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From Home to Museum: Renata Crespi and the institutionalisation of a private collection

Abstract

The Crespi Prado Foundation was created in 1975 by the initiative of Renata Crespi, widow of Fábio da Silva Prado (mayor of São Paulo between 1934 and 1938), to promote the arts and culture and to safeguard the couple's collection. Renata Crespi was the daughter of an important Italian industrialist who immigrated to Brazil, and her husband belonged to one of the oldest and wealthiest families of the state of São Paulo. This article aims to discuss gender issues related to feminine collecting (specially regarding the creation of house museums) that underline the work of Renata Crespi as collector and creator of the Foundation in question.

Keywords : feminine collecting, private collection, São Paulo, house museum.

Résumé

La Fondation Crespi Prado a été créée en 1975 à l'initiative de Renata Crespi, veuve de Fábio da Silva Prado (maire de São Paulo entre 1934-38), pour encourager l'art, la culture et sauvegarder la collection du couple. Renata Crespi était la fille d'un important industriel italien immigré au Brésil et son mari appartenait à une des familles les plus riches et traditionnelles de l'État. Cet article vise à discuter des questions de genre liées au collectionnisme féminin (notamment en ce qui concerne la création de demeures historiques) qui soulignent le travail de Renata Crespi en tant que collectionneuse et créatrice de la Fondation en question.

Mots-clés : collectionnisme féminine, collection privée, São Paulo, demeures historiques.

1. Private Collections, Public Memory

In Brazil, museums in the public sphere generally lack an acquisition policy, their collections are mostly made up of donations, generally from members of the elites. Such donations enable the consecration of their patrons as benefactors or bearers of cultural capital, and introduce a self-image of the donors in the museum. Donations, of the most varied types, coincide, therefore, in terms of the burden of class representation they carry, becoming an artifice for the perpetuation of private interest in the public space. Thus, true repositories of the nostalgia of the elites or memorials of their ways of life are created. In private collections,

the presence of this self-image is accentuated, since the set is the result of choices made by a specific collector.

When the musealisation of a collection encompasses the private space that housed it (like in the House-Museums), or when the space originally conceived to house museological institutions takes the form of an artificially domestic environment (as in the *collection museums*), a greater proximity between the collector and the public takes place. The visitor is led to enter the environment that presents itself as the individual's private universe, although such intimacy was actually designed to be seen.

“Anyone who enters a collection museum confronts a person out of the past, miraculously preserved by the signs of home which are not really a home. The domesticity of collection museums that served such crucial historical and class functions, was also the perfect vehicle for a permanent trace of the individual person of the collector. [...] Collection produces a facsimile of immortality.” (HIGONNET 2009, p. 126-127)

The houses can be adapted to assume features consistent with the message they were created to convey, or they can be emptied of the experiences of their former residents, when these do not fit the principles of the entity responsible for their maintenance or the memory that it wants to forge. Unlike the model of the great encyclopaedic museums, they are generally smaller in size and propose a more intimate relationship with the collection. Such intimacy is noticeable not only in the personal character of the collections' composition but also in the form of their exhibition. This greater proximity, sought, for example, by the *living museums*, undermines the possibility of critical apprehension of what is properly historical, once the indispensable distance between the visitor's time and the past time ceases to exist. (MENESES 2000, p. 97).

These considerations fed the reflection on the House-Museum typology and its applicability to the peculiar case of the Crespi-Prado Foundation (FCP) collection. The FCP was created in 1975, at the initiative of Renata Crespi (1896-1981) to safeguard the collection she gathered alongside her husband Fábio da Silva Prado (1887-1963). Although the documentation consulted shows the idea of institutionalising the collection was one of their goals¹, the shape this project would assume was far from defined, and was only possible due to the decisions and actions of Renata Crespi.

¹ The documentation shows that since the 1950's the collection's destiny after their death occupied the couple's thoughts. But the initial intention to bequeath “the manor as well as everything within it” to the Department of Culture was not realised due to disagreement with decisions of its administration. Later on a will leaving the patrimony to the Paulista Museum (MP) (one of the most traditional and respected institutions in the city) would also be nullified.

Apart from the information collected and presented by the FCP itself in the three exhibitions it organised² and in a catalogue³, the collection had never before 2016 been the object of study⁴. The research gathered dispersed information about the collection and the complex process of its institutionalisation. Through the mapping of the original collection as well as the current institutionalised set, and the comparison of both, it was possible to make inferences about the choices that guided the selection. The FCP proved to be a very intricate object, and the research revealed interesting aspects for the reflection on the boundaries of the House-Museum typology and on representation and gender issues related to it, that will be the object of this article.

2. A hybrid couple

Forming one of the first unions between immigrant families and the so-called “400-year-olds”⁵, the Crespi-Prado couple is a curious object for the study of social and matrimonial relations of the São Paulo elite in the 20th century.

Renata was the daughter of Count Rodolfo Crespi, an Italian immigrant who established such an important industrial group in the textile sector in Brazil, that he received a nobility title from the king of Italy in recognition of his achievements. Fábio da Silva Prado was a descendant of Antônio da Silva Prado (the Baron of Iguape), thus a member of one of the most traditional families in São Paulo. He was mayor of the city between 1934 and 1938, when he created the Department of Culture and Recreation (DC), an innovative institution in the country.

² There were three exhibitions displayed at the Museum of the Brazilian House (MCB). The first one “Acervo Crespi-Prado” (1996-2010) meant to be in display for a long time had to suffer modifications in its original configuration due to electric works in the museum. To allow the pieces of the FCP to remain in display, a short temporary exhibition named “Renata e Fábio Prado: a Casa e a Cidade” was held (Aug.-Dec./2006) on the ground floor of the museum. It would originate another long-term show, “A Casa e a Cidade - Coleção Crespi-Prado” (inaugurated in 2012 and still in display). An overview of the latter is available at <https://mcb.org.br/pt/programacao/exposicoes/a-casa-e-a-cidade-colecao-crespi-prado/>. All three exhibitions presented the collection in its relationship to the manor, using the pieces to portray segmented reconstitutions of the house based on photographs that were displayed alongside the objects. This approach and the documentation consulted demonstrate that the idea of House-Museum was directly discussed by the museum personnel.

³ The catalogue “Renata e Fábio Prado: a Casa e a Cidade” written by the architects Carlos A. C. Lemos and Maria Ruth A. de Sampaio focused on the architecture of the Manor and its relation to the city.

⁴ The first comprehensive study about the collection’s gathering and composition was the Master’s dissertation, developed at the PPGMUS University of São Paulo (USP), in 2016, available at: <https://teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/103/103131/tde-27092016-143828>.

⁵ The “400-years-olds”, or *Famílias quatrocentonas* (*quadricentennial families* in a free translation) designate Brazilian elite families whose roots could be traced back to the first settlers of the region during colonial times. The terms were used to distinguish their members from recent European and Middle Eastern immigrants.

Both families, Crespi and Prado, were involved in the world of arts and collecting. Veridiana da Silva Prado, Fábio's grandmother, was a pioneer in patronage in São Paulo and one of the first collectors in the country. Renata's father created an art gallery, called Ital-Brasil, which displayed an impressive collection of Italian paintings, furniture, and art objects. Therefore, the couple was familiar with collecting practices. Furthermore, their decision to form a collection and the widow's subsequent initiative to publicise it through a foundation fit a larger class behaviour. Both actions are instruments consecrated by Western elites to perpetuate their memory and achieve further social distinction.

Like her father and her husband, Renata knew how to reach a leadership position herself. Certainly, the conditions of her family contributed a lot to this. From an early age, Renata won a place in the eyes of São Paulo's society. In 1911, in the context of the spreading aviation fever, she was, at just 14 years of age, the first woman in the city to ride an airplane at an event organised by the Italian community, an anecdote that helps to illustrate her position in the community.

Later on, she assumed an important role within associations and participated in various philanthropic initiatives in the cities of Guarujá (by the coast), Araras (in the countryside) and in the capital of the state São Paulo. She participated in the fundraising for the works of the Cathedral of Sé and hired the Italian artist Francesco Nagni to make its sculptures. She was also involved in the organisation of the Commemorative Exhibition of the IV Centenary of the city of São Vicente, also by the coast, in 1932. Several of its items would later integrate the couple's collection, namely pieces of colonial furniture that provided an assorted furnishing frame to her husband's family heritage. Acquiring pieces that had their value sanctioned by this exhibition was a way of visually affirming the Prado's position in the Brazilian society.

Such intense social activity was not uncommon among the elite. As stated by Carvalho (2008), men were socially prohibited from being the bearers of the signs of their own success, so the female performance, in its ornamental function and productive leisure, was crucial to male prestige. But Renata's public influence was not restricted to philanthropy and social life. She also played a political role, as mayor of Guarujá appointed by the intervenor Macedo Soares, in 1946.

The marriage between Renata and Fábio stands out as one of the first between immigrant and quadricentennial families. At the time, there was a social barrier between both groups, caused, on one hand, by the aversion of old families to foreigners and their fast-paced economic prosperity, and, on the other, by the contempt that many immigrants had for the old elites that they considered unaccustomed to work. Beyond an unusual social bond, the Crespi-Prado marriage became an extremely important means for the establishment of

political and economic relations between the families it linked. To their contemporaries the couple was seen through those lenses, an identity the couple assumed and affirmed. Their collection was carefully assembled to make a statement about themselves and its institutionalisation assured that this statement was preserved long past their own lives.

In private museums originated from private collections, where each item represents the decisions and choices of a specific collector, the presence of the self-image of its creators is striking. The dimension of self-representation overlays the gesture of collecting and that of constituting a museum open to the public, which must act as a mirror of its creators. As Baudrillard (2012) says, we always collect ourselves: [...] the collection is made of a succession of terms, but its final term is the person of the collector (p. 99), and through the insertion of signs of their personal identity in the collection an alter ego is created. There is, then, a favourable configuration for the immortalisation of the collector/founder.

Huysen (2000) also talks about the proliferation of discourses about memory, a process in which museums assume a prominent role. He addresses the ambiguity of memory and forgetting, considering a reciprocal and paradoxical relationship of causality between the feelings of fear of forgetting and the desire to remember - or to be remembered. Those are very pertinent reflections for the study of institutionalisation of private collections. Public and private recollections seek refuge in the supposed safety of past experiences, in the attempt to avoid forgetfulness. According to Huysen, what is sought is not exactly the formulation and consecration of imagined memories, but the continuity over time, the possibility of extending the existence, allowing for a certain historical stability.

In the case of the FCP, Fábio's passing was the turning point that pushed Renata to take actions towards the creation of the Foundation, in order to preserve the couple's memory. The issue of the collection as an instrument for the exaltation and immortalisation of the collector is very well described in Perec's fiction, "The Private Collection". In the work, issues related to the authenticity of the pieces and the view of the collection as a mausoleum are evident. The collection provides the environment in which the collector "saves" himself (both in the sense of "creating a record" and in an almost religious sense of "achieving redemption") for eternal life through - and along with - his treasure. However, it is not necessary to resort to fiction in the search of examples, since private collecting in Brazil is historically a means of social differentiation and assertion of power, and this has been reinforced by the proliferation of museological institutions that legitimised the practice of elite families.

Another good example of the above is described by Costa (2007), in *Symphony of Objects* (which focuses on the collection of Ema Gordon Klabin and the House Museum she created). The author analyses how collecting also means collecting one's own history, and

identifies two tendencies in the collecting practice of immigrants and their descendants: firstly, approach their origins and affirm their immigrant identity; secondly, try to integrate into a national identity which was still under construction. The latter is identifiable through the acquisition of items linked to the national history, the colonial period, and works by modernist artists. Both trends appear in the couple's collection, that has few but very significant pieces of the Brazilian modernism⁶.

3. The house and the collection

The Crespi-Prado couple's leading political role and outstanding social position are crucial to understand their strategies to establish a discourse about themselves, to their peers and to posterity. Such discourse was shaped through direct representations (photographic portraits and paintings), and more importantly through indirect ones in the constitution and public disposition of the collection.

The house built by the couple in the capital of São Paulo, known as Solar Fábio Prado, was the main stage for the display of the pieces during the couple's life and, up to this day, maintains its link with the collection. Built in 1944-45 by the same company that was responsible, among others, for the construction of the most iconic viaduct of the city (*Viaduto do Chá*), and the new headquarters of the city's Jockey Club⁷, the manor was conceived to meet the daily and social needs of the couple, who lived in the building for 18 years. Its monumental size and the statements present in the documentation researched make the representational purposes of the design clear, as well as the couple's intention, since the beginning of the architecture project, to bequeath it to a cultural purpose that could preserve their memory.

The site chosen for the construction was a large plot of land of 15.000 m², on Rua Iguatemi, a street of heterogeneous occupation consisting of small houses and modest buildings from the beginning of the century. This area of the city was the target of great attention by the administration of Fábio during his term as mayor. The investments made and the couple's choice to build their house in the area were crucial to turn it from a scarcely populated floodplain into the business boulevard it is today. The street, now named *Avenida Brigadeiro Faria Lima*, is currently an economic hotspot of the city, where companies such as Google have their headquarters.

⁶ A painting by Candido Portinari, another one by Di Cavalcanti and two sculptures by Victor Brecheret.

⁷ Fábio was president of the Jockey in two occasions; briefly in 1934 and again in 1951-60.



Figure 1 – Aerial photo of the MCB, 10 March 2017.

Photo: Chema Llanos. Giovanna MB, CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons.

Although the Prado family had, through Paulo Prado (Fábio's cousin), direct involvement in the Modern Art Week of 1922 (main landmark for the Brazilian Modernism Movement), the couple opted for an architectural solution of a historicist taste. This choice can be understood as a conciliatory decision between the origins of Fábio and Renata.

Once the construction was completed, the house figured assiduously in the pages of newspapers and magazines at the time. Articles and entire publications were devoted to choosing, among the wealthiest homes in the capital, the decoration models to be disseminated among their readers. And the dinners, receptions and awards held at the manor were extensively covered by the media.

The analysis of the Crespi-Prado collection as a whole reveals a strong decorative character. Carvalho (2008) shows how domestic decoration, as an instrument of social distinction, mobilises elements of symbolic nature, and how the material configuration of the house also produces values and creates hierarchies in the space: like any form of human appropriation, the act of decorating implies selecting elements out of a complex, continuous, and chaotic universe, transforming it into something understandable and practicable (CARVALHO 2008, p. 275).

Domestic collections such as the FCP are very personalised arrangements, fruits of the collector's own affective and aesthetic criteria. As heterogeneous as they may seem, they have their nexus in the figure of the collector who, by bringing together a myriad of objects of various types, from the most diverse places and periods, juxtaposes individual and social times, creating its own time, simultaneously parallel and transcendent to the historical time. It is necessary to keep in mind that a collection inescapably establishes a collector's

discourse about themselves and that the objects become, within the collection, a code that carries socio-economic meanings, a vehicle for social qualification and hierarchical distribution. We are interested in taking this discourse not for its alleged truth or falsehood, but for what can be inferred from it.

4. A House-Museum?

Even though the childless couple long dreamt of bequeathing their heritage as a cultural legacy, diverse factors prevented them from defining together the terms of this project. After Fábio's decease, Renata donated several pieces of the collection to well established institutions of the city of São Paulo. Some donations, such as the Specialised Brazilian Library⁸ and Fábio's massive bed⁹ were gestures that can be read as an attempt to preserve their memory from oblivion.

The documentation shows that Renata wanted to give a cultural destination to the couple's heritage (not only the collection but also the manor that housed it). However, legal complications and maybe misguided counselling led to a partial dispersion of the pieces, and to the separation of the manor from the collection. Renata donated the manor to the Padre Anchieta Foundation, in 1968. Later on, in 1971, it would be loaned to the State Secretariat for Culture, that would, in the following year, install the MCB there.

Renata was a member of the MCB Director's Council, and she expressed the intention to donate what was left from the couple's collection to the MCB. The negotiations are mentioned in several minutes of the Museum's board meetings. It is interesting to highlight that although the negotiations were long, the donation of the marble bust of Renata, made by the renown Italo-Brazilian sculptor Victor Brecheret, was expedited as a way to physically introduce the donor's image in the Museum already at its opening in 1972, along with the bronze plaque where her gesture of donating the manor was celebrated.

However, the donation of the collection to the Museum proved complicated, and Renata opted to create the FCP as a way to preserve the set. Homeless, with no exhibition space of its own, the collection would depend on agreements with other institutions to be displayed and would occupy different addresses, besides the MCB: the Pinacothèque (*Pinacoteca do*

⁸ The Library held a central role in the manor's architecture, reigning alone in the upper floor with a privileged view of the gardens. The collection of more than 200 books, gathered by Renata, was donated in Fábio's memory to USP's Prehistory Institute, immediately after his passing. The institution was directed by Paulo Duarte, friend of the couple, who advised Renata on the donation.

⁹ The bed was made of jacarandá, in the Portuguese style known as D João V, and belonged to Fábio's grandfather the Baron of Iguape. The piece was donated to the MP with a very sentimental letter, from which Renata Crespi: *This will be another souvenir for the USP from the founder of the Culture Department, and nothing is more grateful to his memory than bequeathing it the historical object that was also such an important part of Fábio Prado's intimate life, having been used by him in his last rest right before his passing. [...]*"

Estado de São Paulo), the Artistic-Cultural Collection of the Palaces of the State Government (*Acervo Artístico-Cultural dos Palácios do Governo do Estado*), and the Jockey Club.

At first, most of the collection was kept in storage, while a selection of objects, furniture and paintings would go to the Jockey Club of São Paulo right after the FCP's creation, assuming a more structured display only later, in 1991. Although presented as a free exhibition in the media, the documentation revealed that the show was not an actual museological exhibition, it rather assumed the form of a decorative arrangement in the Jockey's rooms for its members' delight, which was praised in the press as the perfect decor for private parties. This situation remains roughly unchanged to this day, with one exception: it is no longer possible to freely visit the exhibition. The pieces are now reserved for the fruition of the Jockeys' associates¹⁰.

Later on new loan agreements would grant the conditions to exhibit the collection back in the manor, where the pieces have been in display since 1996. Although the FCP does not own the Solar Fábio Prado, the relationship the public establishes with the collection, when visiting the exhibition on the first floor, necessarily involves the physical space of the couple's residence. This intention is explicit in the documentation behind the loans, where the agreements are justified in terms of "bringing the pieces back home"

5. Notes on value, use, and gender

However inseparable from its historical-social matrices and repercussions, collecting must be approached as a creative process. The paths and decisions that led objects to integrate a given collection say a lot about the agents behind these choices and provide elements for the critical analysis of the discourse behind the whole set.

In the case of the FCP collection, in addition to the decorative character and representational charge, a characteristic of the vast majority of the items is the luxury, the preciousness, the effective value of the pieces. They preferably feature valuable materials such as fine woods, gold, silver, precious and semi-precious stones. In fact, silverware is one of the most representative typologies in the collection, totalling around 300 kilograms of silver.

This preference for valuable materials, according to Alsop (1982), is rooted in the desire of wealthy owners to carry out a form of hoarding of the visible. The conversion of precious metals into objects allowed a symbolic display of status, without voiding the materials actual value since the pieces could easily be transformed into equity if necessary. Luxury

¹⁰ As observed in May 2015.

differentiates ordinary from rare objects, whose function stems from the socially attributed capacity of producing values and meanings. It also presupposes hierarchies and social inequality, since it is produced by everyone, but consumed exclusively by a fraction of society. (PERROT, 1988 as cited in CARVALHO 2008, pp. 25-26).

The Crespi-Prado couple had an active political and social life, to which the collection and the manor served as *decor*. The ambiance thus created helped to convey the image of who they were to their contemporaries, and through the later institutionalisation of the collection allowed that image to become memory. Higonet, in her work on institutions founded by private collectors, explores how by creating and making their collections public, collectors/founders demonstrate more than just their possessions: the theatrical spaces of the museums they created present the historical conditions of their purchasing power.

The use the Crespi-Prado couple made of their collection was not only symbolical. The silverware and dinner appliances for example, while definitely not for daily use, were actually utilised by the couple when hosting. This usage touches on a recurrent point in the literature on collecting: the issue of the nullification of the use value as a requirement for an object to integrate a collection. On this topic, Blom, states:

“[...] whatever we collect we have to kill, literally in the case of butterflies or beetles, metaphorically in the case of other objects which are removed from their surroundings, functions and circulation, and placed in an artificial environment, bereft of their former usefulness, turned into objects of a different order, dead to the world. [...] Even the occasional use of objects in a collection, musical instruments, books or vintage cars, is incidental, and not what the collection is about.

At the same time these objects have taken on a new life, as part of an organism, as part of the collector’s mirror image [...] Through them the collector can live on after his own life has come to an end; and the collection becomes a bulwark against mortality.” (BLOM 2002, p. 177)

However, in addition to the simple possession of the object, conspicuous consumption occurs through the actual use of these objects because, unlike what happens in a museum, in the context of a private collection they are not totally devoid of their use value. Their use is not merely incidental, and the greatest distinctive value resides precisely in the privilege of the daily enjoyment of objects considered economically or historically valuable, not only displayed but also actually used at receptions and other social events.

If the musealisation of the private collection makes such use impossible, this apparent "loss" is compensated by the public projection that the institution provides by further exposing this private ostentation. The musealisation process emphasises this conspicuous character, by publicising a privileged way of life, which gains even brighter colours in House-Museums where the collection and the building create a whole image of the private displayed to the public. Such dimensions, clear in the intention of members of the older elites, were especially relevant to those on the rise, such as São Paulo immigrants in the 20th century. The Crespi-Prado couple is therefore quite representative of this phenomenon.

Analysing the characteristics of the pieces of the collection is a major step to understand the whole. Equally important is looking at the collectors themselves. While the association with memory and a desire for immortalisation appear as a constant in the literature on collecting, there are authors who give, in their work, greater importance to other factors, such as gender. Blom, for example, sees the act of collecting as an eminently male action:

"This, of course, is not to say that collecting is inherently autistic any more than it is inherently male, or that collectors cannot be rounded human beings with thriving personal relationships, but the similarity is arresting and can be transferred to other predominantly male activities. How many woman anglers can one count sitting by the river alone on any given day?" (BLOM 2002, p. 169)

But it is worth questioning whether this identification of collecting as a male act is not simply due to the non-recognition of collections gathered by women as such (shoes, for example).

Pearce and Martin make more consistent observations about possible distinctions in collecting patterns associated with gender. Comparing analyses of collecting experiences gathered by the *Collector's Voice* project, the authors verified differences regarding the objects preferentially collected by men and women and their respective organisation choices. According to the authors:

"men tend to collect material which relates to activities, past or present [...], while women are drawn to material with affective qualities of memory [...]; men prefer to classify their material according to external parameters of perceived value, type and category [...] while women like to arrange material in ways which are emotionally satisfactory, often through display in the home [...]." (PEARCE & MARTIN 2002, p. XV)

The authors warn, however, that "reading" the collections is not as simple as it may seem. To them, collections are used according to socially established standards to create space, time and identity for the collector, and within this framework, the gender constructions created can be as powerful weapons in personality wars as the most subversive declarations. Renata's donation letter of the Brazilian library, for instance, states that it was composed at *her* initiative, with the *support* of her husband and friends of the couple who helped orienting the choices. Her intention to create such a book collection can be understood as a gesture to make herself present in the space of the library, only room in the upper floor of the building and the less domestic space in the manor, typically used for her husband's business meetings.

This example demonstrates that more important than identifying the differences between the behaviours of men and women when forming their collections, is perceiving those differences as a resource for the construction of a personality that relates to socially established standards, either to ratify or to question them.

Authors such as Higonnet and West, in their studies on gender issues that permeate museums arising from private collecting, highlight the importance of the interaction between the male and female genders in the construction of material and symbolic discourses in the house. According to the authors, as they are established from an extension of the domestic sphere, therefore within the socially established limits for female behaviour, such museums would constitute a privileged space for the expression and ideological and political action of women in the public domain. By dedicating themselves to the creation of private spaces, women established "public monuments" based on the issues of their time.

"Because the collection museum hovered between the home and the museum, between domesticity and public display, it lent itself to alternative gender possibilities. [...] Women took advantage of the unique intersection between the history of gender and the history of art institutions at which the home could become a museum." (HIGONNET 2009, p. 194)

In the same direction, Carvalho (2008), in her work on gender and material culture, through the analysis of the organisation of the domestic space and system, addresses the issue of female domestic work and the association of women with the private space, highlighting the relationship between domestic objects and the constitution of gender identities. The author discusses how the aestheticisation of the house was an important step towards establishing the conspicuous behaviour of women in public life, in addition to being a factor of distinction and a way of gratification for symbolic needs. However, she warns that the emphasis given to the female role in the house decoration underestimated the masculine

implications in this process (CARVALHO 2008, p. 270). The male presence in the house, as well as the meaning that the residence assumed in the society, were, according to the author, determining factors for the house to become an object of interest for couples, justifying expensive investments in it.

The author also draws attention to the deep interaction between genders in the production of the domestic space. According to her, the genders are always constituted in a relational context, whether it is opposition, submission, equivalence or complementation (CARVALHO 2008, p. 276). Hence, the importance of avoiding a reductionist analysis that sees the house as the domain of the feminine, a space conquered *from men* and conceived *for the benefit of women*. Without falling into this simplistic scheme, it is valid, however, to state that the female collector's performance could, starting from the decorative sphere, where it was more easily acceptable, expand and embrace archeological objects and works of art, for example.

In the case of the FCP, except for the objects that came from the Prado family (like the bed previously mentioned), we could not find traces of pieces that were included in the set thanks to him. On the other hand, it is possible to trace back the acquisition of several objects to Renata. It is important to be aware that her actions appear to be more relevant to the collection formation partly because she was the one actually creating the FCP and making the donations that would leave the documentation trail used to study the collection. However, it is interesting to note how she always found ways to include her husband in the collection (through her efforts to select objects that would allude to his origins) and in the project of the institutionalisation (by repeatedly stating that this was a project *they both* had and that her actions were in his memory).

6. Final thoughts

The study of private collections constitutes a valuable source for the analysis of the period and society of their production. Constructed for intimate delight, the collections are also endowed with a conspicuous dimension, as they are displayed to guests, in carefully planned homes or business environments for display and social contemplation. The collections were arranged in residences that were often specially built or adapted to hold them. Houses that became social showcases, configuring and being configured by the social persona of their past inhabitants.

A collection is an integral part of a complex set of actions of its creators, who build, through them, a representation of themselves. Private collections need to be understood as interpretive and self-representative experiences, but this does not mean that they are restricted to the subjective sphere. It is crucial to reconstitute and problematise their

insertion in a context that encompasses and goes beyond individual issues, and consider the collectors within their society and time.

Abbreviation list

DC : Culture Department (*Departamento de Cultura e Recreação de São Paulo*)

FCP : Crespi Prado Foundation (*Fundação Crespi Prado*)

MCB : Museum of the Brazilian House (*Museu da Casa Brasileira*)

MP : Paulista Museum (*Museu Paulista*)

USP : University of São Paulo

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Tamira Naia dos Santos is a Museologist with background in History and Arts. During her MA degree in Museology at the University of São Paulo (2016), she was awarded a national scholarship (CAPES) due to outstanding performance in the selection process. Her research was about the trajectory of a private collection from its gathering to its institutionalisation as a Foundation. Since 2016 she lives and works in Europe having engaged in different projects in France, England and in the Netherlands. Interested in: Collections research, House Museums, History of Collecting, Women's Collecting.

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