

Falcon and dog teachers

I'm going to read a bunch of things I've jotted down about education, a topic that interests me. Like María Teresa Constantín, I looked up all the definitions of *maestro* in the dictionary. The title of my presentation makes reference to one she did not mention, but is in the *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española: perros maestros* [dog teachers] and *halcones maestros* [falcon teachers], defined as teachers who have mastered the irrational. I thought that was interesting. These terms are found in the second entry in the *Real Academia Española* dictionary. So I will start with that title. I hope you will be patient...

Argentina is not the only place where formal instruction and research in art academies and schools has been dismantled. It is not a local phenomenon resulting from the dictatorships and economic crises the country has endured. It has taken place elsewhere, and each case has its own peculiarities. Fine art academies' curricula were based on the French model from two centuries ago, which in turn was based on the study of forms through the imitation and analysis of classicism. Those curricula, or at least their most traditional versions, are becoming extinct. In some cases, they have attempted to respond to the urgencies of representation and expression in a contemporary life immersed in a general state of war, savage capitalism, and the advance of the hard sciences along with the frenetic development of technologies. In an attempt to meet the times, many programs changed their names to no longer include the term "fine arts," which is French in origin. They are now called schools of visual art, art universities, art academies, art centers, etc.

Like falcon and dog teachers, the surrealists and the Russian avant-garde also contributed to the representation of the non-rational. The expressionists also undertook a slow but inexorable transformation of fine art academies. The inclusion of expressions and studies of the unconscious, intuition, illness, pathologies, ur-

ban and rural folk art—a whole set of contemporary philosophical and anthropological sciences, along with analysis of educational centers by those same centers—borne out, in some cases, in systems of contemporary art education. That whole process in art academies and schools was aggravated by a collision, a poorly processed and scantily understood encounter between traditional forms of study, archive, and documentation, on the one hand, and new knowledges and technologies, on the other. That led many art academies or school to feel at once overexerted and lost, derailed and unmoored. And that has often led to a vast accumulation of partial objects and a dismantling of more general projects or contents. Technological and ethical changes at the level of representation of society in general have been so drastic that it is hard for the formal education system to keep up, to tackle incipient questions.

Those few art-education programs or projects that have survived are located in countries or regions where formal and intellectual products, as well as those institutions' curricula, engage the market. One segment of the Bauhaus school is still up and running. At the same time, what is commonly called contemporary art, or its dominant tendency, is the result of a close and binding relationship between the market, exhibition institutions, and art schools shaped by the cultural policies of the United States of North America. More or less seven years ago, the European Union brought together a group of art educators to discuss art-education projects, conceived as a European cultural undertaking. That led to the creation of a network of relationships between institutions and countries; art academies are connected first to one another and the institutional market, and second to the commercial market. In Scandinavia, for instance, each country is generating its own strategies to connect public cultural policies with the policies of art academies or schools and with grant and scholarship programs.

Buenos Aires has followed two different traditions: the French fine arts academy model and the Renaissance model where apprentices (either individuals or small groups) go to an artisan's workshop to learn. Many important artists in Buenos Aires in the last five decades never had a traditional or academic art education, but have backgrounds in other areas. Some of those artists have given classes in their studios. It was widely believed that the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes and its curriculum needed to be revamped. The Instituto Universitario Nacional de Artes (IUNA) that replaced it is trying to instill a new curriculum design. In this country, with its impoverished and frayed public education policies, we are just beginning to debate possible institutional projects in all senses. Despite the disarray, the Universidad de Buenos Aires Art History Program is a model of its kind thanks to the critical breadth and programmatic nature of its curriculum. It is a six-year program, whereas in most countries the course work for a master's program in art history is only two years. It should come as no surprise, then, that the University of Buenos Aires—in this case, Rojas, its cultural outreach program—is grappling with what it means to be a teacher.

The *maestro*, according to *Corominas* etymology dictionary, is the boss or director. According to *Petit Robert*, as María Teresa pointed out, the *maestro* is the one who teaches or who stands out in his or her class. But according to the *Real Academia Española*, it also refers to one who masters the irrational (I chose some definitions among many). Two of *Petit Robert's* definitions make reference to power: the *maestro* is one who has the power or authority over someone to reduce him or her to servitude, or the one who has the power to impose his or her will on others. And from there, from those maestros, we get the academy.

In Argentina, the general scorn for and incompetence of art academies leads directly to scorn for the word and idea of *maestro* in the sphere of art. In Colombia and Ecuador, I have heard artists with outstanding careers called *maestros* to their faces and in reverential tone. In Buenos Aires, the word is often used colloquially to refer to small accomplishments of any sort, licit or illicit. It is also a common form of greeting. Only rarely does someone use the word *maestro* or *maestra* when referring to an artist or someone who teaches art. The few magazines or serial publication entitled *Maestros del arte* in circulation locally are, in most cases, put out

by Spanish, Italian, or French publishing houses, and they deal with art produced up to European impressionism. The titles of publications on local artists from the last fifty years rarely include the word *maestro*. Those artists are categorized by name or type of production, or—mostly—according to period, theme, or cohort. It is as if, after the construction of the system of what we call contemporary art, the word *maestro* became more difficult, indeed almost impossible, to use.

German romanticism or a modernism that, in certain ways, never ended up congealing might have been able to give the word *maestro* a new place in the art field. But that's not what happened. After all, academy *maestros* were no more, and the genealogy of the new *maestros* is anything but clear. Each society posits terms according to its own wisdom or current policies, or according to what and whom is deemed important either to behavior or to teaching. Our society is made up of persons of different races and cultures, and that means a range of genealogies and politics that yields a society riddled with paradox and destined to constant and daily negotiation over the survival of one or another cultural tendency.

Local creative projects are as disparate as they are complex and copious. They are committedly multidisciplinary and determined to break norms, which leads to a set of crises or ruptures. In that context, any notion of maestría is difficult to make out if not impossible to define. The local human emotional, conceptual, and expressive system has been structured by systematic generational breaks, which brings a loss and reconstruction of memory (of individuals, families, groups, genealogies, and institutions). Contemporary art is a work in progress, and that, along with its versatility, makes it a place to express, observe, remark on, and grapple with contemporary phenomena and situations. One might think it is an ideal place to teach how to investigate, observe, question, discern, interpret, and analyze anything that exists as form, image, or mechanism of representation. And I am not only speaking of theoretical methodologies, but also of practices or implications related to matter and technology. I don't believe you can teach how to make art. Art is something being made, something taking place. I do believe that an art school or studio is a fundamental tool for the construction of the social form. It can be a place to express, discern, or interpret part of a private, family, or social fabric. If the field of representations

is left to the market, which is creative, but also repetitive, cynical, and self-indulgent, and to market uses, the opportunities for criticism and evolution of forms diminishes, and with it awareness and perception of suffering, personal and human growth.

That is why I think it is indispensable that there be, among other things, both public and private spaces for the creation of art, forms, and representation, and for their study. That said, in Buenos Aires, like the rest of the country, many of the most interesting initiatives for interrogating and supporting expression and representation have been undertaken by foundations. A great many are privately funded, though there are some public cultural outreach centers, some of them joint public/private initiatives (Antorchas, Trama, Start, and others). In the provinces, there are several university cultural outreach centers like Rojas.

Regarding genealogies, my generation is heir to dismembered and impoverished public institutions. Due to the military dictatorship in power from 1976 to 1983, a sizeable portion of the older generation that should be creating and teaching, among other things, is missing. And to make matters worse, economic crisis af-

ter economic crises has decimated my generation and those that follow it. Contemporary art's opportunity lies, in my mind, in creating what we have to create and in supporting study of modes and mechanisms of expression and representation. That will enable us to understand a little better what we represent and what we want to represent together.

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[Translator's note: Since much of this text deals with specific definitions of the word maestro, I have decided to leave it in Spanish, but common translations to English are teacher and master, as in master artist.]