

HISTORY HONORS PROPOSAL SAMPLE

Preliminary project title: The Aesthetics of Modernism: São Paulo and New York City in the Twentieth Century

For my Honors project in history, I will conduct a comparative study of New York City and São Paulo with regards to their respective processes of modernization, particularly with a focus on the aesthetics of modernization in the early twentieth century. While similarities are drawn today between the two megalopolises due to the critical roles they play in global and national economics and politics, the similarities that exist in the histories of development have been overlooked. My study will emphasize the integral role of marshaling a modernist urban image and how these two cities respectively used aesthetics to craft an identity that epitomizes urban modernity nationally and globally. In analyzing this process, I hope to expand the project to explore the internal effects on the inhabitants as caused by a projection of a superficial façade. I am interested in studying whether there exists a disconnection between the idealized vision of urban development by cultural elites and those who physically occupy the spaces in question.

My Honors project will ultimately be an extension of both my history and art history capstones. For my art history capstone, I plan on examining the causes and consequences of the two most critical moments in modern art history for the United States and Brazil, those being the Armory Show of 1913 held in New York and Semana de 22 in 1922 held in São Paulo. Within the honors project, I plan on using the 1913/1922 shows as the starting point of my analysis of urban modernism and hope to continue through the 1960s; I have chosen this time period due to the tremendous growth of artistic and urban development that have come to shape the identities of both cities. The history capstone will take shape as a study of the urban and social development in the two cities from pre-World War I through the post-World War II period, paying particular attention to the changes in immigration and how it affected the formations of the cities. The honors project will then explore how the aesthetics as manifested in visual art and architecture was affected by and how it effected the development of such diverse cities in terms of race, ethnicity and class. The intention is to explore whether or not the articulation of modernism as determined by intellectual and cultural elites successfully translated into the daily needs of the city's inhabitants and whether the legacy of modernism of each city rests in the façade of modernist architecture and art or in the daily operations of the people. Through further reading, I plan on identifying various case studies to demonstrate this dichotomy, most likely in the examples of housing projects, construction of public space and artist collectives.

In terms of executing this project, I plan on relying heavily on my own analysis of critical works, buildings and public projects based on my foundation in the histories of the cities and critical art theory. I have accumulated various artistic manifestos and works that served as the foundation for the modernist movements such as those of photographer Alfred Stieglitz and painter Tarsila do Amaral as well as key architectural examples in both cities such as the Art Deco formations of the Empire State Building and the various constructions of Le Corbusier in São Paulo. I have also begun to accumulate catalogues and propaganda regarding the modern art weeks of the two cities and intend to use them to understand the motivations and visions of the artists involved. My remaining time studying in São Paulo will be focused on gaining accesses to municipal and state archives as well as private archives of museums like o Museu de Arte Moderna, which has hosted commemorative celebrations of Semana de 22, as well as the host of the event, Teatro Municipal de São Paulo. I also plan on working from the archives and libraries of the Universidade de São Paulo and the Pontifícia Universidade Católica-São Paulo. For the portion of my project regarding New York, I plan on working largely from the archives of the New York Historical Society and Columbia University, as well as the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney, the Guggenheim, the Museum of the City of New York and others to find appropriate works.

Preliminary Bibliography

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