

Museu Paulista (institution)

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Housed in a building situated on the shores of the Ipiranga River, in the Ipiranga district in São Paulo, to celebrate Brazil's independence, the Museu Paulista, popularly known as the Ipiranga Museum, was the first public museum founded in São Paulo state and the largest monumental building constructed in São Paulo during the imperial era—*paulista*, a noun and an adjective, means someone or something from São Paulo. Built by the engineer and architect Tommaso Gaudenzio Bezzi (1844-1915), the Ipiranga Monument was inaugurated in 1893 when Brazil had become a republic – in a location close to where the Emperor, then Crown Prince, Dom Pedro I proclaimed independence from Portugal in 1822. In 1895 the museum was installed inside the monument-building.

Initially, its collection consisted of the painting *Independência ou Morte* ('Independence or Death,' 1888) by Pedro Américo (1843-1905) and of an old private collection, the so-called Museu Sertório. The republican authorities then decided to dedicate the museum mainly to the acquisition of natural history collections from South America. Not by chance, the German physician and naturalist Hermann von Ihering (1850-1930) was chosen as the first director of the Museu Paulista, occupying the post between 1895 and 1916. Although during von Ihering's 21-year administration, the institution had primarily operated as a natural history museum, it also accepted donations of historical paintings such as the work *Fundação de São Vicente* ('Foundation of São Vicente,' 1900) by the painter Benedito Calixto (1853-1927), acquired by the state government. Many other works of art were also acquired to form an art gallery at the Museu Paulista focused on painting. In 1917, Afonso Taunay (1876-1958), an acting member of the Historical and Geographical

Institute of São Paulo (IHGSP), was nominated director of the museum by the government of São Paulo and was tasked with transforming it into a museum also dedicated to the history of Brazil and, more specifically, the history of São Paulo, anticipating the commemorations for the Centenary of Independence in 1922.

An engineer from a family of artists and interested in historical studies, Taunay, over the 29 years of his tenure, organized the museum's historical section in a way that leads visitors on an exhibition tour that forms a narrative on the emergence of the Brazilian nation as a history led by the people of São Paulo (the *Paulistas*). On this journey, visitors are greeted in the entrance hall by the figures of the *bandeirantes* Fernão Dias and Raposo Tavares, sculpted in marble by Luigi Brizzolara (1868-1937) – slave raiders and explorers in the colonial era. These two monumental *bandeirantes* and the paintings alluding to the beginning of the colonial settlement in the captaincy of São Vicente, concluded in the 1930s, constitute the start of a visual journey that continues up the staircase. Here the economic and territorial formation of Brazil is depicted by sculptures of *bandeirantes* and paintings of the 'historical economic cycles' and ends on the first floor, the so-called noble hall, where the visitors find themselves face-to-face with the historical scene of the proclamation of independence and the Brazilian Emperor Dom Pedro I, represented in the painting *Independência ou Morte* ('Independence or Death'). To increase the space devoted to the exhibition of this historical narrative, the Republican Museum was founded in the city of Itu, in 1921, as an extension of the Museu Paulista located in the state's interior. Years later, still under Taunay's management, in 1939, the current Zoology Museum (MZ) of the University of São Paulo (USP) was designed, to which part of the zoology collection was transferred.

Taunay was also responsible for the creation of an ethnography section, previously absent from the museum. In 1946, Brazilian historian Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (1902-1982), and professor at the University of São Paulo, Taunay's successor as the institution's director, created an ethnology section headed by the German-born Brazilian ethnologist Herbert Baldus (1899-1970), which also increased the

museum's status as an important center for anthropological research and exhibition. As well as curating exhibitions on South American Indigenous cultures and conducting ethnographic explorations in various Brazilian regions, the museum directorship was also notable for its production and dissemination of a large number of anthropological works written by Brazilian and foreign researchers. In 1989, almost all of this ethnological collection was transferred to the university's [Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology \(MAE\)](#).

A series of dismemberments have thus marked the trajectory of the museum since 1905, including the transfer of many paintings from its collection – such as *A Partida da Monção* ('The Monsoon Departure,' 1897) by Almeida Júnior (1850-1899) – to be included in the initial collection of the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo (the State pinacotheca). This trajectory was not linear, however. The painting *Fundação de São Paulo* by Oscar Pereira da Silva ('Foundation of São Paulo,' 1867-1939), bought for the Pinacotheca, was transferred to the Museu Paulista in 1929, which was when *A Partida da Monção* bandeirante economic cycle. The full incorporation of the Museu Paulista into the University of São Paulo occurred in 1963 during the administration of Mário Neme (1912-1973), although the 1934 federal decree that created the university had already established the incorporation of the museum as a complementary institution to expand the scope of university activities and teaching. A series of USP professors have acted as directors of the museum, one of them being Ulpiano Bezerra de Meneses (1936), responsible for formulating the 1990 Master Plan, which defined the institutional area of the museum, after these dismemberments, as a museum dedicated exclusively to history, focused on the problematization of material culture as a document for interpreting the past.

The museum today possesses more than 125,000 items, including iconography, furniture, objects, and textual documents from the seventeenth century to the mid-twentieth. Its collection has been continually expanded, especially concerning the history of São Paulo from 1850 to 1950. It was closed for renovation work in 2013, aiming to restore and expand its area to provide accessibility, and it was reopened in 2022, during the bicentenary celebrations of Brazil's Independence, in

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dialogue with social movements that demand a contemporary and critical approach to such celebratory evocations. The museum now exhibits its historical collection alongside works by Indigenous and black artists.

**Editor's note:** The museum's journal, *Anais do Museu Paulista*, vol. 27, 2019, has a [special issue](#) in English on its historical painting collection. *Bandeirantes* were the colonial-era explorers and slave raiders, mainly based in São Paulo, of Portuguese and Indigenous ancestry, who expanded the Portuguese settlement into the interior of South America. Since the late 19th century, *Paulistas* made the *bandeirantes* their foundation myth, supposedly explaining their economic power, industrial development, and adventurous *ethos*. They are celebrated in books on the history of São Paulo, paintings, monumental statues, and toponymy throughout the city and the state. This has been denounced by Indigenous activists as a violent and colonial narrative that erases the role of the *bandeirantes* in genocide, ethnocide, and slavery.

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## KEYWORDS

archaeology; art; art curatorship; Brazilian anthropology; heritage; history; museum; University of São Paulo

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