
La educación de los públicos jóvenes en el Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes

The education of young audiences at the National Museum of Fine Arts

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Resumen: La carencia de información sobre las construcciones simbólicas que hacen los públicos jóvenes del patrimonio del Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes trae consigo que el trabajo educativo realizado por esta institución sea limitado. El propósito del estudio es determinar las valoraciones, significaciones y usos del patrimonio artístico que hacen los públicos jóvenes que asisten las exposiciones temporales del Edificio de Arte Cubano para el diseño de acciones educativas dirigidas a este sector social. El empleo de la encuesta como método de investigación permitió concluir que las valoraciones, los usos y significaciones del patrimonio por los jóvenes son diversos.

Palabras clave: Educación; Museología crítica; Públicos jóvenes; Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes

Abstract: The lack of information on the symbolic constructions made by young audiences of the heritage of the National Museum of Fine Arts brings with it that the educational work carried out by this institution is limited. The purpose of the study is to determine the valuations, meanings and uses of the artistic heritage made by young audiences attending the temporary exhibitions of the Cuban Art Building for the design of educational actions aimed at this social sector. The use of the survey as a research method allowed us to conclude that the valuations, uses and meanings of heritage by young people are diverse.

Keywords: Education; Critical museology; Young audiences; National museum of Fine Arts

Introduction

Since the second half of the last century, debates in the academic field on the inclusion of formal, non-formal terms have been intensified and they inform education with the pioneering work of Coombs (1971), fundamentally based on their work *The World Education Crisis*, where significant contributions appear. The author points out that non-formal education refers to “activities that are intentionally organized with the express purpose of achieving certain educational and learning objectives” (p. 199) in spaces or institutions not recognized in the institutional educational system of a country or determined state. Since then there are numerous proposals for concepts by different authors, but the essence of these first ideas have remained intact. In this study I assume them because they are considered appropriate for the purposes of this investigation.

Within these institutions the museum begins its socialization timidly from the 18th century, and the labor education can be distinguished with little clarity from the second half of the 19th century when in 1880 the Louvre creates a permanent service to visitors, but it is the Victoria and Albert Museum of London that is recognized as the first to design a craft program designed and directed for schoolchildren, at the beginning of the 20th century.

When the International Council of Museums (ICOM) is created in 1946, the quality of the museum is recognized by any permanent institution that preserves and presents collections of cultural or scientific objects for the purpose of study, education, and delight. So, in 2007 the concept of a museum has been instituted, which has not changed its essence since then:

A museum is a non-profit institution, permanent, at the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, preserves, researches, communicates and exposes the material and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purpose of education, study and recreation. (International Council of Museums, Statutes, 2007).

The wide and dispersed bibliography that relates to education with the museum gives an account of the central place that has occupied such a relationship in both the theoretical and practical order within the museological field. In the case of Cuba, some works that try to boost educational work in these institutions stand out, however, it has not taken a deep turn in the academic field.

The National Museum of Fine Arts (MNBA) has a tradition in the development of educational activities primarily aimed at children, adolescents, and the elderly. To a lesser extent, the institution has emphasized in young audiences beyond what sociodemographic variables can contribute. Therefore, the museum, from the Cuban Art Building, tries to get closer to young audiences who attend temporary exhibitions, for which it is interested in deepening the symbolic constructions that derive from their contact with the artistic heritage it protects.

The situation described led to formulate the following research problem: what are the valuations, meanings and uses of the artistic heritage that young audiences make of the temporary exhibitions of the Cuban Art Building, which serve as a reference for the design of educational actions aimed at this social sector? To answer this problem, the purpose is to determine the valuations, meanings

and uses of the artistic heritage made by young audiences attending the temporary exhibitions of the Cuban Art Building.

The research is based on the conceptual presuppositions of critical museology in relation to education in museums, because from this current of contemporary thinking the criteria of the public are prioritized, which is in accordance with the principles of the cultural policy of the National Museum of Fine arts. Regarding the methodology, the qualitative and quantitative paradigm is combined as the survey is used as a method with the questionnaire as a technique, the data is tabulated and the information is interpreted to achieve the intended purpose.

From the first indications of the educational work in Cuban museums I met through the research of the specialist of the MNBA López (2016), who found this background in 1933 with the foundation of the Museum of Remedies, in the Villa Clara province. The present communication reflects part of the results of a diminutive analysis of the scientific production carried out on museums on the island, both from universities and from the museums themselves, and revealed that research related to education in these institutions is a minority.

Of the eighty thesis of specialists in museology of the University of Oriente that I consulted, only one is referred to education: Educational project of the Castillo del Morro museum aimed at young people who perform the ceremony “With the sunset”, Muñoz (2003).

The other research was the result of the master's thesis Local history: an approach from the Museum to school institutions, Monteagudo (2011). And Martínez, Abrante, Cimero and Barrera (2015) consulted the article Experiences of the History Museum Natural in the integral formation of students of the Forest Engineering Degree.

It is valid to clarify that, although educational activities are not documented, in the generality of Cuban museums actions are carried out in this sense, both within the institutions and at the community level, only that they do not start from deep research covered in a theoretical apparatus that I managed to explain constructions and behaviors of people regarding the institution and its heritage. To meet their audiences, they rely solely on sociodemographic variables that show the number of visitors, and whether or not they liked a certain activity.

In the National Museum of Fine Arts specifically, the panorama is different, since from the Department of Educational Services, educative actions are projected, protected by a long practical tradition and a theoretical and conceptual foundation consistent with the most contemporary trends of museology, as it is argued later.

Development

The museology field has been strengthened with theoretical developments from different sciences such as History, Sociology, Anthropology, Art, Education, among others, so what happened to history was institutionalized in the 1970s as New Museology, focused on social development. Within the broad field of museology, the contemporary critical museology current stands as a defender and promoter of the value judgment of the public, and weighs the analysis and understanding of the symbolic constructions of the subjects. The theoretical budgets of this current part of granting full participation and power to the public in the projects that are developed in all areas of the museum, including the educational one, hence the learning model also contemplates the subjectivities of the public.

The first analyzes referring to this current took place in the academies of the United Kingdom, the United States, Anglophone Canada, and Spain, more specifically in the field of Art History, emphasizing the collection - public relationship, and taking as a study scenario to contemporary art museums. In Latin America, Costa Rica, Argentina, and Mexico mainly stand out.

Lorente (2006), in the article New Trends in museological theory: around the critical museology, outlines the origins of this stream of museological thinking and raises in his studies on the subject he discovered for the first time the critical museology expression in the doctoral thesis from Lynne Teather.

Education in museums, according to critical museology, should be an instrument that helps to know the different interpretations made by the public of the exhibited goods. “This is a fundamental work of critical museology: it tries to connect the educational practice of the museum with the cultural policies from where it is produced and with the socio-cultural framework that affects the entire museum.” (Rodrigo, 2007, p. 109)

Thus, education is seen not only from a specific area of the museum, but must encompass and be transversal in all the work of the institution, as expressed by Rodrigo (2007):

In this sense, the educational work must also focus on the hidden curriculum that museums offer us: as if it were a school institution, the museum involves a series of rituals and norms that need to be revealed and worked, to provide meaning and to guide to the public in its use (p. 109)

Critical museology analyzes the educational process in museums as a way to achieve a change of attitude in people towards heritage assets, where they not only approach the works, but also a connection between the public with the exhibitions and the museum itself. The educational work takes as its starting point the knowledge and skills of the subjects to, from there, promote critical thinking, not only regarding the exhibitions of the museum but also in relation to their social context.

In the National Museum of Fine Arts, the bibliography consulted indicates the 1950s as opening education in the institution. In 1966 the aforementioned Department of Educational Services (DSE) was created, from that moment the educational work has been intense and uninterrupted. Two master's thesis of specialists of the department stand out in this area. The first, *Educating Museum: a work policy for the Department of Educational Services of the National Museum of Fine Arts of Cuba*, of Macías (2014), who for several years was in charge of the departmental direction, constituted an important conceptual pillar from the which is based on the educational projection of the department.

And the other thesis, *Feel the art. Experiences of mediation*, López (2016), set the objective of dimensioning the educational work of the department towards the school community through the design of an educational and interactive methodological project, based on the budgets of Critical Museology and Critical Educational Mediation, and intended for public education. The field work was carried out in an elementary school near the museum.

So the conceptual backups that support the educational work of the MNBA are evident. Being consistent with the theoretical projection of the institution, in 2017 a study was conducted that deepened the subjectivities of young audiences of the temporary exhibitions of the Cuban Art

Building with the intention of providing relevant information to the knowledge that the Museum about its audiences. Below are some of the results of this study.

Main results

The survey was applied to a total of 1257 young people attending the eight temporary exhibitions of the Cuban Art Building during 2017. Three were with funds from the museum: Game of Angels; The Great Spiral Fifty years of the May 1967 Salon and The Unpublished Look; Drawing and Graph of the twenties and thirties; two were formed with collections outside the Museum: Varda / Cuba / Cinema and Without masks. Contemporary Afro-Cuban Art; and three exhibitions showed the most current artistic work: Chi, hee, chi, apostrophe, Archive Collection, and Palimpsesto. The sample was probabilistic and the concept of youth in force in the country used by the Center for Psychological and Sociological Research (CIPS) was used, in which people between 14 and 30 years old are considered young in Cuba.

The survey was analyzed through four sociodemographic variables: age, level of education, profession, and occupation, which were related to three interpretive variables. The young people surveyed were in the range of 20 to 30 years, divided into two: from 20 to 24, and from 25 to 30. The profile of young audiences corresponds to that of young people between 23 and 30 years old, fundamentally belonging to the field artistic, whether students of plastic arts, conservation or art history; critics; healers; museum specialists; and professors of art and related careers.

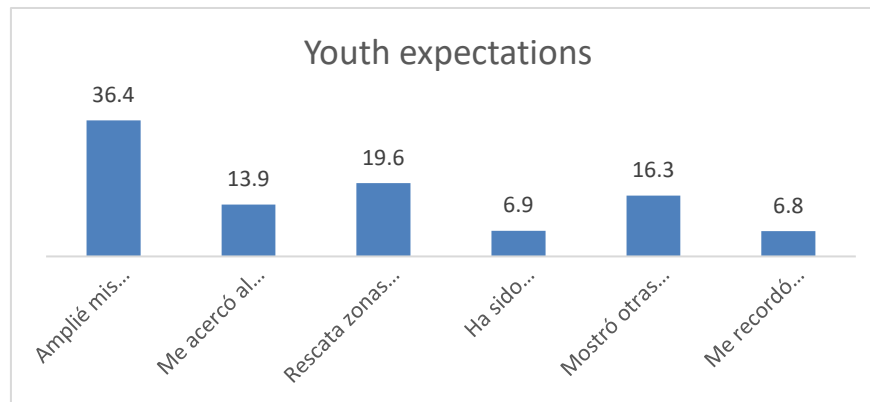
Variable: valuation.

Indicators: satisfaction and opinions. Regarding the expectations of young people regarding the exhibits visited, the survey showed that everyone positively valued the experience, 100% of respondents said that the visit met their expectations. Mainly, the cognitive value of the experience stands out, since the highest percentage, 36.4%, was located in the possibility that young people saw of expanding their knowledge on the subject treated in each of the samples; 16.3% marked discovering other readings on the subject, and 6.9% indicated novelty in the treatment of the subject.

13.9% valued the visit to these exhibitions as an opportunity to approach the artistic heritage of the nation, and 19.6% to those areas of artistic heritage that have been forgotten. It also highlights the

affective value of the experience, since 6.8% mentioned that the visit reminded them of personal experiences, this last percentage was located in the exhibitions *ji, ji, ji* (apostrophe), and without masks. Contemporary Afro-Cuban Art, perhaps because of the topics addressed in them.

Figure 1: Assessment of the experience of visiting exhibitions at the MNBA



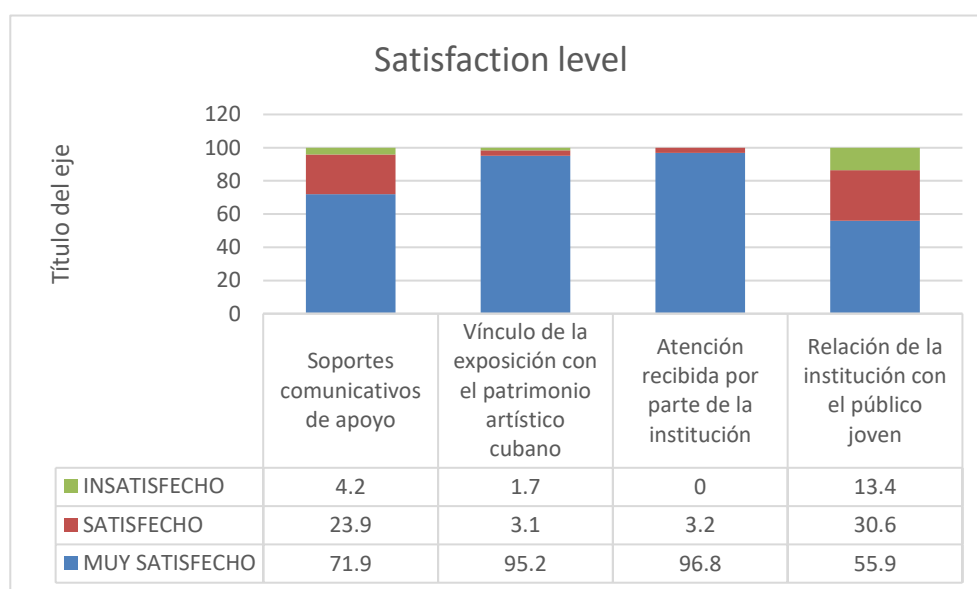
Source: self-elaboration

In order to know the valuation of young people about the link of the exhibits visited with the heritage, and about their relationship with the museum in general, they inquired about their satisfaction levels in relation to some aspects such as communication media of support, such as the catalog, that contribute to reinforce or not the idea of the exhibition proposal and influence the image that the people in the exhibition build. It is significant that 71.9% said they were very satisfied, and 23.9% satisfied with them; 1.6% of the dissatisfied young people were located in the exhibition *ji, ji, ji* (apostrophe), because they apparently did not understand that it was the artist's intention that the catalog be written in several languages and none in Spanish.

Regarding the link between the exhibition and the Cuban artistic heritage, 95.2% of young people said they were very satisfied, which leads them to think that they manage to notice in the museum's proposals a direct relationship with the artistic heritage, however, it is noteworthy that 1.7% of young people who said they are dissatisfied correspond to the group of students, young people with a bachelor's degree, and some mid-level artists who attended the exhibition *ji, ji, ji* (apostrophe), which underlines the idea that these young people concentrate those who do not recognize the relationship between current art and heritage.

The attention that young people receive during their visit to the exhibition by the institution influences their ways of perceiving the museum in a general way and the exhibition in a specific way, for this reason it is relevant that 96.8% of young people said to be very satisfied and none mentioned being dissatisfied, which indicates a positive assessment of such attention and speaks very well of the museum as a host, and of the professionalism of its workers.

However, regarding the institution's relationship with the young public, even though 55.9% said they were very satisfied, and 30.6% satisfied, there is a 13.4% dissatisfied that should be taken into account. Although the highest numbers of dissatisfied young people are in the range of 20 to 24 years - mainly university students and mid-level artists - and one might think that young people of the other range -25 to 30- feel closer to the institution also, in this group, dissatisfied young people were detected, mainly some higher level artists and university professors, which leads us to think that the museum is not depleting all the resources and ways to approach young people.



Graph 2: assessment of the exhibits visited

Source: self-elaboration

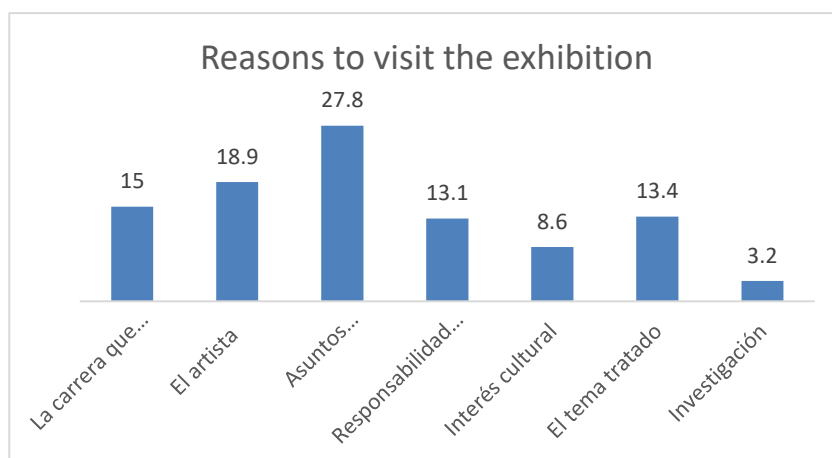
Variable: uses

Indicators: motivations and frequency.

The ideas, images and representations that are formed or already have young people of the artistic heritage condition the ways of relating to it and vice versa. The uses they make of artistic heritage reproduce the representations they have of it or form others. To know these uses, it was necessary

to investigate the motivations that young people have to approach heritage through the exhibitions and how often they do it.

The motivations set by the young people were: professional affairs (27.8%), the artist (18.9%), the career he studied (15%), labor responsibility (13.1%), the topic discussed (13, 4%) and, to a lesser extent, the options of cultural interest (8.6%), research (3.2%) were mentioned.



Graph 3: motivations to attend exhibitions

Source: self-elaboration

As for the frequency with which young people attend exhibitions in the museum, 60.6% say they always, and 39.4% rarely.

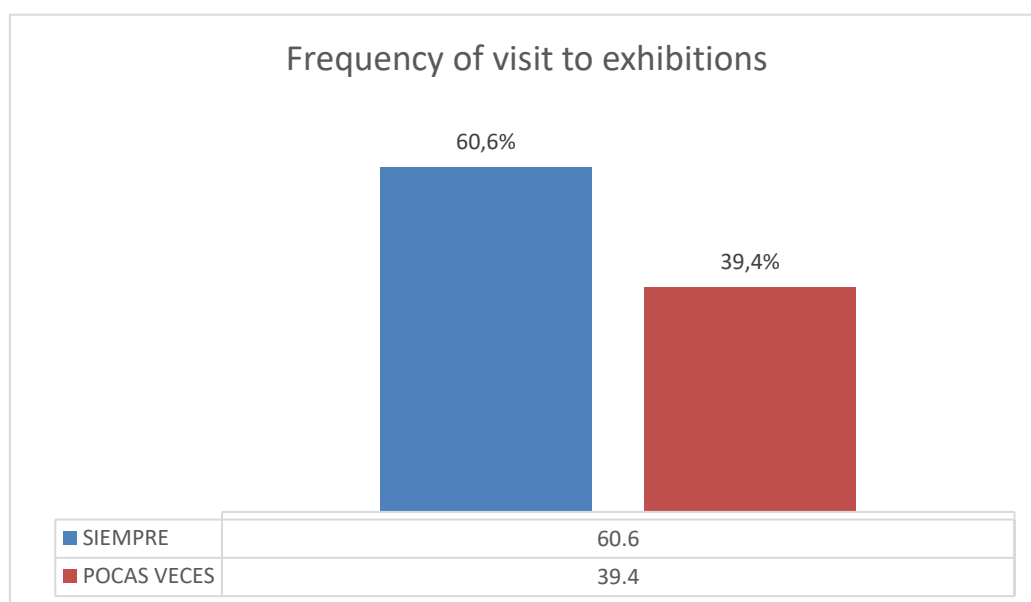


Figure 4: frequency

Source: self-elaboration

Variable: significance

Indicators: symbolic significance, cognitive significance, and symbolic-affective significance.

In order to know the meaning that artistic heritage has for young people and its relationship with the museum, they were asked to express the concepts or expressions with which they associate the MNBA's Cuban Art Building, and the Cuban artistic heritage.

It is significant that approximately half of the respondents, 50.1%, associated Cuban artistic heritage with the MNBA's Cuban Art Building, and vice versa, 52.1% of young people associated said building with heritage; the fact that they saw a notion contained in the other indicates the strongly rooted perception among young people that there is an indissoluble relationship between the Cuban artistic heritage and the museum.

These were the most frequent expressions and concepts mentioned by young people in relation to the Cuban Art Building: artistic heritage of the nation (52.1%); the best of Cuban art, excellence and artistic professionalism (14.1%); tradition in the plastic arts (4.1%), identity (9.1); responsibility with the Cuban artistic heritage (4.2%); commitment to art (3.1).

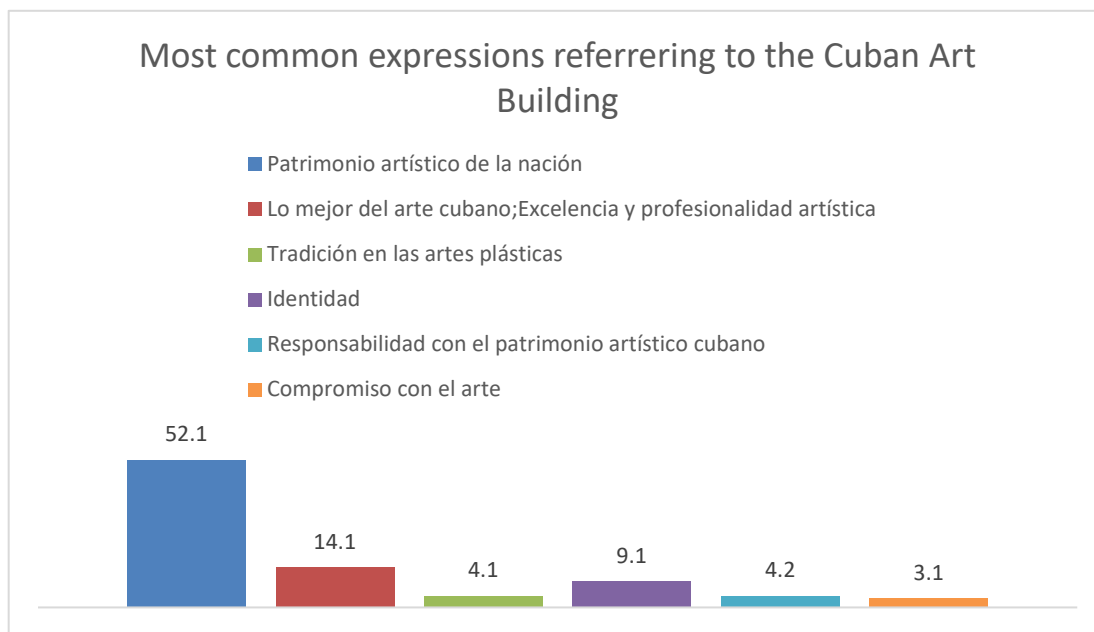


Figure 5: significance of the notion Building of Cuban Art

Source: self-elaboration

The most common expressions repeated by young people in relation to artistic heritage were: MNBA's Cuban Art Building (50.1%); expressions that refer to the quality of works of art: Cuban art with high aesthetic value, the best and most authentic Cuban art, excellence and artistic professionalism (13.1%); Cuban nationality (4.9); identity (9.9%); artistic tradition (3.1%); pride of Cuban art (7.4%).

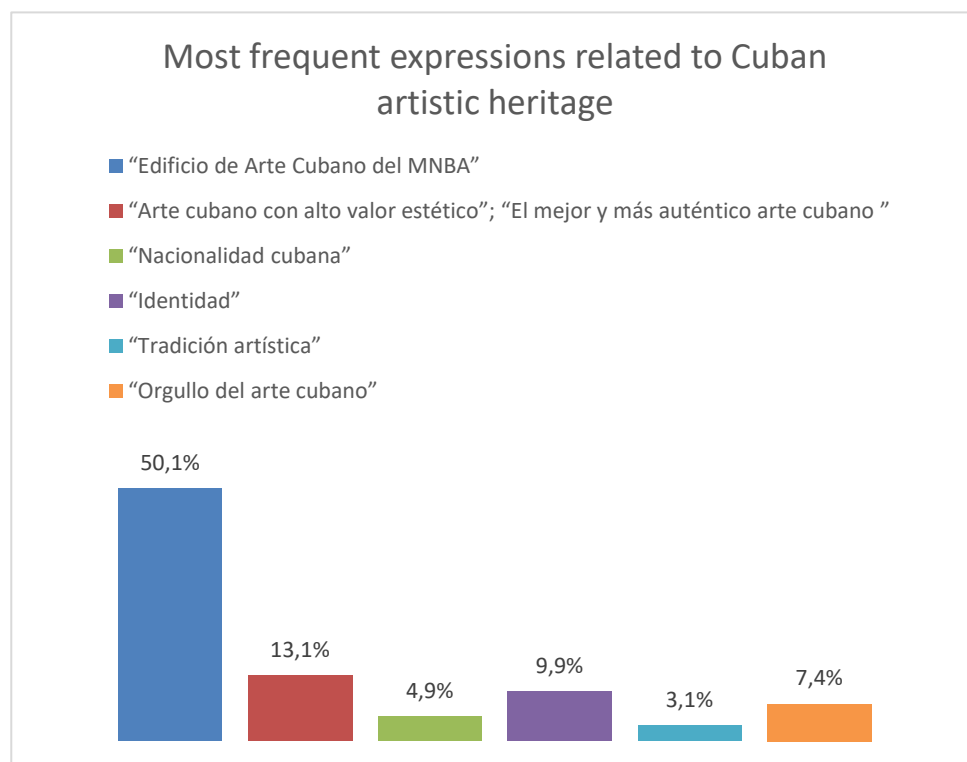


Figure 6: significance of the notion Artistic heritage

Source: self-elaboration

The expressions common to both notions were referred to the quality of art: Cuban art with high aesthetic value, the best and most authentic Cuban art, excellence and artistic professionalism (22.4%); to identity (19.1%), and to tradition (7.2%).

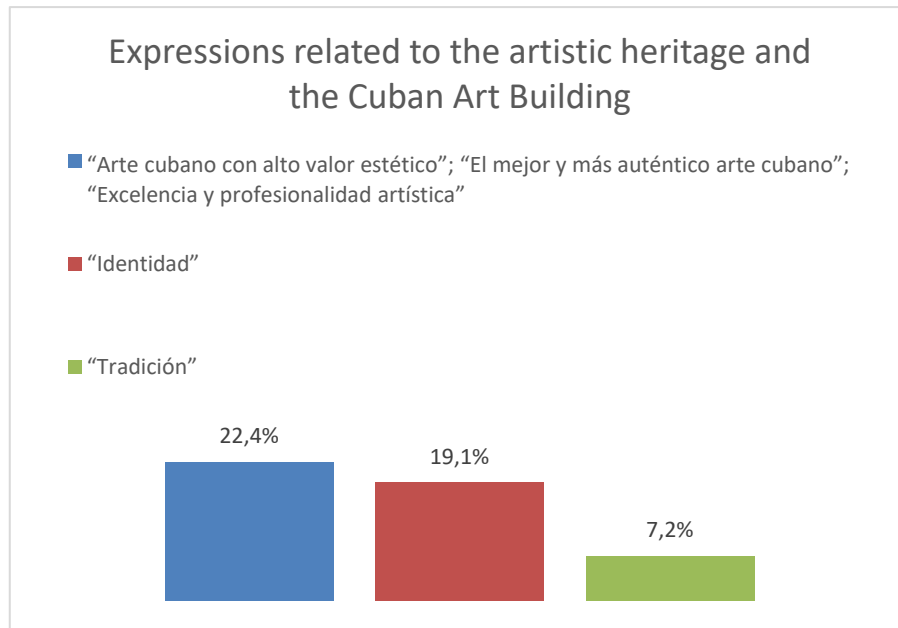


Figure 7: significance of the artistic and building heritage of Cuban Art

Source: self-elaboration

Then, to relate the socio-demographic variables with the results of the interpretive variables, it was possible to deepen the subjectivities of young audiences who visit the temporary exhibitions of the Cuban Art Building, to provide the MNBA with scientifically proven information that will contribute to projecting the educational work aimed at that population sector.

Conclusions

When analyzing the valuations that young people make of the experiences of visiting exhibitions in the Museum and their relationship with the artistic heritage, it can be confirmed that the exhibition spaces are essentially valued as an opportunity to approach the artistic heritage, mainly by artists and young professionals related to the artistic field; they have a marked cognitive implication fundamentally for young students, and are seen as spaces of socialization and spiritual satisfaction by young people away from the artistic field. The exhibits are valued as spaces for updating art by young people of greater age, however, those of younger age fail to visualize such a condition, they value the museum's exhibitions as promoters of the already established art.

The results show that the uses young people do of artistic heritage can be explained from two fundamental themes: they are determined in the first instance by questions of study, work and profession, and to a lesser extent by the more cultural general interest, and are associated with

perceptions that different groups have regarding the museum. Students use it to know, learn and get closer to the classical art of the nation; the artists and professionals of the artistic field as a way to keep updated on art in the country, because they recognize that the museum not only exposes the artistic heritage already recognized, but also shows the current artistic work, which could be part of that heritage, the groups less assiduous to the museum use it as a way to expand their culture and general knowledge, and some professionals use it for research purposes.

What artistic heritage means for young people can be explained in three levels of significance: cognitive significance: the fact that young people weigh the standards of artistic quality by relating the artistic heritage to the museum using the qualifications excellent, authentic, legitimate, high aesthetic value, etc., denotes some knowledge about art, more taking into account the high percentages of young people directly linked to the artistic field; symbolic significance: young people relate artistic heritage to the MNBA's Cuban Art Building, the image they have of the institution acts as a symbol directly associated with heritage; and symbolic-affective significance: the feelings of belonging, pride, and nationality expressed by young people towards artistic heritage reveal the emotional ties that unite them.

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