

Between Bogotá and Munich: Godula Buchholz and South American art in Germany

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The German art historian and gallerist Godula Buchholz (*1935) lived and worked in Bogotá, Colombia from 1951 until 1963, before returning to Germany where she has resided ever since. Her work as an art historian and gallery owner between two regions (Colombia/South America and Germany/Europe) features connectivities and dis:connectivities. As a young German immigrant in Colombia, initially dis:connected from her new country, she was able to connect with artists, institutions and intellectual networks in South America and Europe, thus promoting cultural exchange between them. After returning to Germany in 1963 and founding her pioneering gallery in 1965, she was able to benefit from these experiences and connections. However, having to start over, given that she hadn't been living there for long, and deciding to dedicate herself to promoting South American art, which was little known in the West German art scene, she found herself dis:connected again. Still, she was able to manage the tensions inherent in dis:connectivity and establish her work, playing a key role in the presentation and consolidation of South American art and artists in Germany.

This article focuses on her work in Colombia and later in Germany, particularly from 1965, when she founded the Galerie Buchholz in Munich, until 1977.¹ It sheds light on her role in promoting cultural



Fig. 1
Godula Buchholz in Bogotá, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Zentralarchiv, IV-NL Buchholz 24.

¹ The gallery existed until 2015 in Munich and elsewhere. 'Godula Buchholz: 1965-2015 Galerie Buchholz', 2021, accessed 15 May 2025, <https://www.werkraum-buchholz.com/die-galerie.html>.

exchange between South America and Germany and as a pioneering art historian and female gallery owner in Munich.

Godula Buchholz's work at the Librería Buchholz in Bogotá

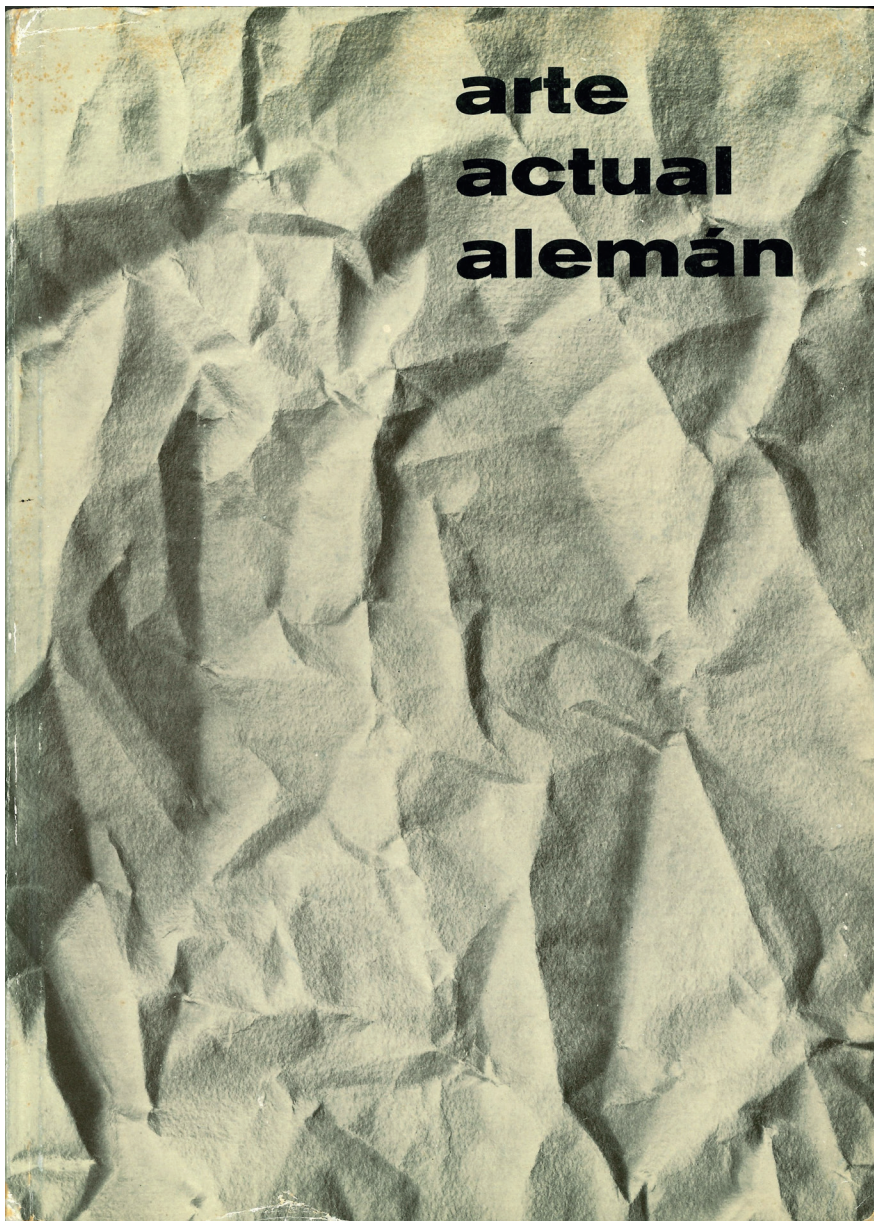
In 1951, Godula Buchholz emigrated with her family to Bogotá, Colombia, where her father, the bookseller and art dealer Karl Buchholz (1901-1992), founded the Librería Buchholz, which existed until 1992.² The Librería Buchholz followed the model of a bookstore-gallery, as Karl had also opened in Berlin, Madrid and Lisbon, and became a hub for the intellectual and German-speaking community in the city (fig. 1).

Godula studied art history in Paris between 1955 and 1958. She then returned to Bogotá and worked at the bookstore, where she organised numerous art exhibitions from 1958.³ The Librería's exhibitions focused on Colombian artists, like Alejandro Obregón, as well as German artists living in Colombia, such as Guillermo Wiedemann and Kurt Levy. It also featured mostly graphic works of some European artists, like Pablo Picasso. Moreover, she presented some group exhibitions of modern German art, such as *Arte Gráfico Alemán Contemporáneo* (1958) and *Arte Gráfico Abstracto Alemán* (1959).⁴ As the South American public's first exposure to some German artists, the travelling exhibition *Arte Actual Alemán*, presented in 1960 in Caracas, Lima and Bogotá aroused great interest and was important for her career. It displayed 137 paintings and 44 sculptures assembled for Karl Buchholz by the Deutsche Künstlerbund in Berlin. In 1962 *Arte Actual Alemán* was also presented in Buenos Aires, Montevideo and Santiago de Chile, accompanied by Godula Buchholz (fig. 2). During the exhibition, she visited some of the artists based there. Thus, she put together a new exhibition, *Pinturas suramericanas hoy*, which she completed with more works from artists in Peru, Venezuela and Colombia and was presented in late 1962 in Bogotá and Caracas. This exhibition inspired a new travelling exhibition entitled *Südamerikanische Malerei der Gegenwart*, which marked her return to Germany in 1963.

2 Godula Buchholz, *Karl Buchholz Buch- und Kunsthändler im 20. Jahrhundert – Sein Leben und seine Buchhandlungen und Galerien* Berlin, New York, Bukarest, Lissabon, Madrid, Bogotá (Cologne: DuMont, 2005), 190.

3 Buchholz, *Karl Buchholz*, 195, 99.

4 Buchholz, *Karl Buchholz*, 202.



Galerie Buchholz München 1965-1977: exhibiting South American art in Germany

Südamerikanische Malerei der Gegenwart was presented between 1963 and 1964 in four German cities, Berlin, Bonn, Baden-Baden and Pforzheim, and surveyed contemporary trends in eight South American countries for the first time in Germany. Buchholz selected 28 young artists who had helped develop painting in South America from approximately 1958 to 1960, such as Fernando Botero and Rómulo Macció (fig. 3).⁵ While the exhibition was running at the Staatliche Kunsthalle in Baden-Baden, Buchholz met the director Dietrich Mahlow (1920-2013), who offered her a job

⁵ *Südamerikanische Malerei der Gegenwart*, ed. Städtische Kunstsammlungen Bonn (Bonn: Haus der Städtischen Kunstsammlungen, 1963).

Fig. 2
Cover of the exhibition catalogue
Arte Actual Alemán in Buenos Aires,
Montevideo, Santiago de Chile, 1962,
SMB-ZA, IV-NL Buchholz 33.



Fig. 3
 Cover of the exhibition catalogue
*Südamerikanische Malerei der
 Gegenwart*, SMB-ZA, IV-NL Buchholz
 33.

as an assistant curator, and she worked there from 1963 to 1965.⁶ After deciding to open her own gallery in Germany, but having long lived elsewhere and unsure of where to locate it, she followed Mahlow's recommendation and decided on Munich, despite being unfamiliar with the city or its art scene. She found a suitable space on a mezzanine floor at Maximilianstraße 29, and she opened the Galerie Buchholz in 1965 (fig. 4).⁷ It was probably the best place

6 Godula Buchholz, 'Questions about the life and work of Godula Buchholz and the Galerie Buchholz, Munich', interview by Claudia Cendales Paredes, 15 February & 11 May 2025. She participated in exhibitions like *Illustrationen* in 1964. See *Illustrationen*, ed. Godula Buchholz and Dietrich Mahlow (Baden-Baden: Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, 1964).

7 Buchholz, interview.



for a gallery, as by the 1960s there were already several galleries located in Maximilianstraße, one of Munich's grand boulevards.⁸

The Galerie Buchholz specialised in contemporary South American art, especially during its first five years.⁹ It also presented works by contemporary Spanish, Portuguese and German artists, and exhibited painting, sculpture, as well as graphic works and drawings. From the mid-1970s, it became more international.¹⁰ The gallery's first exhibition was *Malerei aus Südamerika* in 1965, which featured the works of five painters from Bolivia, Colombia and Peru, including Fernando Botero, Fernando Szyszlo and the French artist Fernand Léger with graphic works.¹¹ In the exhibition catalogue, Godula alluded to the connection to the Librería in Bogotá, but despite profiting from its support and advice, she made her own decisions regarding her gallery in Munich.¹²

8 These galleries collaborated to promote themselves in the Interessengemeinschaft Galerien Maximilianstraße and from the beginning of the 1970s they organised annual joint exhibitions. The Galerie Buchholz participated in *Handzeichnungen* in 1976. See *Handzeichnungen: Gemeinsame Ausstellung der Galerien in der Maximilianstrasse München*, ed. Jörg Schellmann, Jürgen Weihrauch, and Hartmut Stöcker (Munich, 1976).

9 Buchholz, *Karl Buchholz*, 223.

10 Buchholz, interview.

11 *Malerei aus Südamerika* (Munich: Galerie Buchholz, 1965).

12 Buchholz, interview.

Fig. 4
Galerie Buchholz in Munich, ca. 1972,
Godula Buchholz archive, Munich.

In 1965 she also organised other exhibitions in the Galerie Buchholz, including *Graphik aus Südamerika* (14.9.-23.10.1965) and in subsequent years several individual and group exhibitions on South American artists.¹³

When Godula founded the Galerie Buchholz in Munich in 1965, 20th-century art from Latin America was neither very popular nor very present in Munich and greater West Germany.¹⁴ Although some of the artists she presented had already exhibited in Germany before, such as Jesús Rafael Soto, Julio Le Parc and Sergio de Camargo, others were nearly unknown in Germany, such as Fernando Botero and Edgar Negret. In the introduction to *Women Art Dealers Creating Markets for Modern Art 1940–1990*, Véronique Chagnon-Burke refers to female gallerists, especially those operating before the 1970s, as pioneers – serious entrepreneurs who carved out spaces for themselves in a male-dominated art world. They worked as small business owners when there were few women in positions of power, and they took risks, exploring both new tastes and territories.¹⁵ Although this book does not cover Godula Buchholz, that description fit her well, as she decided to explore new tastes and new territories first in Colombia, presenting German art, but especially in Germany, presenting South American art in her own gallery.

Like other female gallery owners interested in emerging and overlooked art and managing artists' early careers, Buchholz contributed greatly to Fernando Botero's renown in Germany and Europe, as she, Botero and other sources have acknowledged.¹⁶ As she described in a recent interview, establishing her gallery and introducing artists like Botero required much practical work, such as importing the works from South America and elsewhere to Germany, and employing different strategies to popularise the unfamiliar artists, as evidenced by Botero's promotion. In the early 1960s, Buchholz discovered Botero's work at an exhibition during her stay in Bogotá. She included him in exhibitions in South America, like *Pinturas suramericanas hoy*, and in Germany, like *Südamerikanische Malerei der Gegenwart*, as mentioned above. After opening her gallery in Munich, she visited him in New York and represented him for a few years.¹⁷ Prior to 1977, she

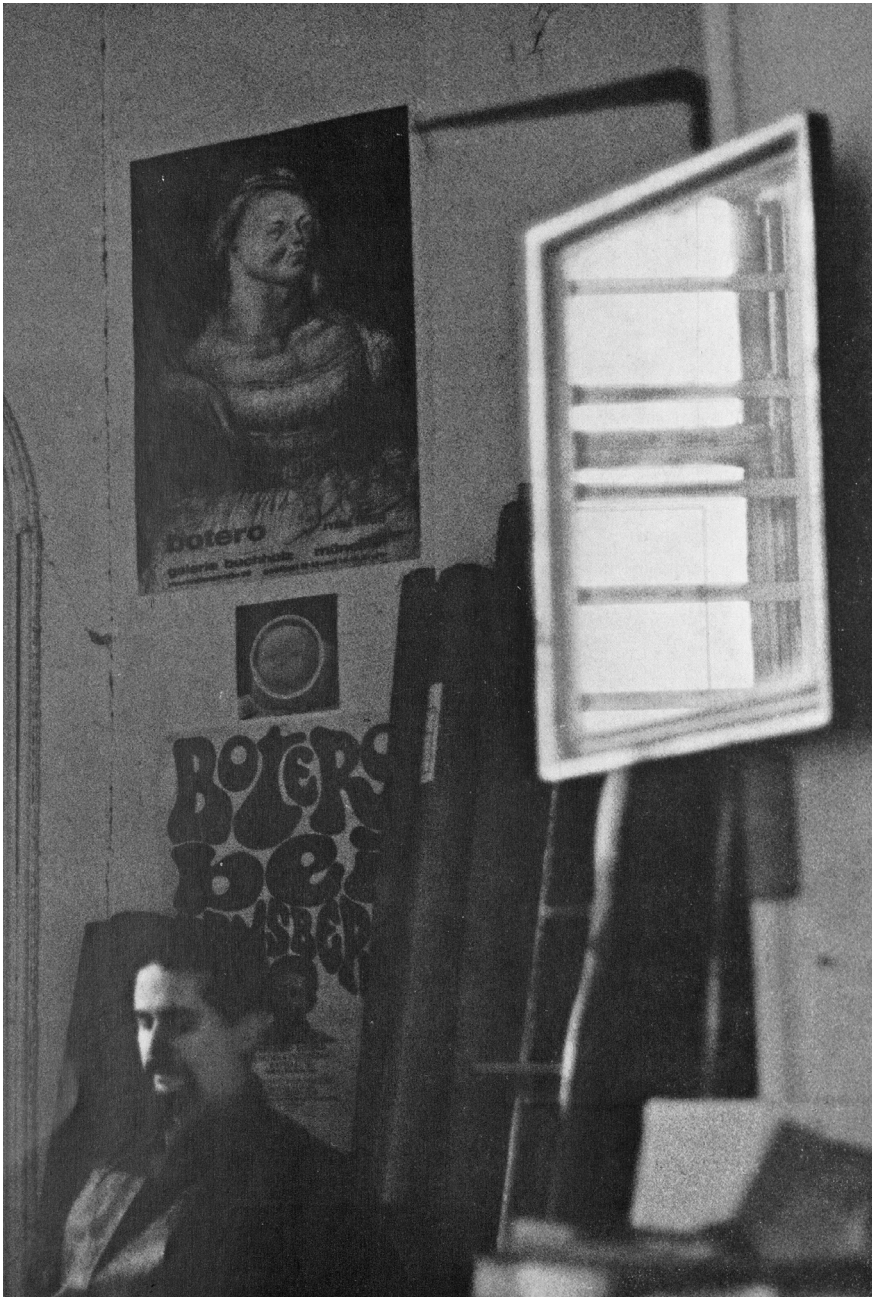
¹³ See the list of the exhibitions held there in 'Godula Buchholz'.

¹⁴ See the brief description in Michael Nungesser, 'Moderne Kunst aus Lateinamerika: Rezeptionsbericht zur Lage in Deutschland', in *De orbis Hispani linguis litteris historia moribus: Festschrift für Dietrich Briesemeister zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Axel Schönberger and Klaus Zimmermann, vol. 2, (Domus: Frankfurt, 1994), 1804-05.

¹⁵ Véronique Chagnon-Burke, 'Introduction: women art dealers: creating markets for modern art, 1940-90', in *Women Art Dealers Creating Markets for Modern Art, 1940-1990*, ed. Véronique Chagnon-Burke and Caterina Toschi (London: Bloomsbury, 2024), 1.

¹⁶ Buchholz, interview; Gottfried Sello, 'Botero-Ausstellung in Baden-Baden Paradies der Dicken', *Die Zeit*, 3 April 1970; Heinrich Wigand Petzet, 'Botero Ausstellung in Baden-Baden – Feist und reglos: gequollener Kuchenteig', *National-Zeitung Basel* (Basel), 14 April 1970; Chagnon-Burke, 'Introduction', 1.

¹⁷ Buchholz, interview.



organised, supported and participated in numerous exhibitions about him at her gallery and elsewhere in Germany,¹⁸ such as two 1966 exhibitions, one at the Galerie Buchholz in Munich and Botero's first solo exhibition in a European museum at the Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, which she curated.¹⁹ She also collaborated with other galleries and museums, contacting them and offering them works, as when she contacted the Galerie Brusberg in Hanover to promote Botero. When German and South American art magazines and newspapers reported on the exhibitions and the growing appreciation for the artists she featured, she collaborated with some of them, providing information and photographs. She also edited catalogues of

¹⁸ See the list of the exhibitions in 'Godula Buchholz'.

¹⁹ 'Godula Buchholz'; *Fernando Botero*, (Munich: Galerie Buchholz, 1966).

Fig. 5
Fernando Botero in his studio,
photograph by Godula Buchholz,
Godula Buchholz archive, Munich.

the exhibitions presented at her gallery, featuring photographs, sometimes her own.²⁰ From 1970, she began editing art books, starting with a book related to a travelling exhibition of Botero (fig. 5).²¹ She also participated in art fairs, such as International Kunstmesse Basel and the Kölner Kunstmarkt,²² where in 1968 she was one of the few female gallery owners to be present with her gallery.²³

In 1976, Godula Buchholz stated in an article that, of the South American artists the gallery had supported, Botero was the first to achieve international recognition.²⁴ While the interest his work generated in Germany was an important factor, Godula's work supporting and promoting paved the way.

Managing connectivities and dis:connectivities

Godula Buchholz is almost completely unknown in Colombia, despite having played an important role working with her father at the Librería Buchholz, whose relevance in the cultural sphere of 20th-century Colombia is widely acknowledged. After her return to Germany, Godula Buchholz did pioneering work as a woman gallery owner at the Galerie Buchholz in Munich, which has not yet been recognised.

A few years ago, when researching South American art networks with West Germany in the post-war period, I came into contact with her work, initially through her father's archive in Berlin. Through further research and interviews with her, I discovered her important work in the promotion of modern art and cultural exchange between Germany and South America, topics that are part of my research focus. I found an affinity with her and wanted to learn more about her work. This paper gives a brief overview of some preliminary results of my research on her and her work, especially about the connectivities and dis:connectivities between two regions and interests.

20 Buchholz, interview.

21 *Fernando Botero*; 'Godula Buchholz'.

22 Bernhard Rohe, 'Der Kölner Kunstmarkt', *Das Kunstwerk* XXI, no. 11-12 (1968).

23 See the photograph of the participants in 'Kunstmarkt Köln '68', *Aachener Nachrichten* (Aachen), 14 November 1968; Buchholz, interview.

24 Godula Buchholz, 'Galerie Buchholz', *Das Kunstwerk* XXI, no. 5-6 (1974).

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