

Blaze in a Rio de Janeiro Museum Ruins More Than 1,000 Artworks

By United Press International

RIO DE JANEIRO, July 8 — A fire in Rio de Janeiro's Museum of Modern Art destroyed more than 1,000 works of art in 30 minutes today. Museum sources said the blaze had ruined the entire collection of oil paintings, sculpture, engravings and other small art objects before being controlled.

Sources in the art world said the collection, considered modest by international standards, nevertheless included works by Picasso, Van Gogh and Dali. A special exhibition by the Uruguayan painter Joaquín Torres-García was almost completely lost, museum officials said.

Firemen said they had not yet determined the cause of the fire, but theorized that it had broken out in a theater on the second floor of the modern concrete-and-glass building near Guanabara Bay in the residential Flamengo section of Rio.

Concert Finished at Midnight

A group of musicians called *Agua* had finished a concert in the museum's auditorium around midnight, and the building was unoccupied after that.

Firemen said the blaze could have been ignited by an electrical short circuit burning through insulation, or by a cigarette. A preliminary statement from the museum said that art specialists had not determined what part, if any, of the collection was salvageable.

"The only thing you can do now is be furious," said Jean Boghci, a collector who had lent six Torres-García works to the museum for the special exhibition.

Hours after the fire, the building's concrete shell was still smoking, littered with piles of dirty gray sludge and broken glass.

Museum sources estimated that 80 percent of the permanent collection, containing the largest and most significant dis-

play of 20th-century Brazilian art, had been destroyed.

They said the special exhibition, which featured some 150 works by 25 Latin American artists in addition to the Torres-García collection, was almost destroyed.

Torres-García a Prolific Painter

Art specialists in New York estimated yesterday that the fire had not destroyed

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a major part of the oeuvre of Mr. Torres-García. They said he was a prolific painter who has had many exhibitions in New York since he first came to the city in 1920.

Born of Spanish parents in Montevideo, Mr. Torres-García spent most of his working years outside Latin America. He was influenced in Paris by Piet Mondrian, the renowned Dutch painter, and devised his own artistic style, which he called "universal constructionism." In this, he sought to propound a universally understood alphabet of symbols that appeared, each in its own compartment, in canvases divided by vertical and horizontal bands.

Eventually he returned to Montevideo, which he saw as a likely setting for merging the avant-garde art of Paris and modern South American art, of which he was considered a founding father and a major influence. Through his writing and lecturing, Mr. Torres-García had acquired an artistic coterie in South America, as well as in New York art circles. He died in Montevideo in 1949 at the age of 75.