

Patricia Velasco

00:00 - Good morning, I'm Daniela Mejías, a student of the plastic arts at the Universidad Experimental de las Artes, and it gives me great pleasure to introduce the director and professor of Sala Mendoza, Patricia Velasco. **(00:22)** Thank you, Daniela. My presentation is titled *Miguel Arroyo: el ojo y el oficio* (the eye and the vocation) and it opens with two epigraphs

00:30 - from José Balza. "To observe is an involuntary and imperceptible gesture, and can also be the result of strict vigilance. In the first case we proceed by instinct, the action of observation turns us into a cat, a lynx, an eagle, the wind. In the second, to observe is a decision whose impulse may come from passion or from a strict

01:00 - intellectual control." The second, "The sublime is not glimpsed without fusing within us all modes of observation." When Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy extended the offer to me to speak about the figure and the legacy of Miguel Arroyo, it seemed to me, at first, a great temerity. I met him in 1993, when two friends and I dreamed of editing a book that would bring together a series of interviews

01:30 - with the most emblematic voices from graphic design in Venezuela. We wanted to converse with active designers, those who formed visual schools and identities like Nero, Sotillo, Lange, Paule, etc. But we also sought printers and people linked to the graphic arts who had contributed to the professionalization of the occupation and its medium. Miguel Arroyo was, of course, in this

02:00 - group. We met with him, we talked and his recommendations were essential for the project, which unfortunately never became a published book. At any rate, what I want to say to you today is that Arroyo took in that project with a singular disposition, as one of his virtues that I perceived in that important meeting was precisely his receptivity, his openness to listen and a kind of

02:30 - particular educational vocation, not at all stingy, to instruct and orient, but above all to awaken or shake up the vision. Or rather, to make someone see, so that the intuition and the eye, with all the significance and the registers that this quality of sense possesses, could be activated with sensibility. A vocation that has its roots in that key phrase that for me

03:00- defines the thought, sensitivity and the activity of Miguel Arroyo: *you must learn to see*. But as I said, it seemed a great temerity to offer me the possibility of speaking on the legacy of this foundational figure of Venezuela's visual arts. I was not his direct disciple, I did not work with him at the Museo de Bellas Artes nor on any of the projects he initiated during

03:30 - his lifetime. But while his practice and his thinking are known, undoubtedly, by his friends, his pupils, students, and colleagues, he is also, or should be, a point of reference for all Venezuelans who work in the field of visual arts. Miguel Arroyo belongs to his disciples, to be sure, but he also belongs to all of us who live our lives in this field. Miguel Arroyo belongs to each of us, and to all of us.

04:00 - He belongs to the artists, the curators, the museologists, those who install exhibits, the educators, the designers, the critics, the theorists, the art historians...truly he belongs to everyone linked to the exercise of the visual arts in this country. The invitation from Sofía and from the team at the Colección Cisneros comes from that awareness, they want to hear the vision of someone active in the institutional territory as they are certain that Arroyo is an inescapable reference,

04:30 - a living example, a model to emulate. So it falls to me to tell you about this enormous figure, based on my experience as the director of Sala Mendoza. I'll offer you these notes on his thought processes and actions. And I'd like to start by detailing two circumstances that allow me to contextualize his trajectory, development and legacy. On one hand, the climate and the will

05:00 - to modernize that reigned at that time. And the other, the inheritance he received from those who went before him at the Museo de Bellas Artes, that is, from Carlos Otero, from Luis Alfredo López Méndez and Armando Barrios. Both circumstances were crucial in making possible the work of a man who had the conditions, the diligent gaze, intuitive and intellectual, as Balza would say, to leave a legacy to the country. Without intending to

05:30 - offer a overly-detailed biography of this ceramicist known as the father of modern museology in Venezuela, let's remember that he served as the director of the Museo de Bellas Artes from the years 1959 y 1975, he was linked to the Escuela de Artes Plásticas y Aplicadas as a student of painting and ceramics and later as a teacher. In his formative period he traveled

06:00 - on two occasions to the United States, first to New York to the World's Fair, and then to Pittsburgh, as a student of arts education. His experience in this country to the north opened to him, as Jorge Rivas affirmed, the doors of modernity. These essential experiences in his formation contributed to the forging of a gaze and the awakening of a sensibility that would come to define all the environments in which

06:30 - he worked. But his sensibility as a ceramist was, in my opinion, fundamental in forging that gaze I keep coming back to. Arroyo saw as good artists see, as if for the first time, with a gaze that learns every time it looks, a gaze that teaches because it always discovers something, because it doubts, because it rebukes, because it feels things, because it scrutinizes. A gaze that becomes instinct and

07:00 - memory, that manifests itself in works, in actions. With that wisdom, at once widely-encompassing and intimate, Arroyo undertakes his creative activity, but also his educational and museum-related activity. His entire practice is marked by that condition, by a development of visual sense that is, once more as Balza says, intuitive and intellectual. In this way Arroyo embodies the intellectual artist who develops a sharp

07:30 - conscience and attention to artistic forms, taking interest in them as producers of meaning that are nourished by their anthropological context and past. He is a master who left the country a modernizing potency, but also a serious and professional structure for museums. His contribution was and still is incomparable. We know him,

08:00 - I insist, as the father of modern museology, since his was the hand that drew museological scripts and designed ad hoc slides, bases, glass showcases, pedestals, modules, dividing panels, etc, an endless source of original creative and functional resources that responded with strict faithfulness to the singularity of the modern works they displayed. It's said that Arroyo approached this work

08:30 - with special diligence and care, attentively studying the works to achieve unique shows that would highlight the nature of the object and display their maximum potential. To his judgment, museology convenes art and science as it demands to consider creative aspects of design along with the psychology of perception. The object and the observer are the preoccupations that should orient,

09:00 - in the view of the master, the work of museology. But his contributions go beyond this environment; he created an organizational infrastructure that elevated the institutional function of the museum. He organized departments and curation, organized and enriched collections, professionalized the departments of registry, conservation and restoration,

09:30 - he established systems and procedures, he took on the maintenance of assets of our heritage, he fought for the professional training of the team that worked with him. In this way, he worked to elevate the physical structure of the institution, remodeling the central patio of the MBA and installing works by great masters such as Calder, Lifshitz, and Moore, he made plans for the creation of a cafeteria,

10:00 - a lecture hall and a sculpture garden, just as they exist today in the great international museums. His achievements in programming are historic and worth emulation. That aspect is, together with the establishment of modern museology, one of the most important achievements within his contribution to the visual arts and to the country. His work followed two very clear and precise lines of action.

10:30 - One: the promotion and dissemination of Venezuelan art in our country and beyond its borders. For this purpose he programmed important exhibitions of national collections and artists, to disseminate, understand and think about local art. Iris Peruga

succinctly summarizes his work in this area, saying, “All the manifestations of Venezuelan art have their place in the halls of the MBA. The art of our

11:00 – most remote ancestors, that of our republican painters, the academics of the late 19th century and the painters of landscapes and figures of the first half of the 20th century, the art of new trends in the present and even the youngest and most experimental of our artists.” End quote. The museum’s own collections and those of the country’s heritage were kept on exhibit while being bolstered by new.

11:30 - acquisitions. Venezuelan paintings from the 19th and 20th centuries, the Escuela de Caracas and the Sala de Armando Reverón, just to name a few. The temporary exhibits were numerous and diverse. Our time is too short to comment on them with the attention they deserve, but it’s worthwhile to point out a few collective shows that marked milestones in the country: “Pintura Venezolana, 1661-1961” (Venezuelan painting) in 1961

12:00 - and “Venezuela, 1498-1810” in 1965 were two retrospectives that offered a panoramic and didactic look at all the manifestations of Venezuelan art. With regard to local artists, let’s remember the individual shows of Juan Lovera in 1960, Juan Pedro López in 1963, 40 works of Rafael Monasterios in 1968,

12:30 - the retrospectives of Manuel Cabré and Jesús Soto in 1971, Federico Brandt in 1972 and Héctor Poleo in 1974, only to mention a very few. Arroyo also continued to exhibit works from private national collections, an initiative conceived by Ventura Gómez, and he developed a successful expositive program that he titled “Las colecciones privadas en Venezuela” (the private collections of Venezuela) and which opened with

13:00 - the collection of Pedro Vallenilla Echeverría, through multiple installments. Pieces by Picabia, Rivera, Severini, Gris, Léger, Picasso, etc., were exhibited to the delight of the Venezuelan public. But you could also see in Venezuela the collections of Hans Neumann, Bonnard, Chagall, Klee, Modigliani, etc., Sagrario Pérez Soto’s collections of pre-Columbia art of México and Costa Rica, and the incredibly important

13:30 collection of Carlos Raúl Villanueva comprised in large part by masters of constructivism. The second line of action points toward the establishment of a network of contacts to bring to Venezuela exhibitions of artworks by great international masters, but also shows of new and emerging talents that were writing, in real time, the history of international art. Collective and individual shows of the artistic vanguard

14:00 came to this country: for example, sculptors such as Adami, Mata, Polesello, Desislo, Steinberg. At the same time, the great creators of modern art were exhibited in the country: Calder, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Picasso, Dalí, Cézanne, Matisse, Braque, Kandinsky, Duchamp, etc. Without a doubt, it was an illustrious age in the history of our visual arts.

14:30 As we cannot look more deeply into these exhibitions, I'll mention a few as examples: *Cien años de pintura en Francia* (100 years of painting in France), 1962-1963, exhibited pieces by Corot, Delacroix, Degas, Manet, Renoir, Léger, Matisse, Picasso, etc. *Henry Moore* in 1964, *De Cezanne a Miró* (from Cezanne to Miró) in 1968, *Salvador Dalí, Joyas y Dibujos* (gems and drawings) in 1967,

15:00 *Grandes Maestros* (great masters) in 1967, which brought together works by artists on the scale of Tintoretto, Caravaggio, Velázquez, Rembrandt, Zurbarán, etc. *El Arte del Surrealismo* (the art of surrealism) in 1972 and many others of equal importance and impact. They were glorious times, sublime times in Venezuela. But the programming convened shows not only

15:30 of the traditional languages but of a wide range of artistic manifestations that helped stimulate and enliven the imagination of our creators, while also educating and refining the sensibility of the public. Lourdes Blanco reminds us that, for Arroyo, all the arts shared the same importance. And in that sense, as a part of his great contributions, today I'd like to look deeper

16:00 at the attention that he paid to certain missing languages or those with lesser presence in Venezuela's visual arts of the time. Manifestations that had not been served grew robust with Arroyo's actions, and took up their own spaces, acquiring the aesthetic dignity they deserved. From a man who maintained belief that "you must learn to see" we could expect no less, because for me, I insist,

16:30 the sensibility of Arroyo the artist sustains a large part of his activities at the MBA. A man of the museum, to be sure, but with the hand of the artist, the hand of a man who knows how to see, who intuits with his glance, who acts, conceives and creates from the *sensorium*. From that quality or system of meaning that put him ahead of his time, that allowed him to intuit and think, that allowed him to see what others

17:00 did not see and that, without him, some disciplines would have taken much more time to obtain the place they occupy today. I'd like to comment on how ceramics, pre-Hispanic art, the decorative arts and the graphic arts, among other languages that are no less important, grew from his labors. Having trained in the field of ceramics, Arroyo directed

17:30 the Workshop of the Escuela de Artes Aplicadas from 1953 to 1956. His studies at the Carnegie Institute of Technology, an institution that inherited the precepts of the Bauhaus movement, influenced his way of thinking of art. His work as a ceramist, teacher and later as a curator and museologist was oriented towards the search for formal purity of simple lines and lack of

18:00 references of anecdotal ornamentation. In the workshop, research was oriented towards the making of impeccably fabricated pieces, with an abstract-leaning esthetic,

toward the project of synthesizing the arts, the modern spirit of the age. Simplicity, subtlety in form and finish, with the object of founding a new tradition of ceramics, separate from pottery. Arroyo

18:30 was interested, then, in the idea of creating a ceramics movement with its own roots that would be nourished by local techniques and materials in order to, from there, construct a modern specificity linked to our country. For example, he reclaimed *barro rojo*, red clay, a material that in his judgment offered extraordinary possibilities to develop an esthetic with its own characteristics. Arroyo worked

19:00 arduously for this language that he nurtured till his death, and before his passing he developed an expositive and editorial project divided in four installments about the history of ceramics in Venezuela. But, in any case, during his direction of the MBA ceramics took a protagonist's role, beyond the official salons that had been held since 1949, the exhibits held by the museum were many and diverse,

19:30 all conceived in excellent museological terms, reading the spirit of the pieces to exhibit them according to just and necessary measure and need. Impeccable and creative exhibit design, with displays according to the nature of the pieces shown. I'd like to summarize two of them. In 1962, 35 pieces of ceramics by Seka made up a singular installation that was designed

20:00 for the patio of the museum. The works' texture and finish evoked nature and the garden was the place chosen by Arroyo to show them. In placing them upon the grass, he underlined their connection with the organic, their harmony with natural forms. The second show I'd like to talk about is Francine del Pierre, Shōji Hamada and Bernard Leach, held in 1966.

20:30 For this occasion, Arroyo conceived a space with Eastern evocations resulting from low tables, light screens as divisions and areas that recalled Japanese gathering rooms. The pieces acquired their proper dimension and spirit by being placed upon surfaces of a lightness that accented the spiritual and ritualistic aspects of the works. Once again, we must appreciate the care, respect and attention of this master of museology

21:00 who worked to understand the kind of works to be exhibited, to exhibit them in a way that emphasized their nature. To see, to think, and to execute. To see, I insist, as artists see, to see as Miguel Arroyo saw. But beyond his audacious and wise exhibit design, I'd like to highlight the boost he gave to this discipline. The museum not only housed important shows of Venezuelan and foreign ceramists, but it promoted

21:30 - the presence of local creators in diverse international events. Iris Peruga, in the publication dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the museum, comments that between 1962 and 1975, that is to say, in the period in which Arroyo directed the MBA, there were

sixteen shows of jewelry and ceramics sent abroad, which additionally earned an important number of awards and honors.

22:00 - Peruga adds, citing Seka, perhaps our most recognized and honored ceramist, that “the success of these shows was undoubtedly owed to Miguel Arroyo, who with rigor and vision took on the task of selecting these works.” It was, then, his responsibility to gather a group of ceramists, many of them students of the workshop of applied arts, who developed pieces of the highest quality of fabrication, to be promoted by the museum

22:30 - at international events. The ceramics movement, due to the work of these years, achieved a prestige and unstoppable development. Another language that came to life and acquired meaning thanks to Miguel Arroyo was pre-Hispanic art, as the master saw the importance of scientific knowledge in its link with the arts. The decision to move part of the archeological collection housed at the Museo de Ciencias

23:00 - to the MBA was a risky and daring act, as it meant the beginning of a different way, a much wider and more just way, of reading the most vernacular and original manifestations of our culture. The ceramic objects from our pre-Hispanic past were ready for the museum, relocated in a new space to give them, more than their anthropological value, esthetic value. Arroyo insisted then on imbuing the pieces with

23:30 - artistic significance, pieces that had up to then only been valued for their link with the pre-Hispanic past. For Arroyo, the primary question that Bellas Artes needed to begin to answer was “Is this a work of art?” In the year 1971, with Lourdes Blanco as the director of Sala Mendoza, *Arte Prehispánico en Venezuela* (pre-Hispanic art in Venezuela) was inaugurated, the first show about these topics to take place

24:00 - in the country, which brought together a multidisciplinary team including Sagrario Pérez Soto, José María Cruxent, Masula Mannil and Arroyo himself, responsible for the museology and the catalog text. In parallel, the Fundación Sala Mendoza edited the first book on the subject, a primary source that’s still used by researchers, which included, in addition to Arroyo’s text, an essay on the archeological spirit by Cruxent and a catalog

24:30 - whose reasoning was laid out by Sagrario Pérez Soto. It was a plural show that deepened and widened the line drawn by Arroyo at the MBA. But in the year 2000, in the spaces of the Galería de Arte Nacional, the last great exhibition of pre-Hispanic art organized by Arroyo together with Lourdes Blanco was inaugurated. The master insisted, at his 81 years of age, on continuing to research our origins in order to understand our present.

25:00 - The research that sustained the exhibit took three years and the exhibition, which occupied all the galleries of the GAN, was open to the public for one year. Without a doubt, it was a glorious show. Another source of pleasant experiences was the design of

furniture and interiors. Arroyo conducted this activity with the same conviction that oriented his ceramic work.

25:30 - That is to say, the creation of furniture that was ours, that linked the esthetic of modernity with local materials and techniques. To this end he reviewed indigenous, colonial and Latin American furniture with the goal to re-read and reinterpret it, from a modern perspective. He created furniture of an extraordinary beauty, attending to ergonomics, functionality,

26:00 - economics and design for the country's climate conditions. Lourdes Blanco categorically expresses the influence of New York and Pittsburgh in enlivening in the master a special sensibility towards the industrial and decorative arts, as well as artisan craft. Up to 1959, Arroyo stayed active, designing dining room sets, tables, bedrooms, credenzas, sofas,

26:30- desks, libraries, armchairs, benches, chairs of excellent quality and of an impeccable formal resolution as their execution was done by artisans possessing a high technical expertise. The use of wood and fabric, always sourced locally, eventually combined with other materials such as aluminum or formica, characterized Arroyo's furniture production, which was made up in its majority

27:00 - of unique artisan-made pieces designed for close friends. Such was his interest in this medium that in 1949 he opened Gato, a store dedicated to interior design in which he made and sold furniture and pieces from the fired arts, and which also offered books, records, and reproduction of artworks. But beyond the design of a piece, Arroyo's central interest pointed toward

27:30 - the conception of an interior space, the interpretation of modern spaces in the spirit of synthesis of the arts. Arroyo understood aspects such as lighting, the wise use of textiles, tapestries, rugs and curtains, the perfect composition of spaces, the inclusion of decorative pieces and works of art to create comfortable areas that awaken pleasure and esthetic enjoyment. For an aesthete,

28:00 - for someone enamored of form and spaces, design and conception of those things was a challenge steeped in pleasure. Without doubt, these antecedents are fundamental to the development of museological work that achieved extraordinary recognition and visibility during all of his life. Graphic design, for its part, reached the grandeur of a medium that, as it is fundamental for a museum's expositive labor,

28:30 - also has esthetic and museum-related qualities that Arroyo knew how to see. But beyond his expositive activity, which certainly existed and was prolific and important, Arroyo busied himself with the visual identity of the museum and the graphic quality of the material published by the institution. He initiated an serious editorial policy in form and content, conscious of the importance of catalogs as documents that provide

29:00 - information, educate and preserve the memory and the history of institutions. And he did all this in an innovative way, with high esthetic standards and surrounded by professionals of high renown such as Gerd Leufert and Álvaro Sotillo. The museum's publications quickly became beautiful and important documents that were recognized and awarded by many international competitions.

29:30 - *Visual*, the museum's bulletin was adapted to the new editorial criteria. They changed not only the format, designing it to the disensiones of the institution's publications, but they also grew the number of pages significantly, including the bylines of Alfredo Boulton, Guillermo Meneses, and Elizabeth Schön, only to name a few. This also meant increasing the number of illustrations and of

30:00 - reviews of local activities, as well as foreign experiences. *Visual* became a great bulletin, an important magazine of the time, a referential publication for keeping up-to-date with happenings in the national and international visual arts. But graphic and editorial design was, during Arroyo's life, a source of experiences, creation, and enjoyment. Between 1975 and

30:30 - 1979, he advised Leufert, Sotillo, Nedo and Pol in the creation of a set of stamps commissioned by the Instituto Postal Telegráfico. In the story of Venezuelan stamp collecting this is a lovely and luxurious chapter. In 1978, designed by Sotillo, the book *ABC de la conservación de obras de arte hechas en papel & cuento del papel* was published, with exquisite texts and images,

31:00 - with many beautiful visual references. Together with Leufert and Sotillo in 1986 he founded the publisher Editorial Alter Ego, which published *Retromundo*, a text by Victoria de Stefano and photographs by Paolo Gasparini, and *Más Acá del Más Allá: 28 fotografías de Vieri Tomaselli* with texts by Arroyo himself. Both photobooks, which is the current term used for these publications, are graphic gems of this history of

31:30 - the Venezuelan photobook, which won awards at internacional competitions. Once again, that eye ahead of its time, that foretelling gaze, the tutelage of projects that write history and that renew themselves in time acquiring new value, pertinence and importance. In 1975 we again find Arroyo working for Venezuelan design, advising the creation of the Centro de Arte La Estancia as

32:00 - an institution dedicated to the study, practice and exhibition of graphic and industrial design as well as photography. But at the MBA Arroyo and his team had already conceived foundational exhibitions for the history of this language. *Visibilia* by Gerd Leufert, opened in 1966, was a memorable show of great impact for the time. Leufert,

32:30 Gego, Chacón, Larry June and Arroyo made up the work team. Sources say that the show was an incomparable experience of visual communication, with a selection of

images from the book projected on the walls, while Gego designed iron pedestals, sculptural works in themselves that exhibited the typographic work in the book. It's worthwhile to review other museological proposals

33:00 - such as *Circo*, Polish posters from 1968, *Museo y el Diseño* from 1970, *Diseño Gráfico Comunicación* from 1971, Gerd Leufert's *Flechas* from 1972, to only name a few representative examples. I've tried to speak on some of the traits of a vital character of our world, highlighting his eye and his vocation. I've

33:30 - made a few notes, a few reflections, but time will always be too short to cover the legacy and the work of Miguel Arroyo. We'll always be left with the sensation of not having said enough, with the worry that we haven't gone as deep as was needed, with the doubt of whether we brought to light all the facets he developed in his life. Still, I'd like to finish with what, in my opinion,

34:00 - drew me to this master of the cultural and educational world of our country. Arroyo was a man who saw, understood and interpreted the seminal spirit of the modern movement. And in this sense he was a man who know how to see what was coming in his era. A man who burst forth in that time, as Agamben says, to see its darkness, to see its shadow. It was Arroyo, then, following the Italian philosopher,

34:30 - a contemporary man. And perhaps his most important legacy is this: We must learn to see. Today it is a more urgent obligation than ever, because of the conditions in our country, conditions of poverty, vulnerability, the dismantling and isolation of institutions. We must burst forth in our time, and commit ourselves to the present.

35:00 - We must be contemporaries of our present time, as Arroyo was with his. His legacy represents the country we were, but also the country we can yet be, the country that is possible. Many thanks.