

LUIS VARGAS ROSAS



A MUSEUM KEEPING PACE WITH THE CONTEMPORARY (1946–1970)

This exhibition examines painter Luis Vargas Rosas's work as the Museum director from 1946 to 1970, a pivotal period between "the modern" and "the contemporary". His years as the Museum's director coincided with the upheavals of the postwar era: international conflicts, economic transformations, and educational and social reforms. In this context, the founding of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in 1946 and the Chilean Museum Association in 1959 opened up debates on museums' educational mission, social role, and professionalization.

Vargas Rosas built on earlier initiatives, such as the outreach program launched by Julio Ortiz de Zárate (1939–1946), although he was unable to fully implement all of them. Instead, he focused his efforts on modernizing the Museum: renovating its infrastructure, strengthening exhibition and acquisition policies, and consolidating educational programs for schoolchildren, beginning with the hiring of the Museum's first female staff members dedicated to these activities. They were joined by Magdalena Balduzzi as technical advisor (1962), Victoria Roepke in the Secretariat, and María Luisa Señoret in Public Outreach and Public Relations (1967), expanding women's participation in the Museum's management.

Although budget constraints, bureaucracy, and rigid institutional structures prevented projects such as the Museum's expansion into other regions of Chile, Vargas Rosas held fast to a far-reaching vision: the museum as a school, a "living institution in service of the general culture of the people" (Memorias, 1959). That vision remains a defining part of his legacy.