
Book Review: *Selling Black Brazil* and *Modernity in Black and White*

Selling Black Brazil: Race, Nation, and Visual Culture in Salvador, Bahia, by Anadelia A. Romo. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2022. 336 pages. Hardcover \$45.00.

Modernity in Black and White: Art and Image, Race and Identity in Brazil, 1890–1945, by Rafael Cardoso. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Hardcover \$49.99.

Two recent volumes exploring race and material culture in Brazil challenge established notions of Brazilian modernism and its articulation in Salvador da Bahia, São Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro. Historian Anadelia A. Romo's *Selling Black Brazil: Race, Nation, and Visual Culture in Salvador, Bahia* argues that the Bahian tourism industry relied extensively on images to promote the city of Salvador as attractive and exotic, ultimately redefining Black culture in the nation's imaginary. In six chapters primarily focused on the 1940s and 1950s, she demystifies lauded figures like the French-born photographer-turned-ethnographer Pierre Verger, the novelist Jorge Amado, and the Argentinean-born illustrator Carybé (Héctor Julio Páride Bernabó) by looking at their training and the circulation of their images and writings. Also focusing on the first half of the twentieth century, art historian Rafael Cardoso leverages illustrated periodicals, cartoons, and graphic design to destabilize the centrality of *antropofagia* and the *Semana de 22* (Week of 22, the São Paulo art festival in February 1922) as the beginning of Brazilian modernism, which, he contends, began in mass-circulated imagery and articles. In five chapters that combine analysis of artworks, literature, and material culture, he examines turn-of-the century modernism in relationship to favelas, Carnival, and art-nouveau publications as well as *antropofagia*, concluding in the late thirties with the onset of Getúlio Vargas's dictatorship. Together, Romo and Cardoso redress common misconceptions about both Black identity and modernism in Brazil, while also tracing specific stories about individuals and their impact on definitions of national identity.

With a compelling and clear prose, Romo's study is a welcome addition to the literature about Afro-Brazilian

art that has seldom tackled important figures like Verger and Carybé from a critical and in-depth standpoint. Tracing the development of Black figural depictions related to tourism from the turn-of-the century to the late fifties, she inserts art historical readings into the fields of history and anthropology, which have long eschewed the value and power of the image in favor of other cultural expressions such as dance, music, and literature. She shows that Carybé, Verger, and other artists including Manuel Martins and Carlos Bastos—all of whom were employed at one point by the official Bahian tourism industry—recreated typologies of Black figures, such as the elderly female street vendor, based on nineteenth-century *costumbrismo*. When examining the early photography of Verger, who has almost become an untouchable legend, Romo addresses fundamental yet obscured aspects of his practice such as his homoerotic depictions of young Black male figures and his lack of connection to his subjects, who were oftentimes working-class people of African descent. Her complex treatment of the construction of Bahian Blackness at midcentury does not shy away from addressing difficult notions of place and placelessness, the white, foreign, male gaze, and the government's racist but strategic embrace of African-derived culture for financial and political ends.

However, a further engagement with art historical methodologies would have strengthened the book's arguments. The term "modernism" is employed loosely, without an explanation of what made the images stylistically modern and how artists complicated modernist practices within Salvador and elsewhere in the country. For instance, relating Verger's geometrically-inspired images to modernist photography of the period would reinforce

the argument that modernism was integral to legitimizing tourism and its shaping of Bahian Blackness, an interesting contention that wanes throughout the volume. While some readings of form and choice of media are particularly engaging, Romo employs formal analysis sparingly; the first chapter about photography and types in the early twentieth century is almost devoid of it. In the fourth chapter, reading further into illustrator Carybé's thick contours and frugal use of lines would reveal why and how his work became so appealing for tourism materials. Romo compares his work to Verger's photographs, which, at times, is convincing; however, she concludes that Carybé's work was "derivative" of Verger's subject matter and composition (163). Formal analysis of Carybé's work offers an opportunity to understand how he took Verger's work a step further, overcoming mimicry and opting for a widely readable and exoticized imagery.

Nevertheless, Romo's analysis of texts in relationship to art is exemplary, especially in the case of novelist Jorge Amado and printmaker Manuel Martins, where she weaves formal and discourse analysis to show the production of a romanticized vision of the city that simultaneously addressed its racial inequality. Created primarily by white, male, and sometimes foreign artists—a positionality Romo addresses in the introduction—the images throughout the book beg for a counterpoint. What are the consequences of depictions that stripped Black figures of their agency, and how did Afro-Bahian cultural producers reclaim it through images? The only example of such reclamation appears briefly in the last chapter, which eloquently teases out the relationship of tourism and Candomblé temples and priestesses. It is arguably the strongest chapter in the book because it documents the growing public-relations structure of temples, yet it eludes the richness of visual material found in the other chapters.

Like Romo, Cardoso takes a cross-disciplinary approach to examining modernism, in this case in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. He locates early twentieth-century modern art in mass publications and printmaking in relationship to literature, journalism, and music. In his chapter on favelas, for instance, he examines photography, painting, prints, cartoons, and newspaper and magazines articles to argue that artists constructed the hilltop neighborhoods as Black spaces to oppose them to white, elite areas, even though the communities were racially diverse

in the early twentieth century. He demonstrates that Carnival was closely tied to bohemianism and art schools, unsettling the separation of modernism and academicism in the aughts and teens.

The book reaches its apex in the discussion of illustrated periodicals, before turning to *antropofagia* and specifically the writings of Mário de Andrade and Oswald de Andrade, as well as illustrated books about racial types during the early Vargas era. The discussion of *antropofagia*'s publications divulges what Cardoso deems to be "ambiguous" considerations of race with proclivities toward European primitivism rather than support of Afro-Brazilians (187). While the analysis centers on prose, a closer look at the now-canonical imagery produced at the time of the texts as well as new research by Irene Small and Maria Castro on Tarsila do Amaral's work would bolster this argument. The cross-disciplinary focus, at times, tends to marginalize artworks that could and should be central to the book's argumentation. Despite Cardoso's meticulous attention to detail and elaborate contextualization, the discussion of race, and more specifically of Blackness, fades as the book develops, creating a fissure between the author's discussion of a renewed definition of modernism and Afro-Brazilian identity. A deeper investigation into artists of African descent from the period, such as Arthur Timótheo da Costa—who appears briefly only a few times in the volume—would have strengthened the inherent place of Blackness in discussions of early twentieth-century modernism and created new counterpoints for *antropofagia*. Ultimately, the book adds a Carioca and Paulista lens to recent scholarship about art criticism, printmaking, periodicals, and modernism in early twentieth-century Latin America by Harper Montgomery and Lori Cole.

Both Romo and Cardoso adhere to Brazilian studies' traditional regionalist approach for understanding modernism and Blackness in Brazil. Romo focuses on Salvador da Bahia, while Cardoso looks to Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Such emphases allow for the depth of research exhibited in both books. However, expanding this site-specific approach would articulate a Brazilian modernism linked to broader networks of Black culture, art making, nationality, and citizenship. What was the response from the southeastern regions on material culture created for the Bahian tourism industry? Likewise, how did Rio's illustrated periodicals impact, if at all, modernist

movements outside southeastern Brazil? Interestingly, Romo connects Salvador's modernism to other contemporaneous Latin American movements such as Mexican Muralism, which contextualizes this visual production among canonical trends abroad. Reevaluating the

relationship of Black identity and Brazilian modernism, both books push us to rethink how we teach and study nationalism, race, and art in Brazil.

Abigail Lapin Dardashti
University of California, Irvine