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Getting to know the Mineiro Museum: tours and museological experiences of Minas Gerais culture

1. Paths and resignifications: the history of the Mineiro Museum and its building

With the arrival of the Portuguese court in Brazil in 1808, a new rhythm of creation and establishment of cultural institutions had begun. Within the 19th century, museums were created to expand the knowledge and studies of natural sciences through the Brazilian territory. Museums had the functions of research, preservation, patrimonial conservation and were the bridge between the public and the historical knowledge of their country. Therefore, when we think of the importance of museums in the national and local culture of a country, the history of the Mineiro Museum - one of the most representative museums in the valorization of memory and culture of Minas Gerais - goes back to this crucial moment of transition of social and political perspectives in Minas Gerais and Brazil.

At the time of the planning and implementation of Belo Horizonte, the state's new capital, in 1897, the country was breathing the fresh air of recent independence - Brazil's Independence from Portugal in 1889. The young nation was nurturing a "scientific" conception of the city, reverberating not only through politics but every aspect of social and cultural life. The New Capital Building Commission (created solely for the planning and establishment of Belo Horizonte) has invested in an architectural ensemble that fits in with this understanding of the city. Inspirations of Greco-Roman and Renaissance architecture characteristics and French lookalike were used in the construction of the new buildings.

On July 11, 1895, the state Law No. 126 was implemented to create the Public Archive of Minas Gerais with the intention of installing the state museum containing the historical collection of Minas Gerais. At the turn of the century, in 1905, the building was adapted to receive the Senate, but was initially designed to house Secretaries of State. During the twentieth century, it faced significant changes in functionality, depending on the current government. In 1910 there was a legal consolidation of the institution, which expanded its sections, adding Natural History, Ethnography, and Historical Antiquities. A few decades later, with the Revolution of 1930 - a coup culminating in the deposition of the president Washington Luis -, it housed the State General Pay Office until the State government decided to use the building for the Mineiro Museum in the 1970s. The building was listed

by the State Institute of Historical and Art Heritage of Minas Gerais (IEPHA/MG) in December 1978 and was restored and adapted for its new purposes.

On May 10, 1982, the Mineiro Museum was inaugurated, and, since then, the institution has been promoting actions that increase the approximation of society with Minas Gerais' culture, in its various forms and manifestations, thus demonstrating its primary role in the dissemination of cultural knowledge and practices. Moreover, the history of the building makes us reflect on the resignifications that precede the consolidation of a historical institution and the possibilities that a building, a land, ideas, and projects, can offer over historical time.

2. Museology and the Mineiro Museum as important interlocutors of the culture of the State of Minas Gerais

Located in the Liberdade Cultural Circuit - a cultural complex established in the central region of Belo Horizonte and internationally recognized as an important example of public politics of culture -, the Mineiro Museum is managed by the Institute of Historical and Artistic Heritage of Minas Gerais (IEPHA/MG). The institution and another fifteen cultural spaces, such as museums, public archives, libraries, and cultural centers with public administration or administration by private institutions, are part of the Liberdade Circuit. Together, they aim to create a dialogue and articulate history and the different records regarding Minas Gerais' culture through the urban space as well as implementing preservation, access, and democratization practices of the local cultural heritage.

Museology in Minas Gerais recognizes the Mineiro Museum as a significant museum space for consolidating artistic and cultural practices and historical facts that distinguish Minas Gerais's culture and its valuable preservation work of the state's memory. Furthermore, the institution is relevant for it presents meaningful discussions about contemporary museological theories and practices, such as the museum's revitalization process in 2018.

The museum's main goal is to preserve, research, and diffuse the culture of Minas Gerais' and establish itself as a space of reference to other museological institutions in Minas Gerais. Besides, the museum promotes actions and events that create dialogue with the contemporary artistic production and that cross with traditional cultures.

The Mineiro Museum is one of the oldest and most representative museums of the State, possessing 46 museological collection types that document several periods of the history of Minas Gerais. The institution has a collection consisting of more than 3,500 pieces, such as furniture, sculptures, paintings, historical documents, household utensils, work and punishment instruments, ceremonials, insignia, and armory. The composition of the whole

heritage plot of the museum space is a living set of the artistic, cultural expression, life, and practices of the *mineiro* in the history and imagination of society. From this, we can analyze the historic milestone for a museum passage with regard to the new paths that the entity seeks to reach through its social function in the community.

By making efforts to elaborate interventions that aim to make the museum a more living and dynamic place in line with the cultural movements of society, the Mineiro Museum reveals in its new museological moment the close relation of the collection with the public. It corroborates the opening of a solid institution that acts as a mediator of the cultural practices and memories present in the museum organization of the State of Minas Gerais.

In 2018 an extensive revitalization project of the institution's building was conducted and received as a great gift by Belo Horizonte's city, the State of Minas Gerais, and the public in a general way. Restoration and conservation measures of the physical structure and part of the collection were carried out, as well as the composition of a new exhibit with the proposal to broaden the themes around the understanding of the institution's permanent collection and the opening to other museological approaches that were in contact with the current history of the culture of Minas Gerais.

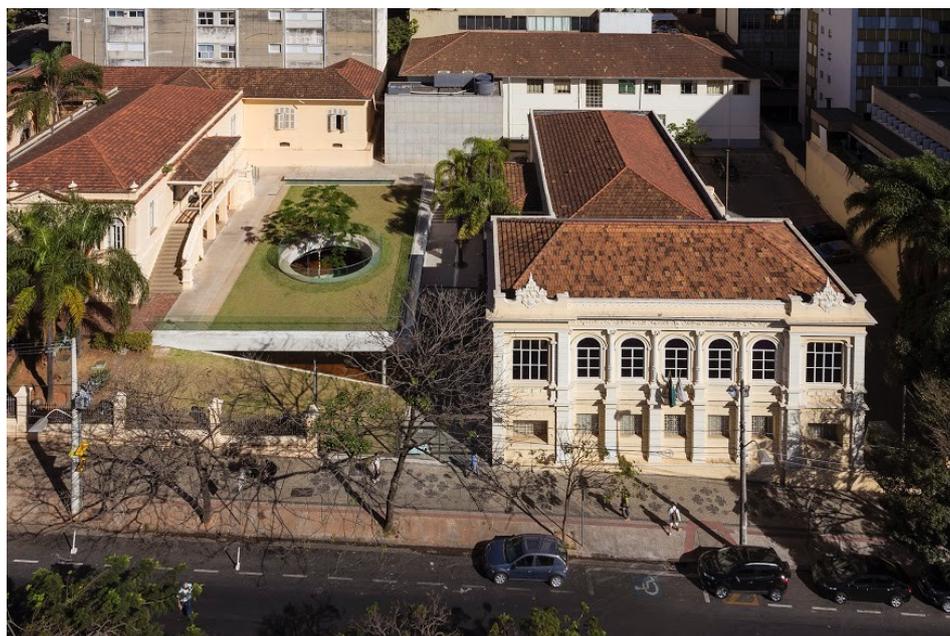


Figure 1 – Museu Mineiro's main venue. Photo: Gabriel Castro.

The new objective of the museum institution is to offer an environment of immersion and experience in the Minas Gerais' cultural context through the following exhibition rooms: the Atrium, the Column Room, the Master Ataíde's Room and Popular Saint Makers, the Minas Gerais Room: original and multiple, the Sessions' Room, the Jeanne Milde's Room, the

Capitals' Room, the Temporary Expositions II Gallery, and the main room of the Museum of the State of Minas Gerais' Board, the administrative managing body of museums.

After 34 years in existence, it is possible to notice the legacy possessed by the museum in the history of Minas Gerais' culture and its own city of Belo Horizonte because it is an institution that values the dialogue and mediation between the heritage of Minas Gerais' culture and society. By proposing to think of new strategies of institutional organization and actions with the public, the institution affirms its social function of being a place that allows moments of coexistence between the visitor and the museum's professionals. The vital dynamic that the museum brings can be noticed in the visitor experience. For instance, local artists are invited to join the discussion around the material and immaterial culture of Minas Gerais and the social and cultural memories of the state in the programming of temporary expositions.

As a legitimate museum that presents the material culture of Minas Gerais, the sacred art collection is composed of works of art from the XVIII and XIX centuries, made by Portuguese and Brazilian artists. The place reveals the real sacred context of Minas Gerais' churches and, through the composition of works of art in the Rococo to the Baroque style, proves its mission of being an art museum of reference. As a way of discussing the different artistic styles that are part of the museum's expography, the religious context of the Catholic universe - which is present in the state of Minas Gerais and also in the museological objects -, is a way of being approached along with the visitor. Once each person is invited to reflect over the art processes and techniques, they can think of all the possibilities of representation of the faith of Minas Gerais' Christians and other art representative forms that also represents important historical moments of the history of the State of Minas Gerais.



Figure 2 - Column Room. Photo: Mineiro Museum.

Consisting of an exhibition project characteristically similar to a cabinet of curiosities, the museum communicates a comprehensive art history of Minas Gerais through artworks by distinguished local artists and of fundamental value. There are, for instance, six paintings by the Baroque painter Mestre Ataíde that initially decorated the chapel of Fazenda de Cima in the city of São Domingos do Prata. In addition, the artworks help the perception of the education and interest of the government in the acquisition of collections for the Museu Mineiro, like with the exhibition of the group of images and devotion, which is a discovery of small pieces from the collection of José Alberto Nemer and is currently in lending with the museum.



Figure 3 - Master Ataíde Room. Photo: Mineiro Museum.

The museum also presents the chronology of the history of the formation of Minas Gerais culture through historical objects. The symbolic elements that narrate historical events in the state of Minas Gerais are discussed. According to the Museum itself, the highlight is the work, "the flag" of the Inconfidentes; and monumental paintings, such as "Cena de Garimpo by Emiliano Di Cavalcanti" (1957, oil on canvas) and "War of the Emboabas by Carybé" (1962, oil on canvas).



Figure 4 - Minas Gerais Room - Original and Multiple. Photo: Mineiro Museum.

In addition, the history of Minas Gerais art and part of its artistic production are exhibited in the Museum's spaces made up of the institution's pictorial collection and reveal the Minas Gerais creative scene in the 18th and 19th centuries. The highlights selected by the museum are the artworks *A Má Notícia* by Belmiro de Almeida (1897, oil on canvas); *Portrait of Young Man* (1886, oil on canvas) and *The Egyptian Shepherd* (1887, oil on canvas), both by Honório Esteves; *Fazenda da Borda* (1921, oil on canvas) by Anibal Mattos; *Morro do Castelo* (1920, oil on canvas) by Genesco Murta.

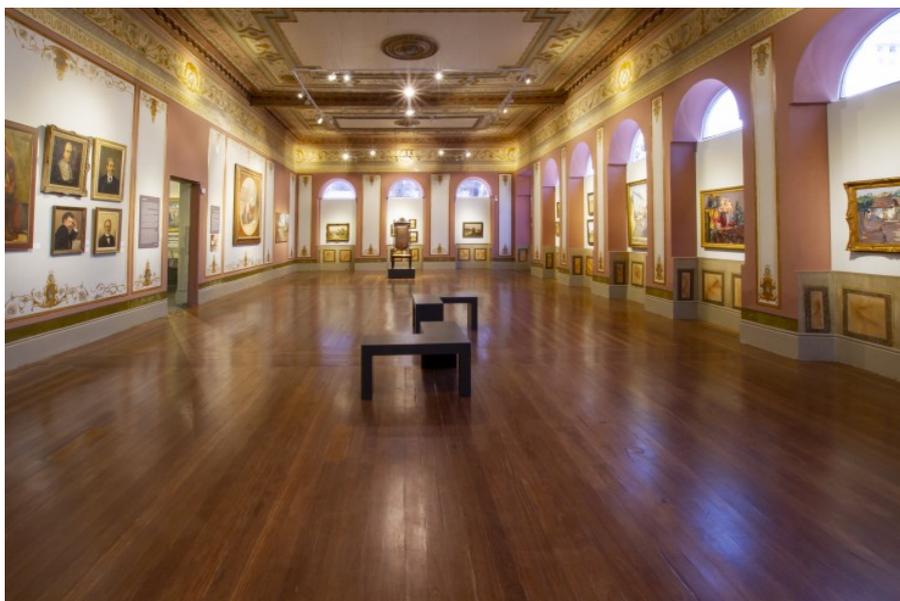


Figure 5 - Session Room. Pictorial collection from the 18th and 19th centuries. Photo: Mineiro Museum.

The representation of a State in formation and solid in its traditions is what we can observe in the institution's spaces. The pictorial collection presents artists' work that document the

transformations that Minas Gerais underwent in its political and social construction during the transitional phases of the State's capital cities. According to the Museum, the collection's highlights are the Panorama of Mariana by Alberto Delpino (1931, oil on canvas), the Procession in Ouro Preto by Renato de Lima (1970s, oil on canvas) and the Construction Commission of the New Capital by Henrique Oswald (19th century, oil on canvas), where the engineer and urban planner Aarão Reis is seen showing his famous plan for the City of Minas, which would later become Belo Horizonte, capital of Minas Gerais.



Figure 6 - Capital Room. Photo: Mineiro Museum.

Soon, the visitor will connect with the artistic works and the respective Minas Gerais artists present in the museum space. In honor of Jeanne Midle, an important Belgian artist and sculptor born in Belo Horizonte in the 20th century, the room features works of influence dating back to 1920 among other artistic movements of modernism. According to the Museum, the highlights are for works by Guignard, Amilcar de Castro, Érico de Paula, Fernando Pierucetti, Álvaro Apocalypse, Solange Botelho, Chanina, Teresinha Veloso, Nello Nuno, among others.



Figure 7 - Jean Mille Room. Photo: Mineiro Museum.

The participation of the public and local artists from Minas Gerais is realized through the occupation of the gallery by temporary exhibitions, educational and cultural actions, providing an environment of appreciation, integration, and democratization of culture, access to mining memory, among others forms of communication between art and the museum space. Works by artists such as Décio Noviello, José Patrício, Julia Panadés, among others, have already been exhibited.



Figure 8 - Temporary Exhibitions Gallery II. Photo: Mineiro Museum.

The Museum of Minas Gerais also has a fundamental commitment to the policies of safeguarding heritage, as it includes the Directorate of Museums of the State of Minas

Gerais. This public organization is part of the State Secretariat for Culture and Tourism of Minas Gerais, which assists museums across the entire state on facility management plans. It also houses the State System of Museums of Minas Gerais, an essential network of registration and contact between museums in the state.

In this way, the Museu Mineiro has several socio-cultural activities and actions to be undertaken in favor of society and brings the public of Minas Gerais arts closer, aligning tradition and classic, together with the contemporary.

3. Research as a participatory link for the preservation and promotion of the museum space

The Museu has workers in various areas such as history, museology, architecture, arts, conservation, and restoration. In addition, it has educational and cultural action services, a library, seminars, and other activities aimed at being in direct contact with the public. Researchers who want to study the collection are welcome and warmly received by the employees.

We know that it is necessary to preserve. In this perspective, the researcher's view of the Museu Mineiro collection allowed us to rescue forgotten memories, promoting the appreciation of the collection and the space, strengthening the link between the community, the museum, and academia, and, consequently, the preservation of such heritage, necessary for the society of Minas Gerais. In this regard, we can mention the studies carried out in the museum's collection on sacred art by Professor Adalgisa Arantes Campos, the work on paintings made in the transition from the 19th to the 20th century by Professor René Lommez Gomes, and on contemporary art, by Professor Marcos Hill, all of whom are researchers and professors at the Federal University of Minas Gerais.

In the current Brazilian museological scenario, the articulation between the academic community and the museum becomes a revolutionary act, an instrument of libertarian education, contributing to the affirmation of identities and the development of citizenship. Museums are institutions that constantly think about innovative ways of engagement and propose actions that allow for mediation between the public and, finally, provide modes of participation and collaboration with the museum in the territory in which it is located.

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