persistent relations with and dependencies upon the United States undergirding developmentalism would haunt the postwar era.

It was at the fulcrum of these transformations that the artists and other actors who populate this book began to imagine and realize their transnational projects of hemispheric integration. Siqueiros sought to industrialize the culture of the region through art (especially murals) produced in Argentina, Mexico, Chile, and Cuba, as explored in chapter 1. But notably it was an industrially aligned art drawing upon US expertise in the form of Duco paint, spray guns used for applying it, and projectors used for producing compositions and templates for the murals, all imported from the Colossus to the North. If Siqueiros sought to wrest Latin America’s culture from the stranglehold of European hegemony through a “revolutionary medium,” his art nevertheless anticipated, paralleled, and materialized a transition toward US dominance in the hemisphere, as well as on a planetary scale, after World War II.

While Siqueiros attempted to modernize Latin America through the practice of Duco muralism, Torres-García tried to Latin Americanize modernity, as analyzed in chapter 2. If Siqueiros adapted US technological expertise to Latin American sites and “content,” Torres-García transformed European aesthetic principles so as to emphasize their morphological link to pre-Columbian and various other indigenous forms. The Uruguayan artist also called for artists to use local materials. As such, Torres-García’s morphological Constructivism performed what we might call an import substitution for art. Whereas Siqueiros was itinerant across the Americas, Torres-García remained in Montevideo from
1934 until his death in 1949. Nevertheless, his art was centripetal in its fusing of transcon-
tinental, transhistorical referents and centrifugal in its dissemination via the expanding
webs traversed by his publications and correspondence.

If, during the 1930s and early 1940s, Siqueiros was peripatetic in his mobile mural
making and Torres-García was stationed in Montevideo, New York was a key site for
the collecting and curating of art from Latin America, namely at MoMA, as traced in
chapter 3. Bridging MoMA and the Office of Inter-American Affairs, Nelson Rockefeller
and his cultural coordinators commissioned works of art by Mexican muralist Rivera
and by Brazilian painter Portinari and organized exhibitions of art from the region;
Rockefeller also funded figures such as Grace McCann Morley to circulate exhibitions
across the hemisphere and figures such as Lincoln Kirstein to amass a collection of art
from Latin America for MoMA. During their travels, Rockefeller’s delegates encountered
both Siqueiros and Torres-García; as this book will explore, these networks both inter-
sected and diverged in their projects of hemispheric integration.

In chapter 4, the book makes an argument concerning the ways in which the vec-
tors of this increasingly consolidated (collectible, classifiable, circulating) thing Latin
American art began to structure the modes of making of a new generation of artists, who
now would incorporate this field and its (changing) rules into their practices. In partic-
ular, Mario Carreño hybridized the mobile materialities, tropes, and agendas character-
izing the art of the region in a series of paintings. Using Duco to limn raw material labor
and Afro-Cuban culture, Carreño sought to make works of art that were simultaneously
Cuban and Latin American, simultaneously industrial and agricultural, simultaneously
representative of home and “exportable” to New York. In turn, Carreño’s transition
toward geometric abstraction in the postwar period dovetailed with the shifting itinerar-
ies and aesthetics of art from Latin America during the Cold War, touched on throughout
the book but more fully explored in the conclusion, which connects the particular cul-
tural shifts of the 1930s and early 1940s to those of the Cold War and of the present day.

**MATERIALITY, MOBILITY, AND EXCHANGE**

In the pages that follow, the materiality of art plays an important role. The Duco paint
used by Siqueiros and briefly by Carreño, among other artists of the Americas, proves a
means by which to understand the particular relationship between art and (imported)
technology. On the other hand, considering works of art made with local materials by
Torres-García opens up questions of antimodernization modernism, of import substitution, and of morphological theories of art. This book attempts to take matter seriously and also to understand it in dynamic relation with form, composition, symbolism, subject matter, the discourse circling around the work, and the funding of the work, among other conditions.

The mutual imbrication of materiality and mobility is key to this book’s methodology and follows from an understanding of materiality not purely as the constituent stuff of an object or artwork but also as a means of understanding the work of art as a thing in the world. Accordingly, a painting’s circulation sutures it to new networks, contexts, and modes of signification in dialogue with, about, and around pictures. In this regard, Arjun Appadurai’s work on “the social life of things,” Bruno Latour’s concept of “immutable mobiles,” the recent deluge of scholarship concerning nonhuman agency and agential matter, and Jennifer Roberts’s work on the “material mobility of pictures” have all proven to be important reference points.

My conception of the work of art as an object and agent of exchange also draws from a broader constellation of texts, including Pierre Bourdieu’s theorization of the cultural field as a “market of symbolic goods” and Jean-Joseph Goux’s work on “symbolic economies.” In the present book, Michael Taussig’s and Peter Galison’s writings about “trading zones,” understood as transactional spaces of encounter in which meaning and knowledge are produced, here become linked to an analysis of the connections between the trade in art and other forms of trade. Art historical work on the relationship between art and commerce is impossible without the model of Michael Baxandall’s scholarship, not least his analysis of the variegated “conditions of trade” affecting the commissioning and making of paintings and his later theorizations of troc, an open-ended means of thinking about the system of exchange connecting painters, paintings, patrons, customers, and viewers. In its attention to the role of institutions in producing value, this project also owes a debt to foundational work by Serge Guilbaut, Shifra Goldman, and Andrea Giunta.

GEOCULTURAL CATEGORIES

The writing of this book has benefited from archival research conducted in Mexico, the United States, Uruguay, and Brazil, and from important publications concerning the principal artists. The book also profits from and hopes to contribute to a growing body of recent scholarship that engages in a transnational framing of art from Latin America,
until recently an unusual practice for art history in general. In diverse ways, this community of art historians pushes, questions, and historicizes the boundaries of what we mean when we talk about Latin American art.

The lack of consensus concerning what Latin American art both denotes and connotes is crucial for the argument that follows. A disclaimer: this book is not interested in providing a definitive answer, in shutting down alternative understandings, or in reinforcing or invalidating the truth value of this term. Much as the “idea of Latin America” is itself a historical construction that both includes and excludes, that produces some meanings and obviates others, so too is Latin American art. I am committed in these pages to analyzing a web composed of vectors that, in my thinking, helped to consolidate this field as it continues to exist today. Accordingly, I am interested in understanding Latin American art as what I am calling a geocultural category.

By geocultural category, I mean to specify that geographically framed aesthetic classifications are forged and refined in particular historical moments in relationship to particular geopolitical and geo-economic transformations. Geocultural category might indicate an urban scale of reference (e.g., the Parisian avant-garde), the national framing of art (e.g., Iranian painting), or the supranational/continental bloc (e.g., African art). Thus, geocultural categories are distinct from what Immanuel Wallerstein calls “geoculture,” understood as a homogenized and homogenizing force, reinforcing a particular understanding of hegemonic globalization. Whereas Wallerstein’s “geoculture” is singular and totalizing, geocultural categories are differentiated, multiple, and sometimes intersecting with national, continental, and regional denominations that are likewise historically defined. Sometimes they are defined from inside and sometimes from outside the territory to which they refer; in other instances, such categories are constructed across and between such borders.

A geocultural category seeks to frame the cultural production of a particular scale of territory in relation to that territory, understanding culture and geography as meaningfully linked. The notion of the geocultural category rests upon a premise: that the category can be projected back on the history of cultural production in that place, now unified across time under the rubric of the category, even if the category art was not always the term under which objects and images were made (as in the case of much of what is now called Asian and African art). What’s more, the category in turn proves prescriptive for any art that proceeds to be produced in the region, art whose makers then must grapple with how their work does or does not conform to the “tradition” (however invented) now established as specific to a particular place.
Of course, a geocultural logic was fundamental to art history from the start. As Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann has argued, for thinkers from Johann Joachim Winckelmann to Erwin Panofsky, the relationship of history and culture to geography was key. Sometimes this relationship between art and the place it was made was grounded in climatological explanations for cultural difference (already evident in ancient texts); a certain environmental determinism persisted in the eighteenth century, not least through the writings of Montesquieu. In the nineteenth century, such considerations would be more clearly articulated in connection to theorizations of nationhood as well as sometimes to “evolving” conceptions of race; arguments linking cultural practices to notions of race would, in turn, prove useful for fascist ideologues and heinous to their critics, such as Meyer Schapiro, who argued against such conflation during the 1930s. Hegel’s conception of the movement of spirit from place to place and from era to era certainly also weighs on the way in which cultures in Latin America, Europe, and the United States were compared in the 1930s and 1940s, not least as this concept was taken up by Oswald Spengler in his landmark study *The Decline of the West* (1918). Notably, Spengler’s thinking was adapted by eugenicists seeking to promote a racialized understanding of history and culture while, in the wake of travels across the Americas, Mexican intellectual (and mural commissioner) José Vasconcelos would famously concoct a theory of *The Cosmic Race* (1925), inverting Spengler’s apocalyptic vision in favor of *mestizaje* (racial intermixture) as the key to the future of civilization. In Vasconcelos’s argument, the Americas would lead the way.

In this book, the geocultural category Latin American art, as art from the region is primarily known today, was in the process of solidifying in institutional and discursive terms. There are multiple ways to trace the history of this idea. Firstly, *Latin America* is itself a historical and discursive construction, the term coined by a Frenchman in the mid-nineteenth century. It is well established that certain questions and debates concerning what we might now call *Latin American culture* were already developing in the nineteenth century literary field, in the wake of Simón Bolívar’s independence campaigns and the Monroe Doctrine. By the end of the century, Martí and Rodó, among others, began to analyze the problems confronting, and also the potential for, cultural production in the region. A variety of terms—*American, Pan-American, Indo-American, inter-American, Spanish American, Ibero-American,* and *Latin American,* among others—began to circulate, with overlapping yet distinct implications. As will prove relevant in the chapters that follow, the theorization of Latin America has been persuasively understood by some
scholars as increasingly defined in contradistinction to an understanding of the United States as a technocratic, cultureless aggressor.\textsuperscript{17} This dialectical construction of both Latin America and the United States in mutually constitutive relation proves important in the present book, though paradoxes, exceptions, and hybridizations complicate the dynamic.

It was in the 1920s when the question of what a specifically visual American art (implicitly excluding the United States) might and should look like began to occupy the pages of journals.\textsuperscript{18} As Lori Cole has examined, Cuba’s 	extit{Revista de Avance} published the results of a survey that asked intellectuals, “What should American art be?”\textsuperscript{19} That same decade, Peru’s 	extit{Amauta}, edited by José Carlos Mariátegui, would juxtapose the work of artists hailing from across Latin America, as Harper Montgomery has recently chronicled.\textsuperscript{40} This practice of juxtaposition would continue in photo spreads and editorial content disseminated by Argentina’s 	extit{Sur} during the 1930s. Greet has analyzed how exhibitions in Paris gathered together the works of expatriate artists from Latin America, first in 1924 and then in 1930 (the latter notably organized by Torres-García), providing important precedents for the framing of art from Latin America as a unified field,\textsuperscript{41} though writers and collectors lagged in shaping this geocultural category. The degree to which artists themselves internalized or sought to answer the question of what form this transnational, regional art would take is less clear. Siqueiros and Torres-García, whose art and writings occupy a substantial portion of this book, are notable for their explicit, at times programmatic, address to these questions and debates; Rockefeller and his cultural emissaries are significant for their promotion and consolidation of the field through collecting and curatorial practices; and Carreño is emblematic as an artist navigating this geocultural category.

At stake in the 1930s and early 1940s was the relationship of the Americas to the world at large. Indeed, the period upon which this book focuses was a moment of geopolitical, geo-economic, and geocultural realignment not just for Latin America but for the globe. During the Second World War, political philosopher Carl Schmitt concocted his theories concerning the geopolitical 	extit{Nomos of the Earth}, tying sovereignty to the dominion of land and sea. It was in 1941 that Henry Luce coined the term “the American century” to signal US dominance on a planetary scale, reimagined with utopian undertones by Wendell Willkie’s optimistic tome 	extit{One World} two years later. Karl Polanyi would publish his theorization of an internationally constituted “market society” in 1944, the same year the Bretton Woods Agreement made the US dollar the new gold standard of international currency.
How Latin America would figure in the postwar world was often neglected by thinkers in the United States and Europe. Addressing this omission, historian Greg Grandin has argued that Latin America during the 1930s and early 1940s served as a “workshop” wherein the United States experimented with techniques of soft power, the region embodying a testing ground for the postwar emergence of the United States as geopolitical hegemon. Grandin understands the Good Neighbor Policy as “a blueprint for America’s ‘empire by invitation,’” specifically modeling the country’s postwar relationships with Europe and Asia. What’s more, the expansion of frontier ideology from a national to a hemispheric scale, what historian Fredrick Pike has termed the conception of Latin America as a “continental frontier to the United States,” may be understood as a precursor to a project of transcontinental sovereignty during the Cold War.

It also bears mentioning that the period upon which this book focuses immediately preceded the formalization of what in the United States became known as area studies. It appears that the formulation of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America as geocultural “areas” in which US academics could become experts (with their expertise then put to work by the Cold War’s various councils, agencies, offices, and classrooms) was contemporaneous and discursively entangled with the emergence of the United States as not purely a juggernaut of industry, of war, and of finance capital but also as a chauvinistic culture in active competition with the new areas of the globe plus Europe, whose culture was first maimed by the devastations of war and then rendered subservient under the conjointly cultural, political, and economic logic of the Marshall Plan. By its conclusion, this book argues that the making, collecting, curating, and circulating of Latin American art in the United States was conjoined with another geocultural category, American art, equipped for its battle with communism at the height of the Cold War. If fascism had dominated the geopolitical landscape as the antagonist to US liberal democracy in the 1930s and early 1940s, it was now communism, with its headquarters in the Soviet Union, with which the United States and its allies would need to contend, not least in the wake of the Cuban Revolution, which embodied a new horizon of possibility for a Latin America untethered from imperialism.

In the aftermath of repressive, violent dictatorships controlling numerous nations in Latin America between the 1960s and the 1980s, it would be at the end of the Cold War, with the partial dissolution of the three-world order that had been invented at the end of World War II, that globalization would come to serve as a common discourse for political, economic, and cultural thought. Much as I am arguing that geopolitical, geo-economic,