

CONTRASTS IN FOCUS

FRANZ JOSEF WIDMAR

20.11.2024 - 31.05.2025

STIFTUNG BRASILEIA

Franz Josef Widmar, who moved from Austria to Brazil in the 1950s, documented the country and its people in his unique way. This exhibition showcases his artistic perspective on Brazil through contrasts: industry and craftsmanship, anonymous masses and personal encounters, urbanization and nature. His portraits capture people from diverse backgrounds.

Widmar's works invite viewers to explore the contrasts of a transforming society and to examine the tensions between tradition and modernity, nature and urban life. The exhibition "Rio 1955" complements the current exhibition "Trade and Transformation" and provides an artistic glimpse into 1950s Brazil within the context of societal change.

Room 1 | Labor – from craft to industry

In the 1950s, Brazil was at a crossroads. President Juscelino Kubitschek promised rapid modernization with his development plan "50 years of progress in five years". Factories spring up, cities grow, and Brasília, the new capital, rises as a monument to the dawn of a new era. But beyond this urban dynamism, fishermen and agricultural laborers struggle to preserve their traditional ways of life. Widmar's images capture this fragile balance. The image of the fisherman shows not only a figure at work, but also a deep connection to nature. Barefoot and using simple tools, the fisherman appears to be part of the landscape, embedded in water and vegetation. His daily life is characterized by his proximity to the elements – which not only shape his work but his entire life. This world is not static, but vibrates to the rhythm of nature.

The opposite image tells a different story. Here, there is no soft embedding in the environment. The angular shapes and clear colors of the industrial worker speak of efficiency, of functionality, of a life that is subject to the machine and the rhythm of production. The figure appears enraptured, almost detached from the natural world, in a sphere that has no connection to the ground and water.

The question arises: what remains of traditional ways of life when cities are expanding, industrialization is taking over, and the land is being reorganized for progress? Nature as a living space – a place of rest and anchorage – is under threat, while the modern city with its silhouette is already lurking on the horizon. Widmar captures this moment of change without providing answers, but with a close look at the tension that permeates these people's everyday lives.

Room 2 | Feira – Of Markets and Men

The industrial developments of the 1950s, which transformed the Brazilian cityscape, also left their mark on the city's markets. Alongside traditional products from agriculture and fishing, new goods that urban growth brings with it are increasingly found. But the markets are not just places of trade. They are lively meeting places where the social fabric of the city becomes visible. This is where people from different walks of life and backgrounds come together – a place where news is exchanged, friendships are cultivated and political discussions are held. The second room captures the atmosphere of the markets as social hubs. Scenes along the walls show the hustle and bustle. The depictions capture the dynamics, colorful chaos and energy that characterize the vibrant life of the market – a reflection of the city and its social diversity.

In the center of the room, two figures engage in a silent dialogue: a vendor surrounded by goods encounters a pensive, introverted figure. Their glances suggest an unspoken exchange and symbolize the clash of different worlds and destinies. This encounter points to the often unspoken connections and tensions that make up the market as a microcosm of society. The room is designed to invite visitors to experience the market as a mirror of Brazilian society in the 1950s and to discover the diversity that Widmar captures in his paintings.

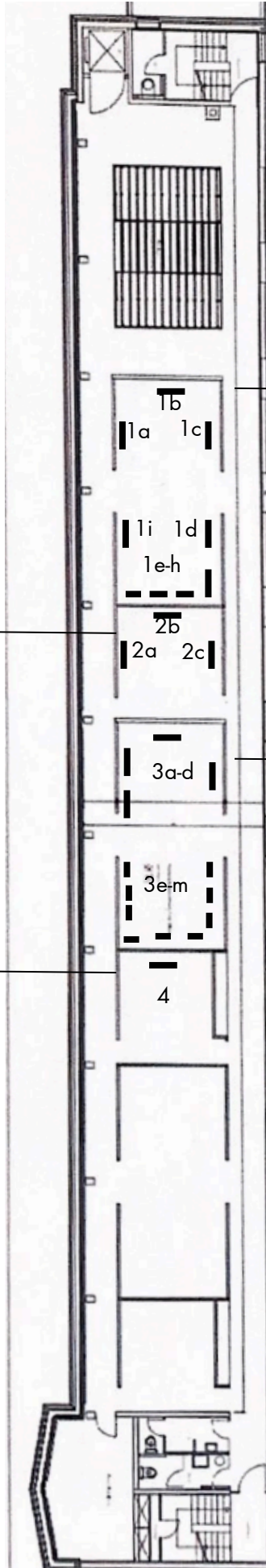
Room 3 | Urbanismo – Of cityscapes and city folk

The juxtaposition of portraits and cityscapes in this room opens a subtle dialogue about the urbanization of Rio in the 1950s. The portraits show the faces of the people living in this rapidly growing city – faces full of character that reflect the diversity and individuality of the inhabitants. Their expressions seem to reflect the question: How is their environment changing, and what does urban change mean for them personally? On the opposite page, the cityscapes of Rio show the rapid change that is taking place throughout the city. The buildings are growing, the landscape is becoming denser and more urban – a new structure is superimposed over the traditional image of the city.

These representations highlight the ongoing urbanization and transformation of living spaces. The city is becoming a place that brings both opportunities and challenges. It is as if the portraits are looking out at these urban scenes, thus emphasizing the relationship between people and the cityscape. Rio residents find themselves in a changing environment – a city that is redefining its identity and where individuals must seek their place. Visitors are invited to reflect on how the cityscape affects people and what stories are behind the faces that witness urban change.

Room 4 | Film: Our Good Neighbors

The last room of this exhibition presents the film “Our Good Neighbors – Brazil”, a documentary produced by the US government in the 1950s. This film conveys the image of Brazil at the time and captures the spirit of the age from an international perspective. It complements the exhibition by visualizing the historical impressions and expectations of a modernizing world, and allows visitors to experience 1950s Brazil from a historical perspective.



ROOM 1

- 1a Acrylic on Eucatex 122 x 85 cm
- 1b Acrylic on Eucatex 84 x 84 cm
- 1c Acrylic on Eucatex 76 x 64 cm
- 1d Oil on Wood 55 x 45.5 cm
- 1e Oil on Eucatex 61 x 50.5 cm
- 1f Oil on Eucatex 41 x 23 cm
- 1g Mixed Media on Eucatex 90 x 54 cm
- 1h Acrylic on Eucatex 122 x 57.5 cm
- 1i Oil on Wood 78 x 48 cm

ROOM 2

- 2a Oil on Wood 78 x 48 cm
- 2b Oil on Wood 46 x 38 cm
- 2c Mixed Media on Eucatex 80 x 56.5 cm
- 2d Oil on Eucatex 72.5 x 60 cm
- 2e Oil on Eucatex 50 x 41.5 cm
- 2f Oil on Eucatex 73 x 54 cm

ROOM 3

- 3a Oil on Wood 65 x 55 cm
- 3b Acrylic on Eucatex 73.5 x 61 cm
- 3c Oil on Eucatex 122 x 94 cm
- 3d Acrylic on Eucatex 111 x 80.5 cm
- 3e Oil on Canvas 65 x 54 cm
- 3f Oil on Wood 46 x 38 cm
- 3g Oil on Eucatex 56 x 46.5 cm
- 3h Oil on Eucatex 53.5 x 42 cm
- 3i Oil on Wood 50.5 x 40.5 cm
- 3j Oil on Eucatex 55 x 43 cm
- 3k Oil on Canvas 51 x 60 cm
- 3l Oil on Eucatex 68 x 53.5 cm
- 3m Oil on Eucatex 61 x 50.5 cm

ROOM 4

Film: "Our good neighbors
Brazil: Rio de Janeiro, 1950"
(OV, EN 11'50'')

GUIDED TOURS THROUGH THE EXHIBITION

Public Tours

Held on the first Wednesday of every month in German:

- January 8, 2025, Wednesday, 2 PM
- February 5, 2025, Wednesday, 2 PM
- March 5, 2025, Wednesday, 2 PM
- April 2, 2025, Wednesday, 2 PM
- May 7, 2025, Wednesday, 2 PM

VEDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Museums Night Basel

January 17, 2025, Friday, 6 PM–2 AM

Guided tour of the exhibition with insights and details about the artist.

Basel Carnival Masks for Children

March 5, 2025, Wednesday, 3 PM

Available in German and Portuguese. Registration required: info@brasilea.com

Öpening hours:
Wednesday 14-18 Uhr
Sunday 11-16 Uhr

Entry: CHF 10/7(red.)



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