

[SLIDE] Upon its creation in 1938, FIAF announced its global ambitions in its choice of name, the *Fédération Internationale des Archives du Film*. Yet only U.S. and European institutions participated in its creation—namely, the Film Library of New York’s Museum of Modern Art, the National Film Library of England (now the British Film Institute), the *Cinémathèque Française*, and Germany’s *Reichsfilmarchiv*. Currently, under a third of FIAF members and affiliates are located in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. FIAF has continued to expand its global outreach efforts in recent years—for example, by developing the *School on Wheels*, a condensed training program that traveled to several Latin American locations in the early 2000s, and holding recent editions of its *Film Preservation and Restoration School* in Singapore, Mumbai, and Buenos Aires. Nevertheless, these percentages suggest there are still significant strides to be made in the forging of a truly global film preservation movement.

In this presentation, I trace the historical roots both of FIAF’s internationalism and of the geopolitical disparities that continue to shape its institutional structure, ranging from limited state investment in cultural activities to the absence of stable film industries and even climate-related obstacles to preservation, with hot temperatures tending to accelerate the decay of film materials. I’ll focus on the case of Latin America, a region that witnessed the first widespread expansion of the film preservation movement outside the United States and Europe, in the two decades following the Second World War. Through the creation of the short-lived *Latin American Pool* active between 1954 and 1960, the region became a laboratory for FIAF’s attempts in the 1950s to establish regional hubs to facilitate the coordination of preservation efforts and the circulation of film materials. This regional section also held out the promise of addressing structural issues that impeded Latin American archives’ participation in FIAF, an initiative that ultimately failed

due to problems internal to member archives, as well as a lack of significant shifts within FIAF that might have rendered its activities more accessible to organizations located outside the U.S. and Europe. Drawing on institutional records from a number of archives, including documents recently made available by FIAF online, I chart the opportunities and challenges represented by Latin American cinémathèques during FIAF's early years, and briefly consider their implications for film preservation efforts eighty years after FIAF's founding.

As Caroline Frick points out in *Saving Cinema: The Politics of Preservation*, histories of the film archiving movement often focus on the clash of personalities and approaches between Ernest Lindgren of the British Film Institute (who prioritized the physical preservation of archival materials) and [SLIDE] Henri Langlois of the Cinémathèque Française (who favored broad access to film prints, sometimes to the detriment of their long-term survival), a divide that contributed to Langlois's dramatic break from FIAF in 1959. However, less attention has been devoted to Langlois's active role in fostering the creation of film archives, which he appears to have imagined as nodes in a growing international network for the circulation of moving-image heritage, especially in Latin America, where nine film archives were founded between 1948 and 1966. More cynically, Langlois's institution-building efforts could be viewed as a bid for greater influence within FIAF, since these young archives functioned as his ready-made allies, and often designated Langlois as their proxy when they were unable to send delegates (a frequent occurrence for non-European members). Langlois's institution-building efforts heavily favored preservation endeavors that were, in his words, "democratic, and rooted in the cineclubs," by contrast with archives that were "aristocratic, and with New York influences" and state-sponsored institutions like the BFI.<sup>1</sup> [SLIDE] Latin American film enthusiasts shared the passion for rediscovering films that had passed out of commercial circulation that animated the Cercle du

Cinéma film society organized by Langlois and Georges Franju, which gave rise to the Cinémathèque Française in 1936. [SLIDE]

Langlois encouraged Latin American film enthusiasts who were studying or working in France to create cinémathèques as a means of accessing archival materials from FIAF, whose statutes only permitted exchanges of prints between member archives. The Cinemateca Brasileira began its existence as a department of São Paulo's newly created Museum of Modern Art, thanks to the contact between Langlois and the Clube de Cinema, a São Paulo film society. This relationship was mediated by Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes, a student at Paris's Institut des Hautes Études Cinématographiques and a frequent attendee of the Cinémathèque Française's archival screenings. [SLIDE] With direction from Langlois, Salles Gomes instructed his São Paulo contacts to create the Filmoteca in 1948 and coordinated the organization's first acquisitions from the Cinémathèque Française. Similarly, the short-lived pre-Revolutionary Cinemateca de Cuba emerged from a 1951 meeting between Langlois and the Cuban film student and cineclub organizer, Germán Puig. Langlois promised to furnish his organization with a steady supply of prints provided that an archival structure was created in order to legally receive them. Langlois also encouraged Rolando Fustiñana, an Argentine critic and film society organizer, to create the Cinemateca Argentina during a conversation at the Cannes film festival in 1949 after the two were introduced by Salles Gomes.<sup>2</sup> Langlois also encouraged the creation of the Cinemateca Colombiana, an outgrowth of Bogotá's Cine Club de Colombia, through correspondence with its principal organizer Luis Vicens [SLIDE], and also provided prints and guidance to incipient archives in Chile and Venezuela.<sup>3</sup> While some of these cinémathèques proved ephemeral or precarious—the Cinemateca de Cuba lasted a mere five years in its original incarnation, and the Cinemateca Colombiana had managed to collect only fifteen films by 1966, over a decade after

its founding—others had a lasting existence. Notably, the Filмотeca do Museu de Arte Modern de São Paulo became the Cinemateca Brasileira—arguably Latin America’s largest and most robust film archive—in 1956. For a number of these Latin American film enthusiasts, European sojourns also provided an opportunity to participate in FIAF conferences. Most notably, Salles Gomes became the organization’s vice president in 1951 and maintained the position for several years.

In keeping with their collective roots in the film society movement, this first wave of Latin American archives established in the late forties and early fifties emphasized the acquisition of an emerging canon of film “classics” that could be distributed to cineclubs for a fee, rather than the preservation of a national film heritage. (As Frick and others note, nation-ness proved to be the organizing principle of most preservation efforts through the 1980s, when regional archives and “orphan films” began to take on greater significance). While perhaps logical enough in Latin American nations that lacked commercial cinemas, it cannot explain the initial dearth of interest in domestic production in Argentina and Brazil, which both possessed robust film industries in the period. Given their collecting priorities, Latin American archives presented especially interesting possibilities as a test case for two global initiatives endorsed by the FIAF membership in 1952—one designed to create regional bodies to coordinate the duplication of film materials outside the archive-to-archive relations that had previously characterized the organization, a second to create a repository of prints for circulation in retrospectives and other non-commercial exhibition contexts.<sup>4</sup> [SLIDE] The duplication initiative was to be coordinated within four zones that map out FIAF’s geographic limits in the period: Eastern Europe, Western Europe, North America, and South America. The second, related initiative was the creation of an international circulation pool to foster the circulation of prints.

[SLIDE] The resolution specified that “Each cinémathèque commits itself to entrust to FIAF’s Executive Bureau the most representative films of its cinema to be circulated independently of bilateral exchanges, through FIAF member countries and those countries where FIAF’s steering committee deems it desirable to encourage or create a national film archives with an eye to its eventual admission to FIAF.” This proposed circulation pool not only promised to offer a more geographically expansive understanding of film history, but also an imperative to propagate the film preservation movement internationally through the circulation of film materials—precisely the logic that had driven Langlois’s institution-building efforts in Latin America.

When introducing these initiatives at the 1952 FIAF congress in Cambridge, Langlois stressed their capacity to mitigate the fundamentally disadvantaged position of young, poorly funded cinémathèques within a system based on exchanges between institutions.<sup>5</sup> In this sense, the initiatives could potentially redress structural imbalances between the organization’s members, defined in terms of levels of domestic film production, funding, and longevity and stability. Comments made by Langlois at the 1957 FIAF congress further flesh out his position on the relationship between the circulation of films, exhibition activities, and the vibrancy of the film preservation movement; [SLIDE] he states, “The goal of the pool is to help incipient archives obtain programming. It is absolutely certain that M. Vicens in Colombia, or M. Roland [Fustiñana] in Argentina, and tomorrow someone in Karachi in India can obtain programming, the archive movement will gain momentum.” (Note Langlois’s tenuous grasp of Asian geography; Karachi is in Pakistan). Further suggesting Latin America’s role as a laboratory for the global expansion of the movement, the proceedings from the 1954 conference in Lausanne, where the Latin American Pool was formally created, note that [SLIDE] “Upon the future

creation of cinémathèques in Asia and Africa, the founding members of FIAF should take the initiative to constitute local bureaus and regional meetings on the South American model.”<sup>6</sup>

Although FIAF’s proposed regional duplication and international circulation pools ultimately failed to materialize in any practical sense, the Latin American Pool that initiated its activities in 1955 embodied many of their principles. The immediate impetus for the Latin American Pool’s creation can again be traced to Langlois, who apparently outlined the project to Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes during the 1954 Festival Internacional do Cinema held in São Paulo, where Langlois was a guest of honor. In theory, its members would compare their inventories to avoid duplicating their efforts when preserving specific film titles. In addition, members would pool funds in order to copy prints that would be furnished to growing networks of film societies, upon which several of the archives relied financially.

During the first years of the Latin American Pool’s existence, the regional section emerged as a means of redressing structural issues, both economic and geographic in nature, that marginalized Latin American cinémathèques within FIAF. Most notably, travel expenses associated with attending the yearly FIAF congress were often prohibitive for cash-strapped archives located at great distances from the conference sites [SLIDE]. (FIAF Congresses were held exclusively in Europe between 1939 and 1969; and the first to take place in Latin America was held in Mexico City in 1976.) Costs could be minimized by holding regional meetings— [SLIDE] which ultimately took place in 1955, 1956, 1959, and 1960—and delegating a single representative to attend and report on the activities of the Latin American Pool. The possibility of actually holding meetings in Latin America is rarely mentioned in FIAF records from the period, though Langlois’s original plan for the Latin American pool suggests that one might be held in São Paulo “every twenty years.” The strategy of designating a Latin American representative

proved largely ineffective, even when creative solutions were pursued, such as recruiting diplomats and cultural workers living in Europe to serve as FIAF delegates. Tellingly, the delivery of the Latin American Pool's first report to FIAF, slated for the 1955 Warsaw congress, never took place. While Salles Gomes volunteered to attend, neither FIAF nor his own institution proved able to pay his airfare, and his replacement failed to arrive at the conference on time.

Similarly, unfavorable currency exchange rates placed a disproportionate burden on many Latin American archives, who were obligated to pay their FIAF dues in Swiss francs. This issue was somewhat mitigated by a provision that allowed members to pay half the sum directly to the Latin American Pool, housed in the offices of the Cinemateca Uruguaya, where it was to fund regional activities directly. Nevertheless, these accommodations failed to ensure smooth relations between FIAF and financially precarious Latin American archives. Letters inquiring about unpaid dues have proved one of most abundant types of correspondence I've encountered between FIAF and its Latin American members. One exchange between Ernest Lindgren and Eugenio Hintz of SODRE (Uruguay's state film archive) in the late sixties is particularly telling. [SLIDE] In one of a series of increasingly stern letters, Lindgren writes, "We have now reached the point where we feel that the attitude of our South American members is not really due to financial difficulties at all (with good will these can be overcome), but is quite simply the result of a lack of seriousness and a lack of interest....Many of us therefore feel that that the time has come to accept the reality of this situation and to regard the South American film archives as deleted from membership and to liquidate all our memberships on your Continent."<sup>7</sup> [SLIDE] Hintz responded to a later inquiry from Lindgren, "I would like to avoid excuses in these circumstances, except to say that with a 135% rise in the cost of living and a 101% devaluation of Uruguayan currency (both world records very probably) I feel sometimes happy when I find

paper to write on.”<sup>8</sup> While both sides of the dispute likely had merits, Lindgren’s comments do suggest limited awareness of truly challenging in Latin American archives.

Such frictions, along with Langlois’s exit from FIAF in 1959, contributed to the Latin America Pool’s effective dissolution after 1960. Ongoing obstacles to intraregional cooperation—including difficulties convincing national governments to waive customs duties for prints destined for noncommercial uses and a lack of available funds to build collections by duplicating films held by other archives—had prevented the regional section’s activities from gaining momentum. [SLIDE] In 1965, the creation of the Unión de Cinematecas de América Latina at the Mar del Plata film festival proposed a form of institutional affiliation no longer mediated by FIAF. As Janet Ceja Alcalá has argued, this new organization emphasized a socially engaged and often politicized preservation practice, though this orientation itself proved controversial, ultimately dividing UCAL during the 1970s and contributing to its disappearance in the 1980s.

More than offering lessons for the contemporary audiovisual preservation movement, the history of FIAF’s Latin American Pool and its place within FIAF’s broader globalizing project reads as a cautionary tale about the difficulties entailed in an internationalism exercised from above, or perhaps more accurately, from supposed “centers” of cultural production to their peripheries, as well as the challenges in bringing about structural change within organizations shaped largely by European concerns. It also highlights—by contrast—the productive potential of organizations that are truly regional in nature, rather than relying on the mediation of international bodies (one could consider the example of the SouthEast Asia-Pacific AudioVisual Association formed in 1995 and still active today). The case of Latin American archives thus



highlights both the limitations and the lasting legacy of FIAF's 1950s vision for global film preservation.

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<sup>1</sup> Henri Langlois de José María Podestá, March 4, 1956. Cinemateca Uruguay.

<sup>2</sup> See congress proceedings (year/page).

<sup>3</sup> Janet Ceja Alcalá, "Imperfect Archives," 75.

<sup>4</sup> Résumé des principaux points abordés au cours du Congrès de la Fédération Internationale des Archives du Film, Amsterdam, 27 October – 5 November 1952, 3-4.

<sup>5</sup> Rapport du Congrès d'Amsterdam, 98-99 [PDF].

<sup>6</sup> FIAF archive, CON/008 - Congrès Lausanne, Resultats des TrauvauX et Resolutions, 8.

<sup>7</sup> Ernest Lindgren to Eugenio Hintz, June 10, 1966. FIAF; Folder, Montevideo – SODRE.

<sup>8</sup> Eugenio Hintz to Ernest Lindgren, January 30, 1968. FIAF – Montevideo – SODRE.