

Grupo Ruptura and Abstraction in Central Europe: Lost Histories and Works by Kázmér Fejér and Leopoldo Haar

Heloisa Espada



MoMA

**Cisneros
Institute**

Grupo Ruptura and Abstraction in Central Europe: Lost Histories and Works by Kázmér Fejér and Leopoldo Haar¹

This essay was written as part of the “Cisneros Institute Latin American Collection Fellowship”, which supports research on overlooked aspects of MoMA’s Latin American holdings and their connections to art from other regions. Sao Paulo-New York, 2025

Grupo Ruptura is a central topic in the historiography of Constructivist art in Brazil. Consensus is that its inaugural exhibition, held in December 1952 at the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (MAM-SP), left an indelible mark on the national debate about abstract and Concrete art. Nevertheless, knowledge of the group’s origins continues to be riddled with gaps, some of them likely unresolvable given the precariousness or loss of certain research sources.² This text addresses two mostly unknown subjects in Brazilian art history: the sparsely documented works and trajectories of Leopoldo Haar (Polish, 1910–1954) and Kázmér Fejér (Brazilian, born Hungary, 1923–1989). The former was a Polish immigrant and the latter, a Hungarian one, and they both moved to Brazil during the second half of the 1940s amid circumstances directly related to the end of World War II. In this text, I seek to reconstruct Haar’s trajectory from a set of documents in his family’s archive, many of them unpublished, and from an analysis of the *Exposição de Artes Industriais: Vitrines e Fotografias (Industrial Arts Exhibition: Window Displays and Photographs)* by Leopoldo and his brother, Zygmunt Haar, at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP) in 1951. Next, I address Fejér’s activity in Budapest between 1946 and 1948 with the Grupo de Artistas Abstratos (Group of Abstract Artists) gathered in the Hungarian capital, particularly the *Új Világkép (New Worldview)* exhibition, which he and critic Ernő Kállai (Hungarian, 1890–1954) organized in 1947. Albeit starting from meager sources, I also broach Fejér’s passage through Montevideo in 1948, the year before he settled in São Paulo.

The information presented in this text reveals far less orthodox stances, productions, and theoretical references than historiography normally recognizes regarding Grupo Ruptura. Data suggests that Haar’s and Fejér’s professional experience and education were more relevant to the group’s proposals than previously imagined. Additionally, research relates the history of Grupo Ruptura to the emergence of international artistic associations in postwar Western and Central Europe with the aim of breaking away from the isolation imposed by World War II and strengthening modern art.

From What Is Lacking

During the research that led to his book *Arte concreta paulista: Documentos* (2002), João Bandeira discovered a heretofore unknown newspaper image of the Grupo Ruptura show at MAM-SP

in 1952 that eventually became an essential source regarding the show’s content (fig. 1). Though this picture is dirty and stained, it nonetheless reveals that there were at least eight two-dimensional works hanging on panels and columns on a side wall, four two-dimensional works hanging on a back wall, and two three-dimensional works exhibited on pedestals.⁴ The word “ruptura,” in lowercase letters, appears on the side of one of the pedestals. The poor quality of the image precludes identification of most of the objects. To make matters worse, not a single researcher of the subject to date has been able to locate a list of the works in the show. What knowledge we have of the inventory comes by way of a limited set of photographs, also of poor quality, published in newspapers of the day, and of notes made by artist Luiz Sacilotto (Brazilian, 1924–2003) in his diaries about works that he had sent for exhibition.⁵

To the left, we see a painting by Geraldo de Barros, although the angle of the photograph makes it difficult to tell whether the piece is *Diagonal Function* (1952) now in the collection of The Museum of Modern Art (fig. 2) or *Diagonal Function* (1952–53?) now in a private collection in Brazil (fig. 3).⁶ The works are similar but differ subtly in essential details. MoMA’s *Diagonal Function* has been the subject of much historiographical commentary, as a fine example of Grupo Ruptura’s interest in Euclidean geometry and Gestalt theory.⁷ The painting is based on a sequence of eight squares set within one another and simultaneously rotated, inverted, and reflected. Barros started from an apparently simple logic: The sides of each inset square are half that of the square that contains it, and each square is shifted in orientation and color alternately—that is, from square to diamond and from black to white. Another constant is that the vertices of each inset square are tangent to the midpoints of the sides of the larger square that contains it. The artist was deeply interested in Gestalt theory.⁷ A series of progressively smaller right triangles emerges because of the rotation of the squares and alternation of black and white. Thus, the composition illustrates the Pythagorean theorem in that the square of each hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides. Based on what has been described here, *Diagonal Function* appears to derive from an algorithmic logic, although the final composition is the result of tiny shifts in that logic. Positioning the innermost square (oriented as a diamond) to the right of the center of the composition, Barros displaced the axis of the operation to the right and, following that, twice to the left, creating the sensation of a spiral movement. Finally, the position of the small white diamond is tangent to the center of the painting.

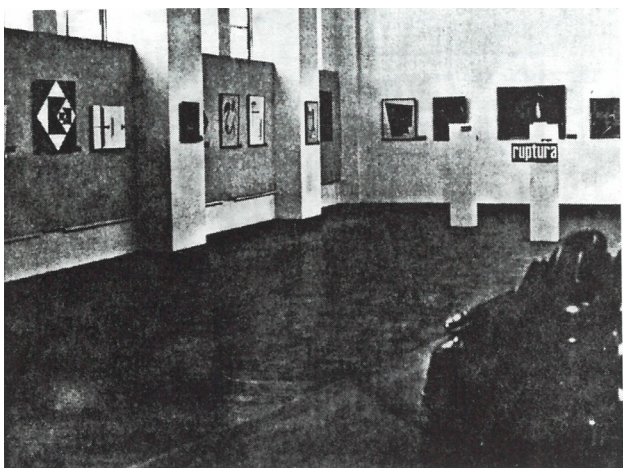


Fig. 1. Installation view of Grupo Ruptura exhibition, Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, December 1952³

In the alternate version of *Diagonal Function*, Barros introduced slight changes in the aforementioned logic, muddying an immediate reading of the painting and introducing new challenges to perception. In this instance, he broke the rule of a progressive reduction of the squares based on the equal division of their sides. The second black square inset within the larger white square (in diamond position) is slightly displaced to the right, so that its left side is larger than half of the side of the white square containing it. Consequently, the existence of this second black square becomes virtual, as the vertices of the right side “elude” the white diamond. That is, the black form is no longer the square of the hypotenuse of the white triangle to the left. And the second, smaller white diamond farther to the right of the frame is positioned within the logic of an equal division of the sides. The second moment of subversion occurred when Barros decided to conclude the centripetal movement described in the work with a white, diagonally positioned rectangle to the right of the center of the frame. The comparison between the two versions of *Diagonal Function* suggests that in the second painting analyzed here, Barros chose to frustrate and even further shift the logical sequence of regular polygons presented in the first version. Does the displacement of the second black square on the right conform to some mathematical calculation? In the second version, the squares advance more than expected, moving beyond dividing lines and an eventual, irregular interpenetration. Despite the resemblances, when seen side by side, the differences between the two compositions stand out and, somehow, contradict the idea that an art inspired by Euclidean geometry should necessarily have a predictable and regular outcome.

The Grupo Ruptura exhibition at MAM-SP is considered the first public manifestation of Concrete art in Brazil. Lasting only fifteen days, the show caused a furor—as did a corresponding manifesto that, in its time, was as assertive as it was radical. Participants included Leopoldo Haar, Anatol Władysław (Brazilian, born Poland, 1913–2004), Geraldo de Barros (Brazilian, 1923–1998), Lothar Charoux (Brazilian, born Austria, 1912–1987), Luiz Sacilotto, Kázmér Fejér, and Waldemar Cordeiro (Brazilian, born Italy, 1925–1973). Thus, the group was made up of five European immigrants and two Brazilians of European descent: Charoux and Wladyslaw arrived in São Paulo in early youth, in 1928 and 1930, respectively, in the company of their parents; Cordeiro, Haar and Fejér settled in the city shortly after World War II; and Sacilotto and Barros, both born in São Paulo, were of Italian and Portuguese descent, respectively.

In short, the group was made up of relatively young white men who, from lower middle-class or immigrant families, needed to earn a living even as they dedicated themselves to art.

Grupo Ruptura became a focus of historiographical studies in the late 1990s and early 2000s, which coincides with the emergence of research on Concrete art in Brazil. In 1998, Ana Maria Belluzzo published the essay “Ruptura e arte concreta” (“Ruptura and Concrete Art”) in the book *Arte construtiva no Brasil: Coleção Adolpho Leirner (Constructive Art in Brazil: Adolpho Leirner Collection)*, in which she analyzes Concrete works by Grupo Ruptura.⁸ However, the first attempt to reconstruct the group’s history and identify the works presented in 1952 was in 2002, when Rejane Cintrão, with support from researcher Ana Paula Nascimento, organized the exhibition *Grupo Ruptura: Revisitando a Exposição Inaugural (Grupo Ruptura: Revisiting the Inaugural Exhibition)* at the Centro Universitário Maria Antônia da Universidade de São Paulo.⁹ In light of the difficulty in locating the specific works shown in the installation views, the curators understandably chose to present works made in 1952 by members of the collective.¹⁰ Recently, art historian Adele Nelson arrived at new conclusions about the exhibition based on a detailed analysis of extant documents—photographic records, architectural blueprints, and press coverage.¹¹ And, in 2022, twenty years after the show conceived by Rejane Cintrão, I had the opportunity to organize a new reading of the group’s inaugural exhibition in partnership with Yuri Quevedo at MAM-SP.¹² Based on the studies that preceded it, this work led us to conclude that knowledge of what was shown by Grupo Ruptura in 1952 remains incomplete as, in fact, only three of the paintings that appear in period photographs—*Diagonal Function* (1952) by Barros, *Complementary Articulation* (1952) by Sacilotto, and *Optical Development of the Archimedes’ Spiral* (1952) by Cordeiro—have been located by curators and researchers.

Even so, given the data collected to date, I agree with Adele Nelson that the 1952 Grupo Ruptura exhibition revealed the common interests of the group’s members, although there are significant differences among the works themselves.¹³ Based on photographic documentation of the exhibition, it is likely that the works shown by Cordeiro, Barros and Sacilotto were made with industrial paint uniformly applied to canvas and based on a vocabulary strongly influenced by Gestalt theory and Euclidean geometry. The works shown by Władysław and Charoux, however, remain unidentified

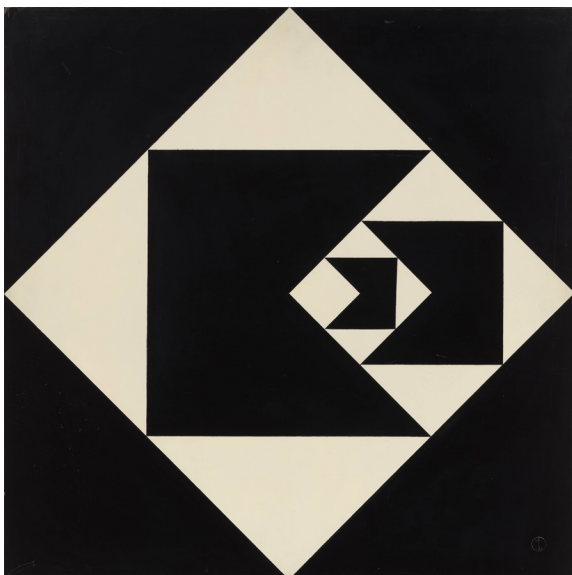


Fig. 2. Geraldo de Barros. Diagonal Function. 1952. Lacquer on wood, 24 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 24 $\frac{3}{4}$ x $\frac{1}{2}$ " (62.9 x 62.9 x 1.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund. © 2024 Luciana Brito Galeria

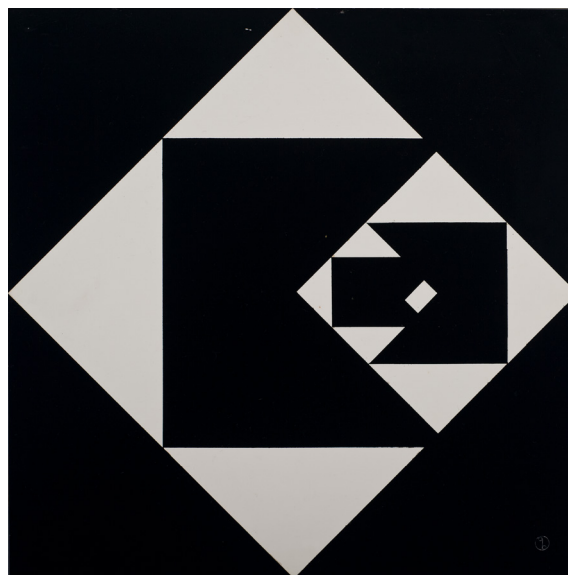


Fig. 3. Geraldo de Barros. Diagonal Function. 1952. Synthetic enamel on wood, 23 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 23 $\frac{5}{8}$ " (60 x 60 cm). Collection Steinbruch, São Paulo. Photo: Gustavo Scatena /Imagem Paulista

because they are not clearly visible in the installation views. It is nonetheless presumed that Władysław and Charoux showed paintings produced in 1952 or thereabouts, when both artists were known to have been working with geometric forms, albeit steering their compositions clear of the algorithmic logic employed by Sacilotto, Barros, and Cordeiro during this period. Beyond this, Władysław and Charoux worked with hues and halftones that they mixed themselves on palettes—as opposed to the premixed industrial colors used by their colleagues. The geometries produced by Władysław, a regular at the Atelier Abstração founded by Samson Flexor (Brazilian, born Moldova, 1907–1971), did not possess the same precise finish (forged by ruler, compass, and ruling pen) that characterized the paintings of other group members.¹⁴ There is no record of which works Kázmér Fejér showed. Nonetheless, I agree with Nelson's hypothesis that the Hungarian artist probably participated in the Ruptura show with biomorphic abstractions like those he had shown at the I Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo in 1951, and that he only undertook his sculptures in plexiglass, glass, and wood in the years that followed.¹⁵ Nearly all of Haar's work of the 1940s and 1950s has disappeared. All we know of his participation lies in the photographs shown in this essay. Though his work is not clearly visible in these images, we are able to deduce that they resemble objects he presented in 1951 in the *Industrial Arts Exhibition: Window Displays and Photographs* at MASP.

Other documents reveal that members of Grupo Ruptura recognized there were important differences among the works they were exhibiting in 1952 at MAM-SP. Indeed, text printed in lowercase letters on the back of the manifesto distributed at the show indicates that the group saw this exhibition as but a first step in a greater investment: "the exhibition of grupo ruptura announces the great national show of abstract and concrete art to be inaugurated in São Paulo on April 5, 1953."¹⁶ The heralded 1953 event never took place. In the same sense of aligning Grupo Ruptura with abstract and Concrete art, Cordeiro, widely recognized as the group's leader and the principal editor of the manifesto, begins his article "Ruptura" by saying, "After four years of semi-clandestine struggle, the abstract and Concrete art movement enters legal artistic life."¹⁷ The reference to both abstract and Concrete art indicates that the group was already differentiating the two, although the discrepancies between them did not become a subject of public debate until 1956, when the *Primeira Exposição Nacional de Arte Concreta* (First National Exhibition of Concrete Art) gathered together works by artists based in São Paulo and in Rio de Janeiro.¹⁸

How Far Does the Grupo Ruptura Go?

Adele Nelson is also right to note that Grupo Ruptura only ever presented itself as such one time. According to her, the group's longevity was a historiographic invention, for by 1953, mention of "Grupo Ruptura" in the São Paulo press was increasingly rare.¹⁹ Although I agree that the existence of the collective *tout court* was circumstantial, I believe it is worth asking why it has become such a memorable reference—and why it was referenced for decades in the statements of critics and artists.

It is noteworthy that the configuration of Grupo Ruptura—or better, of the group gathered around Cordeiro—rapidly changed. Soon after the MAM-SP show, artist Maurício Nogueira Lima (Brazilian, 1930–1999), who also worked in advertising and had studied with Haar at MASP's Instituto de Arte Contemporânea, joined the group.²⁰ In 1954, Barros stepped away to dedicate himself to the furniture design cooperative Unilabor, while the group lost Haar, who died prematurely. At that same time, Władysław became interested in Art Informel, abandoning Concrete art and, by extension, the group. Around 1955, painters Judith Lauand (Brazilian, 1922–2022) and Hermelindo Fiaminghi (Brazilian, 1920–2004) approached the core of the group that was by then identified as the Concretos paulistas, although other Concretists active in the city—Willys de Castro (Brazilian, 1926–1988), Hércules Barsotti (Brazilian, 1914–2010), and Antonio Maluf (Brazilian, 1926–2005), for example—did not attend the same meetings. It is noteworthy that in the mid-1950s, production by the collective, which at this point included Cordeiro, Sacilotto, Charoux, Fejér, Nogueira Lima, Lauand, and Fiaminghi, was more cohesive and more clearly identified with the ideals of Concrete art in a strict sense (that is, with the use of precision instruments, Gestalt principles, and algorithmic logic) than the collective that had presented itself at MAM-SP in 1952.

Despite these transformations, the name "Ruptura" remained present in publications of the late 1950s. For example, in the catalogue that accompanied the 1959 exhibition of the Leirner prize for contemporary art at the Galeria de Artes das Folhas, whose participants included Lauand, Cordeiro, Nogueira Lima, Sacilotto and Fejér, critic Lourival Gomes Machado identifies the group as Ruptura.²¹ And many decades later, in the 1990s, Maurício Nogueira Lima and Judith Lauand, who were not in the inaugural show, continued to affirm their Ruptura membership during the 1950s.²²



Fig. 4. Leopoldo Haar. *W Marszu do Polski* (On the March to Poland), 1944–45. Polish Resistance Army Christmas card, 5 7/8 × 4 5/16" (15 × 11 cm). Collection Mira Haar, São Paulo



Fig. 5. Haar Studios (Leopoldo and Zygmunt Haar). Untitled. 1950s. Draft of poster, 21 13/16 × 14 9/16" (55.5 × 37 cm). Collection Haar Family, São Paulo. Photo: Everton Ballardin

Ever since the founding of MASP in 1947, MAM-SP in 1949, and the Bial do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo in 1951, São Paulo and other capital cities of southeast Brazil had already hosted several exhibitions of abstract art. In 1952, the great novelty appears to have been the Grupo Ruptura manifesto's iconoclastic tone, which heralded a radical break with art's figurative tradition (labeled within the text as "the old"). The pamphlet denies figuration—even when it relates to avant-garde movements such as Expressionism and Surrealism or is molded under the influence of "primitivism." Conversely, it exhibits its Constructivist affiliation by announcing "great possibilities for practical development" linked to abstract concepts of "time-space, movement and matter."²³

In large measure, the group's avant-garde stance is owed to Italian Brazilian painter Waldemar Cordeiro who, in 1946 at age 21, moved to São Paulo. In Rome, the artist had taken part in 1945 in the founding of the Associazione Artistica Internazionale Indipendente, which accommodated groups responsible for the emergence of abstraction and the return to Futurism's iconoclastic stance in early postwar Italy.²⁴ The association was established by Italian painter Enrico Prampolini (Italian, 1894–1956) and Polish painter Józef Jarema (Poland, 1900–1974), who had disembarked in Italy as a sergeant in the 2nd Polish Corps, also known as Anders' Army.²⁵ Prampolini, a former member of the Futurist movement, who had lived in Paris in the 1920s and 1930s and participated in the Cercle et Carré and Abstraction-Création groups, was a reference to new generations. The Associazione emerged for the purpose of activating Italian contacts within the international art scene (as they had been relatively restricted during the Fascist years) and fomenting the avant-garde. Until the mid-1950s, the Art Club in Rome developed an important network of contacts with artists from other countries and promoted the creation of new Art Clubs in Austria, Belgium, France, Holland, England, Israel, Egypt, Turkey, South Africa, Australia, Japan, Uruguay, and Brazil.

Haar, "War Official Artist"²⁶

Prior to settling in São Paulo, Leopoldo Haar and Kázmér Fejér were also linked with the Associazione Artistica Internazionale Indipendente. Haar had studied industrial art in Kraków in 1929 and graduated from the Jan Matejko Academy of Fine Arts there in 1934. Of Jewish origin, a large part of his family died in concentration

camps or in combat during World War II. In 1939, he and his brother, Zygmunt Haar, were arrested by the Russian army, and shortly thereafter, they served in Anders' Army with Józef Jarema. Until 1946, Leopoldo Haar acted as "War Official Artist" (*sic*), designing graphics for patches, coats of arms, T-shirts, newspapers, invitations, Christmas cards (fig. 4), and every other manner of material to publicize the activities of the resistance troops. In the early 1940s, he and his brother accompanied the Polish forces to North Africa to contain the Axis powers, especially in Libya. In 1944, they participated in the Allied campaign to liberate Rome, where they lived until 1946, when they immigrated to Porto Alegre, a city in southern Brazil with a well-established Jewish community.

In Rome, Haar had taken part in the Associazione's inaugural exhibition as well as in shows organized by Józef Jarema that featured Polish artists.²⁷ It is possible to gain a sense of his 1940s work by examining the catalogue that accompanied his solo show in 1947 in the auditorium of the newspaper *Correio do Povo* in Porto Alegre.²⁸ This exhibit included 102 paintings and drawings—still lifes, nudes, landscapes, scenes from everyday life, war scenes—made in Kazakhstan, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Venice, Rome, the Brazilian state of Espírito Santo, and Porto Alegre. Painted in oil, tempera, and Chinese ink, they were simplified figurations that tended toward abstraction, with apparent brushstrokes and large, monochromatic areas. The catalogue does not reflect affinities with Constructivist aesthetics, but rather with formulations derived from a broad and unorthodox idea of Cubism and of Expressionism.

Leopoldo and Zygmunt Haar seem to have adapted well to Porto Alegre. They operated Studio Haar, which offered graphic arts and photographic services. Leopoldo also worked as a page layout specialist for *O Globo*, a magazine that had been a stage for updating local visual arts through graphic arts since 1929.²⁹ In a short article published in the newspaper *Letras e Artes* in 1950, Neli Dutra describes Studio Haar as a meeting place for local artists and writers that also hosted modern art exhibitions, such as a show of prints by Honoré Daumier from the private collection of artist Vasco Prado. The article presents Leopoldo as a "Post-Impressionist" painter and Zygmunt as a "great photographer" responsible for fine portraits of local writers—such as poet Mário Quintana. Leopoldo Haar's painted portrait of Brazilian writer Érico Veríssimo, then editor of *O Globo*, also dates from this period. In this painting, the artist reconciled a modern aesthetic incorporating synthetic forms, a geometric background,



Fig. 6. Installation view of *Industrial Arts Exhibition: Window Displays and Photographs*, Museu de Arte de São Paulo, 1951. Maquettes of window displays designed by Leopoldo Haar are visible in the foreground. Mira Haar Archive, São Paulo

apparent brushstrokes, and large monochromatic areas with a need to represent certain physical characteristics of the *gaúcho* writer, who was known for his historical novels set in the country's southern region.³⁰ The picture is of interest above all else for making clear Haar's connection to Porto Alegre's art scene.

Leopoldo and Zygmunt Haar probably settled in São Paulo in early 1951. They had not been in the capital long when they mounted *Industrial Arts Exhibition: Window Displays and Photographs*, which opened at MASP on April 16, 1951. Simultaneously, they reopened Studio Haar, where they undertook advertising design and developed exhibitions and window displays. Isabella Cabral and M. A. Rezende recall that during that year, Leopoldo introduced Hermelindo Fiaminghi to the works of Vasily Kandinsky (French, born Russia. 1866–1944), Kazimir Malevich (Russian, born Ukraine. 1878–1935), Antoine Pevsner (French, born Russia. 1886–1962), and László Moholy-Nagy (American, born Hungary. 1895–1946) when he was art director of the Lintas International Advertising agency.³¹ The limited number of extant documents regarding Haar's activity in Brazil and his few remaining works from that period suggest that the artist's interest in abstraction and Constructivist design was not restricted; that is, it did not prevent him from being interested in other styles. A 1950s poster signed by Studio Haar depicts an unusual scene with a Surrealist flavor: a drawing mannequin standing on a globe while balancing both a playing card with a single heart and a giant hat on its head (fig. 5).

Industrial Arts Exhibition: Window Displays and Photographs

A comparison between photographic records of the *Industrial Arts Exhibition: Window Displays and Photographs* and of the Grupo Ruptura show leads us to believe that the pieces shown by Haar in the MAM-SP group show in 1952 were related to the commercial work he had presented at MASP the year before.

The *Industrial Arts Exhibition* brought together maquettes of window displays developed by Leopoldo Haar for national and international brands such as Olivetti, Goomtex, and Atkinsons, and Zygmunt Haar's photographic work (fig. 6). About one month earlier, Leopoldo had begun to lecture on elements of composition and technique, at the Instituto de Arte Contemporânea (IAC), the industrial design school inaugurated by the museum on March 1, 1951, along with the opening of the most comprehensive retrospective to date of the work of Max

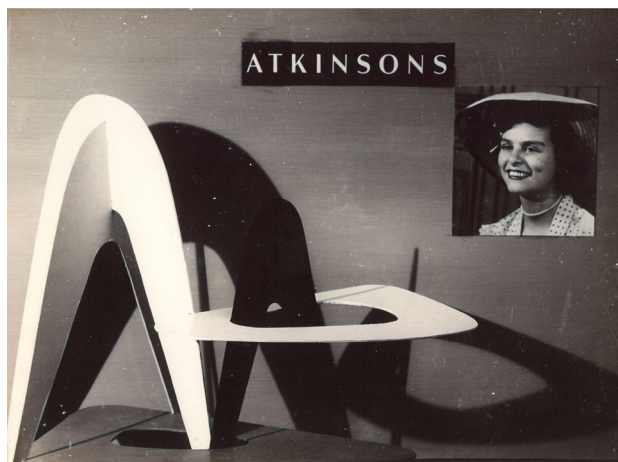


Fig. 7. Leopoldo Haar. Maquettes for window displays for Atkinsons and Olivetti stores, 1951. Mira Haar Archive, São Paulo

Bill (Swiss, 1908–1994). Leopoldo's projects are clearly aligned with modern design and abstract art, particularly to Dutch Neo-Plasticism and the stables of Alexander Calder (American, 1898–1976), an artist who captured the attention of Brazilian institutions following World War II.³² Almost nothing is known about the photographs shown by Zygmunt Haar. Overall, journalists covering the exhibition noted his brother Leopoldo's window displays. Several months later, the magazine *Habitat* dedicated four pages to Leopoldo's work, publishing texts by and about him in addition to photographs by Zygmunt that may have been part of the *Industrial Arts Exhibition*.³³

Within this context, Leopoldo Haar published a brief note acknowledging Piet Mondrian (Dutch, 1872–1944) and principally Max Bill as references for his work as a window dresser. In the article "Plásticas novas" ("New Forms"), he argues that the window display "has beauty as its function," citing the text "Beleza provinda da função e beleza como função" ("Beauty that Comes from Function and Beauty as Function"), which Bill had published in *Habitat* several months before.³⁴ He closes by saying that nowadays, window displays are aligned with "the achievements of art, of science, of psychology etc.—aesthetic demands of individuals who use refrigerators, have knowledge of sulfa and are contemporaries of Max Bill."³⁵ His discourse in favor of a functional aesthetic predates arguments that reappear in the Ruptura manifesto he signed one and a half years later.

Within the context of MASP, the IAC, and *Habitat* magazine, the design of window displays was a hot topic. *Habitat* also published a furious text by architect Lina Bo Bardi (Brazilian, born Italy, 1914–1992) criticizing the quality of window displays in São Paulo. To Bardi, who looked upon the city as a public exhibition room resembling that a gallery of a museum, bad window displays were a problem related to urban planning. Along this line of reasoning, the aesthetic quality of window displays would be a moral responsibility of storekeepers.³⁶ In other words, *Habitat* made clear that the design of window displays as practiced by São Paulo storekeepers was poor and dated, and that the solution was the clean geometric design practiced by Haar.

Pure and Applied

The *Industrial Arts Exhibition* photograph above (see fig. 6) shows a row of maquettes of window displays, among which it is possible to identify ones made for Goomtex and Atkinsons (figs. 7, 8). In the

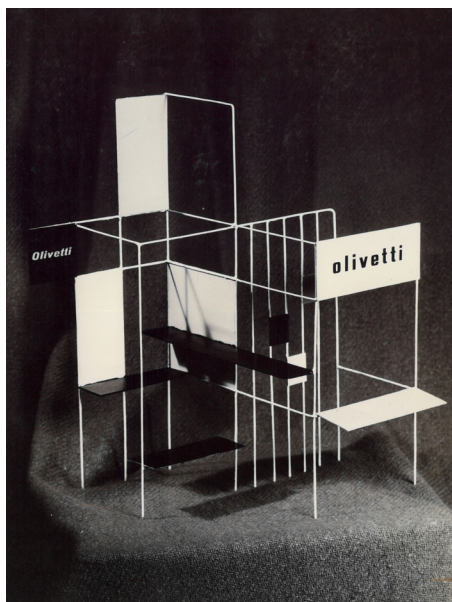


Fig. 8. Leopoldo Haar. Maquettes for window displays for Atkinsons and Olivetti stores, 1951. Mira Haar Archive, São Paulo

foreground, to the right, there is an object not associated with any brand but that resembles a Calder stabile. None of these pieces have survived. We know of their existence through photographs either deposited at the Biblioteca e Centro de Documentação do MASP or held in the Mira Haar Archive in São Paulo.³⁷ These documents hint at the ambiguous nature of Haar's constructions, for they show objects clearly made to serve as supports for particular brands and products within a window display that are very similar to other objects that may be seen as autonomous sculptures. Such is the case of the object made up of a group of straight and curved stems, six small spheres, a black equilateral triangle and a rectangle at the base (fig. 9), which appears on the right in the photograph of the *Industrial Arts Exhibition*. The arrangement of small spheres and triangles creates the asymmetrical visual balance that characterizes work with a Constructivist heritage. It is not known whether the piece was colored.

Friendly Fire

Between his sculpture and his applied arts, the ambiguous nature of Leopoldo Haar's objects is consistent with the functional aesthetic proposed by the historical Constructivist vanguards and aligned with the ideals expressed in the Grupo Ruptura manifesto. The latter states that "artistic intuition endowed with clear and intelligent principles and great possibilities for practical development" represents "the new" in the arts.³⁸ However, Cordeiro, who penned a column about the visual arts for the newspaper *Folha da Manhã*, had his reservations regarding the characterization of decorative objects, fashion, and advertising as "art." The critic-painter recommended Haar's show to readers, with a caveat that the artist's window displays cannot really be called works of art. In his view, they were examples of "impure artistic creations of the erudite variety." In his article, he discusses the proximities and the differences between "pure" and "applied arts," arguing: "Pure art means free of moralist or conceptual incrustations [sic], or intellectualism of any sort. . . . Historically situatable impure artistic creations of the erudite variety are linked to fashion, to decoration, to industry, and also to advertising. . . . The relation between the applied arts and the art of artists (in the traditional sense) is dialectic. The artists supply them with certain aesthetic principles and, in turn, the applied arts become a powerful influence upon the pure art."³⁹



Fig. 9. Leopoldo Haar. Sculpture probably used in window display, 1951. This piece was shown in the *Industrial Arts Exhibition: Window Displays and Photographs* (1951). Mira Haar Archive, São Paulo

Cordeiro therefore recognized that the two types of production influenced one another, while categorically separating "pure" arts from those he deemed "non-pure." Moreover, he stated that Haar's maquettes were "incomplete" because they were not complemented by a lighting-design project and shown alongside the products they purported to advertise. In his opinion, Haar's drawings were "monotonous in their exploitation of space" as they were restricted to the formal logic of a shelf. Cordeiro was probably referring to maquettes such as the one that appears in the invitation to the exhibition, which is formed by two slim stems supporting two triangles and four disks (fig. 10). The triangles bear the name "Olivetti," whereas the disks, which are oriented horizontally, serve as support for the products—like small shelves.

At least two objects by Haar—among those works that did not come with brand names attached and thus could be considered "pure art"—were included in the Grupo Ruptura exhibition at MAM-SP. Another photograph of the show offers a slightly better view of the two pieces presented by Haar (fig. 11). Within the context of a visual arts show, devoid of identifiable commercial brands, the objects were perceived as abstract sculptures. So, apparently, to Haar, within the context of an art exhibition, a piece of "applied art" used to dress a window might also be considered "pure" art.

I have been unable to locate better-quality images of the objects Haar showed in this exhibition. Yet the impossibility of analyzing these works in detail notwithstanding, it is equally not feasible to know for sure what Haar's artistic ambitions were; the documents gathered here testify to the fact that his "pure" works were intimately related to his commercial work as a graphic, display window, and exhibition designer. Beyond this, there are no signs that his output was defined by some type of algorithmic logic.

Fejér and Abstractionism in Budapest in the Immediate Postwar Period

Kázmér Fejér was a painter, sculptor, and industrial chemist. He entered the National Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest in 1940, while also studying industrial chemistry at university, which impacted his art and his collaboration with Grupo Ruptura years later. A profile of the artist published in the *Suplemento Dominical do Jornal do Brasil* in Rio de Janeiro in 1957 and probably written by the

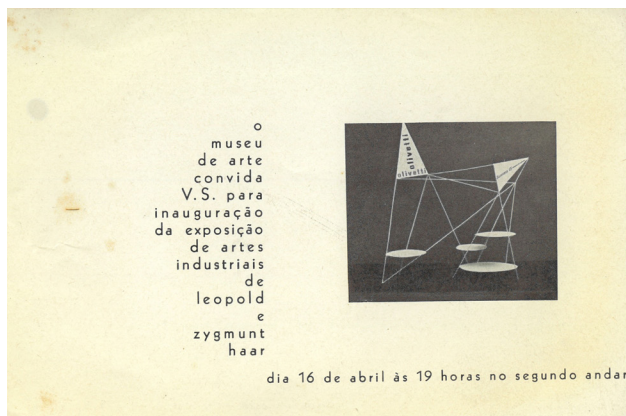


Fig. 10. Detail of invitation to the *Industrial Arts Exhibition: Window Displays and Photographs*, 1951. Mira Haar Archive, São Paulo



Fig. 11. Installation view of Grupo Ruptura exhibition, Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, December 1952. Archive Seção de Catalogação e Documentação do Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo

supplement's editors Ferreira Gullar and Oliveira Bastos describes Fejér's expulsion from art school "for destructive behavior and for professing a vaguely expressionist art of decadence."⁴⁰ Fraternal and jocular in tone, the text is clearly based on a statement made by Fejér himself that seems to nourish a certain reputation for rebellion.

Fejér's registration records at the National Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts from the first semester of the academic year 1940–41 reveal that he studied with Zsigmond Kisfaludi Strobl (Hungarian, 1884–1975), one of the most well-known and traditional Hungarian sculptors of the day and a disciple of sculptor Adolf von Hildebrand (German, 1847–1921), who was known for official monuments and public works of a classical nature. The same document bears a handwritten note stating that the originally Jewish Fjéjer family had converted to Catholicism in 1938. At that point, the conversion probably took place in order to make it possible for the children of farmer Imre Fejér and artist Lilly Walfisch to study.⁴¹ Indeed, after two years at the Academy, Kázmér Fejér did not make the grades needed to proceed with the course and so was asked to leave.⁴² However, his passport, which was issued at the start of 1948 and intensely used that year, when the artist left Hungary, documents that he was a sculptor.⁴³

From 1945 to the early 1950s, Fejér dedicated himself to painting and to sculpture, though he is better known in Brazil for the three-dimensional pieces he produced in the 1950s through 1970s in plexiglass, glass, and occasionally wood (fig. 12). Regrettably, few of these original objects survive.⁴⁴ Nowadays, he is mainly recognized for his sculptures composed of transparent sheets of glass and plexiglass, which he made (or remade) in the 1970s, when he was living in Paris. Some of the works he made in wood in the 1950s are known to us through photographs of and leaflets accompanying exhibitions held in Brazil.⁴⁵

The scarcity of existing works and documents renders it difficult to speculate about the full extent of Fejér's production. Even so, information regarding his activities in Hungary immediately after the war, above all his participation in Budapest's Group of Abstract Artists, offers clues about the theoretical and artistic reflections that led him to produce work that was unique within the context of Concrete art in Brazil.

With the end of World War II, under Soviet military occupation, Hungary experienced roughly three years of limited democracy

administered by national governments supervised by the Allied forces and Moscow, in particular. In late 1945, after free elections for the National Assembly, the winning Hungarian party was forced to create a coalition government that gave the Communists disproportionate power not achieved by voting. Even as the country began reconstruction and a return to a normalcy of sorts, it saw the Soviets penetrate ever deeper into its institutions and modify its economic foundations, which were slowly being nationalized. During this period, large-scale agrarian reform profoundly altered the country when properties larger than 100 acres were confiscated and redistributed to agricultural workers and poor peasants.⁴⁶

Despite the Soviet occupation and the slow changes to the life of the nation during the early postwar years, the plan for Hungary's reconstruction had a measure of success, and the country began to prosper. Cultural life flourished, propelled by progressive ideas and a sense of hope at a moment when the extremely limiting Soviet cultural policy was not yet in force. In the visual arts, the Budapest scene was marked by the emergence in 1945–48 of the *Európai Iskola* (European School), which gathered critics, artists, and collectors. This collective formed by artists working in different styles represented the resumption of interwar modernist trends, particularly Surrealism and abstraction. During this brief period, with the aims of fomenting pluralist production and bringing Hungarian art into closer contact with Western Europe, the European School mounted 38 exhibitions, in addition to holding lectures and debates and producing art publications. The group also mounted a solo show of work by Paul Klee (German, born Switzerland, 1879–1940) and a group show of Czechoslovakian Surrealism.⁴⁷

Founders of the European School included iconic figures in the Hungarian avant-garde of the 1920s such as critic Ernő Kállai and artist Lajos Kássak (Hungarian, 1887–1967). Indeed, Kállai was a central figure in the history of Hungarian Constructivism. Between 1920 and 1935, he lived in Berlin, where he was an active participant in the city's art scene and mixed with influential personalities including Hans Richter (American, born Germany, 1888–1976), Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (American, born Germany, 1886–1969), El Lissitzky (Russian, 1890–1941), Naum Gabo (American, born Russia, 1890–1977), and Theo van Doesburg (Dutch, 1883–1931). The most important publications edited by Kállai in Germany include the *Jahrbuch der jungen Kunst* (*Yearbook of Young Art*) and the *Bauhaus: Zeitschrift für Gestaltung*, on which he collaborated

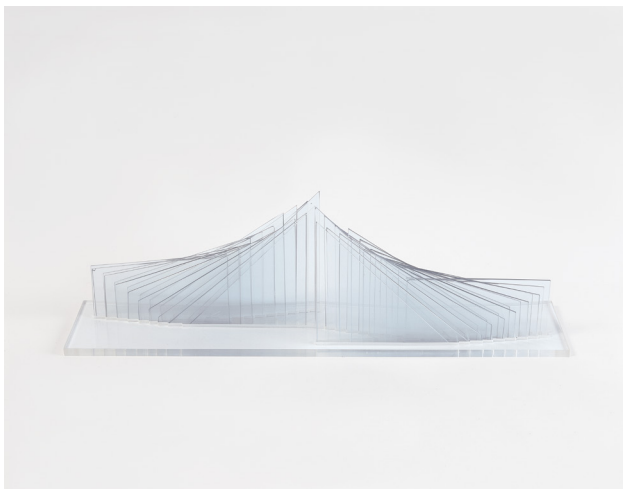


Fig. 12. Kázmér Fejér. *Crystal*. 1956. Glass blades, 23 $\frac{3}{16}$ x 6 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 4 $\frac{1}{16}$ " (17.5 x 59 x 12 cm). Collection Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, Caracas

between 1928 and 1930. Well-known for his activities in Berlin, the critic remained close to Hungarian artists such as Lajos Kássak, Béla Uitz (Hungarian, 1887–1972), and László Moholy-Nagy, who also lived in Germany. Kállai supported Kássak's activities in the 1920s, when the latter lived in exile in Vienna because of his political engagement in defense of artists who had participated in the Bolshevik Revolution. A poet, writer, and painter, Kássak was also a prominent figure in the Hungarian avant-garde and the creator of *Ma (Today)* magazine, which he edited with Béla Uitz in Budapest from 1916 to 1919. During the next decade, when *Ma's* headquarters moved to the Austrian capital, Kállai published his earliest texts on Constructivism.⁴⁸

The European School was essentially founded on the notion that a new Europe could only emerge from a synthesis of East and West.⁴⁹ Its members believed that the pictorial language that came about in the Renaissance was totally obsolete, although despite adherence to the modernist aesthetic, most of them remained linked to mimetic representation. Also in 1946, under the leadership of Ernő Kállai, a few members formed a dissident group, presenting themselves in Budapest's former *kunsthalle* as the Group of Abstract Artists. Although he did not participate in this group's first exhibition, Kázmér Fejér soon began to attend meetings also attended by Nagy Fekete Béla (Hungarian, 1904–1983), Tihamér Gyarmathy (Hungarian, 1915–2005), József Jakovits (Hungarian, 1909–1994), Tamás Lossonczy (Hungarian, 1904–2009), Sameer Makarius (Argentine, born Egypt. 1924–2009), Gyula Marosán (Hungarian, 1915–2003), János Martinszky (Hungarian, 1909–1949), Ferenc Martyn (Hungarian, 1899–1986), and Magda Zemplényi (Hungarian, 1899–1966).

There was not a strict separation between the European School and the Group of Abstract Artists; to be sure, various members of the former also produced abstract work, and some artists participated in the activities of both collectives. Both groups promoted interchange between Hungary and the international art circuit.⁵⁰ The European School possessed links to the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles in Paris; to Galerie des Eaux-Vives, where the Swiss artist group Allianz exhibited, in Zurich; and to artists who would form the avant-garde group CoBrA, such as Asger Jorn (Danish, 1914–1973).

However, the Group of Abstract Artists created a specific program. They worked under the influence of Kállai, who was concerned with defending abstraction and Surrealism from accusations of formalism

and absence of content. To him, the two branches revealed reality through new forms of perception. His aim was to demonstrate the "spiritual" connections between these modern branches and the sciences, mathematics, new technologies, and contemporary architecture.⁵¹ Kállai saw a connection between modern art—and abstraction, in particular—and the forms of reality revealed by new technologies, such as the X-ray, astronomy, and microbiology. It was the critic's understanding that the visual structures revealed by these technologies represent the internal functioning of the world.

Galéria a 4 Világtájhoz

From 1946 to 1948, Fejér acted as secretary to the Group of Abstract Artists, organizing exhibitions, writing texts, and promoting its activities abroad. In February 1947, the collective inaugurated Galéria a 4 Világtájhoz (Gallery of the 4 Points of the Compass), which operated for roughly six months in a small room on the upper floor of the Misztótfalusi bookstore in Budapest, where they held six exhibitions. The gallery's name announced the group's interest in artistic production from the four corners of the world. The space was inaugurated with the exhibition *Új Világkép* (New Worldview), which was organized by Kállai in collaboration with Fejér. The show featured nine abstract works—two drawings by Max Bill, one by Willi Baumeister (German, 1889–1955), and prints, paintings, and sculptures by members of the Hungarian collective. The original works were accompanied by a set of 33 cards containing photographic reproductions of works by Gabo, Le Corbusier, Mondrian, Jean Hélion (French, 1904–1987), Jean Gorin (French, 1899–1981), Moholy-Nagy, Malevich, Hans Erni (Swiss, 1909–2015), Max Bill, Jean (Hans) Arp (French, born Germany [Alsace]. 1886–1966), Constantin Brâncuși (Romanian and French, born Romania. 1876–1957), Yves Tanguy (American, born France. 1900–1955), Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973), Klee, and Vasily Kandinsky, images of the Eiffel tower, as well as scientific photos (details of forms in nature, microorganisms, a nebula, crystals, and small animals) and X-ray images.

Art historians Gábor Pataki and Emőke Bodonyi, curators of *Európai Iskola: Veszélyes csillagzat alatt (1945–1948) (The European School: Under an Ominous Sign [1945–1948])*, held at the MűvészetMalom in the Hungarian city of Szentendre in 2024, explain that *Új Világkép* echoes ideas about abstract art promoted by Kállai in the book

A természet rejtett arca (The Hidden Face of Nature), which was issued in 1947. In this publication, the critic introduces the concept of bio-romanticism, the theory of abstraction he formulated in the 1930s that creates a connection between a new scientific worldview based on modern physics, biology, psychology, and philosophy and avant-garde art, especially abstraction and Surrealism. Influenced by Moholy-Nagy's New Vision, Kállai identifies a parallel between geomorphic and biomorphic forms—recognized by means of aerial photographs, closeup photographs of plants, microphotographs of cells, and X-rays—and the forms of modern art. In his theory, which references the Romantic naturalist philosophies of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Joseph von Schelling, both manifestations represent the rhythm of life that permeates the entire universe. In other words, to Kállai, abstraction is a deeper form of naturalism, a representation of truth hidden beneath the face of nature.⁵² Researcher Sándor Hornyik recalls that as editor of the *Bauhaus Zeitschrift* in the 1920s, Kállai was well acquainted with Kandinsky's anthroposophical ideas.⁵³ In *Új Világkép*, he proposes to reveal the analogy between the works of Kandinsky, Klee, and Arp with images of the galaxy and the microscopic world.

Responsible for the introduction in the exhibition catalogue that accompanied *Új Világkép*, Fejér was aligned with Kállai's ideas. In this text, he asserts that abstraction relates to reality through modern technology and seeks to trace historical reasons for the emergence of this form of art:

We must know that abstract art has a history dating back more than 30 years. It is a fact that its start and its progression in time so far is closely intertwined with the European crisis of an era that gave birth to two world wars. It is also a fact that this crisis is reflected in the development of art, and many signs of this can be seen in the tendencies of abstract and Surrealist art. Abstract art foretold not only these historical catastrophes, it also observed the world with a sensitive mind and eyes wide open. Abstract art created those Constructive paintings and sculptures in parallel to the scientific discoveries of atomic physics, the unity of space and time, and other modern technological advances that marked this era. These discoveries tore down our conception of reality entirely. Why is art still required to adjust itself to the old ways of thinking? Today's art should move closely together with today's science and time. This is what abstract art is.⁵⁴

However, the greatest evidence of Fejér's affinity with Kállai's ideas is the canvas *Moszat (Seaweed)*, which he painted in 1947.⁵⁵ In green and blue hues, this work is an abstract composition that alludes to the forms of algae and membranes submerged in water. Works from the 1940s by other members of the Hungarian Group of Abstract Artists, such as Lajos Barta (Hungarian, 1899–1986), Ferenc Martyn, Tihamér Gyarmathy, Tamás Lossonczy, Gyula Marosán, and Magda Zemplényi, likewise evoke micro- and macroscopic views of nature.

Following the example of the Associazione Artistica Internazionale Indipendente, both the European School and the Group of Abstract Artists sought to internationalize Hungarian art and to activate international cultural exchange. In 1947, in another pamphlet distributed by Galéria a 4 Világtájhoz, Fejér promoted the idea of an international artistic association dedicated to expanding the audience for the arts and improving the standard of living for artists. During the brief period of Hungarian democracy, within the context of the reconstruction of Europe, the artist imagined a kind of global cultural politics. He proposed the establishment of a minimum wage for artists and the realization of itinerant exhibitions in poorer areas of the globe; he also advocated artistic exchange and collaboration among countries. He aligned his initiative to several other artists associations that emerged in Europe following World War II, with the goal of promoting international networks that would strengthen local artists and thereby help in resisting the authoritarianism that had imposed itself mainly in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The arguments for the development of this kind of “universal culture” were nourished and later adapted and coopted by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Fejér was aware of this movement: “When I am writing these, there is already an artistic organization being formed as a subdivision of UNESCO, of which plans and aspirations are yet unknown to us. We hope that this organization will realize the aforementioned goals.”⁵⁶ Fejér's text also points to a kind of engagement with collective issues that might later have been reflected in debates on cultural life in São Paulo during the 1950s.⁵⁷

Beyond *Új Világkép*, the Group of Abstract Artists held five more exhibitions in Galéria a 4 Világtájhoz: four solo exhibitions of works by group members Fekete Béla, Tihamér Gyarmathy, Béla Lossonczy, and Béla Lossonczy, and a two-person exhibition of works by Tamás Lossonczy and János Martinszky as well as the show *Mohácsi busók (Busós of Mohács)*. The latter was also organized by Fejér,



Fig. 13. Kázmér Fejér. *Composition*. n.d. This lost painting was presented at the I Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (1951). Wanda Svevo Historical Archive, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo

in collaboration with Szabó Zoltán Pál, director of the Transdanubian Research Institute. *Mohácsi busók* presented masks used in the *Busójárás* Carnival, a six-day celebration that took place in February in the city of Mohács in the south of Hungary to mark the end of winter.⁵⁸ The event was aligned with the European School's interest in folk and so-called primitive art. In the exhibition text, Fejér reflects on the relationship between folk and modern art and the implications of exhibiting an artifact linked with local folklore in a gallery that specializes in abstract art. At the time, the artist argued that *busó* masks are an “instinctive” and “primitive” expression of timeless value that should serve as an example to contemporary artists.⁵⁹

Even after the Paris Peace Treaties were signed in February 1947, the Soviet Union remained in Hungarian territory and began the transition to the single-party system that would bring the brief democratic period to a close. The debate on the arts became increasingly contaminated by political disputes. Within this context, the European School and Galéria a 4 Világtájhoz were attacked and, involuntarily, became centers of a critical debate that intended to disqualify modern art. In 1947, prominent Marxist philosopher and literary theorist György Lukács published the text “Hungarian Theories of Abstract Art,” in which he argues that abstract art is a decadent petit bourgeois manifestation, a reactionary, twisted response to fascism. According to art historians Péter György and Gábor Pataki, the article was received by progressive Hungarian artists as the start of a new cultural politics that would discredit their existence.⁶⁰ From that moment on, the artistic milieu was suffocated by the rise of an intolerant cultural politics that regarded Socialist Realism as the only acceptable form of expression. The Group of Abstract Artists was dissolved in late 1947 under pressure from both arrears on rent due to the Misztótfalusi bookstore and the political situation. As of 1948, abstract art was banned in Hungary. Cultural repression became so intense that the European School was also dissolved, and many artists left the country altogether.

Montevideo and São Paulo

Fejér left Hungary in early 1948, stopping in Vienna and Rome before settling in Montevideo.⁶¹ The artist lived for about one year in Uruguay, where he frequented the local Art Club, of which Joaquín Torres-García (Uruguayan, 1874–1949) was a member, and participated in a group show at the Arte Bella gallery in 1949.⁶²

Two mentions of Fejér in the local press indicate that his works, far removed from the context of abstraction as practiced in Budapest, were seen as “strange” and met with puzzlement and skepticism by the Uruguayan art world. In a column published in the weekly newspaper *Marcha*, critic Florio Parpagnoli notes that the “message” in “Feyer’s (*sic*) strange composition . . . is limited by a language in which we are unaccustomed to seeing our visual artists express themselves.”⁶³ Soon after, critic Giselda Zani, a well-known champion of abstraction, was harsher still: “And now let us talk of the worst: the canvas by Mister Kazmer Feyer (*sic*), who definitely mocks all judgment. Call it anything but ‘painting,’ this solution of methylene blue swimming with—more or less stylized fir trees—Christmas cards, castle ghosts, and larval forms after the manner of Joan Miró. We do not care for such nonsense.”⁶⁴

The impression that Fejér’s painting recalls little Christmas trees “swimming” in a blue background could point to the fact that in 1949, the artist remained interested in images of microscopic structures, in line with discussions in which he had taken part in Budapest. The same may be said of the abstraction Fejér presented at the I Bienal de São Paulo in 1951 (fig. 13), which also recalls a watery environment with microorganisms not unlike the canvas *Moszat*, which he made in Budapest.⁶⁵ The artist moved to São Paulo in 1949, and there are no records of the works he showed at Grupo Ruptura’s opening in December of 1952. Given that photos of the event indicate that only Leopoldo Haar exhibited three-dimensional pieces, Féjer is likely to have shown paintings.

While he lived in São Paulo, Fejér also worked as an industrial chemist in ceramics and plastics, dedicated exclusively to research on the pigmentation of polymers. In addition to taking part in Grupo Ruptura’s inaugural show, throughout the 1950s, he often shared a studio with other artists, including Waldemar Cordeiro and Hermelindo Fiaminghi. Researcher Pia Gottschaller has shown that Grupo Ruptura artists, such as Geraldo de Barros and Cordeiro, used mixtures of unusual paints, probably derived from Fejér’s inventions in the field of industrial pigments.⁶⁶

In Brazil, in addition to signing the Grupo Ruptura manifesto, Fejér published texts in small catalogues as well as made a few statements in the press.⁶⁷ Unlike Haar, on these occasions, Fejér argued in favor of a restricted idea of Concrete art, openly championing works totally separate from forms in nature. He also championed the

expression of conceptual clarity and the contemporary artist's duty to act according to reason rather than emotion. In 1957, in the profile on the artist published in the *Suplemento Dominical do Jornal do Brasil*, Fejér adopts a position in opposition to the one he had defended in Budapest ten years earlier, when he supported Kállai's ideas relating abstract art to scientific forms revealed by cutting-edge technologies. In the Carioca newspaper, the artist took a stand against "the theorizing of Mário Pedrosa for whom Concrete art aims to provide an image of the world and of reality achieved by science and that neither figure nor verbal language can give. This theorization subordinates art to science and ultimately betrays nostalgia for a doctrine of art as imitation or expression of something."⁶⁸ In other words, here he denies that Concrete art represents any type of scientific discovery and declares his independence from any reference to the natural world, a statement that is partially dissonant with the ideas he disseminated in leaflets for Galéria a 4 Világtájhöz. On the other hand, Fejér's sculptures are coherent in their confidence in modern science's applications—as is implied in his Budapest writings.

From the 1950s to 1970s, Fejér based most of his three-dimensional works on the juxtaposition of geometric sheets of transparent acrylic (or glass), that are transformed in a calculated, progressive manner.⁶⁹ His works from this period stand out for their lightness, suggestion of movement and rhythm. This characteristic is visible in *Crystal* (see fig. 12), a piece made from glass sheets that describes the gradual transformation of two rectangles into isosceles triangles. The juxtaposition of sheets creates different levels of transparency and the illusion of new geometries. The sequences of straight and curved lines suggest a contorted, undulating ocean-like movement, the rhythm of which is controlled with mathematical precision. As we have seen, in the 1950s, the artist denied any relationship between Concrete art and nature. Even so, the title *Crystal* alludes to a type of structure found in the mineral world, the principal feature of which is regularity.

Affinities and Incompatibilities

Fejér's experience in Galéria a 4 Világtájhöz points to references that surely impacted the formation of Grupo Ruptura. Considerations regarding the obsolescence of Renaissance art, attention to the historical abstraction vanguards, and debates regarding new scientific concepts of space and time were all part of the Hungarian collective and the Paulista group's agenda. The Hungarian artist's trajectory suggests that beyond having influenced the choice of pigments used by Grupo Ruptura partners, he was probably looked upon by them as an intellectual interested in the theoretical foundations of abstract and Concrete art being developed in the country.

On the other hand, despite Fejér's proximity to Constructivist art since Hungary, the painting shown at the I Bienal de São Paulo may indicate that he had adhered to geometry after contact with his Brazilian peers. Conceptually, the sculptures he began making in the mid-1950s are aligned with the works of Sacilotto, Cordeiro, and Barros presented at MAM-SP in 1952. As in *Diagonal Function*, in *Crystal*, the mutation of forms is controlled by mathematical progression. Comparison between the output of Barros and Fejér reveals remarkable similarities between Fejér's pieces and works from Barros's Fotoformas series. Interested in the effects of light, both invested in repetition and in the juxtaposition of translucent geometric forms.⁷⁰

Cordeiro's, Fejér's, and Haar's connections with the Associazione Artistica Internazionale Indipendente in Rome, Montevideo, and São Paulo, and Fejér's experiments with the Hungarian Group of Abstract Artists point to the formation of collectives that, immediately following World War II, worked to overcome the isolation caused by years of conflict. Fejér's activities with Grupo Ruptura inspired his interest in the relationship between art and science and, in a way, allowed him to continue the reflections on cultural politics he had begun in Budapest. In Haar's case, participation in the São Paulo

group signaled the recognition and insertion of objects that orbited within the context of his commercial activities in the milieu of the visual arts.

When the reasons for Grupo Ruptura's formation are interpreted from the perspective of articles published in the Brazilian press in the 1950s, it makes sense that Cordeiro's prominent voice should be foregrounded by and consequently dominate the narrative about the group's history. However, the two trajectories outlined herein point to a less cohesive and less homogeneous sense of the Concrete art collective formed in São Paulo. Haar's and Fejér's life stories are marked by their Jewish origins, and the fact that both saw their countries destroyed. Their gaze upon the historical Constructivist avant-gardes was necessarily filtered through the experiences of war. Their origins in Central Europe connect Grupo Ruptura to a broader, more contradictory and varied history of abstraction, one that is occasionally distant from the programmatic and rationalist orthodoxy according to which their works are often read.

Endnotes

- 1 This text was written with the support of Polonyi Kincső Bodza and Maria Florencia Morera Sánchez, who collected primary documents at my request in the libraries and archives of Budapest and Montevideo, respectively. My thanks to these two researchers for their dedication to this work as well as to art historian Ildikó Fehér who, in 2017, found the first clues regarding Kázmér Fejér's activity in Budapest in the 1940s and gently encouraged me to proceed with the research. I also thank Peter Fejér for sharing his father's personal documents with me. All Hungarian sources cited in this article have been translated into English by Polonyi Kincső Bodza.
- 2 The principal references on the history of Grupo Ruptura are Ana Maria Belluzzo, "Ruptura e arte concreta," in *Arte construtiva no Brasil: Coleção Adolpho Leirner*, ed. Aracy A. Amaral, exh. cat. (São Paulo: Companhia Melhoramentos; DBA Artes Gráficas, 1998), 95–141; Rejane Cintrão and Ana Paula Nascimento, *Grupo Ruptura: Revisitando a exposição inaugural*, exh. cat. (São Paulo: Cosac and Naify; Centro Universitário Maria Antônia, 2002); Adele Nelson, *Forming Abstraction: Art and Institutions in Postwar Brazil* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022); and Heloisa Espada and Yuri Quevedo, *Ruptura e o Grupo: Abstração e Arte Concreta, 70 anos*, exh. cat. (São Paulo: Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, 2022).
- 3 João Bandeira, ed., *Arte concreta paulista: Documentos* (São Paulo: Cosac and Naify; Centro Universitário Maria Antônia da USP, 2002), 48.
- 4 In a conversation with the author on December 5, 2023, Bandeira said that he did not remember where he found the newspaper image.
- 5 Rejane Cintrão and Ana Paula Nascimento mention one archival photograph (see fig. 11) and three newspaper clippings (two of them from unidentified sources) that contain photographs of the Grupo Ruptura show. In a 2002 interview with Cintrão and Nascimento, Luiz Sacilotto recalled that the Ruptura artists decided upon the arrangement of the works and were responsible for mounting the exhibition, suggesting that MAM-SP did not interfere in the selection of the works or the organization of the exhibition. Cintrão and Nascimento, *Grupo Ruptura*, 15. See also Luiz Sacilotto, *Caderno n. 4, 1952*, Espólio Luiz Sacilotto, São Paulo.
- 6 According to Michel Favre of the Arquivo Geraldo de Barros (Geraldo de Barros Archive) in Geneva, the title of the work in Brazil is *Objeto Forma—Desenvolvimento de um quadrado (Form Object—Development of a Square)*, and there are doubts regarding the date of its execution. There is a third like-named painting by Barros made in 1952, although it is different from the works analyzed here. It is noteworthy that throughout his trajectory, Barros frequently modified the titles of his works. In this case, we were not able to ascertain whether the two paintings analyzed here originally possessed the same title or not. For the purposes of this text, I have chosen to maintain the information provided by the current proprietor. As regards the date, I acknowledge the possibility that the work was produced in 1952.
- 7 See Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro, ed., *The Geometry of Hope: Latin American Abstract Art from the Patricia Phelps Cisneros Collection*, exh. cat. (Austin: Blanton Museum of Art, 2007), 128; Maria Amália García, *El arte abstracto: Intercambios culturales entre Argentina y Brasil* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2011), 163; Pia Gottschaller and Aleca Le Blanc et al., *Making Art Concrete: Works from Argentina and Brazil in the Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute and the Getty Research Institute, 2017); Zanna Gilbert et al., eds., *Purity Is a Myth: The Materiality of Concrete Art from Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay* (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute and the Getty Research Institute, 2021); and Nelson, *Forming Abstraction*, 77.
- 8 Belluzzo, "Ruptura e arte concreta." In 2007, the Adolpho Leirner Collection of Brazilian Constructive Art was acquired by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.
- 9 The Centro Universitário Maria Antônia da Universidade de São Paulo is a cultural center that holds art exhibitions. In 2002, it presented a series of exhibitions and publications that highlighted Concrete art in Brazil: *Grupo Ruptura*, curated by Rejane Cintrão; *Antônio Maluf*, curated by Regina Teixeira de Barros; and *Waldemar Cordeiro e a fotografia*, curated by Helouise Costa.
- 10 Except for the sculptures Fejér remade in the 1970s given that most of the pieces he made in the 1950s have been lost. Cintrão and Nascimento, *Grupo Ruptura*, 16–18.
- 11 Nelson, *Forming Abstraction*, 136–55.
- 12 Espada and Quevedo, *Ruptura e o Grupo*.
- 13 Nelson, *Forming Abstraction*, 138.
- 14 As of the mid-1950s, Władysław's work was aligned with Art Informel.
- 15 Nelson, *Forming Abstraction*, 139.
- 16 Collection Luiz Sacilotto, Almeida & Dale Galeria de Arte and Valter Sacilotto, São Paulo.
- 17 Waldemar Cordeiro, "Ruptura," *Correio Paulistano*, January 11, 1953; reproduced in *Waldemar Cordeiro: Fantasia exata*, ed. Analivia Cordeiro, exh. cat. (São Paulo: Itaú Cultural, 2014), 210. Cordeiro wrote his text in response to Sérgio Milliet's criticism of the manifesto as vague and lacking in examples to explain the group's declarations. See Milliet, "Duas Exposições," *O Estado de S. Paulo*, December 13, 1952.
- 18 *The Primeira Exposição Nacional de Arte Concreta*, presented at MAM-SP in December 1956 and at the Ministério da Educação e Cultura (MEC) in Rio de Janeiro in January–February 1957, brought together for the first time painters, sculptors, and poets whose work in both cities was based on the principles of Concrete art. The event drew attention to differences between the works presented, setting off not always friendly debates in the press between critics and artists. The controversies between rational
- 19 Nelson, *Forming Abstraction*, 154.
- 20 Conceived and organized by Italian architect Lina Bo Bardi and Pietro Maria Bardi, then director of MASP, the IAC was inaugurated in March 1951 and closed its doors in late 1953. The institute was one of the earliest Brazilian initiatives for teaching industrial design. Its curriculum was modeled after the Bauhaus Dessau and the Institute of Design in Chicago. For more on this subject, see Ethel Leon, *IAC: Primeira escola de design do Brasil* (São Paulo: Blucher, 2014).
- 21 *Prêmio Leirner de Arte Contemporânea*, exh. cat. (São Paulo: Galeria de Arte das Folhas, 1959).
- 22 Interview with Maurício Nogueira Lima, Museu da Pessoa, São Paulo, video, 1992. Campinas and São Paulo: Arquivo do Instituto Maurício Nogueira Lima; Celso Fioravante, "Da figuração à abstração" (c. 1994), in *Judith Lauand: Os anos 50 e a construção da geometria*, exh. cat. (São Paulo: Instituto de Arte Contemporânea, 2015); and Espada and Quevedo, *Ruptura e o Grupo*, 13. These are but a few examples of mentions of the group of artists gathered around Cordeiro as Grupo Ruptura.
- 23 Lothar Charoux et al., *Manifesto ruptura*, exh. pamphlet (São Paulo: Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, 1952).
- 24 Waldemar Cordeiro was a representative of the Art Club in Brazil. He promoted exhibitions by members of the Italian collective in São Paulo and was close to Enrico Prampolini and to members of the abstractionist group Forma—Carla Accardi, Ugo Attardi, Pietro Consagra, Piero Dorazio, Mino Guerrini, Achille Perilli, Antonio Sanfilippo and Giulio Turcato. Grupo Forma emerged in the context of the Associação Artística Internazionale Independente in Rome in 1947. For more on this subject, see Heloisa Espada, "Waldemar Cordeiro and Grupo Forma: The Roman Road to São Paulo Concrete Art," in Gilbert et al., *Purity Is a Myth*, 46–65.
- 25 The 2nd Polish Corps was a military force made up of Polish citizens who had been taken to the USSR as prisoners following the invasion of Poland by Soviet forces in 1939. Between 1941 and 1942, with the split between the USSR and Germany, in consonance with the Polish government in exile, general Władysław Anders formed a resistance force. In 1942, the so-called Anders' Army was sent to the Middle East to contain the advance of the German forces and, in 1944, joined the Allied campaign in Italy. The Polish military remained in Rome until 1946.
- 26 The term "War Official Artist" appears in the artist's biography in the catalogue that accompanied his painting exhibition in Porto Alegre. See Fernando Corona, *Exposição Leopold Haar*, exh. cat. (Porto Alegre: 1947), unpaginated.
- 27 "Mostra di Pittori Polacchi," *Art Club: Periodico d'informazione dell'Associazione Artistica Internazionale Indipendente*, no. 11 (Rome: 1946): 5.
- 28 "Mostra di Pittori Polacchi," 5.
- 29 Paula Ramos, *A modernidade impressa: Artistas ilustradores da Livraria do Globo—Porto Alegre* (Porto Alegre: Editora da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, 2016).
- 30 A *gaúcho* is a native of the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul. Translator's note.
- 31 Isabella Cabral and M. A. Amaral Rezende, *Hermelindo Fiaminghi* (São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 1998), 20.
- 32 Calder was the subject of a solo exhibition presented by the Ministério da Educação e da Saúde Pública in Rio de Janeiro in 1947 and by MASP in 1948. On the North American artist's presence in Brazil during the 1940s and 1950s, see Roberta Saraiva, ed., *Calder no Brasil: Crônica de uma amizade* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2006); and Luiz Camillo Osório, Roberta Saraiva Coutinho, and Leticia de Castro, eds., *Calder e a arte Brasileira*, exh. cat. (São Paulo: Itaú cultural, 2016), https://issuu.com/itaucultural/docs/publicacaocalder_issu_ok.
- 33 The magazine *Habitat: Arquitetura e Artes no Brasil* was founded by Lina Bo and Pietro Maria Bardi, in 1950. Edited by the Haar from 1950 to 1953, the publication gave voice to MASP's activities and pedagogical project, even as it provided a space for cultural criticism.
- 34 Leopold Haar, "Plásticas novas," *Habitat*, no. 5 (1951): 57. Max Bill, "Beleza provinda da função e beleza como função," *Habitat*, no. 2 (1951): 61–65.
- 35 Haar, "Plásticas novas," 57.
- 36 Lina Bo, "Vitrinas," *Habitat*, no. 5 (1951).
- 37 Leopoldo Haar died in 1954, leaving behind his wife and two small children. Most of his works and documents related to his art and design activities have been lost. The Mira Haar Archive, consulted within the context of this research, consists of personal documents (photographs, his passport, etc.), photographs of works and of exhibitions designed by Haar and by Studio Haar, a few meager examples of drafts of posters and book covers, graphic material (invitations, folders, etc.), and a small group of paintings kept by Mira Haar, the artist's daughter, who was one year old when her father passed away.
- 38 Charoux et al., *Manifesto ruptura*.
- 39 Waldemar Cordeiro, "A pureza da arte aplicada," *Folha da Manhã*, 1951, newspaper clipping in the Archive Cordeiro family.
- 40 "Casimiro Fejer," *Suplemento Dominical do Jornal do Brasil*, February 24, 1957.

- 41 Származási, minősítési lap. Országos Magyar Kir. Képzőművészeti Főiskola 1940/41 tanévének I félévére beiratkozott rendkívüli hallgatóról (Kázmér Fejér's registration form, Hungarian University of Fine Arts, 1940–41), Archive Hungarian University of Fine Arts, Budapest.
- 42 Származási, minősítési lap. Országos Magyar Kir. Képzőművészeti Főiskola 1941/42 tanévének II félévére beiratkozott rendkívüli hallgatóról (Kázmér Fejér's registration form, Hungarian University of Fine Arts, 1941–42), Archive Hungarian University of Fine Arts, Budapest.
- 43 Kázmér Fejér's passport, Archive Peter Fejér, São Paulo, Brazil.
- 44 The Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo has a sculpture by Fejér that is made of plexiglass. Dated 1956, it was added to the museum's collection in 1966. Currently, the work is not on display, as pieces of it have come loose and it needs major restoration. As far as I know, the only other sculptures Fejér made in the 1950s are in Brazil. One of them is in the collection of Breno Krasilchik in São Paulo, and the other is in the Fadel Collection in Rio de Janeiro.
- 45 See, for example, *Exposição de arte concreta: Retrospectiva, 1951–1959*, exh. cat. (Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, 1960).
- 46 Miklós Molnár, *A Concise History of Hungary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 295–98, Kindle.
- 47 Doris Hartmann, "Constructive-Concrete Art in the GDR, Poland, and Hungary," in *Art beyond Borders: Artistic Exchange in Communist Europe (1945–1989)*, eds. Jérôme Bazin, Pascal Dubourg Glatigny, and Piotr Piotrowski (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2016), 201–7.
- 48 Ma became known for giving a voice to the artistic avant-garde aligned with leftist political movements.
- 49 Péter György and Gábor Pataki, "The European School and the Group of Abstract Artists," in *A Reader in East-Central-European Modernism 1918–1956*, ed. Beáta Hock, Klara Kemp-Welch, and Jonathan L. Owen, Courtauld Books Online (London: Courtauld Institute of Art, 2019), 400, <https://courtauld.ac.uk/research/research-resources/publications/courtauld-books-online/a-reader-in-east-central-european-modernism-1918-1956/26-the-european-school-and-the-group-of-abstract-artists-between-the-ramparts-the-critical-reception-of-the-european-school-and-the-gallery-of-the-four-directions-broke/>.
- 50 Lánosz Sándor, "Az Elvont Művészek Csoportja," in *A Janus Pannonius Múzeum Évkönyve 29* (1984) (Pécs: 1985), 242.
- 51 Kállai Ernő, "Beköszöntő a Galéria a 4 Világtájhöz," in *Az Európai Iskola: És Az Elvont Művészek Csoportja*, ed. Péter György and Pataki Gábor ([Budapest]: Corvina, 1990), 122–23.
- 52 Wall text for the exhibition *Európai Iskola: Veszélyes csillagzat alatt* (1945–1948), which was held at the MűvészetMalom in Szentendre, Hungary, from April 7 to July 28, 2024, and curated by Gábor Pataki and Emőke Bodonyi in collaboration with Mária Árvai, Sándor Hornyik, Krisztina Passuth, and György Várkonyi.
- 53 Sándor Hornyik, "A világ művészi képletei: Az elvont művészet és a világ új képe az Európai Iskola idején," in *Európai Iskola: Veszélyes csillagzat alatt* (1945–1948), by Gábor Pataki and Emőke Bodonyi, exh. cat. (Szentendre: Ferenczy Múzeumi Centrum, 2024), 172.<?> Ver nota 39 de este ensayo.
- 54 Tudnunk kell, hogy az absztrakt művészet több mint harmincéves múltja tekinthet vissza. Tény, hogy elindulása és eddigi fejlődése időben szorosan együvé esik a két világháborút szülő európai válsággal. Az is tény, hogy ennek a válságnak a képzőművészet fejlődésében és az absztrakt festészet, szobrászat szürrealista áramlataiban sok jele támadt. De az absztrakt művészet nemcsak ezeket a történelmi katasztrófákat látta és érezte meg előre. Akkor is nyitott szemmel és fogékony képzelettel járt, amikor olyan konstruktív festményeket és szobrokat teremtett, amelyek nyilvánvaló szellemi párhuzamban állanak az atomfizikával, tér-idő-egységgel, és a modern tudomány egyéb korszakalkotó felfedezéseivel. Ezek a felfedezések halomra döntötték eddigi térszemléletünket. Miért kívánják hát a művésztől, hogy a régi térszemlélethez ragaszkodják? A ma művészetének igenis szorosan együtt kell haladnia a ma tudományával és a korrall. Ezt teszi az absztrakt művészet. Kázmér Fejér, *Új Világkép*, in *Az Európai Iskola*, 123.
- 55 Kázmér Fejér, *Moszat*, 1947. Oil on canvas, 23 5/8 x 19 11/16 in. (60 x 50 cm). Private collection. Reproduced in Pataki and Emőke, *Európai Iskola*, 288.
- 56 Mikor e sorok íródnak, már megalakulóban van az UNESCO alosztályaként működő képzőművészeti szervezet, amelynek terveit és célkitűzéseit még nem ismerjük. Reméliük, hogy ez a szervezet a fentebb eloadottakat meg fogja valósítani. Kázmér Fejér, "A látástól ameglátásig," in *Az Európai Iskola*, 126. On the creation of artistic associations in Europe during the Cold War, see Nancy Jachec, *Europe's Intellectuals and the Cold War: The European Society of Culture, Post-War Politics, and International Relations* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015).
- 57 For more on the organization of the artistic class in São Paulo in the 1950s, see Nelson, *Forming Abstraction*, 89–131.
- 58 In these festivities, people take to the streets in frightening wooden masks and big woolly cloaks.
- 59 Kázmér Fejér, "A mohácsi busók," in *Az Európai Iskola*, 126–27.
- 60 György and Pataki, "The European School and the Group of Abstract Artists," 401–4.
- 61 Pia Gottschaller says that Fejér immigrated with his girlfriend to Uruguay in 1948, passing through Vienna, Trieste, Rome, and Marseilles. See Gottschaller, "The Migration of Concretist Thought Between Latin America and Europe," in *Migrants: Art, Artists, Materials and Ideas Crossing Borders*, ed. Lucy Wrapson et al. (London: Archetype in association with Hamilton Kerr Institute, University of Cambridge, 2019), 54. The passport Fejér used to leave Hungary in 1948 records his departure in the company of his first wife, Klara Helenyi.
- 62 According to Rejane Cintrão and Ana Paula Nascimento, Fejér participated in an Art Club of Vienna exhibition in 1947 and an exhibition of the Art Club of Turim in 1948. Cintrão and Nascimento, *Grupo Ruptura*, 38. Unfortunately, there is no record of his artwork in Montevideo.
- 63 "[L]a extraña composición de Feyer [sic], cuyo mensaje está limitado por um lenguaje en el que no estamos acostumbrados a ver expressarse a nuestros plásticos." Florio Parpagnoli, "Exposiciones, Montevideo," *Marcha*, no. 504 (November 18, 1949): 15.
- 64 "Y ahora, hablemos de lo peor: la tela del señor Kazmer Feyer [sic], quien decididamente se burla de todo juicio. Se puede denominar de cualquier manera, menos 'pintura'; esa solución de azul de metileno en que nadan abetos—más o menos estilizados—de Christmas Card, fantasmas de castillos y formas larvarias a lo Joan Miró. No estamos para esas bromas." Giselda Zani, "Tres exposiciones y una sola lección, Montevideo," *Escritura*, no. 8 (December 1949): 130.
- 65 The reproduction of the work was found by Adele Nelson in the Wanda Svevo Historical Archive, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo. See Nelson, *Forming Abstraction*, 123.
- 66 Pia Gottschaller, "Making Concrete Art," in Gottschaller and Le Blanc et al., *Making Art Concrete*, 42–43.
- 67 Kázmér Fejér, quoted in "Arte concreta," in *Maurício Nogueira Lima, pinturas*, exh. booklet (Campinas: Galeria Aremar, 1962), unpaginated.
- 68 Kázmér Fejér, "Casimiro Fejer," *Suplemento Dominical do Jornal do Brasil*, February 24, 1957.
- 69 See the website devoted to the artist's work: <https://www.fejer.com.br/>. Pieces made by Fejér in the 1970s are held in several private collections in São Paulo.
- 70 On the Fotoformas by Geraldo de Barros, see Heloisa Espada, "Fotoformas: Luz e artifício," in *Geraldo de Barros e a fotografia*, ed. Heloisa Espada (São Paulo: Instituto Moreira Salles; Edições SESC, 2014), 12–35

Grupo Ruptura and Abstraction in Central Europe: Lost Histories and Works by Kázmér Fejér and Leopoldo Haar¹

Heloisa Espada

Latin American Collection Fellow, 2021

The Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Research Institute for the Study of Art from Latin America

The Museum of Modern Art

Grupo Ruptura is a central topic in the historiography of Constructivist art in Brazil. Consensus is that its inaugural exhibition, held in December 1952 at the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (MAM-SP), left an indelible mark on the national debate about abstract and Concrete art. Nevertheless, knowledge of the group's origins continues to be riddled with gaps, some of them likely unresolvable given the precariousness or loss of certain research sources.² This text addresses two mostly unknown subjects in Brazilian art history: the sparsely documented works and trajectories of Leopoldo Haar (Polish, 1910–1954) and Kázmér Fejér (Brazilian, born Hungary, 1923–1989). The former was a Polish immigrant and the latter, a Hungarian one, and they both moved to Brazil during the second half of the 1940s amid circumstances directly related to the end of World War II. In this text, I seek to reconstruct Haar's trajectory from a set of documents in his family's archive, many of them unpublished, and from an analysis of the *Exposição de Artes Industriais: Vitrines e Fotografias (Industrial Arts Exhibition: Window Displays and Photographs)* by Leopoldo and his brother, Zygmunt Haar, at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP) in 1951. Next, I address Fejér's activity in Budapest between 1946 and 1948 with the Grupo de Artistas Abstratos (Group of Abstract Artists) gathered in the Hungarian capital, particularly the *Új Világkép (New Worldview)* exhibition, which he and critic Ernő Kállai (Hungarian, 1890–1954) organized in 1947. Albeit starting from meager sources, I also broach Fejér's passage through Montevideo in 1948, the year before he settled in São Paulo.

The information presented in this text reveals far less orthodox stances, productions, and theoretical references than historiography normally recognizes regarding Grupo Ruptura. Data suggests that Haar's and Fejér's professional experience and education were more relevant to the group's proposals than previously imagined. Additionally, research relates the history of Grupo Ruptura to the emergence of international artistic associations in postwar Western and Central Europe with the aim of breaking away from the isolation imposed by World War II and strengthening modern art.

From What Is Lacking

During the research that led to his book *Arte concreta paulista: Documentos* (2002), João Bandeira discovered a heretofore unknown newspaper image of the Grupo Ruptura show at MAM-SP

in 1952 that eventually became an essential source regarding the show's content (fig. 1). Though this picture is dirty and stained, it nonetheless reveals that there were at least eight two-dimensional works hanging on panels and columns on a side wall, four two-dimensional works hanging on a back wall, and two three-dimensional works exhibited on pedestals.⁴ The word "ruptura," in lowercase letters, appears on the side of one of the pedestals. The poor quality of the image precludes identification of most of the objects. To make matters worse, not a single researcher of the subject to date has been able to locate a list of the works in the show. What knowledge we have of the inventory comes by way of a limited set of photographs, also of poor quality, published in newspapers of the day, and of notes made by artist Luiz Sacilotto (Brazilian, 1924–2003) in his diaries about works that he had sent for exhibition.⁵

To the left, we see a painting by Geraldo de Barros, although the angle of the photograph makes it difficult to tell whether the piece is *Diagonal Function* (1952) now in the collection of The Museum of Modern Art (fig. 2) or *Diagonal Function* (1952–53?) now in a private collection in Brazil (fig. 3).⁶ The works are similar but differ subtly in essential details. MoMA's *Diagonal Function* has been the subject of much historiographical commentary, as a fine example of Grupo Ruptura's interest in Euclidean geometry and Gestalt theory.⁷ The painting is based on a sequence of eight squares set within one another and simultaneously rotated, inverted, and reflected. Barros started from an apparently simple logic: The sides of each inset square are half that of the square that contains it, and each square is shifted in orientation and color alternately—that is, from square to diamond and from black to white. Another constant is that the vertices of each inset square are tangent to the midpoints of the sides of the larger square that contains it. The artist was deeply interested in Gestalt theory.⁷ A series of progressively smaller right triangles emerges because of the rotation of the squares and alternation of black and white. Thus, the composition illustrates the Pythagorean theorem in that the square of each hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides. Based on what has been described here, *Diagonal Function* appears to derive from an algorithmic logic, although the final composition is the result of tiny shifts in that logic. Positioning the innermost square (oriented as a diamond) to the right of the center of the composition, Barros displaced the axis of the operation to the right and, following that, twice to the left, creating the sensation of a spiral movement. Finally, the position of the small white diamond is tangent to the center of the painting.