

## Di Tella Institute

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Di Tella Institute (Art Centers)  
By Eduardo Herrera

The Di Tella Institute was created in 1958 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and during the following years grew as a conglomerate of centers for cutting-edge research in multiple areas of knowledge. Under the directorship of Enrique Oteiza and Guido Di Tella, the *Instituto Torcuato Di Tella* functioned through two branches, the scientific research centers and the art centers. The scientific research centers were the CIE (Center of Economic Research), CIS (Center for Social Research), the CEUR (Center for Urbana and Regional Studies), the CIAP (Center for Research in Public Administration), the CICE (Center for Research in Educational Sciences) and the CIN (Center for Neurological Research). The art branch consisted of the CLAEM (Latin American Center for Advanced Musical Studies), the CAV (Center for Visual Arts) and CEA (Center for Audiovisual Experimentation), together with a department of photography and graphic design.

The CAV was created in 1960 under the directorship of art critic Jorge Romero-Brest, a crucial figure for the establishment of avant-garde trends in Argentina. Initially, Romero-Brest was hired to curate different exhibits using the private collection of the Di Tella family and organize a national and international prize for visual arts. Soon, the CAV became a locus of avant-garde artistic creation, and supported new artistic tendencies, which at the time included neofigurativism, pop art, happenings, and, during its final years, art for mass consumption. The happenings organized by the Di Tella Institute in Florida Street, where all the art centers were located, became a staple of the cosmopolitan Buenos Aires of the 1960s. Among the most important artists featured at the CAV were Antonio Berni, Juan Carlos Distéfano, León Ferrari, Edgardo Giménez, Roberto Jacoby, Julio Le Parc, Rómulo Macció, Oscar Massota, Pablo Mesejean, Marta Minujín, Luis Felipe Noé, and Delia Puzovio. One of the most iconic works presented by the CAV was *La Menesunda* (1965) by Ruben Santantonín and Marta Minujín—although Minujín has taken most of the credit and publicity around it. *La Menesunda* was an installation occupying two floors of the Florida street Institute and allowing people to navigate through 16 different spaces marked by neon lights, a semi-naked couple in bed, and make-up artist putting make up on the visitors. Of similar notoriety was the exhibit named *Experiencias 1968*, which included Roberto Plate's *Los Baños* (1968), an installation which consisted of two rooms that resembled bathrooms, with sinks, although not toilets, and with the silhouette of a man and a woman on each door. Visitors stated writing graffiti on the walls, several of which criticized the military dictatorship that had taken over since 1966 and lasted until 1973. By the third day of the exhibit the police had arrived to the place and closed it, effectively censoring Plate's work. After this, all other artists in the *Experiencias 1968* exhibit decided to take out their works from the Institute to the streets and burn them in solidarity with Plate.

The CEA (Center for Audiovisual Experimentation) focused mostly on theater, but frequently collaborated with the CAV for multimedia installations and happenings. Under

the direction of Roberto Villanueva, the CEA promoted multiple on-stage artistic manifestations, including, but not limited to plays, dance-theater performances, musical parodies, and experimental group performances. Early works from Griselda Gambaro such as “Los Siameses” were premiered at the Institute’s theater hall, and experimental actor groups like the Teatro Grupo Lobo did several collaborative works together with Villanueva. Many figures that started at the Di Tella became nationally and internationally known, such as Nacha Guevara, Jorge Bonino, Marilú Marini, Alberto Favero and groups like Il Musicisti, an early incarnation of the widely popular music-comedy troop Les Luthiers. For many of the more experimental works, the CEA collaborated with musicians interested in electronic music composition and included experiments in photography and stage lighting. Like the CAV, the CEA began functioning in 1960 and was closed in 1970.

Finally, and different from the other two centers because of its emphasis on pedagogical goals and not necessarily in public outreach, was the CLAEM, directed by the Argentine composer Alberto Ginastera. The CLAEM organized biannual fellowships for a small number of Latin American students to study with a local group of composers that included at different points Ginastera himself, Gerardo Gandini and Francisco Kröpfl, and a series of international teachers which included Olivier Messiaen, Aaron Copland, Luigi Nono, Bruno Maderna, Riccardo Malipiero, and many others. For two years, the fellows would work in refining their craft, and a concert of their pieces was organized at the end of each year. Included in the activities of the CLAEM were the nine *Contemporary Music Festivals*, organized yearly since 1962 until 1970. These festivals showcased recent works from both Latin American and international composers during four concerts held over a week. Finally, the CLAEM became notorious for hosting one of the first, and certainly the best equipped electroacoustic music studio of its time in the region. The *Laboratorio de música electrónica* grew from a large array of audio testing equipment into a highly organized and efficient studio with plenty of innovative apparatus under the direction of engineer Fernando von Reichenbach. The center was closed in 1971, after having trained more than 50 composers from multiple Latin American countries, many of them soon becoming central figures of their countries and the transnational music scene, among them Jorge Antunes (Brazil), Blas Emilio Atehortúa (Colombia), Cesar Bolaños (Peru), Gabriel Brnčić (Chile), Mariano Etkin (Argentina), Eduardo Kusnir (Argentina), Mesías Maiguashca (Ecuador), Antonio Mastrogiovanni (Uruguay), Alcides Lanza (Argentina), Marlos Nobre (Brazil), Jacqueline Nova (Colombia), Joaquín Orellana (Guatemala), Graciela Paraskevaïdis (Argentina), Jorge Sarmientos (Guatemala), Édgar Valcárcel (Peru), and Alberto Villalpando (Bolivia).

To an important extent, these avant-garde promoting art centers became the most visible face of the Di Tella Institute. Located in the popular Florida Street in downtown Buenos Aires, they became associated with 1960s’ counterculture movements, internationalism, and experimentation. It was because of this public visibility that they received the unwanted attention of the ultra-conservative military dictatorship. Between the economic hardships of the Di Tella family and the increased political pressure from the military, the Di Tella Institute closed the visual arts and audiovisual experimentation centers (CAV

and CEA) in 1970, while the music center (CLAEM) lasted only until 1971. Most of the surviving scientific research centers became the basis for the creation of today's Di Tella University. However, even by the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when people in Argentina talked about the Di Tella, they were usually making reference to the art centers in Florida Street during the 1960s.

**Further reading:**

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