

GETTY RESEARCH INSTITUTE ACQUIRES ARCHIVE OF VENEZUELAN INTELLECTUAL AND PHOTOGRAPHER ALFREDO BOULTON



Puerto Nutrias, 1948, Alfredo Boulton (Venezuelan, 1908-1995), Gelatin silver print
Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

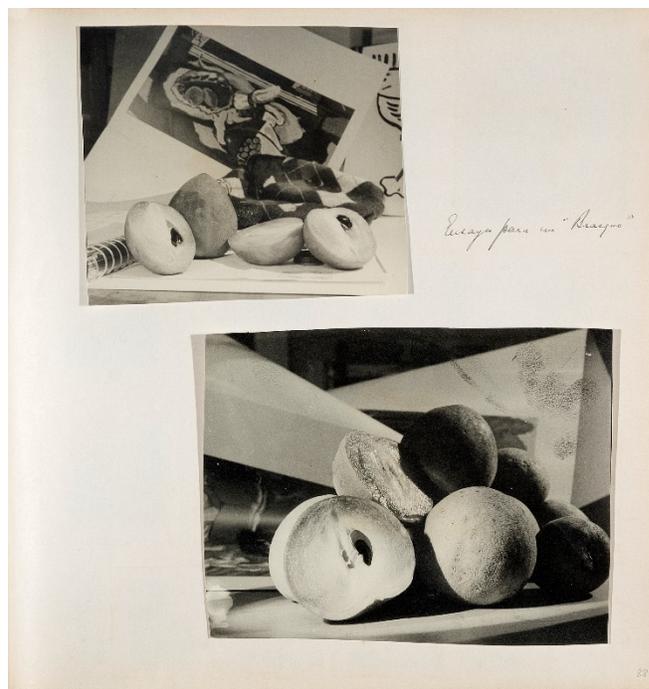
LOS ANGELES – Getty Research Institute has acquired the archive of Alfredo Boulton (Venezuelan, 1908-1995) one of the most important champions of modern art in Latin America and a key intellectual in 20th-century Venezuela.

An art critic, art historian, and photographer, Boulton authored more than 60 publications on the art and historiography of his country. At the same time, he was also a pioneer of modern photography, generating through his images a new cultural definition of Venezuela. The Boulton archive, ca. 1920-1995, contains his extensive correspondence with local and international artists, institutions, intellectuals, and collectors; his writings for magazines and newspapers, his research materials on pre-Hispanic art, colonial art, the iconography of independence leaders, and modern artists; and a complete vintage collection of his photographic production.

“Alfredo Boulton’s life and work correspond to a time when Venezuela became a focal center of modernism in Latin America. His extensive research activities on pre-Hispanic art, colonial art, 19th-century art, and his investigations on the imagery of the leaders of independence, defined the artistic history of Venezuela,” said Mary Miller, director of Getty Research Institute. “He was also an accomplished photographer, and the tremendous research value of his archive is bolstered by the exceptional aesthetic power of his photographic work.”

Boulton dedicated 40 years of his life to building a comprehensive analysis of the history of the art of Venezuela from colonial times to his present day, at a time when there was neither prior literature to refer to, nor organized archives and catalogs to research from. He conducted research in ecclesiastic archives for eight years and helped identify many previously anonymous painters of the colonial time. He published more than 60 books, including his three-volume text *History of Painting in Venezuela (Volume I: Epoca Colonial, 1964; Volume II: Epoca Nacional, 1968; Volume III: Epoca Contemporánea, 1972)*. The first volume on the Colonial period was particularly well received by a public unaware of how much of Venezuelan art history had been ignored until then. The second volume dealt with post-independence art, from the early 19th to early 20th century. For this work, Boulton researched/investigated public and private archives, magazines and newspapers, and artists’ correspondence. The third volume examining the contemporary period was published in 1972.

Boulton was deeply involved with the art of his period. He befriended, advised, and acquired the works of contemporary artists. In particular, he promoted the work of geometric artists Alejandro Otero, Jesús Rafael Soto, and Carlos Cruz Diez. He also supported artists Francisco Narváez and Rafael Monasterios.



Ensayo para un Braque/ Essay for a Braque, 1930s, Alfredo Boulton (Venezuelan, 1908-1995), Gelatin silver print
Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles



Barca/ Boat, 1944, Alfredo Boulton (Venezuelan, 1908-1995)
Gelatin silver print, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

The archive contains the lion's share of Boulton's photographic production, as he did not make a practice of selling images. Nevertheless, his work is represented in the collections of MoMA, New York; Biblioteca Nacional de Venezuela, Caracas; Galería de Arte Nacional, Caracas; Centre Pompidou, Paris; George Eastman Museum, Rochester; Ana Abelló Collection, Spain; Stanisław Poniowski Collection, France; and in the holdings of a handful of private collectors, many of whom received the images as gifts from the artist. An

important part of Boulton's photographic oeuvre is dedicated to the Venezuelan landscapes: the Andes, the Caribbean, and the hilltop of Los Guayabitos, where Boulton decided to live in the mid-1940s.

"With his photography and writings, Alfredo Boulton shaped the art history of his country," said Idurre Alonso, associate curator of Latin American collections at GRI. "The materials in the Boulton archive give a commanding perspective of the art being produced during his long life and are fundamental for the understanding of Venezuelan art history."

The Alfredo Boulton archive contains approximately 4,000 vintage and original prints, and 20,000 negatives of images taken by Boulton between 1928-1993; vast correspondence with artists, gallerists, collectors, and museums, including letters to and from important figures relating to the art world of Venezuela and beyond, such as Alexander Calder, Alejandro Otero, Jesús Soto, Gio Ponti, Arturo Uslar Pietri, Denise René, and Beaumont Newhall; archives of pre-Hispanic, colonial, and contemporary art in the form of photographs, clippings, research documents, exhibition documents, and substantial artists files pertaining to Boulton's *History of Art*; books and catalogs published by Boulton; 25 library cabinet drawers of indexed notes on wills and testaments from the archdiocese of Caracas which Boulton used in his research; collections and provenance records including photos, negatives, and texts documenting

artworks classified by collectors (including many works authenticated or identified by Boulton); research materials collected by Boulton on the likenesses of the Simón Bolívar and other historic figures including Antonio José de Sucre, José Antonio Páez, Manuel Saenz, Simón Rodríguez; and personal papers and mementos.

The archive, assembled by Alfredo Boulton, was purchased from his sole heir, his daughter Sylvia Boulton, by the non-profit Alberto Vollmer Foundation, Inc., in 1995, who lent it to the GRI for study in April 2018. The GRI has now acquired the archive thanks to a partial gift and purchase from the Alberto Vollmer Foundation.

For the past two decades, under the direction of Sofia Vollmer de Maduro, who worked closely with Boulton in the last five years of his life, the archive was organized, catalogued, and made accessible to researchers and institutions, for research papers, exhibitions, and publications. A website (www.fundavollmer.com) provides substantial information both in Spanish and English. The GRI will continue to make the archive available to researchers, connecting with other archives of Latin American art history in the GRI's holdings.

“My goal as custodian of this archive has been to memorialize Alfredo Boulton's outstanding contributions to art history, and this agreement with the Getty fosters a further level of international research and intellectual exchanges that will make a lasting difference to the study of Venezuelan art,” Sofia Vollmer de Maduro.

Curator Idurre Alonso is currently researching the archive for a publication and exhibition, scheduled for summer 2023.

MEDIA CONTACT:

Amy Hood
ahood@getty.edu
(818) 469-7223
Getty Communications

###

Getty is a leading global arts organization committed to the exhibition, conservation, and understanding of the world's artistic and cultural heritage. Working collaboratively with partners around the globe, the Getty Foundation, Getty Conservation Institute, Getty Museum and Getty Research Institute are all dedicated to the greater understanding of the relationships between the world's many cultures. The Los Angeles-based J. Paul Getty Trust and Getty programs share art, knowledge, and resources online at Getty.edu and welcome the public for free at the Getty Center and the Getty Villa.

The Getty Research Institute is an operating program of the J. Paul Getty Trust. It serves education in the broadest sense by increasing knowledge and understanding about art and its history through advanced research. The Research Institute provides intellectual leadership through its research, exhibition, and publication programs and provides service to a wide range of scholars worldwide through residencies, fellowships, online resources, and a Research Library. The Research Library—housed in the 201,000-square-foot Research Institute building designed by Richard Meier—is one of the largest art and architecture libraries in the world. The general library collections (secondary sources) include almost 900,000 volumes of books, periodicals, and auction catalogues encompassing the history of Western art and related fields in the humanities. The Research Library's special collections include rare books, artists' journals, sketchbooks, architectural drawings and models, photographs, and archival materials.