



Research Article

Facilitating Global Art Conversations: Availability of Art Scholarship in Latin America

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Received: 2 Aug. 2016

Accepted: 13 Nov. 2016

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Abstract

Objective – As art history becomes an increasingly global discipline, the question of geographically equitable access to the scholarly knowledge produced at universities in Europe and North America remains unexamined. This study aims to begin to answer that question by investigating the availability of art scholarship in Latin America.

Methods – Sixty university libraries in Latin America were checked for various kinds of access to two major art history journals.

Results – The study found that access rates were low, and that the types of access available were suboptimal.

Conclusion – The results suggest that the current level of access is insufficient to support global scholarly conversations in art history and that current modes of dissemination of scholarship are not reaching key audiences.

Introduction

The study of Latin American art is a major endeavour at universities in Europe and North America, but how much of the knowledge produced at these universities is available to Latin American scholars? This study aims to answer the question of whether Latin American scholars have access to the art scholarship of Europe and the United States. It specifically focuses on scholars at Latin American research universities working towards open scholarship. Recently, local art histories have flourished as the discipline expands from its origins in Western Europe to become a global enterprise, but even with this global expansion of study we have not necessarily seen a concomitant expansion of scholarly communication. The question of access is a key part of facilitating a global scholarly conversation, as access to the theories and analyses that are current in the scholarly literature of the global centre are required for international communities to engage with these ideas and communicate their own perspectives back to the centre.

A Note on Terminology

There are a multitude of terms to describe the unequal global distribution of wealth caused by the legacy of colonialism. In this paper, I use the centre-periphery terminology and model as adapted to the world of scholarly publishing by Suresh Canagarajah (2002). The global centre consists primarily of the United States and Western Europe; however, there are many centres within countries that are part of the global periphery, which also take advantage of colonial mechanisms to concentrate wealth. There are also peripheries within centre nations, excluded from the prosperity that is concentrated in certain areas of that nation. The term centre scholarship in this paper includes scholarship produced by academics at institutions with significant social and financial capital concentrated but not exclusively found in North America and Western Europe. This unequal distribution of resources and reputation

has a particular impact on access to the scholarly literature of the centre in the periphery, as this literature is made available most commonly on a toll access basis.

Literature Review

The traditional publishing model in which scholars give their articles to publishers, and those publishers sell the articles back to scholars and their universities is one that has hampered access to knowledge around the world. The rapid rate of increase in journal prices means that scholars must be associated with well-funded universities to access the full breadth of the scholarly literature, and this tends to disproportionately affect the access of periphery scholars. As early as 1995, this issue was discussed in *Scientific American*, which recounts journal cancellations in libraries across the developing world. Although Latin America was found to have the most access to major journals of the three regions surveyed, libraries in Africa, India, and Latin America were all found to be lacking access to necessary serials collections (Gibbs, 1995a). Sri Lankan scholar Suresh Canagarajah vividly recounts his experiences trying to get access to scholarly literature, when at his university it was unthinkable to get the latest scholarly journal or book. He speaks directly to the fact that his work and that of his peers was hampered without this access (Canagarajah, 2002). Consequently, many periphery scholars must employ slow, expensive, or convoluted work-arounds to deal with a lack of access, such as emailing article authors or traveling specifically to visit centre libraries (Bonaccorso et al., 2014). The purchasing power of developing world libraries is further taxed by the extreme prices charged by academic publishers (Arunachalam, 2003; Davison, Harris, Licker, & Shoib, 2005). Specifically in Latin America, limited financing means that university libraries often have incomplete collections with little ability to plan for the long term (Holdom, 2005; Terra Figari, 2007). However, at the date of writing there has been little to no research on holdings of specific

journals by periphery libraries, especially in humanities disciplines. This has made it hard to quantify the extent of this lack of access to journals. The problematic repercussions of this lack of access is often framed as one of distributive justice, where academic paywalls have recreated patterns of social exclusion and the dominance of the centre over the periphery (Alperín, Fischman, & Willinsky, 2008; Gómez & Bongiovani, 2012).

Insufficient access to scholarly publications creates a barrier to periphery scholars publishing in centre academic journals. Keeping up with the frontier of knowledge development in the scholarly literature of the centre is impossible without access to current journals and databases (Teferra, 2004). This lack of access creates a tendency to emphasize foundational works and to omit the latest developments of the centre (Terra Figari, 2007). This puts periphery scholars at a distinct disadvantage when publishing in journals of the centre, as the peer-review process requires writers to reference the most current centre scholarship (Gibbs, 1995b; Willinsky, 2006). Without access to the current literature of the centre, periphery scholars are left out of the scholarly conversation and excluded from full participation in the process of knowledge creation (Canagarajah, 2002; Holdom, 2005). This creates a situation in which developing countries have the art, but in a striking parallel to colonial exploitation of raw materials, it has to be analyzed in the centre to be turned into scholarly knowledge accepted by the centre (Canagarajah, 2002).

Latin America is in many ways at the forefront of creating open scholarly knowledge. For example, Open Access (OA) publishing has been readily adopted in Latin America. Indeed, the OA model is much more prevalent in Latin America than in most other regions; a full 51% of online journals in Latin America are open access (Alperín et al., 2011, 2008). Growing internet connectivity and the historical lack of visibility of Latin American print journals has meant that OA e-publishing gives scholars in

Latin America new opportunities to disseminate their research (Holdom, 2005). Several factors have enabled the wide adoption of OA in Latin America including the lack of an entrenched scholarly publishing industry and first-hand experience by Latin American scholars with the consequences of limited access (Alperín et al., 2008). Not only are e-journals flourishing, but open access repositories, databases where copies of articles are archived and made freely available, have allowed scholars to make their work openly available even when they publish in toll access journals (Alperín et al., 2008; Johnston, 2010).

Aims

The study's goal was to determine the availability of centre art journals at Latin American universities that are practicing open scholarship. The literature review revealed that Latin American scholars are making their work openly accessible to global scholars, but do scholars at these universities have access to the core journals of centre art scholarship?

Methods

The first step was identifying Latin American universities that are practicing open scholarship. This study used the OpenDOAR Database to select institutions. OpenDOAR lists universities with institutional repositories by country. These institutions have created and support databases where their affiliates can deposit their scholarly products and have them made openly available, demonstrating participation in the open access movement. Additionally, the resources and staff necessary to operate a repository suggest a certain minimum level of funding. Universities with a singular focus like engineering or medicine were eliminated as out of scope. Due to language limitations only institutions in Spanish speaking countries were selected. After excluding institutions that did not meet the criteria, there were a total of 78 institutions; however, for 18 of these, reliable subscription

information could not be located, so the final sample was 60 university libraries.

The study investigated access to two art history journals: the *Burlington Magazine* and the *Art Bulletin*. These two journals were selected because they are core journals for art history. The *Burlington Magazine* is the longest continually published art periodical in English. Published in the United Kingdom, it set the standard for scholarly art history publications, cementing its reputation with a string of well-respected editors (Fawcett & Phillipot, 1976). Beginning publication not long after, the *Art Bulletin* rose in prominence to become arguably the most influential art journal (Fawcett & Phillipot, 1976). It is published in the United States of America by the College Art Association. Neither journal focuses exclusively on Latin America; instead the articles, editorials, letters, and reviews in these journals are key sites of the scholarly back-and-forth that generates new scholarly knowledge in the centre. Because the goal was to determine Latin American scholars' ability to participate in the broader scholarly conversation going on in centre art history, these journals were selected specifically because of their importance to the discipline as a whole, rather than because of a focus on Latin American art. Selecting journals that solely study Latin American art would have risked pigeonholing Latin American scholars and suggesting that they are only able to work on local topics, while centre scholars enjoy the whole purview of global art to study.

The sixty university library websites and catalogs were investigated for access to each journal. Each of the various ways that universities had access to the journal was recorded. As an additional check to catalog and website searching, an e-mail in English and Spanish was sent to these sixty libraries, in order to confirm that availability had not been missed. The responses that were received were then checked against the information gathered from the websites. We found that the emails verified the information found on websites and catalogs.

This study has several limitations. Firstly, it includes only two art history journals and relatively expensive ones at that. However, these journals represent major loci of scholarly conversations in art history. Scholars attempting to write art history that is publishable in centre journals would find themselves confronting a nearly unbridgeable lacuna in their research without access to articles from these journals. While this is a limitation, the selected journals are used as indicators of problematic access to centre art history scholarship as a whole. Additionally, the study only examines Latin American universities with institutional repositories. Therefore, it does not necessarily reflect the situation at all Latin American universities, only those with repositories. However, if institutions with repositories are outliers, the funding commitment and know-how that a repository represents suggests that their libraries may be more well-funded than the average. As the study only looks at these major universities, it consequently left out smaller, perhaps more art-focused institutions such as museum libraries. While access at specialty libraries is certainly an interesting question, a major concern of this study was the ease and convenience of reading these journals at research universities, where the majority of scholars are concentrated. While scholars may be willing to make extraordinary efforts to track down a single key article, these hurdles waste scholars' time, and preclude them from keeping up with general trends and emerging ideas, which are made possible by easy access through one's institution.

Results

The results show that most Latin American scholars at institutions with repositories lack access to these two major journals of art history. A large percentage of institutions had no access to either publication. Where there was access it was generally suboptimal, often only available after an embargo or at the mercy of a commercial vendor which could drop coverage at any time.

The study found several ways that libraries provide access to these two journals. They may subscribe directly to print or electronic editions. Older issues of both journals are available through a subscription to JSTOR, though not current issues, as there is an embargo of five years for the *Burlington Magazine* and the *Art Bulletin* in JSTOR. Libraries that subscribe to some EBSCO or ProQuest full-text packages such as Academic Search Premiere can also get access to the *Art Bulletin*. However, this access is unstable, as these content aggregators can drop the full-text access at any time. Additionally, the extent of back issue access varies among packages, and none provide full access to the entire back file. There were five kinds of access for each journal possible at each institution.

1. Subscription: A direct subscription to the print or electronic version of the journal. Considered full access.
2. JSTOR: Access through JSTOR to back issues, but lacking the five most recent years due to the embargo.
3. Aggregator: Access via ProQuest and EBSCO to current issues and varying amounts of back file, but this access is unstable and unreliable.
4. JSTOR and Aggregator: Access to current issues via an aggregator as well as reliable access to back issues through JSTOR. Considered full access.
5. No Access.

As shown in figure 1, only a single institution had access to recent issues of the *Burlington Magazine*. In a full 72% of institutions, the

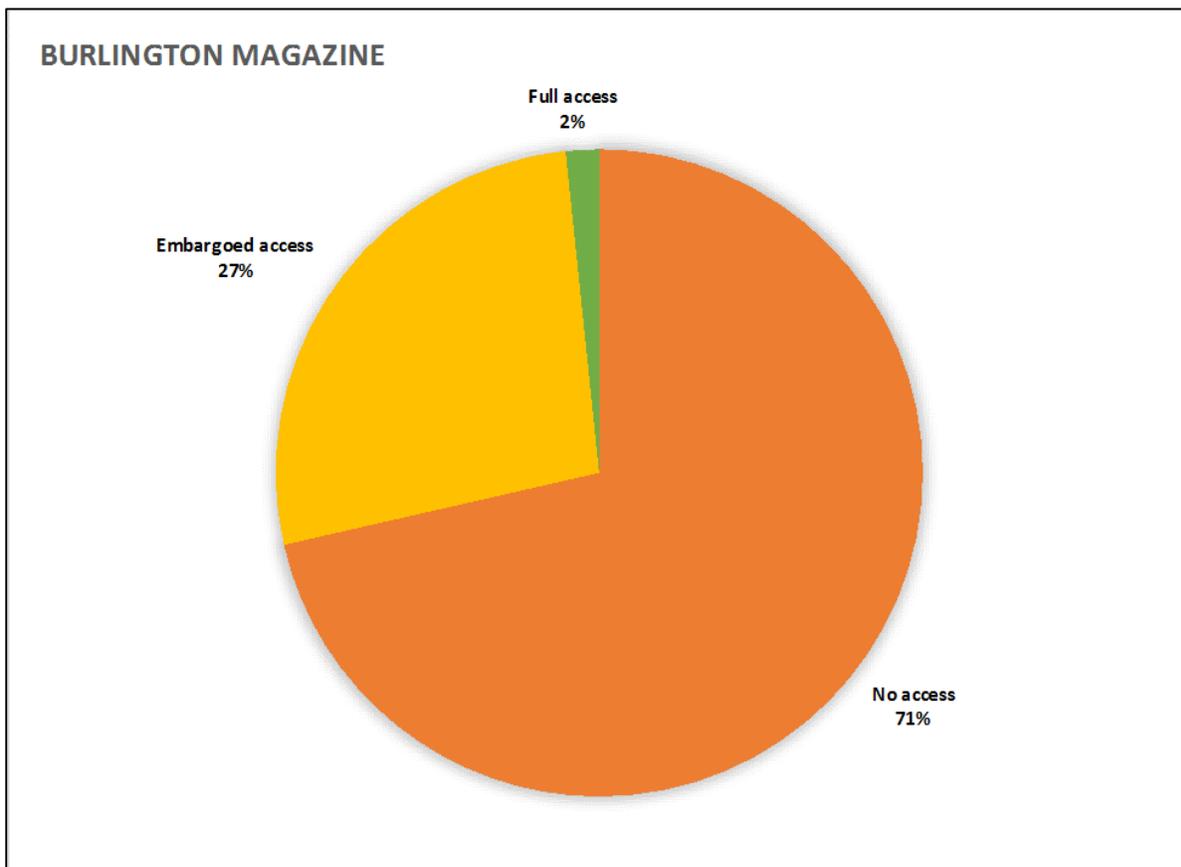


Figure 1
The *Burlington Magazine* is unavailable at most Latin American universities.

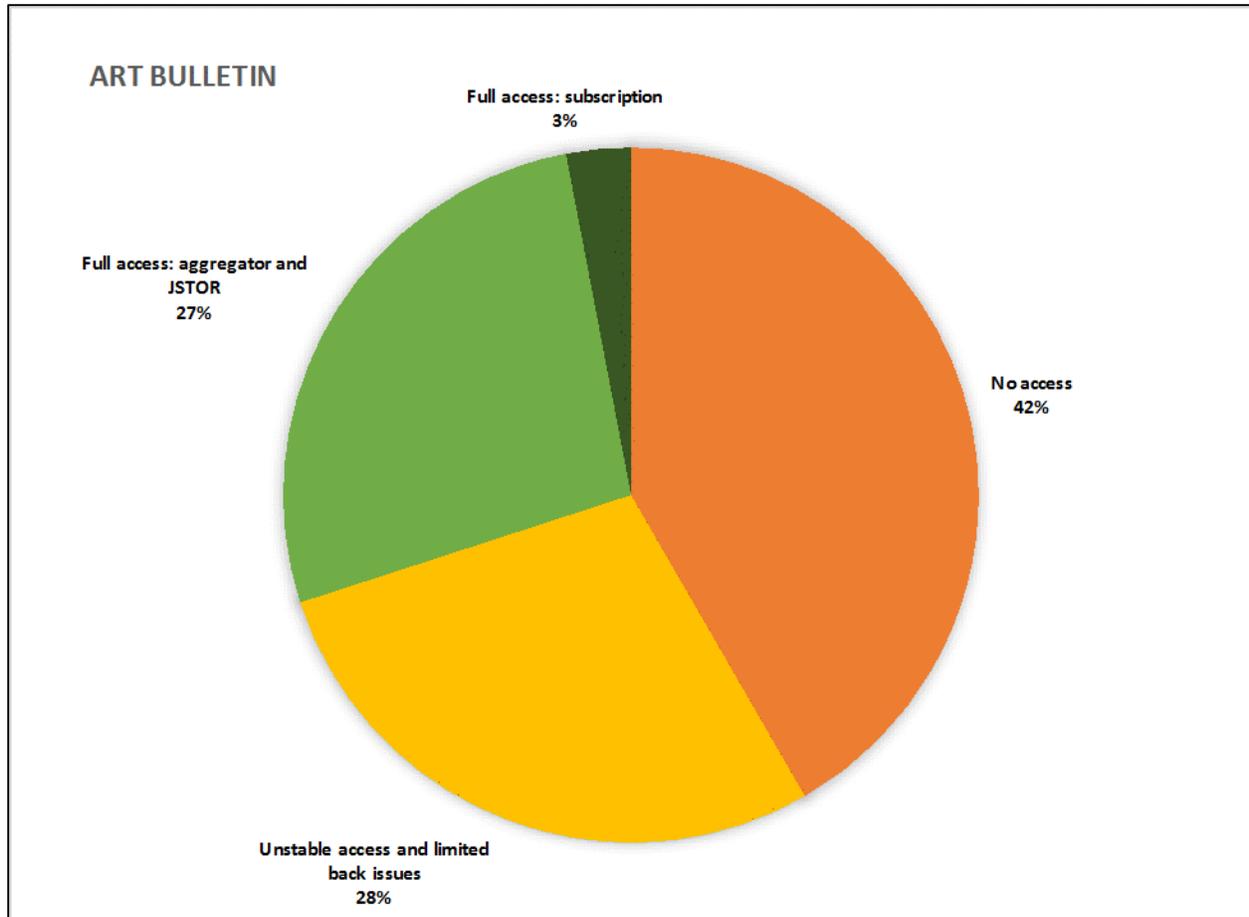


Figure 2

The *Art Bulletin* is more accessible, but much of the access is unreliable.

Burlington Magazine was not available at all. Another 27% had access through JSTOR to articles, but only with a five year embargo.

As shown in figure 2, *Art Bulletin* was unavailable at 42% of the institutions, while 58% had access of some kind to recent issues. The journal's relative availability is due to its inclusion in the typical package of full-text journals subscribed to through content aggregators such as EBSCO and ProQuest. Indeed, only two institutions (3%) had direct subscriptions to the *Art Bulletin*. This means that 55% of institutions had access to recent issues of the *Art Bulletin* entirely through aggregators. Problematically, however, access through content aggregators is not stable. EBSCO or ProQuest could cut *Art Bulletin* from their

packages or the *Art Bulletin* could decide to withdraw, and these institutions would be left with no access to the journal, not even to back issues. Additionally, for those institutions with only aggregator subscriptions, there is a lack of access to a substantial amount of the back file. Some institutions also had subscriptions to JSTOR (27%) that gives them stable access to back issues. When combined with their aggregator subscriptions, these institutions, along with those with direct subscriptions, were considered to have full access to the *Art Bulletin*. Overall, 30% of institutions had full access to the *Art Bulletin* either through subscription or a combination of JSTOR and aggregator access.

Figure 3 shows a cross-sample of both journals, in which 42% of institutions had no access to

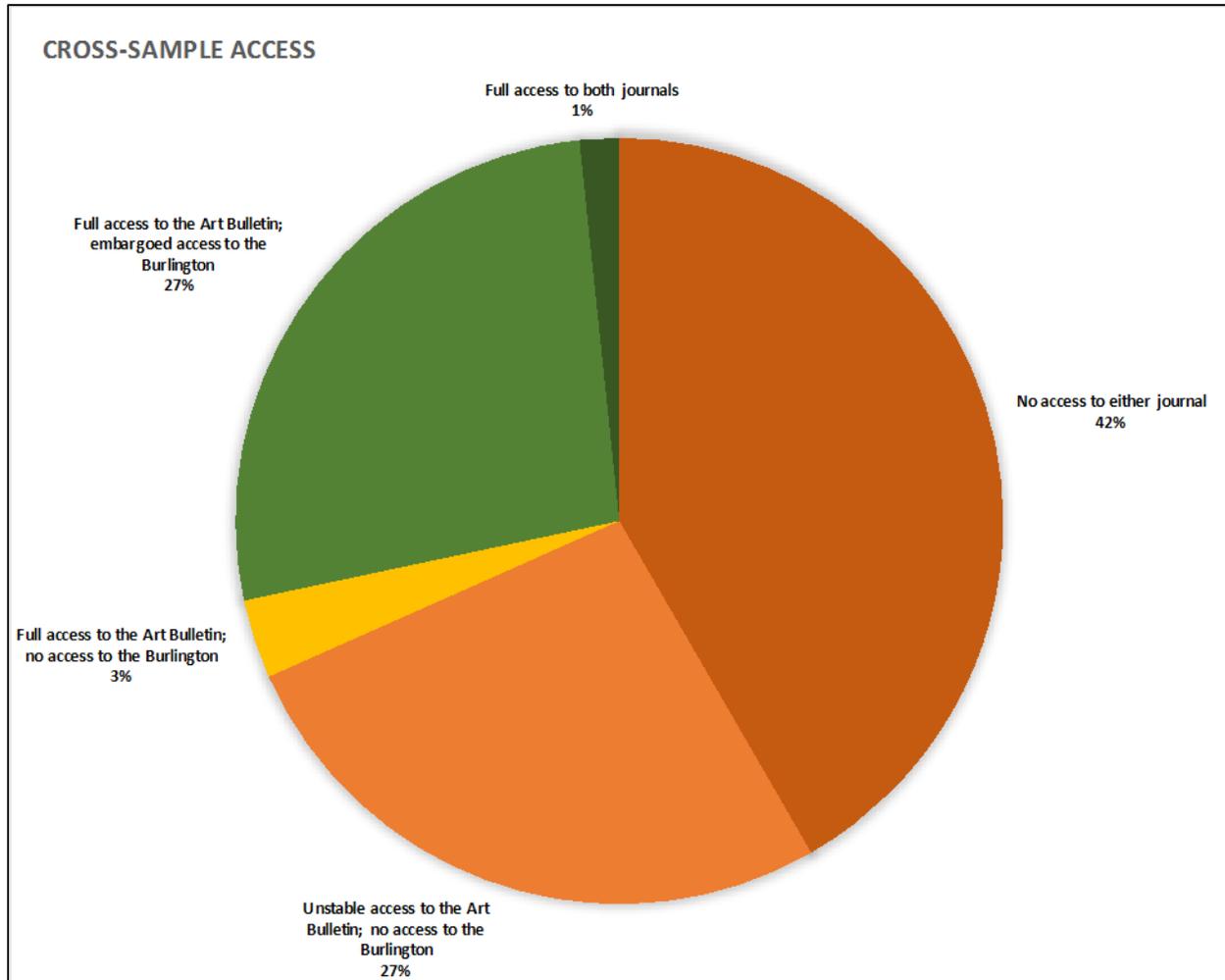


Figure 3

The combined picture of the two journals shows that many institutions lack access to either journal, while very few institutions have access to both.

either journal. A combined 30% had some access to one journal (always the *Art Bulletin*), either full access (3%) or unstable access (27%), while having no access to the *Burlington Magazine*. Only a combined 28% of institutions had some access to both journals. In this small group that had access to both journals, only one institution had full access to both journals without an embargo, while the rest had full access to the *Art Bulletin* but only had access to the *Burlington Magazine* after a five-year embargo.

Discussion

The results show a concerning lack of access to these centre-published art history journals at Latin American universities with institutional repositories. This study found that even when access does exist it is often delayed by five years. The results suggest that Latin American scholars at these institutions will have difficulty reading art history articles published in centre journals in a timely way. As the literature has shown, limited access to centre journals hinders periphery scholars' ability to publish in these same journals because of the difficulty of staying

up-to-date on the most recent centre theory (Gibbs, 1995b; Willinsky, 2006). Therefore, lack of access limits periphery scholars' ability to fully participate in centre discourse. They will be challenged to communicate their theories, ideas, and interpretations to centre scholars, and they will have difficulty debating the work of centre scholars, even when that scholarship is on the art of Latin America. Lack of access thus helps to perpetuate a colonial system of art history knowledge creation in which new knowledge is created and given authority by those in the centre, and where the art and ideas of Latin America only enters the scholarly discourse after being analyzed by centre scholars.

Due to barriers to participation in centre scholarship, the ideas and theories of these periphery scholars are likely to be published in local journals. These publications have a high chance of remaining unseen by centre scholars. Previous studies have shown that much of the art history published in Latin America, though often made available through open access, is difficult to find through conventional research methods (Alperin et al., 2011; Evans, Thompson, & Watkins, 2011; Holdom, 2005). As a result of inadequate information access, there is breakdown in global scholarly communication, where art history ideas are not being transmitted between centre and periphery. The theory and analyses created in both the periphery and the centre remain in separate spheres, rather than becoming engaged in meaningful dialogue and productively building on one another. Thus the scholarly conversation in art history is impoverished, losing key voices while privileging those scholars with greater information resources.

Solving the access problem for these Latin American universities will require a change in traditional systems of knowledge distribution in the discipline. Simply having Latin American institutions increase their journal subscriptions is not a viable solution. When many libraries are cancelling subscriptions, and the rising cost of existing subscriptions exceeds inflation, this is

simply untenable (Hoskins & Stilwell, 2011; Spencer & Millson-Martula, 2006). Centre scholars should question whether only publishing in a scholarly journal, even (and perhaps particularly) top tier toll-access journals, adequately disseminates their work to the global scholarly community. Open access publishing is a well-established alternative model in which access is free for the reader. Open access has already been adopted by many Latin American scholars: all the institutions in this study already have institutional repositories, and open access journals are far more popular in Latin America than in the United States. If centre scholars were to increase their adoption of open access practices, their scholarship would become far more accessible and easily available to Latin American scholars. Importantly this would start to alleviate access problems in Latin America and facilitate global conversations.

Conclusion

Access to scholarship is often overlooked in calls for a more global art history. But far from being a secondary concern, it is a key requirement for scholarly conversations that truly integrate global perspectives and move away from an inherently limited centre-out model of scholarship. More openly available scholarship is necessary if global voices are to participate in centre art history, and if centre and periphery discourses are to be joined into a single, richer discussion. It seems that traditional models for access to and dissemination of scholarship are not up to this task. The evidence of substandard access to centre art history scholarship suggests there is further work to be done investigating access to information in the periphery, as well as the effect of this limited access on the work of scholars in a range of other disciplines. It is this author's sincere hope that this work will catalyze and build towards sustainable solutions, as well as motivate individual scholars to help create a more global discourse by moving toward open access scholarship.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank his research assistant, Amanda Saracho, whose language skills and time spent combing library websites were key to the writing of this article.

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