

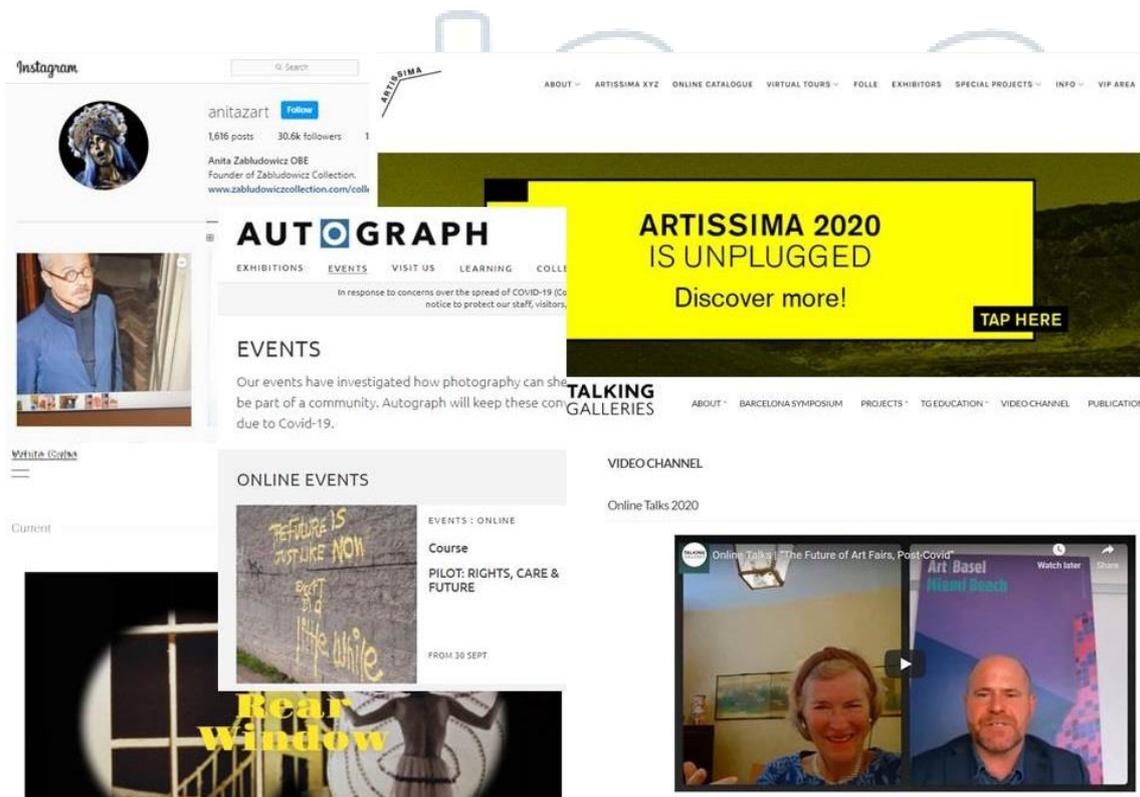


Looking back at 2020

by Marta Inez Rodrigues Pereira

Where shall I start? Is it even possible, at this moment, to summarize the year 2020? There surely were lots of suffering, fear, insecurity and uncertainty. And there surely were lots of social and political turmoil. As I'm not qualified to talk about any this, instead I will focus on a part of the art world, on what seemed positive to me.

First of all, there was a move into the online world. Overwhelming as it might have been, to me it was more than welcome. It turned out to be a wonderful way of democratizing the information and reaching out to a new public. Living far from the major art centres does not make it easy to visit some of the famous exhibitions and be present at other art-related events, unless one spends a great amount of money and precious hours in long-haul flights, leaving behind a huge carbon footprint. So, for the first time, this year I managed to participate in many events I never dreamt of, from all sorts of talks to exhibitions and art fairs and to watching artists' films online. I am aware the art world still needs to sort out how to make all this financially sustainable, but I do hope they keep it up.



Snap-shots of webpages with online material – shown are Anita Zabłudowicz’s Instagram; White Cube’s OVR; Autograph ABP’s online events; Talking Galleries’ online talks, but there are many others



I'm sure to be unfair and leave out many who did a great job and gave me food for thought, but I will mention a few outside Brazil which brought me much otherwise inaccessible information and pleasure: Anita Zabludowicz's interviews on Instagram; White Cube, David Zwirner, Goodman galleries with online exhibitions, interviews and films; The Art Newspaper, The Financial Times and Talking Galleries events; the Artissima fair and tours.

A second point, although related to the first, is the possibility of giving visibility to new artists, whether emerging or simply outside the "US-Euro-white-male" centre. The world has been boiling up to this, but my guess is that the introspection and online-dependence brought about by the pandemic gave this a boost. I would never disregard the "US-Euro-white-male" artists, but widening our perspectives and looking outside this small box comes to the benefit of all. There are many good artists out there that don't usually have a chance to be seen, impoverishing our world and our understanding of it. Let's hope 2020 has served as a propeller and we can have more access to previously unknown artists.

My last point of reflection is about the survival and future development of art institutions. Months of shut doors have certainly opened many eyes to the need for changes. It's time the world moved forward as we've been following the same models for too long. From galleries to non-profits and to major museums and events, it's time to rethink. I have no idea what the solution will be, but I firmly believe that those who do not take the opportunity to rethink their operation model will, sooner or later, be left behind.

To round up, here is my usual end-of-year summary of the international auction market for contemporary Brazilian artists.

Inclusion criteria are:

- Auction results for living Brazilian artists from the first quarter of 2014 to the fourth quarter of 2020;
- Data are for the contemporary evening, contemporary day, contemporary curated (and any other "special" contemporary art sale) and Latin American art sales;
- Online only sales have now been included, as long as the "themes" were as described above – no editions only or photography only sales have been taken into account;
- Only the major international auction houses dealing with Latin American art have been considered, i.e. Christie's, Sotheby's and Phillips de Pury, for sales in both London and New York;
- Values are for premium prices (including buyer's fees) – in US dollars, using conversion rates for date of sale.

Note that 2020 brought a huge change to auction houses' distribution of sales, with addition of new sales, suppression of others, and a new calendar. Thus, it is possible that I missed some. However, if so, I believe it would have been too few to substantially affect my conclusions.



Abraham Palatnik, *Sequencia Visual S-51* (c.1960), wood, metal, synthetic fabric, light bulbs, and motor, 112.8 x 74.9 x 19.4 cm – sold at Christie’s Latin American Art Sale, New York, 19 Nov 2013, for US\$785,000 premium

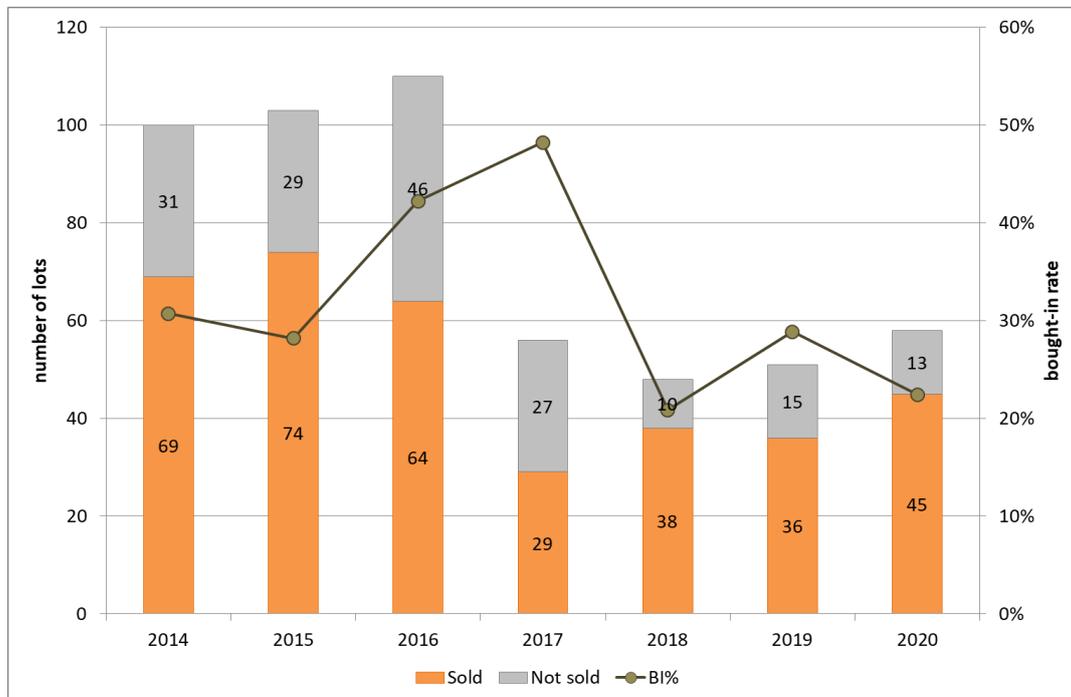
Sadly, this year Brazil lost two of its major artists, Abraham Palatnik (1928-2020) and Nelson Leirner (1932-2020). Related entries for these artists have therefore been excluded.



Nelson Leirner, *Homenagem a Fontana I* (1967), cotton fabric, steel and aluminium, 181 x 126.5 cm – sold at Phillips de Pury’s Latin America Sale, New York, 21 Nov 2013, for US\$359,000 premium



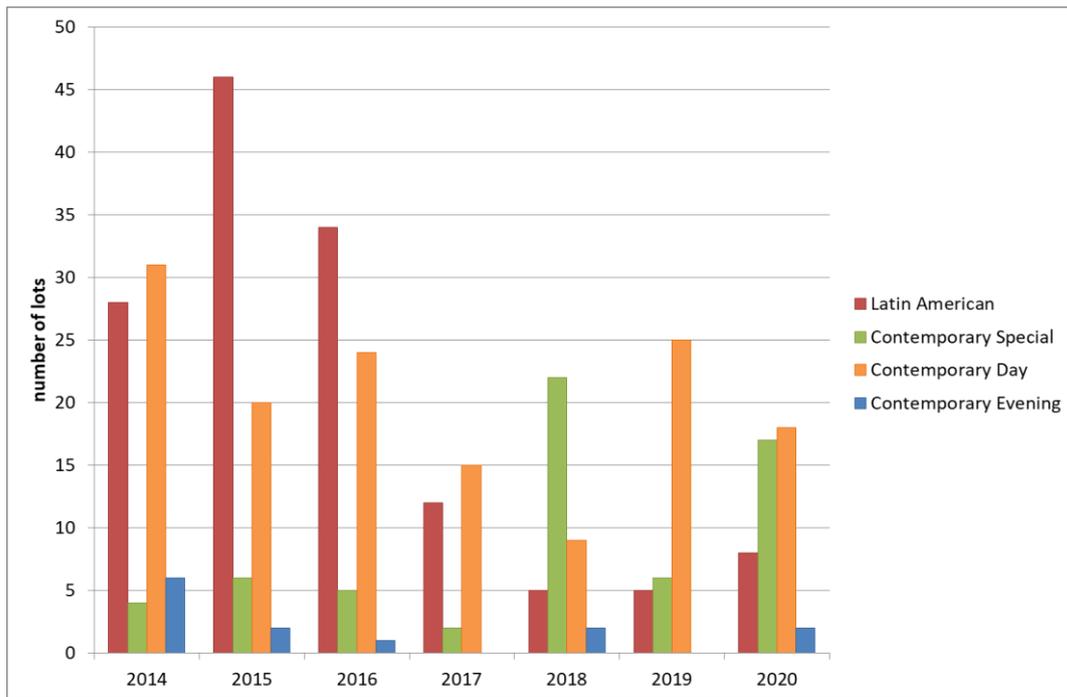
It may be too early to say, but it does seem like the fall suffered in 2017 in number of lots taken and sold at auction is slowly recovering. There was an increase in the number of lots sold compared to the years after 2017, with a bought-in rate of only 22%.



Number of lots taken to auction and bought-in rate, from 2014 to 2020

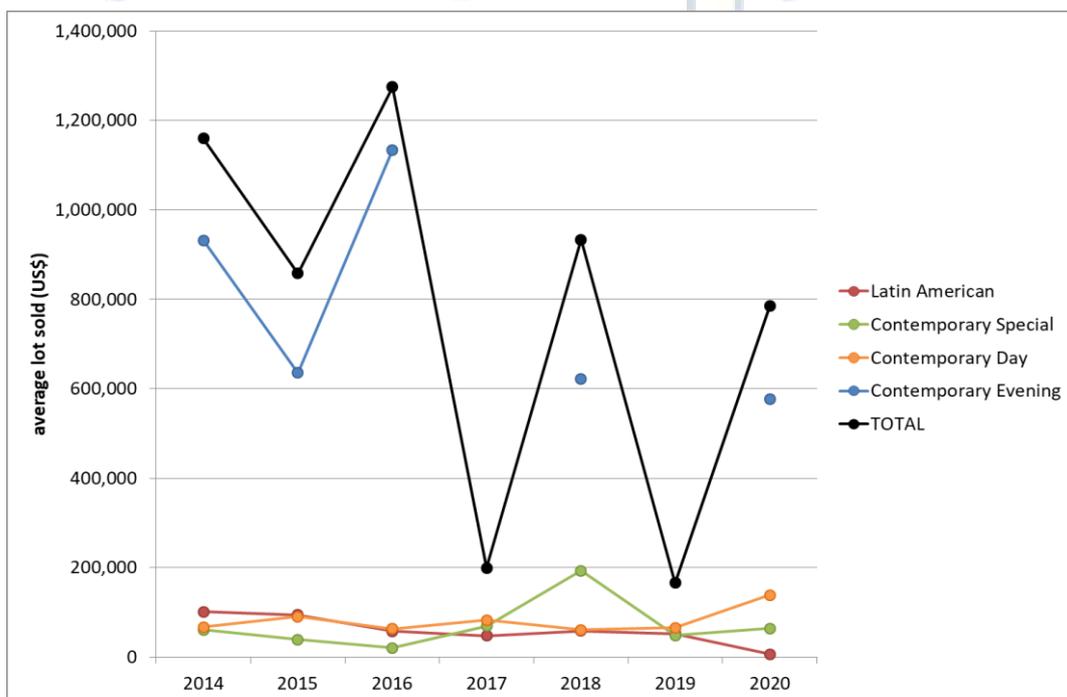
It also does seem like the shift of works from the exclusive Latin American art sales to the more generic “special” sales is being confirmed. In my view, this is positive as it puts artists at the same level, de-ghettoizing a group that may in fact have nothing in common apart from geography of birth.

Unfortunately, still very few works from Brazilian living artists make it to the prestigious evening sales. This year there were only two works, one by Beatriz Milhazes (Sotheby’s, London, 21 Oct 2020) and the other by Lucas Arruda (Phillips de Pury, New York, 2 Jul 2020) – more on him later.



Number of lots sold at auction, by type of sale, from 2014 to 2020

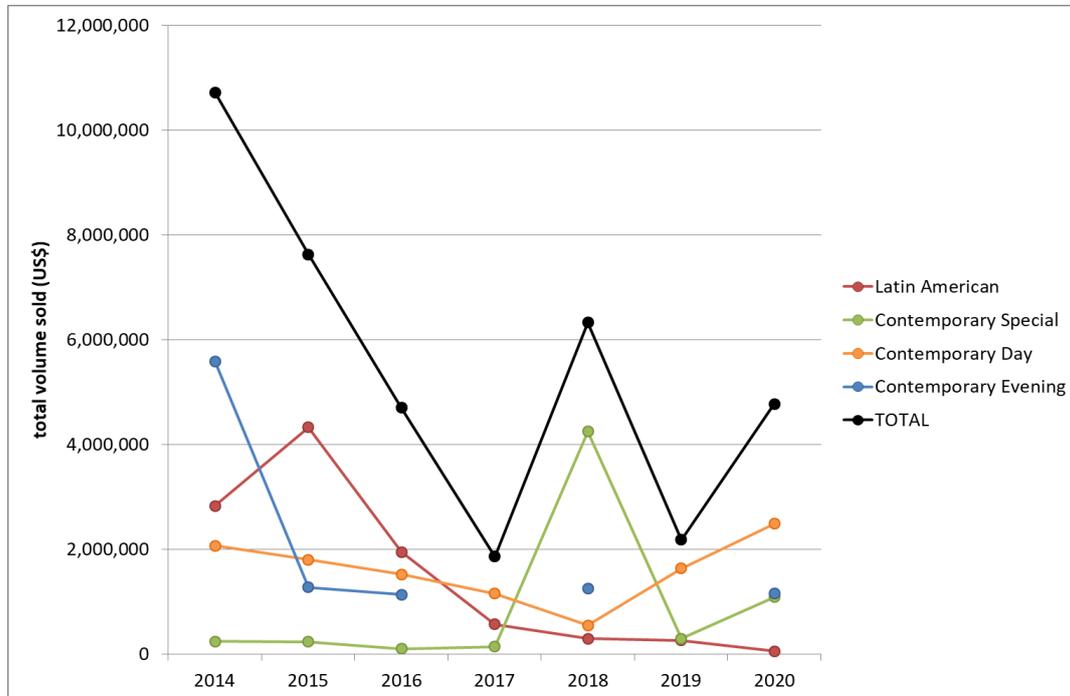
Artworks in the evening sales always fetch higher prices, bringing up the overall average sale price. However, despite a small drop in average prices at the Latin American and “special” sales, average sale prices for the Contemporary day auctions have also risen (from US\$65,260 to US\$137,970).



Average sale price per lot, by type of sale and overall (TOTAL), from 2014 to 2020



Total sale volume increased from last year – due to the increases in the “special”, day and evening sales – but was still lower than in 2018.



Total sale volume, by type of sale and overall (TOTAL), from 2014 to 2020

Of the 66 artist with artworks taken to auction, 17 failed to sell any lot. And, similar to previous years, only six artists satisfied at least two of the three criteria I established for a successful presence at auction, i.e. more than 10 lots sold, greater than US\$100,000 average sale price and greater than US\$500,000 total sale volume.

Artist	Number of lots sold	Average sale price (US\$)	Total sale volume (US\$)
Adriana Varejão	13	571,433	7,428,628
Beatriz Milhazes	22	568,764	12,512,815
Cildo Meireles	30	*80,886	2,426,594
Lucas Arruda	*8	271,896	2,175,171
Os Gêmeos	20	125,204	2,504,076
Vik Muniz	152	*49,381	7,456,511

* below established criterion



Noteworthy is the arrival of Lucas Arruda to this “elite” group. Still young (born in 1983), he is represented by David Zwirner and only one of the 9 lots taken to auction in this period (one lot in 2019, the other 8 this year) failed to sell.



Lucas Arruda, *Untitled* (2014), oil on canvas, 24.4 x 30.5 cm – sold at Phillips de Pury’s 20th Century and Contemporary Art Evening Sale, New York, 2 Jul 2020, for US\$350,000 premium

In conclusion, the auction market for Brazilian contemporary art was not bad this year and, in fact, does look like it is slowly picking up.

I’m sorry for so many of those who suffered losses this year and hope 2021 will bring relief. Looking for what may have been good, I think there were positive sides to the year.

Welcome 2021!