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Hemisphere Museum Directors Close Meeting on 'Positive' Note

By GRACE GLUECK

After three days of wordy sessions, the first joint conference ever held here of United States and Latin-American museum directors ended yesterday with — as one south-of-the-border participant put it — a feeling of “positiveness despite difficulties.”

The conference, attended by seven art museum directors from Latin-American countries and 21 of their North American counterparts, was sponsored by the Center for Inter-American Relations, a privately funded organization set up in 1966 to strengthen cultural and commercial ties between the United States and Latin America.

In sessions held at the center, 680 Park Avenue, and at the Metropolitan, Whitney and Guggenheim Museums, the directors grappled with such problems as museum philosophy, education, fund-raising, collection building and even the ticklish topic of how a museum relates to living artists.

'Two Different Worlds'

From the start, however, the Latin Americans made it clear that many of the sophisticated problems of the North American directors bore little relationship to theirs. At one point during the opening session, “The Philosophy of the Museum,” Gloria Uribe, director of the Museum of Modern Art in Bogota, Colombia, pleaded that the conference be brought “down to earth.”

“We’re talking about two complete different worlds,” she said. “This is a meeting of underdeveloped museums with overdeveloped ones. Even in your poor neighborhoods, here, people have some exposure to

art through the mass media. Our situation is that no one is exposed until he comes to the museum. In my country, an original Picasso was shown for the first time in 1970, when we opened the museum in Bogota.”

And during a session on education, after Duncan Cameron of the Brooklyn Museum had taken a stand against the “volume business” of bringing schoolchildren to museums in hordes for 1½-hour visits, Nemesio Antunez, director of the Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago, Chile, said plaintively: “Most of our Chilean schoolchildren don’t even know what a museum is. I would like to be able to bring them to the museum for 1½ hours just to show them, ‘This is a painting.’”

In an earlier session, Mr. Antunez was asked by a panel guest if the new Socialist Government in Chile was not trying to introduce politics into art with such shows as a recent one “visualizing” the 40 points of Dr. Salvador Allende’s Government. Agreeing that the show was “political, rather than artistic,” he stressed that it had taken place at a university museum, not the city’s art museum, and that he did not think it would have a place at the latter.

Miguel Arrovo, director of the Museum of Fine Arts in Caracas, Venezuela, said that its results had been “highly positive,” although it had revealed some difficulties. One, he said, was the language barrier, “which made it impossible for all of us to discuss in depth some of the problems besetting museums today.”