



## Male vs Female: Brazilian artists abroad

by Marta Inez Rodrigues Pereira

Tarsila do Amaral (1886-1973), Anita Malfatti (1889-1964), Mira Schendel (1919-1988), Lygia Clark (1920-1988), Lygia Pape (1927-2004), Beatriz Milhazes (1960-), Adriana Varejão (1964-)... so many prestigious Brazilian women artists!

And how about Luisa Strina, Marcia Fortes and Alessandra D'Aloia, Nara Roesler, Raquel Arnaud, Anita Schwartz, Silvia Cintra? Just to name a few because it's a long list of women heading important commercial art galleries in Brazil.

Of course, they do have their male counterparts: artists Alfredo Volpi (1896-1988), Candido Portinari (1903-1962), Hélio Oiticica (1937-1980), Cildo Meireles (1948-), Vik Muniz (1961-); curators Mário Pedrosa (1900-1981), Paulo Herkenhoff (1949-); collector and idealizer of Inhotim, Bernardo Paz... and so many others.

But it does seem that in Brazil women have rather prominent places in the art world, quite different from what occurs in other parts of the globe. It is something to be proud of.

However, does having a number of exponent figures give equal opportunities for the majority? Shall we take a quick look at what it's like in the international auction market?

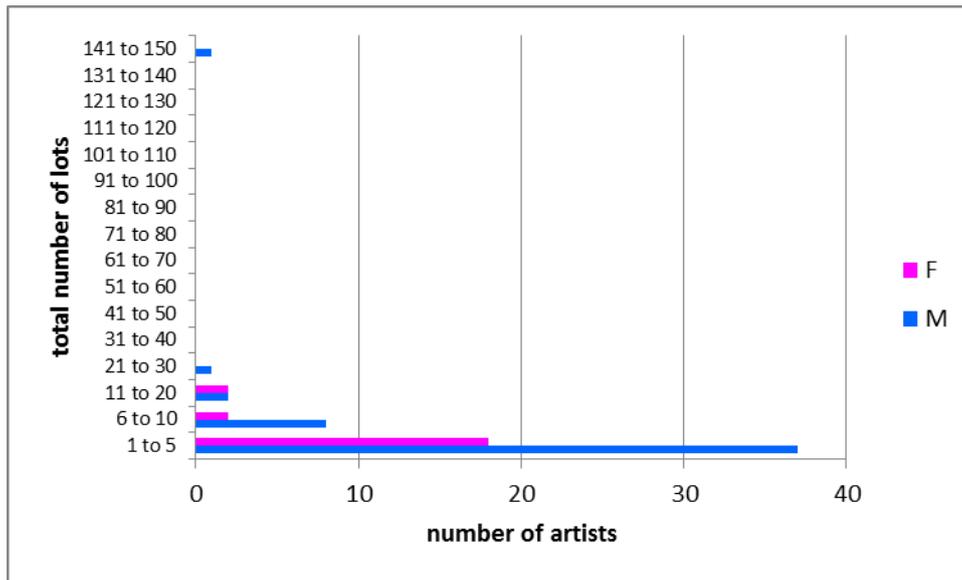
### Data sample

I have used the same database as in a previous post, [Room for growth](#), viz. auction results for:

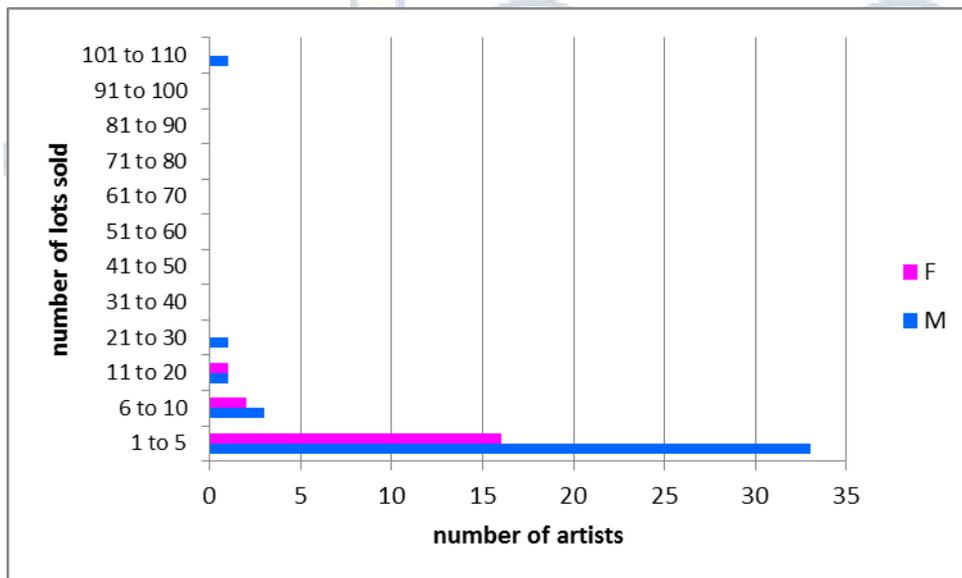
- Living Brazilian artists from the fourth quarter of 2013 to the fourth quarter of 2016
  - Tomie Ohtake (1913-2015) and Tunga (1952-2016) died during the collection period and were maintained in the database;
- Data are for the contemporary evening, contemporary day and Latin American art sales;
- Only major international auction houses dealing with Latin American art: Christie's, Sotheby's and Phillips de Pury;
- Sales in both London and New York;
- Values are for premium prices (including buyer's fees).

### Male dominance

Out of the 71 artists represented in these sales, only 22 are women (31%). And there are even more lots taken to auction made by male artist (325) than by females (83), i.e. women are responsible for only 20% of the lots.



This proportion is maintained when it comes to sold lots (males sold 218 lots and females, 56), which results in a 33% bought-in rate for both genders.



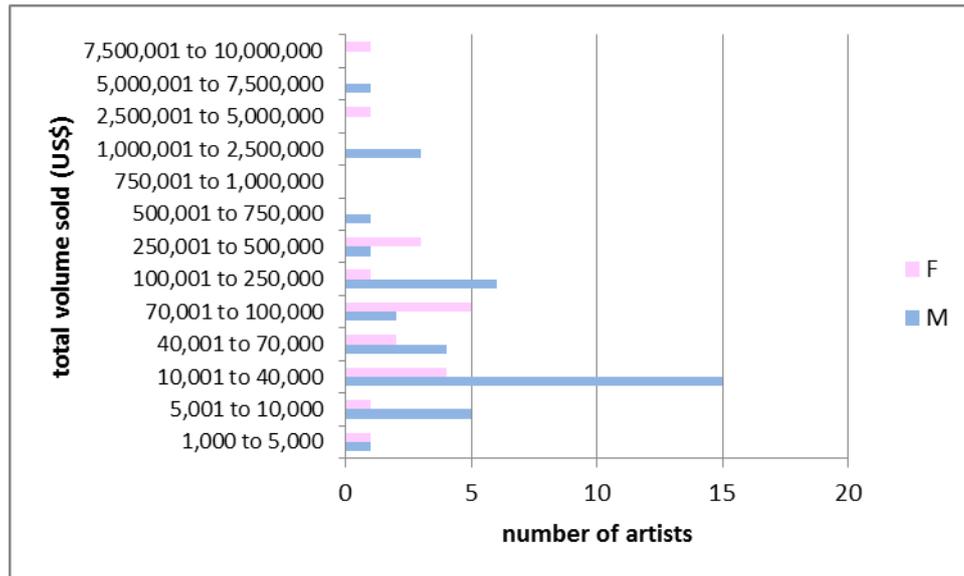
It should be noted, however, that there are few Brazilian artists with a significant number of lots at auction. Thirty-seven males and 18 females had less than six lots taken to these auctions during this data collection period, and 33 males and 16 females had less than six sold lots. The only artist with a large amount of lots at auction (149), whether sold (107) or unsold, was Vik Muniz.



### Female dominance?

When we look at prices the picture seems to favour our women: with much fewer artists and number of lots, women had a total sale volume (US\$14,475, 024) that was even a tiny bit higher than that of their male peers (US\$14,398,517), resulting in a much higher average sale price: US\$258,483 for females and US\$66,048 for males.

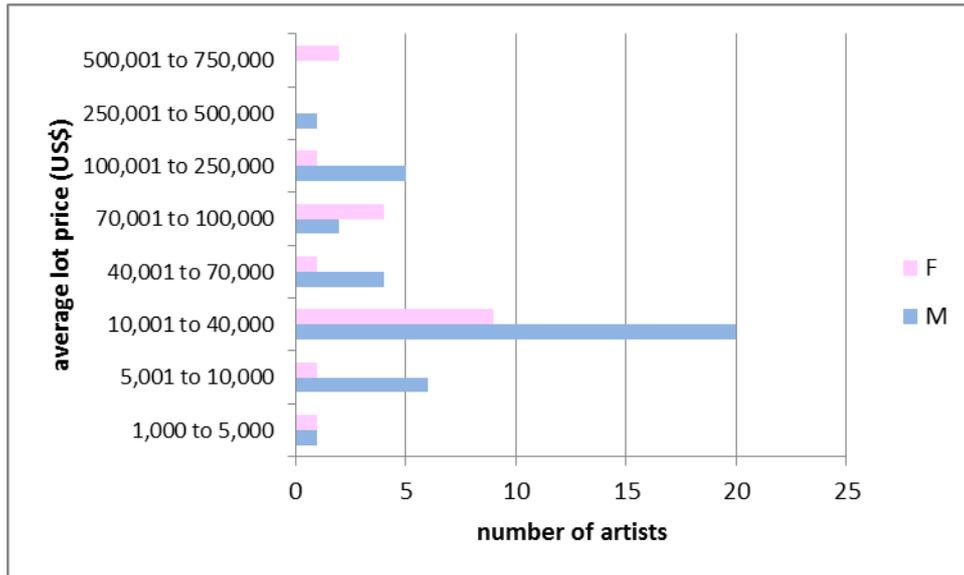
The chart below shows the distribution of artists among the different ranges of total volume of sales. We can see that, under the US\$1 million threshold, the distribution for female artists has a more normal (bell-shaped) look, whereas that of the males is skewed to the lower ranges.



This means that, below the US\$1 million threshold, total sale volume among these female artists is closer to what would be expected: few artists with very low or very high volumes and most of them in the middle ranges.

The most common average sale price was between US\$10,000 and US\$40,000 for both men and women. But the only artist with a total volume of sales above US\$7,500,000 was a female (Beatriz Milhazes) and so were the only two artists with average sale price above US\$500,000 (Beatriz Milhazes and Adriana Varejão).

In the distribution of average sale prices, below the US\$500,000 line we can nearly see a similar pattern to that of total volume of sales, with a more bell-shaped distribution for females and skewed to lower ranges for males; but here it is less clear and the pattern for women is also a bit more skewed to the lower end.

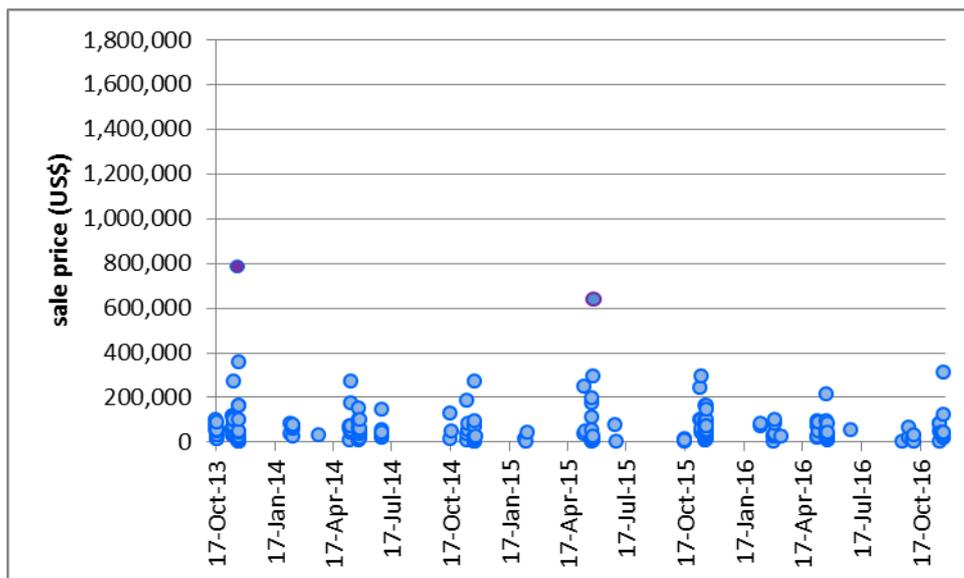


But let's beware of our conclusions! The standard deviation for the group of women was much higher than that of the men (US\$397,458 and US\$88,658, respectively) which indicates a greater variability, clearly seen by the range of values: between US\$5,000 and US\$1,685,000 for females and between US\$625 and US\$785,000 for males.

And what does this mean?

### Breaking it down

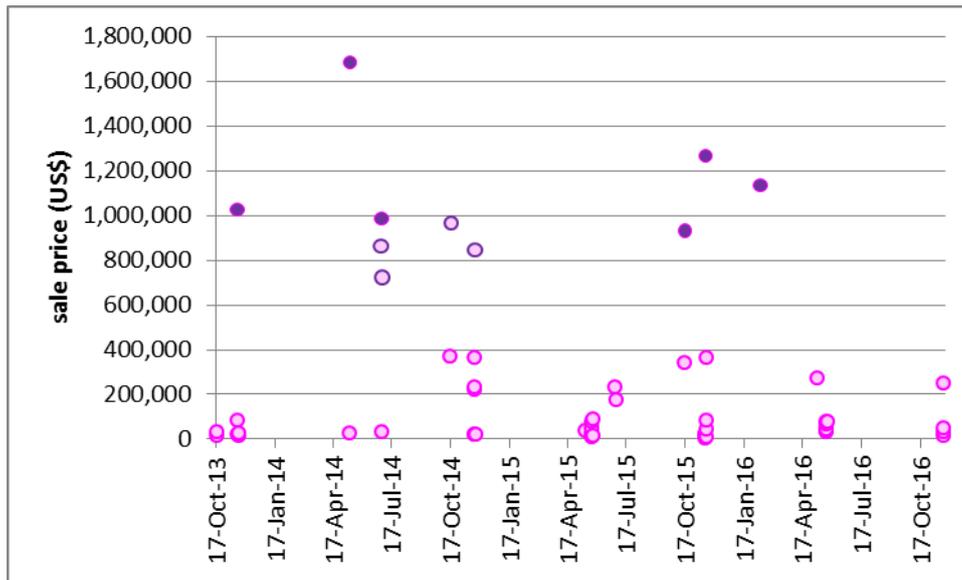
The following chart shows prices for each lot sold by male artist.



- is a lot by Abraham Palatnik
- is a lot by Cildo Meireles



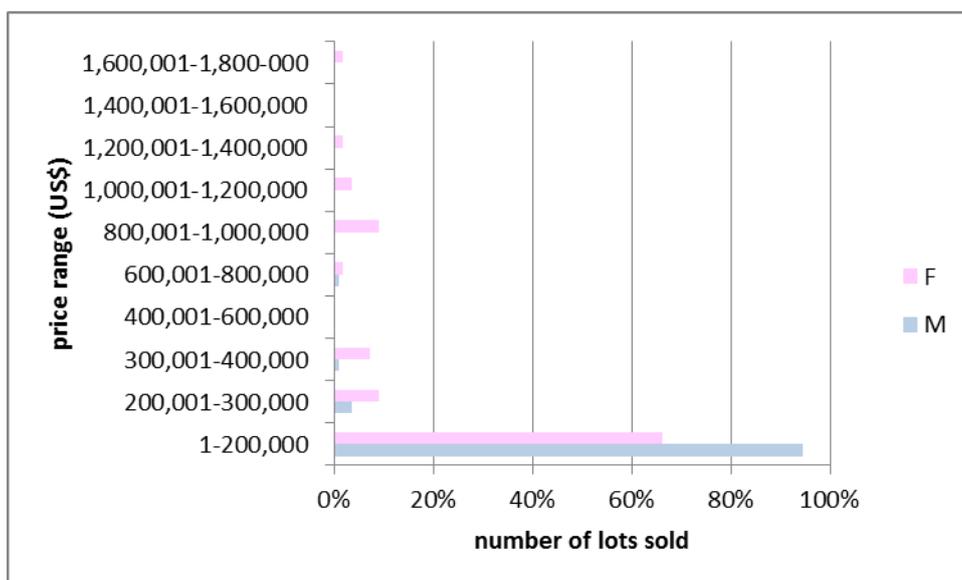
For females it's a bit more spread out.



- are lots by Beatriz Milhazes
- are lots by Adriana Varejão

The higher total volume and average value for female artists is obviously contaminated by the high prices achieved by only two artists (Adriana Varejão and Beatriz Milhazes), with 10 sales above US\$600,000. Although male artists also had their “outlier” sales, these were only two (by Abraham Palatnik and Cildo Meireles) and of not such high values.

Grouping these sales by price ranges and showing the number of sales in each range as a percentage of total number of sales, it becomes clear that, although both males and females had most of their sales in the lower range of up to US\$200,000, females distributed it better throughout higher values.





But again, we must look at it more carefully and see who the artists with these higher priced sales are. And we have...

Number of sales above US\$200,000 per artists						
	Price range (US\$)					
	200,001-300,000	300,001-400,000	400,001-600,000	600,001-800,000	800,001-1,000,000	above 1,000,000
<b>Female artists</b>						
Jac Leirner	1					
Mariana Palma	1					
Adriana Varejão	1	2		1	3	
Beatriz Milhazes	2	2			2	4
<b>Male artists</b>						
Romero Brito	1					
Nelson Leirner		1				
Vik Muniz	2					
Os Gêmeos	1	1				
Abraham Palatnik	1			1		
Cildo Meireles	3			1		

Both males and females had very few artists selling in higher ranges of prices, but the sales of female artists were heavily concentrated on only two of them (Adriana Varejão with 7 lots and Beatriz Milhazes with 10) who sold mostly at much higher values. The group of male artists was a bit more evenly distributed. Therefore, the “better distribution” for females is really only due to two artists.

### Summarizing

- Women represented only 31% of the artists
- Women were responsible for only 20% of the number of lots
- Women, however, were responsible for 50% of sale volume
- Only two women and two men sold above the US\$600,000 threshold
  - But the women sold much more and for much higher
- Both males and females sold mostly in the price range below US\$200,000
- Sale prices for women artists was highly increased due to only two artists
  - Adriana Varejão and Beatriz Milhazes

### Conclusion

Considering the present set of data, we do see a marked gender gap, disfavoring women, when we look at the number of artists with lots taken to international auctions. However, in terms of sale price, the differences are much diminished, with two females taking the lead (Adriana Varejão and Beatriz Milhazes), far detached from their male and other female peers. So we cannot really say women do better, despite the two most highly priced artists being female.