

Cesare Brandi and Giulio Carlo Argan. Editorial

The seventh volume of *Conversaciones...* marks the beginning of a new period of the journal, as it will now become a co-publication between the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH), through the Coordinación Nacional de Conservación del Patrimonio Cultural (CNCPC), and ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property). This new collaboration occurs in a year of numerous celebrations. INAH commemorates its 80 years of existence as an institution that has affirmed the importance of the state's role in the conservation, research and dissemination of a nation's cultural heritage. ICCROM, for its part, celebrates 60 years of having initiated its activities of promoting the conservation and study of heritage in its 136 Member States. This volume of *Conversaciones...* is also dedicated to two great researchers and scholars of art history and important promoters of conservation in Italy, Cesare Brandi (1906-1988) and Giulio Carlo Argan (1909-1992). They were both responsible for the development and creation of the Istituto Centrale del Restauro (ICR), now known as the Istituto Superiore per la Conservazione ed il Restauro (ISCR), an institution that also celebrates 80 years.

Cesare Brandi and Giulio Carlo Argan met in Siena in 1932, when both won a competitive position in the civil service. This would transform into a lifelong friendship, but it was in those early years when they started reflecting on the way of conceiving works of art and on art criticism. This allowed them to create a certain distance from the dominant tradition of Benedetto Croce, which had prevailed in Italy until then. From this new standpoint, they also developed the idea of changing the way in which the conservation and restoration of works of art was conceived and carried out. This proposal, outlined in a presentation made by Argan in 1938 at a meeting of superintendents in Rome, marked a break with the empiricism that had characterized restoration until then, in favor of a scientific approach based on critical analysis and supported by interdisciplinary research. According to a testimony by Paul Philippot while he was doing his undergraduate research using the ICR as a case study, for Brandi, the "problem of restoration is first of all a critical activity, and only in a second moment a practical activity, in close dependence on the former."

Both Brandi and Argan have handed down to us an ample testimony of their way of thinking, and their self-questioning as they shifted the paradigm, in a vast bibliography, which we present as always at the end of this volume. Although both authors focused mainly on theory, they were closely attentive to numerous conservation and restoration projects, keeping a constant dialogue with conservators and scientists to find new solutions for different problems. In particular, they faced the enormity of destruction generated by World War II, which required both solid concepts to deal with reconstruction, and new technical solutions to put theory into practice.

Conversaciones... joins the ranks of publications dedicated to Brandi and Argan, especially since the beginning of this century which marked their centenary. Many of these publications have carried out detailed analyses of the many aspects that characterized their professional lives. As with other authors that we have presented in *Conversaciones...* we feel that the way to pay them a well-deserved tribute is through the complete reading of their works—to understand their journey, maturation and sometimes the changes in their reflections, and to understand the complex and rich connections between criticism, aesthetics, theory and restoration that they bequeathed to us. We hope that these texts will inspire new generations of scholars and conservators. We chose three texts by these two authors, to show a sample of the diversity of arguments they covered. The first is the definition of “Restoration” that Brandi presented in 1963 for a new edition of the *Encyclopedia Universale dell’Arte*. For those who have read the *Teoria del restauro* (1963), it resonates with many of the definitions disseminated in this publication, but it is important to mention that at the time it represented a breakthrough in the way of conceiving works of art and, as a result, their restoration. The second text, also by Brandi, focuses on the theme of “The insertion of the new in the old” (1967), that is, a reflection on the possibility (or not) of modifying historical centers with new contemporary elements. Brandi reflects on architecture, both with old insertions and modifications, where the historical weight takes on a singular importance, and with most recent interventions, where the notion of the authenticity of the monuments as historical testimonies of one or several epochs must prevail. The third text, by Argan on “A policy of conservation of historical centers” (1975), corresponds to one of the two presentations made during the 1973 General Assembly of ICCROM, and from which a series of recommendations derived, including some for the preservation of historical centers, which are also published at the end of the volume. This text preceded the role that Argan would later develop as an independent politician in the management of the city of Rome, and a decade later as Senator, from where he would promote policies for the protection of heritage.

These texts are accompanied by the contributions of six guest authors, which show the richness of the legacy of these two thinkers, although with greater detail for the figure of Brandi. Yolanda Madrid, seeks to go back to the sources of inspiration of Brandi, and the different philosophical and art history currents that shaped his thinking.

Fidel Meraz addresses the central theme of two of the articles. His text shows the wealth of elements that led Brandi to distinguish between works of art, and in particular between painting and sculpture on the one hand, and architecture on the other as a living space for people. The clarity of Brandi’s ideas is evidenced here with logical and profound reasoning that details the characteristics of the architecture.

The subsequent two texts address another topic on which both Brandi and Argan reflected, and which involved a maturation of their ideas, but also demonstrated their capacity to keep an open mind: theory as applied to contemporary art. Muriel Verbeeck eloquently shows the logical sequence that exists in the texts of Brandi, whose reading allows us to find keys for a solid theoretical reflection, and the implementation of conservation actions congruent with the character of contemporary art. Carlota Santabárbara, on her part, enriches the debate with possible readings and interpretations of Brandi’s texts, again going beyond the *Teoria del restauro*, and with the support of students and followers of Brandi such as Althöfer, who defined valuable approaches for the conservation of contemporary art.

Chiara Occelli closes the cycle of analysis and re-reading of texts by Argan and Brandi by reflecting on the theme of lacunae and the concepts of reintegration of the potential unity (or potential oneness) of a work of art. Going back also to the philosophical sources that inspired Brandi's *Teoria*, but adding contributions from other authors, she shows ways to continue using, valuing and exploring the concepts proposed by both authors more than half a century ago.

Roberto Ramírez finally presents a brief essay in which he reflects on the motivations of the insertion of the new in the old, and the impact this can have on the perception and use of a monument, in this case one of particular relevance in the Mexican context: the Basilica of Guadalupe.

As with other issues of this journal, in addition to enjoying the analysis offered by the authors who discuss the central texts chosen for this issue, the invitation is to return to the classic texts of our discipline, which with each re-reading acquire nuances that enrich our understanding and, we hope, our decision-making. May these conversations continue for a long time to come.

Valerie Magar
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