

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHTER: PART II<sup>1</sup>

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## STATISTICS?

Among the nonsense written by [Ademar] Gomes de Deus and published by the SFF [Sociedade Fluminense de Fotografia], what our G. de Deus calls “statistics” is truly disastrous.<sup>2</sup> I want to remind G. de Deus here that I have earned a civil engineering degree from our ex-Politécnica, today the National School of Civil Engineering. Therefore, I know the meaning of statistics. G. de Deus **gathers data** from catalogs of Bandeirante salons in a captious manner, without distinguishing between statistics and **data collection**, and reaches conclusions off the top of his head.<sup>3</sup>

Well, any statistical analysis based solely on catalog data to exam-

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- 1 José Oiticica Filho, “Reforçando os pontos dos ii. 2a Parte,” *Boletim Foto Cine* 5, no. 59 (March 1951): 28–30. Translator’s note: The title of the article can be translated into English literally as “Reinforcing the Dots on the I’s.” In Portuguese, however, the expression “dotting the i’s” has a different connotation from the similar English idiom “dotting the i’s and crossing the t’s.” “Putting dots on the i’s” in Portuguese means to clarify something or to set the record straight, rather than to finalize something, which is the meaning of the English expression. Oiticica’s article, which we offer here in English translation for the first time, responds to another article, entitled “Putting the Dots on the I’s” [literal translation], so that his title, “Reinforcing the Dots on the I’s” [literal translation] actually means “Setting the Record Straighter.”
- 2 Oiticica Filho refers to a letter by Ademar Gomes de Deus, published in the SFF official magazine *Revista Cine Fotográfica* (vol. 2, no. 17, 1951). Here and throughout the Document, explanatory additions in brackets are mine. —A.T.
- 3 Here and throughout the Document—emphasis in original.

ine **the way judgment is passed at photography salons** is flawed for two principal reasons:

1. One can rarely know (as is the case with the catalogs of the São Paulo and SFF salons) the total number of works sent by **each participant** and the **total number of participants from each club**. What one does know is the number of **accepted works** and the total number of **accepted participants**.

2. It is impossible, using statistics, to take into consideration the psychological, subjective factor that leads a juror to reject or accept a given work.

**Comments on reason number 1**—Based on a numeric table, let us use “statistics à la G. de Deus” and show the absurdity of where such “statistics” take us.

Referring to the table from a reliable source—*The American Annual of Photography*—that was cited in the previous part of my article, I have shown that in three years, the total number of the Bandeirantes’ works accepted in international salons was 1,037, and for the people of the Fluminense that number was 270. In G. de Deus’ fashion, we should conclude that “the artistic level of the Bandeirantes is four times superior to that of the SFF.” It is clear for the more informed that the table does not express any of that, yet one thing is certain: the people at the Bandeirante Club are working harder and **send more works** to salons than the people of the Fluminense Club; and since **the Bandeirante sends only two works per member**, one concludes that there are more working Bandeirantes than Fluminenses. But is there anything wrong with that? Of course not, and it would be up to the directors of the SFF, if they were more attuned and enlightened, to turn the patriotic activity of the Bandeirante into an incentive to its members, and not to respond to it immaturely through its magazine.

Would you like another example of “statistics à la G. de Deus”? Well, here it is. Going through the table on page 199 of *The American Annual of Photography* of 1951, one sees that I had works accepted in sixty-one international salons, and that there is not another lawful Brazilian on the list, except for [Francisco] Aszmann (who is not Brazilian) and his twenty-two salons.<sup>4</sup> “A la G. de Deus,” what should one conclude? That I am the best Brazilian photographer and that I am

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4 By saying that Francisco Aszmann (1907–88) was “not a Brazilian,” the author refers to the fact that Aszmann was a recent immigrant from Hungary. —A.T.

three times better than Aszmann. Of course, this is a captious conclusion. It is wrong and does not mean anything. But then I ask, was this not exactly what G. de Deus did in his hilarious “statistics” frivolously published by the SFF magazine?

I want here, in passing, to call attention to the fact that the same applies to the comments about North American salons in [Guilherme] Malfatti’s letter published in the July 1950 edition of the *Boletim do Bandeirante*, page twenty.<sup>5</sup> Referring to his letter, the SFF magazine (no. 11–13, page seventeen) agrees with Malfatti and states that he demonstrated “high statistical spirit.” Well, there is no statistical analysis in Malfatti’s letter, and its conclusions are fundamentally flawed. Among the many reasons for the great acceptance of North Americans at their own international salons is the **high number** of U.S. [photographers] that submit works to their salons. In the last period recorded by the *American Annual*, at 101 international salons, 475 North American participants were **accepted**; and please note that this is **only the number of accepted** works. Of the 101 salons mentioned above, only thirty-six were in the United States, leaving a difference of sixty-five international salons more than the U.S. salons alone.

**Comment on reason number two**—How can statistical analysis take into consideration the psychological factor of individual responses of art exhibition jury members to a particular work presented to them? As far as I know this has not yet been possible, and therefore any conclusion regarding the decisions of a jury based on salon catalogs or any other numeric table does not make any sense.

I believe there is no doubt that the **aesthetic responses** of jurors to a work of art are individual, not objective, and depend on many factors that I will not analyze or list here. For the sake of clarity, I will illustrate what I have stated above with very revealing examples.

Let the first example be a very well-known artwork of mine whose title is *The Kiosk*. Up until today, the work has been accepted at seventy-eight international salons. It is, therefore, a renowned work of art. Alas, there were some salons in which *The Kiosk* was rejected—five, if I am not mistaken. How does one know, how can one guess the reactions of the jurors who did not accept *The Kiosk*? Following the reasoning of G. de Deus and the SFF, I should stop sending works to salons that

5 Oiticica Filho refers to a letter by Guilherme Malfatti, published within an unattributed article “Falamos Bandeirantes,” *Boletim Foto Cine* 5, no. 50 (June 1950): 20. —A.T.

rejected *The Kiosk* because they rejected a work that seventy-eight other salons had already accepted. Of course, I never thought of such a thing because this sort of behavior does not make any sense.

Let the second example be a work by Aszmann entitled *Serpentine*, also a prized work that has been reproduced in catalogs, including a North American one. Very well, at the 1950 International Salon of Washington, I watched the unanimous rejection of this work by Aszmann with surprise. What should one conclude? Was it a biased judgment? Absolutely. Were the jurors ignorant? Absolutely, after all, they were all recognized artists in international photographic circles. What were then the reactions of the jurors to Aszmann's work? It's a mystery that a numeric table will never be able to resolve.

And examples could be multiplied galore. Each exhibiting photographer knows this phenomenon of a work being accepted and prized in one salon but rejected in another.

Therefore, how can one speak of statistics, how can one condemn **certain salons** without taking into account that it is not the salon that judges the works but human beings, each with their own ego, whose final aesthetic opinion will accept or reject the work he was asked to judge?

### THE REASONING OF THE FLUMINENSE

Looking at what has been stated above, one notes that the reason for the Fluminense not sending works to the Bandeirante Salon is indeed lamentable.

In SFF magazine, No. 17, 1951 (no month listed), pages four and five, an anonymous writer gives the reasons why the Fluminense refrained from sending works to the Bandeirante Salon. What was the reason? Do you want to know? Then prepare yourselves for being shocked and upset: it is because the jurors of the Bandeirante Salon have been rejecting works submitted by the Fluminense collectively!! The anonymous author says that the works are rejected "en masse," that "these are photographs prized in various salons," and so on, without concrete evidence of any kind, **prejudging a judgment** that would have been made in São Paulo!!

Here goes an excerpt from the article for the reader's consideration: "We will not arrive at the point—this notion is beyond us—of classifying the jurors of the Paulista as biased, but only for an interpretation of art." He is such a nice guy, right . . . as nonsense. Analyze the

sentence, please: the jurors are not biased, but they reject the works of the Fluminense due to “an interpretation of art.” But, I ask, how does a juror accept or reject a work? Is it not through the interpretation of an artistic message that has been sent for his judgment? It is a senseless sentence, the one above by the anonymous author. Why? Because throughout his article, one notes that the only reason that the Fluminense [do not send their works] is that they do not accept the judgment that the Paulista jurors make of the works that the Fluminense send them, or because the judgment by São Paulo is not how the Fluminense wished it would be. This is the truth, no matter how sad, how pitiful.

The anonymous author bestows upon the SFF directors the great blame of badly advising its members who really want to work and compete in the international salons. Therefore, is having prints rejected by a salon (and there will always be those, in any salon) a good reason for not sending works to that salon ever again?

A good board of directors should insist that its members continue to send works, each time improved and in greater quantities, until they make it into a particular salon. I remember here something that happened at the Foto Clube Brasileiro. In one of their weekly meetings, one of the members asked for the floor and, shouting criticisms of Brazilian works shown in Argentina, asked other members of the Club not to send any more works to that salon. I immediately replied, saying that, on the contrary, if there was criticism against our work it was because the critic in question had judged the works in his own way, and that instead we should continue always to send more and better works to the salons of our sister nation. And today, I am pleased to see that I was right, because works by Brazilians are today well accepted and well regarded in photographic magazines in Argentina. The right to criticize is free; it is one of the pillars of a pure democracy. The recipients of the critique should take advantage of it and either accept it or not, according to their own opinion and aesthetic sense.

An informed board of directors should call to the attention of its members the fact that works often get rejected. It should show its members that a certain percentage of rejections is something to be expected, lift the spirits of its members, and teach them the **true ethics** of exhibitors in art salons.

And all of this is even more lamentable when it concerns a Brazilian salon that is recognized internationally. And in this manner,

the directors of the Fluminense, who often boast of their patriotism, encourage its members to boycott the **Bandeirante Salon**. Against this I hereby revolt and launch my vehement protest against such acts, which in the end only serve to weaken the progress of photographic art in Brazil.

TRANSLATED BY LUISA VALLE