

The Art of Pedro Américo

Leôncio de Aguiar Vasconcellos Filho

VASCONCELLOS Filho, Leôncio de Aguiar. The Art of Pedro Américo. American Society of History, Arts and Letters, 2026. Disponível em: <https://www.theamericanshal.org/portal/publicacoes/the-art-of-pedro-americo>.

<https://www.theamericanshal.org/portal/publicacoes/the-art-of-pedro-americo>

Área: Produções Acadêmicas

Publicado em 31 de agosto de 2026

From very early on, this academician was put in contact with the arts.

The first memory dates from long ago: it was at the National Museum of Fine Arts, in the 1980s, with a personal return in 2002. The most striking painting was *The Battle of Avaí*, which sets out one of the most emblematic ordeals of the Paraguayan War — an engagement of Brazilian troops on one side and Paraguayan on the other, fought in December 1868.

The work was produced by the illustrious Pedro Américo, not only a painter but a polymath of several gifts, from literature to philosophy. Trained at the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts, he also perfected his craft in Paris, and executed other works besides the one discussed here on Florentine soil, later brought to Brazil.

The painting leaves nothing to be desired. With a sober style and the presentation of a general scene of combat, crucial in the history of two nations (since in that particular episode Argentines and Uruguayans were not present), it holds a tragic yet sober realism — and not surrealism, such as artists like Salvador Dalí would practice decades later, consisting of Homeric abstractions of reality.

There was thus no intention of making a spectacle of the suffering of thousands, since history is made of and from suffering. What occurred, through the use of dark paints and in a somber, pastoral, reflective message, was the transmission of an insight into the avoidable horrors imposed upon thousands of individual lives, whose sum compromises entire nations.

Notwithstanding the originality of so grand a work, supported by its physical size as well as by the author's realizing thought — for history painting reveals, simultaneously, the impossibility of physical presence at the event portrayed and the absence of any alleged falsity arising from it, since art and personal narrative vision are, timelessly, blended — it is worth recalling a similar case born of the same singularity: *The Battle of Austerlitz*, which reveals one of the decisive events in the twilight of the Holy Roman Empire, and which hangs in the Louvre, in Paris.

Its colors are more vivid than those of *The Battle of Avaí*, denoting a less somber panorama, associated with Gallic nationalism, in visual comparison with the more realistic canvas of Américo — though the latter was materialized decades afterward, revealing that history can, and should, also be interpreted through the eyes of the unusual geniuses of an omniscient art.

Leôncio de Aguiar Vasconcellos Filho — Holder of Chair no. 21 of the Brazilian Academy of History and Literature. Patron: Pedro Calmon.

Translated from the Portuguese original published by the Academia Brasileira de História e Literatura.

COMO CITAR

VASCONCELLOS Filho, Leôncio de Aguiar. The Art of Pedro Américo. American Society of History, Arts and Letters, 2026. Disponível em: <https://www.theamericanshal.org/porta/publicacoes/the-art-of-pedro-americ>.