

On the Eve of San Francisco 2012

by GABRIELA NOUZEILLES, Program Co-Chair | Princeton University | gnouzeil@princeton.edu
and TIMOTHY J. POWER, Program Co-Chair | University of Oxford | timothy.power@lac.ox.ac.uk

The 30th International Congress of LASA is just weeks away. As we noted in our last report to the membership, the response to the call for papers for the San Francisco Congress was truly outstanding, with the total numbers of individual and panel proposals having increased almost 70 percent above the number of proposals for LASA 2010 in Toronto. Clearly there is enthusiasm about the attractive setting of the Congress and about the chance to reflect with LASA colleagues on the conference theme, the bicentennials of independence. We continue working closely with LASA President Maria Herminia Tavares de Almeida, with the LASA Secretariat in Pittsburgh, with the 68 track chairs who have organized our program, and especially with the Bay Area Local Arrangements Committee in advance of the Welcoming Reception on Wednesday, May 23rd.

The conference theme, “Toward a Third Century of Independence in Latin America,” invites us to historical reflection, but this meeting will also be notably marked by geography. This LASA Congress will be the first in the continental United States since 2004, and this is also the first West Coast LASA since Los Angeles in 1992. Latin America’s relationship with Asia has changed dramatically in recent years, and we are using our beautiful local setting of San Francisco to recognize the deepening ties with the Pacific world. The startling pace of commercial and economic interaction between the two regions has far outstripped the growth of relevant academic expertise, but LASA can play a role in enhancing Asian understanding of Latin America and vice versa. Thus you will notice a large number of events focused on Asia and particularly on China. For example, on Saturday evening there will be a special session featuring the

presidents of LASA’s counterpart associations in China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand. For our colleagues in Asia and the Pacific, travel to this LASA meeting will be unusually convenient, and we look forward to the enhanced dialogue that is sure to result.

Following the innovation of our predecessors in Toronto, Javier Corrales and Nina Gerassi-Navarro, LASA will once again hold Pre-Congress Workshops on Wednesday afternoon, prior to the official opening of the conference. These workshops represent LASA’s ongoing commitment to the professional development of our membership, particularly young scholars, and the response has been enthusiastic. In addition to the publishing workshop run by LARR editor Philip Oxhorn—a tremendously useful event that has become a popular fixture at our Congresses—we will have thematic *talleres* on “Latin American Independence in the Age of Revolution,” “Radical Women: Body and Space in Latin American Art between the 1960s and the 1980s,” and “Getting the Most out of Large-Scale Survey Projects: Developing and Analyzing LAPOP’s AmericasBarometer.” Registration for these Wednesday events is now closed, but we wish to draw attention to the intellectual creativity and excellent networking opportunities offered by this new LASA tradition.

All LASA members can fondly name the two special social events that are held at every Congress, and it is time to mark your calendars. The Welcoming Reception on Wednesday evening will be held in the beautiful setting of the Contemporary Jewish Museum <www.thecjm.org>, located at 736 Mission Street adjacent to the Marriott Marquis, our official

conference hotel. The *Gran Baile* will be held on Friday evening in the Marriott itself, and hopefully will conclude in time for the 8:30 a.m. panels on Saturday!

The San Francisco Congress will have almost too many highlights to mention in this space, but nonetheless we would like to draw your attention to a few. Former Uruguayan president Tabaré Vázquez is scheduled to address the LASA membership on Friday evening. A special presidential panel on “Wikileaks, Transparency, and Investigative Journalism” will analyze the impact of Wikileaks on Latin America. Other presidential panels will include “Latin America and China in the 21st Century,” “Cuba in Times of Change,” “The Power of Numbers: What Latin Americanists Can Learn from 200 Years of Caribbean Economic History,” and “*E pur se muove*: New Middle Classes in Latin America.” On Thursday evening, LASA will hold a special memorial session in honor of Guillermo O’Donnell, the distinguished political scientist (and LASA’s Kalman Silvert Award recipient in 2003) who sadly passed away in November.

Another highlight of the San Francisco Congress will be a major technological advance for LASA. Working with a firm called Ativ Software, the LASA Secretariat has designed a “LASA 2012” app that will run on smartphones and tablet computers. The app has both an Apple iOS version (compatible with iPhones and iPads) as well as an Android version compatible with numerous other handheld devices. This ingenious application lets you browse the LASA program, create your own personal schedule, view maps of the meeting rooms and exhibit areas, subscribe to the LASA Twitter feed, and take notes at panels and email them to yourself. If you are searching for a friend or colleague at LASA, just touching their name on the screen will

show you all of their conference roles—no more flipping to the index in the back of the printed program. Most brilliantly, the app can be updated by LASA in real time (e.g. to reflect new programming or a last-minute room change). Of course the hard-copy program book will continue to be distributed, but we are certain that LASA members will find the new app to be extremely user-friendly. You will shortly receive emailed instructions on how to download the app.

As the Congress approaches, we would like to emphasize that we have made an energetic efforts to reach out to many scholars and researchers in the United States and abroad, many of whom were not acquainted with LASA or have participated infrequently in the International Congresses. The diversity of our 68-member Program Committee is testament to these efforts, as is the continued generosity of LASA with regard to international travel grants. Thanks to the generosity of the Open Society Institute, the Tinker Foundation, and the Inter-American Foundation, LASA has been able to offer over 250 travel grants to members residing in Latin America and the Caribbean, including at least 50 grants to graduate students.

Finally, we wish to acknowledge that there has been some dissatisfaction with our inability to find room for every panel and paper proposal that was submitted for San Francisco. In part this has to do with the dramatic growth in LASA over the past decade, but in part it also has to do with the sharp increase in demand in a single 18-month conference cycle. There were 663 individual paper proposals for Toronto compared to 1362 for San Francisco; the equivalent figures for panel sessions rose from 744 to 1020. With LASA sites scouted and contracted years in advance,

leading to a fixed quantity of meeting rooms and little room for maneuver, it is impossible for the Association to adjust smoothly to such fluctuations. What is sometimes interpreted as excessive “selectivity” is often an adaptation to imperfect information and changing circumstances. In our final report to the Association, we will have more to say on this matter, but for now we agree wholeheartedly with the EC and with many LASA colleagues that the move to annual Congresses is long overdue. At the same time, we are tremendously grateful to each and every one of our 68 Track Chairs, who reviewed and ranked several thousand LASA proposals while maintaining the highest standards of dedication and professionalism throughout the process.

We look forward to seeing you in the architectural and cultural jewel that is San Francisco, California, in less than two months. The Bay Area, with its colonial, political, multicultural, plurilingual, and transnational background, is an appropriate and inspiring setting for the dialogues conducted by our Association. ■