

Workshop

Ghosts of The Present:

*Emphases and Erasures in Latin American
Fashion Histories*

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Central Saint Martins, London

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What are the historical power dynamics that continue to haunt Latin American fashion and its representation in visual and material cultures? How might we construct a global and relational account of fashion and modernity from the perspective of this vast and diverse continent? How can we expel the ghosts of colonialism that cast their shadows on contemporary Latin American fashion design? What is the significance of Latin American archives and museums in revealing colonial injustices but also offering the potential to trouble authorised accounts? Where does resistance to authoritarian social structures intersect with the complexities of fashion as a lived experience in Latin America? How can we interrogate History as a critical practice in the fashioning of Latin America, whilst also acknowledging that alternative fashion histories might employ different concepts of time to those defined by Western historians?

To reflect on these questions, we draw on the writing of historian and anthropologist Lilia Moritz Schwarcz in *Brazilian Authoritarianism* (2022), originally published in Brazil as *Sobre o Autoritarismo Brasileiro* (2019). She writes:

Brazilian history [cannot] escape the fundamental ambiguities that, at the same time that it is formed of a chain of events that build upon one another and conjure substantial changes, it is also replete with selective memories and lacunas, emphases and erasures, reliable accounts and glaring omissions (2022, p. 199).

Written in 2018, in the wake of the election victory of self-styled ‘Trump of the Tropics’ Jair Bolsonaro, but translated into English in 2022 to coincide with leftist Lula Inácio Lula da Silva’s return to presidential power,

Schwarcz's argument in *Brazilian Authoritarianism* is persuasive: Brazil's present is haunted by the ghosts of its past. The spectres of authoritarianism, intimately tied to 500 years of colonial violence, racism and inequality, continue to haunt its contemporary society and politics, shaping the everyday lives of Brazilians. Brazil was the last country in the Americas to abolish slavery in 1888. Although Schwarcz focuses on the history of oppression and inequality in Brazil, her ideas are applicable to the wider context of Latin America, whose chequered histories reveal the shadows of colonial legacies that endure, repeat and persist over time.

This one-day workshop foregrounds alternative, anachronistic, non-linear, plural, decentred and decolonial Fashion Histories in Latin America, or Abya Yala. To understand the nuances and complexities of Latin American fashion in global perspective over the past five centuries we must reject any simplistic notion of Latin American dependence on an authoritative Anglo-European-dominated fashion industry and culture. The aim is to stitch together a plurality of perspectives that use fashion to illuminate erasures and cast doubt on emphases in established historical accounts. In doing so, we draw together new research into Latin American Fashion Histories that speaks to the present, looks to the future, and interrogates the past.