

Critical Documents of 20th-Century Latin American and Latino Art

RESISTING CATEGORIES: LATIN AMERICAN AND/ OR LATINO?

THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON
INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR THE ARTS OF THE AMERICAS

RESISTING CATEGORIES:
LATIN AMERICAN AND/OR LATINO?

Critical Documents of 20th-Century Latin American and Latino Art

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GWENDOLYN H. GOFFE

Foreword

IN 2001, THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON (MFAH), under the inspired leadership of Director Peter C. Marzio, made a long-term, multi-million dollar commitment to Latin American and Latino art by establishing a curatorial department and its research arm—the International Center for the Arts of the Americas (ICAA)—dedicated to collecting, exhibiting, researching, and educating audiences on the work of Latin American and Latino artists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The ICAA's mission was to contribute in a significant way to the development of this emergent field by stimulating research and debate on Latin American and Latino artists and artistic movements. Since its inception, the ICAA has organized four international symposia and published eleven books and exhibition catalogues.

Early on, however, it became clear that the field needed more than the organization of exhibitions and symposia, or the publication of books. Consequently, in October 2001 and then again in November 2002, with seed monies provided by the Rockefeller Foundation and the Getty Foundation, the MFAH invited a group of thirty-five art historians, scholars, and curators from Mexico, South America, and the Latino United States to assist the museum in charting a viable course for the ICAA's programmatic development. The concerns shared by everyone present in these meetings centered on the poor state—or the non-existence in some cases—of archives and an efficient archival infrastructure in Latin America and the U.S. Latino communities, as well as on the urgent need to both preserve and provide access to primary documents and materials related to the visual arts. At stake was the task and the responsibility of preserving for future generations the theoretical and intellectual foundations of this art.

The results of these discussions led to the establishment of the Documents of 20th-Century Latin American and Latino Art Project (ICAA Documents Project), an initiative involving a digital archive and a projected thirteen-volume book series comprised of primary documents of Latin American and Latino art.

With this groundbreaking effort, the MFAH sought to bring about a long-term transformation in these budding fields of study and research. The crux of this project involved a highly structured, team-based initiative that expanded across the Americas. Between 2002 and 2004, the ICAA set out to identify institutional partners as it simultaneously developed the project's administrative and professional infrastructure. In 2004, the seventeen-member editorial board was appointed and the project's Editorial Framework was developed and approved. The first three teams began operations in 2005; they were followed by seven other teams in a staggered timeline. The ICAA provided all of the equipment and training for the teams and oversaw their document-recovery efforts. Six years later, the Recovery Phase of the project was completed. The project's second phase—involving the labor-intensive tasks of processing and cataloguing these documents and their publication in both digital and book series formats—began in 2009. In 2012, the countless hours of work by the ICAA and its hundreds of international partners culminated in the publication of this volume and the simultaneous launch of the ICAA Documents Project Digital Archive.

Initiatives of this nature can test the capacity of institutions to meet their complex demands and intricate logistical requirements. Having been charged by Dr. Marzio with the responsibility of overseeing this effort from its inception, I am extremely proud of what the museum and the center have achieved. Fully understanding the value of research as the foundation for promoting scholarship, innovative exhibitions, and visionary collecting efforts, the MFAH's Board of Trustees wholeheartedly endorsed this enterprise from the beginning. Similarly, the museum's Latin American Art Subcommittee has championed the ICAA Documents Project's growth, development, and fund-raising initiatives every step of the way. Enthusiasm for the ICAA's mission also extended to the entire institution, and a number of key departments worked relentlessly over the past decade to bring the ICAA's digital archive and book series to fruition. These include: administration, development, publications, information technology, marketing and communications, the Hirsch Library, human resources, and volunteer services. My thanks and appreciation go to all of them for their hard work and contributions to making this ambitious undertaking a reality.

I also wish to recognize the exceptional scholarship and dedication of Mari Carmen Ramírez, the Wortham Curator of Latin American Art and director of the ICAA. For Volume I of the ICAA book series, Dr. Ramírez has collaborated

intensely with Héctor Olea and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, both of whom I also would like to thank for their contributions and deep commitment to the Documents Project. María C. Gatzambide was instrumental as well to this endeavor, and she served tirelessly as the point person for the ICAA team. Furthermore, the MFAH is extremely grateful to the ICAA Document Project's partner institutions, researchers, advisors, editors, cataloguers, and consultants for the time and effort they dedicated to recovering, classifying, annotating, and editing the documents that make up the core of this landmark initiative. Please see pp. 33–35 for a complete list of team participants.

Bruno Favaretto, of the São Paulo-based firm Base 7, merits special mention for his extraordinary work engineering the project's database and website. I also extend sincere thanks to Diane and Bruce Halle and the project's sponsors who generously supported the work of the teams as well as the digital archive and book series.

Peter C. Marzio's faith in this project stemmed from a simple idea: the capacity of documents to stimulate interest in the artistic production of an extremely rich, yet under-recognized area of the world. He envisioned a college freshman stumbling upon this digital archive and the book series to discover Latin American art for the first time, and he believed that such an experience had the potential to be truly transformative both for this student and, indeed, for the future of the field. When Dr. Marzio passed away in December 2010, the ICAA had begun its countdown toward the launch of the digital archive and the book series. I believe both the project's website and the present volume will fulfill his high expectations.

GWENDOLYN H. GOFFE

INTERIM DIRECTOR

THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON

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Critical Documents of 20th-Century Latin American and Latino Art

A DIGITAL ARCHIVE AND PUBLICATIONS PROJECT AT
THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON

MARI CARMEN RAMÍREZ

The Project

Documents of 20th-Century Latin American and Latino Art (ICAA Documents Project) is a long-term archival, editorial, and bibliographic enterprise dedicated to the recovery and publication of thousands of primary source materials fundamental to deepening the appreciation and understanding of Latin American and Latino art. As such, it involves two key components: 1) An open-ended, free, and globally accessible digital archive available on the Internet; 2) A complementary book series operating in tandem with the archive that translates and publishes in English selected documents from this digital repository, presenting them within a critical framework that underscores key issues, ideas, and movements.

A basic premise of this immense undertaking led by the International Center for the Arts of the Americas (ICAA) at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, is that the most critical obstacle to the long-term consolidation and appreciation of Latin American/Latino art as an autonomous field is the limited accessibility to primary documents that shed light on the arts, artists, culture, history, and politics of the region. This scarcity of resources naturally obstructs the process of training specialists and generating scholarly publications. In many Central and South American countries, the economic and infrastructural challenges experienced by institutional and private archives—together with the absence of efficient professional networks—has seriously hampered access to significant troves of documents. Furthermore, archival initiatives have barely touched Latino communities—primarily Chicano, Cuban American, and Puerto Rican—in the United States. As a result, some of the written production of twentieth-century Latin American and Latino artists, critics, and curators is in jeopardy of being

irretrievably lost. While this situation has significantly improved in the last decade, it is still compounded by the substantial lag in the teaching of Latin American art in the United States as compared, for example, to the instruction of European art. Largely because experts in the area are comparably scarce, as are translations and sources in English, this compelling art has sustained, until recently, only a restricted presence in the art history and humanities programs of U.S. colleges and universities. The Documents Project is far-reaching and addresses this significant lacuna in the field of Latin American/Latino art history, research, and teaching by providing access within a single, borderless archive to thousands of critical texts.

What this virtual archive attempts to do is to provide the tools and a platform that establish a bridge between academia and the museum. The result is that the ICAA Documents Project Digital Archive can be considered a *virtual constellation* of pivotal texts that shaped the intellectual foundations of visual arts production in Latin America and the Latino United States in the twentieth century. The project has gathered together and makes available thousands of seminal documents, both well-known and obscure. The tremendous range of materials presented by the digital archive and the book series include: individual artist or group manifestos; programmatic texts; letters; public debates carried out in newspapers; art reviews; artists' notes; and excerpts from relevant journals and books. Both the archive and the book series offer access to primary source materials and important texts by art critics, curators, art historians, writers, and philosophers who actively participated in the constitution of specific groups or movements, as well as by other scholars and influential figures whose writings provide insights into issues and ideas central to understanding the many facets of Latin American and Latino art, history, and culture. The majority of these documents qualify as "primary sources," which, for the purposes of the project, is a designation that reflects that these are *non-mediated* texts. In other words, these documents have not been significantly revised or interpreted by others—regardless of whether or not they have been previously published; additionally these are texts that have had a significant impact on the understanding of a particular artist, movement, trend, or period.

In addition to preserving and making available key documents, one of the primary goals of this project is to establish an intellectual bridge between Latin American and Latino artists, critics, and scholars north and south of the

Rio Grande. It must be underscored that these artists and writers do not comprise a homogeneous group defined by national, regional, or community borders. Instead, they represent a discontinuous, fragmented ensemble of more than twenty countries, as well as a multiplicity of races, indigenous groups, and migrant communities. Negotiating such differences is perhaps the greatest challenge that U.S. and Latin American cultural institutions—arts funding agencies included—face as they move into the second decade of the twenty-first century. Bringing together the sources for Latin American and Latino art should clarify, in nuanced ways, both the similarities and noteworthy differences between these groups, thus expanding the framework for mutual comprehension and collaboration.

An Open-Ended Archive

What distinguishes the ICAA Documents Project from other initiatives of this nature is that it is an international, *team*-based effort directed toward identifying, securing, cataloguing, and publishing the documents in both digital and print formats. This carefully planned operation involved a staggered, six-year “recovery” phase leading to the selection of documents that make up the digital archive. To achieve and implement its objectives, the ICAA—tirelessly working with partner institutions—organized ten research teams that operated between 2005 and 2011 in sixteen U.S. and Latin American cities. Joining forces with universities, museums, cultural foundations, and independent research centers [see pp. 33–35], the ICAA entrusted the task of assembling the archive to senior and junior researchers with expertise in the art of the countries and communities engaged by the ICAA Documents Project. The teams also included image and data specialists, digital cataloguers, translators, and administrative staff. In order to fulfill the project’s recovery, cataloguing, and editorial guidelines, the teams mined local archives and repositories to identify, scan, summarize, and annotate the documents. The ICAA provided the training and equipment (including computers, digital cameras, and scanners) necessary for the teams to carry out their research and selection. The project’s Editorial Board and Steering Committee oversaw the scope and activities of the efforts of all involved. Indeed, the formation of these teams and their collaborations with one another led to the articulation of an unprecedented North/South professional network of visual arts researchers. In 2008, at the peak of the ICAA Documents Project recovery phase,

close to one hundred researchers and visual arts professionals could claim formal affiliation with this undertaking. Meetings and conferences held in Houston (2004, 2005, and 2006) and Buenos Aires (2007) further stimulated the live exchange between the project's staff, teams, and affiliates.

Advances in digital technology allowed the ICAA to overcome critical obstacles—including the notion of the physical possession or “ownership” of the materials, as well as geographic boundaries and potential financial hurdles—that, until recently, hindered researchers' engagement with archives. In the case of the ICAA Documents Project, the question of ownership was soundly rejected in favor of providing unfettered *access* to documents. In working to achieve this goal, the ICAA had to ask and address certain important questions, among them: How do we make accessible via the Internet a vast cache of materials related to the visual arts of Latin America without having to remove these documents from their original repositories? To what extent is it possible to use technology to serve the larger needs of a global constituency? To address the technological aspects of these questions, a specially designed database and website—produced for the project by the São Paulo-based firm Base 7—was commissioned to provide the inter-connective foundation for the project. The prospect of digitally reproducing the original documents in PDF format while allowing users to save, print, or e-mail them not only permitted the ICAA to forego the need to physically own these materials, but it also made it possible for these documents to exist in more than one location at any given time. By adopting the formula of taking a single document and simultaneously making it available to a worldwide audience and then applying this method to the handling of thousands of documents, the ICAA would be able to successfully meet its commitment to preserving the intellectual legacy of Latin American and Latino art and culture.

No matter how extensive they may be, all archives are fragmentary and selective since they respond to the social, political, cultural, and institutional contexts that shaped them. In the case of the ICAA Documents Project, *fragmentation* and *selectivity* were, from the very beginning, essential conditions that drove the conception and execution of the endeavor. Although the virtual nature of this initiative makes it open-ended and potentially infinite, the task of compiling an archive relating to such a vast and heterogeneous field as the visual arts in Latin America and the Latino United States requires an extremely selective, and, one might even say, *curatorial approach*. From the point of view of content, the project's

Editorial Board—an advisory body comprised of senior art historians and curators from each of the represented countries or communities—designed the project’s editorial framework; made final decisions regarding the inclusion of specific documents into the archive; and determined research and publication priorities. This editorial scaffolding supported the first stage of the recovery and publishing efforts and identified themes and issues that transcend national and geographic borders that the book series in particular could treat in diachronic ways. This type of approach allows for comparative perspectives and a more flexible focus on the art historical phenomena of the region.

The Editorial Board encouraged the project teams to expand their efforts well beyond existing national or local canons into unexplored areas that offer the potential to open up innovative lines of inquiry. Each project team adapted the editorial framework and guidelines to the specific profile and needs of its cultural milieu. Finally, guided by the project’s core values of flexibility, adaptability, and consensus, the teams made adjustments in response to practical issues encountered in the field.

The Book Series

The long-term goal of the ICAA Documents Project is to build an *information superstructure* that will connect artists and source materials from these various locales, allowing for a more complex picture of the interaction between artists, critics, and curators of the region. This is a turning point if we consider that at present no comparative art history of these movements exists. The *Critical Documents of 20th-Century Latin American and Latino Art* book series, beginning with this first volume—*Resisting Categories: Latin American and/or Latino?*—gives further dimension to this superstructure and allows for selected documents to be considered more critically and in thought-provoking ways that will promote ongoing dialogue and scholarship.

By embracing thematic rather than chronological approaches, these books will allow readers to compare how artists from different countries and/or communities approach aesthetics, social and political issues, and cultural tendencies. This open-ended framework of readings will serve the teaching and research needs of the academic and professional communities in the United States, Europe, and Latin America, essentially eliminating or questioning boundaries and rethinking the current map of what is considered Latin American/Latino

art. That is, a map with unprecedented protagonists, routes, intersections, and junctures that will lead the way toward the understanding of the visual production of the area; or, in dialectical terms, a map offering recognition beyond both *the region* and *what is regional*.

The book series and the digital archive have been designed to ensure that the ICAA Documents Project never functions merely as a passive repository. The initiative seeks, instead, to establish a dynamic relationship with its users, many of whom will over the years ahead undoubtedly contribute to the contents of the archive, while actively pursuing new lines of thought by consulting this ever growing and changing cache of documents.

Somewhat utopian in scope, the ICAA Documents Project is a *work-in-progress* that can only scratch the surface of a vast field of artistic production. It is our hope that the archive's many potential constituencies—from students to scholars to artists, museum curators, and art collectors—will perpetually breathe new life into these writings by considering them again and again, while in the process raising questions, revisiting dialogues, and creating new ones, all in an effort to better grasp the movable construct of Latin American and Latino art, as well as its broader cultural histories and global implications.

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A Brief Guide to Using Volume I

NOTES ON THE SELECTION, PRESENTATION, EDITING, AND ANNOTATION OF TEXTS

Document Selection

The *Critical Documents of 20th-Century Latin American and Latino Art* book series is an extension of the ICAA Digital Archive Project. Hence, the selection of authors and texts for this volume has been dictated by the parameters of the ICAA Documents Project's editorial framework and document recovery operations [see pp. 27–31]. Following the editorial categories initially laid out by the Editorial Board, the project teams identified, recovered, summarized, and annotated the texts and uploaded them to the project's database. The volume editors, in turn, established the thematic scope of the volume and determined which texts would be included in the anthologies. In many cases, the volume editors also functioned as a document recovery team: they identified key textual materials and, with the assistance of the Houston-based central team, incorporated these documents into the Digital Archive.

The geographic range covered by the documents in this first volume replicates the scope of the ICAA Documents Project to date. Countries represented include Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Venezuela, and the United States. For the first time, documents and primary source materials relating to Latino art—Chicano, Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Nuyorican, Cuban American—have been included side by side with writings on Latin American art.

Presentation and Editing of Texts

DIGITAL ARCHIVE NUMBERS: Unlike other documentary anthologies, this one is supported by an ever-growing Digital Archive which is limitless in its capacity to assimilate and display textual materials. All of the documents in this volume are available in their language of origin in the ICAA Digital Archive [[HTTP://ICAADOCS.MFAH.ORG](http://icaadoocs.mfah.org)]. In order to facilitate for the reader the potentially

concurrent and complementary use of both the book and the archive, each document's *digital archive number* has been provided. For example, in the heading section, the reader will find a general document title, author, date and archive number:

III.3.2**DIGITAL ARCHIVE 747185****COMRADES IN CHICAGO****Carlos Mérida, 1938**

DOCUMENT NUMBERS AND CROSS REFERENCES: Each text has also been assigned a *document number* that corresponds to its placement in the present volume. This number is distinct from the *digital archive number* described above. For example, in the case of the aforementioned Mérida essay, its document number is III.3.2 (indicating that it is located in chapter III, section 3, and subsection 2 of this book). In addition to being integral to the framework of this anthology, the document numbering system is designed to encourage readers to consult related documents in other parts of the volume, moving back and forth with ease. As an example, in “The Ailing Continent” [SEE DOCUMENT III.1.3], César Zumeta references the Monroe Doctrine [SEE DOCUMENT III.1.1]; by providing the Monroe Doctrine’s document number in brackets, we have designed the book to be used in dynamic, non-linear ways.

DOCUMENT INTRODUCTIONS AND ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHIC ENTRIES: Each document’s bibliographic information is found in the introductory materials preceding the text. In addition to providing an explanation of the document’s publication and translation history, these entries are designed to briefly introduce the authors and some of the key issues raised by the text or texts in question. In some cases, documents that relate to one another are grouped together in a subsection, and a longer single entry or description addresses all of the documents within the section and begins to consider their connections to one another.

Many of the texts included in this anthology were gathered together during the Document Project’s multi-year recovery phase. These documents have been fully annotated and are available in facsimile view through the ICAA Digital

Archive. For a list of the researchers who contributed to the identification and/or annotation of individual documents, please refer to the “Researcher and Translator Credits” toward the end of this book [see p. 1136].

DOCUMENT TITLES: For the full title of a document (in its language of origin), the reader should consult its annotated bibliographic entry. The titles that precede the documents have sometimes been abbreviated; these titles, then, should be seen as headings and guides to the texts that follow.

ELLIPSES: Because in most cases we are providing excerpts rather than publishing texts in their entirety, we have employed ellipses to indicate where text has been eliminated. The reader will note that three ellipses (formatted with a space between each period) indicate when text has been cut from the middle of a sentence: . . . A fourth period is added to indicate that material has been eliminated either at the end of or after a sentence: When larger sections or paragraphs have been cut, the ellipses take the form of three periods centered between paragraphs. To indicate cases where the ellipses were original to a text—where the author is being deliberately elliptical and where the thought has been consciously left uncompleted to be suggestive—we have used three periods without spaces: ...

ENDNOTES: For most documents published before the latter part of the twentieth century, only footnotes that amplified or explained the text in question have been maintained and published in this volume. For later documents, where footnotes or endnotes are clearly integral to the scholarly process, notes have been preserved and appear as originally published by their authors. The reader of Volume I will notice some variation in note formatting; although consistency with regard to the treatment of notes has been employed wherever possible in texts translated by the ICAA, in writings previously published in English, the editors have respected the document’s original approach to bibliographic citations. To provide a cleaner and consistent look, notes are published as endnotes and immediately follow the document to which they relate.

TRANSLATIONS: Unless otherwise noted in the annotated bibliographic entries preceding the documents, the ICAA Documents Project affiliated translators have translated documents originally published in a language other than English. For

a list of specific translators and the documents translated by each, please consult the “Researcher and Translator Credits.” Within documents, the editors have sometimes chosen to leave certain titles, words, or phrases in their language of origin, especially in cases where even the best translation cannot capture all of the word/words’ nuances. In such cases, English translations are provided in brackets. Within the annotated bibliographic entries, titles have not been translated to remain consistent with standard bibliographic practices.

BRACKETED CLARIFICATIONS/EXPLANATIONS AND EDITOR’S NOTES: In an effort to make this book a useful resource for readers from diverse backgrounds and with varying degrees of familiarity with the issues and materials presented, we have provided clarifications in brackets and editor’s notes whenever possible. For example, if an author references an artist or writer with only a last name, the reader will find the first name added in brackets. In other cases, we offer dates, definitions, and other information that might be necessary for the full appreciation of the material. When an explanation has required more than a few words, an editor’s note has been added in the endnotes. These notes conclude with the following notation: “—Ed.” In cases where a previous editor or translator has added a note that we are reproducing, we have indicated this by bracketing the “—Ed.” designation: [—Ed.].

CORRECTIONS TO AN ORIGINAL TEXT: We have faithfully reproduced texts originally published in English, making only the most minor orthographic or punctuation correction when necessary.

USE OF TERMS: Although we have followed and tried to maintain consistent guidelines with regard to frequently appearing terms in this volume, for obvious reasons, we have not applied those standards to texts previously published in English in order to remain true to the vision of their authors or previous translators. For example, while we have chosen not to hyphenate terms like Pan American or Hispanic American, these words may appear hyphenated, as they were originally published, in certain texts in this volume.

HÉCTOR OLEA, MARI CARMEN RAMÍREZ,
TOMÁS YBARRA-FRAUSTO

Resisting Categories

AMERICA: FROM DISCOVERY TO INVENTION, from theoretical concoction to practical construct... We have been the subjects of a vast inquiry teeming with both questions and assertions. We are at once objects and subjects of that riddle. The one that geopolitics turned into a region, the one that fostered and nurtured the quest for all sorts of utopias, the one that led to experiments with vicissitudes galore, striving to locate or identify us within endless terms, or even trying to fit us with a “proper” name. In the face of such multifarious accounts, Volume I of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston/International Center for the Arts of the Americas Critical Documents of 20th-Century Latin American and Latino Art series spans huge distances in time and encompasses two centuries of “Latin-ness,” as well as many circumstances in that complex space—full of both surmises and surprises—occupied and perpetuated by “America.”

During the course of the twentieth century—most particularly since the post-World War II period—the categories of “Latin American” and “Latino” art evolved drastically. Beginning as mere *descriptors* of the under-appreciated visual arts expression of a marginal (notwithstanding continental) region or of an ensemble of communities within the United States, these terms eventually became synonymous with hot commodities within global artistic circuits. Such a meteoric rise (in both visibility and economic value) of these artistic manifestations prompted heated debates regarding the presumed geopolitical and sociocultural specificities implied by these terms. Scholars, critics, art historians, artists, and other intellectuals have repeatedly posed several questions that reveal a huge gap in our understanding of the issues comprised by the phenomenon that is “Latin American” or “Latino” art. This volume revisits many of these questions and, in fact, strives to push this inquiry to another level, asking: Does the category “Latin American art” apply to particular traits of a culturally and geographi-

cally defined yet extremely heterogeneous region? Or conversely, is the subject just one more manifestation of “universal” art? By the same token, is “Latino” art a regional expression or yet another manifestation of a consumer-oriented, globalized art world? Does the broad use of these terms “ghettoize” this art—as some critics claim—or does it denote a certain resilience associated with long-standing struggles for a presumed cultural or regional “identity”? More importantly, in the aftermath of Postmodernism—with its trenchant critique of essentialisms, overarching relativism, and unbridled subordination to market values—is the attempt to thoroughly debate the notions of “Latin American” or “Latino” art still relevant? Furthermore, could it be that the “ascent” in prestige of these artistic categories over the last two decades has rendered these debates obsolete?

The paradox at the core of this situation becomes even clearer when we consider that attempts to elaborate responses to the above questions invariably lead to dead ends and worn-out clichés. In other words, contrary to what is implied by these terms, there is no such thing as “Latin American” or “Latino” art; there is only art produced by individual artists in more than twenty countries and a plethora of diverse communities that make up the region as a whole. Why then *the insistence* on defining or pigeonholing the cultural and artistic works of the region under all-encompassing appellations? In our view, despite the considerable attention accorded to these labels in recent times, the understanding and appreciation (or lack thereof) of Latin American and Latino art worldwide continues to be plagued by ignorance, platitudes, and even crude stereotypes, all of which hinder enduring validation as legitimate fields of research, study, and collecting. As far as we, the organizers of the volume, are concerned, this misunderstanding is rooted in the origins and histories of the art under consideration. For this reason, a deeply probing, broad-based inquiry into the foundations—historic, cultural, political, and ideological—of the coining and subsequent use and transformation(s) of these terms and their meanings is not only pertinent but extremely timely. The fact that, as of today, Latinos constitute the fastest growing minority in the United States—with a projected rise to 25% of the U.S. population by the year 2050—further justifies and indeed compels the need to pursue the task at hand.

Not surprisingly, the defiance of categories (a strategy underscored by the present volume’s title) lies at the very root of the history of a colonized and

exploited sociopolitical and cultural enclave that, on one hand, comprises more than twenty countries as well as a vast intermingling of ethnicities and nationalities; and, on the other hand, stands for a heterogeneous mix of individuals that includes both native-born U.S. citizens (Chicanos, Mexican Americans, Nuyoricans, Puerto Ricans, and Cuban Americans) as well as a vast array of immigrants from Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean. Without question, despite the differences that separate them, Latin Americans and Latinos share a history of colonialism as well as a long-standing, common struggle to define their identity against hegemonic powers. This shared experience lends a rather unique set of qualities to the topic under investigation, providing an appropriate and a provocative starting point for our inquiry. Unlike other regions of the world, Latin America resulted from a fortuitous “discovery” that, from the very outset, led to all sorts of misinterpretations [SEE CHAPTER 1]. Centuries of colonial domination by European nations placed this New World geopolitical bloc on an unequal axis of exchange with respect to the Old World, its distant yet incontrovertible relative.

The term “Latin America” was first introduced in France in 1862 as a means to implement the imperial (religious, economic, and commercial) ambitions of Napoleon the III in the region which were initiated by the invasion of Mexico [SEE DOCUMENT 1.2.1]. Prior to this turning point, what we conceive today as “Latin America” was known to its inhabitants as “America,” “Hispanic America,” “Ibero America,” or “Native America.” A century later, the visible entrance of Latinos into the U.S. political debate and national consciousness in the 1960s involved the Latino quest for an equal share of the notion of America itself. Rejecting classifications such as “Hispanic” or “Spanish American”—indeed, any hyphenated form of “American”—Latinos saw and continue to see themselves as “Mestizos”—a cultural fusion of their Spanish, Indian, and African ancestry. This community of communities has been a part of the American experience since even before the founding of the United States. It may seem incongruous to want to define or to carve out a Latino identity within such heterogeneous conditions that must encompass both people born in Latin America as well as their U.S.-born and raised counterparts, but the need to do so is undeniable and persistent. Nevertheless, as with “Latin America,” the multifarious definition(s) of Latino identity/identities are by their very nature fluid and flexible.

Within this framework, *Resisting Categories: Latin American and/or Latino?* aims to contribute to the broadest understanding of an extremely complex and

fascinating phenomenon by focusing on how the notions of “Latin American” and “Latino” have been conceptualized from the sixteenth century until the end of the first decade of the present century; that is, from the expansive epoch of “discovery” through the equally elastic era of globalization. By means of one hundred and seventy-eight carefully selected and annotated documents written by artists, critics, journalists, writers, and cultural theoreticians, a concerted effort was made to track the emergence, consolidation, and calling into question of these terms vis-à-vis the heterogeneous social and cultural contexts that generated them, as well as to bring to the fore the critical mass of writings they inspired. In this way, both anticipated and unexpected affinities, differences, continuities, ruptures, and even paradoxes emerged as we considered and arranged within a critical framework our wide-ranging authors’ pursuits of the slippery and ambiguous definitions of Latin American or Latino art. Going beyond issues of nomenclature or identity, however, an underlying premise of this volume is that Latin American and Latino art constitute an *intellectual field* (in the terms of French post-structuralist Pierre Bourdieu) with its own laws, agents, and intrinsic dynamics. Moreover, the articulation of this *field* goes hand in hand with the role intellectuals played in the ongoing, dynamic evolution of these societies. By and large, this role has been described in terms of a specific figure associated with this region: the *pensador*—that is, “the man of ideas” who writes about topical issues from the perspective of an erudite generalist or even a scholar. In the United States, the views of these intellectuals were promulgated and popularized for Latino audiences through the Spanish language press. The ubiquitous role of the *pensador* in the debates about Latin American and Latino identity and art crisscrosses with those assumed by several other key agents of the area whose writings are also highlighted in this volume; this latter group includes the avant-garde artist-theoretician, the art critic, and the curator. Worth noting in this regard is the active participation of women intellectuals in the debates surrounding Latin American and Latino identity, particularly during the second half of the twentieth century. Together with the contributions of their male counterparts, these writers were instrumental to delineating the basic coordinates of the extremely flexible and dynamic Latin American and Latino *intellectual field*.

The texts gathered in this volume shed new light on the shift from defining to *defying* these categories associated with Latin American and Latino art. Within this boundless framework—and contrary to the negative connotations

of these terms that still persist—perhaps the most important idea set forth in these pages is that since the late nineteenth century, there has been an ongoing and consistent—if highly problematic and even contentious—attempt to think about the art of the region in transnational, continental terms. The identification of or quest for common ground in both the political and cultural realities of the region was a recurring argument introduced to counter those who saw a fragmented continent comprised of individual nations. In stark contrast to the nation-building, *E pluribus unum* (out of many, one) strategy of the United States, Latin America faced a shattered *ex uno plures* (out of one, many) continental reality. This condition was the foundation for the longing for continental integration and the overarching quest for identity that marked Latin American history since the colonial period. From this point of view, the project of thinking about Latin America as a comprehensive whole has nothing to do with a return to essentialism, but rather with the rightful, yet ambiguous urge for identity; that is, for bona fide autonomy and a legitimate differentiation from hegemonic rule. To state that the authors represented in this volume grapple with this seminal issue is an understatement. Indeed, a more accurate characterization would situate the unrelenting quest to define “Latin/Latino America” and “Latin/Latino American art” at the continental level as an obsessive pursuit, “a neurosis of identity that is not completely cured” [SEE DOCUMENT VI.2.7] and that stubbornly eludes either closure or categorization.

While one of our key objectives is to trace and examine the obsessive quest(ion)—What is “Latin American” and/or “Latino?”—with this volume, we also seek to expand the reader’s grasp of the complexities of these “operative constructs” beyond traditional perceptions and understandings. In our view, while the struggle for identity and survival lies at the very core of the issues at hand, there are at least two other dimensions of the problem that also merit attention. The first one points to the nexus between Latin America and the United States, which together comprised sometimes clashing, sometimes complementary “half-worlds.” While in the first four centuries of Latin America’s history, Europe was its chief interlocutor; in the twentieth century, the United States, in its capacity as reluctant neighbor, has been a constant presence—whether as bitter foe or foil—directly affecting the economic, sociocultural, and even artistic dynamics of the region. This presence increased in the post-World War II period when the U.S. assumed the role of superpower. The concept of Amer-

ica—one continent sharply divided *in half* by differences in politics, economics, language, culture, and religion, as well as by the ongoing threat of domination that began in 1823 with the Monroe Doctrine [SEE DOCUMENT III.1.1]—permeates the general atmosphere of the texts gathered in this volume. Indeed, these writings are informed by a complex dialectic whereby not only Latin American elites, but also U.S. politicians, intellectuals, and cultural agents exerted—directly or indirectly—their influence on the consolidation of both the region as well as on the varied constituencies and fields that try to represent it. In this regard, the debates over Latin American identity extend beyond issues of colonialism and the looming threat of imperialism to reveal an active and productive exchange between the two half-worlds that comprise the Americas. Focusing on the visual arts, the main subject of this volume, it may be time to fully recognize that the idea of Latin American art as a *discrete field* of study and the collecting of this art at the continental level were North American concoctions [SEE CHAPTER III, INTRODUCTION AND DOCUMENTS III.4.6-9] embraced and expanded during the second half of the twentieth century by cultural agents and institutions throughout the United States and Latin America. More importantly, in the first part of the century, the division implicit in the metaphor of the half-worlds was limited to the distinction between the Anglo and Latin worlds and the political and economic tensions that separated them. However, with the ascendancy of the Latino population since 1960, the presence of one half-world inside the other has become more pronounced, leading many to postulate the internal process of “Latino Americanization” of the United States. This trend has also prompted a number of U.S. Latino intellectuals to set forth the notion of a “pan-Latino identity,” thereby offering closure and satisfying the utopian desire for an integrated continent [SEE CHAPTER VI, DOCUMENTS VI.1.1-3, AND 6-7].

The second, non-conventional aspect of identity highlighted by this volume concerns the role of *representation* in the debates surrounding the specificity of Latin American and Latino art. As we heard insistently in the 1970-90s, in order for an identity to exist, it must first be recognized by the dialectical figure of “The Other”; in the field of art in particular, recognition necessarily implies *representation*. Hence, one of the key contributions of this volume is its capacity for bringing together the problem of identity with the issue of its representation and, ultimately, its display at the level of exhibitions and museum collections. The relationship between identity and representation has been at the core of the

debates surrounding Latin American art since the late-1930s when the Museum of Modern Art presented the first exhibitions focused on the art of this region. The tensions at play surfaced again during the various “booms” experienced by the Latin American and Latino art field—as well as in other creative fields such as literature—since 1945. From this point of view, exhibitions—together with the catalogues and the institutional and financial infrastructure that accompanies them—functioned as vehicles (at times much more effective than politics or diplomacy) for the issues being debated at the intellectual level—and, as such, were fundamental to the topic under consideration. Therefore, we offer a broad range of texts, covering several different periods that, when juxtaposed, provide numerous and nuanced perspectives covering both the practical and theoretical levels and encompassing, among many others, artists perspectives and curatorial practices.

Perhaps the most important conclusion to be drawn from these selected documents is that, rather than absolute signifiers, terms like “Latin American” or “Latino” can only function as “constructs.” That is, as *operative concepts* whose coordinates have been “invented” or are to be ceaselessly “re-invented” by every generation or cultural group as either an antidote or corrective to the lopsided position of these groups vis-à-vis the so-called “First World”—a First World currently and ironically embroiled in its own identity crisis prompted by ceaseless immigrations from all over the planet. This present reality affirms the cyclical—if not circular—nature of the debates concerning both the questioned identity of the region and its varied art. In this regard, current debates—with their provocative stances and cynical posturing—are not unlike the ones that took place twenty-five, fifty, or even one hundred years ago. With this in mind, it is our hope that the flexible challenges offered by this volume will encourage innovative and open-minded approaches to the problems at hand, while providing readers with insights that may begin to delineate the brand new features of the countenance of the society we are becoming.



Amatorū vrb.

Fons Anydri.

Estium anydri

Bythlodacus.

I

THE CONTINENTAL UTOPIA

INTRODUCTION BY HÉCTOR OLEA

HÉCTOR OLEA

The Continental Utopia

THE WIDE RANGE OF DOCUMENTS amassed in this comprehensive chapter reflect the shifts and continuities in thought as well as the various agendas that informed writings relating to the “discovery,” “invention,” and finally the construct of “Latin” America. Some of these sources help to dispel long-standing stereotypes; others point to the sheer “imperial interests” involved, from Spain to France and the United States. Representing the viewpoints of a variety of thinkers and historical figures from different centuries and parts of the world, these seminal documents have shaped the discourses on Latin America. Hence, these texts—especially when considered collectively—begin to illuminate the ways in which the complexity of the continent “resists categories.” This chapter sets the stage and introduces the main dilemmas and questions debated in this entire book. Three main ideas—organized into six parts—are encompassed by this introductory chapter and are echoed throughout the volume: the “Latin-ness” of the continent; the simplistic idea of ensemble implied by the vastness of the word “America”; and the straddling of both terms—“Latin” and “America”—that the overstated, impossible concept of Utopia brought to the fore as it began to be increasingly applied to the continent, beginning as early as the sixteenth century.

1.1 “America as a Utopian Refraction” includes accounts inspired by the earliest European expeditions to the New World which would set the tone and introduce some of the terms of the discourse that would have currency for centuries to come. In Christopher Columbus’s letter to King Ferdinand of Spain, we read his awe and his sense of a God-given right to conquer as he describes his voyage across the Atlantic, as well as the unprecedented people and lands “of which not only Spain, but Universal Christendom will be partaker” [SEE DOCUMENT 1.1.1].—Columbus mistakenly believed he had arrived at the Indian Sea, confusing Cathay (China) with Juana (Cuba), an auspicious error that nevertheless set into motion

a vast *christening* of the continent on European terms. From the Mexican intellectual Alfonso Reyes, we learn of the sixteenth-century cartographers of Saint-Dié who privileged Amerigo Vespucci's travels in *Cosmographiæ introductio* (1507), which "met with success because it spread the news of a Terra Firma [Brazil] different from the one that Columbus had made known" [SEE DOCUMENT 1.1.5]. These navigations inspired a European enthrallment with this still mostly unknown New World, which was embraced for its "possibilities" and seen by many as the site where a Utopia might flourish. In Thomas More's *Island of Utopia* a fictional Portuguese sailor-philosopher Raphael Hythloday—who had apparently traveled with Vespucci—offers an account of the utopian society of wisely governed people he encountered during one of his journeys [SEE DOCUMENT 1.1.2]. His depiction of the Islanders were echoed by European thinkers such as Francis Bacon, who writes of "the great Atlantis (that you call America)" [SEE DOCUMENT 1.1.3]. Like More, Bacon joins fiction with recently discovered facts about the continent and lauds its social, political, and economic successes: that *New Atlantis* "as well as that of Peru, then called Coya, and that of Mexico, then named Tyrambel, were mighty and proud kingdoms in arms, shipping and riches." Such narratives illustrate that what were relatively unexplored territories like Brazil, Peru, and Mexico offered prime, blank slates upon which European minds could picture utopian societies.

Beginning with Columbus, America became a spiritual "field of possibilities" where justice, liberty, and even Utopia could be within reach for the tired, worn-out societies of the Old World. The idea of America as a "promised land" recently discovered (by chance) led to opportunities for a sort of American Crusade resulting in: the annihilation of advanced civilizations such as the Aztecs, Mayas, Chibchas, and the Incas; obstacles of doctrine perpetuated by evangelization; and the imposition of a powerful foreign rule via colonization. What may seem paradoxical is that the ambitious drive toward conquest was inextricable from the (self-) criticism of the failures of European institutions implied by the fascination with Utopia. The idea that America was within arm's reach of Utopia was one that persisted for centuries, despite the impossibility defined by the very term itself: the Greek word "*Ou-tópos*" (U-topia) was literally a "no-place." Indeed, for Mexican scholar Edmundo O'Gorman, America was no more than an "invention" or a "potentiality" to be realized only by receiving and fulfilling

ideas and values of European culture in a *refractive* way [SEE DOCUMENT 1.1.7]. The continental notion of “being” was in some ways a vision wrought by the fantasies and contradictions projected by European concerns.

1.2 “The Invention of an Operative Construct”—the “Latin-ness” of America—by the French intelligentsia is the focus of the second section of this chapter comprising texts by French politicians, historians, geographers, and sociologists. The origins of this view stem from Napoleonic proposals supported by European scholars who posited the American ideal of “the great Latin Family,” which frankly supported France’s hegemonic ambitions. This conception first appeared during the period of Imperial French intervention in Republican Mexico with Carlos Calvo’s twenty-volume commercial and diplomatic history (1862) of Latin America that he dedicated to Napoleon III as an “expression of gratitude of all people of Latin race” [SEE DOCUMENT 1.2.1]. It is Calvo who first introduces the term “Latin America” in print, and his understanding of the continent influenced generations of thinkers on the subject. In 1912, the future president of France Raymond Poincaré congratulated Francisco García Caldeón for his work in *Les démocraties latines d’Amérique*, which suggests that the French venture in Latin America will result in cultivating societies that are “more and more receptive to our literature, to our art, to our trade, and our capital. The great Latin family can only gain in material prosperity and moral authority” [SEE DOCUMENT 1.2.3]. Mixing lofty, cultural ideals with profits, the justification for the extension of this “Latin family” was obvious: France was *the holy seat* of Latin culture and Christendom, and these factors positioned her to best unite these lands under Catholicism. Moreover, as Michel Chevalier notes, “the destiny of France and the power of her authority are inextricably linked to the future opportunities of Catholic countries in general, and the Latin race in particular” [SEE DOCUMENT 1.2.2]. By stressing this, he naively pondered and justified France’s “order” through Mexico’s ordeal, thus encouraging a cultural venture of the continent. Such writings begin to touch on the important role religion could play as a pivotal and unifying factor transcending differences, discrepancies, and antagonisms.

The impulse to homogenize the region with one encompassing term—Latin America—can be traced specifically to France and to critics including André Siegfried: “My travels in the region led me to believe that these countries have enough in common to allow us to group them together within a shared

Latin American milieu” [SEE DOCUMENT 1.2.4]. Increasingly, however, such an all-embracing view of the region triggered considerable debate regarding the *unified*, cultural existence of the geopolitical entity “Latin America.” The question of whether there is a Latin America and what constitutes its being were frequently posed by twentieth-century academics with varying viewpoints and agendas. One such writer, Luis Alberto Sánchez, specifically asks: “How could there not be a ‘Latin America’ when people talk so much about it—about its personality, its efforts, its race, its idiosyncrasies, its unitary religious beliefs, its sentimental literature, its future?” [SEE DOCUMENT 1.2.6]. Although Sánchez is among those who assert a “unified environment,” a younger generation of French scholars rejected essentialist approaches to the question of whether there is a Latin America as such. Fernand Braudel and Marcel Niedergang, among others, think in terms of multiplicity rather than homogeneity [SEE DOCUMENT 1.2.7 AND DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1052740, RESPECTIVELY]. The latter, in fact, proposes an alternative construct: the “Twenty Latin Americas.” In some respects, Guy Martinière finds a middle-ground term, offers a more nuanced *modus operandi*, and argues instead for the application of Latin-ness as an “operative concept” [SEE DOCUMENT 1.2.10] that, in one way or another, makes possible an ample approach to a complex, intricate, and mixed ensemble. Indeed, multifarious traits characterize Latin America even within specific national contexts and borders. Why not, then, an overall appellation?

1.3 Cuban-born independence leader José Martí refers to Latin America in possessive terms—as “Nuestra América” (Our America)—longing for rights grounded in the precarious and blurred identity of a continent recently liberated from the grip of its colonizers. Addressing the struggles within his own country, he notes that America “still suffers, from the tiresome task of reconciling the hostile and discordant elements it inherited from the despotic and perverse colonizer and the imported methods and ideas which have been retarding logical government because they are lacking in local realities” [SEE DOCUMENT 1.3.4]. The incongruity between an imposed colonial system and these opposing “local realities” lay at the core of the struggle for identity of the newborn American republics. Writing more than seventy years before Martí in his well-known letter (1815) from Jamaica, Simón Bolívar got to the roots of the Latin American dilemma of identity: “we scarcely retain a vestige of what once was; we are, moreover, neither

Indian nor European, but a species midway between the legitimate proprietors of this country and the Spanish usurpers" [SEE DOCUMENT 1.3.2]. A key trait of this hybrid struggle was the opposition between fragmentation and unity; or, in other words, between the coherence of the North American *E pluribus unum* (out of many, one) and the continental shattering of *ex uno plures* (out of one, many). The texts gathered in this section exemplify the contentiousness of the fragmentation–unity debate. Colombian statesman José María Torres Caicedo's idea of the *Latin American Multi-Homeland* (1864–65) represents an attempt to chart a new model for the continent that simultaneously rejects both the notion of unity as well as the idea of federation that served as a model for the United States. He argues: "In Latin American States, all colonized in the same manner, ruled by identical laws, traditions, religion, what can be achieved by a federation that moves in the opposite direction. . . ? Unity becomes division, it becomes unhinged" [SEE DOCUMENT 1.3.3]. Torres Caicedo proposes instead a confederation of sovereign states to establish what he dubs a "Multi-Homeland" (*multipatria*). A second alternative whose proponents include the Mexican educator José Vasconcelos takes the form of ethnic unification, overruling the complexities of culture. He calls for the union of Iberian people in the continent in opposition to Anglo Saxon America, stating: "The free mixing of races and cultures will reproduce in higher numbers and better elements, the universalistic experiment that failed in North America. There it failed because it became 'North Americanism'; here it may be saved if the Iberian flexibility and strength establish the basis for a truly universal type. The conscience of this mission beats in the heart of all Latin American nations, and provides an impulse toward contemporary 'Latin Americanism'" [SEE DOCUMENT 1.3.8]. The *ethnically* grounded "contemporary Latin Americanism" conceived by Vasconcelos was racial and even "spiritual," and also quite different from Bolívar's dream of a *politically* unified continent.

Not everyone bought into dreams for a single, though plural and multicultural Latin America. Many South American intellectuals expressed their skepticism regarding Latin America's struggle for unified identity. Writing of the continent's inescapable *Evils of Origin*, Brazilian historian Manoel Bomfim assesses with great pessimism a persistent colonial status: "the new country never becomes a nation, remaining only the ex-colony, extended into the independent State, against all laws of evolution, extinguishing progress, captive to a thousand prejudices, bound to conservatism by ignorance. The result of this

recalcitrant past is this society that we see now: poor, exhausted, ignorant, brutalized, apathetic, with no idea of its own value, hoping that the heavens will remedy its misery, beseeching fortune from chance" [SEE DOCUMENT 1.3.5]. Alberto Zum Felde, an Argentinean-born literary historian, considers the spiritual forms of colonization that result in new, composite brands: "American French" or the "Spaniards of the New World." In Zum Felde's opinion, nations are tantamount to individuals conscious of their developing autonomy: moving from a more simple or primitive state of being, to a period of intermingling and invasions, and finally to something that could only be defined by complexity. Many of the arguments presented in this section are underscored by the implication that post-colonial political assertions of independence are undermined by continued European spiritual and cultural colonization.

1.4 The idea of fitting a plural reality within a single concept has parallels in the idealized and impossible notion of Utopia. The Spanish Baroque poet Francisco de Quevedo was indeed the first to translate the word Utopia as "*no hay tal lugar*" ("there is no such a place").¹ Given the continent's early associations with Utopian hopes and doctrines, it is quite significant that even before being officially named, it was imbued with both negativity and the idea of nothingness. This deep-rooted association with Utopianism, then, naturally leads to the question posed in this section: Is "America a No-Place?" Fundamental to this question is the metonymical equation *pars pro toto* in which several countries (the parts) aspire to belong to the continental ensemble (the whole). The mere aspiration to become defined in terms of a "totality" and as something substantial rather than nothing or no-place (Utopia), is partially an attempt to counter the philosophical negativism of the alternative (lack of) definition. In this chimerical view, a monolithic America offers endless possibilities. According to Alfonso Reyes, the author of *Última Tule* (1942), America "appears as the stage for all attempts at human happiness," and with Europe's gaze fixed upon the New World, it begins "to conceive of a more felicitous humanity" [SEE DOCUMENT 1.4.5]. However, in order for such abstract, *propitious* potential to be realized in Latin America, Brazilian historian Manoel Bomfim stresses that such concrete endeavors as "work, intellectual instruction, and the diffusion of primary education must be implemented" [SEE DOCUMENT 1.4.1]. The idea of America as Utopia also informs the American writer Waldo Frank's notion of "America [as] a potential organism: completely latent,"

full of promise but still in an embryonic phase [SEE DOCUMENT 1.4.3]. Furthermore, as the offspring of Old Worlds, America represents a “standard of universality” that José Vasconcelos philosophically casts as *Indology*; that is, the “future race” that will result from the intermingling of all known ethnicities into “the first instance of a positively universal race” [SEE DOCUMENT 1.4.2].

1.5 The ongoing effort to define “Latin American” identity reflects the “Tensions at Stake”—the uneasiness involving the dialectics of opposition and complement—in the complicated nexus between the Americas and Utopia. Oswald de Andrade’s “Anthropophagous Manifesto” (1928) suggests that such tensions can be resolved in a cannibalistic fashion with the *absorption* and transformation of the “sacred [cultural] enemy” in order to “transform the enemy into a totem” [SEE DOCUMENT 1.5.7]. Questioning the “canned consciousness” that feeds us with Western civilization, he makes an anthropophagous call against Christian morals, arguing: “they were not crusaders who came; they were fugitives of a civilization we are devouring.” In South America, the prevailing thinking beginning in the early twentieth century was that the assimilation of the European “other” hinged upon first setting into motion a process of self-definition. And, in the words of the Uruguayan painter Pedro Figari: “This cannot happen until we have developed a number of organizing proposals, (as if [we were designing] an architectural structure) focused on defining the American soul,” *our otherness* [SEE DOCUMENT 1.5.2]. Despite his deep-seated conviction and confidence that Latin America is “a powerhouse of strength and ideas,” Figari, among other artists, cautioned that the process of colonization, at least at the economic level (which is unavoidable) was not at all over. The French anarchist Charles Malato frankly identified the economic issues at stake as a tension with the “imperialists of the United States”: “Under the thumb of the Dollar Kings [Vanderbilt, Morgan, Rockefeller], things would not be quite the same” [SEE DOCUMENT 1.5.1]. Such a situation irritated the struggling, new Spanish-American republics, who, according to the Argentinean writer and activist Pablo Rojas Paz, had been subjected to externally-imposed definition by their various colonizers: “Many have concocted long, terrible names for us—North America invented Pan American; France came up with Latin American; Spain created the term Hispanic American. Each of these names, though thinly disguised as an overture to harmonious relations, is actually an expression of its creator’s frustrated imperialist designs” [SEE DOCUMENT 1.5.3]. Insofar as the

tensions of imperial devouring are implied, these writers suggest that the continent as a whole has the potential for recourse in an inverted, cynical response. As stated in de Andrade's 1928 manifesto: "Only anthropophagy unites us. Socially. Economically. Philosophically."

In this ongoing struggle to *self* identify as opposed to *being* identified, numerous cultural tensions emerge: rupture versus continuity, autochthonism versus Europeanism, and Americanism versus Nationalism. Such questions and struggles were vigorously debated by Latin American intellectuals, whose perspectives were often nuanced by and filtered through the specific historical and cultural concerns of the countries in question or of their own countries of origin. In the texts included in this section, we find that Mexico and Peru are posited as countries associated with the ancestral values of their indigenous civilizations; in contrast, among writings focusing on Argentina and Uruguay, we find evidence of the continuity of the European legacy in America. In the first case, in considering the so-called Open-Air Schools of Painting in post-revolutionary Mexico, Martí Casanovas notes that the key for asserting cultural independence may lie in the country's indigenous past: "I admire the work of Mexican Indigenous visual artists. . . . the resurgence of the Mexican countryside, the work of Indians. I am passionate about and admire fervently, any event produced along these lines that is live, palpitating, because I see in it the seeds, the possibilities, the future of Indo-American culture" in order to truly resist Europeanism [SEE DOCUMENT 1.5.5]. Other documents stress the primacy of the continental and suggest the "restrictive" qualities of what is national. Peruvian philosopher Antenor Orrego explains this continental perspective by arguing that "we must not forget that within the spirit of America, there is no room for what is national, restrictive, and negative in each country; instead, what is national is American, period" [SEE DOCUMENT 1.5.4].

1.6 We conclude this chapter with texts by Brazilian authors who ponder a seminal question for understanding the hemisphere: "Does Brazil Belong to Latin America?" This controversy isolates Brazil—not only linguistically but also geographically and culturally. But the question has broader, continental significance as well, particularly with regard to South American identity and its historical and philosophical relationship to the so-called hypothesis of Utopia. This section asserts a range of views regarding Brazil, from emphasizing difference to

calling for more integrative approaches aimed at establishing compelling connections with the rest of Latin America. Ideas of the country's disconnectedness or "splendid isolation" were well embedded in the long-lasting rule of the Empire of Brazil (1822–89). Along with establishing the identity of Brazil's enormous territory, this period of Empire also produced isolationist thinking with regard to the rest of the continent as exemplified by the work of monarchic authors including Joaquim Nabuco, Silvio Romero, and Eduardo Prado [SEE DOCUMENT III.1.2]. Prado's rejection of linkage to or similarities with the rest of the continent and Afrânio Coutinho's insistence on cultural autonomy (as if it were possible) [SEE DOCUMENT I.6.6] are countered by more forward-looking thinkers (Prudente de Moraes Neto, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, Antonio Candido) who brought to light a consciousness of the limitations, restrictions, and taboos at play. Mainly, three ideas are pivotal here: isolation, nexus, and/or difference.

The grasp of a "continental island" expressed by several authors in this book (Candido, Darcy Ribeiro, Gilberto Freyre, and Aracy Amaral [SEE DOCUMENTS I.6.7; I.2.9; III.2.4; AND IV.4.2, RESPECTIVELY]) is a point of cultural consternation. For other Brazilian authors, the designation of "Latin America" is especially meaningless: As Coutinho states: "There is no reason whatsoever to designate the peoples of this continent as 'Latin'—not Latin, or Hispanic, or Iberian. Latin America is a historic absurdity that stems from colonial bias" [SEE DOCUMENT I.6.6]. Instead, he explains, "in Brazil, every day we feel less and less Latin." Candido explains this disconnection and isolation in terms of Brazil's colonial roots: "Portugal was always a small, marginal state with no presence worthy of consideration within the centers of collective civilization." Unlike the Spanish colonies, "It never had a Phillip II to astonish Europe, nor a [Miguel de] Cervantes to alter the course of literature" [SEE DOCUMENT I.6.7]. The key issue for many of these writers is reconciling this essential *disconnection* with a desire for coexistence with the broader reality that surrounds Brazil. Although Manoel Bomfim rejects "the general epithet *Latin Americans*," he also acknowledges: "There is a relationship between Spaniards and Portuguese. There were needs common to both metropolises and analogous processes of colonization. The result of all this is a certain similarity of character between the neo-Iberian peoples. But that is all." However, in order to characterize the formation of his country, Bomfim's conception of *Brazil in the Americas* (1929) cautions that this should not be carried too far: "for the distribution of *the Americas*

to be logical, it would be necessary to distinguish three of them, instead of two: the Castilian, the Portuguese, and the English” Americas [SEE DOCUMENT I.6.1].

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Quoted in Steven Hutchinson, “Mapping Utopias,” *Modern Philology* 85, 2 (November 1987): 170.

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- I.1. AMERICA AS A UTOPIAN REFRACTION
 - I.2. THE INVENTION OF AN OPERATIVE CONCEPT
 - I.3. *NUESTRA AMÉRICA*, THE MULTI-HOMELAND
 - I.4. IS AMÉRICA A NO-PLACE?
 - I.5. TENSIONS AT STAKE
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I.1

AMERICA AS A UTOPIAN REFRACTION

I.1.1 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1051844

CONCERNING THE ISLANDS RECENTLY DISCOVERED IN THE INDIAN SEA

Christopher Columbus, 1493

In what is also known as the *Basel epistola*, Italian explorer Christopher Columbus (c. 1451–1506) describes to King Ferdinand of Spain the islands and peoples he encountered during his initial journey across the Atlantic Ocean. Beyond expressing awe at his discoveries and asserting the potential for converting these groups to Catholicism, Columbus establishes the foundational typologies and cornerstone mythologies that would inform writings on the continent for centuries to come. Columbus wrote this letter in 1493, approximately thirty-three days after departing from the Spanish port of Cadiz. That same year, Columbus's letter was translated from Spanish into Latin by Aliander de Cosco. The *Basel epistola* has been widely reprinted and translated into many languages. One of the earliest English-language versions is *The Letter of Columbus on the Discovery of America: A Facsimile of the Pictorial Edition, with a New and Literal Translation, and a Complete Reprint of the Oldest Four Editions in Latin* [(New York: Trustees of the Lenox Library, 1892)]. This current text is a transcript of the 1494 version and the Lenox translation, revised by Osher Map Library and Smith Center for Cartographic Education, University of South Maine, in 1998.

*Letter of Christopher Columbus, to whom our age owes much, concerning the islands recently discovered in the Indian Sea. For the search of which, eight months before, he was sent under the auspices and at the cost of the most invincible Ferdinand, king of Spain. Addressed to the magnificent lord Raphael Sanxis [Sánchez], a treasurer of the same most illustrious king, and which the noble and learned man Aliander de Cosco has translated from the Spanish language into Latin, on the third of the kalends of May, 1493, the first year of the pontificate of Alexander the Sixth.*¹

BECAUSE MY UNDERTAKINGS HAVE ATTAINED SUCCESS, I know that it will be pleasing to you: these I have determined to relate, so that you may be made acquainted with everything done and discovered in this our voyage. On the thirty-third day after I departed from Cadiz, I came to the Indian Sea, where I found many islands inhabited by men without number, of all which I took possession for our most fortunate king, with proclaiming heralds and flying standards, no one objecting. To the first of these I gave the name of the blessed Saviour [San Salvador], on whose aid relying I had reached this as well as the other islands. But the Indians call it Guanahany. I also called each one of the others by a new name. For I ordered one island to be called Santa Maria of the Conception, another Fernandina, another Isabella, another Juana, and so on with the rest.

As soon as we had arrived at that island which I have just now said was called Juana [Cuba], I proceeded along its coast towards the west for some distance; I found it so large and without perceptible end, that I believed it to be not an island, but the continental country of Cathay [China]; seeing, however, no towns or cities situated on the sea-coast, but only some villages and rude farms, with whose inhabitants I was unable to converse, because as soon as they saw us they took flight. . . .

And the said Juana and the other islands there appear very fertile. This island is surrounded by many very safe and wide harbors, not excelled by any others that I have ever seen. Many great and salubrious rivers flow through it. There are also many very high mountains there. All these islands are very beautiful, and distinguished by various qualities; they are accessible, and full of a great variety of trees stretching up to the stars; the leaves of which I believe are never shed, for I saw them as green and flourishing as they are usually in Spain in the month of May; some of them were blossoming, some were bearing fruit, some were in other conditions; each one was thriving in its own way. The nightingale and various other birds without number were singing, in the month of November, when I was exploring them.

There are besides in the said island Juana seven or eight kinds of palm trees, which far excel ours in height and beauty, just as all the other trees, herbs, and fruits do. There are also excellent pine trees, vast plains and meadows, a variety of birds, a variety of honey, and a variety of metals, excepting iron. In the one that was called Hispana [Haiti/the Dominican Republic], as we said above, there are great and beautiful mountains, vast fields, groves, fertile plains, very

suitable for planting and cultivating, and for the building of houses. The convenience of the harbors in this island, and the remarkable number of rivers contributing to the healthfulness of man, exceed belief, unless one has seen them. The trees, pasturage, and fruits of this island differ greatly from those of Juana. This Hispana [Haiti/Dominican Republic], moreover, abounds in different kinds of spices, in gold, and in metals. On this island, indeed, and on all the others which I have seen, and of which I have knowledge, the inhabitants of both sexes go always naked, just as they came into the world, except some of the women, who use a covering of a leaf or some foliage, or a cotton cloth, which they make themselves for that purpose. . . .

Yet when they perceive that they are safe, putting aside all fear, they are of simple manners and trustworthy, and very liberal with everything they have, refusing no one who asks for anything they may possess, and even themselves inviting us to ask for things. They show greater love for all others than for themselves; they give valuable things for trifles, being satisfied even with a very small return, or with nothing; however, I forbade that things so small and of no value should be given to them, such as pieces of plates, dishes, and glass, likewise keys and shoelace tips, although if they were to obtain these, it seemed to them like getting the most beautiful jewels in the world. It happened, indeed, that a certain sailor obtained in exchange for a shoelace tip as much worth of gold as would equal three golden coins; . . . and I gave to them many beautiful and pleasing things that I had brought with me, no value being taken in exchange, in order that I might the more easily make them friendly to me, that they might be made worshippers of Christ, and that they might be full of love towards our king, queen, and prince, and the whole Spanish nation; also that they might be zealous to search out and collect and deliver to us those things of which they had plenty and which we greatly needed.

These people practice no kind of idolatry; on the contrary they firmly believe that all strength and power, and in fact all good things are in heaven, and that I had come down from thence with these ships and sailors; and in this belief I was received there after they had put aside fear. Nor are they slow or unskilled, but of excellent and acute understanding; and the men who have navigated that sea give an account of everything in an admirable manner; but they never saw people clothed, nor these kinds of ships. As soon as I reached that sea, I seized by force several Indians on the first island, in order that they might learn from us,

and in like manner tell us about those things in these lands of which they themselves had knowledge; and the plan succeeded, for in a short time we understood them and they us, sometimes by gestures and signs, sometimes by words; and it was a great advantage to us. They are coming with me now, yet always believing that I descended from heaven, although they have been living with us for a long time and are living with us today. And these men were the first who announced it wherever we landed, continually proclaiming to the others in a loud voice, "Come, come, and you will see the celestial people." Whereupon both women and men, both young men and old men, laying aside the fear caused a little before, visited us eagerly, filling the road with a great crowd, some bringing food, and some drink, with great love and extraordinary goodwill.

In all these islands there is no difference in the appearance of the people, nor in the manners and language, but all understand each other mutually; a fact that is very important for the end which I suppose to be earnestly desired by our most illustrious king, that is, their conversion to the holy religion of Christ, to which in truth, as far as I can perceive, they are very ready and favorably inclined.

I said before how I proceeded along the island Juana in a straight line from west to east 322 miles, according to which course and the length of the way I am able to say that this Juana is larger than England and Scotland together; for besides the said 322 thousand paces, there are two more provinces in that part which lie toward the west, which I did not visit; one of these the Indians call Anan, whose inhabitants are born with tails. They extend to 180 miles in length, as I have learned from those Indians I have with me, who are all acquainted with these islands.

But the circumference of Hispana is greater than all Spain from Colonia [Catalonia] to Fontarabia [Fuenterrabia]. And this is easily proved, because its fourth side, which I myself passed along in a straight line from west to east, extends 540 miles. This island is to be desired and is very desirable, and not to be despised; in which, although as I have said, I solemnly took possession of all the others for our most invincible king, and their government is entirely committed to the said king, yet I especially took possession of a certain large town, in a very convenient location, and adapted to all kinds of gain and commerce, to which we give the name of our Lord of the Nativity. And I commanded a fort to be built there forthwith, which must be completed by this time; in which I left as many men as seemed necessary, with all kinds of arms and plenty of food for more than a year.

Likewise one caravel, and for the construction of others men skilled in this trade and in other professions; and also the extraordinary good will and friendship of the king of this island toward us. For those people are very amiable and kind, to such a degree that the said king gloried in calling me his brother. And if they should change their minds and should wish to hurt those who remained in the fort, they would not be able, because they lack weapons, they go naked, and are too cowardly. For that reason those who hold the said fort are at least able to resist easily this whole island, without any imminent danger to themselves, so long as they do not transgress the regulations and command that we gave.

In all these islands, as I have understood, each man is content with only one wife, except the princes or kings, who are permitted to have twenty. The women appear to work more than the men. I was not able to find out surely whether they have individual property, for I saw that one man had the duty of distributing to the others, especially refreshments, food, and things of that kind. I found no monstrosities among them, as very many supposed, but men of great reverence, and friendly. Nor are they black like the Ethiopians. They have straight hair, hanging down. They do not remain where the solar rays send out the heat, for the strength of the sun is very great here, because it is distant from the equinoctial line, as it seems, only twenty-six degrees. On the tops of the mountains too the cold is severe, but the Indians, however, moderate it, partly by being accustomed to the place, and partly by the help of very hot victuals, of which they eat frequently and immoderately. . . .

Finally, that I may compress in a few words the brief account of our departure and quick return, and the gain, I promise this, that if I am supported by our most invincible sovereigns with a little of their help, as much gold can be supplied as they will need, indeed as much of spices, of cotton, of mastic gum (which is only found in Chios), also as much of aloe wood, and as many slaves for the navy, as their Majesties will wish to demand. Likewise rhubarb and other kinds of spices, which I suppose these men whom I left in the said fort have already found, and will continue to find; since I remained in no place longer than the winds forced me, except in the town of the Nativity, while I provided for the building of the fort, and for the safety of all. Which things, although they are very great and remarkable, yet they would have been much greater, if I had been aided by as many ships as the occasion required.

Truly great and wonderful is this, and not corresponding to our merits, but to the holy Christian religion, and to the piety and religion of our sovereigns, because what the human understanding could not attain, the divine will has granted to human efforts. For God is wont to listen to his servants who love his precepts, even in impossibilities, as has happened to us on the present occasion, who have attained that which hitherto mortal men have never reached. For if anyone has written or said anything about these islands, it was all with obscurities and conjectures; no one claims that he had seen them; from which they seemed like fables. Therefore let the king and queen, the princes and their most fortunate kingdoms, and all other countries of Christendom give thanks to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who has bestowed upon us so great a victory and gift. Let religious processions be solemnized; let sacred festivals be given; let the churches be covered with festive garlands. Let Christ rejoice on earth, as he rejoices in heaven, when he foresees coming to salvation so many souls of people hitherto lost. Let us be glad also, as well on account of the exaltation of our faith, as on account of the increase of our temporal affairs, of which not only Spain, but universal Christendom will be partaker. These things that have been done are thus briefly related. Farewell.

Lisbon, the day before the Ides of March.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS, ADMIRAL OF THE OCEAN FLEET.

1

The first version of this letter in Latin contains an introduction added by Aliander de Cosco, its likely translator, as well as an eight-line epigram of R. L. de Corbaria, bishop of Monte Peloso, dedicated to the most invincible King of Spain. Minor changes have been made so as to agree with the text of the 1494 edition, and minor typographical errors have been corrected. —Ed.

I.1.2 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 839168

UTOPIA

Thomas More, 1516

This passage by English statesman and Renaissance humanist Thomas More (1478–1535) is excerpted from Book I of *On the Best Form of a Commonwealth and on the New Island of Utopia, a Truly Precious Book No Less Profitable than Delightful by the Most Distinguished and Learned Gentleman Thomas More, Citizen and Undersheriff of the Illustrious City of London*. More's work was first published in Louvain, Belgium, in 1516. In the present passage from the first edition, More's alter ego experiences a fictional encounter in Antwerp with a Portuguese sailor, Raphael Hythloday, who reportedly was left behind by Amerigo Vespucci's fourth expedition to the eastern coast of present-day Brazil. Hythloday's name, a composite of Greek terms that can be roughly translated to "peddler of nonsense," reminds readers of the fictionalized nature of his account. In the imaginary narrative, instead of monsters and ghouls, Hythloday finds the wisely and sensibly governed nation of the Utopians. His description of the social and political customs of the island of Utopia challenges European institutions and allows More to introduce the Greek term "u-topia" (no-place), a land of perfection that is indeed nowhere to be found. This excerpt is translated from the Latin by Clarence H. Miller [*Utopia. New Translation with an Introduction by Clarence H. Miller* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 10–15].

AS MY BUSINESS REQUIRED, I made my way to Antwerp. While I was staying there, I was often visited by Peter Giles,¹ among others, though no other visitor was more delightful to me. . . .

One day, after I had heard mass at the church of St. Mary, which is remarkable for its beautiful architecture and its large congregation, when the service was over and I was getting ready to return to my lodgings, I happened to see Giles conversing with a stranger who was getting up in years. His face was sunburned, his beard untrimmed, his cloak hanging carelessly from his shoulder; from his face and bearing I thought he looked like a sea captain. But then, when Peter saw me, he came up and greeted me. When I tried to answer, he took me a little aside and said, "Do you see this man?" (At the same time he indicated

the person I had seen him talking to.) “He is the one,” he said, “I was just getting ready to bring straight to you.”

“He would have been all the more welcome to me on your account.”

“Actually on his own,” he said, “if you knew him. For there is no mortal alive today who can give more information about unknown peoples and lands, and I know that you are very eager to hear about them.”

“My guess was not far off, then,” I said, “for when I first set eyes on him, I immediately thought he was a sea captain.”

“But in fact,” he said, “you were far off the mark. Certainly he has sailed, not like Palinurus, but rather like Ulysses, or even better like Plato.² This man, who is named Raphael—his family name is Hythloday—has no mean knowledge of the Latin language but is especially proficient in Greek; he has devoted himself to Greek more than to Latin because he has totally committed himself to philosophy and he knew that in that field there is nothing of any importance in Latin except some works of Seneca and Cicero.³ Out of a desire to see the world he left to his brothers his heritage in his homeland (he is from Portugal),⁴ joined Amerigo Vespucci, and was his constant companion in the first three of the four voyages which everyone is now reading about; but on the last voyage he did not come back with him. He sought and practically wrested from Amerigo permission to be one of the twenty-four who were left behind in a fort at the farthest point of the last voyage.⁵ And so he was left behind in accordance with his outlook, since he was more concerned about his travels than his tomb. Indeed he often used to say, ‘Whoever does not have an urn has the sky to cover him,’ and ‘from everywhere it is the same distance to heaven.’ This attitude of his would have cost him dearly if God had not been merciful to him. However, after the departure of Vespucci, he traveled through many lands with five companions from the fort, and finally, by an extraordinary stroke of luck, he was transported to Ceylon and from there he reached Calicut,⁶ where he opportunely found some Portuguese ships and at last, beyond all expectation, he got home again.”

When Peter had told me this I thanked him for his kindness in taking so much trouble to introduce me to someone whose conversation he hoped I would enjoy, and then I turned to Raphael. After we had greeted each other and spoken the usual amenities that are exchanged when strangers meet for the first time, we went off to my house, where we conversed sitting in the garden on a bench covered with grassy turf.

And so he told us how, after the departure of Vespucci, he and his companions who had remained in the fort gradually began to win the good graces of the people of that land by encountering and speaking well of them, and then they started to interact with them not only with no danger but even on friendly terms, and finally they gained the affection and favor of some ruler, whose name and country escape me. He told how, through the generosity of the ruler, he and five of his companions were liberally supplied with provisions and ships on the sea and wagons on the land—together with a trustworthy guide who took them to other rulers to whom he heartily recommended them. After many days' journey, he said, he discovered towns and cities and commonwealths that were very populous and not badly governed.

On both sides of the equator, it is true, extending almost as far as the space covered by the orbit of the sun there lie vast empty wastelands, scorched with perpetual heat.⁷ The whole region is barren and ugly, rugged and uncultivated, inhabited by wild beasts and serpents and by people who are no less wild than the beasts and no less dangerous. But when you have traveled further, everything gradually becomes milder. The heavens are less fierce, the ground is green and pleasant, the creatures are more gentle, and finally one sees peoples, cities, towns, which not only trade continually among themselves and with near neighbors but also carry on commerce with distant nations by land and seas. From that point on they were able to visit many countries in all directions since there was no ship traveling anywhere in which he and his comrades were not eagerly welcomed.

He told us that in the first regions they traveled they saw flat-bottomed vessels, spreading sails made of wickerwork or of stitched papyrus, and in other places of leather. But afterwards they found ships with curved keels, canvas sails, and in fact all the features of our own vessels. The sailors were not unskilled in seamanship and celestial navigation, but he told us that they were extremely grateful to him for introducing them to the magnetic compass, with which they had been totally unfamiliar. For that reason they usually were afraid to commit themselves to the open sea and they did not venture to do so except during the summer. But now they have such confidence in the compass that they scorn the winter weather and are careless rather than secure; thus there is a danger that the device which they thought would do them so much good will do them great harm because of their imprudence.

To present what he told us about the things he saw in each and every place would take a long time and would be beyond the scope of this work. And perhaps I will speak of it elsewhere, especially those points of which it would be useful not to be ignorant, above all whatever correct and prudent provisions he observed among civilized nations. We asked him very eagerly about such matters, and he was quite willing to explain them, but we paid no attention to monsters, for nothing is less novel than they are. Indeed, there is almost no place where you will not find Scyllas and rapacious Celænos and man-eating Læstrigions and such prodigious monsters,⁸ but it is not everywhere that you will find soundly and wisely trained citizens. But just as he noted many ill-considered practices among those newly discovered nations, so too he recounted not a few features that could serve as patterns to correct the errors of our own cities, nations, peoples, and kingdoms. These, as I said, will have to be presented elsewhere. At present I intend to relate only what he told us about the customs and institutions of the Utopians,⁹ but first I will present the conversation that led him on, as it were, to mention that commonwealth. For after Raphael had very judiciously analyzed some of our errors and some of theirs (and certainly there are plenty in both places) and had presented some wiser provisions both here and there—and he had such a mastery of the customs and institutions of every nation he visited that you would imagine he had spent his whole life there—Peter was amazed by him and said, “My dear Raphael, why do you not enter into the service of some king, for I am convinced that there is none who would not be extremely glad to have you, because this learning of yours and your knowledge of peoples and places would not only serve to delight him but would also make you fit to inform him of precedents and aid him with advice. In this manner you could at one and the same time promote your own interests enormously and be of great assistance to your relatives and friends.”

“As for my relatives and friends, I am not much concerned about them because I have done my duty by them well enough: others do not give up their possessions until they are old and sick, and even then they do so reluctantly, when they can no longer retain them; but I divided my possessions up among my relatives and friends when I was not only healthy and vigorous but also young. I think they ought to be satisfied with my generosity, and beyond that they should not demand and expect me to hand myself over into servitude to kings for their sake.”

“A fine thing to say,” said Peter. “I want you to go into the service of kings, not be in servitude to them.”

“There is,” he said, “only one syllable’s difference between them.”

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1

Giles (1486–1533) was learned in the law and edited classical and humanist books. Since 1512 he had been chief clerk of the court of justice at Antwerp.

2

Palinurus, Æneas’ steersman, dozed at the helm, fell overboard, and drowned (*Æneid* 5.833–61.), unlike the alert Odysseus and observant Plato, who learned much from their travels (*Odyssey* I.1–4; Diogenes Lærtius 3.6–7. 18–22).

3

More expressed the same opinion in his Letter to Oxford, in *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. 15, ed. Daniel Kinney (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 143.

4

In 1515, the Portuguese excelled in exploration, especially in the Far East.

5

The voyages (1503–04) of the Florentine explorer Amerigo Vespucci (1451–1512), who was in the employ of the King of Portugal, were described in the two Latin narratives (of disputed authenticity) published about 1507; one of the versions mentions he left twenty-four mariners behind in a fort at the farthest point of the voyage (Cape Frio in southeast Brazil), just across Rio de Janeiro.

6

The Portuguese had visited Calicut (a city on the west coast of India, not Calcutta) by 1487 and established a station there in 1511.

7

The torrid zone between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn, the northern and southern limits between which the sun’s orbit was thought to move.

8

Scylla was the six-headed sea monster (*Odyssey* 12.73–100, 234–59; *Æneid* 3.424–58); Celæno was one of the harpies, disgusting birds with women’s faces (*Æneid* 3.209–58); the Læstrigianians were giant cannibals (*Odyssey* 10.17–133).

9

It seems likely that at this point More inserted the bulk of Book I, the dialog about counseling kings, which was written after Book 2, when More had returned to London. In this addition, More does not limit himself to describing Utopian institutions but gives Raphael’s narration about the Polylerites, Achorians, and Macarians. [—Ed.]

I.1.3 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 839039

NEW ATLANTIS

Sir Francis Bacon, 1623

It is believed that English philosopher and scientist Sir Francis Bacon (1561–1626) completed *New Atlantis* in 1623, a year in which he wrote extensively after his political fall from grace. In this narrative, Bacon describes the experiences of a group of shipwrecked Spaniards on the idealized island of Bensalem, located near present-day Peru. He outlines the features of his perfect, imaginary state, which is built on patriarchal order; it encourages the pursuit and application of knowledge and a proper reverence for God that is rewarded by material abundance. Furthermore, the author reveals the plan and organization for “Salomon’s House,” a Renaissance precursor of the modern university where both the study and application of science is fostered. *New Atlantis* was first released in London by Bacon’s literary executor, Dr. William Rowley, a year after the author’s death (1627). It was published in subsequent editions, including the one from which this excerpt is taken [Sir Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis* (Champaign, IL: Book Jungle, 2004)].

WE SAILED FROM PERU, (where we had continued for the space of one whole year) for China and Japan, by the South Sea; taking with us victuals for twelve months; and had good winds from the east, though soft and weak, for five months space, and more. But the wind came about, and settled in the west for many days, so as we could make little or no way, and were sometime in purpose to turn back. But then again there arose strong and great winds from the south, with a point east, which carried us up (for all that we could do) towards the north; by which time our victuals failed us, though we had made good spare of them. So that finding ourselves, in the midst of the greatest wilderness of waters in the world, without victuals, we gave ourselves for lost men and prepared for death. Yet we did lift up our hearts and voices to God above, who showeth his wonders in the deep, beseeching him of his mercy, that as in the beginning he discovered the face of the deep, and brought forth dry land, so he would not discover land to us, that we might not perish.¹

And it came to pass that the next day about evening we saw within a kenning before us, towards the north, as it were thick clouds, which did put us in some hope of land; knowing how that part of the South Sea was utterly unknown; and might have islands, or continents, that hitherto were not come to light. Wherefore we bent our course thither, where we saw the appearance of land, all that night; and in the dawning of the next day, we might plainly discern that it was a land; flat to our sight, and full of boschage; which made it show the more dark. And after an hour and a half's sailing, we entered into a good haven, being the port of a fair city; not great indeed, but well built, and that gave a pleasant view from the sea: and we thinking every minute long, till we were on land, came close to the shore, and offered to land. But straightway we saw divers of the people, with bastons in their hands (as it were) forbidding us to land; yet without any cries of fierceness, but only as warning us off, by signs that they made. Whereupon being not a little discomfited, we were advising with ourselves, what we should do.

During which time, there made forth to us a small boat, with about eight persons in it; whereof one of them had in his hand a tipstaff of a yellow cane, tipped at both ends with blue, who came aboard our ship, without any show of distrust at all. And when he saw one of our number, present himself somewhat before the rest, he drew forth a little scroll of parchment (somewhat yellower than our parchment, and shining like the leaves of writing tables, but otherwise soft and flexible,) and delivered it to our foremost man. In which scroll were written in ancient Hebrew, and in ancient Greek, and in good Latin of the school, and in Spanish, these words: *Land ye not, none of you; and provide to be gone from this coast, within sixteen days, except you have further time given you. Meanwhile, if you want fresh water or victuals, or help for your sick, or that your ship needeth repairs, write down your wants, and you shall have that, which belongeth to mercy.* This scroll was signed with a stamp of cherubim: wings, not spread, but hanging downwards; and by them a cross. This being delivered, the officer returned, and left only a servant with us to receive our answer.

Consulting hereupon amongst ourselves, we were much perplexed. The denial of landing and hasty warning us away troubled us much; on the other side, to find that the people had languages, and were so full of humanity, did comfort us not a little. And above all, the sign of the cross to that instrument was to us a great rejoicing, and as it were a certain presage of good. Our an-

swer was in the Spanish tongue; that for our ship, it was well; for we had rather met with calms and contrary winds than any tempests. For our sick, they were many, and in very ill case; so that if they were not permitted to land, they ran danger of their lives. Our other wants we set down in particular; adding, that we had some little store of merchandise, which if it pleased them to deal for, it might supply our wants, without being chargeable unto them. We offered some reward in pistolets unto the servant, and a piece of crimson velvet to be presented to the officer; but the servant took them not, nor would scarce look upon them; and so left us, and went back in another little boat, which was sent for him.

About three hours after we had dispatched our answer, there came towards us a person (as it seemed) of place. He had on him a gown with wide sleeves, of a kind of water chamolet, of an excellent azure colour, fair more glossy than ours; his under apparel was green; and so was his hat, being in the form of a turban, daintily made, and not so huge as the Turkish turbans; and the locks of his hair came down below the brims of it. A reverend man was he to behold. He came in a boat, gilt in some part of it, with four persons more only in that boat; and was followed by another boat, wherein were some twenty. When he was come within a flightshot of our ship, signs were made to us, that we should send forth some to meet him upon the water; which we presently did in our ship-boat, sending the principal man amongst us save one, and four of our number with him.

When we were come within six yards of their boat, they called to us to stay, and not to approach farther; which we did. And thereupon the man, whom I before described, stood up, and with a loud voice, in Spanish, asked, "*Are ye Christians?*" We answered, "*We are;*" fearing the less, because of the cross we had seen in the subscription. At which answer the said person lifted up his right hand towards Heaven, and drew it softly to his mouth (which is the gesture they use, when they thank God;) and then said: "*If ye will swear (all of you) by the merits of the Saviour, that ye are no pirates, nor have shed blood, lawfully, nor unlawfully within forty days past, you may have licence to come on land.*" We said, "*We are all ready to take that oath.*" Whereupon one of those that were with him, being (as it seemed) a notary, made an entry of this act. Which done, another of the attendants of the great person which was with him in the same boat, after his Lord had spoken a little to him, said aloud: "*My Lord would have you know, that it is not of pride, or greatness, that*

he cometh not aboard your ship; but for that in your answer you declare that you have many sick amongst you, he was warned by the Conservator of Health of the city that he should keep a distance." We bowed ourselves towards him, and answered, "*We are his humble servants; and accounted for great honour, and singular humanity towards us, that which was already done; but hoped well, that the nature of the sickness of our men was not infectious.*" So he returned; and a while after came the Notary to us aboard our ship; holding in his hand a fruit of that country, like an orange, but of color between orange-tawney and scarlet; which cast a most excellent odour. He used it (as it seemeth) for a preservative against infection. He gave us our oath; "*By the name of Jesus, and his merits:*" and after told us, that the next day, by six of the Clock, in the Morning, we should be sent to, and brought to the Strangers' House, (so he called it,) where we should be accommodated of things, both for our whole, and for our sick. So he left us; and when we offered him some pistolets, he smiling said, "*He must not be twice paid for one labour:*" meaning (as I take it) that he had salary sufficient of the State for his service. For (as I after learned) they call an officer that taketh rewards, "twice paid."

The next morning early, there came to us the same officer that came to us at first with his cane, and told us, he came to conduct us to the Strangers' House. . . .

And so six of us went on land with him: and when we were on land, he went before us, and turned to us, and said, "*He was but our servant, and our guide.*" He led us through three fair streets; and all the way we went, there were gathered some people on both sides, standing in a row; but in so civil a fashion, as if it had been, not to wonder at us, but to welcome us: and divers of them, as we passed by them, put their arms a little abroad; which is their gesture, when they did bid any welcome.

. . .

The morrow after our three days were past, there came to us a new man, that we had not seen before, clothed in blue as the former was, save that his turban was white, with a small red cross on the top. He had also a tippet of fine linen. At his coming in, he did bend to us a little, and put his arms abroad. We of our parts saluted him in a very lowly and submissive manner; as looking that from him, we should receive sentence of life, or death: he desired to speak with some few of us: whereupon six of us only staid, and the rest avoided the

room. He said, "I am by office governor of this House of Strangers, and by vocation I am a Christian priest: and therefore am come to you to offer you my service, both as strangers and chiefly as Christians. Some things I may tell you, which I think you will not be unwilling to hear. The State hath given you license to stay on land, for the space of six weeks; and let it not trouble you, if your occasions ask further time, for the law in this point is not precise; and I do not doubt, but my self shall be able, to obtain for you such further time, as may be convenient. Ye shall also understand, that the Strangers' House is at this time rich, and much aforehand; for it hath laid up revenue these thirty-seven years; for so long it is since any stranger arrived in this part: and therefore take ye no care; the State will defray you all the time you stay; neither shall you stay one day the less for that. As for any merchandise ye have brought, ye shall be well used, and have your return, either in merchandise, or in gold and silver: for to us it is all one. And if you have any other request to make, hide it not. For ye shall find we will not make your countenance to fall by the answer ye shall receive. Only this I must tell you, that none of you must go above a karan," (that is with them a mile and an half) "from the walls of the city, without especial leave."

. . .

The next day about ten of the clock, the Governor came to us again, and after salutations, said familiarly, "That he was come to visit us;" and called for a chair, and sat him down: and we, being some ten of us, (the rest were of the meaner sort, or else gone abroad,) sat down with him. And when we were set, he began thus: "We of this island of Bensalem," (for so they call it in their language,) "have this; that by means of our solitary situation; and of the laws of secrecy, which we have for our travellers, and our rare admission of strangers; we know well most part of the habitable world, and are ourselves unknown. Therefore because he that knoweth least is fittest to ask questions, it is more reason, for the entertainment of the time, that ye ask me questions, than that I ask you."

We answered, "That we humbly thanked him that he would give us leave so to do: and that we conceived by the taste we had already, that there was no worldly thing on earth, more worthy to be known than the state of that happy land. But above all," (we said,) "since that we were met from the several ends of the world, and hoped assuredly that we should meet one day in the kingdom of Heaven, (for that we were both parts Christians,) we desired to know, (in respect that land was so remote, and so divided by vast and unknown seas, from the land where our Saviour walked on earth,) who was the apostle of that nation, and how it was converted to the faith?" It appeared in his face that he took great contentment in this our question: he

said, *"Ye knit my heart to you, by asking this question in the first place; for it sheweth that you first seek the kingdom of heaven; and I shall gladly, and briefly, satisfy your demand."*

"About twenty years after the ascension of our Saviour, it came to pass, that there was seen by the people of Renfusa, (a city upon the eastern coast of our island,) within night, (the night was cloudy, and calm,) as it might be some mile into the sea, a great pillar of light; not sharp, but in form of a column, or cylinder, rising from the sea a great way up towards heaven; and on the top of it was seen a large cross of light, more bright and resplendent than the body of the pillar. Upon which so strange a spectacle, the people of the city gathered apace together upon the sands, to wonder; and so after put themselves into a number of small boats, to go nearer to this marvellous sight. But when the boats were come within (about) sixty yards of the pillar, they found themselves all bound, and could go no further; yet so as they might move to go about, but might not approach nearer: so as the boats stood all as in a theatre, beholding this light as an heavenly sign. . . ."

. . .

One of our number said, after a little pause; that there was a matter, we were no less desirous to know, than fearful to ask, lest we might presume too far. But encouraged by his rare humanity towards us, (that could scarce think ourselves strangers, being his vowed and professed servants,) we would take the hardiness to propound it: humbly beseeching him, if he thought it not fit to be answered, that he would pardon it, though he rejected it. We said, *"We well observed those his words, which he formerly spake, that this happy island, where we now stood, was known to few, and yet knew most of the nations of the world; which we found to be true, considering they had the languages of Europe, and knew much of our state and business; and yet we in Europe, (notwithstanding all the remote discoveries and navigations of this last age), never heard of the least inkling or glimpse of this island. This we found wonderful strange; for that all nations have inter-knowledge one of another, either by voyage into foreign parts, or by strangers that come to them: and though the traveller into a foreign country, doth commonly know more by the eye, than he that stayeth at home can by relation of the traveller; yet both ways suffice to make a mutual knowledge, in some degree, on both parts. But for this island, we never heard tell of any ship of theirs that had been seen to arrive upon any shore of Europe; nor of either the East or West Indies; nor yet of any ship of any other part of the world, that had made return from them. And yet the marvel rested not in this. For the situation of it (as his lordship said) in the 'secret conclave' of such*

a vast sea might cause it. But then, that they should have knowledge of the languages, books, affairs, of those that lie such a distance from them, it was a thing we could not tell what to make of; for that it seemed to us a conditioner and propriety of divine powers and beings, to be hidden and unseen to others, and yet to have others open and as in a light to them."

At this speech the Governor gave a gracious smile, and said; "*That we did well to ask pardon for this question we now asked: for that it imported, as if we thought this land, a land of magicians, that sent forth spirits of the air into all parts, to bring them news and intelligence of other countries.*" It was answered by us all, in all possible humbleness, but yet with a countenance taking knowledge, that we knew that he spake it but merrily, "*That we were apt enough to think there was somewhat supernatural in this island; but yet rather as angelical than magical. But to let his lordship know truly what it was that made us tender and doubtful to ask this question, it was not any such conceit," but because we remembered, he had given a touch in his former speech, that this land had laws of secrecy touching strangers.*" To this he said

"You shall understand (that which perhaps you will scarce think credible) that about three thousand years ago, or somewhat more, the navigation of the world, (especially for remote voyages,) was greater than at this day. Do not think with yourselves, that I know not how much it is increased with you, within these six-score years: I know it well: and yet I say greater then than now; whether it was, that the example of the ark, that saved the remnant of men from the universal deluge, gave men confidence to adventure upon the waters; or what it was; but such is the truth. The Phoenicians, and especially the Tyrians, had great fleets. So had the Carthaginians their colony, which is yet further west. Toward the east the shipping of Egypt and of Palestine was likewise great. China also, and the great Atlantis, (that you call America,) which have now but junks and canoes, abounded then in tall ships. This island, (as appeareth by faithful registers of those times,) had then fifteen hundred strong ships, of great content. Of all this, there is with you sparing memory, or none; but we have large knowledge thereof."

. . .

"At the same time, and an age after, or more, the inhabitants of the great Atlantis did flourish. For though the narration and description, which is made by a great man with you; that the descendants of Neptune planted there; and of the magnificent temple, palace, city, and hill; and the manifold streams of goodly navigable rivers, (which as so many chains environed the same site and temple); and the several degrees of ascent, whereby men did climb up to the same, as if it had been a scala coeli, be all poetical and fabulous: yet so much is true, that the said country of Atlantis, as well that of Peru, then called Coya, as that of Mexico, then named Tyrambel, were mighty and

proud kingdoms in arms, shipping and riches: so mighty, as at one time (or at least within the space of ten years) they both made two great expeditions; they of Tyrambel through the Atlantic to the Mediterrane Sea; and they of Coya through the South Sea upon this our island: and for the former of these, which was into Europe, the same author amongst you (as it seemeth) had some relation from the Egyptian priest whom he cited. For assuredly such a thing there was. But whether it were the ancient Athenians that had the glory of the repulse and resistance of those forces, I can say nothing: but certain it is, there never came back either ship or man from that voyage. Neither had the other voyage of those of Coya upon us had better fortune, if they had not met with enemies of greater clemency. For the king of this island, (by name Altabin,) a wise man and a great warrior, knowing well both his own strength and that of his enemies, handled the matter so, as he cut off their land-forces from their ships; and entailed both their navy and their tamp with a greater power than theirs, both by sea and land: arid compelled them to render themselves without striking stroke and after they were at his mercy, contenting himself only with their oath that they should no more bear arms against him, dismissed them all in safety.

“But the divine revenge overtook not long after those proud enterprises. For within less than the space of one hundred years, the great Atlantis was utterly lost and destroyed: not by a great earthquake, as your man saith; (for that whole tract is little subject to earthquakes;) but by a particular deluge or inundation; those countries having, at this day, far greater rivers and far higher mountains to pour down waters, than any part of the old world. But it is true that the same inundation was not deep; not past forty foot, in most places, from the ground; so that although it destroyed man and beast generally, yet some few wild inhabitants of the wood escaped. Birds also were saved by flying to the high trees and woods. As for men, although they had buildings in many places, higher than the depth of the water, yet that inundation, though it were shallow, had a long continuance; whereby they of the vale that were not drowned, perished for want of food and other things necessary.

“So as marvel you not at the thin population of America, nor at the rudeness and ignorance of the people; for you must account your inhabitants of America as a young people; younger a thousand years, at the least, than the rest of the world: for that there was so much time between the universal flood arid their particular inundation. For the poor remnant of human seed, which remained in their mountains, peopled the country again slowly, by little and little; and being simple and savage people, (not like Noah and his sons, which was the chief family of the earth;) they were not able to leave letters, arts, and civility to their posterity; and having likewise in their mountainous habitations been used (in respect of the extreme cold of those regions) to clothe themselves with the skins of tigers, bears, and great hairy goats, that they have in those parts; when after they came down into the valley, and found the intolerable heats which are there, and knew no means of lighter

apparel, they were forced to begin the custom of going naked, which continueth at this day. Only they take great pride and delight in the feathers of birds; and this also they took from those their ancestors of the mountains, who were invited unto it by the infinite flights of birds that came up to the high grounds, while the waters stood below. So you see, by this main accident of time, we lost our traffic with the Americans, with whom of all others, in regard they lay nearest to us, we had most commerce.

“As for the other parts of the world, it is most manifest that in the ages following (whether it were in respect of wars, or by a natural revolution of time,) navigation did everywhere greatly decay; and specially far voyages (the rather by the use of galleys, and such vessels as could hardly brook the ocean,) were altogether left and omitted. So then, that part of intercourse which could be from other nations to sail to us, you see how it hath long since ceased; except it were by some rare accident, as this of yours. . . .

1

Seventeenth-century spelling and punctuation conventions original to this document have been maintained.
—Ed.

I.1.4 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 838157

MACHU PICCHU: THE DISCOVERY

Hiram Bingham, 1911

In the third part of *Lost City of the Incas: The Story of Machu Picchu and Its Builders*, American academic and explorer Hiram Bingham (1875–1956) describes the two days leading up to his breathtaking “discovery” of the Inca city of Machu Picchu in 1911. Bingham previously published accounts of this trip in *Across South America; an account of a journey from Buenos Aires to Lima by way of Potosí, with notes on Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, and Peru* [(Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1911)]. He also included rewritten excerpts from his account of the expedition in *Inca land: Explorations in the highlands of Peru* [(Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1922)] and in the related scientific report *Machu Picchu, a citadel of the Incas: report of the explorations and excavations made in 1911, 1912 and 1915 under the auspices of Yale University and the National Geographic Society* [(New Haven: Pub. for

the National Geographic Society, Yale University Press/London: H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1930)]. The text consulted for this volume is *Lost City of the Incas: The Story of Machu Picchu and Its Builders*, part III [(New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pierce, 1948), 159–67].

RICHARTE TOLD US THAT THEY HAD BEEN LIVING HERE FOUR YEARS. It seems probable that, owing to its inaccessibility, the canyon had been unoccupied for several centuries, but with the completion of the new government road, settlers began once more to occupy this region. In time somebody clambered up the precipices and found on these slopes at an elevation of 9,000 feet above the sea, an abundance of rich soil conveniently situated on artificial terraces, in a fine climate. Here the Indians had finally cleared off and burned over a few terraces and planted crops of maize, sweet and white potatoes, sugar cane, beans, peppers, tree tomatoes, and gooseberries.

They said there were two paths to the outside world. Of one we had already had a taste; the other was “even more difficult,” a perilous path down the face of a rocky precipice on the other side of the ridge. It was their only means of egress in the wet season when the primitive bridge over which we had come could not be maintained. I was not surprised to learn that they went away from home “only about once a month.”

Through Sergeant Carrasco I learned that the ruins were “a little further along.” In this country one never can tell whether such a report is worthy of credence. “He may have been lying” is a good footnote to affix to all hearsay evidence. Accordingly, I was not unduly excited, nor in a great hurry to move. The heat was still great, the water from the Indians’ spring was cool and delicious, and the rustic wooden bench, hospitably covered immediately after my arrival with a soft woolen poncho, seemed most comfortable. Furthermore, the view was simply enchanting. Tremendous green precipices fell away to the white rapids of the Urubamba below. Immediately in front, on the north side of the valley, was a great granite cliff rising 2,000 feet sheer. To the left was the solitary peak of Huayna Picchu, surrounded by seemingly inaccessible precipices. On all sides were rocky cliffs. Beyond them cloud-capped snow-covered mountains rose thousands of feet above us.

We continued to enjoy the wonderful view of the canyon, but all the ruins we could see from our cool shelter were a few terraces. Without the slightest

expectation of finding anything more interesting than the ruins of two or three stone houses such as we had encountered at various places on the road between Ollantaytambo and Torontoy, I finally left the cool shade of the pleasant little hut and climbed farther up the ridge and around a slight promontory. Melchor Arteaga had “been there once before,” so he decided to rest and gossip with Richarte and Álvarez. They sent a small boy with me as a “guide.” The Sergeant was duty bound to follow, but I think he may have been a little curious to see what there was to see.

Hardly had we left the hut and rounded the promontory than we were confronted with an unexpected sight, a great flight of beautifully constructed stone-faced terraces, perhaps a hundred of them, each hundreds of feet long and ten feet high. They had been recently rescued from the jungle by the Indians. A veritable forest of large trees which had been growing on them for centuries had been chopped down and partly burned to make a clearing for agricultural purposes. The task was too great for the two Indians so the tree trunks had been allowed to lie as they fell and only the smaller branches removed. But the ancient soil, carefully put in place by the Incas, was still capable of producing rich crops of maize and potatoes.

However, there was nothing to be excited about. Similar flights of well-made terraces are to be seen in the upper Urubamba Valley at Pisac and Ollantaytambo, as well as opposite Torontoy. So we patiently followed the little guide along one of the widest terraces where there had once been a small conduit and made our way into an untouched forest beyond. Suddenly I found myself confronted with the walls of ruined houses built of the finest quality of Inca stone work, it was hard to see them for they were partly covered with trees and moss, the growth of centuries, but in the dense shadow, hiding in bamboo thickets and tangled vines, appeared here and there walls of white granite ashlar carefully cut and exquisitely fitted together. We scrambled along through the dense undergrowth, climbing over terrace walls and in bamboo thickets where our guide found it easier going than I did. Suddenly without any warning, under a huge overhanging ledge the boy showed me a cave beautifully lined with the finest cut stone. It had evidently been a Royal Mausoleum. On top of this particular ledge was a semi-circular building whose outer wall, gently sloping and slightly curved bore a striking resemblance to the famous Temple of the Sun in Cuzco. This might also be a Temple of the Sun. It followed the natural curvature of the rock and was keyed

to it by one of the finest examples of masonry I had ever seen. Furthermore it was tied into another beautiful wall, made of very carefully matched ashlar of pure white granite, especially selected for its fine grain. Clearly, it was the work of a master artist. The interior surface of the wall was broken by niches and square stone-pegs. The exterior surface was perfectly simple and unadorned. The lower courses, of particularly large ashlar, gave it a look of solidity. The upper courses, diminishing in size toward the top, lent grace and delicacy to the structure. The flowing lines, the symmetrical arrangement of the ashlar, and the gradual gradation of the courses, combined to produce a wonderful effect, softer and more pleasing than that of the marble temples of the Old World. Owing to the absence of mortar, there were no ugly spaces between the rocks. They might have grown together. On account of the beauty of the white granite this structure surpassed in attractiveness the best Inca walls in Cuzco which had caused visitors to marvel for four centuries. It seemed like an unbelievable dream. Dimly, I began to realize that this wall and its adjoining semicircular temple over the cave were as fine as the finest stonework in the world.

It fairly took my breath away. What could this place be? Why had no one given us any idea of it? Even Melchor Arteaga, [the local farmer who discovered the ruins at Machu Picchu,] was only moderately interested and had no appreciation of the importance of the ruins which Richarte and Álvarez had adopted for their little farm. Perhaps after all this was an isolated small dace which had escaped notice because it was inaccessible.

Then the little boy urged us to climb up a steep hill over what seemed to be a flight of stone steps. Surprise followed surprise in bewildering succession. We came to a great stairway of large granite blocks. Then we walked along a path to a clearing where the Indians had planted a small vegetable garden. Suddenly, we found ourselves standing in front of the ruins of two of the finest and most interesting structures in ancient America. Made of beautiful white granite, the walls contained blocks of Cyclopean size, higher than a man. The sight held me spellbound.

Each building had only three walls and was entirely open on one side. The principal temple had walls twelve feet high which were lined with exquisitely made niches, five high up at each end, and seven on the back. There were seven courses of ashlar in the end walls. Under the seven rear niches was a rect-

angular block fourteen feet long, possibly a sacrificial altar, but more probably throne for the mummies of departed Incas, brought out to be worshipped. The building did not look as though it ever had a roof. The top course of beautifully smooth ashlars was not intended to be covered, so the sun could be welcomed here by priests and mummies. I could scarcely believe my senses as I examined the larger blocks in the lower course and estimated that they must weigh from ten to fifteen tons each. Would anyone believe what I had found? Fortunately, in this land where accuracy in reporting what one has seen is not a prevailing characteristic of travelers, I had a good camera and the sun was shining.

The principal temple faces the south where there is a small plaza or courtyard. On the east side of the plaza was another amazing structure, the ruins of a temple containing three great windows looking out over the canyon to the rising sun. Like its neighbor, it is unique among Inca ruins. Nothing just like them in design and execution has ever been found. Its three conspicuously large windows, obviously too large to serve any useful purpose, were most beautifully made with the greatest care and solidity. This was clearly a ceremonial edifice of peculiar significance. Nowhere else in Peru, so far as I know, is there a similar structure conspicuous for being "a masonry wall with three windows." It will be remembered that Salcamayhua, the Peruvian who wrote an account of the antiquities of Peru in 1620 said that the first Inca, Manco the Great, ordered "works to be executed at the place of his birth, consisting of a masonry wall with three windows." Was that what I had found? If it was, then this was not the capital of the last Inca but the birthplace of the first. It did not occur to me that it might be both. To be sure the region was one which could fit in with the requirements of Tampu Tocco, the place of refuge of the civilized folk who fled from the southern barbarian tribes after the battle of La Raya and brought with them the body of their king Pachacutec who was slain by an arrow. He might have been buried in the stone-lined cave under the semi-circular temple.

Could this be "the principal city" of Manco and his sons, that Vilcapampa . . . which Friar Marcos and Friar Diego had tried to reach. It behooved us to find out as much about it as we could.

I.1.5 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 839023

THE CHRISTENING OF AMERICA

Alfonso Reyes, 1942

This text is excerpted from “El presagio de América,” the first chapter (part 20) of *Última Tule*, by Mexican writer and diplomat Alfonso Reyes (1889–1959). Reyes published the book in 1942 [(Mexico City: Imprenta Universitaria)], three years after returning to Mexico having completed nearly three decades of diplomatic assignments in Europe and Latin America which originally began with a forced exile. This excerpt is concerned specifically with debunking some of the misconceptions about the naming of America that were generated by the historiography of its conquest. Reyes’s reflections on the “christening” of America thus are derived from his extensive thinking on the meaning of America; among his writings on this subject are the essays “Notas sobre la inteligencia americana” (1937) and “Posición de América” (1942), in which he presents a cultural synthesis of Old World and Native American values and contributions. This excerpt is from Alfonso Reyes’s *Obras Completas* [“El presagio de América,” *Última Tule* in *Obras Completas*, vol. XI (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1960), 11–62, 55–56].

IT SEEMS TO BE THE WILL OF THE MYTHOLOGICAL SPIRIT presiding over the Discovery that the very name of America should be the result of refraction.¹ In the little-known city of Saint-Dié, lost in the French Vosges, a small society of scholars who were both humanists and printers came together at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The founder of that small workshop was Gauthier Lud; he introduced the printing press and installed it in the home of his nephew Nicholas. Martin Waldseemüller, from Freiburg, became the copyeditor (or *castigator*) of the press, as well as an eminent collaborator. The congenial poet Mathias Ringmann, known as “Philesius” to his friends, also became an associate. He had come to know the Veronese architect Giovanni Giocondo and would die at an early age. In addition to them, there was Jean Basin, a rhetorician who had written a manual on the art of writing letters.

The century’s preoccupation with matters of geography could not help but make its way to Saint-Dié; these scholars would turn to the books of Ptolemy,

believing them to be a sound foundation, before venturing to read the accounts of the latest discoveries. One day the Gymnasium of the Vosges decided to publish Ptolemy's *Introduction to Geography*, followed by the four voyages recounted by [Amerigo] Vespucci: from Honduras to Florida or Georgia following the Mexican coastline; from São Roque to Venezuela by way of the Brazilian coast; from São Roque to the Río de la Plata by the same coast that reaches to Antarctica and twists toward Africa; and the unsuccessful route to the Moluccas through South America. Waldseemüller took charge of the printing and added to it some complementary letters, as well as a foreword/dedication to the Emperor Maximilian [I], which he signed with the pseudonym "Martinus Hylacomylus."

The work *Cosmographiae introductio* was published in 1507. It met with success because it spread the news of a Terra Firma different from the one that Columbus had made known. Columbus had in fact traveled through the Antilles, affirming under oath that his Juana Island (Cuba) was indeed Terra Firma. He had not arrived at the continental conception of the Terra Firma that he had in fact reached. It should be noted that the geographic identity encompassing both the Antilles and the American continent is a relatively modern scientific notion [that came about] after the initial concept of the Discovery.

Vespucci appears in the work published by the Saint-Dié scholars; he is the first to give an account of the countries whose natural attributes were beginning to attract everyone's attention. He spoke of paradisiacal lands that seemed to bring the Prophets' dreams to life. He described singular customs which by themselves alone offered both relief and hope to the intellectual ruts of an exhausted Europe. The word *hamaca* [hammock] appeared for the first time. The publishers noted certain places described by Ptolemy that coincided with recent findings. And in two chapters of the work they used phrases such as the following: "To this new part of the Earth we may give the name *America*, in memory of the bold man who visited it." According to the text, the name was to be applied not to Columbus's archipelago, but to the Terra Firma explored—or at the very least described and "interpreted"—by Vespucci.

The authors of the great *Cambridge History*² suggest, perhaps because of their elegance of style, the name was bestowed half in jest, half in earnest. In other words, it was not given much importance. Waldseemüller himself seems to have completely forgotten about it in a map he published six years later: that is to say, when everyone was calling the New World "America" except for the key

person responsible for the name. Either way, Vespucci died without taking credit for the name or perhaps without even having taken any notice of it. In general, it can be said that the sixteenth century accepted the casual christening by the Saint-Dié scholars. The backlash began in the seventeenth century and made Vespucci's name infamous—an attitude made evident over the following centuries in works by [Pierre] Bayle, Voltaire, and others. Nevertheless, little by little the name America became more widespread, mainly due to the interest generated by these accounts as well as because of their literary appeal, and despite the reasonable objections posed by Michel Servet and the angry protestations that began with Friar Bartolomé de Las Casas. These men of letters have reason to be proud of this success, which owes much to an intrinsic, artistic power and to the widespread appeal of these well-told narratives. It does not matter whether they are considered the authentic works of Vespucci or the writings of others that happen to be littered with errors, as a recent theory by [Alberto] Magnaghi proposes. The whole undertaking was extremely well apportioned. Some dreamed of the New World, others happened upon it; some explored and surveyed it, others christened it; some conquered it, others colonized it and reduced it to a European civilization; some declared it independent. We hope that others will bring it happiness.

1

Here we are rejecting the hypothesis—curious and risky as it may be—that the name of “America” stems from an indigenous source and that it came from that region where El Dorado was supposed to have been discovered. With regard to other excesses in reference to the name “America,” see A[ntônio] L[eôncio] Pereira Ferraz, *Américo Vespuccio e o nome de América* [Amerigo Vespucci and the Name of America] (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1941).

2

The Cambridge History of Latin America, Volume I, Colonial Latin America (1500–1750), ed. Lesley Bethel (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984).—Ed.

I.1.6 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 838902

THE MARCH OF UTOPIAS

Oswald de Andrade, 1953

This essay is part of a series of articles that Oswald de Andrade (1890–1954)—Brazilian poet, essayist, and journalist, as well as one of the main proponents of Brazilian modernism of the 1920s—published in the daily *O Estado de São Paulo* in 1953. De Andrade wrote this text in 1950 as a master’s thesis (submitted to and declined by the Faculdade de Filosofia e Letras, Universidade de São Paulo). “A marcha das utopias” can be read as de Andrade’s ultimate thoughts about the actuality of “utopia” as it is geographically and spiritually related to the Americas. He returned consistently to this idea throughout his long career. The essay has been reprinted extensively, including a posthumous edition by Brazil’s Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) [(Rio de Janeiro: MEC, *Os Cadernos de Cultura*, vol. 139, 1966)]. This translation is based on the version included in the definitive compilation of his work, Oswald de Andrade, *Obras Completas* [vol. 6: *Do Pau Brasil à Antropofagia e às Utopias: manifestos, teses de concursos e ensaios* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira/Instituto Nacional do Livro-MEC, 1972), 147–57].

THE CYCLE THAT BEGAN IN THE EARLY YEARS of the sixteenth century with the publication of the letters of [Amerigo] Vespucci and ended in 1848 with the *Communist Manifesto* of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels could be called the Cycle of Utopias. . . .

The high points of the Cycle of Utopias were: in the sixteenth century, the miscegenation brought by the Discoveries; in the seventeenth century, our national struggle against Holland and the Treaty of Westphalia, which settled the Thirty Years War and defeated Austria’s ambitions to absorb Germany, opening the state horizons of German Imperialism for the Reformation; in the eighteenth century, the French Revolution coming to an end, as we have said, in the political earthquake of 1848.

[In the Brazilian case,] the importance of the Dutch War was that it pre-figured two opposing conceptions of life—Reformation and Counter-Reformation.

. . . I believe the biggest mistake of Catholicism was the act of Clement XIV suppressing the conquering order of [Ignatius of] Loyola. Today, Brazil represents what remains of Jesuit culture, almost a stranger to Romanticism. [This culture] had its most notable expression in the position of Emperor Pedro II during the “Issue of the Bishops.”¹

The failure to create a national Church makes me think more about the schismatic incompetence of the rebellious priests than of the historical impossibility of the phenomenon. No sooner does a prophet call himself a shepherd of Christ’s flock than he is surrounded by heteroclitcs and deluded multitudes. There is the case of “[Antônio] Conselheiro” immortalized by Euclides [da Cunha] in *Os Sertões* [Rebellion in the Backlands] (1909). There is Padre Cícero [in Ceará], as well as the series of *curandeiros* [healers] with cassocks, legal or otherwise, prowling the ambulant faith of the Brazilian masses. There is the irrepressible surge of the spiritualist sects and the “*linguas-de-fogo*” [tongues-of-fire] that overrun and demoralize religious orthodoxy.

Although dismembered into thousands of Pythagorean, Orphic, Satanic, or Christian sects, of which a sketchy image is offered in the beautiful book by Paulo Barreto—*As Religiões no Rio* [Religions in Rio]—I still believe that, in the modern world, our religious culture will triumph over the gelid Calvinist conception that casts North America as an inhuman land that banishes Charlie [Chaplin] and promotes [Senator Joseph R.] McCarthy. In the Dutch war, we defeated a foreign nation that, under great command and with superior force of arms, wanted to impose a foreign language and a foreign culture on us. The limits of our destiny were foreshadowed [in that war]. Utopias are, thus, a consequence of the discovery of the new man, the distinctive man encountered in the lands of America.

According to accounts, it was from a contact in Flanders with one of the twenty-four men left in the trading post at Cabo Frio [in Rio de Janeiro] by Amerigo Vespucci, that Thomas More [SEE DOCUMENT 1.1.2] derived the idea for his *Utopia* and his enthusiasm for a kind of society diverging from the existent one, a society that would cast off the dead weight of the medieval encumbrances still in force. This sailor [Raphael Hythloday], of Portuguese origin, would have met More in the Cathedral of Antwerp, a port city where the emissary of Henry VIII had been sent in a diplomatic-commercial mission concerning the exportation of English wools. In the opening episode of the book, we learn that More was profoundly

interested in that weather-beaten sailor who had set foot in the New World and had met the New Man. They spent the whole day together, and that was when the yearning of the Humanist for this people from whose existence and customs “one could take examples suitable to enlighten our nations” manifested itself. That sea-wolf found Europe rotten to the point of declaring that a wise man would not waste his time in making the voice of reason heard to completely amoral statesmen. The allusion was clearly against the tyrant Henry VIII, whom More served and who later ordered him decapitated, as well as against Cromwell’s father.

More’s *Utopia* contains a curious criticism of absolutist political measures at a time when the suppression and confiscation of Catholic convents by terrorist Anglicans had eliminated every kind of assistance to the people [in opposition to a practice rooted in] the medieval tradition of charity. Henry VIII, at that moment, was instituting laws against violent robbery: for a second offense, the punishment was to be the loss of an ear, and for the third occurrence, the gallows. These were the times in which “the poor, like wasps, live without conveying a drop of honey, taking advantage of the work of others.” As usual, instead of improving social conditions, the sovereign tried to eliminate its symptoms with iron and fire.

More, who had come under the influence of Erasmus at Oxford University, discovered his social climate in the *Praise of Folly*, which dared to state that the need for mercenary armies fosters vagrancy. “Thieves are not bad soldiers, nor are soldiers worse than thieves, thus the relationship between the two careers.” More champions a justice that would “destroy crime and preserve men.” He fearlessly attacks the cunning [clergy] who reconcile evangelical doctrine to human passions. [More’s] Christianity reclaims the social revolution in which it originated. “Almost all of Jesus’ teachings condemn today’s customs more strongly than all my criticism.”

Clearly, Henry VIII’s entire life would be illustrative of this accurate observation.

The geography of Utopia is located in America. It is a Portuguese sailor who describes to More the people and the customs discovered on the other side of the Earth. One century later, Campanella, in his *Civitas Solis* [The City of the Sun], would refer to a Genovese ship owner reminiscent of Christopher Columbus. And even Francis Bacon (possibly Shakespeare), who would write *The New Atlantis* in the seventeenth century, has his expedition depart from Peru.

With the exception of the *Republic* of Plato, an invented state, all the Utopias that appeared on the horizon of the modern world twenty centuries later and made a profound impression on it, were engendered by the discovery of America. Brazil did not play a minor role in the social conquests of the Renaissance.

II

Mr. Osvaldo Aranha [the Brazilian politician who gave the inaugural speech at the United Nations General Assembly] is no fool at all. To the contrary, he has occupied the highest positions in our government with brilliance and efficiency. Just recently, in his investiture speech, Chancellor Vicente Rao noted the fame surrounding [Mr. Aranha's] name in the United Nations. What interests me about Aranha, more than his career, are some of his statements that I consider first-rate. He said recently to a newspaper: "Brazil will be one of the great leaders by the end of our century and will bring to the new human order material and spiritual contributions unsurpassed by other nations, even by those which are today more advanced."

This is exactly what I think. My faith in Brazil comes from the social configuration it assumed, molded by the Jesuit civilization in opposition to the austere and mechanical Calvinism that produced North American capitalism. One could counter this with the example of São Paulo, where incalculable progress was produced, the same [progress] that distinguished the Protestant nations from the dilatory path in the same direction followed by the nations that maintained Catholicism. [But] we should not confuse a phase of history with History itself. We have to accept the uncontested superiority of a Calvinism based on inequality as an impetus for technology and progress. But today, having achieved the values produced by mechanization, the time has come to revise [these values] and seek out new horizons.

What is history if not a continuous revision of ideas and directions?

Arriving at the climax of technology, Calvinism—which was, with the doctrine of Grace, the instrument of progress—has to give way to a human and egalitarian conception of life, one that was given to us by the Counter Reformation. . . . To start with, however, it is necessary to acknowledge how *broad* this conception must be. I designate as its sign and banner the Counter Reformation. Under no circumstances am I assuming a religious or ideological compromise when I praise the Jesuits. Understanding as I do the universal religious feeling

which I call Orphic sentiment, which touches and marks all civilized people as well as all primitive groups, this [praise] in no way invalidates my neutrality with regard to all cults and religions. . . .

When I talk about the Counter Reformation, I want to create an immediate and firm opposition to the arid and inhuman concept brought about by the Reformation, which had as its cultural foothold in England, Germany, and the United States of America. On the contrary, we Brazilians—champions of miscegenation of both race and culture—we are the Counter Reformation, even without God or religious ritual. We are the manifestation of Utopia, for better or worse, as opposed to the mercenary and mechanical utilitarianism of the North. We are the caravel that laid anchor in Paradise or the inhospitable jungle; we are the *Bandeira*² stuck on the farm. What we need is to identify ourselves and to consolidate our lost psychic, moral, and historical contours.

Karl Kautsky—Lenin’s renegade—wrote one of the most curious treatises about Christianity that I know. The central theme of his study is historical materialism, and he gets it right for the most part in many of his statements and much of his research. A new idea he introduces in his book is that monotheistic religions are born of the desert, where there is no malleable material for the fabrication of idols or fetishes, while the countries rich in copper, iron, marble, etc., regale themselves with an infinite repetition of images which produces polytheism. . . .

What relationship can there be between Kautsky’s assertion and a study about Renaissance Utopias? It is that they are [both] born of the impulse of an exogamic race that affixed its historical destiny on warlike monotheism. . . . On the contrary, the Semitic branch of the Arabs undertook, over millennia, the excursion [that would transport] its fertilizing genes over all routes, open or closed, by land and sea. This would lead, in the enchantment of the Discoveries, to the molding and creation of the Utopian paradises that deflected Europe from its Ptolemaic egocentrism. The Arabs were so tolerant that, in the great Caliphate of Córdoba, the use of half a dozen of languages was allowed, from the classical Arabic of the writers to the ecclesiastic Latin, and the dialect that would later become Castilian. In eight centuries of domination, the language of the conqueror was not imposed. . . .

In fact, there is among us a “History” directed to the advantage of the Latin theses that seeks to denigrate the Semitic origins. But we, descendents of

Portuguese, are the product of a miscegenated culture which owes nothing to the withered, monkish harvest of Port Royal, which brought forth as its standard bearer the dry Protestant Blaise Pascal. Lisbon, even today, is a barbarous city where the most beautiful humanity on Earth intermingles.

* * *

. . . Later, with colonization, we were shaped by a culture with an ample vision—that of the Jesuits. Unfortunately, this was cut short by the incomprehension of Rome when [the Jesuits], in their desire for eclecticism and human and religious communication, were bringing the Church to the pagan limits of the Malabar rites. It was the Mozarabs from Spain and Portugal who filled the holds of the caravels. Remaining forever at the portal of the Utopias, is that Portuguese navigator, weathered by the Atlantic sun, whom the English chancellor Thomas More reports to have met in the nave of Antwerp Cathedral and who opened his eyes to the American paradises of the Discovery.

. . . Monotheism could resist and fight against another monotheism until it would graft itself onto the Counter Reformation and into the understanding lassitude of the Jesuits. In the European North, the orthodox branch of Christianity would break, [divided] between the totemism of the Saints and local divinities (in Italy and France) and the inflexible trunk from which Calvin and Luther carved their doctrine of Election. Meanwhile, the singular God of the desert, the God of the caravans, would metamorphose, transformed into Christ, into the God of the Caravels, [carried] beneath the sympathetic conveyance of the Jesuit cassocks toward the conquest of America. It was this religion of the Caravels that presided over the heaving swells of the Utopias, mostly of the two situated at the opening of the era of the Voyages of Discovery imagined by More and Campanella. The *Reconquista* was a purely superficial political and military phenomenon. Arabization had already racialized the Peninsula, producing this minuscule but gigantic Portugal that marked the apogee of the Baroque as well as all the art of its time.

Arabization had already changed into the inaugural robes of [Ignatius of] Loyola. In a thesis [written for a faculty position at] the University [of São Paulo], years ago, I wrote: “The Jesuits are the Mohammedans of Christ. [There is] in their explosive burst of energy a strange fire that cannot disguise its Arabic roots. They are soldiers more than priests and [the Marquis of] Pombal would accuse them of

lacking faith, saying: ‘It is incredible that so many men work to ruin the dogma of faith without being atheists.’” Coming from Arabia, petrified and emerging from the desert, the Saracens would intermingle on the [Iberian] Peninsula, in order to pursue over the oceanic routes their exogamous and conquering impulse, which brought with it the erratic and the fantastic, adventure and fatalism. And [this impulse] would only be stilled in the green [lands] of the Discovery. In the Island of Vera Cruz, Island of Santa Cruz, Island of Utopia: Brazil.

1

The “Questão dos Bispos” involved an altercation between Dom Pedro II and the Brazilian bishops who had arranged for the expulsion of Freemasons from lay brotherhoods. For overstepping their authority, the bishops were arrested and convicted; in 1875, the Emperor, who had supported their conviction, ultimately commuted their sentences.—Ed.

2

In the seventeenth century, the *Bandeirantes* were the adventurers and explorers from the region of the then Province of São Paulo who entered the hinterlands of the territory, going beyond the Line of Tordesillas, searching for gold and precious stones.—Ed.

I.1.7 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 839287

THE INVENTION OF AMERICA

Edmundo O’Gorman, 1961

Both of these selected texts—“History and Critique of the Idea of the Discovery of America” and “The Structure of America’s Being and the Meaning of American History”—are excerpts from *The Invention of America: An Inquiry into the Historical Nature of the New World and the Meaning of Its History* by Mexican historian Edmundo O’Gorman (1906–1995). In 1940, the author began formulating his thesis on the historiographic discovery and “invention” of America, a construct he originally presented in a 1958 Mexican edition [*La invención de América: Investigación acerca de la estructura histórica del nuevo mundo y del sentido de su devenir* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica)]. While working in the United States as a visiting professor, O’Gorman produced the expanded and reworked English version of 1961 [(Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 45–47; 138–43], from which these excerpts are

taken. Here, O’Gorman significantly transforms his ideas on the continental “invention.” He goes beyond his initial articulation of the problem in 1958, adding an entirely new section (part four) that accounts for the different subtitles of the Spanish and English editions.

PART ONE

HISTORY AND CRITIQUE OF THE IDEA OF THE DISCOVERY OF AMERICA

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XI

The time has now come to answer the question with which our inquiry began. We asked whether or not the idea that the American continent was “discovered” was acceptable as a satisfactory way of explaining its appearance on the historical scene of Western culture. We may now answer that it is not satisfactory, because this interpretation does not account adequately for the facts that it interprets; it reduces itself to an absurdity when it reaches the limits of its logical possibilities. The reason for this absurdity is the substantialistic concept of America as a thing in itself. We must conclude that it is necessary to discard both this obsolete notion and the interpretation that depends on it, in order to seek a more adequate way to explain the phenomenon.

Our conclusions have, moreover, laid open to criticism the foundations of American historiography as conceived up to now. The traditional idea of America as a thing in itself, and the no less traditional idea—that because of this previous notion, we are dealing with an entity endowed with a “discoverable” being, which in fact was discovered—are, respectively, the ontological and hermeneutical premises on which the truth of that historiography depends. If one ceases to conceive of America as a ready-made thing that had always been there and that one day miraculously revealed its hidden, unknown, and unforeseeable being to an awestruck world, then the event which is thus interpreted (the finding by Columbus of unknown oceanic lands) takes on an entirely different meaning, and so, of course, does the long series of events that followed. All those happenings which are now known as the exploration, the conquest, and the colonization of America; the establishment of colonial systems in all their

diversity and complexity; the gradual formation of nationalities; the movement toward political independence and economic autonomy; in a word, the sum total of all American history, both Latin and Anglo-American, will assume a new and surprising significance. Thus it will be possible to see that the fundamental issue in the understanding of that history is the ontological understanding of America, which will no longer be conceived as an unalterable and predetermined substance, unconsciously postulated a priori, but rather as the result of a unique and peculiar historical process, which is of course intimately linked with the process of universal history. Historical events will no longer appear as something external and accidental that in no way alters the supposed essence of an America ready-made since the time of Creation, but as something internal which constitutes its ever-changing, mobile, and perishable being, as is the being of all that partakes of life; and its history will no longer be that which *has happened* to America, but that which *it has been, is, and is in the act of being*.

We may conclude that our analysis means the bankruptcy of the old essentialistic concept of American history, and that the way is now open toward a new way of understanding it as something dynamic and alive. If this is the case, we must bear in mind that we can no longer rest on any a priori idea as to what America is, since that notion may be derived only from historical research and not, as is commonly supposed, from some substantialist logically previous premise. This means that if we pretend to tackle the great American historical problem—to explain how the idea of America arose in the consciousness of Western culture—we are committed to a procedure that is diametrically opposed to the one that has traditionally been followed. Instead of starting from a preconceived idea of America in order to explain how Columbus revealed the being of that entity, we should start with what Columbus did in order to explain how such a being was conceived. This new road implies full acceptance of the historical meaning of Columbus' enterprise as it appears from the evidence, from the viewpoint of his personal intentions and convictions, instead of ignoring their significance as it has been traditional to do. Our purpose, then, may be considered as a fourth stage of the same process, in which, finally abandoning the idea that America was the object of a "discovery," we shall seek a new concept by which the facts may be explained more adequately. This new concept, if we may anticipate, is that of America not discovered but invented.

PART FOUR

THE STRUCTURE OF AMERICA'S BEING AND THE MEANING OF AMERICAN HISTORY

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VII

Just as a stranger is recognized as a man, although his personality, his spiritual being, is still unknown, so America was recognized as a continent but its historical being was still veiled in mystery. There was as yet no place for America within the framework of universal history.

As the new lands were gradually explored, Europeans acquired some knowledge of the natives and their ways of life. So long as there was a chance of explaining those regions as part of the Island of the Earth, that is, of Asia, the problems and doubts to which the inhabitants gave rise did not come to the surface. But when eventually it was realized that the new lands formed a distinct geographical entity, difficulties arose. The Christian principle of the unity of all mankind made it necessary to assume that the inhabitants of America were descended from Adam and Eve. But how had sons of Adam been able to make their way as far as America? This question very soon gave rise to the so-called problem of the origin of the American Indian that so much worried the early Spanish historians and led most of them to postulate the existence of the narrow sea passage that we know today as Bering Strait.¹

If the new lands were the fourth part of the world, their inhabitants, in spite of their strangeness, shared in the same nature as that of the Europeans, Asians, and Africans; or to put it in terms of the period, they too were descended from Adam and were beneficiaries of Christ's redemption and had a right to receive the sacraments of the Church. Thus the indigenous civilizations were linked with the course of universal history in the same way as other civilizations in other parts of the world.

The consequence was that the native cultures of the newly found lands could not be recognized and respected in their own right, as an original way of realizing human ideals and values, but only for the meaning they might have in relation to Christian European culture, the self-appointed judge and model of human behavior. The historical being that America revealed as its own was subjected to

that test, giving rise to the no less famous historical problem of the nature of the American Indian, on which [the sixteenth-century historian Friar] Bartolomé de las Casas and [the philosopher and theologian] Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda were so active. The object of this passionate debate was to determine to what degree the native inhabitants of America fitted into the ideal embodied in Christian culture; even in the most favorable case for the Indians, it was impossible to give a higher meaning for their civilizations than that of forms of life pertaining to man, no doubt, but to man only as a creature of nature. The historical being exhibited by America was rejected as lacking in spiritual meaning, according to Christian standards of the time. America was no more than a potentiality, which could be realized only by receiving and fulfilling the values and ideals of European culture. America, in fact, could acquire historical significance only by becoming another Europe. Such was the spiritual or historical being that was invented for America. This way of conceiving the historical being of the new lands found expression in the name of “New World,” which to this day is used as a synonym for America, and which clearly indicates the qualities that, in the spiritual order, differentiated the “fourth part” of the world from the aggregate of the other three parts which were the “Old World.” The meaning of these two designations is now evident. If World in its traditional sense means that part of the earth providentially assigned to man for his dwelling, America was literally a “new” world, which offered the possibility of enlarging man’s old cosmic home by adding a new portion of the universe conceived as capable of becoming another Europe.

We can now perceive the enormous difference between this concept of a “new world” and that which Vespucci and Columbus [SEE DOCUMENTS I.1.1, AND I.1.5] had in mind when they used exactly the same words. To them “new world” implied a dichotomy or irreducible dualism between two entities, each already constituted as a ready-made world, one being “new” only in the sense that it had been recently found. But the concept of a “new world” based on the revolutionary idea contained in the *Cosmographiæ introductio* [of the cartographer Martin Waldseemüller] refers to an entity which is a world only in so far as it is capable of transforming itself into a replica of the “old” world. In the first case we are dealing with two distinct irreducible worlds, which is why Vespucci’s solution was inadmissible; in the second case we are dealing with two different forms of being of one and the same world, one potential (“new”) and the other actual (“old”); so the dichotomy is resolved into unity.

In general terms, the ontological analysis of America is now complete. We have been able to show that America's internal structure is a composite of two fundamental elements, namely, (1) that of being one of the "continents" of the earth, and (2) that of being a "new world." On the one hand America is conceived as a physical entity, i.e., something endowed with a fixed, unalterable nature; on the other hand it is conceived as a spiritual entity, i.e., something capable of fulfilling the possibilities with which it is endowed and thus of realizing itself within the sphere of historical being. We can see, perhaps to our astonishment, that this dual structure, closed and static from the physical point of view, open and dynamic from the historical point of view, is a structure of body and spirit like that of man himself. Not only was America invented and not discovered, as we believe we have proved, but it was invented in the image of its inventor. We have thus established a fact of far-reaching consequences, which opens the possibility of a dynamic and as yet unexplored idea concerning all historical entities. This question, however, goes beyond the bounds of the present inquiry.

VIII

One final question claims our attention; it concerns the meaning of American history. Since the spiritual being with which America was endowed is, as we now know, a being *ab alio* [from another], because it consists in the possibility of becoming another Europe, it follows that, in its essence, the history of America is the way in which that possibility has been actualized.

We recall that our alien stranger had two roads that he might follow: that of imitating Europe, and that of accepting European values but realizing them in his own way. This explains an otherwise baffling phenomenon in American history, the fact that it took a double course, as may be seen in the two Americas, Latin or Spanish and Saxon or English. The whole question is, of course, much too complex and involved to be dealt with here in detail, so we must limit our description to a general outline.

One of the two roads that could be followed consisted of an attempt to imitate the European model by adapting the new circumstances to its image. Thus America would actualize the possibilities of the spiritual being with which it was endowed and, therefore, be itself. Allowing for shades and grades which must be overlooked in any generalization, this program inspired the action of taking possession of the New World on the part of the Iberian nations, eminently

typified by Spain. If one studies the general principles that guided her colonial policy, whether in the sphere of religious, imperial, economic, or cultural interests, or in that of social relations, it can be seen that an attempt was made to acclimatize European ways of life on American soil, with the design of preserving both the original external forms and their internal significance. This is evidenced in the transplantation of church, governmental, administrative, and educational institutions, in the strict and jealous upholding of social privileges and titles of nobility, in all the artistic and cultural expressions that began to appear in the colonies, and in certain other measures like the planning of Mexico City, which was designed to be so far as possible a Spanish capital.²

The existence of a huge indigenous population turned out to be the major obstacle to the achievement of these aims in all their purity,³ but this only reveals more clearly the original intention. Instead of getting rid of the natives or enslaving them, or simply using them without worrying about their future, as other imperial powers have done, Spain tried to protect them by means of special laws and institutions which, like the *encomienda*,⁴ were contrived for the purpose of paving the way for the eventual assimilation of the natives into a European society. Spain knew no principle of racial discrimination, either in theory or in fact, and if the program did not yield the fruits that were expected and the Indian remained in a position of more or less servile inferiority, to a great extent for reasons not imputable to Spain, that does not diminish the historical significance of the attempt, which was achieved to some extent in the large Mestizo Latin-American population of our day.

Latin America was never a frontier land in the sense of dynamic transformation that has been given to that term by American historians ever since Frederick Jackson Turner; it was rather the passive object of transplantation and grafting. Notwithstanding the many changes that took place, the Spaniards—unlike their English brothers in the northern part of America—never engaged in any widespread and tenacious effort to transform forests and deserts into cultivable areas; they confined their settlement to regions that seemed to be naturally destined by Providence for man's benefit. The ancient religious idea of a God-made and God-given world lingered on vaguely. When at the close of the sixteenth century the Jesuit José de Acosta speaks of the project of opening a canal in Panama to join the two oceans, he not only believes the task to be practically impossible, but is more seriously concerned with the fear of Heaven's punishment for "wanting to

correct the work which God, so wisely and providentially, ordered in the making of the Universe.”⁵

In the colonial history of Latin America we have, then, the actualization of America's being according to one of the ways in which that goal could be achieved. We are dealing here, no doubt, with a form of authentic and genuine historical life in that it represents an attempt at being oneself. But since it consisted of a sort of historical mimetism of Europe, it must also be said that that life [in colonial Latin America] was [lived as if on loan] . . . [as if it were an] alien form of life. We must add, however, that the historical life of Latin America at a later period no longer merits this description, for underlying the wars for independence and the many violent upheavals which are so typical of that history there is a design and an attempt to live a form of life that may truly be considered its own. The desire for historical autonomy found its chief inspiration in the history of the other America, where the European model had been actualized through the other channel, and where new forms of historical life had been produced by and for a peculiar new type of man who, certainly not by chance, has been universally granted the name of American.

The second road, it will be recalled, consists not in adapting the new circumstances to the model, but the latter to the former. We have here the explanation for the essence of the history of the English-speaking America and for its phenomenal success. It is true that, as in the case of the other America, here too we have an initial transplantation of systems, institutions, habits, and privileges of European origin; but in the North a process of transformation immediately set in, inspired by an ever-increasing feeling that the new lands did not mean a providential gift from God to the motherland, but rather a providential opportunity to exercise religious, political, and economic liberty, so hindered and fettered in the Old World. So, within the variegated framework of different faiths, different habits, and national idiosyncrasies, every group saw in its own portion of the new lands and its own peculiar way of life the New Jerusalem come true. Step by step with the exploration and occupation of the immense continent, the old European forms of cultural and social life were slowly transformed or discarded altogether as they gave way to new habits that were to be the foundation of a new society.⁶ In this process the American native was left on one side, and although some attempts were made to incorporate him and Christianize him,

in general he was abandoned to his own fate and even systematically destroyed, as a man with no hope of redemption, since his indolence and lack of initiative, thrift, and foresight were judged by Puritan standards as a sign that God had justly forgotten him.

In strong contrast with the lordly and bureaucratic ideals of the Spanish conquerors and settlers, who sought only privileges, preferment, rewards, luxury, and leisure, these men of the other America set up as a principle of life personal skill, frugality, and labor, and instead of passively settling in only those places where God had revealed wealth, they took pains to create it, razing forests, draining marsh lands, and, in general, converting what was useless, fruitless, and uninhabitable into the opposite. If the martial courage of the conquistadors and the self-denial and patience of the monks claim our admiration and gratitude, no less worthy of praise are the early settlers and pioneers who laid the foundations for the great republic of the modern world.

Thus the second new Europe was created, not as a copy, but as an extension of the old Europe in that its historical possibilities were actualized with originality in another setting. Historical life in English-speaking America is, no doubt, of European cast, but on all sides and in all spheres one sees the imprint of new inventive forces. Perhaps the most outstanding instance is the political Constitution of the United States of America, European in its philosophical foundations, but at the same time expressing the genius of a nation that may indeed consider its cultural life as an authentic creation of its own.

All of this raises still another question, that of determining the meaning of the historical situation that arose after America had realized the being with which it was originally endowed, thus wiping out the initial dichotomy of an Old World and a New World as distinct entities. When America has reached that point there is no longer any true historical meaning in conceiving it still as a new world, save in some vague metaphoric sense which can only sow confusion and flatter those who like to see in Europe, against all evidence, a world in hopeless decay. To us it seems that we no longer have two distinct worlds, one young and promising, the other old and dying, but that a new historical entity has been formed, which may well be called Euro-America and in which the great ocean of ancient geography undergoes its last transformation; it has been converted into the new *Mare Nostrum*, the Mediterranean of our day.

Much more could be said on this subject, but let us close with this thought: just as the process of the invention of America's geographical or corporeal being made it necessary to abandon the archaic insular concept of the physical world, so the process by which America actualized the possibilities of its spiritual being made it necessary to abandon the no less archaic insular concept of the historical world as something peculiarly belonging to Europe. It was the Spanish part of the invention of America that liberated Western man from the fetters of a prison-like conception of his physical world, and it was the English part that liberated him from subordination to a Europe-centered conception of his historical world. In these two great liberations lies the hidden and true significance of American history.

1

For instance, [Gonzalo Fernandez de] Oviedo, *A General and Natural History of the West Indies*, First Part (1535), Book XVI, Preface; Acosta, *Historia natural y moral de las Indias*, 1590, I, Chapter 20; Juan López de Velazco, *Geografía y descripción de las Indias*, Madrid, 1894, p. 3.

2

Edmundo O'Gorman, *Reflexiones sobre la distribución urbana colonial de la Ciudad de México*, Mexico City, 1938.

3

Oviedo, *Sucesos y Diálogo de la Nueva España*, anthology by Edmundo O'Gorman, Biblioteca del Estudiante Universitario, no. 62, Mexico City, 1946, II, pp. 157–63.

4

Encomienda was a feudal system established by Spain that involved the Crown granting a specified number of natives to the *conquistadors* and to others of means, including native noblewomen. In return for their protection and for their guarantee of instruction in the Spanish language and in Catholicism, the colonists would receive labor and/or tribute in the form of gold or other commodities and food items from their wards, the *encomenderos*.—Ed.

5

Acosta, *op. cit.* note 1 above (1590), Book III, Chapter 10.

6

Of great interest in this score is Professor Walter Prescott Webb's *The Great Frontier*, Cambridge, Mass., 1952.

I.2

THE INVENTION OF AN OPERATIVE CONCEPT

I.2.1 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1052451

THE LATIN AMERICAN STATES

Charles (Carlos) Calvo (1824–1906) was an Argentinean jurist who served as Paraguay’s chargé d’affaires to the courts of France and England. He represented the administration of Francisco Solano López (1862–69) during the War of the Triple Alliance (1864–1870) against Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay. At the height of France’s intervention on the continent, Calvo published his diplomatic and commercial history of Latin America, *Recueil complet des traités, conventions, capitulations, armistices, et autres actes diplomatiques de tous les États d’Amérique latine compris entre le Golfe du Mexique et le cap d’Horn, depuis l’année 1493 jusqu’à nos jours, précédé d’un memoir sur l’état actuel de l’Amérique, des tableaux statistiques, d’un dictionnaire diplomatique, avec une notice historique sur chaque traité important*). In fact, the name Latin America appears in print for the first time in this work. Calvo’s letter to Emperor Napoleon III and the response from Minister of the French Foreign Office Édouard Thouvenel (1818–1866), both signed in January 1862, three months after the French invasion of Mexico are presented here. The selection also includes the beginning of Calvo’s essay “Amérique latine,” a passage from volume I in which the author, using extensive statistics to make his case, highlights to French investors the intellectual and commercial potential of Latin America. Although the present translation is from the original edition of 1862 [(Paris: A. Durand Librairie), i–v], a later edition of Calvo’s book was published in 1912 by the same Parisian publishing house.

LETTER TO HIS MAJESTY, EMPEROR NAPOLEON III

Charles (Carlos) Calvo, 1862

SIRE,

YOUR IMPERIAL MAJESTY HAS UNDERSTOOD, better than any other European sovereign, the full importance of Latin America and has made the most direct contribution to the substantial development of trade undertaken by France with this vast continent. As one born on the bountiful banks of the River Plate and relying on your customary benevolence—which is one of Your Imperial Majesty's most distinctive traits—I beg Your Majesty to accept the dedication of this body of work, as well as the Foreword and the Introduction, which I have the honor to send together with this request. This is not merely a token of respectful admiration inspired by Your Imperial Majesty's superior intelligence and keen insight; it is, I assure you, the sincere expression of gratitude of all people of the Latin race.

Sire,

I have the honor of being, with the very deepest respect,
Your Imperial Majesty's most humble and obedient servant,

CARLOS CALVO

53, rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin
Paris, April 16, 1862.

LETTER FROM M. THOUVENEL, MINISTER OF THE FRENCH FOREIGN OFFICE, TO CHARLES (CARLOS) CALVO

Édouard Thouvenel, 1862

SIRE,

I HAVE RECEIVED THE LETTER that you honored me by writing on the 16th day of this month, and I immediately hurried to show it to His Majesty. I am referring to the one in which you asked His Majesty to accept the dedication of your work. I am pleased to answer that the Emperor—who genuinely appreciated the affection that inspired your request—has graciously accepted the dedication of a body of work whose publication, in his opinion, seems to be of great interest at this time. Please be assured of the most distinguished consideration with which I am honored to be

Your humble and obedient servant.

THOUVENEL

Paris, April 22, 1862

LATIN AMERICA

Charles (Carlos) Calvo, 1862

LATIN AMERICA WAS DISCOVERED, CONQUERED, AND POPULATED by Europe, yet it is not as well-known as it should be in terms of the interests that underpin the close relationship enjoyed by these two regions of the world. Scholars such as [Alexander von] Humboldt, [Aimé] Bonpland, [Jean-Baptiste] Boussingault, Roulin d'Orbigny, [Augustin] Saint-Hilaire, and many others who have visited

America were content to study her physical nature. They therefore revealed to the world—in works as profound as they were enlightening—the rich treasures that she harbors in her bosom. However, and unfortunately for the Americas, in order to understand [these treasures] completely, we would need a thorough study of the intellectual, political, social, and even economic activities of the population. And we are still lacking this essential work.

But I believe that there are many other factors that could be blamed for Europe's perpetual state of blind ignorance vis-à-vis the level of civilization and progress in the Americas:

FIRST The inadequate teaching provided by European schools on the history and geography of the South American continent; with regard to these subjects, the teachers are at the same level as their students, a fact that I am frequently in a position to confirm.

SECOND The lack of competent, patriotic groups that could educate Europe concerning the specific, positive interests involved, and provide information on the development of wealth in the Americas and the swift growth of trade in these countries with impressive futures.

THIRD The intolerable chattering of shallow writers who travel with their eyes closed and then confine themselves to a hotel room to write fictional novels in which they are always the heroes—of novels in which they discuss everything except the true history of the country they are visiting in a style that is designed to impress people and dazzle the imagination of the feeble-minded.

These are but some of the factors that may prevent Europe from learning anything about the Latin people in the Americas. The lack of information is shameful.

Most Europeans still think of the Americas as they did at the time of the Discovery, which means they still consider them to be “wild” and “primitive.” The intelligent and civilized inhabitants of these lands are thought of as either Indians or Negroes from Africa, who are either naked or clothed in feathers; our fine cities—whose monuments and luxurious surroundings are a match for any second-tier European city—are pictured as villages made of wretched huts, and so on.

Sixteen years after my first trip to Europe, the image of South America still has not changed. As viewed by the Europeans, Latin America got stuck somewhere between 1492 and 1810 and has not moved since. That is to say, between

the Discovery and Colonial times, between the pristine state and civilization, between ignorance and enlightened despotism.

In the eyes of the Motherland, our political emancipation ruined us; European nations thought that, if it was not a step backwards, it was at least what brought us into discredit.

One must wonder if judgments of this kind, as severe as they are unfair, might nonetheless hold a kernel of truth. Are they based on history as well as the facts and the current situations in the various countries that have evolved from the Old Spanish colonies? No, certainly not; it should therefore be the duty of all Latin Americans whose heart is in the right place to take the necessary steps to eliminate any possible doubt among European readers.

Such is the mission that we accept in the name of patriotism and that I shall constantly strive to fulfill here, even though I will be considered the least competent and the most humble son of the Young America. In order to reach this goal, it might be necessary to depart from the plan of this project that focuses exclusively on the study of Public Law of the Americas.

The sovereign and independent states that have been established in the domains formerly ruled by the Spanish, Portuguese, and French Crowns encompass a geographic area of 390,466 square miles and are home to some 32,312,542 inhabitants. In other words, almost the same population as the mighty French Empire; but with an additional 380,433 square miles that—based on the current population of France—could be considered entirely unpopulated.

The Empire of Brazil ranks highest among these States due to the relative superiority of its civilization and people—as well as its prosperity, liberal institutions, and the stability of its administration and government. It rivals several nations of the Old World in terms of its material and intellectual advancement.

It must be said, however, that the Republics of Chile, the River Plate (the Provinces of Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay), Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, New Granada [Colombia], Venezuela, Central America, and Mexico are all on much the same level as Brazil with regard to modern civilization. They too have suffered the kind of internal upheavals that, regardless of their varying durations or degrees of violence, are endured by every other country in the world. But the consequences here are not necessarily the same as those produced in Europe by this kind of unrest. Due to the extraordinary vitality of Latin America countries, such turmoil frequently stimulates the eminently progressive spirit of their populations.

All aspects of modern European civilization, whether in terms of intellectual or material improvement, are rapidly introduced in America with alacrity that is the very antithesis of the decadence to be found in certain nations of the Old World. The standard of education there is such that young Americans no longer feel the need to go to Europe except to attend schools of higher education. These days, there is no region in the Americas without a literary or scientific society, no area without colleges dedicated to teaching art and industry. In Chile, Brazil, and Buenos Aires—and in Paraguay, Montevideo, and Peru—the railroads, electric telegraph, gas, and so on are, in general terms, far more advanced than they are in Spain, Italy, or Turkey, or in certain Northern European countries.

But the prosperity of these countries is to be expected when one considers their trade, which is the basis of their wealth, their well-being, and their civilization. These days, trade in Latin America is livelier than it is in most European countries, as I intend to prove here beyond a doubt. If, upon arriving in Europe, American travelers feel deeply disappointed by the ignorance they encounter concerning their country, they might be relieved to know that there are at least some honorable exceptions to be found, specifically among prominent intellectuals who set the pace of modern civilization.

In 1850, in an eloquent speech that buttressed the authority of words with the accuracy of numbers, the eminent French publicist, Mr. [Adolphe] Thiers made an astonishing prediction concerning Latin America. He referred to Argentina's ten-year struggle with France and England. For the benefit of the Governing Assembly, Mr. Thiers drew from his deep wells of genius and intellectual curiosity. I will thus reproduce some paragraphs of his outstanding discourse.

. . .

I.2.2 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 839365

ANCIENT AND MODERN MEXICO

Michel Chevalier, 1863

The Maximilian Affair of 1862 ignited debate over the role that France should play in Mexico, in particular, and by and large in the rest of the Latin American republics. In this excerpt, French engineer and free-market liberal Michel Chevalier (1806–1879)—whose career had taken off in 1837 with the publication of *Des intérêts matériels en France*—justifies France’s invasion of Mexico, citing a shared Christian tradition as well as a cultural and racial affinity. Chevalier first made this association between Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking America and “Latin Europe” in 1832 while on a state-sponsored trade mission through the United States and Mexico. He took this trip at the behest of Adolphe Tiers, France’s minister of the interior. Tiers later served as prime minister and eventually as president of the Third Republic. Chevalier’s ideas on a European “Latin race” were seminal to the diffusion of the term “Latin America.” This translation is from chapter 3 (“Motif tiré de la politique générale de la France en faveur de l’entreprise”) of the original French edition of the book *Le Mexique ancien et moderne* [(Paris: Librairie de L. Hachette et Cie., 1864), 494–508].

PART 3

RATIONALE EXCERPTED FROM THE GENERAL POLICIES OF FRANCE TO SUPPORT THE UNDERTAKING

France is not, relatively speaking, indifferent to slavery, having stated her opposition to it in the strongest terms. She does not, however, feel the same religious passion and enthusiasm with which England advocates the abolishment of this institution linked to primitive societies. [France] could in fact find, among the principles of her general policies, justification for an expedition to Mexico, since this is her own cause that has nothing to do with the British government. There are many branches in the tree of Western Christian civilization, among which there is one very distinct branch that represents the Latin race. Its roots can be found in France, in Italy, in the Spanish-Portuguese peninsula, and in the

various parts of the world that the French, Italians, Spanish, and Portuguese have populated with their offspring. This branch is characterized by its significant [population] numbers and the prevalence of Catholic worship. While it does not represent all who practice the Catholic faith, it is the one that makes the greatest contribution in terms of new blood and brilliant achievement. It is not our intention here to belittle anyone when we say that France is not just the soul of this branch, it is also its arm. Without our country and her aggressive initiative—which includes the noblest of sentiments in addition to military strength—the other Latin countries would be reduced to playing a very humble role on the world stage and would eventually be totally eclipsed. France is, in fact, an elder sister for all these nations, and her authority safeguards them. She is not just the leader of the group of Latin countries; she is also their sole protector since Spain left so much unaccomplished.

Among the broader range of interests pursued as part of French policies and duties, there is none clearer or more important than promoting the unity of the bloc of Latin countries and the progress of Catholic nations. It is also essential that France stand up to the various forces and factions that oppose her, to demonstrate to these countries her strength and vast influence. At this time when there is a remarkably free exchange of ideas and feelings among European countries, it is appropriate to repeat what Napoleon I stated sixty years ago. On that occasion, he documented the terms of the peace that followed the armed struggle. As always, every European war is a civil war. The goal of harmony and unity that should inspire the bonds between the various countries in Europe should also apply to all Latin nations and should be the basis of their relationship with France. France's influence is undoubtedly what can affect unity among Latin countries and keep them focused on their common interests. Moreover, under the law of reciprocity, which is never absent from human affairs, French authority is the one condition required to consolidate and develop the Latin nations.

Our country possesses vast resources and an indomitable spirit. Her charter includes a number of generous principles. France was created on a foundation of noble traditions to which she remains ever faithful since they represent both her power and her duty. She is a long-standing patron of the arts and sciences; her industrial resources and production are constantly increasing and her agricultural prospects are extremely promising. France is respected far and wide for her fearsome arsenal of weapons. But, should Latin nations disappear from

the face of the earth, she would inevitably be weakened by extreme isolation, and would be like a general without an army, like a head without a body.

This is a matter of great importance to France, and it is in her most vital interest that Spain should remain a viable nation, well established and possessed of plentiful resources and the gift of initiative. In short, France is constantly concerned with the balance of power in the world. The same applies to Italy and to Portugal in spite of its limited size. And to Belgium, which is so industrious, liberal, and shrewd—except when she spends monies to fortify Antwerp. And, further afield, there are all the countries in the New World that were founded by the Spanish and Portuguese and that are now developing their intellectual and moral culture, their wealth and population, instead of being consumed by the flames of anarchy once they earned their independence. When viewed from this perspective, we can see that Emperor Napoleon III was right in supporting Spain and asking for her to be considered among the great powers of Europe. That request was both timely and just, since it acknowledged the glorious reign that gave Spain the right to aspire to the rank she was entitled to occupy. It also recognized Spain's ability to recover from the devastating influence of Henry IV and [Cardinal] Richelieu. They certainly were great politicians to have subdued Spain and diminished her power since she was extremely dangerous at that time. Their policies were appropriate to their century, but if they were living now, in our times, they would see things differently and would be intent on reviving Spain. From that same perspective, we should not forget the assistance given to Italy when she was determined to throw off the yoke of Austrian domination in 1859. Thanks to that expulsion, this pretty country has almost obtained its unity based on its grand policies and extreme caution. France, duly supported by this pair of peninsulas, remains fortified by and united to them through bonds of reciprocal sympathy and the thousand things we share in common. There is also the closeness of languages, customs, ideas, and, most of all, a communion in terms of a superior religion that will be maintained for our shared well-being and for the benefit of the entire world.

It must be emphasized that [while I believe] the French need to energize the countries that are populated by the Latin race, it is not my intention to ignore the prospect of an alliance with the British. On the contrary, this must henceforth be considered an essential priority for France. A solid agreement between these two nations, the most powerful on the earth, is a key condition for peace

in the world and for the advancement of our civilization. This would provide each of us with an ideal security arrangement and would guarantee each one's own authority. The encouragement of this kind of harmony between the two governments in London and Paris, coupled with their respective insights into major events and the general field of international commerce, could lead to joint action in certain areas—a better crafted action than the one that displeased [the British prime minister] Lord Palmerston after several years in very significant circumstances. All this would be of undeniable benefit to the people concerned. In fact, there could be a closer understanding along the lines of the political relations between France and the two peninsulas so that the alliance could be more like a family arrangement. What I am suggesting is that England and France are sufficiently enterprising yet different to allow them to enter into an agreement and establish a bond that would be similar to one that unites Spain and France or the latter and Italy. In short, we bring more to an alliance with England if we are closely united with Spain and Italy, both of whom are well established, and the benefit increases if we are seen as the representative of the Latin race in Europe and the entire world—in other words, if the Latin countries are well organized and are perceived as being ready to move forward on the road to progress.

Therefore, when we look at the map of the world—two centuries later—and compare the sphere of influence of Catholic nations, specifically the Latin ones, it is with some dismay, especially if we look at the dissenting Christian nations, now so established and strongly entrenched, whose great sources of power and civilization are either Protestant, of one branch or another, or even Greek. We are utterly bewildered when we see the area lost by the former and gained by the latter, which is still gaining. This is troubling when we consider the interests of the Latin race and, from that perspective, contemplate how the planet, the home of our human race, has been carved up. Our feelings of dread are compounded when we examine the statistics showing population growth and wealth in different countries. It seems that Catholic nations, and most especially the Latin ones, are being threatened by a rising tide.

Two hundred years ago, Russia was a barbaric region that was never even considered in terms of the political balance of the world. Today, it is an empire with a population of seventy-four million people, widely feared because of its military strength, and extremely powerful because of its determined embrace of many features of Western civilization such as the arts and sciences. . . .

There will soon be a country that is almost as powerful as it is vast, but is a stranger to Catholicism.

Two hundred years ago, Spain was in decline but was still one of the European powers, whereas Prussia, which was not even a kingdom, ranked at a decidedly secondary level. Today, Spain is struggling to reclaim her place among the upper hierarchy of nations, while Prussia is recognized throughout the world as one of the five key countries in Europe. It has a larger population than Spain; its industry is more advanced, and it is superior in knowledge of all kind. The Ecclesiastic Principalities on the banks of the Rhine, which are Catholic, have been displaced and the flag of Protestant Prussia now flutters where the standard of the ancient bishop-princes once streamed. The Turkish Empire is on the verge of collapse and manages to frustrate all diplomatic attempts to avert such a disaster. It is like a lamp with no oil left in its tank, and it seems that the Ottoman population is about to be extinguished. Other states may rise up to take the place of the Crescent Moon Empire, but Catholics are in the minority in that part of the world. Any Christian states established there will genuflect in the direction of Greece.

But when we look beyond Europe, we see more and more evidence of the advance of non-Catholic powers and the decline of Catholic ones. First, it was [North] America that claimed a Protestant spirit; a great nation divided into several colonies that, two hundred years ago was but a meek dependant of England, with a population of barely one million at that time. This country is the United States, currently immersed in a crisis that—as distressing as it is to be embroiled in such an ordeal—will eventually lead to a new kind of progress. After three-quarters of a century of tireless effort, its population has evolved into a force to be reckoned with. The land available to them to form new States seems limitless, allowing them to attract large numbers of civilized people whose numbers, admirable qualities, and endless resources will guarantee them a substantial say in world affairs. In 1790, the total population of the United States was slightly less than four million, of which seven hundred thousand were slaves; by 1860 the population had risen to some thirty-one and a half million, of which approximately four million were slaves.

Immigration contributed significantly to this huge increase, but the main causes were the natural multiplication of human beings, the favorable circumstances provided by the land they inhabited and, most of all, their

self-sufficiency. But after the [Civil] War—whose relentless fury scourged the country and interrupted the flow of prosperity in this great nation—human beings will continue to multiply as before. Then, even accounting for the admittedly limited loss of human life, its population might almost equal the population of European nations, since the figures for the latter are at best mediocre. Mr. [Joseph C. G.] Kennedy has estimated what the population of the United States will be at the end of this century, that is, thirty-seven years from now, which is the average lifespan of a full generation.¹ He found that if it could sustain its yearly growth of three percent—an average that has been consistent so far and in fact has occasionally been exceeded—the United States will by then be home to some one hundred million souls. In France, on the other hand, if the population does not multiply any faster than it has in the last fifteen years we will barely reach forty million. It is not hard to imagine that, by that time and beyond, the American Union will be divided into three or four empires; the space it occupies, however, is so vast that each of those empires could be four or five times larger than France. It will be a mighty group of States that could provide a counterbalance to Europe.

The British settlement in America, which is of considerable size, seems destined to father at least two states along the shores of the oceans that border the continent. It is energetically organized and settled. At this point, we would offer an observation concerning the United States that is along the lines of the matters mentioned above. There are also a significant number of Catholics in British America; there are Irish settlers in the backlands, and French populations in Lower Canada. Roman Catholicism, however, appears to stand little chance of being widely accepted. The papal curia would be hard-pressed to find converts who would support a system that eschews liberalism and would consign its members to a permanent minority status. This is not the best place to promote the cause of religious intolerance. In matters of religion as in politics or civil relations, liberty is the guiding principle here, and Protestantism leads the way.

Looking at the two Americas, we can see that there are a couple of Catholic regions that are getting stronger. One is the Empire of Brazil, a vast, seemingly limitless region; and the other is Cuba, which is a small island colony. It is not my intention to criticize Brazil, since it is ruled in an honest and liberal manner. It has made a name for itself, is respected throughout the world, and has attracted a considerable flow of European settlers. Brazil is poised to become a continental

power but, sadly, it still relies on the black slave trade as its engine of prosperity. There was a time when this sort of arrangement was acceptable but, sooner or later, it will inevitably be detrimental to its broader goals. But even if I were to be kind and indulgent, Brazil cannot be portrayed as a Latin and Catholic counterpart to what the United States represents for Protestant Anglo-Saxons. Currently, Brazil has some eight million inhabitants of all skin colors. With regard to the island of Cuba, it is the most successful area of the Antilles, having experienced remarkable growth in its wealth and its population, now comprising over twelve hundred souls. However, slavery is also prevalent in Cuba, and the black slave trade is a major contributor to its population growth.² It should also be emphasized that the United States is ready to take advantage of any sign of weakness from Spain that would allow it to take over the island for itself.

The reader has now contemplated the expanse of the Great Oceans and has witnessed the establishment of magnificent colonies in what could be described as no man's lands. The question that then arises is: to whom do they belong? Where are they from and what spirit drives them? None of them is descended from a Catholic nation. . . .

There is a purpose to this comparison between Catholic countries and countries that practice other forms of Christian faith. That purpose is to prompt statesmen to consider, with very good reason, that the destiny of France and the power of her authority are inextricably linked to the future opportunities of Catholic countries in general, and the Latin race in particular. This is the strongest reason to support the [French] expedition to Mexico.³

1

Kennedy was the superintendent of census in the United States for the 1850 and 1860 censuses. Chevalier references Kennedy's report, *Population of the United States in 1860; compiled from the original returns of the eighth census...*, by Joseph C. G. Kennedy, Superintendent of Census. (Washington, D.C.: United States Census Office, 1864).—Ed.

2

The island of Cuba is fortunate to have found such a knowledgeable and tireless scribe, Mr. Ramón de la Sagra, who scrupulously presents all points of view. He recently published an enormous work, which includes a descriptive atlas titled *Historia física, económico-política, intelectual y moral de la isla de Cuba*. It is indeed one of the finest scientific publications to have been printed in Spain. His book appeared in 1842, but the author proceeded to gather more information and publish supplements to his original work, one of which appeared in 1860.

3

In the letter addressed by the Emperor [Napoleon III] to Marshall [Elias Frederic] Foray when this military commander took charge of the [Mexican] campaign, this purpose was enthusiastically endorsed.

I.2.3 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 838484

THE LATIN DEMOCRACIES IN AMERICA

This selection of documents includes the prologue to the book *Les démocraties latines d'Amérique* by Francisco García Calderón (1883–1953)—the writer, diplomat, and son of the provisional president of Peru—as well as a “Préface” by Raymond Poincaré (1860–1934). A member of the Académie française, Poincaré wrote the preface in December 1911, only one month prior to his appointment as prime minister of France and two years prior to his assuming the country’s presidency (1913–20). Poincaré endorses Calderón’s recommendations to limit the Latin American policies of excessive borrowing and cautions against the categorical European dismissal of all of these nascent “democracies” as financially unsound. Additionally, the Frenchman naively rebuts García Calderón’s predictions regarding France’s imminent confrontation with Germany and the Slavs just as World War I (1914–18) was about to explode. Ironically, Poincaré served as president of France during the entire conflict. García Calderón—who had moved his family from Peru to Paris in 1906—wrote *Les démocraties latines d'Amérique* [(Paris: Ernest Flammarion Editeur, Bibliothèque de Philosophie scientifique, 1912)] in French and published it the same year as *La creación de un continente*. This title became his most widely read book, inciting discussion throughout the continent. García Calderón insisted on a “Latin consciousness,” and his writing is fueled by skepticism. His speculations on the “negative” supremacy of Anglo-America were realized with the advent of World War I. Although *Les démocraties latines d'Amérique* was subsequently published in Spanish [see, for example, *Las democracias latinas de América* (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1979)], the translations published in this volume are from the original French edition [(1912), 1–7].

RAYMOND POINCARÉ, PREFACE TO FRANCISCO GARCÍA CALDERÓN'S *THE LATIN DEMOCRACIES IN AMERICA*

Raymond Poincaré, 1912

THIS IS A BOOK THAT ALL FRENCH PEOPLE SHOULD READ and think about because it concerns the future of the way Latin people are perceived. Written by a young career diplomat from Peru, who is extremely familiar with our [French] language, it nonetheless retains certain colorful traces of his native language. Mr. García-Calderón's work loses nothing from the picturesque originality of its style. It is, moreover, brimming with vitality and generously endowed with thoughtful insights on a variety of subjects—history, politics, social and economic sciences; Mr. Calderón is at home with them all and discusses them competently and unpretentiously. The full scope of the evolution of the South American republics is presented here for the reader's edification in this book that is now available to the French public and the rest of Europe.

Mr. Calderón, who studied under the finest contemporary historians, began his research into the past by examining the patterns of future development in the Latin [American] republics. Supported by scholarly and balanced research, he shows how the Spaniard of the heroic centuries was transformed by interracial breeding and climate and gradually evolved into the South American *Criollo*. The author traces the distant traits of the Iberian race, now modified by time and diluted by miscegenation. He reviews, in just a few pages, the heroic period when Spanish individualism was apparent in the bold adventures of the Conquistadors and in the cruel mysticism of the Inquisition.

Then came the colonial period, with its increasing disappointments, abuses, and blunders: the domination of an oppressive theocracy, the overwhelming monopolies, the insolence of privileged castes, and the unworthiness of agents in the Iberian Peninsula. Gradually, a thirst for independence spread throughout the Spanish and Portuguese colonies. Their revolt was not entirely directed against the crushing burden of economic and fiscal tyranny; they also

rose up against the harshness of a system of political and moral guardianship that allowed them no political freedom. A severe and widespread crisis ensued. Liberty was ultimately won in three phases. First, the colonies, wishing to remain loyal, sought reforms from the metropolitan state. Then, they dreamed of having European kings. Finally, the Republican ideal materialized, evolved, and asserted its authority.

There was a time of predecessors, then a time of liberators, and Mr. Calderón tells the tragic history with profound gratitude. He takes a clear-eyed look at the Revolution and detects its deeper causes: the excesses of Spanish absolutism; the influence of the *Encyclopédie* and the 1789 doctrines; the example set by North America; British investment and the diplomatic intervention of [Prime Minister George] Canning; an explosive combination of diverse and conflicting forces that created a new, sad, shattered world, inhospitable to social life.

Mr. Calderón presents a few vignettes of this reborn America, showing us a full gallery of paintings created with spirited brushstrokes. We thus see Paraguay during the long dictatorship of its first “*caudillo*”; a gloomy Dr. [José Gaspar Rodríguez de] Francia with his authoritarian traditions and warlike instincts; Uruguay portrayed in terms of its intense local conditions; Ecuador is represented by the very influential traits of [Gabriel] García-Moreno; Peruvian life appears enthralled by the prosperous, powerful embargo of both don Ramón Castilla and Manuel Prado, which included unrestrained speculation, the wild enthusiasm for saltpeter and guano, the abuse of loans, war and anarchy, as well as the current attempt at economic reconstruction and national restoration; Bolivia is shown through the cold and cunningly ambitious prism of [Andrés de] Santa-Cruz; Venezuela is represented by the rough, daring realism of [José Antonio] Páez or by the despotic empiricism of [Antonio] Guzmán Blanco, a politician with no doctrine who is hungry for power, yet is a patriot with a paternal streak. According to Mr. Calderón, one might almost confuse the history of these republics with the biography of their “*caudillos*,” powerful men who, at any given moment personify the needs, virtues, and vices of their countries.

Following Simón Bolívar’s epic feat—recounted here by Mr. Calderón with enthusiastic gratitude—a restless period of military anarchy began. South America was torn to pieces by the “*caudillos*,” whose ambition divided the continent into a number of different states. But the spirit of these newborn nations, drenched in the blood of the battlefield, managed, in spite of their artificial divi-

sions, to nurture a sense of national consciousness. This was a time of war and revolution. South Americans lived in great danger, just as Florentines did during the Renaissance and the French in the time of the Terror. Nevertheless, under military rule wealth was developed, order was established, interests were guaranteed, and life became more gentle and monotonous, ushering in the era of industry, rising fortunes, and peace. It seems to me that Mr. Calderón feels a little sad at having arrived too late in a world that is already too old. What he refers to as the twilight of “*caudillismo*” appears to make him nostalgic for times gone by. All these tyrants—for that is what they were—whose regimes prospered on the backs of the Negroes and the Mestizos, contributed to the destruction of both oligarchies and racial differences. They thus founded democracies that Mr. Calderón’s liberal spirit is unable to view without some measure of kindness. They are lacking in terms of solidarity; they are incompetent, inorganic, and incapable of coordinating human endeavors. Like medieval republics, they are unsettled and consumed by family rivalries and rampant hatred between opposing factions. Beneath the bright veneer of French ideas, they harbor chaotic conflicts between Europeans and Indians, Asians, and Africans.

All that notwithstanding, Mr. Calderón can see in these turbulent countries the reassuring signs of a potent energy that he is confident will soon be well-directed by Latin disciplines. Following the scholarly approach to learning during colonial times, he traces the intellectual evolution of the South American people through the fog of political ideology until they reach a pale imitation of European philosophical thought. Despite the racial diversity to be found throughout the Southern continent, Mr. Calderón is convinced that the long-term secular influence of Roman law, a common religion, and French thought has given these young republics a Latin perspective that is both intangible and sacred. He therefore expresses his very reasonable and well-thought-out wish that the South American people will manage to correct and perfect themselves without breaking with their own traditions or being subjected to foreign influences.

He reviews the threats posed by Germany, North America, and Japan. Mr. Calderón does not underestimate the former, and condemns the pace of German commercial activity, especially in the southern provinces of Brazil. He believes, however, that the Teutonic trait will become diluted through intermarriage and will gradually blend into the general population. He is, on the other hand, extremely concerned about the North American threat; not that he doesn’t

acknowledge the marvelous qualities of the Anglo-Saxon race; he is not indifferent to the prestige of the Great Republic, nor does he dismiss the way in which it has served the autonomy of the Americas. But he feels the increasingly oppressive burden of a once-beneficial protection and anxiously wonders: "*quis custodiet custodem?*" [who will guard the guardian?] He is also not oblivious to the way in which the Monroe Doctrine has changed as it has drifted imperceptibly from a defensive strategy to one of intervention and then conquest. This metamorphosis has given him much to ponder. Whatever exalted heights the Yankee civilization may have attained, it is not the Latin civilization, and Mr. Calderón knows that one should never be sacrificed for the other. He begs South America to defend itself from the threat of Saxon hegemony, to be enriched by European influences, to foster French and Italian immigration, and to purify its race by the infusion of new blood.

Mr. Calderón views the Japanese, as he does the Germans, as tireless emissaries of imperialist ideas. According to him, German antagonism is no less a threat than the one posed by Japan or the United States. Japanese workers, who are stubbornly averse to assimilation, have flooded the Chilean, Peruvian, and Brazilian shipyards. But it is the power of this valiant Asian race that really frightens Mr. Calderón. He fears that Japan will soon extend its dominion throughout the whole Pacific region and that the united strength of all the Americas may not be enough to withstand that fearsome force.

From beginning to end, this book is one long rallying cry, an appeal to the Latin American Republics. I am convinced that Mr. Calderón is deeply saddened by the widespread collapse of the South American countries. The problem of unity, however—one that is frequently discussed at regional talks and conferences—seems unfathomable to him. In the absence of any better arrangement, he would be satisfied with intellectual alliances and commercial and customs agreements that would help the various republics to enjoy closer relations, to get to know each other better and, at some point in the future, to coordinate their regional defense efforts.

It is not up to me to judge the political advice that Mr. Calderón offers his countrymen.

I am especially not in a position to comment on his opinions concerning the presidential system prevailing in South American republics and their con-

stitutional procedures, all of which are quite different from those of our French Parliamentary system.

I would just say that Mr. Calderón is right to warn the American countries against that scourge that we know something about here in France, one that can be extremely dangerous in young societies with no long-standing traditions or well-established institutions. I am referring to the gradual invasion of a parasitic bureaucracy that thrives by living off the healthy segments of the nation, steadily gnawing at its strongest, most vibrant elements.

In conclusion, and at the risk of being somewhat indiscreet, may I endorse the strict list of requirements that Mr. Calderón proposes against the policies of excessive borrowing? The unchecked squandering of resources and subsequent indebtedness of some nations has given South American republics in general a reputation in Europe for being financially unsound, and this has hurt the reputation of certain wiser and thriftier countries in the area.

Since South American republics are obliged to rely on European gold, they would be wise to be alarmed by budgets that are overdrawn and chaotic.

I doubt we will ever reach the sad moment that Mr. Calderón imagines, when Latin populations will be chased out of the Old World by Germans and Slavs and forced to seek shelter along the shore of the blue sea where their cradle is floating. Nor will the time come when the French are obliged to think that the capital of classic culture might be transferred from Paris to Buenos Aires, as it once moved from Rome to Paris. But, rather than wasting time contemplating such alarming predictions, we should feast our eyes on prospects of a far more imminent and encouraging nature—such as the possibility that South America—duly fulfilled and fully engaged in pursuing its American ideal, as Mr. Calderón has suggested—becomes more and more receptive to our literature, to our art, to our trade, and our capital. The great Latin family can only gain in material prosperity and moral authority.

THE LATIN DEMOCRACIES IN LATIN AMERICA

Francisco García Calderón, 1912

PROLOGUE

There are two Americas. One is in the North, the “Overseas” as [Paul] Bourget calls it; a powerful industrial republic, a vast land of raw energy and “*strenuous life*.” The other is in the South, consisting of twenty languid nations riddled with social inequalities, rife with anarchy and complicated by their Mestizo populations. The dazzling United States, with its imperialism and its wealth, tends to overshadow its southern neighbors, and those troubled Latin countries are already either looked down on or overlooked entirely. America therefore seems to be a name that refers solely to the great imperial democracy.

Among those American nations, however, some are prospering and have made considerable improvements in their local conditions, including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru, Bolivia, and Uruguay, none of which is in any danger of being confused with Central American countries, or with Haiti or Paraguay. French writers and politicians such as Anatole France, [Georges] Clemenceau, and [Jean] Jaurès—on their visits to Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay—found well-established Latin cultures, commendable efforts to ensure internal peace, and extraordinary wealth. They all agreed that the economic resources and optimistic attitude they encountered bode well for the future of these young countries.

Several of these countries have just celebrated their first centennial, having gained their independence during the early years of the nineteenth century. 1810 is thus the beginning of a new era in the region—the year when these autonomous republics rose up from the rubble of Spanish colonization. It is high time to take a closer look at the evolution and progress of these nations, if we prefer not to accept the United States as the sole and undisputed source of all civilization and enterprise in the Americas.

Our goal is to burnish the image of these republics; that is the purpose of this book. We explore the history of these countries to discover the reasons for their lower standards and to find insights into their future.

We begin by looking at the people who discovered, conquered, and colonized the Americas. We examine the character of the Spanish and the Portuguese people—in other words, the Iberians, who are half African and half European. Following the conquest, new settlements were established and governed firmly by Spain and Portugal. These overseas theocracies are jealously forbidden to engage in trade of any kind with other European countries. In Anglo-Saxon America, British and Dutch immigrants want to keep the Natives at a distance, attacking and forcing them to move westward, but in South America, conqueror and conquered live side by side. The Mestizos have become so numerous that they are taking over; they want power and detest the arrogant, domineering Spanish and Portuguese. When war breaks out between Iberians and Americans—it is a civil war. Once again, nations are coalescing swiftly, with no tradition of government or established social classes.

These countries are controlled by *caudillos*, the military leaders, so in this region, barbaric conditions and the recurring anarchy create fertile ground for dictators. Certain representative people of this period are mentioned here; but we have glossed over the monotonous chronology of events in some countries—such as Brazil and Chile—where authoritative governments are in power [to control social intermingling]. A new form of industrial regime is appearing in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile, where political life becomes more difficult and *caudillos* begin to lose their grip on power. (Books I and II)

A review of local intellectual activity also reveals the power of ideology in these new democracies. They imitate the French Revolution and are influenced by the ideas of [Jean-Jacques] Rousseau, Romanticism, and the doctrines of individualism. The Americas are Spanish and Portuguese because of their origins and traditions, but they are also French because of their culture. (Book III)

Our goal here has been to identify the influence of the Latin spirit in the development of these nations; to discuss the threats they face, whether from the United States, Germany, or Japan; and to examine the defects and virtues of that spirit. (Book IV) We subsequently review the problems of Latin America and the future of the region. (Book V)

The conclusion to be drawn from this book is that political life in the Iberian-American countries is still confusing, but some of them have found refuge from a depressing legacy. Overseas, liberty and democracy are on the rise. In future conflicts, support from the Americas will be very helpful to the great Mediterranean countries in their fight for Latin supremacy.

I.2.4 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 838505

TO WHAT EXTENT IS THERE A LATIN AMERICA?

André Siegfried, 1934

Best known for his commentaries on American, Canadian, and British politics, French political writer André Siegfried (1875–1959) here shifts his focus to the Latin American republics. He wrote this text as the introduction to his book *Amérique latine* [(Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1934)], which compares the cultural and societal differences of Latin Americans and North Americans. Accepting as a point of departure that the term “North America” evokes both a geographical personality and a kind of Anglo-Saxon society, Siegfried is the first to suggest the excessive simplification that the name “Latin America” conveys. Indeed, his insight—revisited and reworked by other French scholars decades later—stresses an essential question: Why use the term in the singular? The present translation is based on the book’s second edition [“Choses d’Amérique,” collection publiée sous la direction de l’Institut des études américaines (du Comité France-Amérique) (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1949), 7–11].

INTRODUCTION

“The Americas” is the colloquial term that was used a long time ago to refer to the New World. There is, in fact, a North America: the term *North America*, which is rejected by English imperialists—for reasons that are not hard to understand—evokes a geographical personality and a kind of Anglo-Saxon society that encompasses both the United States and the Dominion of Canada. But does that mean that we can speak in the same manner of a South America or a Latin America? Is it not an excessive simplification to use the term in the singular? After several trips to Mexico and Cuba, I had the opportunity to visit the Antilles, Venezuela, the Isthmus of Panama, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil. My travels in the region led me to believe that these countries have enough in common to allow us to group them together within a shared Latin American milieu, which justifies the title of this essay.

Dare I continue? Despite all their differences, isn’t it true that these two parts of the continent share certain features that affirm their connection to one

another? Is there not, also in the singular, a “New World” as distinct from the other continental masses of Europe and Asia? I have sensed and almost felt this when—after seven or eight trips to the United States—I first saw the mighty backbone of the Andes and then the vastness of the Pampas.

A comparison of the two Americas thus helps to explain both of them. From this perspective, we can see that Pan Americanism—when purged of the imperialist virus that transforms it into a euphemism for the political ambitions of a single nation—contains an essential truth, in that it expresses the fundamental unity of the American continent. The Latin and the Anglo-Saxon transplants of the New World all breathe the same air, stand on the same soil, and rely on a similar political instinct to react to international problems. Monsieur de la Palice¹ would affirm that they are both unquestionably “American.” But the resemblance between the two Americas stops there, since history has dealt each of them a very different destiny. The Anglo-Saxon Protestants of the North and the Latino Catholics of the South have lived and evolved in very different social environments that were inherited from different civilizations; to one extent or another, they are all a product of their places of origin. Those strong, enduring cultural bonds therefore help us to understand their links to old Europe: the British influence can be seen in the United States; the Latin inspiration, whose roots run deep in Mediterranean nations, is alive and well in all the countries that were colonized by the Spanish and the Portuguese. Buenos Aires and New York share a geographical kinship as two American cities. But when we consider Buenos Aires, Montevideo, or Rio on the one hand, and Barcelona, Marseilles, or Paris on the other, it is clear that there is another form of kinship involved, one that is based on the Mediterranean and Latin bonds the cities share. It is true that the geographical axis of the American continent runs North-South, but we should not forget the cultural axis that spans the globe from East to West.

This, then, is the compass that should be used to study Latin America. To fully understand it, one must have an almost physical sense of this new continent; one must become familiar with the taste of the air, the color of the mountains and the plains; and, with regard to commerce, one must connect with its spirit of optimism, boldness, and agility. . . . But it is also important [albeit] difficult to reach back through time and space to understand its spiritual roots. Just as one must know Latin in order to speak French correctly and be familiar with Puritan England in order to understand the United States, one

should be well-acquainted with Spain and Portugal if one wishes to have an intelligent understanding of the Latin societies living on those distant shores. The fact is that not many can see South America from its two different perspectives. The North Americans, who are at ease in economic circumstances similar to their own, cannot quite understand the Latin spirit and, more importantly, are unable to respect it. The Europeans, on the other hand, find it easier to relate to the similarity of the Mediterranean culture, but tend to delay any true assimilation until South Americans behave like true Americans in the economic arena. Though they express a genuine desire to understand and an instinctive affinity, I can't help thinking that there is a long way to go; maybe the pages to come will not accomplish much.

1

Monsieur de la Palice, whose name was the basis for the French term *lapalissade* (truism), was a sixteenth-century French military officer whose life and death were fictionalized in a humorous song that gained wide popular appeal. His name has been traditionally invoked as a trope for that which is blatantly obvious.—Ed.

I.2.5 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 807815

LATIN AMERICA

Mário de Andrade, 1934

Brazilian poet, novelist, and art historian Mário de Andrade (1893–1945) critiques André Siegfried's *Amérique latine* in this early review. By the 1930s, de Andrade wielded considerable influence within the literary and art milieu in his native country, and he did not shy away from challenging what he considered to be an unsatisfactory analysis of South America's so-called "primitivism." Armed with an understanding of the interests driving this reductive approach, de Andrade's goal is to expose what he sees as superficial, worn-out formulas and biases that underscore perspectives on Latin America in the tradition of Siegfried. The author published this article in the journal *Boletim de Ariel: mensário crítico-bibliográfico. letras, artes, ciências* [(Rio de Janeiro), vol. 4, no. 1 (October 1934)], one of the most noteworthy platforms for the Brazilian avant-garde of the 1930s. This translation is based on the version published in

an anthology of Andrade's work [Raul Antelo, ed., *Na ilha de Marapatá* (São Paulo: HUCITEC, MEC/Pró-Memória, INL, 1986), 191–93].

IF THERE IS A FORMULA for writing insightful books about faraway landscapes, it seems to me that the book by André Siegfried [SEE DOCUMENT 1.2.4] (*Amérique latine*, Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1934) does not stray very far from it. It entails a thorough examination of its subject, [and reflects] attentive listening and the taking of copious notes. [In this formula, it] is not necessary to scrutinize or to make a great effort to fully understand—just listening and taking notes suffices. Next you summarize what you have heard; collect the notes into a somewhat simplified, general statistical form that not only disregards variations but, because of the need to generalize, also does not delve too deeply. Depth is imitated by a schematic approach, resulting in a touch of the mystical—of the occult. When it is all done, you rub your hands together and, if you wish, declare “*heureux qui, comme Ulysse . . .*” [Happy are those, who like Ulysses . . .].

I am not at all trying to diminish the writer of *Tableau des partis en France* [A Tableau of Political Parties in France]. Neither do I deny that *Amérique latine*, given the truths it contains, could be quite useful to certain people from the Americas who live for the literature produced beyond our continent. Those truths, however, are mere reprints of things already firmly declared by men here, in our America. There was undoubtedly a great deal of goodwill in how André Siegfried tried to understand and, indeed, to love us. There was also gratitude for those who spoke of many things with him and greeted him with open arms. I believe there was even a great enthusiasm that tapped into patriotic Latin pride. But was it all this that led to the haste with which this sociologist reduced everything to simplistic syntheses and schematics?

It is surely incredible that André Siegfried—while making the essential distinction among the three South Americas (the native-born, the white, and the Afro-Negro)—still maintained the notion of “Latin America,” a notion that does not correspond to any South American identity whatsoever. It is also unbelievable that after having designated the natural spirit of the Americas—that “*americanismo*” which distinguishes us from Mediterranean “*Latinism*,”—he conceived that *americanismo* only facilely with reference to *yankismo* [Yankeeism], the *americanismo*

[Americanism] of North America. Moreover, he differentiates ours from *americanismo* of the Yankees, only to revert back to the *latinismo* [Latinism] of Portugal and Spain, even though our psychology, our ethics, our religion—our essence if you will—distinguish us from those countries which are actually Iberian, not Latin. Their Moorish influence should also be considered. Even if he did not want to articulate the characteristics that so profoundly set a Bolivian apart from a Peruvian, a *gaúcho* [from Southern Brazil] from a *carioca* [native of Rio de Janeiro], a Minas Gerais inhabitant from someone from Northeastern Brazil, it would still have been easy for André Siegfried to note that other “*americanismos*” exist within South America and that they differ from utilitarian *yankismo*. There are other more optimistic outlooks than those found in [Sinclair Lewis’s] *Babbitt* and closer to ours, such as those found in Asia and North Africa. If our economy—seen from a European economic and psychological perspective—can only be misinterpreted—then is it not possible to perceive our fatalism more than our optimism? And above all [to recognize] the irresponsible [stereotype] that is quite mystical and shamelessly sensual? With regard to our ethics—which he tries to excuse, considering the political embarrassments of South America—is it not possible to see how they differ profoundly from Christian morality in their appearance of laxity, shamelessness, lack of commitment, heroic fits and starts, [and] arrogant disloyalty, all in the name of a damp and exhausted *tropicalismo*?

Is it yet possible to understand the shameless policies of the South American nations as a trait specific to us? The cinema of the United States is tired of portraying the base deeds of their politics and justice. What is on display in today’s world is merely a gradation of disguises or—my God!—a purity of customs that from time to time leads France to allow a [scandalous] Stavisky “affair.”¹ The United States conceals itself less, and Argentina and Uruguay even less so, and Brazil further less, and other republics almost not at all. It is funny, but in this case I believe this “purity of customs” is more closely related to these last republics! Time goes by and it becomes no longer possible to differentiate between vile policies, or between false freedoms. Today, Venezuela, Germany, Italy, and Cuba are becoming equivalent. Either this synthesis will encompass the extremely abusive spirit of the times and thus be useful and expressive, or it will have to differentiate among the republics. As such, it would no longer be a synthesis, but an analysis. André Siegfried intended to arrive at a happy medium through the

creation of an artificial entity called Latin America, but I believe this is no longer possible. These phenomena are too vast as well as distinctly regional.

The qualities of André Siegfried and those of his book—extreme clarity, ability to synthesize (which by the way might have stemmed from a dictatorial dogmatism. . . born of dealing with these unprecedented and complex problems) do not actually belong to Siegfried or to his book; they are French traits. One is always tempted to assert that France, because of her apparent equilibrium, is now the last bastion of bourgeois civilization. And if it is not the last, then it is likely the most perfect and attractive. The Republic of France is a model of simplicity; it possesses the same slightly simpleminded perfection of any of [André] Maurois's books. André Siegfried, in turn, recognizes in us the permanence of an essentialist quality he reasonably calls "savage." South America certainly has much of the primitive, the untamed. But there is nothing more complicated than this primitivism. There is nothing more chaotic and unsolvable than the primitive. Civilizations exchange influences without disappearing. The historical exchange of influences between England and France, between France and Germany, similarly occurred here between the Incan, Iberian, and even Congolese civilizations. Nevertheless, the very primitive Amerindian, being most complex and chaotic, did not exercise any influence of his own: he disappeared through racial intermingling. We are not simple at all, much less simplistic. It is in the eyes of France that we seem to be clear, uncomplicated, and reducible to formulas, like an ancient dream. André Siegfried's misfortune is that he is writing about a ghost, one who haunts a civilization that is no more. . . .

1

The Stavisky "affair" was a large-scale embezzlement scandal perpetrated in France in 1934 by Alexandre Stavisky. When the scheme and Stavisky's ties to French officials, including Camille Chautemps (the prime minister) and Jean Chiappe (the police prefect), were exposed, they indirectly led to the anti-parliamentary street demonstrations of the so-called 6 February 1934 crisis, which marked the first time since the days of the Third Republic that pressure from protestors led to toppling the governing party in France. —Ed.

I.2.6 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 843743

DOES LATIN AMERICA EXIST?

Luis Alberto Sánchez, 1945

These excerpts are from chapters 1 and 12 of the book *¿Existe América Latina?* by Peruvian philosopher and politician Luis Alberto Sánchez (1900–1994). Both passages reflect Sánchez’s interest in continental—rather than exclusively Peruvian—concerns, a focus that characterizes much of his work from the mid-1940s. Sánchez’s writing is particularly noteworthy for asking whether we should even be asking the question, “Does Latin America exist?” This text provoked decades of debate and responses, some of which are included in this volume. Many of these writings address the essentialist and reductive view of the continent as an indestructible unity. This translation is based on the book’s first edition [Luis Alberto Sánchez, *¿Existe América Latina?* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1945), 9–22; 270–77].

I. A MATTER OF APPEARANCE

At first blush, the question seems absurd. How could there not be a “Latin America” when people talk so much about it—about its personality, its efforts, its race, its idiosyncrasies, its unitary religious beliefs, its sentimental literature, its future? But closer scrutiny challenges the initial, hurried impression and breeds doubt. If “Latin America” does indeed exist, why is it treated like a vague, heterogeneous void by the most vocal advocates of its indestructible unity? Why do reports of the region still portray conflict between the member countries? What ignites the explosions of nationalism and the disputes—over border, political, and commercial issues—between republics that we occasionally hear about? Why do some spectacularly irresponsible people refer to racial differences among people who in fact call themselves children of the same seed, pedestals of a single destiny?

When one ponders these questions and considers the evident self-interest of foreign powers that constantly harp on our differences—whether to use them as a wedge against continental unity or to perpetuate the supremacy of one region of the hemisphere over the other—one is inevitably suspicious of their motives.

It is true that our countries are not in constant touch and are, frequently, distrustful of each other. But, is the lack of communication so severe as to doom any agreement between us and destroy the framework of our collective identity?

Some years ago, in his book *Eurindia* [1924], Ricardo Rojas suggested that Latin America was like a home in which each child had his or her own tone of voice, while still sounding essentially like everyone else in the house [SEE DOCUMENT II.1.4]. Each child was also endowed with particular physical characteristics, while still keeping the “family likeness” that identified each as a member of the same lineage.

In fact, there are just as many differences between the countries that make up what is referred to as Latin America as there are between the individual states in the United States of America—and far fewer than there are between European countries. If anyone were to argue that we cannot compare the fundamental difference between descendants of Europeans who live in Argentina and descendants of Kaffirs living in Haiti with the disparities that exist between one North American state and another, I would mention the Boston Irish, the Pennsylvania Dutch, Jews in Chicago or in the Bronx in New York, African-Americans in Harlem, Native Americans in New Mexico or Oklahoma, cowboys in Arizona, Italian Americans in “Little Italy,” and Asian Americans in California, and ask just how homogenous the United States really is.

It is certainly true that, when confronted with dramatic events such as the attack on Pearl Harbor, all those discrete populations came together as a united whole. But that does not negate the fact that prior to the attack, and notwithstanding the sinking of U.S. merchant shipping, a fierce debate raged in the United States between pro- and anti-war factions that was not that dissimilar to the conflict in Chile between those who were for and against breaking off relations with the Axis powers prior to January 1941, and the one that still roils Argentina to this day.

The United States was also deeply divided by unemployment, the New Deal, Prohibition, and racial issues, as well as by calls to reproach “Latin America” over matters such as Brazilian corporatism; Argentine religious propaganda; land reform in Mexico; the Popular Front in Chile; APRA¹ in Peru; Standard Oil’s behavior in Bolivia; the evolutionary government in Venezuela; increasing liberalism in Colombia; the ongoing neutrality of Chile and Argentina; and so on.

But, far from threatening national unity, these different points of view in fact helped to strengthen the bonds that held people together.

When someone overstates those differences and announces that Latin America cannot possibly be considered a Continent in any but the geographical sense of the word, I am reminded of the profoundly revealing, widespread reaction to [Augusto César] Sandino. From 1926 to 1934, Latin America as a whole responded enthusiastically to the Nicaraguan guerrilla fighter's determined resistance and endorsed his efforts. Sandino represented both the expressed and the unexpressed anguish of our Latin American soul; he gave voice to our collective anger against the harsh imperialist encroachment of the times and the crushed pride endured by Latin Americans overrun by fair-skinned invaders and spoke out in affirmation of our political and spiritual autonomy—in short, he expressed the very essence of our belligerence. He was held in high esteem from the Argentine Pampas to the mountains of Mexico, from the Bolivian highlands to the coastal plain of Peru. General Sandino—as we should refer to him, with genuine respect—was surrounded by soldiers from every country in Latin America. He was revered by the finest poets and writers from the Rio Grande to Patagonia. That truly “divine outlaw” unified Latin America, he united the people and the intelligentsia of “Latin America.” Even conservatives expressed their support for the heroic young fighter and, perhaps for the very first time, were in lock-step with leftist revolutionaries. The opinions voiced at the Conference of Havana [the sixth Pan-American Conference] in 1928 in opposition to the senile bragging of [the head of the U.S. delegation] Charles Evans Hughes were an echo of Sandino's proposals.

. . .

A shrewd observation by [Friedrich] Ratzel portrays Latin America in an entirely different light, certainly a more flattering one. Referring to prehistoric times, he notes that while Europeans were working with iron (a hard, strong metal used to make farming implements), people in the Americas preferred gold and silver, thus giving their civilization an air of sumptuousness, which was a far cry from the predominantly utilitarian nature of other cultures. Some Latin Americans used gold to make the tools and implements they worked with every day, even though they had access to bronze. Such was the custom among the

Arawaks, the Quiché Maya, and the people living along the Marañón River in the jungles of Peru, according to recent discoveries.

This perspective supports, to some extent, the recent thesis outlined by José Gaos, who describes our current culture as being an eminently aesthetic one.² According to him, we are a sumptuous people, united by a common denominator of sumptuousness that is only absent in certain nomadic tribes living in desert areas. This latter group includes the red-skinned people of North America, the so-called Araucanians in Chile, and some of the Charrúa and Patagonian tribes living between the River Plate and the Strait of Magellan.

The undeniable existence of that special, decorative environment raises the question of a typically American pre-baroque style; that moral environment breeds the stoicism that sheds new light on the analysis of fatalism, as the Count of Keyserling said when he came in contact with our world: “I had barely drawn breath there when I named South America the Continent of Sadness.”³ Obviously, from the perspective of a Faustian, even orgiastic man—such as the head of the School of Learning in Darmstadt, who is prone to the doctrines “of the blood” that Herr [Alfred] Rosenberg finds so pleasing—a gathering of men standing still and silent, looking contemplative and indifferent, must surely be the children of a “Continent of Sadness.” But when we see how much these men enjoy what sound like sad melodies to us—just as the Arabs and the Chinese and the Andalusians feel when they hear their traditional songs, which sound sad and nostalgic to us—we realize that the appreciation of sadness is a purely subjective concept and that what Keyserling said reflects the homogeneity of feelings, the existence of a genuine spiritual attitude, that he sees in every Latin American.

Another European observer, André Siegfried [SEE DOCUMENT 1.2.4], eloquently recorded his impressions: “After several trips to Mexico and Cuba, I had the opportunity to visit the Antilles, Venezuela, the Isthmus of Panama, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil. My travels in this region led me to believe that these countries have enough in common to allow us to group them together within a shared Latin American milieu.”⁴

In spite of these reports and many others from men of stature such as Francisco García Calderón [SEE DOCUMENTS 1.2.3 AND 1.3.7] and Waldo Frank [SEE DOCUMENT 1.4.3], José Enrique Rodó [SEE DOCUMENT III.2.1] and Clarence Haring, Pedro Henríquez Ureña and Dana C. Munaro, Federico de Onís and Samuel Guy

Inman, Haya de la Torre and John A. Mackay, we find that as continental solidarity gathers support and becomes increasingly urgent, it is challenged by the insistent, dangerous idea of “dealing with each country according to its particular needs,” whose logical corollary is that: *it’s easier for the United States to deal directly with each Latin American republic than for the republics to deal with each other.*

But those who promote that idea have no qualms about dealing with Europe, treating it as though it were one homogenous, compact, solid, Unitarian whole. [This] is a flagrant contradiction since, compared with Latin American uniformity, [a united] Europe is barely at the threshold of a distant hypothesis.

...

Looking beyond the armed conflicts between countries, Europe is also split between its Latin and Germanic cultures (clarity and darkness, according to the capricious Madame de Staël, who coined the distinction), and of course its slave culture. As if that were not enough, Europe has not only nurtured pathetic religious antagonisms—among Catholics, Protestants, Lutherans, Calvinists, Puritans, Anglicans, Orthodox Slavs, and Muslims—it has also promoted bloody racial conflicts, most notably when Muslims persecuted Christians, Christian persecuted Muslims, Catholics were against Protestants, Catholics against Huguenots, Calvinists against Catholics, Anglicans against Catholics, and Nazis against Jews.

A continent like that—which has not even separated from Asia (that looks like its Siamese twin, connected by their Russian backbone)—is somehow considered a single homogenous unit. When people speak of Europe they mean something compact, defined, with one mind, one orientation, as if the antinomies alluded to do not exist, as if the psychology and the way of life of the British, the French, Italians, Germans, Russian, Spanish, and Balkans could all merge into one.

In spite of everything, however, Europe is Europe. Yet those who accept that premise then pretend, against all that is natural, that Latin America is not Latin America just because of a few conflicts between neighbors often encouraged by the same people who, in pursuit of their own narrow, short-term interests, seem intent on denying our essential unity. These people are incapable of seeing that the future will demand full cooperation between the two rich, homogenous

yet different blocks: Anglo-Saxon America and Indo-Iberian America—but that joint approach must be on an equal footing.

There is no doubt that, according to basic logic, if Europe exists in spite of its multiple incompatibilities, Latin America, with far fewer incompatibilities, also exists and with far greater reason. The key is to define the common denominator of our lineage. Has any impartial, independent research been done in that area? If not, is it time to do so? Are the necessary resources available? I have always boasted that I am an impenitent spokesperson for the Man in the Street. I will use that pulpit once more to pose some questions that I consider basic, concerning common features shared by Latin American countries. But first, we should answer an earlier question about the America that lies between the Rio Grande and Cape Horn, the America that is washed by the Atlantic, the Pacific, and the Caribbean: is that America really Latin?

Of course not. The name survives because it is yet another concession to the prevailing Europeanism, one more example of the United States' submission to the genius of France.

Our culture is not Latin; it is essentially Indo-Iberian, with a few French customs and touches. Our Spanish heritage is not Latin either, since the Phoenicians, Romans, Goths, and Arabs who populated the peninsula have, overall, contributed far more than our Latin ancestors. Our Indian roots, the human embodiment of the earth, also have nothing Latin about them. During a certain period of our history, as a reaction against Spain, the name Latin America prospered. Today it is only used to make things easier for Europeans and North Americans—and to satisfy the pride of the French and those who supported France during the Peninsular War.

As is usually the case, these generalizations are both dangerous and inexact. It is deeply ironic to use the word "Latino" to describe our culture. By exactly the same token, it is a stretch to refer to the United States as a totally "Anglo-Saxon" civilization.... The American historian [Herbert E.] Bolton is right when he says that his country must acknowledge two origins or foundations—the Pilgrim Fathers who landed on the East Coast, and the Spanish conquistadors who arrived earlier and settled California, Texas, Florida, and New Mexico, in the West.

. . .

There are almost 23 million Catholics in the United States. Protestantism has splintered into a number of more-or-less lukewarm sects. Far from dividing the spiritual unity of the country, this situation has strengthened it. There are greater differences between the Pennsylvania Dutch, Boston Irish, cowboys in Arizona and New Mexico, Oklahoma oilmen, cosmopolitan businessmen in New York, still-feudal farmers in the South and the Midwest, African Americans in Harlem, Jews in the Bronx, Bowery bums, and Indians in Texas than there are between Peruvians, Argentines, Chileans, Mexicans, Bolivians, Venezuelans, Colombians, Uruguayans, and Central Americans. The United States nonetheless exists. Why, then, should Latin America not also exist?

It is not hard to understand that there are boastful people living in more developed countries who, childishly and smugly, practice narcissism and contempt for their fellow human beings. It is also easy to grasp that there are some who seek to fray our unity by magnifying our differences. But, before anything else, there must be a logical explanation for the existence, or lack thereof, of that unity and, above all, for what it consists of, so that we can see if some explanations might, in general, be based on the obsession with molding our lives—a *fact* in and of itself—according to the dictates of European ideas, which are sometimes shared by the North Americans.

So it is with certain collective phenomena, such as geography, tradition, race, culture, language, religion, law, the city, the state, local and foreign capital, and so on. Perhaps they could be re-envisioned beyond the status quo and revitalized, to spare them the daily death that overwhelms them—and disorients us—and a new theory of America could be explored, a genuine attempt to define its scope and define its disputed boundaries.

. . .

While on the subject, I will mention a relevant incident. In 1936, the International Conference of PEN Clubs⁵ was held in Buenos Aires. During one of the meetings, or *entretiens* [interviews], the speakers discussed the culture of the Americas. The French, naturally, were impressive as they displayed their tone deaf contempt for everyone else. At that point, Alfonso Reyes, the spokesman for the continent, addressed the gathering as follows, “I will now say, to this tribunal of international thinkers who are listening: grant us the right to the global

citizenship that we have already earned. We have come of age. It won't be long before you get used to relying on us."⁶

It has been barely seven years since then. Our *global citizenship* no longer requires amusing acknowledgements or introductions. It now exists. So much so, in fact, that without it Europe's plans for material and moral readjustment would be doomed, and there could be no future balance among the great powers, among which can now be included, on condition that it improves its unity, "Latin America"—the "Continent of Sadness" as Keyserling called it; though it now makes more sense to call it the Continent of Hope.

...

XII. THE CONCLUSION IS TO START AGAIN

The purpose of this book is now obvious—to show that what we call "our reality" is often a mirage; to show that, though homogeneous, we think of ourselves as heterogeneous because we confuse the eternal with what is actually fleeting; and that we try to justify our potential unity by giving undue importance to things that are foreign to our true nature, expressed in frequently childish ways. In short, that it is time we marched to the beat of our own drum.

...

Nothing is as misguided as looking at nations from *just one* perspective and assuming that they have but *one* tradition. As Mestizos, we can claim as many traditions as we have physical and spiritual attributes. This is true of any human melting pot. The Anglo-Saxons, Irish, Germans, Scots, Jews, Africans, and people of Flemish and Latin descent who came to the United States of America all brought their own traditions, each one reflecting the period and sometimes the circumstances of their arrival. Our early settlers did what came naturally to them, as tends to happen in this sort of historical process. To understand our complete sense of self, we must analyze the relative weight and value of traditions contributed by Indians, Iberians, blacks and Europeans, Catholics and freethinkers, urban and rural people, noble and common folk, military men and civilians, intellectuals and farmers, pre-colonials, colonials, and republicans. Tradition

rejects exclusive, restrictive affiliations. If it exists, we must identify the many branches of its genealogical tree, looking far beyond that original couple referred to in Genesis.

Every tradition becomes a custom which, in turn, evolves into a law. Our legislation is nominal and lax, which might lead some to think that we are too. When a foreign tradition (or traditions) was violently imposed, with no respect for indigenous ways, an imbalance was created. What should have been a harmonious, positive merging of the races in fact became an exercise in arrogance and exclusivity. We were born against the current of our time: we were bred from two civilizations in their twilight years. Our light came from two sunsets; our life from two deaths. . . . We wanted to create a culture of pure dynamism from the double stagnation of two petrified civilizations. . . . That is why, after four hundred and fifty years of uninterrupted death, we are on the brink of an actual existence.

. . .

That concludes my diagnosis. I will now attempt a brief prognosis.

Some simplistic souls, wounded by the directors' sterilizing, unjust exoticism, suggest returning to a pre-Iberian way of life. An "indigenism" or "Americanism" of that kind is based on such a faulty premise that it barely deserves to be dignified with a comment. No one can return to the place where they started, any more than the river can, or the arrow, or history, or mankind. A "return to the indigenous" does not in fact mean living in an aboriginal state; it means *getting comfortable with* the European roots of our personal heritage. Whatever the past and present sins of the conquest and colonialism, they are part of who we are. *They are*. And nobody can deny it.

But just as it is childish and pointless to indulge in a ridiculous desire for unilateral "Westernization" and convince ourselves that we are essentially Iberian, it also seems pointless and childish to deny the influence of Indians and blacks, whose place in our evolutionary process is an undeniable *fact*. *It is*. Nobody can deny that either.

We are a mestizo continent, with a mestizo society. The topography is also *mestizo*, and so is the culture. We must channel all this in a positive direction, toward a state of integration and creativity. In other words, we must adopt a

new attitude that could be described as a “state of cultural grace,” where “culture” includes everything in our people that is alive and fertile.

Perhaps we could begin with the name, and allow it to emerge naturally, instead of getting bogged down in long, pointless debates of the kind so loved by historians and lawyers. Because, whether we call it Latin America, Iberian America, Hispanic America, Indo-America, Pan America, Inter America, Indo-Iberia, or whatever, the important thing is that we *exist*, and we do. According to recent archaeological discoveries, we are as old as or older than Asians and Europeans; but we are nonetheless a New World in terms of our recent arrival on the world stage and our discovery of our own destiny.

. . .

1

APRA, *Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana*, is a left-wing political party established in Peru by Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre in 1924. Among its initial aims were Latin American unity and the nationalization of foreign-owned businesses in Peru.—Ed.

2

José Gaos, “Caracterización de la cultura americana” in *Cuadernos americanos*, no. 6 Mexico City, 1942.

3

[Hermann, Count of] Keyserling, *Meditaciones suramericanas* (Madrid, 1933), 3.

4

André Siegfried, *América Latina* (Santiago de Chile: Ercilla, 1934), 7.

5

The International PEN (originally an acronym for “Poets, Essayists, and Novelists”) Club was established by a group of writers and intellectuals in 1921 to encourage cross-cultural exchange and cooperation and to promote the central role of literature in all nations.—Ed.

6

Alfonso Reyes, “Notas sobre la inteligencia americana,” in *La Vanguardia*, Buenos Aires, May 23, 1937.

I.2.7 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 838616
LUIS ALBERTO SÁNCHEZ'S BOOK: *IS THERE JUST ONE LATIN AMERICA?*
Fernand Braudel, 1948

In this 1948 article published in the Parisian journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*, renowned French social and economic historian Fernand Braudel (1902–1985) responds to Luis Alberto Sánchez's *¿Existe América Latina?* [SEE DOCUMENT I.2.6] Braudel criticizes Sánchez's poetically written perspectives on the continent as naive. He ridicules Sánchez's ideas regarding Latin American unity and his notion of a single Latin America. The article was published three years after Braudel became the leader of the second generation of historians affiliated with *Annales* and one year prior to the publication of his first book and magnum opus *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (1949). The author is best known for his work on the Mediterranean world and on the history of capitalism; however, he had wide interests and wrote frequently on Latin America. From 1934 to 1937, Braudel lived in Brazil while helping to establish the Universidade de São Paulo with the anthropologist Claude Lévi Strauss. This translation is from the original article ["Le livre de Luis Alberto Sánchez: y a-t-il une Amérique Latine?," *Annales, économies, sociétés, civilisations*, vol. 3 (October–December 1948) (Paris: Kraus Reprint), 467–71]. It was later published in *Cahiers des annales* [(Paris), no. 4 (1949)].

LUIS ALBERTO SÁNCHEZ [SEE DOCUMENT I.2.6] is a famous writer. He was a driving force behind the university reform in Peru in 1919 and the author of classic books such as *Literatura peruana* [Peruvian Literature], *América, novela sin novelistas* [America, A Novel Without Novelists], *Vida y pasión de la cultura en América* [The Life and Passion of Culture in America], among many others. Sánchez also has the gift of seeing, understanding, and loving and, more importantly, of helping others to see, understand, and love. His latest book *¿Existe América Latina?* [Does Latin America Exist?] is enthralling from the very beginning. Little by little, as one immerses oneself in its images—which are beautiful, and his reasoning, which is extremely clear—one is captivated by his train of thought. There is not the slightest sense of danger and one feels as though one is in the competent hands of a trusted guide

who is an expert on the roads, enigmas, and problems of the twenty-odd segments of the Latin portion of the New World. And yet, there is some danger here; this fine book is an attempt to intercede on its subject's behalf, but it is often a dream, filled with idealism and humanity, but a dream nonetheless which does not always reflect the cold and sometimes cruel reality. Luis Alberto Sánchez sees Latin America as a human family, one that is beyond discord, clashes, and differences. Internally homogeneous, it is a continent unto itself. But it must now organize itself in terms of that biological unity, in order to live of and for itself in a renewed expression of its original, constructive values.

* * *

The book begins by asking the question that is posed in its title: *¿Existe una América Latina?*¹ But the response, unencumbered by doubts or misgivings, never seems to contemplate the possibility of questions or regrets. This is, in our view, the greatest flaw in this fascinating book; the reason for its aggressiveness and, at a deeper level, for its narrow focus. To intercede on someone's behalf means to choose, to simplify, to rule out objections, and to distort the facts. It means to argue in the style of those earlier European observers and dreamers who, from 1910 to 1939, spoke about European unity. Europe is undoubtedly *one*, but it is not *just one*: Europe has ruled itself out, has opposed itself, and has been obsessed with both its own construction and destruction. Does this mean we can be more optimistic regarding Latin America in the present or the future?

To intercede means to choose. For Luis Alberto Sánchez, instead of the arbitrary, almost "surgical" cities intentionally created by mankind, it means the cities that spring up biologically, like children of nature. It means to prefer the perennial fields instead of the cities; the instinct of the masses instead of the idle *intellectuality* of the élites; the Mestizo—the new human being of the Americas—instead of the white man; an indigenous culture evolving from its own roots instead of an imported civilization with its windows open to the rest of the world. So much for preferences! The list of lacunae is enormous. To intercede means to consciously omit. Substantial problems still remain in the shadows because they are inconvenient. Therefore nothing addresses the vastness of the wide-open spaces where men, nations, and civilizations are scattered, remote from each other. "I hardly know what the Argentines are thinking," wrote the Brazilian art critic Sérgio Milliet recently, "or what is being thought in the rest of South

America, *because we are so isolated from each other.*"² And Pablo Navarro, an Argentine journalist said that, as far as his fellow countrymen are concerned, any contact with Brazil leads to an unexpected encounter with a particular group of people and an unfamiliar terrain just a short distance from their own country, a journey "to a mystery land."³ Nothing at all has been written about the economic realities of the situation that both separates and, to an even greater extent, unites them. Is this a calculated gamble?

In any case, how to ignore, or try to ignore, the various forms of nationalism still to be found throughout the Americas, or how to try to make them go away by closing one's eyes? The day before yesterday, nationalism was political; yesterday it was literary (the only kind capable of soothing the heart); today, it tends more than ever to be economic—which is insatiable. Unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately, but that is not the point), Latin America has its differences; it has national blocks, schisms, oppositions, and powerful centrifugal forces. In some cases, these are due to spaces that are not homogeneous or are a result of what happened in the past, the harsh ways in which people treated each other and the land to which they are extremely attached. Furthermore, civilization is not spread evenly across the continent, but varies according to local colors. Luis Alberto Sánchez has produced a monochromatic book that softens the contrasts of those hues. He is particularly remiss in not having given Brazil its due, since it is a separate, Portuguese Latin America in and of itself. Despite his fair reporting on Brazil, it is not included in this Spanish-American perspective except as part of his general picture. There is an arbitrary imposition of order, but it is an essentially Spanish order that spans the Andes, the Pacific, and the plateaus of Southern Mexico. The strong, eager roots of Sánchez's book plunge deeply beneath the surface of Native civilizations.

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I would reproach the author for not differentiating the various issues and for stubbornly relating every problem to one *single* problem. Let us consider a few examples. The first chapter of his book presents an outline, depicting the geographical conditions of Latin America and its impact on the people and on the natural environment, especially when the environment is still partially wild. This is, admittedly, something that cannot be avoided, as was keenly observed by W. H.

Hudson—the son of an Englishman who was born and raised on the Argentine pampas, then went to England when he was very young. He wrote extensively about the flora and fauna of the Americas, describing the country where he was born as well as Uruguay, the Guyanas, and Venezuela. He always portrayed the natural environment as awesome, exuberant, and tyrannical, and very hard to forget. Another observer, Lucien Febvre, reporting on his visit to Buenos Aires in 1937, spoke of his impressions of the works of Argentine landscape painters, [stating that] the land overwhelms the canvas, leaving barely enough room across the top for a narrow strip of sky. In a similar vein, Sánchez writes: “Latin American literature is strongly influenced by our landscape. . . . Without it, there would be no *La Vorágine*, *Doña Bárbara*, the foreword to *Facundo*, the poetry of Chocano, *Don Segundo Sombra*, the novels of José Rubén Romero, the intoxication with nature expressed by Uribe Arrais, the geographical anguish of [Pablo] Neruda, or *La Suave Patria*, the poem by López Velarde.”⁴ The list would be endless. In addition to *Doña Bárbara*, I am reminded of other novels by Rómulo Gallegos that express the human poetry and scenery of the Venezuelan Llanos. In the Americas, the land exerts a powerful influence on life, art, literature, thinking, and the soul of people.

We are in full agreement with the picture presented by Luis Alberto Sánchez at the beginning of his book and are ready to accept his ideas, observations, and suggestions. According to him, the geography of the continent is its unifying factor, whereas history (that is, people and events) conspires against it in senseless opposition. Geography demands that people should adapt to their environment, should put down roots and develop a “human plasma” that requires that human beings live in harmony with their natural environment. This is precisely what was created by the pre-Columbian civilizations that were destroyed by the European conquest, that random whirlwind of history that, in this case, interrupted a long chain of human adaptation and settlement.

* * *

I will not disagree, nor attempt to refute that history does not often act in harmony with the environment. But, what environment are we referring to? In terms of the American continent, is it not stretching the truth to insist that there is but one geography—a natural and uniform boundary? There are certainly a variety of spaces, harmonies, adaptations, and “human plasmas.” Geography is, after all,

versatile. The geography of the Andes is not the geography of the Argentine pampas, or of Northern Brazil, or of the South. If man must adapt to his environment, does that not prove that such environments, each one intrinsically different from the others, will not necessarily be equally accessible to different people, communities, and nations? Isn't history itself a fallible force that destroys harmonies and unity?

We nonetheless follow the author with pleasure until later in the book, when we part ways with him in his excellent chapter 7: *¿Existe la tradición?* [Does Tradition Exist?] Is there a historical tradition in Latin America? What is it? Does it favor unity, or not? This matter does not merit a lengthy discussion since it is obvious that, in most of the countries involved, it refers to the tradition of the white minority and is thus extremely limited in scope. Could we possibly imagine France ignoring her history prior to Francis I [1494–1547]? According to Luis Alberto Sánchez, however, it is these minority traditions that promote the various expressions of nationalism that are destroying American unity: *Peruvian nationalism*, *Argentine nationalism*, *Chilean nationalism*, and so on. In fact, a living tradition—derived from Iberian and American, and from mestizo and Native life—is Unitarian. At least, this is his assumption and, once again, he is both right and wrong. Iberian, Native, and mestizo are all bogus literary devices. To say Iberian is to risk mistaking Spaniards for Portuguese. Native is a dangerous singular word, and mestizo is nothing but an ambiguous formula. Could we say, in that case, that there is an Iberian, a Native, or a mestizo tradition, and could we say that there is *only one*? Would that not be substituting wishes for realities? Why can the masses—since they are at the heart of this formula—be more united than the elite? And those should both be plural: masses and elites. No, it is not enough to turn our backs on Europe or to deny the essential value of white people in order to create a melting pot of everyone who lives on this continent which is, after all, Portuguese and Spanish, Negro and Indian, not to mention all the other human contributions.

* * *

All that said, I feel perfectly comfortable mentioning the salient feature of this book, which is a paean to a country that is both new and ancient, and that, in order to survive, must reconcile its origins. Whenever Sánchez stops trying to

intercede on someone's behalf, whenever he yields to his natural need to see and feel, he is truly matchless. His chapters devoted to races—the Native, the Black, and the Mestizo (chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6)—are astonishingly rich. I particularly recommend his thoughts concerning the color line, which he considers a social line as much as an ethnic one, which in general does not separate people on the basis of their skin color but according to how much money they have. In social terms, the yawning chasm between the poor and the rich is more dramatic than the Andes mountains; whether one is in the upper or the lower ranks depends on the color of one's skin.

I would, incidentally, like to mention that stark social inequalities are a grim, relentless reality in South America, as mentioned above; they create an imbalance constantly in search for expression through newspapers and avant-garde novels by means of which great movements are instigated. The Americas have lately attained a new maturity in terms of social issues that, like the subject of race, is on everybody's lips. It is yet another change, no less important than the frank and open debate on ethnicity that is taking place in South America, which is Latin in name and undoubtedly in spirit, if not in terms of its population. The admirable books by Gilberto Freyre, the sociologist from Recife, are being replaced by a wave of literature that has engulfed Latin America. Mestizos used to be looked down on. Now they are revered, as are the virtues of the *melting pot* in which the races were mixed and which laid the foundation for what the Americas would become.

I also enjoyed the author's discussions on the law, public mores, the Army, and the Church—the last two, unfortunately, leave much to be desired. Law became terror, the scourge of these new countries that we gladly used to believe were free of excessive regulations! The fact is that laws have multiplied uncontrollably across this virgin land: Latin America is living under a regime of legislative inflation. What are we to think about a country—a huge and very rich country—where the president, during a ninety-day period in 1945, enacted some seven thousand government decrees? In South America one is hard-pressed to take a step forward without stumbling over the regulations or stipulations issued by lawmakers. It is no wonder that old and well-established law schools are flourishing everywhere. Duck your head to avoid this branch, or liana, or bunch of thorns; take another alley and circumvent the fence or the hedge because here,

for sure, the policeman is usually kind. Laws create obstacle courses, but they are so complicated that people look for loopholes. This deluge of constantly changing and frequently ill-adapted laws rains down, neither wetting nor fertilizing the ground upon which it falls.

* * *

Having re-read certain pages, the reader will seriously wonder whether he should quibble with the author, who has so much to teach us. Might we not sympathize with his efforts since—like a water-diviner—he scours this vast country looking for the little-known water of human brotherhood for which he thirsts? If Sánchez outlines ideas that are sometimes false and unquestionably fragile concerning Latin unity, it is not for spiritual reasons but for sentimental ones. The same can be said of André Siegfried [SEE DOCUMENT 1.2.4], an author with whom Sánchez disagrees but on whose support he relies along the way. Sánchez does not see, he dreams; he longs for the unity of the American family, for that land that is almost a continent straddling the four cardinal points: the Pacific and the Atlantic, Europe and the United States and, to an even greater extent, [for that land that is] in thrall to thousands of influences, both internal and external, that have accustomed the region to sudden changes and miracles. As Sérgio Milliet recently wrote: “We live as though everything could change with the arrival of a telegram.”

In truth, Latin America can only be *one*, clearly and sharply defined, if seen from the outside. The fact is that when Luis Alberto Sánchez discovered his America—with the fragrance and violent colors he encountered in Panama—he was coming from the United States. Because it is *one* by contrast, by opposition, held captive within its continental mass. It is *one* on condition that it opposed the other continents, though that never prevented it from being deeply divided.

1

Braudel deliberately misinterprets the title used by Sánchez in Spanish, adding the definite article “una,” which is not in the Spanish original but which reinforces the argument he makes in his review.—Ed.

2

Sérgio Milliet, (no reference to article) *O Estado de São Paulo*, São Paulo, June 8, 1947.

3

Pablo Navarro, (no reference to article) *La Nación*, Buenos Aires, July 20, 1947.

4

The author mentions Sánchez's extensive references to Latin American literature. *La Vorágine* by Colombian José Eustacio Rivera (1889–1928); *Doña Bárbara* by Venezuelan Rómulo Gallegos (1884–1969), who was also president of Venezuela and ousted by a coup d'état (1947–48); *Facundo (civilización o barbarie)* by the Argentinean Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811–88), also a president of Argentina (1868–76); Peruvian José Santos Chocano (1875–1934), who was a key figure in the defense of Americanism; *Don Segundo Sombra* by Argentinean Ricardo Güiraldes (1886–1927) which portrays the gaucho way of life; the novels *La vida inútil* de Pito Pérez about native environments and the 1910 Mexican revolution by José Rubén Romero; little-known writers such as Uribe Arrais, or celebrities like the Chilean Pablo Neruda (1904–1973); and “La suave patria,” the poem by Ramón López Velarde that is widely quoted in Mexico.—Ed.

I.2.8 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 840539

LATIN AMERICAN UNITY

Jean Casimir, 1969

Jean Casimir (born 1938), a Haitian political scientist and former ambassador to Washington, D.C. (1991–97), wrote this text in 1969 for the magazine *Mundo Nuevo*. This Parisian journal, edited by Uruguayan critic Emir Rodríguez Monegal, published new literature by Latin American writers, as well as critical texts about Latin American culture and politics from 1966 to 1971. Casimir, who received his political-science training at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México [UNAM], ultimately calls on his readers to think of Latin America as a politically radical and culturally independent entity that resisted North American dominance. Cognizant of the fact that the region's diversity is an obstacle to unity, Casimir ponders the fundamental question: Do the countries that comprise Latin America have enough in common to be considered as a group? This selection is a translation of the Spanish-language text as it first appeared in *Mundo Nuevo* [(Paris), no. 36 (June 1969), 35–38].

THE DIVERSITY IN OUR IMMEDIATE SURROUNDINGS often prevents us from seeing the unity that might exist further afield. This can make us overemphasize short-lived differences of opinion and view as a fixture what is in fact fluid and

thus fleeting. Do the dark-skinned nations to the south of the Rio Grande have enough in common to be considered a group? And, could the features they share be described as Latin?

There is indeed a group of neighboring countries that were once conquered, organized, and controlled by Latin people. The Dutch and the British were also active here, as they were in North America. But our region was unquestionably under the influence of Latin powers that conquered and organized the Native, African, and European populations and imposed their own standards.

The facial features among the inhabitants of some of the countries in this subcontinent indicate extensive racial intermingling, or *mestizaje*. This is the subtle side effect of a process of Westernization that often led to a misunderstanding of modernization. In spite of certain attempts at “de-culturing,” the African influence that led to distinctions of various kinds has been neatly and surreptitiously retained in the modern versions of cultural expression. Underneath it all, there is a homogeneous substratum that is European, mainly Spanish and Portuguese, but there are also more recent additions of Germans, seasoned with later Mediterranean and Eastern arrivals. Are we a particular species of *Latins*, more or less closely related to our first cousins, or are we totally different from the Saxons?

The answer is obvious. A person from Cuzco or Tegucigalpa is entirely different from a Frenchman or a Spaniard, just as the latter are nothing like people from Finland or Austria. What qualities, then, did those who settled among us retain from the Motherland as transatlantic migration continued at a lively pace?

A century and a half separates us from our Latin ancestors. During that period of time we have come under the influence—indirect, it is true, but powerful nonetheless—of Anglo-Saxon hegemony. In order to maintain a certain degree of Latin-ness, our ruling classes should, first of all, preserve certain characteristics of the Old Country. Of course, they are not Saxon, so other than having only vague and distant recollections of those old ballrooms they are too preoccupied with the specific problems they face to be particularly concerned about the defense of any Latin traditions.

If the name of the subcontinent is meant to imply that it owes its cultural characteristics to its Latin origins, this is misleading. Despite well-known exceptions in the area of fine arts, our lives are—undoubtedly—influenced by both Latin and Western worlds.

Furthermore, some demonstration of success would be required from those who would lead us; even if the class that replaced Iberian domination were still Latin. No one believes that the two Congos [Brazzaville and Kinshasa] are French, let alone Latin, simply because the French and the Belgians spent some time there. Colonies were established for the purpose of exploitation in Latin America too, as they were in Africa. But, to what extent did the foreign culture penetrate?

There was a time when the inhabitants of this subcontinent were just as Latin as the conquerors, buccaneers, and new settlers. However, they certainly were not from the cream of Latin culture and civilization. However, the flow of immigration diminished after the first criollo [Latin American-born] generation appeared. Links were reestablished by the spread of reading and writing, but not exactly with the Latin world.

The truth is that both the Latin and Saxon cultures are strangers to the reality and meaning of Latin American, which is a product of its own history. Whether a bastard or a hybrid, the culture is of our own creation. [For this reason:] *Voodoo* is from Haiti; *macumba* rites are Brazilian; Mexico has its *rancheras* songs; the tango is Argentinean; just as Fidel Castro is Cuban or [Alfredo] Stroessner is from Paraguay.

Ultimately, there is nothing to unite us in the Latin world other than our use of the same language. There is a definite family relationship between the languages, even though an updating by linguists should be initiated. Meanwhile, language is the bearer of Latin American realities, specific problems, and orientations that reflect the region's historical evolution since the sixteenth century. The name for this sub-region where we live refers to a linguistic reality that is far less dominant than its cultural homogeneity might lead one to believe. From this perspective, that dominance is due to the fact that, up to the end of World War II, all independent countries in this sub-region spoke Latin languages. Whenever the terms Hispanic America, Iberian America, or Latin America are used, they help to blur a cultural homogeneity that reveals the ignorance of the dominant classes with regard to the variety and diversity of their sphere of influence.

Nevertheless, if a common denominator can be found between Mexico and Brazil, or Nicaragua and Argentina, it would not be limited to the use of a language or a family of languages. What, then, unites us? According to some

writers, a *Paulistano* [citizen of the city of São Paulo] is much closer to a New Yorker than to an inhabitant of Northeastern Brazil. Why, then, do we insist on talking about Brazil as a homogeneous whole and, a *fortiori*, of Latin America as wholeness?

The history-language connection is not a simple issue. Europe is a maze of languages. They thrive in areas that are smaller than the smallest Latin American province. However, the road that these nations have traveled and the current socioeconomic structures they share are undoubtedly conducive to this kind of unity. The European endeavor—if latest trends can be relied upon—is searching for a political formula to support that unity.

It should be remembered, moreover, that these countries and other Western nations—from the beginning of the modern era to the present—have taken their turn in the world hegemony. They have established themselves as the center of their own universe. The relationships they enjoy among themselves are not controlled by foreign powers beyond their continental frontiers. Goods and ideas flow across their borders and create a true Western culture. Those who participate in the economic alliance have established similar social structures, surprisingly similar political systems, and a unique common pool of knowledge.

Latin America, however, consists of a group of nations that are geographically remote from one another. Mexico and Argentina appear to ignore each other. Panama and Colombia seem to live separate lives. Latin America looks like a conglomerate of unevenly developed regions. Centuries of progress block the road from Mexico City to Chiapas, or stand between La Rioja and Buenos Aires. In backward conditions such as these, the official language coexists with slang and dialects that are as marginal as they are persistent.

But all this chaos is an integral part of the external dependence that channels their international relations in only one direction. Latin American nations have therefore adopted social structures that are strongly endorsed by the Western world. More precisely, they are representative of a Western presence, an exploited land in the same mold of domination: the wretched children of an aristocratic family.

The type of political and economic domination varies from country to country and from one period to another, according to the changing interests of the Western powers. Once the Spanish and Portuguese demands were satisfied, the subcontinent yielded mainly to British and subsequently to North American

imperatives. But we should not forget that all these incursions led to an establishment of social structures that were built on solid historical foundations.

The origins of these colonial relationships can be traced to colonial times, and they defined each nation once and for all. The Iberian influence was layered over the history of the earlier peoples, each with its particular characteristics. Successive changes in dependent relationships affected a constellation of nations that were already different from what they had once been. This [national imprint], in turn, stems from old stimuli that mirror both the preferences and interests of the ruling classes.

It is therefore not surprising to find that Latin languages are widely spoken in spite of the indisputable Saxon hegemony. The backlash in support of the Spanish language in Puerto Rico—where the Anglo-Saxon presence is indisputable—confirms this point of view. Similarly, in places where immigrants dominate an extremely dense Native population, the latter must learn new forms of social and economic organization, a new set of values, and a new language. If it is unable to dominate the entire population under its control, the new authority reveals a lack of power, and in that case the new language is of no consequence. In this scenario, the Native populations keep using their own dialects and are not initiated into the alien culture. The persistence of certain languages that compete in discrete regions with the Latin ones do not manage to explain the Swiss or Belgian cases or the role of European languages in general. Latin American unity of any kind is based on quite different criteria than those of Europe.

Something very similar happens in terms of regional inequalities. As is well known, until the second half of the twentieth century, Latin America's development was totally focused on the outside world. Based on their natural resources and the potential of the ruling classes, these nations worked at trying to satisfy the demands of foreign markets. Some countries were industrialized while others were not, depending on labor conditions or changes in the emerging social classes and how they fit into redefined forms of domination. It is also true that some regions were modernized and some were not. In spite of the resulting diversity, a single historical process caused these disparities, thus explaining them. In this sense, São Paulo is not so different from Northeastern Brazil, and Mexico [is not so different] from Bolivia; they are the well fed or the starving children of the same parents. So, we see that linguistic unity, with all its variations, adapts to the socioeconomic geography of dislocation. Language defines a nation

or a group of nations. Both indicate the presence of a relatively distant past and the development of new forms.

If we study Latin America from the perspective of central economies and dominant societies, we can discern an order in the process that divides the continent. In Mexico, the town of Oriental (in the state of Puebla) has no link whatsoever to Pinotepa Nacional (in the state of Oaxaca). Both places, however, have a great deal in common, since they are controlled by the same power center. Guatemala and Chile are actually neighbors, united by a bridge called Washington, D.C. Once the environment shared by Mexico City, Oriental, and Pinotepa develops, or the link is established between Washington, Guatemala, and Chile, the various parts involved can establish their own modified relationships. The dynamics of their evolution can then be determined. In fact, certain sociological studies and political doctrines identify assumptions that cannot be ignored.

New organizational structures deny the lack of economic articulation within a country so that the entire cultural apparatus tends toward homogeneity. Latin American unity is thus created through the process of denial concerning the subcontinental break-up. Our problems are no longer national. If we could have an intelligent strategy to undermine and destroy the dependence to which we have been condemned—which also defines us in spite of ourselves and splinters our reality—we would choose a common path, an organizing principle, cultural unity.

This process is no different from the European Union with regard to the long-term options available to its population. However, the distribution of variables and homogeneity indexes are different in the central countries as compared to peripheral areas. Though we are a homogeneous bloc in terms of countries with central economies, we still possess certain traits that distinguish us from peripheral countries in Asia or Africa. Our close geographical proximity has allowed certain nations from the center to enter our countries with ease and has led us to modify our dependent relationships in unison. We are all within the same sphere of influence where the dominant political and economic powers can be identified by their characteristic traits.

As nations, we come from the same stock. We thrive on a common dependence and are conscious of a lack of articulation that is more or less pronounced

depending on the phase of development we have reached. Within our sphere everything seems fragmented and diversified. But a single and identical structure of international domination—represented within our borders by our ruling classes—unites us and homogenizes our differences. We cannot rid ourselves of it—even if getting rid of it were an option. That can only be done if the unity arises from within us and is consciously developed.

Are we to remain Latin until the end of our evolution? Are we a version of Latin-ness created by the New World? For this to be true, the Latin/Saxon opposition must be maintained. Our freedom from North America, however, implies radical changes and an evolution in the very heart of the hegemonic nation. Though this opposition hints that it might be real, that possibility fades as time goes by.

But in any case, who cares about the chosen name; Latin America is categorically one; one in her past, one in her current ordeal, and one in her future undertakings. [Facing] reality in motion—today people call it a period of transition—[America] is experiencing a time when her ruling classes will either change or be eliminated; that is, a time when her economic development must be shared with her population. What is happening is an attempt at a national and subcontinental integration that will create a cultural focus whose goal is to shift people into a new reality where they do not have to imitate the dominant culture.

I.2.9 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 807738

DOES LATIN AMERICA EXIST?

Darcy Ribeiro, 1976

Writing from Uruguay during what would be the last year of his fifteen-year exile, Brazilian anthropologist and educator Darcy Ribeiro (1922–1997) first published this essay in 1976 in the newly established Mexican journal *Vuelta*, founded by Octavio Paz. Approaching his subject with a broader perspective afforded by years away from Brazil, Ribeiro recognizes a fundamental unity in the region despite its obvious cultural and linguistic differences.

He notes that one chief unifying principle is the challenge Latin or “Poor” America faces from Anglo or “Rich” America. The main thrust of his argument, however, resides in questioning the nuances of such an overarching construct as “Latin America.” The essay has been reprinted extensively; see, for example, Ribeiro’s *América Latina, a pátria grande* [(Rio de Janeiro: Editora Guanabara, 1986)]. This translation is based on the version published as “A América Latina existe?” in the anthology *Ensaaios insólitos* [(Porto Alegre: L & PM Editores, 1979), 217–19; 221–25].

DOES LATIN AMERICA EXIST? There is no doubt that it does. But it is always good to delve deeply into the meaning of that existence.

Geographically, Latin America is well known as the product of its continent’s continuity. Within this physical foundation, however, there is neither any corresponding unified sociopolitical structure nor any functioning and interactive coexistence. The whole of the vast continent is broken up into single nationalities, some of them scarcely viable as frameworks within which people may realize their potential. Indeed, geographic continuity never functioned here as a unifying factor because for centuries the different colonial establishments from which Latin America’s societies were born coexisted without cooperating. Each one would communicate directly with its colonial mother country. Even today, we Latin Americans live as if we were an archipelago of islands linked by sea and air; more often we turn outward to the great economic centers of the world, rather than inward. Indeed, the borders of Latin America, running along the barren mountain ranges or through the impenetrable jungle, isolate more than they connect, and rarely allow for an intensive coexistence.

On the linguistic-cultural level, we Latin Americans constitute a category with as much or as little homogeneity as the neo-Britannic world of peoples who predominantly speak English. This could seem inadequate to those who speak of Latin America as a concrete, active, and uniform entity; they forget that included in this category are, among others, the Brazilians, Mexicans, Haitians, and the French incursion into Canada, given their essentially neo-Latin linguistic uniformity. [These are] peoples as different from one another as North Americans are from Australians and Afrikaners, for example. This simple list shows the scope of the two categories and their scant usefulness as a classification.

By reducing the scale from Latin to Iberian, we arrive at an entity a bit more uniform—in truth, scarcely more homogenous because it only excludes the descendants of the French colonies. The Brazilians, Argentineans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Chileans, etc. would remain within this category. From the viewpoint of each of these nationalities, their own national essences possess much more vigor and uniqueness than does the Iberian-American common denominator.

If we reduce the scale even more, we can distinguish two contrasting categories: one of Lusitanian American content wholly concentrated in Brazil and another of Hispanic American content, which gathers together the remaining peoples. The differences between them are at least as relevant as those distinguishing Portugal from Spain. As can be seen, they are of little significance because they are based on a minimal linguistic variation that manages not to obstruct communication, although we tend to exaggerate it due to a long shared history of often combative interactions.

Looking at Latin America as a whole, one notices the presence—and absence—of certain groups that both brighten and diversify the scene. For example, the indigenous presence is well documented in Guatemala and in the Andean Altiplano, where it is the majority, as well as in Mexico, where Indian groups reach into the millions and even predominate in certain regions. In these cases, those who come from the indigenous populations are part of such a large group that they were integrated into national societies with an ethnically diverse peasantry; in the future their destiny will be redefined as autonomous groups. This means that in the years to come countries like Guatemala, Bolivia, Ecuador, and also extensive areas of other nations, such as Mexico and Colombia, will be subject to profound social convulsions, all ethnic in nature. These will either redefine the national frameworks or restructure them as federations of autonomous peoples.

The situation is completely different in other countries, where only micro-ethnic tribal groups can be found, immersed in nations with vast, ethnically homogenous societies. In these cases, a visible indigenous presence must be taken into account, whether in the form of language, like that of the Guaraní in Paraguay, or, especially, the phenotype of the populations' majorities, as it occurs in Brazil, Chile, and Venezuela. This, however, does not justify incorporating Indo-Americans into a separate category, as others have suggested. I really doubt that any explanatory typology could be achieved through this line of

reasoning. All these peoples find their genetic and cultural sources in their indigenous traits. Whatever the fate of these surviving indigenous populations may be, their contribution has been absorbed in such a way that their ethnic configuration will not be significantly altered. That is, the intermarriage, assimilation, and Europeanization of the ancient indigenous groups within the heart of these national populations are either complete or still in progress. This tends to homogenize—not merge—all these ethnic lineages, converting them into differentiated contributors to the national ethnicity. This does not mean that the Indians who survived as tribes within these countries will disappear. On the contrary, despite becoming increasingly acculturated, they will survive in a differentiated state and will become ever more numerous.

Another component that distinguishes this framework, and that presents its own particular aspects, is the presence of the African Negro, solidly concentrated along the Brazilian coast with the earliest colonization, in the mining areas, and in the West Indies where sugar plantations flourished. Beyond these regions, various pockets of Negro population are found in Venezuela, Colombia, Guyana, Peru, and in some areas of Central America. Here as well, assimilation and absorption of this group reached a point of Americanization in the same manner as, or perhaps one even more complete than that of any other case. It is certain that African influences on folklore, music, and religion are palpable in areas where the Negro was more predominant. But their persistence can be mainly explained by conditions that marginalized these populations, who in no case constituted ethnic blocs that were unable to assimilate or who aspired to autonomy.

...

Anthropologists, who were particularly interested in the uniqueness of these peoples, produced a vast body of literature that emphasized their distinctiveness, perhaps even to the point of excess. In fact, it is possible to prepare long lists of surviving cultural attributes that allow us to link these groups to their original sources. However, it is certain here as well that the similarities are more significant than the differences, since these groups are completely “Americanized.” In a linguistic and cultural sense they are people of their country, and even “our people,” according to the emotional identification commonly used by their co-inhabitants. Their peculiarities, which perhaps have a tendency to

fade, barely differentiate them from the national community on account of their remote origin.

The same occurs with components of the non-Iberian groups more recently arrived from Europe. Each of them contributes to the national being in a particular way, neither with superiority nor inferiority, which allows them to be defined in a limiting manner as, for example, Anglo-Uruguayans, Italo-Argentines, Germanic Chileans, or French Brazilians. However, it must be pointed out that they all enjoy a higher social standing, based partly on cultural and economic advantages, but principally on a greater social acceptance that privileges them within societies dominated by whites.

. . .

Beyond all the differentiating factors—colonial origins, the presence, absence, or sheer number of indigenous and African groups and other components—what stands out in the Latin American world is the unity of the result produced by Iberian expansion into America and by a successful process of homogenization. Present in greater or smaller proportions in various regions, all these groups constituted ethnic-national societies whose populations are the product of racial intermingling that continues today. Aside from indigenous groups descended from ancient civilizations and micro-ethnic tribes that survive in isolation, in no case do we find the original indigenous peoples—not the Europeans, Asians, or Africans—just as they were when they detached from their origins. Their descendants are the neo-Americans, whose worldviews, ways of life, and aspirations—which are essentially identical—make them one of the most vigorous branches of the human species. By incorporating people from all parts of the earth, a *mestiço* people was created, who carry in their visage an ethnic-cultural heritage taken from all sources of humanity. This inheritance, which has spread rather than concentrating itself in ethnic pockets, imposed a basic ethnic origin—chiefly Iberian in some countries, principally indigenous or African in others—thus coloring the Latin American panorama without fracturing it due to clashing elements. Thus both uniformity and the homogenization process again stand out as the explanatory models that encompass more than 90 percent of Latin Americans.

This continual standardization process is well known in certain domains, such as in linguistics and cultural studies. As a matter of fact, the

languages and cultural structures of Latin America are much more homogeneous than those of the colonizing countries—perhaps even more than in any other part of the world, with the exception of the neo-British nations. In fact, both the Spanish and Portuguese spoken in the Americas have fewer regional variations than those spoken in their countries of origin. Spoken by hundreds of millions of people and despite covering an extensive area in Latin America, Spanish has minimal regional variations with regard to the spoken accent. It did not evolve into any dialects. In Spain, various languages that are unintelligible to each other continue to be spoken. The same occurs in relation to the Portuguese and English languages. That is, the Spaniards, the Portuguese, and the English, who were never able to assimilate the linguistic-dialectical pockets within their own, smaller territories, came to the Americas and imposed on their much larger colonies a near absolute linguistic uniformity and an equally notable cultural homogeneity.

Thus we return to the initial uniformity. It matters little that it is not perceived with clarity within each national context, and this is because each nation takes great pains to emphasize its uniqueness as a mechanism of self-glorification and self-affirmation in a way that only has meaning for those who share the same ethnic loyalties. It is certain that our “Latin Americanness”—which is quite evident to those who view us from afar and perceive our macroethnicity—has still not made us one autonomous political entity: neither one nation nor a federation of Latin American states. It is not impossible, however, that history will succeed in doing so. [Simón] Bolívar’s goal was to offset the United States of the North [the U.S.] with the United States of the South. The *Patria Grande* [Great Fatherland] of [Uruguayan general José Gervasio] Artigas or even the *Nuestra América* [Our America] conceived by [José] Martí [SEE DOCUMENT 1.3.3] both indicate a similar path.

From where does this unifying power stem? How can we explain the resistance to assimilation of linguistic-cultural islands such as the Basques, the Galicians, and the Catalans, or even the regional dialects of Portuguese, as compared to the flexibility of the differentiated groups that form the Iberian American peoples?

Perhaps the explanation lies in the distinctive characteristics of the process that formed our peoples, with its intentionality, prosperity, and violence. Here the colonial powers, which operated in a truly despotic manner, had an

explicit project with very clear goals. Almost immediately they succeeded in subjugating the preexisting society, paralyzing the original culture and converting its population into a submissive labor force.

The process also served to standardize the prosperity of the colonial undertaking, both during the looting of riches accumulated over the ages, as well as in the various methods that took hold after the appropriation of mercantile production. This great wealth allowed for the creation of a vast military, governmental, and ecclesiastical bureaucracy that would rule every aspect of the society. All productive enterprises were established according to precise plans. Cities emerged through acts of will, with streets drawn according to predetermined patterns and buildings constructed according to prescribed plans. Ethnic-social categories were formed to regulate one's entire life, predetermining the jobs to which one could aspire and the clothes and even the type of jewels one could wear, as well as those one could marry. All this intentional and artificial order had an ultimate objective: to defend the colony and make it prosperous for the colonial power's use. There was also a secondary goal, although it was presented as the primary objective: to create a young metropolitan society that would be faithful to the Catholic missionary ideology.

The dominant native classes, as the managers of that colonial pact and cultural construction, never formed [the top level of] an autonomous society; they were a mere administrative stratum that watched over and legitimized the colonization. Once these societies became independent, the exogenous character of the dominant classes, which had been forged during the colonial period along with their own interests, led them to continue ruling their nations as if they were consuls appointed by the colonial powers. Hence they instituted a political and socioeconomic order that was perfectly synchronized with *latifundio* [a large land-owner system] and *entreguismo* [exploitation]. They promoted cultural creativity as if it were the local representation of foreign cultural traditions.

The intentionality of this process led to, on the one hand, the search for rationality while attempting to obtain desired results through efficient actions. On the other hand, there was a determination to realize the colonizers' ambitions through a scheme that was alien to the aspirations of the masses conscripted as a labor force. At no moment in the process of colonization did the groups involved in production form a community that existed for its own sake, a people with its own goals to realize, such as the basic necessities for survival and prosperity. Instead

they were human fuel in the form of muscular energy, destined to be consumed in order to generate profits.

Little by little an undeniable contradiction emerges between the plan of the colonizers and their successors and the interests of the human community that resulted from the colonization: that is, between the purposes and behavior of the ruling class and the subordinated majority population that carried out the endeavor that was first colonial, later national. For this population, the challenge throughout the centuries was how to mature into a people conscious of its own interests and aspiring to mutual participation in determining its own destiny. Given the class opposition, achieving these goals involved the struggle against the ruling managerial class of the old social order. Even today this is the principal challenge that we Latin Americans face.

The term “Latin America” has gained a highly significant connotation from the opposition of Anglo-Americans and Latin Americans. In addition to their already diverse cultural attributes, the two clashed even more strongly with regard to socioeconomic rivalry. Here the two groups interact, one as Rich America and the other as Poor America. They hold asymmetrical positions and relations along an axis, with power at one pole and dependency at the other. It can be said that, in a certain sense, it is chiefly as the opposite of Rich America that Latin Americans are most accurately gathered under one designation.

Another bipolar connotation originates in the view of Latin America held by other countries that unites and confuses our nations as variations on the same pattern, seeing all as backward and underdeveloped as a result of Iberian colonization. Despite being constructed with the advantages and disadvantages of distance and simplification, this external architectural perspective is perhaps more accurate. Why do we insist that we are Brazilians and not Argentineans, that our capital is Brasilia and not Buenos Aires? Or that we are Chileans and not Venezuelans, that our ancient indigenous ancestors are the Incas, because the Aztecs belong to the Mexicans? An outside observer might ask: Are you not perhaps all the descendants of one indigenous source, or the results of Iberian colonization? Were you not all emancipated during the course of the decolonization movement? And are you not also the ones who dishonorably mortgaged your countries to British bankers after independence? Do you not recognize how you were and still are being colonized by North American corporations?

Beyond all these factors of diversification and unification, the engine of integration that operated—and still operates—in Latin America to create its cultural uniformity promises to one day realize an economic and sociopolitical unity. This promise rests on the fact that we are the product of the same civilization process—the Iberian expansion—that planted seedlings here with a prodigious capacity to grow and multiply.

Considering the fundamental uniformity of the civilization process and its historical agents—the Iberian people—all other sources emerge as factors of differentiation. Indigenous groups, as varied as they were within their cultural norms and degrees of development, could only have contributed to diversification if they had played a major, influential role. African groups, in turn, having originated from an infinite number of peoples, also would have produced multiple phenotypes in the New World if they had imposed their culture in a dominant manner.

As we can see, the essential unity of Latin America stems from the evolution of civilization. It shaped us during the course of the Mercantile Revolution—specifically the Iberian mercantile expansion, which generated a dynamic that led to the formation of an ensemble of nations not only unique in the world, but also increasingly homogeneous. Even when the civilization process triggered by the Industrial Revolution followed and Latin America freed itself from Iberian rule and broke up into multiple nations, the macroethnic unity was maintained and emphasized. The civilization process that is at work nowadays is being set in motion by a new technological revolution: the thermonuclear. The more it affects the nations of Latin America, the more it will reinforce their ethnic identity as the expression of a new civilization. It is even quite probable that this will give rise to the supranational political entity that will serve as the framework within which Latin Americans will realize their destiny. Within this framework, various currently oppressed indigenous groups (Quechua, Aymará, Maya, Mapuche, and so on) will stand out more visibly and assertively than they do today. Yet, the macroethnic scenario within which all the nations of the subcontinent will coexist will continue to have an Iberian American face.

I.2.10 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 838531

THE INVENTION OF AN OPERATIVE CONCEPT: THE LATIN-NESS OF AMERICA

Guy Martinière, 1978

French academic Guy Martinière (born 1944) originally included this essay as a chapter in his doctoral dissertation of 1978. The author offers a history of the use and political implications of the term Latin America, beginning with the earliest thinkers on the subject including Charles Calvo [SEE DOCUMENT I.2.1] and continuing on to include more contemporary writers. The author's main contention is that the Latin-ness of America can be as useful an operative concept as more entrenched constructs such as "European," "African," or "Asian." The essay was first titled *Contribution à l'étude de l'économie rétrospective du Brasil, essai d'historiographie* [(These III, Cycle: Histoire, Paris X, 1978)]. Martinière's work was edited and published as chapter 2 of *Aspects de la coopération franco-brésilienne: Transplantation culturelle et stratégie de la modernité* [(Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble and Paris: Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'homme, 1982), 25–37], on which this translation is based.

THE CONCEPT OF A LATIN AMERICA is so widely accepted these days that we take it for granted.¹ But it has not always been that way, far from it. Over time, and for a variety of reasons, it was merely an "operative" concept. To better understand why and how the *Latin-ness* of America became more firmly established during the mid-nineteenth century, we must understand why and how the trend reversed in the late twentieth century with the movement to eliminate this single *Latin* classification, which was the second step in France's cultural transplanting strategy vis-à-vis the New World, so as to better identify the past and present realities of this semi-continent, known by its plural name of *Latin Americas*. Could it be that, shortly after the independence period of 1775–1825—the first "de-colonization"—the criollo middle class in the Americas living beyond the Anglo-Saxon sphere of influence was helped by its *Latin* cultural roots to resist the rising expansion of a United States of America riding a wave of continental unity inspired by their triumphant *Pan Americanism*?

A concerted effort was made during the first three decades of the nineteenth century to find a new political vocabulary that was relevant to the mood of independence sweeping the countries that had been under Spanish and Portuguese colonial rule since the sixteenth century. Revolutions rocked the Spanish Empire in the Americas in the very early nineteenth century, leading to the emergence of some fifteen independent nations, all of which deeply admired the United States of America, recently founded after decades under the yoke of British colonial rule. Echoes of the French Revolution were also reverberating in the area. It had now become impossible to keep using the same administrative and political vocabulary imposed by Spain during her colonial administration of the New World. Names such as *New Spain* [Mexico] or *New Grenade* [Colombia] among others would inevitably be changed by the new “*libertadores*” [liberators]. A process of creating new political names was thus under way. Following the independence of these young nations throughout the continent, [Baron Alexander von] Humboldt was, of course, instrumental in addressing this question by theorizing that, inspired by the very emergence of these countries, there was a common way to analyze the problems of this part of the American continent. The following excerpt is from his *Supplement to the Political Essay on the Island of Cuba* that appeared in 1826:

Regardless of the political changes that may occur in this region I will, in this document, attempt to avoid annoying convolutions by continuing to use the term Spanish America to refer to the countries inhabited by Spanish-Americans. I use “The United States” with no reference to “of North America”—to refer to all the Anglo-American countries that, though not the United States, are also part of northern America. It is embarrassing to talk about nations that play an important role on the world stage when they lack a collective name. The term “American” can no longer be applied solely to the citizens of the United States of North America. An accurate name for the independent nations of the New Continent would be welcome if it could be agreed to easily and harmoniously.²

It would be another thirty years before that “easy, harmonious, and accurate” name would be “invented” for the group of young nations in America that had just gained their independence after their Spanish and Portuguese colonial period. Then, during the following century, from 1860 to 1960, the main question concerned the Latin identity of the America that had been created by the Iberian empires.

The new *invented* name for America came from Europe; it first appeared in France during the Second Empire. This latest baptism rivaled in importance the one performed in the early sixteenth century by the humanist and geographer from Loraine, [Martin] Waldseemüller, who said that *America*—named for Amerigo Vespucci—was the “quarter” of the world that Christopher Columbus put on the European agenda. It is extremely interesting to note how many different intrigues, some with very specific political and ideological connections, were involved in the names used to denote—that is, to define—that land, that continent that Europe discovered, or rather rediscovered, in the late fifteenth century, at the dawn of the first colonization and then again at the end of the nineteenth century, at the beginning of the second great colonial enterprise. The discussions between humanists, Italian or otherwise, were intent on making sure that the name of lands of the New World, of America, contained no reference at all, or a very minimal one at any rate, to the Iberian political powers that annexed them during their imperial periods in the sixteenth century. These very lands—that became independent thanks to their inhabitants who were originally European—were called *Latin America* in the mid-nineteenth century for entirely political and ideological reasons.

Dreamed up in France during the time of Napoleon III, the concept of *Latin America* appeared on the eve of the military expedition to Mexico that was also a Franco-European scientific venture. One of the earliest instances (perhaps the very first) of this concept appearing in print in Paris was in a book by Carlos [Charles] Calvo [SEE DOCUMENT 1.2.1], published by the A. Durand publishing house early in 1862: *Recueil complet des traités* The scope of the work was astonishing: more than twenty volumes of some 400-500 pages each, divided into three main periods, and published over the course of several years. In short, this was a monumental book in the strictest sense of the term, one that made history in the history of the *Latin Americas*.³

Carlos Calvo's contemporaries, by the way, were not unimpressed, since they wrote many reviews of the book, beginning with the very first volume. Calvo was originally from Latin America, and would introduce himself as having been, “Born on the bountiful banks of the River Plate.” His scientific reputation was beyond reproach, closely combining knowledge of both the natural sciences and human society. In Europe and in Latin America he moved in various circles,

socializing with historians, geographers, economists, botanists, naturalists, and even paleontologists. In addition to his scientific abilities, Calvo was also skilled in the art of politics. His calling card teemed with titles. To the one that introduced him as a “Corresponding member of the Historical Institute, of the Geographical Society, of the Imperial Society of the Acclimatization Zoo of France, of the Society of Economists, Paris,” he added the title “Paraguayan Chargé d’affaires to the Courts of France and England.” In other words, Carlos Calvo was no ordinary man.

When he published his book, he included a dedication to Emperor Napoleon III. His goal was clear. Calvo was presenting his work not just as “a token of respectful admiration inspired by Your Imperial Majesty’s superior intelligence and keen insight.” But, also, as “the sincere expression of gratitude of all people of the Latin race.” However, the political and ideological objective could not be clearer: “Your Imperial Majesty has understood, better than any other European sovereign, the full importance of Latin America and has made the most direct contribution to the substantial development of trade undertaken by France with this vast continent.”

A few days later, Mr. Thouvenel, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs replied, saying that the Emperor “who genuinely appreciated the affection that inspired your request—has graciously accepted the dedication of a body of work whose publication, in his opinion, seems to be of great interest at this time.” That was putting it mildly... [SEE DOCUMENT 1.2.1].

It had been little more than three months since French troops had landed in Mexico on a mission to oust [President Benito] Juárez and nearly six months since the joint British, Spanish, and French military intervention had been decided. [Given the timing], could there have been a better guarantee of Napoleon III’s political influence in Latin America than a scientific text written by Carlos Calvo, a respected Latin American diplomat? In fact, Calvo, on one single page lost among the thousands of others in his book, denied being in favor of military intervention in Mexico. Nevertheless, the essential fact remained that he had “taken his hat off” to the “Latin American” policy of the Emperor, whom he called the best sovereign in Europe. Overall, the various great themes of Napoleon III’s political strategy had been woven into one, even if the use of certain military procedures stirred up differences of opinion that were expressed in public. His

definition of “Latin” to describe the French political, cultural, and economic objectives concerning the continent formerly colonized by Spain and Portugal was admirably in accord with the Emperor’s “grand design.”

This grand design had been carefully considered and developed over a period of several years. The view expressed by Senator Michel Chevalier, who was responsible for ideological matters in the imperial regime, would seem to be significant. Essentially, it can be summarized as follows: As the heir of the Catholic nations of Europe, he wrote, France is the world’s torchbearer for the *Latin* races, that is, the French, the Italians, the Spanish, and the Portuguese. A guarantee of peace and civilization, that torch could help light the path to progress since an “effective agreement” exists between Paris and London. If, however, all due caution is not exercised, adverse conditions in Italy, Spain, and Portugal—in other words, the Catholic and Latin countries in Europe—are liable to increase, providing opportunities to dissident Christian nations such as Russia, Prussia, and Turkey, unless a new alliance, led by Napoleon III, could bring them back into the fold. Beyond the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, the rise of Protestant countries and of the Anglo-Saxon race is even more evident in America. Neither Brazil nor Cuba is in a position to counter the influence of the United States all by itself. It is high time to unite the Latin nations of Europe so as to help our sisters in America, to embark on that road to progress that France has already taken, and provide more effective support to Mexico first of all, [and] to halt the expansion of the United States.⁴

The book titled *Le Mexique ancien et moderne* [Ancient and Modern Mexico] was published in 1863 [SEE DOCUMENT 1.2.2]. It featured the Emperor’s *Latin* and *Catholic* grand design and included Napoleon III’s instructions to Marshall Forey, commander in chief of the expedition to Mexico. Neither Michel Chevalier nor Napoleon III directly referred to the concept of *Latin America*. Officially, in fact, it was simply a matter of *Latin races in the Americas*. However, the way in which Carlos Calvo used the name *Latin America*—missing in Humboldt’s writing—was about to take Europe by storm.

Favorable or otherwise, the first exposure to this new name provoked violent reactions, “debates and disputes.” The fact is that an idea such as the one suggested by Carlos Calvo in 1863–64—formally characterizing America as *Latin*—was bound to unleash strong feelings. And, of course, the ideological debates and

political disputes about the French strategy in the Americas drew both praise and censure.

The “cultural” backing from *Catholic* and *Latin European* nations was muted, except among the pro-French groups in the Mediterranean regions. Spain, for example, refused to acknowledge the independence of her former colonies; in her view, these countries of the Americas were Hispanic American, before and instead of Latin American. It wasn’t long before the idea of Hispanic-ness began to appear in response to *Latin-ness*. Similarly, Portugal stood behind its *Lusitanian* Empire in Africa and Asia and considered Brazil to be “adult” enough to find its own way. With regard to the Italians, they were too concerned by their own national unity and the role that Napoleon III would play to be interested in the *Latin* continent of the Americas.

Beyond the Rhine, Humboldt’s followers violently criticized the term *Latin America*; in Goettingen (1863) someone by the name of Wappaens published the following statement in the *Journal des Savants* [The Scholars’ Journal]: “We will gladly excuse a certain amount of boastfulness in the Hispanic Americans. . . . But we most particularly hope that they will think very carefully before adopting French ideas. They would be better advised to consider the basis of their nationality; they should not attempt to be a *Latin* evolution—i.e., neo-French—but rather develop a neo-Spanish identity, along the lines of the neo-English one chosen by the Anglo Americans. To achieve that goal, however, or others of a similar nature, they should not send their younger generations to Paris for their higher education. They should send them to Madrid or to Spanish colleges to be inspired by Spanish literature, instead of filling their heads with the works of Voltaire, [Jean-Jacques] Rousseau, Eugène Sue, and other French writers.”

The term *Latin America* actually achieved its highest levels of acceptance among the intellectual milieu of the young independent states of the Americas, where it was immediately seen as an expression of identity. Eventually, the ex-colonials managed to sever the umbilical cord to the Iberian Motherland and achieve their own international presence, which British support could not provide. Only Napoleon III’s adventurous plan to send a military expedition to Mexico compromised the cultural impact of *Latin-ness* in the Americas.

The ultimate success of the concept of *Latin America* was fueled by the ideological work of the Third Republic. [The surrender at the Battle of] Sedan—

which provided the opportunity and the cradle of the Third Republic, allowing it to become the herald of *Latin-ness*—and the regrettable failure of the expedition to Mexico, both foretold the military collapse of the Empire. But the “success” of the latter in the economic arena—the Industrial Revolution—was seen as a legacy by the followers of the *nouveau régime*. The inheritance of the “concept” of *Latin America* was thus duly claimed in spite of Napoleon III’s mistaken colonial strategy of trying to re-conquer a world that had only just become independent. After the fall of the Empire, however, the concept of Latin America was used very cautiously in France. If it had been tarnished by the Napoleonic “failure,” shouldn’t it be banished along with all the other memories of imperial political activities?

The acceptance of the term in America, however, in addition to the influence of supportive cultural and economic pro-French policies, led to a much wider use of the name during the period 1880–85. New meanings were ascribed to this *Latin-ness*. First of all, the *Catholic* nature of the *Latin* legacy was excised as an aggressive new Positivism emerged and became the prevailing ideology in Jules Ferry’s secular Republic. Thus the Positivist doctrine, carried far and wide by Auguste Comte’s followers, spread its influence in Latin America, conquering a rebellious Mexico that supported Juárez, and was adopted by imperial Brazil as a basis for its government. The American *republics*, therefore, became Latin republics, sisters of the Great French Republic that was leading the world to civilization and progress. Military conflicts waged in the early twentieth century accentuated this new perspective. After World War I, the concept of a *Latin civilization* was an essential part of the ideological and cultural vision of the French and South American ruling classes. It was seen as a true East-West axis, a symbol of the extension of European humanism—the heir to the Greco-Latin world—and a New World with a fabulous future for the *Latin republics* of America.

In the United States, which tried to use its growing influence to promote a *Pan American* perspective of the continent, the concept of *Latin America* was finally accepted and took root in the local lexicon. The North-South expansion of *Pan American* goals, which conflicted with the idea of Latin Americanism, never succeeded at a cultural level following the decline of Europe or during the collapse of “French influence” in Latin America between the world wars. By adopting that name, even by defending it, the criollo elites of America—those who rejected the domination of Spain and Portugal—immediately proclaimed their originality in

defiance of the invasion of Yankee imperialism. The transplanting of *Latin-ness* to America had finally succeeded.

But other terms had been found that also defined the original quality of this subcontinent. Both *Iberian America* and *Spanish America* were still in use, to the great satisfaction of those who supported *Hispanic-ness* and *Lusitanian-ness*. An *Amer-indian America* was also proposed. But, what role did the Natives play in building a national identity that was conceived by the criollo ruling classes? For many years, French geographers were decidedly reluctant to use a term so heavily charged with obvious ideological and cultural connotations and far preferred the more neutral *South America* and *Central America*. But it did not make sense to exclude Mexico from this group that was trying to assert its legitimacy. In 1973, the geographers finally yielded to the mood of the times and published the first collective work on the *Geography of Latin America*, coordinated by Mr. Pierre Monbeig.⁵

This leads to the question: Is this concept still operative? The day after World War II ended, French historians gradually started referring to the *Latin Americas* instead of *Latin America*. In 1948, Fernand Braudel [SEE DOCUMENT 1.2.7] was the first to pose the question in an article with a provocative title: “Y a-t-il une Amérique latine?” [Is there a Latin America?] Written as a review of Peruvian author Luis Alberto Sánchez’s [SEE DOCUMENT 1.2.6] book, *¿Existe América Latina?*,⁶ Braudel’s article suggested the following answer to the question: “To intercede on someone’s behalf means to choose, to simplify, to rule out objections, and to distort the facts. It means to argue in the style of those earlier European observers and dreamers who, from 1910 to 1939, spoke about European unity. Europe is undoubtedly *one*, but it is not *just one*: Europe has ruled itself out, has opposed itself, and has been obsessed with both its own construction and destruction. Does this mean we can be more optimistic regarding Latin America in the present or the future?” “Could we say, in that case, that there is an Iberian, a Native, or a mestizo tradition, and could we say that there is *only one*? Would that not be substituting wishes for realities? Why can the masses—since they are at the heart of this formula—be more united than the elite? And those should both be plural: masses and elites. No, it is not enough to turn our backs on Europe, or to deny the essential value of white people, in order to create a melting pot of everyone who lives on this continent which is, after all, Portuguese and Spanish, Negro and Indian, not to mention all the other human contributions.” He is adamant in his

conclusion: “In truth, Latin America can only be *one*, clearly and sharply defined, if seen from the outside.” . . . “Because it is *one* by contrast, by opposition, held captive within its continental mass. It is *one* on condition that it opposed the other continents, though that never prevented it from being deeply divided.” Indeed, the title of the *Cahier des Annales* no. 4 [Paris, 1949] on the issue, “À travers les Amériques latines” [Across the Latin Americas], suggested an authentic program of action and research. For the first time the plural version was used. In France, it was used by representatives of a *school* that was about to shake up the techniques and conceptions of History, so that this new concept appeared via the laboratory of Latin America.⁷

After 1948, this idea prospered. When, in 1968, the Institut des Hautes Études de l’Amérique latine [Institute for the Advanced Study of Latin America] decided to publish a periodical, it was named *Cahiers des Amériques latines* [Notebooks of the Latin Americas]. According to Pierre Monbeig, [this plural version] seemed to be the best way to enquire about “the fate of the Latin Americas.” Incidentally, it was also a way to highlight the diversity among the contributors to the *Annales* in 1948, as Monbeig did when he included the new term “The Latin Americas” in his foreword to the first volume of *Géographie de l’Amérique latine* [Geography of Latin America].

Nevertheless, even though it had become de rigueur among the *innovators*, the plural form was not widely accepted. To use it required a change in perspective and a rejection of broad generalities in an attempt to gain a better understanding of individual features without losing sight of the details of the whole subcontinent. After all, weren’t these details, chiefly the individual features of several of the countries in the Latin Americas, thoroughly described and disseminated by the work of Marcel Niedergang [SEE DOCUMENT 1.2.8] when he evoked the fate of *Les vingt Amériques latines* [The Twenty Latin Americas]?⁸

It seems that a new *operative* concept appeared immediately after the end of World War II thanks to a deeper understanding of the realities of the region. On their return from several years of teaching in various countries in Latin America—mainly Brazil and Mexico—a group of French college students proposed the new concept. The seed was planted. A generation later, after endless debates and disputes, the very first results appeared. In 1968, during that tumultuous period of new ideas, the new name was finally recognized.

But the river of reality keeps flowing, and the debates did not come to an end. Only a few innovators contributed to the evolution of the idea of a Latin America as they looked for a better way to define the diversity of both the people and the elites of the continent. As soon as a new name for Latin America was up for consideration—trying to adhere as closely as possible to the evolutions in progress—new concepts took shape in the mind of other intellectuals.

The Italian historian Ruggiero Romano referred to the European conquest of bodies and souls in the New World. In his 1972 work titled *Les mécanismes de la conquête coloniale: les conquistadores* [Mechanisms of the Colonial Conquest: The Conquistadores] he wrote: “How can we ignore that the definition of *Latin* does not encompass the realities of Central and South America? These days, nobody dares to speak about the *Latin-ness* of America in colonial times. There is total agreement on that matter and the subject is closed. On the contrary, during the period from the mid-nineteenth century to the first three decades of the twentieth century, there was an agreement concerning the definition of *Latin*; which, I repeat, seems accurate to me. People in those countries had an essentially French outlook and way of thinking at that time. The definition is accurate—even when we remember that, during that period of widespread *Latin-ness*, the most significant influence and investment in Central and South America was actually British.” Romano goes on to say: “Today, however, there are two major sectors of the population that, though living side-by-side, are sometimes opposed to each other. On the one hand, there is an undeniable awakening of the American masses. Slowly, laboriously, to one extent or another, the masses take part in the internal debate concerning their countries in either Central or South America. On the other hand, there is a ruling class that has always been more influenced by lifestyles and ways of thinking imported from the USA. Another, smaller group consists of opposition groups that reject plans, ideologies, and standards that come from the USA, or would prefer to ignore the concept of *Latin-ness* and align themselves instead with Russian or Chinese ways of life, or with their own American heritage as expressed in the Central and Southern regions of the continent. According to their scenarios, it would be wiser not to be defined as *Latin*, but that would take a massive amount of support from the international media, and the intellectuals do not have that kind of power.”⁹

Would it be necessary, then, to renounce any reference to the *Latin-ness* of America, even if the continent's diversity revealed its existence in the background of the *Latin Americas*? The question remained unanswered, and the political context of the 1970s introduced yet another dimension to the discussion.

In 1975, Cuba's appearance on the African political stage generated widespread consternation. Several international political observers immediately linked the Cuban presence in Africa to Soviet expansionism. From then on, Cuba's African policy made the Cubans look like Moscow's "armed wing." It is undeniable that Havana would have been unable to develop the tactical resources and operational ability to establish itself on the African continent—"a synthesis of black and Arab characteristics," in the words of President [Leopold Sedar] Senghor—without the full support of Eastern European countries. Furthermore, the extent of Cuba's aid to the movement led by Agostinho Neto, during the struggle for independence in Angola, was limited to military cooperation. And, when the island intervened in Ethiopia at the request of Colonel Megistu, Cuba's African policy consisted solely of providing manpower to support the armies involved in the conflict.

This fundamental aspect of the Cuban involvement in Africa, however, is only one facet of the new relationship between the two regions. In the cultural realm, the emergence of a new operative concept was expressed in 1975 by Fidel Castro himself: Cuba will no longer be known as a Latin American country, but as a *Latin African* one. This new term was evidently coined to justify the temporary military intervention. Nevertheless, the emergence of a concept of this nature, the *Afro-Latin-ness* of Cuba, inevitably hints at other issues. In fact, Cuba's political discovery of the African continent did not suddenly appear in 1975 but was already a factor in the 1959 Cuban Revolution. The origins of Cuban involvement in Africa are structurally linked to a radical re-evaluation of cultural identity in Cuba; this *Cuban-ness* with African roots was born during the Revolution. Isn't it true that one of the basic functions of the Cuban Socialist model was to establish a governing system to serve the people, not the criollo ruling classes?

In Cuba as in the rest of Latin America, the goal was to provide a seat at the table for those who had been excluded from the market economy. Thus, the scorned and the downtrodden among the dark-skinned masses living in New World countries were finally united in their recently acquired right to a political identity of their own. The goal of "Socialist" revolutions was to improve the fate

of these people, trying to eradicate the racism that was so deeply embedded in the social strata created by Spanish colonization that it wasn't eliminated in Cuba until 1898. Under the earlier regimes, everything was arranged for the benefit of the criollos. But literature, poetry, and folklore all had deep roots to Africa, as did dance—the rumba—songs, music, food, family life, sexuality, racial mixing, and religion. After 1959 the masses—that had been living on the fringes until now, marginalized by the white elite that was “*limpia*” (meaning clean and spotless, at least in their own view of themselves)—found that their traditions were now the object of a revolutionary “cultural” fascination. Why shouldn't these cultural phenomena that were starting to influence local policies also exert an influence in the arena of international cooperation? The “Afro-Cuban” roots of “Cuban-ness” might not be enough to explain the current Cuban policy of “solidarity” with Africa, but they must be considered within the scope of Cuba's policies toward Africa. What was the meaning then—and now—of the symbolic hope of the “Black blood of the Tropics” within the official cultural tradition as expressed by Havana? Does Marxist doctrine provide an unexpected rationality? What is the meaning of the “mestizoed Negro-ness,” loved by both [poet] Nicolás Guillén and [writer] Alejo Carpentier within the context of the cultural re-evaluation of *Cuban-ness*?

The *Afro-Latin American-ness* phenomenon is not unique to Cuba. Other Latin American countries—such as Brazil—aspire to become “midsize powers,” but still express their own version of *African-ness*. Though the emergence of the Third World in the 1950s was a revelation for them, overshadowing *Pan Americanism* and the *Latin* dialogue with Western Europe, that revelation could not find political expression until the de-colonization of Africa, first during the Franco-English phase in the 1960s and then during the Spanish and especially the Portuguese phases that followed.

But after 1964, Cuba and Brazil [following a military coup d'état in the latter] were very different in terms of their areas of development and their international relations. The political fallout from African developments adversely affected their ability to “cooperate.” For instance, while Brazil's *de facto* military government announced a diplomatic and commercial breakthrough in 1970–73 by claiming to have discovered a new “frontier” in the South Atlantic, where white South Africa seemed relatively stable, “Socialist” Cuba would only maintain diplomatic relations with certain “progressive” African countries and with leaders

of “Marxist” revolutionary movements in exile. The ousting of the [President Marcelo] Caetano regime in 1974—carried out by members of the armed forces, which led to a Portuguese retreat from Africa and the creation of five new countries—gave Cuba another opportunity to set foot on the Black Continent. Once these countries proclaimed their independence, the struggle for power led to new forms of cooperation with partners who were not interested in working within the traditional framework of Euro-African relations. Even the traditional North-South cultural relations between Europe and Africa were at risk of being modified.

Brazil and Cuba, though very different from each other, are by no means unusual examples of the new African cooperation. They each, in their own ways, experienced the slave uprisings that in the 1930s helped forge a bond between Negroes in Africa and the Americas. There were obviously many references to interracial breeding and to the black population, as in the case of the *discours antillais* [Caribbean discourse] that testify to the universality of these connections.¹⁰ *Les Amériques noires* [The Black Americas], to use Roger Bastide’s lovely expression, now find their African roots in New World countries. Even countries with barely-known African traditions have re-discovered their African-ness, as shown in Denys Cuche’s recent book on *Pérou nègre* [Black Peru].¹¹

Andean America and Mexico, by claiming their Native-ness, their *Indi-anismo*, had already helped to draw attention to a variety of aspects of that triumphant *Latin American-ness*.

Will the Latin African-ness establish a *dialogue of new worlds* (Michel Jobert) and create a South-to-South relationship to challenge the restriction imposed by the American and the *Latin* compass which insists that relations should be limited to the *Western* Atlantic countries, as André Siegfried [SEE DOCUMENT 1.2.4] shrewdly observed in 1947?¹²

1

All analyses concerning the “Latin African” impact of cultural policies in both Cuba and Brazil were developed in other recent works: “Brésil, la politique africaine” (1970–76), in *Problèmes d’Amérique latine*, no. 48, *La Documentation Française, Notes et Études Documentaires* no. 4474, July 13, 1978, pp. 7–64; *Le Brésil et l’Afrique: les nouvelles formes de relations internationales des Amériques latines*, (Paris: F.N.S.P., Audir, 1979), II–567; “Cuba and Africa” in *Problèmes politiques et sociaux* 347 (October 13, 1978); “Héritage national et solidarité anti-impérialiste: la vocation latino-africaine de Cuba,” in *Le Monde Diplomatique* (January 1979); “Le nouveau dialogue Amérique latine-Afrique, fondement des rapports Sud-Sud,” in *Relations Internationales* 23 (Fall 1980): 313–40 (special issue edited by Guy Hermet and Guy Martinière, “L’Amérique latine dans les relations internationales”), etc.

2

Alexandre de Humboldt, "Supplément qui renferme des considerations sur la population, la richesse territoriale et le commerce de l'archipel des Antilles et de Colombia" *Essai politique sur l'Île de Cuba*, vol. 2 (Paris: Librairie de Gide Fils, 1826), 111–12, note 1.

3

Recueil complet des traités, conventions, capitulations, armistices, et autres actes diplomatiques de tous les États d'Amérique latine compris entre le Golfe du Mexique et le cap d'Horn, depuis l'année 1493 jusqu'à nos jours, précédé d'un memoir sur l'état actuel de l'Amérique, des tableau statistiques, d'un dictionnaire diplomatique, avec une notice historique sur chaque traité important (Paris: Librairie A. Durand, 1862–64).

4

Michel Chevalier, *Le Mexique ancien et moderne* (Paris: Librairie de L. Hachette et cie., 1863), 494–508.

5

Pierre Monbeig, Preface to *L'Amérique latine. Approche géographique général et régional* (Paris: Bordas, 1973), two volumes under the direction of Claude Collin-Delavaud.

6

Like Braudel, Martinière added the article "una" [a] in order to support his argument regarding rejecting the notion of "only one" America. —Ed.

7

Fernand Braudel, "Le livre de Luis Alberto Sánchez: y a-t-il une Amérique Latine?," *Cahiers des Annales* no. 4, Paris, 1949.

8

Marcel Niedergang, *Les vingt Amériques latines* [SEE DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1052740].

9

Ruggiero Romano, *Les mécanismes de la conquête coloniale: les conquistadores* (Paris: Flammarion, 1972).

10

Edouard Glissant, *Le discours antillais* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1981).

11

Denys Cuche, *Le Pérou nègre* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1981); de Roger Bastide, *Les Amériques noires: Les civilisations africaines dans le Nouveau Monde* (Paris: Payot, 1967).

12

André Siegfried, "Le developpement économique de l'Amérique latine," in *Revue de Paris*, 54, 1 (January 1947): 3–13. In addition to this, see Michel Jobert, "Dialogues des Nouveaux Mondes," in *Jeune Afrique*, no. 1011 (May 21, 1980).

I.2.11 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 838924

LATIN AMERICA: AN INTRODUCTION TO FAR-WESTERN IDENTITY

Alain Rouquié, 1987

The following passages are excerpted from the book *Amérique latine. Introduction à l'Extrême-Occident* by Alain Rouquié, a French political scientist linked to the Socialist Party and France's former ambassador to Brazil (2000–03). Here, Rouquié considers Latin America's lack of unity and the limitations of the term "Latin America," while at the same time arguing that the region is united by its unique economic relationship with the United States. Rouquié describes the continent as a "peripheral America" at the fringes of the Western world. Although it cannot occupy the space of the "developed 'center'," Latin America, which Rouquié posits as "Far-Western," is still intrinsically connected to the larger Western culture. Rouquié wrote prolifically on Latin America throughout his long career and published *Amérique Latine* in 1987 [(Paris: Éditions du Seuil)]; this translation is based on the popular Spanish edition, *América Latina: Introducción al extremo occidente* [first edition (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1989)].

FOREWORD

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Like many before it, this book takes a comparative approach, which is best suited to Latin American realities. Once again I have resisted using any standard national monographs, since those kinds of convenient, cookie-cutter descriptions are of no use here. In fact, the more details they provide, the less comprehensible they become. André Siegfried [SEE DOCUMENT I.2.4] made this very astute observation concerning Latin America: "The individual characteristics of each country should, I believe, be explained in terms of the continent to which they belong; we can then realize...that the general points of view help to clarify the individual ones. Hence, when one studies a particular country, it is helpful to view it from a continental perspective..."¹ This is why the subject has been approached from a diametrically different angle. Suffice it to say

that it goes beyond superficial generalizations and approximate extrapolations to find significant differences² or explanatory coincidences in time and space. Sometimes I wondered if this was to be the last time that a comparative and global grasp of the subcontinent might seem appropriate. Would the idea of a Latin America united by destiny now become passé? Is not the clamoring of the subcontinent and the divergent paths taken by its various countries the death knell of those undeniable parallels of history and weighty continental tendencies? I have not found the answer to this problem, but at least I have not ignored it. It is the essence of this book, among others that will seem less abstract and more consequential to the reader: independence, development, and democracy. Surely it would never occur to anyone to consider any of the three from one single, universal perspective.

From now on, all that the so-called “Latin” America loses in unity, it undoubtedly gains in universality. Even though it is not partial to those who enjoy living in a Diaspora, our problems seem larger, over-expanded and more dramatic. That is why, just as it did five centuries ago, this New World has much to teach us. May this book make a modest contribution to the discourse.

...

INTRODUCTION: WHAT DOES LATIN AMERICA MEAN?

It may seem paradoxical to begin dealing with a “cultural area” by stressing the precariousness of its definition. As strange as it may seem, the very construct of Latin America is complicated. It is therefore helpful to try to review the history of the concept and critique the way in which it is used. The fact that it is in regular use everywhere in the world does not necessarily endorse its accuracy. It is somewhat reminiscent of the recent ambiguous term “Third World,” which seems to be a source of confusion rather than a means of precise definition.

What is understood geographically by Latin America? Is it the group of countries in Central and South America? Yes, but according to the geographers, Mexico is part of North America. In the interests of simplification, could the term refer to all the countries lying south of the Rio Grande? But then, we should agree that Guyana and Belize, where English is spoken, as well as Dutch-speaking Surinam, are part of “Latin” America. At first sight, there would seem to

be a cultural concept involved. We might also say that it only includes American countries with a Latin culture. But even though Quebec, Canada, is undoubtedly far more Latin than Belize—and just as Latin as the unincorporated Commonwealth of Puerto Rico—nobody would ever consider the French-speaking province to be part of Latin America.

Looking beyond these inaccuracies, we might consider the emergence of a strong sense of subcontinental identity, woven from the various regional threads of solidarity that are based on a common culture or on links of other kinds. The very diversity of Latin American nations, however, threatens such an arrangement. In spite of the inevitable deluge of discussion that is always unleashed by this subject, such a level of unity might be too much of a utopian dream, given the lackluster economic (and, therefore, cultural) relations between a group of countries that, in over a century of independence, have turned their backs on each other in order to focus on Europe and the USA. Another obstacle involves the huge disparities among countries in terms of their size, economic potential, and regional roles.

This is the reason for questioning the very existence of Latin America. Intellectuals, from Peru's Luis Alberto Sánchez [SEE DOCUMENT 1.2.6] to Mexico's Leopoldo Zea [SEE DOCUMENT 1.4.6], have pondered the essential question but have been unable to answer it. At issue here is not just the question of unity implied in the name, but the identity it refers to vis-à-vis the plurality of societies in a so-called "Latin" America. In this sense, it would suffice to emphasize diversity, thus avoiding the temptation to generalize and, as has already been done, to circumvent the question concerning the "Latin Americas."³ Such a formula has the advantage of identifying one of the difficulties involved, although it overstates the cultural dimension, which still makes the point.

WHY LATIN?

This label is now widely accepted, but what does it mask? Where does it come from? Common sense conclusions quickly disappear when confronted by socio-cultural facts. Are the Black Americas—described by Roger Bastide—Latin? Could we attach a Latin label to Guatemala, a country where half the population is of Mayan descent and speaks indigenous languages, a situation we also find in the Andean highlands where most people speak Quechua? Does the term Latin apply

to the Guarani in Paraguay, the Gallic settlers in Patagonia, or the Brazilian State of Santa Catarina which was, like southern Chile, settled by Germans? In fact, one should refer back to the culture of the conquistadors and colonizers from Spain and Portugal to define the social groupings within their multiple components. This can be understood when our Spanish friends, among others, use the term Hispanic America or even Iberian America in an attempt to avoid overlooking the Portuguese-language component inherited by gigantic Brazil. The epithet “Latin” has its own history, even if Haiti—whose elites speak French—can produce an alibi these days. The epithet appeared in imperial France under Napoleon III as part of the noble purpose of “helping” the “Latin” nations to halt North American expansion. The unfortunate Mexican caper was the actual implementation of that idea on a grand scale. By eliminating certain links between Spain and the New World, Latin-ness had the advantage of providing France with legitimate responsibilities vis-à-vis her American “sisters,” who were Roman Catholic. Madrid, which rejected Latin-ness on behalf of Hispanic-ness and the rights of the Motherland, never granted citizenship to the idea of Latin America. In turn, the United States encouraged the policies of Americanism in order to confront this European war machine before adopting its vertical use in accordance with its own designs and contributing to its widespread use.

Until at least the 1930s, the Latin brand of this America conquered by the Spanish and the Portuguese was accepted by educated elites wherever French culture reigned supreme. Does that mean that this America is only Latin to the ruling classes and the oligarchies? Or is the true representative of the subcontinent the America of the indigenous people and the under classes (*los de abajo*)—the “Underdogs” who have no claim to Latin-ness and resist the culture of the conquerors? By rediscovering the unknown, forgotten Natives, intellectuals of the 1930s, mainly in Andean countries, actually created them. [Víctor Raúl] Haya de la Torre, a powerful political figure in Peru, suggested a new regional denomination: “Indo America.” It was even less successful than the literary Indian-ism he promoted or the APRA [American Revolutionary Popular Alliance], the political party with continental ambitions that he founded. The Indian was unable to develop a following among the ruling classes of the Americas. Secluded and relegated to the margins of society, Natives are minorities—culturally speaking—in all the great States [of the region], even in those with a strong Indian population linked to ancestral pre-Columbian civilizations. According to the 1980 census,

out of 66 million Mexicans, only 2 million did not speak Spanish, and less than 7 million were conversant in one or more native languages. It is entirely possible to dream of a Mexico such as the one conceived by [anthropologist and politician] Jacques Soustelle, who wished that, “like modern Japan, it would be able to preserve its essential indigenous personality while being inserted into today’s world.” But that did not happen, and the entire continent has inevitably become a racial and cultural melting pot.

Nevertheless, even in the “whiter” countries, the indigenous thread has never been absent from the national tapestry and has clearly helped to define the physical look of the people. According to [the Nicaraguan revolutionary Augusto César] Sandino, this America is definitely “Indo Latin.”

Even if the Latin definition of the subcontinent is found lacking as an umbrella term to adequately include the evolving plurality, such an evocative label cannot be abandoned when it is in widespread use, most especially among the residents of the region themselves: we, the Latin(os) (“*nosotros los latinos*”). These comments remind us that the construct of “Latin America” is neither entirely cultural nor specifically geographical. But we can still use this very comfortable term, while remaining aware of its limitations and ambiguities. Latin America does indeed exist, but only through opposition and from the outside. This means that “Latin Americans,” if considered as a category, do not represent a tangible quality beyond certain vague extrapolations and unconstrained generalizations. That also means that the term possesses a hidden dimension that complements the meaning involved.

A PERIPHERAL AMERICA . . .

At first glance, we are looking at an America branded by Spanish and Portuguese colonization (see the French historical case in Haiti) that stands in stark contrast to Anglo-Saxon America. Basically, Spanish and Portuguese languages are spoken there, in spite of the flourishing pre-Columbian cultures, with recent immigrant nuclei being more or less assimilated. However, the absence of Canada in this group—in spite of Quebec—and the fact that international organizations such as SELA [Latin American Economic System] or BID [Inter-American Development Bank] consider Trinidad and Tobago, the Bahamas, and Guyana to be Latin

American States,⁴ gives the “Other America” an undeniable socioeconomic, even geopolitical profile.

All these nations, regardless of their wealth and prosperity, occupy the same place in terms of the North-South divide. They look like developing or industrialized countries but none of them is part of the developed “center.” In other words, all these countries are considered “peripheral” States by the industrialized world. And, of course, they all have much in common.

Historically, as producers of raw materials, they all depend on the world marketplace. They also provide food (in this sense, Bolivian tin is no different than nutmeg from Grenada), but also depend on the “center” that governs the flow. The “center” supplies civil and military technology, capital, and cultural models. There is one particular unifying factor: all these countries located in the “Western Hemisphere” enjoy different relationships with the major industrial power of the world, which is also the main capitalist nation. This is undoubtedly a dangerous privilege that no other Third World region shares. In this respect, the 2,000-mile border between Mexico and the United States is a unique phenomenon. The famous “tortilla curtain” that tempts millions of Mexicans to slip across the border into the richest country on the planet, draws a cultural, socioeconomic, and hugely symbolic dividing line.

Perhaps one could count all the developing countries on the American continent as Latin American nations since—if we overlook the language and culture—nobody would consider the English-speaking Caribbean islands or Guyana to be part of wealthy Anglo-Saxon America. By the same token, political zones sometime extend beyond geography. For instance, didn’t President [Ronald] Reagan recently name El Salvador—a country whose only shoreline is on the Pacific Ocean—as an eventual beneficiary of his Caribbean Basin Initiative? And then, casting all limits to the winds, why not follow those who (putting geography aside) proposed calling the “wretched,” underdeveloped part of the continent “South America”?

... THAT BELONGS TO WESTERN CULTURE

With regard to the rest of the developing world, the singularity of the “Latin” subcontinent is also brilliant. To quote [poet Paul] Valéry: it is a world that was

“deduced,” it is part of a European “invention” which was drawn into Western culture as a result of the conquest. Pre-Columbian civilizations, which had been in a state of crisis when the Spaniards arrived, were in no condition to resist the invaders who imposed their languages, their values, and their religion. The indigenous people and the Africans brought as slaves to the New World adopted Christianity—albeit disguised under various forms of syncretism. Brazil is currently the biggest Catholic nation in the world. All this creates a special place for the region among underdeveloped nations. Many years ago, in this context, Latin America was considered as either the Western Third World or the Western region of the Third World. This was an ambiguous situation in which the colonized identified with the colonizer.

We should therefore not be surprised when, in 1982, the assembly of Latin American nations proposed, against the opposition of African and Asian countries that had only recently entered their post-colonial phase, that the UN should celebrate the journey of Christopher Columbus and the fifth centennial of the 1492 discovery. As distinct from Africa and Asia, isn't this continent a province of our civilization, admittedly distant at times, yet always recognizable, that overwhelmed, reclaimed, and absorbed the preexisting ethnic and cultural elements?

The “European” character of Latin American societies has had obvious consequences on the socioeconomic development of all countries concerned. The constant Western influence facilitates cultural and technical exchanges unhindered by linguistic or ideological obstacles. The waves of immigration from the Old World to the New multiplied the transfer of capital and knowledge. In the international hierarchy, Latin American nations are seen as a kind of “middle class,” positioned at an intermediate level. Among all these nations in transition, only one, Haiti, is designated as a less-advanced country [*pays les moins avancés*] (PMA), along with several other Asian and African comrades in misfortune, but with a per capita income that is equal to or double to levels in Chad or Ethiopia. Most of the large countries in Latin America are already semi-industrial economies—in which industry contributes 20–30 percent of the GNP—and the three main ones, Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina, are considered Brand New Industrialized Countries as well as “Emerging Markets.” Modernization indexes rank Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, and Venezuela above all African countries

and most of the Asian nations—except the city-states. And, in this context, both Argentina and Uruguay are grouped with developed countries.

Our research must go beyond vague definitions regarding this group of countries that are neither the West nor the Third World but which often appear to be a synthesis or a juxtaposition of both. If factors of homogeneity are taken into account, then we perceive that almost all the countries originally come from outside the subcontinent, especially if we rely on a limited interpretation of the meaning of Latin America that is essentially cultural and classic: Spain's and Portugal's old colonies in the New World.

...

CONCLUSION

There was a time when essays on Latin America were brought to a close with rose-tinted remarks about the future. These days, the perspective for the subcontinent involves light and shadow, uncertainties as well as assurances of a bright tomorrow. According to some studies conducted by the UN in 1991, one in every three Latin Americans lives in poverty—53 percent in the case of rural populations—and 18 percent (equivalent to the entire population of Mexico) live in extreme poverty. Who can still believe that “God is Brazilian,” or that, as is often heard in Argentina, being *criollo* means being Latin American? First of all, the New World implies a great deal of hope. Are we witnessing the erosion, perchance the decay of those high expectations? Has the prodigious future once promised to those distant lands become nothing but a memory? Has El Dorado been transformed into the “dismal tropics” or the “geography of starvation?” It is true that the promised land of thousands of European immigrants has become haunted by the “culture of poverty,” and the much-vaunted second independence is always just around the corner; development seems to be at a standstill, at the mercy of the fluctuation of the global economy.

The opulence of the USA—the neighbor to the north—is a challenge to the less fortunate America, since it provides a model that seems within easy reach yet permanently inaccessible. The technological gap deepens with regard to industrialized nations, and the possibility of catching up to them seems like a

mirage. After more than a century, questions still persist concerning the divergent destinies of each part of the Western Hemisphere. Both Latin-ness and Iberian Catholicism have been blamed. At a time of independence in the Caribbean, following the financial crises in Asia, the “Latin disease” is hardly a formula to be taken seriously by observers, and the elementary psychology of the people has taken the place of history and economic analysis. The various forms of colonization and insertion into the world economy taught more about the specificity of this Far-Western focus than culture-based approaches that convey nothing but their authors’ preconceived ideas. In terms of culture, the outermost limits of our geographical region are Western when both expectations and consumer models are taken into account. [Latin America] is located at the periphery of the developed universe because of its production and trade; in fact, one can’t help wondering whether this particular Third World hasn’t been held back by its own bastard-like illegitimacy.

. . .

SISYPHUS, THE LATIN AMERICAN?

After all, if being Latin American is not—as [Jorge Luis] Borges suggested in his cool appraisal before the Peronist dictatorship forced him to discover his “South American destiny”—belonging to an overseas extension of Europe, then what is it? Are neither the image of the *Patria Grande* (Great Fatherland) nor Bolivar’s dream enough to overcome the border-crossing difficulties that are part of any international trip to this America that still claims to be a Latin brotherhood? Is the Western background incomplete? Is the Third World flawed? In Africa and Asia, imitation and borrowing barely affect anything beyond the material civilization. A core of religion or culture resists all forms of glittering worldly seduction. In a “deduced continent,” on the other hand, everything is second-hand: gods and words. The daily spiritual imitation cannot avoid a repetition of the original *Malinchismo*; that is, a willing cooperation with the Conquistador.⁵ This is demonstrated by the success of the “American” schools throughout the continent and the importance attached to diplomas from Ivy League colleges. Central Americans are not the only ones who naively celebrate Halloween and Thanksgiving as though they are their own local holidays. Both Protestantism and the American

way of life became devastatingly popular in countries that fell under the spell of “post-national” capitalism, even before constructing their Nation-States. Miami has become the capital of the dollarized economies in an uncertain New World.

Nevertheless, if elites are experiencing a troubling identity crisis, Latin American countries as a whole enjoy a strong national sense of who they are. Nobody doubts that. But in fact, imitative development is also involved. That is why certain segments of the population have been admitted to the sphere inhabited by wealthy countries. The spread of sophisticated consumer models is the basic cause of a social heterogeneity that, though it has always existed, is more widespread than in the past and is sometimes reminiscent of the colonial situation. Those who benefit from a regressive re-distribution of national income live in synchronicity with the metropolis and are usually light-years ahead of their less fortunate fellow citizens and those living in the country’s more remote regions. Brazil is not the only State in which national symbols are paradoxically borrowed from the dominant races and classes. Humiliated and repressed almost everywhere, the Black and the Native are the standard-bearers of a national identity. This social tension, which is essentially racial, is both an expression of a crisis and a defining trait of Latin American societies.

The social divide mentioned above was partly responsible for the extraordinary rise in the popularity of the novel in the 1960s. The Latin American [literary] boom provided an outlet for the talent and creativity of the people and, mainly, for the restlessness of an intellectual class in search of its roots. In a way, it was expressed as an anti-Miami focused attitude.

Whether tellurian or magical, the Latin American novel—from [Ernesto] Sábato to [Gabriel] García Márquez, and from [Mario] Vargas Llosa to [Mario] Benedetti—was an expression of the troubled conscience of a generation trying to bridge the gap between popular culture and the world of the elites. It was the work of those who were looking for a deeper connection to their roots than the more frivolous interpretations of the local folklore. Some of them, tired of having to make a choice, believed that both the “revolution” and their lyrical creation offered a solution that could reconcile the culture and the people and would help to shape the nation. But they were all aware that they must avoid diluting the national character into a cosmopolitan, commercial mediocrity that passed for modernity.

1

André Siegfried, preface to Jacques Lauwe, *L'Amérique ibérique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), 2.

2

See R. P. Dore, "Latin America and Japan Compared," in J. J. Johnson, ed. *Continuity and Change in Latin America* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1962), 227–49.

3

After the appearance of the famous issue *Annales* 1949, no. 4, subtitled "À travers les Amérique Latines", this formula became overused by all who preferred to stress national characteristics while ignoring broad generalities. In this vein, see the *Cahiers des Amériques latines* published in Paris by the Institut des Hautes Études de l'Amérique latine, or the classic work by Marcel Niedergang, *Les vingt Amériques latines* (Paris: Aux Éditions du Seuil, 1962). [SEE DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1052740]

4

See as an example: Inter American Bank of Development, *Progrés économique et social en Amérique latine*, Washington, D.C., Annual Report.

5

Malintzin (La Malinche) was the daughter of an Aztec noble who became the collaborator and mistress of [Hernán] Cortez during the conquest. According to Mexican history of symbolism, she represents both a betrayal with regard to the invader and a racial mixture that fathered a mestizo country.

I.3

NUESTRA AMÉRICA, THE MULTI-HOMELAND

I.3.1 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1084678

LETTER FROM LOPE DE AGUIRRE, REBEL, TO KING PHILIP OF SPAIN

Lope de Aguirre, 1561

In this letter to King Philip II of Spain, Lope de Aguirre (c. 1510–1561)—a Spanish conquistador of Basque extraction who is best remembered for his extreme brutality and treachery in colonial Spanish America as well as for being one of the first Spaniards to identify himself as an American—condemns the monarch for his alleged cruelty to his vassals in the Americas and declares himself free of any allegiances to the Crown. After spending many years in Peru, in 1560 Aguirre joined Pedro de Ursúa’s expedition along the Marañón and Amazon rivers in search of El Dorado, the legendary city of gold. The following year, he participated in the killing of de Ursúa and eventually overthrew de Ursúa’s successor, Fernando de Guzmán. Aguirre and his followers also seized the island of Margarita and persuaded 186 captains and soldiers to sign an act proclaiming him prince of Peru, Chile, and Terra Firma (now Panama). Aguirre was captured eventually and killed in October 1561. The following translation is by Tom Holloway (History Department, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY), from the version “Carta de Lope de Aguirre, el Peregrino, al Rey Felipe II, hijo de Carlos el Invencible,” published in Spanish [A. Arellano, ed., *Documentos para la historia económica de Venezuela* (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1961)].

To King Philip, the Spaniard, son of Charles the Invincible:

From Lope de Aguirre, your lesser vassal, old Christian, of middling parents but fortunately of noble blood, native of the Basque country of the Kingdom of Spain, citizen of the town of Oñate.

IN MY YOUTH I CROSSED THE SEA to the land of Peru to gain fame, lance in hand, and to fulfill the obligation of all good men. In 24 years I have done you great service in Peru, in conquests of the Indian, in founding towns, and especially in battles and encounters fought in your name, always to the best of my power and ability, without requesting of your officials pay nor assistance, as can be seen in your royal records.

I firmly believe, most excellent King and lord, that to me, and my companions, you have been nothing but cruel and ungrateful. I also believe that those who write to you from this land deceive you, because of the great distance.

I demand of you, King, that you do justice and right by the good vassals you have in this land, even though I and my companions (whose names I will give later), unable to suffer further cruelties of your judges, viceroy, and governors, have resolved to obey you no longer. Denaturalizing ourselves from our land, Spain, we make the most cruel war against you that our power can sustain and endure. Believe, King and lord, we have done this because we can no longer tolerate the great oppression and unjust punishments of your ministers who, to make places for their sons and dependents have usurped and robbed our fame, life, and honor. It is a pity, King, the bad treatment you have given us.

I am lame in the right leg from the harquebus wounds I received in the battle of Chuquinga, fighting with marshal Alonzo de Alvarado, answering your call against Francisco Hernández Girón, rebel from your service as I and my companions are presently and will be until death, because we in this land now know how cruel you are, how you break your faith and your word, and thus we in this land give your promises less credence than to the books of Martin Luther.

Your viceroy, the marquis of Cañete, hanged Martin de Robles, a man distinguished in your service; and the brave Tomás Vásquez, conquistador of Peru; and the ill fated Alonso Dias, who worked more in the discoveries of this kingdom than the scouts of Moses in the desert; and Piedrahita, a good captain who fought many battles in your service. In Pucara, they gave you victory, and if they had not, Francisco Hernández would now be the King of Peru. . . .

Look here, King of Spain! Do not be cruel and ungrateful to your vassals, because while your father and you stayed in Spain without the slightest bother, your vassals, at the price of their blood and fortune, have given you all the kingdoms and holdings you have in these parts. Beware, King and lord, that you cannot take, under the title of legitimate king, any benefit from this land where you

risked nothing, without first giving due gratification to those who have labored and sweated in it.

I am certain there are few kings in hell because there are few kings, but if there were many none would go to heaven. Even in hell you would be worse than Lucifer, because you all thirst after human blood. But I don't marvel nor make much of you. For certain, I and my 200 arquebus-bearing *marañones*, conquistadores and nobles, swear solemnly to God that we will not leave a minister of yours alive, because I already know how far your clemency reaches. Today we consider ourselves the luckiest men alive, because we are in these parts of the Indies, with faith in God's commandments full and uncorrupted as Christians, maintaining all that is preached by the holy mother church of Rome, and we intend, though sinners in life, to achieve martyrdom through God's commandments.

Upon leaving the Amazon River, called the Marañón, on an island inhabited by Christians called Margarita, I saw some reports from Spain regarding the great schism of Lutherans there, which caused us to be frightened and surprised. In our company was a German named Monteverde [Grünberg], and I ordered him cut to pieces. Destiny rewards the prudent. Believe this, excellent Prince: Wherever we are, we ensure that all live perfectly in Christian faith.

The dissolution of the priests is so great in these parts that I think it would be well that they feel your wrath and punishment, because there is now none among them who sees himself as less than governor. Look here, King! Do not believe what they might tell you, because the tears that they shed before your royal person is so that they can come here to command. If you want to know the life they lead here, it is to deal with merchandise, seek and acquire temporal goods, and sell the Sacraments of the Church for a price. They are enemies of the poor, uncharitable, ambitious, gluttonous, arrogant, so that even the lowest of the priests tries to command and govern all these lands. Correct this, King and lord, because from these things and bad examples faith is not impressed on the natives. Furthermore, if this dissolution of the priests is not stopped, there will be no shortage of scandal.

...

The friars do not want to bury poor Indians, and they are lodged in the best estates in Peru. The life they lead is bitter and burdensome, as each one has as a penance a dozen young women in the kitchen, and as many boys engaged in

fishing, hunting partridges, and bringing fruit! They get a share of everything. In Christian faith I swear, King and lord, that if you do not remedy the evils of this land, divine punishment will come upon you. I tell you this to let you know the truth, even though I and mine neither expect nor want mercy from you. Oh how sad that a great Caesar and Emperor, your father, should conquer with the power of Spain the great Germany, and should spend so much money from these Indies discovered by us, and that you should not concern yourself with our old age and weariness enough to provide for our daily bread.

. . .

In the year 1559 the marquis of Cañete entrusted the expedition of the river of the Amazons to Pedro de Ursúa, Navarrese, or rather, Frenchman. He delayed the building of the boats until the year 1560 in the province of Motilones, in Peru. The Indians are called Motilones because they wear their hair shaved. These boats were made in the wet country, and upon launching most of them came to pieces. We made rafts, left the horses and supplies, and took off down the river at great risk to our persons. We then encountered the most powerful rivers of Peru, and it seemed to us to be a fresh water sea. We traveled 300 leagues from the point of launching.

This bad governor was so perverse and vicious and miserable that we could not tolerate it, and it was impossible to put up with his evil ways. Since I have a stake in the matter, excellent King and lord, I will say only that we killed him; certainly [in the briefest way]. We then raised a young gentleman from Seville named Don Fernando de Guzmán to be our king, and we made an oath to him as such, as your royal person will see from the signatures of all those who were in this, who remain in the island Margarita, in these Indies. They appointed me their field commander, and because I did not consent to their insults and evil deeds they tried to kill me, and I killed the new king, the captain of his guard, the lieutenant-general, his [butler], his chaplain, a woman in league against me, a knight of Rhodes, an admiral, two ensigns, and six other of their allies. It was my intention to carry this war through and die in it, for the cruelties your Ministers practice on us, and I again appointed captains and a sergeant major. They tried to kill me, and I hanged them.

We went along our route down the Marañón River while all these killing and bad events were taking place. It took us ten and a half months to reach the

mouth of the river, where it enters the sea. We traveled a good hundred days, and traveled 1,500 leagues. It is a large and fearsome river, with 80 leagues of fresh water at the mouth. It is very deep, and for 800 leagues along its banks it is deserted, with no towns, as your majesty will see from the true report we have made. Along the route we took there are more than 6,000 islands. God only knows how we escaped from such a fearsome lake! I advise you, King and lord, not to attempt to allow a fleet to be sent to this ill-fated river, because in Christian faith I swear, King and lord, that if a hundred thousand men come none will escape, because the stories are false and in this river there is nothing but despair, especially for these newly arrived from Spain.

. . . We pray to God our Lord that your fortune ever be increased against the Turk and the Frenchman, and all others who wish to make war on you in those parts. In these, God grant that we might obtain with your arms the reward by right due us, but which you have denied.

Son of your loyal Basque vassals, and I, rebel until death against you for your ingratitude.

LOPE DE AGUIRRE, THE WANDERER

I.3.2 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1052872

REPLY OF A SOUTH AMERICAN TO A GENTLEMAN OF THIS ISLAND (JAMAICA)

Simón Bolívar, 1815

South American emancipator and statesman Simón Bolívar (born in 1783 in present-day Venezuela, died in 1830) wrote this letter to Henry Cullen—an Englishman living in Jamaica and an admirer of his cause—in 1815, while seeking sanctuary in Haiti shortly after fleeing Cartagena because of a dispute with the government there. Bolívar wrote “Carta de Jamaica (contestación de un americano meridional a un caballero de esta isla)” in Spanish while living in Kingston, where he had recently relocated. Ostensibly, with this letter he intended to inform the English-speaking world of the situation in Latin America. Bolívar offers a caustic

prediction regarding the shattering of his plan for a politically-unified continent. The letter has been widely circulated since 1815; this English translation is by Lewis Bertrand [Simón Bolívar, Vicente Lecuna, and Harold A. Bierck, *Selected Writings of Bolivar* (New York: The Colonial Press, 1951)].

Kingston, Jamaica, September 6, 1815

MY DEAR SIR:

I hasten to reply to your most recent letter of the 29th which you did me the honor of sending to me and which I received with the greatest satisfaction.

Sensitive though I am of the interest you desire to take in the fate of my country and of your commiseration with her for the tortures she has suffered from the time of her discovery until the present at the hands of her destroyers, the Spaniards, I am no less sensitive to the obligation which your solicitous inquiries about the principal objects of American policy place upon me. Thus, I find myself in conflict between the desire to reciprocate your confidence, which honors me, and the difficulty of rewarding it, for lack of documents and books and because of my own limited knowledge of a land so vast, so varied, and so little known as the New World.

. . .

We are a young people. We inhabit a world apart, separated by broad seas. We are young in the ways of almost all the arts and sciences, although, in a certain manner, we are old in the ways of civilized society. I look upon the present state of America as similar to that of Rome after its fall. Each part of Rome adopted a political system conforming to its interest and situation or was led by the individual ambitions of certain chiefs, dynasties, or associations. But this important difference exists: those dispersed parts later reestablished their ancient nations, subject to the changes imposed by circumstances or events. But we scarcely retain a vestige of what once was; we are, moreover, neither Indian nor European, but a species midway between the legitimate proprietors of this country and the Spanish usurpers. In short, though Americans by birth, we derive our

rights from Europe and we have to assert these rights against the rights of the natives, and at the same time we must defend ourselves against the invaders. This places us in a most extraordinary and involved situation. Notwithstanding that it is a type of divination to predict the result of the political course which America is pursuing, I shall venture some conjectures which, of course, are colored by my enthusiasm and dictated by rational desires rather than by reasoned calculations.

. . .

The Americans have risen rapidly without previous knowledge of, and, what is more regrettable, without previous experience in public affairs, to enact upon the world stage the eminent roles of legislator, magistrate, minister of the treasury, diplomat, general, and every position of authority, supreme or subordinate, that comprises the hierarchy of a fully organized state.

When the French invasion, stopped only by the walls of Cadiz, routed the fragile governments of the Peninsula, we were left orphans. Prior to that invasion, we had been left to the mercy of a foreign usurper. Thereafter, the justice due us was dangled before our eyes, raising hopes that only came to naught. Finally, uncertain of our destiny, and facing anarchy for want of a legitimate, just, and liberal government, we threw ourselves headlong into the chaos of revolution. Attention was first given to obtaining domestic security against enemies within our midst, and then it was extended to the procuring of external security. Authorities were set up to replace those we had deposed, empowered to direct the course of our revolution and to take full advantage of the fortunate turn of events; thus we were able to found a constitutional government worthy of our century and adequate to our situation.

The first steps of all the new governments are marked by the establishment of juntas of the people. These juntas speedily draft rules for the calling of congresses, which produce great changes. Venezuela erected a democratic and federal government, after declaring for the rights of man. A system of checks and balances was established, and general laws were passed granting civil liberties, such as freedom of the press and others. In short, an independent government was created. New Granada [Colombia] uniformly followed the political institutions and reforms introduced by Venezuela, taking as the fundamental basis of

her constitution the most elaborate federal system ever to be brought into existence. Recently the powers of the chief executive have been increased, and he has been given all the powers that are properly his. I understand that Buenos Aires and Chile have followed this same line of procedure, but, as the distance is so great and documents are so few and the news reports so unreliable, I shall not attempt even briefly to sketch their progress.

Events in Mexico have been too varied, confused, swift, and unhappy to follow clearly the cause of that revolution. We lack, moreover, the necessary documentary information to enable us to form a judgment. The Independents of Mexico, according to our information, began their insurrection in September 1810, and a year later they erected a central government in Zitácuaro, where a national junta was installed under the auspices of Ferdinand VII, in whose name the government was carried on. The events of the war caused this junta to move from place to place; and, having undergone such modifications as events have determined, it may still be in existence.

It is reported that a generalissimo has been appointed and that he is the illustrious General [José María] Morelos, though others mention the celebrated General [Ignacio] Rayón. It is certain that one or both of these two great men exercise the supreme authority in that country. And recently a constitution has been created as a framework of government. In March 1812, the government, then residing in Zultepec [Tultepec], submitted a plan for peace and war to the Viceroy of Mexico that had been conceived with the utmost wisdom. It acclaimed the law of nations and established principles that are true and beyond question. The junta proposed that the war be fought as between brothers and countrymen; that it need not be more cruel than a war between foreign nations; that the rules of nations and of war, held inviolable even by infidels and barbarians, must be more binding upon Christians, who are, moreover, subject to one sovereign and to the same laws; that prisoners not be treated as guilty of *lèse majesté* [that is, of having committed crimes against the sovereign], nor those surrendering arms slain, but rather held as hostages for exchange; and that peaceful towns not be put to fire and sword. The Junta concluded its proposal by warning that if this plan were not accepted rigorous reprisal would be taken. This proposal was received with scorn: no reply was made to the national Junta. The original communications were publicly burned in the plaza in Mexico City by the executioner, and the Spaniards have

continued the war of extermination with their accustomed fury; meanwhile, the Mexicans and the other American nations have refrained from instituting a war to the death respecting Spanish prisoners. Here it can be seen that as a matter of expediency an appearance of allegiance to the King and even to the Constitution of the monarchy has been maintained. The national Junta, it appears, is absolute in the exercise of the legislative, executive, and judicial powers, and its membership is very limited.

Events in Costa Firme [Venezuela] have proved that institutions that are wholly representative are not suited to our character, customs, and present knowledge. In Caracas, party spirit arose in the societies, assemblies, and popular elections; these parties led us back into slavery. Thus, while Venezuela has been the American republic with the most advanced political institutions, she has also been the clearest example of the inefficacy of the democratic and federal system for our new-born states. In New Granada, the large number of excess powers held by the provincial governments and the lack of centralization in the general government has reduced that fair country to her present state. For this reason, her foes, though weak, have been able to hold out against all odds. As long as our countrymen do not acquire the abilities and political virtues that distinguish our brothers of the north, wholly popular systems, far from working to our advantage, will, I greatly fear, bring about our downfall. Unfortunately, these traits, to the degree in which they are required, do not appear to be within our reach. On the contrary, we are dominated by the vices that one learns under the rule of a nation like Spain, which has only distinguished itself in ferocity, ambition, vindictiveness, and greed.

It is harder, Montesquieu has written, to release a nation from servitude than to enslave a free nation. This truth is proven by the annals of all times, which reveal that most free nations have [not] been put under the yoke, but very few enslaved nations have recovered their liberty. Despite the convictions of history, South Americans have made efforts to obtain liberal, even perfect, institutions, doubtless out of that instinct to aspire to the greatest possible happiness, which, common to all men, is bound to follow in civil societies founded on the principles of justice, liberty, and equality. But are we capable of maintaining in proper balance the difficult charge of a republic? Is it conceivable that a newly emancipated people can soar to the heights of liberty, and, unlike

Icarus, neither have its wings melt nor fall into an abyss? Such a marvel is inconceivable and without precedent. There is no reasonable probability to bolster our hopes.

More than anyone, I desire to see America fashioned into the greatest nation in the world, greatest not so much by virtue of her area and wealth as by her freedom and glory. Although I seek perfection for the government of my country, I cannot persuade myself that the New World can, at the moment, be organized as a great republic. Since it is impossible, I dare not desire it; yet much less do I desire to have all America a monarchy because this plan is not only impracticable but also impossible. Wrongs now existing could not be righted, and our emancipation would be fruitless. The American states need the care of paternal governments to heal the sores and wounds of despotism and war. The parent country, for example, might be Mexico, the only country fitted for the position by her intrinsic strength, and without such power there can be no parent country. Let us assume it were to be the Isthmus of Panama, the most central point of this vast continent. Would not all parts continue in their lethargy and even in their present disorder? For a single government to infuse life into the New World; to put into use all the resources for public prosperity; to improve, educate, and perfect the New World, that government would have to possess the authority of a god, much less the knowledge and virtues of mankind.

The party spirit that today keeps our states in constant agitation would assume still greater proportions were a central power established, for that power—the only force capable of checking this agitation—would be elsewhere. Furthermore, the chief figures of the capitals would not tolerate the preponderance of leaders at the metropolis, for they would regard these leaders as so many tyrants. Their resentments would attain such heights that they would compare the latter to the hated Spaniards. Any such monarchy would be a misshapen colossus that would collapse of its own weight at the slightest disturbance.

Mr. [Dominique, Abbot of] Pradt has wisely divided America into fifteen or seventeen mutually independent states, governed by as many monarchs. I am in agreement on the first suggestion, as America can well tolerate seventeen nations; as to the second, though it could easily be achieved, it would serve no purpose. Consequently, I do not favor American monarchies. My reasons are these: The well-understood interest of a republic is limited to the matter of its

preservation, prosperity, and glory. Republicans, because they do not desire powers that represent a directly contrary viewpoint, have no reason for expanding the boundaries of their nation to the detriment of their own resources, solely for the purpose of having their neighbors share a liberal constitution. They would not acquire rights or secure any advantage by conquering their neighbors, unless they were to make them colonies, conquered territory, or allies, after the example of Rome. But such thought and action are directly contrary to the principles of justice that characterize republican systems; and, what is more, they are in direct opposition to the interests of their citizens, because a state, too large by itself or together with its dependencies, ultimately falls into decay. Its free government becomes a tyranny. The principles that should preserve the government are disregarded, and finally it degenerates into despotism. The distinctive feature of small republics is permanence: that of large republics varies, but always with a tendency toward empire. Almost all small republics have had long lives. Among the larger republics, only Rome lasted for several centuries, for its capital was a republic. The rest of her dominions were governed by driven laws and institutions.

. . .

From the foregoing, we can draw these conclusions: The American provinces are fighting for their freedom, and they will ultimately succeed. Some provinces as a matter of course will form federal and some central republics; the larger areas will inevitably establish monarchies, some of which will fare so badly that they will disintegrate in either present or future revolutions. To consolidate a great monarchy will be no easy task, but it will be utterly impossible to consolidate a great republic.

It is a grandiose idea to think of consolidating the New World into a single nation, united by pacts into a single bond. It is reasoned that, as these parts have a common origin, language, customs, and religion, they ought to have a single government to permit the newly formed states to unite in a confederation. But this is not possible. Actually, America is separated by climatic differences, geographic diversity, conflicting interests, and dissimilar characteristics. How beautiful it would be if the Isthmus of Panama could be for us what the Isthmus of Corinth was for the Greeks! Wish to God that some day we may have the good

fortune to convene there an august assembly of representatives of republics, kingdoms, and empires to deliberate upon the high interests of peace and war with the nations of the other three-quarters of the globe. This type of organization may come to pass in some happier period of our regeneration. But any other plan, such as that of Abbot [Charles Irenée Castel of] St. Pierre, who in laudable delirium conceived the idea of assembling a European congress to decide the fate and interests of those nations, would be meaningless.

Among the popular and representative systems, I do not favor the federal system. It is over-perfect, and it demands political virtues and talents far superior to our own. For the same reason I reject a monarchy that is part aristocracy and part democracy, although with such a government England has achieved much fortune and splendor. Since it is not possible for us to select the most perfect and complete form of government, let us avoid falling into demagogic anarchy or monocratic tyranny. These opposite extremes would only wreck us on similar reefs of misfortune and dishonor; hence, we must seek a balance between them. I say: Do not adopt the best system of government, but the one that is most likely to succeed.

...

I am, Sir,

SIMÓN BOLÍVAR

I.3.3 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1052895

THE LATIN AMERICAN MULTI-HOMELAND

José María Torres Caicedo, 1864–65

Colombian statesman José María Torres Caicedo (1830–1889) probably wrote *La multipatria latinoamericana*, the book from which these excerpts are taken, on the occasion of the fourth Inter-American Conference held in Lima in 1864–65. At that time, Latin American intellectuals promoted the notion of Pan Americanism while many of the newly independent

countries in the region were, ironically, at war with each other. Torres Caicedo writes of the impossibility of “federating” the Latin American republics during their infancy. Instead, he recommends the formation of an American League. That is to say, he proposes a confederation of sovereign states that would belong to what he refers to as a Multi-Homeland (*la multipatria*). *La multipatria latinoamericana* was originally published in Paris [Rosa, Bouret et Cie., 1865]; these translated excerpts (chapters II, III, and XV) are from a more recent edition [Antonio José Rivadeneira Vargas, ed., *La multipatria latinoamericana*, Colección Lecturas de Bogotá (Bogota: Academia Colombiana de Historia, Instituto Distrital de Cultura y Turismo, 1989), 7–17; 96–103].

II

CONFEDERATION AND FEDERATION—WHAT THE FEDERATION HAS BEEN IN ANGLO-SAXON AMERICA AND IN LATIN AMERICA

We have always fought the system of administrative centralization because if it exists, as [Frédéric de] Lamennais says: fulfillment is at the center and paralysis in the extremes. We favor the establishment of a municipal regime that allows all sections to fully exercise their rights, which grants them the free handling of their interests. Just as we oppose administrative centralization, we also fight against the federal system.

To federate is to unite, *foederis*, and where there is no disunity there is no need to unite. In Anglo-Saxon America, New England, Pennsylvania, New York, settled by Puritans, by Quakers, by business companies, etc., all people lived for many years under the rule of different laws, traditions, and customs. When they separated from the Metropolis, the different sections that constituted Anglo-Saxon America had to choose between two alternatives: to lead separate, absolutely independent lives and be exposed to struggles between States, thus appearing weak to the outer world; or else to unite under one non-national government, allowing each state to keep its own way of being, which they had exercised during several centuries of existence. Therefore, the decision was made to join those separate parts, to FEDERATE: *E pluribus unum* [out of many, one]. Anglo-Saxon America acted according to the law of necessity, thus following the etymological and historic meaning of the word to *federate*.

In Latin American States, all colonized in the same manner, ruled by identical laws, traditions, religion, what can be achieved by a federation that moves in the opposite direction. . . ? Unity becomes division, it becomes unhinged. There is no *E pluribus unum*, but *ex uno plures* [out of one, many].

The innumerable, small States of the ancient Germanic Roman Holy Empire were recast as the Rhine Federation in 1806, and took their current shape in 1815. Today, what do the diverse German peoples aspire to? To a union, to a centralized government with a decentralized administration.

If there is a part of the world where needs, traditions, and even long-held hatreds justify the acceptance of the federative system, it would be Italy; and we can well see how it has been struggling, with heroic perseverance, for national unity.

What were France and Spain before that great political unity which they have today was established? History teaches us, however, that these two nations have reached the excess of centralization. What was the motive that compromised the independence of Venezuela, establishing the bloody dictatorship of [José Tomás] Boves? How did the first civil uprisings start in New Granada at the dawn of its independence, and what has happened to that Republic since 1857? Why have there been so many scandals within the Latin American States? How did Mexico end up where it is today?

What political principle did [Juan Manuel de] Rosas proclaim, and why has so much blood been spilled in Argentina? Ask all those questions of the federalists and the entire world. Societies progressively marched from feudalism toward the constitution of a sovereign power held by kings, then by barons and kings, later by the royal power and the representative Chambers. The centralization in Europe has many defects; but the system is unquestionably good, useful, and necessary.

Federation in the countries of the New World spurs infinite ambition, incites local hatreds, weakens the love for a common homeland, creates obstacles to the unified action required of any government, increases sectional expenses thus increasing national expenses, keeps those newly created states in a constant uproar, organizes permanent local dictatorships. . . . Everywhere we see, as a sign of progress and civilization, the adoption of the same codes, currency, weights and measures, etc. In New Granada (today the United States of Colombia), that

unity has been destroyed, and each former province, now a State, can and has adopted its own codes, civil as well as penal, business, etc., and has even denied extradition either from State to State or from Province to Province of convicted criminals who have committed the most horrendous crimes.

It is evidently not by adopting that system of political bosses, weakening the various political entities, turning each Province into a sovereign State, that the basis for creating a great American Confederation or League is achieved.

We repeat: the establishment of a wide and liberal municipal system, which is the basis of freedom, is the opposite of the federative system applied to Hispanic America.

III

CONVULSIONS IN LATIN AMERICA, A NATURAL OUTCOME DURING THE INFANCY OF NATIONS

People ask: What can Latin America do when those Republics have such an agitated existence and live in the midst of the convulsions of civil wars?

Let us repeat what was written elsewhere:

It is blatantly unfair to blame so acrimoniously the Republics of Latin America for their constant political convulsions when the old European nations are either at war or under an armed peace regime. The young Latin American Nations struggle and will keep on struggling to constitute themselves definitively, to find their center of gravity, to establish a solid and permanent harmony between rights and obligations, which is what characterizes free nations and fair governments.

But what do European powers, so advanced in civilization and age, do? When they are not subject to the horrors of civil war, which happens frequently, they destroy each other, or the stronger countries impose their laws on the weaker ones, thus shattering world peace—shedding their people's blood—violating principles of morality and justice, and delaying the development of material goods. The latter constitute the essential condition for the supremacy of freedom, undemanding and easy life, delaying the fusion of races and the rule of universal harmony. At least the struggles of American nations originate, in most cases, for the supremacy of a principle. They start in order to establish certain bases

for social organization, proving to a certain extent the vitality of their population, as well as their individuals, when they become more fully developed. But in Europe, those struggles exist, in general, among the strong nations that want to plunder the weak ones, competing for their territory, making their future existence impossible.

European interventions in America have those same aims.

Although civil wars in the Latin American States have some terrible traits, they are also noble and generous: they tend to elevate and consolidate in virgin areas of America, the temple of Order, Liberty, and Justice. European wars, wars between two States or among many at the same time, are wars spurred by ambition; their objective is almost always greed, and their impulse is the need to dominate. There are very few which, if not under the impulse of the law (since maintaining the balance of forces is a major aim), are at least not threats to the law: such as the case of Crimea [1853–56] and the glorious one of 1859. That one had only one defect: it solved nothing; the latter stopped in the middle of the road, and what is happening today proves that the evil could have been stopped at its source, and it was left standing instead.

XV

BASES PROPOSED BY THE AUTHOR OF THIS ARTICLE FOR THE FORMATION OF AN AMERICAN LEAGUE—CONCLUSION

As a final note to this article, we beg to reproduce here the general bases for unity which we published in 1861, which had the honor of being included in many European publications and almost all newspapers in Latin America.

We stated on February 15, 1861:

Today more than ever we need those Republics:

- To form a large Confederation in order to join forces and resources, and present to the world a more respectable presence.

In order to accomplish the above, the following, among other conditions, will have to be met:

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- An annual meeting of a Latin American assembly. The citizenship of the children of all those States, who should be considered citizens of a common homeland, and enjoy in all of those republics the same civil and political rights;
 - The adoption of a definite principle regarding territorial boundaries: starting with the *uti possidetis [juris]* of 1810;¹ as an additional basis, admitting natural boundaries without excluding territorial compensations when an equitable delineation of disputed boundaries is required, but when it is more convenient for one State to own the territory as opposed to the other;
 - The creation of a kind of American Zollverein (Customs Union),² more liberal than the German:
 - The adoption of the same codes, weights, measures, and currencies;
 - The establishment of a supreme tribunal which decides amicably questions that arise between two or more confederate republics and which, whenever called for, enforces its sentences by force; a liberal system in the matter of postal conventions; establishing tax-exempt importation of dailies and periodicals, brochures, and books;
 - The admission in substance, as valid and compulsory, of any public or private act in whichever of the confederate Republics;
 - The establishment of a federal system concerning commercial matters, without excluding coastal shipping;
 - The establishment of a uniform educational system, making elementary education free and compulsory;
 - The consecration of the healthy principle of the freedom of conscience and tolerance of religious creeds;

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- The consecration of contemporary principles as regards extradition of convicted criminals: enforcing extradition in cases of serious crimes, never for political crimes;
 - The abolition of passports; the abolition of blockage systems; the abolition of the Letters of Trademarks, except in wars which may erupt among one or some of those Republics, or all those confederated, and some or several foreign powers;
 - The establishment of a contingent of troops and resources for common defense;
 - The establishment of the manner and terms leading to the declaration of *casus foederis* [case of the alliance];
 - The adoption of the same principles in the matter of consular and business conventions to be held with foreign nations, and the nationality of the children of foreigners in those countries;
 - The admission, not only of the principle that “the flag covers ownership” but also that foreign merchandise is free under enemy flag, except for war smuggling, limiting the articles considered under such contraband;

In this Organization it should be decided, making such decisions compulsory, that no Latin American state can cede any part of its territory, nor appeal for the protection of any outside power;

Within this organization, it should be decided that Latin American states must present, through their Ministers, a collective Note to the several European cabinets and to Washington, appealing for the application of the principle of saving weak nations, a principle recognized by all civilized nations, that a legitimate government is not responsible for the damage caused to foreigners by its factions, and that a foreigner, upon entering another country, is *de facto* subject to the ordinary laws and tribunals of that country, even more so if that individual establishes residency within it. It would also be necessary to present another collective Note against the untenable system of indemnity without just cause, as well as

the practice introduced in some States, of not granting credit except to the diplomatic agents sent to America, in spite of the irrefutable documents often presented against claims by those agents.

It would be a requisite to collect all claims unjustly made or unduly paid by Latin American States; to publish in London or Brussels a paper in French advocating the rights and interest of those Republics; to make public the benefit to its industry and commerce; to favor immigration, etc.

...

In short, the Latin American Congress assembled today in Lima, has a tall order to accomplish, and we have no doubt that immense benefit will be derived from the deliberations of that organization, whose members are inspired by patriotism, prudence, and a spirit of great fairness.

It is now necessary to fight against the ideas of a few though fierce extremists and not allow such false and absurd ideas to take hold, ideas which tend to establish a marked opposition between America and Europe. Such ideas are anachronistic in this century when we talk so much about fraternity and solidarity; they are absurd vis-à-vis the press and commerce which unite and tighten connections. What is bad for one is bad for all.

America has already been conquered by civilization, and it needs old Europe which, despite its age has arts, industry, and science. Europe, in turn, needs America, which opens its markets, offers raw materials, offers fruitfulness and innovations unknown in Europe, as well as a hospitable population that is intelligent and generous, and advances in the middle of youthful convulsions; because it starts with confidence in the field of science, literature, and industry, as it opens its ports to all the nations of the world.

We will repeat here the statements we made in another article, which Mr. Carlos Calvo [SEE DOCUMENT 1.2.1] did us the honor of quoting: "Latin America needs the intervention of Europe, not an armed intervention, but the noble and beneficial intervention which includes commerce, industry, the diffusion of ideas, and immigration. Latin America needs civilized Europe, and those States have shown to be as open to foreigners as any other nation in the world."

We will close by quoting a statement by [Immanuel] Kant: "One of the conditions for enduring peace consists in the fact that the people's rights are based on a federation of Free States. A right can only be confirmed and endure in

a stable manner within a General Assembly of independent States, similar to the individuals who constitute each separate State.”

Paris, January 1, 1865

1

Uti possidetis juris is a principle in international law which holds that disputed properties remain in the hands of their final possessor at the end of a conflict. *Uti possidetis juris* 1810 is a provision cited in some Latin American constitutions that asserts that official Spanish rule ended in 1810 and that the boundaries demarcating the former colonies should be preserved. See Carlos A. Parodi, *The Politics of South American Boundaries* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 202), 5–6.—Ed.

2

The Zollverein or German Customs Union was established in 1819 by a coalition of German states that came together to manage customs policies and to protect and promote their respective economic interests.—Ed.

I.3.4 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 839109

OUR AMERICA

José Martí, 1891

In his seminal essay “Nuestra América,” José Martí (1853–1895)—Cuban-born independence leader, essayist, and poet—echoes Torres Caicedo’s argument [SEE DOCUMENT I.3.3] that Latin American nations share a common culture. During his long exile in New York City, from 1880 to 1895, Martí mobilized the Cuban community to revolt while lobbying simultaneously to oppose the U.S. annexation of the island. This essay was written in January 1891, exactly one year before he established the Cuban Revolutionary Party. Martí hoped that, with this group, he could gain independence for Cuba and Puerto Rico. The essay was first published on January 10, 1891, in *La Revista ilustrada de Nueva York* [(New York)] and subsequently on January 30, 1891, in *El Partido Liberal*, published in Mexico City. This translation is based on the original version.

FOR IN WHAT LANDS CAN MEN TAKE MORE PRIDE than in our long-suffering American republics raised up among the silent Indian masses by the bleeding arms of a hundred apostles, to the sound of battle between the book and processional candle? Never in history have such advanced and united nations been forged in so short a time from such disorganized elements. The presumptuous man feels that the earth was made to serve as his pedestal, because he happens to have a facile pen or colorful speech, and he accuses his native land of being worthless and beyond redemption because its virgin jungles fail to provide him with a constant means of traveling over the world, driving Persian ponies and lavishing champagne like a tycoon. The incapacity does not lie with the emerging country in quest of suitable forms and utilitarian greatness; it lies rather with those who attempt to rule nations of a unique and violent character by means of laws inherited from four centuries of freedom in the United States and nineteen centuries of monarchy in France. A decree by [Alexander] Hamilton does not halt the charge of the plainsman's horse. A phrase by [Abbé Emmanuel-Joseph] Sieyès does nothing to quicken the stagnant blood of the Indian race. To govern well, one must see things as they are. And the able governor in America is not the one who knows how to govern the Germans or the French; he must know the elements that make up his own country and how to bring them together, using methods and institutions originating within the country, to reach that desirable state where each man can attain self-realization and all may enjoy the abundance that Nature has bestowed in everyone in the nation to enrich with their toil and defend with their lives. Government must originate in the country. The spirit of government must be that of the country; its structure must conform to rules appropriate to the country. Good government is nothing more than the balance of the country's natural elements.

That is why in America the imported book has been conquered by the natural man. Natural men have conquered learned and artificial men. The native half-breed has conquered the exotic Criollo. The struggle is not between civilization and barbarity, but between false erudition and Nature. The natural man is good, and he respects and rewards superior intelligence as long as his humility is not turned against him, or he is not offended by being disregarded—something the natural man never forgives, prepared as he is to forcibly regain the respect of whoever has wounded his pride or threatened his interests. It is by reconciling these disdained native elements that the tyrants of America have climbed to

power and have fallen as soon as they betrayed them. Republics have paid with oppression for their inability to recognize the true elements of their countries, to derive from them the right kind of government, and to govern accordingly. In a new nation a government means a creator.

In nations composed of both cultured and uncultured elements, the uncultured will govern because it is their habit to attack and resolve doubts with their fists in cases where the cultured have failed in the art of governing. The uncultured masses are lazy and timid in the realm of intelligence, and they want to be governed well. But if the government hurts them, they shake it off and govern themselves. How can the universities produce governors if not a single university in America teaches the rudiments of the art of government, the analysis of elements peculiar to the peoples of America? The young go out into the world wearing Yankee or French spectacles, hoping to govern a people they do not know. In the political race, entrance should not go for the best ode, but for the best study of the political factors of one's country. Newspapers, universities, and schools should encourage the study of the country's pertinent components. To know them is sufficient, without mincing words; for whoever brushes aside even a part of the truth, whether through intention or oversight, is doomed to fall. The truth is built without it. It is easier to resolve our problem knowing its components than to resolve them without knowing them. Along comes the natural man, strong and indignant, and he topples all the justice accumulated from books because he has not been governed in accordance with the obvious needs of the country. Knowing is what counts. To know one's country and govern it with that knowledge is the only way to free it from tyranny. The European university must bow to the American university. The history of America, from the Incas to the present, must be taught in clear detail and to the letter, even if the archons of Greece are overlooked. Our Greece must take priority over the Greece which is not ours. We need it more. Nationalist statement must replace foreign statement. Let the world be grafted onto our republics, but the trunk must be our own. And let the vanquished pedant hold his tongue, for there are no lands in which a man may take greater pride than in our long-suffering American republics.

With the rosary as our guide, our heads white and our bodies mottled, both Indians and Criollos, we fearlessly entered the world of nations. We set out to conquer freedom under the banner of the Virgin. A priest, a few lieutenants, and a woman raised the Republic of Mexico onto the shoulders of the Indians.

A few heroic students, instructed in French liberty by a Spanish cleric, made Central America rise in revolt against Spain under a Spanish general. In monarchic garb emblazoned with the sun, the Venezuelans to the north and the Argentinians to the south began building nations. When the heroes clashed and the continent was about to rock, one of them, and not the lesser, handed the reins to the other. And since heroism in times of peace is rare because it is not as glorious as in times of war, it is easier to govern when feelings are exalted and united than after a battle, when divisive, arrogant, exotic, or ambitious thinking emerges. The forces routed in the epic struggle—with the feline cunning of the species, and using the weight of realities—were undermining the new structure that comprised both the rough-and-ready, unique regions of our half-breed America and the silk-stockinged and frock-coated people of Paris beneath the flag of freedom and reason borrowed from nations skilled in the arts of government. The hierarchical constitution of the colonies resisted the democratic organization of the republics. The cravatted capitals left their country boots in the vestibule. The bookworm redeemers failed to realize that the revolution succeeded because it came from the soul of the nation; they had to govern with that soul and not without or against it. America began to suffer, and still suffers, from the tiresome task of reconciling the hostile and discordant elements it inherited from the despotic and perverse colonizer and the imported methods and ideas which have been retarding logical government because they are lacking in local realities. Thrown out of gear for three centuries by a power which denied men the right to use their reason, the continent disregarded or closed its ears to the unlettered throngs that helped bring it to redemption and embarked on a government based on reason—a reason belonging to all for the common good, not the university brand of reason over the peasant brand. The problem of independence did not lie in a change of forms but in change of spirit.

It was imperative to find common cause with the oppressed, in order to secure a new system opposed to the ambitions and governing habits of the oppressors. The tiger, frightened by gunfire, returns at night to his prey. He dies with his eyes shooting flames and his claws unsheathed. He cannot be heard coming because he approaches with velvet tread. When the prey awakens, the tiger is already upon it. The colony lives on the republic, and our America is saving itself from its enormous mistakes—the pride of its capital cities, the blind triumph of a scorned peasantry, the excessive influx of foreign ideas and formulas, the wicked

and un-political disdain for the aboriginal race—because of the higher virtue, enriched with necessary blood, or a republic struggling against a colony. The tiger lurks again behind every tree, lying in wait at every turn. He will die with his claws unsheathed and his eyes shooting flames.

But “these countries will be saved,” as announced by the Argentinean [President Bernardino] Rivadavia, whose only sin was being a gentleman in these rough-and-ready times. A man does not sheathe a machete in a silken scabbard, nor can he lay aside the short lance merely because he is angered and stands at the door of [Agustín de] Iturbide’s Congress, “demanding that the fair-haired one be named emperor.” These countries will be saved because a genius for moderation, found in the serene harmony of Nature, seems to prevail in the continent of light, where there emerges a new, real man schooled for these real times in the critical philosophy of guesswork and phalanstery that saturated the previous generation.

We were a phenomenon with the chest of an athlete, the hands of a dandy, and the brain of a child. We were masqueraders in English breeches, Parisian vest, North American jacket, and Spanish cap. The Indian hovered near us in silence, and went off to the hills to baptize his children. The Negro was seen pouring out the songs of his heart at night, alone and unrecognized among the rivers and wild animals. The peasant, the creator, turned in blind indignation against the disdainful city, against his own child. As for us, we were nothing but epaulets and professors’ gowns in countries that came into the world wearing hemp sandals and headbands. It would have been the mark of genius to couple the headband and the professors’ gown with the founding fathers’ generosity and courage, to rescue the Indian, to make a place for the competent Negro, to fit liberty to the body of those who rebelled and conquered for it. We were left with the hearer [the supreme judge], the general, the scholar, and the *sinecured*. The angelic young, as if caught in the tentacles of an octopus, lunged heavenward, only to fall back, crowned with clouds in sterile glory. The native, driven by instinct, swept away the golden staffs of office in blind triumph. Neither the Europeans nor the Yankees could provide the key to the Spanish American riddle. Hate was attempted, and every year the countries amounted to less. Exhausted by the senseless struggle between the book and the lance, between reason and the processional candle, between the city and the country, weary of the impossible rule by rival urban cliques over the natural nation, tempestuous or inert by turns, we almost unconsciously try to love. Nations stand up and greet one another.

“What are we?” is the mutual question, and little by little they furnish answers. When a problem arises in Cojímar [Cuba], they do not seek its solution in Danzig [Gdansk, Poland]. The frockcoat are still Frenchmen, but thought begins to be American. The youth of America are rolling up their sleeves, digging their hands in the dough, and making it rise with the sweat of their brows. They realize that there is too much imitation and that creation holds the key to salvation. “Create” is the password of this generation. The wine is made from plantain, but even if it turns sour, it is our own wine! That a country’s form of government must be in keeping with its natural elements is a foregone conclusion. Absolute ideas must take relative forms if they are not to fail because of an error in form. Freedom, to be viable, has to be sincere and complete. If a republic refuses to open its arms to all and move ahead with all, it dies. The tiger within sneaks in through the crack; so does the tiger from without. The general holds back his cavalry to a pace that suits his infantry, for if his infantry is left behind, the cavalry will be surrounded by the enemy. Politics and strategy are one. Nations should live in an atmosphere of self-criticism because it is healthy, but always with one heart and one mind. Reach down to the unhappy and lift them up in your arms! Thaw out frozen America with the fire of your hearts! Make the natural blood of the nations course vigorously through their veins! The new Americans are on their feet, saluting each other from nation to nation; the eyes of the laborers shining with joy. The natural statesman arises, schooled in the direct study of Nature. He reads to apply his knowledge, not to imitate. Economists study the problems at their point of origin. Speakers begin a policy of moderation. Playwrights bring native characters to the stage. Academies discuss practical subjects. Poetry shears off its Zorrilla-like¹ mane and hangs its red vest on the glorious tree. Selective and sparkling prose is filled with ideas. In the Indian republics, the governors are learning Indian.

America is escaping all its dangers. Some of the republics are still beneath the sleeping octopus, but others, under the law of averages, are draining their land with sublime and furious haste, as if to make up for centuries lost. Still others, forgetting that [President Benito] Juárez went about in a carriage drawn by mules, hitch their carriages to the wind, their coachmen soap bubbles. Poisonous luxury, the enemy of freedom, corrupts the frivolous and opens the door to the foreigner. In others, where independence is threatened, an epic spirit heightens their manhood. Still others spawn an army capable of devouring them in

voracious wars. But perhaps our America is running another risk that does not come from itself but from the difference in origins, methods, and interests between the two halves of the continent, and the time is near at hand when an enterprising and vigorous people who scorn and ignore our America will nevertheless approach it and demand a close relationship. And since strong nations, self-made by law and shotgun, love strong nations; since the time of madness and ambition—from which North America may be freed by the predominance of the purest elements in its blood, or on which it may be launched by its vindictive and sordid masses, its tradition of expansion, or the ambition of some powerful leader—is not so near at hand, even to the most timorous eye, that there is no time for the test of discreet and unwavering pride that could confront and dissuade it; since its good name as a republic in the eyes of the world's perceptive nations puts upon North America a restraint that cannot be taken away by childish provocations or pompous arrogance or parricidal discords among our American nations—the pressing need of our America is to show itself as it is, one in spirit and intent, swift conquerors of a suffocating past, stained only by the enriching blood drawn from the scars left upon us by our masters. The scorn of our formidable neighbor who does not know us is our America's greatest danger. And since the day of the visit is near, it is imperative that our neighbor know us, and soon, so that it will not scorn us. Through ignorance it might even come to lay hands on us. Once it does know us, it will remove its hands out of respect. One must have faith in the best in men and distrust the worst. One must allow the best to be shown so that it reveals and prevails over the worst. Nations should have a pillory for whoever stirs up useless hate, and another for whoever fails to tell them the truth in time.

There can be no racial animosity, because there are no races. The theorist and feeble thinkers string together and warm over the bookshelf races which the well-disposed observer and the fair-minded traveler vainly seek in the justice of Nature where man's universal identity springs forth from triumphant love and the turbulent hunger for life. The soul, equal and eternal, emanates from bodies of different shapes and colors. Whoever foments and spreads antagonism and hate between the races sins against humanity. But as nations take shape among other different nations, there is condensation of vital and individual characteristics of thought, habit, expansion and conquest, vanity and greed which could—from the latent state of national concern, and in the period of internal disorder, or

with the rapidity with which the country's character has been accumulating—be turned into a serious threat for the weak and isolated neighboring countries, declared by the strong country to be inferior and perishable. The thought is father to the deed. And one must not attribute, through a provincial antipathy, a fatal and inborn wickedness to the continents' fair-skinned nation simply because it does not speak our language, nor see the world as we see it, nor resemble us in its political defects, so different from ours, nor favorably regard the excitable, dark-skinned people, or look charitably, from its still uncertain eminence, upon those less favored by history, who climb the road of republicanism by heroic stages. The self-evident facts of the problem should not be obscured, because the problem can be resolved, for peace for centuries to come, by appropriate study and by tacit and immediate union in the continental spirit. With a single voice the hymn is already being sung; the present generation is carrying industrious America along the road enriched by its sublime fathers; from Rio Grande to the Straits of Magellan, the Great Semí astride its condor, spread the seed of the new America over the romantic nations of the continent and the sorrowful islands of the sea!

1

This is a reference to the Spaniard José Zorrilla y Moral (1817–1893), a popular Romantic poet and playwright. —Ed.

I.3.5 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 833254

LATIN AMERICA—EVILS OF ORIGIN

Manoel Bomfim, 1905

The following passage is excerpted from the summary to the book *A América Latina. Males de Origem* by Brazilian physician and historian Manoel Bomfim (1868–1932). When it was published in 1905 [(Rio de Janeiro: H. Garnier, Livreiro-Editor)], *Males de Origem* was the cause of a tremendous argument between Bomfim—who was a staunch defender of Brazil's historical miscegenation—and the well-known literary critic Sílvio Romero, who argued for the

country's "whitening" as a means of remedying its underdevelopment. The current translation is derived from the centenary edition of the book, with forewords by Darcy Ribeiro, Franklin de Oliveira, and Azevedo Amaral [*A América Latina: Males de Origen* (São Paulo: Topbooks, 2005), 351–59].

SUMMARY

Given the pace and directions of civilization's advance, societies have little choice: either they participate in the general movement, or are crushed. Latin America is threatened; inundated by civilization, and this flood will be a threat and a danger if Latin America does not seek out, through a conscious and methodical effort, the only possible salvation: to move in the direction of progress, join the movement, presenting herself to the world as vigorous and modern, in control of herself, as one decided to live free among the free. Old evils oppose themselves to this progress: it is necessary to know them, and to know their essential causes. The nature and the origin of these evils will indicate to us their remedy. We should reject dissertations and precepts formulated at a distance; we should send packing doctors and other oracles—economists and sociologists who never tire of giving absurd advice, of proposing doctrines about us; let us forget them and return to the fundamental issue.

Let us turn to these peoples, abandoned, backward, and ineffectual. Let us observe them, sad and resigned, or rebellious and agitated—but always miserable, in the midst of a mild and abundant nature. This is enough to confirm the conviction that the evil is fundamental, organic, and comes from our inheritance, from our social and political education, from the very conditions of our formation: the parasitic oppression which from the very beginning pit the colonial populations against each other, leading them to this near incapacity for progress, sinking them in ignorance, confusing them, perverting them, as they were born and developing. It is sufficient to observe—if one knows how to penetrate the mist of appearances, overlooking the discrepant details—in order to discover the solid foundation of the true causes. This observation is difficult and, more often than not, incomplete. A society is too vast a phenomenon; in order to dominate it in all its manifestations, it is necessary that the spirit overcome its nature, never

allowing itself to be tempted or taken in by a series of mere effects. Nevertheless, this temptation is sometimes irresistible, be it in life or in nature itself.

. . .

Let us contemplate these societies once again as they appear to us now and as they manifest themselves in history. They were born of the assault on this continent and from the violent and transitory settlement of the Iberian adventurers, devoured by greed, thirsty for riches, living for many centuries by warfare and depredation. The colonies of the Spaniards and Portuguese had no other reason for being. They dreamed of conquests in order to gain treasures; they found a new world and fell upon it as if it were the realization of their dream. Ferocious and insatiable, they only wanted to enrich themselves. Where they found established nations, mature civilizations, accumulated wealth, they destroyed everything in their plundering fury. Here, as everywhere, they conquered the natives of these lands, enslaving them, sparing no cruelty, to wrest from the labor of these unfortunate peoples the riches they desired. The native defended himself; impelled by an irrepressible need for freedom, indifferent to pain or death, he refused the civilization of slavery; an enormous struggle arose, a centuries-long struggle that established an incompatibility between the natives and the foreign intruders from the very beginning. The invaders won, reduced and exterminated the indigenous populations, seizing the land; but, instead of settling here permanently, normally, peacefully, they perpetuated the same system of exploitation and oppression. They came from the [Iberian] Peninsula—but only to hoard new riches. Where the native absolutely refused to work, where his people were eliminated by massacres, he was soon replaced by the black African, whose trade the parasitic genius of the Portuguese invented and shamelessly exploited. In the colonies, only the slaves worked; everyone else exploited and oppressed them. Production depended solely on the number of slaves and the cruelty of the lashings. Progress was condemned as useless; intelligence persecuted as dangerous. With the colonist above the slave, the taxation system above the colonist, absolutism and religious archaism above them all, these societies sank deeper and deeper into poverty, degradation, and obscurantism. The metropolis wallowed, howled with delight, having realized its ideal, total parasitism. The ruling classes and the Church, which absorbed and dominated them, either became parasites of

the State—the greatest parasite—or lived off the colonies directly. Trade became a regal institution, mingling with taxation; the judicial system was the guarantor of spoils; the mother country a nest of leeches on the colony. Bloodsucking all, they considered themselves to be in the best of the worlds and thought only of *conserving* that state of affairs in which the only ones who really had reason to desire change were the slaves. But the captives had no voice to complain, or even to moan. Until then, the Iberian world had an ideal—an ideal of adventure, conquest, and heroic plundering; but now, linked to slavery, a new agenda was elaborated, a new political and national *ideal* took shape and soon imposed on itself: to *conserve*. No innovations, no progress. No rights, no freedom above all in the colonies, because freedom and rights represented challenges to the exploiters' privileges on which they all lived. In order to maintain and secure this ruthless control definitively, America closed itself off from the world and civilization. Industry was forbidden, the only work allowed was the animal labor of the slave.

A new American society bloomed from the remains of this ignoble exploitation. To this new society, life already appeared as a permanent conflict with the metropolis. Disrupted and thwarted in their natural development, these young societies rebelled from their inception against oppression and plunder—the same struggle of the primitive aboriginal, but now transformed into rancor and discord, feelings that grew and spread from generation to generation. To the enmity of the American peoples, the monarchy responded with ferocious retaliation and ostensible scorn. One side wanted to live, to have a country; the other to protect its privileges, which are based in the system they imposed. These new populations, in their grasp for life, are led to hate, repudiate, and combat the metropolis and its agencies. At the same time, they are forced to imitate the oppressor, because they descended in large part from the peoples of the metropolis, and were educated and governed by them. Ignorant and destined for brutalization, the American societies knew neither how to achieve a place in life, nor how to organize a nation. They rebelled because they were vigorous; they revolted because the whip cut too deeply. The only result of all this, however, is that they became accustomed to rebelliousness, to combat, and knew no other kind of justice or social discipline but brute force. The hatred and horror of this oppression grew in their souls; and since this oppression is represented by the authorities, they developed a hatred for authority, for the state, which appeared to them as the epitome of

evil. Thus, what was born and developed was not nations, but encampments, where the defeated was reborn rebellious, undiminished with each new generation. The Iberian colonists established here did not concern themselves with the creation of normal nations, nor would the metropolis allow it since it was in their interest to perpetuate the regime of direct exploitation, hindering in any way possible the organization of permanent and homogeneous American societies in harmony with normal trends and needs. The government, leadership, social and political education that the new populations received, were all counter to their natural expansion.

Thus were formed and lived these peoples, until the time when all their energies were atrophied and debased by parasitism. From decadence to decline, the Iberian nations reached the point where they could no longer retain their prisoners: the moment when the ideals of liberty and justice bestirred France and spread to all Western nations, summoning consciences to self-possession. In the Latin colonies—and for this very reason they are Latin—these aspirations of liberty did have repercussions. The native population grew, and with it the unrest; and, however low the public morale, the American populations could not ignore the state of abjection and backwardness in which they found themselves. [They had] neither industry, nor trade, nor instruction, nor science, nor art, nor even a normal government, nor the dispensation of common justice: nothing. Nothing, in sum, that could attenuate the despair and shame of the subjugation in which they found themselves.

Some ardent spirits appeared: they talked of “freedom, independence, motherland...” The same conflict, the old rebelliousness, ignited a struggle that quickly became widespread. The oppressed hurled themselves into open battle, demanding complete freedom, proclaiming absolute independence. It was a cruel war with heroic moments, with dark, inhuman, and sometimes loathsome aspects, a war prolonged through difficult alternatives. But a vigorous reaction came quickly, vanquishing the revolutionary impetus on more than one occasion. It is a formal reaction, from all over. It does not come from the metropolis and its official governments, since they were defeated. It was simply the opposition demonstrated by that part of the population which, in the colonies, represented directly or indirectly the mother country—its privileges and oppressions. These privileged ones knew that, in defending the mother country, they were defending themselves. To this end, they fought with the strength

and fury born of their instinct for self-preservation. But times were against them: the impetus set in motion by the idea of liberty was very strong, and its champions were not disheartened. The colonial Iberian regime had against it human evolution, which would not halt, as Spain did, at the ideal of the sixteenth century—the *conservative ideal*. In the eyes of the world, such a regime was a monstrosity.

Finally, the rebellious and conservative elements in the colonies were persuaded. Those unwilling to compromise were crushed; the moderates, the legitimate conservatives, intervened. These came to terms with the revolutionary agendas: they agreed to a separation and governmental independence for the colonies. It was a way to trick or nullify the revolution and to impede the arrival of true liberty. They threw off the metropolis, only to conserve all the privileges, injustices, and oppression it had generated and by which it had established the new societies. Through different processes, they arrived at the same result: they stole independence throughout Latin America. And when, soon afterward, they announced that “the time for revolutions and reforms is closed” and that social and political stability are consolidated, it became evident that what had taken place was only a change of names in positions of authority and the inscription of abstract and sterile formulas in dead Constitutions. All these elements, hostile to liberty, retrograde and anti-social residues of oppression, remained in place. It was impossible for these societies, which had lived in civil conflict from their earliest days, to become pacified and normalized.

Independence established, [the same characters] are found everywhere—royalists yesterday, conservatives always: “monarchists and clerics” in Mexico, “conservatives” in Chile, “unitarianists” in the River Plate, “Bragantistas [monarchists] and moderates” in Brazil. Linking themselves with the original freedom fighters, they fomented discord, distorted ideals, encouraged selfish ambitions, exploited human foibles and miseries, entrenched disagreements. And the struggle rekindled with rebellions and conflicts in the name of other principles, yet at its core sustained by the same causes. This same struggle continued to eliminate the good, the strong of spirit and heart, and those of sound character—this being the most common result of civil wars, as [the Roman historian] Tacitus had already noted. The good are destroyed, and soon the fight is a brutal struggle for possession of the government, for the material ownership of power—to oppress in order not to be oppressed.

The general mass of the population, conditioned and nurtured by this intensive culture of ignorance and servitude, has no incentive, no desires, or clear needs beyond the appetites of low animals. They are ignorant, do not know how to work, see no beauty, nor show any interest in working, since nothing bids them to do so. Totally incapable of progress, [this mass] is easily manipulated by charismatic leaders and political bosses to further their exploits and political attacks. The ruling classes, direct inheritors and unfailing preservers of the governmental, political, and social traditions of the metropolitan State, seem incapable of throwing off the burden of this inheritance. Everything the peninsular parasitism implanted in the character and intelligence of the old masters is now to be found in the new ruling classes. Regardless of the individual, whatever his point of departure and his goals, the Iberian character traits are there: the conservatism, the formality, the morbidness, the traditionalism, the dour somberness, the instinctive horror of progress, of the new, of the unknown—a horror truly instinctive and unconscious since it is inherited. From time to time there arises a spirit capable of efficient action, [but this is] a mirage lost in the desert. Meanwhile, society continues to crawl along at the mercy of those who lead it. Assisted and reassured by these, the fractious remnants of the parasitic past are reborn, proliferate, indoctrinate, and lead. And the new country never becomes a nation, remaining only the ex-colony, extended into the independent State, against all laws of evolution, extinguishing progress, captive to a thousand prejudices, bound to conservatism by ignorance.

The result of this recalcitrant past is this society that we see now: poor, exhausted, ignorant, brutalized, apathetic, with no idea of its own value, hoping that the heavens will remedy its misery, beseeching fortune from chance—lotteries, *jogo de bichos*,¹ religious pilgrimages, “ex-votos.” Illiteracy, incompetence, lack of preparation for life, superstitions, and absurd popular beliefs, all of these [are but] spider webs over neglected minds. [This leads to] either passive corruption or to the agitation of base interests: group conflicts dominated by a narrow and sordid utilitarianism, where the most astute neither know how to think nor are capable of sustained endeavor, running from enterprise to enterprise, squealing when they are hungry, grunting like piglets when they are satiated.

All this, however, makes no impression on those who *lead*, who behave as if they considered no motives other than selfishness, fear, material interests; had no regard for the fragility of social work inspired by other motives. And each

person understands life in accordance with his own interests, or does not understand it at all. This is the case of the majority, who are careless, feeble-minded, and without moral direction or assistance succumb to ignorance, which poses an insurmountable obstacle to the development of all civic virtues. Aside from that, there is the fatigue, the disbelief, the expectation of disappointment. If it is true that “social campaigns are the measure of the vitality and progress of a people,” then Latin American societies in general and notably in Brazil are a very sad testimony to their present value.

The result of all this—even for the most enlightened—is a painful pessimism, a negativistic and sad skepticism, against which no enthusiasm, no ideals, no dreams of generous sacrifices can prevail.

1

Jogo de bicho (the animal game) refers to a popular form of gambling in Brazil that involves a lottery-type drawing. In 1943, it became technically illegal in all but one Brazilian state; however, the game is generally tolerated by officials throughout Brazil.—Ed.

I.3.6 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 838973

LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES

José Veríssimo, 1912

One of the first and foremost historians of Brazilian literature, José Veríssimo (1857–1916) published this article the same year that he established the Academia Brasileira de Letras, and three years prior to the publication of *História da literatura brasileira*, his best-known work (1915). Here, Veríssimo recognizes books and magazines with a continental reach that convey the authenticity of Latin American thought. By the same token, Veríssimo realizes that the region’s intellectuals are in many respects the products of European thought. He also more specifically considers the work of two writers included in this volume, Bomfim and García Calderón, reviewing at great length one of the latter’s works [SEE DOCUMENT I.2.3] in which Latin American *caudillismo* is condemned. This translation is based on the original article from *O Imparcial* [(Rio de Janeiro), December 20, 1912]. It was later published

in J. A. Barbosa, ed., *Cultura, literatura e política na América Latina* [(São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1986), 32–36].

PERHAPS IT IS AN AUSPICIOUS SYMPTOM of a Latin American renaissance and a noble ambition to emerge from the isolation in which the region has long dwelled that so many new publications have appeared in which Latin Americans study various aspects [of their region] as well as seek to inform the world all about life in their countries.

Beyond works of pure literature, I have around me several books, published in the last two years: *La monarquía en América* [Monarchy in America], two remarkable volumes about the controversial question of attempts to implant a monarchy in the Spanish colonies by the Venezuelan Carlos Villanueva; *El porvenir de la América Latina* [The Future of Latin America] by the Argentinean, Manuel Ugarte; *La evolución política y social de Hispano-América* [Social and Political Evolution of Spanish America] by the Uruguayan Abel J. Perez; and *La evolución sociológica argentina* [Argentina's Sociological Evolution] by the Argentinean José Ingenieros.

I know of other works in the same vein, but have not read them.

Helping to spread knowledge of Latin America in Europe are periodicals that pay tribute to Latin American intellectuals. [One of them is] *Mundial*, whose director is Rubén Darío, “the acknowledged master of the new poetry and one of the major lyricists of all times in the Spanish language,” in the opinion of Francisco García Calderón. [Another publication] *La Revista de América* [American Review], directed by the same Mr. Calderón [and] on which several Brazilian writers collaborate, [was] recently inaugurated in Paris. Generally produced with an abundance of studies and reflections and revealing the existence in this America of distinguished thinkers, the works mentioned above are books, and not mere pamphlets. Even so, their authors are all, or almost all, exclusively intellectual products of Europe, and I say that not knowing whether this fact decreases their value as Latin American thinkers. They were mentally formed in Europe; they live in Europe; they write in Europe; they are published in Europe. They are Americans only by birth, perhaps by ancestry, and mainly by inclination. This, however, is not enough to make them American, with all the constraints, troubles, and disappointments that Americanism in situ must bear. And this is exactly the

weakness of their Latin Americanism at a distance. Incidentally, I do not blame them. More than anything else, in my heart, I envy them. I am even certain that a good part of the intellectuals who are my countrymen envy them along with me. The fact, however, seems notable as an indication of the deep disharmony of Latin American liberal spirits with their native environment.

A book written by Mr. Manoel Bomfim [SEE DOCUMENT I.6.1], *A América Latina* [Latin America]; another one with the same title written by Mr. Silvio Romero in a purely polemical spirit against the former; *Pan-Americanismo* [Pan Americanism] and other essays by Mr. Oliveira Lima, notably his *Formation historique de la nationalité brésilienne* [Historical Formation of Brazilian Nationality]—this is all, aside from some pamphlets with little depth, that we Brazilians have contributed to the body of sociological information about our America.

The Peruvian writer Mr. F. Garcia Calderón [SEE DOCUMENT I.2.3], his country's diplomat in Europe, director of *Revista de América*, publicist and critic, recently published *Les démocraties latines de l'Amérique* [The Latin Democracies of America], which he was kind enough to send me. Because of his knowledge of Latin America (including Brazil), his broad understanding of our past and present, but also because of its artistry (which is entirely French), its composition, and the charming qualities of the author's imagination, Mr. Calderon's book is one of the most interesting written on the topic.

The book, as detailed and complete as its size allowed, outlines the evolution of Latin America, its initial formation and development, including: independence, military anarchy, the advent of democracy, *caudillismo*, dictatorship, political anarchy, intellectual evolution, an analysis of the Latin American spirit and its possible conflict with the German, North American, and Japanese competition here, examining also problems of unity [and] race, as well as political and economic problems. The desired solutions to these problems bring Mr. Calderón to optimistic conclusions.

The author not only advocates with conviction, but also believes it possible to create large aggregations of the peoples of Central America, a Confederation of the Antilles, a Great Colombia (Ecuador, Venezuela, and Colombia), a Confederation of the Pacific (Peru, Bolivia, and Chile), and a Confederation of the Rio de la Plata (Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay). These [alliances] would provide a necessary defense against North American ambitions—a danger which,

according to the Peruvian sociologist, is apparent to all but the blind—as well as against possible European enterprises and the already manifest appetites of the Japanese.

...

Unlike the author, I am not an optimist. I confess to not having such robust faith in the future of Latin America as he has. Perhaps because I am too aware of the present conditions—more so than a healthy philosophy would warrant—I still find in [the author's writings] an excess of latitude or impartiality when he judges men and things American. I wonder if, in the eyes of the world, we are not insulting intelligence in the names of objectivity and relativity. Under the pretext of understanding everything, excusing everything, we come to renounce judgment, since the distinction between good and evil has been eliminated in our spirit. Having arrived at this point, historical determinism would lead us to philosophical nihilism.

Probably Latin American societies are as Mr. Calderón depicts them, and maybe the only regime in a given moment that was suitable for them was, as he asserts, dictatorship, a strong government of one to contain and shape the incoherent masses into more progressive forms.

I, however, find him too tolerant of people like [Venezuela's Antonio] Guzmán Blanco and his ilk, strongmen who, in spite of the arrogant force of the power they exercised, did not succeed in improving the conditions of their countries, as Mr. Calderón himself acknowledges. After [these strongmen,] their countries continued to be more or less the same, only richer in tragic examples of administrative plundering, insolent illegality, abominable cruelty, and political shamelessness. The case of Porfirio Díaz in Mexico typifies dictatorship's incapacity as a constructive force in America. After thirty years in power, when the critical moment arrived for this dictator, as it must for all, he did not even have the material force to defend himself and left his country, with the possible exception of its capital, morally and politically in the same situation in which he had seized it: in a word, barbarous.

No, it is not dictatorships that will rescue American democracies. Rather, as Mr. Calderón knows and confirmed earlier, only the general law of human progress, leading slowly from *caudillismo* to industrialization [will save our

democracies]. Just as we were discovered and molded by Europe, we will be regenerated by her. In the future, it will be European immigrants, coming in masses who will transform the miserable conditions of our political life. And this because their labor requires legality, order, and peace, shunning the adventures that were in fact the most flourishing industry in Latin America: political and military *caudillismo*.

Moreover, unlike Mr. Calderón, I cannot discern any purposes, projects, or political ideals in the *caudillos* of Latin America. Even taking into account the circumstances that produced them, the more I learn about them, the more they look to me like predatory animals. To catch and hold their prey, they instinctively develop the same cunning, strength, and courage as their relatives, the great felines.

Rich in ideas and judgments, [presenting] very interesting suggestions for our consideration as Latin Americans, Mr. F. García Calderón's book deserves more than this quick review to which I am forced to limit myself.

I.3.7 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1052919

THE CREATION OF A CONTINENT

Francisco García Calderón, 1912

Parisian-based Francisco García Calderón was one of the foremost thinkers of fin-de-siècle Peru and Latin America. At the turn of the twentieth century, the Francophile wrote an important trilogy on identity formation in Latin America: *Le Pérou contemporain* (1907), *Les Démocraties Latines de l'Amérique* (1912), and *La Creación de un continente* (1912). The text published here includes the introduction to the latter which is García Calderón's most widely read book. While writing about Peru in 1907, he acknowledged that his country was but part of a larger, more uniform world that bound fellow nations together. Writing from a continental perspective, García Calderón argues that the Latin American nations share certain key characteristics that transcend provincial differences. The text has been translated from the original [*La Creación de un continente*, (Paris: P. Ollendorff, 1912), vii–xiv].

INTRODUCTION

No lyric phrases, valiant systems, nor fervent speeches by the tribune move us more religiously than the emotional appeal of our race. When we feel that a history, tinged with gravitas and haloed by gilded legends, supports our meager individuality, our acts take on transcendental meaning. In the fullness of time we participate in an ancestral work, painstakingly adding our own contribution to our common heritage, shaken by a vibration that emanates from the bowels of the Earth. We retell the old legend and draw restorative strength or the gift of hope from the nurturing soil where heroic ancestors lie buried.

While studying the magnificent history of Peru in a devotional book, I discovered that my motherland was but a portion of a uniform world. Beneath the surface of the soil, impatient roots of fraternal trees lay closely intertwined. Ever since the heroic century of the Spanish Conquest, a stubborn solidarity has bound these fellow nations together. In the first place, we share a political continuity; in the second, we are inspired by a common intellectual restlessness and a unanimous struggle for freedom. From a continental perspective, the only differences between these countries with so much in common arise from their provincial originality. When a great conductor of men emerges to direct the vast scenario, the separate parts reclaim their old unity to produce a magnificent symphony that springs from the very bosom of their apparent discord. In this Spanish New World, patriotism is one with Americanism. If petty antagonism clouds the vision of collective need, the moral strength of the race is diminished. Within the immense loudspeaker, hostile notes dissolve Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Concord Hymn" [1837]:

*The foe long since in silence slept
Alike the conqueror silent sleeps
And Time the ruined bridge has swept
Down the dark stream w[h]ich seaward creeps.*

In the disparity of these bewildered nations we found an ancient harmony. There is a continent, a confederation with no written agreements, a moral league with no harsh sanctions, a gathering driven by destiny and dictated by

terrain and by race. Powerless men conspire against unity; they consecrate iconic stones to the worship of hatred. And yet a powerful force that rises from graves buried deep in the earth is pushing this chaotic race of people toward an eventual union. As the Liberators faced their final twilight, this future unity was all that soothed their dying eyes. Those great patrons live on within us and help us to see beyond our temporary separation to their vision of a unified continent.

Those who advocate for Utopia wish that the splintered Old World could follow the example set by this impressive congregation of countries. Europe, however, is merely a geographic expression, totally lacking in moral profile. Their history is a conflicted collection of hegemonies, upheavals spawned by invasions, hostility among creeds, linguistic confusion reminiscent of the Tower of Babel, and endless difficulties arising among castes. France has clarity of language, subtlety of reason, an equalizing democracy, an imperial religion, and radiant skepticism. In Germany there is a religious individualism that flourishes in active sects, an authoritative feudalism, a complex and imprecise language, and a restless mysticism. History has created a fundamental antagonism between two neighboring nations. England is surrounded by the sea, which imbues it with an insular hostility. Only the farsighted will of politicians has managed to unite theocratic Austria and liberal Italy.

Taking their cue from the European divorce, [Latin] Americans deny the originality of their land and their history. In the River Plate region they are discovering the gravity of the Balkan problem; on the Pacific coast, they face the unavoidable conflict between those of Latin and German descent. Whereas the Liberators were forever comparing themselves to Napoleon and [George] Washington and aspiring to duplicate their impressive accomplishments and our Romantics were flailing about in Byronic despair, [Latin] Americans now try to exacerbate their disputes by mirroring foreign divisions or promoting artificial oppositions. Chileans pride themselves on their Teutonic will. But what does it mean to be Germanic without a disillusioned Faust, with no mystic legacy, with no sweeping, complex philosophies on the scale of Gothic cathedrals, with no scientific credentials or proud imperial tradition? Lacking foresight, these nations squander their meager resources on weapons and splendid ships. They fervently build an armed peace, seeking a balance of power and trying to identify influential blocs in neighboring nations, while ignoring the vast barren areas in their own countries that demand creative policies.

In the face of watchful imperialism, the Americas can only achieve their eventual independence through a merging of mutual interests. Now that the Panama Canal has sliced through the isthmus, the southern continent will become an impressive geographical region in its own right, upon which it will be easy to lay the foundations for the intellectual, moral, and economic union of participating nations. The advantages of unity were fully understood by the greatest *caudillos*, the Lords of Chaos: [Jose Manuel de] Rosas, [Andrés de] Santa Cruz, [Joaquín] Mosquera, and [Francisco] Morazán. In Nero-like fashion, the former wanted to rebuild the dismantled Vice-Royalty of the River Plate. Santa Cruz temporarily welded the homogeneous destinies of Peru and Bolivia. Mosquera dreamt of that Greater Colombia whose magnificent heritage was carved up by ruthless generals. Morazán fought to the death for a united Central America. [Simón] Bolívar, being a visionary warrior, understood that without unity, autonomy is a vain prize, and segued from magnificent hero of an Iliad to peaceful organizer of the Peoples's congress.

In both Europe and the Americas, history praises those who create unity: [Camilo Benso, Count of] Cavour, [Abraham] Lincoln, [Otto, Prince of] Bismarck. Cavour built a strongly united Italy on a foundation of Dante-esque disputes between power-hungry principalities. When the North and the South went to war over the enslavement of an exiled race, Lincoln reunited the splintered states and solidified George Washington's undertaking. Bismarck founded the Prussian hegemony by sinking the rough columns of a healthy federation in the enemy blood of elegant France and noble Austria. Feudal division was followed everywhere by modern unity. Local exclusivity was rendered mute before the majesty of broader mergers. As in the biblical vision, the scattered rocks came together against a backdrop of solemn music to build the edifice of the future.

Our era strives to organize random forces in all realms of thinking and action, determined to achieve its goal of synthesis. In the sciences, it is not satisfied with partial analysis; it develops ambitious theories concerning evolution or Darwinian struggle and would like to surround the universe with inflexible formulas. The strangest disciplines are confederated, and philosophy—according to [Herbert] Spencer's definition—is nothing more than completely unified knowledge. Major international movements tend to destroy frontiers: socialism and unionism, united classes, the *trusts* of feudal capitalism, unselfish scientific groups, all flourish in a century that is hostile to the old divisions. All races aim

to define their interests and to preserve their moral unity. A free Saxon Empire, saluted by the booming waves of all the oceans of the world, is the largest political structure of modern times. Only our America is unaware of the universal advantage of unity. She does not act in harmony with the land or with the dead, those sacred charges that are respected by vital nations. Within our republics, families and provinces are at war with each other; across the continent, states argue among themselves about ancestral hierarchies. Instead of populating the remote areas of the country or swelling the national coffers, these aggressive democracies attempt to create atomic divisions, suicidal scattering, or an apocalyptic chaos.

The solvent power of rampant jingoism lasted a century. While a consolidated, protective state was being created in the North of our continent, the nations in the South continued to pursue their original fragmentation. The first centennial of liberty—celebrated with great pomp from Venezuela to Argentina—ushered in a new attitude. It was time to take a serious look at oneself. A shadowy flock of twilight birds can be seen along the uncertain horizon. Is it the decline of hard-won independence, the end of an effective brotherhood? The future of our race will depend on the course charted by American policy. This course will either create a continent built on the dust of hostile nations or will sow the seeds of the final breakup—the tragic contributor to the isolating desert, the dividing cordillera, the annihilating instincts.

This book condemns artificial enmity and rejects Utopia. It respects vested interests and century-old borders, and proposes the creation of a continent where nations can live in harmony with each other. In the moral order, it translates the dictates of geography. It modestly aspires to continue the work of all those who labored tirelessly to unify race and language, rights and morals, family and faith, political system and necessary ideals. It seeks to perpetuate the efforts of the Conquistadors and the Liberators, the solemn jurists and the meticulous doctors, and all who fought with quixotic zeal across the jagged mountains, the violent rivers, and the endless plains to create a beloved, ideal, and independent America.

We began by studying the various forms of unity: [Latin] American congresses and assemblies presided over by the United States; we analyzed two great trends of economic and moral reconciliation: Pan Americanism and Pan Hispani-

cism (Book One). A new race, original and autonomous, grows up in overseas territories: its goal is an Americanism that can withstand all outside influences. We distinguished this strong trend from the excesses of national spirit that are liable to promote dangerous divisions (Book Two).

The Americas, jealous of their political freedom, have not yet achieved their intellectual and economic independence. They even imitate servility, revere the foreigner, and forget their current originality. We successively established the basis for their autonomy in religion, politics, education, the arts and literature (Book Three).

Our review yields some optimistic conclusions. Not the vulgar Panglossian satisfaction, but rather the specific lesson provided by Voltaire: *let us lovingly cultivate our garden and make it a small universe*. The clement skies, the subtle race, the invincible freedom, the wealth of the land and its minerals, of the shaded forests and turbulent rivers are all part of a precious legacy held in trust for those who will build wealthy, welcoming cities where once there was nothing but desert.

I.3.8 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1053099

LETTER TO THE YOUTH OF COLOMBIA

José Vasconcelos, 1923

In this letter addressed to the Colombian educator and historian Germán Arciniegas, José Vasconcelos (1882–1959) outlines his vision for a spiritually and ethnically unified America. The Mexican educator and philosopher was a key figure in the cultural renaissance brought about by the Mexican Revolution, and he was revered in post-revolutionary Mexico. Conceivably, he could have learned of Arciniegas's early work (as a student leader and an editor of several short-lived avant-garde journals in Colombia) from Mexican poet Carlos Pellicer, who spent fourteen months in Bogotá, beginning in December 1918. Dated May 28, 1923, Vasconcelos's letter is anthologized in *Discursos 1920–1950* [José Vasconcelos (Mexico City: Ediciones Botas, 1950), 57–64], on which this translation is based.

VERY ESTEEMED SIR AND FRIEND:

I received your letter of last April in which you informed me of the forthcoming Congress of the youth of Colombia, and you asked me for some words for this occasion. Your letter has moved me not only because you have remembered me, but also because the children of these embattled times often feel the need to transfer their longing to those whom they will replace tomorrow. Seeing how little we can achieve today, it is comforting to look at those who can push the Ideal forward, once we lie defeated. Nobody can explain what the millions of beings who are born daily only to suffer and die without leaving a trace have come to do on this cursed earth. . . .

We all see, some of us with blurred vision, others with clairvoyance, that we are dragged along by a somber current that at times lights up brightly, as with divine intuition. To achieve those instants of illumination, during which we devise a way to escape the absurd cycle, is the highest potentiality of our nature and the supreme objective of life. But if we are going to exercise our conscience, be it for this objective or any other, it is necessary to overcome the laziness of the body and the stupidity of the environment. For the body not to interfere, we feed it; for the work not to rob us of all our energy, we improve our control over nature, compelling it to yield results with little effort; and for our social life to cooperate with our spirit, it has to be reformed on the basis of honesty and justice. Honesty that uncovers the most hidden reality and justice derived not from the laws which the mind argues but from the superior laws of the heart. Thus, producing wealth with work and sharing it fairly, where everybody will be able to feed the body, without having to sell the soul's greatest treasure, which is time. The curse of collective life derives from the contrast between the laziness of those who do not work and the slavery of those who work so hard that the physical work consumes their capacity for meditation and joy. This is the barbarian condition in which the world has lived to this date, but our era is precisely characterized by a longing for universal redemption and happiness for everybody, without hypocrisies and without simulations. Since Tolstoi ended the myth of the genius as a leader, the people no longer search for idols to praise, but for injustice to correct. Quixote triumphs in the world, but he has learned a lot during these centuries about failure, and he is no longer the madman who invites laughter, but the gentleman with strength, at the service of generosity and intelligence. For us the genius is not

the one who grabs glory or power for himself, but the one who shares knowledge or energy. And our times want everything that was exclusive to become universal: happiness, knowledge, power. In addition we also want the sublime to be achieved not only up there, but also down here, and we call impostor anyone who powerlessly raises his hands to the heavens, instead of using his fists to correct injustice. But where is the center of this forthcoming human as well as divine palingenesis going to be...?

Europeans, with the pretext of nationalist ambitions—I really complain because they have reproduced in excess—will continue destroying themselves until the killings and emigration relieve the population congestion in land that has yielded more mouths than bread. Victims of a failed organization, they will not be able to teach us; they will be limited to invading us, providing us with the sap of a new humanity. The free mixing of races and cultures will reproduce in higher numbers and better elements, the universalistic experiment that failed in North America.

There it failed because it became “North Americanism”; here it may be saved if the Iberian flexibility and strength establish the basis for a truly universal type. The conscience of this mission beats in the heart of all Latin American nations and provides an impulse toward contemporary “Latin Americanism,” a modern Latin Americanism different from that of [Simón] Bolívar, because his was a political dream, whereas the present one is ethnic. Bolívar [SEE DOCUMENT 1.3.2] wanted a League of American Nations that would not exclude the United States of North America. We want the union of the Iberian people, without excluding Spain, and specifically including Brazil. And we have to exclude the United States, not because of hatred, but because it represents another expression of human history. Bolívar, by widely interpreting the ideas of his time, wanted a League of American Nations able to guarantee universal freedom.

This same idea was again expressed with less grandeur a hundred years later, by the mediocre doctrinarian principles of Woodrow Wilson, when he incited American nations to participate in the European war in order to guarantee “democracy in the world.” Bolívar was not heard because his time had not yet come; but his ideal is reborn with more precision and strength. Wilson was not heard because the Iberian countries know what democracy is in the land of the dollar. They have their own ideal, which is not merely political but rather mystical: to allow free expression to each race in accordance with its mission and

temperament. Within the most generous internationalism and honestly recognizing the universal capacity of mankind we want, however, for people not to be stripped of their own spiritual traits, because each is like a distinct path toward the revelation of the divine, and nobody has the right to suppress even one of those paths. We believe it is more important for a race to keep its idiosyncrasy than its territory, and for that reason we require spiritual above political emancipation. . . .

As a result of our independence we acquired tutors, and the mental pressure of France, as always in history, led to weakening Latin people and securing the triumph of English people. French nationalism, clumsily imitated, led us to constitute other people's homelands, [and], without realizing it, we replaced everything that is strongest in a people—its noble tradition, its race relationships, its historic unity—with the vain meaningless talk imported with foreign labels. We thus split apart—hypnotized by the first foolishness arrived from Paris—and all of that we did while the Saxon race, led by a wise instinct, got organized to constitute the contemporary “English Speaking World” which dominates the planet. The conquest attempt by the English in Argentina, and the seizing of territory in Venezuela, in Mexico, etc., taught us to recognize the danger. The five or six thousand English people totally annihilated in Buenos Aires, made us see that the homeland is not only territory and political freedom, but also mainly stock, the type of culture to which every people belongs. Mere nationality is built on paper; whereas stock results from life. The creation of Latin American nationalities was the result of politics. The creation of Latin American nationalities was a case of collective suicide. Bolívar understood this, and in order to avoid it he used all the resources of his huge ingenuity; however, selfishness, natural barriers, and the interest of foreign powers were stronger. England's interest preferred twenty clients over one. The vanity of France could not bear to see a great nation in front of which it would resemble a somewhat ridiculous teacher. It consented to show a certain disdainfully condescending manner toward the twenty disciples, as we ended up calling ourselves. Everything strange reached us: the English got hold of our markets, making us the gift of theories based on which they are the superior race and we are a bunch of Mestizos, maybe capable of learning through obedience and imitation. The French filled us with pretty things and arrived in Argentina to say that it was the best country in America because it was culturally closer to France. They immediately allowed the Peruvians to become Frenchified

as a favorite disciple, and then, just like that, they prided themselves on the fact that Brazil was more French; and we all agreed that. . . the brain of the world was in Paris. The French, on the other hand, were all of the opinion that Latin Americans were wretched, and they were right. We handed over the wealth and handed over our soul. And as true pariahs we kept insulting Spain, turned arrogant by our new bosses, because that is what they were through the protection and tolerance they showed toward the despots who knew how to favor their interests. Look at today's Venezuela, the feudal enclave of the last and most monstrous tyrant, protected by foreign companies that exploit the country and mirroring what at different times were Argentina, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Mexico. Our independence was on paper, and our decorum in the mud. Tragic operetta countries; bastard races, we have been the monkeys of the world after having renounced everything we owned, we set ourselves to imitate without the faith and the hope to create. The relentless war fought by [Benito] Juárez against the French starts the confusion in Mexico. Other more fortunate countries have gradually regenerated through the orderly effort of their own development, and we have finally arrived at the decisive period we live in to hear that the Bolivarian concept is brought to life anew, but that it is now much deeper because it no longer aims for a political league with abstract ends, but for the integration of a race which arrives at the moment of its universal mission. Lucky are the Latin American youth who live at a time when the bases for a new period of world history are established!

. . .

If the youth do not muster the heroism that these times require, the newly arrived will deprive us of our role as directors and create a hybrid culture. If we do not do it, they will; but they will spend years adapting to the new environment and in the meantime the civilization will languish or be destroyed. However, if the young people of today take the manly mission upon themselves, then the human victory will be swift and glorious. Foreigners will come and perhaps not with the purpose of conquest; we will treat them well, because they are made of noble human substance and because abuse and disloyalty only lead to dissolution and failure. As brothers we will improve what was done before, and the world will benefit from our triumph, and we will be the first universal race.

I trust you fully because in Colombia there is a distinguished ancestry which will produce miracles. The devotion with which you have kept the purity

of the language is a guarantee that you own the pride that distinguishes only creative races. Any foreign assimilation is fruitful if it is purified and organized within the native mold, as is the case of English as well as Spanish when it was strong. On the other hand, there is nothing more pitiful than our Spanish America dedicated, for a century, to be Frenchified and Anglicized, as if our own blood was not enough to enable redemption and splendor. . . . Let our youth reflect upon the fact that to reform the world is not only a matter of speeches, but it means to be prepared to carry out in practice all of the ideas we believe are good, even if the rest of society rejects them. The society in which we live generally represents what has already passed; the spirit, instead, lives forever in the future. Its general intention makes us ancient men and modern men, rejuvenating the present and being visionary of the future. Only by breaking openly with the contemporary environment, can we achieve progress.

. . . Progress requires us to draw the sword of Christ against the enemies of the general human welfare, and young people have the duty to proclaim their alliance with Christ. Those young people who do not feel the impulse toward generous and immediate vindication do not create a fatherland nor conquer glory. . . .

I greet you my dearest friend and remain yours truly,

JOSÉ VASCONCELOS

I.3.9 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1053750

THE BEGINNINGS OF AN AMERICAN CULTURE

Alberto Zum Felde, 1924

Born in Argentina, literary historian Alberto Zum Felde (1888–1951) was based in Uruguay, from where he put forward his Eurocentric ideas on Latin American culture. Like many other thinkers of his generation, Zum Felde sought to liberate Latin America from its intellectual and artistic dependence on Spain. Achieving this liberation required looking toward France, which he recognized as the spiritual mother of Latin America. This translation is from the

original publication in *Boletín de Teseo*, Montevideo's principal avant-garde journal of the 1920s [(July 17, 1924), 4–7].

OVER TIME, LATIN COUNTRIES IN EUROPE became increasingly interested in our America. The reason for their fascination was that a fresh blend of new nationalities on this side of the Atlantic—descended from the illustrious old progenitors of Latin culture—gave them cause for concern about their future on the new continent. The new blend included secular populations who, inspired by the immutable law of heroic cycles and the fatal reincarnation of the genius of civilizations, believed that it was time for the tired eagles of the ancestors' command to cede the kingdom of space to the Condors of the Andes.

. . .

We watched as France and Spain became increasingly interested in our people. Long-established official institutions and committees of representatives worked to establish or consolidate spiritual links between the two worlds. European books and newspapers were more widely distributed; American writers were warmly welcomed in important centers across the Atlantic; intellectuals from those same centers came to lecture in our cities. Their interest in “our things,” which inflated their overtures, together with their demonstrations of affection toward their “Latin daughters,” that went far beyond conventional diplomatic courtesies, suggested sincerity driven by a motive.

As we witnessed the interest and affection expressed by those two European countries toward our people, we noticed that they each had different motives. What France praised and encouraged in us was not what Spain praised and supported. Far from being similar, the qualities in question were usually diametrically opposed. The truth is that France wanted to cultivate our “Frenchness” and Spain wanted us to maintain our “Spanishness.” Both wanted to shore up their legacy among their American descendants as a way of ensuring their own long-term survival.

Latin America's two main influences were Spain and France. We carry Spain's influence in our blood; it has been there since the saga of the conquest, nurtured by the ancestral conditioning of our colonial phase and maintained

beyond our political emancipation from the motherland through the living, permanent link of our language. Each and every one of our biological elements is Spanish; our Spanishness is one of our defining features. We are Spanish by origin, by our inheritance of certain traits and tendencies, by education, and by the language that we learned—in short, we are Spaniards in America. We would be indistinguishable from Spaniards in Spain if it weren't for France's intellectual influence—which we'd known since before our independence—that challenged the ideas we had inherited. What we learned from France helped us cease to be Spaniards and made us very different from our colonizers. Our wars of independence were sparked, to a considerable degree, by French influence in the Americas. The revolutionary ideology of [Jean-Jacques] Rousseau and the *Encyclopedia* was a major factor in the unraveling of colonial society. The fiery rhetoric of the Convention¹ was on every statesman's lips, from [Simón] Bolívar in the tropics, to [Marcelo T. de] Alvear and [Bernardo] Monteagudo in the [Río de la] Plata region.

The essays, proclamations, and allegations of generals and pamphleteers were riddled with Gallicisms. As French ideas “corrupted” the Spanish spirit of Latin American Criollos, the Spanish language was also corrupted by French literary influences; Bolívar's writings were translated into French, and [Mariano] Moreno adopted a distinctly French tone. Not long afterward, while we were still conducting politics in our barbarous, indigenous way, Romanticism arrived on our shores—imported from France by [Viscount] Chateaubriand and [Alphonse de] Lamartine in their armored galleons—and liberated American literature from the dry Spanish classicism that we had learned in the cloisters of colonial universities.

Absent that extremely powerful French influence, colonial countries in the Americas would have endured as independent extensions of Spain. It was that influence, however, that “differentiated” Latin America from Spain and prompted our desire to be released from the colonial grip of the mother country.

France, therefore, is Latin America's spiritual mother, just as Spain is its mother in the physical sense. Our flesh is Spanish but our intellect is French. Spain gave us our essential character while France filled our heads with new ideas, and our two parents were always at odds with each other. We inherited all our organic, atavistic, subconscious attributes from Spain; but our acquired, cultivated, rational qualities are French. Just as people struggle to find a balance between their organic impulses and their rational tendencies, Latin Amer-

ica became a battleground between French culture and the traits we inherited from Spain.

...

II

Ever since we gained our Independence, Latin America has been influenced—as we have seen—by two powerful forces: an internal, hereditary one from Spain and an external, cultural one from France. Either one, on its own or in a dominant role, would transform these countries into spiritual colonies where life would be a reflection of life in France or Spain, so that their populations might quite logically be called the “American French” or the “Spaniards of the New World.”

Both our illustrious mothers aspired to cultivate their own way of life in Latin America and both fought against other influences. The Spanish praised the Hispanist intellectuals in the colonies, saying, “He is very Spanish, he is one of ours.” The French, on the other hand, lauded those who were clearly influenced by France and confided that, “he is a natural child of our culture, he has our spirit; he is very French.”

...

It is obvious that this blend of nationalities that we call Hispanic America—or Latin America as the francophiles would have it—cannot be a reproduction or an extension of those nationalities. There must be a gestation leading to a new life that may inherit certain traits and qualities from its progenitors, but will gradually distinguish itself from them in the natural order of things, and will eventually develop its own individual, generic personality.

...

Greece, Rome, and Germania were ethnically pure races; they were branches of the common trunk of Indo-European peoples, each with their own well-established, perfectly defined character and individual lifestyle that distinguished them from all others and set them on their particular evolutionary and historical paths. But other nations, formed over the years by emigration or conquest, are peopled by ethnic mixtures that take time to merge and develop a specific character of their own. This latter category includes our two progenitors, France and Spain, from whom we inherited our Latin qualities.

Though France and Spain both enjoy a powerful, clearly defined sense of individuality, they were once, as Latin America is now, “colonies” of various different races and cultures that gradually merged in a confusing ethnic and spiritual melting pot. Rome conquered ancient Gaul and imposed Roman rules and language. It was a Roman colony when it was overrun by Germanic tribes—the Franks, Burgundians, and Normans—during the invasion that led to the Merovingian barbarism of pre-Gothic centuries. France was a blend of Gallic and Germanic tribes with a Roman feudal culture that did not find its national identity until the time of the Crusades. And was it not Spain, which has such a distinctive flavor of its own, repeatedly colonized by Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, Goths, and Muslims...? Surely early Iberians intermarried with rustic Germanics, and Moorish sensuality was fused with the dogma of the Jews...? Isn’t Spanish blood seasoned with the fatalism of Asia and the passion of Africa...? Wasn’t Spain in turmoil for several centuries after the Gothic invasions, searching for itself until it found its own voice and defined its own spirit...? Spain is a complicated blend of Roman stone, the iron of the Visigoths, and the gold of the Caliphate. And under all that, brooding and filled with ancestral echoes, is its Celtic-Iberian skull.

The same laws apply when people are merging together as when countries are being formed. The process begins with a simple, primitive stage that evolves into the confusion of conquests and racial blending, which gradually leads to a state of complexity and definition.

Neither our current lack of a distinct, individual character nor the spiritual colonialism under which we find ourselves should in any way imply that we shall never have our own character, nor that we are conditioned to submit passively to the influences that seek to dominate us at present.

Latin Americans must all be committed to the ideal of autonomy—a concept that we are just beginning to grasp—and, from the vantage point of that ideal, we must evaluate the various influences that attempt to shape us so that, rather than accepting these influences passively we might react against them, just as sensible men use reason and strength of will to react against the internal and external forces in their lives.

. . .

1

Zum Felde refers to the assembly gathered in 1828 in the northeastern Argentinean city of Santa Fé. The convention took place during Manuel Dorrego’s tenure; shortly thereafter, Juan Manuel de Rosas installed his long-term dictatorship.—Ed.

I.4

IS AMÉRICA A NO-PLACE?

I.4.1 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 833254

LATIN AMERICA—EVILS OF ORIGIN

Manoel Bomfim, 1905

In this second excerpt from *Males de origem* [Rio de Janeiro: H. Garnier, Livreiro-Editor, 1905], Bomfim rallies for a holistic educational system—from primary school to intellectual enterprises—that encompasses ethics and the arts. He optimistically argues that, supported by the democratic values of these core disciplines, Latin Americans will come closer to achieving utopia. As in the previous passage from the book [SEE DOCUMENT I.3.5], this translation is based on the centenary edition [*A América Latina: Males de Origem* (São Paulo: Topbooks, 2005), 379–83].

CONCLUSION

...

Let us waste no effort regretting what was not done; let us see what has to be done, and, to be more effective, let us consider what this part of the world will be when these many millions of unproductive people represent effective social units in the competition of human activities. Instead of hoping that the illiterate [will be] enraptured with science, join together and contribute to organize schools for themselves and their children; or that, dissatisfied with their own ignorance, they come to us to ask for instruction for that which they are ignorant, let us offer them this instruction that will elevate them. Let us start from the beginning: the diffusion of primary education. Let us dust off their intelligence; awaken them. This is the path to a complete education. Let us force the issue, in a general campaign; let us call into action as many intellects as are able to respond

to our appeal. Thousands of readers will stimulate our literary production and our scientific culture. Each, in turn, will have an impact upon the public, increasingly expanding and educating it. [We must support] the press, magazines, study groups, libraries, popular universities—truly *popular*, not imitations of academia, from which the people flee with good cause. We must do all of these and [if we do], success will be inevitable, provided that we abandon neither our conviction in the excellence of our campaign, nor the tenacity of our efforts. Moreover, the enterprise itself will help those who conduct it. From the cooperation of ideas will come the cooperation of wills—an indisputable consequence of education. It is a movement that builds on its own energy; from pure intellectual instruction will spring the principles of technical and moral education, which make democracies viable by forming morally free and productive citizens.

It is no longer simply a question of intellectual development, considered in its practical applications—sciences serving industry, for example; it is a matter of the role of intelligence in the establishment of present day societies and in the shaping of the centuries to come, a notion that we should not forget, because a society that intends to endure not only organizes its present but prepares for its future. This can happen only when the social interest is well understood.

Science is not a regime, nor does it prevail through imposition. Still, of itself, science wins over the mind and defeats obstinacy. There is nothing perhaps more edifying than hearing, in the disorder of muddled self-interest [that] serene word, [science's] pure and natural light falling upon intellects lost in this sad and agitated state of confusion. If true progress resides in transforming man's animal nature into a social nature, then nothing has contributed more to progress than science. Even when science acknowledges and demonstrates our true animal origins, it demonstrates with this discovery that perfectibility is inherent to life. These marvelous attributes of the spirit whose cultivation and refinement we so desire are nothing more than the expansion of faculties that are still in an embryonic stage in other types of the series to which we belong and of which we represent the highest degree of evolution. Observing and measuring the progress already made, philosopher and apostle alike can anticipate and expect great accomplishments. In earlier times, we were mere brutes, barely conscious; then we became *human beings*, the owners of the Earth. We created the Heavens, discovered our strength and intelligence, dreamt of goodness and justice, invented divinity and enriched it with our dreams of beauty and virtue. Today, we dispel

this illusory Heaven, master our strength, assert our right to our intelligence, and perfect it. We strengthen our hearts, struggle for the realization on Earth of this paradise of happiness and justice that only yesterday seemed impossible in this world. Yet now, we are more generous and better than divinity itself. Tomorrow we will surpass all utopias.

To live is to progress; to decline is to die. Moral improvement is the development of life. But let us not forget that life does not permit itself to be diminished: if one does not want to decline, one has to accept life and live it fully and actively. To live is to progress, and to progress is to act efficiently, directing our efforts toward a predetermined plan, harmonizing aspirations with actions, bringing forth that unity which is moral beauty itself.

Let us embrace life fully; let us seek out all its sources of energy, which are not restricted to material necessities, but include also intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic needs. Let us restore these great stimuli to the forefront of progress. The need for beauty—like unselfish devotion and curiosity for knowledge—is more universal than is generally thought. Of course, we cannot demand that a wretched, ignorant person perceive the harmony of the Parthenon's lines or that he be enraptured by one of Bach's fugues. There are beauties that can only be appreciated after a preliminary preparation. Yet, there is no reason for aesthetic enjoyment to be the privilege of the few. [We should] expand instruction; prepare the spirits so that art will become a normal function of life. This was understood by its great apostles of modern times, such as [John] Ruskin and [William] Morris. Art has been and will continue to be a force in human evolution. [It is] a prodigious force, touching in equal measure the heart and the intellect, arousing enthusiasm and admiration. As daily bread, a diet of truth and beauty is necessary for a person to attain complete moral harmony.

"The goal of man," said Aristotle, "is his improvement with respect to happiness." Well-being, knowledge, freedom, love, and beauty are the tendencies that have propelled humankind for all times and that, although entangled in a terrible crisis just now, will inevitably end with the reform of centuries-old inequities. Against these, all strong and generous souls are committed, all those spirits who wish to march toward light, truth, and justice.

Let us leap into action, not wait for a fateful current to carry us to progress. Let us leap into action as one convinced that progress and happiness can be won and that the only ones who attain it are those who know how to win it. Let us

look to science for its efficient and unerring resources. Emancipated by criticism, enlightened by knowledge, let us face life with confidence and strength, preparing ourselves for comfort, for fraternity, and for elevated moral and aesthetic pleasures, endeavoring to transmit to future generations the general outlines of a more perfect happiness. This will be the highest tribute we can offer our country. In doing so we would be patriots, being at the same time essentially humans, because the only comprehensible and noble patriotism is that which improves the conditions of existence in each country, uniting all people in their struggle for life, uniting all countries in the direction towards humanity and civilization. Let us consecrate into loftier expression the need to love the horizons and landscapes revealed to us by nature. Let us give moral significance to this natural interest, to those who taught us how to live, to the generations that maintained the nurturance indispensable to our rekindled devotions.

With these feelings, all aspiration is noble and the heart, already impassioned and vigorous, will become stronger and exalt in evocation of its own dreams. Throughout this continent, freedom and progress will unite peoples in friendship, justice, and beauty. A serene, happy, and healthy democracy will appear, confronting life and serving it, marching toward a truly human glory in the triumphal concert of happy and creative endeavors, under the light of vast, pure horizons, like those that extend across our cordilleras.

Utopia... Utopia... the vulgar wisdom will repeat. Utopia, yes: let us be utopians, very utopian, provided that we do not sterilize our ideal, expecting its realization from some force intrinsic to the utopia itself. Let us be utopians, provided that we work. "Without the utopians of the past, men even today would be living in caves, miserable and naked. It was utopians who sketched out the lines of the first city. From generous dreams came beneficial realities. Utopia is the principle of all progress, and the outline for a better future."

The *conservative* and the *prudent* will condemn and despise Utopias; they are like Marthas [to use a biblical archetype], absorbed in common banality that has become automatic with repeated use. We desire tomorrow's glory: a happy America, with its temperate climate, under the splendor of its sky, industrious and peaceful in social communion, affectionate and fraternal with the natural expansiveness of its instinctive cordiality, estranged from the arrogant selfishness that debases other civilizations. Let "the dead bury their dead;" let

us turn to productive action, devote all our energies to life, and it will lead us to progress and victory, as it leads the tree to heaven and the light.

I.4.2 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 832563

INDOLOGY

José Vasconcelos, 1926

This excerpt is from the first chapter of José Vasconcelos's book *Indología*, published in 1926 [first edition (Barcelona: Agencia Mundial de Librería)], which the author dedicates to the University of Puerto Rico for its strategic position between the two cultures that polarize the Americas. Here, Vasconcelos asserts that Latin America is in some senses physically unified by ubiquitous miscegenation, a concept that echoes the rhetoric of his magnum opus, *La raza cósmica* (1922). However, here the author takes a more pronounced philosophical approach in defining an aesthetic that encompasses an approach to the “Indies” that reflects the “unity of our species.” Written after Vasconcelos had resigned as Mexico's minister of education (1921–24), *Indología* serves as the author's first critical response to Latin American nationalism and to the *caudillismo* that plagued many countries following independence. This translation is based on the book's second edition [(Barcelona: Agencia Mundial de Librería, 1927), 1–27].

THE SUBJECT

...

Most philosophical thought consists of abstractions that ignore certain incidentals in order to present simplified expressions of a range of realities that can be reduced to general characteristics. Generalizations materialize, whether drawn from external sources or arrived at by means of deduction; without them there could have been no development, no formulation of the eventual idea. But the cardinal sin of generalization is that it is the result of omissions and reductions.

In spite of its misleadingly generous name, generalization destroys reality and narrows its scope; it invariably obliterates some of the facts; it annuls a multitude of factors or consigns them to oblivion; it disconnects symbols that are, in fact, inseparable. When we say “man,” we evoke a far broader generic concept than just one man in particular, but only in a certain sense of extension; in reality, the former lacks substance and is poorer in terms of divine content than the humblest of particular men. The abstract term “man” is thus superior as far as form is concerned, but inferior in essence; it is inferior in terms of dynamic, vital content. Therefore, every philosophy grounded in generalities and abstractions—any philosophy of mere ideas—is like a game of crystal spheres: beautiful, but empty. Life has always been absent during the day, leaving nothing but a phantasmagorical assortment of general ideas... Fortunately this does not mean the defeat of philosophy; it merely shows that abstraction and generalization, in and of themselves, are not philosophy; they are just one of the methods used in philosophy. But philosophy has another, far more fruitful method; a method in which I discern sensory elements—elements focused on the perception of existence—wedded to the simple idea of form and concept; this other method is involved in the practice of what we call synthesis. To express it somewhat vaguely though nonetheless comprehensively, synthesis is the concept of individual existence linked to—actually augmented by—the existence of the whole. Synthesis, therefore, leads to augmentation. Just as abstraction destroys reality, synthesis animates, that is it augments the potential of what is real. . . .

However, those who pursue the concept of synthesis—far from subtracting symbols or elements, thus impoverishing all who are prone to reflection—will, on the contrary, suggest similarities, developing and liberating the momentum of analogies until every notion, every object, every being affirms its own individuality and becomes more deeply and permanently involved in the whole of reality, in the infinite existence of beings.

. . . The very fact of existence has been achieved through synthesis; it is a triumph of synthesis since, with no loss of unity, the world expands and unfolds in our awareness. The self is an element of unity, a function of unity, and is also a reflection of difference and multiplication. The philosopher’s mission should therefore be to weave together certain guiding threads, clear certain channels, and release the flow of sympathy, the emotional dynamic that connects us to and associates us with the world’s humblest and most sublime processes. To

incorporate each and every surprise prompted by novelty into the changing harmony of total existence, and contemplate it all transformed in spirit and evolving toward the eternal—such is the goal of synthesis. The existence of the individual animated by the grandeur and the music of the whole—that would be the perfect synthesis and, when actualized, would be the ultimate philosophy: the philosophy of beauty, the definitive philosophy of the divine. It would be religion. Religion and beauty, accessible via the divine path of the emotions.

We should, at the very least, be mindful of this sort of rarified knowledge whenever we apply ourselves to the study of a particular problem or set out to meditate on any aspect of reality. Let us, insofar as we can, be guided by similar criteria in any matter to which we devote our attention. Our task must be to define the ethnic movement to which we belong and provide it with some means of identification as well as a meaningful goal. We stand before a dynamic, ethnic process; an almost unprecedented development in history, in spite of the fact that history is over five thousand years old. Let us begin by assigning a name to this new process. This name will be the somewhat artificial yet indispensable symbol that will establish the autonomy of the process, of the fact, among the countless number of other facts and events.

We shall, of course, suggest the name and immediately proceed to justify it. We will use the name *Indology* to refer to the collection of thoughts that I propose to present concerning the contemporary life, origin, and future of this great branch of the rational species known as the Iberian-American race.

I am listing everything concerning ideas related to this ethnic group under the name *Indology* because I would like to associate our ideal with the prophetic vision of the discoverer of the New World and his illusion that, by landing in India, he had circumnavigated the planet. Reality ultimately denied the inspired affirmations of the Navigator, but that does not mean that they do not, to this day, encompass a wealth of fertile suggestions... One could say that Columbus christened what are now our lands the “Indies” with the same breath of genius that led him to discover new routes across the ocean and elevated them to a new era of civilization; an era in which communal life would crystallize into definitive, universal forms. When he spoke of the Indies, Columbus was not only thinking about the marvelous lands at the foot of the Himalayas and the spacious breadth of the most illustrious peninsula on Earth; he was not just expressing his satisfaction at having reached the legendary lands mentioned in the accounts of

Apollonius of Tyana and Marco Polo—he also believed he had demonstrated the principle that the Universe is governed by the sphere. Compared to the plane, of course, the sphere has the advantage of adding multiple possibilities to the subject. Ever since then reality, and not just the imagination, has been able to spin and expand within the vast, profound, recurring rhythms of radiant sphericity. It is only natural, then, that that discovery and that meeting should suggest the idea of a race and a culture in which the universal becomes the norm, in aspiration and in reality. And if Columbus was mistaken in terms of the details—that is, if he found the Americas rather than the Indies—then the facts that are sometimes more amazing than fantasy, not only confirmed the reality of the sphere, they also expanded that reality, offering the future an immense continent lying between two oceans. A continent that is far larger than ancient India and much better suited to become the home of the universal civilization that has been imagined and dreamed of down through the ages.

Universality, the dream of monarchs of the world and monarchs of the mind, the dream of Greeks and the dream of Romans, the dream of Persians and the dream of Hindus, the navigator's dream, the dream of all striving souls, suspended like a giant star over the solitude of this vast, fantastic America; almost as large as the other continents, devoid of past and people, as though it had been held in reserve for the time when civilization would evolve into its final form!

On behalf of the inspiration and the synthesis inherent in the word that Columbus used when he claimed to have discovered the Indies; on behalf of the transcendental symbolism in that name and the heritage that it bestowed upon the indigenous people, I am using the term *Indology* in the sense of the final, universal era of the planet's culture.

By the same token, it is not my intention to use this name as a means of assigning any preferential status to the native tradition of the Americas or to the indigenous race that inhabits the continent, since my assessment of this race must be entirely grounded in the same human and fraternal criteria that apply to the other races that will participate in this new era in the history of the world. The very concept of a future race is rooted in a standard of universality that does not exclude, but rather encompasses and assimilates individuals and blood lines.

The fact is that genuine, total universality is not even accessible to human consciousness, which is limited and material. Our civilization is based on limitations, and life in its broadest sense is a fulfillment of partial means and manifestations of absolute power. We should therefore strive for the most complete universality of the synthesis that affirms rather than destroys specific instances of reality. Let us examine our own yearning for universality. This affirmation of the universal quality of our nature is certainly not arbitrary, as is proved by many facts that we will mention here in due course, and is heralded, as we have seen, by the symbol of our baptismal rite. From the very beginning, and throughout every subsequent stage of our development, we have seen indications of this group consciousness; we see identical traits everywhere regardless of certain variations, from the [Río] Bravo to the River Plate, including Brazil. We must therefore remember that if we are to identify this new dynamic current in history we should use the name *Indology* in the sense of the science of the Indies, the science of the Universe, rather than in the sense of the old Indies or the modern Indies or the geographic Indies, but the Indies in the sense that Columbus once dreamed about—the roundness of the Earth, the unity of our species, and the harmony of all cultures.

* * *

The Indies, the New World, the homeland of a united, triumphant human family. This was the dream, this is what we were to become, but none of it has yet been achieved. In order to do so, let us work toward developing a science, a creed, a foundation, a standard of determination, a collection of higher instincts that will help us to accomplish the goal that has been set for us. Let us forge the attitude we need to achieve this objective, the battery of concepts, visions, and emotions we require to succeed in this endeavor—all this would be covered by the name of *Indology* that will serve as the umbrella term for our meditations.

And though this is a very broad subject it seems that as soon as we label it with a specific title, it immediately fades and scatters; it blends with other subjects, and the term becomes empty, singular, and hollow, a mere word with no substance. And we then ask ourselves, “What can we offer that is genuinely ours, that is intrinsically our own, if all that we know is very little and has in fact been learned from others, if we are barely beginning to know anything at all...?”

If, among ourselves, being uneducated is the rule, how can we presume to deserve the honor that one word—all the potential power of one exclusive word—might hold for us and be dedicated exclusively to us?”

Even the humblest word must have substance—the substance of an idea, the essence of a life. We must urgently, therefore, embody our word. Let us gather up into it all its scattered fragments. Let us remember that, to begin to be, we must narrow our focus and limit ourselves. Let us begin to define our nature by specifying our means and defining our goals. There are many and varied circumstances that entitle us to our own place and our own name, far more in fact than the casual observer might believe. On the face of it, we are a collection of twenty unconnected countries, where the pace of life is slow and civilization is not as developed as it is in our mother countries. With the exception of Argentina and Brazil we have not progressed, we have not improved, we have deteriorated; we have squandered resources and energy throughout the long century of our independent existence. However, although the most cursory inspection shows that this situation—undeniable at the present time—does indeed indicate a crisis, it is not sufficient to deplete the as-yet unspent energy or latent potential in the earth and in the inhabitants of the Spanish regions of the New World. A few serious failures are not enough to sever the thread of our unity or to halt the momentum of our future.

. . .

It is a poor system that tries to define something according to what it is not; but it cannot be avoided when dealing with things that are still unformed, changing, and vast; in such cases nothing can be deemed useless: even denial can open doors. We will of course mention the differences involved and will begin by saying that, in physical terms, the largest expanse of the Iberian continent is completely different to the land occupied by the Anglo-Saxons. With the exception of parts of Argentina—whose pampas are similar to the enormous wheat-growing and cattle-raising plains in Mississippi and Kansas—the rest of Hispanic America differs from Anglo-Saxon America in that it has mountainous terrain in the torrid or tropical zone. There are indeed mountains in North America, but they are not in the tropical zone; whereas the South consists mainly of tropical land, though with extensive uplands where the temperature is mild in spite of being close to

the Equator. The United States' territory is easily accessible to human beings. Fertile plains, irrigated by great rivers, with temperate climates have always been cradles of thriving, long-lasting civilizations. The work of civilizing the land takes longer in mountainous areas; where rivers are roads, mountain ranges are walls. Our physical, geographic isolation has led to our fragmentation into separate nationalities, and has split us up in spite of our ethnic unity and our political interests, creating a true dispersion that would be inevitable if it were not for man's steadily increasing ability to control nature. We have great, prodigious rivers like the Amazon, the Orinoco, the Magdalena, the Usumacinta, and the River Plate; but these rivers flow mainly through extremely hot regions where civilization has yet to take root. I am referring here to an advanced civilization; the civilization of white-skinned people that has yet to succeed in these lands because mankind has yet to conquer the challenge of the tropics. It has become commonplace to blame the Spanish for the backwardness of many regions in our Iberian-American world. But I ask: What has been done in the tropics—in the Guianas—by the British, the Dutch, and the French, three first-rate nations? Less than the Spanish; unquestionably less than the Spanish have done in Venezuela and in Colombia and in similar areas on the coast of Mexico; far less that the Portuguese have done in Manaus, Pernambuco, and Bahía. When we compare what the three nations mentioned above have done in the South American tropics with what the Spanish and the Portuguese have done in adjacent areas, the great ability of the Iberians is plain to see; equally obvious is the unfairness of the criticism that is so frequently leveled against Spain because the Spanish did not transform their colonies into another United States.

The north and south are indeed so very different in terms of their physical characteristics that this alone is enough to explain the differences in development, attitude, and culture that distinguish the northern and southern populations of the continent.

But in addition to these physical differences in the terrain, we must also consider the essential historical and racial characteristics that define each of the major ethnic groups in contemporary America. As everyone knows, we are descended from the Hispanic Latin culture, and the people in the north are an extension of the Germanic and Anglo-Saxon traditions.

. . .

It is also said that, for North Americans, life is work; whereas for Iberian-Americans, life is a banquet. . . . When North Americans cannot work they have nothing to do and get bored; when we are obliged to work, we curse life and therefore try to avoid labor. People often speak of a hardworking Martha who prospers in the north, and a carefree Mary who daydreams in the south; but unfortunately the analogy is inaccurate because the United States is not just a useful Martha, it is also a dreaming, creative Mary, whereas we have been unable to dream profitable dreams; we have been unable to organize our dreams or to imbue them with the creative drive of the spirit. The fact is that neither Northerners nor Southerners have yet managed to accomplish our goal, which is to create a way of life in this New World that is capable of both taming nature and rising above worldly affairs.

I would not finish this essay any time soon if I kept on referring to differences and similarities. It is not my intention to develop a parallel story; I am only trying to use it to demonstrate something that tends to be denied and as such should be reaffirmed: that is, the existence of two clearly defined, dissimilar ethnic groups. On one hand, there is the United States of North America, whose Anglo-Saxon culture and temperament is beyond dispute, in spite of the fact that this melting pot includes Italians, Irish, Spanish, Portuguese, French, and even blacks. On the other hand, there is a Latin America, not in the sense of a vague geographical definition but also as a perfectly homogenous ethnic group, more homogenous in fact than the northern one, in spite of its internal social and political differences, which actually increase the complexity of the race without destroying its unity.

We are a homogenous racial group, as homogenous as any homogenous race on Earth, and this unique race, the Iberian-American race, lives in a huge, continuous region of the New World. . . .

There are many who choose to overlook—almost always with the intention of alluding to our bastard nature—that we are an extension and an offshoot of the powerful Spanish culture that once dominated Europe. No one now denies the enormous progress made in Brazil, but some attempt to ignore that it represents a resurgence of the Portuguese spirit that once controlled the seas and exerted its influence around the world. Progress in Argentina is acknowledged, but only in ways that tend to emphasize its differences vis-à-vis the rest of Iberian America. The forces involved in this tacit conspiracy to deny our ethnic

and cultural unity include writers, capitalists, and soldiers of imperialism. Educated Europeans have become accustomed to viewing us and treating us as the scattered flotsam and jetsam of a catastrophic shipwreck. There is a grain of truth in this perception, but the bulk of these inaccurate assessments are the result of arrogance among Old World countries and governments that are opposed to the promise of the future.

In any case, we are in such a state of spiritual and political incoherence that we should begin by reaffirming ourselves. . . .

Our independence brought division, which was prompted by two disastrous causes: the doctrine of nationality, and isolation. . . . The concept of nationality was imported from Europe, where it is understandable and may in fact be inevitable, since European populations are subdivided into a variety of races and languages. Whereas there are a dozen or so languages, customs, and racial groups in Europe, we have just one language, one continuous territory, and one totally homogenous race. Or rather, to be more precise, since we are including Brazil in our definitions, there are just two languages and two parallel traditions here—Spanish and Portuguese. It should be clarified that, from the very beginning there have been two autonomous States—Brazil and Spanish America—but the creation of twenty Spanish-speaking nationalities is an absurd situation that has been promoted by the natural opponents of our growth, encouraged by England which shrewdly sought to challenge Spanish power and preferred that we did not inherit our Motherland's empire. We would therefore blame foreign ideas and the complications created by our local geography for our initial disorientation in the early days of our life on the international stage. And the fact that, having no other alternative, we began to develop patriotic attachments to our local regions, and to manage our affairs according to local territorial criteria that tear at the very fabric of our racial unity.

However, the fundamental advantage of remaining united was so obvious that the very ones who fought for independence—[Simón] Bolívar and [Antonio José de] Sucre, the creators of our nations—were the first to understand that their efforts to create autonomous political entities were incomplete and at great risk if they were not consolidated within a continental political system.

. . . To progress beyond nationalism involves adopting the moral principles and ideals of liberty and justice that inspire modern crusaders to fight against tyranny and injustice. To emulate Don Quixote, you might say, and why

not? The name is too honorable to reject. That is true, but we're talking about a practical version of Don Quixote who seeks to right genuine wrongs that are easy to correct and require urgent solutions. All attempts at reform have been labeled as unsubstantiated theories and utopian fantasies; but I am referring to facts, not theories; facts that formulate theories and indicate a collective need.

...

All this means little to those who live in the present. Mediocrity thrives in the present. But youth belongs to tomorrow, and it will be up to them to develop these latent instincts and take advantage of these fruitful energies that are fertile precisely because they represent the energy of solidarity and love. My generation has seen the rebirth of Iberian-American hope, which has become so much more widespread in our time that it now inspires even those who do not understand it, those in whom it should wither and die. I am referring, for example, to certain tyrants who have promoted or are promoting the Iberian-American ideal because it is in the air and because they see it as a way of bolstering their own cause; a way of co-opting distant movements to support a level of confidence that is being eroded in their country. Others are moved by vanity to appear to be thinking on a grand scale. Whatever the motive, this is precisely what distinguishes the great movements of a collective soul: the fact that the fertile current is swollen with all manner of things. The murkier ones will form the muddy bottom that helps the water to flow; the clearer ones will add radiance to the current.

To summarize, what can be stated without any doubt is that isolation has been breached and that the Iberian-American race has reclaimed its sense of unity and is on its way to spiritual fusion and political confederation.

And this is just a harbinger of even more significant events. A racial and continental political body is reestablishing itself and, as a result of the special features of the times, we can state—that is, we hope to demonstrate—that we are on the threshold of a new era in Latin American history. It would not be possible for the fundamental aspects of this statement to be fully expressed by just one thinker or in just one book; but there are undeniable facts that could not be submitted by any other branch of the human family. To clearly define the cycle that is now beginning, we would highlight the three factors that are involved: an indigenous Spanish, European, and American cultural tradition; an empty, prodigiously wealthy continent; and a mixed race that is not a mixture of European

and European, but rather one of Europeans with Indians, with blacks, with Chinese, with all known races, a totally mixed race, the first instance of a positively universal race.

This is an endeavor that requires the cooperation of every country on Earth—this is what Iberian-America means; this is the subject of the reflections that we will be considering in these essays on the most fascinating subject in contemporary reality: The beginning of a new cycle in the history of the world.

I.4.3 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1054178

FIRST MESSAGE TO HISPANIC AMERICA

Waldo Frank, 1930

American historian and social critic Waldo Frank (1889–1967) delivered “Palabras pronunciadas en la comida de bienvenida en Buenos Aires, después de los discursos de Alfredo Colmo (Presidente del Instituto Cultural Argentino-Norteamericano) y Leopoldo Lugones (Presidente de la Asociación de Escritores Argentinos)” at a dinner welcoming him to Buenos Aires during his lecture-tour of Latin America in 1929. There, Frank articulated his vision for a unified America in spiritual and aesthetic terms. Although Alfonso Reyes, who was Mexico’s ambassador to Argentina, had first introduced Frank to the Latin American intellectual community, Argentinean editor Samuel Glusberg and Peruvian cultural theorist José Carlos Mariátegui, among others, were the organizers of the tour. This text was first published as part of *Primer mensaje a la América Hispana*, a compilation of Frank’s Latin American speeches edited by José Ortega y Gasset under the *Revista de Occidente* imprint [(Madrid, 1930), 15–23] and on which this English version is based. Frank wrote his speeches in English; however, only the Spanish translations by Glusberg, Eduardo Mallea, Salvador Novo, and Gilberto Owens survive.

. . .

THE TWO EXEMPLARY MEN¹ WHO HAVE WELCOMED ME this night know quite well that some of my opinions differ from theirs. Do not think they are not aware

of this. I recognize with lively and overt satisfaction how much their attitude honors them—just as it honors all of you, in your generosity, the generosity of the strong. I will do whatever I can to deserve it, saying what I must say, without distrust or compromise.

Nevertheless, do not expect a full discourse from me this night. I would like to believe that today I find myself among friends, old friends to be sure, given that I have known you in letters and in spirit for a long time. It is surely impossible to deliver speeches to your friends. Of course you may count on their good will; nevertheless, this does not keep a speech from becoming an unpardonable offense. I need all your good will and I believe I can count on it. Because, although I feel at home among you all, I am very far from feeling comfortable in your language. This is why I do not wish to address you in English, even though you would understand me more easily. . . . It was just a few years ago that I spent a few months in Spain; more recently, I spent a few weeks in Mexico: I have here all my learning, without taking into account the hidden books I read (many of them yours); and, above all, my love for the spirit of Spain and that of Hispanic America, which is embodied in your language. For these reasons you will have to pardon me if I torment you by tormenting your beautiful language. Sometimes it seems that brothers were made to torment one another.

I am here, my friends, chiefly because I am an artist. I did not come to preach or to dish out anything. I am here because creation is the most important thing to me in the world: aesthetic creation, spiritual creation. And it has been some time that I have felt the need to create something here, among you all, with my own means and in my own humble way. America is a potential organism: completely latent. It is only now that it can be said to be more than a mere word. And America must be created by artists. I mean artists of all kinds: artists of thought and of word, of architecture, of the visual arts, of music; and also artists of the law, of harmony, and of action. Only artists can create America, and only the measure of success they have in their creative task will determine if politicians and critics will be able to further develop all that these artists bring forth. The measure of success that artists have in creating America will determine if the peoples of America will be able to feel and enjoy their country. And this is, for me, the principal goal: an America that is conceived, felt, and enjoyed by all the American peoples. Now you see just how ambitious I am. I admit it. It does not matter to me what personal success I might enjoy in the task of creating America.

What I do know is that there is no task more worthy of being undertaken. There is no heroism or sacrifice in what I do. I am simply devoted to the work that most pleases and excites me. I find satisfaction in the work itself.

I could, in this modern world, dedicate myself to many other things. I could dedicate myself to earning money, for example, or to making myself as popular as possible, or to inciting and indulging my senses. Or I could shut myself in an ivory tower, to commune with a lofty and secret Muse or with some superior and elusive God. But it has been some time that I have considered such activities much less worthy than the other goal: the one that calls to all of us who feel ourselves to be American. We are the children of all the ancient worlds. There is no culture—Mediterranean, Nordic, Oriental—whose essence has not imbued our minds. But we are also the potential progenitors of a new culture. And it is not difficult to choose between the joy of being a son and the joy of being a father! And so it is our joy and our obligation to create this new world; and, given that it will be our creation, we will truly be able to call it America.

You see that this will be a work of art, in the most ample and truest sense of the word. Art entails beauty. But the appreciation of beauty is nothing more than an awareness of life; beauty is the conscious participation in life. The America we should create must then be more conscious, more alive—that is: more beautiful—than any world of the past.

Let us take as an example Greece, India, or Egypt. They were certainly all great civilizations, each in their turn. But how small a portion of humanity really contributed to the consciousness and beauty of each of those worlds! In Greece, a few patricians laid the foundations of their beautiful creation on a dark mass of slaves. In India and Egypt, only the men of the holy caste laid claim to the sacred light, jealously hiding it from the blind, anonymous masses. And it was not only the majority of men who were exiled from the conscious and active splendor of those cultures, but the women as well. These were not cultures of humanity; they were mere cultures of class, of the tiny, insolent minorities that exploited everything. And in almost all the values and ideologies that we have inherited, we find this same sense of exploitation, this dualism, this exclusivity. It cannot even be said that the earth has seen a race of men that lives wholly under the same light. Until that day arrives, the human race will live as one mutilated: it will be as a body separated from its soul, like a body only partly nourished by food and light, while another part languishes with neither.

America was founded to produce this human culture. Why? Because this dream is for all the ages. Such an undertaking seems more inspiring to me than any other. And I find the most humble participation in this lofty undertaking entirely superior to anything else! Our problem consists in creating MORE LIFE. Deep down, this is the essence of the arts: more light and more life.

. . .

You see I speak to you all openly: I want you to receive me as a brother. But let there be no mistake. I want it to be very clear among us that sometimes I am critical—and I can criticize harshly—but my deepest motivation is always to create beauty, that beauty born of truth; to create life, and at every moment more life, that life whose awareness and whose experience we recognize by the name of beauty.

There is another point I wish to clarify. I am, in my own country, an uncompromising critic. To such a degree, that some foreigners who know only a fragment of my work, or just a few translated pieces, suppose that I have no love for my country. But the truth is that all my critical works regarding life in the United States were inspired by the love I have for my country; and, even more so, by the faith in my country's great destiny. If it were not for this love and this faith, I would never have become a critic: I feel much happier writing stories and novels. If it were not for this love and this faith, I would have followed the easy advice that my European friends—those who cannot share my faith and love for the United States—, and I would have gone to live in Europe, like so many other American artists.

The errors and vices of the United States are, in great part, the dominant features of the whole modern world and nothing more than that: a world that stands in the full chaos of transition. As I hope to demonstrate to you all, this era that is proudly called the modern era, is essentially one of chaos and transition. The features of modernity are emphasized in the United States because our energy, our tremendous will and our spirit sharpen and make visible the contours of our being and our actions. In the desire to create this new world, in the effort to work for its creation, and in the sheer capacity for creation itself, there is no region in the Americas—no region on all the Earth—superior to the United States. We have a mystic and exalted tradition that has never disappeared, from the days that the Jesuits and Puritans arrived on our northern shores. This tradition has

suffered changes and failures; and it will suffer more still with regard to form. It is a tradition of an ideal that has yet to reach its goal. But neither the tradition nor the ideal has perished. Our great authors belong to this tradition and it is for this ideal that they fought. And at least many of our statesmen (Roger Williams, [Thomas] Jefferson and [Abraham] Lincoln, for example) made the effort to express their aspiration [to this ideal]. And this aspiration still lives on.

. . . I love my country in a manner neither officious nor romantic. My love does consist of seeing this and not seeing that, but in trying to illuminate the whole. It is, I believe, a type of naturalism. And if I am a mystic, as I often hear myself called, I am a naturalist mystic.

I believe in life; not in those instances of life that heal or nurture me, but in life as it is, and in how it shall be. I believe, like [Argentinean writer Enrique] Espinoza, that error and evil are nothing more than insufficient knowledge. As an artist, the wholeness of creation matters to me. And I have come to you, to share more intimately with you, the creative task of our generation, which is to give life to a truly whole America.

Such an America, where conscience and conduct, however much they might vary, remain universal; where life, in its totality, will be confused with beauty, [such an America] does not yet exist.

1

Frank refers to Alfredo Colmo, president of the Instituto Cultural Argentino-Norteamericano, and to the well-known modernist writer Leopoldo Lugones.—Ed.

I.4.4 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1054203

GUARDIANS OF THE QUILL

Alfonso Reyes, 1930

Alfonso Reyes wrote this letter to Waldo Frank in New York with the expressed intent of sending him a clipping of a text that Reyes had published in an Argentinean newspaper on the occasion of Frank's visit to Buenos Aires in 1929. Reyes expresses his gratitude to Frank

for having dedicated his *Primer Mensaje a la América Hispana* to him and lauds him for his various lectures and activities that inspire the young people of Latin America to embrace and work to fulfill Frank's utopian vision of a "potential America." Reyes published the letter in *Monterrey: Correo literario de Alfonso Reyes*, an epistolary bulletin that he edited during the years he served as Mexican ambassador to Argentina (1927–30 and 1936–37) and to Brazil (1930–35 and 1938–39). The journal has been reproduced in at least two facsimile editions: in 1980 [(Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica)] and, more recently, in 2008 [(Nuevo León: Gobierno del Estado de Nuevo León/Fondo Editorial de Nuevo León/Comité Regional Norte de Cooperación con la UNESCO/Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León)]. This translation is from the original [*Monterrey: Correo literario de Alfonso Reyes* (Rio de Janeiro), no. 2 (August 1930), 2].

TO MY FRIEND WALDO FRANK, NEW YORK:

You mentioned my name at the start of your *Primer Mensaje a la América Hispana* [First Message to Hispanic America, SEE DOCUMENT 1.4.3]. You recalled our fortuitous meeting in Madrid years ago, the one that helped convince you—as you said in a dedication to another one of your books—that your dream of a more vast America was an intuition based on reality. I feel that all our young people recognize that your journey through the South and the conferences that you now organize are a real step toward the creation of that *América potencial* [potential America], which you hope Man will wholly embrace just as he does the light of happiness and beauty. You believe America is the most historically appropriate place to inherit and combine all the cultures that have come before, with a sense of universality that, until now, has never been realized. And even if that hour should never arrive, it is no less certain that our only clear path of conduct is to pursue it and to strive for it.

We do not believe that America is an accident of Geography. In studying the origins of the Discovery, we find that America was a premonition, almost an invention or a necessity of the soul, even before it became the inevitable port of arrival for those seafaring adventurers. Considering in retrospect the excitement that the Discovery generated, we see that in their thirst for happiness, men converted that glimmer of the New World into the place of choice to strive for an easier life, a more just republic, a Utopia. It does not matter that the idea

flickers like a flame in the wind: its preservation is our mission. The gold miners of the North are not that far removed from the rapacious men in the South who dealt in slaves and haciendas, only thinking of their own prosperity. And, in the corruption of the times, the errors of those men and of these now complement each other like supply and demand. We have inherited then this same mission and we must overcome those same obstacles. . . .

I.4.5 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 839023

THE DESTINY OF AMERICA

Alfonso Reyes, 1942

This excerpt is from “El presagio de América,” the first chapter (part 21) of the book *Última Tule*, by Alfonso Reyes [(Mexico City: Imprenta Universitaria, 1942)]. After exposing the idealized myths of the Conquest, as set forth by European chroniclers, the Mexican author rhetorically calls for a New World utopia to be established by Latin American intellectuals. Invoking the metaphor of Seneca’s “*ultima Thule*,” Reyes suggests that Latin Americans have the duty to forge the destiny of America as if it were a continent emerging from beyond the sea’s horizon. As with “The Christening of America” [SEE DOCUMENT I.1.5], this selection from *Última Tule* is from Alfonso Reyes’s *Obras Completas* [“El presagio de América,” *Última Tule* in *Obras Completas*, vol. XI (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1960), 11–62, 57–62].

WE HAVE ALREADY DISCOVERED AMERICA. But what can be done with America? Once awakened, the American Crusades followed the Medieval Crusades. From this moment on, the fate of America—whatever the contingencies or errors of history might be—began to be defined before mankind as the likely place to realize a more equal form of justice, a liberty more wholly understood, a more complete happiness that is better shared among all men, a republic to be dreamt of, a Utopia. The powerful clarion call of trumpets announces America to the minds of the grandest Europeans. What a spring of dreams! Just as America appears on the scene, as would a Nereid in an eclogue of the sea, the bookshops

begin to register an abundant surge in utopian narratives. The humanists revive the genre of political dialogue in the style of Plato and, with their gaze fixed upon the New World, they begin to conceive of a more felicitous humanity. [Thus,] dogmatisms break apart at the mere sight of novel customs. The possibility is conceived that other civilizations might be more faithful to the Earth; and the “naked philosopher” of Peter Martyr [d’Anghiera] foreshadows [Jean-Jacques] Rousseau’s “noble savage,” so imbued with innate virtue, just as the fruits of the earth burst with nectar. American exoticism, which [Gilbert] Chinard, [Emile] Dermenghem, and others have studied thoroughly, gives literature a new flavor. In contrast to Eastern exoticism—which was merely picturesque and aesthetic—American exoticism connotes a moral and political intention. That is, by using the marvel of America, literature seeks to substantiate an image that had been posited *a priori*: the Golden Age of the ancients, the state of natural innocence—all this without taking as a given the heretical aspects [inherent] in this idea. Who among the most honored masters of European thought could escape the dazzling glare? It leaves its mark on Erasmus [of Rotterdam], on Thomas More, [François] Rabelais, [Michel de] Montaigne, [Torquato] Tasso, [Francis] Bacon, and Tomasso Campanella. Just as Juan Ponce de León was delirious to find the fountain of eternal youth in Florida, so philosophers seek from this New World an inspiration for the political betterment of all people. The duty to insist upon this is perhaps the truest tradition of the continent.

Montaigne’s testimony is singularly eloquent. The drama of the Discovery plays out in his soul, set to the pure music of the ideals that continue to stir us. Montaigne recognizes that the mere contrast between the Old and the New Worlds awakened him to an understanding of all the doctrines that Bacon and Shakespeare would discern [from that contrast]: namely, forgiveness and charity. During Montaigne’s youth, America was expanding day by day, and its growing gravitational pull seemed to lift it up above the moral level of the time. [Montaigne] would avidly read the accounts by the chroniclers of the [West] Indies; moreover, being a civil servant in Bordeaux, he would witness the arrival of the goods originating from that abundant new land and was amazed [by it all]. One of his servants had lived in Brazil for ten years, and he used to describe to him the mores of the indigenous people. Montaigne took an interest and began translating the poetry and songs of the cannibals. Always disposed to open

the way toward paradox, he was pleased to wonder whether the so-called normal civilization was not, after all, an enormous deviation. *Could the man of America—*

El preciosamente Inca desnudo [the exquisitely naked Inca]
Y el de plumas vestido mexicano [and the Mexican clad in feathers],

—just as [Luis de] Góngora’s lines put it—not be closer to the Almighty? If only social norms did not have a merely relative foundation. In the end Montaigne discovers the refinement and art within the paradisiacal Tupi-Guarani way of life. Certainly, Montaigne would say to himself that these indigenous peoples are cannibals. But is it not worse to enslave and destroy nine tenths of humanity as the Europeans do, than it is to eat your fellow men? America tortures its prisoners of war, but in Montaigne’s opinion Europe allows much worse tortures in the name of religion and justice. So, witness here, in the mind of a paradigmatic European, the hint to the most advanced and audacious perspectives that would be proffered by the modern spirit. Disappointment in the errors of Europe was becoming part of the intellectual milieu. It contaminates both Protestantism and Puritanism—even more Quakerism that had just established itself in [North] America. Meanwhile, the Catholic Church was also making its [own attempts] at societal utopias: within Vasco de Quiroga’s workshops in Mexico [Michoacán], in the first missions set up in [southern] Brazil and throughout the Jesuit Empire in Paraguay.

What a radiant promise the New World was for all those dissenters and reformers! While the merchants were securing their profits, religious apostles embarked on their redemptive mission, but legions of dreamers were longing for hope. It can be said that America was discovered (almost “invented”) as the place in which the most chimerical forces could overflow. Those who were thirsty, either in their bodies or souls, discovered and invented America, [as did] those who needed houses of gold in order to satisfy their hunger for luxury, or even those with a clear conscience [who needed] a place to sow and instill both ideas: of God and of goodness. Later on, America remained a haven for the persecuted: it is already a hospitable home for the forbidden religions of the Huguenot and the Puritan; it is already a land where the condemning eye offers a truce for Cain’s rehabilitation.

The European colonization came afterward. In the following centuries, America would be burdened by a slow gestation period, and so its aspirations would lay dormant. If the seed was sown during the Discovery, then that seed—now that admirable governance of the Vice-Royalties that channels [America's] spiritual energy—lies quietly warmed beneath the soil. It is not dead, quite the contrary. As republics are liberated, the ideal [of America] is [further] defined and characterized by its universality. Throughout the nineteenth century, the most ardent Utopians—be they spiritualists, socialists, or communists—headed toward the New World as a Promised Land in which to realize the happiness that everyone aspires to, albeit under different names. Today, hope spans across the continent, and it offers itself to Europe as a preserve for humanity.

Either this is the meaning of history or history has no meaning at all. If it is not as such, then it should be, and all we Americans know it. Urgent contingencies or foreign affronts could divert our course one day, one year, even one century, but the grand path will prevail. The decline of America is as certain as that of a star, [however] it began as an ideal and remained an ideal. America is a Utopia.

In conclusion, before its discovery, America had already been intuited in the dreams of poetry and in the insights of science. The pressing need to determine the political configuration of the land corresponded to the necessity of settling its borders. The king of the fable had a broken coin; he lacked the missing fragment necessary to decipher the riddle of his fate. Either, just as in Plato's Atlantis, all spoke of a continent that had disappeared into a vortex of oceans; or, just as in Seneca's *ultima* [ultimate] Thule,¹ all speak of a continent emerging from beyond the sea's horizon. Well before her presence was felt, America was noted by absence. We could say in the language of pre-Socratic philosophy that a world without America was in a state of imbalance with regard to matter and the elements, over-constrained as *hubris* or injustice. For a time, America seemed to flee before the keel of the captivated explorers.

Once America was discovered, the human mind—inexhaustible in its determination to advance social well-being—began to theoretically conceptualize Utopias and Perfect Republics: those promising new territories that could serve as a refuge. In the practical sense, endeavors of political and religious expansion arise, no longer confined by the limitations of Old Europe. The pretext [of the Discovery] had been a humble thing: a culinary privation due to the lack of spices

from the East once Constantinople had fallen to the power of the Turks. The real motivation was a material and base matter: the economic exploitation of the colonies, the desire for immediate wealth. But in spite of all this, the ideal had been set in motion.

Given that life never proceeds in a straight line, from that moment on, among the vicissitudes of history, between vacillation and chance, America appears as the stage for all attempts at human happiness, for all righteous adventures. And today, before the disasters of the Old World, America gives hope new value. Her colonial origin—the same that obliges her to look outside herself for the reasons for her actions and her culture—gave her early on an international sensibility, an enviable elasticity so that she [might] perceive the vast human panorama, [both at the] individual [level] and as a whole. American culture is the only culture capable of disregarding ethnic and national partitions. On a course bound toward *homonoia* [harmony], an egalitarian empathy acts as the equalizer between the two main characters of the American drama: [namely] the homogeneity of the Latin world and the sameness of the Saxon sphere. The nations of America are not as foreign to one another as the countries of other continents. Three centuries in the making; one century of exhausting efforts unleashed by independence and novel organizational structures; a half century more of cohesiveness and cooperation. Such is, from a sweeping perspective, the path of America.

1

Seneca writes of Thule in *Medea*: “There will come an age in the far-off years when Ocean shall unloose the bonds of things, when the whole broad earth shall be revealed, when Tethys shall disclose new worlds and Thule not be the limit of the lands.” Seneca, *Medea*, in *Seneca’s Tragedies*, trans. Frank J. Miller (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), lines 376–379.—Ed.

I.4.6 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 838990

THE ACTUAL FUNCTION OF PHILOSOPHY IN LATIN AMERICA

Leopoldo Zea, 1942

The Mexican philosopher Leopoldo Zea (1912–2004) was one of the first Latin American thinkers to be concerned explicitly with the search for philosophical identity in the region. He considered this identity to be an extension of Latin America's cultural legacy. He explains that that which is properly Latin American cannot be found in either pre-Columbian or European culture. The impossibility of bringing the former to life and of becoming the latter is an essential part of what Latin American philosophers should investigate. In this essay, published the same year as Reyes's *Última Tule* [SEE DOCUMENT I.4.5] and often read as its rebuttal, Zea outlines his vision for a distinctly Latin American philosophy. The author wrote the piece in Spanish ("La verdadera función de la filosofía latinoamericana") and published it in *Cuadernos Americanos* [(Mexico City), year 1, no. 3 (May–June 1942)]. The essay was later included in Zea's *Ensayos sobre filosofía en la historia* [(Mexico City: Stylo, 1948)]. This translation is by Iván Jaksic and was published in the volume *Latin American Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* [Jorge J. E. Gracia, ed. (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1986), 219–25].

I

SOME YEARS AGO, A YOUNG MEXICAN TEACHER published a book that caused much sensation. This young teacher was Samuel Ramos and the book was *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México*. [A Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico] This book was the first attempt at interpreting Mexican culture. In it Mexican culture became the subject of philosophical interpretation. Philosophy came down from the world of ideal entities to a world of concrete entities like Mexico, a symbol of men who live and die in their cities and farms. This daring attempt was derogatorily termed "literature." Philosophy could not be anything other than a clever game of words taken from an alien culture. These words of course lacked meaning: the meaning they had for that alien culture.

Years later another teacher, this time the Argentinean Francisco Romero, emphasized Ibero-America's need to begin thinking about its own issues, and the

need to delve into the history of its culture in order to take from it the issues needed for the development of a new type of philosophical concern. This time, however, Romero's call was based on a series of cultural phenomena that he identified in an essay entitled "Sobre la filosofía en Iberoamérica" [About Philosophy in Latin America]. In this article he showed how the interest in philosophical issues in Latin America was increasing on a daily basis. The public at large now follows and asks with interest for works of a philosophical character and nature. This has resulted in numerous publications—books, journals, newspaper articles, etc.—and also in the creation of institutes and centers for philosophical studies where philosophy is practiced. This interest in philosophy stands in sharp contrast with periods when such an activity was confined to a few misunderstood men. Their activity did not transcend literary or academic circles. Today, we have reached the level that Romero calls "the period of philosophical normalcy"; that is, a period in which the practice of philosophy is seen as a function of culture just as is the case with any other activity of a cultural nature. The philosopher ceases to be an eccentric whom nobody cares to understand and becomes a member of his country's culture. There is what one may call a "philosophical environment"; that is, a public opinion that ponders philosophical production, thus forcing it to address the issues that concern those who are part of this so-called "public opinion."

Now, there is one particular issue that concerns not only a few men in our continent, albeit the Latin American man in general. This issue concerns the possibility or impossibility of Latin American culture, and, as an aspect of the same issue, the possibility or impossibility of Latin American philosophy. Latin American philosophy can exist if there is a Latin American culture from which this philosophy may take its issues. The existence of Latin American philosophy depends on whether or not there is Latin American culture. However, the formulation and attempt to solve this problem, apart from the affirmative or negative character of the answer, are already Latin American philosophy, since they are an attempt to answer either affirmatively or negatively a Latin American question. Hence, the works of Ramos, Romero, and others on this issue, whatever their conclusions, are already Latin American philosophy.

The issue involved in the possibility of Latin American culture is one demanded by our time and the historical circumstances in which we find ourselves. The Latin American man had not thought much about this issue before

because it did not worry him. A Latin American culture, a culture proper to the Latin American man, was considered to be an irrelevant issue; Latin America lived comfortably under the shadow of European culture. However, the latter culture has been shaken (or is in crisis) today, and it seems to have disappeared from the entire European continent. The Latin American man who had lived so comfortably found that the culture that supported him fails him, that he has no future, and that the ideas in which he believed have become useless artifacts, without sense, lacking value even for their own authors. The man who had lived with so much confidence under a tree he had not planted now finds himself in the open when the planter cuts down the tree and throws it into the fire as useless. The man now has to plant his own cultural tree: create his own ideas. But a culture does not emerge miraculously; the seed of that culture must be taken from somewhere, it must belong to someone. Now—and this is the issue that concerns the Latin American man—where is he going to find that seed? That is, what ideas is he going to develop? To what ideas is he going to give his faith? Will he continue to believe and develop the ideas inherited from Europe? Or is there a group of ideas and issues to be developed that are proper to the Latin American circumstance? Or rather, will he have to invent those ideas? In a word, the problem of the existence, or lack of existence, of ideas that are proper to America, as well as the problem of the acceptance or rejection of ideas belonging to European culture that is now in crisis, comes to the fore. It specifically implies the problem of the relationship between Latin America and European culture and the problem of the possibility for a genuinely Latin American ideology.

II

In light of what has been said it is clear that one of the primary issues involved in Latin American philosophy concerns the relations between Latin America and European culture. Now, the first thing that needs to be asked has to do with the type of relations that Latin America has with that culture. There are some who have compared this relationship to that between Asia and European culture. It is said that Latin America, just as Asia, has assimilated only technology from Europe. But in that case, what would belong to Latin American culture? For the Asian man, what he has adopted from European culture is regarded as something superimposed that he has had to assimilate owing to the change in

his own circumstance caused in turn by European intervention. However, what he has adopted from European culture is not properly the culture; that is, a life-style, a worldview, but only its instruments, its technology. Asians know that they have inherited an age-old culture that has been transmitted from generation to generation; they know that they have their own culture. Their view of the world is practically the opposite of the European. From Europeans they have only adopted their technology, and only because they have been forced to do so by the intervention of Europeans and their technology in a circumstance that is properly Asian. Our present day shows what Asians can do with their own worldview while using European technology. Asians have little concern for the future of European culture, and they will try to destroy it if they feel that it gets in their way or continues to intervene in what they regard as their own culture.

Now, can we Latin Americans think in a similar way about European culture? To think so is to believe that we have our own culture, but that this culture has not perhaps reached full expression yet because Europe has prevented it. In light of this, one could think that this is a good time to achieve cultural liberation. If that were the case, the crisis of European culture would not concern us. More than a problem, such a crisis would be a solution. But this is not the case: we are deeply concerned about the crisis of European culture; we experience it as our own crisis. This is due to the fact that our relationship with European culture as Latin Americans is different from that of the Asians. We do not feel, as Asians do, the heirs of our own autochthonous culture. There was, yes, an indigenous culture—Aztec, Maya, Inca, etc.—but this culture does not represent, for us contemporary Latin Americans, the same thing that ancient Oriental culture represents for contemporary Asians. While Asians continue to view the world as their ancestors did, we Latin Americans do not view the world as the Aztecs or the Mayans did. If we did, we would have the same devotion for pre-Columbian temples and divinities that an Oriental has for his very ancient gods and temples. A Mayan temple is as alien and meaningless to us as a Hindu temple.

What belongs to us, what is properly Latin American, is not to be found in pre-Columbian culture. Is it to be found in European culture? Now, something strange happens to us in relation to European culture: we use it but we do not consider it ours; we feel imitators of it. Our way of thinking, our world-view, is similar to the European. European culture has a meaning for us that we do not

find in pre-Columbian culture. Still, we do not feel it to be our own. We feel as bastards who profit from goods to which they have no right. We feel as if we were wearing someone else's clothes: they are too big for our size. We assimilate their ideas but cannot live up to them. We feel that we should realize the ideals of European culture, but we also feel incapable of carrying out the task: we are content with admiring them and thinking that they are not made for us. This is the knot of our problem: we do not feel heirs of an autochthonous culture, because that culture has no meaning for us; and that which has meaning for us, like the European, does not feel as our own. There is something that makes us lean toward European culture while at the same time resists becoming part of that culture. Our view of the world is European but we perceive the achievements of that culture as alien. And when we try to realize its ideals in Latin America we feel as imitators.

What is properly ours, what is Latin American, makes us lean toward Europe and at the same time resists being Europe. Latin America leans toward Europe as a son to his father, but at the same time it resists becoming like his own father. This resistance is noticeable in that, despite leaning toward European culture, Latin America still feels like an imitator when it seeks to achieve what that culture does. It does not feel that it is realizing what is proper to it but only what Europe alone can achieve. That is why we feel inhibited by and inferior to Europeans. The malaise resides in that we perceive that what is Latin American, that is, what is ours, is something inferior. The Latin American man's resistance to being like a European is felt as mere incapacity. We think as Europeans, but we do not feel that this is enough; we also want to achieve the same things that Europe achieves. The malaise is that we want to adjust the Latin American circumstance to a conception of the world inherited from Europe, rather than adjusting that conception of the world to the Latin American circumstance; hence the divorce between ideas and reality. We need the ideas of European culture, but when we bring them into our circumstance we find them to be too big because we do not dare to fit them to this circumstance. We find them big and are afraid to cut them down; we prefer to endure the ridicule of wearing an oversize suit. Indeed, until recently the Latin American man wanted to forget what he is for the sake of becoming another European. This is similar to the case of a son who wants to forget being a son in order to be his own father: the result has to be a gross imi-

tation. This is what the Latin American man feels: that he has tried to imitate rather than to realize his own personality.

Alfonso Reyes portrays the Latin American man's resistance to being Latin American with great humor. The Latin American man felt "in addition to the misfortune of being human and modern, the very specific misfortune of being Latin American; that is, having been born and having roots in a land that was not the center of civilization, but rather a branch of it."¹ To be Latin American was until very recently a great misfortune, because this did not allow us to be European. Today it is just the opposite: the impossibility to become European, in spite of our great efforts, and allow us to have a personality. Moreover, it allows us to learn—in this moment of crisis for European culture—that there is something of our own that can give us support. What this something is should be one of the issues that a Latin American philosophy must investigate.

III

Latin America is the daughter of European culture; it is the product of one of its major crises. The discovery of America² was not a matter of chance, but rather the product of necessity. Europe needed America: in every European mind there was the idea of America, the idea of a promised land. A land where the European man could place his ideas, since he could no longer continue to place them in the highest places. He could no longer place them in the heavens. Owing to the emergence of a new physics, the heavens were no longer the home of ideals but rather became something unlimited, a mechanical and therefore dead infinity. The idea of an ideal world came down from the heaven and landed in America. Hence the European man came out in search of the land and found it.

The European needed to rid himself of a worldview of which he was tired. He needed to get rid of his past and begin a new life. He needed to build a new history, one that would be well planned, and calculated, without excess or wanting. What the European was afraid of openly proposing in his own land, he took for granted in this land called America. America became the pretext for criticizing Europe. What he wanted Europe to be became imaginarily fulfilled in America. Fantastic cities and governments that corresponded to the ideals of the modern man were imagined in America. America was presented as the idea of what Europe should be. America became Europe's utopia. It became the ideal world

that the old Western world was to follow to rebuild itself. In a word, America was the ideal creation of Europe.

America was born to history as a land of projects, as a land of the future, but of projects and a future that were not its own. Such projects and such future were Europe's. The European man who put his feet in this America—becoming part of the Latin American circumstance and giving rise to the Latin American man—has been unable to see what is properly American. He has only seen what Europe wanted America to be. When he did not find what European imagination had placed in the American continent, he was disappointed, and this produced the uprooting of the Latin American man from his own circumstance. The Latin American man feels European by origin, but he feels inferior to the European man by reason of his circumstance. He feels inadequate because he regards himself as superior to his circumstance, but inferior to the culture he comes from. He feels contempt for things Latin American, and resentment toward Europe.

Rather than attempting to achieve what is proper to Latin America, the Latin American man labors to achieve the European utopia and thus stumbles, as it could be expected, into a Latin American reality that resists being anything other than what it is: Latin America. This gives rise to the feeling of inferiority about which we already have spoken. The Latin American man considers his reality to be inferior to what he believes to be his destiny. In Anglo-Saxon America this feeling expresses itself in the desire to achieve what Europe has achieved in order to satisfy its own needs. North America has strived to become a second Europe, a magnified copy of it. Original creation does not matter. What matters is to achieve the European models in a big way and with the greatest perfection. Everything is reduced to numbers: so many dollars or so many meters. In the end, the only thing that is sought with this is to hide a feeling of inferiority. The North American tries to show that he is as capable as the European. And the way to show it is by doing the same things that Europeans have done, on a bigger scale and with greater technical perfection. But this only demonstrates technical, not cultural background, because cultural ability is demonstrated in the solution one gives to the problems of man's existence, and not in the technical imitation of solutions that other men found for their own problems.

The Latin American man, however, feels inferior not only to the European, but also to the North American man; not only does he no longer try to hide his feeling of inferiority, but he also exhibits it through self-denigration. The

only thing that he has tried to do so far is to live comfortably under the shadow of ideas he knows are not his own. To him, ideas do not matter as much as the way to benefit from them. That is why our politics have turned into bureaucracy. Politics is no longer an end but an instrument to get a job in the bureaucracy. Banners and ideals do not matter anymore; what matters is how these banners and ideals can help us get the job we want. Hence the miraculous and quick change of banners; whence also that we always plan and project but we never achieve definitive results. We are continually experimenting and projecting with ever-changing ideologies. There is no single national plan because there is no sense of nation. And there is no sense of nation for the same reason that there is no sense of what is Latin American. He who feels inferior as Latin American also feels inferior as a national, that is, as a member of one of the Latin American nations. This is not to say that the fanatic, Nationalist who talks about a Mexican, Argentinean, Chilean, or any other Latin American nation's culture, to the exclusion of anything that smacks of foreign, has any better sense of what a nation is. No, in the end he would only try to eliminate what makes him feel inferior. This is the case of those who say that this is the appropriate time to eliminate everything European from our culture.

This position is wrong because, whether we want it or not, we are the children of European culture. From Europe we have received our cultural framework, what could be called our structure: language, religion, customs; in a word, our conception of life and world is European. To become disengaged from it would be to become disengaged from the heart of our personality. We can no more deny that culture than we can deny our parents. And just as we have a personality that makes us distinct from our parents without having to deny them, we should also be able to have a cultural personality without having to deny the culture of which we are children. To be aware of our true relations with European culture eliminates our sense of inferiority and gives us instead a sense of responsibility. This is the feeling that animates the Latin American man today. He feels that he has "come of age," and, as any other man who reaches maturity, he acknowledges that he has a past that he does not need to deny, just as no one is ashamed of having had a childhood. The Latin American man knows how to be the heir of Western culture and now demands a place in it. The place that he demands is that of collaborator. As a son of that culture he no longer wants to live off it but to work for it. Alfonso Reyes, speaking on behalf of a Latin America that feels responsible,

demanded from Europe “the right of universal citizenship that we have already conquered,” because already “we have come of age.”³ Latin America is at a point in its history when it must realize its cultural mission. To determine this mission constitutes another issue that what we have called Latin American philosophy has to develop.

. . .

What is Latin American cannot be regarded as an end in itself, but as a boundary of a larger goal. Hence, the reason why every attempt to make a Latin American philosophy, guided by the sole purpose of being Latin American, is destined to fail. One must attempt to do purely and simply philosophy, because what is Latin American will arise by itself. Simply by being Latin American, philosophers will create a Latin American philosophy in spite of their own efforts at depersonalization. Any attempt to the contrary will be anything but philosophy.

. . .

It is only on the basis of these assumptions that we will accomplish our mission within universal culture, and collaborate with it fully aware of our abilities, and be aware also of our capacities as members of the cultural community called humanity, as well as of our limits as children of a circumstance that is our own and to which we owe our personality: Latin America.

. . .

1

Alfonso Reyes, “Notas sobre la inteligencia americana,” *Sur*, no. 24 (September 1936).

2

Zea consistently uses “America” and “Americanos” to refer to Latin America and its inhabitants. I use “Latin America” and “Latin Americans” respectively to render these terms throughout the paper, except in the present case, because here Zea is referring to the period of discovery, when there was no distinction between Anglo-Saxon and Latin America. [—Trans.]

3

Reyes, “Notas...”.

I.5

TENSIONS AT STAKE

I.5.1 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1054239

LATIN AMERICA

Charles Malato, 1902

French anarchist and writer Charles Malato de Corné (1857–1938) wrote this brief article on Latin America for the inaugural issue of *Les Annales de la Jeunesse Laïque*, the official journal for the French youth who espoused a critical approach to Catholicism in politics or education. Malato, one of the journal's principal collaborators, was also editor-in-chief of the Parisian newspaper *L'Aurore*, on whose front page Émile Zola had published “J'accuse!”—his condemnation of the Dreyfus Affair—in 1898. Writing in 1902, only four years after the conclusion of the Spanish-American War, Malato warns of the threat of the “imperialists of the United States” and of potential “Yankee invasions.” Just three years later, in 1905, Malato gained widespread notoriety for organizing a plot to assassinate King Alfonso XIII of Spain. This translation is from the original [*Les Annales de la Jeunesse Laïque* (Paris), Georges Bérét, ed., vol. 1 (June 1902), 18].

[FIRST IT WAS] COLOMBIA AND VENEZUELA, now it is Argentina and Chile that are threatening to pull at each other's hair.

These Spanish-American republics are so irritating!

The fact is that these conflicts did not spring up overnight. For many years now, unresolved border disputes have festered and, after many failed attempts to settle them, have led to fighting between the *gauchos* of the Pampas and their neighbors to the East, the conquerors of Peru.

In all likelihood, if war had been declared earlier it would have been won by Chile, which is considered the major military power in South America. But

much time was spent in negotiations during which Argentina—badly destabilized and shaken by an endemic financial crisis—quickly completed its preparations for defense, re-organized its artillery and its marvelous *gaucho* cavalry, and appealed to its European immigrants.

In view of the current balance of power, it is understandable that both countries wisely decided against pursuing a conflict whose result seemed to be in doubt. In 1898, the conflict was submitted to England for arbitration, and it is assumed that the matter will be settled by the respective embassies. Some Latin American-ists—such as Mr. Alessandro d'Altri—might have envisioned a triple alliance between Brazil, Chile, and Argentina that would create an essential counterbalance at the southern tip of the New World to counter any Yankee invasions. Unfortunately, things did not turn out as expected and the region seems to be, once again, on the verge of another outbreak of hostilities, to the great delight of the imperialists in the United States.

The Pan American Congress that was held in Mexico City yielded negative results. The idea of bringing together all the peoples of the New World in this way was not, in itself, a bad one by any means. But, for a federation of this nature to succeed, it must be organized on the basis of liberty, equality, and political and economic guarantees that at present are entirely lacking.

The Great Republic of Washington and Lincoln—which had the honor of fathering [abolitionist] John Brown—has become the province of an oligarchy of multi-millionaire despots who are capable of starving the people even more autocratically than King Louis XIV and both Napoleons. At a single stroke they can siphon off all forms of subsistence required by thousands of families and bring human activity to a halt almost anywhere on the planet. All major commodities, such as wheat, sugar, oil, cotton, and steel are at their disposal. Unlike the heroes bedecked [with medals won] on the battlefield, they can impose their laws on the world.

The United States is a country where plutocrats rule and where politicians dabble in intrigue to a far greater extent than we do (like Jacob's ladder!). It is a country where Southern landowners, furious over the nominal liberties granted to their slaves, take revenge by roasting them over a slow fire. Here, the proletarian masses die freely at their labors under the democratic rifle of the Pinkertons. They no longer represent the solid ideal once suggested to our Republicans. It is, in fact, a capitalist oligarchy that uses slave labor and nothing more.

The people of Latin America are certainly not living in a paradise. Addled by their priests, duped by their lawyer-politicians, and executed by their generals' firing squads, they really have little to lose by becoming part of the realm of Vanderbilt, Morgan, and Rockefeller. These gentlemen do not appreciate needless turmoil and might be able to provide a measure of peace that could be a welcome respite in the aftermath of the local disturbances.

Nevertheless, all this turmoil is part of life. As brutal as they are, armed protests with rifles, guns, or machetes are still a means of protest. Under the thumb of the Dollar Kings, things would not be quite the same.

They have already made their influence felt in the Caribbean; set a goal of hegemony in Central America; and spoken loudly in the Mexican Parliament. Tomorrow, it will be Mexico itself—hitherto a bulwark of Latin America—which will be absorbed into the fabulous United States. To the east, Mexico has been separated from Europe since the United States took possession of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and perhaps other islands; its northern border has been weakened by the introduction of the railroads; and, to the south, it has been deprived of all direct communication with the rest of the continent by the Panama Canal.

Once Mexico has been absorbed, the influence of other States such as Chile, Brazil, and Argentina will no longer be quite so relevant.

I.5.2 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 732894

TOWARD AN EFFICIENT LATIN AMERICA

Pedro Figari, 1925

These excerpts come from a newspaper article summarizing the conference paper “Hacia la eficiencia de América,” which Uruguayan attorney-at-law and painter Pedro Figari (1868–1938) presented at the Asociación Amigos del Arte in Buenos Aires in 1925 as part of the didactic program of the Instituto Popular de Conferencias. This widely influential cultural center was established by the newspaper *La Prensa* in 1914. A frequent contributor to the daily, Figari delivered the lecture four years after he had relocated to the Argentinean capital from his native Montevideo and the same year he moved to Paris (where he lived until 1933). In this

text reflecting his more developed thinking, the artist advocates for a future unification of Latin America based not only on hard work and education, but also on the more important, organic process of self-awareness. This translation is from the original [*La Prensa* (Buenos Aires), year 2, no. 20226, 2nd section (June 27, 1925)].

Following the opening ceremony, the director of the institute, Dr. Carlos Ibarguren, introduced the lecturer:

GENTLEMEN: PEDRO FIGARI, THE PAINTER, will speak to us today about his sociological vision of the future of the Americas. The general public is familiar with this Uruguayan artist's original, powerful pictorial work and is aware of his unique ability to portray vibrant scenes of local criollo life from last century. His paintings capture a vivid sense of place, recalling what has been obliterated by the European "avalanche." Figari's art comes alive because it is an expression of pure color and movement; as we look at his works, we seem to hear the riotous sounds that erupt when blacks get together to dance the *candombe*; we seem to breathe the wind blowing across the wild pampas, carrying the fragrance of native grasses and ruffling the manes of the horses galloping in herds across the plain. Figari's painting has aroused great interest in Europe, where it is as popular as the exotic fruits whose fresh, juicy pulp bursts with new vitality from virgin lands. His inquiring, anti-academic palette is brand new precisely because it is foreign to the schools that have molded the forms used by artists in the Old World.

You are not about to hear from an ex-judge, but from an artist who exudes optimism, inspired by an American ideal that he longs to see fulfilled. He will give us an outline of the clear, thriving future of the Americas—the savior of humanity—in these dark days that seem to herald both the arrival of a new dawn and the onset of twilight. . . .

When Dr. Ibarguren finished his introduction . . . the distinguished Uruguayan artist addressed the assembly:

So far, we South Americans have managed to get by, more by luck than good management, taking advantage of the natural wealth of our lands and the work of

other nations in order to live a civilized life and even to make some progress while doing little or nothing for ourselves. But we can no longer live like that, permanently hitched to someone else's star. That way of doing things is unimpressive and is no longer compatible with the realities we face in these modern times when we all have to work.

Happily, there are many signs that our people are starting to develop a sense of autonomy. Latin Americans want to learn how to become efficient and how to sing their own song. We should congratulate ourselves most sincerely on having arrived at this beautiful, auspicious threshold and must strive to be worthy of our mission.

I believe that our people—who are as fine as any other and who are settled in cosmopolitan enclaves in immense, or immensely rich, territories—are capable of making brilliant, fruitful contributions to the world as long as we work hard and work well. This cannot happen until we have developed a number of organizing proposals, (as if [we were designing] an architectural structure) focused on defining the American soul. It is not enough to imitate and assimilate; Latin America must learn how to be a producer and develop her own sciences, arts, and industries in keeping with the times. That is the only way that Latin America can show her awareness of her circumstances and signal that although, as a new world, she enjoys enormous advantages based on the wealth of her virgin lands, she could nonetheless benefit from the experience of the rest of the world.

. . .

We have not yet learned how to exploit materials and use them in sensible, methodical ways; and we do very little experimenting in Latin America, where everything should be a glorious work in progress. We not only squander our energy and riches; we are also ignorant about our environment and its many valuable elements and resources. Our ignorance is not due to negligence but to our education system that, by focusing on the liberal arts rather than the sciences, has created a totally unrealistic ethic that encourages an attitude of indifference to our natural wealth. Though foreigners may not be as familiar with our environment and its specific virtues, they are more interested in it than we are, and they prize it more highly than we do.

The fact is that we contribute to that very phenomenon by being more interested in other countries than we are in our own and by placing greater value

on what they have to offer than on what we produce in our own backyard. The difference is that we are just beginning, whereas they have been at it for some time. They have promoted their attributes and resources to an extraordinary degree, whereas we have looked down our noses at ours and have essentially allowed them to languish in oblivion.

OUR SNOBBISHNESS

Our “snobbishness” still makes us blush when we are reminded of our simple roots and our original, modest but charming urban settlements, not to mention the crude, rustic nature of our rural life to which we owe so much.

It upsets us to know that just a few decades ago—before the arrival of skyscrapers and taxis, of course, but not that much earlier—black slaves gathered in the Plaza de Mayo [in Buenos Aires] in colorful demonstrations. We are upset because, having extolled the virtue of everything that is foreign (which of course was once just as simple and rustic as what we have to offer in our countries), we are humiliated by our origins instead of feeling extremely proud of the speed with which we have progressed to where we are now. Thanks to this defect, we are easily dazzled by others and incapable of justifying [and] appreciating our own environment. If we would be constructive, however, our identity and our American output should be based on our environment, just as we sink the foundations for our home into our land. I have chosen to look back on our past with admiration, acknowledgement, and affection.

A LACK OF FORESIGHT

. . . We understand that we can no longer trust in the steady pace of natural evolution. The current European catastrophe, for example, has hastened, even disturbed, that pace, and a number of extraordinary new factors (some of them, perhaps, requiring urgent attention) demand that we think, organize, and work; we are, in other words, being forced to develop our own plan of action. The Old World, where people once smirked when speaking of “South America,” now expects more from us than exports of raw materials. They now expect that, as our new race of people develops and can offer the world the fruits of our efficiency, we can be useful to them, which is particularly gratifying since we are so deeply

in their debt. Our people are indeed rich in privilege and free of bitter rivalries; we are a powerhouse of strength and ideas—or could be if we would focus on our own essential goals instead of trying to imitate others—fully capable of forging our own destiny. . . .

The new, pressing matters that I referred to earlier are as follows: How should we deal with the influx of immigrants who come in search of commercial opportunities and work while they are not irrevocably settled? Given the new demands of the times, how [can we] best administer our natural riches? How might we Latin Americans best exploit our resources—our flora, our fauna, our virgin archeology—considering the grievous exhaustion of such resources in the Old World? Should we passively hand it all over to others, as we used to give away gold nuggets, and be satisfied with nothing but rental revenue? Are we to relinquish our control—our autonomy, that sacred cause of the Americas—over the defense and cultivation of the essential interests of our lands to private enterprise which, due to a lack of knowledge, or funds, or patience might not be up to the necessary standards of stewardship? . . .

“EITHER WE INDUSTRIALIZE OURSELVES OR WE WILL BE INDUSTRIALIZED BY OTHERS”

About six years ago, driven by my passion for the Americas, I proposed to my country's government that, in preparation for the coming pressures and demands we should launch an initiative to promote greater understanding and communication among Latin American countries in order to stimulate greater cooperation and improve our efficiency, and I said at that time, “Either we industrialize ourselves or we will be industrialized by others.” That initiative, though well received here and there at the time, was quietly ignored and then forgotten. It remains forgotten, in spite of the fact that everyone agreed that it was something that should be done, which is why I am here today to talk about it again.

Whereas it is certainly an urgent priority to prepare, educate, and organize the industrial sector, it would behoove us to develop every sector at the same time, in one single, wide-ranging endeavor so that we might manage our evolutionary phase as thoroughly and efficiently as possible. What is needed, above all, is a sweeping plan for the kind of theoretical and practical education that will teach the skills required of a successful workforce: to avoid manipulations and promote research and experimentation, and instill the business and

management abilities required to develop the executive, entrepreneurial spirit of a strong nation. Students from elementary school onwards must be stimulated to develop their ingenuity and their industriousness; that is the great creative force that must be harnessed on behalf of our efficiency.

. . .

THE FUTURE

The most effective way for a country to demonstrate its good sense is to set higher goals for itself. The cost of that process can then be counted as seed money for an auspicious undertaking. And, just between us, there are no longer any doubts that the education dispensed in our Latin America is insufficient and irrelevant, since it is of a theoretical nature and leads to conjecture, expediency, and intellectual ownership, and overburdens the fearsome, costly ranks of the bureaucracy, of the electorate, and of those who live lavish lifestyles and offer more glitter than promise, at least when not offered wiser vocational choices. The education of our people, being a constructive force in our society, should be considered a matter of national honor.

If we would strive for superior works and greater efficiency, we must not limit our efforts to a narrow utilitarian criteria guided by impatience or a desire for immediate results. We must prepare, we must foresee, and we must take appropriate precautions. . . .

Happily, some idealists have already been working on this matter. Work has been done by researchers, naturalists, and selfless excavators, sometimes in the face of astonishing public indifference and, occasionally, even crude satire. Much has been accomplished by lovers of tradition, collectors, and legions of scholars and laborers; some of them are well known, others less well so, and some are completely unknown, but all are greatly esteemed for their eminent farsightedness, wisdom, and unselfishness. All of them have made priceless contributions that are even more valuable now when we need them so very much.

. . . We must be very clearly aware of all this. About twelve years ago, I was at a meeting in Europe at a time when South America was still a subject that made people smile. Some people persisted in asking me about “our things,” and I—resorting to the wary, “just in case” attitude of our people—replied: “I am the first to recognize and admire the superb level of culture that you have attained

and to deplore our deficiencies. But, if I were asked by any South American government to come here in search of your progress, I would strive to take only what suited us and leave the rest. That way, perhaps we too might one day achieve a superior level of civilization.”

...

I.5.3 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 731332

BARREN IMPERIALISM

Pablo Rojas Paz, 1927

Pablo Rojas Paz (1896–1956)—an Argentinean writer and founding member of the Buenos Aires journal *Proa* in 1924—provides resolute opinions on what he views as the audacious claim that the capital of Spain could serve as Latin America’s cultural and intellectual point of departure. This idea was brought to the fore by Guillermo de Torre (1900–1971)—a Spanish literary critic and member of the Generation of ’27—in an editorial published in Madrid’s *La Gaceta literaria* [“Madrid, meridiano intelectual de Hispano-América” (April 15, 1927)]. It became a contentious and provocative issue taken up by most of Latin America’s avant-garde journals of the day. In addition to the work of Rojas Paz, the magazine *Martín Fierro* published the responses of some of the other leading Argentinean thinkers of the time, including Nicolás Olivari, Jorge Luis Borges—who was, coincidentally, de Torres’s brother-in-law—Santiago Ganduglia, Lisandro Zia, and Evar Méndez. This translation is from the original [*Martín Fierro* (Buenos Aires) year 4, no. 42 (June 10–July 10, 1927), 6, 356].

EVER SINCE THAT WANDERER CHRISTOPHER [COLUMBUS] put ashore on an island and discovered this uncertain continent, Europeans have entertained an endless succession of surprising ideas and absurd conjectures about the Americas. Even great European minds were susceptible to such impressions; Voltaire believed that Canada was nothing but a region of ice floes that France should not bother to conquer. But, to limit our focus somewhat, let us concentrate on what is now

referred to as “Hispanic America.” Many have concocted long, terrible names for us—North America invented Pan-American; France came up with Latin American; Spain created the term Hispanic American. Each of these names, though thinly disguised as an overture to harmonious relations, is actually an expression of its creator’s frustrated imperialist designs. From time to time, these imperialists see fit to launch a show of force, which is swiftly followed by a formal protest. Pan Americanism allows North America to take advantage of a revolution and seize Nicaragua. Latin Americanism lets the French indulge in the illusion that France is our culture’s wet nurse. And Hispanic Americanism gives Spain a reason to announce that Madrid should be Hispanic America’s intellectual meridian.

South America is paying a high price for her original sin of being discovered, conquered, and colonized by Spain. Before going any further, I should state that I feel great love for Spain and have always been deeply interested in Spanish literature. But this love has its limits, which are based on truth. I do not care to see Spain invading foreign lands nor planting her flag on property that has already been claimed. As to Madrid being Hispanic America’s intellectual meridian, wouldn’t that mean that we would always be running behind? Wouldn’t the Earth have to spin a little more slowly to allow our clocks to catch up? Otherwise, night will fall sooner in Castile than on the Pampas. I would not want to be unfair in my assessment, though I have yet to reach the age of discretion. But the concept of attracting the youth of the Americas to Madrid so that it becomes the Mecca for Hispanic Americanism seems to me to be an idea whose time has passed (that is, a *serondo* [late bloomer] proposal, to use the word I learned from the Maestro [Miguel de] Toro y Gómez). America is in the Americas, and she has no reason to travel foreign roads in search of her own future. It is too late to nurture contrived utopias that, like greenhouse flowers, are doomed to wilt as soon as they are exposed to a cold climate. . . . But we have already progressed a great deal; so much so that we can’t say precisely what language we speak. Our goal should be to corrupt our Spanish to such a degree that a visiting Spaniard would be incapable of understanding anything we say. Should the French, Italians, and Spaniards have kept speaking Latin? Why then do they want us to keep speaking Spanish? This is exactly what is happening with the English language in North America. Why should we want to be yoked to an artificial tradition that is only maintained by politicians when they address the congress? We are devel-

oping a language of our very own, which will lead to our freedom. It is a sign of spiritual power when a nation of people can change their inherited language. Language is a form of wealth like any other, which must be changed so that it can be revitalized.

Why not... “Buenos Aires, the spiritual meridian of the Americas”...? We cannot indulge in such exclusive attitudes. Latin America is irredeemably broken up. It would be a miracle if a genius/savior appeared who was able to subdue minor egos and create a United States of South America. Europeans would be amazed at how little we actually care about. Older nations, on the whole, complicate their spiritual lives with artificial problems that seem more like jigsaw puzzles than ideological blueprints. Young nations—semi-barbarian ones, like ours—live a simpler life; they do not know how to philosophize, but they like to reign. They are not looking for meridians, and they know that what lies ahead is time delayed and not a future. Which is just what [the epic Argentinean poem] *Martín Fierro* was saying.

So, Madrid, the intellectual meridian of Hispanic America? That’s fine. But, what time will it be? The goal of that idea is to magnetize the youth of the Americas so that they will be attracted to Madrid rather than to Paris or Rome. But we should warn that the youth of the Americas are no longer in thrall to great European cities. We will let [José] Ortega y Gasset discuss culture in metaphorical terms alluding to the left wing on any soccer team. As a sporting reference it is very appropriate to the times. But our time has not yet arrived; we are awaiting it, standing like the peasant who waits for dawn to seize the day at first light.

. . . Until our own time arrives, we must resist all these pressures; we must train ourselves to harvest only the grain and leave the rest, as we have a right to do. We must not accept any tutorship from overseas that comes with strings attached which—playing on our desire to believe that we are wide awake and able to think—encourages our submission. Intellectual protectorates are far worse than economic ones because, in the cultural version, the oppressed are deeply grateful to the oppressor. I recently read an interesting article in which several French intellectuals, who had been lecturing in South America, asked the president of France to provide economic support to French schools in Buenos Aires, Lima, Montevideo, Santiago, and so on, on the grounds that these institutions were France’s front line in the struggle to impose cultural

imperialism in South America. What a shame that Europeans don't call us barbarians instead of semi-civilized peoples; because if they called us barbarians we would be entitled to dream of having our own culture! But we are doomed. And we are at the mercy of any European city that wants to tell us when to sleep and when it is time to read.

I.5.4–I.5.7

CONTROVERSY ON THE OPPOSITE POLES OF OUR CULTURE

The documents in this section which were first published in *Amauta*, the Lima-based journal established by José Carlos Mariátegui in the late 1920s, reveal the intensive debates of the Latin American intelligentsia grappling with the concept of a continental identity. In “¿Cuál es la cultura que creará América? III. Mexicanización y Argentinización” [*Amauta*, no. 17 (1928), 14–16], Peruvian philosopher and journalist Antenor Orrego (1892–1960) posits Mexico and Argentina as the two poles of a foundational Indo-American culture. Mexico represents Europe's lack of understanding of the Americas; Argentina functions as an entity embedded in what is sublimely European. And between these poles, Orrego argues, lies the threat represented by the United States. The second text, “Panorama móvil–Polémica: autoctonismo y europeísmo (réplica a Franz Tamayo),” is a response from Martí Casanovas (1894–1966)—a Cuban writer of Catalanian extraction—to a letter from Bolivian intellectual Franz Tamayo [*Amauta*, no. 18 (1928), 77–83]. Writing on June 22, 1928, from Mexico City—where he had been expelled by the dictator Gerardo Machado—Casanovas questions Tamayo's (and, implicitly, other Latin American intellectuals') desire to locate an American classicism in pre-Columbian civilization. He celebrates, however, the works of the indigenous youth who participated in Mexico's Post-revolutionary open-air schools of painting. Orrego echoes Casanovas's sentiment in “Americanismo y peruanismo” [*Amauta*, no. 9 (1927)], arguing for what he calls the “new man” of America as the source of an emerging, vital culture in the region and warns of the impossibility of creating an exclusively national art in the future. All translations are from the originals.

I.5.4 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 839007**WHICH CULTURE WILL CREATE LATIN AMERICA:
THE MEXICAN PARAMETER OR THE
ARGENTINEAN ONE?****Antenor Orrego, 1928**

THOSE WHO WISH TO EXPRESS THE CURRENT STAGE of the history of the Americas in a brief formula could use this one: Mexico represents Europe's lack of understanding of the Americas; that is, of what is strictly American. Argentina represents America's understanding of Europe; that is, of what is sublimely European. Europe reveals the exhaustion of its assimilative ability to understand a new-born culture in Mexico more than in any other Latin American country. And the ability to overtake Europe, or rather the desire to superimpose the sensibility of the Americas over European reality, is more pronounced in Argentina than anywhere else. Mexico represents a crossroads for European culture, the dismantling of a force that presided over the destiny of the world for several centuries. Argentina, on the other hand, clearly represents the continuity of the West's legacy in the Americas. In Mexico, Europe is closed forever; in Argentina, the Americas are wide open to the future.

Guillermo Ferrero expresses Europe's inability to understand the Mexican Revolution—which is the revolution of the Americas—when he confuses it with the sordidness of fascist and Spanish dictatorships, whose only similarity is in their external violence because they are poles apart in terms of their vital, creative significance. America's understanding of Europe's spiritual values is most clearly expressed in Argentina's well-grounded, brilliant way of life. It is no accident that the greatest cultural movement so far in the history of the Americas is rooted in Argentina.

It is clear that the first phase of a future Latin American culture is developing in these two countries, moving inward from the periphery to the center, and not expanding outward from the center to the periphery. This is a characteristic feature that will be a key to understanding the new spirit of the Americas.

Chance, or predestination, has also been at work to place these two nations at opposite ends of the Indo-American world. These two complementary forces, rippling from north to south and from south to north, contain the gestating cosmic egg of a new, better race.

And, representing Europe's position vis-à-vis the hatching of the defining spirit of the Americas, fate has reserved a place at the head of the continent for the United States, which threatens to devour Latin America with its enormous jaws if the nations to the south don't wake up to their historic destiny and transform themselves into a powerful intellectual, moral, economic community. Perhaps this northern menace is the incentive that Latin America needs to come into its own. The United States offers two lessons to our countries: on one hand, it is an example of the banal existence of a form of arrogance founded on the shallowest, most despicable values of a decadent civilization; and on the other, it is a clear indication of the punishment that awaits any nation that renounces its inner, most essential self to become nothing but a servile carbon copy.

The phase of the great revolution of the Americas that first flickered in the land of the Aztecs and will go on to explode into a vast creative conflagration that will consume every Indo-American nation could be defined as the time when the Mexican parameter and the Argentinean one were rampant in Latin America.

Trujillo, September 1928

I.5.5 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 839776

AUTOCHTHONISM AND EUROPEANISM

Martí Casanovas, 1928

*Mister Franz Tamayo,
La Paz, Bolivia*

MY FRIEND:

. . .

I believe that the diversity of our opinions and points of view with regard to the future and current possibilities of the Indo-American culture may be explained by the diversity of positions and criteria concerning the problem of culture in general. You see culture and, in our concrete case, the Indo-American culture is a question of form, of a continent. Myself, somewhat far from the philosophical discipline—passionate about live things and the gestating process of everything—I believe that a culture is a vital manifestation integral to the existence of individuals and communities, at any stage of life and during its evolution. Namely, [culture is] an expression that exists and is produced independently of all formal value, and that, in any case, will achieve this value or category for improving and setting a hierarchy with its own elements and constitutive possibilities.

. . .

Let me tell you about one of the greatest surprises, one of the most comforting revelations which this marvelous Mexican land has offered me. It was my visit to open-air schools of painting and the vision of the work that is being accomplished there. Why? Because in these schools, whose norm and pedagogical principle is the total and boundless freedom of the student, the indigenous boys who attend in large numbers produce live, stirring art, revealing eloquent and vigorous emotions and, above all, [they do so] with a spirit and expression which is totally indigenous. My friend Mr. Tamayo, I must point out that the work of these schools is subject to polemics, dissensions, and more than a few

censures, even in Mexico itself, and among sensitive and intelligent Mexicans. I myself, who profoundly admire their work, find it easy to explain those censures, because the paintings by those young Indians do not have a measurable artistic value to be determined from a formalistic point of view, namely as a pure aesthetic value. They do have, however, unquestionable value as pure expression, directly translated with immediacy, without any other concern or objective than an honest expression, without speculating about their formal and artistic elements. But the expression is present, certainly, and what is most interesting is its live expression, breathing, full of meaning and emotion. That explains my great admiration for their work: if there is expression and it has been fully achieved, there is art [and] there is form, in my opinion. Going further along with this premise and criteria: if there is expression and possibilities of expression, there is the beginning of culture, if you will, but it nevertheless exists, as do its possibilities, which is what, in principle, we are interested in. . . .

I believe that a culture is not limited or framed by a question of form; I believe that any culture conveys a profoundly human attitude which is vital, no matter how formally and artistically complete the expression may be; I believe that any culture is the vision of the world and the establishment of certain bonds and relationships between Man and the environment, in accordance with the essential principles and laws that rule the life of a people, or an era. . . . Now you will understand, my dear Tamayo, why my great admiration and my concern in Mexico have been directed toward things that are alive and in gestation, toward what is vibrating and close to me, toward the present possibilities of the work in the process of being realized rather than toward remains and ruins. My faith in an American autochthonism, powerfully reaffirmed in Mexico, is therefore not based on ruins nor in the evocation of a glorious past: it is affirmed and based on live things, on the Indian that walks by my side, on the racial pride with which some of them have learned to magnificently arm themselves, (how edifying it is, in that respect, to visit the Casa del Estudiante Indígena! [House of the Native Student], and in those artistic expressions, the work of Mexican Indians, filled with a sense of race, of expression, of vigor, which the lazy Western [culture] can hardly aspire to achieve.

The West is, for you, order and harmony. You demand for our developing culture, an American basis and an American soul, coupled with Hellenic reason, harmony, and order. "Americans when we can, with our own free soul, but fatally

Occidental in culture and will.” But, I dare ask, my dear Tamayo, a culture like the Indo-American culture, which is in its beginning. How can it incorporate and make it its own, this spirit of order, of harmony, this superior balance that can only be the product and expression of the culmination of a moment of completion which, rather than an initiation, necessarily impatient and unrestrained, corresponds to the superior stages and end results of the evolution of a culture?

. . .

How, while believing in the anonymity of artistic creations in the collective soul, being deterministic, could we a priori choose and fix something that corresponds to the emergence and to the final moment of a long process and development of a culture? If you, like me, believe that in our countries there are latent human possibilities from which new modules and forms of culture and thought may surface, how could we predict beforehand what they will offer us? And what would we not do to encourage their manifestations, their development, hoping that if they have value and are interesting for us today—as exciting as a pure human expression, as a possibility, and revelation—then tomorrow, a somewhat distant but certain tomorrow maybe, they will surely have that artistic value and that sense of perfect humanity which you require from them!

I believe, my friend Tamayo, that all universalism and any form of universality are reduced to a simple centrifugal projection of some possibilities and some initial forms. I will try to explain myself. Initially, any culture is reduced and circumscribed to a limited circle of solutions, interests, and human values. Little by little, that circle widens concentrically, and these solutions, those interests, widen their radius, their possibilities of comprehension, their reach, and their limits, until they become universal. For any culture to become universalized, its spirit of “perfect humanity” responds and is produced by a centrifugal movement from the inside to the outside, but by no means and in no case, from the outside to the inside. Because in that case, no matter how strong its power of assimilation, it always detracts from it, and thus contradicts the law that rules its growth; that determinism, that collective soul you talk about. Because of that, I profoundly and passionately admire Mexico, and because of that, I have deep faith in the productiveness of the effort being made in this marvelous country. The ruins, my dear Tamayo, are not the source of my greatest admiration: archeology is not my great passion, but I do admire fervently the Indian who has within him

concentrated after three centuries of Spanish barbarism all of his racial ancestry, all of the weight of his blood and heritage, someone who today has opened wide his avid curiosity. I admire the work of Mexican Native visual artists, full of expression and meaning; I admire the work that is being achieved at the “Casa del Estudiante Indígena”; I admire the resurgence of the Mexican countryside, the work of Indians. I am passionate about and admire fervently, any event produced along these lines that is live, palpitating, because I see in it the seeds, the possibilities, the future of Indo-American culture.

. . .

This letter would be endless if I followed yours step by step; it being rich in suggestions and tempting enticements. Allow me, therefore, to close with where I began. I believe, between the two of us—though we are both eager and have the same purpose, the same impulse of faith in the future of Indo-Americanism, and the resurgence of Indo-American art—there is an essential difference. You marvel at the formal results of culture: the product, the solutions, things done, and consecrated. Myself, on the other hand, I marvel at the possibilities, the gestation, the effort, the [possible] accomplishment. I believe that your admiration for and cult of the Greco-Latin genius, and for the West, is evidence of a deep and fervent aesthetic admiration. You admire the result. But, do you believe that such perfection, such order, such supreme harmony, are inherent and initial virtues that constitute the Greco-Latin and Western genius, or rather, that they are the same for any culture, the result of the refinement of its own impulses and passions, of a painful process, of a gradual broadening of horizons and human potential? I believe that the seed, the incipient, potential energy, the possibility for improvement, for formal perfection, [and] for synthesis, exists in all cultures: chaotic, incipient, but live and alert. And you, having so much faith in America and in the American destiny, do you not believe that such possibilities exist in our continent? Why search outside of ourselves for what is already alive, impatient, deeply rooted in the nature of our peoples and our races?

. . .

With my most friendly regards,

MARTÍ CASANOVAS

I.5.6 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 839055

AMERICANISM AND PERUVIANISM

Antenor Orrego, 1928

THE CHARACTER OF THE NATIONAL ART and, above all of the literature, that the usual critics have defined and popularized, is based upon a misunderstanding, the misunderstanding of Peruvianism. Literary Peruvianism never existed after the Conquest, nor can it exist in the future.

The only Peruvianism that we can talk about that corresponds to an effective and exclusive reality is the retrospective Peruvianism of the Inca and pre-Inca cultures, which for us can no longer have anything but an archeological reality, [or] the virtual effect of an art gallery and museum. To a certain extent, this Peruvianism has largely contributed to keeping buried today's authentic and lively Americanism, which is flourishing. There have been and still are people who believe that the secret of a national art resides in the *huacas* and *huacos* [the venerated objects] of the indigenous civilization. It tacitly expresses and promotes the regressive return to ages that are definitively dead. It forgets that we have advanced some centuries and, above all, that we have gone through the Western culture. Art does not dig up mummies, nor does it feed on hypogenous or funerary stones; it breeds new forms and realities. Inca art, as well as all ancient American cultures, may constitute pivotal creative moments and forms, but can never be exclusive factors in determining the new culture. The attempt to resurrect the remote past in order to achieve the future is absurd. Life that is ascending and superior is not regressive; it always provides continuity. From the European pleonasm, we want to switch to the regressive and barbarizing replay of the Inca spirit.

The more direct the national writers were, namely the closer they got to the reality of their environment, the more likely they reflected the colony as a poor copy of Spain. Or else, they reflected devitalized European art and thought, which in their hands became deformed and village-like. Peru was, and has always been, an ultramarine branch office of Castilla, a branch location that was rotten, a Hispanic ossuary.

It is annoying to see how intellectual activity is downgraded, leaving the finest values of European and Peninsular culture in the hands of Criollismo,¹ which is funny and “zandunguero” [charming] (to use one of the popular words that best defines it). Colonialism is denounced and necessarily transcends it. It is a second hand version, *ad litteram*, of the style and manner of the classics and the Spanish *majas* and *chulas*. If a vernacular reality existed it was the tragedy of the Indian faced with injustice and the insolence of the conqueror and the Mestizos, but this was the case, in general, all over America and not exclusive to Peru.

I also do not believe it is possible to create an exclusively national art in the future. The national differences among the several Indo-American peoples are so minor and scant that they cannot generate independent arts and literatures with their singular rhythm and their own accent. I do believe in an Americanism that reflects the New America that is being born.

I believe in a new culture with its own universal values; values that we start to glimpse and which will help to integrate the human spirit. I believe in a cosmic vision and emotion that belong exclusively to the new race, which in turn has started to be articulated aesthetically and philosophically.

Until recently, America has been the garbage deposit and hypogeum of Europe. One need not have a very fine sense of smell to become aware of the decomposing corpse. America was the servile copy, the devitalizing, apelike gesture of the model. If we survey [the situation], it is enough to become clearly aware of it. The sepulchral environment is unquestionable.

However, as is always the case with broad vital processes, throughout the decomposition, sedimentation was taking place underground; so that the new spirit starts to emerge within an aesthetic context, that will rise more definitely across the centuries, and perhaps, across future millennia.

The Americanism that America has cultivated has been based on a misunderstanding similar to Peruvianism: on an optical illusion, on a mirage. It is that exploratory Americanism I have talked about on other occasions: superficial and verbal Americanism, alluding externally to geographic peculiarities, to fauna and flora of the continent; the exoticism of Baedeker,² which pleases damaged tastes, and which refers, at most, to scenic décor, but is always mere gesticulation within a foreign aesthetic expression.

In order to cite a concrete example among many, I will refer to José Santos Chocano, who has been and is called *the poet of America*, but this being only a

verbal *allusion*, an allegory of American geography and history. It is the gesture, the movement, and the stage effect. He accomplishes, sometimes, a Parnassian gesture that is descriptive and brilliant and thus increases the confusion, and reaffirms the equivocation. The simple allegorical allusion, the verbal or photographic version of the objective aspects of a territory, never constitutes a privative art. The objective forms, by themselves, do not express anything; they are dead if there is no soul behind them, if they are not the vehicle for a vision and emotion related to life and the Cosmos. The shapes in nature make sense if Man fills them with the drama in his soul, his personal thought or that of his race, so that they become integrated in an ensemble and constitute the symbol of a collective spirit. This does not mean that Chocano lacks aesthetic values. What I want to point out is that he lacks authentic American values; his values are Hispanic and European, in spite of the equivocation of Americanism.

The American nations are destined to form a vast racial block, with one culture and one ensemble thought, and never with exclusive and national arts. To pretend that there is a Peruvianism, an Argentinism, or a Chilenism in art is simply stupid.

We lack the experience of a privative art to such extent that what looks more national to us is intrinsically not so at all. First the Colonia, which is nothing but a Hispanic imitation, seemed national to us: for example, Ricardo Palma, in spite of his literary talent. Next, the simple geographic and historical allusion, the visual impression of territory, was considered national: for example, Chocano.

It is necessary to establish a new value system in order to appreciate what is national and, at the same time, American. What is substantially American is and will be expressed in the literature, in art, in the new thought. Criticism will have the initial task within a new culture. But it is evident that a strong Americanism is being accomplished in the oeuvre of the new generations. The decomposition of Europe in America is over or is about to be over. A new mental and emotional structure, authentically American, is starting to emerge. I do not believe I am overly optimistic or naïve, because the signs are highly evident.

America has been called the young continent that has been until today, I repeat, the garbage burial site for Europe. All of the European decadence and vices cross the ocean to decompose and die of malnutrition and devitalization. The spectacle of America, from the discovery until today has been the spectacle

of old age and disintegration. Pio Baroja has told the truth when he called it the “stupid continent” that has created nothing for human civilization. For many centuries America accepted an infamous pupilage, not doing anything other than reproducing badly the thoughts of the European superior. You have to be a hero to immerse yourself in the reading of those massive American literary tomes which have the taste of dry leaves, leaves from which all vital juices have been drained; dry, insipid and overwhelming residue.

. . .

The youth of America today really begins to produce a new man, the product of the autochthonous race and of all of the races of the world that came to its territory to melt in a wide human embrace. The primitive and the invading race have died, or are agonizing, and the American lineage which is neither, but a new type and product is being generated. That explains why life in the new continent has been on hold and its history has been decaying old age, a slow secular death of the other races. That is why an American art, thought, science, industry, politics have not been possible.

We find ourselves in a transitional period, during which this young impulse claimed by its people bursts into the life of the world. While the old America makes thunderous, painful, and nostalgic sounds because of the extinction of the old life imposed by Europe, the young America readies its arm, brain, and heart to build the new and powerful life that its historic destiny and great human role exact. Now we can already talk about the youth of America as a vital fact and not as a mere accident for rhetorical usage. But, above all else, we must not forget that within the spirit of America, there is no room for what is national, restrictive, and negative in each country; instead, what is national is American.

1

Criollismo was a late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literary and artistic movement in Latin America that promoted regionalism and nativism.—Ed.

2

Baedeker, the German publishing house known since the early nineteenth century for its travel guides, published *Baedeker: Lima-Callao y balnearios: guía de bolsillo para el turista, el comerciante y el residente* in 1926, just two years before the publication of Orrego's essay.—Ed.

I.5.7 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 771303

THE ANTHROPOPHAGOUS MANIFESTO

Oswald de Andrade, 1928

In this seminal manifesto, Oswald de Andrade proposes anthropophagy (in the sense of the consumption and subsequent transformation of European cultural taboos) as a paradigm on which to build a Brazilian and, by extension, Latin American cultural identity. Just as *Abaporu*, a 1928 painting by de Andrade's then-wife, Tarsila do Amaral, exemplifies modernism, so too does this manifesto record the tenets of the *modernistas*, specifically those who congregated around the *Revista de antropofagia* in whose inaugural issue this manifesto was published [(São Paulo), vol. 1, no. 1 (May 1928), 3, 7]. The journal was edited by Antônio de Alcântara Machado and published by poet Raul Bopp until February 1929, and then again from March to August of that year as part of the *Diário de São Paulo*. Tremendously influential to the 1960s Brazilian avant-garde, the publication was issued in a facsimile edition [Edição facsimilar da *Revista de antropofagia*. *Reedição da revista literária publicada em São Paulo*, 1ª e 2ª "Dentições," 1928–1929 (São Paulo: Abril/Metal Leve, 1975)]. This translation by Vajra Kilgour is from *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde Art in Latin America* [Mari Carmen Ramírez and Héctor Olea (New Haven and London: Yale University Press; Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, Houston), 2004, 466–67; doc. 12].

ONLY ANTHROPOPHAGY UNITES US. Socially. Economically. Philosophically. The only law in the world. The masked expression of all individualisms, of all collectivisms. Of all religions, of all peace treaties.

Tupi or not Tupi, that is the question. . . .¹

Only what isn't mine interests me. The law of man. The law of the anthropophagus. . . .

What ran roughshod over the truth was clothing; the waterproof jacket between the inner and outer worlds. The reaction against those who are clothed. American cinema will keep us informed.

Children of the sun, mother of the living. Found and loved ferociously, with all the hypocrisy of nostalgia, by immigrants, slaves, and tourists. . . .

We never had grammars, or collections of old vegetation. And we never learned what was urban, suburban, on the frontier, and continental. Indolent on the world-map of Brazil.

A participatory consciousness, a religious rhythm.

Against all the importers of canned consciousness. The palpable existence of life. And a pre-logical mentality, to give Mr. Lévy-Bruhl something to study.

We want the Caraiba Revolution.² Bigger than the French Revolution. The unification of all efficient rebellions for the sake of human beings. Without us, Europe wouldn't even have its pathetic Declaration of Human Rights.

The golden age advertised by America. The golden age. And all the girls.

. . .

We have had justice, the codification of vengeance. And science, the codification of Magic. Anthropophagy: the permanent transformation of taboo into totem. Against a reversible world and ideas that have been objectivized. Cadaverized. The stop on thought that is dynamic. The individual victim of the system. The source of classic injustices. Of romantic injustices. And the oblivion of the innermost conquests. . . .

The Caraiba instinct. . . .

We were never catechized. What we did was a carnival. An Indian dressed as a senator of the Empire and pretending to be [William] Pitt. Or figuring in the operas of [José de] Alencar, full of noble Portuguese sentiments.

We have already had Communism. We have already had a Surrealist language. The golden age.

Catiti Catiti / Imara Notiá / Notiá Imara / Ipejú.³

Magic and life. We had the relation and distribution of physical assets, of moral assets, of the assets of dignity. And we knew how to transpose mystery and death, with the help of a few grammatical formulas.

I asked a man what Law was. He replied that it was the guarantee of an exercise in possibility. This man was named Mr. Gibberish: I ate him up.

. . .

Against antagonistic sublimations brought over by Columbus's caravels.

Against the truth of the missionary peoples, defined by the sagacity of an anthropophagus, the Viscount of Cairú:—"It is an oft-repeated lie."

But those who came here were not crusaders. They were fugitives of a civilization that we are devouring, because we are strong and vengeful, like the Jabuti. . . .⁴

We didn't have speculation. But we did have divination. We had politics, which is the science of distribution. And a planetary-social system.

Migrations. Flight from states of tedium. Against urban scleroses. Against the conservatories and speculative tedium. From William James to [Serge] Voronoff. The transfiguration of Taboo into totem: Anthropophagy.

. . .

Before the Portuguese discovered Brazil, Brazil had already discovered happiness.

. . .

In the matriarchy of Pindorama. . . .⁵

The struggle between what could be called the Uncreated and the Creature—illustrated by the permanent contradiction of human beings and their Taboos.

Quotidian love and the capitalist *modus vivendi*. Anthropophagy. The absorption of the sacred enemy. In order to transform the enemy into a totem. The human adventure. Earthly finality. . . .

In Piratininga.⁶

Year 374 of the devouring of Bishop Sardinha.

1

The author's [modified] quote from Hamlet is a pretext for introducing the subject of the Tupinambá, an indigenous people who lived in the region of the Amazon River. Tupi-guarani was one of the four main linguistic branches in South America. Systematized by the Jesuits, it served as a lingua franca until the nineteenth century and is still spoken by some tribal groups in the area. [—Ed.]

2

Caraiba, or Caribe, is a native population that, during European colonization, inhabited the Caribbean sea (Lesser Antilles), the Guyanas, and the Central America coastal regions. Several tribal groups in Brazil belong to this linguistic background. [—Ed.]

3

This poem in Tupi-Guarani was taken by Oswald de Andrade from the book *O Selvagem* [The Wild One] by Couto de Magalhães, in keeping with the tone of a parodic collage in which the author constructed his manifesto, with other quotations from texts by historians of Colonial Brazil. It is an invocation of the new moon: "New moon New moon / Whisper to such-and-such a one / To such-and-such a one whisper / Regards from me." [—Ed.]

4

In indigenous stories from the Amazon region, the Jabuti (land tortoise) is an invincible hero. Although the tortoise is inoffensive, he appears in these stories as crafty and vengeful, overcoming stronger animals like the puma and the jaguar. [—Ed.]

5

Pindorama was the name by which the people of the Andes and the Pampas referred to Brazil in ancient times. [—Ed.]

6

Piratininga is the original name of the area in which the city of São Paulo was founded. [—Ed.]

I.6

DOES BRAZIL BELONG TO LATIN AMÉRICA?

I.6.1 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1054341

BRAZIL IN THE AMERICAS

Manoel Bomfim, 1929

The following excerpt is from the introduction to *O Brasil na América: Caracterização da formação brasileira*, which Manoel Bomfim wrote in 1925 and published in 1929 [(Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves Editôr)]. Written approximately twenty years after *A América Latina: Males de origem* [SEE DOCUMENTS I.3.5 AND I.4.1], Bomfim begins by identifying himself as a Latin American, a continental posture that remains unusual among Brazilians. Simultaneously, the author also questions what he perceives to be a superficial unity in the region. This translation is derived from the book's second edition [Manoel Bomfim, *O Brasil na América: Caracterização da formação brasileira*, Preface by Maria Thétis Nunes (São Paulo: Topbooks, 1997), 31–36].

INTRODUCTION

WE OTHERS—ARGENTINES, PERUVIANS, BRAZILIANS, CHILEANS—who are among those called *Latin Americans*, never think [in terms] of *Latin America*. In our perceptions of reality, in the actual course of normal relations or as common ground for any immediate action, such a unity does not exist. Rather, we regard [as separate] each of these peoples whom some scholars abroad would [argue] constitute the Latin-ness of America. The same happens to any foreigner who has come to live with us: he will speak of Venezuela, Paraguay, Mexico, Nicaragua, but will never feel the need to fix his mind on this concept: Latin America. On the other hand,

all those who do not know us, the constructors of theories, who speak of social, historical, or political things, will not fail to repeat pompous and puerile prejudices regarding this unreal unity: *Latin America*.

Finally, to what does this term apply?

In fact, [the term applies to] several American nations, some of English origin with their own quite particular development in the tradition of the political customs of their origins, as well as other nations derived from Spanish colonization. Besides those, there is Brazil, established by Portugal. There is a relationship between Spaniards and Portuguese. There were needs common to both metropolises and analogous processes of colonization. The result of all this is a certain similarity of character between the neo-Iberian peoples. But that is all, because after all the defining developments, there are more differences between the Brazilian nation and those created by the Castilian vice-royalties than between the colonizing nations themselves, Spain and Portugal. We should also note that, if you compare Chileans with Guatemalans, Mexicans with Argentines, Cubans with Paraguayans, you will find specific national characters separating them into very different peoples. [Francisco] García Calderón [SEE DOCUMENT 1.2.3], when he studies *The Latin Democracies of America*, has a very clear aim: to stress and value whatever these democracies have in common. His work is directed toward the unity of Latin America. However, in considering especially this same unity, he has to acknowledge that “in one century of isolated political development, under the influences of climate and territory, divergent characters were formed in the nations of Latin America...” And he goes so far as to draft the lines that define such divergences: “. . . Mexico. . . Colombia. . . the rudeness of Chileans, in contrast with the rich imagination of the Brazilians. . . Argentina, a commercial people. . . astute Bolivia, slow and practical people. . . Some practical, governed by active plutocracies; others, dreamers. . .”¹ Another neo-Castilian, the Argentine Ramos Mejía, dedicates a long chapter of his excellent work, *El Federalismo Argentino* [Argentinean Federalism], to demonstrate that Spanish colonization, “from a particularistic people, by temperament,” gave origin to disaggregated colonies, without the capacity to assimilate, divergent, [engaged] in constant internal conflicts: “. . . Peru alien to Chile; Argentina alien to both: to all the rest of America. . .”²

This much-used expression, this Latin America, ought to reasonably serve to designate geographically a group of nations formed by Iberians in a colo-

nial regime of subordination and direct dependence, which soon degraded into a despotic and anti-progressive parasitism. Nothing more than an empty designation, it is appropriate only for the useless technology of those who accept the easy division of the West into *Latin*, *Germanic*, *Slavic*. . . ; following this argument, they conclude that there must be a Latin America to be in opposition to English America. Thus was born the notion, facilitated by ignorance, that took hold nevertheless because the expression has a resonantly grandiloquent sound; it is clear, distinguishes itself with pretentious erudition, [and is] easily manipulatable by obtuse sociologies in which the creoles of our lands are ill-treated and dishonored. The North American is still more explicit and cartographic: they talk peremptorily of South America, making the implicit contrast with their *North*. . . . We can console ourselves with the certainty that no people, among those who interfere in the affairs of others to delve for riches, know us less than those of the great Republic.

There is no contradiction between these current statements and the spirit in which the book, *Latin America*—of which this [book] is a necessary development—was understood. The main goal in the previous book was to respond to those who, applying to us the general epithet *Latin Americans*, assumed that we are inferior peoples, condemned to the factious agitations of a sterile barbarianism of no interest to the rest of the world. Accused and vilified under that label, it became indispensable to take possession of it and inscribe it in the frontispiece of a work dedicated especially to the matter in order to demonstrate that the facts cited to indicate our general degradation—the same [characteristics] by which the so-called *Latin Americans* were identified—are nothing more than the inevitable consequences of our colonial formation. Regrettable, yes, but perfectly eliminable, already eliminated, in large part, in the course of the independent life of some nations. The title of a book devoted to this purpose could be no other, but to apply it is not to admit that the neo-Castilian peoples remained undifferentiated. Nor does it suppose that Brazil, for being included in Latin America, lacks a national character and its own destiny. Just the opposite: it was necessary in that book to accentuate essential differences between the Brazilian nation and the other neo-Iberian peoples. It is to point out explicitly these distinctions and that the present work was undertaken as a development of the earlier book. It became really necessary to address this near slanderous treatment only to show that it is applied, and then repeated, because superficial “scholars” judge us

without knowing us. Through ignorance and ill will, they created and maintain this concept that confuses us with others, as if we were peoples scarcely differentiated by these bad or negative qualities attributed as characteristic of Latin Americans.

In all of this, the most regrettable would be if we, ourselves—Chileans, Mexicans, or Brazilians—after such frequent encounter with the concept, in the neatness and simplicity of its terms, [if we] ended accepting that such a thing as Latin America must exist in the same sense used by those who condemn us with this term. That is to say, we would begin to think that we suffer from some basic inferiority, a kind of ethnic original sin that makes us unforgivably degraded, all with the same destiny. Well, we must resist such an outcome; resist, above all, within ourselves. [At the same time, we must understand] the full range of defects from which we truly suffer, analyzing them objectively, carefully searching out their origins, which are, along with the colonial traditions of the metropolis, the very same conditions of [our] national formation. In this way, we will confirm that all these evils can be summed up as essentially curable and transitory, consequences that will soon disappear, if we denounce them consciously, if we sincerely try to correct them. Therefore, since we are a people who distinguished ourselves as a nation early on, all these evils that we complain of must be defined in their specificity, as to what is inherent, particular, and proper to the formation of our national character.

In truth, we came from these origins: Iberian Portugal, where, from early times, the Portuguese affirmed themselves as a distinct nationality, diverging from what came to be Castile. Therefore, contrary to what those who pretend to know us as part of this Latin-American homogeneity, one must acknowledge that within the branches transplanted as the respective colonies, there are large differences and more accentuated divergences than between the two metropolises. We came from Portugal, a nation already detached from the rest of the Spain. So many things happened during the four centuries of our history, so many transmutations of stimuli and energies in the formation of our nationality that, in truth, there are more differences today between other neo-Iberians and Brazilians than between Belgians and French or even between Dutch and Prussians. For the distribution of *the Americas* to be logical, it would be necessary to distinguish three of them, instead of two: the Castilian, the Portuguese, and the English. When they talk about Europe, these scholars never mention Iberia, not even as

a simple geographical expression. Yet, in the vastness of our America, in spite of its evolution into nations, they take for granted the uniformity of this diluted [term]: American Latin-ness.

Without intending to abandon its Iberian origins, Brazil had, in the shaping of its character, a totally different colonial history, where the predominant motives were exclusively Brazilian. Often, these motives were even opposed to those that directed the formation of the neo-Castilian colonies. Three centuries of a markedly different life produced a national character of perfect unity, distinctly different. And with this [there exists] a particular ethnic situation, a pronounced mixture that could not exist in those colonies hampered by racial prejudices. We must remember that Brazil is a nation born of that colony which resisted the French and, above all, the Dutch, in order to preserve its unity of origin and conscience. [Brazil was] the colony that, in the intrepid adventures of its “*bandeirantes*,”³ expanded the nation through the heart of the continent. For all these reasons, the history of colonial Brazil is unique. [The nation was] built with such an affirmation of patriotic energy on the part of the Brazilians that it could justly be considered as the very spirit of our nation. Given the reality of the facts of the first century of Brazil, it would be absurd to think that history would not influence the ultimate destiny of a nation thus formed. Brazil was the only colony to resist foreign invaders with its own means; the only one to develop through its own resources. It was the first to present a new society, originating with the colonists but different from them. All this should have had, as indeed it did, a strong impact on the new national character and its modes of reaction against the wretched methods of the metropolis.

Thus, it is legitimate and indispensable to those interested in the destiny of this country to seek conscientiously its historical antecedents, clarifying and appreciating them in the acknowledgment of the qualities that ultimately remain with us and of the facts that are already ours. All this [has] the explicit goal of acknowledging, the historical influences, the evil constants; and remedying, diverting, [and] avoiding all that has proved or will prove harmful to us. After that, each matter denominated will have to be appraised and ranked in the ordering of our national aims. Brazil, as an assembly of people, cannot be considered as a simple sum of ethnic elements, considered separately—the Portuguese A, the Negro B, the Indian C—to arrive at a type merely composed as A-B-C. In the Brazilian people we find these three different, even very different races. The

confirmation of these ancestries, in qualities and nuances of civilization, as diffuse origins, would be a commonplace, repeated with no meaning beyond technology. Because what is interesting is not the trivial, anthropological description or the stereotyped enumeration of ethnographic characteristics, but a deep understanding of the way in which the formative elements of the nation came together, so that the historical consequences of this formation can be logically determined. This is how we can acknowledge the value of each of the elementary qualities of these mixed races, arriving at the general formula of our national *combination* resulting from this mixture. No one today would tolerate this prattle that elevates itself as sociology and, in order to explain and characterize Brazilian literature, hunts for isolated motives in anonymous production or individual works to label them: this is from the *Negro*, this is from the *Indian*, or this is from the *Portuguese*, without managing to recognize what is new and properly Brazilian in our genius. The scholars as such go on as if it were possible that traditions could meet and at the same time remain impermeable to each other, without any reciprocity in influences, without consequences in the social and intellectual life that brought about this encounter. Well, rather than this, everybody knows that: more than blood, traditions blend when different races come together. The qualities of the spirit are combined, and their respective manifestations complete each other in a new and vividly original expression. The result of Judaic monotheism on the Western civilizations was not a simple mixture where one could distinguish parts of Aryanism juxtaposed against Semitism, but the exciting, regenerated, vivifying, and creative innovation of Christianity. This was the synthesis of earlier moral inspirations, an original and powerful synthesis because it improved on the combined traditions.

Thus, without wasting our attention in reproducing backward descriptions of races, we must consider the aspects of Brazilian development that are truly constants and that give it its character.

1

Francisco García Calderón, *Les démocraties de l'Amérique* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion éditeur, 1912), 311.

2

Les démocraties latines de l'Amérique (1912), 101.

3

Armed expeditions, usually departing from the Captaincy of São Vicente [Santos] and later from the city of São Paulo, conquered the backlands of the country, with the capture of Indians or the discovery of mines as their goals. These events took place toward the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth.

—Ed.

I.6.2 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1054457

THE DISCONNECTION OF AMERICA

Prudente de Moraes Neto, 1932

Prudente de Moraes Neto (1904–1977) wrote this letter to Alfonso Reyes from Rio de Janeiro on April 28, 1931, and Reyes published it in his epistolary journal *Monterrey: Correo literario de Alfonso Reyes*. The Brazilian poet and journalist remarks on the affectation of certain Latin American elites who act as though they are merely passing through the region, perhaps to satisfy the European expectation of exoticism. Little known today, de Moraes Neto was active in Brazil's modernist circles of the mid-1920s, establishing Rio's *Revista estética* in 1924. He is also known for his sports chronicles published under the pen name Pedro Dantas in many of Brazil's leading dailies, including *Diário de notícias*, *Folha carioca*, *Diário carioca*, *O Estado de São Paulo*, *O Globo* and *Jornal do Brasil*. This translation, as well as that of the following document by Ribeiro Couto, is from the original edition of *Monterrey* [(Rio de Janeiro), no. 8 (1932), 2].

I

“... **BY CHANCE, I DISCOVERED YOUR NAME** in European magazines, as always happens when the writers are Spanish-speaking Americans who pass through our borders only indirectly. It was when I was reading Valéry Larbaud that I learned of the existence of Ricardo Güiraldes, whose admirable *Don Segundo Sombra* I consider one of the great, perhaps the greatest, literary accomplishment of the South American spirit. It was, if I am not mistaken, in *La Gazeta Literaria* that I found the first references to [the Mexican writers] Mariano Azuela, [Xavier] Villaurrutia, [and Jaime] Torres Bodet. Surprisingly, I was able to get a copy of *Los de Abajo* [The Underdogs] here. But of the two poets, I still know no more than what I saw transcribed in the aforementioned periodical. Books from Mexico, Argentina, and the other Spanish-American countries only rarely appear here, after a success in Europe (*Don Segundo Sombra*, *Los de Abajo*), or through one of those mysterious ways accessible only to the professional Ibero-Americanists. While in only fifteen or twenty days I am able to receive the most recent books and magazines published in any European country, it took months, three or four months, to get some books

by Jorge Luis Borges, [Oliverio] Gironde, [Francisco Luis] Bernárdez, Norah Lange, [Raúl] González Tuñón, [Nicolas] Olivari, Piñero, in sum, the Argentines of *Proa* and *Martín Fierro*. To this day, I have tried in vain to obtain Güiraldes's first books. I was informed recently, through *Les Nouvelles littéraires* [The Literary News], that a posthumous collection of Güiraldes's short stories was published, with a preface written by you. And I have just finished reading, in French, that Mrs. Victoria Ocampo is publishing a magazine in Buenos Aires that must be very interesting."

II

"I believe that I see, in the little I am able to know of X.'s work, a fusion between the two elements that are disputed about all of us American [writers]. If the critic and the humanist cannot deny their European influences, the poet is drawn by the spectacle of the land and the social environment, in whose service, moreover, his culture is always placed. In this field, any theoretical explanation is necessarily arbitrary and incomplete, but I deem it undeniable that our connections with Europe are accentuated in the temporal plane, while our connections with America take place in the spatial plane: history and geography, tradition and reality. The question, ultimately, is one of international law: we must reconcile in ourselves the "*jus sanguinis*" [rights of the "blood"] with the "*jus soli*" [rights by the "soil"]. The American spirit emerged, for each of our countries, with the first son of Europeans born in America. Whereas for the father America represented a phase, a dream, good or bad, from which he expected to awaken some day by returning to his country and to the reality of the life of his times, for the son reality was just the world that surrounded him, an insecure and uncomfortable life, but free [and] the only one he knew. Europe could hold for him no more than the mythical prestige bestowed upon it by his own imagination. It had to belong to the realm of fantasy. This, perhaps, is the problem that each of us has to resolve within himself even today.

"Material progresses, man's slow adaptation to the land, [and] manifold miscegenation, have, undoubtedly, altered the problem. But these ["*jus sanguinis*" and "*jus soli*"] are exactly the two great forces that operate on us. Our makeup is such that, for many of us today, Europe is still the true reality. I believe it was [the Brazilian writer and abolitionist] Joaquim Nabuco who used to say: "We do not go to Europe, we return to her." Conversely, the majority of those among us who devote themselves to intellectual or artistic questions behave toward America as

if they were mere travelers. From this comes an art and literature that are exotic, although they were created here. This particularly aggravates the misunderstanding that you so lucidly denounced that leads the Europeans to ask from us only an exoticism that, although no longer appealing to the best of us, nevertheless continues to be stubbornly cultivated.

“What we desire is the coexistence in a sole individual of a critical spirit equal to the best of Europe—which would be reminiscent of Classical culture, emphasizing the Latin side of our civilization—and of a pure poetic sensibility—in whose origin can be seen as a reflection of the awe we still feel for our own land, our natural reaction to our physical environment.”

Rio, April 28, 1931

I.6.3 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1054477

THE CORDIAL MAN, AN AMERICAN PRODUCT

Ribeiro Couto, 1932

Brazilian poet, journalist, and short-story writer Ribeiro Couto (né Rui Esteves Ribeiro de Almeida Couto, 1898–1963) wrote this letter to Alfonso Reyes from Marseilles, France, on March 7, 1931, while serving as Brazil’s honorary vice-consul and in the same year that he published *Cabocla*, his best-known novel. As in the preceding text by de Morães Neto, Alfonso Reyes published this work in *Monterrey* [(Rio de Janeiro), no. 8 (1932), 2]. The letter is distinguished by the author’s coining of the term the “cordial man,” a construct that was later analyzed extensively for the Brazilian context by Sérgio Buarque de Holanda in his *Raízes do Brasil* [SEE DOCUMENTS I.6.4 AND I.6.5] and by Oswald de Andrade in “Um aspecto antropofágico da cultura brasileira: o homem cordial,” a manuscript from March 1950, first published in 1966.

III

“TRUE AMERICANISM REJECTS THE IDEA OF INDIANISM, of a local ethnic purism, of primitivism, yet summons the contribution of the primitive races to Iberian

man. The [concept of a] pure Iberian man would be an error great as [the concept of] pure primitivism (lack of culture, ignorance of the evolution of the human spirit in other ages and on other continents). From the fusion of Iberian man with the new land and the primitive races, a “(Latin) American sensibility” will surely emerge, a new race, a product of a virgin culture and intuition: *the Cordial Man*. In my opinion, this is what our America is contributing to the world: the Cordial Man. European egoism, built on religious persecutions and economic disasters, marked by intolerance and hunger, crossed the oceans and founded, there in beds of primitive women and all the generous vastness of that land, the Family of Cordial Men. These [men] distinguish themselves from the rest of humankind by two essentially American characteristics: a hospitable spirit and a tendency to credulity. In short: the Cordial Man’s attitude contrasts with the European’s mistrust and the selfishness of a home closed to passersby. (How good it is, in the villages and small hamlets of our America, in your Mexico as well as in my Brazil, to invite into our home the French peddler who sells linen or the German engineer who is studying the local geology, and to invite them to share a meal! Right away, we shout inside: ‘Hey, woman, have them kill a chicken!’ ...)

“The fact, however, is that if we are not Latin—coming as we do from the Celtic-Iberian peninsular adventure in American lands, (an adventure nourished in the nuptial hammocks of the wild indigenous women and by the docile sensuality of the easily-available *Négresse*)—if we are not Latin, then we are *something else* very different in spirit and in our sense of everyday life. We are a people who like to converse, to smoke quietly, to listen to the guitar, sing our popular songs, love with modesty, invite a foreigner to come in for a cup of coffee, to shout through our windows at the moon on clear nights: “What beautiful moonlight!” This attitude of emotional openness is truly ours, it is Ibero-American. It is observable in the little nothings, in the insignificant small events of everyday life. These take on importance in the eyes of the critic because they are the indications of this Cordial Civilization that I consider Latin America’s contribution to the world.”

Marseilles, March 7, 1931

I.6.4 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1054600

THE ROOTS OF BRAZIL: FRONTIERS OF EUROPE

Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, 1936

Brazilian writer and historian Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (1902–1982) wrote the book *Raízes do Brasil*, from which this text is excerpted, in 1936 [(Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio)] upon his return from Berlin, where he had lived since 1929. Largely introspective, *Raízes do Brasil* has been cited as the most influential book written in Brazil. In this passage from chapter 1, Buarque de Holanda brutally confronts many of the primordial characteristics of the Iberian world: its rigid social structure; its lack of hierarchy, order, and discipline; and its acceptance of anarchy. As unattractive as it may seem to Brazilians, writes Buarque de Holanda, all these traits indicate that Brazil is still strongly tied to the Iberian Peninsula. This translation is from the book's twenty-sixth edition and twenty-ninth printing [*Raízes do Brasil* (São Paulo: Editora Companhia das Letras, 2008), 31–40].

THE MOST DOMINANT AND CONSEQUENTIAL FACTORS for the origins of Brazilian society were the attempts to transplant European Culture throughout an extensive territory with natural conditions which were, if not adverse, at least largely alien to its millennial traditions. By importing our forms of society, our institutions, and our ideas from distant countries, and proudly endeavoring to maintain all this in an often unfavorable and hostile environment, we remain, until today, expatriates in our own land. We may produce excellent works, enrich our humanity in new and unforeseen ways, bringing to perfection the type of civilization that we represent, but the truth is that all the fruits of our labor (or of our laziness) seem to be part of a system of evolution suited to a different climate and a different landscape.

Therefore, before asking ourselves to what extent this attempt can succeed, we must investigate how far we have been able to reproduce those forms of society, institutions, and ideas that we inherited.

In the first place, it is significant that we have received this inheritance from an Iberian nation. Spain and Portugal are, along with Russia and the Balkan countries (and, in a certain way, also England), bridging territories through

which Europe communicates with other worlds. Thus, they constitute a frontier zone of transition, less charged, in some cases, with this Europeanism that they retain as a necessary patrimony.

[It was only] at the time of the great maritime discoveries that the two countries [Spain and Portugal] resolutely joined the European choir. This late entry would have intense repercussions in their destinies, determining many peculiar aspects of their history and their spiritual formation. Thus there emerged a type of society that would develop almost at the margins, in some respects, of their European neighbors, without receiving any inspiration from them beyond that already present in a germinal state.

What are the foundations that, preferentially, underlie the patterns of social life in this indeterminate region between Europe and Africa that extends from the Pyrenees to Gibraltar? How can we explain many of these social patterns, without resorting to indications that are rather vague and that would never bring us to [a position of] strict objectivity?

It is precisely through the comparison of [the peoples of Spain and Portugal] with those beyond the Pyrenees that our attention is drawn to a characteristic very particular to the people of the Iberian Peninsula, a characteristic which they are far from sharing, at least with the same intensity, with any of their neighbors on the [European] Continent. The reason is that none of these neighbors was able to develop to such an extreme the cult of personality, a trait that appears to be most determinative in the evolution of the Hispanic peoples since times immemorial. We can truly say that much of the originality of the Spanish and Portuguese is owed to the particular importance that they attribute to self-love, to the autonomy of each person in relation to others within time and space. For them, the measure of a man's value is indicated, above all, by the extent to which he does not need to depend on others, to which he needs no one, to which he is self-sufficient. Each one is his own creature, a product of his own efforts, his own virtues—and the virtues sovereign to this mentality are so imperative that they leave their mark on the personal bearing, even on the physiognomy of men. The most complete manifestation [of this position] had already been expressed in Stoicism, which, with little change, has been the national philosophy of the Spaniards since Seneca.

This view of life is perfectly reflected in a very Hispanic word—“*sobranjería*” [haughtiness]—a word that initially denotes the idea of insuperability. Yet,

the struggle and the competition implied by this concept were tacitly acknowledged and admired, exalted by poets, praised by moralists, and sanctioned by governments.

This [concept] is largely responsible for the singular indifference of these people towards forms of organization and all associations that imply solidarity and regulation. In a land where everybody is a baron, it is not possible to arrive at a lasting collective agreement, except in the presence of a respected and feared external force.

In fact, hereditary privileges, never had a very decisive influence in the countries of Iberian origin, at least not as decisive and intense as in lands where feudalism was deeply rooted. They did not have to be abolished in these [Iberian countries] to allow the principle of individual competition to become firmly established. The weakness of the social structure and the lack of an organized hierarchy were responsible for some of the most extraordinary episodes in the history of the Hispanic nations, including Portugal and Brazil. Anarchic elements always bore fruit with ease here, with the complicity or through the careless indolence of our institutions and customs. The initiatives, even when intended to be constructive, always tended to divide, rather than unite people. Government decrees came about in the first place from the need to contain and moderate the particular passions of the moment, [and] only rarely from the intention to permanently unite [the] active forces [in society].

Therefore, the lack of cohesiveness in our social life is not a modern phenomenon. That is why those who imagine that the only possible defense against our disorder is a return to tradition, to a specific tradition, are profoundly mistaken. The orders and rules formulated by these learned men are, in fact, ingenious creations of their imagination, removed from reality and contrary to it. Our anarchy, our incapability for stable organization is, in their opinion, nothing more than the absence of the one order that seems necessary and efficient to them. The hierarchy they extol, if we consider it well, is one which requires precisely that anarchy to gain legitimacy and influence.

Would this recourse to the past, in search of a model inspiring the better organization of our society, even be legitimate? On the contrary, wouldn't it serve as an indication of our incapacity for spontaneous creation? Truly vibrant eras were never traditionalist by choice. Scholasticism was creative in the Middle Ages because it was current. Hierarchy of thought was subordinate to a cosmogonic

hierarchy. The collectivity of men on Earth was simply a parable, a pale reflection of [Saint Augustine's] City of God. Thus, in the Thomistic philosophy, the angels composing the three orders of the first hierarchy, the Cherubim, Seraphim, and Thrones, are equated with the men who form the immediate *entourage* of a medieval monarch. They assist the sovereign in the execution of his affairs: they are his ministers and counselors. Those of the second hierarchy, the Dominations, Powers, and Virtues, are, in relation to God, what the governors are to the king: they are charged with the administration of the different provinces of the kingdom. Finally, those of the third hierarchy correspond, in the temporal city, to the agents of power, the subordinate officers.¹

If medieval life aspired to a beautiful harmony resting upon a hierarchical system, that was perfectly natural, since even in Heaven there were degrees of beatitude, as Beatrice informed Dante. The natural order is nothing more than an imperfect and distant projection of the eternal Order, and is explained by it:

*Le cose tutte quante
hanno ordine tra loro e questo forma
che l'universo a Dio fa simigliante.*²

Thus, the society of men on Earth cannot be an end in itself. Its hierarchical disposition, although strict, does not seek permanence, nor does it desire the well-being of the world. There is no place in this society for creatures that seek earthly peace in the possessions and gains of this world. The community of the just is a stranger on Earth. It wanders and lives on faith in exile and in mortality. "Thus," says Saint Augustine, "the earthly city that does not live on faith aspires to an earthly peace, and the purpose it attaches to the mission of authority and subjection, among citizens, is that, when it comes to this mortal life, there exists a certain harmony of human wills."

The Middle Ages was scarcely aware of the conscious aspirations for a reform of civil society. The world was organized according to incontrovertible eternal laws, imposed from the other world by the supreme organizer of all things. In a singular paradox, the formative principle of society was, in its clearest expression, an inimical force, opposed to the world and to life. All the work of the philosophers, of the great constructors of systems, denoted nothing if not the ardent

desire to disguise, as much as possible, this antagonism between the Spirit and Life (*Gratia naturam non tollit sed perficit*).³ In a certain way, this work was productive and venerable. Yet, in our times, there is no longer the desire to understand it in its essence. The enthusiasm that this grandiose hierarchical concept (as it was known in the Middle Ages) can inspire today is in fact a professorial passion.

In reality, the principle of hierarchy itself was never very important among us. Every hierarchy is necessarily based on privileges. And the truth is that, well before the so-called revolutionary ideas triumphed in the world, the Portuguese and Spaniards seem to have been keenly aware of the particular irrationality, the social injustice of certain privileges, above all of the hereditary privileges. Personal prestige, independent of the inherited name, continued to be important throughout the most glorious periods of the Iberian nations.

On this point, at least, [the Iberian nations] can consider themselves pioneers of the modern spirit.

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If such characteristics were notably constant among the Iberian peoples, it does not mean that this was due to any inevitable biological fatalism, or that, like the stars in the sky, they could subsist at the margins and at a distance from the conditions of earthly life. We know that, in certain phases of their history, the peoples of the [Iberian] peninsula demonstrated singular vitality, an astonishing capacity for adapting to new ways of life. [This was the case] especially, towards the end of the fifteenth century, when they were even able to surpass the other European States, creating political and economic units of modern expression. But wasn't the very success of this sudden and perhaps premature transformation one of the reasons for the stubborn persistence among them of customs of traditional life that in part explain their originality?

It was exactly this mentality that became the biggest obstacle, among them, to the spirit of spontaneous organization, so typical of Protestant peoples, [and to] the Calvinists above all. In fact, the doctrines that proclaim free will and personal responsibility are all less-fostering of association between men. In the Iberian nations, lacking this rationalization of life that some Protestant countries had attempted so early on, the unifying principle was always represented by the governments. In these nations, the kind of political organization that

continuously prevailed was artificially supported by an external force. In modern times, [this external force] found one of its most characteristic forms in military dictatorships.

A fact that we must take into consideration when we examine the psychology of these [Iberian] peoples is the insuperable repugnance inspired in them by any morality based in the veneration of labor. Their normal attitude is precisely the opposite of that which, in theory, corresponds to the system of the medieval crafts guilds, which values physical labor to the denigration of profit, the “torpid lucre.” Only very recently, with the greater prestige enjoyed by the institutions of Northern peoples, has this work ethic succeeded in gaining some ground with them. But the resistance [this ethic] met (and still meets) with is so intense and persistent that it is legitimate to doubt its complete success.

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We can also understand how the lack of this work ethic is closely allied to a reduced capacity for social organization. In effect, humble, anonymous, and disinterested effort is a powerful agent of joint interests and, as such, stimulates the rational organization of men and sustains cohesion between them. Wherever any kind of work ethic prevails it will be difficult to find a lack of order and tranquility among citizens, because they are both necessary to the harmony of interests. The truth is that, among the Spaniards and the Portuguese, the work ethic was always an exotic fruit. It is not surprising that among these peoples the idea of solidarity was precarious.

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To the free will of the individual, to the extreme adulation of personality that is a fundamental passion that tolerates no compromise, there is but one alternative: the renunciation of this personality for the greater good. That is why, although rare and difficult, obedience sometimes appears as the supreme virtue for the Iberian peoples. So, it is not strange that this obedience—blind obedience, fundamentally different from the medieval and feudal principles of loyalty—has been the only really strong political principle for them until today. The desire to command and the disposition to obey orders are equally characteristic of them. Dictatorships and the Holy Office [of the Inquisition] seem to constitute forms as typical of their character as their inclination

toward anarchy and disorder. In their view, no other kind of discipline is perfectly conceivable, except that based on obedience and excessive centralization of power.

Yet, it was the Jesuits who demonstrated, better than anyone, this principle of discipline through obedience. They left, even here in our South America, a memorable example of this with their austerity and their doctrines. No modern tyranny, no theoretician of the dictatorship of the proletariat or of the totalitarian state, came even close to conceiving the possibility of the enormity of rationalization achieved by the priests of the Company of Jesus in their missions.

Today, simple obedience as a principle of discipline seems an exhausted and impractical formula, and from this, above all, results the constant instability in our social life. In the absence of this restraint, we have been trying in vain to import from other modern nations, or even to create by our own means, an appropriate surrogate capable of overcoming our uneasy and disorderly nature. Experience and tradition teach us that, in general, each culture only absorbs, assimilates, and develops traits of other cultures when these traits can be adapted to their ways of life. In this matter, we must remember what happened to the European cultures transported to the New World. Neither the contact nor the mixture with the indigenous or adventitious races made them as different from the cultures of our grandparents from overseas as we would sometimes like them to be. In the case of Brazil, as unattractive as it may seem to some of our countrymen, the truth is that we are still tied to the Iberian Peninsula. [What binds us] to Portugal, specifically, is a long and living tradition, alive enough to nourish, even today, a common soul, despite everything that separates us. We can say that the current form of our culture came from there; the rest was matter that adapted well or poorly to this form.

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On the parallelism between these two hierarchies, see the theological teachings of *João de São Tomás*, the Portuguese philosopher considered by many modern Thomists the best interpreter of the Angelic Doctor, translated by M. Benoit Lavaud, O.P., Jean de Saint Thomas (Paris, 1928).

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Dante, *La Divina commedia* (Paradise, I, 103–105). “All things existent possess order among them and this favors a similarity between the universe and God.” —Ed.

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“Natural Grace does not create, but perfects itself...”

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THE ROOTS OF BRAZIL: THE SOWER AND THE BRICKLAYER

Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, 1936

“O sementeiro e o ladrilhador” is the fourth chapter of Buarque de Holanda’s *Raízes do Brasil*. Having previously outlined the characteristics of Iberian culture [SEE DOCUMENT I.6.4], the author turns his attention to the implantation of European culture on Latin American soil. In this excerpt, Buarque de Holanda—who participated in São Paulo’s Semana de Arte Moderna of 1922—situates the establishment of cities as a strategy for domination during Europe’s colonial enterprise in Latin America. Buarque de Holanda outlines the differences between the Portuguese and Spanish colonies through their respective patterns of urbanization. Unlike Spain, Portugal had no Phillip II to develop the Laws of the Indies that regulated the locating, building, and populating of settlements across Spanish America. Instead, as a Portuguese colony, Brazil inherited a vision of its territory as a mere place of passage. De Holanda describes the fundamental difference as follows: The Spanish were akin to bricklayers, seeking to construct an orderly new Spain in the Americas; the Portuguese were like sowers, harvesting a new enterprise in the Americas, then departing with great wealth. This excerpt is translated from a 1995 version of *Raízes do Brasil* [(São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1995), 95–138].

THE CASTILIANS’S URBANIZING ZEAL

The marked preference for rural life agrees well with the Portuguese spirit of domination, which did not impose imperative and absolute rules and yielded every time immediate circumstances counseled [and] which cared less for building, planning, or laying foundations than for importing an easy wealth, almost within hand’s reach, [through coastal trading posts known as *feitorias*].

In fact, city life is essentially anti-natural, associated with manifestations of the spirit and will, since cities are opposed to nature. For many conquering nations, the building of cities was the most decisive instrument of domination

they knew. [The German sociologist] Max Weber admirably demonstrates how the foundation of cities represented—for the Near East and particularly for the Hellenistic world and Imperial Rome—the clear means for creating local instruments of power. He adds that the same phenomenon is found in China, where, even during the [nineteenth] century, the subjugation of the Miao-Tse tribes could be identified with the urbanization of their lands. It is with good reason that these [different] civilizations applied a similar strategy, since experience has demonstrated that [city building], above all other [strategies], is the most enduring and efficient. The economic frontiers established in time and space by the foundation of the cities of the Roman Empire also became the boundaries of the world that could later pride itself on the inheritance of Classical culture.¹ As the rural territories greatly gained in importance, the freer they became from the influence of the institutions of the urban centers, that is, the farther they were from the frontiers.

But we do not need to go so far historically and geographically. In our own continent, Spanish colonization was broadly characterized by what the Portuguese lacked: persistent diligence in securing the military, economic, and political domination of the metropolis over the conquered lands through the creation of large, stable, and well-organized centers of population. A conscientious and provident zeal directed the establishment of the Spanish cities in America. In the early days [of colonization], there was ample freedom for individual efforts, so that through memorable exploits, new glories and lands would be brought under the dominion of the crown of Castile. Soon thereafter, however, the heavy hand of the State made its weight known, imposing discipline on the new and old inhabitants of the American countries, mollifying rivalries and dissension, channeling the raw energy of the colonists to the greater advantage of the metropolis. Once settlement was accomplished and the construction of buildings completed, but “not before”—as expressly recommended by the *Ordenanzas de descubrimiento nuevoy población* [Ordinances for New Discoveries and Populations] of 1563—the officials and settlers should, with great diligence and sacred dedication, undertake to bring peacefully all the natives of the land to the bosom of the Holy Church and to obedience towards the civil authorities.

The characteristic layout of urban centers in Spanish America reveals the clear desire to master and rectify the capricious fantasy of the wild landscape: it

is a resolute act of human will. Streets are not permitted to follow the twists and unevenness of the earth: rather, the [Spanish American colonizers] impose on them the gratuitous emphasis of the straight line. The grid plan was not born, at least here, from a religious idea, such as that which inspired the construction of the cities of Latium and later the Roman colonies in keeping with Etruscan rites: it is simply a triumph of the desire to order and dominate the conquered world. The straight line, expressing the direction of the will towards a preconceived and chosen end, clearly manifests itself in this resolution. It is not by chance that [straight lines] noticeably dominate all these Spanish cities, the first “geometric” cities built by Europeans on our continent.

Among the descendents of Castilian conquerors an abundant legislation precluded out of hand any fantasy or whim in the construction of the urban centers. The rules of the Laws of the Indies, which governed the establishment of cities in America, exhibit the same bureaucratic sense of minutiae that oriented the casuists of those times, occupied with enumerating, defining, and judging complicated matters of conscience for the edification and guidance of the father confessors. In the pursuit of a place to be populated, it was necessary, first of all, to examine carefully the healthiest regions, considering the abundance of men, young and old, well-built, of good disposition and color, free from diseases; with healthy animals of working size, with offspring and healthful fodder; where there were no venomous or noxious things; the sky clear and benevolent, the air pure and sweet.

If [the place to be settled] were on the coast, it was necessary to consider the shelter, depth, and potential for defense of the port, and, wherever possible, [to find a place] where the waves did not come in from the South or the West. For the inland settlements, extremely high places, exposed to the winds and of difficult access were not to be chosen, nor were those that were too low, which tend to be unhealthy. Rather [they should be located] at a median altitude, exposed to the north and south winds. If there were mountains, [the settlement] should be along the flank running east to west. If the choice were to fall to a place on the banks of a river, it should be situated in such a way that at sunrise, the [light should strike] the village first and, only afterward, the waters.

The building of the city should always start with the so-called *Plaza Mayor* [Main Square]. When by the seashore, this Square should be in the port, at the point of disembarkation; when in a midland zone, at the city center. The shape

of the Square should be quadrilateral, its width at least two-thirds of its length, so that horses could run through it on festival days. In overall size, [the Square] should be proportional to the number of inhabitants; but since the population could increase, it should not measure less than two hundred feet in width by three hundred in length, yet never more than eight hundred by 532 feet. The median and good proportion would be six hundred feet in length by four hundred in width. The Square was the basis for laying out the streets: the four main [streets] would extend from the center of each side of the Square. From each angle two more streets would branch off, with care taken so that the four angles face the four cardinal points. In cold regions, the streets should be wide; narrow, in the hot ones. However, if horses were present, better they be wide.²

In this way, the town clearly arose from a center; the *Plaza Mayor* plays the same role here as the *cardo* and the *decumanus* plays in the Roman cities, with the two lines traced by the *lituus* of the city planner, from North to South and East to West, serving as references for the future planning of the urban network. Yet, while the methodical [Roman] plan intended merely to reproduce on Earth the cosmic order itself, in the Spanish American cities what is expressed is the concept that man can intervene arbitrarily in the course of things and that history not only “happens” but can also be directed and even fabricated.³ This concept attains its best expression and apogee in the Jesuits’s organization of their Indian settlements. They not only introduced [this concept] into the material culture of the Guaraní Missions, “fabricating” geometric cities made of carved stone and adobe in a region rich in wood and very poor in quarries, but also extended [this concept] to their institutions. Everything was so regulated, following specific guidelines, that in the [Jesuit] Indian settlements located today in Bolivian territory “*conjuges Indiani media nocte sono tintinabuli ad exercendum coitum excitarentur.*”⁴

In Portuguese America, however, the work of the Jesuits was a rare and miraculous exception. Beside the truly enormous phenomenon of will and intelligence that this work constituted and to which the Spanish colonization also aspired, Portugal’s enterprise seems timid and ill-equipped to succeed. Compared to the [effort] of the Castilians in their conquests, the effort of the Portuguese distinguishes itself mainly by its predominating character of commercial exploitation, thus repeating the example of colonization in Antiquity, above all in the Phoenician and Greek situations. The Castilians, in contrast, wanted to transform the occupied countries into an organic extension of their own. Although

we cannot truly say that Castile followed this parallel course to the very end, it cannot be disputed that this was, at least, their intention and initial direction. In their eagerness to make of the new lands more than simple *feitorias*, the Castilians were sometimes led to begin the construction of the colonial edifice from the top down. In 1538, [for example] the University of Santo Domingo was created. The [University] of San Marcos, in Lima—with all the privileges, exemptions, and limitations of the [University of] Salamanca in Spain—was established by royal decree in 1551, only twenty years after the beginning of the conquest of Peru by Francisco Pizarro. Also dating to 1551 is the University of Mexico City, which inaugurated its courses in 1553. Still other institutions of higher education were founded in the sixteenth century and during the two centuries that followed. At the end of the colonial period, no fewer than twenty-three universities had been erected in the Castilian protectorates, six of them first-rate (without including those of Mexico and Lima). Even during the period of Spanish domination, tens of thousands of the sons of America would pass through these institutions, to complete their studies without having to cross the Ocean.⁵

This example is only one of the aspects of the Spanish colonization, but it serves well to illustrate its creative will. This is not to say that this creative will always distinguished the Castilian endeavor or that good intentions persistently triumphed and prevailed over man's inertia. But it is, undeniably, for this reason that their work differs from that of the Portuguese in Brazil. We could say that here [in Brazil] the colony is simply a place of passage, for the government as well as for the subjects. This is, by the way, the impression that [Henry] Koster, [who wrote *Travels in Brazil* (1816)], would take away from our land as late as the nineteenth century. On the other hand, the Castilians would continue in the New World the centuries-old struggle against the infidels; the coincidental arrival of Columbus to America in exactly the same year that the last Muslim stronghold on the Peninsula [the Caliphate of Córdoba] fell seems to have been providentially calculated to demonstrate that there was no discontinuity between the two endeavors. In their colonization of America [the Castilians] only reproduced, with the improvements brought by experience, the same processes already employed in the colonization of their lands in the metropolis after the expulsion of the disciples of Muhammad. Moreover, there was the significant fact that in the regions of our continent allotted to [Spain], the climate did not generally present great difficulties. A considerable part of these regions was located outside of the tropi-

cal zone and another part at high altitudes. Even in the city of Quito, that is to say, exactly on the Equatorial line, the Andalusian immigrant would find a constant temperature which was not more severe than the one of his land of origin.⁶

The great population centers built by the Spaniards in the New World were located precisely on these sites where the altitude allowed the Europeans, even in the Torrid Zone, to enjoy a climate similar to the ones they habituated to in their countries. Unlike the Portuguese colonization, which was above all coastal and tropical, the Castilian one seems to deliberately flee the seashore, preferring the inlands and plateaus. Besides, there were explicit recommendations with regard to this in the ordinances for new discoveries and populations. You should not choose, said the legislator, sites for population in maritime places because of the danger posed by pirates; these sites are not very healthy; the people are not diligent in tilling and cultivating the land; and their customs are ill-formed. Only when there are good harbors should settlements be installed along the sea's edge and then only those truly indispensable to the penetration, commerce, and defense of the land.

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Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* [Science and Society], vol. II, (Tübingen, 1925), 713.

2

Recopilación de leyes de los reynos de Indias, (Madrid: 1756), 90–2 ff.

3

We should not exclude the hypothesis of a direct influence of the Greco-Roman models on the design of the Spanish American cities. Recent studies even demonstrate the close affiliation of Felipe II's instructions for the establishment of the New World cities to the classic treatise by Vitruvius. Dan Stanislawski, "Early Spanish Town Planning in the New World," *Geographical Review* 37, no. 1 (January 1947): 94–105.

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Cf. A. Bastian, *Die Kulturländer des Alten Amerika*, vol. II *Beiträge zu Geschichtlichen Vorarbeiten*, (Berlin: 1878), 838.

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From only the University of Mexico, we know with assurance that in the period between 1775 and Independence 7,850 bachelor's degrees and 473 doctoral and licentiate degrees were awarded. Cf. John Tate Lane, "The Transplantation of the Scholastic University," *University of Miami Hispanic American Studies*, vol. I (Coral Gables, Florida: November, 1939), 29.

6

Bernhard Brandt, *Südamerika* (Breslau, 1923), 69.

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WHAT DOES LATIN AMERICA MEAN?

Afrânio Coutinho, 1969

Brazilian literary critic and essayist Afrânio Coutinho (1911–2000) was influential in introducing the New Criticism to Brazil in the 1950s. He wrote this article in Spanish in 1969 for the Parisian-based journal *Mundo Nuevo* created by the Uruguayan literary critic Emir Rodríguez Monegal. Staunchly defending Brazil's cultural autonomy, Coutinho echoes Eduardo Prado's denunciation of the Eurocentric use of the term "Latin" to homogenize the autonomous character found in each of the republics in the continent [SEE DOCUMENT III.1.2]. At the time that he wrote "¿Qué es América Latina?" Coutinho served as editor of the literary journal *Cadernos brasileiros* [(Rio de Janeiro: Editora Vida Doméstica)] and was also the author of influential critical books such as *A filosofia de Machado de Assis* (1940), *Por uma crítica estética* (1953), and *Da crítica e da nova crítica* (1957). This translation is based on the original Spanish-language text [*Mundo Nuevo* (Paris), no. 36 (June, 1969), 19–20].

THIS IS THE QUESTION that always strikes any sensible member of a Latin American community whenever ["Latin America"] is used by a European or a North American. Does Latin America exist? Do its countries constitute a uniform bloc of customs, thoughts, feelings, and aspirations? Do an Ecuadorian, Argentinean, and Brazilian have something in common that allows them to understand each other and to sense each other's problems while keeping harmonious solutions in mind?

The term "Latin American" always seemed absurd to me. I never felt there was any validity in the generic designation of Latin America. I do not consider it appropriate as it refers to a homogeneous bloc. We are not truly "Latin" in a strict sense. To apply that term to the inhabitants of this part of the globe is to misuse an expression that is completely at odds with the historical, social, cultural, literary, and artistic facts.

In Brazil, every day we feel less and less Latin. The great Brazilian intellectual Silvio Romero once stated that we Brazilians are *Mestiço* [racially mixed], if

not by blood, then by culture. Our civilization is *mestiça*, and we have been proud of that for some time. Until the beginning of the century, a Eurocentric attitude prevailed in Brazil, which led us to conceal our mixed heritage. After the Modernist movement erupted in 1922, we began to acknowledge and proudly proclaim that our mixed heritage was the great advantage to our culture. So we began to have an intellectual awareness of it: to study it, analyze it, emphasize its components, and value its contributions.

Instead of approaching our civilization as the mere result of a Portuguese endeavor, we affirm that Brazilian evolution was the work of Brazilians—and by “Brazilian” I mean every one of the individuals who came here. [Spanish philosopher José] Ortega y Gasset declared that Europeans became Americans from the first moment they set foot on the new continent. Thus Brazilians, Argentineans, Peruvians, Chileans, and Mexicans arose immediately from the confluence of culture and interracial mixture. Cultures and bloodlines came together, giving birth to something new, something that Europe could not claim as its own.

The Brazilian critic [Tristão de Alencar] Arape Júnior devised a theory he named *obnubilação brasílica* [Brazil-born bewilderment] in order to explain the phenomenon of the “oblivion” that takes hold in the mind and mores of Europeans who come here. In this way they brought themselves into contact with the new land, new animals, new fruits; they had to overcome enormous difficulties with native inhabitants and fauna, while also trying to develop innovative methods of coexistence and adaptation. They then created a new psychology, a new type of behavior and mental attitude, feelings, ideals, and a certain musicality. They adapted to the new habitat, from which a new man evolved.

Two camps in Brazil, the Westernists and the Brazilianists, were always in opposition regarding the interpretation of Brazilian civilization. The former considered Brazil a mere extension of white, European civilization, and advocated subordination to Western culture by means of its Portuguese heritage and the Catholic Church. These were the society’s aristocrats, who prevailed until this century.

The others, the Brazilianists, considered Brazilian society a native product and therefore natural, made up of both European and local elements. It was not European, Portuguese, Negro, or Native, but rather a product of this melting pot, something new, original and distinct: Brazilian civilization. Europeans can see

that what we have is our own, and this offends them. Our music, our folklore, our architecture, the sculpture of [Brazil-born colonial artist] Aleijadinho, our literature—all these are elements of a different civilization, precisely because it is the result of *mestiçagem*, the mixture of various cultures and ways of life.

How can we call this “Latin,” except by forcing an expression that in the end must have no meaning? Catholicism itself was profoundly altered in its approach to social interaction as a result of syncretism with other religions.

Thus, there is no reason whatsoever to designate the peoples of this continent as “Latin”—not Latin, or Hispanic, or Iberian. Latin America is a historical absurdity that stems from a colonialist bias whose sense of superiority in the face of a multitude of peoples forces them to pose as Latins, or heirs to the “superior” civilization of Europe. We are not Latin; we are Argentinean, Ecuadorian, Chilean, Paraguayan, Bolivian, Uruguayan, Colombian, Venezuelan, Brazilian, and so on.

Each one of our nations has its own unmistakable individuality; Argentineans and Colombians are not mistaken for each other or for anyone else. We are all different in accordance with our country’s historical evolution, through which we developed our own social and cultural typology. While the colonizers were consolidating their position and operating on the surface of our societal strata, the anonymous peoples in the cities and in the fields built new societies without even lifting their gaze. And they built them naturally, automatically, with no shortcuts or commotion—societies new in body and soul that would one day be seen as the true civilization of all the peoples of our continent.

Today, current generations in Brazil tend to value this aspect of our civilization. The *mestiço* civilization: this is the authentic *Brazilian* civilization. It is not Portuguese, or Negro, or Indian, or European, or Western; it is Brazilian, period. Therefore I cannot accept this “Latin American” designation. It is absurd and incompatible with historical, social, cultural, and artistic reality.

We, the Brazilian people, are not Latin, nor do we feel that we are Latin; we are *Brazilians*. And I assure you that the same is true for the rest of the so-called Latin American nations. As such I leave the matter here settled.

I.6.7 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 807627

BRAZILIANS AND OUR AMERICA

Antonio Candido, 1993

In this essay, Brazilian intellectual and professor Antonio Candido (born 1918) offers a historical overview of the disconnection between Brazilian and Spanish-American intellectuals since the turn of the twentieth century. Candido argues for figures such as Manoel Bomfim [SEE DOCUMENTS I.3.5; I.4.1; I.6.1], who shunned the euphoria of the Romantics in their lucid examinations of Latin America. Moreover, the author rationalizes that one cannot fully understand the Brazilian psyche without taking into account Brazil's geographical and cultural position of interested contact in relation to the rest of Latin America. In this sense, Candido's interest in positioning Brazil on an equal footing with Spanish America is a counterargument to the more imperialist and isolationist opinions of thinkers such as Prado and Coutinho [SEE DOCUMENTS III.1.2; I.6.6]. This text from an unknown source was written around 1989 and remained unpublished until 1993, when it was included in *Recortes* [Antonio Candido (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1993), section 23, 143–54], the anthology of Candido's texts on which this translation is based. The essay was later reprinted in booklet form as *Os brasileiros e a nossa América* [(São Paulo: Coleção Memo, Fundação Memorial da América Latina, 2000)], as well as in a revised edition of *Recortes* [Antonio Candido (Rio de Janeiro: Ouro sobre azul, 2004), section 23, 143–155].

IT IS STRANGE TO CONTEMPLATE THE MANNER in which the two largest linguistic blocs in Latin America have thought about and seen each other. Looking at the situation objectively, it is [clearly] marked by asymmetry, as the Lusitanian bloc, that is Brazil, concerns itself more with the Hispanic bloc than the other way around.

There are many reasons [for this to occur]; beginning with the great difference in significance of the two colonial powers. Spain was a decisive European power at that moment, and its culture influenced Western civilization. Portugal was always a small, marginal state that was focused on the sea and the vast world, with no presence worthy of consideration within the centers of collective

civilization. It never had a Phillip II to astonish Europe, nor a [Miguel de] Cervantes to alter the course of literature. Through *Don Quixote* and picaresque prose, Spain paved the way for the novel—a new genre that would serve to express modern trends. On the other hand, Portugal had *Os lusíadas* [The Lusiads] by Luís de Camões, a work whose genre—the epic—was destined to shortly lose its prominence. Because of all this and other matters that will not be discussed here, Spaniards tend to overrate their culture and impose their language. In contrast, the Portuguese meekly learn about others. We must think of ourselves as the heirs of that legacy. Even today, for instance, a Brazilian in Bolivia will make the effort to speak *portunhol* [a pidgin of Portuguese and Spanish], while a Bolivian in Brazil will quite readily speak in Spanish.

[During] this century Spanish, the language of culture, became indispensable to Brazilians, who became familiar with a considerable part of the intellectual output they lacked through the intermediaries of the Spanish, Argentinean, Mexican, and Chilean publishing houses that gave us authors and texts of philosophy, economy, and sociology. Higher education in Brazil between 1940 and 1960 would have been practically impossible without those translations. In a manner of speaking, Spanish is a supplementary language for us; Portuguese, on the other hand, is of little use to the people who live in the Hispanic bloc. This is why Spanish is taught in Brazilian high schools; there are also chairs of Hispanic American literature at the higher education level. There is nothing similar with regard to our language within the Spanish-speaking Americas.

This lack of symmetry can be seen at all levels; despite the good will of many and the actions of a few; it is made worse by the fact that all our countries are still more focused on either Europe or the United States than they are on any of their neighbors. Only by pondering these issues may we consider the presence of Latin America [both] in literature and Brazilian thought. I will give you a few examples.

A certain attraction for Hispanic America occurred in early Brazilian literature, perhaps due in part to the French influence. Let us consider the great popularity of Voltaire's tragedy *Alzira*, whose subject is Peru, as well as *Les Incas* by [Jean-François] Marmontel, that circulated the theme of America within the cultural capitals [of the world]. They certainly paved the way for our emergence by means of the prestige that flowed back upon us.

The period of interest runs from the end of the [Brazilian] Empire to [the time] of the mature Republic, let us say between 1880 and 1920. It was during that time that the most systematic consideration of Latin America evolved through the writings of men of the highest intellectual stature, such as Joaquim Nabuco, Sílvia Romero, Eduardo Prado, Oliveira Lima, as well as one less illustrious, yet undoubtedly the most lucid [contributor] to this field, Manoel Bomfim [SEE DOCUMENTS I.3.5; I.4.1; I.6.1].

. . . The Republican Proclamation of 1889 began an era of strong North American influence that in turn stimulated a reflection upon the Brazilian position with regard to the rest of the continent. A tradition stemming from the era of Independence held that the monarchist regime was justified in Brazilian liberal opinion because it assured unity, [thus] preventing the fragmentation and the turbulence that marked the fate of Hispanic America. The latter was seen as a crucible of agitators and *caudillos*, whose most extreme and feared example was that of the former French colony Haiti: a case of slave uprising that was to be avoided at all costs given the slave-based Brazilian economy.

It is of interest to highlight here Joaquim Nabuco's book, *Balmaceda* (1895), as it delves into the vicissitudes of the Chilean statesman [of the same name]; it studies with distrust the popular aspects of his work and noticeably sympathizes with the aristocratic order that would have granted certain stability to the monarchist regime of Brazil. A democracy of elites would in this manner become a republican solution for Latin America. This idea would in part contradict the democratic and populist stance that Joaquim Nabuco would assume during the years 1870–1880, when he was a key leader of the anti-slavery campaign that culminated in the abolition [of slavery] in 1888.

A monarchist just like Nabuco, Eduardo Prado [SEE DOCUMENT III.1.2] wrote *A ilusão americana* [The American Illusion] (1893); in it, the Spanish republics of America were seen as anarchies camouflaged in liberty, all under the corruptive influence of North American imperialism. For Prado, the most advantageous model was British imperialism, which was both monarchic and European! He had deeply rooted prejudices about Latin America. According to him, Brazil had been an exception while its unifying monarchy endured; but it was doomed to fragmentation and chaos, mainly because it was populated by inferior *Mestiços* (Lusitanian-Native-Negroes). With an apparent aversion to the countries

of the subcontinent, [Prado] describes as inevitable the conflicts among them. He adheres to the official version of our historiography, namely to affirm Brazil's civilizing role within the River Plate region against those *caudillos* that he considered "monsters," such as [Juan Manuel Ortiz de] Rosas and [Francisco Solano] López. In summary, [Prado believed] Brazil should be oriented toward Europe because it had no affinity for, nor common interests with, the other countries of Latin America.

Prado was virulently opposed to the United States. In addition to being an oppressor, it also presented a bad model of the Republican regime (which was equated to disorder), as well as that of a Federation (which was equated to annihilation). It also represented a difference of opinion regarding the ideology of the Brazilian Republic. The latter was fascinated by the great power of North America and was fully disposed to becoming a partner in its imperialist policies, as, indeed, it was, despite its assertions to the contrary. That was the era of Pan Americanism, which was in principle accepted as the best formula for coexistence and progress by several administrations, as well as by intellectuals of stature such as Nabuco, Rui Barbosa and [the Baron of] Rio Branco. It is certain that this latter statesman attempted to temper dependency by stimulating the growth of Latin American solidarity and also by fostering mutual knowledge among the various countries.

Oliveira Lima was decidedly critical of the official policies. His book *Pan-americanismo* [Pan-Americanism] (1907) defined the imperialist frame of mind as well as the dangers of the Monroe Doctrine [SEE DOCUMENT III.1.1] while also highlighting the more independent position taken by Argentina through the Drago Doctrine. Lima stated: "From its inception, the Monroe Doctrine was always a selfish doctrine that sought to reserve the Americas—economically and diplomatically—as the personal property [of the United States] due to its dominant position: instead of [the South American nations] continuing to depend on their mother countries, they are now restricted and isolated by their self-absorption.

Of all the intellectuals at the beginning of the century, Oliveira Lima was probably the most involved in the differential analysis of the two Americas: the Anglo-Saxon and the Latin. He also provided the most in-depth study of the relational problems among our diverse countries due to his knowledge of them. Despite a conservative position that was prone to monarchic [tendencies], [Lima] pointed out with far-sightedness that the predominance of the United States

could not be confronted through declarations and treaties, but rather through the assured progress of the subcontinent: “The real obstacles to the North American conquest are precisely our values and progress.”¹

José Veríssimo [SEE DOCUMENT I.3.6], whose interest in Hispanic American literature was almost unparalleled at that time, took a similar position. Starting in the 1890s he began to publish articles on writers such as [José Enrique] Rodó [SEE DOCUMENT III.2.1], Carlos Reyes, Rufino Blanco Fombona, [and] Manuel Ugarte, [articles] which discussed the subject of Pan Americanism as well as relations between Brazil and the Spanish-speaking countries, whose intellectual life he endeavored to comprehend. A confirmed pessimist, [Veríssimo] considered the whole subcontinent to be a wretched universe of ignorance and violence, incapable of formulating its own aspirations. Consequently, the task of doing so fell to a small elite class that was educated and civilized; they would create an enlightened community beyond the frontier.²

. . .

The policy of rapprochement among the countries of the subcontinent was manifest in Brazil by means of a seminal project: *Revista americana* [American Magazine], which circulated between 1909 and 1919. Ostensibly produced under the influence of the [Baron of] Rio Branco, who was the minister of the foreign office from 1902 to 1912, the young diplomat Araújo Jorge directed the publication. Its objective was to promote a broader mutual understanding among the countries of Latin America as well as to diminish their obsessive fixation on Europe. Although the United States was tacitly included in the project, the subject was always Latin America, and [the periodical] was published [only] in Portuguese and Spanish. A retrospective of the magazine shows that our cultural relations were established primarily with four countries: Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, and Peru; but [the magazine] had other collaborators as well, such as the Dominican [diplomat and writer] Max Henriquez Ureña, as well as a Honduran poetess. The subtitle indicated the spectrum of its vision: *Ciências. Artes. Letras. Política. Filosofia. História*. [Sciences, Arts, Literature, Politics, Philosophy, History]. The suggestion is that its topics were Pan Americanism and the Monroe Doctrine, which were generally interpreted, explained, and defended.

. . .

Euclides da Cunha was an eminent collaborator on the *Revista americana* who displayed, at various points in his work, an unreceptive attitude toward our relations with Hispanic America. As he had personally experienced the problems along the Amazonian border, he reacted apprehensively to a war with Peru that seemed imminent and usually viewed relations with our neighbors through the light of an incurable pessimism. For him, the monarchy kept Brazil [in a state] of order and normalcy, while it also sought to secure civilization on the subcontinent. Hence [da Cunha] considered it a risk to come into serious conflict with [the monarchy]. Thus the best solution was isolationism, as he wrote in around 1903: “The Republic took us out of an oasis of isolation [created by] the Empire so that we could enter into a dangerous solidarity with South America,” which [da Cunha] later described as: “...an absolutely beautiful but unachievable ideal, whose only effect is to tie us to the long-standing conflicts of two or three countries which are irreparably lost because they are incompatible with the strict necessities of true progress. In the future, let us continue along our former splendid isolation.”³

Euclides da Cunha was skeptical regarding the tendencies of his time; that is, [he was skeptical about] reinforcing the links between the countries of the continent well beyond the constant sowing of discord as well as [beyond] the risks of playing along with North American imperialism.

. . .

Let us now consider those who confronted the problem of Americanism without nationalist fervor from a perspective that tried to overcome both the unilateral vision of the elites as well as the conventional version. Such was the rare case of Manoel Bomfim, who in 1903 published *A América Latina—Males de Origem* [Latin America—Evils of Origin], a book that harshly confronted the prejudices of its time. [Because of this,] it never received the appreciation it deserved. It is worth noting its obscure origin.

In 1891 Medeiros e Albuquerque, the director of Public Education in the Federal District [at that time Rio de Janeiro], established a course on the History of the Americas within the schools that trained educators. He created a public competition in order to select the best volume written specifically on this subject. The only contestant to present himself was the young historian Rocha Pombo, whose work was accepted in 1899, based on Manoel Bomfim’s approval. This [Bomfim’s] written opinion was the origin of his future book that would mark a split from

traditional viewpoints (some of which were accepted by Rocha Pombo), including a disagreement with the negative characterization of [dictators such as] Rosas, [Solano] López and [José Gaspar Rodríguez de] Francia. In the Brazil of that era, this was undeniable proof of freedom of thought.

Bomfim's enemies used to say that the information he dealt with was limited to what he had read in Rocha Pombo. If this is not the whole truth, it is at least a part of it, as can be verified by the repetition of the same errors later made in *A América Latina*. But in fact Bomfim possessed a socio-historical imagination that Rocha Pombo lacked: one that allowed him to construct an innovative and profound vision from extremely limited and insufficient information.

His purpose was to reveal the backwardness of Latin America and to investigate its causes. One of the most cited reasons of the time was tied to the theory of biological inequality of races, which was then accepted as truth by the evolutionists. Latin America was what it was—a backward, turbulent and disorganized continent—for it was inhabited by Natives, Negroes and *Mestiços*, who were incapable of reaching the superior level of white colonizers. Bomfim dispensed with this hypothesis and asserted that *mestiçagem* [racial intermingling] did not signify any sort of inferiority whatsoever and could even become an element of superiority. For him, the “*males de origem*” [evils of origin], as he dubbed them, were due to the social characteristics of the colonial powers, which were reflected in the colonization process. The latter was marked by “parasitism,” a key concept in his reasoning that he transposed from biology. Parasitism is manifested in slave labor, which in turn generates inhumane forms of coexistence and incapacitates societies for the systems that could ensure [both] liberty and progress. Hence the chaos of Latin America is permanent.

...

Just as the elite tend to endure due to the constancy of social structures, so the societies of Latin America [tend to be] essentially conservative, with their principal goal being that elite rule prevails through the counterfeit transition of administrations. Manoel Bomfim's viewpoint can be clarified if it is understood as his own “theory of independence.” Indeed, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the separation of the Latin American colonies from their mother countries was a last resort employed by the elite in order to prolong their dominance. Fundamental institutions were duly maintained intact, especially

servile labor, even if slavery was officially abolished. Thus the fatal law of Latin American development came to be conservatism. For his time, Bomfim arrived at original positions in his study of conservatism (the book was written in 1903), demystifying the stance of dominant historiography. He also demonstrated that conservatism was stronger in Latin America because it was so deeply ingrained, however unconsciously. Since it had been entrenched in the soul and sentiment of every one, it would act in spite of the most apparent convictions. These could be liberal or even radical, expressing themselves through laws and progressive discourse that in truth serve to disguise the most crucial element: the mechanism perpetuating the oligarchies that were based on the economic exploitation of the working masses; [this was made possible] by the latter's exceptional capacity for accommodation and compromise, a type of *change in order to continue*.⁴

This was perhaps the most consequential idea of the book as well as one of the most fertile in terms of the study of Latin American societies, particularly as the author illustrated it through such an interesting political classification. According to Bomfim, there is no place in Latin America for extremists desiring either a complete transformation or absolute preservation. What does exist is an imperceptible gradient between both extremes that manifests itself in the categories he thoroughly analyzed regarding early nineteenth-century Independence movements: the *liberals* who desired liberty but, as this [term] was vague, adapted themselves to diverse types of commitments; the *moderates* who were peaceful, cautious and neutral, who adjusted as necessary; the *conservatives* who situated themselves between the moderates and the camouflaged reactionaries; and the indomitable *reactionaries* who sought to maintain the status quo.

For this reason, in Latin America there was always a "corruption of the revolution," as [Bomfim] called it: a victory of conservatives over radicals that created all sorts of obstacles to progress. Conservatism, being a byproduct of parasitism, became then the chief cause—the great evil stemming from the origin ("*mal de origem*"). Using an excellent turn of phrase, he stated that in Latin America the true conservatives are the moderates, who arrive at the necessary compromises. At the time the book was written and published, the latter welcomed North American imperialism with deceitful rhetoric. Manoel Bomfim wrote sharp criticism against this, [effectively] unmasking both Pan Americanism and the Mon-

roe Doctrine. It is thus easy to grasp why his name was stricken from the roster of contributors to *Revista Americana*.

One of the better elements of his book was its strong continental consciousness. [Bomfim] spoke not as a Brazilian, but as a Latin American who was galvanized by fraternal solidarity to reveal the exploited and underdeveloped state of the subcontinent. He would later modify his position in his book *O Brasil na América* [Brazil in the Americas] (1925). In it he maintained his radical analysis of the Independence; however Bomfim attenuated his assessment of *mestiçagem* in which the African contribution to the Brazilian racial composition was minimized in order to exaggerate its Native component. He also diminished his continental sensibilities due to a jingoism that led him to position Brazil above other countries because [within Brazil] the fusion of races had been more profound and equalizing. The main effect [of this racial intermingling] had been a unity that did not exist throughout the expanse of Latin America. This problem—the exceptional unity of Portuguese America—led Bomfim to replace his initial objective analysis with excessive national pride. But, if we consider the book [published] in 1903, we will understand that no one else who studied our communal problems was as lucid or as Latin American as he was.

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1

Stated during the Pan American Conference in Buenos Aires in 1911. An article published in Oliveira Lima, *Obra selecta* edited by Barbosa Lima Sobrinho (Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Nacional do Livro – Ministério da Educação e Cultura, 1971), 510.

2

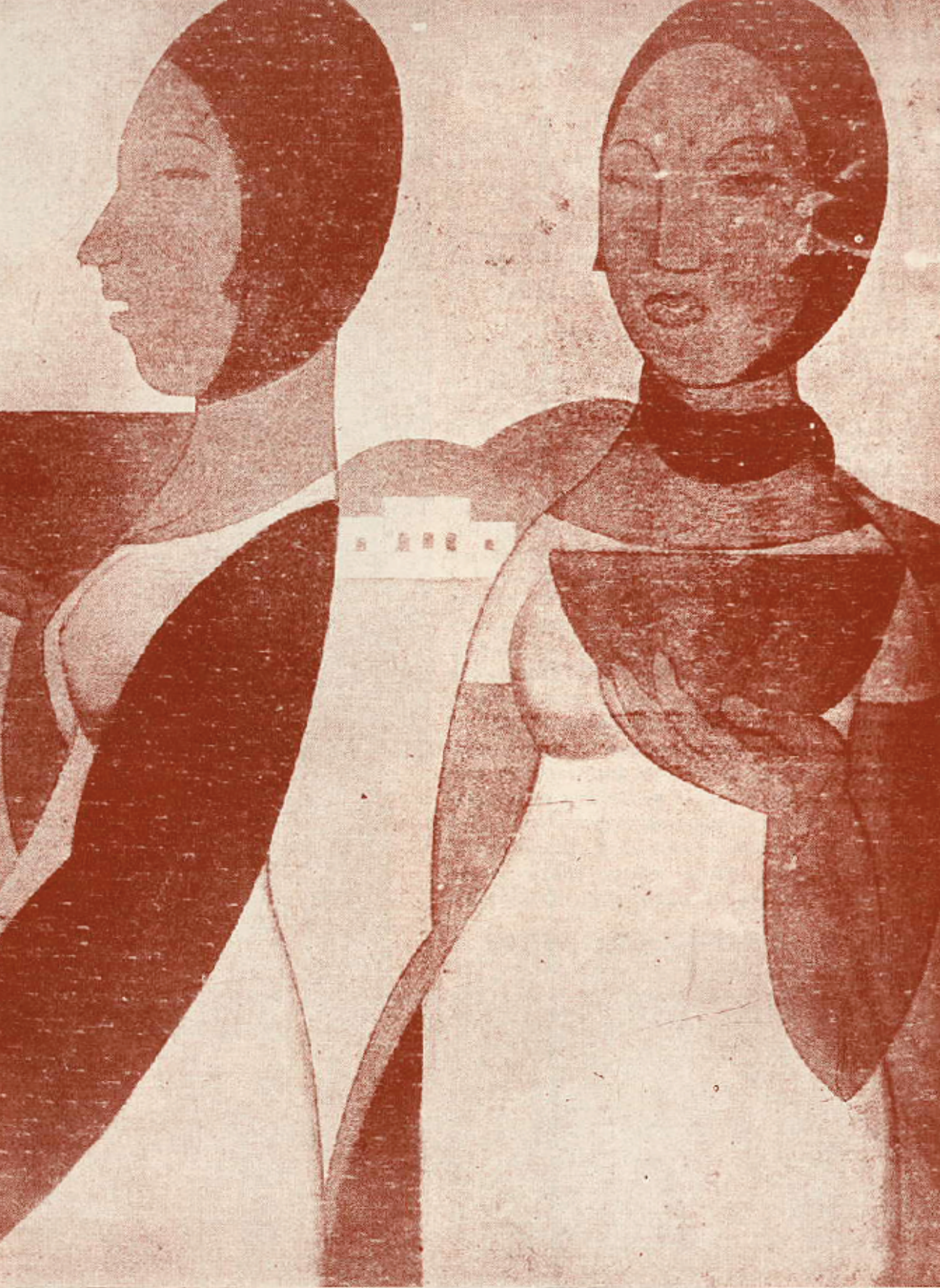
See José Veríssimo, *Cultura, literatura e política na América Latina*, selected and presented by João Alexandre Barbosa (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1986). This important issue gathers together Veríssimo's production regarding this subject.

3

Euclides da Cunha, "*Solidariedade sul-americana*," "*Contrastes e confrontos*," [Contrasts and Confrontations] presented by Olímpio de Souza Andrade, (São Paulo: Editora Cultrix, 1975), 107, 110.

4

Giuseepe Tomassi di Lampedusa (1896–1957) wrote *Il Gattopardo* (*The Leopard*), a novel that chronicles the changes in Sicilian life during the Resorgimento. His criticism of the status quo became especially known for the notion: "Se vogliamo che tutto rimanga comm'è, bisogna che tutto cambi" (If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change). Bomfim's ideas parallel this sentiment.—Ed.



II

A NEW ART

INTRODUCTION BY MARI CARMEN RAMÍREZ

Carlos Mérida's *Figuras*, 1925, oil on canvas, accompanying the essay dedicated to José Vasconcelos by Luis Cardoza y Aragón, "Ensayo sobre el arte del trópico." The essay was published in J. Carlos Mariátegui's magazine *Amauta* (Lima), no. 14, (April 1928): 12. [SEE DOCUMENT II.3.4]. Courtesy of Alma Mérida, Mexico City, Mexico.

MARI CARMEN RAMÍREZ

A New Art

BY 1920, AS POLITICIANS AND INTELLECTUALS continued to debate the coordinates for the identity of the region, a new dimension of the problem emerged around the inclusive notion of a “new art” for the continent. Straddling the line between “nationalism” and “Americanism,” the texts selected for this chapter apply the debate about “fragmentation or unity” introduced in Chapter I to the realm of the visual arts while clearly opting for continental integration. Specifically, they propose that despite the vast heterogeneity that characterizes the more than twenty countries south of the Rio Grande, their cultural and socio-political similarities, as well as their shared colonial history, far outweigh the differences between them. These conditions, in turn, paved the way for a distinct form of expression—in the form of “American” or “Latin American” art—to coalesce at the continental level. The aspiration to “surpass the local” lay at the core of this racially and culturally inclusive view espoused by artists and artistic groups across Latin America [SEE DOCUMENT II.1.5]. Implicit in this position was the attempt to harness the two ends—the local and the continental—of the seemingly irreconcilable or paradoxical equation that is Latin America into one. As described by Uruguayan painter Joaquín Torres-García, the goal was to articulate “a general idea that, on one hand, embraces all the art produced everywhere on the continent and, on the other, includes, in appropriate proportions, everything local that should be included without negating the first requisite” [SEE DOCUMENT II.1.7]. A further manifestation of the *pars pro toto* position is the fluid terminology with which the writers included in this chapter refer to the phenomena at hand. Indeed, the majority use the terms “American,” “Latin American,” and/or “Native-American” interchangeably; and some, like Guatemalan-born Carlos Mérida, even go as far as freely substituting individual names of countries such as Mexico for the broader term “American” on the premise that they both share the same mixed ancestry of indigenous and Spanish peoples [SEE DOCUMENT II.1.4].

The origins of the controversial category of “Latin American art”—a construct challenged in recent years—can be traced to this “period of indocility,” in Mérida’s terms, that comprises the two and half decades between the First and Second World Wars. Historians generally acknowledge these years as the end of the colonial period and the beginnings of a stage of “self-consciousness” or “self-awakening” propelled by the surge of cultural nationalism throughout the region. Indeed, the consolidation of nationalist projects in many Latin American countries serves to frame the Americanist integration discourse exemplified by the texts included in this chapter. In this context, to acknowledge the existence of an art of continental versus national or local projection is equivalent to recognizing the unfettered right of this art—as well as the peoples it represents—to express themselves on their own terms. Hence “American” or “Latin American” art emerged during these years not as homogenizing categories, but as emblems of the struggle for artistic legitimacy that began in the period of Independence and only now had a real chance of becoming a reality. In the minds of many intellectuals, the in-unity-lies-strength position also functioned as a psychological barrier against unresolved issues such as the ever-lurking threat of “Yankee” imperialism or the distorted lens through which Europeans and North Americans engaged the overall complexities of Latin American reality.

The cultural awakening that supported the emergence of the *new* art was grounded in the social and political gains of the 1920s and 30s. At the political level, the Mexican Revolution (1910–17) quickly emerged as an emblem of self-determination and modernization for all of Latin America. Indeed, for most countries of the region, this period represented the consolidation of several waves of economic and political modernization projects set in motion since the late nineteenth century by the progressive elites of major countries like Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil. These modernizing initiatives resulted in economic growth; the rise and expansion of a middle class; significant gains in literacy and education of the masses; the spread of radio and newspapers at an unprecedented scale; and a budding infrastructure for the visual arts in the form of museums as well as public collections and exhibition spaces. The unexpected ascendancy of countries like Mexico sharply contrasted with the spiritually exhausted and economically depleted Europe that emerged out of World War I. Confronted with this situation, Latin American intellectuals were convinced that the only way Europe could be saved was through “the mixing with virgin races” [SEE

DOCUMENT 11.2.2] embodied by the New World republics. Such a view lay at the core of Cuban painter Eduardo Abela's conviction that "in America lies the source that will fertilize twentieth-century art." Many such arguments made by the Latin American intelligentsia of the 1920s suggest that their understanding of the potential global (and specifically American) implications of the conditions in Europe were largely informed by Oswald Spengler's highly influential *The Decline of the West* (1918–23).

11.1 In such a forward-looking context, "a *new* art for a new continent" became the rallying cry of a new generation of artists, critics, and intellectuals steeped in the values of both the cosmopolitan avant-garde as well as local cultures. As early as 1875, José Martí, writing from Mexico City, laid out the key idea that was to be repeated as a leitmotif over and over by almost every artist or writer active in the first half of the century: "A new society [needs] a new kind of painting to be imagined and created" [SEE DOCUMENT 11.1.1]. The idea that Latin Americans should forget the Old World and devote all their energies to conceiving an original art and culture for their New World context was rooted in the legacy of Positivism that emphasized teleological progress as the basis for future-oriented, modern societies. For José Clemente Orozco, the production of this *new* art was not just an artistic task but a duty and a responsibility: "If *new* races have appeared upon the lands of the *New World*, such races have the unavoidable duty to produce a *New Art* in a new tangible and spiritual milieu. Any other road is plain cowardice" [SEE DOCUMENT 11.1.6]. For Joaquín Torres-García the problem demanded an even more radical solution: a *tabula rasa*. In his view, Latin American artists "should proceed *negatively*: let us eliminate everything we have acquired, everything we have borrowed, let us create a void... For now, *to be nothing* is more interesting than pretending to be something *we are not*" [SEE DOCUMENT 11.1.7].

With few exceptions, artists and writers who subscribed to these ideas had trained or spent time in Europe where they absorbed key principles of avant-garde practice and theory represented by such influential movements as Cubism, Fauvism, Expressionism, Dada, Constructivism, and Surrealism. Upon their return to their native countries, they sought to realize for the first time the promise of this *new* art for Latin America. Described by Mérida as "celestial lightning rods" [SEE DOCUMENT 11.1.4], these artists assimilated and transformed for their own purposes the European avant-garde's social and artistic iconoclasm, its uto-

pian approach to art, and its emphasis on “creation” or process over representation. Furthermore, the avant-garde’s transnational sphere of action provided a perfectly suited vehicle for Latin American artists to break away from their subservient past in order to elaborate a truly cutting edge art for the continent. In the visual arts field, David Alfaro Siqueiros’s paradigmatic 1921 manifesto “Three Appeals for the Current Guidance of the New Generation of American Painters and Sculptors” [SEE DOCUMENT II.1.2] was the first text of its kind to espouse a continental *call-to-arms* in true avant-garde fashion. It also pioneered a concrete path toward achieving the *new* Latin American art. Eschewing unilateral interpretations of nationalism, universalism, and Americanism, it proposed the assimilation of both indigenous and avant-garde elements into a new form of artistic production. In this way, it called for the *universalization* of Latin American art through the exaltation of its *difference*. Siqueiros proclaimed: “Let us reject theories anchored in the relativity of ‘NATIONAL ART.’ LET US BECOME UNIVERSAL! Our own RACIAL and LOCAL physiognomy will inevitably come to light through our work.” Echoes of this position can be found in the manifestoes and writings of other Latin American avant-garde pioneers such as Xul Solar [SEE DOCUMENT II.3.2], Orozco, and even the Estridentista movement in Mexico.

If Siqueiros’s “Three Appeals” illustrates the attempt to articulate and project a continental art at the universal level, Ricardo Rojas’s extensive treatise *Eurindia* [SEE DOCUMENT II.1.3] sets out to develop an aesthetic theory stemming from the cultural nationalist perspective that would serve as the basis for such an art. Rojas considered that artists had to inscribe themselves in a tradition and that their country’s vernacular elements should provide the intrinsic, constitutive starting point. His treatise differed from other prevailing modes of cultural nationalism in that it included both foreign and native expressions (European + indigenous) in search of the definition of Argentinean culture while expanding such a characterization to embrace all of Latin America [SEE DOCUMENT II.1.3]. In this way, *Eurindia* also called attention to another facet of the topic under consideration in this section: it represented an acknowledgment of the role of immigration in shaping Argentinean (and Latin American) society in the late 1910s and early 1920s as well as a call to embrace heterogeneity in the creation of the *new* Latin American art. This was a turning point: as the century evolved, such an inclusive position would continue to grow in influence and significance across the Americas [see Chapters IV and VI].

II.2 There is, perhaps, no better indication of the scope and intensity of the debate concerning the *new* art for the Americas than the fact that it was the subject of “surveys” conducted by leading newspapers and magazines of the period. The survey was a popular journalistic genre that illustrated both the ascendancy of the press throughout the region and the articulation—in the pre-Internet age—of a transnational community of artists, writers, and intellectuals eager to engage in a public conversation about timely topics such as the identity of “American” or “Latin American” art. This section, “Surveys Concerning a Continental Attitude,” gathers together a sampling of responses to a series of four questions circulated by the Cuban avant-garde *revista de avance* under the title “A Survey: What should American art be?” Reflecting upon the purpose of the survey, Francisco Ichaso, one of the journal’s founders and editors, summarized the questionnaire as guided and “updated by the unanimous desire to present our spiritual profile to the world with lines as distinct as those of geography” [SEE DOCUMENT II.2.7]. The responses to questions concerning the justification for specific features and legitimacy of the “new” Latin American art cover the gamut of positions—from the fiercely committed to the presumably *neutral*. Yet, the respondents all agreed on one point: to avoid the issue was not an option and even “tantamount to losing one’s citizenship” [SEE DOCUMENT II.2.4]. The survey proved particularly revealing with regard to the question: “Do you believe there are characteristics that are common to every Latin American country’s art?” While all the contributors acknowledged the complexity of dealing with such a racially and ethnically heterogeneous continent, the majority of them still considered the notion of *Latin American art* a legitimate one on the basis of local similarities that manifested themselves through their own “essence,” “shading,” or “elemental psychology,” all of which clearly diverged from European art. Nicaraguan journalist and poet Eduardo Avilés Ramírez could not have expressed it more succinctly when he wrote: “Between Mexican and Bolivian painting . . . there is a distance in the manner of expression, but basically they are both ‘American’ originals” [SEE DOCUMENT II.2.4].

II.3 The various arguments for the existence of a continentally broad art based on the synthesis of “American” and “universal” elements naturally led the editors of this volume to raise the questions: Was the notion of a Latin American art mere rhetoric, or did it actually stand for something concrete? Which

artists or trends did these authors have in mind when they argued for a “Latin American” art? And what were the specific features of this art? The third section of this chapter, “Harbingers of the New Art,” sets out to provide some answers to these questions through a series of texts focused on specific artists or movements advocated by the various writers included and offered by many of their contemporaries as models for the region. The consensus early on focused on Mexico as the “vanguard of the Americas, the forward prow of the race” [SEE DOCUMENT II.3.4], a view that found a justification not only in the country’s rich native past, but also in the visible leadership role that the 1920s post-revolutionary government had accorded to avant-garde artists through paradigmatic initiatives such as Mexican Muralism. Like Mexico, Peru also was considered representative of the new tendencies on account of the legacy of its indigenous past and the presence of artists such as José Sabogal [SEE DOCUMENT II.3.6] who took inspiration from his previous experience with the Mexican pictorial movement. The artists who served as models of the *new* art all had all spent time in Europe and their production combined references to local cultures through avant-garde principles. Such were the cases of Emilio Pettoruti, Diego Rivera, and the already mentioned Mérida. Describing the Cubist-inspired synthetic still lifes and architectural interiors of his fellow artist Pettorutti—“one of the Criollo avant-gardists of the future”—his friend and collaborator Xul Solar observed that his works possessed the “sober monumental scale of pristine native art,” as well as the “idiosyncratic intensity of white modernity, and the paradoxical constructions (which are pure intellectual joy) of the hyper-creative era to come” [SEE DOCUMENTS II.3.2, AND II.3.1, RESPECTIVELY]. A similar argument was raised with regard to Mérida, an artist considered by the French critic André Salmon as the most qualified to bridge “the abyss separating America from Europe” [SEE DOCUMENT II.3.3]. Mérida’s renditions of indigenous themes culled from the vernacular Mayan traditions of both Mexico and his native Guatemala relied on two-dimensionality and the values of pure painting—particularly a geometrical “wealth of color never seen before”—conditions considered prerequisites for a *new* art that qualified as avant-garde.

In addition to positing the need for the *new* art, much of the debate surrounding the topic in the 1920s and 30s hinged on the specific characteristics of this art. In this regard, despite emphasizing the expression of key elements of the American experience, proponents of a *new* art almost unanimously rejected conventional painting styles rooted in academic notions or mainly in the stereotyped

picturesque. “Works of this nature have no place in the painting of the Americas,” declared the Guatemalan art critic Luis Cardoza y Aragón [SEE DOCUMENT II.3.4]. Instead, the type of art proposed by the authors featured in this chapter was one that embodied the two elements outlined above: “what is American” (i.e., indigenous, native, local) and “what is universal” (either avant-garde or cosmopolitan) perspectives. Moreover, Siqueiros’s points of reference were not exclusively the Mexican or Latin American indigenous traditions, but rather Cézanne, Picasso, and the early European avant-garde movements. For José Sabogal, a “major precursor” of Latin American painting was Paul Gauguin [SEE DOCUMENT II.3.6]. Bolivian diplomat Germán Quiroga Galdo argued, in turn, that Picasso’s widespread influence throughout Latin American countries served as both a powerful stimulus and leveling force against the nefarious influence of naturalism, naïve folklorism, and so on. According to this view, “the Indian, the Llama, the Condor, the Mountain, the Gaucho, and so forth—which until recently were the favorite motifs employed from Mexico to the Straits of Magellan—are today considered merely raw materials of construction” [SEE DOCUMENT II.3.5]. The paths outlined by both artists and intellectuals thus rejected “archaeological reconstructions” of indigenous, primitive, or American elements, in favor of the type of constructive synthesis advocated by the avant-garde movements. The reasons for such a position were as much ideological as strategic, as suggested by Salmon’s observation that only this type of art was “capable of appealing to Europe, while still questioning its possible decadence” [SEE DOCUMENT II.3.3].

By the outset of World War II, however, it was clear that the intellectual and material gains that supported the overarching optimism of the 1920s and 30s could not mask the inherent limitations and contradictions inherent to the Latin American milieu. At the end, despite improved conditions for artistic production, endemic calamities such as poverty, illiteracy, and a weak—if not inexistent—cultural and visual arts infrastructure impeded the consolidation of a truly autonomous field for art. It would take a new generation and innovative intellectual frameworks to again tackle the vast complexities at play in the very notions of either “an art for the Americas” or “Latin American art.”

II.1. A *NEW* ART FOR A NEW CONTINENT

**II.2. SURVEYS CONCERNING A
CONTINENTAL ATTITUDE**

II.3. HARBINGERS OF THE NEW ART

II.1

A NEW ART FOR A NEW CONTINENT

II.1.1 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 831988

A VISIT TO THE EXHIBITION AT [THE SCHOOL] OF FINE ARTS

José Martí, 1875

Better known for his essays and poems, Cuban-born José Martí engaged in art criticism throughout his career, including during his Mexican exile of 1875–76. As with his political writings, this particular text urgently pleads with Mexican artists to break free from an obsolete academicism in order to develop an art that poignantly depicts the country's new social order and helps overcome its inglorious past. This text was first published on December 29, 1875, in Mexico's *Revista Universal* [vol. X, no. 297, p. 1]; the present excerpt is taken from Ida Rodríguez Prampolini's *La crítica de arte en México en el siglo XIX: estudios y documentos II (1810–1858)* [(Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1997), 336–39].

. . . **A VIRGIN REQUIRES CLARITY, HAZINESS, TENDERNESS:** the drawing must possess an exquisite purity; transparency in clothes, angelic expression in the features: the reality of the figure should make us aware of the vagueness of the ideal conception. [Juan Nepomuceno] Cordero's Virgin¹ is the child of a burst of inspiration that owes more to audacity than to tenderness; her face is not delicate enough; her extremities are not perfect enough; the folds of her cloak are too sharp. The beautiful angel, who draws the attention of every viewer, is also more flesh than spirit: we love and respect the inspirational aspect of this figure, and this noble quality is visible in both of Cordero's paintings. The reddish tones here are an expression of his unique perception of color. But his execution

of that strong angel dressed in green is not as delicate as [the subject of] creation deserves: its light comes from hell rather than heaven.

. . . The main shortcoming of this painting is not to be found in the stiffness of the clothing, the imperfection of the extremities, the inappropriate light, or the thickness of the lines: the problem lies in the very essence of the work. The problem is that the execution does not reflect creation; the fault may actually lie with the production of the painting itself. This heavenly woman has not been portrayed as a celestial being. This vision of mysticism was not created by a mystical artist; an all-too-human painter would be incapable of conceiving or executing a satisfactory image of a figure that is probably not in his heart and is surely not in the air he breathes, in the company he keeps, or in the very different needs of his ordinary daily life. Why such a forceful rejection of artistic talent? Why abandon the very medium where true inspiration finds its expression? In times of great oppression on the Earth, the spirit was more inclined to take refuge in celestial images; now, as we become freer, Catholic Virgins are deserting us. If there is no religion in the soul, how can there be any religious unction in the painter's brush? . . .

Everything is in motion, everything changes and paintings of Virgins are now a thing of the past. A new society [needs] a new kind of painting to be imagined and created. Every age has its fantasies, but the imagination does not remain rooted in days of old, nor should the painter dip his brush in the colors used in the eleventh or the sixteenth centuries. These days we populate our soul with ghosts; let us express them and produce them. When is the gentleness of love—or the frown of anger or the contortion of fear—ever absent from the human face? There is no end to the light in the soul, no interruption of the supply of new expressions in the eyes. Painters should not strive to look back at schools that were once great just because they represented an original period; once the period has passed, the greatness of those schools becomes more relative and historical than current and prevalent. Painters should copy the light on the [volcano] Cinantécatl and the pain in [sixteenth-century Aztec ruler] Cuautemotzin's face; they should imagine the twisted limbs of those who died on the sacrificial stone. They should see in their mind's eye the compassionate expression and bitter tears that revealed Marina's unshakable love for Cortés and her pity for her wretched brothers. Our history is full of greatness and originality; our school of painting

is endowed with an original, powerful tradition. Since Cordero is so enamored of reddish shades of light he should paint scenes of an Indian lying among ears of corn that have been shattered by the conquistador's horse, weeping over the blood-soaked clothes of a brother-in-arms killed in battle while armed with nothing but a rock and a lance against the armored rider who is accompanied by the thunder of God and aided by the razor-sharp teeth of a mastiff.

Let us end our visit here for today, pausing for a moment in the lovely patio where the light itself is artistic, and take our leave of the Academy of San Carlos, which has no reason to be envious of the exhibition of paintings held in Madrid in 1871. Among the works collected for that occasion were some recent paintings by [Eduardo] Rosales, whose talent we will surely see echoed in the works of a Mexican painter before too long.

1

Juan Nepomuceno Cordero (1822–1884) was a religious painter of the Classic School in Mexico. He obtained broad recognition in Rome and Florence for a seminal work titled *El regreso de Colón en América* (Columbus Returns to America), which was reproduced and widely disseminated in Italy.—Ed.

II.1.2 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 794607

THREE APPEALS FOR THE CURRENT GUIDANCE OF AMERICAN PAINTERS AND SCULPTORS

David Alfaro Siqueiros, 1921

Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896–1974) published this seminal manifesto in 1921 in the first and only issue of *Vida-Americana, revista norte, centro y sudamericana de vanguardia*, a Barcelona-based monthly that he also edited [*“Tres llamamientos de orientación actual a los pintores y escultores de la nueva generación americana,” Vida-Americana (Barcelona) 1, (May 1921), 2–3*]. Siqueiros asserts principles fundamental to avant-garde art and issues a three-part appeal urging fellow artists to pursue: an interest in modernity and its dynamism; an assimilation of the synthetic energy and constructivist vigor of pre-Columbian cultures; and a disavowal of nationalism in favor of a universal art. A key word in his

manifiesto, “UNIVERSALICÉMONOS” (Let us become universal), intentionally spelled out entirely with capital letters, introduces an idea that would be influential to the avant-garde Mexican movement Estridentismo. This important manifesto has been widely published. The version included here is based on the facsimile edition [(Valencia, Spain: IVAM/L’EIXAM, *los papeles del siglo pasado*, 2000), 1–3]. The English translation is by Laura Pérez from *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde Art in Latin America* [(2004), 458–59; doc. 5].

I. DETRIMENTAL INFLUENCES AND NEW TRENDS

Our work is predominately extemporaneous and develops erratically, producing nothing of lasting value to respond to the vitality of our great race. Isolated as we are from decisive new trends, whose solid guidance we receive with bias and hostility, we adopt only DECADENT INFLUENCES from Europe, such as the anemia of Aubrey Beardsley, the preciousness of Amán-Jean, the ill-fated archaism of Ignacio Zuloaga, [Hermengildo] Anglada Camarassa’s pyrotechnics, Bistofi’s sculpted confections, Queralta, [Mariano] Benlliure, etc., all of that MARKETABLE ART NOUVEAU which is dangerously *camouflaged* as art and sells so splendidly among us (particularly if it is imported from Spain). All of this poisons our youth by obscuring FUNDAMENTAL VALUES.

From the early nineteenth century on, Spanish art has been noticeably decadent. Recent group shows in Madrid make our hearts sink. These exhibitions represent the very latest in contemporary Spanish art: traditional literary art; theatrical art in the style of folklorist *zarzuela*, a disease that we have caught through racial affinity. And yet many years ago, three Spaniards of genius and of their time—[Joaquín] Sunyer, [Pablo] Picasso, and Juan Gris—avidly embraced [Paul] Cézanne and obeyed the husky voice of [Pierre-Auguste] Renoir.

Fortunately, a new group of painters and sculptors is emerging in Spain. These artists are attuned to the restlessness of our days; they experiment and liberate themselves from the enormous weight of the great traditions, becoming universal. Most of the members of this group are Catalan.

We extend a rational welcome to the anxiety about spiritual RENEWAL born in times of Cézanne: the substantial vitality of *Impressionism*; the purifying reductionism of *Cubism* in its diverse ramifications; the new emotive forces of *Futurism* (except those that naively attempt to crush the inexorable process of

tradition); the absolutely new REAPPRAISAL of “classical voices” (Dada is still developing); tributary truths that all flow into the MAINSTREAM whose multiple psychological aspects we easily find within ourselves; preparatory theories endowed with fundamental elements that have restored painting and sculpture’s true aim which is plasticity, enriching them with new praiseworthy values.

In order to strengthen our art, it is essential that we RESTORE THE LOST VALUES of painting and sculpture, even as we endow them with NEW VALUES! Like the classical masters, let us make our work conform to the inviolable laws of aesthetic balance; like them, let us be skilled workmen. Let us return to the constructive foundations and great sincerity of antiquity, but let us not use archaic “motifs” which for us would be exotic. LET US LIVE OUR MARVELOUS DYNAMIC AGE! Let us love the modern machine by approaching the plastic emotions it unexpectedly provokes; the contemporary aspects of our daily lives; the life of our cities under construction; the sober, practical *engineering* of our modern buildings, which, being immense towers of iron and cement stuck in the ground, are devoid of architectural complications; and comfortable furniture and utensils, which are plastic materials of the first order. LET US DRESS OUR HUMAN INVULNERABILITY IN MODERN CLOTHING: “NEW SUBJECTS,” “NEW ASPECTS.” Above all, we must be firmly convinced that, despite periods of natural transitory decadence, the ART OF THE FUTURE must be forever Superior!

II. PREVALENCE OF THE CONSTRUCTIVE SPIRIT OVER THE DECORATIVE OR ANALYTICAL SPIRIT

We draw silhouettes in pretty colors. When we sculpt, we concentrate on superficial arabesques and forget the concept of huge PRIMARY SHAPES—CUBES, CONES, SPHERES, CYLINDERS, PYRAMIDS—which should be the skeleton of all architectural plasticity. Let us painters impose the CONSTRUCTIVE SPIRIT on the merely decorative. Color and line are expressive elements of a secondary order. The MAIN PURPOSE, the basis of the work of art, is the magnificent, geometric STRUCTURE OF FORM, with its conception, connections, and architectural materialization of form and perspective. This structure CREATES VOLUMES IN SPACE by imposing “limits,” and by creating “atmospheric” depth. Whether our objectivity is dynamic or static, let us above all construct. Let us mold and build

on our personal emotional reactions to nature, all the while maintaining it as scrupulous mirror truth.

Let us be specific and unambiguous about the organic “quality” of the “plastic elements” with which we work: CREATING matter that is solid or fragile, rough or soft, opaque or transparent, etc., and its specific weight.

We should use caricature, if necessary, to humanize its consistent framework. The theories of “painting light” (“Luminism,” “Pointillism,” “Divisionism”), which simply copy or analyze luminosity, lack any strong creative ideal, art’s only real objectivity. Let us discard puerile theories which we have recently welcomed with frenzy in the Americas, sickly branches of the tree of “Impressionism” *pruned* by Paul Cézanne, the restorer of the essential: “We must turn Impressionism into something that endures like museum art.”

Understanding the wonderful human depth in “*l’art nègre*,” or “primitive art” in general, has given the visual arts a clarity and depth lost four centuries ago along the hazy path of error. For our part, let us return to the work of the ancient inhabitants of our valleys, the native painters and sculptors (MAYAS, AZTECS, INCAS and so forth). Our atmospheric proximity to them will help us assimilate the constructive vitality of their work, which shows a genuine knowledge of nature that can serve as our point of departure. Let us absorb their synthetic energy, but let us avoid lamentable archaeological reconstructions (“INDIANISM,” “PRIMITIVISM,” “AMERICANISM”), which are so in vogue here, but which are only passing FADS.

III. LET US ABANDON LITERARY MOTIFS. LET US MAKE PURE PLASTICISM!

Let us reject theories anchored in the relativity of “NATIONAL ART.” LET US BECOME UNIVERSAL! Our own RACIAL and LOCAL physiognomy will inevitably come to light through our work.

Our free schools are OPEN-AIR ACADEMIES (as dangerous as the official academies in which at least we learn about classical masters), communities with *commercially oriented* teachers and a type of feeble argument that stifles emerging personalities.

Let us not listen to the unfavorable opinions of our poets. They produce beautiful pieces of literature totally divorced from the real value of our work.

II.1.3 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 832004

EURINDIA

Ricardo Rojas, 1924

Journalist and educator Ricardo Rojas (1882–1957) was among Argentina’s most vocal proponents of cultural nationalism during the early decades of the twentieth century. In 1924, he completed editing and subsequently published *Eurindia. Ensayo de estética sobre las culturas americanas*, a fundamental treatise on Latin American art and aesthetics. In this book, Rojas proposes land, race, and tradition as the basis for a unified aesthetic that synthesizes the particularities of Latin America culture, or what he loosely calls *Eurindia*, a term that emphasizes the culture’s intricately connected European and Indian roots and histories. The following selection of excerpts highlights Rojas’s preoccupation with the problem of cosmopolitanism; his differentiation of Latin American and Argentinean culture from that of Europe; and his proposal of America as a “cosmic melting pot” that foreshadows José Vasconcelos’s 1925 essay *La raza cósmica* (The Cosmic Race) [SEE DOCUMENT IV.1.2]. Prior to its publication first in Spain then in Argentina in 1924, the text for *Eurindia* originally appeared as installments published in the Sunday supplement of Buenos Aires’s *La Nación* in 1922. This translation is from the book’s unaltered first Argentinean edition [Ricardo Rojas, *Eurindia. Ensayo de estética sobre las culturas americanas* (Buenos Aires: Librería “La Facultad,” J. Roldán y cía., 1924), 62–79].

. . .

88. A NEW AESTHETICS

. . . There is in Argentina’s evolution [as in other countries of the continent] a certain organic connection between the land, the people, the tradition, and the culture. . . . Finding its origin, nature, and destiny in all those areas accelerates a culture’s autonomy.

[My study] . . . has led me to identify four traits that make up our essential nature—indigenous or American, colonial or Spanish, European or cosmopolitan, and national or Argentine.

These four traits have generated fragmentary symbols. Within the culture of the country, those symbols have, in turn, appeared simultaneously in the fields of politics and art, which has led to a synchronism of homologous forms. . . . From all of the above I have deduced maxims that I have called “continuity of the tradition,” “unity of the culture,” and “correlation of the symbols.” These maxims also explain the regional culture of other countries in the Americas, an area that is covered by “the law of homologous forms in the Americas.”

Those who are unaware of these differences in the connections or indeed of such connections in the inner consistency of apparently capricious forms will be unable to understand our social nature. The new school will have to be founded on the basis of that awareness, not as a philosophical, literary, or artistic school, but as one that functions as a catalyst so that our American consciousness can organize its own culture, and so that the art of the Americas can find its own free expression in terms of the essential nature of its land, its people, and its tradition, gathered together into a single, autonomous ideal.

The *Eurindia* aesthetic is not a product of my own imagination; it has been suggested to me by our historical experience, and illuminates the future with the light from the past—history will be our guide in the work we produce in the future.

. . .

90. NATURE AND LIFE

. . . [History] itself is a rich trove of traditions; for centuries our literature has looked almost exclusively to history for its subject matter. Contemporary artists seeking to connect with the spirit of our people should consult this source if they wish to define the place they occupy in the evolution of our culture. Of course, history could not in and of itself satisfy the full magnitude of their creative aspirations. . . .

It is no easy feat to express—through art—the landscape and the people of the Americas. A long apprenticeship is required for those who would become skilled in the art of seeing and expressing virginal subjects or examples. One begins by practicing and then painstakingly improving as one works to express the aesthetic ideal of the many generations in whose footsteps one walks. Now and

then a genius will appear before his time, but the archetype is usually preceded by a gradual development across a pool of artists over a period of time. Dante, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Michelangelo, and Wagner all had their predecessors.

I don't believe that nature and life in Argentina are something completely new; but the artistic works produced so far barely give us a fragmentary view, and their expression is incomplete. The artist should certainly refer to those works but must then improve on them. The artist should act like a tree—putting down deep roots in Latin American soil, drinking deeply of the traditional sap, absorbing the light of his own environment, and yielding fruit that expresses the beauty of the reality from which he draws his inspiration.

Art is not something sporadic or trivial; it has a serious historical function. Nothing is gained by superficial expressions of cosmopolitan life, the whims of exotic imitations, or personal vanity. An artist must subscribe to a tradition of some kind, and it seems logical that he should choose his country's tradition as his own. Argentinean artists should experience a conjugal relationship with their land; they should contemplate, observe, and meditate on local subjects, and they will see that beauty and pain look different in this context and that, for the believer, aesthetic pleasure is bound to the ineffable emotion of one's first possessions. If this be not so, let us hear from the poets, musicians, architects, painters, and sculptors, indeed from all the artists of the new school; let them tell us whether the aesthetic emotion of their work filled their souls with the civic pride that comes from contributing to the highest undertaking of one's people and with the virile pride enjoyed by those who procreate in virgin flesh.

Art springs from two universal sources: one is nature, the other is life. Nature is everything that exists in the external world; life is nature reflected in the internal world of consciousness. There are forms and rhythms in both sources. But between them—that is, between the artist and reality—there is a third element: the cultural milieu to which the artist belongs; that is both a facet of reality as well as the environment of the soul. This is the historical aspect that the doctrine of *Eurindia* refers to, without denying the essential sources of nature and life.

The two spiritual pillars of *Eurindia* are emotional spontaneity and creative freedom—but with one caveat, which is its preference for the natural world of the Americas and for local life.

91. THE MYSTERY OF LOGOS IN ART

The existence of schools, theories, and dialectical suggestions about art can be explained by the artist's need to anchor himself and his attitude as he finds himself buffeted by the whirlwind of historical forces. The artist has to know who he is, where he comes from, where he is going, and where he fits in the cultural scheme of things. My goal in writing *Eurindia* was solely to help the people of the Americas to solve those problems, which are matters that all thoughtful Americans should consider.

Problems of this kind are more easily solved by European or Asian artists because they work in an environment of ancient, homogenous cultures. Not so for us, where the novelty of art and the cosmopolitan nature of daily inspiration can be disorienting for even the strongest among us. Many centuries of human life and activity here in the Americas could reproduce conditions found on other continents; but, in discussing these matters I am searching for a way to shorten the historical process. The phenomena analyzed in this book suggest the possibility of finding some way to do so.

I have used the literary canon as an indicator of Argentine thought because this is the most comprehensive record and because these works revealed the social origins of what once seemed to be my own personal ideas. I then explored the other art forms and found in them the same principles that can be found in poetry.

...

Though written in a European language, our poetry reveals traces of our four essential traits, along with their images, feelings, and ideas. Do I wish to evoke indigenous life? All I have to do is say: *guadal* [bog], *pampa* [pampas], *travesía* [crossing], *cóndor* [condor], *ombú* [ombu], *rancho* [shack], *pucará* [fortress], *malón* [foray], *vidalita* [melancholic song]. Do I wish to evoke colonial life? All I have to say is: Lima,¹ Potosí,² *cabildo* [town council], *monopolio* [monopoly], *galeón* [galleon], *hidalgo* [nobleman], *tapada* [woman], *villancico* [Christmas carol], *regatonero* [retailer], *virrey* [viceroys], *alcalde* [mayor]. Do I wish to evoke cosmopolitan life? All I have to say is: *puerto* [port], *ferrocarril* [railroad], *rascacielo* [skyscraper], *tranvía* [tram], *Universidad* [university], *gringo*,³ *conventillo* [tenement], *cinematógrafo*

[cinematographer], hotel. Do I wish to evoke the fatherland? All I have to say is: Mayo,⁴ Caseros,⁵ *libertad* [liberty], *federalismo* [federalism], *república* [republic], *montonera*,⁶ *mazorca*,⁷ *romanticismo* [romanticism], *caudillaje* [leadership], and so on. These words can be used to evoke landscapes, men, institutions, feelings, and ideals in a brief expression of life.

The mystery of logos, summarized in this way, is expressed in poetry and is very common in all the arts. Literary works that have become symbols of these traditions—poems, plays, and novels—share certain forms with architecture, painting, sculpture, music, and dance, as we have already seen. Perceiving the social connection between these traditions and the aesthetic connection between their various symbols is another responsibility of every American artist. All arts are a language, either of pure images or of pure emotion. . . .

Artists who feel this way should join together to create a social version of the aesthetic unity of Latin American life. This bonding will in no way diminish the individual creativity of those involved; it will, rather, increase the historical power of their work. Once our artists have established this brotherhood, united by *Eurindian ideals*, we will be on the threshold of a new era in the history of our culture.

92. THE NAÏVETÉ OF CASTE-ISM

An affirmation of this fundamental doctrine does not, by any stretch of the imagination, imply any form of hostility toward foreigners. The Roman word “*hostis*”—the etymological root of the word “hostility”—has no place in an Argentine’s vocabulary; the pilgrim is welcomed here in the spirit of “*hospitus*” [hospitality] and is offered a place to stay. The doctrine does, however, suggest hostility toward cosmopolitan hybridism, sterile individualism, and a sterile, wayward life of the soul; all of which tend to be—frequently are—characteristics of Criollos who have been rendered heartless by the pursuit of imitative pedantry.

I recognize, however, that this doctrine—which is an expression of the essence of what it means to be Argentine—involves a risk; there is a chance that it might attract those with sentimental feelings about patriotism whose only contribution is a regressive brand of politics in the realm of action and, in the realm of contemplation, a rudimentary form of art. To protect itself from either, *Eurindia* includes both native and foreign expressions, expanding the definition

of native to embrace all of the Americas. It includes them in order to differentiate and assimilate them, keeping what is essential and fruitful and eliminating the rest. These disciplines are devoted to meditation and study, whose goals are progressive and creative.

I believe that it is a mistake to select just one facet of the Latin American tradition and imagine that it can represent the whole nation. The essential spirit of the country cannot be represented by the Indian, the Gaucho, or the Spaniard. Simple patriotism, which has no experience in these complex matters, might be influenced by individualistic hallucinations and, as has happened more than once, be inclined to promote a romanticized view of the Indian, a naïve portrayal of the Gaucho, or an affected version of Spanish.

The romantic view of the Indian was popularized over forty years ago in Brazil through the work of [Antônio] Gonçalves Dias, [José de] Alencar, and [Carlos] Gomes. This trend was imitated in the River Plate countries where there were pseudo-classical precedents to be found in *Siripo* by [Manuel José de] Labardén and *Molina* by [Manuel] Belgrano. In this same region it inspired a few essays by Esteban Echeverría and Juan María Gutiérrez; and it later expired after the publication of perhaps the final descendant of the line: *Tabaré* by the Uruguayan Zorrilla [de San Martín, Juan]. All these depictions were imprecise, lacking any authentic archeological color, or were a hybrid of the Spanish influence in terms of technique.

Naïve portrayals of the Gaucho also became popular, fueled by European romanticism. *Martín Fierro*, by [José] Hernández, the major work of a popular genre, introduced urban readers to the character of the Gaucho, whereupon some city writers set about mimicking the book in prose and verse. Some copied the form of the original; others imitated the spirit of the poem. Hence the appearance of *Juan Moreira*, a novel by Eduardo Gutiérrez; *Solané*, a play by Francisco Fernández; and *Cuentos*, a collection of stories by Fray Mocho, plus a number of comic sketches by Criollo authors—all of which were but incipient works of limited literary merit.

The affected version of Spanish was a logical reaction to the anti-Spanish sentiment of the Independence and the cosmopolitan influence of immigration. The popular corruption of the Spanish language and the lack of classical depth in our own romanticism prompted this academic reaction, which lacked both spontaneity and truly American roots. There was a certain anachronistic colonialism in this attitude. We were expected to speak the purified language of the Golden

Century. Grammar teachers (most of whom were Spaniards) were the arbiters of a new rhetoric. Foreign feelings provided the substance, and stereotypical idioms supplied the form. We were introduced to an affected form of Spanish by [Carlos María] Ocantos in *Misia Jeromita* or *La Ginesa*, novels that he called “Argentine” but which were actually Spanish or simply colonial.

Eurindian disciplines seek to recast the legendary mystery of the Indian, the Pampas-style excitement of the Gaucho, and the idiomatic genius of the Spaniard into an aesthetic sense that includes them all as well as something universal that is embedded in the traditions of art and in the reality of life itself.

94. INITIATION

. . .

The spiritual factory of the fatherland is symbolized here by a Shrine. The universe of its social realities (landscapes, men, and institutions), and the history of its collective ideals (science, liberty, and beauty) have all been wrought into our books. Thinkers and poets have forged this monument, which took centuries to erect. They all brought their keystone or picturesque icon in a spirit of devotion to the inspiration of the place, and left each one where it belongs, from whence it cannot be moved. The edifice as a whole appears to have been the result of an intelligent plan, more intelligent by far than the mind of man. *Eurindia* has explained, so far, the outlines of the plan and the hidden meaning of its allegories. But that is not enough, because it is but the first step in this process of initiation; an intellectual apprenticeship that is expressed in antinomies, in cycles, and in laws. We must advance even further, entering into the realm of our aesthetic emotions. This is what we learn when we enter this Shrine.

95. CONTEMPLATION

As in the atrium of some Arab mosques, there is a tree and a fountain at the door to our temple: the tree of life and the fountain of purification. The neophyte who has grasped the totemic mystery of the tree (another one of our symbols, which has already been explained), reaches the fountain of ablutions which allows one to forget what must be forgotten. The neophyte then passes beyond the porch and walks through the nave of the ideal basilica.

Each nave is like a vaulted hall, with vast spaces and enormous columns whose arrangement is inspired by ideograms. The corners are like Hindu pagodas, profusely decorated with universal symbols. There are hints of every style imaginable, but there is nothing that does not allude to American traditions. Human figures carved from gigantic monoliths, as in the Egyptian temple at Ipsambul [or Abu-Simbel], or like atlases in caryatids and architraves; animal bodies, monstrous fetishes, icons of outlandish beauty, placed in metopes as the Greek used to do, or in plinths in the manner of the Assyrians, or in cornices and capitals in the Gothic style. A new penumbra infuses the colossal masses; the exterior light is filtered through the elaborate windows, bringing significant images to life; and, in spite of such variety, the vast space is dominated by the Indian unity of the allegories, just as must have happened in the legendary temples of Palenque and Uxmal.

The human figures are, of course, impressive. In the nave of the primitives: the Peruvian Incas, the Indian chiefs, the Gaucho leaders. In the nave of the colonials: the Spanish conquistadors, the Christian evangelists, the founders of cities. In the nave of the patriots: the liberating heroes, the revolutionary tribunes, the organizers of the republic. In the nave of the moderns: the governors, the wise men, the artists. . . .

The neophyte recovers from his initial astonishment as he walks and contemplates all that surrounds him. He is filled with an interior light, its brilliance bathing the immense stone walls and the rare forms. Finally, all is unity and harmony in the eyes of his soul.

96. THE RITES

This basilica's rites are derived from a religion of beauty. The Shrine itself is a monument to moral harmonies, symbolized by the visual arts. On the high altar there is a Book that explains its plan and the meaning of its forms; the neophyte who has read this Book has deciphered the poem of color and stone. He must now attend the liturgical ceremony of the arts of rhythm. For this purpose there is, in a specific place in the crossing, a magical throne bathed by the light from the cupola. From there the neophyte has an uninterrupted view of all the different spaces and the various images. Huge frescoes are painted on the walls:

landscapes of the pampas, the jungle, and the mountains; portrayals of customs, historical events, and traditional characters. An ineffable music begins to play, and an olive-skinned woman, swathed in multi-colored veils, begins to dance before the throne, like Salome before the Tetrarch. . . . The woman dances a ritual of the Sun. Her gestures communicate the tradition, while the song expresses the most profound parts of our history. The symphonic poem alternates between pastoral feelings and anguished or picaresque erotic themes, followed by a hymn that culminates by extolling heroism in full pantheistic crescendo. The naivety of the folkloric melody is accentuated by the harmonization of learned intonations that are increasingly free and original. . . . The rite ends when the neophyte claims to know the meaning of *Eurindia*, whose truth is concealed in the mystery of art.

97. THE AWAKENING

The aesthetic I am suggesting does not mean to impose monastic laws on art or on the country. The country should remain open to outside influences, as it once was, but should also be open to its children's aesthetic contemplation. Art is free, as it once was, but is also emancipated by a yearning for a new sense of beauty. The secret of *Eurindia* should not be sought in things but in souls.

We already knew how and where to contemplate the beauty of other countries. A detailed history, learned critique, and secular glory guided the neophyte to the sacred sites of the ancient form of worship. For the new form of worship—a little schismatic, a little heretical—we were in need of a different initiation.

Eurindia does not deny the ancient law and its prophets; it actually finds support in them and—just as the Gospels were added to the Old Testament—suggests that they be added to what Europe teaches us and also to what the Americas can teach us.

The artist is a minor god, a lord of space and time, who can contemplate the whole universe at his leisure. According to one Maestro, he is free to take his inspiration where he finds it: in all of humanity, in all of history. He may gaze upon exotic or archaic vistas; he may subscribe to a classical or a romantic style of expression. Would he like to be a pointillist, an expressionist, an ultraist? He is free to be so. . . . But there is one thing that he cannot deny, and that is his own

nature, which binds him to the racial group to which he belongs. In this sense, the artist is a demigod in chains. The genius is always a titan, but he is in shackles, high on the peak of a mountain, which is his country. . . . This mystery of our individual and collective being is what our American artists should search for in the tradition of the Americas. . . .

My Shrine, thus, symbolizes a place of meditation and contemplation. Latin American life, with its landscapes, its particular types, its customs, its feelings, and its ideals, is anchored there by virtue of its spiritual vision. Its geographical reality and its historical forms appear to be determined by its art. The initiate who has entered the Shrine meditates on what he finds there and senses stirring within him the intuition of a new aesthetic interest.

. . .

1

Lima, capital of the Viceroyalty of Upper Peru, maintained a close relationship with Buenos Aires, its counterpart in the Viceroyalty of the River Plate. During the struggle for independence, the Argentine general and statesman, José de San Martín (1778–1850), declared Peru's independence on July 28, 1821, in Lima, and took power, bestowing upon himself the title of Protector.—Ed.

2

The Imperial Villa of Potosí, in what is now Bolivia was—due to the wealth of its mineral deposits (of silver and tin)—the main trading center in what was at that time the Viceroyalty of the River Plate.—Ed.

3

In the River Plate region, “gringo” means foreigner in general and “Englishman” in particular.—Ed.

4

The Revolución de Mayo (May Revolution) overthrew the colonial Viceroyalty and appointed a Primera Junta (The First Assembly) on May 25, 1810, the date that marks the dawn of Argentine independence. —Ed.

5

The village on the outskirts of Buenos Aires where General Urquiza defeated the troops commanded by Juan Manuel de Rosas, which put an end to the latter's dictatorship (1852).—Ed.

6

In Argentina, “*montonera*” is the word for guerrillas.—Ed.

7

In South America, “*mazorca*” is a despotic form of government junta.—Ed.

II.1.4 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 747066

ART INTERPRETATIONS

Carlos Mérida, 1926

Guatemala-born, Mexico-based artist Carlos Mérida (1891–1984) wrote this article in 1926 on the cusp of his full transition to nonfigurative painting. This is one of the first texts in which Mérida develops ideas on the ancestral (mainly Mayan) traditions that would inform his geometric work of the late 1930s and 1940s. Straddling the past and the current situation in Mexican art exemplified by muralism, Mérida delves into what he considers “noble aesthetic concepts.” The artist writes that Mexican painting is the epitome of American art because it persists in channeling the country’s Indo-Hispanic character. Furthermore, it also encompasses a vital, racially-driven principle that supersedes external influences manifested in Mexican art since colonial times. The essay was published in the bilingual journal *Mexican Life: Mexico’s Monthly Review* [(Mexico City), vol. 2, no. 1 (1926), 16–17].

MEXICAN PAINTING (why not call it American, if the vast, marvelous breath of our ancestors blows anew through all the Indo-Hispanic land?) is now undoubtedly directed within the traditional standards susceptible to transformation and therefore to evolution. From all the diversity of production of some years up to this time, the same ascending course toward new paths—but toward new paths intimately joined by the strong bond coming to us through the centuries—can be observed. That profound “vital principle that animates the intuition” is that which created the bas-reliefs of Palenque and sculpted the *stelae* of Quiriguá; and it is the same principle that has left its impressions in the *retablos* of Nuestra Señora de la Soledad [in Mexico City], as well as in the frescoes of the Ministry of Public Education. Racial potentiality always manifests itself in spite of all evolutions and in spite of influences. The unanimous judgment of that conglomeration called people will ever be with the aesthetic vibration that has created the mural paintings in the Escuela [Nacional] Preparatoria, rather than with “those wrecked flowers flooding the salons of our wealthy grandees.” What is that secret that has not been lost? What is that secret which thrives in spite of all the transformations and all the vicissitudes?

The present flourishing of art in America—I wish to be broad, for Mexico is a very beloved part of our America—is without doubt due to a return to the conclusion of our tradition, a moment paralyzed by special but transient circumstances. With the result that sociological movements are at work changing the organization of public, the liberating, inquietude of these is translated into noble aesthetic concepts—noble because disinterested—that are made tangible long before these same peoples may have found that which the artists engraved for eternity.

Mexico and the rest of America are passing through a period of indocility which has been interpreted in the attainment of a visionary art which goes the way of the future, while the people are agitating to launch new struggles against new tyrannies as lamentable as the preceding ones, the artists coming from these people already see the era of noble attitudes full of equity.

An art which is the child of the people, and which is accomplished with great pains and intermixtures of noble tradition, has to be a strong art which is understood and loved by all the people—no matter the race—who have a heart and a brain, sentiment and sensibility, and this art is above everything. Did we not conclude the observations? Is someone ethnically different from us concerned with our artistic speculations?

And the artists who determine this art for posterity are the heralds of new vital attitudes, the advanced bodies of the future—“celestial lightning rods”—as one of our great poets termed them. They are the guarantors of the natural civilization, the visionaries of that which is ever hatched in the crucible of life. We read that even our old virtues flourish; those which illuminated the anonymous artists of Chichén Itzá, and which are now illuminating that phalanx of enlightened ones opening the breach toward the future.

II.1.5 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 832040

NEW ART

Martí Casanovas, 1927

Martí Casanovas summarizes a lecture he delivered at the closing session of the *Primera exposición de arte nuevo*, held in May 1927 at Havana's Asociación de Pintores y Escultores. Organized by the editors of *revista de avance*, the exhibition launched the activities of the Cuban avant-garde, whose fundamental ideas Casanovas helped to synthesize and articulate before he was expelled from Cuba during the presidency of Gerardo Machado (in office 1925–33). Casanovas wrote that Latin American artists should be engaged in a “militant” activism on behalf of the people as opposed to trying to appeal to or “flatter the narcissism” of both avant-garde “minorities” and “elites.” This excerpt is from the original, published in *revista de avance* [“Arte Nuevo” (Havana), year 1, vol. 1, no. 7 (June 15, 1927), 158, and 175]; the translation by Julieta Fombona is from Ramírez and Olea’s *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde Art in Latin America* [(2004), 468–69; doc. 15].

...

THE ARTIST CANNOT LIVE AS A STRANGER TO SOCIETY, or to the problems and concerns of his time, and much less at this hour of active and passionate militancy in which humanity is engaged in a profound and difficult endeavor. The artist, as an integral part of society, must feel a passionate interest in the same problems that trouble every man and society as a whole. The artist must be a militant element in the battles that have to be fought, and if he thus feels the urgency, pain, and excitement in everyone, his art—pervaded by this spirit—will reflect the passions and emotions of his time in a fecund and magnified way. This human enthusiasm, generous and universal, and not the hyper-aesthetic cult of individuality, is the road to redemption, the suitable lodestar that would certainly lead to a renovation of the present hour. The throngs that fill the spaces of our exhibition will vehemently join in the effort.

What are our possibilities in the future? What does the future hold for us? What can we contribute to the renewal of the vitality of the artistic gist?

We are firmly convinced that in America this course and this struggle have been taken up much more forcibly than in Europe. On the Old Continent, art continues to be immersed in an unstoppable process whose fate is decadence; the new strident stances of this hour are mere symptoms of protest, of firm denial and angry rejoinder. Furthermore, they are a sterile Ultra-ism of the intellectual barricade that remains prisoner in the exhausting vicious circle of an irreducible individuality. In our republics, on the contrary, in Native Latin America, there is still a virgin reservoir of undeniable fecundity that constitutes the essential reality of the aboriginal ancestry common to all. A similar spirit and reality, a unique cultural and human feeling and longing for universality, is affirmed throughout the continent.

Mexico—the republic in charge of the continent’s glorious destiny—and Peru, in art as well as in all other cultural fields, have already paved the way to a superior and expansive formulation of an American civilization. Diego Rivera’s murals and the heroic work of the new generations contain a profound and human enthusiasm. Their works, enormously plastic, attest to a thriving and noble universal aspiration. A breath of immortality, which reaches us all and engages us, still holds the wonderful power to touch the innermost fibers of the Mexican Indian. It is he, after almost five centuries of humiliation and oppressive disregard, who feels anew the ancestral voices of the aboriginal culture, the fecund seeds for any enterprise that would encompass the whole continent.

As one more effort and one more contribution to this enterprise—in order to serve a high cultural ideal, not to flatter the narcissism of a selfish and apprehensive minority, that is, a few elitists—“1927” has organized and promoted this exhibition that today has come to an end. Though “1927” is indeed the endeavor of a minority, it is not an excluding one. Our aspiration is that our ideals and our banners, which proclaim a continental inclusiveness, an ambition to surpass the local, will soon become the triumphant principles of a solid majority.

II.1.6 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 782312

NEW WORLD, NEW RACES, NEW ART

José Clemente Orozco, 1926

In this brief text, painter José Clemente Orozco (1883–1949)—who was one of the so-called “Big Three” Mexican muralists, along with David Alfaro Siqueiros and Diego Rivera—warns about artists blindly pursuing purely European or indigenous models as the basis for their own works. Written in 1929 in the United States, where the artist lived from 1927 to 1934 (first in Los Angeles, then in New York), Orozco’s proposition for a *new art* for the *New World* is rooted not in privileging indigenous traditions, but in his valorization of Manhattan’s architecture as quintessentially American. While exalting buildings such as the New York Stock Exchange—a temple of capitalism—Orozco ironically anoints the mural as the purest and most unbiased of art forms because it cannot be commoditized. The text was originally published in English [“New World, New Races, New Art,” *Creative Arts: Magazine of Fine and Applied Art* (New York), vol. 4, no. 1 (January 1929)].

THE ART OF THE NEW WORLD cannot take root in the old traditions of the Old World, nor can it do so in the indigenous traditions represented by the remains of our ancient Indian peoples. Although the art of all races and of all times has a common human, universal value, each new cycle must work for itself, it must create, must yield its own production, its individual duty to the common good.

To go subserviently to Europe, bent on prowling about its ruins in order to import them and slavishly copy them, is as great an error as the looting of the native remains of the New World in order to copy with equal servility its ruins or its pre-Columbian folklore. However picturesque and interesting these may be, however productive and useful ethnology may find them, they cannot furnish a point of departure for the New Creation. To rely on autochthonous art, whether of antiquity or of the present day, is a sure indication of impotence and of cowardice, in fact, of fraud.

If *new races* have appeared upon the lands of the *New World*, such races have the unavoidable duty to produce *New Art* in a new tangible and spiritual milieu. Any other road is plain cowardice.

At this time, the architecture of Manhattan is a new value; something that has nothing to do with Egyptian pyramids, with the Paris Opera, with the Giralda of Seville, or with Hagia Sophia [Istanbul], any more than it has to do with the Mayan palaces of Chichén Itzá or with the villages of the Pueblo Indians of Arizona.

Imagine the New York Stock Exchange in a French cathedral. Imagine the brokers of the stock market dressed like Indian chiefs, with headdresses or with Mexican sombreros. The architecture of Manhattan is the first step. Painting and sculpture must certainly follow as inevitable second steps.

The mural is the highest, the most rational, the most pure, and the strongest form of painting. This unique form becomes one with all the other arts—and with everything else.

Also, it is the most altruistic form because it cannot be transformed into a matter of private profit nor can it be hidden away for the benefit of a certain privileged few.

It is for the people. It is for ALL.

II.1.7 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 832022

LESSON 132: THE AMERICAN MAN AND THE ART OF THE AMERICAS

Joaquín Torres-García, 1941

After returning to his native Uruguay from Europe in 1934, artist Joaquín Torres-García (1874–1949) devoted himself to developing and propagating his theories on Constructive Universalist art. Torres-García wrote Lesson 132 in June 1941, in between the 1940 dissolution of the Asociación de Arte Constructivo (AAC) and his founding of the Taller Torres-García in 1943. Here, he establishes that the process of finding America's vernacular aesthetic expression is foremost one of self-awareness. Offering the poet Walt Whitman as an example, Torres-García argues that each artist must first locate himself in the context of America before articulating the unique structure of his vital craft. The text is part of *Universalismo constructivo*, an anthology of lectures the artist delivered during the early 1940s in which he established the

theoretical foundations for a new American sensibility. The manuscript was first published in 1941 ["Lección 132. El hombre americano y el arte de América," (Montevideo: Ediciones la Regla de Oro, June 1941)] and included in *Universalismo constructivo* of 1944 [(Buenos Aires: Editorial Poseidon)]. This version is excerpted from a 1984 reprint [Joaquín Torres-García, *Universalismo constructivo* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial), vol. 2, 726–32].

. . .

VERY WELL THEN: the problem of art in the Americas is a momentous one whose resolution demands extraordinary ability, in every sense of the word. . . . So, with no further ado, to go straight to the heart of the matter, an overall solution might be as follows: a theory that expresses a general idea that, on one hand, embraces all the art produced everywhere on the continent and, on the other, includes, in appropriate proportions, everything local that should be included without negating the first requisite.

In terms of the first category, the American man and the art of the Americas would be governed by an abstract rule (a structural concept that would cover all aspects of the problem of the visual arts). In the second, appropriate criteria must be established to determine how the living should be combined with the rest in order to create a perfectly harmonious balance. This would encourage the local to contemplate the universal and would lead, in the short term, to the creation of great, powerful art and, in the long term, to the development of an art that is truly ours: the future art of the Americas. . . .

I know that we cannot change ourselves overnight or create a whole new structure of art on a whim; that is something that takes time and, sometimes, fortunate circumstances. In other words, we should not expect to create all this artificially. It is also true that we are well aware that, so far, we have done nothing but imitate. And that we must decide to do something different right now, or admit our impotence. We are therefore beginning to wake up to that idea; we are also aware that we are different from the Europeans, so we must take that into account as well. . . .

At a recent conference I referred to Walt Whitman as a pure example of the new man of the Americas. We should use that idea as a point of reference and a point of departure. . . . That is, we should forget about the Old World and devote all our hopes and energies to creating this new culture that must be

developed here. We should forget about those artists and schools, forget about that literature and philosophy; we must purge ourselves, renew ourselves, and learn to think in terms of the life that now surrounds us. . . . If we hope to achieve those goals, then it is obvious that we must begin by embodying them; in other words, we must become that new spirit that we wish to see expressed in our works. We must therefore remake ourselves to some extent, and to do so we must begin by thinking differently because a new way of thinking can make us immune to outside influences. So, let us forget about authors and teachers who are no longer of any use to us, since *there is nothing they can tell us about what we must discover within ourselves*.

. . .

How should we write? We must learn how. How should we paint? We must discover how. Let us have no more precedents and no more obstacles to creation and expression. We should let nothing scare us. The only thing we should be scared of is backsliding to what we have already learned—poor imitations, voluntary or involuntary plagiarism, European prejudice; we should be scared of the cozy support of all that is venerated and acclaimed. If we have occasionally criticized all that, it was out of pure petulance and because we had nothing with which to compete, and we still have nothing.

. . . And now I must warn you that no academic statement is a rule. A rule should be something eternal, universal; and, furthermore, it should be based on the structure of mankind (which, in turn, is based on the structure of the universe). *This is the only rule we can accept*. To plagiarize current European masters or to plagiarize those of classical times is the same thing—that's not what we must do; what we must do is find the American man and the art of the Americas. So, with an abstract rule like this, an eternal, absolute rule as I mentioned, we can express the reality of our surroundings and the reality of our being.

. . . Do you write? Then speak to me about the *language*, about its structure (its construction), immerse yourself in *words*, search for *rhythm*, count, measure. And when you have absorbed all that you will, without realizing it, express what you see on the street and the ideas that occur to you as a result. Because those who write *begin with words*; words are their starting point, rather than *reality*, as some believe. And *an art of our own* must, above all, be based on our own structure.

Do you paint? Then speak to me most of all about the values of the visual arts; speak to me also about structure, whether based on mathematics or geometry or intuition, but always about construction. Speak to me about geometry, because we will only find our own voice if we *start there rather than with reality*. For this is where all this—this plastic event—will take shape, and we *will use it to express its form*. . . .

The American man and the art of the Americas are always considered the precedent, as though they could justify our art or our social life. If we eventually reject all that and approach everything anew, from a different perspective, and attempt to rebuild it as something different, we should never attempt it with a Pan American goal in mind. Because we are in a different business—not that we have anything against intercontinental politics of that kind. . . .

I am aware that there are currents that flow through the world and identify particular periods. It has always been so. And when a *well-defined style* appears, it is used everywhere and is *adapted* according to local realities. We can therefore not presume to ignore this worldwide current. But, what can we do? Well, we can do this: *we can be part of the current*, but we must not adapt whatever it brings *as this or that author has done*, but rather as though it were being used for the first time, according to *our own system or method*; in other words, in a way that is totally new and *original*.

As you can tell, I am talking about the same thing again—about *structure*. It does not matter whether we are discussing literary, musical, or visual arts, because *creation arises from structure*. We must first find *the idea*, which is the key to *how we will construct*, how we will structure a given situation; we must find the *crux of the matter* that will give the work its originality and its unity. And this must be our *entire focus*, as everything else is secondary. So, we must be constructive. And now, forgive me for referring to myself. This has indeed always been my only focus, and though I have worked in avant-garde areas I have never been tagged, as others have, with an “ism” of some kind, which has been acknowledged by more than one able critic. So, would it be possible for a painter who is exposed to the same current that influenced [Paul] Cézanne or [Pablo] Picasso *to do something different* with it, to explore the trend for his own purposes? What is he looking for? *A way of making* (since, what is art but using certain rules to make things?), which is in turn *a structure* that the painter must find. This is why I have said on other occasions that where there is no construction, there is no art. That is what distin-

guishes the creator. Very well then, if we go about it that way (as Whitman does), a new form of art will appear here in the Americas. . . .

Two artists stand on either side of a wall. They both seek the same thing, but each one, in his attempt to say the same thing, has found a different structure. They will produce two works that are essentially identical, but are different in terms of their architecture. Both works will have been constructed, and will therefore be powerful expressions of the visual arts. . . . *Start by thinking for yourself.* Analyze; observe. Be aware of things, and of yourself. And remember, above all, that *artist* means *constructor* (regardless of whether the artist is a poet, musician, architect, or painter). Yes, constructor. And then? You must remember that the first thing to know, the first skill to acquire is the *art of construction* (please forgive the pleonasm, since art and construction are the same thing). That way, when you take possession of the *rule* (a term which I believe includes the entire range of constructive science), then, and only then, *will you be an artist*. And that rule must be *yours*; that is, your abstract concept will have adapted it to your particular constructive need. Every great teacher had his own rule. And currently, which artist carries on [according to] his own rule? Well then, today, as we focus on the problem of art in the Americas, what we need more than anything else is that indispensable tool for our work. Without it, we will never come up with anything worthwhile. . . .

We don't want to say, "Let's destroy everything, let's start a revolution, let's create something new." The future artist of the Americas *will exist* when each of us is *prepared to do everything for himself*: to draw water from the spring in his own bowl. Otherwise, there's no point in painting typical scenes or local color, since a work like that will neither be yours nor belong to America. So, refuse to borrow from European methods or procedures. If you do that, what will you have? *A void, nothing*. Yes, undoubtedly, but *that is where you must work*, in that void. You have the rule (which will be yours), and the natural environment where you live (which is also yours), and [the worker] himself; that is how the *artist of the Americas* will come into being.

. . . Every country has its alphabet and its words; it also has the rhythm and music of its speech, which is the structure of its language. What creates this constructive rhythm? It is purely and simply the expression of something in the soul of the people, rising up from their most personal way of being. In other words, it is an expression of a vital, defining quality of a particular people.

A similar structure will be found in their dances, their music, in their way of going about things. . . . But we must attempt something more than that; what we are seeking is the expression of a new man: the man of the Americas. It is not about folklore or local color, but rather something much larger that must include the thousand races of this new continent. And, for now, what can best define this man is that he *looks to the future*. He wants to be; he wants to grow. He knows that he will be and therefore is expectant. He trusts in his future. . . . A structure will therefore have to emerge from his *desire*, from his *vital self*, and not from his thinking—a new vision for a new world. He will need another dimension through which to see things, another proportion, another rhythm, another structural coordination. And as a result, his mind will have to define itself.

All this is taking place at deep levels, and no one can accelerate what time must create. One thing, however, must be done: if we cannot proceed *positively*, we can and we should proceed *negatively*: let us eliminate everything we have acquired, everything we have borrowed, let us create a void, as I mentioned earlier. Because, though we know *who we are not*, we do not know *who we are*. For now, *to be nothing* is more interesting than pretending to be *something we are not*. We have that void. Let us *temporarily* begin to build in it, using logical, universal forms in which, little by little, the essential will be ignited. The poet's (or musician's) little room, the painter's studio, are now naked. There is nothing on the table but the tools of their trade. The poet, the musician, and the painter stand before the open window, looking into the distance, waiting for news from . . . who knows where.

II.2

SURVEYS CONCERNING A CONTINENTAL ATTITUDE

II.2.1–II.2.7

A SURVEY: WHAT SHOULD AMERICAN ART BE? (1928–29)

1. *Do you think that an American artist's work should reveal a preoccupation with American themes?*
2. *Do you think Americanness is a matter of optics, content, or vehicle?*
3. *Do you believe there are characteristics that are common to every Latin American country's art?*
4. *How do you think American artists should react to European art?*

Cuba's bimonthly (and later monthly) *revista de avance* not only fleshed out the direction of the country's avant-garde tendencies of the late 1920s; the publication also became one of the timeliest venues for cultural debate among Latin American intellectuals. On September 15, 1928, the journal's editors—Francisco Ichaso, Félix Lizaso, Jorge Mañach, Juan Marinello, and José Z. Tallet, collectively known as Los Cinco—polled their readership on the question of Latin American art (“Directrices: Una encuesta”). In their survey guidelines, the editors announced: “We invite replies from any American with a considered opinion. For obvious reasons, please make the answers as brief as possible.” During 1928 and much of 1929, the journal published responses to this survey from a select group of influential artists, writers, and intellectuals. The survey represents one of the earliest attempts to arrive at a definition of a Latin America aesthetic, an issue at the core of this anthology.

Included herein is a selection from six of the sixteen contributors to the published surveys:

- Prominent Mexican writer (and eventual politician) Jaime Torres Bodet (1902–1974) [SEE DOCUMENT II.2.1] [1928. *revista de avance* (Havana), year 2, vol. 3, no. 28 (November 15, 1928), 313–315, 325];
- Painters Eduardo Abela (1889–1965) [SEE DOCUMENT II.2.2] and Carlos Enríquez (1900–1957) [SEE DOCUMENT II.2.3], two of the most influential voices of the Cuban avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s [year 2, vol. 3, no. 29 (December, 15, 1928), 361] and [year 3, vol. 4, no. 33 (April 15, 1929), 118];
- Nicaraguan-born, Havana-based journalist, poet, and scholar Eduardo Avilés Ramírez (1896–1989) [SEE DOCUMENT II.2.4] [year 3, vol. 4, no. 31 (February 15, 1929), 55];
- Cuban playwright José Antonio Ramos (1885–1946) [SEE DOCUMENT II.2.5] [year 3, vol. 4, no. 34 (May 15, 1929), 150];
- Cuban intellectual and diplomat Raúl Roa (1907–1982) [SEE DOCUMENT II.2.6] [year 3, vol. 4, no. 37 (August 15, 1929), 242].

On September 15, 1929, essayist Francisco Ichaso (1900–1962) summarized the key findings of the survey while praising the journal's attempt to provide an initial and very timely inquiry into the possibility of creating a continental art ["Balance de una indagación," 1929. *revista de avance* (Havana), year 3, vol. 4, no. 38 (September 15, 1929), 258–65, 258] [SEE DOCUMENT II.2.7].

II.2.1 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 832061

RESPONSE TO *REVISTA DE AVANCE* SURVEY

Jaime Torres Bodet, 1928

...

(1) I THINK THAT THOSE WHO HAVE NOT SEARCHED their conscience to find answers to these important questions are—in artistic terms, at least—living a

part-time life, a borrowed life as it were. The constant flux of ideas, whether perpendicular or parallel to their own undefined convictions, must surely keep them in a never-ending state of anxiety. Every pronouncement by their colleagues or rivals must appear to be in opposition to their views or must overwhelm them with doubt.

To avoid defining oneself, to allow oneself to be carried along on the tide of fashions and European trends is a comfortable and exquisitely tropical way of relegating oneself to the sidelines, of ducking one's commitments, sometimes coming up with something decent, but—more frequently—failing to rank with the best. Wanting to define oneself too soon . . . however, strikes me as being too dangerous. I say dangerous because of the universal opportunities that that option denies, but it is even more dangerous because of the small, transitory, local successes that it promotes. . . .

. . . It seems so obvious to me that the work of an American artist should reveal a preoccupation with American themes that I am almost amazed to note that it is mentioned in the intelligent “1928” questionnaire. Even when writers or poets do not set out to reveal that preoccupation, they are betrayed by an involuntary impulse just when they may think they have hidden it so well. . . . Somewhere in his writings, [Mexican intellectual] Alfonso Reyes sums up the expression of filial love that seeps through the dignified tone of the discreet phrase spoken by [Jean] Racine: “*Toi, que je n’ose nommer...*” [You, whom I dare not name...] I wonder to what extent the true American spirit—and true patriotism, too—should be expressed like that. . . .

My intention, as you will all understand, is to communicate that, of all the different ways there are to reveal an American influence in literature, I am least convinced by those that amplify the voice and use rhetorical circumvolutions to exaggerate the *gesture*. If in fact art perceives a particular Americanness, I am sure I do not have to search for it in speeches, or in political proclamations, or in the heroic examples used by elementary school teachers every day to enrich our textbooks. My Mexico, for example, exists just as vividly in a poem by Ramón López Velarde or a story by Mariano Azuela because—and here I veer unintentionally toward the second paragraph in your questionnaire—I do not believe that the Americanness of a literary work is necessarily expressed in its essential *subject*, or its tone, but rather in the author's sensual, sentimental, ideological sincerity.

(2) Novels, symphonies, and statues cannot be really Mexican, or Argentinean, or Latin American until the dominant groups have developed a Mexican culture, an Argentinean culture, or a Latin American culture that such works of art can mirror. . . . What essential human differences can we see between *Poema del Mio Cid* and the *La Chanson de Roland*...? Which can resist the powerful similarity with which they are endowed by the era itself? . . .

And if we find that similarity in works published in different languages over the course of centuries during which communications were fraught with every imaginable obstacle, how can we demand to see individual artistic and literary identities in today's Latin American republics? Especially when everything seems to be conspiring against it: the speed of international communications, the rapid penetration of exotic cultures, and the increasing abandonment of the colonial tradition, a small, hazy refuge against the Americanization of the spirit which that other manifestation—the Americanness of the machine—is anxious to devour.

(3) The world, on the other hand, is experiencing a period of extreme universality. To overlook the broader human picture and focus on the individual, therefore, seems to me to be a mistake in terms of history, economics, and taste. This is true to an even greater extent if we consider that those who advocate this focus on the indigenous qualities in our literature are the very same ones who, in the political arena, promote even more insistently—if not more unselfishly—the advent of an advanced form of socialism. That is, the organization of the world by classes rather than by countries, defined by groups rather than by national borders.

How, then, to presume to define the common characters that can be found in every Latin American country's art? Any attempt to do so would be risky. In the future, of course, these characters will have to acquire greater spiritual, perceptible coherence. In the first place, other than the admirable examples of indigenous traditional art—which are not, by the way, an expression of a living social phenomenon but the repetition of a dead, maladjusted culture—we must acknowledge that Latin American art does not yet display the kind of personal characteristics that might help to define it, to distinguish it from the rest. Our mission will be to find those characteristics. Surely nobody doubts that. But, in

my opinion, we must guard against making this mission a chore. Agenda-driven plays, program music, and nationalist art have always followed the same course—plays try to win over the audience to a particular point of view; music seeks to put the audience to sleep on the fragile scaffolding of the program; and art tries to make the audience loathe the concerns and landscapes of true nationality.

(4) My references to the first three items in your questionnaire should, I believe, indicate how I think American artists should react to European art. They should reject any thoughtless submission that nullifies the personality, and—to an even greater extent—the systematic negation advocated by those who, out of ignorance, want to create an *American Boxer*,¹ encircled by hate, with no links to tradition or windows on present reality.

1

Boxer is used here in a chauvinistic or jingoistic way. It is a reference to the Boxers, a violent, secret Chinese society that tried to expel foreigners and force converts to renounce Christianity around 1900.—Ed.

II.2.2 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 832077

RESPONSE TO *REVISTA DE AVANCE* SURVEY

Eduardo Abela, 1928

(1) I **SINCERELY BELIEVE** that in America lies the source that will fertilize twentieth-century art. The spiritual forces of Europe are almost depleted, and its civilization [like a tree] will be saved by the vitality injected through its sap: the mixing with virgin races brimming with the essence of humanity. If the current renewal of art has demonstrated that the appeal of any work of art stems only from its emotional power, it is understood that the true American artist has to feel the concern, or rather the need, to express visions of his environment and his spirit.

(2) Its content will simultaneously serve as its means. It is art that expresses passions not imagined by civilized Europeans. In every corner of America lies the pain of a deflowering or of love that sings of an injustice. If today a painting has no more vision than its content and the painters have become artists (poets) again, the most American portrait will be the one that best conveys the song of love or of pain; in other words, an American life.

(3) There may be some similarities in the manner of expressing themselves, and among some sectors and countries an almost equality of content, since being neighbors and of the same ethnicity has given rise to the same feelings and customs; but there will always be traits that are profoundly different among them. Particularly Mexico, Peru, and Cuba will clearly stand out, since few countries in the continent can show such an original profile. With regard to Cuba, I believe that in spite of its absolute lack of indigenous population (which modulates the physiognomy of almost all countries in America), it produces an extraordinarily characteristic type, imbued with spiritual strength.

(4) Simply said, the attitude of American artists vis-à-vis European art cannot be any other than what an artist who deems himself to be such adopts individually, confronted with what others have done before. Namely the artist will benefit from the science accumulated by his predecessors and, with a vision of the beyond, will penetrate his own spirit to capture there the unknown essence. . . . The unquestionable law of evolution will once more be fulfilled. American art is a life that is born facing a life that has already gone.

II.2.3 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 832163

RESPONSE TO *REVISTA DE AVANCE* SURVEY

Carlos Enríquez, 1929

(1) **THE ARTISTIC TYPE—AND THE BOURGEOIS**—both metabolize the harvest from their regional orchard. Apparently the psycho-metabolism of environmental dynamism exists. In this context, the concern for what is American may be revealed in the visual arts. Or not. *Neutrality* is possible.

The artist who is a victim of the moral-political concern expressed in his work will indirectly—maybe pathologically—reveal the yearning of his milieu. As a reaction to the “railway track” logic, the *neutral* type acts as the opposite of the *prejudiced*. That artist will pose the following questions: Is there room in pure art—taken in the abstract—for regional and racial limitations? Is there room for popular impressions in the creation *from the inside out*? The fact is that pure art exists as a hypothesis, and to subject it to formulas is to castrate or execute it, objectifying it as tourist-abdominal-recreation.

(2) It is a matter of optics. The power of the American feeling (south of the Rio Grande), with all its ethnographic variables, would be superficial if it were taken as content or vehicle of the work of art. It would be electrolyzed in the sentimentality of familiar visual art forms. The artist’s sensitive side—adapted to his innermost panorama and externalized subconsciously without assigning much importance to the means and to the technique—will reduce the work to an Americanness arising from artistic optics.

The shape (delivery) should not derive from nature, but be in relation to it. There would be, at once, an immediate conflict with the active prejudice of the viewer if Americanness were a question of content or of means.

(3) The key aspect of American art resides not in the possibility but in the existence of common features of the visual arts in our America. There exists—and why not?—elemental psychology in local similarities that diverge from continental art.

I exclude the traditional-anecdotal paintings since they only converge superficially on common traits. By affirming the existence of *common characteristics*, I rely on observations of details in artists who, under different circumstances and availing themselves of diverse techniques, produce forms that are similar to one another. This implies a new aesthetic element which has crystallized in the subconscious of today's creators.

(4) The artist who is *not ready-made*, but born without prejudice is a universal entity, and art—from European primitivism to surrealism—is a familiar Esperanto to the true artist. The only intelligent attitude, without fake nationalism [jingoism], involves the understanding and the exchange of ideas. I exclude the *foto-grafiadores* [photo engravers] who, lacking fundamental convictions, by their own accord, settle in the realm of copiers.

There are certain traits in the creation of visual art that the artist can—in his creative unconscious—conceive and realize. These traits—inherent in a third aesthetics—may converge with the simple aesthetics of nature and of the individual. They universalize the work, making it sentient to Oriental and to African traits.

II.2.4 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 832146

RESPONSE TO *REVISTA DE AVANCE* SURVEY

Eduardo Avilés Ramírez, 1929

(1) **FOR SURE...! THE AMERICAN ARTIST** is bound to exalt the classical traits of indigenous art. That is how Mexico and Peru are interpreting the secret of our Sphinx and escaping the vile servitude to Europe. If art continues to be human (with the permission of [the Spanish philosopher] Mr. [José] Ortega y Gasset, who temporarily believed the opposite), it must be inspired obviously by the familiar landscape and the meager or prodigal product of mother earth. To distance oneself from the American concern in artistic production is equivalent to losing

one's citizenship. . . . If Diego Rivera's basic theme in his work were the asphalt of Paris, instead of the streets of Mexico, he would be a painter gone astray. And it is time for the American artist to face the dilemma: either to vilely copy Europe in his work,—[like an] unconscious ape in a frock coat, giving the painful impression of unconditional submission to its dictator—or decide to be a liberator, to be plain, to be free.

(2) The Americanness of a painting, of a song, or of a poem, must at the same time be a matter of optics, of content, as well as a vehicle. Americanness exists in each of the three variants of the whole; but a product will be truly American if it contains all three qualities The American work must catch the eye, move the heart, and serve as propaganda.

(3) Foreign character, of course not, but American character, yes. Between Mexican and Bolivian painting, for example, there is a distance in the manner of expression, but basically they are both "American" originals. The production of the continent may present expressive variables which depend on the varied expressions of each people, but nobody could erase the generalized impression of [the Americas] having its own shading, its own original coloring. Lacking, at present, a more expressive definition, let us call it the "American imprint." This [shared] mark still allows for exterior differences; just as in a family one recognizes several siblings of different sizes and opposing tastes. The legendary heroes [who preceded the Spanish Conquest] prove it: [the Incan ruler] Manco Cápac, [the Mapuche military leader] Caupolicán, [the pre-Columbian Aztec leader] Netzahualcóyotl, and Nicarao, [the namesake of the area that would become known as Nicaragua], are dissimilar because of their differing language and customs, but who would dare assert that their souls were different?

(4) It [should be with] the same attitude that the nationalist Chinese [approach] Europe: [like them, we should] assimilate [European] strength, adapt their energy, exploit their discoveries, do everything to benefit American art. The energizing of this art will be achieved through the process of assimilation, thus achieving, if possible, transfusion itself. Cubism, surrealism, expressionism, all European innovations, have a place within genuinely American art, since they do not challenge its roots. It is necessary for the two personalities to face each

other, both well planted on their feet: the personality of Europe, the personality of America. There being no political dependency, why should intellectual dependency prevail? In artistic matters and with regard to Europe, let us be the Chinese of the West [Western hemisphere].

II.2.5 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 832276

RESPONSE TO REVISTA DE AVANCE SURVEY

José Antonio Ramos, 1929

(1) **I BELIEVE THE SURVEY IS ERRONEOUSLY FORMULATED**, and [this is] particularly [evident coming from] an avant-garde magazine: *revista de avance*. No duties should be imposed upon art. Not even sincerity—which seems to be of the same substance—may be defined so as to impose it as a duty upon art. Because even sincerity—which is only a human aspiration, a postulate—follows human evolution closely. . . . I am deeply interested, however, in the premise lurking beneath the survey...

(2) *American* art...? Let us see. Is there already in the word “American” enough adjectival weight to modify to a noticeable degree the concept of art? North Americans, who attribute to themselves the genuine representation of AMÉRICA, have the frontier, the pioneer, Puritanism: a wide hotbed of rebellion, industrialism. Yesterday, it was man against nature; today, it is the mechanization of life against the individual. Something at least. [The North American authors] Bret Harte, Willa Cather, and Theodore Dreiser, for instance, owe very little to London or Paris. *Babbitt* [by Sinclair Lewis] can only be North American. Eugene O’Neill experiments even with Marco Polo [in his play *Marco Millions*], but keeps using material *made in the U.S.A.*

(3) . . . Argentineans claim [their] pampas, the Mexicans their Indians, our Antilles the tragedy of our utter hopelessness. We have lived for a century taking to

heart the *saviors* of our homelands and singing to Lola, to Teresa, and to Enriqueta. It is unworthy. Thus [Rubén] Darío, [Enrique Rodríguez] Larreta, and Diego Rivera, for example, found themselves thanks to Europe and made their names resound beyond their own frontiers. Our Galatea-América is still petrified. . . .

With the relative exception of Buenos Aires, our urban centers are sparsely populated. Our culture suffers of Jesuitism: intense among those favored by the fortune, sparse or nonexistent among the others in God's flock. And our little [childlike] nineteenth-century homelands always carefully keep their closed circle of national glories. . . .

Dilemma: art is produced either for the local public and is consequently debased, or it is done for other artists—continental or local—with the lethal harpoon of mystification buried in our guts. . . . Any artistic manifestation is closely related to the density of population and to its cultural and financial homogeneity: in other words, to purely economic causes. And those economic causes, which send scared shivers down the backs of our lyrical critics—are not exorcised with pretty speechifying. . . .

Our [independence fighter] Manuel Sanguily—admiring the ability of the *mambi*¹ to regroup into the core of their strength after a defeat in battle—created the ironic *sense of dispersed order*. Scattered as we live [in America], we will never be able to create great and enduring work.

On the other hand, the language...

Our language is a dying language. It is in fact dying of literary abundance, of abortive lyrics. Today the world thinks and acts in English. Those of us who write in Spanish cannot shake a touch of sadness, as though we wrote from jail or exile. The exceptions turn out to be worse, because some live in limbo and others inject themselves with the heroic drug of mutual loud acclamation. Or they close their eyes to their evident isolation, their historical innocuousness.

(4) A negative conclusion?

Not at all. If some day, for purely economic reasons, I hasten the end of my life, I know that I will not blame the world at all. I will always believe it to be my fault, our fault. The world cannot be otherwise. And that is all right.

The artist who best encompasses the antinomies of art in our America will benefit more from them than the most gifted European does from his traditional advantages. Besides, Europe is a museum, an excellent workshop. Why

not use it too? Are we perhaps going to earnestly take into account the dogs that, having been born inside the museum, are in the habit of barking at visitors? Our true spiritual brothers are already offering it to us, wholeheartedly.

In any case, Americanness is not an individual condition; it should not be conceived as a limitation, regardless of whether it is related to optics, to content, or to means. It may be all of that and even much less: it may be a mere illusion, a mirage.

What matters is to work, to create, to act. Everything we do today, not only in art but in all human activities as well, will be what will truly determine our Americanness. . . .

1

The “mambises” were insurgents of colonial Cuba who rebelled against the domination of Spain.—Ed.

II.2.6 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 832346

RESPONSE TO *REVISTA DE AVANCE* SURVEY

Raúl Roa, 1929

(1) **WITHOUT A DOUBT.** The very reason for the existence of [Latin] American art is its American concern. It seems obvious to assert it. It is certainly not for “1929” [alone] that the question is asked with such evident calm. . . . Because the authentic American artist cannot happen—without betraying his very being—having been uprooted from the complex that is America. Nor can the European, from the complex that is Europe. They will always show off their work with pride—with a warning label: “trademark.” Not in vain do the joy and anguish—especially the anguish—of the homeland strongly mark their creations with defining traits. Even in those achievements which have been described—with the joyful acquiescence of the select minority that lives by and for Beauty—as pure aesthetics. Within the current civilization—based on class injustices—art without borders is one more myth in my opinion.

Would it not be better, friendly editors of “1929,” to pose the question in the following manner: Should the work of the American artist reveal or not reveal a revolutionary concern in the historically accepted sense? Of course the generation to which I belong would decisively agree.

(2) I mainly conceive of art as vehicle, never as an end in itself. The content particularly matters because it determines the essential qualities of the work of art no less. This is true if we refer strictly to art. As for myself, Americanness is—[and] will be—political reality with a solid economic basis. . . . But not literary and artistic Americanness. From the visual point of view of our generation, it implies simultaneously vehicle and content. And in addition, [artistic Americanness is] optics too.

(3) I believe in the possibility, yes. But today those common traits do not appear anywhere. The exception is of course the implicit American concern with any genuine artistic creation. Moreover, those traits will not emerge encouraged by intellectual factors exclusively. When the same ideological rhythm moves with equal belligerent fervor, the artists of our America—making their lives a generous struggle and not, as has been the case so far, strict aesthetic dedication—then, I believe, those common traits will begin to appear more clearly. Meanwhile, one can only aspire to purely adjectival similarities, which are obviously unimportant.

And Nicaragua is bleeding to death in the face of everybody’s cowardly inhibition!

(4) A preeminently critical attitude. Otherwise, we would become the intellectual colony of Europe, as we already are [the colony], economically speaking, of the United States. First and foremost: with a clear historic awareness, we must mistrust Europe, especially Rome and Paris. . . .

II.2.7 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 832363

STATE OF AN INVESTIGATION

Francisco Ichaso, 1929

OUR “INVESTIGATION INTO AMERICAN ART” ENDED in our last edition, at least officially. Unofficially, it would be good if every American were to continue with his own personal inquiry. As Jaime Torres Bodet [SEE DOCUMENT II.2.1] said in response to our survey, that those “who have not searched their conscience to find answers to these important questions are—in artistic terms, at least—living a part-time life, a borrowed life as it were.” In this search, as in all such searches, we find fragments of what we were looking for as well as new things to investigate. The latter could be more valuable than the former as nothing makes up for partial [success] more than those new unexpected findings.

Not as many friends as we would have wished accompanied us on this exploration of our cultural possibilities. The survey is a type of journalistic endeavor that has few supporters in informed sectors. It has descended into the same plane of disdain as interviews and competitions. Almost every writer who thinks he “has arrived” begins by not responding to surveys, not granting interviews, and not attending competitions. In reality we are a little unfair to these surveys. They are meant to encourage a group of writers to rethink certain topics. But are they rigid? A questionnaire is not rigid except for those dogmatic souls who believe that truth can be found in the “yes, father” and “no, father” of catechisms. José Antonio Ramos [SEE DOCUMENT II.2.5] gave proof of the ease with which an agile spirit can move through a questionnaire when he gave the most personal and emotional response to our “Investigation”. . . . It is no small thing to have brought together a dozen collaborators to this issue, an old one to be sure, but updated by the unanimous desire to present our spiritual profile to the world with lines as distinct as those of geography. If our survey has created or recreated the problem of American art for more than one man on the continent; if, apart from those responses given for publicity, more than one reading of [“1928” and] “1929” has answered the questions posed with inquisitive gravity, then our purpose was fulfilled. . . .

[José] Martí identified the problem when he said that in America “the struggle is not between civilization and barbarism, but rather between false scholarship and nature.” Our literature is full of both good and bad scholarship. Our true talents are not applied to the interpretation of our landscape, affairs and men, but rather to the fastidious confection of more or less elegant pastiches. It is not that we lack an American instinct, or our own vision, or that our senses have ceased to be passionately moved by these lands. It is that [the task] is given to men of letters (the bad thing about America is that it places “the man of letters” in opposition to “the man of men”), and thus we scorn our ability to be moved deeply by things. We do not possess primitive man’s prolific wonder before the sunset or the reflection of the moon on the Amazon; instead we renounce everything that is spontaneous in us in order to adopt the European patterns we learned at the academy, at university, or in a book.

The American concern to which we allude in our “Investigation” is deeper and more dear, more deliberate if you will, although this word comes already tainted by intellectualism. In truth, we must now concern ourselves with becoming a new breed of American, if our America would—as [Jorge] Mañach [SEE DOCUMENT II.2.8] said—“The Americas still wish to make a substantial contribution to the task of the worlds. Not to be adjectival and dispensable; not to live a borrowed life.” This is not simply a question of aesthetics, but of the highest cultural policy. In established nations that are already firmly structured, this problem does not exist. But [it does exist] for new countries, where all efforts should be directed toward the creation of a strong national character. There are two paths to creating our own culture: [we could] spontaneously give birth to geniuses, who in each generation would undermine the great European tradition by making themselves part of the spiritual foundations of our world, or we could shape our personality with modest, yet genuine contributions. It is obvious that this second path is more viable than the first. If a genius were to arise, he would leave his mark; but we cannot ask our “golden middling men” to renounce all dangerous emulation in order to impose their own personal contributions.

American culture cannot be said to exist while the thought and art of its natives are subordinate to Europe; that is, while they copy states of mind, lifestyles, and ethical, political and social opinions alien to the American conscience or even in conflict with it. Europe will not be able to look upon us with respect while we live spiritually beneath their tutelage. . . . Europe cannot be interested

in listening to itself as it echoes through our mountains. America, for its part, cannot be so lacking in initiative that it renounces its own work and slavishly emulates Europe. Now the time has come for transatlantic ships sailing from our ports to carry forth the spiritual treasure of America, just as galleons once left laden with its gold and silver. . . . A Spanish musicologist, Adolfo Salazar, wisely surmised the problem. “Under what conditions—one might ask—would the cure of American exoticism be beneficial to Europe?” And the response: “Only when America is considered exotic and not an extension of Europe.” Why should we not begin by becoming exotic to each other? It is a very sad thing for our dignity that European artists and critics should be the ones to remind us of our duty not to continue as mere extensions of Europe.

And for us not to remain so, we must take up the cause of America. Even more: America must move us “to the guts of our soul,” to use [the Basque writer and philosopher Miguel de] Unamuno’s expression. At every moment, but above all, at the moment of creation. Because we usually feel ourselves to be Americans at every moment, except at the moment of artistic birth. And so our tree, the *flamboyán*, continues to seek its self-satisfaction in our lands!

. . . .That which is human seems to be the result of immersion in what is your own, in that which is traditional. When [Ricardo] Güiraldes wrote his *Don Segundo Sombra*, Argentina was thrust onto the world stage, not in a leap of abstraction, but carried forth on the *pampero* wind, firmly human, whole, full of character. He achieved a great human creation based on the Argentine man, and the humanity of *Don Segundo Sombra* can be found in its universal Argentine character. Christ became a man in order to be God. We must become every day more nationalistic in order to be more cosmic. By loving our own, we will love other peoples as well. I do not believe another formula for universalism exists.

The “American essence” reveals itself, always present within the fortunate range of our physiognomy. Inner characteristics engender patterns of thought and feeling and common ideals and aspirations. [These are] ties stronger than language, race, geography, and history. Above all there is a marvelous equality before destiny, the most powerful of connections. The peoples living South of the Rio Grande must adopt a common continental attitude before such problems as Yankee imperialism—our common enemy—, the question of *mezizaje*—be it from the mixture of the indigenous or black races with the Spanish,

Italian, or the Chinese—and also with respect to the European or North American interpretations, which are generally defective due to a lack of knowledge or excessive greed. This attitude would be advisable as much for Americans from the Antilles as for those from Tierra del Fuego. . . .

In short, we want an art of the people for America, but not an art of the common people. Popular art is traditional, intimately joined to that which Unamuno calls “the eternal tradition” of the people. We should nourish ourselves on this tradition instead of taking the risk of living a parasitic life. . . . Popular art is not common, although these two notions can become confused, especially among the common people. *Martín Fierro* is popular. The latest tango by Martínez or Pérez is trivial.

An American art that does not have its roots firmly in the people, whatever technique it might employ, would be adventitious. One would have to search for its roots in Paris, Rome, or Moscow. Would this imply narrow-mindedness, isolation? Quite the contrary: [it implies] free concurrence. To focus narrowly on your own belly button evolves into sterile quiescence. And what America needs is militancy, struggle. . . . Only an opposition of contrasts can make our Americanism stand out. Thus I cannot conceive of any attitude other than an ambitious and intelligent curiosity toward the European influence.

We must rid ourselves of that childish fear of becoming diluted in the vastness of the universe before which we feel we must build a wall of stone and mortar. Forget about any new walls of China. The whole world is small before our youthful curiosity. All of it fits into the quiver of the Native or the peasant. We must not fear bleeding to death in the world; our youth guarantees a constant abundance of red blood cells. . . . We must open the doors so that the air may circulate: both inside and out. In this as in many other cases, Martí pronounced the rule: “We must make our republics part of the world, but our republics must remain our foundation.”

II.2.8 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 832383

APEX OF THE NEW TASTE

Jorge Mañach, 1929

Cuban critic and philosopher Jorge Mañach (1898–1961) wrote the essay “Vértice del gusto nuevo” two years after the opening of the landmark *Primera exposición de Arte Nuevo* in Havana. First published in *revista de avance*—which Mañach helped to establish and at one time edited—on September 17, 1929 [“1929.” *revista de avance* (Havana), year 3, vol. 4, no. 38, 130–38], the essay offers a somber reflection on the potential pitfalls of pursuing an excessively nationalistic or dogmatic art. Mañach’s essay signifies the first attempt to reconcile some of the inherent contradictions that exist in focusing on the local *and* the universal in art, a problem with which many of the Cuban artists of his generation grappled. He proposes seemingly paradoxical approaches by stressing an “American effort to become unique,” while expressing the irrepressible wish to become *universal*, an aspiration he describes in philological terms as “a Catholicization of sensibility.” Moreover, as with his other writings from this period, Mañach’s essay reflects his involvement with the 1920s Grupo Minorista, which opposed the dictatorial regimes of Alfredo Zayas and Gerardo Machado and championed the development of a vernacular art capable of reinvigorating modern art and of restoring its core values.

IF WE SCAN THE PANORAMA OF ART in our America today, the first thing we will notice is that it is undermined with tunnels, bristling with barricades. We are witnessing a time and a spectacle of unusual pugnacity throughout the cultural domain, particularly in its aesthetic sector. It is not just the instinctive antagonism between the energetic and the arthritic but also a stubborn, virulent internal clash among the very ranks of the young adults. Divided into marked factions, they are committed to the undeclared—not to mention the boisterous—polemic of guerrillas.

These days, of course we hear stories of these things going on all over the world. But the debate in the Americas has a naïve, passionate quality that makes it even more profoundly youthful and more dramatic as well. We lack those softening qualities of skepticism and irony that peoples with extensive experience

can call upon to defend their havens and their intellectual (or emotional) centers. Standing on the threshold of maturity, we are driven by a violent eagerness to express ourselves and to be—to be expressing ourselves. And this fevered rush to become an entity through the revelation of what is specifically ours is the reason we are so tormented by the multiplicity of roads that may be taken. Moreover, we are beset by the young person's typical longing to be of service. The Americas still wish to make a substantial contribution to the task of the worlds. Not to be adjectival and dispensable; not to live a borrowed life. This dual desire raises the problem, in cautionary terms, of the authenticity of culture, of how to legitimately create and value our own culture

But it is evident that such a question does not come up with respect to *all* cultural works. Science, for example, does not allow characterization or predicates limited to a region or country. If at some point someone refers to "German science," that attribution is nothing more than a violent, militaristic trope. The subject matter which science investigates may be regional, as in philology, but it is obvious that the scientific task consists precisely of discovering what universal laws govern the constitution of that subject. Since science is a universal vision of the particular, the regionalism of science can only be a preposterous theme. We are thus cornered to the sense of "what is intrinsic" to that other great aspect of culture, which is art. In what sense may art be our own? Like a science, because its practitioners and motifs are ours, or also through some essential particularity of its nature and function? If we allow the possibility of an art with a nature of that kind, to what extent is that possibility unique and therefore imperative?

What is important about these doubtful questions—and what makes them so entertaining for the academic old guard, united under its own banner—is that they are not based on the nuances or forms of a general understanding. Instead, they address the very root of the art to be advocated. We are living through a struggle of antinomies: humanized or "dehumanized" art; pure art versus descriptive or anecdotal art; social art versus individualistic art. And, in short, an art of the Americas *versus* universal art. . . .

This is no idle chat, this discussion that starts off by showing that strictly speaking, all these problems come down to a single essential dilemma. Either art is a thing that refers to the milieu in which it is produced, deriving substance from it and giving back to it an intention (interpretative or dogmatic), or rather, it is an absolute, self-contained thing created by the artist and provided with

an objective, final, monetary value. It is either an art of allusions or an art that is exclusively visual, an art based on forms. Of course the references may be to humanity or to the group. But from the time when the artist refers to the external, there is a tendency to express [the subject] in terms of its situation, and to specify—by the very law of artistic economy—anything characteristic and/or singular in the artist’s surroundings. It is almost inevitable that art with [external] references becomes regional. However, when the artist’s purpose is exhausted in the artwork, this work is not susceptible to any other particularity than that of personal style, and almost always unrelated to any geography. In short, the opposition is between a “nationalist” art and a universal art, [filtered] through the individuality [of the artist]. These are the extremes of the two attitudes.

Béla Bartók, the Hungarian composer, writes: “In conclusion, I will add that, in music, internationalism is not imaginable and may even be harmful, the same as in any other art. In general, music and art must always reflect the true nature of a region. This is what creates genuine variety in art and in life.” And regarding that position, [the art critic] Eugeni d’Ors feels so righteous and justified in the opposite opinion, that he has no problem asserting it in one of his recent notes: “In this regard, the situation of Spanish-speaking [Latin] Americans seems to me to be somewhat backward compared to that of English-speaking Americans. The latter, finally emancipated from their localism, are just now achieving a universal, ecumenical spirit. Meanwhile, in many republics, the former are busy adopting a continentalism more or less à la Monroe, or if not, and even more humiliating, a certain outdated nationalism. . . . Nevertheless, we can only hope that these childish manifestations won’t last too long. And hope that all of the Americas will be convinced—in the not-too-distant future, that for them just as for Ancient Greece—the artist’s true vocation is not in the traditional, but in the human”. . . .

Both positions seem to me to be inspired by a cultural, teleological concern, a political zeal with a different range, based on the purposes of culture. Bartók is an angry nationalist; his sensibility is vigilant, but connected to his neighbors Perhaps d’Ors advice is not so generous, but he is also looking at certain extra-aesthetic ideological achievements. As an intellectual citizen of the world and constant preacher of the common, universal case of intelligence, *Xenius*¹ maintains the opposite, Esperantist prejudice. But fundamentally, his

reasons are no less political; they are just as distant from the immediate interests of art. . . .

Bartók's position leads us to a different conclusion. It is the position assumed by a majority of Latin American young adults, especially in countries such as Mexico and Peru, countries that are repositories of Native traditions and problems. Naturally these countries, proud of what is their own, tend to advocate an art of characterization for which archaeology and Native culture offer them artistic and natural elements that are unique in themselves. In contrast, lacking this vernacular heritage and more exposed to cosmopolitan influences, the countries in the Americas still feel the matter of their own culture as a problem—represented by every effort to extract distinguishing traits from life's murkiness and amorphousness.

In Mexico, and to a certain extent in Peru, added to these circumstances have been others that are more strictly ideological. Faced with the need to strengthen and incorporate a large Native population, both peoples have developed a social and political ideology with a marked collectivist stance. The resulting antipathy to any individualistic heritage has been extended to aesthetic matters, thus fueling the advocacy of a social art that is at the same time a "traditional art."

As we know, there is an assumption—fairly risky for certain purposes—that there is such a thing as the Americas' homogeneity. Given the idea that what is good or possible in Mexico is the same [as what is good and possible] in Cuba or in Argentina, the ideology of social traditional art has been turned into an imperative for all American art. And such ideas are frankly welcomed by young adults. We have witnessed an enthusiastic effort to resuscitate the symbol of the tame Indians discovered by Columbus and extinguished by the Spaniards. The [Soviet] Russian vogue, a few seeds of proletarian ideology, prepared the ground, and above all, the current revival of the nationalist spirit . . .

With all these experiences pressed into the service of "nationalism," it is natural that art also requires a citizen identification card. In Mexico, we have a Diego Rivera who arrives on the scene and postulates that all art that is not proletarian is bourgeois (and therefore false and reprehensible). Likewise, there is no lack of voices that would extend the same anathema to all pure art in Cuba. In my opinion, these theories entail an intrusion of social, political, or historical desires into the field of aesthetics. That is, they represent an intrusion to the

extent that such theories seek to make these interests inherent in the aesthetic function so that any art that lacks them can no longer be deemed art.

It seems that it is the fate of aesthetics to suffer such interventions. This is because art has—not in theory, but in its basic sense—so much that is superfluous, marginal, or marked by cultural luxury that it has always required social sanctioning. This may be by invoking its immediate usefulness (applied art) or attributing to it the purposes and consequences of group construction Thus, aesthetics has been chronically diminished, been interfered with; in an earlier time, [the diminishment or interference was perpetuated by] theology or morality, now [that role is taken up] by sociology or by politics. Artistic nationalism represents an analogous intrusion, because it tends to turn art into the instrument of a social *desideratum*, the record of the collective personality. This is why it gets along so well with proletarian art.

. . . What seems objectionable to me is that it seeks to make the authenticity and value of the artwork lie in its ulterior or collateral potential. This creates confusion and tends to shrink creative freedom. There is danger in postulating any specific kind of art and making it imperative and forcing a violent obedience to that admonition resulting in imbuing the artist with the idea that this is the only respectable art. There is nothing that establishes a greater imposition than these dogmatic concepts of what is respectable The intrusion of such exigencies on aesthetics has led to a reaction: that a considerable portion of modern art—much of it fine work—is moving farther afield every day from general understanding. The rejoinder to an insistence on human art, on art that is *too human*, is perhaps no less than excessive insistence on “dehumanized” art. Maybe the truth lies in between.

. . .

But I believe that there is a difference that we fail to take into account as much as we should—when all is said and done, [we fail to consider] the old, somewhat simplistic distinction between form and content. It may be obvious, but it is of utmost importance to all true understanding of art. Especially modern art; since the way to characterize this art, in my opinion, is that it increasingly aspires to be confined within a beauty that is purely formal to revive the innocent wonder of early man. If it is music, it seeks to be pure sound; if poetry, pure internal rhythm, and no more external data than that is necessary for maintaining

the caprice of the images; if painting, exclusively form, line, color. The famous “dehumanization” of art [1925], about which we were so clearly warned by [José] Ortega y Gasset, reduces art to a point where it eliminates anything anecdotal. Today’s artists with this orientation believe that references to life must be left to literature, which is integrated art par excellence. And the advantage used as justification for that rejection is that if the artist focuses exclusively on the specific subject matter of the art practiced, it will be possible to achieve more intensity. At the same time, the artist will enjoy greater creative independence, since there is no need to follow any external guideline.

. . .

However, there is as much error and dogmatism in claiming the exclusive validity of that sensory art as in claiming it for art of the opposite nature, steeped in human “inspiration.” Let us happily acknowledge the exquisite belligerence enjoyed by sensory art. Therefore, if both are equally “valid,” if neither of them can justifiably claim to be preeminent, is it *suitable* for our culture to express its preference for one of them? The problem is *suitability*, utility, and therefore extra-aestheticity. Our response has to be based on a prior weighting of advantages in the cultural order.

. . . Instinctively—in the Americas, and perhaps also in instances of Native art itself—what is sought is the greatest freedom of stylization. Along with maintaining a certain fidelity to natural data, [this freedom] will give the artist a creative means capable of the most concentrated eloquence. This is the position of nationalist art today. . . . In short, the story is expressed by stylizing what is natural, thus producing pictorial art at the same time as adding traditional eloquence and unquestionable visual beauty. Viewing these canvases, the pure painter will enjoy the rendering of the forms exclusively; the literary painter, [will enjoy] the expressive force; and the man of radical ideas will enjoy the canvas inasmuch as it has a message [and] serves as a political poster.

The range of its eloquence is not all such [Native] art has to offer. Through its exaltation of folkloric motifs, through its use of certain traditional stylistic forms, or simply, through deriving its rhythms and its emphasis from nature in its vernacular form, it creates a powerful record of the identity of the nation, of the territory. As a result, it entices a certain jingoistic indulgence and fuels those cohesive feelings that tend to contribute to a collective narcissism. . . .

I have no doubt that this is an advantage—for the Americas. However, in the current state of a broader world outlook, it may not be desirable The explanation is that ecumenical mysticism is repelled by this zeal to particularity in the Americas, which—in spite of everything—dominates our aesthetic disagreements, albeit becoming an instinctive statement. And perhaps the world has not yet reached the point at which it would be feasible to overcome instincts. Perhaps today, the ecumenical yearning has elements of the utopian and the artificial as well as the noble. . . .

Aesthetically, we must acknowledge the equal validity of abstract art, conceived in a universal language of forms, and that of an art of human concerns, stated in the language of a regional style. For the good of the world, it is reasonable to aspire to a *universality* of sensibility. Finally, if every distinguishing trait is to a certain extent a mystery, then so is the inspiration to discover it an incentive to [achieve] the innermost knowledge. . . . The practical attitude that these considerations seem to support is that of an eclecticism that understands art as a function, not an instrument. Thus it grants art its full freedom, instead of tying it down with dogmatic restraints.

1

Xenius is the artistic pseudonym assumed by the critic Eugenio d'Ors; a composite of “genius” and “Eugenio.”
—Ed.

II.2.9 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 740703

OUR SURVEYS: PAINTING IN LATIN AMERICA, WHAT LUIS FELIPE NOÉ HAS TO SAY

Luis Felipe Noé, 1961

An Argentinean painter who is also widely regarded as a writer, art critic, and theorist, Luis Felipe Noé (born 1933) participated in this 1961 survey in which he provided opinions on the state of Latin American painting. His statements reveal some of the precepts of *Otra Figuración* (or *Nueva Figuración*, 1961–64), a group that he established that same year with Rómulo

Macció, Jorge de la Vega, and Ernesto Deira in reaction to the abstract style popular during the previous decades. Furthermore, Noé's reflections on art and society and *chaos* as the basis for art's vital structure predate his seminal theoretical work *Antiestética* [(Buenos Aires: Editorial Van Riel, 1965)]. In Noé's view, the reality of the continent is much more complex than the mere adding, mixing, or superposing of forces (i.e., traditions, trends, and schools) in order to reach a supposed mestizo art. Instead, he argues that Latin America can develop its own voice by synthesizing its two "inner forces": the Eastern (the magical or intuitive) and the Western (the individualistic). The journal *Hoy en la Cultura* (Buenos Aires) included the survey in its inaugural edition [year 1, no. 1 (November 1, 1961), 14–15], also publishing responses by artists Carlos Alonso and Leónidas Gambartes.

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1. *Whenever people discuss Latin American painting, the Mexican muralists are inevitably mentioned. Do you think that that particular genre was limited to a specific moment in history, or that it is somehow still relevant today?*
 2. *Do you think that relics of pre-Columbian culture, or those that are still part of Latin American folklore, are valid themes for the contemporary painter?*
 3. *Avant-garde trends in contemporary art have unquestionably influenced Latin American painters. Is it reasonable to ask whether the application of those trends should be distinguished in some way that is relevant to the medium in which [the works] are produced?*

(1) **THE PREMISE SUGGESTED HERE WAS VALID FIFTEEN YEARS AGO.** Today, however, Mexican mural art is a thing of the past. This genre gave its name to a particular period in the history of contemporary [Latin] American art; it was the first one, the phase during which we became aware that we existed in universal time, but also lived in a space with very specific geographical and human characteristics. It was a period when we came to grips with the enormous weight of our own expression and contemplated a totally uncharted future. It was also a phase in the history of universal contemporary painting that focused on nationalism and the political message.

What we gleaned from that period, as we became aware of our circumstances, is not only still valid, it also represents a perfectly natural process. Through his work, an artist communicates with his surroundings, either

conversing with specific things or interacting with his environment as a whole. His surroundings are part of his sense of self, which he will naturally express in his work. But the [Latin] American artist's world is more of a work in progress than a reality, so he must find order in the chaos of traditions and trends as a means of discovering his own identity. It is essential to grasp that universal value can only be found in whatever contributes something specific of its own to expanding our vision of the universe.

Mexican painting was an expression of [Latin] America's adolescence; it was an essay on freedom. It reflected an attitude of violent, individual affirmation—especially in political and social matters—and a yearning for self discovery that insisted on cutting the umbilical cord that tied it to Europe. That is why it emphasized traditional folklore and social and political themes and relied on a narrative that focused on a peoples' self-affirmation. The narrative told us that there is no cultural freedom without political freedom. It therefore concentrated on politics and the realities of indigenous people. Though this was perfectly understandable under the circumstances, it tended to marginalize this particular discourse from the evolution of worldwide expression.

The narrative described the life of an indigenous people who had a magnificent past but were now in rebellion. It did not communicate anything in particular to the rest of the world, other than its own particular angst. It was an ambitious form of painting that wanted to transmit the essence of Mexico, and therefore of what was American, to the world. That is why it was expressed as murals.

That kind of painting had its heyday, which coincided with the Surrealist period. It represented one particular aspect of the great adventure of contemporary man. But, whereas other expressions have helped to expand mankind's vision of the world, Mexican painting did not accomplish that goal because it did not attempt to do so. Its main flaws were rooted in its thematic dogmatism, which limited the freedom of expression that any new voice requires; it also exhibited a degree of carelessness vis-à-vis its purely visual values, which are what give a painting its strength as a means of communication. All that notwithstanding, I cannot ignore the great contributions of the genre's master artists, who have now fallen from grace, for their aesthetic zeal. That zeal, however, confused aesthetics with psychology of form, and could only be justified politically by its inability to understand art as an independent expression of the spirit. Some

people are pro-Mexican murals; others are anti-Mexican murals—in my opinion, a true evaluation of the genre lies about halfway between one camp and the other.

We should also not forget that Mexican painting was a starting point for the painting of the Americas, as demonstrated by the fact that the greatest [Latin] American painter—who is undoubtedly [Rufino] Tamayo—is Mexican. That is, a man who experienced that genre and then went on to produce paintings that reflect that Mexican awareness by means of essential, permanent features, using a language of his own, which is valid for any [Latin] American country with roots that are similar to Mexico's. In Tamayo's wake came an abstract current that tended to capture the gist of the Americas by using its own rhythms. That trend produced the greatest painters in Latin America, who were not born in our country. Argentina, lacking a cultural tradition of her own and closely aligned with Europe, has not followed the same artistic path that was followed in other countries in the Americas. Suspended between two nostalgias, at a distance in two senses—far from Europe, and far from the Americas—Argentina has been developing her own identity based on this oscillation between two continents.

Argentina is ill at ease with the rest of the continent, so she sips from universal streams in search of her own voice, though she may not be aware of it. That is why she is more interested in what goes on in Europe than she is in her Latin American brothers' quest for their own form of expression. As a result, though she produces art of considerable quality, it lacks energy and strength—which can only be siphoned from the artist's personality—and is pursuing ever-greater refinement, a sign of weakness. That is also why Argentina is not interested in the trends toward abstraction throughout [Latin] America. It would appear that most Argentine painters who are unconcerned with thematic issues have deliberately ignored this question of an individual form of expression. They have consequently never been aware of the problem discussed here.

Changing the subject slightly—on a recent trip to Peru, I noticed that young painters there were not only interested in Americanist social painting but were turning their backs on Americanist abstract art and relying more on themselves than on archeological themes; that is, they were more interested in trends of greater freedom (Informalism and Action Painting) than in voluntary mental perceptions.

For all these reasons, I believe that the Mexican mural experience, as it was expressed in its time, cannot be sustained, and much less so in our country.

. . . Now, it is understandable that painting in any country roiled by revolution will repeat the Mexican experience. It is happening in Cuba. Painting that talks about painting will not ignite any revolutions; but it is logical to expect that revolutions will sow the seeds of political painting, because the artist is the child of his environment and his time.

(2) [The murals] are interesting and should be studied because they can help us to understand many things; however, I think it is dangerous to use them as a basis for our work. We should remember that they express the cosmic vision of men whose culture was very different to ours. I think, therefore, that it is a mistake to use them to support the severing of ties with European art. If we do that, we simply exchange one dependency for another and create a dependency on the past. Many Latin American abstract artists choose not to imitate them but rather to learn from their elements, forms, and rhythms. The danger lies in allowing themselves to be fooled into producing decorative art by the presumed American content of the relics, since neither forms nor rhythms express the life or the cosmic vision of mankind.

We cannot, of course, say the same about Tamayo, who uses indigenous rhythms, forms, and colors to express man's violent interaction with the universe. His was indeed an awakening of the Mexican spirit, though Tamayo's work did not take the form of a narrative or a political statement, but instead reflected his own intensely personal experience.

(3) I believe this question has already been answered in the affirmative. However, we could take the question a step further. How can this objective be met once we have rejected anecdotal, political, or indigenous elements, and removed all archeological or folkloric influences? What might be used as a support for such work? This will only be achieved once the continent as a whole has fully matured. But we must become aware of the problem so that we might eventually find the answer. [Latin] America must start developing its voice now, as part of the process of creating its ultimate, total being. As with people, a country's personality is largely defined by its willingness to be faithful to its various internal forces. The personality is therefore the result of interpreting those inner forces and of a willingness to develop experientially whatever is extracted by means of that

cognitive act. That is why the continent must express its spirit by synthesizing its two inner forces: the intuitive and the magical—its Eastern influence—and the individualistic—its Western influence. This is what will give birth to our mestizo art; mestizo not just in the racial sense, but above all in the spiritual sense [of communion].

There was a time—when there were very few internal forces in the Americas and they were easily synthesized—when a mestizo art emerged in the Cuzco and Quito schools. The synthesis in progress today is different. But those two schools are an important precedent; more important to our painting today than the pre-Columbian cultures, though they are still virgin subjects. But it is not about creating mestizo painting. It is about Latin Americans becoming aware of that idea so that they might express themselves simply as men. If they can do that, they will produce a Latin American art.

II.3

HARBINGERS OF THE NEW ART

II.3.1–II.3.2

XUL SOLAR ON PETTORUTI

These two manuscripts by Argentinean artist, writer, and language inventor Xul Solar (born Oscar Agustín Alejandro Schulz Solari, 1887–1963)—who was a member of the Buenos Aires avant-garde and a contributor to the influential literary journal *Martín Fierro*—represent some of the earliest critical writings on his good friend, compatriot, and fellow artist Emilio Pettoruti (1892–1971). These manuscripts were published at a time when Pettoruti's work was not particularly well received in Argentina. Solar positions Pettoruti's paintings as occupying a paradoxical space between the old and the new in that it both struggles with and “longs to be Native (Criollo).” Composed in the language that Xul Solar invented (*neo-Criollo*), the texts were written between 1923 and 1924. Pettoruti returned in 1924 to Buenos Aires from Italy, where he had been associated with the Italian Futurists, and shortly thereafter he and Xul Solar spent time together in Munich. The documents mainly outline Solar's own aesthetic program and esoteric beliefs. These translations are based on the original documents, “Pettoruti y obras” (Munich, June 1923) and “Pettoruti” (c. 1923–24), which are available in the archives of the Fundación Pan Club-Museo Xul Solar in Buenos Aires. The texts were reprinted in *Entrevistas, artículos y textos inéditos* [Alejandro Xul Solar, Prologue by Patricia M. Artundo (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Corregidor, 2005)].

II.3.1 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 732326

PETTORUTI AND HIS WORKS

Xul Solar, 1923

- **HERE ARE FEW THINGS ABOUT** the Argentinean Emilio Pettoruti: a few mulatto paintings (among black and white), very architectural; paintings in rainbow colors, silky and light, *fortissimo*, flashy, compelling the harmonies; drawings and nudes and decorations... who knows? This sample [comes from] his exhibition at “Sturm” [Storm], Berlin.
- This great painter never repeats those lyrical moments in which he surprises even himself. Having many lives, his aesthetics always gives us the unexpected. . . . He is proud of his pure Italian blood, nevertheless—due to racial flexibility—he also wants to be criollo, as criollo to us as a plumed Indian or the great distant pampas that are seldom seen: our heritage.
- We, the neo-Criollos, will take up a bunch of what remains of the Southern Continent old nations, a river not dead tired but still very much alive in other forms; we will bring back the experiences of that age and all that our heterogeneous cultures have taught us, and above all the restless, individualistic, spiritual vigor of the times: the huge part of us. . . .
- These Pettorutian works, although they are so novel to our peoples, do not really belong to the fleeting present of what is Criollo; archaic instead, they belong to the past and, even more, to the richest future of this new world [to come].
- The sober monumental scale of pristine Native art is involved, as well as the idiosyncratic intensity of white modernity, and the paradoxical constructions (which are pure intellectual joy) of the hyper-creative era to come.

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- It is difficult for an artist to be revolutionary. It does not suffice that he should shout along with the rest, or that he destroy his previous daub paintings. (We are not lawmakers). He must eschew superstitions (that is, imposed fashions). Surely, he must be strong enough to go against the current. If he is truly generative, his greatest father will always be his own God, not a foreign one.
 - His work must proliferate—either within or outside of a paradigm,—when background, media, form, all [come] together to catch the rare gist of true originality, forever young and alive.
 - Pettoruti's innermost revolution is accomplished. What is next is a nexus guided only by himself.

II.3.2 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 732314

PETTORUTI

Xul Solar, 1923

LET US SPEAK of the Argentinean painter PETTORUTI, one of the criollo avant-gardists of the future. Let us also speak of the pros of art in our America!

We are and feel ourselves to be new; our novel goal will not admit old and foreign paths. Let us be different! We are of age and yet we still have not finished the wars for independence. Let us put an end to Europe's moral tutelage. Let us assimilate what can be digested; let us love our teachers; but [let us admit that] our only Meccas cannot be overseas any longer. We do not have any art geniuses in our brief past to serve as guides (or even to tyrannize us). The ancient peoples of Cuzco, Palenque, and Tenochtitlán crumbled [destroying] themselves (and we are not red skins anymore). Surely, it became mandatory to break the invisible chains (the strongest of all) that in many fields still keep us as a COLONY: the great Iberian America with its ninety million inhabitants.

Let us search deeply within ourselves; let us ponder on the past and pursue our sudden cravings, but above all let us desire the making of our country. . . .

To a jaded, worn-out world, a new meaning. A higher and prolific life implies our racial mission. And it rises. A country should not be closed off, xenophobic, or stingy. [It is only worthy] as a special compartment of HUMANITY where kindred souls collaborate in the construction of a distant, future land. There, each man—already a superman—shall BE COMPLETED.

PETTORUTI—a meandering name that sounds like square wheels—was born in La Plata, of Roman blood. Mars dominates, although his astrology is tempered by Venus.

We do not wish to pigeonhole what is genuine and diverse: Pettoruti's paintings. Always in the best of taste, they are now very far outside the letter of the Law. Even varied as they are, they are a school in and of themselves, a school of criollo roots. Made by his very will. Even in his early, compromising paintings, their arabesque (I mean, the discursive melody of the soul) fought for freedom. He usually jumped over the natural in favor of the metaphysical, often escaping the cage of reality to play in another world in the same way that music frees itself in fugues. Even his colors—reaching the HIGHEST EXPRESSION OF SPIRITUALITY—while beginning gracious dialogues, spoke beautiful nonsense. In this way he prepared himself, bolstered by what seemed inactive periods of restlessness and interior fermentation, outside the bounds of the superstition that was known as PAINTING for many centuries.

We also find some unsettling paintings, new glyphs that defy categorization: the most interesting are the products of a secret laboratory; a token of how far an artist may go when there are no hindrances to his whims. Using unbridled matter at times, then with simple means, or even with skillful extravagance, he has reached the limit of theory: each work is Law and an end in itself, a new entity and autonomous being, neither a part nor a reflection of another.

. . .

PETTORUTI'S very complex art is and wants to be Criollo. Our very best is embedded in his works. Seeing faintly a future made him an enthusiast of our gargantuan America, from Mexico to the South Pole. Let us be happy! For new generations of creativity—and free room to fill with beauty—but let us also recognize this enormous responsibility that Fate has given us by seriously working.

Having spent many years in Europe, his assimilation clarified many problems. But he was fed by an enthusiastic faith—that of an ideal Fatherland—and a longing to freely give of its bounty while sowing in fertile soils. . . .

The potential of the new schools were not exhausted, however justifiable and contradictory to each other they were. The only important thing for the new arts is that they be invigorated by the spirit; that is, to be renewed on and on. . . .

II.3.3–II.3.4

ON CARLOS MÉRIDA

This selection presents two contrasting views of the work of Carlos Mérida. In the preface to the artist's print portfolio *Images de Guatemala*, French poet and critic André Salmon (1881–1969)—who with Guillaume Apollinaire and Maurice Raynal was a staunch defender of Cubism—writes of Mérida's success in adopting this widely practiced language of painting for his autochthonous purposes. The second text is a critique of Mérida's work of the same period (1920–27) by Guatemalan poet and art critic Luis Cardoza y Aragón (1901–1992). Salmon questions whether Mérida can move beyond painting the “exotic” (which did not have negative connotations at the time) to create works that appeal to “cultivated” audiences, all the while preserving the painter's own “race.” Cardoza y Aragón presents the artist—“Carlos Mérida: Ensayo sobre el arte del trópico”—as a figure who, while powerfully evoking America, also notably transcends nationality. Published by the Galerie de Quatre Chemins as “Fragments de la préface pour un album à apparaître prochainement,” [Carlos Mérida portfolio, *Images de Guatemala* (Paris: Galerie de Quatre Chemins, 1928), 3–5], Salmon's preface should not be confused with his introduction to the catalogue for Mérida's first exhibition in Paris, also held at Quatre Chemins, in 1927. Although Cardoza y Aragón also wrote from Paris, where he was living at the time, he published his text in the Peruvian cultural and political journal *Amauta* [(Lima), no. 14 (April 1928), 12; 32–36]. This journal was printed in Lima during the 1920s and was widely read by intellectuals throughout Latin America and abroad.

II.3.3 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 832600

IMAGES OF GUATEMALA

André Salmon, 1927

Excerpts from the Preface for an Album that will be Out Soon

NOW IS THE TIME for truly influential local forces to start encouraging young people in the Americas toward the refreshing possibility of creating a brand-new art. One that is capable of appealing to Europe, while still questioning its possible decadence. After so many false starts, we now see works steeped in the origins of Native art.

. . . The very best young painters in Latin America can, with marvelous ease, come closer to this naked art. An art with which they seem earnestly engaged and which our [Paul] Gauguin—the first European to really dream—was able to embrace in exchange for a most particular intellectual perspective.

This is the art that Carlos Mérida, with his refreshing authority, will henceforth show in Guatemala—and I imagine farther afield as well. It is therefore a great pleasure to hear that he wishes to show his art in Paris, where we may judge it for ourselves.

Let us be clear. We should neither label this kind of art with the platitudes we usually use to name decorative art, nor be overly intimidated by its range.

If Carlos Mérida brings us a wealth of color never seen before, the surprise could be as dazzling as the Russian ballets we have witnessed. At a certain level, civilized Europe is a true offspring of old Asia. Moreover, having been taught by smarter collectors than ours, Moscow artists were not unaware of Henri Matisse and Odilon Redon. The abyss separating America and Europe is considerably deeper.

There is no one better suited to the task of bridging the abyss than Carlos Mérida. Among his other talents, he is appropriately gifted and was born to introduce us to the joys of an exuberant art of union with no repetition. One that springs from a devotion to aesthetic perfection and takes its principles from

essential elements of ancestral Native art; thus, manifesting its own opulence—which, seems to approximate a Barbarian devotion to opulence. But on the contrary, it reduces all the magnificence of accent and tone to a measured level where a harmonious combination occurs. There, I would say, gold is nothing more than an ancillary *quality* to the whole, in stark opposition to the works that moved those who arrived in the caravels. Thus conditioned, it demonstrates an improper *value* that challenges supreme agreements.

Carlos Mérida has come to visit us, imbued with confidence and joy. After several weeks, or several months, can there be any doubt as to the warmth of his youthful works, or as to their ability to deliver a brilliant trove of exoticism?

Carlos Mérida discovered the “Paris Movement” [École de Paris] and was astonished; he felt profoundly moved by all that staunchly refutes the spirit of decorative art.

Nevertheless, he must regain his confidence. High decoration—of the architectural kind—overcomes the inadequacies of the decorative spirit. We have seen that, in America, where it is practiced; young masters spent a decade enduring the same kind of aesthetic suffering as our own [painters]. It finally seems to be understood that, thanks to its willpower in returning to essential principles, the School of Paris has freed one country after another. Each one has therefore found an art of its own, in spite of the belief in a cosmopolitan unification that was in vogue many years ago.

Let me tell you something, Carlos Mérida. Haven’t you become the master of essential principles, the key ones that involve certainty, without which you couldn’t be a national master? Furthermore, aren’t these obstinate creations—which yield limitless fruits because of the limited scope of the field—sufficiently sensitive to any cultivated nature that they will not be touched, and which also nourish the most immediate passions of your race?

Well, you will progress beyond the works that you submitted today, among which we recall a variety of titles.

You have dazzled us with the harmony of a New Egypt. The drawings of radiant clothes, some shawls, even the ponchos with so many hieroglyphs to be deciphered in order to discover the secret of sleeping gods hidden among mountain tops and lakes, framed by the craning neck of a mysterious yet familiar llama.

Passionate young man, you will deserve the good name of *Libertador* if you are able to free a world, the Empire of the Sun, from the pedagogical slavery in which it is still kept by ethnographers.

That might be sufficient. However, the traits and their resolution, their possibilities regarding a prolific break—an already profound science governing the distribution of hues—assure us that soon, perhaps tomorrow, you will have fulfilled your goals. And these are focused on a national art that can be understood by all young visual artists.

II.3.4 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 832415

CARLOS MÉRIDA: ESSAY ON THE ART OF THE TROPICS

Luis Cardoza y Aragón, 1928

THERE IS NOTHING MORE SUMPTUOUS, more opulent than our tropical zones. Every day, for everyone to see, the sun opens its womb in a unique *hara-kiri* of color. Even those who live with that orgy of hues never get completely used to it and are always thrilled by its marvelous virginal novelty. Colors enter through the eyes and through the hand that cuts the stubborn fruit and the hearts of vegetables; colors rise up through the foot that walks the land, through the body that is bathed in the inescapable glare of the sun's rays.

The colored fabrics produced by Mexico's mother race—the Maya—cannot equal the harmonious, magnificent, luxurious varieties produced by Mayan artisans living in Guatemala. Their ceramics, on the other hand, were spectacular. It is hard to find anything to rival the noticeably Eastern imagination and skill our ancestors developed to transmute the earth into their earthenware bowls and etch the feeling of the tropics into the rocks.

We are blood brothers of the same race, all who share our ideas, who are free thinkers, and we are in solidarity when we attack or when we love. At this

time it is impossible to talk about Guatemalan art. In addition to having only just begun, it lives under Mexico's favorable shadow. The influences are ethnic in origin rather than being transmitted from neighboring brothers. That same race, the Maya, who lived on the same lands in Guatemala are perhaps the most interesting civilization in the Americas. To me, in a certain way, the idea of a patriotic homeland is an expression of idiotic fanaticism. Any cause with a blood connection is defended powerfully and instinctively. No half measures are allowed in the tropics, where passion infuses everything, and that is what makes them glorious.

The rough, fleshy feel of the prickly pear, the juicy tongue of the maguey cactus, the delicacy of vanilla, tobacco, corn, the gold of our fruit, and the polyglot color of our birds are what we speak of when we tell other countries about ourselves. Just as we feel the daily assault on our senses from the merciless sun. . . . A people influenced by the sun, the great classic of the tropics. Color justifies our race. . . .

As Europe enters old age, Mexico's voice is just breaking; Mexico, vanguard of the Americas, the forward prow of the race. Mayan Mexico, primitive nature: jungles, blind forces, alcohol. Everyone in tune so that the Renaissance can dance on the hips of Boticelli's *Spring*.

Latin America has become a refuge for impotence, sheltering mediocre intelligence. It is a pity! Only three or four names deserve our respect. Everyone else takes advantage of the fact that people are easily influenced by Latin Americanisms such as, *let us kill the gringos!* Or by a form of communism rooted in laziness. See the transcendental manifestations of what stirs interest in the Americas: a few books, paintings, and music. That is all I remember as I write. . . .

As I listened to my own heartbeat, I proclaimed myself a Mayan prince in the middle of Paris, not far from the Eiffel Tower. The Sun was my godfather, I witnessed the event in the name of the gods. The steel Geyser Tower mirrored my modern orientation, pointing straight up at the sky. I will have my shield inscribed on two wooden crates, one from the Maya of my birthplace (near Antigua, Guatemala), and the other from Mexico—the very same country with two names in the books—and will use both to cover the breast of the perennially unlikely woman.

How many other things came to mind as I contemplated Carlos Mérida's paintings!

I must state, once and for all, that Carlos Mérida is one of the most brilliant, enthusiastic “harbingers” of the Americas painting. His current work shows its roots, reveals his patient learning, and expresses his entire life. He introduced a certain pictorial tonality and was one of the major influences who made us deeply aware of our underlying racial history at a time when almost all the scarce painting in the Americas was tinged by a parasitic dependence on Europe. . . .

There is no doubt that, in art, the best fruit comes from the Tree of Genealogy. Thus we see how painting in the Americas takes control of itself, develops a true awareness of itself, its power. And that approach, which we should adopt once and for all, is a great triumph for our Primitives.

In terms of teaching American painting—that was stillborn by the glittery, picturesque, leafy quality that seduced painters who had no technique at all, no feeling for Native themes, and who were disastrously influenced by the French or the Italians (painters who stooped to paint superficial symbols)—Carlos Mérida took on the difficult task of guiding these painters, of introducing them to significant values. He whittled his way toward a visual art of the Americas. At that time, few approved of the direction Mérida proposed, and he was largely ignored.

I don’t think any other painter on the continent has championed the idea of revaluing America with the same spirit of perfect brotherhood or has known how to promote it in such a modern way, with total freedom. There are two or three other painters in the Americas whose work is more finished than Carlos Mérida’s paintings; but we must not forget that he was the main instigator of those works. Here is a rousing endorsement from Diego Rivera himself, “For several years now, Carlos Mérida’s work has shown an Americanness of extremely interesting influence; he was the first to introduce a sense of the picturesque nature of the Americas in real paintings”. . . .

Mérida spent his youth in the miraculous natural environment of the highlands, in the western states of Guatemala, on the shores of Lake Atitlán, and in Mexico, and has absorbed, almost by osmosis, the incomparable colors of those regions. . . .

Some young painters think they will amaze Europe with their version of an art of the Americas, which merely captures the picturesque quality and portrays traditional scenes, but solves no problems and offers no interpretation; it

has no feeling for indigenous themes and no concept of an aboriginal expression of the visual arts. Works of this nature have no place in the painting of the Americas or in any other kind of painting. The true stream of American feeling runs deep, and very few can capture it because very few possess the necessary erudition and sensitivity to plumb its depths. Our young painters would benefit a great deal from a visit to Mexico, where they will find an interesting pictorial movement and some relatively modern, technical organizations. [Alternately], a trip to Europe poses enormous risks for them, [as they are faced with] many currents extremely distant to our own, which can influence sensitivities that have barely lost their virginity. It is like a lynching of the soul, a merciless fight that I once suffered and still feel. When someone from the tropics is twenty years old in the all-embracing life of Paris, it seems something truly pathetic and moving. . . .

Undoubtedly, Carlos Mérida is Guatemala's major artist. No one among us does it better and nobody is more Guatemalan than he is. The only international life our little countries enjoy is provided by our prodigal sons. Mérida has managed to multiply and whittle down his criollo sensitivity. His is dense, indigenous work, guided by an admirable temperament; his figures are imbued with a natural rhythm of life that is like our breathing. . . .

Mérida arrived in Mexico a few years after he returned from his first trip to Europe, where he learned about the need for total freedom through his involvement in the great pictorial incubation inspired by [Guillaume] Apollinaire: the Fauvists and the Cubists. Anita Brenner, in her essay "The Mexican Renaissance," describes his work at that time: "Carlos Mérida, who returned to Mexico before Diego Rivera did, was the first to adopt the lessons of modern French painting. And he was the first to return to the plane values found in traditional indigenous painting. . . .

There was no painting milieu in Mexico when Mérida arrived in 1920—a year before Rivera returned from Europe. In very sporadic cases, there might be works with no connection to each other, totally disoriented, that was all. . . .

Mérida told me that, "color is what came most easily to me in my painting." He already possessed that native sensitivity to color; and a unique chromatic vision that was governed by an exotic obedience to the form it sought to express: Mayan sensitivity. . . . Mérida's color does not just reflect the violent, tropical color of other Latin American painters—a very "chromo" color, even in the admirable Brazilian Tarsila [do Amaral]. His color shows the smoothness of tones and

half tones, it reveals the most difficult shades—ochers, blacks, grays—that move me most of all. We are in the tropics. Color is just right; like an epithet, color matched like a declared objective, definitely devoid of synonyms. Color may be the outstanding quality in Mérida's work; in spite of the marvelous construction of his works, all so well formed and so full of architecture, that stir up I don't know what kind of strange, troubling feeling.

. . .

In spite of the exotic flavor of Mérida's work, its quality has surprised the critics in New York and Europe, who rate him—more or less conveniently—with no reference to Gauguin's painting. On the whole, there are few disagreements on this work, whose main guidelines I have tried to outline above, with the help of quotes from specialists in the field. [I draw attention to the one] by Anita Brenner: "Carlos Mérida, devoid of all form or theory, produces work that is pure painting. Imitating no one and using his own life within the framework of his own time and materials, Mérida transfers the values of ancient monuments, in whose shadow he was born. Like the creators of those monuments, he needs no interpreter or dictionary. To understand his work one must either know nothing about art or know a great deal about art. More importantly, Mérida does not use color or lines to compose his subject; he uses nothing but the geometry of color. Which is the equivalent of painting at the purest level". . . . "Through a transparent spectroscopic calculation, Mérida uses two dimensions to express a third one on the plane. Mérida has turned color into a religion. His life culminates in painting and his painting culminates in color. Line and composition are thus controlled and subordinated". . . .

I can surmise a stage when the painting of the Americas will be stripped of all decorative intention, to seek even greater refinement in color, the field in which several of our painters excel. In Europe, of course, Mérida's solid color, his flat color seems decorative, because trends there are different and overtly opposed to his work. European painting is under the formidable influence of [Pablo] Picasso, the [Leonardo da] Vinci of the New Renaissance. The painting of the continent has never been more out of climate than now, when transplanted in Europe. We have plenty of sensuality. We must intellectualize the painting of the Americas, taking into account that our nature is out of place in Europe, which is indeed its best [pictorial] *raison d'être*. . . .

 II.3.5 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 777197

PABLO PICASSO: FIRST SPIRITUAL UNIFIER OF LATIN AMERICA

Germán Quiroga Galdo, 1935

Bolivian career diplomat and politician Germán Quiroga Galdo (1908–1991) wrote this article while on diplomatic assignment to the Bolivian embassy in Rio de Janeiro. He proposes Pablo Picasso's cubist works as one of the many models of interest to modern Latin American painters. Quiroga Galdo discusses modern Latin American art in pre- and post-Picasso terms, acknowledging that the Spaniard looked to so-called primitive African art as rich source material for his own artistic creations. Quiroga Galdo proposes that Latin American artists will find similar potential in indigenous Indo- and Afro-American sources. This article is excerpted from the original text [Germán Quiroga Galdo, "Pablo Picasso, o primeiro unificador espiritual da América Latina," *Diário de S. Paulo* (June 2, 1935)].

IT IS LOGICAL FOR THE MODERN MANIFESTATIONS of Latin American art to be an expression of [Pablo] Picasso's influence because it extends throughout all civilized countries, imposing itself after having undermined the prestige of classicism, [that] anemia of plastic arts...

Modern Latin American painting can be considered the best and most comprehensive demonstration of [Picasso's] impact. We could say that the Spanish sensibility encountered the American sensibility and the affinity that ought to make possible the production of true masterpieces. Until the appearance of Picasso, American painting was a servile imitation of the impotent academicism of European artists. Moreover, it was not the bona fide expression of the Indo-American sensibility, mainly because it did not translate its reality to the hilt. All intellectual and artistic life of the American elites was reduced to copying European ideas and forms, thus aping all its spiritual expressions.

. . . However, here is where an unexpected event occurs. Picasso's influence in Indo-America no longer had to combat academicism, because the latter was already defunct in Latin America as it was in Europe. Yet, [our continent] encountered an unexpected enemy here: folklorism, which was, indeed, a verita-

ble disease in art and literature. The Spaniard's influence fought its second battle against [folklorism], defeated it, subjugated it, and soon transformed it, using the backwardness of folklorism as a precious material for the creation of classic works that were truly universal.

How did this decisive event come about leading American painters in completely different directions from those followed by artists up to that time?

First of all, let us examine what [the movement] commonly discussed or referred to erroneously as Cubism is. Picasso was not, as is generally believed, the inventor of Cubism. He was simply its discoverer, which is something very different. Cubism, as we say, is in painting a method for understanding the essential. It is a method, at the same time, of analysis and synthesis. . . .

Observe the works of Picasso, his series of de- and re-compositions of the elements of a bottle, of a guitar, of a harlequin; thanks to the Cubist method these very humble motifs begin to take on a life of their own, to radiate spirituality.

To start with, we must make it clear that the Cubist method was already known by the most illustrious painters of the past. The last ones who knew how to use it efficiently were the Renaissance artists, above all Leonardo da Vinci, whose works are nothing more than the result of the Cubist process. This process was lost with the passing of the centuries, buried beneath the chaff piled up by the routine of artists who, in this way, unconsciously slid down into academicism. . . .

So, during many years, this method was lost, until the much-needed appearance of Pablo Picasso and, above all, the formation of an aesthetic climate in which his revitalizing activities could develop. Therefore, we pay homage to the effort of the harbingers, [Edouard] Manet, [Claude] Monet, [Paul] Cézanne, [Vincent] Van Gogh, who reacted against pretentious academicism. Furthermore, to [Georges] Seurat's effort, who was the first to abandon the predominance of light and color to the detriment of form, an excess that the above-cited masters, the Impressionists, fell into in their eagerness to fight against the minutiae of construction applied by the academicians. . . .

Therefore, the work of Picasso opens up an extremely broad horizon to Latin American artists. It reveals to them that folklorism—as an artistic goal—is a demonstration of inferiority before the other countries of Western culture. Picasso makes them understand that they must restrain themselves, disciplining their inspiration and employing the most rigorous reflection in the study of the

chosen motif. [They must] avoid at all costs creative facileness, which produces only mediocre work; shun all complacency toward public taste; repel the understandable drive to copy Nature. [Why?] Because the role of the artist is to reveal the hidden virtues of things, verifying the intensity of the relationship between the material and the spiritual world. In a word, prevent the artist from usurping the rigid and defined functions of mechanical devices, be they photographic or cinematographic!

Thanks to Picasso, naïve folklorism is transformed into material for artistic creation. Thus the Indian, the Llama, the Condor, the Mountain, the Gaucho, and so forth—which until recently were the favorite motifs employed from Mexico to the Straits of Magellan—, are today considered merely raw materials of construction. Furthermore, the predominance of local details was excluded, as was the documentary intention that always existed in the artworks, along with any national or social ideology.

The precursors of this movement in Indo-America are the Mexicans, Diego Rivera and [José Clemente] Orozco, who set their creative gifts on the path charted by Picasso. In our opinion, neither attained the desired level of perfection, having been hindered by the political and social ideals of their country. This was a negative influence that stopped them halfway down the road which would lead to complete liberation. When we examine the entirety of their works, we see that they do not exhibit unity, which is the mark of the creative genius. Some of their images are truly admirable, but the majority evokes a feudal and exploited Mexico, or else they portray revolutionary scenes which have much of the naïveté of folklorism, which is quite different from spontaneity.

This double failure, however, was a lesson for the youngsters who followed in the footsteps of the Mexicans and learned to stop themselves in time to take their inspiration exclusively from the works of Picasso. The folkloric forms, once stripped of their local details, purified of the particularism that impoverished them, acquired an unsuspected internal force, increased their power of suggestion, and finally appeared, for the first time, endowed with the virtue of universality.

A large number of young artists emerged, mostly in Mexico, Bolivia, and Peru. They continue the struggle for liberation initiated by Rivera and Orozco and begin their production in a clearly original manner. From the Gulf of Mexico to the heart of the continent and on its Atlantic shores, we see the simultaneous and

splendid appearance of Jayme Colsón in the Island of Santo Domingo, Velásquez Chávez and Máximo Pacheco in Mexico, Camilo Blas in Peru, Victor Pabón and Antonio Sotomayor in Bolivia. Brazil is also represented, with the captivating Santa Rosa and the remarkable [Candido] Portinari.

What is impressive about this simultaneous burst of creativity is that it is localized, preferentially, in the countries that are heirs of pre-Columbian civilizations; that is to say, Bolivia, Mexico, and Peru. If we examine this artistic phenomenon, we see that it was determined by the existence of extremely rich materials very well utilized by the artists of these countries. The civilizations of America constitute vast horizons for the development of modern art. This phenomenon seems to us perfectly logical. There is the revealing precedent of Picasso, contemplating one day a little African statue that was given to him by [Henri] Matisse and discovering that the anonymous African artist had expressed the essential in his sober creation. This was for the Spanish master the lesson that would be useful for the conception of the works that would, soon after, renew painting and exert an undeniable influence over all the artistic manifestations of our time, without exception, from architecture to music, which—despite being the most abstract of all arts—was wrested from Wagnerian Romanticism to reach its apogee with works such as *Hyperprism* [by Edgard Varèse (1923)]. Pure music, which I will venture to qualify as sonorous Picassoism.

...

II.3.6 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1051636

MODERN MEXICAN PAINTING

José Sabogal, 1937

Peruvian painter and muralist José Sabogal (1888–1956) wrote this manuscript in September 1937 upon visiting an exhibition of Mexican art organized by Moisés Saenz, Mexico's ambassador to Peru. From 1922 to 1925, Sabogal lived in Mexico where he met *Los Tres Grandes* (Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros). In this text, Sabogal admires the nascent energy of Mexican

artists included in the exhibition and indicates that the use of their country's folklore reflecting both the pre-Columbian and Spanish colonial past can be instrumental in the crafting of a renewed national aesthetics. By 1937, Sabogal had become the chief proponent of Peruvian painting based on an indigenous aesthetics, a position that had been officially sanctioned five years earlier with his appointment as director of Lima's prestigious *Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes*. This text was published in Sabogal's posthumous *Obras literarias completas* [(Lima: Ignacio Prado Pastor Editor, 1989), 423–24].

MEXICO'S REMARKABLE ART MOVEMENT was a byproduct of the long, bloody revolution; it coalesced at the peak of the widespread aesthetic renewal known as the "Paris Movement" [*École de Paris*]. Several noted Mexican artists were involved in the Movement, and later went on to take part in their country's artistic awakening.

Both movements shared common goals and proposed identical forms of renewal in the field of visual arts. Mexican artists now found themselves inspired by the eternal rhythm of art once expressed in the warm, vivid, admirable style of their rich, traditional art in the amazing Indian works of ancient times and in the unbroken link with their colonial background. They bring fresh insight to the work of reconstruction; with cleansed souls and hearts filled with childlike enthusiasm, they stand facing a vast horizon.

The postwar, worldwide aesthetic revolution followed a similar path. That great tragedy revealed the rampant disorientation in the field of visual art at that time and stimulated a deep appreciation for the eternal, living work of art-truth. This new phase in the history of humanity also introduced a new, purer way of seeing things, and acknowledged the unsung masters from earlier times whose works of art nurtured and sustained priceless links to the past. These masters were revered in guides to the renewal; among them, Paul Gauguin was the most significant artist as far as we are concerned, because the nature of his work positions him as a major precursor of our current painting in the Americas.

This happy confluence of events led to a new artistic blooming in Mexico, which in turn produced a higher level of visual art with an American content that had hitherto been absent. Thus began a period during which artists, fired with Renaissance-inspired enthusiasm, were influenced by the noblest pictorial

methods of the past and managed to revive the “painting of mankind,” as Michelangelo described al fresco painting.

This favorable environment contributed to a crystallization of ideas in the field of mural painting that expressed the mood of the times and defined an era in Latin America’s history of visual art.

The exhibition of Mexican painters in Lima was organized by Moisés Sáenz, who is a learned, accredited representative of that nation; he is a key figure of the renewal movement in the field of education, therefore closely identified with aesthetic resurgence in his country.

We are grateful to Ambassador Sáenz for his generosity in offering this exhibition of works from his valuable private collection.

II.3.7 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1051653

SABOGAL IN MEXICO

Mada Ontañón, 1942

Journalist and writer Mada Ontañón (née Carreño, 1914–2000)—a Mexico City-based Spanish émigré—interviewed the Peruvian painter José Sabogal during the artist’s trip to Mexico in 1942. On this visit, Sabogal, who had lived in Mexico in the early 1920s, returned in his official capacity as director of Lima’s Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes. During this trip, Sabogal announced his intention to paint large-scale frescoes in Peru. Much like the strategically-minded Mexican muralists who created art as political statements, the Peruvian artist used his administrative charge as a platform from which to call for a radical nationalist art in Peru that was based on native values. Initially published in Mexico City’s magazine *HOY* [(January 23, 1942), 96-97], the interview is included in Sabogal’s *Obras literarias completas* [(Lima: Ignacio Prado Pastor Editor, 1989), 433–35].

THE GREAT PERUVIAN PAINTER HAS COME TO VISIT US—he came for the first time twenty years ago—on his way home from a trip to the United States. The winds of

war have stirred up even the quietest, most remote places, and we are now being visited by crowds of people from all over the world. Mexico is host to a most interesting parade of celebrities: one of the kings who are still around; international “stars”; distinguished politicians; artists who escaped Europe and were known only by name. They are now here and still a little surprised, as we are, that so much has happened. Also, as in the case of [José] Sabogal, old friends of Mexico have returned after thinking they might never again leave their country or their regular work routine.

In the lobby of the hotel where he is staying, Sabogal—with an air of the moderate dreamer about him—says nice things about Mexico. He has seen so much that has impressed him that all he wants to do is get back to work and do a lot of painting. In the meantime, he is traveling in Mexico—“which has changed a lot”—in the company of friends. The phone rings constantly and he interrupts the conversation with a very pleasant “excuse me” and an ever-widening smile.

“[Pablo] O’Higgins? Yes, I’ll be there to pick you up in a little while.” Sabogal is happy. With Mexico, with his trip to the United States—at the invitation of the State Department—, with the chance to meet up with old friends. He also speaks in very complimentary terms about the art milieu in Mexico and about young Mexican artists.

“It is interesting,” he says, “to note the duality that has always existed between Mexico and Peru, ever since pre-Hispanic times. Now, once again, our two countries are developing the art movement in the Americas, both fired by an identical vision. Our similarity has connected us and united us over the course of time.”

Sabogal is the current director of the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes [National School of Fine Arts] in [Lima,] Peru, and is one of the most enthusiastic supporters of new art. The National School of Fine Arts in his country sets an example of a broad perspective; it is a place defined by flexible criteria where students learn, above all, to express themselves and their personal vision. For an official school—of the kind that can so easily become mired in the foul odors of academism—this is a well-nigh miraculous achievement.

Young artists—Sabogal mentions Julia Codesido, Teresa Carvalio, Camilo Blas, and [Enrique] Camino Brent—travel around Peru so that, while they are studying art from other countries, they can also learn about their own. Sabogal says, “This is the example Mexico set for us in 1923; then we had to explore our-

selves and discover our own form of expression; we had to discover an art for the Americas. Now, twenty years later, Mexican painting, for example, ranks in the upper echelons of world painting.”

—“Do you think this movement is important for art?”

—“I think this blooming of the visual arts, which started in the continent in late 1922, is just as interesting as l’École de Paris.” Sabogal tells me about his intention to begin painting al fresco when he returns to his country, inspired by the splendid exhibitions he has admired here. “This revival of al fresco painting,” he says, “is, in my opinion, yet another example of art in the Americas, proof of its vitality, its vision, its new breath of life.” He adds,

—“Furthermore, a wall measuring so many meters high by so many long is a good place on which to theorize. You can speak to the people from there, as from a podium.”

—“Are you interested in politics?” I ask maliciously.

Sabogal takes his time to answer.

—“Art is broader than any political idea. I think politics inevitably gets in the way of an artist’s painting.”

—“Now let’s talk about European art.”

—“I’m very interested in the modern French painters.”

—“And Picasso?”

—“Picasso is always alright, whatever he does. And we shouldn’t forget about the Impressionists so soon. But, among modern painters, the one to whom we, the Americans, feel closest is Gauguin.”

Sabogal—who brought no paintings with him—hands me some photographs for readers of *HOY*. His mature, firm style is most clearly visible in his most recent works that get steadily more powerful, more sure of themselves. They are portraits of Peruvian Indians and marvelous landscapes that are extraordinarily concise—the rocks of the Andes and their white tunics; the high plateaus looking as still and unreal as a moonscape; sun-bleached scenes of churches; authentically picturesque Spanish imagery—the soul and color of the people—featuring towers painted with tragic realism; and popular musicians who sing their dirge to who-knows which god.

Sabogal’s painting, which is so Peruvian, reaches out beyond the frame. Focused exclusively on expressing his country—the art of his homeland—Sabogal’s work, like all good painting, embodies a direct connection to universal art.



III

THE GOOD NEIGHBORHOOD AND BAD TIMES

INTRODUCTION BY TOMÁS YBARRA-FRAUSTO

Conrado Vásquez's *Earthquake*, 1939, lacquer on wood, featured on the exhibition catalogue cover of *Latin American Exhibition of Fine Arts, July 23–October 20. Brazil. Ecuador. Mexico. Venezuela*, sponsored by the United States New York World's Fair Commission at the Riverside Museum, New York, 1940. [SEE DOCUMENT III.4.3–III.4.5]

TOMÁS YBARRA-FRAUSTO

The Good Neighborhood and Bad Times

AS LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES STARTED TO DEVELOP and affirm national identities in the nineteenth century, the United States began to activate a sphere of influence in the region. From the very beginning, North–South interactions played out in a field of asymmetric economic, military, and political power. A defining moment occurred on December 2, 1823, when President James Monroe in his seventh State of the Union address to Congress proposed a policy whose primary objective was to protect the sovereignty of newly independent nations in the Americas and to defend them from European intervention and control. Broadly known as the Monroe Doctrine [SEE DOCUMENT III.1.1], this protocol established the groundwork for asserting United States leadership in hemispheric actions and, by extension, for expanding U.S. interests in the financial and cultural arenas of the region.

In the years following the Great Depression, the United States redefined its Pan American efforts and adopted a more peaceful tone than the one introduced by the Monroe Doctrine, which was recast in 1904 by President Theodore Roosevelt in his diplomatic corollary to the doctrine, commonly referred to as his “Big Stick” policy. On March 4, 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt stated in his inaugural address: “In the field of world polity, I would dedicate this nation to the policy of the good neighbor—the neighbor who resolutely respects himself and, because he does so, respects the rights of others.”¹ The trope of the Americas as a neighborhood with northern and southern neighbors sharing rights and responsibilities did much to foster hemispheric goodwill. From the North American perspective, a neighborhood is a space of communal interaction where the principles of friendship, trust, and confidence reign; a neighborhood integrates its members into webs of reciprocity and equity. These utopian ideals were fomented at the diplomatic level with cultural exchange programs and reciprocal

trade agreements between the United States and diverse Latin American nations. The main principle of the Good Neighbor Policy was that of non-intervention and non-interference by the United States in Latin American domestic affairs. Nevertheless, this rule had been previously breached by the U.S. military occupation of Cuba from 1899 to 1902, of Nicaragua in 1909, of Veracruz (Mexico) in 1914, of Haiti in 1915, and of the Dominican Republic in 1916. Despite the two decades-long gap between the two (Theodore and Franklin D.) Roosevelt administrations, the Good Neighbor Policy was seen by many Latin Americans as mainly a new disguise of the cunning and conniving Northern wolf. In fact, as we will see in studying the documents gathered in this chapter, United States economic and cultural penetration continued albeit with more subtle maneuvers.

III.1 In this section, “The Monroe Doctrine: A Precursor to Pan Americanism,” we present documents that explore the complex historical, cultural, and political relationships between the Americas that followed the establishment of the Monroe Doctrine. Initially, reactions to the Monroe Doctrine within Latin America were generally favorable. Some politicians and intellectuals there looked to the United States and found inspiration in the eighteenth-century North American revolution, in the U.S. Constitution, and in its assertion of the political virtues of the nation as the domicile of individual freedom. However, another, more wary and skeptical view also emerged in Latin America and was characterized by a belief that differences in cultural background, core values, and historical origins would impede genuine reciprocity between the two Americas.

Throughout the nineteenth century, theorists in Latin America analyzed socio-political problems and the relationships between the various peoples and powers that comprised the Americas through the lens of science and race-centered theories embedded in the neo-scientific doctrines of Positivism, the dominant philosophy of the period. Engaging medical tropes of disease and sickness, some historians and cultural observers described their countries in terms of social organisms afflicted by an unhealthy virus contained in the intermingled composition of populations [SEE DOCUMENT III.1.3]. Social biologism and racist ideologies that underscored some of these views affirmed racial hierarchy; the dogma that racial mixing produced social degeneracy; and the ideas that political instability, cultural deficiency, and perpetual anarchy were pathological traits of an “ailing continent” that could only be mitigated by the immigration of white

Europeans. This continental ailing process, as described by César Zumeta, “took place among the colonial powers,” which were, in fact, still highly relevant in the twentieth century.

III.2 Indeed, the Americas are, in the words of Waldo Frank, “Half-Worlds in Conflict,” and the tensions within and among these half-worlds comprise the focus of this section. At the turn of the nineteenth century, United States expansionist policies—coupled with major economic investments by American corporations throughout the region—activated a radical change in the mindsets of socially committed intellectuals. Dominant theories of racialized societies were discarded and replaced by institutional reform and social renovation anchored in cultural resistance and affirmation. In 1900, the publication of José Enrique Rodó’s polemical *Ariel*, a composite text that is simultaneously an essay, a sermon, and an idealistic parable, stimulated fervent debate [SEE DOCUMENT III.2.1]. Indeed, *Ariel* calls for Latin Americans to guard against a moral conquest by the United States. Instead, the text’s affirming, pro-Latin American vision avers that Latin Americans possess enduring moral and aesthetic values derived from their Greco-Roman and Christian Catholic cultural heritage. While Rodó praises the ideals of liberty and individual freedom of North Americans—as well as their efficiency and technological advances—he strongly warns against *dependency* on a society based on pragmatism and materialistic ideals. In an essentialist sense, Rodó urges Latin Americans to re-affirm their unique cultural identity rooted in the Spanish motherland rather than badly copy the values of the United States, a country still in a provisional stage of civilization. Rodó coins the term “*nor-domanía*” to describe the mania for the North against which he warns. Moving beyond nationalism, *Ariel* introduces the concept of Latin American integration rooted in cultural unity. The work’s humanist idealism also intuits that the two Americas have a future shared destiny.

This key point regarding a joint future based on common concerns remained influential throughout the twentieth century. After its publication, intellectuals in both the United States and Latin America joined the enduring discourse “to define” the primal characteristics and values of their respective national cultures. The U.S. novelist, critic, and historian Waldo Frank notes the striking symmetry between the “half worlds” of America Hispana and Anglo-

Saxon America [SEE DOCUMENT III.2.3]. In his view, each world lacks what the other has. The pragmatic, machine-oriented North has order but lacks life, while the heterogeneous, mestizo South has life but lacks order. For Frank, the effort to create a single, harmonious world through revitalization and the creation of a hemispheric culture would strongly depend on a conversion where the best qualities of the materialist and rationalist North and the spiritual unity and culture of the South organically converge into a unified entity.

Assessing the possibility for the co-existence of “the two Americas,” José Vasconcelos in *Indología* [SEE DOCUMENT III.2.2] proclaims a doctrine of cooperation against the struggle for supremacy between two vastly different cultures with unequal power. Vasconcelos believes that while the United States is already formed and powerful, Latin America is a potential force in the process of establishing a vital equilibrium between nature and culture. To reach its potential, Latin America must deal internally with oppressive *caudillos* and, simultaneously, with North American cultural and economic penetration and political interventions. According to the Mexican writer and politician, North and South are both developing cultures and must keep their doors open to immigration since both are not the result of one tradition but of many.

Continuing the polemic of differences and commonalities in hemispheric cultures, Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre uses the metaphor of an *archipelago* to envision a continentalism or a pluralist Americanism that is in no way uniform [SEE DOCUMENT III.2.4]. His country, in spite of a long-lasting monarchic tradition, created an interracial democracy. Freyre believes that Brazil is American in its rhythm and free forms of expression; it is Hispanic and particularly Portuguese in its values, motivations, and approaches toward life. He argues that a true American culture, like Brazil, will amplify values inherited from Europe, Africa, and Asia.

Art and culture are linchpins of Latin American modernity. Artist Diego Rivera states that art has an important social function for the construction of economic, social, and cultural unity in the Americas [SEE DOCUMENT III.2.6]. Taking a Marxist approach, Rivera argues that art has potential to excite and nurture the will for liberty, independence, and equality if it is connected to a program of planned industrialization linking the enormous natural and human resources of the region. Furthermore, he suggests that the Southern

Hemisphere must move beyond its racist, Greco-Latin roots toward a continental American culture of an absolute modernity in its unification of the sciences, industry, and art.

Rivera's commentary on the photography of Edward Weston and Tina Modotti offers a case study of sorts in the ways in which Northern and Southern traditions can be integrated to achieve more continental expressions. Rivera affirms that their photography is imbued with a sensibility that embraces the modernity and plasticity of the North and the living traditions of the South [SEE DOCUMENT III.2.5].

A young Octavio Paz describes mid-1940s Pan Americanism as a system of cultural penetration, noting that since 1896, it had become part and parcel of American "dollar imperialism" that involved expanding U.S. commercial markets in Latin America. However, Paz expresses some hope that such events as the first Pan American Conference, held in Mexico City in 1902, allowed Latin America a voice in Pan American relations. At the conferences, which were held every four years, delegates from the hemisphere came together to discuss treaties, pacts, and contracts that were then ratified by participating governments. The advantage for Latin Americans in such encounters was that they could debate, modify, or reject items in the United States commercial, political, and cultural agendas. According to Paz, the unilateral maneuvers of the United States were to be replaced by a new culture of negotiation and reciprocity. The ebb and flow of this reciprocal process is charted by his reportage, "Latin American Unity: A Battle of Diplomacy in San Francisco" [SEE DOCUMENT III.2.7].

The Cuban poet and essayist Roberto Fernández Retamar [SEE DOCUMENT III.2.8] speaks from inside the irremediable colonial conditions of Cuba, in particular, and Latin America, in general. Responding to the question [AN ISSUE VASTLY DEBATED IN THIS VOLUME, SEE DOCUMENTS I.2.4–12], *Does a Latin American culture exist?*, and echoing José Martí's conception of *our mestizo America* [SEE DOCUMENT I.3.4], Retamar says that the mestizo cultural ethos is the essence, the central line of development of Cuban culture—"a culture of descendants both ethnically and culturally speaking, of aborigines, Africans and Europeans." He stresses that while "capitalist countries long ago achieved a relative [racial and cultural] homogeneity" at the expense of internal diversity, the colonial world—including Cuba—remains a highly complex composite. Often Latin American cultures are seen as an emanation from Europe, especially since Latin Americans continue to

use the language and many of the conceptual tools of the colonizer. Furthermore, rethinking the Shakespearean metaphors introduced by Rodó's highly influential *Ariel*, Retamar joins the ranks of Latin American intellectuals, writers, and artists who object to open or veiled forms of cultural and political colonialism and equates Latin America with *The Tempest's* Caliban, who denounces and curses the colonizer in his own language.

III.3 The third segment of this chapter, "Insights from Latin American on U.S. Art and Society," considers the complicated relationship between the North and the South through the lens of art. Specifically, this section presents writings by Latin American artists who evaluate the cultural production of the United States with both admiration and condemnation. These critiques are underscored by and reflect Latin American history and realities, including the fact that, since the turn of the nineteenth century, artistic production in Latin America has been linked to broad social processes like nation building and modernization. Consequently, artists and writers had to grapple with a cluster of persistent cultural themes: the theory of *mestizaje* (racial/cultural intermingling); notions of cultural authenticity and differentiation from the Anglo Saxon North; and the ongoing reality of United States cultural penetration embedded in political strategies like Pan Americanism or the Good Neighbor Policy.

Latin American points of view on U.S. visual culture in this cluster of essays start in 1888 when the Cuban writer and critic José Martí, after viewing an exhibition of watercolor landscapes in New York, reports that artists in the United States—in "this province which is increasingly pulling away from England and going its own way in the field of arts and letters"—are slowly creating a self-confident native art less dependent on European models. In some respects he offers the United States as a model for other, emerging nations, noting that young artists from a coarse society have achieved the artistic discretion that more cultivated countries take centuries to acquire [SEE DOCUMENT III. 3.1].

Speaking to his guild audience in Chicago, Mexican-based Guatemalan artist Carlos Mérida looks back on the apogee of Mexican Muralism in the 1930s and considers the assimilation of Los Tres Grandes (Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros) into the collection of New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). His presentation coincides with the continuing development of U.S. mural projects under the auspices of the WPA (Work Progress

Administration)[SEE DOCUMENT III.3.2]. Mérida chides Northern artists who are following without discernment the Mexican muralist experiment, which he notes is presently in its worse phase. Indeed, Mexican Muralism had several phases in its long-lasting process. Its initial period reflected major influences from folklore; then, the muralists sought to capture the true character of Mexico through graphic storytelling, while keeping in mind that the simple reproduction of what we see does not constitute an enduring art. Mérida, who is critical of the “false revolutionary art” of Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros, explains that the work of art cannot be based on unhelpful repetitions. If North American artists are to create a focused and vital work, Mérida argues, they must emulate the *post*-Muralist artists of Mexico whom he points out “are creating works that, although still imperfect, are nevertheless more vital, more revolutionary, and more expressive than any created by the legion of insipid illustrators.” The artists, he explains, “must not create art that is representative, but rather abstract, and they must take this word to mean the creation of a unique organism.”

In reviewing a touring exhibition of North American art in Montevideo in 1941, Joaquín Torres-García, who had lived in New York in the 1920s, questions the state of art in the hemisphere. He comments on the “significant changes and, what’s more, undeniable progress compared to what I used to see in those earlier years” [SEE DOCUMENT III.3.3]. In a “good neighbor policy” show with “obviously excellent, mediocre, and atrocious works,” the Uruguayan painter sees—among North, Central, and South American examples—“poor imitation and parody. . . a desire to emulate an old culture, European culture.” And he goes on: “This is why we do not yet have an art that we can call our own; and by that I mean our palette, our style, our way of understanding composition, our perception of reality—where we find our own concept of the visual arts.” According to Torres-García, what is missing are “Concrete elements that I would call abstract since they are not imitative.”

José Sabogal offers an alternative course for the future of American art, one based on an understanding and appreciation of indigenous art and culture. Writing in 1943, Sabogal records his impressions and thoughts about his seventy-two days spent traveling throughout the United States that same year [SEE DOCUMENT III.3.4]. Sabogal admires the grandeur of nature and the technical and functional focus of American society. Sabogal sees the North American museums he visited as dynamic centers of education and is especially enlightened by their

collections of American Indian art, from the pre-colonial art of the continent to contemporary tribal arts of the Americas. The Peruvian painter proposes the idea of a museum dedicated to ancient art of the Americas (to be implemented with laboratories and a library) that would make it an undeniable hub for American studies.

In a letter from New York [SEE DOCUMENT III.3.5], Argentinean art critic Damián Bayón presents ironic observations on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Museum of Modern Art. Bayón argues that MoMA's installation is very contradictory, mixing the best and the worst together so that unenlightened visitors begin to think that all the paintings are of prime quality. According to his report sent to the magazine *Ver y estimar* in Buenos Aires, Bayón says that ninety percent of the work exhibited at MoMA and the Whitney Museum of American Art is bad or immature in the best cases: they lack for him *museum quality*. A key point of his critique is that in this "rich country" even mediocre artists have great support infrastructure and so many opportunities that critics and audiences can easily confuse the good with the bad; suggested in this analysis are the broader, cultural implications regarding tendencies and values in a relatively privileged and wealthy society (as opposed to those of poorer nations). For example, regarding the overestimated U.S. artists, Bayón writes: "If they had been born in any other country in the world, they would still be struggling to avoid starvation and trying to show their work and sell it."

III.4 The chapter concludes with this fourth section, "The United States 'Presents' and 'Collects' Latin America Art," that explores how the operative construct of "Latin American art"—as applied to exhibitions and museum collections—was formed and fostered by a combination of U.S. institutions, government policies, and exhibitions starting in the 1930s. An early catalyst for interest in the region was the Rockefeller family, which united public philanthropy with private financial and business interests. The Rockefellers were deeply involved with New York's Museum of Modern Art, which Abby Aldrich Rockefeller (Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.) helped to co-found in 1929. MoMA's initial interest in Latin American art was marked by Diego Rivera's one-man show in 1931, and soon after the museum's Latin American collection was established in 1935 with Mrs. Rockefeller's gift of José Clemente Orozco's *The Subway* (1928), followed a year later by two large Riveras. In 1939, the collection was augmented with

paintings by Brazilian Candido Portinari, and in the 1940s, Lincoln Kirstein, MoMA's consultant in Latin American art, greatly expanded the museum's holdings in this area. From its inception, the construct of Latin American art has been U.S.-centric, reflecting hemispheric political agendas, and it has been filtered through MoMA's significantly institutional narrative of modernism. The documents presented in this section trace the evolution of this Latin American art construct.

The Conference on Inter-American Relations in the Field of Art was convened by the U.S. Department of State on October 11–12, 1939 [SEE DOCUMENT III.4.1]. Attended by 125 representative leaders from various areas of the art field in the United States, the conference carefully surveyed the panorama of artistic exchange between the United States and other American countries as well as the possibilities for future comparable endeavors. The delegates praised the present trend that had led artists to turn away from the resources of Europe and to recognize the native scene as a more vital source of inspiration and development. A special emphasis was placed on contemporary production and on the living artist, suggesting the recognition that the best cultural ambassadors are in fact the artists themselves. An important point made at the conference was the acknowledgment that Latin America is not a unit, but that it consists of twenty nations, a fact that must be considered in any program of exchange. Likewise the diversity of the United States surfaced when delegates favored a coordinated exhibition that might be illustrative of the “American way of living.” Nevertheless, a divergence of opinion arose as to what constituted truly representative art material from the United States.

As a follow-up to the Inter-American Conference of 1939, a Continuation Committee met on Feb. 15–16, 1940, in Washington, DC, seeking to create programs and structures to carry out future artistic exchange with the other American republics [SEE DOCUMENT III.4.2]. The committee repeatedly emphasized that selection of materials to go to Latin America should be made on the basis of what the Latin Americans themselves desire, and the essential reciprocity in artistic exchange was also stressed. The participants outlined possible programs including: a general volume on Latin American art; exchange of exhibitions; the granting of fellowships; and the creation of a clearinghouse of information and a coordinating agency for development of long-range artistic exchange programs.

Held the same year as the Inter-American Conference, the New York World's Fair of 1939 included the *Latin American Exhibition of Fine Arts* [SEE DOCUMENT III.4.4]. As stated in the introduction to the accompanying catalogue, the exhibition was carried out in the spirit that the "Americas are developing an artistic and cultural consciousness of their own." Other central ideas expressed in the catalogue include the notion that art can promote cross-cultural appreciation and that by focusing on national themes that have universal meaning, painters in the Americas can build solidarity and understanding to make "*more readily possible the peaceful adjustment of international controversies.*"

During the heyday of the Good Neighbor Policy in the mid-1940s, Americans began looking at Latin America "full in the face" with evident interest but with little true comprehension. During this period, Alfred H. Barr, MoMA's director, amassed the most important collection of Latin American art in the United States. Among the central issues he raises in his paper "Problems of Research and Documentation in Contemporary Latin American Art" [SEE DOCUMENT III.4.7], presented at the 1945 Conference on Studies in Latin American Art, are those relating to artistic quality and interest. In his view, international standards can be applied to art that is international in style or character, but it is much more difficult to judge values that are national or local in character. He notes that the problem of standards is also evident in research where U.S. critics are concerned with systematic fact and documentation, which he says "has been rather hasty in a good many ways, and superficial." He also considers the differences between Latin American and U.S. approaches to scholarship, noting that Latin American scholars are much more rhetorical, poetic, and use a more philosophical style in presenting their critical views.

Barr's paper offers a view into the future and raises the problem of how to connect the wartime political promotion and financing of Latin American art with long-term and long-envisioned art collecting, exhibition, and study programs that will demonstrate quality and seriousness.

Also speaking at the 1945 Conference on Studies in Latin American Art held at MoMA, Grace McCann Morley [SEE DOCUMENT III.4.8], the first director of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, addresses "regional schools with distinct personalities and character within national development." Focusing on "national developments," McCann Morley divides the countries and trends she considers into one of two categories: countries whose production reflects a pre-Columbian

heritage and those whose recent developments relate to Europe. According to her, art in Latin America is weak in development and generally derivative from foreign styles; the result is that the creation of a national art follows an “international pattern.” She further notes that Latin American artists work in poor conditions, lack financial support, and have restricted opportunities for exhibition; moreover, patronage and audiences are small. She also cautions that whenever the term “Latin America” is used, “hidden behind surface unities and similarities there is great diversity and important fundamental differences between the various countries.”

Designed to coincide with the Pan American Games held in Chicago in 1959, the exhibition *The United States Collects Pan American Art* curated by Joseph Randall Shapiro signals the inadequacy of the term “Latin American art” to denote a single, homogenous identity. As Shapiro demonstrates in his introduction to the exhibition catalogue [SEE DOCUMENT III.4.10], differences in geography and ancestry have created quite opposite socio-religious cultures, histories, art forms, and styles. Shapiro, the founding president of Chicago’s Museum of Contemporary Art, argues that the artists gathered together in the 1959 exhibition work in a modern idiom that is both metropolitan and international and also one that parallels the progressive architecture of modern Latin American cities. Noting that many younger artists have adopted current “International styles” of abstract and non-objective painting, he observes that they are conversant with contemporary trends in the United States and Europe and adamantly oppose the traditional colonial and Indian art of their countries as well as sentimental, picturesque, and exotic tourist art. In creating these new idioms, the young artists, Shapiro explains, also respond to the heterogeneity of Latin American art—the native arts of Mexico and Peru, the Mexican muralists, regional folklore, and the currents of European art.

The United States interest in Latin America, which first peaked during World War II and was manifested in various political, diplomatic, and cultural endeavors, began to wane in the postwar period, with attention now being directed toward Europe and Asia with the advent of the Cold War. Nevertheless, in this same period following the Second World War, the discipline of Latin American Studies emerged within academic institutions, and scholars articulated new paradigms that critically explored the region’s politics, economics, and

culture. Latin American art history programs began to train a younger cadre of art historians and curators who in subsequent decades would re-envision and re-conceptualize the operative construct of Latin American art.

1

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "First Inaugural Address," Washington, D.C., March 3, 1933.

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- III.1. THE MONROE DOCTRINE:
A PRECURSOR TO PAN AMERICANISM
 - III.2. HALF-WORLDS IN CONFLICT
 - III.3. INSIGHTS FROM LATIN AMERICA
ON U.S. ART AND SOCIETY
 - III.4. THE UNITED STATES “PRESENTS” AND
“COLLECTS” LATIN AMERICAN ART

III.1

THE MONROE DOCTRINE: A PRECURSOR TO PAN AMERICANISM

III.1.1 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1055512

ANNUAL MESSAGE: THE MONROE DOCTRINE

James Monroe, 1823

James Monroe (1758–1831), fifth president of the United States, delivered this speech, his seventh State of the Union address, to the U.S. Congress on December 2, 1823. Monroe's speech laid out the foundation for what would be known broadly as the "Monroe Doctrine," which prohibited Europe from intervening in the affairs of the Western Hemisphere and stipulated that the Americas fell under the sphere of influence of the United States. This idea was strengthened further in 1904 with the [Theodore] Roosevelt Corollary—commonly referred to as "The Big Stick"—which extended the parameters of the doctrine by asserting the right of the United States to intervene in the affairs of Central American and Caribbean nations if these countries were unable to repay their international debts. Although the Monroe Doctrine is referenced often in political history, the original text of President Monroe's speech is not as widely known, nor is the identity of the actual author of the so-called Monroe Doctrine, Secretary of State John Quincy Adams. This version of the seminal address is from a 1920 reprint [James Monroe, "Text of the Original Monroe Doctrine," in Albert Bushnell Hart, *The Monroe Doctrine: An Interpretation* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1920), 66–68].

AT THE PROPOSAL OF THE RUSSIAN IMPERIAL GOVERNMENT, made through the minister of the Emperor residing here, a full power and instructions have been transmitted to the minister of the United States at St. Petersburg to arrange by amicable negotiation, the respective rights and interests of the two nations on

the northwest coast of this continent. A similar proposal has been made by His Imperial Majesty to the Government of Great Britain, which has likewise been acceded to. The Government of the United States has been desirous, by this friendly proceeding, of manifesting the great value which they have invariably attached to the friendship of the Emperor, and their solicitude to cultivate the best understanding with his Government.

In the discussions to which this interest has given rise, and in the arrangements by which they may terminate, the occasion has been judged proper for asserting as a principle in which the rights and interests of the United States are involved, that the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers. . . .

It was stated at the commencement of the last session that a great effort was then taken in Spain and Portugal to improve the condition of the people of those countries, and that it appeared to be conducted with extraordinary moderation. It need scarcely be remarked that the result has been, so far, very different from what was then anticipated. Of events in that quarter of the globe with which we have so much intercourse, and from which we derive our origin, we have always been anxious and interested spectators. The citizens of the United States cherish sentiments the most friendly in favor of the liberty and happiness of their fellow men on that side of the Atlantic. In the wars of the European powers in matters relating to themselves we have never taken any part, nor does it comport with our policy so to do. It is only when our rights are invaded or seriously menaced that we resent injuries or make preparation for our defense.

With the movements in this hemisphere we are, of necessity, more immediately connected, and by causes which must be obvious to all enlightened and impartial observers. The political system of the allied powers is essentially different in this respect from that of America. This difference proceeds from that which exists in their respective Governments; and to the defense of our own, which has been achieved by the loss of so much blood and treasure, and matured by the wisdom of their most enlightened citizens, and under which we have enjoyed unexampled felicity, this whole nation is devoted.

We owe it, therefore, to candor, and to the amicable relations existing between the United States and those powers, to declare that we should consider any attempt on their part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere

as dangerous to our peace and safety. With the existing colonies or dependencies of any European power we have not interfered and shall not interfere. But with the Governments who have declared their independence, and maintained it, and whose independence we have, on great consideration and on just principles, acknowledged, we could not view any interposition for the purpose of oppressing them, or controlling in any other manner their destiny, by any European power, in any other light than as the manifestation of an unfriendly disposition towards the United States.

In the war between these new Governments and Spain we declared our neutrality at the time of their recognition, and to this we have adhered and shall continue to adhere, provided no change shall occur which, in the judgment of the competent authorities of this Government, shall make a corresponding change on the part of the United States indispensable to their security.

The late events in Spain and Portugal show that Europe is still unsettled. Of this important fact no stronger proof can be adduced than that the allied powers should have thought it proper, on any principle satisfactory to themselves, to have interposed, by force, in the internal concerns of Spain. To what extent such interposition may be carried, on the same principle, is a question in which all independent powers whose Governments differ from theirs are interested, even those most remote, and surely none more so than the United States.

Our policy in regard to Europe, which was adopted at an early stage of the wars which have so long agitated that quarter of the globe, nevertheless remains the same, which is, not to interfere in the internal concerns of any of its powers; to consider the Government *de facto* as the legitimate Government for us; to cultivate friendly relations with it, and to preserve those relations by a frank, firm, and manly policy, meeting, in all instances, the just claims of every power; submitting to injuries from none.

But in regard to these continents, circumstances are eminently and conspicuously different. It is impossible that the allied powers should extend their political system to any portion of either continent without endangering our peace and happiness; nor can any one believe that our Southern brethren, if left to themselves, would adopt it of their own accord. It is equally impossible, therefore, that we should behold such interposition, in any form, with indifference.

If we look to the comparative strength and resources of Spain and those new Governments, and their distance from each other, it must be obvious that

she can never subdue them. It is still the true policy of the United States to leave the parties to themselves, in the hope that other powers will pursue the same course.

III.1.2 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 776328

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

Eduardo Paulo da Silva Prado, 1894

These two passages (“Prefácio” and “Capítulo Um”) are from *A ilusão americana*, a book criticizing U.S. expansionist policies that Brazilian writer and journalist Eduardo [Paulo da Silva] Prado (1860–1901) published in 1894. The author urges Brazilians not to be fooled into believing in any sort of real cooperation and compromise between Brazil and the United States or other Latin American republics. Prado’s argument is underscored by the belief that at a time when hatred between neighbors was evident, fraternal unity was nothing more than an illusion and the Monroe Doctrine [SEE DOCUMENT III.1.1] was a common threat. Prado’s critique stemmed from his monarchist associations and convictions. A privileged member of the *paulista* coffee oligarchy, colloquially known as “quatrocentona,” Prado was a staunch supporter of imperial Brazil under Dom Pedro II. Once Brazil proclaimed itself a republic on November 15, 1889, the conservative critic focused his attention on denouncing the new government. The Republican government, in turn, confiscated the first edition of *A ilusão americana* [(São Paulo: Typ. da Companhia Industrial de S. Paulo)], which Prado wrote in exile in London three years after the 1891 Brazilian constitution was adopted. The book was published in several editions, including one released in 1961 [*A ilusão americana*, 3rd ed. (São Paulo: Brasiliense), 5–18], which is the source of this translation.

PREFACE

Originally written in Brazil, this work has now been reprinted abroad,¹ and would deserve to be brought to light even if it was uninteresting.

This unpretentious text was confiscated and forbidden by the government of the Republic of Brazil. To possess this book was a felony, to read it a conspiracy, and to have written it, a crime.

Before the painful ordeal that in the name of the Republic devastated the Brazilian fatherland, no other administration had felt so weak and culpable to the point of being unable to tolerate either truth or contradiction, or even an objective and noble critique.

Our great-grandparents were young when the Inquisition was abolished. From that time on in our country, power never dared to come between our exceptional writers and their meager public. This achievement in liberty was considered definitive, but tragically the republican government of Brazil was destined to resist civilization and to disillusion all. My book did not enjoy any more freedom within the Republic than did the press, public assemblies, or even the guarantees of citizenship.

The Romans used to say that all books have their own destiny. The fate of this one is not so terrible, honored as it was with the wrath of liberty's enemies. And has not Truth itself proclaimed felicitous all those who suffered the persecution of justice?

CHAPTER 1

We believe it is time to react against the madness of imposing an absolute alliance with the great Anglo-Saxon republic upon Brazil. We separated ourselves from it not only due to the enormous distance [between us], but also because of race, religion, character, language, history, and the traditions of our people.

The fact that Brazil and the United States are found on the same continent is a mere accident of geography to which it would be puerile to attribute an exaggerated importance.

Where in history is it written that all nations on the same continent must have the same form of government? And where does history demonstrate that these nations must mandatorily be brothers? In the midst of a monarchic Europe, do France and Switzerland not exist as republics? What sort of fraternity is there between France and Germany, Russia and Austria, Denmark and Prussia? That these nations are located on the same continent—that they are close neigh-

bors—does that prevent them from acting like bitter enemies? To attempt to identify Brazil with the United States because they are both in the same hemisphere would be the same as imposing Swiss institutions upon Portugal because both countries happen to be in Europe.

The fraternity of the Americas is a lie; consider the Iberian nations of America. There is more hatred and more enmity among them than among European nations.

Mexico—both despondent and oppressive—has time and again invaded Guatemala. Guatemala has waged bloody wars against the republic of El Salvador. El Salvador is the bitter enemy of Nicaragua. Nicaragua is the fierce adversary of Honduras. And there is no love lost between Honduras and Costa Rica. The tortuous and horrid history of all these nations is a veritable river of blood—a continuum of carnage. Where is the solidarity of the Americas? Where is the fraternity of the republics?

Colombia and Venezuela despise each other. Never completely resigned, Ecuador is the victim of either Colombian violence or Peruvian demands. And Peru? Did it not attack Bolivia? And then after forming an alliance with her, did they not wage an unjust war against Chile? And Chile—has it not twice invaded Bolivia and Peru, [resulting] in a horrific massacre of Bolivians and Peruvians in the last war, perhaps the bloodiest conflict of this century? But Chile does not have only these enemies: her great adversary is the republic of Argentina. In addition to having usurped territory from Bolivia, this latter country also forces Chile to maintain an enormous army. No one denies that any conflict between these countries would be a catastrophe that could break out at any moment. The dictator [José Gaspar Rodríguez de] Francia, the laconic executioner of Paraguay whom Augusto Comte places among the saints to be venerated on the Positivist calendar,² was led by his hatred for the Argentineans and the other peoples of America to isolate his country for decades. The republic of Argentina was the natural enemy of Paraguay. Thus when [Francisco Solano] López attacked Argentina, Brazil allied itself with Argentina in a war against Paraguay. And how does Uruguay feel about Argentina? Today there is not one Argentinean man who does not admit that the supreme ambition of his country is to reestablish the ancient Viceroyalty of Buenos Aires through the conquest of both Paraguay and Uruguay.

Such is the fraternity of the Americas.

Facing the rising sun and with its populous centers nearer to Europe than the majority of the other countries of the Americas, [Brazil enjoys] greater ease of travel. As it is separated [from the other nations of the continent] both by origin and language, neither the corporeal nor the intangible Brazil forms any [coherent] system with the other nations. Geologists surmise that a long time ago the Amazon and the River Plate were linked to each other as two interior seas. Brazil, being an enormous island, was really a continent unto itself. The alluvial deposits, the strata at the depths of the ancient Mediterranean, cemented Brazil to the Eastern slopes of the Andes. This connection, however, is superficial; it developed independently from the deep roots and eternal bases of the Brazilian massif. Therefore the volcanic tremors from the other system never reach Brazilian shores. When they do occur, the quakes are so distant that they are faint and imperceptible and can only be registered by instruments since the senses are unable to perceive them. The Jesuit missionary Samuel Fritz stated in 1698 that a terrible eruption in the Andes transformed the Solimões, a Brazilian waterway, into a “river of mud” and that the Natives perceived this as the wrath of the gods. With regard to political order, it seems that in the end it was both the Spanish [republics] and revolutionary eruptions that troubled the Brazilian waters. The torrent, however, is not only of mud but also of blood. . . .

If we study the Iberian countries of the Americas as a whole, one by one, we find a peculiar trait in all of them beyond the tragicomedy of dictatorships, constituents, and seditions. The life of these countries connotes financial ruin.

The principal cause of this insolvency is systematic bad debt: the shameless theft made [possible] by the good faith of their European creditors. By not repaying loans, the treasury ministers of the Spanish republics have stolen more money from European pockets than Europe ever took from the gold and silver mines of the Americas. Let us consider the fantastical budgets of these countries. The irregular accounting practices of these nations are at the core of the appalling *deficits* and unscrupulous forgeries. State funds are appropriated and spent by the presidents with ease unfamiliar to even the czar of Russia. What are we witnessing? The celebrated war budget devours everything: there are dozens of generals, hundreds of colonels, and thousands of officers.

This is proof that the brotherhood of the Americas does not exist.

If the nations of the Americas lived, or were even capable of living as brothers, they would not need to crush their taxpayers or wreck their respective treasuries while defrauding their creditors through the purchase of armaments and instruments of war that are so destructive to the national prosperity.

Now let us speak of that great North American republic so that we may see what sort of fraternal feelings it has shown toward Latin America, as well as the moral influence it has exerted over the civilizations of the entire continent.

In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, extraordinary men of the old Anglo-Saxon lineage—spurred either by Puritanism or encouraged by philosophical fads—appeared in the thirteen English colonies of North America. They resolved to create an independent nation and never did it enter their minds to proselytize independence or the republican model in the Americas. That was not characteristic of their race.

The goal they had in sight was immediate, bounded, and practical. When they declared independence from their mother country, they had the kingdoms of Spain and France as allies. How could they wish Spain to lose its rich American colonies when they were grateful for its intervention on behalf of their independence? If they had any sympathy for the emancipation of the other countries of the Americas, it did not surface for another thirty or forty years. By then all Latin America was bringing about its independence at the cost of great sacrifice, without any help from the United States.

The ignorant pretension with which superficial French writers tried to link the American Revolution to the French revolution is highly comical. They wanted [to show] that French revolutionary ideas had influenced America when, if there had been any influence exerted, it had been the other way around. Benjamin Franklin, wearing black trousers, slip-on shoes and [carrying] no sword at his side, [had no need for] embroidery or plumes: he had his reputation as a wise man and liberator. Because of his fame for having been a simple worker in his youth, he had an impact in France. When he, in his good-humored skepticism, would laugh uproariously at the saying coined by Robert Turgot [Baron de l'Aulne]: *Eripuit coelo fulmen sceptrumque tyrannis* ["he snatched the lightning from the sky and the scepter from the tyrants"]—he was proving that his good sense had not been lost on the French aristocracy despite its suicidal foolishness. When the revolution broke out, when it began to burn and kill,

there was a great sympathy in all of the United States for Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette: the old allies [and] generous protectors of American independence. Shortly thereafter, the government in Washington broke off diplomatic relations with the French Republic. So, where was the brotherhood? Where was the republican solidarity?

Let us consider history. What support did the government of the United States offer for the independence of the Iberian colonies of the Americas? What was the attitude of the United States when these nations were attacked by the powers of Europe? How did the government in Washington treat them? What role did the United States play in the civil and international struggles throughout Latin America? What was its political, moral and economic influence over these countries?

All that follows to be read in this book refers to these matters. They will all be discussed here, though not always in the same order in which they are listed.

Latin America is principally indebted to England, not the United States, for the moral strength that permitted it to achieve independence. It was William Burke³ who was the first voice in Europe to speak in favor of the independence of South America; he wrote a vibrant pamphlet advocating for it. Then emerged the Abbé de Pradt, and afterward [Prime Minister George] Canning, who practically made independence possible—essentially feasible and certain—after Lord Wellington had officially advised it during the Congress of Verona.⁴

The independence of the Latin nations of America was not supported at all by the United States. The nations that struggled for their political emancipation must then render considerable appreciation to England.

Mr. Carlos Calvo [SEE DOCUMENT I.2.1] states that the attitude of the United States and the proclamation of its Monroe Doctrine [SEE DOCUMENT III.1.1] weighed in a decisive manner on the spirit of the English government. During the Congress of Verona in 1822 and because of Lord Wellington's [influence], England came out in defense of the Spanish-American nations, against which the Holy Alliance was attempting to intervene in favor of Spain.

This affirmation is incorrect. In the first place, the so-called Monroe Doctrine was proclaimed by the United States fifteen months later in December 1823. And what was the attitude of the United States toward the rebellious colonies? The Spanish-American author Mr. [José María] Samper informs us: "With regard to the United States, it is strange to observe that even though it [should have been]

the power most interested in favoring our independence, from the political and commercial point of view that is, it nevertheless demonstrated itself to be much less approving than England. The [United States] in general was indifferent to our revolution and thus very late in its official declarations, as well as parsimonious in providing the arms support that we were requesting—with our own money—from traders and shipbuilders.⁵

Long before the message sent by [President James] Monroe, the American ambassador [to England, Richard] Rush, had received a communication from Canning that the Holy Alliance was thinking of intervening in the Americas on behalf of Spain; Canning added that he was disposed to directly oppose this plan [of the Holy Alliance] if he could count on the cooperation of the United States. Rush sent Canning's communication to his government, and it was received with great satisfaction because at that time, as was later recounted by cabinet member [John C.] Calhoun, the United States considered it unwise to intervene given the great power of the Holy Alliance. Calhoun would treat his secretaries with consideration, as opposed [to the manner in which] the semi-barbaric presidents of the continent's other republics [treated] the irresponsible men serving as their ministers. [Monroe] shared the communication from London with his cabinet, and he also consulted with [Thomas] Jefferson as to whether he should accept the help offered by England.⁶ Until then, the attitude of the United States had been one of reserve and abstention. For a nation that wanted to present itself as the protector of all Latin Americans, it is necessary to stress that this policy was not fraternal: it was egotistical. In fact in 1819, the American government refused to receive the consuls of Venezuela and Argentina, citing various pretexts.⁷ It was only in March 1823 that the United States recognized the independence of the [former] Spanish republics.

Strengthened and encouraged by England's initiative, on December 2, 1823, President Monroe issued this message:

. . . We owe it, therefore, to candor and to the amicable relations existing between the United States and those [European] powers to declare that we should consider any attempt on their part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety. With the existing colonies or dependencies of any European power we have not interfered and shall not interfere. But with the Governments who have declared their independence and maintain it, and whose independence we have, on great consideration and on just principles, acknowledged, we could not view any

interposition for the purpose of oppressing them, or controlling in any other manner their destiny, by any European power in any other light than as the manifestation of an unfriendly disposition toward the United States. . . .

[In short,] there you have the famous doctrine!

South American naïveté—never so mocked and defrauded—saw in this declaration a formal commitment—one solemn and definitive—of an alliance with the United States: an alliance as preposterous as one between dogs and cats. For seventy-one years, the United States government accumulated declarations upon declarations that are tantamount to retractions. For seventy-one years, writers, orators, and American politicians have explained that [Monroe’s speech] implied neither commitment nor alliance. For seventy-one years, through words, acts, and omissions, the government in Washington has effectively attributed a restricted meaning to Monroe’s words. But even today there are those who superstitiously interpret it literally. Stupidity, it seems, is unassailable. . . .

1

These words were written by the author to introduce a second edition. The first edition of this book was confiscated and destroyed by the Brazilian government for its monarchic ideas and support of the *ancien régime* against the recently inaugurated Republic.—Ed.

2

Indeed, Positivism was implemented as a guiding doctrine of the state beginning in the nineteenth century in countries such as Mexico, Brazil, and Chile.—Ed.

3

William Burke, *South American Independence, or The Emancipation of South America: The Glory and Interest of England* (London, 1807).

4

[François René, Viscount of] Chateaubriand, *Le congrès de Verone*, chapter XVI.

5

J.M. Samper, *Ensayo sobre las revoluciones políticas y la condición social de las repúblicas hispano-americanas* (Paris, 1861), 195.

6

Von Holst, *Constitutional History of the United States of America*, vol. 1, 420; Thomas Jefferson, *Works*, vol. VII, 315–16.

7

Annual Register of the Year 1819 (London, 1920), 233. [—Ed.]

III.1.3 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 843008

THE AILING CONTINENT

César Zumeta, 1899

Venezuelan writer and statesman César Zumeta (1860–1955) wrote this pamphlet from New York, where he had been exiled since 1884 for opposing the despotic government of President Joaquín Crespo (in office 1884–86; 1892–98). At the cusp of the Spanish-American War—by which the United States gained control of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines—Zumeta was one of the first to warn of a new colonial order imposed by the United States [SEE ALSO PRADO, *A ILUSÃO AMERICANA*, DOCUMENT III.1.2]. The author argues that the Monroe Doctrine marked a turning point when the United States substituted its democratic ideals with the expansionist policies of European monarchies. Moreover, Zumeta advocates for the necessary alliance of Latin nations (metaphorically represented by Romulus and Remus, the mythical founders of Rome) against the “sons of the Leopard,” that is, the Anglo-Saxons. “El continente enfermo” was first published in 1899, without reference to a printer or a publisher. The present translation is based on a 1961 edition, which stems from the original document housed at Zumeta’s archives [César Zumeta, *El continente enfermo. Compilación, prólogo y notas de Rafael Ángel Insausti* (Caracas: Colección “Rescate,” 1961), 19–31].

IS THE INDEPENDENCE OF TROPICAL AMERICAN REPUBLICS IN DANGER?

There are ominous omens to that effect, and the countries that are being threatened do not seem to be prepared to avert the catastrophe. In historical terms, our American era began with the victory at Ayacucho and has now been brought to an end by events in Manila and Santiago [Cuba].

Our independence was proclaimed in 1823–1824 by the victory of our liberating forces and guaranteed by statements addressed to Europe by [Prime Minister George] Canning on behalf of England, and [President James] Monroe [SEE DOCUMENT III.1.1] on behalf of the United States. With the Holy Alliance contained and Europe preoccupied with post-Napoleonic restoration, re-drawing of borders, and successive shifts in its internal balance of power prompted by situations in the East, Italian unification, and Prussian hegemony, our independence was not

threatened by any foreign aggressor as long as the United States rejected the concept of legitimacy conferred by right of conquest.

In 1899, as a result of Manila and Santiago, the United States announced that it would take possession of the Philippines by *right of conquest* and, having thus shattered the democratic tradition that had been one of its greatest moral strengths—perhaps the most honorable feature of the Northern Republic—it took its place among the colonial powers.

The American democratic idea has been replaced by the European monarchical one; and the other nations in the Americas are now at the mercy of the many complex forces that have been unleashed by the new order. The modern version of progress dictates that, in order to sustain their power, the great industrialized nations must find the raw materials their industries need and stimulate the trade required to sell their products. Given that this dual capacity for production and consumption increases in each country according to its standard of civilization, the modern strategy in the quest for markets is to acquire virgin territories in order to, at least theoretically, raise the standard of civilization among those settled on conquered land and exploit the local resources.

Hence the division of Barbarian regions in Africa and the submission of ancient Asian civilizations to colonial rule or to political and financial systems designed to promote an exchange of products. Just as the habit of demarcating spheres of influence in subdued lands was waning, the United States entered the fray—as another significant factor—and declared itself heir, by reason of conquest, to Spain's colonial possessions in Puerto Rico and the Philippines and, by reason of annexation or protectorate, in Cuba.

Once the rest of the world had been divided up, greedy eyes turned to America which, according to [Michael G.] Mulhall, was stricken with *earthquakes and revolutions*. European diplomatic initiatives insisted on annulling or modifying the Monroe Doctrine and on an understanding with the United States in terms of a *modus vivendi* that could coexist with the White House's imperialist policy.

Those negotiations and their complex territorial divisions will affect tropical America, with its shipping canals, great waterways, and quasi-virgin jungle growing in river basins. It is useless to argue about rights when one is dealing with facts. The laws of sovereign countries are ignored except among those with equal power; and since force is a right that is not guaranteed by the laws, the

universally acknowledged authors of these foreign initiatives are ultimately [the weapon makers] Armstrong, Bange, and Krupp.

The doctrine in vogue today could be expressed as follows:

Countries that do not have either the knowledge or the ability to exploit their natural wealth and populate the empty space granted to them by geographical or political chance reduce world production to the tune of their own wasted potential. There is moral justification in a process that allows the most suitable and hardworking to occupy that which poor stewardship renders fallow. The forests belong to the woodcutter; the fields belong to the farmer; the rivers belong to those who develop them and navigate them. It is a reenactment of the ancient struggle between people and races that represent the most advanced forms of progress and people and races that represent the ultimate expression of stagnation and barbarism.

This doctrine is being applied to us because in Europe and North America we are widely perceived as being incapable of developing the lands we possess according to the standards of current civilization. That perception has attracted such deep, widespread support that, according to the latest book on the subject, the discussion is no longer about the option and advisability of plundering us; now the subject is the type of political and administrative shackle by which we are to be bound.

According to [Benjamin] Kidd, “Nations would once dispute the possession of land that was suitable for habitation by the white race. Another great rivalry is now under way to inherit the tropics, not in the sense of taking possession of them—because the world’s most civilized countries have abandoned that idea—but of controlling them according to a specific plan.”¹

It is time to ponder what we must do to preserve our independence.

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Benjamin Kidd, *The Control of the Tropics* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1898).

III.1.4 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 832506

EUROPE AND LATIN AMERICA: CURRENT OPINION AND CONSEQUENCES OF EUROPEAN MALEVOLENCE

Manoel Bomfim, 1905

The following segments—“A opinião corrente” and “Conseqüências da malevolência européia”—are excerpted from the first chapter of Manoel Bomfim’s *A América Latina: Males de Origem* of 1905. Here, Bomfim offers his opinion on the European concept of “South America”: a largely imagined space of vast lands filled with riches suggesting the legends of El Dorado during colonial times and a place harboring an unruly populace since independence. He declares that North American objectives for a continental defense (under the aegis of the Monroe Doctrine) are focused on its “absorption” of Latin America. Furthermore, Bomfim translates the European recognition of this implicit threat as the continental result of a protector/protectorate relationship. Here, as he does elsewhere in *Males de Origem*, the author stresses the “bad reputation” of Latin American nations abroad. The first edition of the book was published in 1906 [(Porto: Livraria Chardon Lello & Irmão)]. As with other excerpts featured in this volume [SEE DOCUMENTS I.3.5 AND I.4.1], this translation is derived from the centennial edition of the book [Manoel Bomfim, *A América Latina: Males de Origem*, prefaces by Darcy Ribeiro, Franklin de Oliveira, and Azevedo Amaral (Rio de Janeiro: Topbooks, 2005), 41–43; 47–51].

CURRENT OPINION

European public opinion knows that Latin America exists. . . . And it knows more: that it is a vast chunk of continent, populated by Spanish peoples, an extremely rich continent, whose populations frequently revolt. These things, however, already appear in a poorly defined void; riches; vast lands; revolutions; and peoples; everything gets confused to create [images of] a legendary land of stories without great enchantment because they lack the prestige of antiquity. Where are these riches? What are they worth? How are these revolutions carried out? Who carries them out? Where do they take place? These are questions that do

not find answers in the faraway obscurity of this single vision: *South America*. . . . That's what we talk about. Even when particular names come up—Peru, Venezuela, Uruguay...—it does not matter where; the image that comes to mind is that of *South America*.

Even if Europe is ignorant of what this piece of the Occident is, it does not forget that it exists; and, in recent times, it has actually given it special attention. It is not given the space and importance consecrated to the Balkans, Macedonia, Asia Minor, Africa, or the Far East, because, in the end, it worries about what already belongs to it. However, the Latin nations of the New World cannot complain of being forgotten. Every incident, even if not of great import, finds some repercussion in the European press. It is true that there are none of those long studies, contextualized and wise, where masters in international affairs say what they know about the political, social, and economic history of the country they are dealing with in order to demonstrate their wisdom. No; as is customary whenever dealing with the *Latin American republics*, scholars and publicists of world politics limit themselves to cultivating judgments—invariable and condemnatory. To hear them, there is no possible salvation for such nationalities. This opinion is profoundly and absolutely deep-rooted in the soul of European governments, sociologists, and economists. As variants of these judgments, they limit themselves to dictating, from time to time, some axiomatic advice; but they dictate from pursed lips, in the tone of a schoolmaster directed at an undisciplined and failing student: "If you listened to me, if you weren't a lazy bum, you would do this and also this and this...; but you are worthless! You will never do anything! You will never know anything! You will never be anything!"

That is the way we are treated and, in the meantime, South America has the reputation of being "the richest continent on the globe," where all the Pactolus rivers run—the El Dorado, lands that contain and have accumulated all the riches, waiting only for dignified, hardworking, and wise men to occupy them to make it all worthwhile. And Europe, who already cannot contain its number of inhabitants and whose greed and rapacity intensify in proportion to the spread of its population, cannot take its eyes off the legendary continent. Condemning the societies that live on it, the spokesmen of current opinion in the Old World cannot manage to hide their feelings about the future that they expect for the South American nations. The more enlightened say it with no qualms; others—those who know how things are done—shroud their thoughts a little. But whoever

wants to read between the lines will find the reflection of this general concept: "It's sad and irritating that, while Europe, wise, civilized, hardworking, and rich, contorts itself along these narrow lands, millions of lazy bums, degenerate, noisy and barbaric creoles claim to be lords of rich and immense territories, granting themselves the *nouveau riche* ostentation of considering themselves nations. It is proven that they are incapable of organizing true nationalities; what Europe has to do is stop its idiotic contemplations and temporizing... "

This is the general sentiment that translated into not only a categorically unfavorable judgment about us, but also into a certain ill will from anyone who sees in today's South American nations an obstacle to the possession and enjoyment of an appetizing richness.¹ Once in a while, this ill will explodes. The suppressed appetites come to light in the form of *démands*, to which formal investment would have already followed were it not for the United States; this continent would already be infinitely more bloody, more barbaric than it currently is.

. . .

CONSEQUENCES OF EUROPEAN MALEVOLENCE

However, there would be a true advantage for Europe to know well, in order to judge with assuredness and justice the political and social conditions and situation of the South American countries. There would be a great advantage for them and, consequently, for humanity and civilization in general, and it would be an advantage for us in particular.

For the countries of South America, this represents almost a question of life or death. In the first place, this universal, condemnatory judgment reflects on us in a very pernicious way. . . . In the second place, if these conditions persist, sooner or later we will be attacked brutally or insidiously in our sovereignties, and, to some extent, the development of these South American societies will be disturbed profoundly; nothing in the world will be able to stop the development on this continent of bloody battles, which would be significantly more fierce and more barbaric than current revolutions. If Europe does not change [its outlook toward us to reflect] feelings of relative equity, and the civilized nations do not decide to conduct their acts according to principles of justice and human solidarity that people individually accept—if such a miracle does not occur—South America,

the Latin American populations, will have the same fate as those of India, Indochina, Africa, the Philippines, etc. [Louis] Guétant proclaims the truth when he affirms that: “The right of persons does not exist except for those who apply it advantageously; they are permitted, however, to traitorously attack the peoples who do not have a deliberative voice in the Congress of The Hague to denounce such infamy.” For now, we are protected by the Monroe Doctrine [SEE DOCUMENT III.1.1] behind the power and richness of the United States; and this is one of the serious inconveniences of Europe’s malevolent and aggressive attitude. [Despite the power of such protections,] the possibility of an attack does not disappear; nothing guarantees us that the great Republic wants to forever play this role of lifeguard and defender of the South American nations. It must be noted that North American public opinion reflects the effects of the judgments and ideas with which Europe condemns us and that the American politicians also consider us: *ungovernable*, almost *useless*. Under these conditions, the Monroe Doctrine figures for them—as far as what is reported in South America—as a platonic, sentimental preoccupation. They keep to it more for national pride perhaps than for any other reason. So, to a practical people interested directly in all of the great international questions of the day, it must seem, in the end, nonsensical to be accepting challenges and taking risks in stubborn battles to protect the life and sovereignty of nations that, deep down, are considered inferior. And it is valid, therefore, to believe that, one day, the great Republic might change its behavior and admit diplomatic combinations that tend toward the hoped-for invasion of Latin America.² The forecast does not change, and it will drag, today or tomorrow, the poor Latin American nations into disturbing even more their social and economic organization, arming themselves as best they can for self-defense. Moreover—even given the United States’s disposition toward helping and protecting us *ab æternum*, we will still end up losing our sovereignty and our status as free peoples. The sovereignty of a people is annulled the moment it has to take shelter in the protection of another. By defending us, North America will fatally absorb us. I believe that this absorption is not in the plans of the American statesmen; but it is a natural consequence of the situation of “protected” and “protector.” In fact, part of our national sovereignty has already disappeared; for Europe, Latin America is already considered the protectorate of the United States. On the occasion of the [first] Peace Conference at The Hague [in 1898], everyone remembers that the South American nations were not invited because the European governments

understood that they were not sufficiently sovereign. Moreover, the interests and opinions of the American peoples were perfectly represented and guaranteed by the United States, which was thus tacitly invited to function as a kind of protector over the rest of America. It is only under these conditions that Europe recognizes the Monroe theory.³

Such is the reality of things.

Can, [I mean,] should the Latin American nationalities resign themselves to this situation? Certainly not. As friendly as the United States—a nation whose development and progress all American peoples see with pleasure and pride—may be to us [and] as large as these feelings of esteem may be, there is no country in Latin America that isn't repelled by the idea of abdicating its sovereignty and being absorbed by North American protection. Putting aside even the natural patriotic biases, there is the incontestable fact that this absorption could not be done without prejudice and damage to our progress, without great disturbances in our social development. I am referring to the condition of the societies that currently exist in South America: if one day the United States has to intervene in their political life, their luck will worsen, [and] they will suffer even more. . . .

Such are the consequences for us of the malevolent reputation that Europe creates about us.

1

There is no exaggeration nor misunderstanding when talking about *ill will* in these terms. It is clearly there. All one has to do is read the European press—any of it—and reflect on its way of dealing with acts by South American nations. Not that long ago, in the Anglo-Germanic-Venezuelan conflict, there were two facts to consider and to judge: the political life of Venezuela—the way in which it, represented by its government, conducts itself—and the actions of the blockading nations.

2

This work was already written when the Argentine government, understanding very well that this Monroe Doctrine, applied and formulated as it was in the great Republic—without any agreement with the other American powers—was more an attack on the sovereignty of those other nations than a guarantee, intervened in the American foreign commerce department. It asked for a reduction of that same doctrine to explicit terms, on the advice of other governments of interested countries. . . . The principles alleged in the cited note are the current principles of international law; nonetheless, the American government responded evasively, recognizing the legitimacy of such interventions and reserving for itself the right to interpret, by itself, the Monroe Doctrine, as most appropriate at the moment, or even to revoke it, if that seemed best.

3

In 1887, the recognized writer Mr. [Ernesto] Quesada already explicitly protested, voicing his apprehensions regarding the subalternity to which the Monroe Doctrine reduces Latin America: "It is indeed a seventy-two-

year-old North American invention with no practical application. People say: *The Américas for the Americans*, coldly adding *North Americans*. Such has been the frank interpretation.” In 1900, during a commemorative speech in Paris, the Argentinean jurist voiced his fears once more, affirming: “A sharp, albeit slow-motion action deployed by the U.S.A. within Iberian American nations is already noticeable: the Monroe Doctrine implies nothing less than the disguised trusteeship of those who consider themselves as superior, due to initiative, riches, and consciousness of their own worth.” *La Nación* itself, an intentionally and carefully circumspect newspaper, recognizes that: “This is a tough one, if considering the protectorate status offered by the U.S.A.” These are *apprehensions*... one might say; but they are generalized apprehensions throughout all of Latin America, inexorably treated by North American sociology as a *sick continent*; apprehensions which only propagate in this way because they are natural.

III.1.5 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 853185

LANDINGS: CULTURE AND HISPANO-AMERICANISM

Samuel Gili Gaya, 1930

Spanish linguist and literary critic Samuel Gili Gaya (1892–1976) writes in this 1930 article that Puerto Rico cannot derive its cultural wealth from Spain or assimilate its cultural influences from Anglo-Saxon civilizations. Rather, he asserts that the core values of Puerto Rico must emerge from the spirit of the island, and he hopes this will bridge oppositions and controversies among Spanish and Anglo-Saxon cultures. Several decades later, Luis Muñoz Marín (1898–1980)—Puerto Rico’s first democratically elected governor (in office 1949–64)—echoed Gili Gaya’s key concept of *bridging* cultures. [SEE DOCUMENT III.1.8]. This translation of “Aterrizajes: Cultura e hispanoamericanismo” is from the original publication in *Revista Índice—Mensuario de Cultura*, a key platform for the Puerto Rican literary vanguard of the 1930s [(San Juan), year 2, no. 15 (June 13, 1930)].

WHEN FUTURE GENERATIONS wish to take the measure of Puerto Rican culture, they will have to focus exclusively on what it possesses that is both substantial and unique to it. [That measure] will surely not consist of the values that Puerto Rico can copy, as if by echo, from Spain; neither will it have to do with what it

can assimilate from the Anglo-Saxon civilization, but rather in what it can create from within its own spirit.

We have heard the often-repeated phrase that Puerto Rico is a bridge between two cultures. Just so, sincere men who come from one or the other extreme of this bridge should compel us to say to the Puerto Ricans that, if their country does not become more than a cultural tollway, then its authentic contribution to the creative spirit of the world will remain quite small. Knowledge, information, and facts come to us from the outside, but culture is born from within.

For this reason the educated man is truly sincere; this is to say that he does not deceive himself. This duty of sincerity to oneself could one day oblige the Puerto Rican people to be somewhat like the *mambises*¹ with regard to the culture of Spain or to opposing the adoption of certain Anglo-Saxon customs. In both cases, their duty is epitomized by [the ancient Greek poet] Pindar's admonition: "Be who you are."

It would thus be flippant and at the same time false to conceive of "meridians of Hispanic-American culture," as it would be to accept the passive and colorless role of a BRIDGE without making an effort to create one's own meridian.

To the good fortune of all, the Hispanic-American civilization is a CULTURE, a lifestyle, a manner of understanding the relationship between man and the world. The young intellectuals of Spain begin to see that our common culture, precisely because it is a CULTURE, looks more to the future than to the past. It is not a matter of crying over the ruins of a former time that cannot and should not return, but rather of listening to the soul of the present, illuminated by the future, by each of the Hispanic-American peoples, and by each of us who shares a common language.

The future will surely bring us unity and diversity. Both traits have flourished and continue to flourish abundantly on the Iberian tree, at once so united and so diverse. Spain has always dwelt in the realm of spirit and so cannot desire a homogeneous America that is docile with regard to its line of thinking, rather [it will prefer] one that grounds her maternal glory in the personality of each one of her children. And for this reason, it is advisable to warn the Hispanic-American and Anglo-American youth that the practice of an obtuse intellectual Monroe-ism would surely break the spirit of America, of all America.

1

The *mambises* were Cuban insurrectionists who rebelled against Spanish colonial domination.—Ed.

III.1.6 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 832583

BOLÍVAR-ISM AND MONROE-ISM: HISPANIC-AMERICANISM AND PAN AMERICANISM

José Vasconcelos, 1934

In the early 1930s, José Vasconcelos was well known throughout Latin America for his ideas on Hispano-American culture, ideas that overtly challenged Anglo objectives. Throughout this text and in other writings, he expresses his interest in preserving Hispanic culture. Vasconcelos seeks the vindication of figures such as Mexican ideologue Lucas Alamán (1792–1853), who was vilified for his cultural conservatism but was an early opponent of both American imperialism and the Monroe Doctrine. Nevertheless, the text also reveals Vasconcelos's own cultural conservatism, for he argues that the continent should be closely dependent on Catholicism and Spanish cultural values that are, according to him, the cornerstones of an American culture *independent* from that of the United States. Moreover, the fiercely Catholic statesman freely attacks the personality of—and some of the liberal political and social reforms implemented by—Benito Juárez (1806–1872), Mexico's first native-born president. Indeed, despite the author's antagonism, these “Leyes de Reforma” eventually reduced the stronghold of the Roman Catholic Church over Mexican politics. Originally published in Chile [José Vasconcelos, “Hispanoamericanismo y Panamericanismo,” *Bolivarismo y Monroísmo: Temas Iberoamericanos* (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones Ercilla, 1934)], this translation is based on the book's third edition [(Santiago de Chile, Ediciones Ercilla, 1937), 9–21].

HISPANIC-AMERICANISM AND PAN AMERICANISM

I.

By Bolívar-ism we mean the Hispanic-American ideal of creating a federation that includes every country with a Spanish culture. By Monroe-ism we mean the Anglo-Saxon ideal of using Pan Americanism to bring the twenty Hispanic nations into the Empire of the North.

[Simón] Bolívar proposed the creation of an inter-Hispanic-American organization at the Congress of Panama. His ideas, however, were not very well defined, since he allowed a representation of delegates to the Congress from North

America, and there was even some talk of a vague union “between all the countries with republican governments” as a counterweight to the Holy Alliance, the refuge of monarchists. Race was not a significant factor at the time when England was replacing Spain in terms of paternal influence. A community based on language excited no enthusiasm, possibly because the threat was not yet apparent; English had not yet become the language of global conquest. And, finally, the religious problem had not yet arisen, because all new countries, in their constitutions, had guaranteed a position of privilege for the Catholic Church. Nobody foresaw the influx of Protestant missionaries, who sowed the seeds of discord among Christians when they invaded our countries, despite the fact that there are so many countries in Asia and Africa that would benefit from any aspect of Christianity.

Nobody at that time clearly understood the problems that were being created by a liberation movement that, in fact, was not entirely of our doing; it was also the result of the crisis in Europe and of the defeat of Spain both at home on the Iberian peninsula and in the Americas, where the denouement was helped along by patriot armies and British ships; not to mention the High Command of the Empire itself that had become our bitter enemy. On the Hispanic side, the confusion could not have been greater; whereas the British and North American response was clear and perfect. First of all, [Prime Minister George] Canning prohibited Spain from interfering in the New World so that, since we had no merchant navy of our own, all trade was ipso facto to be carried by the British fleet. [John Quincy] Adams immediately snatched the prize from [Prime Minister George] Canning by announcing the concept of “America for the Americans”—though it was clearly understood that the Americans were divided into groups of younger brothers under the exclusive care of an older brother who would serve as regent.

I do not know what Bolívar thought of Canning’s doctrine. To my knowledge, there appears to be no record of his disapproval, or even a sense of the risks involved in avoiding the expression of any specific objection to it. The fact is that nobody else possessed Bolívar’s ability to envision the partial destiny of our countries. What I do think has been satisfactorily established, but is not very well known, is that it was Lucas Alamán, from Mexico, who dealt the first blow to the Monroe Doctrine. . . . Ninety percent of my readers are going to say, “What are you talking about?” And they are right. I myself am an educated Mexican, yet

I only came to understand who Alamán really was in my later years as a result of much independent thought. Prior to that I, and most of my fellow Mexicans, considered Alamán to be a reactionary, almost a traitor, and an enemy of our people. No wonder the Juárez school and the Pan American school have been poisoning people's minds throughout this long period of darkness and explicit or tacit betrayal.

But let us not get ahead of ourselves. Let us not judge; let us lay out the facts in all their unvarnished, brutal, shameful nakedness.

II.

Lucas Alamán was the Minister of Foreign Relations in the first cabinet appointed by a man who had given himself the eccentric name of "Guadalupe Victoria." He called himself Guadalupe in honor of the Patron Saint of Mexico, the Virgin of Guadalupe; and Victoria in honor of the victory of the independence movement. [In fact] the independence movement in Mexico had been defeated and the rebels executed, but it was then consummated by a very strange coup d'état that, had it not led to the establishment of our nation, would have been universally condemned as an act of "vile, unmitigated treason." What happened was that one fine day the last Viceroy, [Juan] O'Donojú, following orders from I don't know which [Masonic] lodge, called on [Augustín de] Iturbide, who commanded royalist forces and who had distinguished himself for his hatred of the insurgents. Between them, these two proclaimed Mexican independence, created a flag, and, to give the conspiracy an image of national unity, invited the old guerrilla warrior Don Vicente Guerrero to join their ranks. O'Donojú immediately stepped aside and Iturbide proclaimed himself Emperor. Shortly thereafter his support evaporated, which led to the rise of several *caudillos* and subsequent leadership disputes. About 1833, however, a man of clear conscience emerged from among the staff of one of these bewildered chieftains; his name was Alamán. The first thing Alamán did to reestablish Mexico's relations with the outside world was to resume the process that had been interrupted in Panama by convening the Congress of Tacubaya. This Congress is not mentioned in the elementary history that is taught in Latin American schools, despite the fact that it was attended by representatives from every Iberian-American country and avoided the purely romantic ideas proposed in Panama, arriving instead at highly innovative and

transcendental decisions. This was doubtless its downfall, because after that Monroe-ism politely took note of our words but cruelly interfered with our deeds.

The Congress of Tacubaya established what was most important for the future of Iberian-America, but those very initiatives were doomed before the meeting was over. The most important accomplishment ever achieved by any of our statesmen was the Latin American Customs League that Alamán got approved by the Congress of Tacubaya. It was unanimously signed by the delegates in spite of opposition from the North American Minister and its State Department, which was presided over at that time by the famous [John Quincy] Adams, a worthy rival for Alamán. Adams was in turn represented by the famous [Joel Roberts] Poinsett, who had traveled extensively throughout the Americas, learning about our misfortunes and our local conditions. As a result, he was aware that Latin American *caudillos* were opposed to unification, preferring the divisions that allowed them greater control over their fiefdoms. In spite of these pressures, Alamán was able to take advantage of the influence that Mexico then wielded as the most powerful and educated country in the Hispanic family of nations. It therefore became necessary to destroy Alamán. Adams sent his delegate to accomplish that mission by opposing the resolutions adopted by the Congress.

It was unfair, claimed the delegate, to leave the United States out of the economic consortium created by the Latin American Customs League. The United States was, after all, also a “republic.” But this Bolivarian argument carried no weight with Alamán. Adams [who was instrumental in shaping the Monroe Doctrine as Monroe’s Secretary of State] insisted that, while the Monroe Doctrine prevented Europeans from sharing in the wealth of the Americas, it benefited American countries and that the United States should therefore be a member of the League. But Alamán felt no sense of obligation to Monroe-ism. He was not a member of the generation that allied itself with England to vanquish Spain. Alamán believed in the race, the language, and the religious community of the Americas. In short, Alamán provided Bolívar-ism with the content it lacked and fearlessly dismissed Monroe-ism. Alamán was the first to introduce Hispanic-Americanism in clear, well-defined opposition to the hybrid ambitions of Pan Americanism.

Alamán managed to convince the delegates from Spanish-American countries who, without exception, voted in favor of his plan. Alamán succeeded at the Congress thanks to the clarity of his arguments. But Adams, though beaten,

was not prepared to give up. Poinsett, who represented Adams, then set about organizing a campaign in Mexico among the lodges devoted to the Anglo-Saxon ritual [from York and Scotland]. Were these lodges perhaps opposed to the ones that had helped achieve independence?

The fact is that Poinsett's lodges overthrew the government that Alamán served. The first "liberal" revolution was successful, and Alamán not only lost his position in the government, he was also marginalized from the decision-making process and lost the support of his fellow citizens. He was persecuted by the government and slandered by pro-Monroe propaganda.

Pan Americanism thus chalked up its first Mexican victory. Hispanic-Americanism fell from grace along with Alamán and, in spite of a few more or less sincere attempts to revive it, the movement remained dormant for the rest of the century.

...

We will now, however, take a closer look at a man who, perhaps unknowingly, was the embodiment of Pan Americanism even before this movement got around to articulating its goals at congressional and institutional forums. He is widely considered to be the key figure in Mexican history and is also the distinguished role model for quite a few "Latin Americas" across the continent. A bust of this man sits in a place of honor in the Pan American temple in Washington, and his likeness is everywhere in his native land where, by law, his statue must be erected in every public plaza. I am referring to Benito Juárez. No one ever achieved more widespread notoriety. No one did more damage to Mexico nor caused greater confusion in the Americas. The Aztec ax reappeared in his hands to consummate the useless sacrifice of Maximilian. There is nonetheless a persistent chorus of praise that insists on proclaiming his greatness.

Juárez stood at the heart of an epic saga in which Mexico's soul was adrift and sinking, in spite of the glitzy trappings of victory in which the country had managed to wrap itself. According to the official version of history, France, the imperialist power, and Austria, a country of noble ancestry—with the Pope's involvement behind the scenes—conspired with Mexican traitors to steal Mexico's liberty and assets. Whereupon Benito Juárez, a humble but tenacious Indian, took command of the country and led its people to a grand finale of justice and the rule of law. To this day, this is still the Pan American version of events, and

four or five generations of Mexicans have been raised to believe it. If it were not for Mexico's current disastrous situation, many Mexicans might never have begun to see things differently. Let us raise this torch of understanding that was so difficult to light.

We should now devote a few words to the myth of Juárez. . . .

Let us take a deeper look at the double leitmotif of life in the New World. Ever since gaining our independence from Spain we have been engaged in a lengthy, brutal conflict that we hint at with references to betrayal, deception, or ingenuousness. Hispanic-Americanism and Pan Americanism; Bolívar-ism and Monroe-ism. The conflict has driven countries in the New World to lash out at each other and tear each other apart.

Prior to Juárez and shortly after the fall of Alamán's Mexico, we were forced to endure one of those characters thrown up by the forces of evil that are swept along by murky causes somehow destined for success. I am referring to the dastardly [Antonio López de] Santa Ana who, with his ferocious tyranny, his cruel megalomania, and his lust for cockfighting, was the despair of a nation that was still in the throes of consolidation. The people's anguish was such that entire provinces, like Texas, welcomed a new conqueror that liberated them from the outlaws who governed them! We should remember the case of [Lorenzo de] Zavala, the first Pan American associated with [Sam] Houston in the Texas Independence movement and his bilingual conspiracy on behalf of Monroe-ism to conquer Texas. The result was the gutting of Mexican-Spanish culture in Texas and the relegation of non-Anglo-Saxon customs to the working classes. New Mexico, on the other hand, though also absorbed, did not yield to Pan Americanism. Its population, which was more united and patriotic, came to an agreement with the invader and set its own conditions: respect for the language, respect for the Catholic religion; no Methodist missions that neo-Mexicans were forced to join. They wanted nothing to do with Pan Americanism and demanded respect for their essential Hispanic heritage, even in defeat.

. . .

Let us ignore these islands in the continental tide and focus on Mexico, which is the model and the harbinger for the Monroe Doctrine's goals for the rest of the continent. Santa Ana destroyed Mexico. To us, he is like [Juan Manuel Ortiz de] Rosas in Argentina, and like [José Gaspar Rodríguez de] Francia in Paraguay.

Like them, he represented a pseudo-nationalism based entirely on arrogance, with no revitalizing spiritual content. Santa Ana cost us half our territory and, what is even worse, he cost us our Reform.

In Argentina, Rosas was not only responsible for a long delay in the country's progress; he also interrupted the influence of foreign, Pan American, pro-Monroe trends that were being developed with no apparent apprehensions by men as eminently capable as [Domingo Faustino] Sarmiento. The unfavorable interpretation of Spain's colonizing role in the Americas that sought to justify shedding Spanish influence, actually finds in Sarmiento a standard bearer that this movement does not deserve. The same movement promoted the meddling influence of the Monroe Doctrine, although in Argentina's case it was still the Canning Doctrine. In other words, British intervention in Argentine life through capital investment and an anti-Spanish attitude since they were unable to accomplish their goals by force after being defeated by the patriots under the leadership of [Viceroy Santiago de] Liniers.

...

For more details on Pan American history the reader is encouraged to consult the masterly works by Mexico's Carlos Pereyra¹ who, though never thanked for his efforts, has done more to vindicate Spanish influence in the Americas than all the Institutes financed by official grants. He has also done more than many statesmen to awaken our Hispanic-American sense of identity. We would especially recommend his *Breve Historia de Hispanoamérica* [Brief History of Hispanic America], which portrays the Monroe Doctrine as a snake wrapped around the lethargic body of our continent. Making no claim whatsoever to a learned command of history, we confine ourselves to extracting well-known, elementary facts and reviewing conclusions that seem alarming and that therefore might stimulate the kind of action required to save us.

III.

Juárez is the main hero of Pan Americanism. He represents the Anglo-Saxon idea in the Hispanic mind. He was not actually Hispanic other than as a result of the influence of his environment. He had no European blood in his veins. He owed his education to a mestizo priest and did his schooling at the seminary in

Oaxaca, a thoroughly Spanish institution. Pan Americanism appealed to his subconscious anger as an Indian who could never forgive the Spanish. When Juárez took a wife, the instinct of racial purity that began with Malinche—the call of the flesh—prompted him to marry a woman of Iberian descent who was almost white. . . . And his program implicitly endorsed entrusting the country's soul to Pan Americanism. Perhaps, deep within themselves, men like Juárez had no clear concept of what they were doing when they said, as he did, "Let us replace the backward Catholicism of Spain with the modern Protestantism of the North Americans." They were the playthings of a political force whose power they did not understand, and there is no basis for the love expressed for [Sebastián] Lerdo de Tejada, Juárez, and [Melchor] Ocampo. They were unaware of the shadowy side of the whirlwind that swept them along. Because of them, and in spite of them, the country paid the price for having allowed a foreign ambassador—the obscure Poinsett—to deprive Mexican politics of the only able statesman produced by our people in the early days of our national existence. No country produces dozens of people like Alamán, endowed with the genius required to save them. And it is demonstrably true that countries are most successful when they commit to being governed by their best and brightest. Disaster awaits countries that, on the other hand, exclude capable men from government and replace them with Napoleonic types or common shysters. The reformers—the group that Juárez brought with him—were simply no good. . . . Not sure exactly what they were doing, Juárez and his group advocated accepting the Monroe Doctrine; the conservatives, meanwhile, supported by a selfish clergy and fueled by desperation, tried to resist the moral invasion of an enemy that had already devoured half our territory. The conservatives lost due to their characteristic, incorrigible contempt for the interests of the masses and because the liberals yielded unconditionally to the "Yankees" in their desire to win. In fact Mexico was, in mid-century, a battleground between two imperial ideas: the Latin idea and the Anglo-Saxon idea; Catholicism and Protestantism. Alamán versus Adams, although the men themselves were no longer involved. But the memory, the doctrine, and Alamán's *Zollverein* [united customs initiative] were an inspiration for the pro-Mexico movement that did not find what it was seeking in either of the other alternatives. The liberals, who had no national doctrine of their own, were resigned to borrowing one, adopting the models proposed by Washington, Canning, Franklin, and even Adams, the father of Pan Americanism. Juárez was defeated, with no way out, in the northern town

near El Paso that now bears his name: an obscure border village that today's Pan Americans have converted into a gambling den. . . .

Unfortunately, we Mexican expatriates have always ended up in the United States. Once there, we lose our moral independence and sometimes our Mexican point of view. Among the more clear-headed and honest there is a genuine desire to introduce the kind of freedom we remember from the days when democracy was a functioning reality in the United States. The fact is that moral conquest travels ahead of material invasions, and northern statesmen no longer have to make any great effort to impose their politics on the South, since they already have the misguided support of refugees who will control the country tomorrow. Juárez had been in New Orleans and now waited in El Paso.

As soon as the United States recovered from the Civil War, its first order of international business was to demand that France withdraw the military contingent the French had sent to Mexico to support Maximilian. France decided to abandon its Mexican adventure rather than cause a rift with the United States on the eve of the conflict with Germany (this was during the campaigns of the seventies), and Napoleon III ordered the evacuation of his troops. . . .

This move was exactly what Washington wanted; instead of recognizing the de facto government once the meddlesome French troops had been withdrawn, the United States took advantage of the situation to send Juárez in again, well provided with all manner of resources. Once Juárez had taken command of the government, his policies showed him to be a grateful man and, furthermore, one who was completely ensnared in the nets of the country's traditional enemy.

. . .

1

Carlos Pereyra (1871–1942), who lived in Spain for many years, wrote countless works and was the director of the Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo Institute, where he published the *Revista de Indias*. His main books are: *La obra de España en América*, *La conquista de las rutas oceánicas*, *La huella de los conquistadores*, *Historia de la América española*, *Breve historia de América*, *Hernán Cortés y la epopeya de Anáhuac*, *Francisco Pizarro*, and *El Mito Monroe en encendida defensa de la hispanidad*.

III.1.7 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 807793

THE LATIN AMERICAN ESSAYS: NEWTON FREITAS**Mário de Andrade, 1944**

This text by Mário de Andrade, author of the early experimental novel *Macunaíma* (1928), is the preface to *Ensaíes americanos*, a book by the Buenos Aires-based Brazilian writer and journalist Newton Freitas (1906–1996). A staunch Latin Americanist who dismantled many prevailing Brazilian biases asserting the “uniqueness” of Brazil, Freitas sought political asylum in Argentina in 1938 at the onset of Getúlio Vargas’s repressive Estado Novo (1937–45). Freitas first introduced de Andrade and his work to the intellectual circles of Buenos Aires. Like many of their modernist colleagues, de Andrade and Freitas opposed Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s “Good Neighbor Policy” (in force from approximately 1933 to 1945) and—departing from Brazil’s official position—they both also defended Paraguay’s sovereignty. This text, the translation of which is based on the original edition of *Ensaíes americanos* [(Rio de Janeiro: Zélio Valverde Editor, 1945), 197–200], is an adaptation of the article “Um sul-americano,” which de Andrade had published in *Diário de S. Paulo* the previous year (January 8, 1944). Both texts are identical except for the first paragraph, which the author completely rewrote for the version published in *Ensaíes americanos*.

. . .

I CANNOT FIND A MORE ACCURATE WORD to describe the creativity of Newton Freitas’s critiques and his innermost nature than one that is seldom used authentically: affection. The secret and most subtle originality of these critical essays render the book’s seductive charm. Newton Freitas is very devoted [to his writing]! At times it could be said that he is not sufficiently devoted, in such a way that his admirations crystallize into less profound appeal. And this is admirable; but with those he prefers and considers superior, Newton Freitas never resigns himself to the hollow and always reductive mirror of acute intellectual reverence, nor does he become intoxicated with distortive love.

. . .

Hence his ongoing impatience with aggressive forms of passion, demagoguery, pragmatism, or “societal” art: an impatience with which I have never been able to agree. This causes his disappointment with Chile, despite the luminescent grandeur of Pablo Neruda and the incomparable Gabriela Mistral. Nevertheless [Freitas] achieves something remarkable approaching [Brazilian art critic] Sérgio Milliet and [Argentinean writer] Eduardo Mallea, and an even more delicate Argentinean-ization of G.H. Hudson, which is one of the most accomplished studies in the book. Among them all, the two best are, in my view, “Paraguai” and “Eterno” [Paraguay and The Eternal] and that stupendous essay on [Afonso Henrique] Lima Barreto; they are uniquely original and of a profound understanding; yet his esteem does not [cause him to] shrink from the truth, so much so that the study almost distresses us. There is no false compassion or luster. It is gorgeous.

Due to the intrinsic nature of Newton Freitas’s criticism, the benefit we receive from it is not merely spiritual. There is more. Putting aside any theories and preliminary intentions, there is in Freitas an actuality, an affectionate truth, a [Latin] American identity that imbues this book—the most profound of all his books—as well as all his work, his background, [and] his entire life. Here, he overcame the tumultuous political era of his youth.

I have spoken of that quality: Newton Freitas’s capacity for originality that makes him so unique and exemplary in the [Latin] American intellectual milieu. It existed independent of any theory or preliminary intention. For me, this is the great success of the Argentinean activism [promoted by] Newton Freitas, and of his works on Brazil that were published there, especially *Ensaíes americanos* [Latin American Essays]. In all this, there is a free man—one impossible to summarize—who is still very much alive. He is incapable of concealing differences or of replacing them with niceties because he ignores, or better yet, transcends continental doctrines [and] diplomatic motives. In all this, there is a man who is truly alive, freely putting aside all that is not essential. It is for these [reasons] that Newton Freitas—in this book in particular—lacks even a hint of “interchangeability” theory;¹ moreover, he does not smother us with any of those tiresome commemorative preliminaries.

My friends, have your eyes ever been affronted by a lot of pompous fuss over interchangeability? Have your lips ever been saturated by the synthetic sweetness of “good neighbors”? In a supreme delusion of misunderstanding,

indeed, it would be extreme arrogance to ignore psychological traits and differences; complexities are diminished and the inner self is trampled upon. In coining the term “good neighbor” (a term that should never be uttered), the most aggressive form of “exchange” is achieved. For being tough and pitiless, such grotesque hubris could not foresee that this new character—[Pan Americanism,] though having been born of a possible ideal and goodwill—was at the same time a mere mask. . . .

How tragic, my friends, is the pigeonholed world in which we live. . . . Indeed, we have just arrived in an American manner to this moment of friendly conviviality. We will perhaps experience an encounter of love in this dense wood. With no theories, with no exchanges, we already began to feel that mutual knowledge was needed, because curiosity is born of no doctrine whatsoever and due to its predisposition for that knowledge. The shameful notion of the good neighbor explodes in a grisly manner and builds a stronghold so fortified that it alienates your closest neighbors for being miles away in terms of both understanding and interests. Thus, our human fulfillment is obviated.

Instead of practicing a good neighbor [policy], we need to be simply neighbors. . . . In any society, to be solely neighbors involves solidarity and collaboration. Though this would be scandalous, it seems that to be neighbors would require that principles be put aside so that the neighborhood might sleep peacefully. It would be preferable to practice the “good neighbor” [policy]—the policy promoted in a grand show of generosity—by using the telephone or sharing recipes for sweets. These sweets are made in a mold, invitations are made by telephone, and, in a single night lacking in spontaneity, people dance the fandango of interchangeability. But this is frighteningly tragic, my friends...! “And here we are the Latin Americans of purest race!” bellow today’s Hispanists by means of the corn, the llama, and *macumba* [voodoo]. Do you buy this attempt to disguise Fascism through the beating of drums and castanets? It is a horror, and in an instant the political entourage of ideas warp any sort of human sympathy into a shadow; likewise, nascent love is defeated by means of a premature divorce.

Newton Freitas is incapable of dancing this fandango. If we attempt to follow his line of thinking, we see that there is nothing doctrinaire in the life of this South American man. [I stress,] South American. Only a Brazilian could dwell within this spirit of Hispanic Americanism. In his study of [Peruvian writer] Luis

Alberto Sánchez, Newton Freitas becomes impatient about the isolation of our Latin America, subtly hinting at the unexpected problem of mutual influences.

The gist of what is South America makes pitiful the human situation of Brazil. We are not alone because people contemplate us a great deal. But the worst part is that we are confined. Disregarded is a feeling that sweeps across the heart very strongly. I have never been afraid of a hypothetical grandeur or annoyed about a nonexistent superiority. Instead, only our differences prevail. There is no doubt that in addition to our Hispanic heritage—so united and quite superior—we also inherited a share of that cat/dog mentality, making enemies of Spain and Portugal. This is because [Latin American countries] are many, and we are only one. That is our curse. However, do not the land, different climates, and the requirements of our continent, imply [the need] to forget that shameful heritage. . . ? The fullest destiny of humanity can be realized only through the glory of living simply; that means, without doctrinaire exchanges, without the phoniness of good neighbor rituals, without the Monroe Doctrine [SEE DOCUMENT III.1.1], [moreover,] without fascist-like Hispanic-ness.

It is this sense that I contemplate the admirable example of Newton Freitas. Indeed, he is purely a South American who by necessity lives within [the spirit] of South Americanism. It is enough to observe his *Ensaíes americanos* through the useful and free manner in which he strives to capture indigenous Brazil within the Spanish language. . . .

1

Mário de Andrade stresses his disagreement with Pan Americanism, objecting to the idea of gathering the continent together en bloc. This concept that was intensively promoted during World War II by what he calls the “*teoria do intercâmbio*” (theory of interchange).—Ed.

III.1.8 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1055544

THE PUERTO RICAN PERSONALITY IN THE COMMONWEALTH

Luis Muñoz Marín, 1953

Luis Muñoz Marín, the first democratically elected governor of Puerto Rico, delivered this speech to the General Assembly of the Association of Teachers on December 29, 1953. He urged the assembly of educators to adopt as its chief mission the dissemination of Puerto Rican culture grounded in Spanish language and Hispanic traditions, and he emphasized the great importance of this project and how culture could improve the lives of Puerto Ricans. Puerto Rican culture is special, he explains, because of the island's position as a bridge between the United States and the rest of the Americas. Muñoz Marín describes the Caribbean island as a dynamic, energetic land, and his countrymen as sensitive citizens. A poet and journalist who became a politician, Muñoz Marín helped found the PPD (Popular Democratic Party) of Puerto Rico in 1938. In 1949, he was elected governor and held office consecutively until 1964. During his administration, he also drafted Puerto Rico's constitution of 1952, which is still in force, and he thereby became the founding father of the U.S. Commonwealth now known as the Estado Libre Asociado (or the E.L.A., the Associated Free State). This translation is from the original pamphlet distributed by the Puerto Rican government on the day of the assembly [Luis Muñoz Marín, "*La personalidad puertorriqueña en el Estado Libre Asociado*," folleto distribuido por el ELA durante el discurso pronunciado por el Gobernador de Puerto Rico, Hon. Luís Muñoz Marín, en la Asamblea General de la Asociación de Maestros, el martes 29 de diciembre de 1953 (San Juan de Puerto Rico; official publication, 1953), 3–14].

THERE COULD BE NO BETTER TIME OR PLACE than this great assembly of teachers during the Commonwealth's second year of existence to express some ideas on how we might expect Puerto Rican culture to evolve. I am not referring to culture in a strictly literary, scientific, or artistic context but in the broader sense that includes all the attitudes, habits, and values to be found in a human community. Though this culture should be everyone's concern, no group of men and women have a greater opportunity and responsibility to influence it than you do. There

is no better time than now. I believe we are on the verge of a moment in history when—if we do not deliberately take control of our cultural process by examining it and asking ourselves what it should be—we could lose our Puerto Rican identity in endless distractions that make little sense. And when a nation loses its identity it loses its life, even though it may continue to exist and multiply and improve its skills and knowledge. I think the life of a nation's persona should be protected just as a man's life is protected. When a nation's persona dies, something of value is lost. It is a loss to a nation's sense of self. It is a loss to the wider human community in which it is involved. In Puerto Rico's case the loss, other than to the country's self-esteem, would affect its contribution to the American Union as a Latino country, as a cultural border zone, and as a bridge to understanding and goodwill in relations between the Americas.

We are deeply concerned by this matter. How are we to decide upon a definition of the Puerto Rican man? This is not the same as defining his political status. Some might feel inexplicably unwilling to be involved with something of such importance if they confuse it with the issue of political status. That would not be a helpful reaction because this question of the particular culture we want demands an extremely open-minded attitude if it is to be handled well. Before going any further, and since the subject involves the cultural relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States—including what is and has been worth adapting from that great culture, and what *is not* and *shall not* be worth adapting—please allow me to say the following:

I believe very sincerely in our association with the United States and am fully aware that I enjoy solid, overwhelming support in that regard from the Puerto Rican people. I believe in it because I believe in the great human dignity and spiritual values that are, in many ways, embodied by the United States at this point in human history. The United States naturally has defects mingled with its virtues; it has a very superficial understanding of life but has depth in other areas. I also believe in this association because it is our country's best hope for accomplishing our fundamental goal of eliminating extreme poverty among our people. Above all, I believe in our United States citizenship and the implicit allegiance that we have voluntarily merged with our allegiance to Puerto Rico, which we carry in our veins and in our laws. I also believe in the profound spiritual nature of the Puerto Rican people. I am confident that my feelings on this matter are shared by a vast majority of Puerto Ricans.

If that allegiance to our United States citizenship were perceived as subordination, if it meant feeling uncomfortable about questioning the easy cultural assimilation of language and customs and spirit—that is, questioning how a Puerto Rican should act as a Puerto Rican—, then yes, political status would be inextricably part of Puerto Rico’s cultural aspirations. But what kind of freedom would there be in a political status that made one feel awkward and anxious about being Puerto Rican?

I do not see it that way. I do not think any Puerto Rican should see it that way. That would be a colonial perspective, which would prompt renewed discussion on the issue of status (in highly emotional terms), when the people have already decided that the issue has been settled by the Commonwealth’s dynamic ability to grow in its own way within its association with the United States, which is closest when it is most free.

I believe that, while we clearly express our allegiance to our United States citizenship, which is sincerely meant in terms of our affection as well as our responsibilities, no one should be surprised when Puerto Ricans express their thoughts on the cultural values that make their lives more satisfying, add meaning to their contribution to the American Union, and provide depth to their efforts to promote better understanding of Latin American language, views on life, and sense of self—all much needed throughout the continent. Our allegiance is one of free men. It is the allegiance of free Puerto Ricans! Not free men from somewhere else, of some other race, who speak a different language, but specifically and unmistakably free Puerto Ricans. This is not the allegiance of subjugated colonials! Though it is an allegiance of equal countries, it is not one of similar countries. It is an allegiance of equals who are different—which is more sincere than a colonial version, and no less sincere than an allegiance between similar nations. It is the only one that, under our particular circumstances, allows Puerto Ricans to honor our United States citizenship with all the moral commitment that it deserves. A colonial allegiance would dishonor the word. An allegiance among similar countries is founded on historical conditions that, in our case, simply do not exist.

The problems of *our* culture should not, therefore, be confused with the issue of political status. Our country is not suggesting that we modify our status, although we are always interested in expanding the situation that was established

by your votes and based upon its potential for improvement. By its very nature, this expansion would lead to a situation in which the closeness of the relationship would be in direct proportion to the level of freedom involved. An apparent curtailment of freedom is the only thing that could weaken the association.

My support for the Puerto Rican way of life should not be misconstrued to mean that I would like it to remain static. It is not static and should not be so. I do not advocate a nostalgic yearning for the good old days of the nineteenth century. It is fine to remember them and love them dearly, but not to miss them inappropriately! I'm talking about Puerto Ricans becoming more informed and aware and preparing themselves to live in the present and in the future in accordance with their native Puerto Rican genius. A nation will become static if it rests on its laurels and does not change. Nations can also become static if their inertia allows their culture to be influenced by customs that nobody is deliberately trying to impose and that are not at all necessary. Dynamic nations trust their natural genius to adopt great and worthy customs from other cultures and adapt them in their own, positive way. Creative nations use their own originality to develop superior ways of life and cultures. Neither static and nostalgic for the past, nor inert and servile in the present, but imbued with an energetic, humble sense of self—that, in my opinion, is how we should imagine and create the Puerto Rican man.

Culture should be able to adopt and reject. It should not yield to inertia. It is not a sign of inferiority for a culture to adopt valuable things that it does not possess, and it does not depersonalize a culture to do so. Those who decide that a foreign institution is better than theirs and deliberately adapt it to their cultural heritage are not guilty of inferiority but are demonstrating good sense and self-confidence; whereas those who allow their culture to be overrun with artificial features and are proud of them are guilty of a lack of self-assurance.

How should we define a Puerto Rican? How should we picture him in a dream? I don't use the concept of dreaming to imply a sentimental form of vagueness, but to identify one of the great forces in life.

Let us consider the facts about this Puerto Rican in our dream. What are his financial goals? Sources indicate a minimum of two thousand dollars per year per family. This would include a home of a certain basic quality; it would include a high minimum level of education, health, and recreational facilities. It

means intense industrialization, demanding greater production from the land, and making a little more land available where possible. It means re-education in the area of business procedures. It means re-education in terms of work-related customs and habits. We do not dream of a utopia of abundant riches—since they are not very necessary in a culture that values serenity—but we do dream of abolishing extreme poverty and eliminating the lack of resources that chokes and numbs, or chokes and frustrates our people.

We can clearly see that there will have to be certain cultural changes if we want to achieve these economic objectives; that is, we will have to change our way of doing and seeing. We need greater discipline in our working environment, which should be guided more by understanding and custom than by oversight; in our use of the land we must be willing to consider knowledge instead of just tradition; and we need to change our commercial distribution systems for items of general consumption in order to lower their cost as far as the original purchase price will allow.

Although there is undoubtedly satisfaction to be gained by doing those things well, these are cultural changes that serve our economic objective. Some are already in progress; they are all urgent. But the economy itself should serve the nation's lifestyle; it should influence how a nation wants to live. . . .

As part of its cultural relationship with the United States, Puerto Rico has adapted a number of very valuable customs, such as an excellent political democracy, superior economic, mechanical, and administrative systems, and a wider interpretation of a woman's role in society that, through the dramatic mid-century upheavals and uncertainties have in some ways strengthened our natural Hispanic sense of human equality.

This is deliberate adopting and adapting; it is what it means to belong to our great Western civilization, whose internal components give and take and mutually enrich each other. On the other hand, which parts of United States culture are not compatible with the idea of the Puerto Rican man that we have proposed? I would say that the main ones are a certain confusion about whether or not economic activities are an end in themselves and consumer habits that can make even a very rich country feel poor or insufficiently rich. These of course cannot be justified in a poor nation where the acceleration of economic production might correct injustices or might make them academic; though that may be true or nearly true over there, it is not so in a place like Puerto Rico. . . .

Puerto Rican culture evidently has an inactive side, a facet we might call lazy, that permits an imposition of habits that no one is even attempting to impose; it allows others to attach habits to it with pins and attach attitudes with flour and water paste; in other words, it tolerates being depersonalized. Through a number of unnecessary imitations, the culture absorbs many trivial customs whose only value might be to indicate an alarming weakness that could mean that no Puerto Rican can ever achieve his dream of himself. This might cause his personality to become warped.

One example is the extraordinary, irrational use of English names in countless situations that have no practical justification in a Spanish-speaking country. Thus we see “Auto Supplies,” “Beauty Parlors,” “Drugs,” “Barber Shops,” names of residential developments and theaters, and many advertisements with text in both English and Spanish. Thus people now use the word “drink” when they mean what in good Spanish is “*trago*” or “*copa*,” and what in good Puerto Rican is referred to by very expressive names, such as “*palo*” [stick], “*matracazo*” [wallop], and “*juanetazo*” [knockout]. Obviously, what we call things like this is not intrinsically important; that is, it is not very important in and of itself. What is important is the attitude of a recessive culture, of a cultural inertia that seems to suggest that it is used far too often. In a town on the Island I saw a place with a sign that said, “Agapito’s Bar.” Why did you do that, Agapito? Surely there are no English-speaking customers on that street in that little town from one year to the next! Do you feel better saying it in a language other than your own? If you are disdainful of your language, aren’t you also being a little disdainful of yourself? And if that attitude is prevalent among thousands and thousands of people who, without thinking, do as Agapito did, where will this nation find the spirit to continue providing a respectable culture for itself that it can also contribute to the United States and to the Americas, and to the Western world? . . .

Puerto Rico cannot be the voice of the United States’s anti-colonial spirit if, through no fault of the latter’s, we speak to Latin America in *papiamento* [creole]—that is, in a superficial, impoverished mixture of languages.

Obviously, none of what I am saying here is applicable to Puerto Ricans who emigrate and make their home anywhere in the United States. The United States was created by people just like them, who adapted to the culture they found there and contributed to it and enriched it. Puerto Ricans who settle in the United States have to adapt to their new community just as their Irish, Polish, Italian,

and Scandinavian predecessors once did. I am talking about Puerto Rican culture in Puerto Rico, which has so moved the many distinguished co-citizens from the North who have chosen to live among us that they have adapted to it.

Language is the spirit's way of breathing. A nation's language is created by generations of speakers in that nation and the one it came from. Language is the result of an extremely close connection between word and spirit. So, when people speak their language they breathe, they don't translate—and, above all, they don't have to translate their way of being or feeling to be able to talk. A nation's knowledge is enriched by the addition of another language; but the partial substitution of its vernacular with another language, by invasion or inertia—where encroachment is disorganized and unintentional, and the host culture is unaware—denies people a substantial amount of freedom to express themselves to their full potential, denies them part of their spiritual vitality, and diminishes to some extent their capacity for happiness.

Eventually we will be—we must be—bilingual. But let us agree not to be semi-lingual in two languages.

Language is the spirit's way of breathing. Let us not make that breathing asthmatic. We cannot carry our burden uphill if we have asthma.

In conclusion, I think it would be helpful to clarify ideas and define concepts. We know that Puerto Rican culture and North American culture are and will continue to be part of our great Western culture. But there is no such thing as a Western man who is not from somewhere in the West. If we are not Westerners with Puerto Rican roots, we will be Westerners without roots. And a nation needs roots to remain vital. We are Westerners who act according to our roots. We are Americans from the United States, and Americans from the Americas, and Westerners from the West. And we embody all these things as Puerto Ricans from Puerto Rico. . . .

III.2

HALF-WORLDS IN CONFLICT

III.2.1 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1055578

ARIEL: THE IDEA OF *NORDOMANÍA*

José Enrique Rodó, 1900

This extract from *Ariel*, the watershed essay written in Montevideo by Uruguayan poet and essayist José Enrique Rodó (1872–1917) in 1900, warns Latin America nations about the dangers of sacrificing their originality to imitate the unbridled utilitarianism of the United States (which is spurred by, among other things, the pursuit of material wealth). Rodó wrote *Ariel* as a lecture delivered by an elder professor to his young students, employing the characters of Ariel and Caliban from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (c. 1610–11) as symbols for the different types of societies that could be identified in Latin America and the United States, respectively. Rodó introduces the idea of “*Nordomanía*” (a mania for the North) that has taken hold of a “de-Latinized America” that compulsively and obediently follows the North American archetype. The essay is essentially a proposal for how Latin Americans should pursue a different path where “spiritual idealism” would become the overriding goal of a yet-to-be-realized society. Utopian but not completely egalitarian, such a society would resemble ancient Athens, where the spiritual balance, harmony, and hierarchy of its social organizations and the conduct of its individuals would mirror the beauty and genius of the arts and sciences. The present translation is by F.J. Stimson [José Enrique Rodó, *Ariel. Translated with an Introductory Essay by F.J. Stimson, United States Ambassador to Argentina* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company/Riverside Press, 1922), 87–97].

. . .

TO SHOW HOW BOTH THESE UNIVERSAL LESSONS OF SCIENCE can be transformed into action, working together in the organization and spirit of society, we need only insist on our conception of a democracy that is just and noble, impelled only by the knowledge and sense of true superiorities, in which the supremacy of

intelligence and virtue, the only limits to the just equality of men, receives its authority and prestige from liberty and sheds over all multitudes the beneficent aura of love. And at the same time that it reconciles these two great lessons of our observation of the order of nature, such a society will realize the harmony of two historic forces which give our civilization its essential character, its regulative principles of life. From the spirit of Christianity, in fact, is born the sentiment of equality, albeit tainted now with something of the ascetic disdain for culture and selection of the spirit. And from the classic civilizations rises that sense for order, for authority, and the almost religious respect for genius, though tainted with something of aristocratic disdain for the weak and the lowly. The future shall synthesize these two suggestions in immortal formula; then shall Democracy have triumphed definitely. Democracy—which, when threatening an ignoble leveling, justifies the lofty protests and the bitter melancholies of those who see sacrificed in her triumph all intellectual distinction, every dream of art, each delicacy of life, will, now even more than the old aristocracies, extend inviolable guarantees for the cultivation of those flowers of the soul which fade and perish in the surroundings of the vulgar, amid the pitiless tumult of the multitude.

The utilitarian conception as the idea of human destiny and meanness shared by mediocre people as the norm of social proportion make up the formula that in Europe they call the spirit of Americanism. It is impossible to think on either of these as inspirations for human conduct or society, while contrasting them with those that are opposed to them, without at once conjuring up by association a vision of that formidable and fruitful democracy there in the North, with its manifestations of prosperity and power, as a dazzling example in favour of the efficacy of democratic institutions and the correct aim of its ideas. If one could say of utilitarianism that it is the word of the English spirit, the United States may be considered the incarnation of that word. Its Evangel is spread on every side to teach the material miracles of its triumph. And Spanish America is not wholly to be entitled, in its relation to the United States, as a nation of Gentiles. The mighty confederation is realizing over us a sort of moral conquest. Admiration for its greatness, its strength, is a sentiment that is growing rapidly in the minds of our governing classes, and even more, perhaps, among the multitude, easily impressed with victory or success. And from admiring it is easy to pass to imitating. Admiration and belief are already for the psychologist but the passive mood of imitation. “The imitative tendency of our moral nature,” says [Walter]

Bagehot, “has its seat in that part of the soul where lives belief.” Common sense and experience would suffice of themselves to show this natural relation. We imitate him in whose superiority and prestige we believe. So it happens that the vision of a voluntarily de-Latinized America, without compulsion or conquest and regenerated in the manner of its Northern archetype, floats already through the dreams of many who are sincerely interested in our future, satisfies them with suggestive parallels they find at every step, and appears in constant movements for reform or innovation. We have our *Nordomanía* [mania for the North]. It is necessary to oppose to it those bounds which both sentiment and reason indicate.

Not that I would make of those limits an absolute negation. I well understand that enlightenment, inspiration, great lessons lie in the example of the strong; nor do I fail to realize that intelligent attention to the claims of the material and the study of the useful, directed abroad, is of especially useful result in the case of people in the formative stage, whose nationality is still in the mould. I understand how one must try by preserving education to rectify such traits of a society as need to be made to fit in with new demands of civilization and new opportunities in life, thus by wise innovation counteracting the forces of heredity or custom. But I see no good in denaturalizing the character of a people—its personal genius—to impose on it identity with a foreign model to which they will sacrifice the originality of their genius, that, once lost, can never be replaced; nor in the ingenuous fancy that this result may ever be obtained artificially or by process of imitation. That thoughtless attempt to transplant what is natural and spontaneous in one society into the soul of another where it has no roots, historically or naturally, seemed to [French historian Jules] Michelet like the attempt to incorporate by mere transference a dead organism in a living body.

In societies, as in art or literature, blind imitation gives but an inferior copy of the model. And in the vain attempt there is also something ignoble; a kind of political snobbery, careful to copy the ways and acts of the great; as, in [William Makepeace] Thackeray’s satire, those without rank or fortune ineffectually imitate only the foibles of the mighty. Care for one’s own independence, personality, judgment, is a chief form of self-respect. A much-commented passage of Cicero teaches how it is our duty sedulously to preserve our original character; that which differentiates and determines, so far as may wisely be, the primal natural impulses, as they derive from a various distribution of natural gifts and so make up the concert and the order of the world. And even more would this seem

to be true as applied to human collectivities. But perhaps you will say that there is no seal, no peculiar and definite thing to mark the quality for whose permanence and integrity we should do battle in the actual organization of our people. Perhaps there lacks in our South American character the definite contour of a personality. But even so, we Latin-Americans have an inheritance of Race a great ethnic tradition to maintain, a sacred bond which unites us to immortal pages of history and puts us on our honour to preserve this for the future. That cosmopolitanism which have to respect as the irresistible tendency of our development need not exclude that sentiment of fidelity to the past, nor that moulding and directing force of which the genius of our race must avail itself in the fusing of the elements that shall constitute the American of the future.

It has more than once been pointed out that the great epochs of history, its most fertile periods, are always the result of distinct but coexisting forces which by their very agreement to oppose maintain the interest and stimulus of life, which in the quietism of a universal accord might tend to disappear. So the two extremes of Athens and Sparta revolve on an axle around which circles the race of greatest genius man has known. So America needs at this time to maintain its original duality, which has converted from classic myth to actual history the story of the two eagles, loosed at the same moment from either pole, to arrive at the same moment at each one's limit of dominion. This difference in genius does not exclude honourable emulation, nor discourage in very many relations agreement or even solidarity. And if one can dimly foresee even a higher concord in the future, which will be due not to a one-sided imitation of one race by the other, but to reciprocity of influences and a skillful harmonizing of those attributes which make the peculiar glory of either race.

Still, the dispassionate study of that civilization, which some would offer to us as a model, affords a reason no less potent than those which are based only on the indignity and unworthiness of mere imitation to temper the enthusiasm of those who propose it as our model. . . . And now I come to the very theme of my discourse, and the relation to it of this spirit of imitation. Any severe judgment formed upon our neighbours of the North should begin, like the courteous fencer, by lowering a rapier in salute to them. Easy is this for me. Failure to recognize their faults does not seem to me so insensate as to deny their qualities. Born—to employ [Charles] Baudelaire's paradox—with the innate experience of liberty, they have kept themselves faithful to the law of their birth; and have

developed, with the precision and certainty of a mathematical progression, the fundamental principles of their organization. This gives to their history a unity which, even if it has excluded the acquirement of different aptitudes or merits, has at least the intellectual beauty of being logical. The traces of its progress will never be expunged from the annals of human right, because they have been the first to evoke our modern ideal of liberty and to convert it from the uncertainty of experiment and the visions of Utopia into imperishable bronze and living reality. For they have shown by their example the possibility of extending the immovable authority of a republic over an immense national commonwealth, and, with their federal organization, have revealed—as [Alexis] de Tocqueville felicitously put it—the manner in which the brilliancy and power of great states may be combined with the felicity and peace of little ones. . . .

III.2.2 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 832526

THE AMERICAN HALF-WORLDS

Waldo Frank, 1931

In this essay, Waldo Frank (1889–1967) offers his perspective on what he essentially considers to be two faces of the same coin: Anglo-Saxon and Hispanic America. Indeed, they are *half-worlds*, according to Frank, who proposes Latin America’s collectivism as a remedy for the alienation felt by the individual surrounded by industrial capitalism in the United States—or what he refers to in caustic terms as an—“exteriorized Jungle.” At the same time, the author’s viewpoint reflects some romantic notions upheld by his contemporaries, including the belief that Latin Americans—compared to North Americans—enjoy a closer relationship with nature as well as possess a heightened spirituality. Frank proposes a dichotomous framework—“Order Lacking Life” (North America) versus “Life Lacking Order” (Latin America)—to explain the divergent characteristics of the “half-worlds” he describes. The author included this text in *America Hispana: A Portrait and a Prospect* [(New York and London: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1931), 317–41], which was published two years after his 1929 tour of Latin America [SEE DOCUMENT I.4.3, HIS “FIRST MESSAGE TO HISPANIC AMERICA,” A SPEECH DELIVERED IN BUENOS AIRES].

A. THE MACHINE FLOWS FASTER THAN GOLD

Behind the symbols of gold and the machine stand two concepts of the person; and the fulfillment of these concepts is the America—Anglo-Saxon and Hispanic—in which men live today. In the North, the person, more separatistic and more wholly released from the Christian values of medieval Europe, destroyed what did not conform and created a world almost purely in his own image. Moreover, a temperate America, inhabited largely by wandering tribes, offered small resistance. From Mexico to Peru the case was otherwise. The egoistic dynamism of the Spaniard was bound by Church formula and checked by Church idealism in its universalistic phase. The Spaniard was less atomic, and vastly more receptive. And the human America he encountered was more potent, his physical America was a tumult of snow and fire, an infinite of plain and forest.¹ He fused with this world, rather than destroyed it; and the world he created—although also a fragment—was more complex than that of the men in the North, his enemies the English.

In order to return more clearly to the ultimate problems of America Hispana, we dwell for a while with the North.

There is no doubt that Protestantism was earlier in the English colonies than Capitalism. There is no doubt that the concept of the primacy of the individual person, which had been lodged in Britain since [the time of the late-thirteenth-century theologian] Duns Scotus and which divergently flowered in the Protestant creeds, appears as well in Capitalism. And there is no doubt that Capitalism has adumbrated from the Protestant countries. From this series of juxtapositions, the attempt has been made to explain Capitalism as a fruit of the Protestant religion.² It seems more precise to regard both Protestantism and Capitalism (and Democratism also) as coeval tendencies of the European soul released from the Synthesis of the Catholic Republic.

All are rationalized and sophistical forms, on different levels, of that state of heart and state of mind that we have discovered at the break of Medieval Europe. All, intricately merged, appear together throughout the dissolving fabric of feudal Europe; and not alone in the “Protestant-Capitalistic-Democratic” countries. . . . Indeed, the Enlightenment of eighteenth-century [Catholic] France shares equally with German Protestant idealism and British liberalism the honor of creating the modern capitalist and democratic era. In the south of Europe

the Catholic form prevailed, and these tendencies that debouched elsewhere in Protestantism–Capitalism–Democratism, although they did not die, remained subjective.

The essence of all three terms, regarded not as institutions but as dynamic attitudes of man, has a double aspect: they are the ultimate fruit of the great Culture whose high summer was Holy Rome, and they represent, as *energy*, the destructive virus within that Culture. This virus worked more swiftly and directly, but not more finally, in England than in Italy and Spain. The active principle in this virus is the *discrete ego*, whose tendency is to be aggressive, materialistic, and rationalistic. . . .

The world that the pioneer created with his Democratized fusion of Capitalism and Protestantism is the machine culture of the twentieth-century United States. Its critical portrait has been drawn.³ Here, we can merely darken those lines which converge into the prospect of America Hispana. The chief physical and economic feature of this world is of course the machine, which was the symbol of its founders' spirit three centuries ago. Its chief psychological feature is that the machine is master. The reason is that life in the United States, adumbrated from a false concept of the person, lacks true persons. Therefore its individuals are the victims of their dominant will as atomic and separatistic creatures. This will, embodied and rationalized by the machine, and wondrously propagated, creates a kind of exteriorized Jungle⁴ that is the American environment. Through this aggressive Jungle, the North American hazardously wanders in a state essentially barbaric as the state of the savage in the Brazilian Forest.

Like those other savages in the South, the North American has a religion—the first authentic religion of the United States. This religion has a vague name: *Pragmatism*, and a high priest, John Dewey, whom posterity may call the dominant American of the first four twentieth-century decades.

Pragmatism takes the social structure that the machine has woven, as matrix of man, chief forming agent of his destiny. This structure is, itself, an exteriorized form of certain subjective tendencies; but Pragmatism accepts it as the sole real Norm. The individual's activity within this industrial Norm, Pragmatism would confine to processes of adjustment for survival. This principle of adjustment it calls the intelligence which at the same time it defines as a mere *function* of survival and adjustment within the environment. Virtually, then, Pragmatism treats this machine nature as an absolute: an absolute that

is external and superior to man's essence; and of his spirit and mind it makes a series of contingencies whose business it is to propitiate, by fitting in, this nature. Pragmatism is thus revealed as a rationale of submission to the industrial Jungle, against which it illogically asserts for man no weapon save those that the Jungle itself graciously delivers.⁵

Now, if we recall again that the Machine-world is an embodiment of certain impulses *in* man, we see why it is accurate to call Pragmatism a religion. Primitive man hypostasizes his personal will in external objects in which he worships it as absolute and prior to himself. This is called animism. And Pragmatism in its essence is an animistic religion. Thus, the civilized citizen of the United States . . . [does not only have] his Jungle, but [also has] a religion to go with it. In place of tree or totem, in which the savage worships his vital forces, the Pragmatist adores his separatistic will in machine and machine-society, believing it prior to himself, and making it truly dominant by his submission. And this will, unlike the vital forces of the savage, is not an unconscious expression of totality, but a fragment whose effect is humanly destructive. . . .

The North American is removed by his false premise of the person not alone from his soul but from his soil. His driving will cannot know self since it exploits the energy of self for fragmentary separatistic ends: and cannot know earth for the same reason. Here, too, the ravening heart has its symbol in the machine which digs into earth, and leaps it, and levels it, and weighs it; but cannot *know* it. Man, to achieve that conscious share in life which marks him from the sleep of the brute, needs contact of both self and soil. Contact with his true self, because self is the single source by which he can know. . . .

In the United States, the inherited forms of relationship between men, between man and woman, between parent and child, between ruler and ruled, between artist and public, between pastor and flock, have virtually disappeared. They are disappearing in Europe and America Hispana. They must disappear, since in all these worlds, from England to Chile, they are cluttered with traditional assumptions no longer valid. The arts and styles of the United States are therefore welcome, as aids in the elimination of refuse. Moreover, man will no longer accept starvation. Misery and disease that could be the norm of the masses in slave worlds and in a Christian world that bilked the problem of slavery by making Heaven democratic, is unacceptable today. Already, eighteenth-century France had learned what the Hebrew prophets knew: that the man whose body is

gray with squalor cannot be bright with spirit. North America has moved at least part way toward a new high level of physical welfare, and has contributed immortally to the human spirit in universalizing the will, if not the fact, of health. This is a great strength in the eyes of the world and makes the attraction of North American values—since the admirer seldom judges—universal.

And finally, in place of the defunct moralities, Industrial Democratism in the United States has morale. Morale may be defined as a common temper or spirit rising from a people's accepted and functioning ideals. The United States has ideals and works by them. They are not the professed ideals of any church—and the churches lack morale. They are not the ideals of scattered intellectuals and artists, who also largely lack morale. They are, however, implicit in the Constitution. They set up and move American society as a herd organized for the business of personal gain and comfort, and led by humanitarians with a devout eye on Property. . . .

Other peoples have ideals; but largely they are formed by traditional and theological words no longer valid, and speak confusedly to the folk. The folk is attached to certain values, yet sees that in their irrelevant form they do not work. Hence, its morale is shattered. There are only two nations in the world today in which common activity is adjusted to common values—only two nations with morale. They are Russia and the United States. And these are the two most influential nations, not because their ideals are accepted by the world, but because morale is invasive.

B. AMERICA HISPANA, A HALF-WORLD

The Spaniard came to America with his lust for gold, his absolute State and his Church. His Christian charity was arrogant and brutal, but it did not destroy the world he conquered. Inquisition and sword were not such perfect instruments as the nonconformist will of the North. The wilderness he found remained, and [so did] the Indian who fulfilled it. The Spaniard merged with this America on a double level: below his creed as a beast in rut, and above his creed, as a man in love with the world that dwelt within the womb of his Indian woman.

On both these levels, he soon ceased to be a Spaniard and became American. Not of course a clear American like the Indian; but an American confused and prophetic like the Mestizo. Meantime, the State and the Church acted upon the

ferment chiefly as a principle of suspension. They stopped any premature crystallization of the Mestizo; they held the Indian back from returning altogether to his secret past. The Monarchy was remote from the Colonial, yet for three centuries it forbade any experiment in native government.⁶ The dogmas of the Church were never real in the pampa and the Andes, but they preserved both Indian and Colonial from the chaos of the sects. Rome, although its body was inadequate to America Hispana, kept alive its spirit in all the colonial world: Universal brotherhood, the will to wholeness in thought and deed, the service to earth through the making of beauty and to Heaven through the making of justice, were assuredly not the immediate concern of the folk; but at least they never became words by which an opposite will was carried into effect. They were a presence, haunting and disembodied, throughout America Hispana: an unsubstantiated energy that took the form of the folk's mood. Thus, while the people was devout, these ideals were the emotions of the Church. And when French and North American principles prevailed, they became the emotions of the Republic.

Only in this way can these Republics be understood. Institutionally, they are irrelevant to their world. But so were the Monarchy of Spain and the theology of Rome. As a form of ideal sentiment, they caught the vagrant Christian spirit of the people that the Church could not contain. Might not the Republic bespeak the brotherhood of men better than the Diocese? Thus, the ideal energy of the Church, since the Church body was shrunk, begat in America Hispana these ironic Republics, remote from the economic and political structure of the nations, but naïvely articulate of the romantic Christian spirit. In the United States, the Republic so perfectly configures the business of the people that its ideal sources can be forgotten. It is a working programme: an instrument of the land's possessors. In America Hispana, the Republic as a political fact does not exist; and therefore it can still serve as an ideal gesture. In this unformed state, it holds potential values, inherited from Church tradition, which might yet make it an instrument of the folk's regeneration.

This is conjecture: by its practice, the Republic in America Hispana⁷ symbolizes a *discontinuity* between the people's ideals and life, which goes far deeper than politics. This discontinuity accounts for America Hispana's want of morale. At his lowest, the Criollo or Mestizo (for reasons we have understood) lives for soft sensual enjoyment; and since his world is usually a hard one, he lives thwarted and lacks morale. More evolved, he may have the ideals of *his* Church. But these

ideals have no enactment, and he knows it. His Church has been swept aside by the historic stream: its culture dwindles, its art is mean, its laws are shattered by science. The great world rushes on, to whatever end, despite its existence. He is humiliated in his loyalty to a spirit whose body he knows to be archaic. He is insecure and afraid. Perhaps, he believes in the Republic; then his ideal will be the romantic one of [Thomas] Jefferson and [Simón] Bolívar, and here, too, he feels the poignant discrepancy between the theory of his state and its actual motives and fulfillments. He will feel impotent as a citizen. . . . If the man of America Hispana is a Mestizo, the abyss between his spirit and his life is vast. He knows his soul; there is no place for it in Republic or Church. He knows his land; as it prevails in his race, it has no rights in the laws of the Nation. And if the man is a mestizo, the conflict between ideals and world is raised fourfold by the confusions within each.

In summary, the Hispano-American of whatever nation and whatever caste, peasant or intellectual, is devoted to ideals that have come to him in a traditional and archaic body, and the body is broken, and he has made no channel whereby its spirit, to which he is still loyal, can be brought into the modern world and re-embodied in terms of existence. He longs so greatly for actualization of his ideals—a double need, since he is the child of both Indian and Spaniard (races that need no word for *cant*), that he feels dispossessed in the modern world, impotent despite his high capacity, and inferior to any nation, whatever its ideals be, which has found for its spirit a form and habitation. In consequence, as a social being the Hispano-American is at his worst. Distrusting himself, he distrusts his fellows. Fear or despair or some desperate hope will be the motives of his public action. As a citizen, he is without morale.

The actionable forms of his ideals in the open world are wanting. But his spirit has its own inward body, frail though it be. As an individual, he has morale—although imperfectly, since the true person acts as a social being. The Hispano-American, unable to fulfill himself in the public body, intensifies his family devotion and comes together with harmonious-minded persons. And this is the cause of the rich group life of these countries—not alone in the Indian, but among intellectuals and cowboys, laborers and farmers. The final inadequacy of these groups when they issue into public action, perhaps by following some *caudillo* or by revolution, is of course due to the social formlessness of their ideals.

There are many kinds of persons in America Hispana. The cold pines of southern Chile do not harbor the same man as the palms of Cuba: the humid Amazonian air is breathed into different lungs from the thin ozone of the Andes and the wide winds of the pampa. Yet there are essential harmonies between the peoples. First of all this harmony of *pathos*, rising from the want and need of a morale: the common loyalty to values whose traditional forms are dispossessed by the modern world, and to the task of re-creation. . . . A harmony of *birth*: culturally burdened, these peoples are nationally empty, being citizens of a deliberate nation in contrast to the European who is born in a nation that is the ripened fruit of long organic culture. This willful way of birth also has its pathos, being a burden to the instinctive man. . . . A harmony of *physical outlook*: every Hispano-American beholds a world whose natural exuberance is overwhelming. He has made no mark on it; and this brings into his eyes another pathos of human incompleteness. . . . A harmony of *cultural outlook*: every man of America Hispana must look forward; the Mestizo, because he has lost everything; the mestizo, because he has won nothing, and because a retrospect leads him into the pitfalls of tradition from which he must emerge. Yet neither Spain nor aboriginal America has prepared him to look forward. (Both Spaniard and Indian, we have seen, are men of the immediate and the eternal.) He is forced, by his young and deliberate world, to live in time to which he is essentially alien. This harmony of outlook leads, again, to pathos—the pathos of the man abiding forever in strangeness. All these affinities have, then, a minor key: all have lostness or longing or tragedy within them.⁸

But there are more positive relations linking the man of the pampa to the man of the Mexican meseta [plateau]. Whatever his condition, the Hispano-American has direct contact with his soul and his soil. (They are correlative, and go together.) If he has remained the simple Indian or Negro, the contact is intense, and can become almost maniacal with oppression. The Negro's experience may be an instinctive indwelling as of sleep in forest and self, the Indian's may be his archaic self-awareness as an integer of the clan whose body is the communal acre. However elementary and arrested, it is a seed of creation against the coming of some spiritual Spring which shall warm it and make it grow. Nor has this contact died in the urban classes; for the towns—even the great cities like Buenos Aires and Rio and Mexico—are immersed in their land-side, quickened by it,

tuned to the economy of agriculture; and the bleakest mining village of the Andes is not cut off from its mountain, since it has not emotionally surrendered to the machine. The Church, insofar as it functions, fosters the contact both with soil and self. Christian Platonism could not live in America Hispana: the piety that leads to Heaven long since was transformed into a piety of the flesh as the visible grail of the soul. Asceticism in the North grew worldly; the cult of sacrament in the South grew earthy. The Catholic of America Hispana knows his soul as of the earth, feels them together, and enjoys them together. And the student has this intimate contact. His University, daughter of the Synthesis of Saint Thomas, is universal: which is to say, that it professes the tradition of the Whole and teaches the unity of life as an organic Sum. The intellectual, freed of the Catholic dogma, changes the focus of his vision, in most cases loses focus altogether. Yet, while he gropes for a new one, these primordial contacts and the tradition of the Whole save him from the despair of specialization: they direct him to a creative interest in politics and economics, they make him proof against false arts lacking in the aesthetic essence, they suffuse his sense of self so as to make him receptive to philosophic and religious values.

America Hispana, even more than the United States, is a half-world. With striking symmetry it has what the North lacks and lacks what the North has made for itself. In its Indian and Catholic traditions, it has an adequate base from which to build cultural substance for intellectual, proletarian and peasant. But this transforming work it has not yet done; unlike the United States, that from the poorer base of its traditions (a Christianity splintered into sects and shriveled by false doctrines) has distilled the energy and forms of an aggressive civilization and of a working morale. The United States has achieved a public opinion potent enough to permit dissent, liberal channels of communication, stable government and commerce, leaders who reflect the popular values, and the rhythm of a folk engaged in the pursuit of its more conscious wishes. And these, in America Hispana, are lacking. Although it is full of the themes of a magnificent music, it has as yet no rhythm, which means that it is not organically living.

The United States is in danger of catastrophe, because although its speed is great its aim is poor, because the nurture of its creative life is being weakened while the proliferation of its material life which only the creative spirit can control continues; and because its morale rests on a premise of values which human

experience reveals as false and sterile, so that the more it accelerates its present progress the more, certain it is to reach disaster. But America Hispana, lacking leadership and morale, is in danger of miscarriage.

C. ORDER LACKING LIFE *VERSUS* LIFE LACKING ORDER

The American continents present two faces of a single problem. The need of the United States is a new germinal value. From its inadequate cultural base, it has built up a solid body that is unwieldy to human intelligence and inexpressive of human spirit. Within this body, it must lodge the seed that will take unto itself the energy of the body, and burst it in transfiguration. This seed must be the fresh experience of life in its wholeness: a revelation of human fate, tragic and divine, by whose light the folk will know its present ways as false and tawdry. This revelation must be made manifest through leaders as a destiny which all the people can harmoniously gather to fulfill (the folk is always ready). It will be a change of attitude so deep and intense as to approximate in modern terms what the Saints called conversion.

To America Hispana came a rigid order instinct with a great spirit; and the order grew more rigid, and shrank, and did not hold the spirit. The people's values have no body, and their institutional bodies—religious, political, economic—have no value. The problem, seemingly so different, is the same as that of the United States. In one place, there is order that lacks life; in the other, there is life that lacks order. But a dead order is not organic, and a disembodied life is not alive. In America Hispana there must come, by way of leaders and of leading groups, the nuclear revelation of a social form (humbly beginning) that can contain the ideals of the folk, so that the folk—made strong by it—shall feed it with energy and number. This growth in America Hispana will not, however, be conversion so much as evolution, since the old forms—Indian, Catholic, Republican—in contrast to the body of the United States, are so decrepit that any moving spirit will blow their dust away.

The North, in Industrial Democratism, has a body inadequate in base but strong in surface, that must be disrupted, probably with the aid of violent revolution. It has a tradition of wholeness which has never died, from Roger Williams to Walt Whitman, but which is weak. It is weak because in the

eighteenth century, when the nation was founded, the tradition of life as an Organism had already sundered. America Hispana has no body at all. This is an advantage, perhaps, over a hard-armored body that must be broken. And America Hispana has a strong tradition of life as an organic Whole. In the Indian, the Catholic, the Spaniard, it is strong. This tradition is manifest today in the will of the Hispanic youth. The material upon which this will must work is an enormous chaos. But the way is open.

The problem in the United States is to free its impulse toward a fresh creative beginning: in America Hispana, it is to find the means to fulfillment. The problem in the North is one of religion—where the South folk are strong: the problem of the South is one of discipline, technique and method, where the North is strong. . . .

1

The English, when they reached America, settled down: it took them two and a half centuries to reach the Pacific. In fifty years, the Spaniards had explored from Chile to the Hudson River. Why this difference? The Spaniards were looking for gold: also, they wanted a *world* to incorporate into the Catholic Body. Therefore they pushed to its peripheries. Their religion was global; that of the English was atomic. And the English were men of work. They wanted not a cosmic body but a compact and separate colony to exploit. Nonetheless, their concept of the person was far more active and mobile than the Catholic Spaniard's: the machine flows faster than gold. Therefore, in the long run, the pioneer went farthest and it was the Spaniard who most substantially settled down.

2

See above all the works of German [sociologist and economist] Max Weber.

3

See *inter al.* the works of Herbert Croly, Van Wyck Brooks, Randolph Bourne, Walter Lippmann, Thomas Beer, and Lewis Mumford; and *Our America* and *The Rediscovery of America*.

4

The jungle is "exterior" not merely because it consists of objective machines and of objective machine-made institutions and machine-made arts, but also in the sense that the machine—representing the separatist will of man—is, in its effect, alien and hostile to man's *total* nature that has a unifying and not a separating will. But more deeply, the jungle is "interior," since it is a representation of a part of man. This problem of the machine and the American Jungle, etc., is detailedly analyzed in *The Rediscovery of America*.

5

Dewey writes: "The sense of wholeness which is urged as the sense of religion can be built up and sustained only through membership in a society which has attained a degree of unity. The attempt to cultivate it first in individuals, and then extend it to form an organically unified society, is fantasy. . . . Indulgence in this fantasy marks a manner of yearning and not a principle of construction."

6

An exception was the Missions of the Jesuits; and the Jesuits—chiefly because of them—were ousted.

7

There may be one or two partial exceptions: Argentina, Costa Rica, Uruguay, for instance.

8

Many Hispano-American critics are beginning to analyze these affinities; and this is a good sign, since heretofore the writers have been content to feel them. I have before me an admirable book by Carlos Alberto Erro, critic of Buenos Aires: *La Medida del Criollismo* that has helped me in my enumeration. But there is scarcely an issue of the leading continental magazines without a contribution to this critical synthesis.

III.2.3 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 807875

AMERICANISM AND HISPANICISM

Gilberto Freyre, 1942

In this staunch critique of orthodox Pan Americanism, Gilberto Freyre (1900–1987)—the Brazilian cultural historian, sociologist, and anthropologist best known for his paradigmatic *Casa-Grande e Senzala* (1933)—defends the inalienable right of each American nation to free-determination, so long as it does not destabilize the region. “Americanismo e Hispanismo” continues with an argument that the author first introduced in the United States in 1939 in an essay published in *American Scholar* (New York) and a lecture delivered at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland. The author defends the idea of an Americanism (different from Pan American ideology) through which isolation—the individuality of the “Brazilian island” included—could be preserved. His point is to stress this possibility on a continental scale, taking into account the particular histories of every nation. Although the essay was originally published in Recife’s *Diário de Pernambuco* on April 28, 1942, this translation is based on the essay as it appeared in Freyre’s *Americanidade e latinidade da América Latina e outros textos afins* [edited and annotated by Edson Nery da Fonseca, preface by Enrique Rodriguez Larreta and Guillermo Giucci (Brasília/São Paulo: Editora Universidade de Brasília/Imprensa Oficial do Estado de São Paulo, 2003), 91–94].

IN 1939, IN AN ARTICLE for the magazine *The American Scholar* (New York) and also in a lecture at Case Western Reserve University, I defended what then seemed to be a horrible heresy to the most fervent devotees of Pan Americanism: the right

of each country in the Americas to determine its own form of government, provided that this did not result in a violent disturbance in the life of the continent. This Pan Americanism would be similar to urban planning, but on a grand, even continental, scale. It would reconcile, just as urban planning does (do not the great civilizations tend principally to be cities?), the ancient with the modern, old churches with new avenues, aesthetics with the ethics of monarchical traditions such as Brazil's, as well as the necessities of advanced experimentation and sociological innovation as carried out today by the Mexicans and the Brazilians.

I remember that during my lecture at Case Western Reserve University I was challenged by a person who was closely connected to what I supposed was the viewpoint—either official or unofficial—of the United States. As for the article in that illustrious magazine of academia, it provoked heated protests from the orthodox Pan Americanists and from the Universalist democrats. I responded to one of these by emphasizing the points touched on by the new Americanist position: that the type of government was secondary and depended on social conditions and the historical evolution and human ecology particular to each people or cultural region, and that these conditions are variable. For instance, while Brazil has a monarchical tradition that perhaps predisposes it to a less democratic form of government than that of the United States or Uruguay, it nevertheless compensates for this by being more democratic than any other populous nation in the Americas regarding the treatment of interracial relations. During the imperial period [1822–89], for example, distinguished *Mestiços* such as [André] Rebouças and [Joaquim] Saldanha Marinho ascended to lofty social and political positions. And during the Republic [1889–1930], Nilo Peçanha, who was unmistakably a mulatto, first replaced the red-haired Lauro Müller as minister of foreign relations, and then went on to become president [1909–10].

In a recent article on the articulation of culture in the Americas, I sketched out the possibility for cultural development of this part of the world in the form of an enormous archipelago, in its sociological and, to a certain extent, its political shape. Within this configuration, a sense of the sameness of culture throughout the continent's extent would be reconciled with the density and indivisibility of the "islands" that constitute it, in a Continentalism, or a pluralist Americanism, that is in no way uniform, but is still Americanism.

Just as in Argentina or Mexico or the United States, the American destiny of Brazil's culture is clearly anticipated by its communal inclinations. Only

it will not be an Americanism in which the individuality of the “island” of, for example, Brazil—an American people singularly formed with a preponderance of Portuguese, a large contribution by Negroes, and the rapid acceptance of the *Mestiço*, and of an equally singular political formation, considering the long period of monarchy that has marked our character, perhaps forever—dissolves in two steps, if an anxious imperialism of socio-political uniformity should ever develop on a continental scale. It is imperative to stress this point.

But there is also another point: The sociological condition of the “island” representing each great people of the Americas cannot mean dependency on any bloc from which the principal elements of its cultural formation derive. Such a dependency would be colonialism: colonialism with a political flavor. Consequently it would run contrary not just to Americanism’s formulas, but also to its fundamental tendencies, understood as an expression of a culture newer and freer than that of Europe.

On the other hand, we—the American peoples of Hispanic origin, whether Portuguese or Spanish—find ourselves at a stage of cultural development that benefits us, even though it is still a phase of European cultural colonization, or rather, of European cultural post-colonization. Here, Portuguese and Spanish elements—folkloric and popular, as well as from the truly elite—enter into the development of the cultures of the new peoples of the Americas in order to invigorate them with individuality and the Hispanic tradition, and not, it must be stressed, to direct this evolution or to orient it toward intentions or empty desires of political recolonization.

Such a direction would run contrary to the cultural process that suits the people of the Americas, which is somewhat disorganized and not at all prematurely fixed. Equally contrary is that simplistic Pan Americanism which supposes that the people and culture of the Americas are self-sufficient, and as such can dispense with any European role in their evolution.

This is wrong, in my view. Not only is that contribution proper, it is essential. For Brazil this means substantial European—especially Portuguese—participation both from the elites and from ordinary people in the development of our culture, which is American in its rhythm, its freer forms of expression, its creation, and the broadening of its values. At the same time, it is Hispanic—and particularly Portuguese—in its deepest motivations toward life and in its most characteristic ways of being. In their linkage to the Americas, these elite and

popular elements are not lost, nor are their energies wasted. Here, the possibilities for their expression are amplified, within each of our peoples and within the Americas as a whole.

For Brazilians—as for Mexicans, Argentineans, and Paraguayans, to mention only four characteristic peoples—the “islanders” versus “continentals” duality as the expression of a new culture in the Americas seems to me to be an important aspect of the relations of each American people with its neighbors and its motherland. We are dealing here not with an antagonism that is impossible to overcome by means of reconciliation but with a fertile duality to be cultivated. It is perhaps on these grounds that the true articulation of an American culture will be established. This will not be a mere horizontal or superficial Americanism that is concerned only with the extension of progress for the peoples of the continent. Instead, it will amplify those values inherited from Europe, Africa, and Asia without sacrificing the depth of their dimensions.

III.2.4 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 734189

EDWARD WESTON AND TINA MODOTTI

Diego Rivera, 1926

This article by noted Mexican muralist Diego Rivera (1886–1957) definitively positions photography within the realm of the visual arts. Written at the height of the Mexican mural movement, Rivera establishes a parallel between using oils and brushes (the essential tools of the painter) and employing a camera. Rivera emphasizes that a photographer must master complex technical skills and be able to successfully manipulate an image in the darkroom. In his text, he is awestruck by the influential American photographer Edward Weston (1886–1958), who worked in Mexico intermittently between 1923 and 1927. The muralist is particularly impressed by Weston’s ability to combine the aesthetic sensibility of the North with the vivid artistic tradition of Latin America. Rivera also briefly mentions Italian-born photographer Tina Modotti (1896–1942), whom he refers to as Weston’s “pupil”; he writes that her photographs are “marvels of sensibility” and that her work “harmonizes exactly” with the passion of Mexico. This translation by Frances Toor—founder of the bilingual cultural

magazine *Mexican Folkways* (1925–37)—is from the article’s original publication [“Edward Weston y Tina Modotti [sic],” *Mexican Folkways* (Mexico City), vol. 2, no. 6 (1926): 16–17]. It has been reprinted by Raquel Tibol [*Diego Rivera, Arte y Política* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 1979)] and Xavier Moyssén [*Diego Rivera, Textos de Arte* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1986)].

FOR A LONG TIME EVERYONE HAS ACCEPTED THE FACT that photography liberated painting, defining the field between the **IMAGE** copy of the physical aspect of the world, and the **PLASTIC CREATION**, within which falls the art of painting. [That is,] for whose particular **REALITY PARALLEL TO NATURE** the image of the exterior world may not be employed; but it is indispensable for the existence of this reality **TO ESTABLISH ITS OWN ORDER**.

More than eighteen years ago [Alfred] Stieglitz, the great photographer, was one of the first men in New York City to fight in favor of the work of [Pablo] Picasso, the great painter and my comrade.

Today, our sensibility is no longer deceived by the novelty of the processes of the camera and we, modern men, feel clearly the personality of each one of the authors in different photographs made under the same conditions of time and space. We feel the personality of the photographer as clearly as that of the painter, draughtsman, or engraver.

In reality, the camera and the manipulations of the photographic workroom are a **TECHNIQUE** just as oil, pencil, or watercolor, and above all persists the expression of the human personality that makes use of it.

One day I said to Edward Weston and Tina Modotti, as we were looking over some of their work: “I am sure if Don Diego Velázquez were to return to life, he would be a photographer,” and they replied that the same thought had occurred to them. Naturally, people who do not understand will think this is a modern slander against the King of Painting of “pure” Spanish descent, but all those who are not stupid will agree with me, because the talent of Velázquez manifesting itself in the **COINCIDENCE** with the image of the physical world, his genius would have led him to select the **TECHNIQUE** most adequate for the purpose; that is to say, photography. (Recall that the greatest subtlety, the greatest strength, just as the greatest originality of Velázquez are to be found in his **VALUES**. And I believe that people like Weston and Tina are on a parallel scale, similar to that of

the painters and other plastic workers—of their kind and category—which in the case of Weston and Tina are of the highest.

Few are the modern plastic expressions that have given me purer and more intense joy than the masterpieces that are frequently produced in the work of Edward Weston, and I confess that I prefer the productions of this great artist to the majority of contemporary, significant paintings.

The talent of Weston has its place among the present plastic workers of the first rank, although he may be less celebrated than they and although in his country, the United States, they may have not as yet completely discovered him, and that in Mexico—where we have the good fortune of having him—he may be ignored. . . . Just as is everything which THE VOICE OF THE FOREIGN MASTER DOES NOT ADMIRE ORDER. Any day that Weston may wish or any day that some outside force may break through the modesty and indifference that are characteristic of him, he will astonish THE FOREIGN MASTER of the poor intellectual bourgeoisie of Mexico with his work. Then, in Mexico, they will know that he exists, and the “grumpies” will know that there is not in Europe, by far, a photographer of such dimensions as Weston.

Edward Weston is THE AMERICAN ARTIST; I mean, one whose sensibility contains the extreme modernity of the PLASTICITY OF THE NORTH AND THE LIVING TRADITION OF THE LAND OF THE SOUTH.

Tina Modotti, his pupil, has created marvels of sensibility on a plane, perhaps more abstract, more aerial, even more intellectual, as is natural for an Italian temperament. Her work flowers perfectly in Mexico and harmonizes exactly with our passion.

III.2.5 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 747269

ART AND PAN AMERICANISM

Diego Rivera, 1943

“El arte y el panamericanismo” is the first of three essays based on a lecture series that Rivera delivered at Mexico City’s Colegio Nacional in 1943. The artist was among a founding group of

writers, scientists, and artists—including fellow muralist José Clemente Orozco—who lent their expertise to a focused series of conferences and seminars established and held at this prestigious center that same year. At the height of World War II, Rivera—in his seminar titled “Necesidad del arte e importancia del mismo para la unión de América”—called for the unification of Latin America. The Mexican painter proposed art—essential to humankind’s subsistence—as the basis for Latin America’s redemption. Paradoxically, despite being written in a conspicuously Marxist tone, the essay is an unfettered defense of Pan Americanism that undoubtedly contradicts Rivera’s position as a communist leader. This translation is based on the original publication in *Así* [(Mexico City), no. 154 (October 23, 1943), 16–17].

DURING THE SERIES OF LECTURES on “the need for art and its importance in the development of Pan American Unity,” several examples of the art created on our continent during its entire history were exhibited in support of the overall theme of the series. . . .

We presented specific examples to show that, ever since the dawn of “the political animal”—who, throughout the history of mankind has frequently been led by brutish politicians—art has been closely linked to every major activity involved in dealing with basic human needs, which are: a) food; b) clothing and shelter; and c) love.

In the first category, primitive man developed his hunting and fishing skills in order to survive. His senses became keener, and his eyesight and hearing evolved to the point where they were sharp enough to help him catch the prey he needed. That was an essential step, and it was immediately reflected in the art that this early man produced. He depicted the movements of animals and human beings with such precision and acuity and painted such accurate scenes of beauty in action that only now—since developing photographic lenses capable of catching movements that last fractions of a second—are we able to re-create the prehistoric images that can still be seen on rocks in parts of Africa and Europe.

Once primitive man began to seek or create shelter, he discovered architecture and the art of body ornaments. This custom quickly spread to all the implements he used in his domestic life and the tools he used for hunting and fishing; it was soon also apparent in the weapons he used for war and the artifacts that were part of his religious life that, like science, evolved out of his involvement with magic.

With regard to love, the beautification of dwellings and the decoration of garments played an important role in the mutual attraction of the sexes that led to the amorous relationships required to produce new human beings to continue the species. In time, the art of decoration was expressed on the human body as well and influenced grooming, makeup, tattoos, and the jewelry that was often inserted into the skin and the flesh. . . .

We can also see from available examples that whenever the oppressed fought back against their oppressors, art and artists spontaneously took part in the struggle. This is because art—whose essential function is to nourish and invigorate—is naturally progressive and subversive, and there can be no progress without the necessary level of subversion that keeps alive man's desire for independence, freedom, and resistance. Any society or government that is not threatened from time to time by the resistance of its people becomes corrupt and degenerates into tyranny, backwardness, and idiocy. This is the basis of true democracy that was expressed with dazzling clarity of thought and word in the late eighteenth century by Thomas Jefferson, one of the greatest founders of modern America.

When we examine works of art from the Americas we find that, ever since the earliest periods (from the mists of proto-history until our present times), everything that deserves to be called American art possesses the distinctive quality of being the work of free men, endowed with extraordinary vitality. . . .

We must, therefore, from a logical, scientific standpoint, conclude that art is a necessary form of human expression whose function, like all mankind's other needs, is influenced by the telluric environment and the kind of social structure in which it is produced. This is the foundation for a superstructure or culture that operates from top to bottom and can be modified by new factors introduced at different levels. It disseminates its works that then filter down to the lowest levels of the structure or, rising from below, contribute to its modification and affect the culture in a genuine organic, circular motion. . . .

This is why, obviously, every country develops an official art and culture apparatus—which can be controlled by the class that holds power—to create the sedatives, drugs, and toxic products that keep the oppressed masses docile and happy and facilitate their exploitation. This is also why the seeds of rebellion and progress rise from the lowest levels of the structure toward the superstructure. There they develop, forming clandestine organizations within the official state

art and culture apparatus, and then filter back down to the lowest levels, energizing the people in their struggle for freedom.

As this movement demands greater vitality and boldness in the expression and production of its subversive, progressive, revolutionary art, the aesthetic quality of the art increases. This allows us to witness the strange, apparently paradoxical yet in fact entirely dialectical way in which the powerful, wealthy bourgeois classes acquire and capitalize on subversive, progressive works of art because of their high aesthetic quality. These works in turn become interchangeable assets within the socio-economic superstructure that are subject to increases in price that generate profits for the owner.

When we take all these circumstances into account, it becomes obvious that the social phenomenon of art is extremely important on our continent in terms of its social, political, and economic unity. But, even more importantly, the art of the Americas, in addition to its very high aesthetic quality, possesses a distinct unity of its own. This unity is apparent within the variables created by the geographic and social environments of the region and by the links and ligaments that connect its various national and even tribal forms of expression. This art is therefore a genuine continental backbone, similar to the one created by the mountains that stretch from one pole to the other.

This unity is not an archeological reality, much less a prehistoric one. There is no country on this continent where hundreds of thousands of men do not continue to observe the traditions of continental art in their contemporary production. Furthermore, many superstructure artists of great culture and refinement have managed to put down roots once again in the Americas where, from north to south, a marvelous art of the people is flourishing.

In conclusion, it is clear that these circumstances are most useful and can help to promote the development of Pan-American unity. When we work toward that goal in our continental society's superstructure, where we can easily establish the necessary connections to do so, we will immediately see positive results that will filter down to the lowest levels of our social structure, given this art's deep roots in the past and the present, and its involvement with the people's desire for liberty and resistance. Liberty and resistance in the face of life and death. The development of this art will contribute directly to stimulating and nourishing the desire for freedom, independence, and equality in the lower echelons of our society—which are conditions that can only be achieved through

true continental democracy. I am referring to a democracy that will put an end to semi-colonial goals, imperialist pride and abuses, racial discrimination, and national divisions, and instead will create unity and planned industrialization among countries that have not yet been industrialized—by the largest and strongest country in the world, the United States—in order to mobilize the continent’s vast natural resources, boundless development, and extensive social possibilities. This can only happen and will have to happen if Latin America does not want to perish under the rubble of the slave-owning, racist Greco-Latin world that is now collapsing, as well as under the X-factor of the powers still standing. [This can only be achieved] through continental unification around an American culture with roots established in ancient times that are now flowering in the modern conditions of our current scientific, industrial, and artistic period. . . .

III.2.6 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1056599

LATIN AMERICAN UNITY: A BATTLE OF DIPLOMACY IN SAN FRANCISCO

Octavio Paz, 1945

Mexican poet and Nobel Laureate Octavio Paz (1914–1998) wrote this newspaper essay in San Francisco in the days leading up to the drafting of the charter of the United Nations, which occurred on June 26, 1945. Paz wrote this piece while completing his Guggenheim Fellowship, which had enabled him to study at the University of California, Berkeley, and prior to his first assignment as a member of the Mexican diplomatic corps in Paris. At that time and as a result of his experience in California, he began writing what would become one of his most famous works, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950). Paz recounts how the Latin American republics acted in exemplary solidarity to push for a human rights bill as part of the charter and how their collective stance paid off when U.S. Secretary of State Edward Stettinius accepted the petition under mounting pressure from both civic and religious groups in the United States. It is in this context that Paz discusses Pan Americanism as a very malleable system of international relationships that enabled the Latin American republics to soften the stronghold of its most powerful, northern neighbor. As a part of his undisguised “official” reading

of the events, Paz underscores the importance of the Act of Chapultepec through which the TIAR (Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Defense) was articulated. “La unidad de Latinoamérica. Batalla diplomática en San Francisco” was published initially in *Mañana* [(Mexico City), no. 92 (June 2, 1945), 12–13, 15] and reprinted in the recent anthology *Crónica trunca de días excepcionales* [Octavio Paz (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2007), 81–92], on which this translation is based.

ON MAY 15, AT A DINNER AT THE PRESS CLUB in this city, Ezequiel Padilla,¹ the head of the Mexican Delegation, addressed more than two hundred journalists and announced that at last, that afternoon, the issue of regional agreements had been resolved. He added, “This has been one of the happiest days of my life. The unity of the Americas has been preserved.” After his speech, I and the few other Mexican journalists who were there requested an interview. Half an hour later, he received us in his suite at the Hotel Saint-Francis. He was silent, still overcome by emotion, and handed us a sheet of paper; it was the statement issued by Stettinius.² As he gave it to us, Padilla seemed to be saying, “This is the result of a battle that lasted two weeks; read it, and if it doesn’t seem to be much, consider that it is probably more than any of us expected.” There were three or four of us in the room, and we immediately began to translate the document and make notes.

When we had finished, someone wanted to ask questions. But Minister Ezequiel Padilla refused. He was exhausted, and said, “It’s very late. Besides, I have nothing further to add.”

“Did every Latin American delegation accept the proposal offered by the United States?”

Though extremely tired, Padilla answered.

“Of course. And I can and should tell you that we all remained united during the course of this two-week struggle. We should be as proud of that as we are of our victory.”

That was true. For me, Latin America’s unity has been the most encouraging feature of our recent history. In the face of Pan-Americanism, which has traditionally been seen as a way of dividing us, Latin Americans maintained an exemplary unity. And I say exemplary because it was not achieved by one country exerting its power over other, weaker ones.

THE INTER-AMERICAN SYSTEM

Why were the Latin Americans so willing to keep Pan-Americanism as part of the new world organization? On the face of it, this willingness contradicts what we have said in the past; we have always mistrusted Pan-American unity and have at times been hostile to the idea. There are two reasons for this sudden about-face: the evolution of the Inter-American system and the growth of Latin American countries.

The Pan-American Union was founded in 1896 at the request of the United States. It began as a trade agency. It was an expression of the famous dollar imperialism, which was one of the stages in the development of Yankee international policy. When the Union was created by the State Department, it coincided with the introduction of a new style of politics in which good manners were intended as a substitute for the stick, though they did not entirely replace it. The first Pan-American conference was held in Mexico in 1902; from that moment on, the Union ceased to be a trade agency and became a political organization.³ After 1902, a conference was organized every four years: in Havana, in Lima, in Montevideo, in Rio. . . The delegates to these meetings discussed and approved agreements, treaties, and conventions that were later submitted to their own governments for ratification. Pan-Americanism was a very elastic system of international relations; or, to put it in the jargon used by the professionals, it was an “open” system.

Though the United States introduced this policy because it conveyed the international legal endorsement for North America’s need for expansion, it was not long before the Latin Americans also discovered that the system had its advantages. They found that it provided a forum where they could argue with their powerful neighbor, fight with it, and often defeat it or at least soften its demands. As the importance of the Union grew with each conference, it became increasingly harder for the United States to resort to its old method of using the stick. The Pan-American system developed into an instrument for the advancement of the policies of all the countries in the region, rather than those of just one of the participants. In recent years the United States has discovered that its southern neighbors are political and economic powers that are beginning to wake up; they cannot be beaten or domesticated, but must be handled through negotiations and agreements.

In spite of all these favorable circumstances, nothing would have been accomplished without the emergence of a new political attitude in the United States. That new awareness was embodied in one name: Roosevelt. For the past twelve years the Good Neighbor policy has been the object of both cloying praise and poisonous, passionate criticism. Many saw it as the same old wolf in new clothing. What those critics did not understand was that this new policy was not a perverse, ingenious plot invented by the State Department; it was in fact the expression of a new attitude and an organic change in American life. Thanks to that change, the Pan-American system has been improved and has become one of the most essential, complex organizations in contemporary international life.

CHAPULTEPEC, DUMBARTON OAKS

In Rio de Janeiro, and later in Chapultepec, the system reached full maturity.⁴ The pressure of war undoubtedly contributed to the fact that the resolutions agreed to at these two conferences were of a militant nature that emphasized continental unity. But what was remarkable about these resolutions was that they all tended to advocate a peaceful solution to any conflict and, most important, they aimed to solve them jointly, as a group. All those treaties and agreements created a legal foundation of exceptional importance for the future: Nations' Rights and Obligations; Dispute Conciliation and Arbitration; Rejection of War; Non-Intervention; Reciprocal Assistance, and so on. The Non-Intervention agreement, for example—unlike the one that betrayed Spain—guaranteed the independence and sovereignty of nations and prohibited foreigners from interfering in the internal affairs of the countries involved. The Chapultepec Agreement—a Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance—stipulated that, in the event of an attack on any American country, all the others would come to its defense. This resolution was of great importance because it prevented any unilateral action, transformed the Monroe Doctrine into a group instrument, and guaranteed the unity of the continent.

But the war continued to wreak profound changes on American society and politics. It transformed the United States into a world power. Or, rather, it awakened the country to its true situation; the Americas, and the Inter-American system, were not enough for the United States. Dumbarton Oaks was the expression of that change. When Latin American diplomats read the Dumbarton Oaks

proposals, their first question was, “What will happen to the Pan-American system and, above all, to the Chapultepec Agreement?” The answer was expressed in the Big Four’s proposals, but it was a confusing answer. On one hand, it said that regional organizations would be part of the new world organization and that their existence should be encouraged. But it also indicated that the Security Council would be authorized to initiate coercive activities. (Regional organizations could only initiate them with approval from the Council.) Dumbarton Oaks negated the Chapultepec Agreement. And, as if that weren’t enough, the Big Three, in San Francisco, introduced a new amendment: All regional organizations and agencies that were capable of taking coercive actions should submit to the High Command of the Inter-American Defense Council, an emergency organization created during the war that consisted of representatives of the high commands of each country in the region. If the Defense Council survived, it would exist under the umbrella of the Security Council’s High Command.

BATTLE, COMPROMISE, VICTORY

The Dumbarton Oaks plan is, theoretically, a denial of the Monroe Doctrine; in the event of a conflict in the Americas, the Security Council could send Russian, or English, or French troops to quell the disturbance. But that is just an option. The Big Five have veto powers and the United States would surely put a stop to any action if the Council tried to send non-American troops to the American continent. It is reasonable to assume that the United States—representing the Council—would be in charge of imposing order in the Americas. Dumbarton Oaks, which in theory is a denial of the Monroe Doctrine, is in fact a step backward to a stage that we had already put behind us. Once again, the United States would be the only country with the power to initiate coercive actions on the continent. Or, at least, it would be the only one in a position, through the Council, to authorize such actions.

That was the situation. A battle then began, which the daily press has been reporting and whose results are now known. Daily meetings, diplomatic skirmishes, and interviews. The Latin Americans remained united and unyielding. The United States delegation was on the verge of division. The situation was confusing, and those of us who witnessed the battle frequently felt that all was lost. Just a few hours before arriving at the compromise in which Padilla played

such an important role, Stettinius seemed determined to give no ground. Both sides were playing a dangerous game; above all, the World Organization had to be saved, but Latin America had shown that friendship is better than the stick, and that our loyalty can be easily gained if we are treated as an equal. And, finally, on the afternoon of May 15, a solution was found that can be summed up in three points:

1. The Security Council would be the supreme authority.
2. If the Council takes no action, each nation will be entitled to act in self-defense (a conditional admission of the Chapultepec Agreement).
3. Regional organizations must be considered the normal channels for arbitrating local disputes.

The Pan-American system was essentially saved at the San Francisco Conference. While it is true that the Chapultepec Agreement was only saved on a conditional basis—since it will function as an auxiliary instrument of the Security Council—that was inevitable. That is the price of our international cooperation. In previous articles, I have tried to show how we must adjust to a new world in which world politics will be the single decisive factor. San Francisco has been the first test. There will be others. I think we have passed the test and that, contrary to what many expected, we have come away with an intelligent compromise, and that is a victory. Padilla was right; Latin American diplomats can be proud of their efforts.

1

Ezequiel Padilla (1890–1971) was the Minister of Foreign Affairs (1940–45), and his performance in that post made him one of the strongest presidential pre-candidates for the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana [Party of the Mexican Revolution]. In 1945, while still head of Foreign Affairs, he was chairman of the Inter-American Conference on War and Peace that was held at Chapultepec Castle, which led to the Chapultepec Agreement, and he was the head of the Mexican Delegation to the San Francisco Conference. Together with Manuel Tello and Francisco Castillo Nájera, he signed the United Nations Charter on June 26, 1945. The following year he was the PMD and PAN candidate for president of the Republic, but Miguel Alemán Valdez was elected. Padilla died in Mexico City on September 16, 1971.

2

Edward Reilly Stettinius, Jr. (1900–1949), was the final Secretary of State in Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration, and the first to serve under Harry S. Truman, from 1944 to 1945. Truman, who did not attend the event in San Francisco, put Stettinius in charge of the conference. Afterward the president asked him to resign his cabinet post so that he could accept the position of United States ambassador to the United Nations.

3

Nineteen countries attended the second meeting of the Pan American Union, held in Mexico City. The Pan American Health Office was created on this occasion. The United States insisted on the creation of the Pan American Bank, but no agreement was reached on the subject.

4

This refers to the Third Meeting of the Secretaries of State of the American Republics, held in Rio de Janeiro in January 1942. This meeting set out to establish regional plans for defense and economic solidarity, and to sever relations between American countries and the Axis powers. The Chapultepec Agreement was issued at the Inter-American Conference on War and Peace at the meeting held in 1945 at Chapultepec Castle; delegates to the conference declared that all sovereign states are legally equal.

III.2.7 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1056617

CALIBAN: A QUESTION

Roberto Fernández Retamar, 1969

This text is excerpted from “Calibán: notas hacia una discusión de cultura en nuestra América,” the landmark essay by influential Cuban poet and essayist Roberto Fernández Retamar (born 1930). It subverts José Enrique Rodó’s [SEE DOCUMENT III.2.1] concept of the Europeanized Ariel as the embodiment of Latin American culture and identity, proposing instead the beastly, enslaved Caliban, who had been robbed of his island, as a more appropriate metaphor for the Continent’s racial intermingling. Fernández Retamar begins his essay with a significant question that underscores and influences a broad section of the present volume: “Does a Latin American culture exist?” According to him, Latin Americans are ethnically, although not culturally, differentiated from one another. Written in 1969 and first published in 1971 in *Casa de las Américas* (Havana), no. 68 (September–October 1971)—a combative journal that Fernández Retamar established in 1965 and directed for a number of years—the essay also appeared in the anthology *Calibán: apuntes sobre la cultura en nuestra*

América [Roberto Fernández Retamar (Mexico City: Editorial Diógenes, 1971)]. This excerpt is from the text's first translation into English published as "Caliban: Notes Toward a Discussion of Culture in Our America" [Roberto Fernández Retamar, *Caliban and Other Essays*, Translated by Edward Baker, foreword by Fredric Jameson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 3–45].

NOTES TOWARD A DISCUSSION OF CULTURE IN OUR AMERICA

A European journalist, and moreover a leftist, asked me a few days ago, "Does a Latin-American culture exist?" We were discussing, naturally enough, the recent polemic regarding Cuba that ended by confronting, on the one hand, certain bourgeois European intellectuals (or aspirants to that state) with a visible colonialist nostalgia; and on the other, that body of Latin-American writers and artists who reject open or veiled forms of cultural and political colonialism. The question seemed to me to reveal one of the roots of the polemic and, hence, could also be expressed another way: "Do you exist?" For to question our culture is to question our very existence, our human reality itself, and thus to be willing to take a stand in favor of our irremediable colonial condition, since it suggests that we would be but a distorted echo of what occurs elsewhere. This elsewhere is of course the metropolis, the colonizing centers, whose "right wings" have exploited us and whose supposed "left wings" have pretended and continue to pretend to guide us with pious solicitude—in both cases with the assistance of local intermediaries of varying persuasions.

While this fate is to some extent suffered by all countries emerging from colonialism—those countries of ours that enterprising metropolitan intellectuals have ineptly and successively termed *barbarians*, *peoples of color*, *underdeveloped countries*, *Third World*—I think the phenomenon achieves a singular crudeness with respect to what [José] Martí [SEE DOCUMENT 1.3.4] called "our half-breed America." Although the thesis that every man and even every culture is *mestizo* could easily be defended and although this seems especially valid in the case of colonies, it is nevertheless apparent that in both their ethnic and their cultural aspects capitalist countries long ago achieved a relative homogeneity. Almost before our eyes certain readjustments have been made. The white population of the United States (diverse, but of common European origin) exterminated the aboriginal population and thrust the

black population aside, thereby affording itself homogeneity in spite of diversity and offering a coherent model that its Nazi disciples attempted to apply even to other European conglomerates—an unforgivable sin that led some members of the bourgeoisie to stigmatize in Hitler what they applauded as a healthy Sunday diversion in Westerns and Tarzan films. Those rogues proposed to the world and even to those of us who are kin to the communities under attack and who rejoiced in the evocation of our own extermination—the monstrous racial criteria that have accompanied the United States from its beginnings to the genocide in Indochina. Less apparent (and in some cases perhaps less cruel) is the process by which other capitalist countries have also achieved relative racial and cultural homogeneity at the expense of *internal* diversity.

Nor can any necessary relationship be established between *mestizaje* [miscegenation] and the colonial world. The latter is highly complex¹ despite basic structural affinities of its parts. It has included countries with well-defined millennial cultures, some of which have suffered (or are presently suffering) direct occupation (India, Vietnam), and others of which have suffered indirect occupation (China). It also comprehends countries with rich cultures but less political homogeneity, which have been subjected to extremely diverse forms of colonialism (the Arab world). There are other peoples, finally, whose fundamental structures were savagely dislocated by the dire activity of the European despite which they continue to preserve a certain ethnic and cultural homogeneity (black Africa). (Indeed, the latter has occurred despite the colonialists' criminal and unsuccessful attempts to prohibit it.) In these countries *mestizaje* naturally exists to a greater or lesser degree, but it is always accidental and always on the fringe of the central line of development.

But within the colonial world there exists a case unique to *the entire planet*: a vast zone for which *mestizaje* is not an accident but rather the essence, the central line: ourselves, “our *mestizo* America.” Martí, with his excellent knowledge of the language, employed this specific adjective as the distinctive sign of our culture—a culture of descendants, both ethnically and culturally speaking, of aborigines, Africans, and Europeans. In his “Letter from Jamaica” (1815) [SEE DOCUMENT 1.3.2], the Liberator, Simón Bolívar, had proclaimed, “We are a small human species: we possess a world encircled by vast seas, new in almost all its arts and sciences.” In his message to the Congress of Angostura² (1819), he added:

Let us bear in mind that our people is neither European nor North American, but a composite of Africa and America rather than an emanation of Europe; for even Spain fails as a European people because of her African blood, her institutions, and her character. It is impossible to assign us with any exactitude to a specific human family. The greater part of the native peoples has been annihilated; the European has mingled with the American and with the African, and the African has mingled with the Indian and with the European. Born from the womb of a common mother, our fathers, different in origin and blood, are foreigners; all differ visibly in the epidermis, and this dissimilarity leaves marks of the greatest transcendence.

Even in this century, in a book as confused as the author himself but full of intuitions (*La raza cósmica*, 1925), the Mexican [educator] José Vasconcelos [SEE DOCUMENT IV.1.2] pointed out that in Latin America a new race was being forged, “made with the treasure of all previous ones, the final race, the cosmic race.”³

This singular fact lies at the root of countless misunderstandings. Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Arab, or African cultures may leave the Euro-North American enthusiastic, indifferent, or even depressed. But it would never occur to him to confuse a Chinese with a Norwegian, or a Bantu with an Italian; nor would it occur to him to ask whether they exist. Yet, on the other hand, some Latin Americans are taken at times for apprentices, for rough drafts or dull copies of Europeans, including among these latter whites who constitute what Martí called “European America.” In the same way, our entire culture is taken as an apprenticeship, a rough draft or a copy of European bourgeois culture (“an emanation of Europe,” as Bolívar said). This last error is more frequent than the first one, since confusion of a Cuban with an Englishman, or a Guatemalan with a German, tends to be impeded by a certain ethnic tenacity. Here the *rioplatenses* [people of the River Plate region] appear to be less ethnically, although not culturally, differentiated. The confusion lies in the root itself, because as descendants of numerous Indian, African, and European communities, we have only a few languages with which to understand one another: those of the colonizers. While other colonials or ex-colonials in metropolitan centers speak among themselves in their own language, we Latin Americans continue to use the languages of our colonizers. These are the *lingua franca* capable of going beyond the frontiers that neither the aboriginal nor Creole languages succeed in crossing. Right now as we are discussing, as I am discussing with those colonizers, how else can I do it except

in one of their languages, which is now also *our* language, and with so many of their conceptual tools, which are now also *our* conceptual tools? This is precisely the extraordinary outcry that we read in a work by perhaps the most extraordinary writer of fiction who ever existed. In *The Tempest*, William Shakespeare's last play, the deformed Caliban—enslaved, robbed of his island, and trained to speak by Prospero—rebukes Prospero thus:

*You taught me language, and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
For learning me your language...!*⁴

1

See Yves Lacoste, *Les pays sous-développés* (Paris, 1959), 82–84.

2

Currently Ciudad Bolívar, Venezuela.—Ed.

3

José Vasconcelos, *La raza cósmica* (1925). A Swedish summary of what is known on this subject can be found in Magnus Mörner's study, *La mezcla de razas en la historia de América Latina*, [trans.] Jorge Piatigorsky (Buenos Aires, 1969). Here it is recognized that "no part of the world has witnessed such a gigantic mixing of races as the one that has been taking place in Latin America and the Caribbean since 1492" (15). Of course, what interests me in these notes is not the irrelevant biological fact of the "races" but the historical fact of the "cultures"; see Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Race et histoire* [1952] (Paris, 1968).

4

William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (Act 1, Part 2, 362–64).

III.3

INSIGHTS FROM LATIN AMERICA ON U.S. ART AND SOCIETY

III.3.1 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 839794

ART IN THE UNITED STATES

José Martí, 1888

In this letter to the editor of the Buenos Aires daily *La Nación*, Cuban writer and critic José Martí uses a recent exhibition of watercolors that he saw in New York as a departure point from which to examine the state of art in the United States. Like many of his Latin American peers during this period, Martí was interested in the social and cultural differences between Latin America and North America. Nevertheless, he was more interested ultimately in noting the commonalities between North American and Latin American art, particularly at a moment when the United States had finally gained its cultural and artistic independence from England. According to Martí, North American artists achieved this autonomy by shifting their attention to the landscape. In the process, their work began to display the luminosity and color of Italian and Spanish painting, which, he emphasizes, has always been the basis of Latin American painting. His letter, “El arte en los Estados Unidos—¿Hay un arte propio?—¿Puede haber un arte vigoroso en un país industrial?—Los acuarelistas americanos—Un arte pasmoso—Su entrada franca en la escuela de la luz—España, Italia y México en el arte yanqui,” first appeared in *La Nación* (March 13, 1880); Martí also published it in Mexico City’s *El Partido Liberal* (February 18, 1888). The present translation is from the reprint of the letter in the author’s complete works [José Martí, *Obras completas*, vol. XIII: *En los Estados Unidos* (Havana: Editorial Nacional de Cuba, 1963–66), 479–84].

NOT MANY YEARS HAVE PASSED since the days when a New York exhibition of works by American painters was a sad affair. They kept producing landscapes

over and over again—the only kind of art that they could learn from the English, because it is the only kind that the English know how to paint. Their dark, brutal seascapes lacked the fluid, translucent quality of water and were stiff, hazy, and purplish, like meat on the verge of rotting. Their figures were lifeless and artless; they looked like wooden cutouts, thrown up against a rectilinear background that was always gray, or emerging from what looked like a haze of smoke or ash. Who would have thought that, a mere eight years later, “Yankee” painting would have absorbed all the energy and light of America and begun to enliven the gloomy English art from which, until just yesterday, it was receiving such misguided, timid lessons!

“Yankee” painters lack the luminous palette that our artists—like the Spaniards and the Italians—inherit from their land and their sunshine rather than finding it within themselves. They also lack the gift bequeathed by sun-drenched countries where the beauty and harmony of nature find their highest expression: that serene, sensible art, devoid of extravagance and excess, which is denied to those whose imagination must compensate for an absence of natural beauty. There is such depth and so much that has yet to be taught in the canon of art which is known in Latin America that neither [Eugène] Fromentin, nor [Louis] Blanc, nor [John] Ruskin could have known...!

North American painters—like their French and especially their English counterparts—lack that calm artistic temperament, but not the will to learn, nor the desire to see what is new, nor an instinct for color, nor the need for intense feelings, which are indispensable for achieving balance and peace of mind in countries where life is difficult and hectic. “Does painting produce...?” the North American artist wonders. Then, let us paint! Is painting a delightful expression of the imagination, a noble occupation, an oath sworn by the light, a refined soul’s act of rebellion against the grotesque, bestial, insipid, and degrading existence of a nation that hastens its own decline, as it gorges and dazzles in equal measure, because it loves only what is of an animal and perishable nature? Then those with refined souls should paint, so that a country’s art can become proportionately higher as its coarseness intensifies.

. . .

That is why, even when they paint scenes from nature, English painters and aestheticians drench their work in shades of ethereal, rose-colored ideas.

That is why artists in the United States—who are exiles from light—seek out places where they can flood their art with it. These days they do not imitate as much as they used to: they are less prone to copy [François] Millet's mist, burdened with a sorrowful soul; or the lilac crests and epic waves of the English painter [J.M.W.] Turner; or the fashionable creation of some maestro blessed with fleeting fame who goes beyond blues and reds pursuing the fleeing sun or the fame that eludes him. They are no longer seduced, as they once were, by virile innovators or famous proponents of Japanism. They say that snow is a good subject for chromes! Too much color is bad, but we can't live without color! And so, moved by a love of nature that expresses the rhythm of the republic, whose truth enhances and strengthens the truth of the spirit, they seek the light they crave where it exists as a normal part of nature or retains memories of centuries of art. In Granada, in Madrid, in Venice, in Florence, in California, in Florida, in Mexico...!

Among North American artists, who are only just beginning to trust themselves, one still finds that passion for extravagance whose only justification is as an expression of desperate ambition in countries where art merchants offer amazingly bold works to sated buyers. Or where, amidst a paucity of paintings of natural subjects, they demand—from their imagination or their dreams—the splendor heralded by the soul.

But, from this exhibition of watercolors that we have just visited; from these charming, honest, and talented works that would have seemed impossible eight years ago; from this exhibition that showcases the warm, improvisational genius of America, it is clear that once they found the source of art—which is the beauty of nature—they abandoned the schools and the false ways of literary painters who prosper in damp, dark countries. Those were the earliest forms that were inevitably used in North American painting, in this province that is increasingly pulling away from England and going its own way in the field of arts and letters.

There are still some, like [Frederic Edwin] Church on occasion, or like [William Henry] Lippincott, who envelope their rosy creations in a pale, milky veil; or like [Theodore] Robinson who, like the poet Charles Baudelaire, finds springtime in a sensuous African woman's welcoming lips. One artist copies [James Abbott McNeill] Whistler by placing a bony bust against a yellow background. Another, displaying extraordinary temerity, clothes his *Coquette* in a green tunic and hides her chin behind a black fan. But what stands out here is not, as was once the

case, a futile attempt to imitate those who have lost their way or seek to shock the viewer, but rather the colorful landscapes, the exploration of natural beauty, the undisguised immersion in the school of light, and the alacrity with which these young artists (in this coarse milieu) have acquired the delicate, restrained touch required to paint watercolors. So much so that [Mariano] Fortuny could well have signed Winslow Homer's *A Country Lad* and [Alexandre Louis] Leloir could have claimed authorship of León Morau's *The Marquise*. Those who set out to be realists now take the correct approach, scouring what is constant and beautiful for artistic reality, which is not the same as the ordinary variety. Those who considered themselves idealists no longer confuse thought with expression, and instead express ambition, dogma, or symbols in solid, well-proportioned works that please the eye, unlike those that, looking like depictions of steam, were but feasts of milk, storms of rainbows, and pools of blood.

. . .

But the artists' swift victory over the spirit of their native environment and the smoothness and charm of the works that emphasize their picturesque quality and serene composition are not the only breakthroughs with which this exhibition reveals the essential qualities of North American genius. Totally honest in terms of its portrayal of the country's current reality and the frankness with which it tests universal ideas at the local level, this art scorns the falseness of whimsical schools and searches for truth naturally. . . . And the truth is that—while we cannot see where one color ends and another begins, and the works lose none of their look or faint delicacy—in terms of energy and effect, neither Catherine Greatedorex's superb *Dahlias*, nor Louis Tiffany's solemn *Sycamore Canyon*, nor Hamilton's colossal *Landscape* have any reason to be envious of the most robust oil painting, and in fact are undoubtedly superior—why not admit it?—in terms of vagueness and charm. On the other hand, the large watercolors of pale, coarse figures attempt in vain to compare with paintings; these attempts to produce larger watercolors are far less successful than the adorable, perfect *Salome* by [John] La Farge and *Miss Dorothy* by [Thomas] Moran, which are painted in an appropriate size. . . .

Among those who observe how North Americans are expressing themselves in their painting, who would brand this superficial study of the current condition, genuineness, and remarkable advances in their art as trivial? They

do not yet grasp the epic issues, which not even their formidable war can teach them. But, in their canvases, as in their buildings, their businesses, their communication networks, and their public holidays they tend, in their own particular way, toward grandeur. Like all working people, they love animals, which painters depict in a thousand portraits that are snapped up by buyers in no time at all. But if they paint seascapes, they paint rolling, roaring waves that consume the beach, as in [Thomas Alexander] Harrison's work; if they paint trees they ignore the leafy canopy and paint the trunk. Their enthusiasm is such that, in just a few years, they have acquired a level of artistic sensitivity that more educated nations might struggle for centuries to attain. Their ability to learn from others enables them—as children of storm and snow—to express themselves with Italian colors and attention to detail when they paint the minutest, liveliest facets of cities where life sparkles with restless nuances among the diversity of its residents. Their familiarity with colossal themes encourages them to use the resources of the *art of grace* to attempt gigantic works of the *art of strength*. Since the imagination guards against the corruption of nations and artists are the holy men of their people in terms of their language or their paint brush, we can see how, as the republic's vices and mistaken concept of life temper the North American's love of country, art returns to claim him and allows him to express his deeds and his memories as fast as maggots can lay siege to the body and as quickly as his soul can manage.

. . .

But what pleased us most was the considerable number of canvases painted in our countries, or in places that, like [Upper] California, will always be ours by nature if not by history! These painters come to us in search of light: to the missions of Santa Barbara, Santa Ines, and San Diego, scenes of yesterday's stoic Franciscan's sterile virtue and today's bare gardens, with trellises but no vines, fountains with no water, bell towers with no bells, roofs with no tiles. One day in Santa Barbara, visitors like Louis Tiffany—who paints the patio looking melancholy and the cloister deserted—witnessed Brother Junípero Serra's works of love. They came to Sycamore Canyon where serpentine trunks sprouted from ashen rocks under clear, pure water, devoid of grass or flowers, flowing peacefully over stones. Like Hopkinson Smith, who uses the same earthy yellow used by

[Ferdinand] Heilbuth, they came to the *Tierra Caliente* [Hot Land] where the short trees cast their shadow across the gaunt earth, whose only touch of green was a thirsty maguay cactus. Smith also came to Mexico City, and with faint brush strokes attempted to capture the beauty and shades of light in a scene of canoes bearing fruit and flowers up the waterways to market. His later colors seemed more real, though they lacked the vitality and splendor of the land, when—peering through misty eyes—he copied the cloister at Santo Domingo in a scene that included some Indians who look like Arabs. There is also the entrance to San Hipólito [church], which appears to have been composed, though not colored, by an excellent artist, with the exception of a sunshade that, in order to enliven the surrounding earth tones, is [painted the color of] red cotton. Not everyone can seize the light of Latin America...!

III.3.2 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 747185

COMRADES IN CHICAGO

Carlos Mérida, 1938

This text by Mexico City-based Guatemalan artist Carlos Mérida is a transcription of a speech he delivered in Chicago in March 1938 on the occasion of the establishment of the Union Artists Gallery. Mérida begins his political statement commending the efforts of U.S. artists because, as he assures them, the gallery's space will be dedicated to exhibiting American art. Making an animated call to avoid what he considers to be the blind alley of Mexican muralism, Mérida publicly denounces the superficiality and demagoguery of the ("Big Three") Mexican muralists and their apparent lack of aesthetic judgment. Instead, he highlights other painters such as José Chávez Morado, Pablo O'Higgins, Carlos Orozco Romero, and, especially, the printer Leopoldo Méndez. Mérida's position was controversial at the time, and the artist returned consistently to the ideas that he first articulated when he wrote his treatises on *Integración plástica*. The transcription of Mérida's speech was first published in *Letras de México: Gaceta literaria y artística* [(Mexico City), "Proemio o parte escrita de la plática dada por Carlos Mérida en Chicago en marzo de 1938," no. 28 (June 1, 1938), 7, 10], on which this translation is based.

THE AFFECTION PROMPTED BY THE CLOSE AFFINITY between the work being done by artists in Mexico and that of our comrades in Chicago gives me the confidence necessary to speak these words. I bring you a message from my friends as well as my fondest wishes that the work we have in common may prove fertile and bear fruit as much for art as for the cause of human freedom and in our fight against fascism.

The effort that the members of the Union Artists Gallery have made in founding this cultural center inspires my admiration and leads me to express my best wishes for its prosperity. It is in places such as this, organized in such a worthy manner, that the future art of North America will cement its support, and like us, move step by step toward the conquest of the future despite an endless number of difficulties. It would be daring, even risky, to affirm that an art that reflects the life and the spirit of this great people already flourishes in North America: an expression that would be equivalent to that which exists in theater, architecture, and, in these most recent times, in music and in dance. Nevertheless, I can make out on the horizon the work that will be done [in this country], and I do not hesitate to affirm that, through a common effort like the one now being undertaken, the day is not far off that the United States will boast of a new artistic expression. And this will happen when painters delve a bit deeper into the soul of the people, when they base their work on their tradition and fundamental culture.

Now is the time to warn you that I am fearful that this effort will not crystallize soon, because a great number of North American artists at this moment are following—without the least judgment—one of Mexico's worst experiments. Despite [this era's] revolutionary pretenses, it resulted in nothing more than stagnation, an anti-revolutionary movement due to its fundamentally academic nature. I might as well say that I am referring to the interminable number of paintings that have been created in Mexico, with immediate utilitarian purposes, without any artistic sense at all, or even with demagogic ends [in mind.]

In order to understand Mexican painting, it is necessary to perform a modest analysis of its evolution. Our artistic production has passed through various stages that encompass not only our process, but the evolution of all artistic production. The most transitory period [occurred] when painting received its chief influence and subject matters from folklore. This was superficial painting, mere gloss, without transmutations that form new organisms. Directly after we had, for reasons connected to social movements [then occurring] in Mexico,

another rational period that was preoccupied with telling graphic stories, without any artistic sense at all. [This period] produced only a few artworks of indisputable quality. These are the ones that reveal the authentic character of Mexican painting; those few works point out the paths that subsequent [artists] will either not see or will choose not to follow. I do not have to say which type of works I am referring to, but it does not hurt to recall a few beautiful fragments from Chapingo [School of Agriculture], at the Secretaria de Educación [Ministry of Education], and at the Escuela Preparatoria. Apart from these works, the rest of painting was immediately accessible, even though the artist should never lose sight of his intermediate position. Simple reproduction of what we see does make for art that will stand the test of time.

It is logical that we will be able to realize this intermediary art, when we approach the earth in the most intimate manner possible, [likewise] the people and their idiosyncrasies, which should be our idiosyncrasies, [will act] not as spectators but as authentic actors. Painting has an expressive medium, its plastic element—its material. This is the clay in which it manifests itself, in which it is rendered sensorial. Technique facilitates the tangible work, the process of creation; but it should never be considered as an end, but rather as a means. The plastic element, sublimated in the creator's hands, constitutes a poetic language with no relation to the simple [works of] graphic tales that I mentioned before.

These two cycles in Mexican painting are in the past; the folkloric art, which was superficial and imitative; [and] the false revolutionary art, which was negative, utilitarian, and inexpressive. Today, in Mexico, the youth have taken advantage of the lessons and painful experiences of their elders. They now know that an artwork cannot be based on protracted and useless repetition. At the present moment, these same youth are creating the third cycle of the visual arts in Mexico. They are creating works that, although still imperfect, are nevertheless more vital, more revolutionary, and more expressive than any created by the legion of insipid illustrators.

In order for North American artists to create fertile and vital works, I believe it is necessary to re-create the elements of the environment and transmute the ethnic values and idiosyncrasies of the nation. They must have the capacity to see and express themselves differently, as [John] Graham says; they must not create art that is representative, but rather abstract, and they must take this word to mean the creation of a unique organism.

American artists will at last manifest their artistic expression when they reach a state that is both passionate and lyrical, and when they divest themselves of harmful influences, as in the case I mentioned previously. These influences are a danger to you all, my cherished friends, and I believe here we should take note of the multiplicity of faults and vices that exist, both ours and yours. In my travels through the United States, I have painfully observed the tendency of American painters—I am speaking of the youth, those who are creating the artistic consciousness of this great nation—, who constantly and insistently create graphic expressions that are for immediate use in much the same way that Mexican painters do. These thousands of canvases do nothing more than repeat exhaustively that which is of the least interest to the people, namely to see themselves mechanically represented exactly as they are. Would it not be more logical to give the people a more emotional, more passionate art that would unleash their very passions, their fears, their desires, their suffering, and their fatigue, instead of simple exterior pictures that represent what they are physically?

We need a sublimated art. We may take as an example the tragic and beautiful vault painted by Antonio Pujol in the [Abelardo L.] Rodríguez Market [in Mexico City], which without fear of seeming unjust, should be considered one of the most lyrical pieces in contemporary Mexican painting.

Now that I have cited some young personalities within the field of Mexican painting, and especially now that an exhibition featuring works by members of the LEAR [Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios (League of Revolutionary Writers and Artists)] group is about to open, I would like to mention another great young artist, Alfredo Zalce. This painter, who is sensitive, delicate, and profound, derives his motivation from the people themselves. Even more, he lives those [motives], as he is the people; he transforms them until they become new artistic organisms of the highest poetic quality. No one can remain numb before Zalce's work; his drawing is masterful, rhythmic, and devoid of angles, unfolding within an absolutely vivid space.

Another young master that I must speak of in the most laudatory terms is the admirable engraver Leopoldo Méndez. This artist, a militant among leftists and a pure socialist, has been able to elevate his subjects even to the point that they become elements secondary to the development of artistic values; as such, he is able to create a work that is wholly opposed to mere propaganda. His work is

the most worthy expression of the pain, anxiety, and desire for liberation of the Mexican people. When one sees an engraving by Méndez, the cosmos is revealed. This artist is the authentic heir to another great son of the people: the engraver [José Guadalupe] Posada.

Among the other young artists that are on exhibit here, it is necessary to speak of Gonzalo Paz y Pérez and his emphasis on race; both harmonious and lyrical, he is master of a deeply emotional sensibility; [and we speak] of Pablo O'Higgins, [master of the] angular, dramatic, and hard; of [José] Chávez Morado, yet another talented engraver; of Everardo Ramírez, full of purpose, but still a bit constrained by the ballast of a story; and of Isidro Campos, who is bitter and sardonic. Could we discover in him some affinity with [George] Grosz? When this young artist realizes his potential, the drama that can already be seen in his work will radiate in an all-powerful manner.

The work of these young painters—full of expression and emotion—fantastically artistic and dramatic—is Mexican in its essence and manifestation despite being far removed from the representation [typical of] *costumbrismo*. In some of their works we feel, like in [José Clemente] Orozco's work, a hint of tragedy—the daily tragedy of our earth.

Finally, I must mention Carlos Orozco Romero, a painter of great potential who is in full command of his [artistic] personality. Orozco Romero, who is Mexican in sentiment and universal in expression, possesses a fluid and sober style.

III.3.3 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 833512

MY OPINION ON THE NORTH AMERICAN ARTISTS' EXHIBITION

Joaquín Torres-García, 1941

Joaquín Torres-García delivered this lecture on September 5, 1941, after visiting an exhibition of North American painting at the Salón Nacional de Bellas Artes in Montevideo. He had lived

in New York from 1920 to 1922, and consequently he considered himself to be free of prejudice in critiquing U.S. art. Torres-García invokes Walt Whitman's desire for the spiritual unification of the entire continent. However, he notes that although the United States provides ample, material support for the production of art, the country does not foster the spiritual growth of its artists. Hence, in his view, the United States has not allowed its artists to accomplish two objectives fundamental to the development of American art: the discovery of the new American man and the invention of abstract forms that reflect his moral and intellectual character. Both of these objectives were key to Torres-García's seminal theories on a new art for Latin America that he was developing via many of his lessons on *universalismo constructivo* (Constructive Universalism). This translation comes from the essay's original publication as a brochure in 1942 [Joaquín Torres-García, *Mi opinión sobre la exposición de artistas norteamericanos (contribución al problema del arte en América)* (Montevideo: La Industria Gráfica Uruguaya), 5–19].

ABOUT TWENTY YEARS AGO I WAS IN NEW YORK. I was there with my family, and lived like everyone else; that is, not as a tourist but as a resident, a neighbor. I was therefore in tune with the rhythm of the great city—sending the kids to school; looking for work; spending time with the friends we were making there; celebrating the national holidays; and, of course, painting. And, as one should, showing my work, going to museums and art galleries, and visiting other artists' workshops. In this way I not only learned about local customs and the American way of life; I also became familiar with the art and the aspirations of American artists. I got to know a number of them, many of whom became my friends, and therefore missed none of what was being explored and created in the field of art. I mention all these details as background before going on to say that now, as I look at the works in this exhibition, I can see significant changes and, what's more, undeniable progress compared to what I used to see in those earlier years. In other words, time has not been wasted there, and these artists have put the last twenty years to good use. Now, therefore, having seen what this show has to offer, if we wished to define where exactly this progress is apparent, what should we point out among all the works on display? . . .

Every country is judged; every nation is slandered. This habit tends to be disregarded but, if it were scrutinized a little more closely, it would be obvious that superficial conclusions of this nature breed misconceptions that then lead

to far more serious problems. There is genuine prejudice out there concerning countries, ways of life, and national traits. These falsehoods stand in our way and prevent us from knowing the true facts. Thus it is with North Americans, whose artistic skills are classified in terms that are very far from the truth. More than one visitor to this exhibition surely arrived with a preconceived idea in mind and, after struggling with their prejudice, found certain values here that left them, perhaps, feeling somewhat confused and disoriented. . . .

There are obviously excellent, mediocre, and atrocious works in this exhibition. The collection includes some unforgiveable flaws, and it is certainly a great pity that the selection process did not insist on a higher standard. Who benefits from such carelessness...? . . . Well now, it seems to me that those who assembled this particular selection of works were not simply trying to show us the best, but also wanted to give us a broader view of all facets of North American painting. We can thus see a wide range of contemporary art produced by our friends to the north, which we could not have done if only the best examples of their work had been shown here.

. . .

Let me say a couple of words about the native current. Let us forget about what the Indians—in their precarious position of slavery and persecution—managed to create, and let us instead look at what the whites or the *mestizos* did, standing on the shoulders of the aboriginals. What did they do? They did something bad; they made a real “pastiche.” Ignoring the fact that the Indians see everything as a sacred part of life, they helped themselves to Indian morphology and blended it with European decorative art. The result was a false geometric art, with no support—and therefore empty—lacking any harmonic order, profane, and ridiculously Native American. The worst thing is that there were no exceptions.

These are the two main currents that have influenced art in the Americas. But there is another one, derived from regional folklore that may be the most genuine of all, the true Criollo art. This latter current is the only one that could be called a local expression. This is the only kind of art that truly belongs to us, whether it is from the north or the south. It is the art created by the grandchildren of the invader who merged with the Indian to produce a *sui generis* type of society and man: the *criollo*, the new race in the Americas.

* * *

This, then, is what we have to show Europe. This is what we can say is truly ours. It is the logical result of all that has happened in the New World. But this kind of art—with apologies to nativists—has no roots. Because if it is primary, it is not primitive. It did not sprout from a seed; it has no specific value; it is the child of adventure and chance; an improvisation taking place on the fringes of the colony. It grew up twisted and unrefined, superficial and aggressively uneducated. . . .

At the recent exhibition of paintings and prints—sponsored by North Americans and made possible by their good neighbor policy—we saw a parade of paintings from all over the Americas. We saw how each country drew the raw material for their art from both their own lands and from Europe. We saw a varied range of expressions, of authors and of European trends according to the latitude in each region that reflected a diversity of attitudes and sensibilities. We also saw each country's interpretation of its native conditions. In other words, how the *criollo*—whether Latino or Anglo-Saxon—interpreted primitive American art and European art.

It was a most interesting, thought-provoking parade. First of all, and for example: What unity could be discerned here that might encourage us to dream of an art of our own, that is racially different from Old World art, that we all hope will be created? There is nothing there that augurs well for that dream. On the other hand, an attentive observer would or could have noted something else, something very similar, though interesting in another context: the characteristics of an ethnic lifestyle seen through a blend of European and local art; always created by the Criollo. This was *criollismo* at a higher level, seeming timid and apparently wanting to skip an evolutionary phase, going beyond its earliest expression. Then there was a return to its original colonial roots in an attempt to regain stature, but once again with allegiance to Europe. Then back to culture, abandoning the rustic phase, but with a significant loss of racial identity. In other words, back to Europe.

That is what we saw at this exhibition of paintings from North, Central, and South America. Poor imitation and parody; an attempt at something known to be foreign; a desire to emulate an old culture, European culture, because without that support there was nothing but a void. . . . So that if, within that artificiality and illusion there was a desire to get closer to reality, it was expressed through themes—traditional subjects, the black and indigenous experience, the

gaucho, the Far West idea, patriotism. And, as we know, the theme is not the essential part of any serious art; it is merely a pretext for art to express itself. This is why we do not yet have an art that we can call our own; and by that I mean our palette, our style, our way of understanding composition, our perception of reality—where we find our own concept of the visual arts. . . . Concrete elements that I would call abstract since they are not imitative. New tones and rhythms; artistic events arranged in a new order; the order that arises from another light, another life, another mind, and even from other materials; all of which respond to other aesthetic, religious, or social needs. It seems logical that none of this can yet be seen, because it could not exist without a culture. And something with a basic unity should be understood as such. . . .

. . .

As we looked at the works exhibited by North American artists we saw, just as we see among our own painters and sculptors, that more than one of them, in an attempt to escape from insipid art, has been watching modern trends in Europe. Using that influence as a starting point they have then, to a greater or lesser degree, interpreted it in their own particular way. One example is the painting of the Old Master [Maurice] Prendergast, who has created his own version of Impressionism by following in the steps of [John Singer] Sargent and [James Abbott McNeill] Whistler, who found inspiration in the Spanish Masters. There is a palpable need to move beyond a level of production that has no style or visual art support. As we reviewed the whole range of North American art at the exhibition, we saw countless attempts along those very lines, which contributed to the first-rate quality and technical consistency of the collected works. For all these reasons, this exhibition, this reflection of life in that extraordinary country, can be described as good. It should be visited and studied. And this is not, by any means, empty praise.

* * *

These artists appear to have found what they were looking for in Surrealism, which they express in their own unique way that, thanks to the technique I mentioned earlier, results in very high-quality work. Despite the fresh vision and new structure, these works have a lasting quality and a sense of achievement that

would not be out of place in any museum. There is a faint suggestion of Dutch painting—though without a hint of imitation—possibly due to racial atavism and a certain inexorability. Something that already has a hierarchy. And then, right beside that swath of modern expression, there is another group of works that look even more American and again show impeccable technique—views of industrial scenes; factories and equipment, all expertly painted. This is new, this depiction of real life. There are also industrial scenes in rural settings where North American artists have not managed to find an appropriate form of visual expression. . . . All of this is as yet unconcerned with transcendental questions about art in the universal sense and in terms of a search for a larger structure. In a word, it still lacks classical aspects, that is, eternal values.

Modern North American artists were trained in modern styles or schools and then created their own versions of what they learned by painting scenes depicting their local environments. And here I would say: Good work, boys! You are creating your own artistic America and because you are bold enough to have faced modern styles and not failed in your attempt to express yourselves! This is amply demonstrated in this exhibition. On a personal note, as an old artist and also perhaps as an official art instructor, I think I speak for everyone when I say that I believe I can be grateful for this art festival provided for us by the efforts of these North American artists.

* * *

There are many works that will make us pause to inspect them, all well executed. Our silence will condemn the rest, barring any involuntary omissions. One good work, for example, is *The Reflector* by Gifford Beal, whose firm line is well defined. There is an even better one by [William] Glackens, a work that is worthy of a Master, which strikes me as the best in the show. Levine's fine effort should be acknowledged; as should Prendergast's watercolors, which are remarkable for their consistency. There is a magnificent watercolor by Cikousky [*sic*], and compositions by [George] Grosz. We saw a skillful watercolor by [Edward] Hopper, and another by [Kenneth Hayes] Miller that is even better because it is more of a painting. We should not forget [Paul] Sample's work, which has such a North American theme; or Schreiber's theater; or the equally well-crafted work by [Jacob] Getlar Schmith [*sic*, Smith]—or a few other, similar pieces that I don't remember. The only Cubist work in the show was the *Chinese Restaurant* by Max Weber, which was

also good because of its intrinsic value. As we move on to something else, let us not forget John Kane's good, primitive work.

As I said earlier, the exhibition included a considerable number of Surrealist works, so there are many to mention. *The Drought*, by [Alexander] Hogue, is undoubtedly one of the best, though it is quite literary. Another one that turns heads—not literary in the usual sense, but frankly Surrealist—is Fletcher Martin's *Tomorrow and Tomorrow*. There are also some very expressive landscapes, such as [Charles] Burchfield; and [Samuel] Coleman's, on an unusual street; and a work by [Francis] Criss, which is no less surprising. A small canvas by [Arshile] Gorky, with solid, abstract planes reminiscent of [Joan] Miró, is brilliant and well balanced. In a different genre, seemingly trying to avoid Surrealism and thereby suggesting a new vision that is more in tune with North America, there were some scenes of factories and other similar environments, as in [Edmund] Lewandowski's *Industrial Composition*; [Charles] Demuth's *My Egypt*; a good, very objective landscape by [Charles] Sheeler; another by [Robert] Spencer, and, of course, Campbell's composition; another urban landscape by Burchfield, and so on. But I have nothing to say about the rooster's wife and the such-and-such.

This is a very incomplete list; I know I am forgetting many works, and I am sorry I don't remember them. It would have been better to write this review while I was looking at the paintings, which also might have helped me do a better job of pronouncing the artist's names in English. But now, may I be allowed to lower the tone a little and use a very unrefined word to refer to this exhibition? I'd like to use Uruguayan slang to describe this exhibition as truly "*macanuda*" ["fab"]. . . . Those of us who live in this vast hemisphere that is the New World consider ourselves to be a well-defined race, the great *criolla* family of both Latin and Anglo-Saxon heritage, as I said. Yes, a new race, from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego; a *sui generis* race, as mentioned earlier, but—let us be clear—a race that has nothing to do with being *mestizo*. Just as Old World nations have forfeited any claim they may once have had on us, so too must native people. But we would then hasten to say that indigenous people should live as equals among the other children of the Americas. And then, why not the blacks as well?

Assuming that all this is settled and no longer bears discussion, the next question is: what kind of art can and should this new race produce? Whatever does not address that primordial question is of lesser importance and therefore no longer holds any interest for us. I don't think North American artists believe they

have developed an art of their own, any more than we do, and therefore are even less involved in the great future art of the continent. And if there were indeed a slight movement in that direction—more a desire than a fact—it is not strong enough for either of us to base our hopes on. It is premature to say anything about any country in the Americas because we must not confuse what might be shaded by nuance—which can be inspired by the things that surround the artist and even by the art that he feels obliged to practice due to local pressure—with something fundamental that could lead to a new structure. That is, to something internal, to something constructive, rather than visions, aspects, and themes, no matter how original they may be. This root must be found because it is the start of a new culture which is, in turn, the basis for the new structure, the foundation and the key to the new art of the Americas.

* * *

Those who are informed, who have survived the disappointments and fallacies of demagogues, believe that change rises from below, from the material plane—or, to put it another way, from the financial realm. Force dominates the world and that is the reality. I am among those who believe that the opposition's struggle is the root of life. That is how the universe is structured. A materialist civilization is the result. But the world is still also ruled by ideas, which means two parallel civilizations coexisting simultaneously.

What can we conclude from all this?

If statesmen can organize their nations and themselves, why not do the same thing with artists, philosophers, musicians, and men of letters? After that, why not lay the foundations for a new, genuine culture whose essential tenet is that a new version of mankind exists in the Americas? With regard to the symbol and the figure of this new man, why not start with an abstract idea that is capable of inspiring widespread unity? A balance could be achieved by considering the material and financial world as well as the world of art and ideas. And vice versa.

. . .

We have always seen that times of material prosperity coincide with the greatest flowerings of the arts. The artist therefore must be supported, and we should applaud the Roosevelt Plan that—according to Mrs. Caroline Durieux [who

organized the exhibition]—wisely chose not to forget such an interesting, vital part of any nation: the soul, the essence of its spiritual being, whose subsequent expression will reveal the culture of the people.

...

The North Americans have a huge poet: Walt Whitman, who seems like a model for the future man of the Americas. He refers to himself as a “cosmos.” What does that mean? It means that a universal man can rise above American Man’s psychological framework. And that, gentlemen, is what every intellectual in the Americas should be working toward if they want to help to define the standards for our new society. Practical men will build a solid, material foundation upon which the other, subsequent domain of the spirit can be raised. As a Universalist, Whitman senses that other world. And in fact he insists on a new social, religious, and artistic structure. People can say what they like, but his vast perspective is unlike anything that any age has ever proposed. So, was he a prophet? With no hesitation, I say that he was.

Well, then, there he is. He can help us see that a true culture has to have a basis; it must have its own complete order, with roots; a world system; an overall metaphysical entity, for without it there will be no culture or unity of spirit on our continent. . . . Under the sign of the great Walt Whitman—whose work should be our bible—let us work toward the spiritual unification of the Americas. Let us join forces with those in other countries who work tirelessly toward the same goal.

III.3.4 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1059380

IMPRESSIONS FROM MY VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES OF NORTH AMERICA

José Sabogal, 1943

On March 21, 1943, at the request of the Instituto Cultural Peruano-Norteamericano, José Sabogal spoke on Radio Nacional in Lima about his impressions of a recent trip he had taken

to the United States. At that time, he was director of that city's Escuela Nacional de Belas Artes and had been invited to the United States by the Bureau of Cultural Affairs of the Department of State as part of a cultural promotion program instituted during World War II. Always a consummate diplomat, Sabogal politically praises the countless feats of engineering and the public works system in the United States, as well as U.S. efforts to organize the display and collection of the cultural patrimony of other nations. [SEE DOCUMENT III.4.9 FOR A 1946 CHECKLIST OF TRAVELING EXHIBITIONS OF LATIN AMERICAN ART AVAILABLE THROUGH THE INTER-AMERICAN OFFICE OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON, D.C.]. The radio broadcast ends with Sabogal calling for the United States to establish a pre-Columbian and Native art museum to house treasures from across the Americas, noting that many such treasures were already in the possession of major U.S. museums. He also addresses the possibility that the Instituto Cultural Peruano-Norteamericano, where he presented this address, pursue the establishment of laboratories and a library in order to become a center for [Latin] American studies and research. This transcription of "Impresiones de mi visita a Estados Unidos de Norteamérica" is included in *Obras literarias completas* [José Sabogal (Lima: Ignacio Prado Pastor Editor, 1989), 426–28].

AFTER JUST SEVENTY-TWO DAYS in this gigantic country filled with populous cities, traveling enormous distances by railway without command of the English language, my visual impressions—that is to say those having to do with the arts realm—have intensified. Perhaps my need to see everything has replaced, in part at least, that great bond of direct language that is the psychological nuance of man. At last [my experience] was like that of the ancient civilizations whose language we ignore in favor of the remains they have left us, given that the visual arts are the most exalted language of all; in this great nation of the United States where the construction work is tremendous, I had a vast expanse to observe and critique. My geographical sense of the continent has grown during this trip. Now I possess a more complete appreciation of the nature of our America: from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from the North to South; the plentiful rivers, the immense summits, the lakes as big as seas, the mirror of Lake Titicaca. The briny mirror of the Great Salt Lake; the abundant foliage created by nature and the foliage carved out by man's powerful will. And on this stage of the New World, I have seen, in their own setting, the original native peoples and the men of the modern era: the Hispanic-Saxons.

My mental panorama of America has made me appreciate the greatness of the artworks of all eras. In the epoch of ancient civilizations, the pre-Colombian cultural triangle of the Aztecs, Mayans, and Incas stands out. In the era of Mediterranean culture, the Hispanic creative spirit has left its mark from California to the River Plate region, with works so energetic that we, their descendants, have yet to surpass them. And in these modern times, it is the men of the North that raise a continent of cities linked by highways of iron and networks of magnificent roads. From this vigorous constructive effort, begun so powerfully in the past century, the expressive works born of the technique and functional North American spirit become as bridges for my understanding. Each stage in the perfection of the United States' technique has been marked by [the construction of] an enormous bridge. The final years of the nineteenth century were marked by the Queensboro, Williamsburg, and Brooklyn bridges in New York. Their style was typical of the nineteenth century, both ornate and monumental. The last bridge over the East Hudson River—the Washington Bridge—is very much of the twentieth century; its steel sings the glory of its beautiful mathematical lines and of the people who have mastered [the use of] metals. And then there is the Bridge of Gold, the Golden Gate [located in] beautiful San Francisco Bay; the largest in the world, it was inaugurated with a magnificent art exhibition linked quite logically to the artistic vision of the great work itself and to engineering, which in the end also becomes art. . . .

I must say that museums are responsible for having preserved the great works of the world, the art of all eras and of all parts of the globe. This thought leapt to my mind when I considered the destruction, which is every day more intense, of the cultural centers of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Egypt and its fantastic art—were Cairo to be destroyed the best examples of Egyptian art could still be found in Boston, Chicago, New York, and other places in the American Union, and thus they would be saved from the cataclysm of war. The United States has been systematically collecting examples of world art, [perhaps due] to the organizational bent of the North Americans, and many private and national collections have found refuge in the museums of this nation. Thus it is a given that in the National Gallery of Washington you will see the best of this century's modern French art—still the property of France although under the care of this great museum. The architecture of the U.S. museums is without a doubt the best in the world, and these great centers of art radiate an extraordinary cultural dynamism.

The citizens visit these [museums], and the works travel; they are engaged with works of art in architecture, painting, sculpture, engraving, as well as music. The North American man responds deeply and cooperatively to the work of cultural education; faithful attendance is the best form of collaboration for a laborer, while a man of fortune should donate money, art collections, and even fund museum buildings worth millions.

In all the museums I have visited, I have admired the “Native American” art section, [in particular] the energetic wood sculptures of Alaska and the diverse creations of the Pueblo, Navajo, and Arizonan Indians, as well as those of other [tribes] that preserve their authentic cultures in the United States. [I have also appreciated] works by the Toltecs, Aztecs, Tarascos, and the Mayans as well as marvelous Incan and Parakan cloths, and the refined artistic ceramics of my own ancient native Peruvian culture. These are my impressions of art in the United States. . . .

I would like to take advantage of this opportunity that was so kindly offered to me to insist upon an initiative suggested to me by the magnificent trove of continental art in the United States. It was in this country that I came to the idea of gathering together all the art of the ancient native peoples in America into one museum that would be especially constructed for it. I should like to see contemporary artists from all the nations of the Americas collaborate on the museum; that in this grand building there should be laboratories, a library, and whatever else is needed to make it a potent center for American studies. And in light of our mutual recognition of this nascent movement toward the spiritual integration of America, I believe that a memorial to the ancient art of the hemisphere should be erected, and I likewise believe that it should be in the United States because of its valuable art collections of the ancient indigenous cultures, as well as for its energetic constructive spirit and for its powerful economic capacity. . . .

Another civilization, [one comprised of] Hispanic men of Mediterranean temperament, interposed itself, and after three centuries, [those men] at last became today’s modern Americans. Our modern art did not begin yesterday with only the individual works of four Peruvian painters of the nineteenth century who were linked to the workshops of Paris and Rome. In my understanding, our modern art begins with the era initiated in [the Battle of] Cajamarca in 1533 [which marked the end of the Incan Empire]. And the works of architecture, sculpture,

painting, and of civil and religious themes are rich and varied, and [they reflect the] interesting process of our evolution. What is missing is our Comprehensive Museum, the one that will contain the artworks of all the ancient native peoples, [as well as] the work of the Mediterranean and of the contemporary era. . . .

That spirit of affirmation and confidence in the future is the spirit that is felt in this great country I have just visited.

III.3.5 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 787215

LETTER FROM NEW YORK

Damián Carlos Bayón, 1955

In 1955, Argentinean critic and art historian Damián Carlos Bayón (1915–1995) sent this comprehensive report on the New York art scene to the Buenos Aires journal *Ver y estimar* (1948–55)—which he had helped to establish in 1948, serving as its editor-in-chief and frequent contributor. Unusual in its digression from Bayón’s primary focus on Argentinean and Latin American art, the text offers a highly critical reading of the North American art world, focusing on exhibitions in New York (at the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and other museums whose merits he labels “questionable”). The author launches an especially caustic review of the newly inaugurated Whitney and its holdings, which Bayón describes as immature and mediocre. Despite his early negative reaction to American art, he returned to the United States in the 1970s to accept a teaching position at the University of Texas at Austin [SEE DOCUMENTS IV.4.1–3 FOR A 1975 SYMPOSIUM ON LATIN AMERICAN ART HELD UNDER HIS PURVIEW]. This translation is from the original publication of “Carta de Nueva York” in *Ver y estimar* [(Buenos Aires), series 2, no. 7 (May 1955), 8–10].

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS SINCE THE OPENING OF THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Two events to celebrate the anniversary: the Museum will be transformed from top to bottom into an exhibition of its own collections; and the publication of a

magnificent book (*Masters of Modern Art*)—printed in Holland, with 72 color illustrations and many in black and white. An illustrated guide, it includes brief commentaries and is signed by Alfred H. Barr, Jr. It suffers to some extent from the same defects we see at MoMA: an overly ambitious desire to include too much, a naïve collection of details, dates, curiosities, and anecdotes.

A new temperament: MoMA has also decided to collect the great masters of the last century who foreshadow the current movement. A wise move, and we are grateful for their marvelous Cézannes; good Gauguins and Van Goghs, though perhaps too few; a new work by [Henri] Rousseau, the customs officer: *The Dream*, which is almost as mysterious as the famous work *The Sleeping Gypsy*, the museum's pride and joy. By the way, both have recently been cleaned, and, although they look a little the worse for wear (we had become accustomed to the golden sheen of the varnish), they have lost none of their excellent quality. And, speaking of the Naïfs, MoMA continues to repeat an old mistake; it wants to try to explain why modern painting is so in thrall with this group of painters. Other than Rousseau—who is beyond the category and, in a way, negates it—and maybe [Maurice] Utrillo, the other Naïfs are fourth-rate painters. Some have a certain appeal: [Louis] Vivin, [Camille] Bombois; but most do not.

The Nordic Expressionists are quite well represented in prints and oils. The Fauves fared less well. On the other hand, the museum has long had a weakness for [Pablo] Picasso, which of course needs no justification. Sixteen canvases, some as important as *Les Femmes d'Alger*, and the *Three Musicians*, and of course *Guernica*, which is not being shown this time.¹

This is a contradictory museum. Beside [Henri] Matisse's *Red Studio* or his *Piano Lesson*, beside good works by [Fernand] Léger, [Georges] Braque, [Juan] Gris, and a whole caravan of masters, right beside them, side by side, there are a number of mediocre paintings, some of which are frankly bad. There are a few good North Americans; putting them where they should be would be fair and helpful. Mixing values like that only helps to confuse poor, innocent viewers who reel from the onslaught of that world in which they find themselves inexplicably involved—very good things alongside useless ones. MoMA's presentation is not designed with the general public in mind; in fact, it might confuse the few values some visitors may have managed to prioritize. Those who know what they are doing go straight to what they think is best, ignoring the mediocre and

monstrous works (a third of the museum is thus afflicted.) Those who are not as sure of themselves tend to believe that it is all the same, that it is all *museum quality*, and try to accept all of it. That in turn promotes the school of reactionaries and snobs.

THE NEW WHITNEY MUSEUM

I have so far deliberately avoided the subject of North American artists because they have the brand-new Whitney Museum all to themselves (it has moved from 8th Street and is in its new building next door to MoMA, with mutual access to each other's space.) The building is beautiful on the outside, though that is somewhat debatable; the interior is simply abysmal.

Looking at it in terms of function as well as through the prism of elementary good taste, it is modern in the style of a rich, tacky home, like a furniture store from twenty years ago: chrome, mirrors with geometric designs, niches with statues, cheap picturesque knickknacks (very expensive). If it were old we might perhaps accept it with a sigh, but it is brand-new, just finished. Thanks to the architect Philip C. Johnson, the outer shell bears no resemblance to the detestable interior.

So, let's take a look at what's inside. The Museum is devoted to North American art. It was founded by Mrs. Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney in 1930, and has never stopped growing. When it comes to art, North Americans have a strange, but justifiable standard: anyone with an American passport is considered a North American. As a result, one often sees little signs at the bottom of paintings that say: so-and-so, American (born in Germany, Russia, France, or Japan). It therefore comes as no surprise to find that the vicious caricaturist [George] Grosz is American, as is the languid Surrealist Yves Tanguy, and many others. This may be of interest in terms of international law, but it does not seem very serious to me. Artists are good or bad, and their work must be shown. In this museum or that? Let's cut to the heart of the matter. The problem is that ninety percent of what is exhibited here is incomplete or immature. Among the works in the sculpture room on the ground floor, the ones by [Russian-born] William Zorach are good. And, of course, there is the work of one of the few great artists born in the USA, [Alexander] Calder.

In the galleries there is a whole collection of mediocre North American painting: Max Weber, [Charles] Sheeler, [Edward] Hopper, Georgia O'Keeffe. Hanging next to them are the few truly good ones: [Lyonel] Feininger, [Charles] Demuth, Niles Spencer (whom I think is an important artist who does not get enough recognition); John Mann (who, on the other hand, I think is overrated); Stuart Davis, who paints posters rather than paintings; Karl Knaths, very tight; Morgan Russell's beautiful tones; [Stanton] Macdonald Wright.

Among fifty-year-olds who are still painting, the least useless one is, in my opinion, Ben Shahn, whose work has a non-transferable North American quality. [Mark] Tobey builds abstractions that are rather simplistic but beautiful. [Jackson] Pollock scandalizes his audience by dripping paint on canvas from a distance . . . with undeniable enthusiasm. [Willem] De Kooning seems to me to be the false Maestro who is overrated in both museums—and perhaps [William] Baziotes would be my choice for best of the show. The rest is silence.

In this rich country, mediocre artists have so many resources and opportunities that there is a very serious risk of production masquerading under false pretenses. And what is worse: I am convinced that in the USA there are young artists who are more informed than many at the museum but who, for some reason, are unable to study in Europe or even travel there.

In this country of confusions and distorted values, the museums do very little to clear the air and make it more breathable. If a country really does have just a few good artists, I think the logical thing would be to exhibit their work, to stimulate them—if they are alive—but not to overrate them. And especially not to invent future glory for painters whose work is sadly mediocre. Wanting to be understanding and to encourage every little effort confuses things even more. The painter who already has a painting in the museum starts—with fatal results—to behave differently and to treat the community differently. He tends to think he has arrived. Most of those unwary youngsters have absolutely not arrived. If they had been born in any other country in the world, they would still be struggling to avoid starvation and trying to show their work and sell it. Maybe they die of hunger here too, but I doubt it: it is one thing to live in bohemian Greenwich Village and quite another to have nothing to eat—but they take themselves too seriously and are taken too seriously by others. That is my sharpest criticism of this optimistic museum, which also applies to the North American facet of MoMA.

THREE DUBIOUS EXHIBITIONS

[Salvador] Dalí is still trying to confuse his audience so as to disguise his meager pictorial resources. The most surprising things about the exhibition are the titles *pour épater les bourgeois* [to impress the middle class] as well as [Dalí's] dubious taste in color; the thoroughness of a *pompier*, a drawing by a fake Maestro from a fake Renaissance. All the bad literature from the worst Surrealism (Yves Tanguy and Max Ernst were probably the best), and a certain theatrical, mannered style in some of the paintings of the moon or landscapes of Cadaquès.

What always happens with Dalí, and with other artists endowed with false powers of imagination, is that when asked for unfettered fantasy, they can't produce it (in art, wanting is not the same as doing). Dalí's illustrations for the *Divine Comedy* are flat and useless, and many are copies from traditional forms.

For some time now, the Metropolitan Museum has had a painting by Dalí, a Crucifixion donated by millionaire Chester Dale. It is an innocuous work, but it is better than the ones in the exhibition. An academically painted Christ accompanied by just one of the Holy Women; a study of apparel in blue and yellow—a dark twilight in the background. The cross is thick and huge, made of wood that the painter delights in reproducing in all its detail. Contrary to what some naïve viewers may think, the square nails do not represent anything at all. The painter was clever enough to avoid showing the face of Jesus by turning it away. We are grateful to this irresponsible painter for that minimum show of respect.

[Roberto] Matta is another problem. Just how good is this Chilean painter? His drawings are always interesting, full of life and strange signs, which I suppose must intrigue psychoanalysts in search of sexual symbols. But he is overwhelmed by the large canvases that he attempts; he doesn't quite know how to fill them. His subject matter is not beautiful; it is actually dull and rather dead. The pinkish-lilacs and the acid greens can't manage to move the inert mass of gray in the background that is always the same. What is Matta's painting? It is certainly something interesting. But it is mannered work, it copies itself and, in this case, that vice—which is never justified—leads to an impoverished result. At this time of new feelings at any price, [Jean] Dubuffet is the *desideratum* of decadence. Crumpled paper dolls, flora and fauna from one's worst nightmare, and yet, one is forced to acknowledge that this painter has *something strange* to communicate. He

displays an extraordinary craftsmanship. A terrible one, in my opinion, because he seasons every dish, no matter how meager its composition or color, with everything he has in his kitchen, which is lavishly equipped with all the latest fashions from Paris. Snobs shout their approval; the bourgeoisie screams its fury. It's neither one thing nor the other.

A skillful painter who has invented a world that *sustains itself*. My nightmares will now mirror Dubuffet's. I am enjoying thinking about a book by [Franz] Kafka, illustrated by Dubuffet. Has it already been done? If not, I am giving this idea to any ambitious publisher.

1

Although today *Guernica* resides in the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid, it had been placed with MoMA for safekeeping by Picasso after the rise of Francisco Franco, whose forty-year dictatorship began in 1939. For many years while under MoMA's care, the painting traveled extensively throughout the United States, South America (Brazil, São Paulo Biennial), and Europe. *Guernica* was returned to Spain in 1981.—Ed.

III.4

THE UNITED STATES “PRESENTS” AND “COLLECTS” LATIN AMERICAN ART

III.4.1 – 4.2

CONFERENCE ON INTER-AMERICAN RELATIONS IN THE FIELD OF ART

Prompted by the Department of State’s Division of Cultural Relations, the first Conference on Inter-American Relations in the Field of Art was held on October 11 and 12, 1939, with the aim of deploying art to improve relations between the United States and Latin American nations. Part of the U.S. government’s efforts to increase its influence in the Western Hemisphere and also to counter the proliferation of fascism during World War II, the State Department called on museum directors, curators, artists, and other arts professionals in the United States to advise its staff by drafting recommendations for art and cultural exchange programs to be supported by the division. The proceedings of both the conference and the continuation committee—comprised of the individuals who, over the course of meetings held on February 15–16, 1940, devised a program of inter-American dialogue emphasizing publications, student and educator exchanges, and exhibitions—reveal a number of significant themes and debates, including the substantial interest in Latin American Native and pre-Columbian art in the United States; the question of how the United States should represent its own culture (folk and industrial arts were two areas of emphasis); and the question of whether the United States should pursue a collaborative approach by soliciting information about Latin Americans’ interest in U.S. culture or even pursue a paternalistic one by determining what is “best” for Latin American audiences without the benefit of such counsel. Excerpts of both documents are taken from their original publications. [“Conference on Inter-American Relations in the Field of Art,” October 11–12, 1939, *Analysis and Digest of the Conference Proceedings* (Department of State, Washington, D.C., 1940), 1–31; “The Continuation Committee of the Conference on Inter-American Relations in the Field of Art,” *Minutes of the meeting of February 15–16, 1940* (Department of State, Washington, D.C., July 1940), 1–16, Appendix 1, Appendix 2].

III.4.1 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 837785

**ANALYSIS OF THE PROCEEDINGS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE FINDINGS
COMMITTEE, OCTOBER 11-12, 1939**

ANALYSIS

The Conference on Inter-American Relations in the Field of Art called by the Department of State revealed an extraordinary degree of interest in the development of broader and more active exchange with the other American republics. It was attended by some 125 representative leaders from all fields of art in the United States. The vitality of its discussions was such that time was at a premium during its four sessions on October 11 and 12, 1939. The conference carefully surveyed the panorama of artistic interchange between the United States and the other American countries, and the possibilities for future cooperative endeavors.

Before the conference and during the two days' sessions a small representative group of individuals served as a findings committee, and its recommendations were presented to the conference at its last session. An effort was made to stimulate freely the suggestions of conferees and to urge those present to respond frankly to the three or four general topics which had been selected for discussion. Those general topics were:

- (1) The resources of inter-American exchange in the field of art: the contribution of the other American republics to the United States and the contribution of the United States to the other American republics;
- (2) The problems of exhibitions both permanent and traveling, covering types of exhibition material and technical considerations;
- (3) The program for student and professor exchange including opportunities, fields of study and other general subjects;

-
- (4) Miscellaneous problems: such as the motion picture as a medium of exchange in the field of art; radio and its application to interchange; et cetera.

In providing a summary of the sense of the conference it has been found difficult to present any definite consensus of opinion since the purpose of the conference was to explore possibilities freely without limiting the thought. [Other suggestions:]

- (5) A plan of the Los Angeles Museum of Art to organize the first of a series of Pan American Biennial Exhibitions in 1940 or 1941 which would later be available for circulation.
- (6) A project whereby South American architects will be invited to visit the United States for nine months' travel under the auspices of the Producers' Council and the decision on the part of the Education Committee of the American Institute of Architects to make use of its fellowships for interchange between the Americas.
- (7) A conference of the Americas contemplated by artists' groups to be held in 1940 to emphasize the interchange of artists and art facilities.

Members of the conference outlined an additional group of projects, many of them proposals that might be readily executed. A rapid sketch of these suggestions will reveal the varied thinking of delegates and the wide range of subject matter. Certain major suggestions have been selected.

Recognition of the rich resource of Latin American art included the achievements from the pre-Columbian period to the present. Indian civilization was recognized as offering valuable material.

In discussing the United States, conferees explored its artistic contribution and noted difficulties of obtaining authentic examples. They suggested that prints and reproductions be relied upon for exchange. There was a divergence of opinion as to what constituted truly representative art material from the United States. A valuable collection of American reproductions created by the Index of

American Design Project of the WPA was shown to be available. These are now being prepared in colored still filmstrips, and could be distributed to Latin American countries. Later in the conference the rich resources of the Work Projects Administration Art Project as a great general reservoir of material were described. Other material for exhibition interchange included examples in the housing field and in the products of the machine age. Early in the discussion a delegate made a plea for "a coordinated exhibition that might be truly illustrative of the American way of living." There appeared to be unanimous sentiment for such an integrated exhibition.

A series of proposals involved special emphasis on the contemporary product and the living artist. The thought was expressed that the best ambassadors for artistic interchange and closer art relationships are artists themselves. Many speakers enlarged on this proposal, revealing a movement on the part of artists' groups in the United States to stimulate exchange between the Americas. Such a movement was variously phrased as a plan to create a "round table" of representative artists of the twenty-one republics or to call a "congress of artists" from all countries. Delegates praised the present trend that has led artists to turn away from the resources of Europe and recognize the native scene as a more vital source of inspiration. An important point was made when one of the delegates asked the conference to recall that Latin America is not a unit but consists of twenty nations and must be so considered in any program for interchange.

In reviewing opportunities for student and professor exchange speakers stressed the efficacy of such projects. It was questioned whether the same funds spent on sending students to Latin America and the reverse would not give more fruitful results than would the appropriation of similar funds for exhibition circulation. Many felt this to be the case. Conferees discussed all phases of interchange and fields for legitimate study, many directors of academies, departments and institutions mentioning current activities, and suggesting how they might be integrated into the larger program of inter-American exchange.

Among the miscellaneous subjects touched upon towards the close of the third session were problems of film preparation and distribution. Experts brought out the usefulness of photographic collections of artistic works. The resources of governmental photographic archives were mentioned. Members of the conference presented current projects for wider distribution of motion pictures and still

films. The audience was asked to present its own reaction to questions pertinent to motion picture and still film distribution. Resources of "still pictorial film strips" were discussed. Radio possibilities were also weighed, experts pointing to this important medium of cultural exchange.

The conference closed on Thursday afternoon, November 12, after accepting the suggestion of the Findings Committee.

Mr. Robert Woods Bliss, former Ambassador to Argentina and president of the American Federation of Arts, was named as chairman of the Continuation Committee. Although he was not able to attend the conference, Mr. Bliss kindly accepted this responsibility.

The four-point program of the Continuation Committee is appended to the digest of the discussions. The Continuation Committee is charged with the responsibility of:

- drawing up definite suggestions for artistic cooperation;
- relying upon the proposals made at the conference and subsequent suggestions which conferees may send in, (it was agreed that the conference be considered a panel from which the Continuation Committee might draw for advice and counsel);
- approaching representative Latin American art groups, and reporting findings to all members of the conference.

Mr. Bliss—having been authorized by the conference, to appoint the members of the Continuation Committee, in consultation with the Division of Cultural Relations—takes pleasure in announcing that the following representatives in various fields of art have consented to serve on the Committee:

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| • C. G. Abbott | SECRETARY, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION |
| • John E. Abbott | EXECUTIVE VICE-PRESIDENT, NEW YORK MUSEUM OF
MODERN ART |
| • George Biddle | VICE CHAIRMAN, ARTISTS' CONFERENCE OF THE AMERICAS |
| • Edward Bruce | CHIEF, SECTION OF FINE ARTS, PUBLIC BUILDINGS
ADMINISTRATION |
| • Holger Cahill | DIRECTOR, W.P.A. ART PROGRAM |

• Gilmore D. Clarke	CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON FINE ARTS
• Walter W. S. Cook	CHAIRMAN, INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
• Stuart Davis	NATIONAL CHAIRMAN, AMERICAN ARTISTS CONGRESS, INC.
• René d’Harnoncourt	EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, ARTS AND CRAFTS, OFFICE OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
• Richard Foster Howard	DIRECTOR, DALLAS MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS
• Concha Romero James	CHIEF, DIVISION OF INTELLECTUAL COOPERATION, PAN AMERICAN UNION
• Edward A. Jewell	ART EDITOR, <i>NEW YORK TIMES</i>
• Josiah Marvil [sic]	[JOSIAH P. MARVEL, DIRECTOR, SPRINGFIELD MUSEUM OF ART]
• Everett V. Meeks	DEAN, SCHOOL OF FINE ARTS, YALE UNIVERSITY
• William Milliken	DIRECTOR, CLEVELAND MUSEUM
• G. McCann Morley	DIRECTOR, SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF ART
• Robert C. Smith	HISPANIC FOUNDATION, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
• Herbert J. Spinden	CURATOR OF AMERICAN INDIAN ART AND PRIMITIVE CULTURE, BROOKLYN MUSEUM
• Roy Stryker	CHIEF, HISTORICAL SECTION, DIVISION OF INFORMATION, DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.

. . .

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE FINDINGS COMMITTEE

The Findings Committee of the Conference of Inter-American Relations in the Field of Art met on the evening of October 11. The Committee was impressed with the wealth of ideas and suggestions that had been offered during the discussions of the Conference. It recognized, however, that insufficient time was available before the end of the Conference to give to the proposals and projects advanced by various speakers the careful consideration they so clearly merit. It also believed that those proposals and projects should be studied, not only by members of the Findings Committee, but by the entire membership of the Conference.

The Findings Committee accordingly proposes for your consideration the following procedure:

- (1) That a representative Continuation Committee be chosen to digest and analyze the stenographic transcript of the Conference's discussions and that such digest and analysis be sent promptly to all members of the Conference, for their study and comments.
- (2) That the Continuation Committee draw up definite suggestions for cooperation in the field of art, and for approaching the representative art groups in the other American republics, and that these suggestions be sent for study and comment to all members of the Conference.
- (3) That Mr. Robert Woods Bliss be named as chairman of the Continuation Committee, and that he, in consultation with the Division of Cultural Relations of the Department of State, appoint the members of the Committee, to include representatives of artists' organizations, museum representatives, educators, architects, representatives of the industrial arts, of motion pictures, still photography and the radio, and representatives of general arts organizations.
- (4) That the members of this Conference be considered a panel from which the Continuation Committee may be permitted to draw in the future for advice and counsel.

October 12, 1939

III.4.2 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 837946

**THE CONTINUATION COMMITTEE OF THE
CONFERENCE OF INTER-AMERICAN RELATIONS
IN THE FIELD OF ART**

CONTINUATION COMMITTEE: MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF FEBRUARY 15-16.

The Continuation Committee of the Conference on Inter-American Relations in the Field of Art met in Washington on February 15 and 16, 1940, to consider the recommendations of the Conference and such other proposals as had been submitted for its consideration, and to determine what continuing bodies should be created to carry out a future program of artistic interchange with the other American republics.

At the morning session on February 15, the Committee heard brief reports of the meetings of the continuation committees in the fields of music and education; discussed proposals submitted for its consideration; considered the advisability of formulating a three-year program of exhibits and how these would be organized and financed. It also discussed the possibility of the establishment of a special Latin American Gallery and considered the naming of a Subcommittee on Exhibits.

The afternoon session on February 15 was devoted to a consideration of the facilities for research and publications. This included a discussion of the need for a general volume on Latin American art, the fields in which specialized research is particularly needed, the advisability of appointing committees for research and publication projects, and fellowships in the field of art.

At the morning session on February 16, the Committee heard reports from subcommittees appointed the previous day to lay down a definite program with respect to art publications and exchange of exhibitions, and considered plans for the establishment of a continuing organization to carry out projects recommended by the Continuation Committee.

At the final session on the afternoon of February 16, the Committee adopted a statement of policy, recommended the creation of a continuing

committee and adopted a resolution urging Walter W. S. Cook, Chairman, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, to head such an organization and that the Honorable Robert Woods Bliss, President of the American Federation of Arts, be asked to serve as honorary Chairman. The Committee also recommended that the Continuing Committee have a full-time Secretary to assist in carrying forward the program outlined and that a subcommittee or subcommittees be appointed to function along the following lines:

- (1) To carry out the recommendations of the Continuation Committee with respect to art publications;
- (2) To stimulate the granting of more fellowships in the field of art; and
- (3) To act as a clearinghouse of information and coordinating agency in the development of a long-range program of exchange of exhibitions.

The Art Conference Continuation Committee then dissolved.

. . .

An attempt, however, will be made to cast into some organized form the major points of view that were emphasized during the discussion. It was repeatedly emphasized that selection of material to go to Latin America should be made on the basis of what the Latin Americans themselves desire. The essential reciprocity in artistic interchange was stressed by several speakers.

At the outset, representatives of the Department of State stressed the role of the Division of Cultural Relations as an agency to cooperate with private organization engaged in the stimulation of cultural interchange. Representatives of the Department of State explained that the Division is primarily a service rather than a directive agency.

Throughout the proceedings certain specific projects were announced that are being contemplated or are already under way. They illustrate the current trend of growing interest of United States art institutions and artists in Latin America and make apparent the timeliness of such a conference as the Conference of Inter-American Relations in the Field of Art. Briefly, the following projects were reviewed:

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- (1) The program directed by the Department of State to administer the exchange of students and professors under the 1936 Convention for the Promotion of Inter-American Cultural Relations.
 - (2) The plan of the Hispanic Foundation of the Library of Congress to promote an archive of photographic materials.
 - (3) The plan of the Museum of Modern Art to hold a major exhibition of Mexican art in the spring of 1940.¹
 - (4) A three-year program of the American Federation of Arts for at least eight exhibitions for exchange between North and South America, the collections to include the widest range of art material.
 - (5) The January 1940 exhibition of Argentine artworks to be held at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond.²

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APPENDIX I

SELECT LIST OF ART SOCIETIES IN LATIN AMERICA

ARGENTINA

- Academia Nacional de Bellas Artes, Leandro N. Alem 2500, Buenos Aires
- Agrupación de Artistas "Camuati," Bolívar 566, Buenos Aires
- Agrupación de Intelectuales, Artistas, Periodistas y Escritores, Victoria 1050, Buenos Aires
- Agrupación de Gente de Arte y Letras "La Peña," Avenida de Mayo, 829, Buenos Aires
- Asociación Amigos del Arte, Calle Florida 659, Buenos Aires
- Asociación Amigos del Museo de Bellas Artes, Calle Juncal 1350, Buenos Aires
- Agrupación de Artistas "Juan B. Justo," Venezuela 1051, Buenos Aires
- Centro de Vinculación y Extensión Artística "Conit," Victoria 442, Buenos Aires

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- Círculo de Bellas Artes, Avenida de Mayo 1370, Buenos Aires
 - Comisión Honoraria de Bellas Artes, A/c Ministerio de Instrucción Pública, Buenos Aires
 - Instituto Argentino de Artes Gráficas, Cerrito 55, Buenos Aires
 - Instituto Americano de Arte, Suipacha 1422, Buenos Aires
 - Sociedad de Acuarelistas, Pastelistas y Grabadores, Arenales 687, Buenos Aires
 - Instituto Nacional de Estudios do Teatro, Bolívar 108, Buenos Aires
 - Sociedad de Artistas, Diagonal Presidente Roca 537, Buenos Aires
 - Sociedad Estímulo de Bellas Artes, B. Irigoyen 553, Buenos Aires
 - Comisión Municipal de Bellas Artes, Santa Fe 835, Rosario
 - Comisión Provincial de Bellas Artes, 25 do Mayo 245, Santiago del Estero
 - Amigos del Arte, Santa Fe

BOLIVIA

- Alianza de Intelectuales, Artistas, Periodistas y Escritores, Apartado 149, La Paz, Bolivia
- Comisión de Bellas Artes, Museo Tiahuanacu, La Paz

BRAZIL

- Academia Brasileira de Teatro, Rua Áurea 96, (Santa Teresa), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- Associação dos Artistas Brasileiros, Palace Hotel, Rio de Janeiro
- Conselho Nacional de Bellas Artes, ENBA, Ave. Rio Branco 199, Rio de Janeiro
- Serviço Nacional do Teatro, Ministério de Educação e Saúde, Rio de Janeiro
- Sociedade Brasileira de Bellas Artes, Rua da Carioca 54, Rio de Janeiro
- Sociedade Propagadora das Bellas Artes, Ave. Rio Branco 74, Rio de Janeiro
- Sindicato dos Artistas Pintores de São Paulo, Rua 11 de Agosto, São Paulo

CHILE

- Sociedad de Amigos del Arte, Esmeraldas 739, Santiago
- Sociedad de Aristas Plásticos, Academia de Bellas Artes, Parque Forestal, Santiago
- Sociedad Nacional de Bellas Artes, Casilla 218, Santiago

COLOMBIA

- Academia Colombiana de Bellas Artes, A/c Dr. Raimundo Rivas, Bogotá
- Amigos del Arte, Ministerio de Educación Nacional, Bogotá
- Dirección Nacional de Bellas Artes, Bogotá

CUBA

- Academia Nacional de Artes y Letras, Acosta y Compostela, La Habana
- Asociación de Escritores y Artistas Americanos, O'Reilly 9, La Habana
- Círculo de Bellas Artes, Industria 196, La Habana
- Sociedad Cubana de Pintores y Escultores, Dragones 62, La Habana
- Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba, Galiano 110, altos, La Habana

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

- Sociedad. "Amantes del Arte," A/c Dr. Marcial Martínez Larre, San Pedro de Macorís

ECUADOR

- Sociedad de Artistas y Escritores Independientes, A/c El Telégrafo, Guayaquil
- Sindicato de Escritores y Artistas de Quito, A/c Casilla 75, Quito

EL SALVADOR

- Asociación de Amigos del Arte, Avenida España 35, San Salvador

HONDURAS

- Amigos del Arte, A/c Isabel D. Lainez, Tegucigalpa

MEXICO

- Academia Hispanoamericana de Ciencias, Artes y Letras, Gante No. 1, Mexico DF
- Ateneo de Ciencias y Artes de México, Apartado 1938, Mexico DF
- Sociedad Amigos de Taxco, Gante No. 1, Mexico DF

NICARAGUA

- Círculo de Bellas Artes, A/c Guillermo Ortega Chamorro, Managua

PANAMA

- Galería Interamericana de Arte, Ciudad de Panamá

PERU

- Centro de Arte Nativo Ccoscco, Calle de Peru No. 1, Cuzco
- Sociedad de Bellas Artes del Cuzco, A/c Angel Rosas, Cuzco
- Academia de Arte Cuzqueño, Calle de El Triunfo 78, Lima
- Sociedad de Bellas Artes, Calle Muelle 333, Lima
- Ínsula, Alcanfores 925, (Miraflores), Lima
- Asociación de Escritores, Artistas e Intelectuales, Divorciadas 607, Lima

URUGUAY

- Comisión Nacional de Bellas Artes, Ministerio de Instrucción Pública, Montevideo
- Sociedad Amigos del Arte, Calle Juan Carlos Gómez 1418, Montevideo
- Agrupación de Intelectuales, Artistas, Periodistas y Escritores Plaza Libertad 1157, Montevideo

VENEZUELA

- Ateneo de Caracas, Apartado 662, Caracas
- Dirección de Cultura y Bellas Artes, Ministerio de Instrucción Pública, Caracas

APPENDIX II

Information on art in the other American republics is generally scattered over a great many publications of various types. The only publication that appears with any degree of regularity is the *Revista de Arte* [Magazine of Art], Santiago, Chile.

1

MoMA's exhibition *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* opened in May 1940.—Ed.

2

A Comprehensive Exhibition of the Contemporary Art of Argentina was held at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, January 16–February 26, 1940.—Ed.

III.4.3 – 4.5

LATIN AMERICAN EXHIBITION OF FINE ARTS, 1940

These three texts are excerpted from the catalogue of one of the earliest Latin American art exhibitions held in the United States, at the Riverside Museum in New York City (July 23–October 20, 1940), and sponsored by the New York World’s Fair Commission. An autograph by Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882–1945)—thirty-second president of the United States—supporting efforts promoting “mutual understanding of the Americas” opens the exhibition catalogue, followed by an introduction by Henry A. Wallace (1888–1965) and a foreword by Leo Stanton Rowe (1871–1946), the directors of the 1939 New York World’s Fair and the Pan American Union, respectively. The exhibition was part of the U.S. government’s program to promote cultural exchange and to maintain influence in Latin America during World War II, as well as to perpetuate the idea of Latin America and the United States as part of the same, distinctive, and exemplary Pan American culture. However, the results of such exchanges, as exemplified by this exhibition catalogue [*Latin American Exhibition of Fine Arts. July 23–October 20. Brazil. Ecuador. Mexico. Venezuela* (New York: Riverside Museum, 1940)], often stressed the picturesque or folkloric aspects of Latin America and featured officially sanctioned artists, such as Candido Portinari of Brazil, or those from favored countries like Mexico and Venezuela with which the United States had the strongest economic and political ties.

III.4.3 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 749636

MESSAGE TO LATIN AMERICAN EXHIBITION OF FINE ARTS

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 1940

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

*All cultural efforts to promote
the mutual understanding of the
Americas have my interest
and hearty support
Franklin D. Roosevelt*

All Cultural efforts to promote
the mutual understanding of the
Americas have my interest
and hearty support.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

III.4.4 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 749636**INTRODUCTION TO *LATIN AMERICAN EXHIBITION OF FINE ARTS*****Henry A. Wallace, 1940**

THE WORLD OF TOMORROW has a significance in 1940 which it did not have in 1939. We now know that both the Latin and English-speaking Americas have for the future a tremendously enhanced world importance. The responsibility for democratic civilization is in our hands. This means that on this hemisphere will be developed a distinct Pan American art. Therefore, as Chairman of the United States New York World's Fair Commission, it gives me great pleasure to welcome this Exhibition of Latin American Art from those countries which in spite of world turmoil have found it possible to give us in the United States an opportunity to see what their modern artists are doing. The Americas are developing an artistic and cultural consciousness of their own.

III.4.5 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 749636**FOREWORD TO *LATIN AMERICAN EXHIBITION OF FINE ARTS*****L.S. Rowe, 1940**

THE EXHIBIT OF ART OF THE AMERICAS arranged under the auspices of the United States New York World's Fair Commission is one of the outward expressions of the new relationships that are being established between the American nations. In the Declaration of American Principles adopted at Lima by the last Pan American Conference, intellectual interchange was given a coordinate place with the peace-

ful settlement of international disputes, nonintervention, the outlawry of force, the observance of treaties and the precepts of international law, and economic reconstruction. The Declaration says:

"Peaceful collaboration between representatives of the various States and the development of intellectual interchange among their peoples is conducive to an understanding by each of the problems of the other as well as of problems common to all, and makes more readily possible the peaceful adjustment of international controversies."

Furthermore, the interchange of art exhibits, an important factor in intellectual cooperation, was the subject of a convention signed at Buenos Aires in 1936 by all the American Republics, because they were *"desirous of improving their spiritual relationships through a better acquaintance with their respective artistic creations."*

The signature of such a convention and participation in the present exhibit are thoroughly in harmony with the cultural tradition of the Latin American Republics, since their governments have long fostered art by supporting free national schools and giving fellowships to talented students for study abroad, as well as in many other ways.

The present marked tendency among painters in the Americas to choose national themes is especially helpful in promoting international understanding. The nationally-minded artist is preoccupied not only with the beauty of his country, the typical scene, the custom loved from childhood, but also with the stress of toil, the sordidness of poverty, the incertitudes of modern life. Although expressed in aspects strange to citizens of other countries, these preoccupations take on universality when transmuted by genius.

In making available to the visitors to the New York World's Fair this notable exhibit of Latin American contemporaneous art and thus advancing cultural relationships in this hemisphere, the United States Commission is performing an important service to the people of the United States as well as to the nations of Latin America.

III.4.6 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 838005

THE LATIN AMERICAN COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Alfred H. Barr Jr., 1943

Alfred H. Barr, Jr. (1902–1981), founding director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA), wrote this foreword to the catalogue accompanying the exhibition *The Latin-American Collection of the Museum of Modern Art* [(New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1943), 3–4]. The catalogue was organized by Lincoln Kirstein, at that time MoMA's consultant for Latin American art. Barr had spent the summer of 1942 traveling throughout South America, and Kirstein, in turn, had traveled to Mexico and Cuba during that same period. Both intellectuals sought artworks to augment MoMA's holdings in the art of the region. Although Barr was aware of the museum's main political motivation for expanding its encyclopedic collection of modern art, in his text he focuses primarily on how the acquisition of approximately two hundred Latin American works changed the character of the museum's collection as a whole. According to Barr, such accessions not only signaled a new curatorial direction for the museum, but also generated excitement for the collection that he was entrusted to shape.

FOREWORD

Thanks to the Second World War and to certain men of good will throughout our Western Hemisphere, we are dropping those blinders in cultural understanding which have kept the eyes of all the American republics fixed on Europe with scarcely a side glance at each other during the past century and a half.

In the field of art we are beginning to look each other full in the face with interest and some comprehension. As evidence of progress we believe this volume has a certain value—indeed a double value. First of all this is a record of the most important collection of contemporary Latin-American art in the United States, or for that matter in the world (including our sister republics to the south). As such it is a supplement to the catalog, *Painting and Sculpture in the Museum of Modern Art* (1942), which is devoted for the most part to the art of Europe and the United States. And, secondly, Lincoln Kirstein's essay on the following sixteen pages may well be the

first publication in English of a survey of the pictorial arts of Latin America during the previous three centuries, considered as a whole, and with frequent reference to our own art—a subject so vast, so complex and so unexplored that his short piece takes on the character of a pioneer venture. In this historical introduction Mr. Kirstein's courage is admirable, but braver still are his brief summaries of the contemporary art of the modern republics; for though the period is shorter, the matter is even harder to condense—and the artists are alive. In any case it should be made clear that this book has been written and this collection assembled with full knowledge that both are tentative and incomplete.

THE ARTS OF THE OTHER AMERICAN REPUBLICS IN THE MUSEUM: 1931–1941

The Museum's interest in the Latin American field, although it has recently been intensified, began a dozen years ago with the Diego Rivera one-man show in 1931. This was followed by the exhibitions of Inca, Maya and Aztec art in 1933; *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art*; *Portinari of Brazil*; and festivals of Mexican and Brazilian music, all in 1940; the *Industrial Design Competition for the 21 American Republics*, 1941; the results shown in the *Organic Design* exhibition, 1942; the *United Hemisphere Poster Competition*, 1942; and *Brazil Builds*, 1943. Each was accompanied by a more or less elaborate publication and most of them were sent on tour.

Exhibitions, concerts and competitions are, however, transitory, leaving only a memory—and a catalog or program. Aware of this, the Museum has been at work upon a less conspicuous but more permanent undertaking—the acquisition of a collection.

The Museum's Latin American collection was begun in 1935 with Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s gift of [José Clemente] Orozco's *Subway*, followed a year later by two large Riveras. In 1937 a trustee anonymously gave a remarkable group of four Orozcos, including the famous *Zapatistas*; and the same year Dr. Gregory Zilboorg presented the first of the Museum's paintings by [David Alfaro] Siqueiros, a series to which Lieutenant Edward M. M. Warburg and the Estate of George Gershwin have also contributed.

Over a hundred drawings, watercolors and prints by Rivera and Orozco, the gift of Mrs. Rockefeller, increased the collection of Mexico's “big three” which was further and greatly augmented in 1940 by the acquisition of Rivera's *Zapata*, Siqueiros' *Ethnography* and Orozco's *Dive Bomber*, which the Museum

commissioned. Other Mexican works were given by Major Merle Armitage, T. Catesby Jones and the Museum's Advisory Committee.

The South American collection began in 1939 with the purchase of one of the best paintings by the Brazilian, [Candido] Portinari, whose government has recently given the Museum his large mural decoration, *St. John's Day*. The most important sculpture in the collection is also Brazilian: Maria [Martin's] *Christ*, the gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller. Leigh Athearn gave the first Bolivian painting and from the Cuban National Commission for Intellectual Cooperation came the first Cuban acquisition. Thus by the end of 1941 the Museum had some 70 Latin American works, a third of them prints, but by only 11 artists in four countries. Four artists were, however, of great importance and were magnificently represented: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros and Portinari.

THE INTER-AMERICAN FUND AND OTHER GIFTS, 1942

In 1942 the collection was greatly expanded through a timely gift to the Museum of a considerable sum of money for purchases. With vision as well as generosity the anonymous donor of the Inter-American Fund stipulated that the money should be spent for works of interest or quality, quietly and without involvement in official complication or compromise. To make purchases under the terms of the Inter-American Fund Lincoln Kirstein went to South America in the winter and to Mexico and Cuba during that summer.

To detail these purchases here would be to anticipate the greater part of the catalog, but to give a brief idea of their importance it may be said that they include almost all the large group of Argentine works, all the Brazilian collection except the Portinaris; the Chilean, Ecuadorian, Peruvian and Colombian groups; more than half of the Uruguayan and Cuban sections and a large proportion of the work by the younger generation of Mexican artists. Thanks to the Inter-American Fund nearly 200 works of art have been added to the Museum Collection: 58 paintings and watercolors, 17 drawings, 3 pieces of sculpture, 6 prints and many posters.

Partly as a result of the stimulating effect of the Inter-American Fund, other donors have added a number of important gifts. The Honorable and Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss have given one of the few pictures in this country by the Uru-

guayan master, Pedro Figari; and from Dr. Fresnedo Siri of Montevideo has come a painting by [Joaquín] Torres-García, another important Uruguayan. At the cogent suggestion of Señora Maria Luisa Gómez Mena of Havana, the distinguished surgeon, Dr. Ramírez Corría, most generously presented the Museum with paintings by two of the best Cuban artists, Ponce de León and Carlos Enríquez. Lieutenant Edgar J. Kaufmann, Jr., has made it possible to purchase a number of excellent paintings, drawings and photographs by the younger Mexican artists, and Mrs. Edgar J. Kaufmann and Mr. Samuel A. Lewisohn have given additional works in the same category.

These recent purchases and gifts bring the Latin American collection to the following totals: Frescoes, 3; Oil paintings, 69; Watercolors, 31; Drawings, 35; Prints (signed proofs), 94; Posters and Broad-sides, 49; Sculptures, 4; Photographs, 9; with a grand total of 293.

Even with these considerable numbers the collection must be considered incomplete. Unexpected exigencies of travel, caused by the War, prevented visits to many countries. Indeed, of the twenty other American republics ten are not yet represented at all and only one, Mexico, is shown at full length. In general there is too little sculpture—only one major piece and three heads—a lack to be explained in part by serious difficulties in transportation. Mr. Kirstein recommends the eventual acquisition of pieces by such sculptors as [José] Fioravanti of Argentina, Bruno Giorgi of Brazil, Ortiz Monasterio of Mexico. Photography is also inadequately represented. And among paintings Mr. Kirstein regrets particularly the absence of important compositions by certain of the Argentine masters; a major work by the Brazilian, [Lasar] Segall; and another painting by Figari.

Limitations of time, accessibility and funds have created certain regrettable omissions both of countries and of artists, but as it stands the Latin American division of the Museum Collection is rather more complete than the European—for the Museum now owns more Chilean paintings than British, more Brazilian than Italian; and if certain Latin American countries are not yet represented this is also true of important European countries.

However, the Museum Collection is not static but a dynamic affair, continually changing. Errors of omission will be repaired: errors of inclusion will be eliminated. To this field of friendly competition, to this company of living works of art, the Museum welcomes the new arrivals from the other American republics.

III.4.7 – 4.8

PROCEEDINGS OF A CONFERENCE HELD AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, MAY 28–31, 1945

Alfred H. Barr, Jr. (1902–1981), and Grace L. McCann Morley (1900–1985)—the founder and first director of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art—delivered these papers at the Conference on Studies in Latin American Art held at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York on May 28–31, 1945. They were among a number of leading curators, museum administrators, and scholars in the United States who spoke on their recent experiences exhibiting and studying Latin American art. Barr considers the difficulty that U.S. scholars have in determining the quality of Latin American works of art, but he asserts that MoMA's collection is a “dynamic affair, continually changing” to add worthy objects and to eliminate those that do not stand the test of time. McCann Morley exhibits a keen awareness of critical issues involved in exhibiting and studying Latin American art in the United States. However, she warns of the illusory unity suggested by the term “Latin American” and reminds conference attendees of the diversity of Latin American nations. Like Barr, she argues that U.S. audiences and scholars will come to appreciate Latin American art only by learning more about the specific contexts in which it is made. Both texts appeared in the conference proceedings edited by Elizabeth Wilder. [Alfred H. Barr, Jr., “Problems of Research and Documentation in Contemporary Latin American Art” (1945) and Grace L. McCann Morley, “Contemporary Regional Schools in Latin America” (1945), in *Studies in Latin American Art: Proceedings of a Conference Held in the Museum of Modern Art, New York, May 28–31, 1945. Under the Auspices of the Joint Committee on Latin American Studies of the American Council of Learned Societies[,] the National Research Council and the Social Sciences Research Council* (Washington, D.C.: The American Council of Learned Societies, 1949), 37–43, and 82–87].

III.4.7 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 833746

PROBLEMS OF RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION IN CONTEMPORARY LATIN AMERICAN ART

Alfred H. Barr Jr., 1945

AT THIS HOUR IN THE MORNING I think I can scarcely speak too briefly. I had really not wanted to talk at all because this is primarily a learned meeting and I don't feel that I am at all a scholar in the study of Latin American art.

When I think of Dr. [Herbert J.] Spinden and Dr. [Frederick E.] Kidder working in their field of American archaeology, I feel that we who are concerned with modern art are very new indeed to Latin American studies, with the exception of Dr. [Grace L. McCann] Morley [SEE DOCUMENT III.4.8]. Most of us have become interested only in the last three or four years, and my own profound knowledge, so far as field trips are concerned, is based upon four weeks in Mexico and eight days in Cuba. So whatever I have to say, specifically about these countries, or Latin America in general, should not be taken too seriously.

Perhaps Mr. Rich and myself might not have taken any great interest in South America had it not been for the war, the state of emergency, the necessity of establishing closer relations with the countries to the south. I think we were very conscious of the political background of our interests, and conscious, too, of the somewhat complicating nature of that political atmosphere.

I know that we (here in the Museum of Modern Art) worked in considerable haste. Already, we begin to see that we made a good many errors, both of policy and taste. We entered the field in a spirit of discovery. I hope that the results have laid the foundation of a more profound study that may come in the future.

The political atmosphere created a good deal of skepticism about our intentions, particularly among Latin Americans who are—as Mr. [René] d'Harnoncourt phrased it—extremely able to detect political motives in non-political actions, even when they don't exist. However, we met much of the same cynicism in this country where even exhibitions, publications and acquisitions of superior material were often discounted because they were Latin American and therefore, supposedly, must have been undertaken for political reasons.

This made objective judgments pretty difficult, but I think we have learned, first of all, our own ignorance. We begin to see the complication and breadth of Latin American contemporary art, and we have learned rather paradoxically that no matter how disinterestedly and objectively we may approach art and bring it to the attention of our fellow countrymen here, if the art itself is lacking in quality or lacking in interest—and I would like to distinguish between those two things, quality and interest—it is really scarcely worth the trouble. Culturally and politically, if not morally, the *quality* of what is done may be as important as the purity of motives. For instance, Mr. [Philip L.] Goodwin's expedition to Brazil that he frankly admits was half for good will and half for architecture produced what is, to my mind, the most remarkable achievement [*Brazil Builds: Architecture New and Old, 1652–1942*] in the whole field of recent Latin American studies in the modern field. Comparable to that perhaps are the [José María] Velasco and [José Guadalupe] Posada exhibitions coming from Mexico.

The problem of standards was complicated, I think, not only by a general spirit of haste and emergency but by a chronic confusion between national reputations and international standards. At first glance, it would seem an easy thing to make these distinctions, to study and decide what are actually exportable works of art, exportable from the point of view of the Latin American country, importable from our point of view; and vice versa, because we, of course, have sent things to Latin America which have had to face the same kind of skepticism which many Latin American things have had to face when they were brought to this country.

International standards can be applied to art that is *International* in style or character. We can easily compare, say, a cubist picture from Chile with a cubist picture from the source of cubism (namely Paris) and find it lacking. But it is much more difficult to judge values which are national or local in character. I think, for instance, of a painter such as Antonio Ruiz of Mexico, familiar to many of you. There is a man who from an international point of view deals entirely with local color, local political problems, local social satire, in a style that might be called provincial realism. Yet I think in the quality of his painting; he is—aside from any factors of information or sociology or politics—decidedly producing articles of export.

The problem of standards also confronts us in the matter that we are primarily concerned with here: namely, research. Our scholarship, I think we will admit, has been rather hasty in a good many ways, and superficial; certainly we have started from scratch far more than those of you working in other fields.

It is interesting, and I believe no mere coincidence, that both Dr. Morley and Mr. Rich—without having compared notes—propose the same kinds of publications: a general dictionary of artists, of course, and histories of national schools. We, however, would have to admit that the Argentines have already done a better history of their own national school, more sumptuously illustrated and with better documentation, than anything that has been done in this country about our own national schools. We need monographs, too, and there again I can't think of any monograph on one of our own painters so handsomely presented as a recent Mexican book on [José Clemente] Orozco. Perhaps sometime we can afford in this country monographs of such elegance and with so many color illustrations.

I think the monographs, insofar as we have anything to say about them, must be very carefully edited, from the point of view not only of the Latin American reader, albeit of our own. We have to choose the artists with great care. I am perfectly conscious in making these remarks that they may seem too painfully obvious and yet at all meetings of this sort someone has to say the obvious things, and I am saying them.

We have to choose critics, too, with the greatest care, and with some rather hardheaded consideration of what will really be effective when translated into English. This has already been touched on by Dr. Morley: the difference in critical approach between the writers on modern art in the Latin countries (and I include France and Italy in this as well as Latin America) and those in this country. Perhaps because of our somewhat greater concern with systematic fact and documentation we are put off a bit by the eloquence, rhetoric and generally poetic or philosophical approach of our Latin American colleagues.

Besides these three categories (the general dictionary, the history of the national school and the monograph), I think we should have studies on special problems such as the relation between internal political situations and art. We have had a magnificent illustration of such a problem in Mexico during the past

quarter century; I need merely mention it to make the point clear. The conflict between the international interests of artists and increasingly vigorous nationalistic movements in certain Latin American countries as well as in our own, make a study that would be many times as important if it could be handled on a comparative basis.

Then there should be studies of the economics of the artist, for example, the very interesting effects of our occasional economic intervention, whether on a basis of disinterested admiration or of commerce, or of a political nature. There is an astonishing difference in the welfare of the living painter in different countries. I believe that in Venezuela there is a kind of artist's paradise that approaches that which we are told exists in the Soviet Union; though in the case of Venezuela the artist's work is eagerly consumed by a middle-class collecting public.

In Mexico there has been an extremely artificial economy produced largely by American interest in Mexican painting. In the early twenties there was almost no American interest, yet the Mexican government provided support for their artists who produced perhaps the most important work in this hemisphere during that decade. I mean, of course, the mural paintings in Mexico City. More recently, American collectors and the museums of the United States—according to Mexican statistics published in *Tiempo*—have accounted for about 90 percent of the money spent on living Mexican artists, five percent was provided by other Latin American collectors and five percent by the Mexicans themselves. This was, in my opinion, an extremely unhealthy condition. It has been suggested that we are to blame. I decidedly question that. I think, however, that if we gave less uncritical support, whether tourist or good-neighborly, to Mexican artists, some of whom deserve it and some of whom do not, then the Mexicans themselves would again begin to feel more responsibility for the support of their own artists, both privately as collectors and publicly through the creation of museums.

In Cuba there was until very recently almost no support, either from outside or from inside, for the artists who seem to us to be the most talented. Our "intervention"—to repeat a discredited word—was very minor: a brief visit, some genuine interest, a few purchases for little money. Yet this modest pump priming seems to have destroyed apathy, aroused pride and interest, and helped produce what from here appears to be a kind of renaissance of Cuban painting supported by Cubans.

I say "appears to be," for what I have said about Mexico and Cuba is highly superficial and speculative. Really to know the truth we must have time and money for research and publication.

While we are speaking about the economics of the artist, it might be relevant in this company to speak of the economics of the scholar. I think we have passed the stage at which we can ask scholars, either American or Latin American, to work and write in the contemporary field without adequate payment for their work. As an example, let me report to you that recently a very important English publisher approached a distinguished Latin American scholar to do a short monograph on a famous Latin American artist. He offered fifty pounds, that is, about \$200, for four or five thousand words and an assemblage of photographs to be used in the monograph. Unfortunately, at the same time he was asked by an American publisher with official connections to write a very similar monograph involving nearly the same amount of work, but offering only \$25, about one-eighth of the fee suggested by the Englishman—and I may say the English publisher was in no sense subsidized by government support as was the American publisher. In such situations there are political as well as professional implications.

I began this ten-minute talk with some considerations of the political background of our recent interest in Latin American art. I think that this will not necessarily prove a handicap; and as we look back on it in future years we may even see that it had an extraordinary catalytic value, even when it was too hasty in method or policy. But we have a serious responsibility to justify what we did then in a state of emergency by our continuing interest now that the emergency is past.

I remember a conversation with a distinguished Mexican historian who came through New York on his way to take a position in an American university. I asked him a very general question as to what he felt about our effort to establish good will in our cultural and intellectual relations with Latin American countries. He answered very bluntly and with an objectivity which can scarcely be considered cynical. He said that he was old enough to remember our difficulties with Mexico in 1916 and the sudden change in 1917, when we were involved in the war with Germany; how there was suddenly a great deal of excited promotion of good will and hands-across-the-Rio-Grande, and how in 1918, the whole thing collapsed suddenly with an extremely disquieting and disillusioning effect on

Mexican intellectuals and scholars. I hope this will not happen this time. I think that it will not happen if we can be warned by what occurred then.

I am not proposing that we maintain our Latin American studies in a spirit of grim resolve not to abandon what we have undertaken. For art, certainly, for scholarship, probably, such a feeling of conscientious compulsion would be fatal. Fortunately, the field itself, at its best, is sufficiently interesting and largely untilled. Our real problem, as I understand it, lies in the reconversion of wartime political promotion and financing into a long-term and long-visioned program in which the quality and seriousness of our studies will find whatever material and moral support they deserve. Scholarly excellence and disinterested critical integrity will in the end prove to be a very valuable, though concomitant, political factor in our international relationships, particularly with Latin Americans.

III.4.8 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 833729

CONTEMPORARY REGIONAL SCHOOLS IN LATIN AMERICA

Grace L. McCann Morley, 1945

I SHOULD PREFER CALLING THIS DISCUSSION “National Developments in Contemporary Latin American Art,” for in two countries at least, and potentially in several others, there is actually now enough activity to have produced regional schools with distinct personalities and character within individual national development. Yet the original title usefully suggests a certain unity. It is very true that there are common influences, parallel developments in many countries, so that it is possible to group the countries together for convenience. One must always keep in mind, however (just as is necessary always wherever the term “Latin America” is used) that hidden behind surface unities and similarities there are great diversity and important fundamental differences between the various countries. For example, one may conveniently group the countries that have an important heritage from pre-Columbian times, and at the opposite pole one may

group those countries that have derived their contemporary artistic development directly, and in some cases by fairly recent import, from the contemporary international movements of Europe. Within these two general categories and lying between the two extremes there are, however, all sorts of variations.

At the outset, if we accept the fact that, generally speaking, Latin American painting is provincial in character, we can, I think, resist the impulse to over-enthusiasm, and at the same time the equally dangerous snobbishness of a patronizing attitude. From our point of view, enjoying the advantage of constant contact with contemporary international art movements, and proud of our own vigorous and varied art, it may often seem that the movements in Latin America are minor. We must never forget, however, that if some movements seem to be minor, if recognizably derivative from foreign styles and if relatively weak in their development, they have nonetheless a very great importance for the individual country. Through the evolution represented in a succession of such movements, the country is forming a national art which will fit somewhere within the great international pattern of art movements and make its own contribution of high originality or minor variation to contemporary art as a whole.

It may well be that some movements hold little interest outside the country. On the other hand, there is no reason why a great genius may not rise from one of these smaller schools. The chances are against it, because activity and opportunity are lacking. The status of the artist in many countries is frankly that of an amateur, as is true for most of the learned and skilled professions. Usually the Latin American practicing an art has an independent income, or carries on some other type of work to make a living. In either case his art is a sideline. At the same time he lacks a critical public, has usually very restricted opportunities for exhibition and very few patrons, if any. Nevertheless, despite difficulties, movements flourish everywhere in Latin American countries with great vigor, and often produce individual personalities of considerable interest.

It is necessary in carrying on studies in Latin American contemporary art to know something of the background of individual countries. I assure you, though all but two of the countries speak Spanish, the diversity in Spanish heritage—as in general cultural heritage—is very great, and the other influences vary widely. To cite examples: the countries with a pre-Columbian heritage are best and most brilliantly exemplified by Mexico. In the development of the Mexican contemporary school the stimulation, partly in a scholarly way, partly in a

sentimental, romantic, emotional way, of the Indian heritage, past and present, has been great. In many of the other countries, especially the Andean countries, something similar has taken place, but quite divorced from the drive generally recognized as given to the Mexican school by identification with a revolutionary movement. The feeling of the artist in Mexico that he spoke for the people, that he had a message to convey, has been largely lacking elsewhere. When it has been present, it has been to some extent an artificial thing. Superficially, contemporary art in Peru seems close—perhaps too close—to Mexican development. [José] Sabogal [SEE DOCUMENT II.3.6] and his group have been active in exploring the background of Peruvian culture. They have collected pre-Columbian Indian art, have appreciated it—often in an unscholarly way—but they undoubtedly learned from it. They collected folk arts, old and contemporary, with enthusiasm. They have been fully aware of their rich colonial heritage in all its diverse manifestations. At the same time they have been alive to the stimulating leadership of Mexico. In a sense they wished to transplant what had happened in Mexico to their own country, and to interpret it by grafting present on past as Mexico had so brilliantly done. But the Peruvian social and political climate was not conducive to the same development. The work of this group, avoiding social and political subjects, reflects in a general way contemporary international movements, not by direct imitation, not by working deliberately within any contemporary style, but by a certain natural development of the material at hand and by a sensitive response to the general feeling of our time. In the case of several of the most gifted artists there results at its best a highly personal, emotional, and somewhat abstract expressionism. The ultimate product thus does not at all resemble Mexican art, despite the related point of departure.

. . .

At the opposite pole from these movements that grow out of the country itself, profoundly influenced by past and present native life, stand such countries as Argentina, where the importation of contemporary international movements has been direct and self-conscious. In such countries the artists are inclined to think of themselves as a regional group within the general framework of the French or international contemporary schools. The adaptation of the international styles to local conditions has been comparatively recent: it is very diversified, and of varying success and interest. Argentina, influenced by many

international movements, is so active in art that there are regional schools. The Argentines have begun collecting their nineteenth-century art. There is a considerable local patronage of contemporary art; one museum is devoted primarily to the collection and exhibition of Argentine art, especially contemporary art. Argentine art and artists receive worthy publication and serious respect.

Another example under the international heading is Cuba, where advanced French influences have been strongly felt and yet have been adapted intimately to the country, and have been well assimilated, taking on strong national character. Such local adaptation has in no way weakened Cuban expression. On the contrary, it gives to the international abstract forms a vigor and vitality that the simple importation of an abstract style, detached from its international center, usually lacks.

The over-enthusiastic recognition of familiar patterns of art is the foreigner's chief temptation. We tend to recognize and evaluate more quickly in a new complex of art—whether it be music, literature, or the visual arts—those styles and expressions that are closest to the art we already know and understand or admire. For this reason, I think, we have somewhat overemphasized the personalities and the styles and movements in the Latin American countries that most closely resemble those we know well in international art. It is a very natural tendency, and hardly to be avoided. One must be alert to it, however. It has occasionally prevented our recognizing other movements or tendencies that have strong local roots and local importance, but which—because of our lack of knowledge of the country itself, the people, the background—have eluded us in their true character and significance. Knowledge of the country, its people, its literature, and its life aids greatly here; we must be ready to receive a new style or philosophy of art if it is offered.

On the other hand, picturesque and striking novelty has also been overrated. We have generally underestimated the value of local variants of international styles. Perhaps we have placed too great stress on so-called "modern primitives" in Latin American art. There are some excellent ones. Some have value apart from their national frame. However, is including a modern primitive as sole example of the national school of a country being quite fair to the country and to its general development in art?

These are examples of conflicting points of view, especially troublesome when planning exhibitions. Should the standards of evaluation be absolute or

must they be relative? In choosing an exhibition to illustrate Latin American art, should one judge it from the international point of view, leaving aside, therefore, many local developments because they do not seem to fit into the international pattern? Or would it be more to the point to try to see their art through the eyes of the people in the country, with whatever additional critical acuteness an objective point of view may add?

It has been very thoughtful of the Museum of Modern Art to bring here before you typical works that illustrate the point admirably. They are all strong expressions of Latin American art—quite clearly works that would have value apart from any local national framework, and yet two, *Ethnography* by David Alfaro Siqueiros and *Morro* by Candido Portinari, are very much richer, more profoundly understood and felt, more valuable, if the background out of which they were created is known thoroughly. The Siqueiros, until we had become interested in exotic art—in African masks and Polynesian and pre-Columbian material—would probably have been dismissed by international art critics as a strange, ugly work, difficult to fit into the international critical framework. But today we respond to such a painting, for we find in it more than the parallels to exotic art we appreciate, and the formal values that are quite obviously there: beyond that we read into it a great deal of Mexican symbolism, for Mexican art, life and thought have become somewhat familiar. Candido Portinari's painting, recognizably powerful, is much richer if you know Brazil. Most of his work makes use of a personal symbolism that has complex associations for those knowing Brazilian life. In both cases, the qualities of international art are combined with rich local meanings.

Local art criticism and publications, if they exist, are valuable, but the published material must be weighed in the light of direct, intimate knowledge. South of our borders there is a great amiability of temper and a certain regard for rhetoric hard for those not thoroughly familiar with the Latin literary point of view to estimate justly. Very often the essays on an artist are largely rhetorical, appreciative rather than critical; zealous and exclusive, rather than objective and inclusive.

For studies in Latin American contemporary art there is great need of more source material and published material of every kind. A greater need is for more people to work on the subject, to collect quantities of information from varied points of view, and to provide the exchange of opinion and critical discussion without which a field of investigation cannot develop healthily. The main obsta-

cle to growth of interest from our point of view is that many developments seem minor or provincial compared with what is offered by contemporary art in Europe or even in our own country. Yet the whole field of study of contemporary art is not complete without adequate investigation of Latin American art.

My own interest in Latin American art is founded on the scope it offers for comparative study, and on the light it throws on the development of contemporary art in general. The common problem of all New World countries—the adaptation and assimilation of imported styles and influences to a new environment and to the peoples of young republics—appears under sufficiently varied conditions there to provide a sort of ideal laboratory.

A second point of value is the usefulness of art in enriching other fields of study and as a teaching aid. Nothing illustrates better than art the diversity underlying the glib suggestion of unity implied by the convenient label "Latin American". There is no more direct and more powerful way to illustrate to the layman or to the student in other Latin American fields the difference in cultural heritage and contemporary development in the various countries, nor any more telling way to give in résumé the essential quality of thought, feeling and expression characteristic of each. Art, for those who know how to read it, is a rapid and direct way to the very core of a culture.

This proposed use of art to enrich other studies further emphasizes the need here for more, and better published material. Too often the least creative Latin American art has been reproduced for the sake of its quality of illustration. For art studies in their own right, what is presented as Mexican or Chilean art must have quality, and must be characteristic of the given country. Otherwise it does a serious disservice to the cause of art and to the country it libels. Much excellent material published in Latin American countries is of limited usefulness because of its Spanish text, and because it is found in this country only in large or special libraries. Many artists and groups have not been recorded adequately, many not at all, even in their own countries. Few general studies of contemporary art in individual countries exist, even in Spanish. No comparative studies of Latin American art in general or of the contemporary development in a group of countries have yet appeared in satisfactory form either in this country or elsewhere. What has been published in this country is as yet scattered and incomplete. General background studies, scholarly monographs, illustrated brochures, and albums, profusely illustrated and popularly presented, but with an equal regard

for quality, are all needed as instruments to better and more intimate understanding through art of our southern neighbors of this hemisphere.

III.4.9 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1059900

TRAVELING EXHIBITIONS OF LATIN AMERICAN ART AVAILABLE FOR CIRCULATION IN THE UNITED STATES

National Gallery of Art, 1946

In January 1946, the Inter-American Office at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., compiled a list of all of the exhibitions of Latin American art available for loan to museums and institutions in the United States. In this document, attention is given to the role of the Inter-American Office as a “clearinghouse” for information at the National Gallery. Also of note is that certain U.S. institutions in the 1940s were taking the lead in organizing exhibitions of Latin American art. Among the most notable of these institutions were the National Gallery of Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the latter of which organized its own series of traveling exhibitions of Latin American art from 1941 to 1943. Moreover, the document shows how, by the onset of the Cold War in the early 1950s, Latin American art had become the ultimate commodity, pre-packaged into tightly focused exhibitions available for circulation in the United States. The detailed checklist also outlines the necessary physical space for the available exhibitions as well as the fees involved. The text is transcribed here from its original publication [Inter-American Office, National Gallery of Art, *Traveling Exhibitions of Latin American Art: A list of the titles and sources of exhibitions now available for circulation in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1946), 4–10].

FOREWORD

For the benefit of exhibitions in the United States, the Inter-American Office has compiled this list of traveling exhibitions of Latin American art that are currently available for circulation. The exhibitions are listed according to source rather

than subject. In some cases, complete details on borrowing arrangements have been omitted for the sake of brevity. All requests for additional information on the exhibitions listed should be directed to the respective owners or agents at the addresses indicated.

This list is not intended to constitute a descriptive catalogue, but merely a source of reference that will be revised periodically to serve of current value. Information on new exhibitions will therefore be gratefully received, as well as any data that may have been overlooked in the present edition.

The preparation of this list for distribution represents one of several public services that the Inter-American Office hopes to perform in fulfilling its role as an official clearinghouse for information on Inter-American activities. To the individuals and institutions whose cooperation in providing information has made this compilation possible, the Inter-American Office wishes to extend its sincere thanks.

INTER-AMERICAN OFFICE

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

WASHINGTON, D.C., JANUARY 1946

THE BROOKLYN MUSEUM

Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn 17, NY

• *Latin American Colonial and Folk Art*

43 examples of colonial and folk art including textiles, ceramics, silver, lacquer, paintings, et cetera, accompanied by 15 framed photographs of architecture, drawings, and Brooklyn Museum School Service plates.

SPACE: Approximately 100 running feet.

FEE: Shipping charges and insurance.

• *Pre-Columbian Art of Latin America*

35 examples of stone, pottery, jade, textiles, and basketry, accompanied by 15 framed photographs of architecture, drawings, and Brooklyn Museum School Service plates.

SPACE: Approximately 60 running feet.

FEE: Shipping charges and insurance.

THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF THE ARTS

Barr Building, Washington 6, D.C.

- *Contemporary Mexican Folk Costumes by Carlos Mérida*

25 watercolors of the folk costumes of Mexican Indian tribes, by the Guatemalan painter.

SPACE: 75 running feet.

FEE: 3 weeks, U.S. \$30.00.

- *The Figure of Man in Ancient American Art*

23 panels of photographs and text designed to illustrate the treatment of the human form in Pre-Columbian art.

Organized by the Inter-American Office, National Gallery of Art.

SPACE: 100 running feet.

FEE: 3 weeks, U.S. \$30.00.

- *Watercolors, Drawings, and pastels by Diego Rivera*

35 works from 1922 through 1936 including 6 watercolors and pastels, from the collection of the San Francisco Museum of Art.

SPACE: Approximately 160 running feet.

FEE: 3 weeks, U.S. \$45.00.

MARJORIE BATCHELDER

School of Fine and Applied Arts

Ohio State University, Columbus 10, Ohio

- *Mexican Puppetry: A Pictorial Record*

50 plates of photographs, etchings, mezzotints, and artists' sketches illustrating of the Teatro del Nagual, one of three puppet theaters sponsored by the SEP [Mexican Ministry of Education].

Circulated by The Puppeteers of America.

SPACE: 130 running feet.

FEE: 2 weeks, U.S. \$5.00, plus shipping charges.

BLANCHE A. BYERLEY

Walton, Connecticut

- *Latin American Craftwork*

A group of colorful textile works, dolls, metalwork, silver jewelry, basketry, tin, chiefly from Mexico and Guatemala.

SPACE: Approximately 15 running feet.

FEE: 3 weeks, U.S. \$20.00.

FRITZ HENLE

538, Fifth Avenue, New York 19, NY

- *Mexico*

43 mounted photographs of modern Mexico showing her artists, architecture, landscape, handicrafts, and industries.

SPACE: 100 running feet.

FEE: 3 weeks, U.S. \$35.00.

INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS MACHINE CORP.

Fine Arts Department, 590, Madison Avenue, New York 22, NY

- *Contemporary Brazil Prints*

39 graphic works of Oswaldo Goeldi, and Carlos Oswald.

SPACE: Approximately 86 running feet.

FEE: None.

- *Contemporary Mexican Prints*

33 works by leading Mexican printmakers.

SPACE: Approximately 56 running feet.

FEE: None.

- *Seventy-five Latin American Prints*

Prints from 18 Latin American countries.

SPACE: Approximately 170 running feet.

FEE: None.

- *Watercolors of Latin America and the Dominion of Canada*

75 watercolors from each of the countries of Latin America and Canada.

SPACE: Approximately 250 running feet.

FEE: None.

NELLIE SARGENT JOHNSON

12489, Mendiota Avenue, Detroit 4, Michigan

- *Ancient Peruvian Textiles*

20 indented and framed fragment illustrating weaving techniques of Old Peru.

SPACE: 50 running feet.

FEE: 3 weeks, U.S. \$35.00, plus shipping charges and insurance.

- *Modern Peruvian Textiles*

25 examples of modern Peruvian textiles including rugs, blankets et cetera.

SPACE: 50 running feet.

FEE: 3 weeks, U.S. \$35.00, plus shipping charges and insurance.

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Department of Circulating Exhibitions

11 West 53rd Street, New York 19, NY

- *Brazil Builds*

26 colored panels and 59 enlarged photographs tracing the principal development in Brazilian architecture from colonial times to the present day.

SPACE: 190 running feet.

FEE: 3 weeks, U.S. \$43.75.

- *Cuban Painting Today*

66 oil paintings, watercolors, and drawings representing the young and vigorous trend of modern Cuban art.

SPACE: 350 running feet.

FEE: 4 weeks, U.S. \$125.00.

- *Fifteen Latin American Painters*

One painting of each of 15 outstanding artists in Latin America.

SPACE: 60 running feet.

FEE: 3 weeks, U.S. \$31.25

- *Graphic Arts of Mexico and Argentina*

Works of outstanding graphic artists of the two countries which lead Latin America in printmaking.

SPACE: 200 running feet.

FEE: 3 weeks, U.S. \$31.25.

- *Paintings from Latin America*

30 representative paintings of the Museum's collection, by contemporary artists from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay.

SPACE: 150 running feet.

FEE: 3 weeks, U.S. \$75.00.

- *Watercolors and Drawings by Six Cuban Painters*

29 watercolors and drawings by contemporary Cuban artists.

SPACE: 100 running feet.

FEE: 3 weeks, U.S. \$50.00.

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PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

Division of Education

Parkway at 26th Street, Philadelphia 30, PA

- *Pictures of Mexican Children*

84 pictures by Mexican public school children, including watercolors, drawings, prints, and cutouts.

SPACE: 220 running feet.

FEE: 3 weeks, U.S. \$15.00, plus shipping charges.

Smaller edition of the same exhibition containing 34 pictures.

SPACE: 90 running feet.

FEE: 3 weeks, U.S. \$10.00, plus shipping charges.

SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF ART

War Memorial Civic Center, San Francisco 2, CA

- *Latin American Art*

A simple introduction to Latin American art consisting of 12 mounts of photographs and explanatory text.

SPACE: 40 running feet.

FEE: 3 weeks, U.S. \$3.00, plus shipping charges.

- *Watercolors, Drawings, and Prints by Artists in Ecuador*

30 works by 16 artists of whom 11 are Ecuadorians and 5 are European and American who have settled and are contributing to art development in that country.

SPACE: Approximately 160 running feet.

FEE: 3 weeks, U.S. \$30.00, plus shipping charges.

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THE UNITED STATES COLLECTS PAN AMERICAN ART

Joseph Randall Shapiro, 1959

This is the introductory text to the catalogue for the exhibition *The United States Collects Pan American Art*, held at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1959 and organized by Joseph Ran-

dall Shapiro (1904–1996), a Russian-born art collector and philanthropist who lived in Chicago and was the founding president of the city's Museum of Contemporary Art. The exhibition was organized as part of Chicago's Festival of the Americas, which coincided with the Third Pan American Games that were held for the first time on U.S. soil in the summer of 1959. The event was one of the first in the 1950s and the first held in Chicago to feature a collection of artworks by Latin American artists drawn primarily from private collections in the United States. Decades later, a similar milestone paved the way for the controversial exhibition *Art of the Fantastic: Latin America, 1920–1987*, organized by Holliday T. Day and Hollister Sturges for the Indianapolis Museum of Art on the occasion of the 1987 Tenth Pan American Games held in Indianapolis. [SEE DOCUMENT V.1.5 FOR THE EXHIBITION'S CURATORIAL STATEMENT; FOR SCATHING CRITIQUES BY PROMINENT LATIN AMERICAN INTELLECTUALS, SEE DOCUMENTS V.2.5 AND V.2.6]. This excerpt is from the original publication of *The United States Collects Pan American Art* [Joseph Randall Shapiro (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1959, n/p)].

THE UNITED STATES COLLECTS PAN AMERICAN ART. On this theme, the Art Institute [of Chicago] has assembled this exhibition of contemporary Canadian and Latin American paintings as its participation in the Festival of the Americas being celebrated this summer in Chicago. The United States, as host, is not represented. The exhibition and the long list of distinguished lenders affirm the appreciative regard held by our museums and private collectors for the distinctive art of our Canadian and Latin American neighbors.

Since the source of the loans was exclusively within the United States, the exhibit is of necessity limited to paintings available and further by the vicissitudes of the critical evaluation exercised in the selection. Naturally those Canadian and Latin American artists of international fame such as [Jean-Paul] Riopelle, [Rufino] Tamayo, [Roberto] Matta and [Wifredo] Lam are more frequent in our collections and consequently more numerous in the exhibition. Fortunately many of the younger and comparatively unknown painters have also found their way into our collections and could be included.

It is this new generation of artists who have adopted the current "International style" of abstract or non-objective painting. They vigorously oppose the traditional colonial and Indian art of their countries and equally protest against

the so called “tourist art”—the sentimentally picturesque, the exotically foreign—so long associated with much of the art of Latin America. No longer insulated, these young contemporaries, by travel, study and exposure, are entirely conversant with the modern art of Europe and the United States. The modern idiom is to them more reflective of their existing culture—metropolitan, international—as manifest in their modern cities and progressive architecture.

What then is “Latin American” about these new paintings other than the nationality of the artists? Most Americans think of Latin American art as having a single identity. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that this art is or at any time was homogeneous. Differences in geography and ancestry have created different socio-religious cultures and art forms distinctive in their basic rhythms and imagery.

Broadly speaking, the native arts of Mexico and Peru arose from ancient and advanced Indian civilizations, such as the Mayan, Inca and Aztec. The Mexican sense of life is essentially tragic. Death is omnipresent and its image has permeated Mexican art from ancient times to the present. Look at their popular or folk-art, and look at the paintings of young [José Luis] Cuevas and Meza.

The traditions of Mexico, and also the prestige of its great muralists, [José Clemente] Orozco, [David Alfaro] Siqueiros and [Diego] Rivera, penetrated Central America and the Northwest coast of South America. On the other hand, no pre-Columbian tradition existed in Chile, Argentina, Venezuela or Uruguay. These coastal countries, subjected to the currents of European commerce and communication, felt this Western influence. Their art is less provincial and more sophisticated. The Portuguese settlement and the Negro population have had their effect on the culture of Brazil, apparent in the paintings of [Candido] Portinari. Tropical Cuba and the islands abound with the buoyant forms of life and growth expressed by Lam and other Cuban artists. And throughout Latin America, the vast cleavage between the wealthy cultivated minority and the inarticulate masses. Such a diffusion of cultures should lead to a diversity of vital indigenous art forms.

Will this increasing adherence to European and American styles increase the tyranny of conformity and with it the peril of anonymity of the young artists of Latin America? Perhaps the ultimate answer lies within the creative artist himself and the essential core of his existence. Meaningful content, the mystery and authority of good art; these exist independent of subject, stylistic forms and

tradition. Styles and traditions become exhausted and change; these are variable factors, altering with time and place. What remains is the individual artist, Latin American, or otherwise, who by the expressiveness of his art, at once personal and universal, has revealed a poetic insight into the quality of human experience.

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IV

LONGING AND BELONGING

INTRODUCTION BY MARI CARMEN RAMÍREZ

MARI CARMEN RAMÍREZ

Longing and Belonging

DATING FROM THE MID-1950S THROUGH THE LATE 1970S, the documents gathered in this chapter re-frame the discussion of the nature and features of the “new” Latin American art laid out in Chapter II from the perspective of the post-1945 generation of artists, critics, and art historians from Latin America and the United States. As in the case of World War I, Latin American countries benefited economically from the Second World War—a fact that stimulated a more systematic push for modernization, this time directed by social scientists under such banners as Third World developmentalism, industrialization, economic integration, dependency theory, and social change. These conditions further stimulated the emergence of a more sustained and diversified economy that led to key advances such as: the consolidation and expansion of a middle class, the growth of cities and urban centers, the introduction of new technologies (i.e., television), and much more accessible education for all. Such gains, however, were not enough to erase the endemic conditions of poverty, unequal wealth distribution, and relative illiteracy that characterized Latin America as a whole. Hence, in tandem with these developments, the period also saw the emergence of radical political movements animated by a so-called Third World perspective. In this context, the ideal of an egalitarian and progressive society successfully set in motion by the Cuban Revolution (1953–1959) galvanized a new generation of artists and intellectuals at the continental level. Contributing to their political radicalization was the surge of authoritarianism embodied by several *de facto* governments throughout the region. Between 1963 and 1982, a number of South American countries—including Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Chile—fell into the hands of military regimes that suppressed individual liberties.

Meanwhile, in the United States, political and social unrest also accompanied the post-war economic prosperity that saw the birth of the baby boomer generation, a housing and urban development explosion, and the landing of the first man on the moon. In such a context, the U.S. Civil Rights movement strove

to give voice to racial and ethnic minorities who until then had been marginalized deliberately from the national scene. In addition to African Americans, these minorities included U.S. Latinos, an extremely heterogeneous group that featured, among others, Mexican Americans or Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and Cuban Americans. Spurred by these developments as well as by a reappraisal of the legacy of the indigenous civilizations of the Americas, a new breed of U.S. Latino political leaders and intellectuals raised the stakes in the continental debate, claiming their rightful share of both Americas. Their position added an even more complex dimension to the quest for a “Latin American identity”: specifically, Latin America’s *raison d’être* could be located between the republics of the continent and their reluctant neighbor the United States. It should be noted that during the period under consideration, Latin American and Latino intellectuals pursued the dream of an integrated “America” along separate paths that did not immediately recognize each other. These tracks would only intersect in the last two decades of the twentieth century when both globalization and Multiculturalism pushed these agents into the same arena.

Paradoxically, this expansive yet volatile period proved highly beneficial for Latin American artists and their production. Stimulated by a worldwide trend toward “internationalism,” Latin American art indeed emerged in the cultural scene of the 1950s and 60s as “a body and a force to be reckoned with” [SEE DOCUMENT IV.2.6]. The newly acquired status was accompanied by unprecedented exhibition and market activity that included the organization of international biennials in major countries of the region. These conditions, on one hand, activated—if only briefly—a visual arts circuit that facilitated the exchange of artists and works with Europe and the United States; on the other hand, they led to the increased professionalization of the institutions and agents that constituted this emergent field. Foremost among these was the appearance on the scene of two key professionals that, until then, were practically nonexistent in most countries of the Americas: namely, the modern-day art critic and the art historian. The first was paradigmatically personified by Jorge Romero Brest and his outstanding disciples Marta Traba and Damián Bayón; the second was represented by Jorge Alberto Manrique, Aracy Amaral, and Rita Eder. Simultaneously seeking to meet both the demands of their newly acquired professional field and the tradition of the *pensadores*¹ and animated by a desire to contribute to the social transformation of the region, these agents made “Latin American art” their field of action.

Their position found a counterpart in a new generation of North American art historians that included Stanton Catlin, Guggenheim director Thomas Messer, Shifra M. Goldman, Jacqueline Barnitz, and Jacinto Quirarte. Unlike the war-driven generation of Alfred H. Barr Jr. and Grace Morley, the new crew of U.S. Latin American scholars was driven not by U.S. policy interests or jingoism, but by intellectual curiosity, political solidarity, and an unwavering commitment to portraying “the other side” on its own terms.

IV. 1 Within this framework, the first section of this chapter—“Straddling an Aesthetic Doctrine”—gathers key texts by leading Chicano or North American intellectuals that clearly lay out the “Americanist” claims of a marginalized group of the U.S. population: the mestizo-based Mexican Americans broadly known as Chicanos. By 1960, the Chicano population—concentrated primarily in Texas, California, and the Southwest (though later expanding to the Midwest and to the Eastern states)—had increased significantly, establishing a pattern of steady growth that would continue over the next few decades. Traditionally exploited and ghettoized in the barrios, Mexican Americans found a powerful vehicle in the 1960s U.S. Civil Rights Movement, a conduit that helped them stake out a radical position in the national political landscape of that decade and the next. In this context, the word “Chicano,” as Goldman observed, became the foundation of a new racial and ethnic-based cultural identity that called into question the very notion of what it meant to be “American” [SEE DOCUMENT IV.1.4]. Luis Valdez’s “Introduction: ‘La Plebe’” (1972) exemplifies the confrontational tone of the Chicano insurgency while brilliantly articulating the arguments set forth by Chicano intellectuals. In his view, it was presumptuous for anyone to pretend that Chicanos and Mexican Americans were “one more in the long line of hyphenated immigrants to the New World.” Instead, Valdéz proclaimed: “*We are the New World*” [SEE DOCUMENT IV.1.1].

This powerful claim was grounded in the fact that Chicanos saw themselves as the descendants of both the indigenous mestizo populations whose presence on the continent preceded for centuries that of white men as well as of the Mexicans who inhabited Texas and the Southwest—well before Mexico lost this territory to the United States in 1848. In this view, the real outsiders were the white Anglo-Saxons who were nothing but “transplanted Europeans” [SEE DOCUMENT IV.1.1]. In staking out this racially-based position, the Chicano intelligentsia

was acknowledging its debt to the Latin American *pensadores* of the early part of the twentieth century for whom the Mestizo—who embodied everything that was original and authentic about the New World civilizations—served as the foundation for the new Latin American culture. Particularly influential in this regard was the Mexican intellectual and politician José Vasconcelos’s notion of “la raza cósmica” (the cosmic race) [SEE DOCUMENT IV.1.2], an all-embracing intermingling or *mestizaje* in which most existing races are included. Aesthetically sensitive and animated by Christian faith, the Mestizo was charged with “discovering new regions of the spirit” so that humanity could redeem itself. The key element of this encompassing race would manifest itself not through violence but through art [SEE DOCUMENT IV.1.2]. From here emerged the significance ascribed by U.S. Latino intellectuals and art historians to the new form of expression embodied by Chicano and Latino art. Mexican-born, California-based anthropologist Octavio Ignacio Romano, for example, argues that Latinos were not just receptacles of culture but were also active agents of social change. Indeed, they not only succeeded in re-inventing themselves, but were constantly generating new forms of culture as well.

Both the historic legacy of the Mestizo and its live presence in the barrios of major U.S. cities (Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Chicago) set Chicanos apart from other racial and ethnic minorities such as African Americans or Asian Americans. From this point of view, the Chicano exaltation of the Mestizo was also a powerful indictment of the “melting pot” and its failure to serve as the model for a coherent, modern United States. As Goldman wrote in answer to the question “What is Chicano art?”: “It is the final realization, in graphic form, that the human ingredients in the famous ‘melting pot’ of the U.S. have failed to melt; that the total homogenization foreseen in the early twentieth century has not taken place” [SEE DOCUMENT IV.1.4]. In her view, what actually occurred might be called “syncretization”—defined by *Webster’s Dictionary* as “‘the reconciliation of conflicting beliefs; the process of growth through coalescence of different forms,’—with its implicit proposition that conflicting contraries are held in a state of suspension which may, under certain circumstances, dissolve and fly apart.” Clearly, for Goldman and others, only this type of *syncretic model* could represent the type of diversity and heterogeneity embodied by the U.S. Latino community. As will become evident in Chapter VI of this anthology, this notion would hold the key for 1990s Multiculturalism.

IV.2 Whereas in the 1920s and 30s the crux of the debate concerning the “new” art was the urgent call-to-arms for an avant-garde art of continental scale, by the 1950s the focus of the discussion shifted to the question: “Does Latin American art really exist?” A tone of outright skepticism laced the appreciation of this matter by progressive intellectuals trained in disciplines as varied as art history, aesthetics, and sociology as well as in the leading critical currents of the period: Marxism, Existentialism, and Structuralism. This section, “A Dose of Skepticism,” engages the degree of uncertainty that took hold of this debate through a series of texts that challenged the very notion of this art. Leading the charge with her trademark polemical savvy was, again, the Argentinean art critic Marta Traba, who overtly deplores the persistent notion of “American” or “Latin American art” as nothing but “a kind of vague, common desire of artists and critics” [SEE DOCUMENT IV.2.1] which, despite several decades of insistence, had not yielded anything concrete. Convinced that it was impossible for artists to produce works that would express a national or local ethos without reverting to folklore, Traba went as far as suggesting that the whole issue was nothing but another expression of provincialism born out of the Latin American *cultural* inferiority complex [SEE DOCUMENTS IV.2.1 AND IV.2.2]. Traba’s position plainly illustrates the growing distrust on the part of intellectuals of the time for ideologies like Nationalism and Indigenism. By the 1950s, what had emerged in the post-World War I period as progressive movements to counter the persistence of colonialism was now seen by many thinkers as traps that not only posed dangers to democracy, but also threatened to kill genuine artistic expression. Traba thus warned: “Latin America will not be well named, judged, or shown if it constructs its future culture and art based on a misguided continental nationalism, just as dangerous and disastrous as regional nationalisms” [SEE DOCUMENTS IV.2.1 AND IV.2.2].

Like Traba, the authors represented in this section believe that Latin America had to find a way to clearly communicate its *difference* to the world; however, they disagree with each other on both the terms that defined that dissimilarity as well as on the means to convey it to others. Hence, where their predecessors focused on the similarities between the diverse modes of expression of the region in order to make a case for an art of continental projection, Traba, Bayón, Catlin and Grieder, Messer, Romero Brest, Barnitz, and Eder underscore instead the *differences* that separated artistic manifestations in the area. Their arguments hinge on one basic fact until then downplayed by proponents of the “Americanist”

position: Latin America's vast racial and ethnic heterogeneity and lack of unity—both within individual countries and between the countries of the region—made it impossible to articulate an encompassing notion of Latin America art. Complicating this issue was the fact that even the work of those artists who, in the view of these authors, had come close to defining the Latin American ethos—Candido Portinari (Brazil), Emilio Pettorutti (Argentina); Pedro Figari and Joaquín Torres-García (Uruguay), Oswaldo Guayasamín (Ecuador), Wifredo Lam (Cuba)—was so heterogeneous that it could not be reduced to an artificial or, least of all, to an all-encompassing definition.

For many authors, the concern with Latin American “identity” was directly linked to the ancillary position of the continent vis-à-vis the United States as well as to the need to distinguish itself from the powerful giant of the North. Of particular interest in this regard are the texts by the North Americans Thomas Messer, Stanton Catlin and Terence Grieder, and Jacqueline Barnitz. Confronted with the heated debate concerning the existence (or not) of Latin American art, they all admitted the relevance of the question while at the same time acknowledging the impossibility of finding a simple answer. More important, however, were the contributions of these authors to the issue of both the representation and the broader projection of Latin American art in the international scene. Messer, as well as Catlin and Grieder, organized two of the first large-scale exhibitions of Latin American art presented in the United States in the post-war period. Particularly revealing is the way in which the discussion about Latin American identity informed the choice of artists and works for these exhibitions, thereby setting the stage for the debates about the representation of this art inside and outside the United States in the following decades. In outlining the criteria used to select the artists for *The Emergent Decade* (1966), Messer, for example, observed: “we deliberately sacrificed even texture (which would have been attainable had we adjusted the selection to an international norm) and emphasized rather than minimized the diversity of art in each country” [SEE DOCUMENT IV.2.3]. Additionally, they all acknowledged the limitations imposed by such a complex area of study.

The organization of exhibitions of Latin American art in the United States further confirmed the increased internationalization of this art as well as the beginnings of its sanctioning outside the region. This phenomenon also brought to light once again the need to develop methodological frameworks and

critical standards for Latin American art pointed out by Barr, Morley, and their contemporaries during the war years [SEE DOCUMENTS III.4.6–III.4.8]. In three separate texts, art historians Rita Eder and Jacqueline Barnitz pick up the question of “Why Latin American art?” from the point of view of what these trends mean for the study and interpretation of artistic practices in the continent. The ascent of such avant-garde movements as Kinetic and Op Art, Minimalism, Conceptual Art, and other manifestations of non-object and process-based art, only served to exacerbate the identity problem confronted by Latin American artists. The fact that a number of them had emerged as key exponents of the above-mentioned trends complicated the matter further since it suggested that Latin American art was now more than ever in a position to compete on equal footing or even to resemble the art of other Western countries. However, for both Eder and Barnitz, navigating the “internationalist” waters involved considerable challenges. The first of these, in Eder’s view, was “the constant reference to and comparison with European styles,” a tendency that inevitably led to considering Latin American art as “lesser, provincial, pseudo, etc.” [SEE DOCUMENT IV.2.9] Barnitz—in revisiting in 1984 the question she first addressed in 1966–67 [SEE DOCUMENTS IV.2.6 AND IV.2.5, RESPECTIVELY]—and Eder underscored the need to develop critical tools and frameworks that would allow for the interpretation of Latin American art outside the prevailing Eurocentric canons. Eder called for developing a sociology of Latin American art capable of accompanying the transformations it had experienced since 1945, while Barnitz pointed out the need to develop methodological criteria to identify and classify existing patterns in the arts of the different countries. Only then, in the latter’s view, “will it be possible to understand this art on its own terms and not on those of France or of the United States” [SEE DOCUMENT IV.2.6]. Their perspectives illustrate the dilemma confronting professional critics and art historians during this period: While seeking to open the discussion of this issue beyond simple Manichaeism, their positions ended up implicitly affirming the unique character of Latin American artistic manifestations and the “effective” differences that separated them from those of Europe and the United States.

IV.3 At the core of the problems confronting Latin American art from the 1950s through the 1980s was the opposition between identity—in the sense of loyalty to the local culture—and modernity—the need to embrace the most up-to-date artistic currents. Within this framework, “Our Janus-faced Dilemma”

delves deeper into both the negative and positive aspects of this paradox from diverse theoretical and methodological perspectives that strive to go beyond the merely diagnostic in order to propose innovative frameworks for the interpretation of the old issues and problems. As early as 1956, Traba had anticipated the mire that would result from this doomed opposition when—seriously doubting the existence of a “Latin American” artist—she raised the question: Should Latin American artists resolve their aesthetic problems by committing and chaining themselves to their continental Fatherland or should they be free to search their form of expression as artists anywhere else do [SEE DOCUMENT IV.3.1]? Her answer, of course was emphatically negative.

In “Identity or Modernity?” Jorge Alberto Manrique equated the dilemma confronting Latin American artists to that of a “two-headed Janus, looking simultaneously beyond and on this side of the Atlantic” [SEE DOCUMENT IV.3. 2]. In this classic text—that brilliantly merges the intellectual tradition of the *pensador* with that of the art historian—Manrique engages this problematic opposition as the dialectical expression of an ontological dilemma confronting the Latin American artist in his search to define himself against “the Other.” This dilemma is summarized by the persistent question of whether or not Latin America really exists as a unit or whether it is a fictional construct [see Chapter I in this volume]. Rather than opting for one answer or the other, the author concludes that it is precisely this dialectical interplay—and the multiplicity of answers and positions that it has generated across time—that should be considered the *core identity* of Latin American art. Rejecting any possible suggestion of essentialism, Manrique stresses that, far from constituting a finished product, Latin America has to be considered an entity “in the process of making or *inventing* itself.” In a follow-up essay titled “The Invention of Latin American Art” (1978) [SEE DOCUMENT IV.3. 3], he continues to develop this idea—directly inspired by Edmundo O’Gorman’s *The Invention of America* (1961) [SEE DOCUMENT I.1.7]—of Latin America and Latin American art as productive fictions or constructs. In his view, these constructs carried a positive—if not strategic—value since they had already proven their broad capacity to generate an autonomous way of thinking as well as a genuine culture and art that set Latin America apart from the Eurocentric or North American focus. O’Gorman’s notion of “invention” also inspired Argentinean artist Luis Felipe Noé who defended the importance of painting within the strict parameters of young countries like those represented by Latin America. Noé argues that because

painting had the capacity to “imagine”—in the double sense of both inventing and making images—it could transform itself into a historical discipline whose function would be to endow the Latin American man with a self-image. By contrast, this process was absent in “post-historic” societies like the United States where global symbolic images had been replaced by fragmented “image-stimuli” or “image-signs” [SEE DOCUMENT IV.3.7] such as those embodied by Pop art. Worth noting is the fact that Noé’s statement echoes the line of argument wielded by Traba in a 1972 text discussed below.

Manrique’s ontological approach was only one of the many methodological tools employed by critics and essayists to engage the problematic question of whether or not Latin American art existed as a distinct entity. The rapidly shifting political and cultural context for this art in the 1960s and 70s as well as the complexity of artistic practices in the region demanded radical frameworks of analysis. Concerned with the broader, all-encompassing issues of cultural and economic dependency, a number of authors turned to the social sciences—particularly economics and sociology—for the level of precision and the innovative perspectives that they could contribute to the analysis of culture. In their respective texts, Marta Traba (1972), Juan Acha (1973), and Saúl Yurkievich (1974) employ insights from sociology and economics in order to tackle the problem of Latin American art’s dependence on European or North American aesthetics and its seeming inability to generate parallel frameworks of its own. In her text, Traba’s focus is the intensifying influence that North American consumer culture-based art had been exerting on Latin American artists since 1948, when the center of the art world shifted from Paris to New York. In her view, as expressions of a highly industrialized consumer society, the values conveyed by U.S. artistic movements such as Pop art, Minimalism, Op art, and such radical trends as *happenings* and anti-art were fundamentally at odds with those of Latin American societies. The latter were struggling for survival in conditions of underdevelopment and poverty and grappling with the lingering remnants of feudalism and colonialism. In this context, attempts to mimic U.S. trends were not only doomed to fail, but could only be considered updated manifestations of colonialism. Acha, in many respects, endorses this position when he calls for “questions that would lead to the formulation of a new or (and this is essentially the same thing) a different, realistic way of conceiving art that would help to channel our (Third World) mutation into a sensitive form of expression and halt the excesses and defects of

development.” He concludes that “the only thing that can accomplish that goal is a uniquely Third World, sociological perspective” applied to the visual arts [SEE DOCUMENT IV.3.5]. Yurkievich’s text explores the specificity of Latin American art in light of the economic changes undergone by the region as a whole since the early twentieth century. In his view, the direct correlation between Latin America’s economic dependency and its aesthetic subordination to the hegemonic centers was not arbitrary but part of the persistence of a *colonial* dynamic still in place despite the political independence of the countries of the region. Just as Latin American countries exported raw materials and imported manufactured products, so too were they called upon to export artists and import aesthetic systems. The key question, then, was: “Once we have achieved economic de-colonization, how can we achieve cultural de-colonization?” [SEE DOCUMENT IV.3.6]

IV.4 The arguments outlined so far only underscore the intrinsically political and ideological nature of the issues surrounding the questions “Does Latin American Art Exist?” and, if so, “What does it look like?” Contributing to the identity mania was the unprecedented explosion in the number of symposia and public debates on this topic organized between 1975 and 1980 in cities like Buenos Aires, Mexico City, São Paulo, Caracas, and Austin, Texas. The proliferation and increased accessibility of air travel can be credited for this phenomenon in that it facilitated a very agile transportation of arts professionals across the region, including the United States. The result was the beginnings of a dynamic scholarly network supported by intellectual debate and specialized exchange at the continental level. In line with these developments, this section includes selections from four influential symposia carried out in Austin, São Paulo, Mexico City, and Caracas that exemplify this trend. While the positions articulated in these papers are not necessarily new, they highlight the degree of political radicalization undergone by the intellectual and artistic milieu during the late 1960s and 70s. By then, terms such as “cultural imperialism,” “resistance,” and “dependency” had become staples of the discourse on Latin American and Latino U.S. art and culture. Traba’s contribution to the “Speak out! Charla! Bate-Papo!: Contemporary Art and Literature in Latin America,”—organized by Damián Bayón at the University of Texas, Austin, in October 1975—offers a case in point. Twenty years after the 1956 seminal text [SEE DOCUMENT IV.3.1] where she seriously questioned the very notion of a “Latin American” art, Traba veers to the left in order to

articulate a passionate defense of Latin American art in its position of “resistance” to the highly *commodified* values of the art produced by the developed, industrialized, and technological societies of the First World. Traba’s ideological transformation took place after her visit to Cuba in the early-1960s, a pivotal trip that led her to actively embrace the goals of the ongoing revolution.

In such a context, of particular interest for the overall discussion on Latin American art is the controversy concerning an installation work by the Brazilian group *Etsedrón* (*Nordeste* or *Northeast* spelled in reverse)—an artistic collective from Salvador, Bahia, a major city of the impoverished and off-center Brazilian Northeast—presented at the 13th São Paulo Biennial in 1975. Intended as a visceral critique of Brazilian environmental policies, the work featured a rustic corral with ugly religious effigies—part human, part flora, part fauna—made from dirt, bones, and other materials related to the region. Although the work itself did not generate any controversy at the time of its presentation, it became the focus of an animated exchange of views when Brazilian art historian and curator Aracy Amaral raised the question: “Could it be that *Etsedrón* represents . . . one of the paths that Brazilian art might follow if we were not so submerged in the internationalist wave of art?” [SEE DOCUMENT IV.4.4] In other words, in the midst of the active debate regarding the authenticity of Latin American art, here was, at last, an example of a form of art that in its eccentricity and marginalization appeared to tap the core elements of Brazilian society without visibly referencing the type of internationalist-based European or North American art favored by the art centers of Brazil. In Amaral’s view, judging this kind of work would require “a Latin American, rather than European–North American critical viewpoint.” But was that at all possible? The Peruvian critic Juan Acha, the Uruguayan critic María Luisa Torrens, and Mexican sculptor Manuel Felguérez all weighed in on the pros and cons of the *Etsedrón* phenomenon, and their analyses are also presented in this section.

Commenting on the surge of symposia focusing on the identity/identities of Latin American art, a number of authors noted how these events raised more questions and suppositions and offered few answers. Hence, it is not surprising that for his intervention at the *Primer encuentro iberoamericano de críticos de arte y artistas plásticos* (First Ibero-American Encounter of Art Critics and Visual Artists) held in Caracas in 1978, Paris-based Argentinean artist Julio Le Parc chose

to read a long string of *questions* that called attention to various artistic myths, including the existence or lack thereof of Latin American art. Speaking from the artist's point of view, Le Parc concluded that only artistic creation, which offers the "potential for a different future," can shed light on the questions at stake [SEE DOCUMENT IV.4.11]. His clever strategy of paralleling the debate's question-asking approach, which had at this point become a familiar trope, with his own series of questions further emphasizes both the ideological nature and, ultimately, the futility of this seemingly endless argument. Indeed, as will become evident in Chapters V and VI of this anthology, despite the diversity of methods or perspectives involved in attempts to resolve the dilemma once and for all, questioning the Latin-ness of art in the Americas continues to preoccupy profoundly and even confound artists, art historians, and critics.

1

Norman P. Sacks explains that *pensadores* were "men of ideas, though professionally they may be poets, novelists, artists, critics, historians, political scientists, sociologists, moralists, essayists, etc. If they are 'philosophers,' they generally are more akin to the French eighteenth-century *philosophe* than to the nineteenth-century German *Philosoph*. With very few exceptions, they are not system-builders, though they may, in some instances, have been influenced by such thinkers. The performance of the *pensador* is often that of the generalist rather than the specialist." For more on the *pensadores*, see Sacks, "Latin American Intellectual History," *Latin American Research Review* 13, no. 1 (1978): 283.

IV.1. STRADDLING A CULTURAL DOCTRINE

IV.2. A DOSE OF SKEPTICISM

**IV.3. OUR JANUS-FACED DILEMMA: IDENTITY
OR MODERNITY?**

**IV.4. DEBATING IDENTITY ON A CONTINENTAL
SCALE**

IV.1

STRADDLING A CULTURAL DOCTRINE

IV.1.1 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1061252

INTRODUCTION: “LA PLEBE”

Luis Valdez, 1972

In this key essay, Luis Valdez (born 1940)—the Chicano playwright, writer, and film director—questions the validity of differentiating appellations such as “Spanish American,” “Mexican American,” or “Latin American.” He argues, instead, for the appropriateness of the politically loaded “Chicano” and locates the concepts of “La Plebe” (the riffraff) or “La Raza” (the race) as part of a continuum of *bronzed people* at the core of the mestizo nations in the Americas. Although Valdez wrote the essay in English, he intersperses key Spanish words and phrases, employing the same sort of discretionary bilingualism that is ubiquitous in the work of many Latino writers in the United States. The text first appeared in 1972 [Luis Valdez and Stan Steiner, eds., *Aztlan: An Anthology of Mexican American Literature* (New York and Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf and Random House of Canada), xiii–xxxiv]—a few years after the playwright established El Teatro Campesino, located in the historic Mission San Juan Bautista in California. A strong supporter of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, his troupe and cultural arm of the United Farm Workers paved the way for an explosion of a national Chicano theater movement in the 1970s.

IT IS THE TASK OF ALL LITERATURE to present illuminating images of mankind. This, as most writers are surely aware, is not easy to do. It takes the clearest, most unassuming effort on the part of the poet to speak for Man. This effort is very often confused and frustrated when the writer is a victim of racism and colonization. His birthright to speak as Man has been forcibly taken from him. To his conqueror he is patently subhuman, uncivilized, backward, or culturally deprived. The poet in him flounders in a morass of lies and distortions about his conquered

people. He loses his identity with mankind, and self-consciously struggles to regain his one-to-one relationship with human existence. It is a long way back. Such is the condition of the Chicano. Our people are a colonized race, and the root of their uniqueness as Man lies buried in the dust of conquest. In order to regain *corazón* [our soul], we must reach deep into our people, into the tenderest memory of their beginning. . . .

Man has been in the Americas for more than 38,000 years. White men have been around for less than five hundred. It is presumptuous, even dangerous, for anyone to pretend that the Chicano, the “Mexican-American,” is only one more in the long line of hyphenated-immigrants to the New World. *We are the New World*.

Our insistence on calling ourselves Chicanos stems from a realization that we are not just one more minority group in the United States. We reject the semantic games of sociologists and whitewashed Mexicans who frantically identify us as Mexican-Americans, Spanish-Americans, Latin-Americans, Spanish-speaking, Spanish-surname, Americans of Mexican descent, etc. We further reject efforts to make us disappear into the white melting pot, only to be hauled out again when it is convenient or profitable for *gabacho* [gringo] politicians. Some of us are as dark as *zapote*, but we are casually labeled Caucasian.

We are, to begin with, *Mestizos*—a powerful blend of Indigenous America with European-Arabian Spain, usually recognizable for the natural bronze tone it lends to human skin. Having no specific race of our own, we used poetry and labeled ourselves centuries ago as *La Raza* [the Race], albeit a race of half-breeds, misfits, and mongrels. Centuries of interbreeding further obfuscated our lineage, and *La Raza* gave itself other labels—*la plebe*, *el vulgo*, *la palomía*.¹ Such is the natural poetry of our people. One thing, however, was never obscured: that the *Raza* was basically *Indio*, for that was borne out by our acts rather than mere words, beginning with the act of birth. During the three hundred years of [the Vice-Royalty of] *Nueva España*, only 300,000 *gachupines*² settled in the New World. And most of these were men. There were so few white people at first, that ten years after the Conquest in 1531, there were more black men in Mexico than white. Negroes were brought in as slaves, but they soon intermarried and “disappeared.” Intermarriage resulted in an incredible *mestizaje*, a true melting pot. Whites with *Indios* produced *Mestizos*. *Indios* with blacks produced *zambos*. Blacks with whites produced mulattoes. *Pardos*, *Cambujos*, *Tercernones*, *Salta atrases*, and other types were

born out of Mestizos with zambos and mulattoes with Indios, and vice versa. Miscegenation went joyously wild, creating the many shapes, sizes, and hues of La Raza. But the predominant strain of the *mestizaje* remained Indio. By the turn of the nineteenth century, most of the people in Mexico were Mestizos with a great deal of Indian blood.

The presence of the Indio in La Raza is as real as the barrio. Tortillas, tamales, *chile*, marijuana, *la curandera* [witch doctor], *el empacho* [indigestion], *el molcajete* [mortar], *atole* [corn hot drink], La Virgen de Guadalupe—these are hard-core realities for our people. These and thousands of other little human customs and traditions are interwoven into the fiber of our daily life. America Indígena is not ancient history. It exists today in the barrio, having survived even the subversive onslaught of the twentieth-century neon gabacho commercialism that passes for American culture.

Yet the barrio is a colony of the white man's world. Our life there is second hand, full of *chingaderas* [garbage] imitating the way of the *patrón*. The used cars, rented houses, old radio and TV sets, stale grocery stores, plastic flowers—all the trash of the white man's world mixes with the bits and pieces of that other life, the Indio life, to create the barrio. *Frijoles* [beans] and *tortillas* remain, but the totality of the Indio's vision is gone. Curanderas make use of plants and herbs as popular cures, without knowing that their knowledge is what remains of a great medical science. Devout Catholics pray to the Virgen de Guadalupe, without realizing that they are worshipping an Aztec goddess, Tonatzin.

The barrio came into being with the birth of the first Mestizo. Before we imitated the gringo, we imitated the *hacendado* [land owner]; before the *hacendado*, the *gachupín*. Before we lived in the Westside, Chinatown, the Flats, Dogtown, Sal Si Puedes, and El Hoyo, we lived in Camargo, Reynosa, Guamúchil, Cuautla, Tepoztlán. Before the Southwest, there was Mexico; before Mexico, Nueva España. The barrio goes all the way back to 1521, and the Conquest. . . .

Imagine the Conquistadores looking upon this continent for the first time. Imagine Pedro de Alvarado, Hernando Cortés! Fifty-foot caballeros with golden *huevos*, bringing the greed of little Europe to our jungle-ridden, god-haunted world. They saw the land and with a sweep of an arm and a solemn prayer claimed this earth for the Spanish crown, pronouncing it with Catholic inflection and Siglo de Oro majesty: *Nueva España*, New Spain. Imagine now a

fine white Spanish veil falling over the cactuses, mountains, volcanoes, valleys, deserts, and jungles; over the *chirimoya* [custard apple], *quetzal* [bird], *ocelotl*, *nopal* [prickly pear]. Imagine, finally, white men marching into the light and darkness of a very old world and calling it new.

This was not a new world at all. It was an ancient world civilization based on a distinct concept of the universe. Tula, Teotihuacán, Monte Albán, Uxmal, Chichen Itzá, México-Tenochtitlán were all great centers of learning, having shared the wisdom of thousands of generations of pre-Columbian man. The Mayans had discovered the concept of zero a thousand years before the Hebrews, and so could calculate to infinity, a profound basis of their religious concepts. They had operated on the human brain, and had evolved a mathematical system which allowed them to chart the stars. That system was *vigesimal*, meaning it was based on a root of twenty rather than ten, because they had started by counting on their fingers and toes instead of just their fingers as in the decimal system.

It was the Mayans who created the countless stone stellæ, studded with numerical symbols utilizing the human skull as number ten. Did this imply a link between mathematics and the cycle of life and death? There is no telling. Much about the Mayans is mysterious, but it is clear they had more going for them than frijoles and tortillas. Then there were the Toltecs, Mixtecs, Totonacs, Zapotecs, Aztecs, and hundreds of other tribes. They too were creators of this very old new world. The Aztecs practiced a form of “plastic surgery,” among other great achievements in medicine. If a warrior, an Eagle or Ocelot Knight, had his nose destroyed in battle, Aztec surgeons could replace it with an artificial one. They also operated on other parts of the body and stitched up the cut with human hair. All cures, of course, were not surgical, for the Aztec had a profound knowledge of botany, not to speak of zoology, astronomy, hieroglyphics, architecture, irrigation, mining, and city planning. The design of entire cities was an ancient art in the Americas when Madrid, London, and Paris were suffocating in their own crowded stench. . . .

América Indígena was obsessed with death. Or was it life? Man was a flower, a mortal subject to the fugacity of all natural things. Nezahualcóyotl, Chief of Texcoco (1402–72), was a philosopher king and one of the greatest poets America has ever produced. His poem “Fugacidad Universal” [Worldly Fleeting Nature] pondered the philosophical question of temporal existence. *An nochipa*

tialtipac: zan achica ye nican. His words lose much in a double translation from the Náhuatl to Spanish, then English: It is true we exist on this earth? Not forever on this earth: only a brief moment here, even jade shatters...

Man was born, blossomed, and then deteriorated unto death. He was an intrinsic part of the cosmic cycle of life and death, of being becoming non-being, then back again. Coatlicue, Aztec goddess of fertility, was sculpted as a poet's vision in stone: with a death's head, scales like a serpent, and a belt of human hands and hearts. She was the embodiment of the nature of existence: death becoming life, life becoming death. Fertility. Life on earth was ephemeral, but impossible without the sacrifice of other living things. Did man not survive by devouring death, the dead bodies of animals and plants? Was he not in turn devoured and disintegrated by the earth? Even Tonatiuh, the Sun God, must eat, so man offered Him human hearts as sustenance, and thus became deified. . . .

The *Popol Vuh*—sacred book of the Ancient Quiché Maya—describes Creation as American man saw it thousands of generations ago: “There was only immobility and silence in the darkness, in the night. Only the Creator, the Maker, Tepeu, Cucumatz, the Forefathers, were in the water surrounded with light. They were hidden under green and blue feathers, and were therefore called Cucumatz.” How natural, how fitting, how deep is this Indio vision of genesis! Where else could life have begun but in the water? And with the Creator hidden under blue and green feathers! The sophisticated use of natural life symbols is so profound that the Catholic Conquistador, confident in his ignorance, must have thought it naïve. None of the achievements of Indigenous America meant very much to the Conquistador. Nor was he content to merely exploit its physical strength. He sought to possess its mind, heart, and soul. He stuck his bloody fingers into the Indian brain, and at the point of the sword, gun, and cross ripped away a vision of human existence. He forced the Indio to accept his world, his reality, his scheme of things, in which the Indio and his descendants would forever be something less than men in Nueva España's hierarchy of living things. Murder and Christianity worked hand in hand to destroy the ancient cities, temples, clothes, music, language, poetry. The women were raped, and the universe (el Quinto Sol, the world of the Earthquake Sun) was shattered.

. . .

In the twilight of the Conquest, the Mestizo was born into colonization. Rejected as a bastard by his Spanish father, he clung to his Indian mother and shared the misery of her people, the overwhelming sense of loss: “Nothing but flowers and songs of sorrow are left in Mexico and Tlaltelolco, where once we saw warriors and wise men.” Soon there was not even that. Death overtook all who remembered what it had been like, and colonization set in for three hundred years.

Our dark people looked into one another’s eyes. The image reflected there was one the white man had given us. We were savage, Indio, Mestizo, half-breed: always something less than simple men. Men, after all, have a tendency to create God in their own image. No, men we could never be, because only the *patrón* could be a god. We were born to be his instrument, his peon, his child, his whore—this he told us again and again through his religion, literature, science, politics, economics. He taught us that his approach to the world, his logical disciplines of human knowledge, was truth itself. That everything else was barbaric superstition, even our belief in God. In time there was nothing left in our hearts but an empty desire, a longing for something we could no longer define.

Still, for all the ferocity of the Conquest, the Mestizo cannot totally condemn the Spaniard. He might as well condemn his own blood. Anglos particularly are very fond of alluding to the black legend of the Conquistador in Mexico, perhaps to mask the even more inhuman treatment of the Indian in the United States. The *gachupín* offered the Indio colonization; the Anglo, annihilation. There is no question that Nueva España was more human to América Indígena than New England. Some white men, such as Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, saw the evils of New Spain and denounced them: “All the wars called conquests were and are most unjust and truly tyrannical. We have usurped all the kingdoms and lordships of the Indies.” Others, like [Fray Bernardino de] Sahagún and [Fray Toribio de] Motolinía, saved what they could of ancient chronicles, *Los códices de la tinta negra y roja* [The Red and Black Codices], the life thought of a dispossessed world civilization.

It is doubtful, however, that any white man in colonial Mexico or New England was aware of the ultimate importance of the Mestizo. As the real new man of the Americas, he was the least likely candidate to be called an American. The reason may be that the name *America* was an imported European title,

and reserved therefore only for European types. By right of discovery, the honor afforded to Amerigo Vespucci should have gone to Christopher Columbus. Yet Columbia would have been just as alien to the native people of this land as America. The naming of the continent had nothing to do with the Indios or their Mestizo children. It was strictly an amusement of white, western European man. Once America was named, Europe yawned and went on with the dull but profitable business of exploitation and colonization. Wherever possible, North and South America were built or rebuilt in the image of Europe. Spain gorged itself on the gold of New Spain; and England did a brisk trade on the tobacco of New England. Aside from mercantile ventures, the Old World was so uninterested in the New that even white colonists felt neglected.

It took a revolution in the thirteen colonies of New England to again raise the issue of America. Once again the Indios and Mestizos were forgotten. In 1776 the United States of America usurped the name of a continental people for a basically white, English-speaking, middle-class minority. It revealed, perhaps, the continental ambitions of that minority. But an American was henceforth defined as a white citizen of the U.S.A. The numerous brown Quiché, Náhuatl, and Spanish-speaking peoples to the south were given secondary status as Latin Americans, Spanish Americans, and South Americans. It was a historical snow job. The descendants of América Indígena were now foreigners in the continent of their birth.

Cabacho America,³ however, was not to touch the Mestizo for at least another half century. While the Monroe Doctrine [SEE DOCUMENT III.1.1] and Manifest Destiny were being hatched in Washington, D.C., the Mestizo was still living in Nueva España. During the colonial period, he easily achieved numerical superiority over the white man. But the dominant culture remained Spanish. So the Mestizo stood at a cultural crossroads, not unlike the one he later encountered in the United States: choose the way of Mexico Indio and share degradation; or go the way of the white man and become Hispanicized. The choice was given as early as 1598, when Don Juan de Oñate arrived in the Southwest to settle and claim New Mexico, “from the edge of the mountains to the stones and sand in the rivers, and the leaves of trees.” With him came four hundred Mestizos and Indios as soldiers. Many of the Hispanos, or Spanish Americans living in New Mexico today, are descended directly from those first settlers. Their regional name reveals the cultural choice their ancestors made; but it also reveals a reluctance to choose,

for Hispano to some New Mexicans also means Indio-hispano. In 1598 there was not, of course, national status for Mestizos as Mexicanos. Even so, after Independence, Hispanos refused to identify with the racial, cultural, and political confusions of Mexico.

The internal conflicts of nineteenth-century Mexico re-stilted from a clash of races as well as classes. Conservative Criollos and the clergy usurped the War of Independence against Spain; after 1810, the bronze mass of Indios and Mestizos continued to be exploited by a white minority. Avarice and individual ambition superseded the importance of national unity. Coups and *pronunciamentos* [military rebellions] became commonplace, and further weakened the new nation. Mexico did not belong to her people.

Watching the internal struggles south of the border, the United States circled around Texas and hovered above California like a buzzard. Mexico was ill-equipped to defend either state. When rebels struck at the Alamo, President Antonio López de Santa Ana unfortunately decided to rout them out personally. Leaving General don José María Tornel in charge of the government, he drafted an army of six thousand. Through forced loans from businessmen, he equipped them poorly, and with promises of land in Texas won their allegiance. The long march to Texas was painful and costly. Supplies, animals, ammunition, and hundreds of soldiers were lost due to the rigors of winter. Inept as a general, Santa Ana despotically ordered the worst routes for his convoys. He almost accomplished the failure of the expedition before even reaching Texas. The rest is "American" history. The rebels lost the Alamo, but regrouped under Samuel Houston to finally defeat Santa Ana at San Jacinto. Some important historical facts, however, are never mentioned in U.S. classrooms. After the fall of the Alamo and San Antonio Bejar, the rebels resorted to guerrilla warfare. They destroyed crops and burned towns, so that the Mexican troops would have no place to get supplies. They in turn received weapons, food, and men from the United States. The South particularly was interested in Texas as a future slave state. Mexico had outlawed slavery in 1824, but some of the defenders of freedom at the Alamo died for the freedom of holding black slaves.

Slavery was foremost in the minds of the Mexican signers of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848. Ceding fully half of the national territory of Mexico to the United States, they were concerned about the 75,000 Mexican citizens about to be absorbed into an alien country. They feared that the dark Mexican

Mestizo would share the fate of the black man in America. They asked for guarantees that Mexican families would not lose their ancestral lands, that civil and cultural rights would be respected. But the United States, still hot from its first major imperialistic venture, was not ready to guarantee anything.

Witness the memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant, who was with General Zachary Taylor at the Rio Grande, which admit that the United States had goaded Mexico into “attacking first.” No stretch of the imagination can explain why Mexico—bleeding from internal conflict—would want to provoke war with the U.S. Known as *la invasión norte-americana* in Mexico, the Mexican War polluted the moral climate of America. Abraham Lincoln debated with Stephen Douglas over the ultimate wisdom and morality of the war. It was an early-day version of Vietnam. Manifest Destiny won the day, however, and the U.S. acquired the Southwest. When the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo came before Congress for ratification, Article Nine was replaced and Article Ten was stricken out. The two Articles dealt, respectively, with civil rights and land guarantees. The no-nonsense attitude of American politics merged with white racism to create the stereotype of the “Mexican greaser.” Carrying the added stigma of defeat in battle, the Mestizo was considered cowardly, lazy, and treacherous. Anglo America was barely willing to recognize his basic humanity, much less the nobility of his pre-Columbian origins. He was a Mexican, and that was it. But contrary to the myth of the Sleeping Giant, the Mexican in the Southwest did not suffer the abuses of the gringo by remaining inert.

In 1859, Juan N. Cortina declared war on the gringos in Texas. On November 23 from his camp in the Rancho del Carmen, County of Cameron, he released a proclamation: “Mexicans! When the State of Texas began to receive the new organization which its sovereignty required as an integrant part of the Union, flocks of vampires, in the guise of men, came and scattered themselves in the settlements . . . many of you have been robbed of your property, incarcerated, chased, murdered, and hunted like wild beasts, because your labor was fruitful, and because your industry excited the vile avarice which led them. A voice infernal said, from the bottom of their soul, ‘kill them; the greater will be our gain!’” The document was intense but despairing for a real solution to the problem of gringo domination. Cortina proposed to fight to the death if need be, and offered La Raza in Texas the protection of a secret society sworn to defend them. He addressed his people as Mexicanos, but the fact remains that they were no longer citizens

of Mexico. They were Mestizos cast adrift in the hellish limbo of Anglo America. Cortina got his war, and lost.

There were others, before and after Cortina, who waged guerrilla warfare from the mountains of the Southwest. In California, from 1850 to 1875, Joaquín Murrieta and Tiburcio Vásquez span a period of unmitigated struggle. History dismissed them as bandits; asinine romanticized accounts of their “exploits” have totally distorted the underlying political significance of their rebellion.

Bandits in Mexico, meanwhile, were on the verge of creating the first major revolution of the twentieth century. The Revolution of 1910: the revolution of Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa, *El indio y el mestizo*. At Independence, only one fifth of Mexico’s population had been white. A century later, it was less than one thirteenth. In the hundred years between Independence and the Revolution, the number of Mestizos *quadrupled*. In 1910 they numbered fifty-three percent of the total population, while the Indios had remained fairly stable at close to forty percent. Yet white men ruled, while the blood and flesh of Mexico went hungry. A new motivating force was behind the Revolution of 1910, and that force was La Raza, la plebe, *los de abajo* [the underdogs]. Indigenous Mexico discovered itself and so arose with all the fury that four hundred years of oppression can create. The bloodroot of *la patria* [the fatherland] exploded, and Mestizos and Indios fought to the death to make Mexico what it had not been since Cuauhtémoc: a unique creation of native will. . . .

It was a revolution with few restraints, and La Raza expressed itself as never before. A half-breed cultural maelstrom swept across Mexico in the form of *corridos*, bad language, vulgar topics, and disrespectful gestures: *pleberías*. It was all a glorious affront to the aristocracy, which, wrapped in their crucifixes and fine Spanish laces, had been licking the boots of American and British speculators for a lifetime. In 1916, when Woodrow Wilson sent [General John Joseph] Pershing into Mexican territory on a “punitive expedition,” looking for Pancho Villa, U.S. intervention had already seriously crippled the Revolution. Pershing failed to find Villa, but la plebe launched a *corrido*. . . .

Three years later Emiliano Zapata was dead in Chinameca, and the terrible reality of a dying Revolution began to settle on the people. In 1923 Pancho Villa was assassinated by a savage hail of bullets in the dusty streets of Parral, Chihuahua. That same year, almost 64,000 Mexicans crossed the fictitious border into the United States. During the following years 89,000 poured across, and the U.S.,

alarmed by the sudden influx, organized the border patrol. This was the first time the boundary between Mexico and the Southwest had ever been drawn, but now it was set, firmly and unequivocally. Even so, ten percent of Mexico's population made it across: *pa' este lado*. La plebe crossed the border, and their remembrance of the patria was forever stained by memories of bloody violence, festering poverty, and hopeless misery. For all their hopes of material gain, their migration (and it was only a short migration into the Southwest) meant a spiritual regression, for them and for their sons—a legacy of shame for being of Mexican descent in the land of the gringo. Yet the *Revolución* would persist in memory, in song, in *cuentos*. It would reach into the barrio, through two generations of Mexicanos, to create the Chicano.

The Chicano is the grandson, or perhaps even the son, of the Mexican *pelado*.⁴ Who is the *pelado*? He is the Mestizo, the colonized man of Mexico, literally, the “stripped one.” La Raza is the *pelado en masse*. He is almost inevitably dirt poor, cynical about politics, and barely manages to live. He earns his immediate survival day by day, through any number of ingenious schemes, or *movidas*. During the last thirty years or so, he has been epitomized in the *cine mexicano* by the genius of Mario Moreno's Cantinflas. Yet he is hardly a mere comic figure. The humor in his life is born of such deep misfortune that the comedy takes on cosmic proportions and so becomes tragedy. The *pelado* is the creator of the corrido and the eternal patron of mariachi. His music, in turn, inspires him to express all his joy and sorrow in a single cry. So he lets out a *grito* [shout] that tells you he feels life and death in the same breath. *Viva la Raza, hijos de la chingada!*

In Mexican history, the *pelado* undoubtedly gave voice to the “Grito de Dolores” in 1810, and then went off with Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla to fight the War of Independence against Spain. In other generations, the *pelado* took orders from Santa Ana at the Alamo, and probably finished off Davy Crockett. He also fought with Don Benito Juárez during La Reforma,⁵ and most certainly rode with Pancho Villa. It was the *pelado* who crossed the border into the United States, only to be viciously stereotyped as the sleeping Mexican, leaning against a cactus. There is no understanding of the *pelado* in the literature of the United States. None, that is, except for the embryonic works of Chicano literature. *Comadres* and *compadres* [godparents], *pachucos* [zoot suit men], *campesinos* [peasant] begin to emerge from the pen of the Chicano poet: people of the rural and urban barrios of the Southwest, with names like Nacho, la Chata, Tito, Little Man, Pete Fonesca, and “el

Louie Rodriguez, carnal del Candi y el Ponchi.” Some are sketched, some are fully drawn, but they are all intimately real—a far cry from the racist stereotypes of the John Steinbeck past.

Yet they are all drawn against the background of the barrio, replete with the spiritual and material *chingaderas* of colonization. Beset by all the pain and confusion of life in los Estados Unidos, the pelados in Chicano literature take drugs, fight, drink, [are in] despair, go hungry, and kill each other. Some resist racism of the gringo, and become *pachucos*. Some acculturate and sell out as Mexican Americans. Some are drawn from a distant twenty-year-old memory, and some are as real as today. But they are not to be confused with the writers that created them, for they are Chicanos.

The Chicano is not a *pelado*. His very effort to cut through nearly five centuries of colonization defines him as a new man. This effort is so total, in fact, that it is characteristic of Chicano writers to also be teachers, community organizers, and political leaders. In one sense, *being Chicano* means the utilization of one’s total potentialities in the liberation of our people. In another sense, it means that Indio mysticism is merging with modern technology to create *un nuevo hombre*, a new man; a new reality, rooted in the origins of civilization in this half of the world. Neither a pelado nor a Mexican American, the Chicano can no longer totally accept as reality the white, Western European concept of the universe. Reason and logic are not enough to explain the modern world; why should it suffice to explain the ancient world of our ancestors? The sciences of archaeology and anthropology may unearth the buried ruins of América Indígena, but they will never comprehend, through logic alone, its most basic truth: that man is a flower, for there is poetry in reality itself.

In an effort to recapture the soul-giving myth of La Raza, the Chicano is forced to re-examine the facts of history, and suffuse them with his own blood—to make them tell his reality. The truth of historical documents can sometimes approach poetic truth. So the Chicano poet becomes historian, digging up lost documents and proclamations other men saw fit to ignore. Yet he will inevitably write his own gestalt vision of history, his own *mitos*. And he will do it bilingually, for that is the mundane and cosmic reality of his life. Anglo America, no doubt, will resent the bilingualism of the Chicano. The average educated *gabacho* will probably interpret bilingual Chicano literature as reflecting the temporary bicultural confusion of the “Mexican American.” He will be reluctant to accept in the

Chicano poet what he proudly accepts in a T. S. Eliot. Both are bilingual, or even multilingual poets; but the former intersperses his English with mere Spanish, while the latter alludes in the “highly sophisticated” Latin or French.

If the Anglo cannot accept the coming reality of America, *que se lo lleve la jodida*. . . Otherwise, he can learn Spanish, which is the language of most of the people in America. The time has come to redefine all things “American.” If our bilingualism has prompted gabachos to wonder if we are “talking about them,” in the street, in school, at work, this time, the Chicano literature, we certainly are discussing them. If Anglos insist on calling us Mexican Americans, then we must insist on asking: What is an American? Nobody pursues the title with such vehemence as the white man in the United States. He does on occasion recognize the existence of “Latin” America, and so calls himself a *norte-americano*. Still, North American does not define him clearly enough. After all, North America is not only the United States. It is also Mexico, Jamaica, Haiti, Puerto Rico, Canada, and Cuba. Fidel Castro is a *norte-americano*.

Who then is this resident of the United States known by the Chicano as an Anglo, *gringo*, *yanqui*, *bolillo*, or *gabacho*? Who is this person whose immediate ancestors were so incapable of living with Indigenous America that they tried to annihilate it? He is the eternal foreigner, suffering from the immigrant complex. He is a transplanted European, with pretensions of native origins. His culture, like his name for this continent, is imported. For generations, despite furious assertions of his originality, the “American” has aped the ways of the Old Country, while exploiting the real native peoples of the New. His most patriotic cry is basically the retort of one immigrant to another. Feeling truly American only when he is no longer the latest foreigner, he brandishes his Americanism by threatening the new arrival: “America, love or leave it!” Or, “If you don’t like it here, go back where you came from!”

Now the gringo is trying to impose the immigrant complex on the Chicano, pretending that we “Mexican Americans” are the most recent arrivals. It will not work. His melting pot concept is a sham: it is a crucible that scientifically disintegrates the human spirit, melting down entire cultures into a thin white residue the average gabacho can harmlessly absorb. That is why the Anglo cannot conceive of the Chicano, the Mexican Mestizo, in all his ancient human fullness. He recognizes him as a Mexican, but only to the extent that he is “American”; and he accepts Mexican culture only to the extent that it has been Americanized,

sanitized, sterilized, and made safe for democracy, as with taco bars, *chile con carne*, the Mexican hat dance, Cantinflas in *Pepe*, the Frito Bandito, and grammar school renditions of *Ay Chiapanecas Ay, Ay...* [Clap, clap, children]. But we will not be deceived. In the final analysis, frijoles, tortillas, y chile are more American than the hamburger; and the pelado a more profound founding father of America than the pilgrim. No, we do not suffer from the immigrant complex. We suffered from it as its victims, but history does not record the same desperation among our people that twisted and distorted the European foreigner, that made the white immigrant the gringo.

We left no teeming shore in Europe, hungry and eager to reach the New World. We crossed no ocean in an overcrowded boat, impatient and eager to arrive at Ellis Island in New York. No Statue of Liberty ever greeted our arrival in this country, and left us with the notion that the land was free, even though Mexicans and Indians already lived on it. We did not kill, rape, and steal under the pretext of Manifest Destiny and Western Expansion. We did not, in fact, come to the United States at all. The United States came to us.

We have been in America a long time. Somewhere in the twelfth century, our Aztec ancestors left their homeland of Aztlán, and migrated south to Anáhuac, “the place by the waters,” where they built their great city of México-Tenochtitlán. It was a long journey, for as their guiding deity, Huitzilopochtli, had prophesied: the elders of the tribe died en route and their children grew old. Aztlán was left far behind, somewhere “in the north,” but it was never forgotten. Aztlán is now the name of our Mestizo nation, existing to the north of Mexico, within the borders of the United States. Chicano poets sing of it, and their *flor y canto* [flower and song=poetry]⁶ points toward a new yet very ancient way of life and social order, toward new yet very ancient gods. The natural revolutionary turn of things is overthrowing outmoded concepts in the life of man, even as it does in nature; churning them around in the great spin of Creation, merging the very ancient with the very new to create new forms.

The rise of the Chicano is part of the irrevocable birth of America, born of the blood, flesh, and life spirit of this ancient continent. Beyond the two-thousand-mile border between Mexico and the U.S.A. we see our universal race extending to the very tip of South America. We see millions upon millions of bronze people, living in Mestizo nations, some free, some yet to be freed, but existing: mexicanos, guatemaltecos, peruanos, chilenos, cubanos, bolivianos,

puertorriqueños; [and] a new world race, born of the racial and cultural blending of centuries. *La Raza Cósmica* [SEE DOCUMENT IV.1.2], the true American people.

1

“La plebe” suggests a range of identifications from plebes to guys to kids; the broad, overarching definition of “el vulgo” could include: the masses, from the common people to riff-raff; “la paloma or palomilla” (*palomía* in northern Mexico) suggests both a mischievous group of friends as well as a rabble or a gang.—Ed.

2

Gachupines is a pejorative term denoting a Spaniard living in the Americas.—Ed.

3

In current Mexican slang “gabacho” identifies an American citizen, the Yankee, the Gringo, even a blond person; however, the term originally stemmed from the watercourses in the Pyrennes and referred to a Frenchman, a “Frog,” and even a Gallicism in Spanish literature.—Ed.

4

The word “pelado” literally translates to *peeled*, as in a fruit. In Mexican slang, however, it can be used to refer to a poor, coarse common person or to a foulmouthed and rude one.—Ed.

5

A turning point in Mexican history when, led by Benito Juárez, the State declared that it was best for the national government to be independent from the Church, the Holy See. By means of the Reforma legislation, the official relationship with the Vatican was severed in 1857, assuring the secular identity of the State.—Ed.

6

A Náhuatl term, “xóchitl” (flower)—as a modifier that has the sense of “something precious, delicate”—was conventionally paired in the Aztec world with “cuícatl” (song) to refer to poetry. One well-known examples comes from Nezahuacóyotl’s poem *Nitlayocoya* (I am sad): “xochitica ye ihan cuicatica” (my deepest poetry).—Ed.

IV.1.2 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 776251

THE COSMIC RACE: “GROUNDS FOR A NEW CIVILIZATION”

José Vasconcelos, 1925

In this extract, “Grounds for a New Civilization,” from the first chapter of his hallmark 1925 book *La raza cósmica*, José Vasconcelos outlines his vision for a comprehensive, undivided race—the cosmic race—resulting from the fusion of all existing ones. Highlighting its aesthetic sensitivity, love of beauty, and—most importantly—deeply rooted Christian faith, the Mexican thinker proposes this universal fifth race that embodies the intermingling in the

Americas as the basis for a new civilization. With Vasconcelos at the helm of 1920s Mexico's Ministry of Public Education, these values were also tantamount to the country's literacy policy under president Álvaro Obregón (in office 1920–24). In fact, the book had far-reaching influence in the Americas during Vasconcelos's lifetime and, later on, for the Chicano intelligentsia of the 1970s who asserted Mexican ancestry as the foundation of their cultural and political militancy [SEE FOR EXAMPLE LUIS VALDEZ, DOCUMENT IV.1.1]. First published in Madrid as *La raza cósmica. Misión de la raza iberoamericana. Notas de viajes a la América del Sur* [José Vasconcelos, (Agencia Mundial de Librería, 1925)], this translation is by Didier T. Jaén [José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race: A Bilingual Edition*, (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1979)].

GROUNDINGS FOR A NEW CIVILIZATION

...

We have the duty to formulate the basis of a new civilization, and for that very reason, it is necessary that we keep in mind the fact that civilizations cannot be repeated, neither in form nor in content. The theory of ethnic superiority has been simply a means of combat, common to all fighting peoples, but the battle that we must wage is so important that it does not admit any false trickery. We do not claim that we are, or that we shall become the first race of the world or the most illustrious, the strongest and the most handsome. Our purpose is even higher and more difficult to attain than temporary selection. Our values are still potential to such an extent that we are nothing yet. However, the Hebrew race was, for the arrogant Egyptians, nothing more than a miserable caste of slaves. Yet, from that race was born Jesus Christ, who announced the love of all men and initiated the greatest movement in history. This love shall be one of the fundamental dogmas of the fifth race that will be produced in America. Christianity frees and engenders life, because it contains universal, not national, revelation. For that reason, it had to be rejected by the Jews themselves, who could not decide to commune with gentiles. But America is the fatherland of gentility, the true Christian Promised Land. If our race shows itself unworthy of this consecrated land, if it lacks in love, it will be replaced by peoples more capable of accomplishing the fateful mission of those lands, the mission of serving as the seat for humanity fashioned out of all the nations and all the racial stocks. The *biótica*

[mode of life] imposed by world progress on the America of Hispanic origin is not a rival creed that confronts the adversary saying: "I surpass you," or "I am self-sufficient." Instead, it is an infinite longing for integration and totality that, for the same reason, invokes the universe. The infinitude of her longing insures her strength to combat the exclusivist creed of the enemy faction and grants her confidence in victory, which always corresponds to the gentiles. The danger is rather that it may happen to us as it happened to the majority of the Hebrews, who, not wanting to become gentiles, lost the grace that originated in their midst. This may happen, if we do not learn how to offer a home and fraternity to all men. Then another people will serve as the axis, another tongue will be the vehicle, but no one can detain any longer the fusion of the races, the emergence of the fifth era of the world, the era of universality and cosmic sentiment.

The doctrine of sociological and biological formation we propose in these pages is not a simple ideological effort to raise the spirits of a depressed race by offering it a thesis that contradicts the doctrine with which its rivals wanted to condemn it. What happens is that, as we discover the falsity of the scientific premise upon which the domination of contemporary power rests, we also foresee, in experimental science itself, orientations that point the way, no longer for the triumph of a single race, but for the redemption of all men. It is as if the *pal-ingensis*¹ announced by Christianity with an anticipation of thousands of years, would be confirmed at present by the different branches of scientific knowledge. Christianity preached love as the basis of human relations, and now it begins to be clear that only love is capable of producing a lofty humanity. The official policy and the Positivists' science, which was directly influenced by that policy, said that the law was not love but antagonism, fight, and the triumph of the fittest. However, they established no other criterion to judge fitness, but the curious begging of the question contained in that thesis itself, since the fittest is the one who triumphs, and only the fittest triumph. Thus, we can reduce to verbal formulas of this kind all the small wisdom that wanted to disassociate itself from the genial revelations, in order to substitute them with generalizations founded on the mere sum of details.

The discredit of such doctrines is aggravated by discoveries and observations that are revolutionizing the sciences today. It was not possible to combat the theory of history as a process of frivolities when it was thought that also indi-

vidual life was deprived of a metaphysical end and a providential plan. But now mathematics wavers and modifies its conclusions in order to give us the concept of a moveable world, whose mystery changes according to our relative position and the nature of our concepts. Physics and chemistry no longer dare to affirm that the functions of the atom involve nothing else but the action of masses and forces. Biology also states in its new hypotheses, for example, with [Jakob von] Uexküll,² that in the course of life “cells behave as if they worked within a complete organism whose organs are harmonized according to a plan and work in conjunction, that is, they possess a functional plan . . . there being an interlocking of vital factors in the physico-chemical motor—a notion which contradicts Darwinism, at least in its interpretation by Darwinists who deny that nature obeys a plan. Mendelianism also demonstrates, according to Uexküll, that the protoplasm is a mixture of substances from which everything, more or less, can be made. Faced with all these changes in the concepts of science, it is necessary to recognize that the theoretical edifice for the domination by a single race has collapsed. This, in turn, is a forewarning that the material power of those who have produced all that false science of circumstance and conquest will not be long in falling.

[Gregor] Mendel’s law, particularly when it confirms “the intervention of vital factors in the physico-chemical wheel,” must be part of our new patriotism, because from it we can draw the conclusion that the different faculties of the spirit take part in the processes of destiny.

What does it matter if Spencerian materialism had us condemned, when today it turns out that we can see ourselves as a sort of reserve for humanity, as the promise for a future that will surpass all previous times? We find ourselves, then, in one of those epochs of *palingenesis*, and in the center of the universal maelstrom. It is urgent to bring to our consciousness all of our faculties in order that—alert and active—they begin to intervene right away in the process of collective redemption. This is the splendid dawn of a peerless age. One could say that it is Christianity that is going to be consummated, now not only in the souls, albeit at the root of beings. As an instrument for this transcendental transformation, a race has been developing in the Iberian continent; a race full of vices and defects, but gifted with malleability, rapid comprehension, and easy emotion, fruitful elements for the seminal plasma of the future species. The biological materials

have already been gathered in abundance: the predispositions, the characters, genes of which Mendelians speak. Only the organizing impulse, the plan for the formation of the species has been lacking. What should be the traits of this creative drive?

If we were to proceed according to the law of pure confused energy of the first period, according to primitive biological Darwinism, then blind force, by almost mechanical imposition of the most vigorous elements, would make the decision in a simple and brutal manner, exterminating the weak, or, properly speaking, those who do not fit into the plan of the new race. But in the new order, by its own law, the permanent elements will not support themselves on violence but on taste, and, for that reason, the selection will be spontaneous, as it is done by the artist when, from all the colors, he takes only those that are convenient to his work.

If in order to constitute the fifth race we should proceed according to the law of the second period, then a contest of craftiness would ensue, in which the astute ones and those lacking in scruples would win the game over the dreamers and the kind at heart. Probably, then, the new humanity would be predominantly Malaysian, for it is said that no one surpasses them in caution and ability, and even, if necessary, in perfidy. By the road of intelligence, one could even arrive, if you wish, at a humanity of stoics that would take duty as the supreme norm. The world would become like a vast nation of Quakers, where the plan of the spirit would end up strangled and deformed by the rule. Because reason, pure reason, may be able to recognize the advantages of the moral law, but is incapable of imprinting action with the combative ardor to make it fruitful. On the other hand, the joy-creating faculty is contained in the law of the third period, which is a feeling for beauty and a love so refined that it becomes identified with divine revelation. A quality assigned to beauty since ancient times, in the *Phaedro*,³ for example, is that of being pathetic. Its dynamism is contagious; it moves the emotions and transforms everything, even destiny itself. The race best qualified to discover and to impose such a principle upon life and material things will be the matrix race of the new civilization. Fortunately, such a gift, necessary to the fifth race, is possessed in a great degree by the Mestizo people of the Ibero-American continent; people for whom beauty is the main reason for everything. A fine aesthetic sensitivity and a profound love of beauty, away from any illegitimate interests and free from formal ties, are necessary for the third period, which is impreg-

nated with a Christian aestheticism that puts upon ugliness itself the redemptive touch of pity which lights a halo around everything created.

We have, then, in the continent all the elements for the new Humanity: A law that will gradually select elements for the creation of predominant types; a law that will not operate according to a national criterion, as would be the case with a single conquering race, but according to a criterion of universality and beauty; and we also have the land and the natural resources. No people in Europe could replace the Ibero-American in this mission; no matter how gifted they might be, because all of them have their culture already made and a tradition that constitutes a burden for such enterprises. A conquering race could not substitute us, because it would fatefully impose its own characteristics, even if only out of the need to exert violence in order to maintain its conquest. This mission cannot be fulfilled either by the peoples of Asia, who are exhausted, or at least, lacking in the necessary boldness for new enterprises.

The people that Hispanic America is forming in a somewhat disorderly manner yet free of spirit and with intense longings on account of the vast unexplored regions, can still repeat the feats of the Castilian and Portuguese conquerors. The Hispanic race, in general, still has ahead of it this mission of discovering new regions of the spirit, now that all lands have already been explored.

Only the Iberian part of the continent possesses the spiritual factors, the race, and the territory necessary for the great enterprise of initiating the new universal era of Humanity. All the races that are to provide their contribution are already there: The Nordic man, who is today the master of action but who had humble beginnings and seemed inferior in an epoch in which already great cultures had appeared and decayed; the black man, as a reservoir of potentialities that began in the remote days of Lemuria; the Indian, who saw Atlantis perish but still keeps a quiet mystery in the conscience. We have all the races and all the aptitudes. The only thing lacking is for true love to organize and set on its way the law of History.

Many obstacles are opposed to the plan of the spirit, but they are obstacles common to all progress. Of course, some people may object, saying that how are the different races going to come to an accord, when not even the children of the same stock can live in peace and happiness within the economic and social regime that oppresses man today. But such a state of mind will have to change rapidly. All the tendencies of the future are intertwined in the present:

Mendelianism in biology, socialism in government, growing sympathy among the souls, generalized progress, and the emergence of the fifth race that will fill the planet with the triumphs of the first truly universal, truly cosmic culture.

If we view the process panoramically, we shall find the three stages of the law of the three states of society, each one vivified with the contribution of the four fundamental races that accomplish their mission and, then, disappear in order to create a fifth superior ethnic specimen. This gives us five races and three stages, that is, the number eight which in the Pythagorean gnosis represents the ideal of the equality of all men. Such coincidences are surprising when discovered, although later they may seem trivial.

In order to express all these ideas that today I am trying to expound in a rapid synthesis, I tried, some years ago, when they were not yet well defined, to assign them symbols in the new Palace of Public Education in Mexico. Lacking sufficient elements to do exactly what I wished, I had to be satisfied with a Spanish renaissance building, with two courtyards, archways, and passages that give somewhat the impression of a bird's wing. On the panels at the four corners of the first patio, I had them carve allegories representing Spain, Mexico, Greece, and India, the four particular civilizations that have most to contribute to the formation of Latin America. Immediately below these four allegories, four stone statues should have been raised, representing the four great contemporary races: the white, the red, the black, and the yellow, to indicate that America home to all and needs all of them. Finally, in the center, a monument should have been raised that in some way would symbolize the law of the three states: the material, the intellectual and the aesthetic. All this was to indicate that through the exercise of the triple law, we in America shall arrive, before any other part of the world, at the creation of a new race fashioned out of the treasures of all the previous ones: the final race, the cosmic race.

1

Palingenesis (a composite of the Greek *palin*, "again," and the Latin-derived term *genesis*) implies the ideas of resurrection, regeneration, and re-birth.—Ed.

2

Jakob Johan von Uexküll (1864–1944) was a Baltic German biologist born in what is present-day Estonia. He worked in the fields of muscular physiology, animal behavior studies, and the cybernetics of life.—Ed.

3

Phaedro is one of the most popular Dialogues of Plato (428–347).—Ed.

IV.1.3 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1061603

THE HISTORICAL AND INTELLECTUAL PRESENCE OF MEXICAN-AMERICANS

Octavio I. Romano, 1969

This landmark essay on Mexican American culture by Mexico-born, California-reared, anthropologist and writer Octavio Ignacio Romano (1923–2005) disavows the widely held notion of Mexican Americans as a homogeneous monolith. Romano draws on Mexican history as well as on pervasive ideological currents in Mexican American society including: Indianism, confrontation and its multiple manifestations, mestizo-based cultural nationalism, and manifold immigrant experiences. Ultimately, Romano underscores the demands of living in-between the United States and Mexico. Moreover, he stresses the Mexican American invention of innovative, plural (and even subversive) forms of culture. Widely considered a programmatic document for Chicano studies, the Berkeley-trained Romano was equally influential in his founding of two of the most important vehicles for the widespread dissemination of pioneering Mexican American and early Chicano thought: a publishing house, Quinto Sol Publications (founded at Berkeley in 1967), and *El Grito. A Journal of Contemporary Mexican American Thought* (issued by Quinto Sol from 1967 through 1971). This essay first appeared in *El Grito* [(Berkeley: Quinto Sol), vol. II, no. 2 (Winter 1969): 32–46].

DURING AND FOLLOWING THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION OF 1910, it is estimated that one of every ten people left the country. Some went to Spain, some to France, some went to Cuba, to Guatemala, but most went north to the United States. Among those who went to the North were printers, poets, civil servants, merchants, farmers, school teachers, *campesinos*, musicians, bartenders, blacksmiths, jewelers, carpenters, cowboys, Mestizos, village Indians, religious people, atheists, infants, mothers, Masons, counter-revolutionaries, philosophers.

Among those who went north was José Vasconcelos who later became Secretary of Education in Mexico. So did Martín Luis Guzmán, author of the classic novel of the Revolution, *El Águila y la Serpiente*. Adolfo de la Huerta started the rebellion in northwest Mexico, was Provisional President (1920), and persuaded

Pancho Villa to settle on the Canutillo Ranch. Huerta finally fled to Los Angeles, California, worked there as a singing instructor, and later returned to Mexico. Another northern migrant was José María Maytorena, governor of Sonora, supporter of Madero, follower of Villa, who finally ended up in California. Ramón Puente was a doctor, teacher, journalist and writer in the Villa army. Following Villa's defeat, Puente left for the United States. Along with the others, these men were among the great number of people who became the "immigrants" and "refugees" from the Mexican Revolution. In the words of Ernesto Galarza: "As civil war spread over the republic after 1911 a major exodus from the countryside began. Landowners fled to the large cities, principally the capital, followed by hundreds of thousands of refugees who could find no work. This was one of the two great shifts that were to change radically population patterns, until then overwhelmingly rural. The other current was in the direction of the United States, now accessible by rail. It moved in the dilapidated coaches with which the Mexican lines had been equipped by their foreign builders, in cabooses fitted with scant privacy, on engine tenders and on flat cars for the steerage trade. "A la capital o al norte" (to Mexico City or to the border) became the alternatives for the refugees from the crossfires of revolution."¹

In the North they worked on the railroad, in the clearing of mesquite, in fish canneries, tomato fields, irrigation, and all other such work that became so drearily familiar to the people living in the *colonias* [neighborhoods]. At the same time, for many, the Mexican Revolution was still fought in the barrios in the United States, as described by José Antonio Villarreal in his novel, *Pocho*: "The man who died under the bridge that night had no name. Who he was, where he came from, how he lived—these things did not matter, for there were thousands like him at this time. This particular man had fought in the army of General Carrillo, who, in turn, was one of the many generals in the Revolution. And, like thousands of unknown soldiers before and after him, this man did not reason, did not know; [he] had but a vague idea of his battle. Eventually there was peace, or a lull in the fighting, and he escaped with his wife and children and crossed the border to the North."²

Not only did an attenuated version of the Revolution continue in the North, with plot and counterplot, avoidance and memories of hate, but there also continued the ideas, the intellectualizations, and the philosophies of the day.

In the Northern *colonias*, as was happening in Mexico, people still discussed and argued over the relative merits of Indianist philosophies, of Historical experience and Confrontations, and about the philosophical and historical significance of the Mestizo. These relevant philosophies became a part of the common poetry readings of those days in the *barrios*. They also appeared in the colonia newspapers of the day, in stage and other dramatic presentations, in the music of the trumpet and guitars, in schools of Mexican culture, in the rationales and goals of the autonomous labor unions as well as in the constitutions and by-laws of the *sociedades mutualistas*. In some cases, the ideas had been transplanted from Mexico. In others, they were merged with pre-existent philosophies among the Mexican descended people already in the United States. And through it all, they continued the human quest and the conflict between Nationalistic Man and Universal Man, between Activist Man and Existential Man, Cleric and Anti-Cleric, Mutualist, Classical Anarchist,³ Nihilist Man, Agrarian and Urban Man, Indian Man, and Mestizo.

These are the principal historical *currents of thought* that have gone into the making of the mind of *el mexicano*, the “refugee,” *el cholo*, the Pocho, the Chicano, Pachuco, the Mexican-American. They have their roots in history and currently appear in three main streams of thought—Indianist Philosophy, Historical Confrontation and the philosophically transcendental idea of the Mestizo in the form of Cultural Nationalism. These are philosophies, styles of thought, ideas as they persist over time. At times, they coincide with actual historical occurrences. Other times they lie relatively dormant, or appear in a poetic metaphor, a song, a short story told to children, or in a marriage pattern. These philosophies were articulated in the post-Díaz days in Mexico and in the days of the Revolution.

EN AQUELLOS DÍAS [IN THOSE DAYS]

The ideologies and philosophies that gave air to the smoldering fires of the Mexican Revolution of 1910 were pluralistic, reflecting the composition of Mexico at that time. Many worldviews, numerous projected plans, desires of power, and historical precedents all contributed to this fiery outburst that led to untold human agonies, an attempted reconstruction, and a massive exodus. In the *Labyrinth of Solitude*, the philosopher-poet Octavio Paz attempted bravely to deal with

these crisscross currents in their historical relation to the present. His published effort resulted in a somewhat Quixotic quest for *THE Mexican*—el Puro Mexicano,—a quest that fluttered between the two extremes of National Man and Universal Man. What emerged from his search were NOT only masks, as Paz insisted in the Freudian-esque overtones of his work. Instead, what emerged from his search were but different lifestyles which represented different historical trends, a variety of individual experiences, multiple intellectual currents—in short, Many Mexicans, just as today there are Many Mexican-Americans. Quite often, this seemingly endless multiplicity represents many men. Equally often, it represents every man.

CADA LOCO CON SU TEMA [EVERYONE HAS HIS HOBBYHORSE]

In 1926, José Vasconcelos—former Secretary of Education in Mexico—wrote: “The struggle of the Latin American revolutionist is the struggle of democratic European ideas to impose themselves upon the Oriental indigenous type of despotism.”⁴ Vasconcelos condensed his notions into the “philosophy of the Ibero-American Race,” having its origins in an ethnically pluralistic Spain, transplanted into an equally pluralistic Mexico, reinforced by the universalistic components of the Catholic faith, and ultimately manifested in the Mestizo—genetic assimilation with European ideology integrated into the contemporary Mexico of his day.⁵ The heart of his argument, of course, was that ideas invariably supersede the biological imperatives of miscegenation. Therefore, if miscegenation was the best vehicle for advancing pre-existing ideas, then such a course was desirable for Mexico. In all this process he envisioned “. . . the hope that the Mestizo will produce a civilization more universal in its tendency than any other race in the past.”⁶

This was not the only view that depicted the thought currents of the time. Octavio Paz has also written: “The Revolution had antecedents, causes, motives, but in a profound sense it lacked precursors. . . . The Revolution began as a demand for truth and honesty in the government, as can be seen in the Plan de San Luis (October 5, 1910). Gradually the movement found and defined itself, in the midst of the battle and later when in power. Its lack of a set program gave it popular authenticity and originality. The fact accounts for both its greatness and its weaknesses.”⁷ Then, “The revolution, without any doctrines (whether

imported or its own) to guide it, was an explosion of reality and a groping search for the universal doctrine that would justify it and gave it a place in the history of America and the world.”⁸ Finally, “Our movement was distinguished by a lack of any previous ideological system and by a hunger for land.”⁹

The views of Vasconcelos and those of Paz reflect two major trends of thought at the time of the Revolution. First, there was the articulation of the desire to emulate pre-existent ideologies, i.e., *el Mestizaje*. Second, there was the desire to do autonomously, to confront, and then to articulate. Both ultimately envisioned something uniquely Mexican in its final outcome, a new synthesis. There was a third trend, the Zapata movement. This movement was a form of Indianism as intellectualized largely by the school teacher Montaña, a pure Indian. According to Vasconcelos, “There was a time when the European dress was not allowed in the Zapata territory; and those Mexicans of white Spanish skin that happened to join the Zapata armies had to adopt the dress and the manner of the Indian, in a certain way had to become *Indianized* before they could be accepted.”¹⁰ As Paz describes it, “The Zapatistas did not conceive of Mexico as a future to be realized but as a return to origins.”¹¹ It seemed almost as if a star had exploded long before, and only now could they see its light.

The Zapatista-Indianist philosophy, the Historical Confrontation, and the philosophy of the Mestizo were the three dominant philosophies of Revolutionary Mexico. Sometimes elements of one trend of thought would blend with another, as did the Indianist with Historical Confrontation. But when this took place it was in a complementary fashion, and not at the expense of the ideological premises that were guiding each chain of thought. In the same manner, any given individual could ally himself with any of the three philosophies in the course of his life, or shift from one to the other depending on surrounding circumstances, just as was the case with the “Whites” who joined the Zapatista Indian forces. In short, the three ideological currents actually gave individuals alternatives from which to choose. These alternatives, in turn, represented relatively new historical manifestations at the turn of the century—cumulative changes that had been taking place in Mexico. They represented, therefore, the historical development of thought and not the rigid, unbending, and unchanging Traditional Culture so commonly and uncritically accepted in current sociological treatises that deal with people of Mexican descent. At the same time, these three alternatives also

made it possible for individual people, even families, to be living three histories at once, a fact that escaped Paz when he accepted the notion of the Freudian-esque masks.

In any event, when the time came for people to change locale and move to the United States, this was but another in a long series of changes that had been taking place.

CADA CABEZA ES UN MUNDO [EACH MAN IS AN ISLAND]

It is this complexity of thought and its many individual manifestations that made so popular the saying, “Each man is an island.” For multiple histories could hardly have done other than breed complex people and equally complex families. It is this complexity, actually pluralism, that was transferred with the “refugees” and the “immigrants” to the North and which appeared in the colonies and barrios. This complexity was condensed in the recent poem by Rodolfo Gonzales of Denver, Colorado, titled “I am Joaquin” [1967]. Just who is this Joaquin? Joaquin is Cuauhtémoc, Cortés, Nezahualcóyotl of the Chichimecas. Joaquin is Spaniard, Indian, Mestizo, the village priest Hidalgo, Morelos, Guerrero, Don Benito Juárez, Zapata, Yaqui, Chamula, Tarahumara, Diaz, Huerta, Francisco I. Madero, Juan Diego, Alfego Baca, the Espinoza brothers, Murrieta. Joaquin is slave. Joaquin is master. Joaquin is exploiter, and he is the exploited. Joaquin is *corridos*, Latino, Hispano, Chicano. Joaquin is in the fields, suburbs, mines, and prisons. Joaquin’s body lies under the ground in Mexico. His body lies under the ground in the United States, and in the “hills of the Alaskan Isles, on the corpse-strewn beach of Normandy, the foreign land of Korea, and now, Viet Nam.”¹² Joaquin is many men. Joaquin is every man.

The ideas that were, and are, present wherever people of Mexican descent live involve the Indianist philosophy, Historical Confrontation, and Cultural Nationalism. Now, to the three currents of thought manifested historically there was added a fourth, the Immigrant Experience.

INDIANISM

Indianism has never been a focus or a rallying cry for action among Mexican-Americans as was Indigenism during the War for Independence and the Revo-

lution in Mexico. Yet, symbolically, the Indian penetrates throughout, and permeates major aspects of Mexican-American life, and hardly a barrio exists that does not have someone who is nicknamed “El Indio,” or “Los Indios.” For decades, Mexican-American youth have felt a particularly keen resentment at the depiction of Indians in American movies, while Indian themes consistently have been common subject matter for the neighborhoods’ amateur artists, a fact that may be called an anachronism by some or the dislodging of history by others. On occasion, *los matachines*¹³ still make their Indian appearance in churches, and Aztec legends still pictorially tell and retell their stories in barrio living rooms, in kitchens, in bars, restaurants, *tortillerías*, and Chicano newspapers. The stem face of Don Benito Juárez still peers out of books, still surveys living rooms, and still takes a place of prominence in many Sociedad Mutualista halls and in the minds of men throughout the Southwest. Small wonder, then, that several hundred years after the totally indigenous existence of Mexico reference is still made to these roots and origins in the Mexican-American community. Small wonder, also, that thousands of miles away from the Valley of Mexico, in contemporary Denver, Rodolfo Gonzales utilizes recurrent Indian themes in his poetic work. At the same time, such is found in the wall paintings at the Teatro Campesino center in Del Rey, California, and Indian art and life are common subject matter in such newspapers as *Bronze*, *La Raza*, *El Gallo*, as well as others.

Chichimeca, Azteca, Indio, Don Bento Juárez, Emiliano Zapata y Montaña; in art, prose, poetry, religion, and in Mexican-American study programs initiated by Mexican-Americans themselves in colleges, universities, and high schools, the presence of the Indian is manifested. It hardly need be added that the Indian is also manifested in the faces of so many Mexican-Americans. The Indian is root and origin, past and present, virtually timeless in his barrio manifestations—a timeless symbol of opposition to cultural imperialism.

HISTORICAL CONFRONTATION

The philosophy of confrontations has had thousands of manifestations, from the retelling in an isolated *corrido* to protest demonstrations by thousands of people of Mexican descent in the United States. It, too, has an old history that in the North began with personages such as Joaquín Murrieta, Alfego Baca, the Espinoza brothers, and Pancho Villa. Memories of these manifestations spread widely,

as attested to by Enrique Hank Lopez when he wrote about his childhood in the United States: “. . . Pancho Villa’s exploits were a constant topic of conversation in our household. My entire childhood seems to be shadowed by his presence. At our dinner table, almost every night, we would listen to endlessly repeated accounts of this battle, that stratagem, or some great act of Robin Hood kindness by *el centauro del norte*. I remember how angry my parents were when they saw Wallace Beery in *Viva Villa!* “Garbage by stupid Gringos,” they called it. They were particularly offended by the sweaty, unshaven sloppiness of Beery’s portrayal.”¹⁴

Confrontationist philosophy continued with the labor protest movement among people of Mexican descent in the United States, which at one time became manifest in eight different states and which now has lasted for over eighty-five years. It also has taken other forms, such as the *Pachuco* [zoot suit man] who extended the notion of confrontation to a perpetual and daily activity with his own uniform and his own language. The *Pachuco* movement was one of the few truly separatist movements in American history. Even then, it was singularly unique among separatist movements in that it did not seek or even attempt a return to roots and origins. The *Pachuco* indulged in a self-separation from history, created his own reality as he went along even to the extent of creating his own language. This is the main reason why Octavio Paz, digging as he did into history in search for the “true Mexican,” felt it necessary to “put down” the *Pachuco*. By digging into history for answers, Paz was forced to exclude people who had separated themselves from history, especially Mexican history. Thus, in denying the Mexican-ness of the *Pachuco*, Paz denied the Mexican aspect of the processes that went into his creation. That is why Paz ended up by making the *Pachuco* into a caricature akin to a societal clown, for it was only by doing so that he could enhance the notion of “*el puro mexicano*” in his own mind. It is unfortunate that Paz chose to ignore the trend of thought represented by the famous, disillusioned, existential poet of Mexico, Antonio Plaza, who wrote in typical fashion: “*Es la vida un enjambre de ilusiones / a cuyo extremo están los desengaños.*”¹⁵ Had Paz chosen to acknowledge Plaza, and the philosophical trend he represented in his Mexican, existential, self-separation from history, then perhaps he would have understood a little about the *Pachuco*. For the *Pachuco*, too, separated himself from history, and in doing so became transformed into Existential Man. And, like existential man everywhere, he too was brutally beaten down.

The language of the confrontationist philosophy has been Spanish, English, Pocho, or Pachuco. Almost always, it has addressed itself to an immediate situation spanning the social environment from rural to urban. Normally, it has been regional or local in its manifestations. On different occasions, the confrontationist philosophy has been self-deterministic, protectionist, nationalistic, reacting to surrounding circumstances, and existentialist. The present Chicano movement has incorporated all of these alternatives in its various contemporary manifestations, making it one of the most complex movements in the history of Mexican-Americans.

Having been a recurrent theme in Mexican-American history, like that of Indianism, the confrontationist philosophy also makes up a part of study programs initiated by Mexican-Americans in colleges, universities, and high schools. Like Indianism, it is a history that has yet to be written in its entirety.

CULTURAL NATIONALISM

“Vine a Comala porque me dijeron que acá vivía mi padre, un tal Pedro Páramo.”¹⁶ In Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Nevada, Utah, Oklahoma, Kansas, Arkansas, Ohio, Missouri, Illinois, Michigan, New York, and other states, symbols of Mexican and Mexican-American culture can be seen. Invariably, in one way or another, these symbols are associated with the Mestizos—present descendants of untold Mexican descendants and reduplicated in an ever-expanding northern arc. Different people have known them as *mexicanos*, *cholos*, *pochos*, *México-Norteamericanos*, *Chicanos*, Mexican-Americans. Viewed as a group, they comprise a pluralistic minority within a pluralistically divided nation. They speak Spanish, or English, or both in a great variety of combinations.

The Mestizo-based notion of Cultural Nationalism is prominent among them. But this cultural nationalism is of a very particular kind, un-American in a sense, and considerably unlike the rampant ethnocentrism with its traditional xenophobia (commonly called self-interest) that has been so characteristic of ethnic groups in the United States.

The fiestas patrias, the characteristic foods, the music, the sociedades mutualistas, and all of the other by-products of culture that people write about,

are simply appurtenances to more profound conceptualizations regarding the nature and the existence of man. Generally, as a group, Mexican-Americans have been virtually the only ethnic group in the United States that still systematically proclaims its *Mestizaje*—multiple genetic and cultural origins exhibiting multiplicity rather than seeking purity. Philosophically and historically this has manifested itself in a trend toward Humanistic Universalism, Behavioral Relativism, and a recurrent form of Existentialism, this last of which is often naïvely and erroneously interpreted as fatalism.

The Indianist views, the Confrontationist Philosophy, and Cultural Nationalism with its *Mestizaje*-based Humanist Universalism, Behavioral Relativism, and Existentialism, when related to the types of people who have immigrated from Mexico, those born in the United States, as well as people of Mexican descent who were residents in conquered Western lands, all give some glimmer of the complexity of this population, especially when one views it internally from the perspectives of multiple philosophies regarding the existence and nature of Mexican-American man. For, in truth, just as “el puro mexicano” does not exist, neither does “the pure Mexican-American,” despite the massive efforts by social scientists to fabricate such a mythical being under the monolithic label of the “Traditional Culture,” rather than the more realistic concept of multiple histories and philosophies.

This multiplicity of historical philosophies, to a considerable degree, represents a continuation of the pluralism that existed in Mexico during the Revolution, undergoing modifications and shifts in emphasis. At the same time, it can be said that the philosophies of Indianism, Historical Confrontation, and Cultural Nationalism to this day represent the most salient views of human existence within the Mexican-American population. To these there has been added the immigrant dimension.

THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

Just as could be expected from a pluralistic population exhibiting multiple histories, people of Mexican descent have adjusted to life in the United States in many different ways, including the *Pachuco*'s self-separation from history, the organizers of labor unions, the publishing of bi-lingual newspapers, and the increasingly militant student population. By and large, these adjustments mostly fall

into four broad categories: Anglo-Saxon Conformity, Stabilized Differences, Realigned Pluralism, and Bi-Culturalism.

Anglo-Saxon Conformity. A number of people of Mexican descent have eschewed virtually all identity with their cultural past, no longer speak Spanish, and possibly they have changed their name and anglicized it. Most can be said, if not all of these people, to have been acculturated, which, generally, is the process by which people exchange one set of problems for another.

Stabilized Differences. Since 1921 there have been well over 1,000,000 immigrants from Mexico. In various communities they have found pockets of people who have sustained the basic Mexican way of life, along with its multiple histories and philosophies. These pockets vary somewhat as one travels from Brownsville, Texas, to El Paso, to Albuquerque, New Mexico to Tucson, Arizona and through California and over to Colorado. Throughout this area one still hears the respect titles of *Don* and *Doña*, the formal *Usted*, as well as a variety of dialects of the Spanish language. This population comprises the heart of the *sociedades mutualistas*, the *fiestas patrias*, the music, food, and the other by-products of culture already mentioned.

Realigned Pluralism. It has been the experience of many immigrant groups to take on the general ways of the surrounding society, only to discover that despite their efforts they are still excluded from the main currents for one reason or another. Such has also happened to Mexican-Americans. As a result, those who have participated in such behavior often tend to establish ethnically oriented and parallel activities and institutions, principally organizational, such as ball clubs, gangs, etc. In addition, other organizational activities include scholarship-oriented organizations, those that are charity oriented, community service oriented, as well as political organizations. Within this sphere one also finds the common phenomenon of the "third generation return." That is, quite often members of the third generation return to identify themselves with their own ethnic group after having undergone the process of "assimilation."

Bi-Culturalism. Despite the merciless educational pressures to stamp out Bi-Culturalism and bi-lingualism among Mexican-Americans in schools and colleges, it still persists in many varied and developing forms. It exists; for example, all along the border areas among those entrepreneurs who operate equally well on both sides of the international border. It also exists among the untold number of Mexican-Americans who are interpreters, either on a professional or voluntary

basis. There are many others who can deal with a bicultural universe, such as owners of Mexican restaurants, bookstores, gift shops, musicians and the like.

More recently a new phenomenon has begun to appear in increasing numbers. Specifically, more and more Mexican-American students are going to college. Many of them come from impoverished homes where reading resources were unnecessarily limited. Some of these students, attending college, gravitate toward Spanish or Latin American majors. As a consequence, they begin to read Juan Rulfo, Martín Luis Guzmán, Gabriela Mistral, Pablo Neruda, Gabriel García Márquez, and they hear the classical music of [Carlos] Chávez, [Heitor] Villa-Lobos, [Fermín] Revueltas; or they see the art of [Rufino] Tamayo, [José Luis] Cuevas, Esteban Vila, Salvador Roberto Torres, and Rene Yañez. As a consequence, such students eschew not their cultural past but rather reintegrate into it at the professional and intellectual level and they are well on their way toward Bi-Culturalism at another dimension.

The recent Mexican-American study programs in colleges and universities are certain to enhance and accelerate this process, especially if they adhere to the bilingual base. Therefore, in the near future it will become more and more possible for Mexican-American students to avoid the assimilative fallacies and pitfalls of the past and join in the truly exciting and challenging universe of Bi-Culturalism. In this way, not only will they participate in significant innovations in higher education, but they will also take a big step toward realizing one of the promises contained in the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo.

MANY MEXICAN-AMERICANS

Indianist philosophy, Confrontationist, Cultural Nationalism based on *Mestizaje* with trends toward Humanistic Universalism, Behavioral Relativism, and Existentialism; Assimilation, Mexicanism, Realigned Pluralism, and Bi-Culturalism; Cholos, Pochos, Pachucos, Chicanos, Mexicanos, Hispanos, Spanish-surnamed people, Mexican-Americans. Many labels. Because this is such a complex population, it is difficult to give one label to them all. And probably the first to resist such an effort would be these people themselves, for such a monolithic treatment would violate the very pluralistic foundations upon which their historical philosophies have been based.

There is another dimension to this complexity, one involving the family. Traditionally, in the United States, the Mexican family has been dealt with as if it were monolithic, authoritarian, and one-dimensional. This is a gross oversimplification based on sheer ignorance. The truth of the matter is that virtually every Mexican-American family takes several forms and includes many types of people, from assimilationist to Chicano, to cultural nationalist, and through all varieties including “un español” thrown in every now and then for good measure. Mexican-American families have individuals who no longer speak Spanish, who speak only Spanish, or who speak a combination of both. In short, the same complexity that is found in the general Mexican-American population is also found in the family of virtually every Mexican-American.

If the day should ever come when all of these people are willingly subsumed under one label or banner, when they align themselves only under one philosophy, on that day, finally, they will have become totally and irrevocably *Americanized*. On that day, their historical alternatives and freedoms in personal choice of lifestyles, and their diversity, will have been permanently entombed in the histories of the past.

1

Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor* (Santa Barbara, CA: McNally & Loftin, Charlotte, 1964), 28.

2

José Antonio Villarreal, *Pocho* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1959), 29.

3

Classical anarchism as used here refers to the original anarchist movement promoting the decentralization of power, the opposition of dictatorships in any form, cooperative movements, and not the “mad bomb plot and madman” stereotype of later years.

4

José Vasconcelos and Manuel Gamio, *Aspects of Mexican Civilization* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1926), 51–52.

5

Ibid., 90–102.

6

Ibid., 92. Such a conclusion repeats Vasconcelos’s well-known statement in *La raza cósmica* (1925). [SEE DOCUMENT IV.1.2]—Ed.

7

Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961), 136.

8

Ibid., 140.

9

Ibid., 141.

10

Vasconcelos, (1926), 90.

11

Paz, (1961), 144.

12

Rodolfo Gonzales, "I am Joaquin," manuscript, Denver, Colorado, 1967.

13

The word "matachín" originally implied "espadachín" (the good swordsman). As time went by, it came to denote a bully, the wrangler, and even the hit man.—Ed.

14

Enrique Hank Lopez, "Back to Bachimba," *Horizon IX*, no. 1 (Winter 1967) 81.

15

Antonio Plaza, (book of poetry, published in Mexico, handed down for decades; [publisher information missing]. Courtesy of Mr. Rudy Espinosa, San Francisco, California, whose grandfather used to read from this book after dinner each evening.) Editor's translation: "Life is a swarm of illusions / in whose tip disappointments are attached."

16

Juan Rulfo, *Pedro Páramo* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1968), 7. Editor's translation: "I came to Comala because I was told that my father lived here, that fellow Pedro Páramo."

IV.1.4 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1061662

CHICANO ART

Shifra M. Goldman, 1974

Exhibiting an indefatigable fighting spirit, the writings of Shifra M. Goldman (1926–2011) excel at the social history of art. This document exemplifies her approach applied to Chicano art, a cause that she championed beginning in the late 1960s. Written during the heyday of the Chicano movement, this essay by the Los Angeles-based American critic and art historian represents an early attempt to define Chicano art from a sensitive outsider's perspective. Chicano art, for Goldman—best known for her work on the politics and policies of Latin American and Latino art exhibition, collection, and study in the United States—is indeed a complex, bilingual visual expression embedded somewhere between Mexican and American

cultures. She originally published the essay at Santa Ana College (Santa Ana, CA) in 1974, and it was later included in *Chicano Art History: A Book of Selected Readings* [Jacinto Quirarte, ed., (San Antonio: Research Center for the Arts and Humanities/University of Texas, San Antonio, 1984), 83–84], from which this transcription was made.

REFLECTED IN ALL LITERATURE dealing with “Chicano Art” is the nagging controversy (not to be resolved here by any means) concerning what constitutes Chicano art and, by extension, just what is a Chicano. Various definitions have been offered: some say the term Chicano comes from a contraction of “Chihuahua” (a state in northern Mexico) and “Tejano” (Texan) adopted by Mexican residents of Texas; others say it is a shortened term for Mexicans in the United States. Perhaps the most accurate definition is sociological rather than etymological: “. . . the word Chicano, in the past a pejorative and class-bound adjective, has now become the root idea of a new cultural identity for our people . . . [it] signals a rebirth of pride and confidence.”¹

Historically the Chicano is a product of double-*Mestizaje* [intermingling]. The original Mestizo (fusion of indio-español-negro) resulted from a violent collision of cultures in sixteenth-century Mexico, and their interpenetration. The modern Mestizo, living in an area he considers “conquered Mexico” (the southwest United States), encountered a further collision with the Anglo-industrial-technical-complex, urbanized in cities and sprawling over the land in great agribusinesses. Out of this was born the bilingual, bicultural Chicano who has not yet come to total terms with either *Mestizaje* or *Chicanizaje*.²

What is Chicano art? It is the final realization, in graphic form, that the human ingredients in the famous “melting pot” of the U.S. have failed to melt; that the total homogenization foreseen in the early twentieth century has not taken place. The blended, de-culturalized All-American did not materialize and it has been belatedly recognized that such a process was perhaps neither possible nor desirable. By most evidence, not only have Chicano, Black and Asian Americans of the last decade shown few signs of homogenization, albeit they have repudiated the prospect as an impoverishment of their own rich heritages. What has actually taken place might be called “syncretization”—defined by Webster as “the reconciliation of conflicting beliefs; the process of growth through coalescence of different forms,”—with its implicit proposition that conflicting contraries are

held in a state of suspension which may, under certain circumstances, dissolve and fly apart.

This sense of reconciled conflict informs Chicano thought and art. "I paint," says Malaquias Montoya, "because of my daily confrontations with life."³ [And he reinforces:] "I was made to feel ashamed of the positive things I thought I had—*cuentos*, *bruja*s, *curanderos*, fantastic folklore that I identified with. The symbols that we knew were forced back so we had to create new ones."⁴ Esteban Villa and Gilbert Luján also reflect the spirit of confrontation. "*Primero*," says Villa, "I want to say that I paint and draw as a Chicano. All my observations on life are definitely seen and felt as a Chicano."⁵ [He also adds:] "And what we are trying to do. . . through our art, is to bring it to their attention, that we do exist, that we are here and not only do we exist but we also have a culture of our own."⁶ Says Luján, in turn: "People have been unable to accept that Chicano Art is a reflection of the entire Chicano experience, because they have projected certain stereotyped notions into the concept, and in so doing, denied it intrinsic value and validity."⁷

Chicano visual imagery also reflects its *Mestizaje*. Chicano culture, Chicano art, seems to be like a merger of that "*Que viene de México* (which comes from México) and contemporary American society—a kind of marriage of the two."⁸ We find commingled, like a visual bilingualism, pyramids, skulls and *calaveras*, the Virgin of Guadalupe, eagles and jaguars, feathered serpents, masks, *La Llorona* [The Weeping Lady], blazing suns, colonial churches, the "low rider" Chevy, motorcycles, frame houses and gardens, billboards, drive-in movies, freeways, Vietnam, striking farm-workers, beer cans, and American flags. Styles vary widely, from the Indigenismo of pre-Columbian forms to Pop Art artifacts to Mexican mural social-realism to total abstraction. Correspondingly we may find a philosophical stance that ranges from Individualism to Pan-Americanism to Internationalism according to the expressive needs, intellectual construction, and temperament of the individual artist.

In spite of the seeming heterogeneity of Chicano art there seems to be a preponderance of work that addresses itself to communication—a goal that has been partially lost to sight in the *esoterica* of mainstream U.S. art. A sense of community, of affirmation, of protest, of idealism, of concern with the human condition—whether in the barrio or in the world—makes itself manifest in the work of many artists and affects not only the content of their art, but its graphic artists

are dedicated to reaching a mass audience by painting on outside walls or creating duplicate silk-screens, woodcuts and lithographs. In the words of Charles Almaraz, “He [the Chicano artist] must make an art that is cheap, simple, but alive and relevant; an art for *gente* [people] who can’t afford art—like a *corrido* (popular song). Let us make an art that is not for us, not for museums, not for posterity, and certainly not for art’s sake, but for mankind.”⁹

Because “syncretism” is not a passive, but a dynamic process of growth, the panorama of Chicano art has a great sense of vitality and energy. Sometimes a particular work may seem unpolished or a statement uncertain. It should be recalled that Chicano art, as an entity, is going through the birth process; it has a sense of “becoming” rather than “being.” Like Chicano society, the Chicano artist has not yet come to total terms with his *Chicanizaje* and is still groping between his Indian heritage and European artistic education for a new synthesis and a new symbolism that precisely defines and gives shape and expression to a unique life experience. Whatever is viable, new and human in the arts comes through the same door.

1

Manifiesto from “El Plan de Santa Barbara,” *La Raza* 1, no. 1 (May 1970).

2

Raymond V. Padilla, “Freireismo and Chicanizaje,” *El Grito. A Journal of Contemporary Mexican-American Thought* (Berkeley, CA: Quinto Sol Publications) (Summer 1973).

3

El Grito, vol. 2, no. 1 (Spring 1969).

4

Lucy Tapia, “Montoya and the Art of Survival,” *La Voz del Pueblo* (June 1972). Editor’s translation: short-stories, witches, folk healer.—Ed.

5

El Grito (Spring 1969).

6

Quoted by Jacinto Quirarte, *Mexican American Artists* (Austin, TX: The University of Texas Press, 1973), 135.

7

Gilbert Luján, “El arte de Chicano,” *Con Safos* no. 7 (Winter 1971): 11.

8

Esteban Villa, quoted by Jacinto Quirarte (1973).

9

“Notes on an Aesthetic Alternative,” personal manifesto (1973).

IV.2

A DOSE OF SKEPTICISM

IV.2.1–IV.2.2

MARTA TRABA

Marta Traba (1923–1983), the influential Argentinean art critic, wrote these two essays in the years after she relocated to Bogotá with her first husband, Colombian writer Alberto Zalamea. Returning to South America in 1954, after living for years in Paris, Traba’s initial critiques of Bogotá’s artistic milieu valued the individuality of the artist and emphasized the mastery of the formal aspects of painting, drawing, and even abstraction. This pair of documents is notable because they signal a refocusing of the critic’s gaze from European values—which originated for Traba in Buenos Aires a decade before as a student of Jorge Romero Brest—to a willingness to consider Latin American art on its own terms [SEE DOCUMENT IV.3.1]. Both texts illustrate her initial struggles and hesitancy with an idea that she warmed up to by 1960 as she embarked on her first extensive regional investigation of Latin American art, publishing *La pintura nueva en Latinoamérica* [(Bogotá: Ediciones Librería Central, 1961)]. The earliest of these texts—“¿Qué quiere decir ‘Un Arte Americano?’” [(Bogotá: Antares, 1955), reprinted in *Mito* (Bogotá), no. 6 (February–March, 1956), 474–478]—warns against the wielding of folklore as an “identity” weapon and rejects naïve ideas about a homogeneous continental style.

“Problemas del arte en Latinoamérica” [*Mito* (Bogotá), no. 18 (February–April, 1958), 428–436] cautions against blind nationalism and what she sees as the outright backwardness of Pan Americanism. Rather than act as social reformers or political emissaries, Traba writes, the artists in the Americas should be free to mirror universal aesthetic values. “Problemas del arte en Latinoamérica” also appeared in the anthology *Marta Traba* [Emma Araújo de Vallejo, ed., (Bogotá: Planeta Colombiana Editorial S.A., 1984), 208–209], the source for the present translation. “¿Qué quiere decir ‘Un Arte Americano?’” comes from the original publication.

IV.2.1 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 839092

WHAT DOES “A LATIN AMERICAN ART” MEAN?

Marta Traba, 1955

I WILL BEGIN BY STATING MY THESIS and then go on to state the arguments that led me to it. My thesis is that the expression “modern Latin American Art” still has no definition that accords it a precise meaning. Instead, it is a kind of vague, common desire of artists and critics to have a child with its own personality that bears the least resemblance possible to its parents and ancestors. In general, the “Latin Americanist” belongs to an extremely intransigent intellectual sect whose continental nationalism is even more virulent than any domestic nationalism. This is why I wish to base my thesis not just on my personal experience but on several important arguments from the panorama of Latin Americana art criticism.

My investigation is also based on my interest in finding a Latin American spirit that is our own, definable, and characteristic, from which we may deduce a common denominator that underlies all our visual artworks. I am adding to that aspiration, which is common among critics, the requirement not to commit fraud and to present the results of the investigation without embellishment. I am willing to risk that there is no common Latin American spirit whatsoever in our art. That yearning and that interest could take form in the beautiful words of Waldo Frank (*Redescubrimiento de America*) [Rediscovery of America]: “Europe’s blood runs in the direction of the sea to lands unknown. And the old Mediterranean is dying. Its death drains into the Atlantic, a new investigation by mankind, a new world without limits. Beyond the symbolic ocean we find a country ill named from the beginning, misjudged and not yet *revealed*: America.” The stage of knowledge must precede the intellectual or artistic expression of a people; until we know what the Latin American man is; [until we know] his ambitions and his tendencies, his capabilities, we will be unable to state the aesthetic grounds on which a continental art must be based.

It would seem indisputable that “Latin American art” cannot be found in visual renditions of folklore. . . . Therefore, it is not a matter of painting or sculpting “the picturesque” or of walking around in search of traditional things

like some unimaginative tourist. But in spite of this rejection, the local, invertebrate, and undefined seem to be fundamental to the Latin American aesthetic need. Even the very people who hate the literal transcription of folklore allude to this requirement. For example, Julio Payró, one of the best known Argentine art critics, says of Emilio Pettoruti: "There are those who claim that his art is removed from nature and nationality, and he does not resort to a single localist prop—no poncho, no horse, no ruins, no gaucho, no *mate* and no *Quechua* patterns here. Nonetheless, his basically visual art becomes a limpid national pictorial poem, inspired by a deep understanding of our physical nature and invigorated by the complex emotions of the simple man." A solution that seems intelligent on paper: "Let's create an art that is neither folkloric nor national," is nonsensical gibberish when it is expressed in canvas or clay. How do we create a work that contains the visual elements that represent a nationality? In which, at the same time, we avoid the folklore that those elements entail? The conflict is so great that it cannot even be resolved by painters such as the Uruguayan Pedro Figari. Figari himself claimed to have Latin American ways and Latin American thoughts. He also rejected "the apelike sentiments of young peoples who look at and follow Europe's worn down path before acting or taking a step." Confronted with the vehement desire to make something Latin American, Figari finally turns to the late colonial period, and his extraordinary painting becomes a chapter in the history of art with a treatment that is purely impressionist. It may be the most beautiful retrospective chapter written in Latin American painting, but it could never be a solution to the problem of creating our own art. Even Figari's critic and biographer, Herrero MacLean, accentuates the anecdotal nature of Figari's work, perhaps unknowingly: "To create something Latin American, all that work sought the source of decorative inspiration in the nature around the artist," he writes. "Bird, animal, leaf, native flower, all, after skillful stylization, were used to create a new form of beautification. And after rummaging through nature, he turned to history and soaked up all the archaeological sources, seeking a new path for his inspiration in the Native, dormant past."

We keep going around in a folklore/anti-folklore vicious circle. The Argentinean professor Ángel Guido is one of the Latin Americans who has done the most work to reassess continental values in art (*Redescubrimiento de América en el arte*) [The Rediscovery of Latin America in Art]. In one of his articles, he maintains that "To date, the skyscraper and Mexican painting represent the only

original visual artwork in contemporary Latin America.” But regarding Mexican painting that would require a lengthy discussion. [To begin with,] people found the first polemical frescos of [Diego] Rivera, [José Clemente] Orozco and [David Alfaro] Siqueiros amazing. But once the commotion had passed, people began to notice that right from the start, this unforeseen union of political and art revolutions was disconcerting to pure aesthetics. Today, given a broader perspective (from outside Mexico, not within), we can clearly see the temporary nature of these realistic/historic/figurative aesthetics. Meanwhile, intelligent criticisms of the only unorthodox painter, Rufino Tamayo, are on the increase. The critic José Moreno Villa, in his book *Lo mexicano en las artes plásticas*, [“The Mexican” in the Visual Arts] gives the impression of running after a chimera that slips through his hands as he is trying to capture it. However, he also has the courage to raise the subject: “...we have no alternative but to come right out with the terrible question: ‘What is ‘the Mexican?’” At no point in his book does he reach any clear solution for this. In another paragraph, he goes on: “To me, ‘the Mexican’ can be found in two things that can be rendered perfectly clearly in words: one in the psychological, perhaps moral order; the other, in the physical order. The moral view is derived from a dramatic perspective on Native Latin American life; the physical, from its most characteristic colors, the dull earth tones: the red volcanic rock set off by the somber green of the cactus and the greenish gray of the jade.”

The effort to reduce the Mexican spirit to some kind of formula is clear, but what is also clear is the artificial and precarious nature of the solution. For example, the color factor seems to be of a completely personal nature, and if there is anything anarchic (marvelously anarchic) in art, it is a painter’s palette. An analysis of books on national painting written in Latin America provides no clarity on the matter either. Some critics, such as Gabriel Giraldo Jaramillo (“La pintura en Colombia”) [Painting in Colombia] analyze the common trajectory of Latin American art from colonial times down to our days, without attempting a more complex, aesthetic approach. But even in this serious art research work, the writer is unable to think straight about modern painting and sculpture. His serious attempt to give it a defined orientation or judge it en bloc as an authentically national expression is unsuccessful. Other critics, such as Soto and Samarra on the subject of modern Cuban painting, are such victims of their own yearning that they end up mistaking desire for reality. [Out of that confusion,] they praise Native Americanism as the true voice of Latin American visual art.

But what is Native Americanism? Is it the art of a group that proposes the resurrection of the Native soul? For that, we would have to turn our eyes back to France, where [Paul] Gauguin would become a precursor of the movement when he said: “La barbarie est pour moi un nouveau rejeunissement” (For me, barbarism is a rejuvenation.) And what does the rest of the Native world have to offer after four centuries of extermination, misery, and abandonment? [What has become of] the Native artist whom the archbishop of Mexico said in 1531 was: “exceptionally gifted, especially in painting?” Thanks to the work of civilization, he has been turned into the miserable manufacturer of small, insignificant vessels and jewelry made with metallic pieces where the motif is repeated infinitely, as in the art of the nomads.

“South America must harmonize the elements of its complexity,” writes René Huyghe, the conservator of the Louvre Museum, who has a vast knowledge of Latin American art. Ethnic elements? The Native in the art of [Oswaldo] Guayasamín? The triumphant Mestizo in the paintings of Rivera? The commanding Black man in the canvases of [Candido] Portinari? The Italian around whom the work of Pettoruti is ordered? The “world citizen” seeking his place in the universe in the work of [Joaquín] Torres-García? The U.S. citizen creating a frenetic rhythm in the canvases of Wifredo Lam? I believe that Mr. Huyghe, like all those who refer to this matter, is always talking about primitive ethnic elements: the White man, the Native, the Black man. But we have been trying to be civilized societies by accepting waves of immigrants for so many centuries that this idea is no more than a historical touchstone without any current reality.

Moreover, we need only glance at early art in Latin America to understand that, after the eclipse of the Spanish and Portuguese baroque periods, South America accepted France, without prejudice, as its artistic guiding influence. In 1816, Brazil received a French artistic mission directed by [Joachim] Lebreton—including a painter, [Jean-Baptiste] Debret, an untalented student of [Jacques-Louis] David, destined to sow the bad seed of a highly academic Neoclassicism. David’s influence later gave way to that of the Romantics, but, unfortunately, there were more supporters of [Théodore] Chasseriau than of [Eugène] Delacroix. Juan León Paillère in Argentina, [Raymond] Monvoisin in Chile, [A.A.] Bonafie in Peru, [Victor] Meirelles [de Lima] in Brazil; these Frenchmen were the great “Latin American” artists of the nineteenth century. But neither an aggrandized, fictionalized history nor the exoticism promoted by the Romantics stirred the

Native motif to life. Except for one precursor, the Peruvian Francisco Laso, a student of [Paul] Delaroche, not until the early twentieth century was there the emergence of Native, mestizo and Black motifs. The significance [of these motifs] is not purely a matter of visual arts, rather a social phenomenon, and the art in which it appears asserts the demands of these populations.

It is clear that there is also another problem: it was not an investigation of an aesthetic nature that prompted the Mexican or Brazilian motifs. Their origins were purely political; of course it is perfectly legitimate that politics should influence art, but there is no truth in the idea that politics “generates” art. The harmonization of elements sought by Huyghe is thus much more complex than it seems. And is it necessary to harmonize them? Must we incessantly pursue this aesthetic mirage that ends up being imposed on the entire artistic continent? Do we have to raise a banner with enthusiastic words that, upon close examination, mean absolutely nothing and do not lead us anywhere? It is possible that Latin Americanism is neither folklore, nor the vernacular landscape, nor the Native, nor the mestizo, nor the Black person. Perhaps it is not a mix of all these either. Maybe it cannot be found in any pre-established formula. It is possible that the invocation of “Latin Americanism” is the desire of provincial peoples born with an inferiority complex due to our evident lack of culture, or a falsely romantic concept.

No one talks about “Europeanism,” and it would be an almost impossible undertaking to give a common definition to European painting (totally fragmentary, chaotic, and parceled out). Undoubtedly, Latin America has an absolutely distinct and extraordinary geography; it is also evident that this rich, virgin continent is in a terrible state of misery. However, the artist’s lack of consent to this unjust and terrible situation must lead to something other than pure artistic speculation that may please the Europeans, who will accept it at face value. In short, we should expect a difference of expression from peoples soaked in culture and peoples who are semi-barbarian. But it is also possible that this expression has no commonality, given economic, geographic, and cultural conditions that are very different from one country to another in Latin America. It is possible that the expression will be individual, such as is shown to date in the five or six painters working in Latin America: [Candido] Portinari in Brazil, Pettoruti in Argentina, [Pedro] Figari y Torres-García in Uruguay, Wifredo Lam in Cuba, Guayasamín in Ecuador, [Alejandro] Obregón in Colombia. Varied as they are,

their works do not allow us to “define what is Latin American.” However, they do have one negative element in common: in the continent’s great painting, folklore has been turned into a remote allusion submerged by the artist in the pure process of his work. Transformed into one more artistic element, it serves to remove all provincial characteristics from the art.

Back to the initial thesis: when there is an emphatic appeal to the necessity of creating a Latin American art, what is being said lacks any meaning whatsoever. It is unknown whether there is any honest definition that fits that requirement. Latin America will not be well named, judged, or shown if it constructs its future culture and art based on a misguided continental nationalism, just as dangerous and disastrous as regional nationalisms.

To balance this negative thesis, in the entire panorama of Latin America, I have only found one positive thesis worthy of respect, but unfortunately, it is starry-eyed. Though lacking certainty, Professor Guido (referred to above) bases his thesis on hopes. He believes with all his heart that the “undiscovered landscape” of Latin America, the “Latin American *reconquista* in art,” will evolve into a true Latin American voice (...though he doesn’t say through what media). Against all evidence, one man’s hope; for now, that’s all there is.

IV.2.2 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1061697

ART’S PROBLEM IN LATIN AMERICA

Marta Traba, 1958

...

2. DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSIBILITIES

Nationalism, in its great determination to “construct the country,” went about distributing responsibilities. Just as it urged the farmer to increase the yield on the area cultivated with sugar cane, Nationalism confronted the painter’s blank

canvas, looking it over with profound distrust in order to detect and discredit any deviations. It unrolled before the artist a huge map that showed nature as it had never been seen, apocalyptic, with astral rivers and jungles thrown like floods of green ink on a map. It also showed him the countless injustices that were turning apparently innocent areas into a living hell. Trapped between geography and the demand for social justice, many artists agreed to bear their easels like backpacks and threw themselves into the difficult task of describing and denouncing as enjoined by Nationalism.

It was this distribution of responsibilities to which we can attribute the expression “Latin Americanist art” that has been applied to the visual arts. No one knows what it consists of, what its aims are, what areas of the spirit it codifies, or how it would perform this task. One more disadvantage we have as countries without culture is that we do not require words to have a defined ideological content. Instead, we allow them to wander freely through the stratosphere of “set terms” that weigh on us, refusing to make any commitment whatsoever; [despite the fluidity of our terms], we never release [or lose sight] of our prey [Latin Americanist art].

Faced with the puzzle of giving a form to “Latin Americanism,” the solution the Mexican muralists chose as their narrative was not a history mediated by the artificial eloquence of the epic. Instead, they chose the gaunt, tragic, sensationalistic journalism of the revolution. Thus Latin Americanism came to have an explicit meaning: the obligation of denouncing the misery of the unfortunate peoples of Latin America. Unfortunately, the unionized policing accorded to painting by the Mexican mural arose at the wrong time in terms of aesthetics. This was when European artists were making every effort to break loose from a conventional system of representation. Thus they were doing battle—one that was perhaps unprecedented—to establish the value of the language of art above every other historical, social, or simply descriptive language.

It was a time when the talent and vocation of the European combatants were winning the game for the language of art and getting the public accustomed to painting that could not be “read” as a *costumbrista* lesson. So it was an unfortunate anachronism that Latin Americanism climbed up on a platform of painting that was not just historical, but demagogic. Modern art was having its greatest triumph, stating its case on the freedom from any commitment other than to

art itself. Meanwhile, Latin Americanism was binding itself to a multiple commitment of teaching, correcting, and prophesying on social events from the public square.

. . . With these opportunities spread before it, Latin Americanism contributed absolutely nothing to the development of the new models. On the contrary, it framed its spirit of regression and obstinate immobility with worn-out conventions. In the best of cases, it made extensive use of the language of images established by modern European art, putting them into the service of the artists' assumed social obligations. In other words, it forced a language that had arisen from the will to abolish the myth of representation, to represent, first and foremost, things, things, and more things. This incongruity leads to the flagrant artificiality of a work as noteworthy as *El camino del llanto* [Trail of Tears] by [Oswaldo] Guayasamín.

The greatest weakness of many works of modern art resides in the lack of internal coherence that should inform all artwork. Every day we see countless paintings that we feel and understand as fragments of a puzzle created to organize a harmony completely alien to the artist's feelings. All that such work achieves, then, is a decorative effect. But with a few exceptions, it is Latin American art en bloc that suffers most from this defect. Situated in the domain of the universe, this art has ceased to represent and has deliberately disrupted the conventional space in order to distance itself from the scenario. That is why, in Latin America, art must live out its existence as an actor. Since the performance of this actor is based on a system of signs that undermine any will to act and persuade, its action falls straight into the void.

Both the solutions given to contemporary painting by Latin Americanism are equally bankrupt. On the one hand, in a school headed up by [Diego] Rivera, we have the painted chronicle that deems aesthetic meditation to be seriously deviant. On the other, there is the ambiguous navigation between the waters of social activism and the waters siphoned off from the great [Pablo] Picasso reservoir. Here we find Guayasamín—a captain capable of colossal journeys—shipwrecked.

This is the disastrous result of assigning to the Latin American painter the responsibilities of social reformer and political defender of the people.

Nationalism made these assignments in the merciless spirit with which cultural matters are tackled. And in so doing, it forgot that the Latin American

painter's greatest responsibility is to develop a culture in harmony with universal culture. To that end, it is necessary not only to leave him in complete freedom, but to cut the barbed wire fencing off each country from the next.

Man alone, with no one by his side to harass him, is capable of seeing. Thus, a free view of things may wake up the artist's power of meditation; thus, he may transform what he sees into an art object. But a man who is bewildered by slogans and walled in by limited patriotic notions [is a man encumbered.] If he is not driven by the unbiased pleasure of creating but rather by the aberrant idea of suitability, this man can be no more than a tourist or a radical. As a tourist, he may crisscross Latin America, treating it like a bazaar of traditional objects; as a radical, he may study the continent to detect injustice. From both perspectives, Latin America is not simply a continent experienced: it is a continent sacked by the very people who believe they are constructing it.

3. THE THIRD ALTERNATIVE

Alongside those clinging to the nationalist directives in a docile way are the "depraved," whose work reveals an undeniable affiliation with the European models on which contemporary art is being built. Generally speaking, such works are not marked by the contradiction between the commitment to narrate and the freedom or arbitrary nature of the language of modern visual art. Unbound as they are from supposed obligations to chronicle the medium in which they live, these works are expressed in a way that depends on the motifs they develop—in the case of a painting or a sculpture. Alternatively, if they are nonfigurative works, they may lack any recognizable motif. In these approaches, it is impossible for any work not to introduce, as additions, the geographic, social, or historic data that situates a man in a determined location on earth. I have said and emphasize that these are additions, since they are art elements freely organized on the surface of a painting or determined independently of a sculpture's *raison d'être*. They serve as the visible data that surround the artist. Not the other way around. I refer to the suns of [Emilio] Pettoruti, suns that originate in an explicit, gloomy, pampa. Suns that proclaim their Argentine identity in their imperious heat, slipping through the half-closed blinds of summer in Buenos Aires. Subsidiary and humble, these suns bend to the strictly geometric laws that underlie the painting, giving it meaning and necessity.

In other specific cases, such as that of [Joaquín] Torres-García in Uruguay, there was a will to interpret a Latin American reality, in the sense of creating a new form as heir to the great group art movements. This was form based on eminently logical and harmonious concepts of art with a desire to stay apart from its modern, eminently personal trend. Torres-García thought that this experience of returning to group decisions might work much better in Latin America than in Europe. On the one hand, this was a new, unprejudiced society, [with people living their lives] in boundless natural surroundings that they also instinctively had to measure, confine, and geometrize (at all costs) in order to encompass them.

The Latin America that we discover in [the works of] any of the continent's few important painters is not a demagogic or political imposition. It is rather the land where a certain visual art experience happened to occur. And nothing can show the existence of Latin America as well as the moderately original way these painters resolve and finally define these art experiences. At least the errors of Nationalism have shown that if Latin American painting appears in the orbit of contemporary art, it is not through the demagogic labor of the Mexican muralists. Instead, it is through the structures of the Uruguayan master Torres-García, or through the precise color ensembles of the Argentine Pettoruti, or through the surreal, feathered, and frenetic fantasies of the Cuban Wifredo Lam.

There's no use fooling ourselves about the origin of these carefully imagined forms. They all originate in Europe, where artists are taught a clear awareness of what painting is and learn the process of developing ideas and yielding to emotions that precede an artwork. There too, they feel the weight of the timeless power of the culture. They also understand the impossibility of fostering culture with decrees to stimulate national art or hurried incursions through lands completely fenced in by localism. But the chimera of "national culture" completely disappears when we acknowledge the formal link that binds our worthy artwork to modern European art models. From there, we must proceed to faithfully establish the dependence of the numerous painters whose work has some merit on those European models.

. . . A good student always admits the governance, attraction, and superiority of his master; the best student comes to dress up this adherence in his own ideas. In the end, based on the continuous modification of the concepts learned, the student, in turn, reaches the point of expressing himself as a master. Latin Americans must acknowledge that the true emancipation from all prejudice and

our secret inferiority complex is in knowing how to be the best student. When we learn this, we will have won the battle of discipline versus improvisation. In general, artists working under the third alternative accept the instructions of discipline, which is certainly not determined by a labor union, rather by aesthetics alone. They understand that the discovery of the chords, coincidences, and harmonies that replace the natural order abolished in the early twentieth century along with the Renaissance tradition is a work of aesthetic discipline. . . .

4. AN ARTIFICIAL TRADITION

. . . Southern countries dispossessed of the Native past by the simple reason of extermination have limited alternatives for dealing with that history. One solution is to place on a pedestal of provincial fame the second-rate followers of historical realism and impressionism who began to mix colors in the mid-nineteenth century. But where there is a record of Native art, the problem is more difficult. Here, what is required is to reconcile with modern painting, after a centuries-long hiatus, art forms that pertain to a Native mentality that is unknown and vanished.

The continuity between one period and the other—with the Spanish in the middle importing the worst conventional academic methods and teaching “good painting” using primary-school rules—could not be more arbitrary. There is not the slightest emotional relationship between Chibcha art and twentieth-century Colombian art, or between Aleijadinho and [Candido] Portinari, or between the Aztecs and Rivera. The majority of Colombians are unaware of the Museo del Oro; therefore, it would be completely untrue to contend that they see in these exquisite pieces early evidence of a great art tradition, which continues to this day, rather than archaeological curiosities. On the other hand, when a Frenchman enters a Romanesque chapel and stops under the portal of Chartres, he finds his inalienable spiritual ancestors in these perished forms. He knows that he comes from that family and feels that the culture has risen naturally, like well-kneaded bread, taking whatever time it needed. There is no void whatsoever behind his work. Not only is he sustained by a portico of statues and columns, but there is also a secular habit of meditation and an inclination toward the creative act. The clear knowledge of what comprises the highest rank of human dignity and the certainty of being the legitimate heir of this excellence flow into the artist

to strengthen that true original spirit. Especially when he is prepared to exercise his heart, his brain, and his hand in the drawing, the coloring, or the sculptural form. But if a Latin American chooses the geometric patterns from an Aztec fence to create the motif of his painting, his choice is purely picturesque. . . .

Apart from the pre-Columbian art whose voice was silenced many centuries ago, the greatest effort of Nationalism is to create a national pantheon as quickly as possible. This is the same rush with which a dispossessed person tries to invent on paper a genealogical tree that would give him distinguished grandparents and great-grandparents. When all is said and done, this is a falsification of ancestors. As such, it must always be opposed by the frank, true acknowledgment that we come from barely two or three generations of adventurers and peasants. Suppose we accept our lack of an art history and valiantly step forth from the void. We could start by imitating whatever has a universal value and whatever constitutes, in our contemporary world, art language that may give a new man a precise awareness of his artistic mission. Or suppose instead that we erect cardboard pantheons behind the artist, assuring him they are made of marble—with illustrious ancestors who cannot stand up to the least analysis, thus introducing a golden era of mediocrity. This would sap artistic honesty and the zeal of this new man, crushing him beneath the taboos of a false past.

. . .

Thus a small, shrunken tradition, sprinkled with gold paper, replaces the great universal tradition of art. But we keep on hearing: we are in Latin America; we have a debt to Latin America; we must stimulate Latin America; we must deceive Latin America. And this is where Nationalism turns to the critic for help and support.

5. WHAT DO THE CRITICS DO?

. . .

It is amazing, in the great, immense space occupied by Latin America, that among the small groups of honorable people no one has organized a league against benevolence. Neither is there any pact against conformity or a denunciation of critical leniency as one of the most effective ways to destroy any vigor in

the artistic forms that may arise on this continent. A fear of upsetting the happy chorus of conformity and a secret panic about opposing the Nationalist harangue paralyzes [even] the most intelligent minds. What they do then is to close down in silent condemnation. . . . But the art critic is resourceful enough to show the other side of the coin. That resource is to open up to the public eye more and more, in all the media available, the universe of the visible, so that it may receive and revere the endless parade of images—just as if it were a victorious army spreading strategic flanks before the amazed, dazzled spectator. Confuse the public; intoxicate it with images that come from all parts of the world, from societies that have vanished and geographies that have changed. Nonetheless, all these images have come forth from the same heart of man and have traveled the same trembling path from the inventor's brain to his diligent hand. The laws, obligations, salvation, power, and the reasons for the perpetuity of the artwork will come later. What is important is to take the public back into the universe to which nationalisms have [previously] denied access. . . .

I don't think the axiom that refers to governments can be applied to culture: the people do not have the culture they deserve. My hopes for a reform of the narrow conceptions that determine the lack of Latin American culture are too vehement for me to resign myself to that fate. When it comes to the matter of art, the colonial period in Latin America seems to be interminable. But, will the fanatic shadow of Nationalism be cast over us indefinitely? This depends on the courage with which people—released from their family commitments more and more every day—are capable of analyzing events and situations and exposing these analyses to the public. Basically, the capacity for culture is a capacity for analysis: the ability to think without pressure and to carry out one's reasoning freely. Our young countries move among worthless relics like fussy old people. Meanwhile, the tired old European countries are boldly transforming their authentic relics, yet never becoming immobilized by them. While the lesson of our tragicomedy is full of scholarly solutions, it is as valid as any other lesson: Know how to listen; know how to see; know how to read; learn to be a disciple; evict nationalism and the paralysis it perpetrates.

IV.2.3 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1061823

THE EMERGENT DECADE: LATIN AMERICAN PAINTERS AND PAINTING IN THE 1960S

Thomas M. Messer, 1966

This text by Czech intellectual Thomas M. Messer (born 1920)—who directed the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York from 1961 until 1988—introduces the book *The Emergent Decade: Latin American Painters and Painting in the 1960s* which accompanied a 1966 exhibition at the Guggenheim. Messer had previously organized a smaller exhibition of Latin American art at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston (1960), and he offers here a comparison between the two exhibitions, noting that the recent show is “more geographically inclusive,” though it excludes a variety of media, namely sculpture and printmaking. Regarding the main concern of this volume, Messer’s paradoxical answer to the question of whether or not Latin American art exists is “yes and no,” and it is noteworthy for its essentialist assertion that “if it exists, [it] will be rooted in the realities of Latin American life.” Regardless of *The Emergent Decade’s* shortcomings, this was indeed the first exhibition in the United States to underscore innovations of Latin American art. The passages published here are excerpted from the essay’s original publication [Thomas M. Messer, “Introduction,” *The Emergent Decade: Latin American Painters and Painting in the 1960s* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1966), xiii–xv].

INTRODUCTION

In 1960, when, as Director of Boston’s Institute of Contemporary Art, I undertook a selection of Latin American painting, my intention was simply to put together a good show. Accordingly, I visited relatively few painters, choosing wherever I could their most recent and significant works. The show, presented under the title *New Departures: Latin America*, featured five oils each by Manabu Mabe (Brazil), Fernando de Szyszlo (Peru), Alejandro Obregón (Colombia), Alejandro Otero (Venezuela), Ricardo Martínez (Mexico), and Armando Morales (Nicaragua). Argentina, already in artistic ferment and evidently on the way to establishing a clear hegemony, could no longer be represented by a single painter. I decided to include

one work by each of five painters: José Antonio Fernández-Muro, Sarah Grilo, Miguel Ocampo, Clorindo Testa, and the Japanese [-born] Kazuya Sakai. The show turned out well. It was of even texture and managed to represent, if not the art of the continent as a whole, at least a selective sample of the mid-generation's most significant work in the countries I visited.

As an exhibition, *The Emergent Decade* is probably less satisfactory to the eye, merely because the simple and somewhat artificial premise of the earlier show is no longer acceptable. In every respect, we set our sights higher this time. The show is more inclusive geographically, embracing Uruguay and Chile in addition to the countries previously covered. A special effort was made to include the work of the leading expatriates of each nation. More importantly, we deliberately sacrificed even texture (which would have been attainable had we adjusted the selection to an international norm) and emphasized rather than minimized the diversity of art in each country. The result is a very broad stylistic range in which figuration coexists with many kinds of abstraction. Both appear in their expressionist, constructivist, surrealist, and primitive manifestations—to use for purposes of quick identification these general and imprecise terms by which broad categories are described. Finally, the choice reflects a desire to focus on the various levels of creative maturity. In each country visited, I selected works by old masters of modern art, by mature contemporaries, and by the younger experimenters. Each category was treated according to its significance in the whole fabric of a nation's artistic development.

The selection was made in the course of two month-long trips taken to the east and west coasts of Latin America during the last half of 1964. I inspected hundreds of paintings, seeking them out in artists' studios with which I was already familiar or to which I was drawn by the recommendations of other observers, often the artists themselves.

The expenditure of so much time, money, and effort on a purely regional project is unusual in this era of globally oriented museums. Nevertheless, I must point to my endeavors apologetically rather than complacently, for they were clearly insufficient, in light of the complexity of the task. When Latin American artists chide us for not coming to grips with the burdensome problems of our common concern, they are only partly wrong. For some of these artists, through their work, propose weighty issues that we have had to approach, I fear, with more sympathy than understanding. Thus, if it is pointed out that there remain

countries unvisited and, within those visited, unrepresented painters of importance, I must sadly agree. If, further, it is stated that the media of sculpture and printmaking have been ignored, I must assent again, with the remark that the loss is smaller in sculpture, where works of distinction are very rare though not altogether lacking. If, finally, the objection is raised that the choice is an arbitrary one, my defense may still be only partiality tenable. For admittedly every human judgment depends upon the texture, invariably imperfect, of the judge's own knowledge and perception—a texture that may be particularly porous in the area of contemporary art. Arbitrary, however, need not mean capricious. Rather it may signify the isolation of a particular, and hopefully valid, strain in order to illuminate a single area in a great realm of undefined possibilities.

* * *

When trying to perceive broader currents in art, one always begins by examining individual works. In them we may seek levels of meaning that may be tested further as we move from the single work to the artist's total contribution. But only by studying a great many such sequences can we hope to arrive at a basis for a national or continental style.

The question whether there exists something that may rightly be called Latin American art is relevant to this pursuit. Of deceiving simplicity, the question prompts complex and equivocal responses. To answer in a sentence, Latin American art exists, in some sense, yes and no. The existence of national and continental identities is self-evident. At the same time, it is extremely difficult if not impossible to render them intelligible by listing their attributes. It is easier to state what Latin American art is not, what it cannot possibly be.

To dispel the most primitive misconception, Latin American art can have no relation to the pictorial sentimentalities manufactured by tourist bureaus. These nostalgic scenes obviously have no meaning and merely confuse by their evocation of a long discredited myth. Neither, on the other hand, can the essence of Latin America be conveyed other than through a form language that in some way bespeaks the thoughts and emotions, the concerns, problems, and issues, of its origin. An imitative, international style deprived of its indigenous substance will not do this. Therefore, both—picturesque unreality and its opposite, neutral abstraction—must be rejected. A true Latin American art, if it exists, will be

rooted in the realities of Latin American life. If these realities are coherent, their formal equivalents may emerge as a visually identifiable form language. A style, in other words, may come into being. Whenever art lacks such distinguishable features, it must be presumed that coherence either is lacking or has not been articulated in visual form.

The concept of a Latin American art must be rooted in a grasp of the Latin American identity. That identity, however, resists definition. An adequate definition would have to be impossibly comprehensive, for it would embrace geography, history, economics, religion, psychology, politics, and many other factors as well. Reason and emotion, facts and ideas, the past with its memories and its conditioning force, the present in all its fluid immediacy, and an indiscernible future foreshadowed in terms of vague aspirations would all need to be part of it. It would have to be applicable simultaneously to the individual and to the larger entities of family, nation, continent, and world.

Only the artist is equipped to evoke this identity. By means of intuition and by using the implicit language of forms, he is capable of epitomizing the various components of reality. The images he uses are, of course, the products of his own individual awareness and are always relative to a specific content. (One among many common elements of artistic consciousness in Latin America is the obsession with death, expressed in a curious mixture of the Indian and Spanish.) Yet the Latin American artist is committed to articulating not only the legacy of his culture but also those central concerns that he shares, regardless of geography or tradition, with his contemporaries. This simultaneous commitment to a continental frame of reference that is concrete but limited, and to another that is universal and largely unassimilated, produces a field of tension that demands creative release.

In this tenuous balance of superimposed identities, an accurate Latin American profile cannot be drawn in heavy lines. Its visual component, the artist's work, is varied and diverse, and not reducible to an artificial uniformity. Such diversity reflects that richness of ideas, of responses, and of perceptions that is as much a part of life in Latin America as it is of life in Europe or the United States. If a subtle unity asserts itself nonetheless, it is a unity that is not inconsistent with diversification, a unity that envelops a fragmented texture with a wholeness that is frail and transparent but nevertheless real.

Conditional recognition of a common denominator should not be taken to suggest that Latin American art is exclusively a regional phenomenon. On the contrary, the Latin American artist is clearly dependent upon the fundamental pictorial modes that hold sway everywhere today. Whatever their origin, the central concepts of our time, whether expressed in words or in forms, provides the guidelines for painters in Latin America, as they do everywhere else in the world. Such concepts are the standard of our age and constitute a legacy that exists whether it is wanted or not. In the end, the problem of the Latin American artist is to find an authentic posture, one that is equally distant from self-conscious isolation and rootless universality.

IV.2.4 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1061840

ART OF LATIN AMERICA SINCE INDEPENDENCE

Stanton L. Catlin and Terence Grieder, 1966

The American art historians Stanton Loomis Catlin (1915–1997) of Yale University Art Gallery and Terence Grieder, a professor of pre-Columbian art at the University of Texas at Austin, introduce their 1966 exhibition *Art of Latin America Since Independence* in this essay. While Catlin and Grieder are wary of the conflicted stances associated with ascribing a single cultural identity to Latin America, their point of view reveals a kind of Pan Americanism that is obsessed, in one way or another, with presenting the art of Latin American to U.S. audiences as part of a supposedly shared “American” culture. The present excerpt comes from the essay’s original publication [Stanton Loomis Catlin and Terence Grieder, “Introduction,” *Art of Latin America Since Independence* (New Haven, CT, and Austin, TX: Yale University Art Gallery and University of Texas Art Museum, 1966), 1–5].

INTRODUCTION

The history and art of Latin America fall naturally into three periods: pre-Columbian, colonial, and modern. Of the three, the modern period is least known

to the world at large. Its approximate duration of one hundred and fifty years—dating from the era of Independence—does not compare with the millennia of pre-Columbian artistic culture, and its span is only half that of the colonial period. Nevertheless it encompasses artistic treasures and remarkable personalities that deserve to be more widely known.

The material of the present exhibition is of special interest for the United States since it comprises the work of fellow Americans. That they are indeed fellow Americans becomes clear as we examine the achievements of the various periods here considered. In general, artistic development in the Latin American countries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries follows a course surprisingly parallel to the evolution of the arts in the United States. On the other hand, in view of the fact that Latin Americans have so often been described, by themselves as well as by others, as poetic and emotional, the objectivity of their images is surprising when compared with the romantic enthusiasm of their North American contemporaries. The prevailing preconception of the public in both North and Latin America is that each holds the advantage in art. Although the interest of such a question is more political than artistic, the claim of Latin American artists to our attention cannot be easily ignored.

The Latin American painters may bring to mind cognates in the art of the United States. For example, the Venezuelan Juan Lovera may remind us of his contemporary, [John] Trumbull; [Juan Manuel] Blanes may be compared to [Winslow] Homer and [Eduardo] Sívori to [Thomas] Eakins. The dispassionately observed and conceptually controlled Mexican landscapes of [José María] Velasco make a striking contrast with the more poetic and emotional landscapes of [George] Inness, [Albert] Bierstadt, and [Frederic Edwin] Church. In some periods and styles there are no very direct parallels; for example, there are none for the strong Cubist-oriented school of the 1920s and '30s of [Emilio] Pettoruti, Guido, [Lino Enea] Spilimbergo, and [Antonio] Berni in Argentina.

Two points, however, clearly distinguish the Latin American art world from its counterpart in the United States, namely the acceptance of the principle of patronage of art by all levels of government and, again in principle, the widespread respect of the public for artists. The Latin American tradition of government patronage is inherited from the colonial period, when patronage was extended both by the royal courts of Spain and Portugal and by their representatives in the New World. The Mexican Academy of San Carlos and the

Brazilian Academy, founded in 1785 and 1816 respectively, are the earliest of the Latin American national academies and represent continuations of the Spanish and Portuguese traditions of the national patronage of art schools. National art academies were founded in Chile (1848) and in other countries, the majority well before our own. If some of these schools have lost their influence in recent years—with the notable exception of the National School of Fine Arts in Peru—their historical role has been impressive.

One of the results of government patronage is public esteem for the arts. Accomplished artists in Latin America, living or dead, are regarded as great men, and their profession is generally honored as a distinguished calling. In some cases, respect has perhaps been carried too far, as in the election, purely on his merits as an artist and great man, of Pedro Américo to the first Constituent Assembly of Brazil in 1890. (The excessiveness in this instance is evident by the fact that Américo did not perform his duties in the Assembly, but departed almost immediately for Florence to pursue his true vocation.) Other artists have held high political office, for example, José Guadalupe Zuno, governor of Jalisco, Mexico, and Pedro Figari of Uruguay. The presence of an Imperial court in Brazil from 1811 to 1889, which made Rio de Janeiro a major art center, also inspired a certain amount of emulation in other nations. But the tradition was well established in any case. In Mexico Porfirio Díaz, hardly an art lover gave a special grant to the late Dr. Atl [born Gerardo Murillo] for study in Europe when the young man approached him; and such stories are common in the artistic biographies from many nations. The artist who did not receive a government stipend for study in Europe is the exception, as a glance through the accompanying biographies will reveal—surely a situation that Homer or Eakins would have envied. Even governments that obviously could not afford to indulge in extravagances provided modest scholarships for art study abroad, as in the case of the Uruguayan government, which sent [Juan Manuel] Blanes to Italy with such meager funds that he could not afford to travel from Florence to Rome. So large was the return on the investment in Blanes' case that it would be hard to calculate.

In addition to direct patronage of artists and academies, the continuation of the tradition established by the courts of Europe had other effects. It led to the beautification of cities, and especially of the public parks. The public interest, often neglected in social and economic terms, was unusually well served by

handsome areas provided and tended by the government. Manifestations of the same tradition may also be seen in the importation of missions or individual artists from Europe to Rio de Janeiro in 1816 and to Buenos Aires in 1824 to design the public buildings of those cities, and to Peru in 1880 for Lima's Exposition Park, a spacious green bounded by wide avenues and containing circles lined with monuments. The vast sweep of the multiple malls of Brasília (1956) is in this same tradition.

The acceptance of public patronage in Latin America is at least in part the result of the academic tradition, which considers art a learned study. Hence, judgment in art matters has been reserved to those educated in art. A remark of the sort "I don't know anything about art, but I know what I like" is not unknown in Latin America, but the attitude expressed in it, historically speaking, has had less direct influence on important patronage than in our own country.

If the exhibition may be of special interest to North Americans for the light its comparison may shed on our art, it is of equal interest for the view it provides of European art and society of the times here represented. Perhaps unwittingly, we have accepted a picture of the nineteenth century that is far removed from the facts of European culture. Comparison of almost any major art gallery in North America with its Latin American counterpart reveals the relative wealth of the nineteenth-century collections of the latter as compared to the relative poverty of its twentieth-century collections. The reverse is the case in the North American museums, where the nineteenth century means the French Impressionists, with perhaps [Jean-Auguste-Dominique] Ingres, [Eugène] Delacroix, [Camille] Corot, and [Gustave] Courbet for good measure. [Édouard] Manet would perhaps be amazed, and not entirely gratified, by our over scrupulous selection of precursors of twentieth-century movements.

The revolution of taste against the Parisian Beaux-Arts tradition has been far less extreme and complete in Latin America. As we examine the collections of the Latin American museums, a phase of life and art is revealed that has been largely omitted from our frames of critical reference, but whose values and glories cannot be considered entirely transient. This phase was dominated by the sophisticated, luxury loving, international monied aristocracy whose world centered on Paris, whose literary models were French novels, and whose artistic tastes were based on those expressed by the Paris Salons. The First World

War destroyed this world so completely that only vestiges of it remain, and these vestiges are possibly more alive in the cities of Latin America than in Europe itself.

This world is revealed again in the paintings of Américo and [Eliseu] Visconti in Brazil, of Tovar, [Arturo] Michelena, and Rojas in Venezuela, of Hernández and Baca-Flor in Peru, and of Pedro Lira and Valenzuela Puelma in Chile. This world's complacency and materialism are most remembered now; but its insistence upon technical quality and finish, its formality, its modes of sensibility, and its serious concern, at least in theory, for the noblest human sentiments—in short, its idealism and its high technical standards—are refreshing, and so out-of-date as to seem avant-garde. This was the stylistic ambiance of Europe in the period from 1875 to 1910, as most respectable Europeans knew it, and some of its foremost names—Bouguereau, Collin, Cabanel—were the teachers of the Latin Americans.

In Latin America the esteem in which art is held is just one facet of an intellectual approach that favors the aesthetic. The Latin American *pensador* [thinker] is far more likely to write on *Aesthetics* (for example, [José] Vasconcelos, Pedro Figari, and Antonio Caso and, in a sense, Ricardo Rojas under the title, *Eurindia* [SEE DOCUMENT II.1.4]). The Mexican positivist, Francisco Bulnes, remarked in disgust “The great Latin delusion is the belief that art is the highest, almost the only object of national life.” Thus, he says, by trying to be artists, they turn their religion unto idolatry; they handicap themselves in industry; and in science they fail to understand the scientific method, all because “Latinos lend every effort to being artists.” Bulnes, writing before 1899, takes a negative view of what in humanistic studies can only be considered one of Latin America's chief glories: her poetry and belles-lettres. Yet, even among the positivist thinkers, a large and influential group in the last decades of the nineteenth century, we do not find the pragmatic approach but rather an exaggerated idealism. The famous Puerto Rican educator, Eugenio María de Hostos, who worked primarily in Santo Domingo and Chile, saw his mission in terms of an ideal society—an approach that may be considered aesthetic rather than utilitarian or pragmatic. And among Latin American thinkers, generally, according to Crawford, many “were poets first, and nearly all wrote poetry.”

It is a strange fact that the subjective and frankly “aesthetic” appears more frequently in the literary than in the pictorial arts of Latin America which,

as mentioned earlier, are often objective. Some of the best Latin American work in “science” has appeared in pictorial form, such as the botanical drawings of [José Celestino] Mutis’ late eighteenth-century academy in Bogotá, the ornithological paintings of Joaquín Pinto, the paintings of the Comisión Corográfica in Colombia, and the volcano studies of Dr. Atl of Mexico. These, Bulnes would say, are examples of the confusion of art and science. Whether they succeed as science may be debatable, but their artistic value is hardly in doubt.

The cultural and geographical implications of the exhibition’s title may again raise the question of the existence of an art that may properly be called Latin American. The creation of a “Latin American” art or a “National Art” has been a persistent concern among artists and critics in the Latin American world. As the complex problem of national identity that faces nations with highly diversified populations is cultural as well as political in nature, such concern on the part of artists is natural. This preoccupation cannot be discounted as a productive force when one considers artists such as [Diego] Rivera, [David Alfaro] Siqueiros, [José] Sabogal, [Candido] Portinari, [Carlos] Mérida, [Fernando de] Szyszlo, [Alejandro] Obregón, and many others, whose works have reflected regional, national, or ethnic values. In our opinion, however, it is more valuable at this stage not to attempt to consider this question, but rather to examine the kinds of art produced by artists who have an identifiable relation with Latin America as a whole.

This is a broad category. In an area and during a period in which artists, styles, and ideas from abroad have played a constant role, borderline cases frequently occur. For example, the style of the majority of nineteenth-century reportorial artists remains European in the course of their American activity. Here their involvement in American subject matter, and the premise that their art may well have played a part in the formation of the Latin American image of itself are the deciding factors. Moreover, except for the accident of birth, it would almost seem that such figures as the Peruvian Baca-Flor and the Venezuelan Michelena should be eliminated from the American category because of their almost totally Europeanized styles. However, birthplace is still everywhere accepted in cultural history as a basic fact of identity, and in these and other cases the styles practiced were variations on an international approach that was widely accepted in their times in Latin America. There is also the reverse position of the European professionals who came to America under contract to governments to teach in state academies. Although many of these artists continued in directions already

established, they played an important role in the formation of new generations and in the shaping of the sometimes reactionary, artistic climate in the countries where they worked. Not at issue, of course, is the position of foreign artists who came on their own in search of New World careers and who borrowed or modified their styles under American conditions.

There are more questions about Latin American art since Independence than there are answers, and if the exhibition brings into focus the questions, it will have served its purpose. The visual arts, literature and philosophy, and the natural sciences probably have been more closely interwoven in Latin America than anywhere else. The disclosure of their specific relationships promises invaluable insight into the realities of Latin American society as well as its art and the problems of the Hemisphere that we have in common.

IV.2.5–IV.2.6

THE “QUESTION” CONCERNING LATIN AMERICAN ART

In these paired documents, Jacqueline Barnitz, the longtime University of Texas professor and scholar of Latin American art, addresses the question of whether there is in fact such a thing as “Latin American art.” In the first text, Barnitz’s point of departure is a 1966 symposium held at New York’s New School of Social Research where she and her fellow panelists—Thomas Messer of the Guggenheim Museum, Stanton L. Catlin of the Yale University Art Gallery, and painters Ernesto Deira and Marcelo Bonevardi—tackled this very question. She strongly agrees with the Argentinean artists that the formal elements of contemporary work from Latin America stem from Europe; however, Barnitz’s essentialist argument also recognizes specific content and attitudes that she believes are unquestionably Latin American. Barnitz published “The Question of Latin American Art: Does it exist?” in *Arts Magazine* [(New York City), vol. 47, no. 3 (December–January, 1966–67): 53–55]. It was reprinted and translated into Spanish seventeen years later in San Juan’s *Revista Plástica* (“‘The Question’ 17 Years Later”) for an issue of the journal [*Plástica Latinoamericana*, special edition of *Plástica. Revista de la Liga de Arte de San Juan* [(San Juan: Liga de Estudiantes de Arte de San Juan), year 6, vol. 1, no. 12 (September 1984): 14–16, 94–95 and 17–20, 96–98].

IV.2.5 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 805617

THE QUESTION OF LATIN AMERICAN ART: DOES IT EXIST?

Jacqueline Barnitz, 1966–67

TOO OFTEN HAVE LATIN AMERICAN ARTISTS been lumped together by careless critics and dismissed as mere followers of international “bandwagons.” The “Art of Latin America since Independence” at Yale and “The Emergent Decade” [SEE DOCUMENTS IV.2.3–4, RESPECTIVELY] were the most recent exhibitions to be thus minimized. But if one takes the trouble to examine individual works a bit more carefully, are they really synonymous with their European counterparts or have they some character which distinguishes them as uniquely Latin American?

The question “Is There a Latin American Art?” was taken up recently at a symposium held at the New School for Social Research. Panelists Thomas Messer of the Guggenheim Museum and Stanton L. Catlin of the Yale University Art Gallery answered an ambiguous “yes and no” to the question. Mr. Catlin mentioned some small isolated groups that are not known here and, one would gather, not active in the major Latin American art centers. Mr. Messer felt that there is an intention that suggests differences. The other two panelists, Ernesto Deira and Marcelo Bonevardi, both Argentinean painters, vehemently denied the existence of a Latin American art. Bonevardi felt—with some justification—that aesthetic objectives did not have anything to do with nationality. “There are no nationalities, only good artists,” Deira said. “Latin America does not exist as such; there are twenty different countries. . . . If Latin America does not exist as a concept, how could one ask for something characteristic of its art?” After further deliberation and no conclusive answer, the symposium joggled to an end. But one point had barely been touched. Content! The discussion had been largely concerned with style while the only clear allusion to content had been Mr. Messer’s “intention that suggests differences.” Yet content appears to be the whole difference.

I am not concerned here with the Mexican Renaissance which unquestionably produced both a style and content distinct from anything else, and

which in turn exerted a strong influence abroad. The brutality inherent in much Mexican painting has been either refined or completely eliminated from the art of other Latin American countries while its energy has survived and taken other forms.

As I talked further to Latin Americans and took a closer look at their works, it became increasingly apparent that their attitudes were neither those of the United States nor those of Europe. Contrary to Deira, both the Peruvian painter Fernando de Szyszlo and the Bolivian Maria Luisa Pacheco, for instance, are very much aware of being Latin American in their art. While their individual forms of abstraction admittedly come from Europe, the content in both painters' work is completely indigenous. Both use their countries' pre-Columbian civilizations as themes. Another example is Fernando Botero of Colombia. Botero's paintings of fat gnomish creatures, executed in a technique and polish acquired from studying the Italian old masters, are unparalleled in their strange combination of powerful commentary, wit and sincerity. In other figurative work, for instance that of [José Luis] Cuevas and [Leonel] Góngora, one is aware of a mentality that is distinctly Spanish-American. There is a fusing of well-mastered plastic elements with a taste for absurd commentary.

Nowhere is this mentality more evident than in the work of five Argentinean expressionists, one of whom ironically, is Deira himself. The other four are Luis Felipe Noé, Jorge de La Vega, Romulo Macció and Antonio Seguí. Collectively, their styles show a combination of Cobra [group] characteristics, a Germanic taste for the bizarre, and a little James Ensor. Yet the chaotic buoyancy and intellectual enigma often present in these works speak of a mentality other than European. The Argentinean, although largely Spanish by heritage, manifests a turn of mind most resembling the French in its capacity for quick, witted perception and subtle sense of humor. Yet he also manifests a forthright emotionalism that is not Gallic. Although each of the five expressionists concerned is distinctive, one from the next, each is motivated by a common objective. The five painters aspire to regain human values in their art. Theirs is an intensely personal art. "We, the men of today," Noé once wrote, "are creating among us a new order of things and signaling the way to a new organic 'Weltanschauung.' But this new order has nothing to do with any previous one; it is above all to understand chaos that we are living because what we call chaos is nothing but that for which we lack a pattern of understanding. The United States is a society which affirms itself," he

continued. "But in our country as in the whole of South America, we are still at a stage previous to that of formulating our own way of life as compared to the 'American way of life,' and thus we are left with that which precedes all order — chaos. Therefore we must invest ourselves with it." Chaos is both the subject and the means of his work, and man is the subject and the means of chaos. In his own work Noé has no set of rules: but each of his compositions places the viewer before a new "disorder of images."

Commentary on the human species has always been a Spanish favorite. But when Latin Americans denounce man, they seem to do it with infinite warmth and empathy. They are patently on his side since they consider themselves as much the object of the lesson as is the viewer. They present "truth" with considerable humor. Noé, Seguí and de la Vega are particularly noted for their whimsical touches. Noé's portrayals of people are often biting caricatures in garish colors.

The concern for human values constitutes perhaps the most cohesive force throughout Latin America. Because of it there exists a sort of ideological consistency far greater than among North American artists who are still trying to reconcile what little individuality remains with the overpowering spokes of the industrial wheel.

In Latin America there is as yet no such problem. Therefore the artist can only refer to it in a vicarious manner when he chooses to do so. South Americans are undeniably individualists as is evident in their politics. This condition is both good and bad. In art and spiritual values it is good. It is also advantageous to self-esteem, personal courage and unconditional enjoyment of life. One could say that, it is more conducive to a richer inner life and less so to one's adaptation to social and political formulæ. In short, it can create... chaos. The South American artist, especially in Argentina is the "man-in between" as opposed to the North American artist whose life is far more isolated. As such, the Latin American stands in the middle of his audience and speaks directly to it about himself, about mankind. In turn, the average Latin American viewer, who, like in the United States belongs to the business, political or professional classes, is rarely one hundred percent layman. He is enough of a poet himself to be able to read a painting without requiring further explanation. Perhaps he might also feel a little ashamed not to understand since his attitude toward art is not condescending, but rather one of respect for the artist as an oracle and agent between

unseen forces and himself. There is no doubt that Latin America has its “international” artists just as Europe and the United States have. Can anyone say that Jean Bazaine is particularly French, [Jean] Tinguely particularly Swiss, Ben Nicholson particularly British, [Philip] Guston or [Milton] Resnick particularly American anymore than [Marcelo] Bonevardi is Argentinean or Jesus Rafael Soto is Venezuelan? Artists have always sought to bring something individual to art in general more than they have to one particular country. When artists do contribute to the art of a country it is often so unconscious a process that they are not aware of it themselves. Certainly a true artist does not concern himself with anything as superficial as style. But the condition of his life in relation to a particular country or environment is bound to affect his attitude. It is this attitude that we sense in the work of the Argentinean expressionists as well as in that of many other artists throughout South America.

The Latin American artist believes in his fellow men while at the same time he fully realizes that they are as fallible as himself: “We are not afraid of making mistakes,” says Deira. It is undoubtedly for this reason that artists are sympathetic to the mistakes of others. They accept the challenge of the unknown. They are not satisfied with easy comforting answers. It is this self-doubt that spurs them on to constant re-adaptation in their quest for new values in art. In this sense they are being essentially Latin Americans; they are responding to their environment. “Our tradition is in the future,” Deira says. “Anything else is not tradition because it does not work.” He is unconsciously contributing a large share of energy to a tradition he is so close to, [so that] he cannot yet recognize its budding form.

IV.2.6 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 805646

THE “QUESTION” 17 YEARS LATER

Jacqueline Barnitz, 1984

FROM A 17-YEAR PERSPECTIVE, it seems very audacious to me now to have attempted to define what “Latin American” art is—or was in the 1960s. As is glaringly evident today, the 1967 article [SEE DOCUMENT IV.2.5] was based on the opinions of Argentinean [painters]—[Ernesto] Deira, [Marcelo] Bonevardi and [Luis Felipe] Noé—who were living in New York at the time, besides [the art historians and museum directors] Thomas Messer and Stanton L. Catlin. The fact that the direction and nature of Latin American art differ from one country to another and from one decade to another is reason enough to shrink from such definitions. As the continuing number of essays and symposia addressing the question of artistic identity has demonstrated, no unanimous conclusions have been reached. The 1975 symposium at the University of Texas in Austin was a flagrant example of polarized views, and there have been many more since then in Latin America. Yet, the fact that symposia continue to take place and articles to be written indicates that the issue is real and begging for better understanding. It is this issue rather than the nature of Latin American art itself that is at stake. The question is why. Given the fact that there is more than one vantage point from which to view the question, either as an outsider or an insider, against my wishes I must classify myself as an outsider.

Art in the Western world since after World War II has come away from localisms, making specific Latin American characteristics increasingly difficult to detect. If any exist, they must be sought in the forms in which artists choose to work as well as in why they reject others. The surfacing of Latin American art on the international scene in the late 1950s and 1960s as a body and a force to be reckoned with, has contributed to creating questions of identity as well as vulnerability to foreign critical evaluations. The reason is obvious. Unlike the 1920s and 1930s, artists are no longer producing the kind of folkloric or indigenous themes that so delighted foreigners for their “typical” appeal. Now, Latin American art must be looked at like the art of other Western countries. This shift from local

to universal status was of course linked to the emergence in 1951 of the São Paulo Biennials, the existence of financial support for other biennials such as the Kaiser Industries in Córdoba, Argentina (1962–66), the Coltejer Biennial in Medellín, Colombia (1968–72; 1981) and the national and international award exhibitions organized in the 1960s by Jorge Romero Brest as director of the department of visual arts of the Instituto Torcuato di Tella in Buenos Aires (1963–70), the latter partially financed by Rockefeller funds. Of course the 1960s campaign in the United States to promote close relations between the United States and Latin America through the Inter-American Foundation for the Arts (later absorbed by the Center for Inter-American Relations) in New York, and the visual arts department of the Pan American Union in Washington [D.C.] under the direction of José Gómez-Sicre (active since 1948) contributed enormously to this new surge of interest.

Given this situation, it is hardly surprising that “identity” problems arose and that Argentinean [artists]—who held center stage at the time—were the least affected. The increase of interest and patronage in the United States pleased some artists while it angered others because of the obvious predatory implications. Nonetheless, the effects of these conditions had long-range repercussions and very much affected the art forms that developed. As a result of internationalization, Latin American art has been pitted by critics against the art of developed Western nations—those of Western Europe and the United States who saw this art as “derivative” versions of established forms.¹ A retrospective view of the art of the 1960s on however, soon reveals that much of it is in fact very original. One of the problems has been the absence of adequate critical tools among Latin Americans and the all too frequent reliance on foreign critics for evaluations.

In the United States, until the appearance of abstract expressionism, there was no “national” movement on a grand scale (precisionism and regionalism in the 1930s and 1940s were short-lived and local schools). But with its emergence, critics also evolved a “method” of evaluation that culminated in the apotheosizing of abstract expressionism as the ultimate national monument which in turn furnished the measuring stick for art the world over during its heyday. Even the “Paris School” was rejected by U.S. critics in the 1950s and early 1960s. But unlike Latin America, Paris didn’t care.

Not only did the U.S. produce its own criteria for dealing with its art (Clement Greenberg and formalist criticism), it also began imposing it on the art

of other cultures. An example of this attitude can be found in Thomas Messer's comments [SEE DOCUMENT IV.2.3] when—as director of the Guggenheim Museum in New York—he offered some rather condescending evaluations of Latin American art in 1964 when he traveled to several countries to select work for *The Emergent Decade* exhibition of 1966.² Lawrence Alloway, as curator of the Guggenheim in the 1960s and a regular participant in Latin American biennial juries, stated in 1965 that “At present, Latin American artists are receiving increased attention (and painting better than at any previous time, fortunately). . . .”³ This was a time when Latin Americans were painting more like other U.S. and French artists.

The post-war commercialization of Western art which affected artists everywhere, only helped to exacerbate identity problems in many Latin American artists who were caught between two worlds: the dying one of Indigenism (particularly in the Andean countries) which by its very nature had provided them with an identity in art up to then, along with a sense of didactic effectiveness, and the world of abstraction which confronted artists everywhere from São Paulo Biennials to Paris, New York and Venice. The late 1950s and early 1960s were especially traumatic when dozens of artists saw little choice but to take up these forms in order to qualify for international exhibitions whose criteria for acceptability were dictated primarily from Paris and New York. At first many did not find ways to make abstraction relevant to their own needs, which left them floundering in a cultural vacuum. Needless to say, artists like [Fernando de] Szyszlo, [Máximo] Pacheco, [Alejandro] Obregón and several others, found solutions through references to ancient Andean or Caribbean themes. [Fernando] Botero tried abstraction for a short time in the late 1950s but soon rejected it as unsuitable at the cost of isolation from mainstream art at the time. Needless to say, he has since been avenged. One should remember, however that initially U.S. abstract expressionists, like the Latin Americans, were also seeking links to a primordial past and to Northwest Coast Indian cultures, especially [Jackson] Pollock, at a time when ideological art was discouraged. But unlike Szyszlo, for example, North Americans focused on the individual Jungian aspects of a distant past as compared to the more poetic and less personally charged expression of the Latin Americans. (Argentineans did not experience these conflicts to the same degree since there had been previous avant-garde movements in Argentina in the 1940s that established their artistic identity in this context.)

Today, artists everywhere in Latin American seem less concerned with specific local traditions than in creating an art that is relevant to their contemporary society—a very different problem from Indigenism. Some seek to remove art from its “aristocratic” context to make it accessible to everyone, as did several Brazilians and Argentineans in the 1960s and early 1970s, in the United States for example. Pop Art represented a rejection of the concept of art as a unique object for the delectation of a privileged class, in favor of mass-produced banal images addressed to the common man. But U.S. Pop with its focus on consumer products and attendant cultivated bad taste, could not serve in Latin America as a means of mass communication in its original form, which is why its exportation there (along with the products it celebrated) either proved meaningless in the long run, since there is a difference between the common man and the poor masses, or contributed to feelings of hostility towards the United States expressed sometimes by Latin American artists in parodic versions of Pop. Themes of mass communication must of course be sought locally. Although Marta Traba noted that there was no “*central bank of diffusion*” in Latin America, there are local stocks of images from the media if not ancient or colonial themes, which have served such purposes. In Brazil for example, Rubens Gerchman and Carlos Vergara among others, used themes derived from popular television programs, photos of Amazonian Indians, Carnival, in Salvador, Bahia. In the mid-1970s, a group known as Etsedrón (“Nordeste” [Northeast] spelled backwards) that comprised doctors, social workers as well as artists used locally available “poor” materials to create environments suggesting ways of utilizing these materials for the specific benefit of the underprivileged local populations.

Artists in Latin America do not want to live as alienated intellectuals carrying out vast and useless projects, like say Christo or Michael Heizer, nor would they be able to get the funds for such projects. Rather they care about creating an art that can in some way modify and improve society either through its message or in actuality, like Etsedrón.⁴ Other ways in which artists seek to make art meaningful is by creating workshops in urban and rural areas to encourage the local community and its children to participate. This is far from a new idea in Latin America. Pedro Figari had attempted to launch such a project in Montevideo during the First World War, and in Mexico, Adolfo Best Maugard attempted something similar a little later. More recently, Omar Rayo’s Museum in Roldanillo, Colombia, besides providing space for graphics exhibitions, offers workshops for

the development of local art. In Chile, between 1969 and 1973, the mural brigades made an aborted attempt to establish rural puppet shows, poster workshops and encourage the local and rural populations to participate in a consciousness-raising program of local art projects. In Rio the Museum of Modern Art held *Domingos da Criação* in its gardens during the 1970s. On those occasions, materials were distributed to those who attended, who were encouraged to discover their untutored creative abilities. There has been any number of these programs in the visual arts as well as in theater largely unknown abroad, designed to encourage self-awareness among the local populations.

It is of course doubtful that the art produced in these centers and under these circumstances would be of universal interest at least initially. Therefore, for artists interested in international recognition, there continues to exist a disjunction between what they are doing and what they desire to do. That is, bring art closer to what it was in the ancient Indian social system as a functional part of daily life and not as unique socially disconnected objects whose worth is determined by its stock market value. This is why Bauhaus principles, for example, were popular in Latin America and why Torres-García established an arts and crafts workshop in the 1940s. On the other hand, artists who are currently creating art forms that require a sophisticated art public and private patronage—and these still constitute the majority—must of course continue to work within the capitalist structure since there are no governments who are currently supporting major art programs and projects as there were in the 1920s and 1930s. Julio Le Parc's longtime conflicts with these issues are well known. He once signed himself off at a symposium as "*un artista experimentador consciente de sus contradicciones en una sociedad capitalista*" [An experimental artist conscious of his own contradictions in a capitalist society] [SEE DOCUMENT IV.4.11].

As has been noted, symposia usually reveal many more differences than they resolve. Besides self-image differences between one Latin American country and another, they reveal the abyss that exists between what North and Latin Americans believe the function of art should be. Latin Americans reject a purely formalist view of art since it proved invalid for their needs as it precludes sociopolitical evaluations, and North Americans cannot understand why Latin Americans are concerned with the relevance of their art to their society because the urban-versus-regional social contrasts in Latin America are too remote from North American concerns. Except for short-lived periods of politicization among

North Americans, the majority generally tends to see art as separate from immediate social issues, or at least has been conditioned to do so. (If one looks closely enough, art is never divorced from social-political issues, but critics can make it seem so.) The concern for artistic identity among Latin Americans must then be seen as directly linked to the relative position of Latin America vis-à-vis the United States and the all too frequent need at least until the mid-1970s to rely on North American and European patronage. More than wanting to identify with specific nationalities, artists want to identify with a culture that is different from the North American one, that is *sui generis* and in no way an extension of the latter. Since there can be no doubt about the existence of these differences, the issue of identity appears to be a reflection of a relationship (to the United States) and not of a geographic or cultural condition.

Not only is Latin American art a reality as a whole, it obviously comprises many different realities as well. Although distinctions between one region and another are not always immediately apparent in the art, one can find today perhaps more than in the 1960s, certain tendencies and ways in which artists absorb foreign art forms as in Brazil, Peru, Colombia and Argentina, that confirm that there already existed a local language that modified the manner in which these influences are understood in each place. This aspect can neither be dismissed nor taken lightly. It is impossible for any country to have been in existence for two, four or ten centuries and not have developed certain specific local frames of reference. This fact is being demonstrated constantly in its negative aspects in political conflicts throughout the world. But in this sense, yes, of course Latin American art exists. Today, artists can more easily find relevant models for their art in their own countries than they could twenty or thirty years ago when [Joaquín] Torres-García, [José Clemente] Orozco, [Rufino] Tamayo and [David Alfaro] Siqueiros seemed to be the main choices, other than foreign models; [Roberto] Matta and [Wifredo] Lam were back in Europe after the war and [Diego] Rivera had largely been discarded in the 1950s, although there has been a Rivera revival among later artists.

There are few artists today whose work does not have a distinctive personal quality. Although these are individual rather than of a national or collective nature, one can detect certain common tendencies in given places brought about by interchange. It is significant that younger Latin American artists have looked to seventeenth-century Spanish models, [Diego] Velázquez, Cotán, [Francisco de] Zurbarán, but also Caravaggio and [Hieronymus] Bosch for subject, lighting and

compositional devices. [José Luis] Cuevas, who had already appropriated some Spanish precedents along with [Francisco] Goya, but also Rembrandt, set an example especially in Andean countries. Many artists for some years also looked to Italian Renaissance models for structure and distribution of color, indicating some interest in bypassing more recent western confections in favor of past sources of Western modern art, which they view justifiably as an equally important part of their heritage. Some artists add to that an overlay of contemporary allusions to film and photography. [René] Magritte has also proven to be a favorite model particularly in Colombia and Chile, because of his taste for paradox.

After 1975, when the international art market shifted from its treadmill sequence of art fashions to a less restrictive acceptance of stylistic diversity, the pressure to conform to one style or another lessened for artists everywhere. As a result, the choice of what kind of art to make became less traumatic. But there remains a need in individual countries to establish critical art criteria that will permit the identification and classification of existing patterns in art. Only then will it be possible to understand this art on its own terms and not on those of France or the United States. (Rita Eder [SEE DOCUMENT IV.2.9] proposed as a system “sociology of art”).⁵ On the other hand, foreign critics need to broaden their views to accommodate cultural factors and tastes different from their own. Problems of “identity” will continue to exist among Latin Americans, as long as their critical tools are not firmly established and universally recognized on their own terms along with their art. These problems have long ceased to exist for Latin American literature, which as we know has won worldwide acclaim. Perhaps in the visual arts this is developing now. But artists cannot work in isolation nor without a public, whether they address themselves to social issues at home or to foreign patrons.

1

Rita Eder, “Why a Latin American Art?” *Journal Southern California Art Magazine* no. 25 (November–December 1979), 62–65.

2

The Emergent Decade, exh. cat. (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1965–66).

3

Lawrence Alloway, “Latin America and International Art,” *Art in America* (June 1965), 65.

4

Eder (1979), 64.

5

Ibid.

IV.2.7–IV.2.8

ARTES VISUALES ASKS: “WHEN WILL THE ART OF LATIN AMERICA BECOME LATIN AMERICAN ART?”

In the summer of 1976, the Mexico City magazine *Artes Visuales* published a number of texts addressing the ongoing debates on defining a “Latin American” aesthetic that had gained momentum after a symposium at the University of Texas, Austin, in October of 1975. [SEE DOCUMENTS IV.4.1–IV.4.3 FOR THE DELIBERATIONS OF JUAN ACHA, ARACY AMARAL, AND MARTA TRABA]. The discussions on this polarizing question involving issues of identity continued in specialized journals, including in Octavio Paz’s magazine *Plural*, which originally appeared as a monthly supplement in the Mexico City daily *Excélsior* from 1971 to 1976, as well as in *Artes Visuales*. The latter publication launched in 1973 as a collaboration between Fernando Gamboa—then director of Mexico City’s Museo de Arte Moderno (MAM)—and Carla Stellweg, the Dutch-born and New York-based critic and promoter of Latin American art who served as its editor-in-chief.

Damián Carlos Bayón wrote “Contestación a una pregunta: ¿Cuándo se vuelve latinoamericano el arte en América Latina?” from the United States, where he was part of a small group of Latin American thinkers sponsored by American institutions like the University of Texas, where he taught. Citing the fierce originality of the Mexican printmaker José Guadalupe Posada and of the Venezuelan *cinéticos*, Bayón calls for other Latin American artists to produce work that is expressive of its context.

In a meandering rebuttal “Comentario al texto de Damían Bayón,” Jorge Romero Brest (1905–1989) notes that, even though he agrees with much of his old protégé’s essay, he finds Bayón’s characterization of artistic intent too absolute. Instead, Romero Brest argues that the value of an artwork should be qualified as something defined by experience and produced by the dialectic interplay that occurs in any given socio-cultural context. Notably, he shifts the political debate involved in Bayón’s text to focus on the aesthetics of culture, urging an understanding of a Latin American “aesthetic” that would encompass everyday experiences, mass media, and traditional arts. Romero Brest’s theoretical stance mirrors his support of “happenings,” Pop art, and other experimental art forms carried out at the Instituto di Tella in Buenos Aires during his directorial tenure in the late 1960s. Translated by Betty Sisto for the

magazine, both texts were published by *Artes Visuales* [(Mexico City), 10 (April–June 1976): 18–22 and 23–26].

IV.2.7 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1061734

IN REPLY TO A QUESTION: “WHEN WILL THE ART OF LATIN AMERICA BECOME LATIN AMERICAN ART?”

Damián Bayón, 1975

IN REPLY TO A QUESTION:

I think the art of Latin America will become Latin American art when an artist appears whose sensibility, imagination, and will to synthesize make him capable of achieving an expression that could not have appeared at any other point in time or space. There can be no doubt that a moment arrives in every area of thought—in poetry, in the novel, in music, or in plastic arts—when the attentive and unprejudiced reader or observer says to himself: “This is different!” And I am not speaking here of injecting a few cheap touches of folklore, but rather of acquiring the knack—either purposely or in a sublimely unconscious way—of capturing a vital moment in the process of our evolution and giving it a form. . . . a form that sooner or later will become an essential element of the cultural life of a community, and, later, of the whole world.

Any numbers of examples occur to me. I am honest enough, however, to declare at the outset that by this I do not mean resorting to facile “native” touches, as was the case, I feel, with [José] Sabogal in Peru—an academic painter who went to Spain and on returning to his own country set himself, in all good faith, to “translating” Galician farmers and Basque fishermen into Indians of the highlands, without ever having acquired the assurance of the mediocre Spanish painters he imitated. No, I am referring here to what I consider truly authentic Latin America ways of being. Whatever his importance, the Indian will never be

a fully representative image of our identity. What is important is not the “figure” that is presented, but what we can say, or want to say, by using that figure—in the broadest sense of the term, since the figure can be an abstract one as in the case of [Fernando de] Szyszlo’s work, [also] in Peru.

To begin with, and not just because I am writing for a Mexican journal, the name of José Guadalupe Posada seems to me to be one of the most obvious examples to be found in the past century. He has the advantage of having been a naïf even before that approach became fashionable. Naïf, but at the same time wise in his art, there can be no doubt that Posada’s truculence was pure Mexican, and the essence of his times. That is to say, there is nothing more representative of that society and that moment in time than one of his famous skeletons. That is what I call true expression of one’s cultural identity, and it seems to me a profoundly Latin American symbol, transcendental rather than superficial. Later came more cultured movements. Mexican muralism was one of them, in spite of its ups and downs. Not because it was headed by a Jupiter (in this case, José Vasconcelos), but rather because of the efforts to convince, to adapt, and to create that were made by men like [Diego] Rivera, [José Clemente] Orozco, and also perhaps, in his own way, by [David Alfaro] Siqueiros himself in his most inventive moments (his use of exaggerated perspectives and foreshortening, paint sprayers, and new materials).

...

The examples I have mentioned are “weighty ones” because they are so obvious and indisputable. No less persuasive in the long run, however, are those provided by the isolated efforts of Tarsila do Amaral in Brazil and [Joaquín] Torres-García, [Pedro] Figari, and [Emilio] Pettoruti in Uruguay and Argentina. They all “raised welts” in their own time: irritating, promoting, stimulating, opening up new roads, forming disciples. And don’t come to me with any of that stale gibberish about Tarsila, Torres-García, and Pettoruti having received their formative training in Europe (as by the way did Rivera); Orozco and Figari, on the other hand, only went there after becoming fully developed painters.

Personally, it makes no difference to me that Torres-García and Pettoruti had links with international movements like Cubism, Futurism, and Constructivism. The truth is that they lived them from within and as protagonists. Why should that be cause today for suspecting artists who, on returning to their

respective countries, were to have a lasting influence on the generations that followed them? . . . Where Europeans are concerned, we find no cause for reproaching what we reproach in ourselves, as though we were always obliged to give some special accounting. Why, and to whom? And what is even worse, it isn't outsiders who reproach us, but ourselves, in a pathetic show of cultural masochism. Forgive me, but to me the whole thing smells of reactionary nationalism, of historical revisionism whose goal is to discover whether we are sufficiently Latin American or not.

After a look at other outstanding examples like [Rufino] Tamayo, [Wifredo] Lam, or [Roberto] Matta, we come to things that happened only a short while ago: Neo-geometricism and Kinetic art are extreme stands that were quickly adopted by Argentine and Venezuelan artist when—is any reminder needed?—those trends gained scant popularity in Europe and even less in the United States. The South American artists we speak of assimilated what they found in museums, artistic currents, critiques, lectures, and persons—as all young people do everywhere and always—and made use of what they found in manufacturing their own product.

The same—or almost the same—thing happened a few years later with the “nueva figuración” [New Figuration] that undoubtedly originated with [Jean] Dubuffet, [Willem] de Kooning, and [Francis] Bacon, but equally undoubtedly only became part of a generalized “wave” in South America. And I am not referring only to the generation of Jacobo Borges in Venezuela, or that of [Rómulo] Macció, [Ernesto] Deira, and [Antonio] Seguí in Argentina. In the latter country, an older artist like Antonio Berni has created original works based on his long-standing “politicized” figuration that he combines for his own purposes with Pop Art. He uses colossal collages to achieve a niggardly humoristic effect.

It should be noted that when the Mexican muralists took on their task, it had been many years—at least since the times of [the French nineteenth-century artist Pierre] Puvis de Chavannes—since any painter of importance had used walls as a medium for developing his art, engaged or otherwise. Those northern Latin Americans revived the concept and techniques and gave them new and noble tones. The same thing was true of Kinetic art, and to an even greater extent: Cinetismo almost did not exist at all, except in the experiments of [Lázló] Moholy-Nagy, [Victor] Vasarely, and [Nicolas] Schöffer (all three of them Hungarians, incidentally, for those who are interested in cultural enigmas). In their desire

to carry the work of those pioneers to its ultimate consequences, [Julio] Le Parc, [Jesús Rafael] Soto, [Carlos] Cruz-Diez, [Gregorio] Vardanega, and Marta Boto (to name only a few) were to join other Latin Americans in Paris, Caracas or Buenos Aires in inventing something totally new that was later copied by the rest of the world. I once heard—from a distinguished colleague—the absurd theory that all of this occurred as a result of the workings of the North American mechanisms of art. This crassly mistaken idea could only have resulted from a *lack of familiarity* with the characteristics of art in both the northern and the southern portions of our American continent. The type of expression I refer to never gained any real acceptance in the United States: a few years ago some artists there were pleased to experiment with the vogue of Op Art, but they soon returned to their private obsessions. Cinetismo is not a copy of anyone's work, because it is a pure invention. And that invention—except for a few French examples by artists who were “carried away” by the current of adventure—may be said for the most part to be the work of Latin American artists, who are responsible for a truly overwhelming majority of the works involved.

Soon, Africans will be called upon to demonstrate their *African-ness*, and those blacks who speak French, English, Portuguese, or Arabic will be faced with the same problem that we have been faced with for the last century and a half: how to reply to what is intrinsically a trick question.

With sympathy and understanding, Umberto Eco has said of us that what is most characteristic of our culture is a kind of dependence on other cultures that makes us continually doubtful of producing anything original while despising ourselves for using the products of foreign cultures.¹ And this, he adds, is responsible for the fact that we Latin Americans never realize how many original contributions we are making and are capable of making in many areas. Finally, Eco declared: “The essential nature of provincialism, therefore, does not lie in its maintaining a dependent relationship with other cultures, but in its invariable development of a neurotic awareness of that dependence.”² In quoting Eco's words at the Austin Symposium (*Contemporary Latin American Art*, University of Texas, October 1975) I aroused the wrath of certain of the participants in that meeting. I am still asking myself why, since the words I quoted expressed the positive stand taken by a European intellectual whose probity is beyond suspicion. In other words, if I repeat that statement here it is not with the intention wounding anyone's feelings, but because I intend to take it seriously and use it as a basis for

developing what I propose as a plan of action. It is an important opinion, for it shows us how our image is reflected in a mirror that is not our own, unstained by any misunderstood nationalism.

...

To me, that is what should be happening in art. Instead of weeping crocodile tears over our hopeless dependence on others and drawing a certain pleasure from the masochism with which we accept our incapability of acting, I think that our first and foremost duty is now, once and for all, to affirm our own personality and take a stand.

The artist—who after all is free to search either within himself or without for inspiration—will produce his works as he sees fit. It makes no difference whether they are figurative, neo-figurative, abstract, kinetic, surrealist, or even conceptual or ecological, or whether they are intended to modify the earth or one's body through the effects of certain techniques involving public video-taped performances. What is essential is that any such manifestation must reveal the imagination and indispensable creativity that enable the artist to produce a specific work that demonstrates some heretofore-unknown aspect of his original insight of the world.

I dislike mentioning names [because] I might forget one, and that always brings problems. I will not mention Mexicans—the reader can make up his own list—but there can be no doubt that [Armando] Morales, in Nicaragua; Soto, Cruz-Diez, and [Alejandro] Otero, in Venezuela; and [Edgar] Negret and [Fernando] Botero, in Colombia, are all well-known figures today, just as Tamayo, Matta, and Lam were in the preceding generation. The renown each has won is well deserved, and corresponds—more or less—to that won by the best of the men of letters who are their contemporaries. The time has come, then, to write about them—the visual artists—without falling back on the native touches, folklore, or local color that so often totally absorb North Americans and Europeans. To us, these artists are not exotic: they are our compatriots, friends or not, but always members of the same spiritual “blood group.”

Always supposing, for sure, that the museums and galleries recognize that all of us—both artists and critics—are acting in good faith, and begin organizing the kind of individual and collective expositions that I have never ceased to demand.

. . . Let us begin to produce those works, to be ourselves, once and for all. And let us have no more of such complaints as “we just don’t exist,” “they pay no attention to us,” that sound as if they came from crybabies, beaten before they begin.

No, we are no better than anyone else. But neither are we worse. And it may be that we who are the last called—or perhaps the next-to-the-last, since there are always the Africans—will be the first in the heavens of present-day or future art. I have great faith not only in the talent, but also in the enthusiasm, fertility, and obstinacy of our best artist and their indispensable interpreters, the critics.

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See Damián Bayón, *Aventura plástica de Hispanoamérica*, (Mexico City, 1974), 279.

2

Bayón, (1974), 279.

IV.2.8 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1061762

COMMENTS ON THE ARTICLE BY DAMIÁN BAYÓN

Jorge Romero Brest, 1976

. . .

UNLESS WE REFUSE TO GO BEYOND SURFACE APPEARANCES, we must make that effort; it will show us how great a lack of inner freedom there is beneath the apparent freedom of action we see on the surface. Likewise, if Latin American artists, like other groups, are now resorting to demonstrating their resistance to political regimes, it is precisely because of the restraints those regimes impose on inner freedom. Thus, Umberto Eco may be seen to have made a banal observation, since one must be familiar with the causes of dependence and the reasons for the scornful attitude towards “using foreign products” in order to deal with the political question that is referred to only indirectly.

No Latin American artist or any artist anywhere, at any time, can do his work “just as he himself decides to do it,” not only because such an absolutely personal decision is unthinkable (freedom does not mean doing just what one pleases) but also because he is responding, whether badly or well, in that work to a concept of the absolute that society develops in each succeeding age. Unless it is decided that it is the implicit mandate of that society, legitimate so long as it places no unacceptable curbs on the use of one’s imagination, that is to be followed.

Bayón [SEE DOCUMENT IV.2.7] recognizes this principle in his text, when he demands that the artist “must reveal the imagination and indispensable creativity that enable the artist to produce a specific work that demonstrates some heretofore-unknown aspect of his original insight of the world.” Except that it has never been just “some aspect” that has had to do with that concept; furthermore, the concept itself—as [Wilhelm] Dilthey would have said—is not an insight of the world, but of the absolute, as is shown by the use of the word “original,” since accepting the origin implies overcoming all that is merely relative, including the world.

...

There lies the fundamental question, which I have already set forth in my *Política artístico-visual en Latinoamérica* [Artistic and Visual Politics in Latin America] (Buenos Aires: Editorial Crisis, 1974), and which there is no room to include, even in summarized form, in this article. I can only list the basic points on which I differ with Bayón’s text in answer to the four questions I have been sent.

1. A distinction should be made between the aesthetic, which has to do with the way in which men in general make use of their creative imagination, and the artistic, which is the particular way in which some men express the former in specific works. And yet another distinction must be made between the work of art itself and the art of which it forms part, for the work of art is a unique and not-to-be-repeated situation that is produced like a spark between the creator and the viewer. Therefore, to ask about Latin American aesthetics is to ask about a *whole complex* of

intransitive or transitive attitudes that are contagious to everyone in the area, and not about the deliberately and objectively transitive forms that are created by the artists. This is a mistake that can lead to serious results, since people frequently attempt to characterize the aesthetic nature of a period by analyzing works of art, as if it were something that flowered from them, when it really lies at their very roots, and the works should be characterized by analyzing the aesthetic factors that jointly account for their existence.

2. In speaking of aesthetics, I prefer to use the neuter article ["lo" in Spanish]. The determinant is all very well if we are speaking of the philosophical discipline itself, but not if we are dealing with the ways in which men reveal those attitudes in all their day-to-day acts. Artists interpret such manifestations as a unit that proceeds not from the forms but from the metaphysical attitude men adopt in common, which is the basis of the strange correlations that enter into their symbols and, from the formal point of view, their styles. Here we come to the crux of the problem: the lack of unity in Latin America—which is not so much the artists' fault as it is that of the tremendous cultural diversity, and is owed less to the number of races inhabiting those countries and to class differences than it is to the metaphysical poverty of the most developed sectors of the population. How can one speak of *the aesthetic* in similar terms when some countries have large native or black populations and others have populations that are preponderantly mestizo and white? How can one do so even for a single country, when that country has the same mixture of human elements? Above all, how does one coordinate those who look backward towards the past and those whose view is fixed firmly on the present? That is why I maintained, in the above-mentioned work, that in order to obtain a Latin American art we must act on what is aesthetic to perfect and unify our ways of life.

3. It is understandable that I am asked to provide more precise information on the body of theory underlying the thesis I have briefly outlined here. Well, it doesn't exist, and it will not exist until there has been a thorough investigation of aesthetic habits: gestures, body movements, ways

of dressing and adorning oneself, slang and voice inflections, etcetera; ideas, intuitions, feelings, and mandates, in relation to environmental characteristics determined by race, the dogma and cult of religion, the political system moral conduct, etcetera; everything that has to do with the imaginary, and the absolute as an intentional horizon—God or the concepts that have been replacing Him since the beginning of the Middle Ages (the universe, the individual, society, energy, and so forth) as transplanted to Latin America, though in less and less absolute form. I have undertaken this task on my own since, with the exception of [Georg] Lukács (and he only in part), no one seems to have thought or to think as I do. I have been busy for several years on a book to be titled *Tránsitos de la conciencia artística* [Transitory Aspects of the Artistic Conscience] that will present my ideas on this subject.

4. Obviously, I cannot say in what precise moment Latin American art began. But as I understand it, the question refers not to the remote or even to the fairly recent past, but to the moment in which we began to have an original art of our own. My position is as follows: If manifestations of popular art are original today in some countries, it is due to the powerful sense of the aesthetic retained by the Indians and mestizos or the blacks, groups known for their racial unity and socio-cultural organization. And if other present-day expressions in the form of songs, dances, cinema, TV, videotapes, and posters are beginning to show originality, it is because of the emerging socio-cultural unity of youth. Works of cultured art, on the other hand, show no originality. Is this because of the dependence and inferiority complex alluded to by Eco?

That is part of it, although from whom were we Latin Americans to learn, if not from the Europeans and U.S. artists? But is more largely due to the lack of aesthetic unity, which is disorienting to creative artists.

That stage in art has run its course and, in spite of what recalcitrant may think, may be considered over. We are now about to enter a new and far more difficult stage, in which there is full awareness of the aesthetic factor and of artists' capacity to create the kind of art that it demands—a stage, in other words, in which we will truly understand what Latin America is. Because this task will

not be limited to the artists alone, but must be undertaken by everyone, to the measure in which the economic and sociopolitical order permits them to achieve an identity by developing powers that have been numbed, not by the capitalist system, but by the post-industrial society. All this shows how difficult it is to say that Latin American artists have any real freedom of action. Can one be free who does no more than follow political or cultural watchwords?

I proposed to demonstrate this crucial situation in Latin America in the course of a series of ten lectures on easel painting that I gave at the Museo de Arte Moderno in Mexico City in 1974. My intention was to convince my hearers indirectly that the easel painting, like the statue and the limited-edition print, are anachronistic and ineffective whenever they fail to strengthen our sense of the *aesthetic*, and in such cases actually impoverish creative activity. . . .

IV.2.9 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1061782

WHY A LATIN AMERICAN ART?

Rita Eder, 1979

In her essay “Why a Latin American Art?,” Mexican art historian Rita Eder (born 1943) offers her view on the question at the core of this section, and, in particular, she examines one of its pivotal aspects: the establishment of theoretical frameworks and critical approaches for interpreting art made in the Americas. From Eder’s perspective, the persistence of a comparative methodology that diminishes Latin American art by considering it vis-à-vis unattainable European or North American standards, parameters, or models is not productive. Such a comparative *anti*-methodology overlooks the new sociology of Latin American art. [FOR OTHER SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXTS, SEE DOCUMENTS IV.2.3, IV.2.4, AND V.2.6]. Eder proposes that theory must be developed to address the complexities suggested by interdisciplinary collectives such as Tucumán Arde (in Argentina) or the T.I.P., Taller de Investigación Plástica (Workshop for Visual Arts Research), which put into practice the unrealized utopian ideals of the Mexican muralists. The text was originally published in English [Rita Eder, “Why a Latin American Art?,” *Southern California Art Magazine* (Los Angeles), no. 25 (December 1979): 62–65].

THE CONCEPT OF A LATIN AMERICAN CULTURE IS—by no means of recent origin. Since the beginning of this century thinkers such as the Uruguayan José Enrique Rodó (*Ariel*, 1900) and a little later the Mexican José Vasconcelos (*The Cosmic Race*, 1925), [SEE DOCUMENTS II.2.1 AND IV.1.2] to name only two examples, have been developing a school of thought in connection with the cultural generalities unifying Spanish and Portuguese America. [Painters] José Clemente Orozco and Joaquín Torres-García, among others, made it their particular business to transplant this question into the field of the visual arts.

The most recent discussions on this theme were not invented yesterday; nor were they gestated inside a North American university (Austin, Texas), which held a symposium on Latin American art in 1975. Since then there have been some ten meetings from Mexico City to Buenos Aires, by way of Caracas and São Paulo. No matter how possible it may be to criticize these events (given that in some cases the organizer take advantage and use them as displays of power), they have nevertheless fulfilled the function of posing questions and provoking new responses. This renewed introspection has focused discussion on the need to formulate adequate tools to permit a more complete analysis of this thing we call “Latin American art.”

Skeptics affirm that the idea “Latin American art” is an abstraction since they think (simplistically) that it has scarcely been possible to verify the constants of artistic creation in twenty-one countries.

Apart from the fact that one can indeed speak of generalizing tendencies in Latin America, such as the proneness to integrate the arts or the presence of a mythic substratum in painting, etcetera, I think that such a focus (although desirable, of course) is not the fundamental pillar on which this Latin Americanism in art can legitimately rest. It is as useful to point out similarities, as it is to emphasize differences. The essential thing is to have created *one's own frame of reference*, not only for art theorists, but also for the artists themselves. For a long time now, the influence of Paris and New York has been of use in understanding, placing, scorning or applauding our countries' artistic production. Although this situation of course persists (one has only to look at the enormous list of painters from Latin America who live in these two great capitals), one can no longer ignore the fact that Latin Americans are successfully performing closer to artistic production.

The first problem that has become apparent in the study of art in Latin America is the constant reference to and comparison with European styles. The result of this (when the characteristics of the compared objects do not identically correspond) is that the Latin American product is labeled lesser, provincial, pseudo, etcetera. In twentieth-century painting, for example, the ongoing comparative fluctuation continues: with cubism, surrealism, informalism, constructivism, and many more. Just occasionally one glimpses the possibility that a relatively independent movement like [Mexican] muralism or Argentine-Venezuelan kinetic art might be classified as uniquely Latin American. This attitude arises out of considering originality (along with the possibility of surpassing the European model or not) as the only consideration. This way of looking at art originates in a methodology—or perhaps one should say anti-methodology—whose point of departure is the theory of styles, and which tends to overlook the social history that provokes its particular adaptation.

It can be said that there has been a theoretic renewal since the time when changes took place in art itself. Such changes were marked by the transference of emphasis away from the object towards the productive processes, and its insertion into society (the spaces which it occupies and the form in which it affects the public) these repercussions are peculiar strategies by Latin American artists, and an increased interdisciplinary perspective on the part of students of art. Substituting new methods of participation for the work of art itself has increased art's public in an unexpected way. Occupying open spaces and working inside unionized organizations, for example, is only one of the different functions of art, and throws into relief its democratic relationship with sectors that are unlike the usual spectators of the arts. It may be true that the events of 1968 in France stimulated this method of making art. Nevertheless, groups of Latin American artists who refuse simply to make objects have proliferated, developing ideas about the relationship between a community of artists, or producers of art, on the one hand, and society on the other. On this point, one could cite a number of examples ranging from the Argentine experience *Tucumán arde* [Tucumán is burning],¹ of a political nature, to the activities of the T.I.P., Taller de Investigación Plástica [The Visual Arts' Research Workshop].²

The T.I.P., anchored in the prestigious tradition of muralism, aspires to put into practice what Orozco, [Diego] Rivera and [David Alfaro] Siqueiros only

expounded as theory: Public Art (that is, art not only for everyone but also by everyone), where the spectator does not remain as the eternal watcher or “voyeur,” but rather joins with the artist to produce images about his immediate problems. In this respect, there is a bold emphasis, given the social problems of Latin America, on considering art as a proper instrument for criticism and change. There are numerous examples of artists who are interested in a kind of art that modifies the immediate conduct of individuals and institutions. This, accompanied by a major development in the sociology of art, will result in a new theory of artistic production that will respond to Latin America’s specific process.

1

In August–November 1968, a collective comprising Argentinean artists, theoreticians, and political activists gathered to tackle a specific social problem or, rather, the official denial of the severely depressed economic conditions of the sugar mill workers living in Tucumán, in northern Argentina. In an effort to bring attention to the devastating closing of the mills, the collective employed various strategies—many of them demonstrating an appreciation for the merging of art and the mass media—including, on-site research, statistics, photo documentation, film, posters, interviews, and press conferences. The group ultimately held an exhibition, *Tucumán Ardé*, in Rosario and Buenos Aires, cities under unionized support of the CGT (the General Labor Confederation of Argentina).—Ed.

2

In 1976, José Luis González Soto organized the Taller de Investigación Plástica (T.I.P.) in order to foster new methods and art practices to address and express the collective goals of the community. The T.I.P. focuses on both interior and exterior art practices, with an emphasis on the visual arts’ integration with the architectural and urban environment. As time went by, several of the group’s performances received attention from art critics such as Ida Rodríguez Prampolini, Raquel Tibol, Néstor García-Canciani, Shifra M. Goldman, Bruce Campbell, as well as the author of this paper.—Ed.

IV.3

OUR JANUS-FACED DILEMMA: IDENTITY OR MODERNITY?

IV.3.1 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1061801

THE PROBLEM OF THE “EXISTENCE” OF THE LATIN AMERICAN ARTIST

Marta Traba, 1956

In this early essay, Marta Traba ponders how Latin American artists can produce art that is “continental” in character at a moment when art world centers are eschewing realism. She observes that European artists enjoy a free exploration of aesthetic issues without the distractions of context, and she also considers how the formal investigations of artists such as Wifredo Lam, Rufino Tamayo, or Joaquín Torres-García have created models for new vocabularies of Latin American-inflected form. As in her previous texts from the mid-1950s—which are also sampled in this chapter [SEE DOCUMENTS IV.2.1 AND IV.2.2]—Traba is torn between advocating international modernism for the Americas and showing disdain for its homogeneity. “El problema de la ‘existencia’ del artista latinoamericano” was originally published in Bogotá’s *Revista Plástica* [no. 66 (1956): 25], and it also appeared in the anthology *Marta Traba* [Emma Araújo de Vallejo, ed., (Bogotá: Planeta Colombiana Editorial S.A., 1984), 203–204], the source for the present translation.

CONTEMPORARY EUROPEAN ARTISTS are resolving the problem of a new aesthetic and entering into combat on schedule on the full field of knowledge. Meanwhile, the Latin American battle is deployed on ground that is much less pure, full of snares and irregularities, as complicated as the geography of the continent itself. The Latin American artist is a man who does not work with the spiritual tranquility of the European, since fairly or not, he finds himself committed on many

fronts. To begin with, there is that elusive yet urgent idea of “Latin Americanism”; while no one has yet to give a convincing definition of it, the concept is no less categorical or fearsome for being so vague. This idea turns the tutelary shadows of the young Europeans into true specters. If anyone discovers in one of our artists a supposed obedience to any Europeanizing style, this calls into question his *americanista* fervor, and he starts to be seen as a traitor. It is true that when young artists return from their European studies, they are given a margin of tolerance on the part of the critics. Their [European] infection is accepted temporarily because the artists have just stepped off the boat, but they are immediately given the inevitable warning: it is expected that once they are in contact with the Native environment, peoples and nature, they will be delivering the “Latin American message”—with proper enthusiasm, to boot. This is a message to which they are bound by their birthplace. Painting and sculpture have been taken prisoner, that is, they are bogged down, with no way out. In some respects, they would seem to be destined for a mission filled with high analytical intent. But we also know that any preconceived purpose is an attack on the freedom of art and dries up the very roots of any aesthetic. In two countries, first in Argentina and now in Colombia, I have been a meticulous witness to the despair of the artists who see, understand, assimilate, and digest everything vernacular and who are trying to emerge from this dangerous process clean, with the universal dignity of art intact.

. . . But given the self-confidence with which a new modern aesthetic is being formulated in Europe, we must not fall into this trap. In a period of creation of forms and invention of an original expressive language, those renderings of folklore and history can only be regarded as archaeological vestiges. These relics hail from an age that disappeared in the nineteenth century, an age abolished by the revolutionary work of modern art. So then, if “Latin Americanism” does not reside in the realistic transcription or interpretation of Latin American scenes, where—within the range of contemporary aesthetics—can we place it? The first hurdle is to figure out whether the Latin American artist must resolve his visual art problems with an unchangeable commitment, or perhaps even an obligation to, his country. Or, on the contrary, must he seek his expression and style (that is, the repetition of his own expressive premises) with the disregard for anything other than the painting or sculpture itself that characterizes European art? The *a priori* of the first position involves a tremendous unfairness: it seems impossible

for the artist—dubbed the “anti-servile genius” by [André] Malraux—to develop his language if he is subjected, in advance, to a geographic obligation and civic duty apart from his free artistic nature. In fact, we acknowledge the artist’s unbowed, inviolable condition when he establishes the relationships between forms and undertakes the creation of his own artistic rules without any regard for the outside world; we continue to acknowledge it when, in the natural process of this work, our artist avails himself of the Latin American motifs that surround him and incorporates them into his aesthetic.

Thus, the new language that every modern artist must create cannot be artificially submitted as a “Latin American” duty; on the contrary, it must arise freely. Later, if the artist feels the necessity, the local vocabulary can be adopted. In case this seems like a mere game of words, it is not: there is a clear difference between being bent by forms or being the one to bend them. And this is the option recognized by the authentic artist. Hence the European recognition of Wifredo Lam, the Cuban artist who was a protégé of Picasso. Without any anecdotal intention, he gave the French an image of the tropics: feathered, burning, disproportionate and fantastic. A French writer says about [Rufino] Tamayo: “Latin America is its own universe whose countless realities confront one another and are superimposed one on the other and are sometimes even in opposition.” To a European, the discovery of Latin America does not take place unless the artist goes beyond normal vision and includes the quirky and the magical among his expressive forms. This excessively measured handling of things, which sometimes approaches surrealism (although it is impossible to categorize it that way), was rendered by Lam in an extraordinary way. The soul of the “superbe Afrique” [impressive Africa] invoked by André Breton, paraphrasing [Charles] Baudelaire, to point out the resurrection of the primitive spirit in the work of Lam, is the equivalent of the Latin American spirit inasmuch as both restore the innocence of the primitive vision. Nevertheless, Breton was wrong when he talked about innocence.

Lam found his own place in relationship to Picasso, to surrealism, to the formidable creative adventure of modern art. Those feathered palms that rise mythically from memory include all the refinements of this process. Tamayo confesses that in spite of all his protests of universality, he is intimately tied to the visual arts tradition of his country. So he is committed both to this “half freedom” and to reaching the “essence of things.” Lam, who has no tradition to respect, can

throw himself vehemently into that volcanic invention of Latin America, which is why his work stands out so powerfully. The Mexican muralists, [Diego] Rivera, [David Alfaro] Siqueiros and [José Clemente] Orozco, bringing back the political element to *costumbrismo*, complicated the insecure idea of the existence of Latin American art even more. Rivera left a broad legacy spread around all Latin America, which—once it had lost its colossal inspiration and its capacity to move enormous masses—showed the mortal threat posed by linking art to social demands. And it is not yet known whether, when the events referred to have lost their burning reality, those Mexican frescos will be valued like those of a Masaccio. In other words, as art that lives beyond the episodes from the life of Saint Peter. Or, alternatively, will they be judged as stories of the revolution that made use of the art to express themselves?

The example of U.S. art sheds no more light on our problem than that of Mexico. From 1900 to 1940, Europe considered itself done with reality and was putting into practice the slogan of [Paul] Gauguin, “the right to dare everything.” Meanwhile, in the United States, a veritable legion of artists was conscientiously reproducing—with a model right in front of their eyes—railroads, ships, streets, workers resting and workers hard at work, rural and urban landscapes, circuses, skyscrapers, nowadays inherited and “frozen” by the ultimate U.S. realist, Ben Shahn. Right now, a no less conscientious legion of abstract painters seems destined to replace that descriptive apologia of a new country with visible signs. If “Latin Americanism” were an a priori category that the artist had to install in his head before undertaking the intelligent specification of a style, what road would he choose? Would it be *costumbrismo*, socialism, the overt narratives, [the assertion of] the demands of the wretched populations, history? And how would we reconcile with these orientations the presence of a [Joaquín] Torres-García in Uruguay, with his hieroglyphic paintings, recognized in December in Paris as one of the “great” Latin Americans? And how about Pettoruti in Argentina, who has made the pampa sun fill the cold triangles of a true, tyrannical cubism? [Oswaldo] Guayasamín in Ecuador, a protégé of Gauguin at times and Picasso always, has been capable of giving his *Camino del Llanto* [Trail of Tears] a country that is indisputable, human, and geographic, designed to move and convince the viewer at the same time.

But we already know that polemic art is a mirage of art, and if Guayasamín often escapes from this risk unscathed, it is because of his visual art

resources and not his explanatory and combative intent. Until now, Latin America wanted to show its identity clearly, like a guest who arrives late to the party and must present all kinds of excuses in order to be admitted and recognized. However, there is no *raison d'être* for this complex anymore, because we have been participating in the general conversation for some time now, and no one is particularly bothered by our presence. In fact, because we come from a continent where the marvelous reigns, we are expected to express original ideas; but it is not a new form that is sought, rather a distinct content shown through the universal language of modern art. In this labyrinth of difficulties, prejudices, false impositions, and mistaken understandings, Lam seems to have the surest thread that leads to the best solution. But if Latin American art could at some point reach a unity within the diversity, such as we see in oriental art, that future could not be achieved without effort, desperation, and errors. And if its destiny is rather to become a magical branch of European art, that road is rocky as well. In both cases, forcing on our artists a continental consciousness that can do nothing but overwhelm and disorient them will certainly lead to a bad outcome. This will only turn them away from their will to create: the only active consciousness they must have. “Man lives and moves in the midst of what he sees”—writes [Paul] Valéry—“but he only sees what he dreams.” It is indisputable that in our artistic times, reality has fallen into marked disrepute, but what our era does highlight is the importance of man. And Latin American artists cannot escape this truth that encompasses all the art of their time.

IV.3.2 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 838652

IDENTITY OR MODERNITY?

Jorge Alberto Manrique, 1974

Here we include two excerpts from “¿Identidad o modernidad?”, an essay by the Mexican art critic Jorge Alberto Manrique (born 1936) that inspired the subtitle of this section. The first part—“De uno y otro lado del Atlántico”—probes what he refers to as the Janus-faced dilemma of Latin American intellectuals during the seminal decade from 1920 to 1930 when their

pursuits were simultaneously introspective and open to European modernity. As a result of this inherently contradictory double approach, the visual arts, Manrique explains, oscillated between the two poles of the so-called Latin American identity: the Creole, Europe-focused nations and the mestizo nations. “El segundo gran viraje del siglo,” part four of his essay, explores the second great artistic turning point for the Americas of the 1940s, when artists and intellectuals shunned an interest in what is national in favor of more universal concerns. Decades later, the pursuit of art for art’s sake became the impetus for the work of those whose nationality was merely incidental to their art (Jésus Rafael Soto, Alejandro Otero, and Julio Le Parc, among others). Manrique first published the essay in *América Latina en sus artes*, an anthology edited by Damián Bayón as part of a series dedicated to Latin American culture published under the aegis of Siglo XXI (Buenos Aires, Madrid, and Mexico City) and UNESCO (Paris) [Jorge Alberto Manrique, “¿Identidad o modernidad?,” in Damián Bayón, ed., *América Latina en sus artes*, (Mexico City: Siglo XXI Editores, 1974), 19–33] [SEE DOCUMENT IV.3.7 FOR ANOTHER ESSAY FROM THE ANTHOLOGY].

1. ON ONE SIDE OF THE ATLANTIC AND THE OTHER

The great Latin American art movements of the 1920s—such as the Mexican movement (“Manifiesto del Sindicato de Artistas Revolucionarios” [Manifesto of the Revolutionary Artists Union], 1922), the group that arose from the Semana de Arte Moderna de São Paulo [The Week of Modern Art in Sao Paulo] (1922) and from [Gilberto] Freyre’s “Manifiesto Regionalista” [Regionalist Manifesto] (1926), the Martín Fierro movement that was involved with the *Martín Fierro* magazine published in Buenos Aires (as from 1924), the Grupo Montparnasse [Montparnasse Group] in Santiago, Chile (founded in 1928), or the one led by Víctor Manuel in Cuba as from 1924—functioned as a giant hinge that both united the history of modern Latin American art and divided it into two separate parts. United and divided. On one side was the nineteenth century that consisted essentially of reflections from other places, of imported artistic ideas, of works and schools, a period which in fact dragged on through the first two decades of our century. On the other side of the hinge was the twentieth century, in which Latin America, finally, addressed “its own” statement to the world in terms of the visual arts.

In fact, as will be explained later, the change could already be seen on the horizon toward the end of the previous century in the work of intellectuals

such as the Cuban [José] Martí, the Mexican [Ignacio Manuel] Altamirano, or the Uruguayan [José Enrique] Rodó, or in the works—some of excellent quality—produced by artists like the Brazilian [Eliseu] Visconti, the Uruguayan Juan Manuel Blanes or, closer to the dawn of the new era, the Mexican Saturnino Herrán. Prior to the second decade of this century, however, the new attitudes had not yet fully developed or been defined; it would be up to the contemporary movements of that period to do so.

The opinions expressed at that time by artists—whether organized on a more formal basis, as in the case of the Mexican union, or merely affiliated by manifestos that did not constitute an association in the strictest sense of the word—actually suggest a dual stance that is, essentially, a contradiction in terms. The conflict here is perhaps an expression of an ambiguous attitude rooted in what we might call the Iberian-American spirit. The movements that attracted artists to one group or another all had, in varying proportions, a single common denominator, which was an awakening to modernity. There was among them a common desire to open their eyes to contemporary revolutionary developments in Europe, and to reach out to the infinite variety of forms that were being explored there in the first two decades of the century. There was also a desire to use art to address an increasing awareness of Latin American social realities as a way of defining and identifying ourselves as being different from Europe.

I think that the movements that emerged in that ten-year period of Latin American cultural history, as well as their attitudes to art—though perhaps less remarkable than those in other countries, were no less revealing—can only be understood in terms of two-headed Janus, looking at both sides of the Atlantic, since at that time the United States was not yet a viable option. Each of them different, arising out of very different circumstances and supported by distinct and highly individual traditions with different levels of violence, all our movements in those days, one way or another, were looking within and without, all at the same time.

To ask oneself why all those movements engaged in such contradictory contemplation, and why they did so in varying degrees, leads one to wonder about the fundamental Latin American reality. The question in this context is not whether there is already a “Latin American self” but rather whether there is even a specifically Latin American way of being; whether we are in fact one single unit or a fictitious or imaginary diversity that is presented as one single entity.

Let us ignore for a moment the fact that our stubborn insistence on the unity of Latin America for over a century and a half—even when contradicted by objective facts concerning that reality—constitutes a substantial event in the cultural history of our countries that implies a state of unity in its own right. Let us also ignore the always problematical and never satisfactory attempts to find commonalities in language, race, and political or social history. There are, however, deeper attitudes that seem to indicate a common denominator in our Latin American consciousness, which arise in response to the fundamental question: *Who are we?* And since we do not consider ourselves to be European, but are also unable to see ourselves as being separate from Europe, the answers to that basic question always alternate between the two extremes of feeling both European and not European.¹ This question has clearly been answered in a wide variety of ways by different people from different places at different times; the variety of responses has in fact helped to define the general outline of our evolution as a conglomerate of thinking men. It would seem that all Latin American countries have pondered the same fundamental question, attempting to define ourselves in terms of “the other” (basically vis-à-vis Europe, at least in the years prior to the Second World War). And the answers have been similar: we have alternated between defining ourselves as being the same—in a certain marginal sense acknowledging “deficiencies” rather than “differences”—and defining ourselves as being different from European culture.

But, though a fluctuation of contradictory answers has been the norm, the actual nature of the various responses, and their greater or lesser radical quality, has exposed an extremely varied range of options that have contributed to our separate, individual cultural histories. Within that range of responses, the most extreme at either end of the spectrum can be understood in terms of the different historical and social realities of our countries. The responses that expressed the strongest sense of identification with Europe, therefore, came from countries that we might describe as “Criollo,” such as Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile. The strongest feelings of difference, on the other hand, were expressed by countries that take pride in seeing themselves as “*Mestizos*,” such as Mexico, Peru, and Bolivia.

Between the two extremes of, on the one hand, exulting in feeling different and being our own lord and master of something that is clearly defined and distinguishable from “mother countries” or “refined cultures” and, on the

other, being horrified at feeling like second-class Europeans who need to catch up with and be equal to Europe, Latin America has forged the history of its culture. The visual arts have expressed that dual stance to a greater or lesser degree, and we could almost claim that there is a history of Latin American visual arts—rather than just a history of European art in the Americas—to the extent that the question *Who am I?* has been expressed in the works that our artists have painted, sculpted, modeled, or built, regardless of the fact that the responses reflected one or the other point of view, since both are Latin American responses (and, furthermore, since both responses together constitute our American reality.) Therefore, it is not the existence of a “*mestizo*” art that should be considered as our common, defining statement; it should rather be the question concerning the nature of that *mestizo* being and the responses to that question, both positive and negative.

The study of the specific forms that have been expressed in that history of Latin American art has made a substantial and frankly indispensable contribution in terms of detecting and defining the issue of Latin American identity. Where the mind finds insufficient concepts to express verbally, the visual arts have—at times—been able to communicate more fully our most intimate ontological concerns. If art is always a measure of a people’s attitudes to the world and to themselves, Latin American art—whether we now consider it to have been better or worse in this or that period or place—has provided the measure of our reactions to “otherness”; it has been the measure of our own self-definition as a people who face the world with determination.

This definition, in fact, and the responses to it that alternate on the arc of a pendulum, do not imply a “Latin American essence” but rather, at most, reveal the general direction of the gradual unfolding of a process. Latin America should not be understood as something *ab initio* imbued with permanently defined characteristics, but as something that has been creating itself (or “inventing itself,” in Edmundo O’Gorman’s apt expression) as it has advanced within that process.

When the great Latin American art movements of the 1920s were founded, by whatever means, the most profoundly introspective American question had long been the subject of conjecture among our people. These movements were, in fact, the first ones in our region with a clear conscience. That is, those who were involved in the movements would become the first Latin American artists to successfully base their work on a sufficiently defined poetics that was created as

the starting point for each group's common endeavor. At that point, as far as the groups were concerned, and as José Clemente Orozco put it, "the table was laid."²

In fact, the core issue for Latin American visual arts—that involved the definition of a Latin American person—had been sufficiently explored at that stage to be clearly distinguishable. It seemed as though art was, for the very first time, in the unprecedented position of being able to cancel out the issue permanently. The responses that alternated successively between exultation and horror (and that differed according to changing conditions influenced by time and place), expressed a fundamental ambiguity. Contradictions often arose quickly one after another, in many cases originating from the same person almost immediately. Everything suggested that synthesis might be at hand.

Hence the idea that we can only understand Latin American artistic attitudes of the 1920s by imitating Janus, who looked in both directions at the same time in an attempt to solve the old problem. On one hand, more explicitly or more tacitly—sometimes expressing it verbally, sometimes only through the forms they chose to use—those artists acknowledged their European selves and were determined to keep abreast of the latest work being produced by artists in the Old World. Painters and sculptors at that time understood that if they were to identify with European trends they must be in the realm of the avant-garde. For perhaps the first time, instead of following what had already been absorbed and digested, they went in search of the most revolutionary attitudes, as in the case of Diego Rivera, [Joaquín] Torres-García, and [Emilio] Pettoruti, who were early devotees of the European avant-garde.

But on the other hand, by doing that, the artists were prepared to distance themselves to some extent and to expose their differences. The Uruguayan [Pedro] Figari was moved by the power and symbolism of color and the meaning of the human figure that he saw in post-Impressionism and Expressionism and then used those qualities to portray the Latin American reality of carnivals, *candombes* [Afro-Uruguayan dances], and festivities in typical scenes of our people and customs. Diego Rivera explored Cubism's approach to simultaneous rendition, its emphasis on the two dimensional picture, and the purity of geometrical form, but then painted landscapes brimming with color and a sense of tropical nature, or portraits of such depth that they defied any comparison with contemporary works by [Pablo] Picasso, [Georges] Braque, or [Juan] Gris.

In fact, the synthesis, the solution that was expected to solve the issue of Latin American identity in artistic terms, was actually based on using European “instruments”—which of course implied our identification with European culture since those instruments were considered valid for us—but they were used to show and express our Latin American reality, which in turn identified that reality as something substantially different, something that was unique to Latin America and that could only be expressed by Latin Americans. Rubén Navarra expressed it clearly when referring to Brazil and Mexico, and his opinion could certainly apply to other Latin American countries as well: “. . . Brazilian and Mexican painters grasped the unparalleled creativity of French painting—that is, its spirit of freedom—and allowed it to inspire them in their struggle against the conventional pictorial vision, seeking instead a more authentic portrayal of native realities.”³

. . .

2. DIFFERENTIATING NUANCES

. . .

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Latin Americans were increasingly concerned by the lack of any kind of national art or Latin American art. Thoughtful people called for an art that reflected our reality and our history and demanded an “essentially Latin American” school. The Mexican Ignacio Manuel Altamirano asked whether art should “embody new forms, if I may put it that way, and assume a national persona that belongs to us, or at least that belongs to Latin America?” Manuel de Olaguíbel encouraged painters to pursue that goal: “For historical paintings you have sublime heroes; for indoor painting you have interesting types; and for landscapes you have virgin nature.” The Cuban José Martí put it even more clearly: “Everything moves and is transformed, and the time for paintings of virgins has passed. A new society needs a new form of painting... ”⁴ That desire, however, was not easily satisfied, especially since the highly sought-after national or Latin American art was supposed to be expressed in universal terms; in other words, the old problem of contradiction once again reared its head. To be sure, one satisfactory solution was found in the landscape genre,

which followed the European schools that were in vogue in the latter half of the nineteenth century, though some artists—such as [Antonio] Salas in Quito or [Prilidiano] Pueyrredón in Argentina—were also discovering our own landscape. But landscape painting—perhaps because of its inanimate nature, no matter how hard the Mexican José María Velasco tried to inject a moral or historical subtext—was unable to satisfy everyone at the time. The movements that emerged between 1920 and 1930, however, finally managed to create art that expressed our national concerns in a universal language, particularly in Mexico and Brazil and, to one extent or another, in other countries as well. In their struggle against “the conventional pictorial vision,” they sought “a more authentic portrayal of native realities,”—which in fact was an expression of our own reality in a universally comprehensible language using the instruments provided by the French avant-garde.

But, all that notwithstanding, those art movements were not just a doorway to the future; they were also the fulfillment of a long-postponed Latin American dream. Those activities and accomplishments can be understood as the achievement of our old goals and can be considered, to some extent, as more of a link to the past, to the cultural tradition of a century of independence. That is why I am saying that the artists of that period had one eye on Europe and the other on Latin America (in their attempt to solve the old issue of Latin American identity); that is, one eye looked to the future, to the new possibilities ahead, while the other looked backwards, to the tradition that they would bring to a climax.

The importance of that ambiguity in terms of what was to follow in the history of Latin American art can be better understood if we note that the more the movements of that crucial decade represented the fulfillment of past dreams and ambitions, the more they would be linked to that tradition, and the more they would therefore compromise their future. In fact, what came later can be largely understood as a result of that critical situation. Wherever there had been the greatest demand for a national form of art expressed in universal terms and where art had most obviously filled that immense void and felt like a goal that had finally been achieved—as in the case of Mexico—the link to that past was established more strongly in the long term. We could even go so far as to say that the greater the accomplishments of those movements of the 1920s—as movements rather than in terms of the artists’ personal works—the more they mortgaged their long-term future.

I said earlier that the events of that period could be described as a great hinge that divided the history of Latin American art between our independence and the future. But, of the two parts of the hinge, the one that carried most weight was the one that was attached to the wall of nineteenth-century romantic longings.

4. THE CENTURY'S SECOND GREAT CHANGE OF DIRECTION

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Latin American art—which includes artists of the caliber of the Venezuelans [Luis Rafael] Soto and [Alejandro] Otero, the Argentine Julio Le Parc, and the Brazilian [Manabu] Mabe, all of whom in fact left their respective countries to go to school in Europe or the United States—seems to have permanently abandoned its search for its own form of expression and committed to the search itself. These were undoubtedly first rate, world class artists, who could have been from anywhere. There are other similarly first rate artists whose work, though eschewing the old nationalist tradition, nonetheless carries the unmistakable imprint of their native land, as is the case with the members of the older generation: [Rufino] Tamayo, Carlos Mérida, Wifredo Lam, Amelia Peláez, and Oswaldo Guayasamín, and younger artists such as the Peruvian [Fernando de] Szyszlo, the Chilean Marta Colvin, the Colombian Alejandro Obregón, and the Mexicans Pedro Coronel, Juan Soriano and, more recently, Francisco Toledo. But these days most artists just want to be artists. It does not seem to matter whether they are Argentines, Colombians, or Venezuelans; that appears to be a family matter that has nothing to do with art. And yet, who knows? Although after about 1945 the option to feel universal seemed to be the only valid one, it is still just an option that somehow still responds to the old conflict between identity and modernity. Latin America has undoubtedly chosen that latter path, but we can still ask ourselves: Is this just another stage in the pendulum swing that makes us alternate between closing and opening ourselves to the rest of the world?

1

Edmundo O'Gorman—*La invención de América. El universalismo de la cultura de Occidente* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1958)—has approached the ontological issue of Latin Americans in those terms [SEE DOCUMENT I.1.7].

2

José Clemente Orozco, *Autobiografía* (Mexico City: Era, 1971), 56. Orozco enthusiastically supported efforts to produce the kind of mural painting that Dr. Atl and his students had been working on since before the Revolution of 1910 (op. cit., 31–32; 35–38). Cf. also Justino Fernández, *Arte moderno y contemporáneo de México* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1952), 211–35.

3

Rubén Navarra, “Inicição à pintura brasileira contemporânea,” *Revista Acadêmica*, Rio de Janeiro, April 1944.

4

I. M. Altamirano, “La pintura heroica de México,” *El Artista* (Mexico City, 1874); Manuel Olaguíbel. “Nuestros artistas: pasado y porvenir,” Ibid.; José Martí, “Una visita a la exposición de Bellas Artes,” *Revista Universal*, X, no. 297 (December 29, 1875). [SEE DOCUMENT II.1.1]. Cf. Ida Rodríguez Prampolini, *La crítica de arte en México en el siglo XIX* (3 volumes) (Mexico City: UNAM, 1964).

IV.3.3 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 815432

THE INVENTION OF LATIN AMERICAN ART

Jorge Alberto Manrique, 1978

The essay “Invencción del arte latinoamericano” by Mexican art historian and critic Jorge Alberto Manrique (born 1936) examines the meaning of the term(s) “Latin America(n)” in the context of the visual arts. Echoing the work of Edmundo O’Gorman [SEE DOCUMENT I.1.7], Manrique’s main contention is that these parallel constructs were invented by Simón Bolívar [SEE DOCUMENT I.3.2] and others so that Latin American artists came to meet in their practice the expectations associated with these general ideas. According to Manrique, Latin America has unique aesthetic values whose sum *is not* necessarily tantamount to a “Latin American art.” Rather, what defines the art produced along this cultural axis or continental bloc is the need to define, to question, and, in certain cases, to rebuff any unifying construct altogether. Initially, Manrique presented this essay at Primer Encuentro Iberoamericano de Críticos de Arte y Artistas Plásticos organized by Caracas’s Museo de Bellas Artes on June 18–27, 1978 [SEE DOCUMENTS IV.4.10 AND IV.4.11, FOR OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SYMPOSIUM]. The translation of this document is based on the original typescript in the museum’s archives [Jorge Alberto Manrique, “Invencción del arte latinoamericano,” *Primer encuentro iberoamericano de críticos de arte y artistas plásticos*, (Caracas: Museo de Bellas Artes, 1978)]. The manuscript was published in *Catálogo General. Colección Pintura y Escultura Latinoamericana* [(Caracas: Museo de Bellas Artes, 1979), 15–17].

WHEN I SAY “INVENTION OF LATIN AMERICAN ART” I am not talking about the invention or creation of all the works of art produced in Latin America over the centuries. Neither am I referring to local styles or groups of artists or periods in Latin American art. That is, the history of art that has been and is still being produced, and has its own ambitions. My purpose in writing this essay is to propose the idea of “invention”¹ as a concept that can, to some extent, explain and justify a complex, challenging, and contradictory reality. I am talking about what we call Latin American art.

An inspection of Latin America’s rich artistic heritage clearly reveals its defining diversity: Latin American art is the pre-Columbian expression of Central America and the Andes region. That may sound like an absurd definition, since we classify it as pre-Columbian, pre-Hispanic, or pre-Cortés—that is, as having been produced in areas eventually settled by Spain. Latin American art is also the monastic art of sixteenth-century Mexico or Guatemala; the mannerist work of Mexico, Colombia, Quito, or Peru; the baroque style of the Andes uplands or the Anáhuac; the classical, academic, nationalist, and contemporary art produced in our countries. On another level Latin American art is intelligent, sophisticated, and urban, yet also includes traditional forms ranging from folklore to higher art. Local art also belongs under the umbrella of Latin American art—from the baroque to the nationalism of the twentieth century—as does our international art, whether neoclassical or academic, abstract or conceptual. Latin American art is restrained; it advocates temperance and scorns ornamental touches. It is also brimming with imagination and decoration and formal riches, past and present. Latin American art includes very distinct traditions from different parts of the continent; some countries have a rich pre-Hispanic heritage, a magnificent colonial tradition, and thriving folklore and traditional art—other countries are home to more recently-arrived migrant populations with correspondingly less history (though that reality too is included.)

All that past and present variety—and the infinite diversity among the artists themselves—create a mosaic so complex that no common denominator is immediately apparent.

We nonetheless speak of a Latin American art and when we do, what we essentially mean is art “produced by Latin American artists, whatever their aesthetic and regardless of where they live” (Saúl Yurkievich [SEE DOCUMENT IV.3.6]).

I do not believe that Latin American art can be conceptualized without an understanding of the essence of Latin America.

In very broad terms, we define Latin America as an area of the world where countries have similar histories—all of them experienced an Iberian conquest and colonization, gained their independence at approximately the same time, enjoyed a liberal period, and so on. These countries have endured many of the same conditions (a mestizo society, dependence, exploitation, neocolonialism, and a false economy, among others). They are similar in some ways, but also very different, each one a product of its own particular experience. [For example,] the races did not mingle in the same way in every country—there are obvious differences between Argentine society and Mexican society; the Brazilian economy is nothing like the Bolivian economy, and so on.

The fact is that results are different from one country to another, in spite of seemingly parallel histories and similar problems. Latin America, therefore, is a mosaic of different countries and geographies, each with different histories and social conditions. All this notwithstanding, we still talk about Latin America using this umbrella concept to convey something beyond a geographical identity or the fact that these countries are part of the Third World.

The fact is that this universal reference to Latin America makes undeniable sense. We define ourselves more in terms of what we are not than what we are; we identify ourselves in terms of the other, whether that be the Western world in the strict sense of the term, or the Asian or African worlds—we identify ourselves, in other words, according to our need to define ourselves. The desire to be something when we are actually something else is an “invention” that was initiated by [Simón] Bolívar, Fray Servando Teresa de Mier, [Melchor de] Talamantes, and [Francisco] Miranda, among many others. Perhaps it is fiction: it was then and maybe (in some ways) it still is. But if so, it is a fiction that has been so often repeated and so widely accepted that it has gained a certain aura of reality. We have invented the concept of Latin America and, in a rather odd way, have managed to make the reality look like the concept we are referring to.

What I have said here would seem to clarify matters in terms of art. Since Latin America exists in its own, recognizable right—though this existence may be a virtual reality, which I wish could transform into a tangible form—it then follows that the art produced by that Latin America must also exist.

I think, however, that we must look deeper. Because, though there seems to be no doubt that, for example, Mexico and Argentina exist, there is doubt regarding the existence of a Mexican art and an Argentine art. Not about whether art is being and has been produced in those two countries and others in the region, but about the existence of a very local kind of art expressing Mexican or Argentine nature; specifically, there are doubts regarding the existence of a Latin American artistic reality as such.

The fact is that our need to define ourselves as a continent and as a culture is the mirror image of our need to define ourselves as individual countries and cultures. And we still feel that need.

We will not rest until we are convinced that our art—our culture—has a secure place in the world. This is not about one or more artists being famous and enjoying worldwide recognition (which is just a small part of the problem), but about being recognized as creators of our own art. As such, we don't accept the tired old line (which is in itself an expression of the problem) that "we are almost at" the level of the great civilized nations—meaning Europe and the United States—in terms of art. We have been "almost there" and "catching up" for two hundred years. Poor comfort indeed. It is also poor comfort to learn that, absent a change in production forms and dependence structures, we will be unable to have our own art or culture.

This position's seemingly revolutionary attitude entails a reactionary conformism, since it commits action in the artistic field *ad calendas græcas* [when pigs fly] to an uncertain future.

I believe that there has been a Latin American art in the past; I believe that Latin America has produced painters (some mediocre, some great talents) and continues to produce them. And that, in the aggregate, they are Latin American art. That is aside from the issues—not entirely remote but not exactly pressing either—of the market, promotion, exposure, and recognition.

As long as our current art tries (explicitly or tacitly) to be Latin American that is what it will be—as it has always been—and will thus earn its place in the world. When I say "as long as it tries..." I am sidestepping the thorny question of nationalism, with its national, historical, social, or political undercurrents. I believe that art at either end of the spectrum—whether expressing explicitly local content or adopting a more universal approach—is a valid response in terms

of our need to define ourselves. [However,] I am referring to something more general, something deeper though perhaps a little less defined: the question of whether the artist feels Latin American.

When asked if artists living in exile are Latin Americans, I reply that if they still care about their country and their culture, not to mention their art vis-à-vis that culture, then they are.

After all, for example, everyone talks about “French art”—past and present—and yet, while there is less diversity there than in our countries, there seems to be no logical common denominator between [the cathedral at] Chartres, [Antoine] Watteau, and [Georges] Braque. There is, however, a barely definable likeness we now take for granted—perhaps something as vague, indefinable, and real as the “nature of the French people.”

As Latin Americans, we may never enjoy the untroubled conscience of the French because our need to define ourselves is what makes us who we are and what gives us strength. That need stimulates thoughtful contemplation and creates a culture, an art. Were it eliminated—should that even be possible—I believe the concept of Latin America would disappear, as would Latin American art, to be replaced by something else.

1

The concept suggested by the author echoes the opinion expressed by Edmundo O’Gorman in his book *La invención de América* (1958), an updated (1961) version of which is included in this volume [SEE DOCUMENT I.1.7]—Ed.

IV.3.4 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 833707

THE VISUAL ARTS IN A CONSUMER SOCIETY

Marta Traba, 1972

In *Arte Latino Americano Actual*, Marta Traba examines how the growing influence of U.S. art shaped the art of Latin America during two cornerstone decades, the 1950s and 1960s. She also weighs in on how Latin American artists both succumbed to and resisted the impact of this influence. Here, we include an excerpt from part one—“Las artes plásticas en la

sociedad de consumo”—in which the influential Argentinean critic stresses that movements such as Abstract Expressionism, Pop, Op, and the idea of “happenings” were developed in the context of highly industrialized urban centers in the U.S. There, according to her, the reified individual transformed art into mere “things” or objects of consumption. Indeed, her book marks a shift in Traba’s point of view [SEE DOCUMENTS IV.2.1, IV.2.2, AND IV.3.1 FOR EARLIER EXAMPLES OF HER WORK]; with this text, she launches “closed” or “open” critiques on the consumerism of U.S. art and culture and vividly calls for a cultural and political defense to retain the social and critical value of the art produced in the continent. This translation is made from the original publication [Marta Traba, *Arte Latino Americano Actual*, (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, Ediciones de la Biblioteca, 1972), 7–22].

FROM THE END OF WORLD WAR II to the present, the visual arts in the highly industrialized consumer society of the United States have been confined within a strict sociological framework. It is a framework that is delineated categorically, with no chance of misunderstanding or ambiguous interpretation. What is ambiguous, not to mention distressing, is the way art activities serve consumer society. Paradoxically, the more [art] proclaims its freedom and makes a huge display of its licentiousness, the more evident is the alienation caused by this role. What is not ambiguous is that art is in the service of technology, which is also an ideology capable of devising vigorous controls. These controls could lead to a totalitarianism that defeats any attempt to speak in an autonomous language.

[Herbert] Marcuse’s indictment of technology seems consistent with his overall system. Only a technology that is not neutral, one that is clearly tinged with totalitarian ideological content, could produce this [modern] robotic individual. Imitative and docile, the individual complies with the controls and renounces his “interior dimension.” The interior dimension lost by man in the consumer society cannot exist outside what [Henri] Lefebvre calls “a general code.” This is an overall system that emanates from the society to establish signs and meanings that are also general. An understanding of the system strengthens the harmony between man and his community. But, what is the language in the consumer society? We may call it, as Marcuse does, “ritual-authoritarian language” or categorize it, as [Roland] Barthes does, as “the language of all authoritarian regimes.” Or, we may follow Lefebvre in his pessimism about a consumer society’s capacity to grant any specific meaning to the image, accepting that all it can do is create some kind of

road sign. The common denominator of all these interpretations is that technology, easily converted into an ideology, has penetrated the cultural unity of the consumer society and fragmented it. Upon disappearance of a general code that allows us to have common signs and meanings, [society] has created watertight compartments. As Lefebvre points out, these compartments act in accordance with operationalism, functionalism, structuralism, and, more and more, they tend to render a general code impossible.

It makes sense that these partial operating fields would inevitably lead to multiple meanings, to an infinite range of semiologies, to the arbitrariness of personal interpretations and speeches. Standards disappear, and there is a feeling of total freedom that Marcuse denounces as the greatest alienation of all.¹ Given this linguistic chaos, we might expect an ever increasing divergence between the artist and the public. At some point, “participation” is no longer the initial game of turning the spectator into an accomplice; rather it becomes the only option, and a dramatic one [at that]. The most visible influence of this “ideological technology” on the visual arts is the replacement of what we could call traditional aesthetics by the aesthetics of decay. The highest value of traditional aesthetics was achieving the permanence of the artwork, going beyond the contingencies of a period and fashion to settle into a style. But the aesthetics of decay rules out and openly challenges these concepts. The most recent period in U.S. art, which has undoubtedly laid down aesthetic guidelines, began by supporting mobility and change. But in the past three years, an artwork is no sooner improvised than it is immediately destroyed, and the destruction is not even completed by the artist himself, but by a stranger: the public. This does not mean a negation of the artwork; rather it confers on it a very high value—one opposed to the traditional. This value is that of the perishable, which is also corrupting the other products of the consumer society.

Willem de Kooning may be the last individualist who actually has—perhaps through his European roots—a prodigious, “internal dimension.” Although his hand to hand battle to practice an art that resists the aesthetics of decay leads him to defeat, such a failure also allows him to grow as an artist. At the same time, this process precludes him from being involved in the serial production carried out by U.S. art from that period forward. Over the next few years, specifically while he wrestled with the amazing figure of the woman with her back to the window, de Kooning would reject the proposal that subsequent

U.S. art would fully accept. That proposal was to turn art into a fragment of the technological plan that dominates consumer society, letting art be governed by the laws of technology and setting limits on its freedom. It would be left to art to determine a facile, collective happiness and help people overcome their inhibitions (to thus discharge aggressiveness). Consequently, individuals would be rendered less dangerous. In short, this would turn art into a perfectly prefabricated component of catharsis. As such, art would only be allowed to do these three things: entertain, liberate, and destroy. From then on, this would be carried out with incredible and terrible regularity.

In the work of some of the contemporary geniuses of U.S. art, we can easily follow this process. I am thinking of [Robert] Rauschenberg, undoubtedly one of the most surprising personalities given his capacity for invention. There is a penetrating poetic will in his first collage works, where the imprint of Action Painting persisted, though with a trace of something diffuse and melancholy. Compare these with the later works that incorporate objects and begin to take on an arbitrary, laughable, even phony meaning. (All these works are inferior to the marvelous surrealist associations created thirty years earlier by [Marcel] Duchamp and Man Ray.) Next, compare the early works with his current erotic light boxes, which show the failure of eroticism to create new myths in order to replace the meaningless void. In these comparisons, Rauschenberg's work entertains, liberates and destroys to the extent that ideological technology imposes this requirement on contemporary art.

The usual justification of Pop art, which is clearly a specifically U.S. product—in spite of the efforts of the European critics—is the almost obvious correspondence of Pop forms with the new American way-of-life. In the same way, we may recognize a basic parallel between that way of life and the Happening or “anti-museum” art. Thomas M. Messer has just classified this as the maximum fusion between art and nature; between art and the thing that exists; between art and nothing, which is all that has been achieved to date. But it would be a mistake to consider these coincidences as data on style and therefore legally transmissible, in other words, to treat them as if they constituted a language. What they are is rather precisely the negation of language, considering the dual meaning offered by Lefebvre: [language is] a set of signs used by a society, and in turn, a code that allows us to decipher those signs, thus uniting meaning with meaningfulness, with no further ado.

We have seen that the consumer society lacks general signs and codes, just as technology generates controls and issues them in an authoritarian way. The control that requires art to entertain, liberate, and destroy its own image has been faithfully followed by the artists who contribute to the romantic, idealistic, and loose efforts of the Pacific art [school] and of Action Painting. Hard-edge [abstraction], Pop art, Minimalism, the “Mad” trend as well as the “anti-museum” artists and Happenings, [along with the 1965 MoMA exhibition] *The Responsive Eye* are creating an aesthetic sphere. Governed by decay and predetermined by the ideological laws and the economics of the consumer society, this aesthetic relegates art to a watertight compartment. It is forcing art to be marginal, a fraction, an operation, forcing it to be parceled. It is demanding that art display, as was so intelligently stated by Lefebvre, “a group strategy.”

There is no doubt about it; modern U.S. art has agreed to be one sphere in the world of technology. Starting with that agreement, it lost any opportunity to render an overall interpretation of a society that it is [now] unable to see, except from the corner it was conceded. This is why the artists who constitute the pleiad of Pop art—even those who have created passionate artwork—insist on their absolute neutrality regarding criticism. Moreover, they discredit any art historian who sees them as subtle, caustic judges of the consumer society. In fact, they [argue that they] do nothing more than proclaim a truth that seems unsustainable from the point of view of traditional aesthetics, in which an art with no intention of interpretation or durability is inconceivable. The fact is that the energy displayed by the new U.S. artists is typically a production-based energy that extends to the paroxysm of the Happening. That is, to that point at which the incitement of the ideological technology becomes an irritant since it demands collective abandonment of inhibitions, playful pleasures that offer tranquility, that conform. . . . The difference between language—a general code—and adherence to the orders of the consumer society goes beyond defining U.S. art today. It does indeed help us understand the continuous changes and fragmentation of interests, motifs, and solutions of U.S. art. But the distinction between code and orders is also important for establishing the relationship of that art with artists in Latin America.

It seems to be a platitude to say that our continent has not gone beyond its colonial status. It is also obvious to recall that from Spanish domination, we went on to fall under French and European cultural domination. Then, immediately

after the center of the visual arts moved from Paris to New York around 1948, Latin America began to receive signals from the [new] transmission hub. To the extent that the dissemination of art news was speeding up, the regularity and velocity of these signals increased as well.

The signal that replaced the relationships of sign and meaning in a global language was picked up instantaneously by the Latin American receivers. The age-old custom of a culture of adjustments and accommodations allowed the receivers to act in all confidence. Thus they turned directly to generate the same cultural products almost simultaneously. This was especially true in the open countries—Argentina, for example—where stage and audiovisual studies at the Instituto [Torcuato] Di Tella coincided with similar experiments in New York. Today, an exhibition of new Latin American artists is absolutely unidentifiable; their solutions, their forms of expression, and even their materials are identical to those of the artists of a highly industrialized consumer society.

This simultaneous presentation of parallel art events could be taken as a valid form of the “coalition of cultures” referred to by [Claude] Lévi-Strauss. At first sight, it might seem favorable in order to enrich the cultures that he himself calls “savage,” to differentiate them from “domesticated” thinking, with the greater contributions from the latter.² The thesis of a coalition of cultures as an effective system of cultural progress has been defended by all the Latin American critics whose opinion weighs on and legitimates artists’ attitudes. The attitude of mistrust toward this coalition is considered somewhat provincial and “bitter.” In fact, the defense of the supposedly regional cultures almost always comes from heated nationalists. Since they are the ones who would defend the most indefensible positions of any “Nativism,” this has contributed to the confusion of positions.

For the artists on the South American continent, to defend a coalition of cultures and thus legitimate any product backed by the U.S. transmission hub, lets them make up for lost time. It allows them to enter into orbit and express themselves without regionalist complexes, within a universal concept of art.

But the coalition is disadvantageous; the universalism is false, and the forms created are exactly the same as those generated in the consumer society. So this leads to an inexcusable abdication of intent—never mind whether or not it fails—to formulate its own language. Lévi-Strauss himself sees the disadvantage

of the coalition, as do his critics, when they maintain that alliances of this kind inevitably lead to a similarity between the resulting cultural products.

. . .

They are not just responding to the orders of technological society when U.S. artists maintain before the critics: “What you see is what you get”; “we are only aiming at the retina”; “we are not passing subliminal messages”; “we have no interest in saying anything”; “we only want to create,” etc. Rather, they are automatically reconnecting with a community in which art faced its worst crisis of misunderstanding vis-à-vis society—from the end of the Impressionism through the Bauhaus. This crisis basically arose in Europe when the artist, seduced by the desire to experiment with new forms of expression, had to face the conservative and reactionary standards of the new bourgeoisie. Working under the mistaken belief that technology was their ally, the artists turned to the new forms of which we are all well aware. The new artwork ranged from the destruction wrought by analytical Cubism to the idealistic, spiritual evasions of abstract art. The Bauhaus was the only movement that understood the inevitable triumph of the technologies and tried to use them, prophetically foreseeing that art would be enslaved by them. But even the Bauhaus was strongly tinged by idealisms (Paul Klee) and metaphysical yearnings (Josef Albers). When these were transplanted into the American field, they would be torn up by the roots.

Given the nature of our times, art was going to end up dominated by technology. This could only have happened in the United States, where rationality and the desire for meaning were notably weaker than in Europe. The model for contemporary American art provides a thrilling simplicity. Forty years of transcriptional, pedestrian art, measured with the yardstick of daily life, transformed the artist into an efficient “Kodak.” During ten years of radical escape toward the Orient, the United States turned its back on Europe, working with Zen in a complete void and without interference. At the same time, it adopted the irrational value of the matter in Action Painting, and in the last two decades, it formulated the aesthetics of decay. Hence, art became a limited area within a technological society and the rejection of significant values. This is why the greatest disadvantage of a coalition between contemporary U.S. visual arts and ours is that we are allying ourselves with a cultural field that has no transmissible language. We

are taking up with a biased player, closed into the strict area of its own reference. We are neither entering a school nor a university where we would be taught a certain type of knowledge that we could make “our own” with adjustments. This is what happened with the Spanish and then French colonization of times gone by. What we are doing now is moving into the household of a very strange, self-contained family, one that lives behind closed doors, with great internal consistency. There is no knowledge forthcoming; we are taking home a way of life that is not ours, and when we imitate it, we are [mere] apes. There is no coalition at all between one culture and the other; there is simply imitation. From all that is stated above, we can detect the false premise of the supposed universalism of U.S. art; its specific nature is precisely its regionalism. U.S. art is regional, local, and moreover, specifically urban. All its references are linked to the mass communications media and consumer goods. Therefore, it suffers from its own variations.

...

But even more serious than this trap, which is fairly obvious, is the absurd concept that confuses language with “road” signs. The specific nature of our societies, the cultural chaos, or plain and simple “acculturation” unfortunately turns us into receivers of “mother” cultures. But let us not forget the splendid cases of hybridization and artistic crossbreeding we find in the history of Latin American art. I believe we may even go so far as to state that the European influence (whether transmitted by the Baroque or Romantic period, or Modernismo) represented authentic instances of “coalition.” The art was received as coded signs and was inventoried. The work of the true creators could even end up back in the field where it originated. I am thinking of the entire Mexican Baroque period, of Aleijadinho [in Brazil], of the early republicans deriding Romanticism and Neoclassicism, of a genius such as [Armando] Reverón [in Venezuela] dismantling the influence of Impressionism until he reached absolute zero.

Thus, it is not dangerous to receive a language insofar as this language assumes a set of signs which may be used for different purposes as well as its own. What is ridiculous is to accept a traffic sign in a place where there is no traffic. To say this in terms that are less “metaphor-based pop art variations,” it is nonsense to assume that the signs of a highly industrialized consumer society could ever apply within societies that were branded by sociologists as “archaic,” “feudal,” semi-colonial or just plain colonial, living in pre-capitalist situations.

[Other descriptions have pointed out] their meager domestic markets, oligarchies turned into pressure groups, development based on external pressure, marginalization of entire populations, parochialism, paternalism, and so on. Emphasizing the enormity of the cultural transplant—since today's U.S. art refers to urban circumstances, objects, and imagery—it must also be introduced in urban areas. And if we wish to do that, we must remember that in our cities, almost one third of the population originates from peasant and other migrations. In other words, this [segment] lives in specific conditions determined by unemployment, social instability, and a failure to adapt that excludes any possible participation in a cultural life.

Once a system of references has disappeared, the art generated by said system will disappear. However, that has yet to happen. The entire Latin American avant-garde is working on visual arts in accordance with the signals emitted from the United States. It is true that their conduct is not identical; we can point out some variations and types of resistance that—in spite of the interest they stirred up—have been abandoned over time. The current panorama of the continental visual arts is unequivocally what we would see in a colony. The seriousness of this statement is based on the absolution we have gradually been granting ourselves. Perhaps a frank acceptance of this fact has already taken place; perhaps the colonized population wishes to be so and enjoys this status. If so, then any review of the growing U.S. colonization of Latin American “audiovisual” world may be in vain. But beyond this clearly pessimistic possibility, there is a sentence written by [Jean-Paul] Sartre that should be kept alive: “When the only recourse left to a people is to choose what type of death they will have, when all they have received from their oppressors is the single gift of desperation, what is left to lose? Their misfortune will be turned into their courage; they will turn this eternal rejection that opposes colonization into the absolute rejection of colonization.” However, in order for this to take place, first, it would have to be agreed that being an art “colony” is a misfortune. (And I do not say cultural colony, because literature seems to have done better at escaping this problem.) About this, the whole world is not in agreement, and neither is it easy to perceive the *nuance of misfortune*, since the signals are emitted and received under the most attractive and innocent of circumstances. In this case, the Trojan horse is the innocence of the art plan emitted by the technological society; the signals function with the competitive wisdom of all successful products. . . .

1

The author is referring to Herbert Marcuse's book, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (1964).—Ed.

2

This is a reference to the vertebral thinking of the Belgian ethnologist and related to his book, *La pensée sauvage* (1962), or *The Savage Mind*, (translated and published in English in 1966).—Ed.

IV.3.5 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 832453

TOWARD A NEW ARTISTIC PROBLEM IN LATIN AMERICA

Juan Acha, 1973

Trained as a scientist, art critic and theoretician Juan Acha spent the early part of his career in his native Lima writing for *El Comercio*, and, in 1971, he relocated to Mexico City. It is undeniable that Acha's travels and eventual migration enabled him to become one of the first truly regional voices in Latin American art theory and criticism. Here, he is particularly concerned with analyzing the problems of the mimetic aspects of Latin America's Third World aesthetics while urging for a drastic delving into the social and cultural realms in order to engender a more productive artistic language in the region. Acha originally published this essay in the winter of 1973 in Mexico City's *Artes Visuales*—which he co-edited with Carla Stellweg. It was later reprinted in his broad compilation *Ensayos y Ponencias Latinoamericanistas* [(Caracas, Ediciones GAN/Galería de Arte Nacional, 1984), 37–43].

THE MAIN ARTISTIC PROBLEM IN LATIN AMERICA—in my opinion—is our inability to create art out of our own problems, out of what arises from our very own third-world reality that, in and of itself, implies mutation and exudes a sense of the temporary. In other words, we need a new Latin American problem equipped with a dual purpose: it should challenge the influence of the development aesthetic that we now practice and should also explore questions that would lead to the formulation of a new or (and this is essentially the same thing) a different, realistic

way of conceiving art that would help to channel our (Third World) mutation into a sensitive form of expression and halt the excesses and defects of development.

The development aesthetic involves problems whose solutions inevitably lead us to embrace a form of high art and to practice it according to the standards of advanced countries and at their levels. To these problems we should therefore add the ones we have not even considered yet due to our backwardness vis-à-vis the countries that have already identified and, in many cases, solved them. Sooner or later, driven by development—by that yearning to follow in the steps of rich countries—we will have to deal with those problems ourselves.

This aesthetic, as we know, is inspired by foreign models and consists quite simply of finding high art created in other worlds and popularizing it in our own. The aesthetic as such has already been crystallized and stands very little chance of exhausting all our artistic potential or of satisfying all aspects of our particular sensibility. This is especially true if we attempt to be guided by what some young artists are saying in nearly every country. Because, in that case, we will have to acknowledge that our development leads to a form of art that is already deeply disputed; an art that is considered inadequate, even inappropriate, in our current period and given the precocious forces of the times; a kind of art that we have found to be spurious for our Third World where we are hungry for all manner of change.

The need to develop a new social and cultural context in our countries prompts us to ask ourselves to what extent we can and should chart a new course for our art. This certainly does not mean that we should just come up with a new aesthetic that our artists should follow, but rather that we should decide on why we need one. At most, we should define the basic guidelines that artists should follow—or have begun to follow—in order to create an aesthetic that, while new and different, encompasses those of our enquiries and practices whose artistic nature is now acknowledged, as well as our other sensory interests and activities that are beyond our current level of awareness and are not even considered as being within the realm of art.

The guidelines for an aesthetic of this kind already exist in our reality, in a latent or potential state; all we have to do is find them, agree on their positive and negative aspects, and then implement them. The goal of these preliminary, limited notes on the visual arts is simply to help with the identification and definition of these guidelines.

Latin America has always had two main, contradictory perspectives concerning art, which might be used as a platform from which to review our artistic potential and practices. One is the intellectual approach, which hews strictly to ontological-aesthetic, historical-artistic criteria to determine the course of high art or to deny it. The other takes a subjective or psychological view that prefers an emotional opposition to ideas as the best and most effective guide of art because it mistakes spontaneity and narcissism for freedom of opinion which, in and of itself, is rational.

. . .

Artistic intellectualism advocates the predominance of the thinking man who, knowing the history and theory of art, is skilled in the handling and expression of ideas. Historicism and essentialism—or ontologism—however, are its proclivities, which transform ideas into artistic imperatives. Infused with unbridled axiological vehemence, it seeks to establish what art is and, in the very next breath, define the man and the society that wish to produce art or consume it. As a result, artistic activities become intellectual exercises and are confined to the parameters of Western art history and theory; as if Latin American art were simply a backward extension of the art produced by advanced countries.

According to this approach to art, all artistic problems are dependent on the approval of either the official expressions of high art or of those who deny this kind of art. In the latter case, the intellectualists would limit themselves to arguments concerning the superstructure and the decline of both high and objective art. . . . For them, the need for a new aesthetic would be intellectual rather than experiential; a question of superficial imitation rather than of existential qualities. They have, in fact, achieved their goals. Because it just so happens that our best works of visual art in Western terms have been produced in Latin American cities where we see the greatest traffic in ideas, thus fulfilling our developmental aspirations. But these works consist of qualitative expressions of known trends rather than the creation of new ones. . . .

The reason for this phenomenon is clear and eminently developmental: in a cultural constellation such as the Western one to which we belong, it is impossible for Third World artists to respond to the new, advanced social situations currently being created by sophisticated industrialization, economic pros-

perity, and the mass media; these are situations that will eventually appear in the rest of the world, together with the art that will respond to them as they are developing. . . .

As might be imagined, it is not a question of throwing intellectualism overboard, but of purging it of its vices and channeling it appropriately. The goal is not to banish ideas or knowledge; on the contrary, we should embrace them, but treat them as valuable, indispensable tools with which to examine our Third World reality in all its infrastructural, psycho-social, and sensitive mutations. To do this we should strive for greater mobility beyond the confines of art history and theory, both of which are usually limited to questions concerning the superstructure of art.

Our artistic subjectivism, however, generates quite the opposite effect: it stifles our intellectual curiosity and leaves art at the mercy of our emotional irrationalism. While this situation has not produced our finest works of art on a Western scale of values, it has managed to express a Latin American—or national—sense of “self,” a collective identity that is sometimes based on our indigenous (native) reality, and at other times is inspired by our cultural or racial mixture (*mestizaje*), thus creating the need to operate outside the bounds of Western high art and produce works that are diametrically opposed to European and North American tastes and dictates.

We cannot deny the importance of impulses that encourage this way of looking at art. They are useful in that they prompt us to investigate unexplored avenues of artistic expression. But they are useless if they are not accompanied by ideas. Their failings are also well known: archeology sometimes errs on the side of anachronism; nationalism can be tainted by a hint of xenophobia; populism can don the trappings of paternalism and demagoguery under the pretext of providing a socialist solution. Pre-Hispanic art is exalted as a source of inspiration for high art or, in place of the latter we genuflect before the altar of folklore. Alternatively, we promote “distributionism,” which consists of producing high art for the masses or popularize existing art in its name.

Though we have long-since outgrown the widespread, rabid nationalism that led to all those terrible mistakes, our artistic subjectivism is still with us, urging us to jettison all oversimplifications. Because the art of a world in constant, abrupt mutation—such as ours—cannot be reduced to a simple opposition

to what exists in our past and our cities, just as its problems cannot be solved by refusing to budge, as we seem to be suggesting with our belief in a collective identity, fair and square, fixed and immutable, that is both a receptor and a motor of art.

Since both of these attitudes on their own are ineffective strategies, it would make sense to propose balancing their effect by uniting them in tandem. But that would not be enough, because they must each fully concentrate on the mechanics of our current mutations. They therefore need something that will keep them united until they achieve their interdependence and that, along the way, exposes them to the psycho-social, sensitive causes and consequences of those mutations. The only thing that can accomplish that goal is a uniquely Third World, sociological perspective. That certainly isn't a new solution. It is in the air we breathe, and artists everywhere are applying it—they begin with the sociological element, and the aesthetic quality is expressed as a byproduct. After all, art is a social product; the fact that it happened backwards in the past was due to the peaceful cultural and social environment of the times.

Once we start taking a sociological approach to our artistic problems, we will have to root our aesthetic expression in the reality of these heterogeneous societies that have endured constant, radical transformations of their minds and their sensitivity due to the effects of the technological revolution. As a result of the ecological changes caused by objects and the mass media—which are manipulated by the cultural imperialism to which we are subjected by developed countries—we see an increase in the diversity of our social, cultural, and artistic situations, ranging from the feudal to the industrial, from illiteracy to the culture of the masses.

In a situation of this kind—so hectic and fleeting as regards our sensitivity and our minds—we can no longer think in terms of a single, fixed, artistic solution, nor to continue to separate the various expressions of our sensibility according to a set of hierarchies. The best solution would therefore be to promote an aesthetic pluralism, which simply means assigning a “legal” personality to the wide range of expressions which are a de facto component of every group, so that they might be combined in a way that involved no prior hierarchical criteria.

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IV.3.6 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 832488

THE SPECIFIC NATURE OF LATIN AMERICAN ART

Saúl Yurkievich, 1974

Saúl Yurkievich (1931–2005), the Argentinean poet and critic, taught Latin American literature at the Université de Paris-Vincennes and was also visiting professor at Harvard University, University of Chicago, Columbia University, and UCLA. “La especificidad del arte latinoamericano” is the second part of Yurkievich’s essay “El Arte de una sociedad en transformación”; it addresses some specific aspects of Latin American art in the mid-1970s. Writing at the onset of a rekindled regional interest on this matter, he argues that the specificity of Latin American art is marginal at best and that it is impossible to circumscribe its art to a set of common values. Yurkievich does, however, note commonalities in the social context, including the fact that the vast majority of Latin Americans experience the dramatic contradiction inherent in living in a pre-modern society threatened by mass media images of modernity. His text first appeared in *América Latina en sus artes* [“El arte de una sociedad en transformación,” (Mexico City: Siglo XXI Editores, 1974), 175–79]. [SEE DOCUMENT IV.3.6 FOR ANOTHER ESSAY FROM THE SAME ANTHOLOGY].

THERE CERTAINLY ARE GROUNDS FOR SPECULATION concerning the specific nature of current Latin American art; beyond the fact that it is produced by Latin Americans who do not always live in Latin America. What, exactly, does it tell us? What characteristics does it reveal or connote? If we take specific nature to mean the desire to provide a clear representation or expression of Latin American reality, then a more thoroughly Latin American art would be the kind that chooses a figurative portrayal of distinctly local themes, and paints scenes from the local geography, or sculpts Criollo types; in other words, the sort of work produced by the Mexican mural painters, the indigenists, and the social realists. Aside from this standardized figuration—this depiction of aboriginal or native subjects—there are other painters who sometimes use non-figurative media to allude to their Latin American origins and roots; for example, Rufino Tamayo, Wifredo Lam, Nemesio Antúnez, María Luisa Pacheco, Fernando de Szyszlo, or Armando Morales. The essentially Latin American quality, then, would consist

of an explicit or implicit geographical or cultural reference to the Latin American continent. But there is also another very important group of artists who work with plastic languages that are not limited by any ethnic or geographical parameters; that is, those who express themselves with pure plastic media, devoid of any literary, social, or political connotation, [this group includes] Julio Le Parc, Jesús Soto, Luis Tomasello, Alejandro Otero, Carlos Cruz-Diez, Sérgio Camargo, and many others.

In short, Latin American art cannot be defined solely as work produced by artists who seek to present themselves expressly or allusively as Latin Americans. Neither can it be defined as work created exclusively in Latin America. The most popular criteria—though controversial and not universally acknowledged—defines Latin American art as work produced by Latin American artists, regardless of their aesthetic or where they live.

On a worldwide scale, in spite of varying levels of development and inequalities in technological progress and the accumulation and use of wealth, the consensus is that our Latin American society is in an accelerated state of mutation and that we live in a world of spiraling changes wrought mainly by mankind's increasing ability to transform raw materials into products. This process creates fundamental changes in the way we live and affects us in terms of perception, conception, operation, and our way of representing the world. The art of our time is an art of rupture, defined by a permanent desire for innovation and by a growing instability and mutability that form the underlying narrative of our historic acceleration, of mankind's eternal attempt to adapt to the dynamics of a controversial universe in perpetual motion.

In spite of its social and economic backwardness, its frequently obsolete structures, its abysmal internal differences, and its fundamental insufficiencies, Latin America cannot avoid the repercussions of the times. The explosive situations created by its mushrooming population; its rapid, disorganized urban development; the pressure-cooker conditions of its subdued masses clamoring for a decent standard of living and true political representation; and the violence of its social confrontations have intensified its crises, ruptures, contrasts, instability, mobility, highs and lows, and antagonisms.

In a continent where the vast majority of the peasant population is doubly marginalized—marginalized from rural society and from global society, and

where almost a third of the total population lives on an income of sixty to seventy dollars a year, virtually excluded from the financial economy and the consumer society, fifty million radios and ten million television sets extol the virtues of modern life.¹ People can hear and see a contemporary reality that they cannot enjoy. In Latin America these days, the mass media are the main vehicle for the popular arts. For now at least, the visual arts are doomed to exist for the enjoyment of the privileged minorities, although in more urbanized countries they are reproduced in magazines with enormous print runs that are sold in sidewalk kiosks.

In Latin American art, as in other areas, there are two contrasting movements: one is marginal, folding in on itself, centripetal, driven by a local focus; the other is expansive, centrifugal in an international sense. The former promotes and venerates values that do not transcend national borders and commands disproportionate prices in local markets. It tends to consist of soothing, reassuring, predictable works that are in step with prevailing social tastes, are easily “legible” by the majority and, from an aesthetic perspective, are more or less anachronistic.

As distinct from such artists, whose acclaim is entirely local, there are others who manage to access the international circuit via metropolitan cultural centers and, very occasionally, directly from their country of origin. Sometimes, sophisticated artists who are sufficiently au courant with trends produce advanced works that are rejected by their milieu due to a lack of permeability and cosmopolitanism at the local level. Also, as has occurred in Buenos Aires on several occasions, there frequently can be a lack of exposure to the artist’s work in the international circuit, in which case exile is the only solution.

This basic, simplified differentiation provides insight into how art was promoted in Latin America at that time. The region’s marginal position vis-à-vis world decision-making centers in economic, political, and cultural matters, its dependence on major cities overseas, and the nature of the prevailing neo-colonialism also led to forms of aesthetic subordination. Our countries export raw materials and import manufactured products; similarly with cultural products—we export artists and import aesthetics. Our economic systems, like our educational systems, were imposed from abroad; or rather, they were transplanted by cosmopolitan minorities and inadequately adapted to local conditions.

There have been many socio-economic studies that proposed reformist or revolutionary theories and practices designed to deprive us of our independence and subjugate the free will of our people. But economic sovereignty does not mean isolation; it means stepping onto the world stage as an equal. Such is the imperative of the technological era that no modern country can avoid. Once we have achieved economic de-colonization, how can we achieve cultural de-colonization? By pursuing native themes and regional expressions of limited diffusion, or by searching for widely understandable languages that are in synch with modern people in a modern world? By tirelessly seeking approval through neo-folkloric forms, or by allowing the free expansion of a culture with no local strings attached? And furthermore, should nationalism and internationalism be seen as mutually exclusive opposites? [Undoubtedly,] socio-economic liberating practices tend to be more univocal, effective, and satisfactory than cultural and artistic ones.

Almost without exception, producers and exporters of cultural and artistic trends tend to be more prosperous. The gestation, diffusion, and international imposition of schools or aesthetics all begin in the power centers. There is an undeniable relationship between political-economic power and artistic-cultural power, though they do not automatically go hand-in-hand. France has less economic power than Western Germany, but it has more cultural clout. Since the dawn of our political independence, France was the source of most cultural imports to Latin America, in spite of the fact that the economy in many countries, especially those in the southern cone, was under British control, and the United States exerted considerable influence over countries in the northern part of the continent. After the Second World War the situation changed, both economically and culturally. The United States monopolized politics and economics in Latin America and developed substantial influence in artistic fields as well as a result of the boom in the visual arts that originated with the brilliant New York school, and was followed by Pop art, Op art, Minimalism, and Conceptual art. This coincided with a decline in creative output in France. We should not attempt to oversimplify the reasons for these changes or to attribute the artistic boom in the United States purely to economic influences. That would suggest that Latin American artists are robots, with no discernment of their own, who submissively

accept their aesthetic from the metropolis *du jour*. It is undeniable, however, that economic factors do play a part in cultural situations.²

Paris played a decisive role in the evolution of the visual arts between the mid-nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century as the unavoidable crossroads, the heart of production, concentration, meeting, and propagation of artistic trends. Her aesthetic sway in Latin America was combined with the even lengthier ideological influence of the encyclopedists whose ideas had been circulating throughout the continent ever since the end of the eighteenth century. Paris was the source of the earliest ruptures that rocked the academic conventionalism of capital cities in Latin America, which were little more than villages at the time. It was, on the whole, the Italian masters who trained our painters and sculptors in Pompier realism and mimetic art, the stereotypical reproduction of traditional genres that at times dared to sponsor pathetic forays into the dramas of social naturalism.

In the wake of their devastating wars, the Latin American republics, stagnant and out of touch with the rest of the world, began a period of internal organization. The machine age transformed the dominant countries into industrial powers that now came seeking raw materials and food in their colonies, trading posts, and dependent nations. Latin America was soon engaged in trade, though doomed to be nothing but a provider of basic commodities. The local elites, who had made their fortunes in the agricultural and livestock business and the exploitation of minerals in response to ravenous world demand, began to lose their national identity and their local nature. They became partners in international financial ventures, they traveled, they became cosmopolitan, and they spent time in Europe, buying European works of art. They thus brought to Latin America important collections of Impressionist paintings, sculptures by [Auguste] Rodin and [Antoine] Bourdelle—both of whom produced monuments for Buenos Aires—, and the latest fashions in ornamental objects. They copied the habitat and the architecture of the *fin-de-siècle* Paris haute bourgeoisie. . . .

Half a century late, Latin American Impressionism offered a timid version of the original and, as befits its adaptation to a semi-rural environment in the very early stages of industrial development, it was a stripped-down version

sans the scientific theory—the psycho-physiology of vision, theory of color, focus on capturing the movement of real life, supremacy of luminous energy over physical immobility, and so on—that complemented the original experimentation of French Impressionism.

The same truncated process of adaptation would be repeated in the transplanting of a whole range of schools that were prematurely transferred with no thought to the level of development in the Latin American context. Cultural transplants functioned in an imitative fashion that had no connection to local socioeconomic conditions. Cosmopolitan minorities grafted aesthetics onto a local environment, limiting them to a narrow range of consumption with none of the structural relationships that existed in their place of origin, in the area that originally gave rise to those movements. To wit: Cubism and Futurism represented the enthusiasm and admiration felt by the early avant-garde for the physical and mental transformations prompted by the first machines; Surrealism was a rebellion against the alienation of the technological era; the Concrete movement emerged together with the functional architecture and industrial design that was intended to create a new, programmed, comprehensive human habitat; Informalism was another reaction against rationalism, asceticism, and the mass production of the functional era; it was a response to the profound crisis of values and the existential void caused by the Second World War, the most savage slaughter ever perpetrated in all human history.

We [Latin Americans] have been involved in all those trends in the same sequence in which they appeared in Europe, but we have barely experienced the “mechanical realm” of the Futurists; we have had no major industrial era; we have not been fully immersed in the consumer society; we have not been swamped by mass production or limited by an excess of functionalism. Though we have experienced existential angst, [we did it] without Warsaw or Hiroshima.

Around 1920, Latin Americans decided to catch up quickly and began skipping stages. Artists settled in manufacturing centers and began to participate in avant-garde movements. Post-Impressionism, Expressionism, Fauvism, Cubism, and Futurism all appeared and were re-expressed by our artists in a frequently timid, impoverished synthesis. From the very beginning, the avant-garde artists considered themselves to be an international movement; they devel-

oped a network of affiliates around the world that lent itself to a maximum circulation of works and ideas. Several Latin Americans—who were quick to settle in France and Italy—joined the new schools just as they were at their most expansive and effervescent. This was the first true rupture with the nineteenth-century tradition; it was also a break with a delayed and purely imitative epigonism.

1

Cf. Jean Huteau, “La transformación de América Latina,” *Tiempo Nuevo* (Caracas: 1970).

2

Yurkievich’s thinking in this regard is extremely close to Marta Traba’s interpretation of the totalitarian ideological content imbued in the contemporary robotic individual described in “The Visual Arts in a Consumer Society” [SEE DOCUMENT IV.3.4].—Ed.

IV.3.7 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1061890

THE NOSTALGIA FOR HISTORY IN THE VISUAL IMAGINATION OF LATIN AMERICA

Luis Felipe Noé, 1982

Argentinean artist Luis Felipe Noé presented this paper at the *Primer Encuentro de Artes Visuales e Identidad en América Latina*, a 1981 colloquium organized in Mexico City by the *Foro de Arte Contemporáneo de México*. In his paper, Noé proposes painting as the historical response to a Latin American need to record history—to *invent* it even, echoing the well-known argument by Edmundo O’Gorman [SEE DOCUMENT I.1.7]. Noé states that such a longing for history relies on abstract referents and, in fact, on a pre-Columbian past, colonial baroque tradition, and the period that followed independence. In opposition to Europe—where art has become the hollow antithesis of the self-referential work—Noé suggests that Latin American art must continue to engage collectivism in order to craft a distinctive cultural identity. The essay is translated from its original publication in the annals of the colloquium [Luis Felipe Noé, “La nostalgia de la historia en el proceso de la imaginación plástica en América Latina,” *Artes visuales e identidad en América Latina*, (Mexico City: Foro de Arte Contemporáneo, 1982), 46–51].

ARTIST, THAT CATEGORY CREATED BY THE BOURGEOIS WORLD, that profession of uncertainty, is nothing other than a man in dialogue with his surroundings through a language, [a man] with the objective of grasping that which is not evident, of perceiving that which is not obvious. . . .

The past, present, and future are just a part of the surrounding uncertainty. A past with a strong tradition offers the artists concrete references for his dialogue [with uncertainty]. In contrast, the lack of a cultural past leads to confusion about the present and future. In this case, imagining—both in the sense of invention and the creation of imagery—becomes an urgent need. Perhaps this explains the importance that painting has in the young nations of Latin America. Painting thus becomes a historical discipline: it is concerned with creating history, with *inventing* it. Naturally, some will say that this occurs just as it does in any other human activity and in every other circumstance and place. Nevertheless, in this special case, the creation of an image miraculously acts like a mirror wherein that which has no form and has not yet come to be, looks for its own image through magical transference. The arts are a way of being; that is, of becoming, of becoming an image of itself for the Latin American man.

The same is not true for the European man. For him, the arts are part of a historical process that, from Romanticism until today, has been removing the trappings of a classicist academy in the same manner as a “striptease”: emphasizing the garments it takes off and then throws to the floor. For example, at one time it seemed that Expressionism’s importance lay in its exaltation of the “I,” but afterward it became quite clear that it had become fed up with the prison of the “I.” It was out of Expressionism’s core, in search of purity, that Piet Mondrian and neo-plasticism were born. A short time later, Action Painting placed emphasis on the action of painting itself. Soon after and as a consequence of this trend, the “happening” emerged: [it mirrored] the exaltation of some painters take in pure action, putting painting itself aside. In this way, art has been evolving into what Roy McMullen calls “post-history painting.” For the same reason that the U.S. praises the capitalist historical process begun in Europe, the Western man has turned his back on the need for a global symbolic image, especially given that the examples of Action Painting, “happenings,” and later Pop, Minimalism, and conceptual art are in essence North American. Today is the era of the stimulus-image, the indication-image. . . . Western art finds itself starting from scratch

with regard to everything that concerns a world image; and painting, that “strip-tease” artist, has been left with no clothes. The language of art has become, above all, a graphic language.

The Latin American man has in reality always been a passive recipient of information: he has been told that he pertains to this civilization—he has been made to believe that he is part of the West based on a longitudinal philosophy of the world and that he is a consequence of history. And he really lives immersed in this belief, in the same way that he believes that he belongs to a consumer society. . . . But this Latin American man is naturally the bourgeois Latin American; the only one who can take on the problems of art, if in fact he does so at all. Likewise, Latin American art tries to live a process that is chiefly a process of information: it lives what it believes it means to live today and, in reality, it is living the day to come. This is an example of what Edmundo O’Gorman calls “the way of being Latin American: to be like others in order to be oneself” [SEE DOCUMENT I.1.7]. This, however, is also a process of transforming information.

[Let us view the Latin American man] from another point of view. Do not all the crises of the West touch him? Of course they *do*. Can this man, historically young, dispense with the necessity of searching for and defining his own image of the world as a way of stating that he is part of it? Of course he *cannot*. In so far as he is of the West, he finds himself on the return path, and insofar as he is Latin American, he finds himself at the starting point. And this is absolutely clear in relation to the arts of our continent. The Latin American man has a *historic need of history*, of existence, and in this sense, of an image of the same. He needs to be able to express his manner of seeing the world in order to be seen in it, even if he does not yet know it. In this way, this strange Westerner on the one hand shares post-historic experiences with the European American (of the North) and, on the other hand, has his own prehistoric knowledge. Additionally, if he is an artist, he finds himself in the strange situation of a primitive man [living] in a world that exceeds him; but in this case, the “object of excess” is not one of nature, but of culture. Just as if he were an idol-maker in the middle of a culture that is collapsing and another that is yet to be; the latter is theoretically his own: the one he is creating. This artist feels like a mirror, and before him stand both the ghost of a dead man as well as the latent future of one yet to be born. Without a doubt, he is thirsty for history; he is anxious for himself: he is nostalgic. And this nostalgia,

in what other way can it be defined but as a distance from his very self? Distance, given that one is apparently here but is in reality far away, confined to what he lacks, longs for, or dreams.

This nostalgia for history is twofold [and manifests itself as]: the lack of a past of one's own (by not being the child of a particular tradition) and the lack of belonging to a foreign past, of a particular history: as is the case with art. . . .

In general it can be said that two types of Latin American artists exist: those who believe the history of art is universal and those who believe that art will only reach maturity by basing itself on a Latin American foundation.

At first glance, the history of Latin American art . . . appears as eternal nostalgia, because it is not European, as well as a race to cease being a "poseur" in order to join the historical process of Western invention. From the era when young painters would go to Europe to study (without having the means to exhibit their works there), to the era when they exchanged the classicist academy for [André] Lothe's post-Cubism, to the one today where Paris is overrun by Latin Americans—and the one in between to which this author belongs—, the only thing that can be said to have changed is that the attitude of referentiality (always present) is today criticized. Today we try to move ahead of this history. There have been notable examples of this in the past, which are evident now thirty years later: the Madi art of Argentina.

Both aforementioned types of Latin American artists today have the awareness to strive for a *cultural creation*. Now comes the "how" of proclaiming ourselves to be new. Some say it should be the conscience of the past exercised in the present; others prefer to make advances in the process of inventing history; a third group hopes to combine both positions in a way that transcends them through a revolutionary perspective. This latter group maintains that the only way to anticipate history is to change the present. Art will reflect this change and, because of this, the problem of art should be addressed later. At present only the process matters. This last notion encompasses the will of self-affirmation: the ability "to become," not just to express oneself, but also to stop depending on the mechanisms of power in order to be recognized. The Latin American artist is well-acquainted with this phenomenon. [From the Western perspective], we are seen as: folkloric, at times, or as following the fashions imposed by others.

At the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, the ideas of anticipating history in both avant-garde art and politics crossed paths at a point. The initial effort began its questioning at the moment when the West was skeptical of itself (except for its power), [asking] if art had reached the hour of an “aesthetic of silence” as well as the “loss of the world image.” This was the moment when art began “to be thought of as something which had to be overcome and even called for its own abolition” (Susan Sontag); an art where “its history had met its own end” (Harold Rosenberg); that which “dissolves in the life of society” (Octavio Paz) or that “tends to be no more than a system of symbols” (Lévi-Strauss). [It was a time] when, in order to believe in itself, art proposed “to be a creation of daily life” (Raymond Williams) or “an instrument to modify the conscience and organize new modes of feeling” (Susan Sontag); and all this to the point of creating “the possibility of arranging the human environment as if it were a work of art” (Marshall McLuhan). In short, at a moment such as this, with which history will the Latin American man move forward? Is it the technology that fascinates McLuhan? Impossible. Will he become more skeptical, or, on the other hand, will he be full of hope so that he may bring about revolutionary change in society. . . ?

Such was the moment that led to the development of the “self-made poetics” that would resolve the dilemma of the colonial artist articulated by the Uruguayan printmaker Luis Camnitzer (who in a very Latin American paradox resides in the United States). He stated: “Here is where the dilemma of the colonial artist arises: In participating in the metropolitan game of art, is he not in reality postponing the liberation of the colony to which he belongs?

. . . Being colonized fosters an interest for folklorism; the affirmation of a national culture that refers to the past with a nostalgic attitude is the same as the one held by the Latin American artist who works with Europe or the United States in mind, and it is perhaps more false because the colonial reality becomes more real to him than the other. . . . Behind this affirmation of mine beats the truth of [José] Martí: “There are no letters for expressions until there is no essence [of meaning] to express through them. There will be no Hispanic-American literature until there is no Hispanic-America. We live in ebullient times, not of condensation, of the mixture of elements, not of works of unified components.” Behind this affirmation these two concepts [of mine] paradoxically beat in a way that creates one sole affirmation: “The art of a society cannot be created until that

society proclaims itself to be such; art is made of this social proclamation.” The first maintains that art is the face of the people; the countenance that serves as a historical testament once these peoples have ceased to exist. The second, in turn, refers to an aesthetic of popular origin, and that supposes that the revolution itself is art. In other words, the manifestation of a social reality brought about by the effects of the phenomenon known as “art”; according to [Samuel Taylor] Coleridge it is “rendering the interior as exterior, exterior as interior, nature into thought, thought into nature”...

Such was the era of Black Power in the United States, which was based on the supposition that to declare that one did not possess something was a way to secure it. Ten years have passed: nothing that was desired has been achieved; many hopes have evaporated; the mechanism of withdrawal is general; dictatorships have been established; the hour of the diaspora has arrived for many [individuals of] many nations in our continent. Today there is no confidence in mechanisms that before were viewed with potential.

On the other hand, this Latin American existence—and why not call it cultural—begins to paradoxically formulate itself and surprise the West through its literature. People speak of the rich imagination of Latin Americans, to which many respond that that is the daily reality of our continent. Then comes the question: Why don’t the visual arts flourish in a similar manner? There are various possible responses. One potential answer is that the interests of Western galleries do not coincide with those of the Western publishing houses; another implies that literature establishes the process and the visual arts create the image of a culture once the affirmation process has begun.

Today, in my judgment, it is becoming evident that, even if there is no Latin American image or an independent language of art (speaking in general terms naturally), there is a *Latin American perception*. Among other things, it is denoted by the manner in which it manifests itself in the visual arts: a jam-packed space, vibrant color, linear definition, and a preoccupation with the image. I believe that when Latin American art ceases to be preoccupied with itself and with others, it will discover its richness in the *exercise of its perception*. . . .

A recent work of mine on the crisis of painting that occurred at the end of the 1970s concludes with a quote from the book I left unpublished [1972–73], wherein I attempt to reply to Susan Sontag’s “aesthetic of silence” with an “aes-

thetic of hope.” The quote reads: “If the history of painting in the West has consisted in dressing and then undressing itself, ending today in a ‘striptease,’ can that same emptiness of image be blamed on the societies that have not helped to determine the evolution of Western culture? . . . Slowly but surely the aesthetic of nostalgia will transform itself into an aesthetic of hope. And we will ignore the aesthetic of silence forever.”

IV.3.8 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1061874

MODERN ART IN LATIN AMERICA

Damián Bayón, 1984

In the preface to the anthology *Arte Moderno en América Latina* (1984)—which includes texts by nineteen of the most outstanding critics of Latin American art—editor Damián Bayón dispels some of the long-standing myths and stereotypes associated with the Americas. Beginning with the generic denomination itself, Bayón reminds us that, through at least the early twentieth century, the countries in “Latin America” operated in extreme isolation from one another. Regarding the arts, each country’s differing social and geographic environments resulted in unique creative manifestations, ranging from nationalism–populism–*indigenismo* catchalls to the cutting-edge proposals of conceptual artists. Moreover, art critics provided divergent responses vis-à-vis the region’s multilayered artistic fabric. From apolitical critics to political engagés—with their varying degrees of acceptance of emerging trends—Bayón warns of the pitfalls of making unsustainable generalizations or, worse, illustrating lopsided critical theories with mediocre second- or third-tier art. This translation is based on Bayón’s *Arte Moderno en América Latina* [“Prefacio,” (Madrid: Taurus Ediciones, 1984), 15–23].

PREFACE

To begin with, the name “Latin America” is a somewhat conventional term, coined in Europe about a century ago as an umbrella designation that was intended to

include all the countries that were colonized by the Spanish and the Portuguese, as well as a few islands and smaller areas that were subsequently colonized by the French, the British, and the Dutch. Some international organizations refer to this latter region as the Caribbean. To simplify matters, I have taken the liberty of using the term “Latin America” to refer to the entire continent—with the exception of the Anglo-American areas—as one entity.

The North American historian Charles Wagley, in his introduction to *The Latin American Tradition* (New York, 1968), wrote an eighty-page essay of extraordinary psychological perception on the customs and nature of the Latin American people. He initially rejected the simplistic tendency to use one single name to designate this vast expanse of land and the different countries whose only common denominator was the Catholic religion and the two main languages that were imposed upon them. By the end of his essay, however, Wagley admitted that the idea of a “Latin American” culture was not as mistaken as it had originally seemed, since there were actually more similarities than differences among the communities living between the southern banks of the Rio Grande and the southernmost tip of Patagonia.

We might even ask ourselves now if that generic name of Latin America—with all its defects—has had a certain “continentalizing” effect on us, in the sense that it includes us yet sets us apart from that other abstract entity, that Anglo-America with different origins and a Protestant perspective, a region distinguished by a different economy and a different world view.

The nickname that someone gave us—the *Dis-United States of America*—though cruel is not entirely incorrect: until at least half a century ago, each of our countries behaved like an “island” with regard to the rest of the continent. Without attempting to justify this isolation, the reader should nonetheless be reminded that we are talking about a gigantic stretch of land measuring nearly twenty million square kilometers [nearly eight million square miles]—about forty times the size of the Iberian Peninsula—which also covers a wide range of distinctly different geographical, climatic, and racial zones. The towering mountains, mighty rivers, jungles, and deserts have literally “boxed” each country and every group of people into their narrow local areas for three and a half centuries, thus encouraging the fierce individualism that we inherited as one of our distinctive traits from the Indians and the conquistadors.

Those little mountains, those streams of water, all those accidents of nature, occur relentlessly from the steamy tropics all the way down to the inclement weather of the southern regions. A serious misconception among those who have never traveled in Latin America is that it is all “tropical” from north to south and from sea to sea. But that is far from the truth: those who look at the map but do not consider the elevation—that is, the height above sea level—are bound to draw mistaken conclusions since, with the exception of the Caribbean, Brazil, half of the coastal areas and a large temperate zone, most of the large cultural centers have always been in the mountains or the high plateaus. In other words, to consider that Latin America consists entirely of a “hot weather culture” is not just a flagrant exaggeration; it is almost an outright lie. The reader should also be wary of another stereotype, in this case involving a most insidious attempt to apply a single psychological label to an immense area populated by people of all races and all types. There is, in fact, a commonplace in circulation that claims that the inhabitants of our continent are, by definition, violent, passionate, and sensual people, whose art should always be classified as “baroque” or—even worse—“surrealist.” It should be noted that the latter two categories, so exclusive and exaggerated, are not just the creation of tourist guides who seek to promote the “local color”; they are a figment of the imagination of certain foreign writers and even a few famous Latin Americans who have transferred their own traits and world views to the whole culture indiscriminately throughout space and over the course of the centuries.

The greatest cultural gathering in history had already taken place over three centuries ago in the early days of the process we are discussing here. By that time several races had already become permanently intertwined: the Indians, the Iberians, and the blacks had intermingled in every possible combination during the colonial period. To complicate matters, after the War of Independence, when each country was struggling to control its own internal affairs, the great waves of international immigration began coming ashore everywhere on the continent, around 1860 or 1870, and would continue to do so for a century. That widespread racial fusion—though theoretically similar to the melting pot experience in North America—would, however, produce a very different type of population, if only because at that time the first version of a mixed [mestizo] race did not yet exist in the United States or Canada.

Within that social turmoil, art began to play a role that was no longer solely religious, nor was it limited to satisfying the privileged classes to the exclusion of all others.

Even before Independence was achieved, architecture had adopted a neo-classical style in major urban areas such as Mexico City, Lima, and Rio de Janeiro. This same influence spread to smaller cities some twenty or thirty years later, where it was in vogue for almost a century, especially among European contractors and master builders and their Latin American students who were building private homes. Painting, on the other hand, evolved smoothly, with almost no transition, from late baroque or rococo to international romanticism. Our most inspired artists from 1830 to 1880 were Romantics, especially the portrait painters who provided us with a gallery of “types” such as we had never had before. Certain native painters were also Romantics—actually, even more so, if that were possible—as were the foreigners whom we now call *Costumbrists*, who were the first who dared to look at our Latin American landscape and try to paint it just as they saw it, with no hint of European influence. That is, not in a “Naturalist” style (that would come much later), but by accepting the information before their eyes and using it to recreate the landscape through a sort of “wakeful fantasy” that, to this day, we find exciting and moving.

The new governments adapted to the needs of the times. The countries in the region were, in theory, all republics (although Brazil and Mexico had also had their imperial periods), but the truth is that control once again passed into the hands of the oligarchies who were descended from the landowners: the original colonists and their descendants, the *Criollo* families who had spawned most of the “liberators” who fought for independence.

It was not until the latter half of the nineteenth century, however, that the thirty troubled years of revolutions, dictatorships, and general chaos began to wind down, at least to some extent. This period of relative prosperity—that was, as always, based on great social injustice—coincided with a boom in immigration, the drive to exploit natural resources, an interest in agriculture and cattle ranching, and the development of a network of roads and railroads that were so desperately needed. This was the time of intrepid pioneers, some of whom were Latin Americans, though most were Europeans or North Americans. Those technicians, engineers, and architects often immigrated with their families and

contributed even further to the mixture of races and evolving languages in Latin America just as it had in the North.

These “evolving” nations were unable to maintain the cultural traditions of the old countries but, bit by bit, they began to develop their own way of life. Foreign “cultural agents,” for their part, realized that going to Cuba was not the same as going to Chile; going to Mexico was not the same as going to Brazil. Geographical conditions and human environments were different from one place to another; some were ready to welcome the latest trends, others were not. Conversely when, toward the end of the century, Latin Americans on scholarships went to study painting and sculpture (architecture came later) in the Old World, they returned with all the latest ideas: the academic styles of the Beaux-Arts, Art Nouveau and, later on and always a few years behind the times, Cubism, Fauvism, Surrealism, and the typical figuration of the thirties that was generically referred to as “the School of Paris.”

The grand architectural programs of the turn of the century relied a great deal on foreigners—especially the French and the Italians—who trained certain formal Latin American professionals. These architects then went on to design the legislative and judicial buildings, government ministries, universities, and theaters that were built by the budding Latin American culture. They also helped to build the city and country homes of the rich. Argentine *estancias* [ranches], for example, were built in the “Andalucía” or “Tudor” style, or were imitations of French castles or palaces in the purest “Beaux-Arts” manner. In other words, Latin American art has been expressed in many and varied ways, adapting to the needs of the Porfirio Díaz period in Mexico and the whims of the nouveau riche in Chile, Brazil, and Venezuela. All this notwithstanding, there has also been, in almost every country, a parallel expression of non-academic forms of art that have been rehabilitated in recent years, as in the case of the printmakers Picheta and [José Guadalupe] Posada in Mexico, the naïve painters in Haiti and Brazil, and popular illustrators and cartoonists in Peru, Argentina, Uruguay, and Colombia.

Everything was improvised in Latin America for three and a half centuries: at least from 1550 to 1900. As in every other region, there were mediocre artists during that period, as well as some quite bad ones and a few whose work was excellent. It was not easy to assess the true worth of each of these artists when they were judged from the inevitably relative contemporary perspective of the time. It

is only now that we are in a position to see and evaluate these works more clearly, as long as we do not allow ourselves to be blinded by an obtuse nationalism.

After this brief historical review—that was not intended as a “triumphalist” commentary, far from it—I believe the time has come to address certain theoretical issues concerning Latin American art and the moderate, lucid critique that should always be part of the process. When I say “critique” I am almost always referring to a general, philosophical reflection, and not to the run-of-the-mill newspaper article. Those who have done the best job of approaching our cultural situations from this perspective are some of the leaders that we call “*pensadores*” [thinkers]—quite a number of them Latin Americans and a few foreigners who, between them, tried to clear up some of our mysteries.

Our nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century thinkers are very well presented by the North American Martin S. Stabb (*In Quest of Identity*, 1967, which includes a Spanish translation) and the Englishwoman Jean Franco (*The Modern Culture of Latin America*, 1967). Most of the authors studied by Stabb and Franco, incidentally, interpret Latin American cultural facts in social and political terms; the most common theme among them seems to have been the question of national “identity.” This idea was originally promoted mainly by the Argentine Ricardo Rojas, who coined the term “*argentinidad*” [Argentine-ness]. The concept became immensely popular throughout the continent, where each country and even each province tirelessly set about searching for its own identity.

More recently, however, not every intellectual agrees with this basic concept that can now be seen as the root of nationalism, indigenism, populism, and even xenophobia. For example, the essayist César Graña (who was born in Peru and is a citizen of the United States), in his book *Fact and Symbol* (1971) and in his essays, “La identidad cultural como invento intelectual” [Cultural Identity as an Intellectual Invention] (in *El intelectual latinoamericano* [the Latin American Intellectual], 1970) and “La metafísica de la frustración cultural” [Metaphysics of Cultural Frustration] (in *Los intelectuales políticos* [Political Intellectuals], 1971) attacks, among other things, that concept of identity that, in his opinion, is merely an “intellectual’s idea.” An idea that, according to him, has no relevance to the profound, essential reality of Latin Americans who fulfill their destiny—as have others throughout history—without becoming unhealthily obsessed with defining themselves.

Generally speaking, the question of identity assumes, above all, a nationalist answer. That nationalism can, in turn, be either “right-wing” or “left-wing” (to put it in the elementary terms of the dichotomy imposed upon us by contemporary circumstances.) This nationalist attitude then leads inevitably to the “indigenism” that represents—as its name clearly implies—a desire to privilege the Indian culture, advocating a “return to the land.”

It would appear that there was another, simultaneous movement that seemed to negate the earlier one but that, in reality, complemented it in a nostalgic sense: it was what we might call “neo-colonialism.” It was that sense of returning to the past that was apparent in architecture, especially after the thirties when—wishing to avoid the Beaux-Arts and subsequently the “international modern” styles—many of the more educated Latin American architects (who were sometimes also historians) attempted, in the mid-twentieth century, to revive the art of the colonial period. Both indigenism and artistic neo-colonialism had the distinctly xenophobic traits that always constitute the negative side of the nationalist coin. In those days, everything foreign was criticized as the catalyst for separating us from our own roots.

The indigenism issue in Peru is not the same as it is in Mexico, as a result of the difference between those who espoused it in the visual arts. In Peru we have José Sabogal (1888–1956), a mediocre artist who studied art at an advanced level in Spain and Mexico. On his return to Peru—which coincided with the arrival of [Raúl] Haya de la Torre and [José Carlos] Mariátegui, two important left-wing political thinkers—Sabogal attempted to promote his “recipe,” which enjoyed only marginal success. His approach was to paint nothing but local Peruvian themes; not just the geographical landscape but, more importantly, the “human landscape”—in other words, the Indians and Mestizos. The idea itself was not a bad one and could be justified as a national affirmation vis-à-vis foreign culture. It was also supported by circumstances in Peru at the time: on the one hand, the founding of Haya de la Torre’s APRA (Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana [American Popular Revolutionary Alliance]), and on the other, Mariátegui’s (Marxist leaning) Partido Socialista [Socialist Party]. In his fundamental book *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* [Seven Essays Interpreting Peruvian Reality] (1928), and in his magazine, *Amauta*, Mariátegui had adopted a conservative approach on artistic matters and indiscriminately attacked Cubism,

Futurism, and Dadaism. Unfortunately, although the idea advocated by Sabogal and his pupil Julia Codesido was a noble one, a few rather uninspired prints and easel paintings could not do much, in the long run, about that distinctly demagogic indigenism.

In contrast, indigenism in Mexico—though that is not what it was called—was at least fortunate enough to enjoy the support of several notable artists, in particular the most famous mural painters of the time, Diego Rivera (1886–1957) and David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896–1974). The great murals painted by these two artists included expressions of left-wing nationalism, indigenism, populism, and, in Rivera’s case, a flagrant anti-Spanish message, all of which was always expressed in a rather elementary, didactic manner. No matter; just as the ideas advocated by Sabogal and his followers had not managed to “pass,” efforts by Rivera and Siqueiros resonated in their milieu ([José Clemente] Orozco never wanted to have anything to do with these dubious enterprises). It must be understood, however, that these two were major artists, and their works, many of which were very worthy, were constantly visible on the walls of certain important public buildings.

This nationalist-indigenist-populist spirit has, to date, not been completely lost. It is still apparent, in a certain way—though very transposed—in works by [Rufino] Tamayo and [Francisco] Toledo that evoke ancestral myths, though combined with modern themes, ancient earthy subjects, and copper colors that are reminiscent of a historic and sensitive past. Furthermore, and in spite of changes in artistic vocabularies, some theoreticians believe that they can still detect hints of an extreme intellectualized indigenism in the abstract works of the Peruvian [Fernando de] Szyszlo (1925) and the Colombian [Alejandro] Obregón (1920).

In any case, certain avant-garde critics still see a sort of indigenism “translated” into the terminology of land art or body art. Protest statements of this kind are apparent in Brazil, for example, where in recent years people have experienced a powerful sense of collective guilt and tormented conscience as a result of the extermination of the indigenous race and the resulting disappearance of their cultural forms of expression.

In conclusion: the obsession with not being sufficiently deep or original; the tireless search for each of those identities; and the strange combination

of nationalism, indigenism, populism, and politico-social utopianism risk stagnating our current Latin American art to the point that the debate has become ideological. The state of these issues up until quite recently has been outlined in several books that I had the good fortune to edit, which include the voices and opinions of a number of artists and historians. I am referring specifically to *América latina en sus artes* [Latin America in its Art] (1975); *El artista latinoamericano y su identidad* [The Latin American Artist and His Identity] (Actas del Simposio de Austin [Minutes from the Symposium in Austin], 1977) [SEE DOCUMENTS IV.4.1-3], and *Panorámica de la arquitectura latinoamericana* [An Overview of Latin American Architecture] (Diez entrevistas [Ten Interviews], 1977). I would refer the interested reader to this material.

IV.4

DEBATING IDENTITY ON A CONTINENTAL SCALE

IV.4.1–IV.4.3

SPEAK OUT! CHARLA! BATE-PAPO!: CONTEMPORARY ART AND LITERATURE IN LATIN AMERICA, SYMPOSIUM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN, OCTOBER 1975

Does present-day Latin American art exist as a distinct expression? If it does, on what terms? Can an artist produce work independent from foreign interests? To what extent do Latin American artists respond to their immediate circumstances: community, visual arts resources, and so on? What operational models can the Latin American artist employ?

These pivotal questions were posed by the important symposium that accompanied the exhibition *12 Latin American Artists Today/12 artistas latino americanos de hoy* at The University of Texas at Austin, Archer M. Huntington Art Museum (September 28–November 2, 1975). Indeed, the event's proposal was to continue a dialogue on the notion of a Latin American aesthetic, an issue repeatedly addressed by artists and critics since the previous decade [SEE DOCUMENTS IN SECTION IV.2]. Here, we include the papers presented by Mexico City-based, Peruvian critic Juan Acha, the São Paulo-based curator and art historian Aracy Amaral (born 1930); and Argentinean art critic Marta Traba (1923–1983).

Acha asserts that, just as there is not a single type of Latin American, there cannot be a homogeneous artistic production. Instead, he proposes a sort of productive permeability, a somewhat essentialist solution that calls for approaching art as a socio-cultural phenomenon.

Amaral agrees with what she refers to as the “geo-sensitive” tenet in Acha’s argument and with the notion that there is no unifying artistic expression in Latin America. Amaral expresses an interest in art that responds to a societal context and reflects the violence of existing domestic contradictions in national terms. She also ponders the obvious reluctance of the art centers of the metropolis to accept peripheral artistic outcomes from northeastern Brazil which use an aesthetic language steeped in the country’s precarious social conditions.

The last of the group of texts from the UT Austin symposium is Marta Traba’s polemical “¿Existe el arte latinoamericano como una expresión artística distinta?” Here, she expands her opinions on the deceptively homogeneous cultures of technological and highly industrialized societies, which she previously condemned in *Arte Latino Americano Actual* [SEE DOCUMENT IV.3.4]. In her view, the driving force of these societies is the creation of commodity art produced to feed an expanding global market; a process that robs art of its representative character and disqualifies art produced in the margins. Presented one year after Traba published her groundbreaking book *Dos décadas vulnerables* and her essay “La cultura de la resistencia” (1973) [Fernando Alegría, ed., *Literatura y praxis en América Latina* (Caracas: Monte Ávila, 1974), 49–80], the present essay revisits the modus operandi of a “culture of resistance,” a term she often stressed in light of the growing debates on Latin American art.

All three texts appeared with minimal variations in the proceedings for the symposium, *El artista latinoamericano y su identidad* [(Caracas: Monte Ávila, 1977)], edited by Damián Bayón, also the curator for the exhibition. The present excerpts by Acha and Traba are reprints of the translated manuscript versions at the Benson Latin American Collection/ University of Texas, Austin [*Speak out! Charla! Bate-Papo! Contemporary Art and Literature in Latin America*, Symposium organized by Damián Bayón, University of Texas at Austin, October, 1975]. Amaral’s text is drawn from a 1983 anthology [Aracy Amaral, *Arte e meio artístico: entre feijoada e o x-burguer (1961–1981)*, (São Paulo: Nobel, 1983), 226–331]. Traba’s paper also appeared as “Somos latinoamericanos” in a posthumous anthology of her writings [Emma Araújo de Vallejo, ed., *Marta Traba*, (Bogota: Planeta Colombiana Editorial S.A., 1984), 331–333].

IV.4.1 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1065080

LATIN AMERICAN ART TODAY DOES AND DOES NOT EXIST AS A DISTINCT EXPRESSION

Juan Acha, 1975

QUESTION:

DOES PRESENT-DAY LATIN AMERICAN ART EXIST AS A DISTINCT EXPRESSION?

I am afraid that I must begin by giving an authentic and conditional answer: Our present-day art both does and does not exist as a distinct expression.

It does or does not to the degree in which some works are distinct in themselves and others are not, for Latin American art consists of a wide range of expressions and quality, and includes many different concepts and practices. And it exists, or does not exist, as such, to the degree in which the artists' ideal in producing any work of art is to make it something both distinct and universal. Although, at the same time, he cannot avoid similarities to other works [nor can he avoid] the inevitable influence of his geographic space and his historic time.

In attempting to determine whether the nature of the distinctness is and should be a matter of expression or of invention, of aesthetics or of Latin American character, we should remember that not all expression is aesthetic, nor does every painting or sculpture fulfill the ideal of being unique (distinct or new) and possessed of socio-cultural value—that is, of having some effect on its surroundings (society and culture), of changing them in some way. . . .

Everything seems to indicate, then, that the aesthetic quality of a work lies in its uniqueness, and that it is this uniqueness, therefore, which may be said to determine whether a work is distinct and new. Our art does, unquestionably, include works of this type just as it also includes others that directly express, and dwell upon, a known reality—one whose origin may be either: foreign or local. Nevertheless, neither the question nor the answer may be said to end here, because our art both is and is not distinct in the very same measure in which we,

Latin Americans, are both like and unlike people anywhere else, and also because we seem to feel the need to give aesthetic uniqueness a Latin American air.

Now, if we consider that our identity is still in the process of being forged in the fires of local and world realities, that we are and want to be different from what we were, and that we are decidedly *plural entities*—born and brought up under the most widely varying conditions, products of a number of mixed strains of ancestry, and thus able to slip effortlessly from one attitude to another (which to the European mind makes us unstable and unpredictable)—it becomes fairly obvious that not everything that comes from Latin America is truly Latin American. Furthermore, that no one can point in all honesty to just what is and what is not legitimately Latin American in art—much less impose any such opinion on artists.

Thus, our artists are perfectly free to express some new aspect of what they think we are, or what they suppose we want to be, or even to use their inventiveness to express what we can and should be, and they are equally free to express the very process of becoming and wishing to become *other* than we were. They can take local realities and give them back to us transubstantiated, ponder permanence throughout change, and also give an unexpected Latin American touch to aesthetic uniqueness.

But as it happens, whether we like it or not, such distinctive touches are usually something that the artist inadvertently gives his work. There are other artists meanwhile who do this deliberately, making peculiar their work by giving it a Latin American stamp that supplants aesthetic uniqueness. Unfortunately, there are all too many works of this kind, and far too many art critics, theoreticians, historians, and aficionados who mistake these Latin American stereotypes, as well as other international fashions, for something of aesthetic value.

All these things that are true of our art are likely to be just as true of art anywhere else. But—in our case—there are far too few really good works, and our art is far from being an important element in our local culture as in world art. In my opinion, the reasons for this state of affairs are clear:

- 1) The numbers factor: Owing to socioeconomic causes, the numbers of our artists are few, and they have only limited opportunities for developing their art; the same is true of critics, aficionados, theories, and historians.

-
- 2) Ours is a young art, existing as a sociocultural phenomenon only since 1920, a date that according to Richard M. Morse marks the end of our colonial period.

 - 3) The lack of an independent, realistic, and developed visual thought that would nourish artworks and ideals by means of reflection and solidify Latin American substrata for the aesthetic uniqueness of our artists. Above all, thought that would put an end to the mistaken concept of *limiting art to artists*, in order to go beyond the specific aspects of each work and approach art as a sociocultural phenomenon: one in which those who reflect on, spread, and consume art would also play a part. Thereby avoiding what is an extremely widespread vice: the art milieu self-centered on the ongoing battle for prestige of a series of prima donnas, a struggle that entices personality cults fostering both official institutions and the art marketing in general.

A further goal of this body of thought would lie in conciliating its own eminently visual interests with political concerns and literary models, and in laying the foundations for both a Latin American teleology and a Latin American re-formulation of the basic concepts of art.

IV.4.2 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 776786

LATIN AMERICA: A CULTURALLY OCCUPIED CONTINENT

Aracy A. Amaral, 1975

...

IF WE TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION that Latin America is a culturally occupied continent, nothing is more natural for an “islander” [like] the Latin American artist than to take information from the outside with relative ease. The question is

about the influences upon the Latin American artist [and, specifically, what operational models does the Latin American artist have at his/her disposal in terms of international currents, indigenous movements, or other resources?] That is, what are the models and patterns that today form and inform him? (And we are talking about international and local influences.) I would say that all of them combined are the informing sources for our continent.

Regarding “other resources,” I would say that the main contingent is perhaps the artist’s innermost reality, no matter his country of origin—whether it is Nicaragua, Brazil, Chile, or Colombia [to name just a few]. Of course, in societies of larger industrial and technological development, there is less of a need for a surrealistic expression than in other areas with stronger social and economic contrasts. Even between Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo we can see a difference; we can see how significant the influence of the environment is upon the artist.

The artist of Latin America, in spite of his cultural occupation, cannot be compared with the hybrid Australian or Canadian artist; a Latin American artist has different characteristics than these, not only because of his cultural contradictions but also because of his popular roots. That is, a Latin American artist can be—and most are—from the middle class, but this does not prevent him from being morally and fondly connected to the common man. He resents the social injustice, the political and economic instability, and the historical crisis of his country. He is influenced by the racial mixture (be that Indian, African, or Oriental) and also the consequences of this blended heritage upon his cultural formation. For these very reasons, we feel that Argentina and Uruguay, because of their strong economic conditions and stronger European cultural density, have a different position within Latin America. Argentinean artists are much more connected to Europe and European rationality (and in the present days also more connected to the United States) than any other Latin American country.

It would be rather simplistic to mention four or five informational sources, without taking into consideration the complex process of any artistic creation. Concerning Latin America—and not the reality of some internationally influenced areas (such as Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Venezuela, the south of Brazil, São Paulo included)—I believe much more in a “collective unconscious,” an idea that parallels those of Juan Acha and Marta Traba [SEE DOCUMENTS IV.4.1 AND IV.4.3, RESPECTIVELY], who take similar positions when talking about a “culture of resistance.” At the same time, I would like to quote Damián Bayón, who

speaks of the “inherent popular sense” or about “something as obvious as the air we inhale.” He says: “...let us say, as a heritage: we are born native, just as we are born stateless.” Bayón’s words may be applicable to certain now-fashionable attitudes of some artists in my country, Brazil.

[To what extent do Latin American artists respond to their immediate circumstances: community, plastic resources and others?] If I take Brazil as an example, it is because this searching for an identity—or this desire to emphasize an identity—has lately been reflected in my country in some works by young artists. Works deprived of any artistic quality. (It is possible that these are only preliminary steps in a real search for identity, because, in Brazil, we are much too far away from having a unique reality due to the multiplicity of Brazilian realities.) Coming back to what I have said before about the lack of artistic qualities in these works of art—which are more concerned with an identity search—we can realize, of course, that this [lack] may be irrelevant because this is just a path, a step, a stage of an artistic development, worthy enough to be mentioned. In these works, we see a constant concern with a popular theme, a folkloric or regional theme.

This concern with the popular is something new in Brazil—because only in the 1930s did the popular interest emerge under President [Getúlio] Vargas’s government—and it would sound rather reactionary in Mexico today because of the muralists’ experience. In Brazil, these attempts are dismissed as inconsequential, since the theme of the Brazilian Indian is expressed by urban artists who do not achieve the expression of the Indian’s dignified culture, now in extinction; instead [they] portray the same romantic image of the Indian projected by the mass media.

This may be just a choice to return to a local model, and, in Brazil, it cannot be disconnected from what would necessarily be involved in a model based on everyday life. Beginning in 1969, the presence of [official military] censorship in Brazil surely diverted the arts into different directions. Because of that censorship, we had a great number of draftsmen going into erotic lucubration with gradual disregard for daily life; or using subtle metaphors through images; or, if treating this theme, working from an isolated, individualistic point of view, where the social group is totally erased as an inspirational source. At the same time, “nostalgia” seems to take hold of the younger generation, and we see young artists exercising post-cubism and abstractionist tendencies, full of precocity,

but lacking inventiveness. This has also happened on account of an emergent art market beginning in 1971.

But there is also the tendency to vigorously repel—as in other parts of the continent—anything that can refer to the “ecological,” because it is felt that this type of expression limits one’s artistic creativity to the regional, to the detriment of the internationalism of information, which would propel a renovation of artistic language. It is as if these artists do not realize that an artistic renewal could arise out of the very models that today they disdain as “regional” because of their popular roots.

And, meanwhile, in another part of the world, unencumbered by our colonial inferiority complexes against whatever is “popular,” research based on popular roots preceded revolutionary achievements by artists such as [Kazimir] Malevitch, [Wassily] Kandinsky, Sonia Terk-Delauney, [Nathalie] Gontcharova, etc. From popular art came the purest color, the abstract elements of decoration, [and] autonomy of expression that would never have originated in a rigid academy.

[A third question implies the universal complaint about the lack of truly professional art criticism in Latin America. Does it compel the artist to seek feedback elsewhere?] I do not believe that it is the absence of specialized art critics that pushes Latin American artists abroad. Instead, this seems to happen due to a desire for access to primary sources of information, [and] for the inspiration and energy offered by a developed artistic environment. The lack of these elements in his/her domestic surroundings, plus the possibility of a market abroad (compelling the artist to produce in a competitive and demanding atmosphere) are the main reasons for leaving one’s own country. Thus, I would consider that, first, what calls the Latin American overseas is: a vibrant artistic environment, followed by a market as a condition of survival, stimulation, and, later criticism, as a luxury one could say, because even in one’s own country what use is widespread or stimulating criticism if artists can’t support themselves professionally?

I am talking here about two different things—a stimulating environment and also the existence of the art market. In Latin American, these two things may be easily disassociated. This is very clear in the case of the environment of Rio de Janeiro, where boldness seems to bloom with less difficulty than in São Paulo. In that industrial city, contrary to Rio de Janeiro, a larger art market can offer

economic stability to an artist. Nevertheless, in both cities, artists exhibited different characteristics [unique to their specific milieu]: in São Paulo there is more of an elaboration; there is mannerism; a concern with new materials; there are the typical architects-painters; with obvious difficulties in realizing their ideas, [they] give up precarious, substandard forms to compensate for impossibilities. But this is nothing new. In the 1950s (the period of Concrete art) São Paulo *concretistas* were opposed by the poetics of the geometrical abstractionism of Rio; just as in Rio today, ritualism and magic is often a peculiar behavioral expression, especially among younger artists.

Besides that, we can see from examples of a recent past, from the 1920s, that it was not the criticism that pushed several Latin American artists. I am referring specifically to both São Paulo and Rio *modernistas*, who updated themselves in Paris during that period, producing vigorously amid that city's stimulating atmosphere. What we saw in following years, when they returned to their country, was a drop in the quality of their art production. This happened for several reasons, but we can point to the provincialism of the environment in which they were immersed and not, I believe, to the absence of the Parisian critics (which in the end did not end up being so fundamental). And now we can say the same regarding Latin American artists living in New York where the situation repeats itself.

In addition, it is this very pulsating artistic atmosphere that makes way for the critic who facilitates the rise of criticism. Again, I'll give a domestic example. In São Paulo a veteran group of art critics with a literary background persists, not yet replaced by the young generation; in contrast, in Rio de Janeiro we have seen the rise of personalities such as Mário Pedrosa, not to mention Ferreira Gullar, Frederico Morais, and more recently the young Ronaldo Brito. The feverish atmosphere of Buenos Aires, mainly from the 1950s onward, was quite fertile; it also served as an irradiant center of art critics (even now, here, in this meeting we have Marta Traba, Damián Bayón, and Kasuya Sakai, the latter taking on a dual role as artist and art writer, [all representing Buenos Aires]), and [these critic] split their activities among several capitals of the continent and beyond, reaffirming the cosmopolitan character of Buenos Aires, where intellectual agitation began with [Jorge] Romero Brest during the 1940s.

Due to the lack of active and directed criticism in most of our countries, I believe that the Latin American artist works more using information he receives, and a self-analysis of his work replaces the [external] critic to function as a self-

correcting strategy directing new paths. Therefore, it is not new that in this continent, which is already nourished by outside cultures, the consecration of relevant artistic exponents takes place abroad, which then allows artists to achieve domestic success in their native countries. . . .

IV.4.3 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1065742

WE ARE LATIN AMERICANS: THE WAY OF RESISTANCE

Marta Traba, 1975

THE OBJECTIVE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION, “Does Latin American art exist as a distinct expression?” would be to assert: We DO NOT EXIST as a distinct artistic expression or even as an artistic expression outside the limits of our continent.

The problem of a cultural existence is tied to the reception or attention paid to given creations and always has a relative meaning: for example, African sculpture exists for Europe only when Picasso incorporates it into his painting. Keeping in mind that the process of modern- and present-day art has been forged in two metropolises, first Paris and then New York—and has unconditionally served an imperialist project destined to disqualify the cultural provinces and to unify artistic products into a deceptively homogeneous whole that tends to establish a planetary culture—our artistic existence is not even posed as a probability.

The global or planetary culture, generated by technological and highly industrialized societies, moves within established frameworks:

- 1) Incessant production of consumer art;
- 2) Extermination of the concept of art as fiction on grounds of its anachronism;
- 3) Escalation of the terrorism of the avant-gardes.

The incessant production of consumer art has robbed art of its specificity and its representative character. On destroying its specificity, art has ceased to be conceived of as a difficult creation that goes from what is perceived to that which is imaginary and now attempts to follow the pattern of products intended for consumption. The artist has become an undifferentiated producer who responds to the requests of the cultural superstructure that gives him an outlet to the market, compels him to change according to expectations, guarantees his dissemination and promises an increase in his market value.

This type of handling has a price: to renounce art as fiction, that is to say, to eliminate all semiotic meaning and to construct visual patterns devoid of risk.

Such a draining of the work of art would not have been arrived at without the powerful device of the avant-gardes. The avant-gardes have not worked as bridgeheads of the cultural process (as it was incumbent on them to do), but as emissaries of the planetary culture. At its service they have lost the possibility of representing any human group, proposing, in exchange—innocuous, stupid or ferocious, but always empty—entertainment, to the satisfaction of the manipulating elites.

In this process Latin America is of no importance.

In the book by Simón Marchán [Fiz]¹—the one that straddles from Object-Based art to Conceptual Art,—for example, the only Latin Americans mentioned in its 360 pages (devoted to a methodical review of the years from 1960 to 1974 and despite containing copious information) are those who were able to fuse totally with a European project. [To wit:] Kinetic art, thus erasing the original sin, or those who have demonstrated their permanent avant-garde zeal by incorporating themselves (the Jorge Glusberg's Group of Thirteen in Buenos Aires) into the group of cybernetic, conceptual and "video simulator" artists of North America and Europe.

But the exclusion of the Latin Americans from the process I have indicated should not be considered "fatal" to their existence or a factor that diminishes it. Confronted with such a project, the Latin American artists who work within twentieth-century art have acted in two ways:

- 1) By placing a voluntary distance between themselves and the project when they became aware of the swindle, distortion, and extermination of art that was being programmed;

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- 2) By seeking to coincide mimetically with the project when they realized there is no existence possible outside of its dictates.

The artists of the first group have worked within a consistent line that I describe as a *culture of resistance*. The culture of resistance has a well founded tradition that begins with the first generation that was ready to demonstrate its differences and to emphasize them proudly, a generation we could locate in [Joaquín] Torres-García, [Armando] Reverón, [Roberto] Matta; then runs through a second group of artists associated with [Fernando de] Szyszlo, [Armando] Morales, [José Luis] Cuevas, who with a much greater awareness of their defensive work expressly disconnect themselves from the process; and is passed on to the generations that are now between twenty and thirty years old, generations that are energetically showing their repudiation, disgust and absolute rejection of the project. [Namely] by organizing a genuine renaissance of drawing and engraving and returning to a figurative art that implies their political and cultural reconnection with regional surroundings.

Besides their repudiation of the project, a characteristic common to the artists of the resistance has been the will to formulate art as language, to clarify its possibilities of communication and to establish it as a semiotics, where the structure of the work acquires its significance only on being questioned and used by a human group.

The project of global art succeeded in North America and Europe. In spite of the abyss fallen into by the manipulated avant-gardes; in spite of the repulsive aberrations and fetishisms displayed by body art, funk art, Mec art and their most insane practitioners; in spite of the impudence with which television monopolies sell TV à la carte; in spite of the sophistication with which groups such as [the Parisian literary magazine] *Tel-Quel* decide to relocate “painting,” or of how the emerging Nazism acclaims certain hyperrealistic representations that are no less miserable than the ones produced by socialist realism; in spite of the irony with which certain critics (i.e., [Alberto] Arbasino, [Harold] Rosenberg) dissect the “mafias,” or that serious [art] critics like [Pierre] Francastel abstain or, like Dore Ashton, fight them on the strength of intelligence; the project to exterminate art has achieved complete success. . . . Yves Klein’s defiance of death, [Piero] Manzoni’s suicide, [Rudolf] Schwarzkogler’s “accident,” they are genuine assassinations by the cultural superstructure.

What do we have to do with any of this?

Even though the project to exterminate art and the homologation of the work of art to a consumer product was conceived of in the metropolises, it also had colonialist intentions.

On expanding throughout Latin America—traditional bastion of any attempt at cultural colonization—it proposed to deprive our countries of the possibility of clarifying the confused and delayed national identity to which we aspire.

Our societies are mostly pre-technological, agrarian and economically underdeveloped. Cultural underdevelopment on abandoning artists to their own efforts has allowed them, however, to better defend themselves. In addition, on penetrating into Latin America the contemptuous and imposed nature of colonialism has generated tenacious “antibodies.”

What has been the general defense strategy?

- 1) To reject the changes demanded by the terrorism of the avant-gardes;
- 2) To remain faithful to a personal conception, always thought out vis-à-vis the community. Hence the fact that Latin Americans continue to be creators of visions and communicators of visual signs, in spite of the fact that such activity has been belittled by the metropolises and their submissive spokesmen, who classify it as provincial, regressive, outdated or stagnant.

Latin American art of the resistance exists for us; it fulfills an epistemological function and offers a political service.

As artists and critics of the resistance we are not at all interested in fitting into the deceptive fabric of the cultural superstructure. The strengthening of a regional art—as remote from coarse and unfortunate Indigenism and Nativism as from the imprisoning trap of a “planetary art”—is the objective of an art that will process (with the necessary reservations and to the extent that it can be reduced to the discourse of fiction) the new technological, scientific and social data produced, be it either to accept or reject it. This means that the way of resistance is polysemous and does not follow any given program that leads to pre-ordained forms. The resistance is the aesthetic behavior we present as an alternative to fadish, arbitrary, onanistic or destructive behavior.

A docile or ignorant criticism—which continues to be discursive or paralytic—fearful of being left behind, has not adequately accompanied this valid segment of Latin American art. It seems ironic [to me] that it is The University of Texas at Austin in the United States that is debating a subject that concerns us exclusively and which so many sad imitators who vegetate in our countries prefer to scorn.

To conclude, the existence of Latin American art is linked to our capacity to support our viewpoints, to the sharpening of our arguments, to the modernization of the critical procedure, and to our being aware that the salvation of those who are put on the fringes lies in accentuating their marginality in order to give it its full meaning.

1

Simón Marchán Fiz, *Del arte objetual al arte de concepto (1960–1974)* (Madrid: A. Corazón, Comunicación, 1974).—Ed.

IV.4.4–IV.4.7

THE *ETSEDRÓN* DEBATE: THE 13TH SÃO PAULO BIENNIAL, OCTOBER 1975

In 1976, the Mexican art magazine *Artes Visuales* appeared with commentaries on one potential model for Latin American art: *Etsedrón: Project III*, a mixed-media installation that Grupo Etsedrón (an artistic collective from Northeastern Brazil) presented at the 13th São Paulo Biennial (1975). Despite the installation's unfavorable reception in metropolitan Brazil, Aracy Amaral's reading proposes *Etsedrón* as a new paradigm for art production stemming from the margins. As an alternate model for Brazilian art, it offers an undiluted mestizo or mulatto visual language in overt opposition to taste and fads embedded in the country's institutionalized art milieus and circuits. In Amaral's view, *Etsedrón* (Nordeste or Northeast spelled in reverse) should be seen within a Latin American critical perspective rather than through the lens of a biennial that obediently follows the dislocated model of Venice.

Extending the debate, Juan Acha argues that the installation constituted a hostile disruption of Brazil's art production. For the Peruvian critic, *Etsedrón: Project III* epitomizes one of

the *many* possible aesthetic avenues available to art in the Americas. However, he cautions against presupposing that a single work could “redirect” the totality of Brazilian art or could even serve as the basis for a cohesive regional style or trend.

Uruguayan critic María Luisa Torrens and Mexican abstract artist Manuel Felguérez (born 1928) also weighed in on Etsedrón group and on its potential. In her paper, Torrens calls attention to the fact that *Etsedrón: Project III* should be understood within the context of the biennial’s timid refocusing on Latin American art. Rather than seeing the group in marginal terms, Torrens argues instead that Etsedrón employs the most up-to-date modes of artistic production: happenings, multi-media, film, photography, and so forth. Felguérez insists that Latin American art is inevitably a plural and highly differentiated expression, noting that Etsedrón broadens the discussion in several fields. In thinking about his native Mexico as well as the Latin American works shown at the biennial, the artist recognizes that his peers have assimilated American and European trends to produce original works.

These four essays were published in *Artes Visuales* [(Mexico City), no. 10 (April–June, 1976): Aracy Amaral, “Etsedrón: una forma de violencia,” 5–8; Juan Acha, “Etsedrón; respuesta a Aracy A. Amaral,” 9–10; María Luisa Torrens, “Etsedrón o la carencia de interés libidinoso por la realidad,” 11–13; and Manuel Felguérez, “La necesaria pluralidad del arte latinoamericano,” 2–4]. Their translations are by Betty Sisto for *Artes Visuales*. [SEE DOCUMENTS IV.2.6 AND IV.2.7 FOR ESSAYS PUBLISHED IN THE SAME ISSUE AND ADDRESSING THE QUESTION: WHEN WILL THE ART OF LATIN AMERICA BECOME LATIN AMERICAN ART?].

IV.4.4 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1065099

ETSEDRÓN: A FORM OF VIOLENCE

Aracy A. Amaral, 1976

IN GENERAL, IT CAN BE SAID THAT THE WORK *ETSEDRÓN*,¹ which was presented at the last São Paulo Biennial aroused little comment. It was almost ignored by the “initiates,” both artists and critics, who considered it a “difficult” work. Deprived of the critic’s usual frame of reference, they may—who knows...?—have found

that they had nothing on which to base any judgment or comments. The public may find it repulsive and perplexing, which is a healthy reaction, but the artistic fraternity classifies it as something horrible, dirty, as well as completely different from what is usually imported from Europe or New York. To my way of seeing, it is precisely this latter characteristic that is the most attractive thing about *Etsedrón*, and on inspecting this environmental work I found a great deal of nurture for thought. Could it be that *Etsedrón* represents, to a certain extent, one of the paths that Brazilian art might follow if we were not so submerged in the internationalist wave of art?

Faced with such reflections, one might argue, as the critic Laís Moura does, that the authors of the work are somewhat less than fully informed. She is right since they decided to produce “environmental art” they know it is valid, and it makes no difference whether it is two-dimensional or three-dimensional. But I think that is as far as their knowledge of international art goes, for the concept, the materials and the forms they have employed give the impression of having emerged from the earth itself; and that is what gives this work its predominantly visceral tone. That minimum amount of information, however, was at the same time enough to make it clear that this work is not a thing apart from the everyday world. It is also an indication of the fact that we are not dealing with a folklorist concept.

But neither is it a matter of gratuitous nationalism. It might be well to begin by asking ourselves just what it was that led to the appearance of *Etsedrón* in recent years. (Another work by this group was presented in the preceding Bienial.) It is significant that it comes, as mentioned before, from the Northeast: the part of Brazil that most jealously maintains its cultural traditions, owing to its lack of economic “oxygenation.” The latter factor may also make it—in the terminology of Argentine critic Marta Traba—an area that is “closed” to outside information, and thus less open to the internationalist tendencies that dominate art in the southern part of the country. The number of European—or Oriental—immigrants to be found in northern and northeastern Brazil is minimal in comparison to the contingents that have settled in the area between Rio Grande [do Sul] and Rio de Janeiro. The population of those northern areas is therefore still a product of the same racial mixture that has existed since colonial times (Iberian white, Indian, and black). At the same time, *Etsedrón* may almost be considered a cry of alarm, calling the attention of an entire country-continent, which—in its

southern and best-communicated part—is virtually losing its traditional characteristics: its “roots.”

The work *Etsedrón* is loaded with evidence of our ecological-social reality: midway between man and the earth, these strange, fantastic, beings, part human, part flora, part fauna, are nonetheless seen as an extraordinary unified whole, crafted from the matter-energy of ivy, fibers, clay, bones, leather and straw. [They are] crafted by human hands from their own region. “Is it beautiful?” It makes little difference, when one of the categories of aesthetics itself is the “horrible beautiful.”

What is certain is that *Etsedrón* is a work of impressive vigor and vitality, although it must be looked at in a new way by the expert or city dweller who is used to finding a reflection of imported art in Brazilian works of art. The only similarity between *Etsedrón* and foreign-inspired art lies in the bold way they call on our attention.

The installation of the work left much to be desired and impaired its effectiveness. As we know only too well, the same thing applies to everything that is shown at the Biennial. The space is so inadequate that the works presented there are almost never shown to their best advantage. Furthermore, owing to a lack of sensitivity on the part of those who arranged the exhibits, *Etsedrón* lost [some] of its impact because of the works placed on either side. The rather unfortunate work by Bernardo Caro and the folklorism of the lineal and literary Adereson Madeiros, neither of which had the slightest thing in common with *Etsedrón*, were confusing to the visitor, since the three were placed almost as if they formed a visual sequence.

On asking visitors to the Biennial what impression they had received from *Etsedrón*, I heard such comments as these: “It evokes poverty, so I didn’t like it”; “It presupposes an atmosphere of struggle”; “I don’t like it because the materials are offensive to the senses”; “Aesthetically, it’s ugly”; “The colors are disgusting,” and “The expression is hostile”; all of them answers that proved the impact of the work. The rural air of *Etsedrón* (which [Argentine critic Jorge] Romero Brest would be sure to reject on the basis of that characteristic alone, since according to him the renovation of art must come from urban circles, from the representatives of “modern living,” had an obvious effect on visitors’ thinking, as witnessed by the opinion overheard to the effect that the characters in the work looked like “those figures they set in the middle of rice fields to scare away the birds.”

It is true that the dramatic element of these figures gives them an expressionistic air. There is emphasis on impetus, on strength, on structure (volume is almost ignored), on rich tactile-visual effects, and on a very symptomatic disinterest in colors. The “absence” of color, that is, the preference shown for ochre and earth tones in detriment to chromatic vivacity—which is as typical of Brazil as it is of most tropical countries where the lineal element is more important than vivid coloring (the goal of these northeastern artists, as has been noted by so many writers) rhythm, vigor, and the “disgusting” nature of the materials—is a characteristic feature of *Etsedrón*.²

The whole character of this *Etsedrón* work seems to me far more mature than that of the work shown at the preceding Biennial, for, plastically speaking, it is a much more finished proposal. It is a work of the “here and now.” As it happens, however, art is not normally produced for a numerous public, but for an elite group of initiates whose approval or rejection decides its fate. It is for this reason that *Etsedrón*, no matter how serious it may be, is rejected by the public. Here we have a work that is not “white,” that expresses a high opinion, without prejudice or complexes, of the personality of the mulatto or *cafuso*.³ A “poor man’s work” that has nothing whatever to do with the sophisticated “arte povera” of Europe, it is difficult fare not easily accepted by those who are accustomed to forms of expression copied from those of European and North American artists. We may well be witnessing a new, Brazilian mestizo form of plastic/visual expression [that stems from those] of the colonial period. An expression of the *sertaneja* cultural reality [coming from the backlands], which deliberately avoids any visible link with the type of European art that dominates artistic circles in Southern Brazil.

It is because of this series of considerations that I would rather not try to relate *Etsedrón* (or even such other, and to me less successful, efforts as the previously mentioned work by Aderson Madeiros, or those by [the group from the State of] Ceará) to the current wave of “primitivism” in the United States. There, that movement is a result of the fact that artists in the great urban centers have developed a new awareness of certain almost forgotten ancestral values, such as the American Indian culture (and here—theoretically—there might be an affinity with the goals that *Etsedrón* pursues, but there is not). And [they] are showing it in works in which the erudition is very close to the surface, particularly as regards the refined treatment given certain rustically present materials. In Brazil, the artists who are best known form giving their work a sophisticated touch

in the American fashion (which is of enormous value in the magnificent work of Puerto Rican artist Rafael Ferrer) are “the internationalists” Rubens Gerchman and *Romosa*.⁴

To avoid prejudice in judging it, work like *Etsedrón*, a testimony of a mulatto or *sertanejo* art that suddenly appears in a Biennial modeled on—of all things!—that of Venice, it might prove useful to adopt (as the Peruvian critic Juan Acha suggests) a Latin American, rather than a European-North American, critical viewpoint [SEE DOCUMENT IV.4.5]. Is it possible—and what is even more important—, have we sufficient cultural autonomy for there to be a plastic expression, a Brazilian plastic language, in place of the one we have copied from the Western culture? It may be too soon. But perhaps *Etsedrón* represents a first howl (for there is a great deal of violence in the work) of assent. It is not a word designed to “bring order out of chaos,” as the São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro Brazilian urban architects of the fifties (the “concrete men”) proposed to do. It is, above all, the “matter” of the earth, used by craftsmen: [those] who worked as a team in a common social effort.

1

Etsedrón is an anagram of the word “Nordeste”—Northeast—spelled backwards. The Nordeste region is also the poorest area in Brazil.—Ed.

2

The whole work is impressive due to its commitment to struggle. Characters are represented in battlefield rites viewed as the observer moves treading on soil featuring the wretched ones, the defeated, [and] the desperate people already prepared for a new battle.

3

“Cafuso” is a Portuguese term meaning a person of mixed Indian and African ancestry.—Ed.

4

See Carter Ratcliff, “On Contemporary Primitivism” in *ArtForum*, Nov. 1975. The intellectual nature of this trend is very evident in the author’s concept: “Primitivism seems to be a combination of style and iconography intended to plunge beyond them both toward newly discovered (or rediscovered) certainties, truths, essences, or intensities of feeling, insight or perception.” In the case of the Brazilian *Etsedrón* group, it is a question of an “artistic effort” based on a given local reality, and the artists do not represent any great artistic center. Their reality is more linked to rural than to urban tradition. Judging by their work, it would appear that the sole function of urban society lies in providing the original impulse for expressing themselves as they do. Mention is made in Ratcliff’s article of an exposition-seminar organized at Vassar College on Robert Goldwater’s work, “Primitivism in Modern Art,” in which the author divides the “primitive” tendencies of present-day art into four different categories: psychological, historical, cultural (which may be confused with the preceding type), and aesthetic primitivism.

IV.4.5 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1065118

ETSEDRÓN: COMMENTS ON THE ARTICLE BY ARACY A. AMARAL

Juan Acha, 1976

DOES ETSEDRÓN REPRESENT one of the paths to be followed by Brazilian art . . . ? This is the question that Aracy A. Amaral [SEE DOCUMENT IV.4.4] asks herself and passes on to us and, by extension, to all of Latin America. (The original version of the question ends with a complementary phrase: “. . . always supposing that it is not completely submerged in the current of internationalist art information?”, which I have set aside by virtue of the fact that I consider that the presence of *Etsedrón* is in itself largely due to that information, and that any Latin American aesthetics will have to confront it.)

When a group of artists takes a bit of the poverty stricken “northeast” *habitat* and transfers it to the Thirteenth [São Paulo] Biennial in the form of a rustic corral containing a few magic-religious effigies made from equally rustic materials, it means, in my opinion, that they are striking out along a path that leads in a well known direction; one that parallels others already trodden by such modern artists as the primitivists, the expressionists and the environmentalists. The difference lies in the fact that *Etsedrón* adds a singularly heretic touch by transplanting a rustic reality that is offensive to every idea of neatness implanted by the city and its technological products. Nevertheless, this rusticity has a significant anthropological-cultural background.

Etsedrón, like every work of art, contains two dualities: on the one hand, what is real (the corral and the materials) and what is fantastic (the forms and connotations of the Afro-Brazilian effigies), and on the other, ruptures (contravention of the established ideas of art) and artistic continuity (antecedents such as “arte povera,” environmentalism, expressionism and primitivism).

If we wished to pursue the customary, but poor, course of commenting first on the quality of the work (applying scales of values), we might point out the aesthetic merits of the inner balance of both dualities, since the latter are

in agreement with the sensibility of our times (tending more to rupture than to continuity) and with the Latin American need to redefine art on the basis of our own reality. Since there is no possibility as yet of any artistic separatism of an autochthonous and autarchic type, that redefinition must be achieved by combining ruptures with established elements of Western art. Nevertheless, the hostile rusticity—as an artistic rupture and as a reality of our Third World—does not constitute sufficient reason to either affirm or deny the aesthetic quality or Latin American exemplarity of *Etседrón*. Neither do the effigies and the dramatism of the work. As for the rest, quality, even for critics, is a result and not a starting point.

The aesthetic quality (axiology) must therefore be considered to derive from the possible functions, ideals, or purpose (teleology) that motivate the couple of dualities. But first of all, we must deduce what it contributes to Latin Americanist aesthetics (not Latin American, since that is a factor that affects the stereotyping and the simple selection of existing elements and is far from being prospective).

Under these circumstances, we do not believe that the teleology of *Etседrón* can be called political, in the sense of a mere denunciation of poverty. That is something that can be done by other and more effective means, whereas art has a specific function to perform that is clearly reserved to art alone. Even if we were to concede that there is a certain affinity here between the political element and art, we would still have to return to the problem of quality. Nor can this be regarded as a mere hippie-style, Rousseau-istic or Franciscan approach to aesthetics of poverty.

As for the effigies, we will obviously have to deny the presence of any religious intent that would constitute a return to magic and to sacred art. The same is true regarding any possible idea of representing magic-religious practices and effigies of a Brazilian cultural minority as an artistic postulate for the purpose of revalidating that culture and laying claim to its legitimate right to be considered an integral part of the cultural plurality of the country. (To claim supremacy would be a crass error, in spite of the fact that the Afro-Brazilian rhythm of the Samba prevails in the sensibility of all Brazilians.)

The effigies do, of course, invoke an aura of myth as an obligatory reaction of present-day art against rationalism and the machine. But what we are

really dealing with here is the expression of a whole anthropological-cultural attitude that uses rusticity and effigies as a means of assailing the pressures imposed by a technological ecology and the established ideas of art. And an attitude of this type might easily turn into a questioning of the anthropological and (Western) limits to artistic change, which would include the function we should assign to art in Latin America. But there is only one way to test and confirm those limits: by changing art itself.

One need only employ a touch of the genetic structuralism advocated by [French theoretician] Lucien Goldmann in examining the socio-cultural reality of Brazil to agree that *Etsedrón* is a direct descendent of such vernacular trends in Brazilian art as “Antropofagia” and “Tropicalismo,” just as it is in large part a result of the concern for the social causes and effects of art that is characteristic of Brazilian critics. Add to this the healthy development of sociology and anthropology in that country, and there is sufficient evidence for one to assert the sociological-cultural background of *Etsedrón* and to consider it significant. Naturally, that background will have only a practical meaning in the context of the multiple pluralities existing in every Latin American country and of the artistic plurality that is flourishing everywhere in the world today. (The sole or best solution that was the goal of aesthetic monolithic [trend] is now considered outdated, and today every work of art is expected to offer a different solution.) Consequently, *Etsedrón* constitutes but a minimal part of the sociocultural phenomenon of art, and we would be mistaken if we were to expect a single work to provide solutions for the whole range of Brazilian art. It would be still worse to try to take it as a basis for inferring the entire Latin American aesthetics, even an aesthetics motivated more by sentiments than by ideas; that would be about the same as if we were to try to deduce the entire nature of Gothic art from the fishes and crosses the early Christians scrawled on the walls of the catacombs.

The essence of this work lies in the fact that it goes farther than choosing between familiar realities (in this case, the Afro-Brazilian) and simply expressing resistance to imperialism; here, the resistance itself is a new version of colonialism, because the effort is aimed directly at resisting outside pressures by arousing a neurotic reaction to them, rather than at developing our own creativity and suggesting goals of our own which, put into action, would unfailingly and effectively combat all imperialism, both domestic and foreign.

Etsedrón penetrates one of our realities [by means of] transubstantiation; it reveals a spirit of search; it counteracts Brazilian centralism, and it responds to a need for change and artistic independence. But we must take care that our desire for artistic independence does not lead us to discovering definitive, inflated, and all exclusive values in attitudes of this type that are frequently encountered in world art today. Therefore, I believe that a look at the anthropological-cultural background will help us to decide what possibilities *Etsedrón* affords for the long-overdue entry of Latin American art into the equally long and complicated process of independence.

I consider the Afro-Brazilian reality that is the basis of *Etsedrón* to be an anthropological one because it seeks possibilities of art in the idea of the nature of man, thereby freeing itself from the obligations that would be imposed by a sociological and political reality of our own times. Its primitivism is a result of that fact, and is therefore very different from those other types of primitivism which simply introduce primitive themes, messages, materials and shapes in a traditional art object that also contains unnoticed and deep-rooted cultural imperatives—or imperialisms—which can only be unmasked and surmounted by means of a radical re-conceptualization of art. *Etsedrón* does not seek to transform the manner of producing a painting or sculpture; rather, it proposes that we begin by revising both our idea of man and Western concepts of art in order to give that art (or our own inherent artistic abilities, which is the very same thing) a function that accords with our own anthropological reality.

In short, a decision is made in favor of a primitivist synthesis of erudite art, which is a process that has given good results in our part of America and has been well accepted everywhere, as evidenced by our folklore and, in music, by the tango, rumba and samba.

Meanwhile, the cultured synthesis of the magic substratum that is currently being sought by erudite art has yet to acquire a well-defined artistic personality. The two syntheses saturate a single collective consciousness that is in constant state of flux: one implies absorption through synthesis or a vital combination of racial characteristics, while the other is a continual metamorphosis that has still to achieve independence. Both face a common enemy today: the popular culture disseminated by the mass media. The aesthetic paths of Latin America are therefore both complicated and difficult.

To sum up, the anthropological-cultural background of *Etsedrón* indicates one of the paths that might be taken by Latin American art. Its merits depend on the ways in which our artists go on changing their concepts of art and draw closer to our reality, while our art theorists and critics provide in their articles the guidance that is needed to understand the anthropological-cultural background of those changes and new approaches. It is to be hoped that these new efforts will gradually free themselves from the spiritualist finalism that still weighs so heavily on *Etsedrón* and entraps our artistic independence.

IV.4.6 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1065137

ETSEDRÓN, OR THE LACK OF LIBIDINOUS INTEREST IN REALITY

María Luisa Torrens, 1976

IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SÃO PAULO BIENNIAL, *Etsedrón* is like a great arrow pointing backwards that brings the visitor up short and disorients him, whether he is a member of the general public or an artist. This inverted anagram marks a right-about-face towards the search for and finding of meanings that so seldom occurs in contemporary art. It was no accident that the jury of the Thirteenth Biennial, as they themselves proclaim, refused to enter the exhibit (for fear of dirtying their feet). For my own part, I maintain a systematically open attitude towards all expressions of art, but even so I had to transgress my own routine of behavior and my own conditioned—in spite of all my efforts—response, to overcome what [Alvin] Toffler calls the “shock” of change.

Etsedrón’s presence at the Biennial was important, both as a challenge and as an urgent call for attention to the problems of our continent. What we saw was *Etsedrón*’s *Project III*; the group had already presented *Project I* at the previous Twelfth Biennial. Thus, their exhibit was not an isolated choice, but part of an organic and systematic process. The emergence of such experiences as *Etsedrón* is linked to a general process, observable at every level that demonstrates our

increasingly clear and mature awareness of the need to accept our own role as [Latin] Americans.

For the first time, the São Paulo Biennial has begun to abandon its traditional framework as a showcase for European and United States artists, moving timidly, as yet, towards the local product. Although the Grand Prize (12,000 U.S. dollars) was won by Yagoda Buick, a Yugoslav artist, and the Mexican painter [Manuel] Felguérez won only an Honorary Grand Prize, the optical approach adopted by Latin American critics and artists, which is, after all the most important thing, showed evidence of a radical change in course from its former shamefully submissive approach. Biennial authorities place special emphasis on the presentation of special rooms devoted to the works of living twentieth-century Latin American artists, and it was announced that the next Biennial would accent the art of this continent.

In such a propitious climate, *Etsedrón* may be seen as spring that nurtures and enriches the energetic current of Latin American art. Although Aracy A. Amaral finds in *Etsedrón* only “one of the paths that Brazilian art might follow,” it actually represents an overflowing [SEE DOCUMENT IV.4.4]. In our efforts to express our own identity, we must not let ourselves be confused by false mirages. But neither do I share the opinion that the work of the Etsedrón group is based on a minimum of information and limited only to an environmental approach. The Northeastern group knows all about happenings, audiovisual shows, etc. The fact that it is a team—which is the very fact that Amaral seems to forget—proves beyond a doubt that it is conversant with the most modern forms of interdisciplinary activity.

According to the exhibition catalogue, the participants in *Etsedrón III* come from seven different sectors: THE VISUAL ARTS: Creation and Implementation of the Project, Edison de la Luz; Implementation, Joel Estácio, Carlos Francisco Sampaio (Chico Diabo), Lygia Milton, Milton Sampaio, Lourival Miranda; ARCHITECTURE, Antônio Luiz M. Andrade (Alma); ART CRITICISM, Matilde Matos; SCIENCES: Tropical Medicine, Fernando Carvalho Luz, Geraldo Milton da Silveira; Jungle Hospital and Outservices (Itautuba-PSESP), Durbai Benício da Luz, José Maria Maia; ARCHEOLOGY, Valentín Calderón; ANTHROPOLOGY, Museu Emilio Goeldi [de Belém]; DANCE, Clyde Morgan, Maria Célia Mella, and Grimaldi Bonfim; COMMUNICATION, Carlos Ramón Sánchez; CINEMA, Fernando Pereira da Silva; PHOTOGRAPHY, Hamilton Luz and José Olavo de Assis; MUSIC, Djalma

Silva Luz. All this kind of interdisciplinary work was first introduced in the modern world of the visual arts by the E.A.T. (Experiments in Art and Technology), founded by [Robert] Rauschenberg in New York some fifteen years ago. Rauschenberg himself was present at the São Paulo Biennial, where Pop works were shown, and he gave lectures that I attended with Amaral herself. The consequences of E.A.T. were felt at CAYC [Center for Art and Communication], in Buenos Aires, which maintains a widespread international information service based on the catalogues and other publications it sends out.

Etsedrón, which originated in Salvador, [State of Bahia,] and was organized as a working group representing the most civilized centers of the world, is above all devoted to questioning such common applications of terminology as “closed area” and “open area.” Like other classifications such as “Third World,” when sociologists and economists now speak of a *fourth* and even *fifth* world, the term *closed areas* has become far less definitive in this industrial era we live in. It might be more appropriate, nowadays, to speak of them as personalized and de-personalized areas. This allows for the possibility of change that, despite all opposition, is invading present-day and future society and softening the image of a complete blockade that is presented by the term “closed area.” Nevertheless, the *Etsedrón* proposal might feasibly be described as falling midway between the poles of alienation and folklorism, and any attempt to ascribe it to either of those alone would be far too simplistic.

The [Brazilian] magazine *Realidade*² presented a forceful article on the Northeast’s intrepid efforts to overcome underdevelopment and become a part of the technological world. The *Etsedrón* group clearly reflects that phenomenon. Certain anthropologists advance the territoriality theory as an explanation for man’s continual tendency to establish a “sacred territory” for himself. The path to achieving our own identity as [Latin] Americans will lie in using the wealth of tradition we have at our disposal to enrich technology without rejecting the advantages it offers. Brazil and most of Latin America have fabulously rich potential bases for establishing such sacred places. The *Etsedrón* group has already discovered its *territoriality*; it has raised the standard of the Northeast, and this is a perfectly legitimate action. But the authors must now prove themselves capable of raising the implicit contents of that crusade to the level of symbols.

Etsedrón concerns itself to an excessive degree with recreating the environment—and predominating animist atmosphere—of Northeast, but forgets to

exploit the psychology of its inhabitants in their collective unconsciousness. It should be pointed out that there are certain basic elements lacking in the membership of the group, such as a psychologist or, even better, a psychoanalyst, and a historian. The studies they have made to date have been too formal. In placing too much emphasis on external aspects and too little on the processes of creation, the Etsedrón group makes use of photography, cinema, music, dance, the visual arts, architecture, and even medicine, and thus inevitably ends by producing environmental art itself the richest and ripest fruit of advanced industrial societies that are true instant product factories. They consume at a dizzying rate: instant soups, instant news flashes, speed courses in new languages, and finally discover an art as perishable as environmental art, with its continuous bombardment of symbols directed at doped senses. Although Etsedrón was right in choosing to work as a team, it is mistaken in the meaning its search should have undertaken. The impression it leaves is one of a show based on effects, though full of violent and aggressive touches.

As a *happening*, it is not fully successful, since the essence of the latter lies in directly confronting the coarseness of ones' surroundings, while what we have in this case barely amounts to a bit of transplanted reality and its effect is therefore weakened and impoverished, particularly when it is set in the midst of the gigantic spectacle of the Biennial itself.

Etsedrón definitively lacks even a minimum dose of that libidinous interest in reality that we find occurring over and over again in all artistic expressions based on contact with the outer-world, whatever their version may be. If we agree that the artist's principal function is *to recapture the lost intensity of our experiences by reactivating their most deep-rooted symbolical ties*, we can safely say that Etsedrón went only halfway. They worked along the same lines as the blacks in the United States did in creating the blues and jazz. The Etsedrón group erred in making instrumental the Northeast instead of presenting a hedonist statement, and they tossed their product into the Biennial like a bomb that fizzled out. The pathway leading to the recovery of myths still lies open.

1

This terminology was created by Argentinean-born, Colombian art critic Marta Traba.—Ed.

2

"Etsedrón," *Realidade*, no. 80, Rio de Janeiro (November 1972).

IV.4.7 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1065156

THE NECESSARY PLURALITY OF LATIN AMERICAN ART

Manuel Felguérez, 1976

AT THE LAST [THIRTEENTH] SÃO PAULO BIENNIAL a group of Brazilian artists presented a work [*Etsedrón III*] that embodied the quest for new forms, based on expressions drawn from the popular art and traditions of certain areas of the country. Once again, inspiration has been sought in the familiar popular folklore that is so beloved, and so protected, by our governments.

What is Latin American art?

- The art produced by the pre-Hispanic civilizations?
- The art produced during the three hundred years of the colonial period?
- The art our peoples produced after winning their independence?
- The popular art that is a product of the backwardness and poverty of large sectors of our population?
- The cultured academic art of the nineteenth century?
- Could our culture exist at all without the contributions of Greece and Rome?
- How many of the peoples in question can deny that Christian art is our own?
- Have not the black people of this continent also contributed their sensibility?
- Has not the cultural imperialism of this century altered our traditions?
- And have there not been Oriental influences on our culture since its very beginnings?

All of this only goes to prove that we are peoples with a broad cultural heritage and that in view of the impossibility of achieving any one product that embodies the entire range of that heritage, we must accept the fact that our art

will inevitably be a plural and highly differentiated expression. From tradition, our rich and varied tradition, each would-be artist must select and extract those rhetorical elements he feels will make his work a new link in the uninterrupted chain of art. The result of an artist's work will depend on the manner in which he combines those elements and the times he lives in.

Consciously or not, the tone of the artist's work is influenced by the society that surrounds him and draws its significance from it. For an object to be art, it is essential that it communicate a highly informative message that shows us a new aspect of reality. What is generally called artistic tradition does not refer to paintings or sculptures made just anyhow by anyone, since the result of that action would simply be an object that did not exist before and now does. The object in question must necessarily be an object different from any other that has ever existed, but in addition it should reveal to us a new aspect of reality with which we were previously unacquainted; one that is sufficiently powerful to transform the viewer's whole ideology by the mere fact of his seeing it.

Latin American art can differ from North American and European art only to the same exact degree in which our culture differs from theirs. This is not something we can direct; we can only accept it. If we analyze the complex of traditions that nurture our art and that of the United States we will find that they are very similar, but our cultural differences are even more obvious. To cite the example I know best: Mexico, owing to its geographic situation, is the country that has most suffered the influence of the United States, but in spite of that fact it has not accepted in its artistic production the visual arts movements that have succeeded one another in recent decades in the North. First there was action painting, then Pop art, Op art, Supra-realism, Conceptual art, Video art, and so on. And in Mexico not a single artist of any significance has followed those trends. This is not to say that we lacked information on them or that they did not affect our sensibility to some extent, but they never dominated it. The experiences of American and European artists have been assimilated but the resulting artistic product has been different, and the same thing has occurred in the rest of Latin America.

The artist's participation in his society is both dialectic and diachronic. By becoming subjective an object he makes, it speak for him and bears witness to his existence, and the everyday existence of a cultured artist is very much the same in any part of the world. Art is international in nature, and the differences that develop in the art of different countries do not depend on its rhetorical

source, since anyone who refuses to accept universal art as his own heritage can never achieve true fulfillment as an artist. Latin Americans are not a race; they are the product of a mixture of races. Our culture cannot depend on a single race and ignore the rest of what we are. Any individual whose sensibility and intelligence differs from that of his fellow men will inevitably produce an art object that is different. *Art is not an individual but a collective phenomenon.* For some reason, the mental structures of a given generation will lead a series of individuals to search for the same thing, to try to express the same thing, and this leads to the birth of characteristic styles. Among the many who are looking for the same thing within a given tendency, there are certain artists whose genius enables them to communicate more fully, to show a new aspect of reality more clearly, and these artists, by the very clarity of their work, oblige society to change its ideology and thereby to seek new aesthetic routes. As a social phenomenon, art is a matter of quantity in its origins and quality in its results.

The São Paulo Biennial is thus an event that demonstrates the truth of the foregoing, that provides an opportunity of seeing how Latin American art—which in general may be said to participate in the same plurality of trends as the rest of the world—nonetheless produces different results. When in this Biennial we see a work [like *Etsedrón*] inspired by Brazilian folklore, we obviously recognize its origins. But the path of art does not lie in expressing the obvious. Art is creation; it discovers new aspects of reality. It is not its function therefore to show what we were or what we are, but rather to reveal to us something we did not know before, something we could never become aware of if art did not exist.

IV.4.8–IV.4.9

CONTROVERSIES AND PAPERS: SYMPOSIUM OF THE FIRST LATIN AMERICAN BIENNIAL OF SÃO PAULO

The I Bienal Latino Americana de São Paulo (November 3–December 17, 1978), organized around the theme “Myth and Magic,” included a symposium organized by the Brazilian curator Aracy A. Amaral. Rio de Janeiro-based art critic Frederico de Moraes’s symposium

paper emphasizes that the exhibition's brazen insistence on both the folkloric and the kitsch suggests an outright lack of critical reflection. However, he praises the elevated theoretical discussions of the symposium as well as Antunes Filho's stage adaptation of Mário de Andrade's masterpiece *Macunaíma* (1928).

Amaral published "O regional e o universal na arte: por que o temor pelo latino-americanismo" in response to another highly critical text by de Moraes ["America Latina e a crise da vanguarda," *O Globo* (Rio de Janeiro), September 1, 1978]. In this article, Amaral points out the risks, but also the necessity to cultivate Latin Americanism, and she challenges de Moraes's commentary that Latin America is fashionable because of a certain apathy or loss of interest in the international avant-garde, arguing that a mestizo culture and the influence of popular culture could vitalize the international art scene.

The translation of de Moraes's "I Bienal Latino-Americana de São Paulo" of 1978 is made from the version published in the volume *Artes plásticas na América Latina: do transe ao transitório* [Frederico de Moraes, (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1979), 62–65]. Amaral's text originally appeared in *O Estado de S. Paulo, Suplemento Cultural* (São Paulo), October 8, 1978, 3–4; this English translation is from a 1983 reprint ["O regional e o universal na arte: por que o temor pelo latino-americanismo?", 1978, in Aracy Amaral, *Arte e meio artístico: entre feijoadas e o x-burguer (1961–1981)*. (São Paulo: Nobel, 1983), 293–295].

IV.4.8 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 777145

FIRST LATIN AMERICAN BIENNIAL OF SÃO PAULO

Frederico de Moraes, 1979

APPENDIX

The First Latin American Biennial of São Paulo has finally been launched. However, everything negative that was forecast to happen effectively happened. After having been rejected for more than two decades inside the International

Biennial, Latin American countries were frustrated [again] during what could have been a new stage in the dialogue among our nations. The accumulation of errors became so large that the criticisms that will follow—both inside and outside the country—could jeopardize the very continuation of the project, which would be a lamentable step backwards. The [Biennial's] failures with respect to representing current production in the various countries are so alarming that, in fact, it cannot be said that we had, in São Paulo (in November of 1978), a Latin American Biennial.

If before the opening some Brazilian criticism noted manifestations of “xenophobic nationalism,” “artistic Aryanism,” and “ethnocentrism” in the execution of the Biennial, at the end of its accompanying symposium Marta Traba [went so far as to] accuse the directorate of the Biennial of racism. In her view, the Biennial impolitely discriminated, consciously or unconsciously, against several countries that were “very rich in myths and magic.” Moreover, in her view, [the administration of the Biennial] was impolite regarding several countries that were not able to garner the necessary [public and critical] attention with regard to the mounting, display, and signage of their works. That is, the Biennial, by privileging countries such as Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico, reproduced, within Latin America itself, the same association of domination that is involved in our cultural relationship with other countries outside the continent. Certainly other critics have not expressed the fear of a Latin American ethnocentrism as formulated by [the journalists] Jacob Klintowitz, Sheila Leirner, Radah Abramo and [by the critic] Mário Schemberg, and there are those like Aracy Amaral, Mário Pedrosa, and Roberto Pontual who not only set out to debate our continental art but also to emphatically defend the realization of the Biennial. As a matter of fact, in one of the symposium presentations, the Mexican [art critic] Rita Eder said that “belief in the universality of certain theses was what delayed, in a way, the study of the visual arts in Latin America. It seems urgent to ask if the European theories which we have absorbed to this point were really universal or if they worked as a convex mirror where reality appeared distorted.”

The ridiculous inclusion of some countries, the absence of countries with great cultural weight such as Venezuela, and, above all, [the omission] of the most representative names of the continent's art whose works perfectly fit into the show's theme, including artists such as [Joaquín] Torres-García, Xul

Solar, Armando Reverón, Roberto Matta, Fernando [de] Szyszlo, Fernando Botero, Rodolfo Abularach, the Mexican muralists, Francisco Toledo, among many others, cancel out a large part of the true relevance of this Biennial. Of what there was, very little can be highlighted: Gastón Ugalde, from Bolivia (poetically exploring the theme of coca); Liliana Porter and Marta Minujín from Argentina; Juan Camilo Uribe de Roda from Colombia, which besides Mexico was the only country that, in a more concentrated way, sought to present an evolution that was organic and at the same time didactic on the subject (notwithstanding the debatable quality of many works, and especially those that deal with conflictive issues of color). Through popular art (altars for the dead and *calaveras* [skulls]), [the Biennial] dealt with the myth of death: through paintings by anonymous authors, it showed the social structures (castes) and the process of miscegenation. Finally, we have the political myth in the figure of the national hero [Emiliano] Zapata, who arises, first, in photographs of the [1910–17 revolutionary] period, followed by the plastic interpretation of artists of different periods and styles: Antonio Ruiz, Arnold Belkin, Enrique Estrada and Felipe Ehremberg, the latter showing “Zapata hoy,” that is, already appropriated and turned into a cliché by the official system of fine arts.

The Biennial’s theme, rich at a theoretical level, as can be verified in several of the papers presented during the symposium, is extensive (“the presence of myth in Latin American art is something persistent; it is its very situation”—Jorge Alberto Manrique) and is also poorly represented in terms of artistic production. Frequently, the Brazilian representation slides primarily into the folklore field, into *kitsch*, into reportage or the simple accumulation of material, replacing reflection and critical analysis. Most of the time, the artists limited themselves to recreating environments, such as in the “miracle” rooms, with ex-votos of wax and photographs, *cordel* literature,¹ voodoo worshipping, or even posting native signs, presentations of photographic sequences of sorcerers, and images galore. A few, when they deal with popular and religious themes, succeed in escaping from the obvious and establishing new relationships with real meaning. And in some cases it is difficult to connect the exhibited work to the general theme of the Biennial. What we have, above all in the special halls, is what is already seen and catalogued by the market and by criticism: the already known and accepted. The Latin Americans who visited us for this First Biennial may have even taken away a good impression of our art—that is, of the conventional and of the stable in our art—but [they found] nothing of our disquiet and our creativity. By and large, at

no time did they have the opportunity to participate in a broad discussion about our art or Latin American art.

And here we have another serious failure of the First Biennial: there was no link whatsoever between the exhibition and the symposium. At the theoretical level, the symposium clearly showed that we have already advanced a lot, despite the fact that we may have not yet found our own methodology and that we may still manipulate theoretical grounds that are not ours. But we have advanced a lot. After the [previous] contribution of Mário Pedrosa, [Jorge] Romero Brest, Juan Acha, and Marta Traba, a new generation of art critic-theorists is emerging (I would mention, among others, Néstor Garcia Canclini, Mirko Lauer, Jorge Alberto Manrique, and Rita Eder) who are transforming the methods of appreciation of artwork with brilliance and audacity. However, while the theoretical discussion in the several symposia on Latin American art tends toward autonomy, Latin America's production in the visual arts is still experiencing a lack of interpretation and both fields [art criticism and the visual arts] are waning. Rarely, in the São Paulo Symposium, was the discussion centered on the work of some artist, and [in the few instances] when that happened we didn't have the work or a reproduction (slide) of it in front of us.

Fortunately, a good portion of the Latin American and Brazilian critics attending the Biennial took advantage of their stay in São Paulo to see *Macunaíma*, by Mário de Andrade,² brought to the stage by Antunes Filho. They left enraptured by the visual beauty of the show. In four years that last about four hours, they were able to go on a voyage through the myths and magic of Brazil. They went through the diversified Brazilian geography, from the Amazon jungle to the city-machine (São Paulo), from Paraíba to Rio de Janeiro. They saw *Macunaíma*—our underdeveloped [anti-]hero without character—face life with malice and survive wholly due to his trickery. They saw *Macunaíma* invent soccer and the [*jogo de bicho*] ["animal game" or lottery], frequent brothels, literary academies and Macumba rites, confront the capitalist [Wenceslau Pietro] Pietra and defeat him. And they also saw *Macunaíma*'s melancholic return to his [Amazonian] origins, that is, to the jungle. *Macunaíma*, the mise-en-scène, with its creative explosion, is all that the Latin American Biennial is not... but that it could be. As a presentation of the theme "Myths and Magic," the play is perfect. It would have cost the Biennial less to finance and stage it as an exposition of the theme. But, as *Macunaíma* himself would say: "Ai, que preguiça...! [Ah! What laziness...!]

1

In northeastern Brazil, “literatura de cordel” refers to popular editions of poorly printed short stories with subjects such as heroes of the backlands, political struggles, and love affairs. Their name stems from the fact that these leaflets are left hanging “on cords” in markets or squares of the region.—Ed.

2

For a transcreated version of Mario de Andrade’s 1928 experimental rhapsody, see Héctor Olea’s translation in *Macunaíma* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1977).—Ed.

IV.4.9 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 776533

WHY DO WE FEAR LATIN AMERICANISM?

Aracy A. Amaral, 1978

WITH THE UPCOMING LATIN AMERICAN-THEMED, São Paulo Biennial in mind, this essay analyzes some of the issues pertaining to artistic production in Latin America, responding to the opinions of those art critics who believe that the current interest in this continent is somehow related to the declining interest in the vanguard. If progress is imperative, then so are risks. And I believe that the current trend of “rethinking oneself” in Latin America, not in terms of “universal art,” [but] in the fine arts realm, runs a risk, as [Jacob] Klintowitz¹ has pointed out, but the experience of rethinking oneself is valid and cannot be delayed. For many years, we lived first under colonial rule and subsequently under the economic imperialisms that shaped the behavior of all who live here, the natives, the imported, the immigrated, and the mestizos. And yet, according to political, social, and economic models, we are not free from the metropolises, whatever the trends may be. As such, the aspiration for autonomy from an artistic perspective is almost utopian. But that aspiration is valid. With a sound conscience, in the context of the current Latin American art juncture, I analyze the desire to see oneself, to think of oneself. It is important, almost like a motivating force, a link in the chain that is the process of consciousness building from which we cannot escape. We are not simply an extension of Europe or a photocopy of North American experiences that have little if anything to do with our mestizo culture.

The United States is a society of racial and cultural groups ruled by a pragmatist mentality, with its origins in its Anglo-Saxon Protestantism. Latin America is a society of mestizos and those in the process of miscegenation, or of Indians, generally governed by white elite who exercise economic power in an unstable, precarious, and even distant manner. There is an easily identifiable behavioral fluidity, especially in the non-Andean areas like Brazil, the Caribbean, Central America, and Venezuela.

And Latin America is not “in style” as Frederico [de] Moraes incorrectly wants to view it, only because the “Group of Thirteen,” from Buenos Aires, won the Award at the last Biennial (or perhaps this view refers to the reaction that he has experienced in Rio de Janeiro, but it has nothing to do with the interest in Latin America, especially in certain parts of the continent, that has emerged in the last five years). Moreover, that critic’s² text recently posited the thesis that the “declining interest in the vanguard’s activities in the international field” would coincide with the burgeoning interest in Latin America, which is the same point made by Juan Acha, the Peruvian critic who hosted a panel discussion about that very same topic in São Paulo to commemorate the grand opening of the Bienial of 1975 in FAAP,³ at which, if my memory serves me, the critic from Rio was also present. And the point about “the alternative to this ‘dead-end alley’ of the international vanguard would be here in Latin America” seems to me to be purely Moraes’s imagination. In the end, those interested in Latin America, in recent years, are Latin Americans themselves and neither Europeans (because they are too interested in themselves) nor Americans, in whose country there continues to be the biggest proverbial indifference toward anything that is neither American nor French. There are only a few scholars or Latin American research centers, thus the rarities . . . [could hardly represent a significant] interest in Latin America. [This is the case] even when important museums or universities prepare expositions of Latin American art. Yes, it is true that this corresponds not to an interest in the continent “from below” as [the Cuban poet] Alejo Carpentier would say, but it signifies, first, a way of filling a void in the inactive museological activities of our time. It would be arrogant to consider it anything else. In fact, for years now we have been watching the major retrospectives of international art in the United States and in Europe. As I said in a conversation a few days ago in São Paulo with Professor [James Marston] Fitch—of Columbia University who came to teach at USP [Universidade de São Paulo]—it is not an increased interest (as we

previously thought) in architecture or landscape projects that leads to the various expositions of this genre in New York's well-known galleries, but first it is simply the fact that there is no other artist or movement that is more interesting that causes these spaces to become open to this type of exposition.

On the other hand, the dichotomy that pits Latin America against "what is universal," in my opinion, does not exist. It seems clear that the erudite inhabitant of a great Western metropolis—whichever his country may be—is just like any other, possessing the same identical origins and cultural aptitude. But that is what makes his artistic expression universally similar and uninteresting, only worthy of consideration if it is of the highest, fine-aesthetic or inventive quality (in the case of the visual arts), being that the common denominator is the major international centers. But the exciting Latin American "climate" offers, with all of its incoherencies, the possibility of the simultaneous existence of diverse "art-works" unlike Europe (where the erudite, pseudo-intellectual, and the end exist). On this *culturally engaged* continent, the popular expression (be it in the form of music, craftworks, similar manifestations in consumer society, in popular manifestations which may be religious; secular; athletic; of clear, fine arts substance; not to mention indigenous art which exists in many parts of Latin America) of the erudite art of the elites of the major urban centers linked to the cultural metropolises [In so doing, they are creating parallel vanguards in our land]. . . .

What is impossible or artificial is the desire to express everything, that is, to achieve what is universal without any identification with one's "here and now." Latin America, throughout its historical dependence has aspired (meaning the dominant class has aspired) to identify itself with Europe and with the United States since the last century, and it has not seen itself nor has it desired to see itself even today. That is what leads the very frequently-discussed Carlos Rangel, author of *Del buen salvaje al buen revolucionario* [From Good Savage to Good Revolutionary] (1976), to begin his prologue by referencing the "discrepancy between what a society actually is and the image that society has of itself," which, according to him, reflects the ambiguity of the Latin American mentality.

Thus, in my opinion, the Latin American's interest in his own continent will help to undo that distortion. We will be able, throughout this process, to see ourselves with realism; we will assume, consequentially, and make our own tomorrow based on our real situation. Without false ideals—Latin America in general took a while, even in its paintings, to register "its" physical landscape—

which epitomizes my point. And that is an attitude of maturity to which one can only arrive via what Klintowitz fearfully refers to as Latin American “nationalism.” It may be a dangerous road, but it is crucial to the affirmation of our third-world, developing nation condition, of a developing culture.

1

Jacob Klintowitz, “Na Bienal latino-americana, os riscos do nacionalismo xenófobo,” *Jornal da Tarde* São Paulo, (September 9, 1978).

2

Frederico Moraes, “América Latina e a crise da vanguarda,” *O Globo*, Rio de Janeiro (September 1, 1978).

3

Fundação Armando Álvares Penteado, São Paulo.—Ed.

IV.4.10–IV.4.11

A FIRST CRITICAL ENCOUNTER WITH ARTISTS AND THE VISUAL ARTS: AN INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM, MUSEO DE BELLAS ARTES, JUNE 1978

Following the success of the 1975 Austin Symposium [SEE DOCUMENTS IV.4.1, IV.4.2, AND IV.4.3], international gatherings such as the Primer Encuentro Iberoamericano de Críticos de Arte y Artistas Plásticos—under the aegis of Museo de Bellas Artes in Caracas, June 18–27, 1978—became fertile ground for the consolidation of continental art criticism and scholarship in Latin America. Organized by the short-lived Centro de Investigación, Documentación y Difusión de las Artes Plásticas de América Latina (CIDAPAL), the Encuentro’s main aims were to foster the establishment of a critical framework for Latin American art praxis as well as the research-based means to set it on equal footing with international practice. As in Texas, a parallel show, the group exhibition *Arte iberoamericano hoy*, was also organized by the museum in Caracas.

Included in this section are transcriptions of the papers delivered by the Peruvian art critic and professor at the Universidad de San Marcos in Lima Carlos Rodríguez Saavedra and by the Paris-based Argentinean avant-garde experimental artist Julio Le Parc (born 1928).

Rodríguez Saavedra simultaneously positions Latin American art as either following the unsteady path of intermittent acceptance or rebuttal of the mainstream. For his part, Le Parc—who in 1960 helped establish the influential GRAV (Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel), a visual arts and conceptual collective in Paris (active until 1968)—presents an open-ended text that asks key questions and warns against aestheticism, arguing in favor of intensive research to investigate the link between art and society. Beyond questioning the roles of artists within a capitalist society, he denounces the opposition of many Latin American dictatorial regimes of his day to creativity because of its subversive implications. The translations of both texts are made from the original typescripts in the archives of the Venezuelan museum [Carlos Rodríguez Saavedra, “Alternativas de la pintura latinoamericana actual,” Lima, June, 1978 and Julio Le Parc, “Interrogantes,” Caracas, June, 1978, *Primer encuentro iberoamericano de críticos de arte y artistas plásticos*, (Caracas: Museo de Bellas Artes, 1978)].

IV.4.10 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 815687

ALTERNATIVES FOR TODAY'S LATIN AMERICAN PAINTING

Carlos Rodríguez Saavedra, 1978

I WILL BEGIN WITH A CLARIFICATION. The title—“Alternatives for Today’s Latin American Painting”—involves the problem of orientation of this continent’s painting. I do not intend to dictate a solution to this matter or to offer any conjecture whatsoever. I have never believed in the ability to tell the future, whether it was the innocent kind peddled by gypsies and clairvoyants or the pedantic kind practiced by scientists or learned university scholars. The alternatives that I will set forth exist in immediate reality. Latin American painting has been held up through them [and] with them.

[Moreover, let me say] one more word with regard to the risks of being a critic. A meeting like the one that brings us together would have been unimaginable in an earlier era. Art historian conventions have taken place many times. But the meetings of critics who assume the authority to debate the foundations and pathways of aesthetic creation are a dangerous innovation of our times. It may be

said that the errors of our forebearers have taught us nothing. On the contrary, it would seem they enable and confirm our present authority. Nevertheless, the History of Art Criticism is a tragicomedy of errors played out with impunity before the opposition of a lucid minority. From its beginnings, in the eighteenth century, [Denis] Diderot, whom none could call ignorant, dedicated himself to glorifying the lachrymose oil paintings of [Jean-Baptist] Greuze beyond all proportion. The absurdities of criticism grew during the last century with the development of the press. The names of [Louis] Leroy, [Louis] Vauxcelles and [Albert] Wolff, along with their preferences, have become anecdotes in the History of Art while the art works these critics condemned now hang reverently in museums. Only after the end of the First World War, when the avant-garde ceased to be such, when it became official and was consequently castrated, when it became museum-worthy—as happened more precisely after the Second World War—only then did art criticism get things right. At least this is what we believe today. Our era has achieved the miracle of converting avant-garde painting into the preferred art of official critics. For this reason we should doubt our own authority and suspect that perhaps we know less than we presume. The words to follow should thus be understood as an investigation into the creative process of today's Latin American painting. It is a sort of prediction as to which direction [painting] will take on our continent. [It should] not be taken as an exhortation to create or carry it out according to preestablished approaches.

The existence of alternatives highlights the problems of Latin American art. We have become so accustomed, especially in the last few years, to the notion of alternatives for our pictorial task that we have forgotten that the mere idea of it can only exist once we have accepted the possibility of an alternative to our experience of being. Because if art reveals anything—that something, [Martin] Heidegger says—is being. The work of each artist is the manner in which being is interpreted through a personal, individual vision. To suppose that we have alternatives beside our own disposition from which we can choose is equivalent to believing that we possess that magical gift of creating works that belong to many views of the world. Of course there exists an ample repertory of prefabricated proposals with which the international market tempts artists. And we are acquainted with the motives that might lead an artist to choose a model from within this repertory. This type of transaction has been perfected with great frequency in our times. I would also like to note that there are many who copy (rarely innocently)

native models. But let's not kid ourselves. [The method] chosen in this manner by these so-called artists is not a profound formulation of truth, but simply a method of execution—not of creation—invented by others. It is an accepted formula, a commercially fruitful fabrication of those objects that [Charles] Baudelaire defines as “aesthetic abominations.” The profit will undoubtedly be immediate. But the truth will surely later be restored. This is why Marcel Proust says that an artist's work is his real and Final Judgment.

The truth cannot be chosen. In the realm of authentic creation, alternatives necessarily do not exist. Only over the course of a slow and very difficult process of investigation—I should say excavation—does the premonition, the glimmer, the difficult encounter with reality that each person must discover on his own, occur. In this trance, the artist finds himself obliged to create a language that is inseparable from the truth he has discovered. The aesthetic language is both instrument and material. I repeat that, on this path, choice does not exist. An artist must always obey truth. To do so he will break every rule that inhibits his expression and will freely use every one that serves his task, his duty: to intensify his knowledge of being, to deepen his experience. Hamlet's alternative, quoted so terribly often, does not mean there are two possibilities, but rather one. “To be or not to be,” says the Prince of Denmark. The [choice] is clear: to be or nothingness. His words also suit painting.

Nevertheless, the History of Latin American Painting seems, from the outside, to be a rolling movement, a pendular movement, an alternative movement. This movement is a result of a fracture in our original coherence in pre-Columbian times due to the Spanish conquest. Beginning in the sixteenth century, we became part of a value system that we did not create and within which we have been second-class members: Western culture. We use the same clock as the Europeans, but with a different time. The conditions of this pendular movement were given in that moment by the historical process: to go from what we were to what we are not, from our own to that which is foreign. In painting, this pendular movement has been visible since Independence, when our republic substituted the Baroque-mestizo universe of colonial art for the academic individualism of Europe. The first expressions of this alternative movement are, on one extreme, Costumbrist painting and, on the other, the painting of the academy. Since then, the pendulum has continued swinging, each time at a faster rhythm. One part of our art has consequently consisted of recreating the proposed model.

But the pendulum also has a return movement. It returns to its source, to us, to our essence. Seen from the outside, the described movement appears as a confirmation of the *theory of the alternative*, which essentially consists of moving from alienation to an absentminded absorption and vice versa. Still, for the real artist, as I have said, no real alternative exists. What happens is that the cultural spectrum of the Latin American man, a living spectrum within his own self, does not respond in any way to this simplistic model—the native and the foreign—of the exterior movement previously described.

Instead of choosing between an alternative with two faces, the artist listens to his own complex spiritual experience, composed of the sum of the contrary [proposals], the symbiosis of native and foreign elements, nourished from the time in which we entered orbit around Western culture, through aesthetic approaches, techniques, and theoretical tools that have been wrought by [this same culture] and that are inseparable from our own expressive process. This is the attitude of those who have revealed the depth and universality of this continent through their works, beyond whatever difference in language and perhaps precisely by means of their dialect. Such is the case of [Rufino] Tamayo, [Wifredo] Lam, [Roberto] Matta, [Alejandro] Obregón, [Jesús] Soto, [Fernando] de Szyszlo, Negret, to cite only a few names. There are more. In the work of each of these artists, the complexity of the broadest worldview has been taken on and transfigured into aesthetic forms. Given the power of conviction that emanates from these works, all research into the origin of their elements—native or imported—is surely useful from the point of view of Art History; nevertheless, it could be irrelevant and worthless from the view of criticism. The act of creation fuses the Manichean polarity of historic alternatives and forms the work of art.

This alternative movement is, nevertheless, inseparable from the existence of Latin America. Prompted successively by a centripetal energy and another centrifuge, our continent opens and gathers itself in an incessant diastolic and systolic [motion] of primal necessity. It focuses (to affirm itself) and expands (to renew itself). When we contract, we consolidate ourselves; when we stretch ourselves, we confirm our universal vocation. In the first case we become more authentic; in the second, more complex and richer. To eliminate either of these two instants would be the equivalent of decreeing paralysis and consequently death for Latin America. This is also, finally, the process by which we construct our personality, which cannot be limited to only one of our components. It is

evident, for example, that we cannot identify ourselves exclusively with our older and deeper roots, the pre-Columbian past, and it is also evident that we do not belong to the culture of Europe. Nonetheless, each one of us could say just as Truman Capote did upon his return from Europe: “I know now that I do not belong to that world, but I also know that world belongs to me.” Open, desirous, incredibly sensitive and barbaric, free of burdens, foreign to every style, our appetite for universality fortunately has no limit. We thought ourselves located outside of Western culture and now we know that it has been given to us—a marvelous feast—as an ingredient of our destiny. We are *cultural Mestizos*; but we know that all culture is mestizo, and ours cannot consist of a limiting identification with what is typical. Our *mestizaje* means that we are new and that we consequently enjoy a fountain of power and liberty that is our very selves. We are people open to all the possibilities of man.

The artists of this continent thus have at their disposal—not to lose their identity but rather to build it—all the systems and instruments of creation that exist in contemporary culture: all these are reflected in their worldview. The role of art criticism is not to discriminate against those [tools] used by an artist, confirming some and disqualifying others. The role of art criticism is to elucidate, if possible, the authenticity with which each work has been created and, as such, its worth. The alternatives for creation in Latin America cannot be defined with sociological arguments, political convictions, or historical approaches. The alternatives of creation are the deep and latent possibilities that each artist tests in his own spiritual context that, like a concentric mirror, reflects the cultural spectrum of contemporary man.

IV.4.11 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 774036/815575

QUESTIONS

Julio Le Parc, 1978

. . .

WE KNOW THAT THE ART WORLD EXISTS, that it creates product, that it circulates, that it can be commercial, that people make their living from it, that it has its social significance. Because of this, it is necessary to try to analyze it. For these reasons, I offer some points for reflection at this time. [I do this] knowing that nothing can be solved as if by magic and that collective reflection can be an important foundation in the struggle against what is arbitrary in our medium.

The current situation of the Ibero-American artist is not the same in different countries, and the social contingencies produced by different regimes of power have a bearing on it. [The situation] spans a spectrum beginning with the artist who has had to exile himself or the artist who must not only confront ideological censorship but also material censorship. He struggles to survive without, in many cases, even the materials with which to work (paper, paint, etc.). The other extreme of the spectrum would be the situation of the artist [living] in societies that are flourishing economically, dazzled by the possibility of financial success. Having pointed out these conditions, here are some questions which may appear naïve if removed from the “true aesthetic problems” of avant-garde art. They are meant to situate some of the problems that concern us at the core of daily life within a capitalist society.

QUESTIONS: 1

Can we continue today with the myth of art as a type of religion that is practiced by an elite group of followers; with the myth of freedom of expression, without seeing the narrow parameters within which an artist works; with the myth of the artist as a highly gifted man; with the myth of artwork as a unique product—highly valued—that defies the

times; the myth of an ignorant public, incapable of appreciating the art of their time?

Can we still believe in the creative act as the product of sudden illumination, of an abrupt inspiration that places the artist in a trance that allows him to transmit imponderable messages through [the use of] his tools? Is not the creative attitude an internal and daily exploration of self and also the daily confrontation of reality and society in [the process of] transformation?

What conceals the swift succession of artistic styles that rule each other out?

From which international centers, by what means of diffusion, and with what interests do the new artistic styles reach all areas? And why are they reproduced locally?

Are the new forms of expression, the new techniques, a guarantee of a new art?

Is it possible for all artists to be like a shapeless mass, able to be manipulated and from which the cultural powers that be can extract what is useful for their survival, ignoring the rest?

Can they continue believing that artists are such individualistic and obtuse beings that it is dangerous to incorporate them collectively into the cultural process?

Can one defend the art history that takes place every day as something objective, impartial, informative, [and] lacking interpretations or abusive assessments?

Why is an artist who sells [his work] held in higher regard than one who does not?

...

Should artists today aspire to have their works valued highly by the art market so that they should be worth millions and that the buyers should keep them in their rooms if not in safes?

Can it be that a great number of artists, who are influenced by the situation, conceive their works with this obsession: to sell them?

Can a cultural policy that does not look to the models of the international centers be imagined; [can there be a cultural policy] that does not compete for international supremacy; that does not allow itself to be influenced by governmental pressures; that does not consider the interests of the art market; that does not base itself solely on the aesthetic judgment of its executors, and so forth; that is, not elitist but rather based on impartial information, the most objective possible with regard to contemporary creation?

Would such a cultural policy not permit a culture to flourish, considering the cultural richness that is the feverish heterogeneity of concepts and artistic trends in continual confrontation with and in direct relation to the public?

QUESTIONS: 2

Is it possible to affirm that:

Ibero-American art is one and indivisible?

In other words,

The historic art of the pre-Columbian civilizations?

That art that today uses symbols drawn from those civilizations?

That art created every year by some peoples?

That art which represents the natives?

That art that competes on the international scene?

That art that recounts the struggles of the people?

That sells well?
 That joins the fight?
 That reproduces locally the patterns of the international fashion?
 That tries to reflect the industrial and technological world?
 That triumphs abroad?
 That belongs to the painters who are sincere?
 That respects the rules of the academy?
 That creates its own avant-garde?
 That is practiced by some of the indigenous tribes discovered in Mato Grosso [in southwestern Brazil]?
 That upholds established values?
 That seeks a different [type] of communication? And so on.

To capture Ibero-American art as it is today is not easy, and the result will always be as partial as it is imprecise.

Is it possible to consider Ibero-American art as something fixed—like a cadaver that will be dissected in order to analyze it in a laboratory—keeping it at a distance and maintaining a neutral position? Although imprecise, in motion, [and] full of contradictions, Latin American is *what it is*: the reflection of the convulsive reality of a continent where oppression, repression, and torture rule as a system of government.

Is the reality of today's Ibero-American art abstract, remote even to us? Is it not the product of our social reality and what we ourselves have made? We, artists, critics, and scholars of art, curators, independent or otherwise, together we make up this conference: Can we avoid this responsibility?

Each one of us who is present for this encounter has taken and must take responsibility for today's Ibero-American art. And above all, [we have] a much greater responsibility than will exist in the future. A great number of those present hold key positions within the social function of art. And assessments take place from these key positions, selections are made, some trends are praised, others are ignored or condemned.

Is it possible to assert that it is not through the outsourcing of artistic activity in our cities that the same preconceptions of the international imperialist centers are reproduced?

Can the succession of the critics' artificial classifications contribute something positive? Do they not leave individualism vulnerable and able to be manipulated? Is this not the way that artists, one after another, come to be an unsure mass from which experts will then extract the most "valuable"? By what criteria or on what grounds? And is not the act of selection, classification, valuation, purchase, an act of power?

AT STAKE

The dominant classes are conservative. They reproduce the capitalist patterns of power locally; they imitate the lifestyle of the imperialist centers; they impose the criteria and values that they think proper; simply put: they block creative development. In almost all Latin American countries, creativity is attacked by the current regimes because it is synonymous with reflection, criticism, change, and action. Such regimes, in order to perpetuate themselves, dehumanize their peoples, keeping them in a passive and dependent situation.

When it comes to art, in the best of cases, they only accept that which reflects their situation and helps them maintain their power; in other words, art which increases passivity and dependency, art that transmits harmless aesthetic models, art which should be part of the supply and demand system. In this way they strip the artist of his creativity and render him at their service, dehumanizing him as they do the rest of the people.

It could perhaps be declared that the true Latin American spirit in art is authentic creation, accompanied by an attitude in accordance with [imagination]. That creative attitude in art would correspond to the creativity of the people that, although alienated, continually invent new forms of struggle against repression, to destroy the oppressors and generate new forms of experience. Art thus could be that creative attitude that helps the individual, in one way or another, to survive or live, to break mental chains, to eliminate ideological conditioning, passivity, submission, fear, [and] that lets one feel the potential for a different future.



Hippank

ART IN THE UNITED STATES

V

DESTABILIZING CATEGORIZATIONS

INTRODUCTION BY TOMÁS YBARRA-FRAUSTO

Carlos Alfonso's *Where Tears Can Stop*, 1986, acrylic on canvas, featured on the cover of the exhibition catalogue *Hispanic Art in the United States: Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors*, organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (New York: Abbeville Press, 1987). [SEE DOCUMENT V.1.3–V.1.4]. Smithsonian American Art Museum, museum purchase made possible by the American Art Forum © 1986, Sena Toll Artigas.

TOMÁS YBARRA-FRAUSTO

Destabilizing Categorizations

IN THE 1980s, ARTISTS, ACTIVISTS AND SCHOLARS in U.S. Latino communities consolidated the social and cultural agendas from the Civil Rights struggles of the 1960s and 70s. The settled populations of Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans were augmented by immigrants from throughout the Caribbean and Central and South America to form the largest ethnic groups in the United States. The forty million plus Latinos in the U.S. at that time comprised a community larger than Spain and many countries in Latin America. This surge in the Latino population coincided with the rise of a parallel pan-Latino consciousness that evolved in the artistic and cultural production in the United States. Issues of representation and commodification of culture that had concerned previous generations remained paramount; at the same time, new issues of gender, sexuality, and cultural hybridism, as well as more nuanced analyses of race and class, increasingly informed Latino cultural and artistic practices. Hence, there emerged a major political effort to destabilize and reshape the official canons, taxonomies, and traditions of mainstream Anglocentric American culture.

In the conservative climate of the Ronald Reagan era (1980–88), the counter-cultural values of the political Left—including ethnic minorities—clashed with the culturally conservative political Right in the so-called Culture Wars. Controversies over national identity, educational norms, religious principles, museum exhibitions, and popular culture polarized the country. The national culture was therefore re-envisioned as a dynamic, multicultural mosaic drawing meaning and unity from all of its constituent cultures. As the Culture Wars waned, mainstream cultural institutions responded to pressures to attend to the educational and social agendas promoting diversity and the inclusion of minority groups into all spheres of American life. Major museums began to collect and exhibit U.S. Latino art, wielding curatorial strategies focused on identity, politics, and multiculturalism.

V.1 Several essays gathered in this first section, “Exhibiting Entrenched Representations,” describe the process of selecting, interpreting, and presenting work by Latino artists in the landmark exhibition *Hispanic Art in the United States: Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors* [SEE DOCUMENTS V.1.3–V.1.7], held at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, in 1987. This was indeed among the first Latino exhibitions in a major museum.¹ Nevertheless, the exhibition’s prestige was in some respects impacted by the perception that its Houston venue was located on the artistic periphery or, more specifically, outside of New York, seen by many as the center of the U.S. art world. The exhibition also marked the increasing role of museums in the Latino/Latin American identity debate; prior to this moment, museums had not really participated in this particular discourse. In the catalogue for the show, curators John Beardsley and Jane Livingston state: “we came to realize that there was a great richness and variety of visual art in the Hispanic worlds everywhere in the United States. Painting, sculpture, decorative arts, architecture, design, photography, film and video were among the many areas we explored.” And they stress: “In all, the true depth and range of Hispanic art in the United States remains an uncelebrated phenomenon, an unacknowledged chapter in the history of recent American art” [SEE DOCUMENT V.1.3]. A very significant outcome of the Houston exhibition was to insert into national consciousness the artistic heritage of a distinct Latino culture that had historically enriched American society for more than 500 years.

The main essay included in the *Hispanic Art in the United States* catalogue is by Octavio Paz [SEE DOCUMENT V.1.4.], the renowned Mexican intellectual. His perspective is undeniably that of an elite writer, far removed, one might argue, from the everyday lived experience of U.S. Latinos. Yet, he does reflect on the persecutions, inequalities, humiliations, and daily injustices that have been decisive factors in strengthening and facilitating the cohesion of Hispanic communities in the United States. However, Paz’s broad poetic–philosophical intervention provides U.S. Latino cultural production with a long historical lineage. His core conceptual tropes of “participation and separation” are rooted in primordial quests to belong and to be acknowledged, whether as a person, a community, or a nation. All societies are engaged in a perpetual search for connection and reconciliation, and, in Latin American cultures, this search is even more complicated and pronounced because it involves a tradition of negotiating the cultural

differences between themselves and the colossus of the North. Paz affirms that the Anglo American and the Hispanic worlds in the United States have irreconcilable and incommensurate differences in their sensibilities, visions of time, and relationships to history and to their cultures of origin. He then sketches out the historical basis for those cultural differences, noting that the Euro-American, a product of the Reformation and the Enlightenment, asserts the sanctity of the individual and the primacy of reason. In contrast, U.S. Hispanic culture is still rooted in the Catholic ideas and values of the Counter Reformation and includes the other heritage—black and Indian—in a syncretic, cultural melting pot. The Counter Reformation, according to Paz as well as to historians, failed as an enterprise: “We, Latin Americans, are the descendants of a petrified dream.” It must be underscored that, among themselves, U.S. Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and Central Americans have differences relating to geography, race, class, and historical experiences. Nonetheless, together they have created a true cultural community with shared traditions and, to a certain extent, communal cohesion, in spite of experiences of discrimination and continued but distant ties with their cultures of origin. For Paz, U.S. Hispanic artists are the mediators between the poles of fusion and dismemberment, between the worlds of here (United States) and the worlds of there (Latin America).

Writing in response to the Houston exhibition, Shifra M. Goldman [SEE DOCUMENT V.1.5] discusses the struggle over nomenclature, self-representation, and the absence of sociohistorical context. Self-representation in artistic production was a key principle of the Latino cultural project and seen as analogous to self-determination in a specific social sphere. The self-selected name of “Latino/a” was amply favored over the official governmental and media imposition of “Hispanic,” which was deemed Eurocentric, thus leaving out the indigenous and African elements of Latino culture. Goldman critiques this kind of “homogenizing” approach reflected by such exhibitions where the curatorial focus is on a “shallow even ‘primitivistic,’” kind of ethnicity—while deracinating the artwork from any social or political context. In her words, ethnicity “is composed of what is folkloric, naïve, popular, exotic, religious and traditional.” Implicit in the ethnic/primitivism duality is the idea that Latino artists are “emotive and visceral to the exclusion of more cerebral art forms like geometric abstraction or conceptualism.” For Goldman, it is not ethnicity that binds Latino artists together but their

historical resistance to economic colonization and cultural homogenization both within the United States and in Latin America.

In 1991, more than three years after their controversial exhibition, Livingston and Beardsley reflected on the conception, the process for selection of work, the curatorial strategy, and the critical response to *Hispanic Art in the United States: Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors* [SEE DOCUMENT V.1.6]. According to their curatorial practice, the show was based on a year of research and organized over a three-year period, during which the curators traveled throughout the country assessing and selecting pieces from a broad, highly organized preexisting network of artists referred to them by professionals in the art milieu. Artists of mature and sustained accomplishment were selected, while, conscious that “Hispanic” art drew its impetus and meaning from the community, the curators chose works investigating the more “purely artistic and poetic impulses of the individual.” As the exhibition traveled around the country, discussion and debate was heated and centered on a group of key issues: among them, a perceived lack of political content; scant inclusion of women artists; an “aestheticizing” tendency focused on form over content; and a primitivistic bias contained within modernist aesthetic parameters. From the curators’ viewpoint, they “were not merely representing Hispanic art to the mainstream: [they] were representing American art to itself, and arguing . . . for a more fluid, more heterodox vision of American culture.”

Peter C. Marzio, then director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, where the exhibition under discussion was inaugurated, suggests that: “apathy and disregard among museum professionals and the general public toward minority art, particularly, when that art is placed in the general museum environment, must be changed to cooperation and understanding” [SEE DOCUMENT V.1.7]. In other words, the marginalizing approach toward such art must be challenged as mainstream audiences become increasingly diverse. Marzio also introduces certain economic issues that will necessarily influence the successes or limitations of mounting such challenges or pursuing new paths. *Hispanic Art in the United States* went against the tide in various ways. Many museums take the position that new kinds of exhibitions confuse institutional identity and divert funds from their established, dedicated purpose. Moreover, museums are undercapitalized and few have funds for research or even to expand in new program

areas. Museums, then, must find ways to make “minority art [exhibitions] a vital part of” normal operations. Marzio’s words affirm that “minority” exhibitions in major museums make important statements about quality and lead new audiences to experience a broad range of fine art providing it is made understandable and accessible. As a skilled and experienced cultural broker interested in making sure that the programming in mainstream museums reflects the interests and experiences of the diverse populations they serve, Marzio states that art museums “must provide educational and community service to all constituents.” In an effort to reach out to its various potential audiences, the MFAH also offered major symposia, film festivals, concerts, and tours in English and Spanish led by Hispanic docents as part of its educational initiatives relating to the aforementioned exhibition.

The artistic production of contemporary U.S. Latino artists continues and expands a long-standing participation of Latin American artists in the cultural life of the United States. *The Latin American Spirit: Art and Artists in the United States, 1920–1970* [SEE DOCUMENT V.I.8] examines selected artists who had a prolonged and substantial professional career in the United States. Previous analyses of their work by North American art historians, curators, and critics involved the construction of and their incorporation within a monolithic aesthetic composed of “bright colors,” violent or energetic brushstrokes, and Native or folkloric elements. Moving beyond notions of a unified style, this 1988 exhibition at the Bronx Museum of the Arts—organized and curated by its director, Luis R. Cancel—examines the production of the selected artists within six art historical categories—constructivism and geometric art, socially concerned art, New World surrealism, abstraction, figuration, and realism and the multi-faceted art of the 1960s.

Especially noteworthy was *The Latin American Spirit*’s inclusion of Mexican American and Puerto Rican artists to show cultural continuity across borders and across time. It is well known that Puerto Rican artists in the United States occupy an indeterminate space: North American art historians classify their work as Latin American art, while South American scholars group them within United States culture. The result of such divergent approaches is that Puerto Rican artists receive less exposure and scholarly attention than artists from Latin America. Furthermore, U.S. Latino artists are often marginalized into “ethnic” art categories. Their Latin American counterparts, however, have a history of recognition in mainstream North American museums that began in the 1930s [SEE DOCUMENTS

III.4.1–10]. For some curators, Latino art is seen as derivative if compared to the “authentic” art produced in southern geographies. Ironically, the growing presence and stature of Latino art in U.S. museums often paves the way for the inclusion and recognition of Latin American artists.

The prologue and introduction to the Indianapolis Museum of Art exhibition *Art of the Fantastic: Latin America, 1920–1987* [SEE DOCUMENT V.1.9] propose that the idea of the fantastic is “one of the most powerful modes of expression in Latin American culture.” The fantastic in Latin America is not rooted in intellectual doctrine like Surrealism but arises from the layered racial and cultural syncretisms of the social reality. Fantastic imagery—like hybrid figures together with distortions and dislocations in time and space—extend our experience by contradicting our normal expectations either formally or iconographically. Beginning with *The Art of the Fantastic* exhibition, the fantastic became a ubiquitous trope in exhibitions of Latino/Latin American art, and, in the process, the arguably over-used paradigm led to profound critique and new conceptual and theoretical discourses about Latino/Latin American visual culture.

In his introduction to the exhibition catalogue *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century* [SEE DOCUMENT V.1.10], Walter Rasmussen, a curator and director of International Programs at New York’s Museum of Modern Art since 1969, reflects on the fact that MoMA was the first institution outside Latin America to exhibit and collect art of that region. Starting in 1931 with a retrospective funded by Abby Aldrich Rockefeller featuring the works of Diego Rivera, MoMA began to collect Latin American art that often related in some way to the business interests of its major trustees, especially the Rockefeller family. The Rockefellers’ commitment to Latin American art and culture was allied to their business interests in Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil, as well as other countries. When Nelson Rockefeller became coordinator of the Office of Inter American Affairs—as part of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor Policy—MoMA presented exhibitions that paralleled and extended United States efforts to build goodwill and influence in Latin American countries in support of the Allies at the start of World War II. Inside MoMA, Alfred H Barr, Lincoln Kirsten, and René d’Harnoncourt were the three key leading figures who collected Latin American art for the museum’s permanent collections, negotiated loans for the major exhibitions, and interpreted the works in catalogues published and disseminated by the museum. Their collaborations helped to establish, define, and validate the field of Latin American art for

American museums in general. The search for an operative concept of Latino/Latin American art was sedimented and shaped through the exhibitions, scholarly symposia, and publications pioneered by MoMA as it explored the international contours of modern art. *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century* (1993) was integral to the quincentennial commemoration of the “discovery” of America. Rasmussen’s description of MoMA’s relationship with Latin American art begins in 1914 with the first generations of Latin American modernists and extends to contemporary Latino artists working in the U.S. The aim of this important exhibition and its accompanying publication was to simulate further research in the field, namely scholarly studies of neglected individual artists and specific periods and movements in Latin American art.

V.2 The United States—the fifth Spanish speaking enclave after Mexico, Spain, Colombia, and Argentina and projected to be the third or fourth within a few decades—is a significant Latin American cultural space. Today, the U.S. Latino population exceeds 50 million, and Latinos have been active components of American society since before the Anglo republic was created. Nevertheless, they still reside in a phantom culture within the United States, especially in the field of the visual arts. This section, “Questioning Stereotypes,” includes essays from North and South America that explore the construction of U.S. Latino and Latin Americans as peripheral “others” in cultural practices and discourses.

Five artists in dialogue with art historian Jacinto Quirarte [SEE DOCUMENT v.2.1] discuss the multiple ideological and aesthetic issues involved in contextualizing the art production of artists of Mexican descent who were born in the United States and who worked there during the 1970s. Coming from different regions of the country, the artists reflect on questions of identity, belonging, and cultural citizenship. As professionals trained in university art departments and art schools, they see themselves creating contemporary art that intersects with local, regional, and international forms and content. More specifically, they create an art of *fusion and negotiation* between artistic norms and traditions of Anglo American and Mexican modern and contemporary art. Within this spectrum, two viewpoints prevail. Identifying themselves as “Chicano,” one group of artists sees its visual production integrated with the social political goals of the Chicano civil rights “Cultural Project.” For them, murals, posters, and other forms of engaged art become collective representations of the imaginations and social aspirations

of the largely working class Chicano communities. A second group comprised of Mexican American artists believes that aesthetic value is linked—but not determined by—social concerns. For them, the artist must remain true to a personal inner world, letting his/her art respond to and express this internal vision in the form and content of their creations. Both groups see themselves as being a part of contemporary American art.

Continuing the dialogue articulating the content and context of Chicano art, performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña and visual artist Rupert Garcia [SEE DOCUMENT V.2.2] denounce the simplistic assessment of Chicano art as a minoritized art solely focused on cultural identity. Looking back to the politically charged art of the 1960s and 70s, they make clear that it was “unnecessarily” nationalistic, morally self-righteous, and aesthetically conservative. The Chicano cultural project—according to Gomez-Peña and Garcia—was more than “a mere strategy of critique and resistance. We didn’t make art to be just ‘intellectually interesting’ or ‘aesthetically fashionable.’ Our concerns—though at times essentialist and unfulfilled—were genuine. It was a popular and populist form of post-modernism. . . .” Moving beyond rigid binary thinking, together they explore questions of “identity, ethnicity, and the theorization of otherness” as a strategy of separation and offer a critique of post-modernity rooted in advanced capitalism. Multiculturalism in the United States revealed culturally specific visions and revisions of postmodern cultural practices. Through their theoretical insights arising from their artistic practice, Gomez Peña and Garcia reevaluate and dismantle essentialist paradigms that minimize Chicano art and re-center it as a foundational component of North American contemporary art and culture.

With a social history of art focus, Shifra M. Goldman’s essay [SEE DOCUMENT V.2.4] is a “suggested outline considering the relationship between the phenomenal increase in the number of Latin American art shows and the electoral politics, foreign policy and international economics of the United States” during the 1980s. Historical antecedents of this correlation of art and politics can be located in the 1930s when large exhibitions of Mexican art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art were triggered by U.S. needs for Mexican petroleum, an issue that has remained a vital plank of U.S. foreign policy from 1919 until the 1970 oil crisis; even today, Mexico is the third largest exporter of oil to the United States. The 1940 exhibition *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* at MoMA was related to gaining

Latin American support for the allied forces as the U.S. prepared for World War II, a strategy that sought to counter the fact that the Nazis were also courting Latin America during this same period. In 1978, “Mexico Today” a yearlong project of symposia, exhibitions, and cultural exchange occurred during a time of high stakes negotiations between the U.S. and Mexico regarding petroleum and natural gas.

The art market for Latin American art is a recent phenomenon that emerged in 1977 when Sotheby’s held the first auction of Mexican art. Its success led to the continuation of modern Latin American art auctions every six months. It is widely known that collectors, investors, and entrepreneurs are all involved in expanded market speculation for Latin American art. As Goldman argues, the current “boom” in Latin American art is embedded in webs of extra-artistic contexts including U.S. foreign policy, the rise of a Latino electorate in United States politics, and the emergence of a global art market.

The 1990s saw the ascending role of curators and the declining role of art critics in the Latino/Latin American art debates. The curator became, at that time, the new agent (or “art broker”) and the museum functioned as the crucible for deciding issues of representation. Art historian and curator Mari Carmen Ramírez [SEE DOCUMENT V.2.6] examines the identity-defining role “of Latin American art exhibitions organized and funded by U.S. cultural institutions” at the moment when Latino communities in the United States comprised the largest ethnic minority group in the country. According to Ramírez, the denunciation of *cultural stereotypes* presented in these exhibitions “has brought the issue of the representation of this marginal culture directly into the heart of the U.S. mainstream” museums and cultural institutions. In the historical continuum, exhibitions of Latin American art in American museums reflect the uneven “axis of exchange” between both continents and exemplify the neo-colonial legacy shaping U.S./Latin American relations since the nineteenth century.

Exhibitions of Latin American art in North American institutions have been mainly organized by curators of European art with little specialized knowledge of the historical, cultural, and aesthetic traditions of Latin American art. Nonetheless, these curators have created a discourse formulating specific narratives and definitions of Latin American art. In her essay, Ramírez explores the ideological and conceptual premises underlying the framing of identity issues through three much-debated exhibitions of Latino/Latin American art presented

in the 1990s. Her analysis is underscored by a central question she raises regarding the validity of the term “Latin American art” itself, noting that in reality no single identity for the cultures south of the U.S./Mexico border exists. As a “heterogeneous ensemble” of more than twenty countries, Latin American culture is inscribed in the Western tradition and has always functioned within its strict parameters. This line of thought could also be extended to U.S. Latino populations, as they cannot be grouped straightforwardly within a single race or ethnicity and, instead, “represent an amalgam of races, classes, and national heritages that elude any attempt at easy classification.” Ramírez explains that there is “no Latino/Latin American art per se,” but a “broad gamut” of politically and socially dependent modes of expression and styles.

The vast majority of Latin American/Latino art organized in the 1980s and 1990s followed the survey model looking at the art with an ethnographic gaze inherited from colonialism. Within this framework, alternative projections of modernity were ensnared in a primal, ahistorical, and instinctual “fantastic” essence presumed to convey the peculiarities of the Latin American/Latino character expressed through art. Museum practices on both continents were and continue to be governed by a neo-colonial mindset that perpetuates the ethnocentric discourse of the West.

1

Jane Livingston, one of the organizers of the Houston exhibition, had previously curated *Los Four* at the Los Angeles Museum of Art, February–March, 1974.

**V.1. EXHIBITING ENTRENCHED
REPRESENTATIONS**

V.2. QUESTIONING STEREOTYPES

V.1

EXHIBITING ENTRENCHED REPRESENTATIONS

V.1.1–V.1.2

HISPANIC AMERICAN ART IN CHICAGO, CHICAGO STATE UNIVERSITY GALLERY, 1980

Robert L. Weitz (born 1945), professor and founding curator of the University Gallery Program at Chicago State University, and Mexico-born, Chicago-based art historian and curator Víctor A. Sorrell (born 1944), address the premise and concerns of the 1980 exhibition *Hispanic American Art in Chicago*. As the first national show to bring together Chicano, Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Venezuelan artists practicing in the Chicago area, the exhibition is testament to the vibrancy of early Latino art production in the Midwestern United States. The show, organized by Sorrell, challenged Chicago area art critics to pay attention to previously unrecognized artists, and it addressed the function of labels with regard to Latinos, particularly in the sense of what was then referred to as “Hispanic-American” art. The label “Hispanic American” was a term contrived during the first Richard M. Nixon Administration (1969–74) as an option on the 1970 U.S. Census form to identify people whose descent could be traced to Spanish-speaking countries; the term “Latino,” a label which originated *within* the Latino community, was adopted by many as a self-referent and in opposition to the bureaucratic and political imposition of “Hispanic.” To the extent that the former term conveys a connection to Latin America (*vis-à-vis* “Hispanic,” which relates, instead, to the Iberian Peninsula), “Latino/a” has been viewed as a better reflection of the hybridism and multiculturalism present in Latin America.

In his essay, Weitz calls attention to the often misconstrued or misunderstood category of Hispanic-American art in writing about the exhibition held at the Chicago State University Gallery. Sorrell’s text complements Weitz’s analysis of (mis)categorizations and labels in a groundbreaking effort to document, interpret, and promote Chicano art history in the

United States. Sorell offers a critical call for the recognition of the often disregarded work of Chicago-based artists such as Paul Sierra, Arnaldo Roche Rabell, and Carlos Cortez. His text harkens back to a long-standing debate about ethnic labeling and, specifically, Sorell reflects on the nuances of the often-conflated terms Hispanic and Latino/a. Both essays are transcriptions from the catalogue for this critical exhibition [*Hispanic-American Art in Chicago. Monday, June 9–Wednesday, July 16* (Chicago: Chicago State University Gallery, 1980), 2 and 3–4].

V.1.1 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1065177

HISPANIC AMERICAN ART IN CHICAGO

Robert L. Weitz, 1980

PRESENTATION

This exhibition at the Chicago State University Gallery is a selective but representative view of Hispanic-American Art in Chicago. The exhibit—on view between June 9 and July 16, 1980—presents a broad range of media, styles and techniques that reflect both the traditional values of the participating artists and the intellectual development of their ideas. Twenty artists are represented by paintings, drawings, graphics, photography, plastic forms and by statements which communicate to our students and the viewing public the diverse educational, artistic and cultural experiences which have produced the objects in our exhibit.

Works painted by muralists and artists whose media are small or scaled-down to fit the surroundings of the gallery are represented. Artists who choose to paint in the streets and those who must paint in the streets, due to the inaccessibility of more conventional showcases, are both included in our exhibition. Their art is expressed in many varied and unique forms; yet their aesthetics are all drawn from the vocabularies of contemporary art.

A university setting is a compatible environment for an exhibition of this kind. It provides, by its nature, an atmosphere for formalized study and the scrutiny of ideas. It is an environment where long held shibboleths can be observed,

examined, and often dispelled. The nature and content of the Hispanic-American art—so often misconstrued as merely being recurring motifs displayed on neighborhood walls—is one of the concepts that this exhibit and catalog offer for examination. Another concept most conspicuously evident is that Hispanic-American Art flourishes in Chicago.

V.1.2 **DIGITAL ARCHIVE 781458**

SOME THOUGHTS CONCERNING THE EXHIBIT OF *HISPANIC AMERICAN ART IN CHICAGO*

Victor A. Sorell, 1980

THIS EXHIBITION'S TITLE, "Hispanic American Art in Chicago," must seem spurious to those readers who would subscribe to [historian] Dr. Rodolfo Acuña's opinion that the term "Hispanic(s)" is a label "sewn" by Chicano bureaucrats to create the social and economic illusion that they constitute/have a national homogeneous constituency of Spanish-speaking Americans.¹ Thus perceived, the label becomes little more than an arbitrary and artificial tag. The umbrella under which twenty artists are exhibiting at Chicago State University would appear to be on the verge of collapse under a wind of doubt, and charges of possible misrepresentation. And, yet, how more succinct a label could one invoke in bringing together the creative energies of six Mexicans, five Chicanos, five Cubans, three Puerto Ricans and one Venezuelan, all of whom work in Chicago? One response might well be to have done with a label altogether. But, that point of view overlooks completely the *need* which an exhibit such as this very one fulfills.

This writer conceived and organized this event because he felt and continues to feel that there is an urgent need to address, and even confront, those Chicago critics of the visual arts whose articles appear in the city's dailies and whose views influence public opinion, despite the lamentable fact that all too often they choose to disregard the nature of the work executed by this same city's minority artists, excluding them altogether from their discussions.

Those artists whose heritage is not white ethnic, or to be more specific, Anglo, are no longer satisfied with token citations issued when, for reasons of political expedience, the press chooses to placate them, acknowledging, for example, a few barrio murals. These artists want to be recognized as a part of the “mainstream,” albeit a unique part. Murals, notwithstanding their unparalleled significance as communal public art, are, after all, only one medium of expression. Jose Aguirre, Maria Enriquez de Allen, John Asencio, Carlos Cortez, Renato Esquivel, Edmond Fernandez, Luciano Franchi de Alfaro III, Emma Yolanda Galvan, Eladio Gonzalez, Jose Gamaliel Gonzalez, Oscar Martinez, Francisco Mendoza, Marcos Raya, Elizabeth Rivera, Richard Michael Rivera, Arnaldo Roche, Alejandro Romero, Gloria de los Santos, Paul Sierra and Inca Zabala are all individual artists whose work must be appreciated in the international context of contemporary art with its many and divergent streams. Twenty varied styles and iconographies reflected and conveyed in several media beg the critic’s objective scrutiny. The artist’s cultural/ethnic heritage is merely one piece of information amidst so many pieces from which the critic can select. Certainly, no artist represented here should elicit from any critic the argument that the artist’s ethnicity is being used as a crutch to advance an allegedly “deficient” art.

The political connotation that the label of ethnicity carries can move the critic not unlike a bee drawn to honey. Ethnic identity/labeling is, therefore, a stage that minority artists accept and overcome in the process of attaining artistic recognition. Their ultimate expectation, however, is earned recognition irrespective of ethnic designation; the recognition due an artist whose work speaks for itself. Professor Acuña, himself, contends that: “labels are important since they condition our future.”²

Beyond the promotion of dialogue with art critics, two other principal reasons motivated this writer to help realize the exhibition. Firstly, the landmark traveling exhibition of 1979, *Ancient Roots/New Visions*, when mounted at Chicago’s Museum of Contemporary Art, was unable to showcase as many of Chicago’s “Hispanic American” artists as its guest curator, Jose G. Gonzalez, considered equitable. It is hoped that the present show will contribute toward greater representation of those talents. Secondly, and of paramount significance, is the often unstated *truth* that “Hispanic American” artists are themselves misinformed about their own art and artists. *Hispanic American Art in Chicago* examines, then, some of the “Myths” and “Truths” surrounding itself.

From the outset one's experience in viewing this show of over fifty pieces is at one and the same time visual and extra-visual. Questions of terminology, apparent contradictions between ideology and practice, and a pervasive process this writer chooses to call the "politicization of culture" (a process which does not of necessity or design hinge on the artist's overt rendition of political subject matter) are key extra-visual considerations. Their role becomes evident upon a review of the works on exhibit and their authors' statements.

1

Rodolfo F. Acuña, "Return to the Spanish Boy," *Somos* (June 1979): 20.

2

Ibid., 21. The contemporary movement for women's rights affords one interesting and parallel frame of reference.

V.1.3–V.1.7

HISPANIC ART IN THE UNITED STATES: THIRTY CONTEMPORARY PAINTERS AND SCULPTORS, MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON, 1987

This group of documents relates to the exhibition *Hispanic Art in the United States: Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors*, the first large-scale traveling exhibition featuring the work of Hispanic artists in the United States, held at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH), from May to September 1987. It was organized by the American scholars Jane Livingston (born 1944), and John Beardsley (born 1952), both of whom were serving as curators at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. Two years before, Livingston, together with Rosalind Krauss, had published an important volume on surrealist photography (*L'amour fou. Photography & Surrealism*, 1985), and Beardsley was known as specialist of the often symbiotic relationship between art and landscape or land art. The two curators had collaborated on the exhibition *Black Folk Art in America 1930–1980*, (Corcoran Gallery of Art, January–March, 1982), where they had first entered into conversations with the Corcoran's then director, Peter C. Marzio (1943–2010), regarding the possibility of a project on Hispanic art. The exhibition was not realized until Marzio joined the MFAH as its director in 1982.

Part of a larger trend led by major U.S. art institutions to mount important exhibitions on the subject during the late 1980s and early 1990s, *Hispanic Art in the United States* responded for the first time to a nationwide interest in multiculturalism, and it acknowledged a turning point regarding the shifting politics of representation among the nation's mainstream museums. The show's major contributions included bringing Hispanic art into the limelight and garnering visibility for the thirty artists who participated (Luis Cruz Azaceta, Rolando Briseño, GRONK, Carmen Lomas Garza, Luis Jiménez and César A. Martínez, among many others). Without making any claims with regard to a comprehensive knowledge of "Hispanic-American" art, Beardsley and Livingston, in their "Preface and Acknowledgments" for the exhibition catalogue, consider what they deem to be a nascent field—at once a great unknown and a great art discovery. The curators state that their main concern relates not to a preconceived typology of "a Hispanic 'style' or 'school,'" but rather to an aesthetic judgment based on their informed understanding of what constitutes "good" art.

In his lengthy treatise written in the context of the exhibition, the celebrated Mexican poet Octavio Paz offers what he believes is the crucial difference between Hispanic and Anglo-American cultures: the communal orientation of Hispanic-Catholic culture vis-à-vis the Anglo-American individualism that leads to what he terms "anxieties of possession and participation." This essay was shaped by Paz's lived experiences in Latin America and in the United States, and it reveals certain relevant contradictions. Amid the recognized heterogeneity within Latino culture in the United States, Paz underscores the continuity between Hispanics in the U.S. and Spanish civilization in the Americas while simultaneously considering the cultural production of the former as another face of *North American art*.

The exhibition received considerable backlash from detractors who argued that its proposal highlighted a limited number of artists whose work could not properly represent the full gamut of Latino American artistic production in the United States. In "Homogenizing Hispanic Art" (1987), Shifra M. Goldman writes that in selecting the artists and works for the exhibition, the curators go on to establish precisely what they denounce in their "Preface": that is, a "sociology" and subsequent a neatly packaged sampling of the art production of artists from several heterogeneous communities under the rubric of "Hispanic Art." Moreover, Goldman shares the opinions of many Latino intellectuals who felt at that time that the exhibition comprised the work of two non-specialists and did not fully consider an unquestioned tradition of politically engaged art. Years later, and echoing Goldman's criticisms, the

Chicano community responded with large-scale exhibitions such as *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation (1965–1985)*, or *CARA*, which opened at UCLA’s Wight Art Gallery on September 9, 1990, and then traveled through the United States until 1993.

In “The Poetics and Politics of Hispanic Art: A New Perspective” (1991), published four years after their controversial exhibition, Livingston and Beardsley offer a final rebuttal of the critiques of Goldman and others. The curators suggest that, like a photograph that is said to be a representation of reality at a specific time, any exhibition can only presume to express the ideas and existing state of scholarship current at the moment that it is presented. In the show mounted at the MFAH in 1987, the challenges and parameters included reconciling coherence and diversity; focusing the scope of the exhibition to the contemporary period; confining the selection to the more traditional media of painting and sculpture while putting aside performance art, photography, video, and other interesting proposals at that time; and, finally, opting to display in-depth the artworks of each of the chosen artists.

A lifelong champion of the democratization of art, Peter C. Marzio reconsiders *Hispanic Art in the United States* from his vantage point as director of the MFAH. The great challenge, he writes in “Minorities and Fine-Arts Museums in the United States,” is not dissipating collegial debate regarding the hits and (purported many) misses of the exhibition, but rather how to bring minority art to the forefront and how to entice the audience—both the general public as well as the minorities supposedly represented in the show—into coming to the museum and caring about the work. Published in 1991, only three years after the exhibition was held at the MFAH, Marzio’s thoughtful essay reflects the benefits of hindsight, and, in his reconsideration of the show, he warns against the perpetuation of the marginality of minority art. It was this vicious cycle that in 2001 prompted him to vigorously support a large-scale effort such as the ICAA’s Documents Project at the MFAH, which seeks to address numerous issues: Specifically, lack of primary documentation precludes American academia from producing trained scholars in the field; it hinders mainstream museums from presenting the material; and in turn, this limited visibility results in a lack of familiarity with the work among the audiences, potential sponsors, and the art market itself.

In this group of documents, we include Beardsley’s and Livingston’s “Preface and Acknowledgements” from the exhibition catalogue [*Hispanic Art in the United States: Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors*, Museum of Fine Arts, (Houston/New York: Abbeville Press,

1987), 7–11], Paz’s essay “Art and Identity: Hispanics in the United States” [also from *Hispanic Art in the United States*, translated by Eliot Weinberger, 13–37]; Goldman’s response to the exhibition [“Homogenizing Hispanic Art,” *New Art Examiner*, September 1987, 30–33; later reprinted in *Dimensions of the Americas: Art and Social Change in Latin America and the United States*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, 409–15]; Livingston’s and Beardsley’s “The Poetics and Politics of Hispanic Art: A New Perspective”; and Marzio’s “Minorities and Fine-Arts Museums in the United States” [both in Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures*, (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987), 104–120; and 121–27].

V.1.3 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1065215

HISPANIC ART IN THE UNITED STATES

John Beardsley and Jane Livingston, 1987

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Hispanic-American visual art is at once too familiar and utterly unknown. Largely overlooked by our major museums and art magazines, it is regularly championed only by smaller organizations with limited constituencies. Very few artists whose work is of an assertively Hispanic character, whose subject matter or style reveals an affinity for their Latin roots, have received a measure of recognition at least partially equivalent to their accomplishments. A few other Hispanic Americans, although unacknowledged as such, have come to the fore in a more mainstream style. At the same time, certain limited aspects of Hispanic visual culture have been seized upon—both by a majority of the art establishment and of the interested public—as the sum total and limit of Hispanic achievement in the fine arts. The Chicano mural movement, in particular—while it boasts a distinguished tradition and while it is still capable of summoning excellent work from a number of artists—has lately become something of a stereotype in the perception of Hispanic artistic expression. In all, the true depth and range of Hispanic art in the United

States remains an uncelebrated phenomenon, an unacknowledged chapter in the history of recent American art.

Such were our intuitions in 1982 when this project originated in conversations among us and Peter Marzio [SEE DOCUMENT V.1.7]—then Director of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Having worked together before on an exhibition of self-taught American artists, we had been particularly struck by Felipe Archuleta, Martín Ramírez, and the tradition of Hispanic religious carving in the Southwest. Jane Livingston had also been haunted by her experience in Los Angeles in 1973–74, working with the artists in *Los Four*—Carlos Almaraz, Gilbert Luján, Frank Romero, and Beto de la Rocha—on an exhibition that occurred at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art shortly before she left there to become Chief Curator at the Corcoran. That show became for her an issue of unfinished business. It was so good, so open-ended, and so prescient of what was to come in mainstream art everywhere that it seemed to call for resuscitation and elaboration. In addition, we had each independently followed the emergence of certain important artists on the American scene, such as Rafael Ferrer, Robert Graham, Luis Jimenez, and Manuel Neri, who, whether or not they were primarily identified with a Latino sensibility were blazing a trail into the mainstream American art world for other Hispanic artists working—but working invisibly.

However our suspicion of a larger and deeper phenomenon of contemporary Hispanic art in the United States wasn't sufficiently substantiated by 1983 to justify a firm commitment to a large exhibition based on it. We felt strongly impelled to explore the field, but were also firm in postponing any announcement of a show and book until we had consulted further with our colleagues, especially those in the various Hispanic art organizations.

. . .

Planning for this project, we came to realize that there was a great richness and variety of visual art in the Hispanic worlds everywhere in the United States. Painting, sculpture, decorative arts, architecture, design, photography, film, and video were among the many areas we explored; literature, poetry and theater were beyond our purview, but our increasing familiarity with their depth and vitality became important in our early research. Early on we felt the necessity to narrow our field of view. Somehow, to concentrate on painting and sculpture seemed to us the natural first step in revealing both the scope and the particular-

ity of the achievements of Hispanic artists in the United States. Still photography, video, and performance might have been equally compelling fields to explore, but they would simply have opened up too much territory to survey in a single book and exhibition. We trust that these important areas of endeavor among Hispanic artists will be treated in due course.

. . . Although it was always understood that the show would open at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, there is an important sense in which the exhibition has been a collaborative effort between the Museum of Fine Arts and the Corcoran Gallery of Art. It was as Director of the Corcoran that Peter Marzio had first expressed interest in the possibility of such an exhibition; it was as Director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, that he committed the time and the resources to make it possible.

. . .

In reviewing the sum and substance of what is here, we think it will be apparent to all but the most prejudiced observer that the predominating values in this book and exhibition are artistic, not sociological. What we have cared about above all else is the strength of an artist's work, not conformity to some preconceived notion of what constitutes a Hispanic "style" or "school." Such generalizations as each of us draws follow from our observations of what is *good* about Hispanic art; the broader cultural implications we detect reflect artistic goals determined by the painters and sculptors themselves. At the same time, certain issues have emerged, almost unconsciously, or at least in spite of our stated intentions. We did not set out to define a generation, and yet we see a fascinating generational gap. What we have included perforce is *mature work*—which means most of our artists are over thirty-five (one, Martín Ramírez, died long ago and serves as a special case). Were this book written and the exhibition mounted ten or fifteen years in the future, it would include a rather different roster and content.

First, more women would be represented. Our overwhelming reaction to the many young women whose work we saw—from, among numerous others, Elsa Flores and Diane Gamboa in Los Angeles to Candida Alvarez and Marina Gutierrez in New York and Marta Sanchez in Philadelphia (still a student at Tyler School of Art when we saw her work)—was a sense of *promise*, a feeling that their work would fully flower soon. We have a strong conviction that in the near future

the clear talent of these women will prevail over whatever particular cultural forces might still tend to limit them.

Second, a project of the year 2000 would certainly include much greater monumentality of execution. The impetus to large, public art is rife among Hispanic artists—but the economic means of supporting such art is for the present rising. Several of the large-scale pieces here would not exist were it not for the direct subsidy this undertaking provided. And others could have been added given yet more time and additional resources. In short, the Hispanic aesthetic we are addressing *thinks* monumentally. We associate this tendency with the long tradition of city murals, but it has many other potential outlets. Hispanic and Hispanic-derived art may well surround and define the American public landscape of the near future.

Third, in the next generation, Hispanic artists in the United States will be far more readily recognized as deeply influential for American mainstream art. We hope the present effort is only the first suggestive episode in a sequence of events that will stretch both backward and forward, helping us to understand some previously unappreciated realities about the development of American art—and to prepare the way for what is to come.

V.1.4 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1065195

ART AND IDENTITY: HISPANICS IN THE UNITED STATES

Octavio Paz, 1987

NAMES AND CONSTITUTIONS

...

We live within concentric, successive, widening circles: family, neighborhood, church, school, work, club, party, city, and nation. The sense of belonging to this or that collective reality is older than names or ideas: first we *are* part of a

family, later we *know* the name of that family, and still later we form an idea, however vague, of what a family is and means. The same occurs with the sense of separation and solitude. Growing up, we discover new names and realities; each name stands for communities, groups, and associations that become wider, increasingly evanescent: we can see our family, talk with it, but only in a figurative way can we see or talk with our nation or the congregations of the faithful of our church. All of the names of these various communities refer obscurely to the original sensation; all of them are extensions, prolongations, or reflections of the moment of beginning. Family, clan, tribe, and nation are metaphors for the name of that first day. What is its name? No one knows. Perhaps it is a reality that has no name. Silence cloaks the original reality, the moment when we opened our eyes in a strange world. At birth we lose the name of our true homeland. The names we say in the anxieties of possession and participation—*my* family, *my* country—attempt to fill the nameless empty space that is somehow involved with our birth.

That double sense of participation and separation appears in all societies and in all times. The love we profess for house and home, the loyalty to friends and those of the same religious beliefs, to party and to country, are affections that come from our beginnings, reiterations and variations of the primal situation. They are a code for our original condition, which was not simple, but rather composed of two antagonistic and inseparable terms: fusion and dismemberment. This is the essential principle of every human life and the nucleus of all of our passions, feelings, and actions. It is a principle older than consciousness or reason, and yet, at the same time, the origin of both. From feeling to knowing is a small step; we all take that step to reach the consciousness of ourselves. The name of the origin—unknown, hidden, perhaps nonexistent—becomes an individual name: I am Peter, Teresa, Juan, Elvira. Our names are the metaphor for the name lost at birth.

This process has been repeated in the lives of all societies, from the Paleolithic to our own times. First there is the collective feeling of belonging to this or that community, a feeling shared with greater or lesser fervor by all its members; then the sense of the difference between our group and the other human groups. Later, the sense of feeling different creates the consciousness of what we are; and that consciousness, finally, is expressed in the act of naming. The name of the group recapitulates the dual principle on which we are founded: it is the name of

a collective identity composed of internal likenesses and the differences between us, and the others. The enormous diversity of societies, their various histories, and the richness and plurality of cultures have not altered the universality of the process. Everywhere the phenomenon has been basically the same, whether in the Neolithic village, the Greek *polis*, the Renaissance republic, or among a tribe of headhunters in the jungle. The name reinforces the ties that bind us to the group and, at the same time, justifies the group's existence, asserts its worth. The name is a code for the fate of the group, simultaneously designating a reality, an idea, and a set of values. . . .

The declaration of a constitution is simultaneously a fiction and the consecration of a pact. It is a pact because the constitution pretends to be the birth or baptismal certificate of a society—a fiction, for obviously the society existed before the announcement of its birth. At the same time, the fiction becomes a pact and thus ceases to be a fiction; the constitutional pact changes custom into norm. Through a constitution the traditional and unconscious ties—customs, rites, rules, taboos, exemptions, hierarchies—become voluntary and freely accepted laws. The original dual principle—the sensation of separation and participation—reappears in the constitutional pact, but it is transformed: it is no longer a fate but a freedom. The fatality of birth becomes an act of free will.

The history of modern societies, first in the West and later in the rest of the world, is to a great extent the history of the intimate association between the various constitutions and the idea of a nation. I say the *idea* of a nation because, as I have noted, it is evident that the reality we call a nation is older than its idea. It is nearly impossible to determine what a nation is, or how and when nations are born. It is still endlessly debated exactly when political philosophy appeared in Greece. But the reality named by the word *nation* needs no proof to be perceived. Before it is a political idea, the nation has been, and still is, a profound and elemental feeling: that of participation. Nature, said [Johann Gottfried von] Herder, has created nations but not states. By that he no doubt meant that nations are the more or less involuntary creations of the complex processes that he called natural and that we call historical. The English, the French, and the other European peoples were nations before they knew what they were; when they learned it, and fused the idea of the nation with the idea of the state, the modern world began. In general, despite the natural differences of every case, the process has been similar in all the nations of Europe and, later on, the other continents.

The idea of the nation, transformed into one of the ideologies of the modern era, has frequently replaced historical reality. Through a curious confusion, the Gallic chieftain Vercingetorix has been seen as a patriotic symbol for France, the cave paintings of Altamira as the beginning of the history of Spanish art, and the independence of Mexico in 1821 not as the birth but as the restoration of the nation. According to our official history, Mexico *recovered* in 1821 the independence it had *lost* in 1521 when [Hernán] Cortés conquered the Aztec city-state of México-Tenochtitlán. The examples I have almost randomly cited—there are many to choose from—illustrate the modern and dangerous confusion between reality and ideology. I should add that this confusion, though widespread and dangerous, is understandable. It was natural, for example, that the Mexican feeling of participation, exaggerated after the war for independence (separation) from Spain, should have been expressed in a distorted chronology tinged with ideological passion: the nation existed for many centuries, was kidnapped, and then the constitutional pact restored the original reality. For this romantic version of our history, shared by many, the independence of Mexico was not a beginning but a return to the beginning. In almost all the modern revolutions, one finds the same idea: revolutionary movements *restore* the ancient freedoms and the lost rights. Thus the ancient idea of the return to the original time fuses with the modern idea of an absolute beginning, an unholy marriage of myth and political philosophy.

CHILDREN OF THE IDEA

The process has been universal: the nation is the child of history, not of the idea. And yet there are exceptions. The most notable among them has been the United States. The English or the French discovered one day that they were English or French, but the Americans decided to invent themselves. Their nation was not born from the play of impersonal historical forces but from a deliberate political act. They did not, one happy day, discover that they were American; they decided to become it. The past did not establish them; they established themselves. I exaggerate, of course, but not a great deal. It is obvious that the birth of the United States, as in all that happens in history, was a coincidence of circumstances. It ultimately produced American society. What seems to me astonishing, however, and worth thinking about is the central and prominent

role played, amid all these circumstances, by the political will to create a new nation. One often hears the United States referred to as an enormous historical novelty. Yet nearly everything that is the United States began in Europe. Not only is it a country made of immigrants and their descendants, its ideas and institutions, its religion and democracy, language and science, capitalism and individualism also came from Europe. But in no other part of the world has a nation been born by a deliberate act of self-establishment. It was also a new country in a polemical sense; it wanted to be different from the others, different from the nations created by history. Its newness was radical, anti-historical. The independence of the United States was not a restoration of a more or less mythic past, but an authentic birth. Not a return to the origins, but a true beginning.

The appearance of the United States was an inversion of the normal historical process: before it was a nation it was a proposal for a nation. Not a reality but an idea: the Constitution. The Americans were not children of a history: they were the beginning of *another* history. They did not define themselves by their origins, as others did, but rather by what they were going to be. The “genius of the people,” that expression so loved by Romantic historians, was always conceived as the sum of inherited traits; in contrast, the primary characteristic of the United States was its lack of characteristics, and its uniqueness consisted in an absence of national traits. It was an act of violence against history, an attempt to create a nation *outside* of history. Its cornerstone was the future, a territory more unexplored and unknown than the land in which the Americans rooted themselves.

It was a total beginning in the face of and against a history personified by the European past with its particularities, hierarchies, and old, stagnant institutions. [Alexis Clérel de] Tocqueville’s fascination for it is understandable; he was the first to realize that the appearance of the United States on the world scene represented a unique attempt to conquer historical destiny, thus its negation of the past and its wager on the future. Of course, no one escapes history, and today the United States is not, as the “founding fathers” proposed, a nation outside of history, but one bound to it with iron chains, the chains of a world superpower. But what was decisive was the act of origin, the self-establishment. That act inaugurated *another* way of making history. All that the Americans have made, within and beyond their own borders, good and bad, has been a consequence, an effect, of that initial act.

I mentioned earlier the absence of national traits in the United States. I did not mean, of course, that such traits do not exist. Rather, I wanted to emphasize that the project of the founders of the United States did not consist, as in other countries, of the recognition of the genius of the people, the collective idiosyncrasy or the unique character of the national tradition, but in the proclamation of a set of universal rights and obligations. The United States was founded not on particularities but on two universal ideas: the first, from Christianity, declared the sanctity of each individual, who was considered unique and irreplaceable; the second, from the Enlightenment, affirmed the primacy of reason. The subject of rights and duties is the individual person, in whose interior conscience debates itself and God: a Protestant legacy. In turn, those rights and obligations possess the universality and legitimacy of reason: a legacy of the eighteenth century. The emphasis on the future has the same root as the rational optimism of the Enlightenment. The past is the dominion of the individual, while the future is the kingdom of reason. Why? Because it is the unknown territory, *a no man's land* that progress will ultimately explore and colonize. And progress is nothing but the form by which reason manifests itself in history. Progress, for the nineteenth century, was reason in motion. American pragmatism and activism are inseparable from progressive optimism, and the basis of that attitude is the belief in reason. In sum, one can see the birth of the United States as a unique phenomenon and yet, at the same time—and without contradiction—as a consequence of the two great movements that began the modern era: the Reformation and the Enlightenment.

The *new* universality was expressed by three emblems: a language, a book, and a set of laws. The language was English, the book the Bible, and the laws the Constitution. A strange universality: not false, but rather paradoxical and contradictory. It was a universality undermined by the three emblems that expressed it. English has become a universal language, but only because it embodies a particular version of Western culture. In the United States it was forced to respond to a double exigency, to remain faithful to the English tradition while still expressing the new American realities. The result has been a continual and stimulating tension; because of it, there is an American literature, one with its own unique character. The Bible, for its part, symbolizes the Protestant scission and represents a particular version of Christianity. None of the churches

into which the reformist movement split has been able to reconstruct the original universality. The same can be said of the Constitution: the principles that inspired it are not timeless, like an axiom or a theorem, but rather are expressions of a certain moment in Western political philosophy. A triple contradiction: it was a universality that, in order to realize itself, had to face up to particularities and, in the end, identify with them; it was a set of beliefs that could be seen as versions or interpretations of the central doctrines of the most widespread traditions of the West; and finally they were political and moral norms that expressed the beliefs and ideals of a single linguistically and culturally determined ethnic group, the White Anglo-Saxon Protestants.

In its clash with particularities, the United States discovered history. These particularities assumed many forms, but, in my opinion, two of them were especially significant: relations with the outside world, and the immigrants: two manifestations of *otherness*. In other writings I have dealt with some of the ramifications of the former, the inability of the United States to find a foreign policy that can meet the contradictory demands of an imperial democracy. As for the latter, it is hardly necessary to recall that it is, and has been for two hundred years, one of the central themes of American history. Some of the immigrations were forced (such as those of the blacks taken from Africa); others were voluntary (the Europeans, Asians, and Latin Americans). For a long time an extraordinary plurality of ethnic and cultural groups has predominated in the United States. Other empires have known such heterogeneity—Rome, the Caliphate [of Cordoba], Spain, Portugal, England—but it was one nearly always outside of the metropolitan areas, in the distant provinces or in the conquered territories. I know of no similar examples in history of such heterogeneity within a country. The situation can be reduced, in a succinct but not inexact way, to this alternative: if the United States had not built a multiracial democracy, its life and its integrity would have been subject to grave threats and terrible conflicts. Luckily—although not without errors and setbacks—the American people have met this goal. If they can hold on to it, they will have created a work without parallel in history.

In order to resolve the problem, the Americans have considered, at one time or another, nearly all of the other solutions attempted by other countries and empires. The repertoire is extensive and depressing. The oldest remedy—outside of plain extermination—is exclusion. It was Sparta's solution. It is inapplicable to

the modern world. Not only is it in contradiction to our institutions and ethical and political convictions, but it also implies an impossible demographic immobility. The example of England and the other modern empires is equally inapplicable. The foreign populations are not outside but rather within the national territory. It is equally impossible to imitate the policy of imperial China—homogenization. Another notable solution has been the caste system of India, which has lasted more than two thousand years; it, of course, is based on ideas foreign to our civilization. Spain and Portugal offered a model halfway between exclusion and absorption. The two empires were founded on the universality of the Catholic faith (participation) and on the hierarchies of blood and origin (separation). The Roman model is a worthy ancestor. Rome granted citizenship to the subjects of the empire. It was a great deal for its time, but today it is not enough. In fact, the only lasting and viable solution is the choice made by the United States: integration within a plurality, a universalism that neither denies nor ignores the singularities that comprise it, a society that reconciles the two contrary currents of that original sentiment: separation and participation.

GUADALUPE, COATLICUE, YEMANYÁ

In size, the Hispanic minority is the second largest in the United States. In its ethnic and cultural composition, it is a world apart. What is most surprising is its ethnic diversity—Spanish, Indian, Black, Mestizo, Mulatto—a marked and violent contrast to cultural homogeneity. This fact distinguishes it from the other large minority, the blacks. While the original culture is still very much alive among the Hispanics, the African roots of the black communities in the United States have almost entirely disappeared. Those cultures, of course, were never homogeneous, and one must speak of them in the plural. The differences between the Hispanic and Asian minorities are equally notable—language, religion, customs, histories. The Asian minority is composed of a great diversity of languages, cultures, religions, nations; the Hispanics are largely Catholic, Spanish is their original language, and their culture is not essentially different from that of other Spanish Americans. Culturally and historically, Catholic Hispanics are a continuation in America of that version of the West embodied by Spain and Portugal, as, at the other extreme, Anglo-Americans are an English version.

This fact has never been easily accepted, for the Europeans and the Americans have, since the eighteenth century, looked down on the Spanish and Portuguese and their descendents. Nevertheless, to accept the fact is not to ignore the differences. They are substantial and great.

For the United States, the Hispanic minority represents a variant of Western civilization, a variant that is no less eccentric than that of the Anglo-Americans. Both are eccentric because the founding nations—Spain, Portugal, and England—were frontier entities, almost peripheral, not only geographically albeit historically and perhaps culturally. They are singularities in the history of Europe, an island and a peninsula, lands at the end of the world. Latin Americans and Anglo-Americans are the heirs of a pair of extreme and antagonistic movements that, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, fought for supremacy not only of the sea and the continents but also of the human conscience. Both communities were born in the Americas as European transplants; transplants composed of separate cultures with conflicting ideas and divergent interests. Two versions of Western civilization were established in this hemisphere. The English and Dutch version was full of the spirit of the Reformation, which began the modern age; the Spanish and Portuguese version identified with the Counter-Reformation. Historians still debate the meaning of that movement. For some it was an attempt to halt the rise of modernity; for others it was an attempt to create a model different from modernity. Whether it was one or the other, the Counter-Reformation was a failed enterprise. We, the Latin Americans, are the descendants of a petrified dream. The Hispanics of the United States are a piece of that dream that has fallen into the Anglo-American world. I don't know if they are the seeds of a resurrection scattered by storm winds, or the survivors of a great shipwreck of history. Whatever they are, they are alive. Their culture is ancient, but they are new. They are a beginning.

The eccentricity of Hispanic culture cannot be reduced to the Counter-Reformation and its negation of modernity. Spain is incomprehensible if one neglects two essential elements of its formation: the Arabs and the Jews. Without them we cannot understand many aspects of its history and culture, from its conquest of America to its mystical poetry. A culture is defined not only by its acts, albeit by its omissions, lacunae, and repressions; among the last, in the case of Spain, is the expulsion of the Moors and the Jews. It was an act of self-mutilation that, like all such acts, engendered countless demons and obsessions. Our

other heritage—black and Indian—is equally complex. It, too, contains terrible demons: the conquest, slavery, servitude, the myths, languages, and lost gods.

Besides this ethnic and cultural complex, the Hispanics in the United States also belong to various nations. At one extreme, the Mexicans: immigrants from a country in which the most immediate reality is the mountains and the great plateaus, a population that traditionally has lived with its back to the sea. At the other extreme, the Cubans and Puerto Ricans: islanders who have never known any other plain but the sea. Among the Mexicans—ceremonious, taciturn, introverted, religious, and violent—the Indian legacy is the determining factor; among the Cubans and Puerto Ricans—extroverted, boisterous, effusive, vivacious, and equally violent—the black influence is visible. That is, a pair of temperaments, a couple of visions, two societies within the same culture.

This ethnic, geographic, and psychological diversity extends to other domains. The majority of the Mexicans are of peasant stock. The oldest populations are descendants of the early settlers of the American Southwest, from the time when those lands were Mexican; the others, more numerous, have arrived in successive waves throughout the twentieth century. Mexico is an ancient country, and the most ancient part of Mexico is its peasants. They are contemporaries of the birth of the first American cultures, three thousand years ago; since then they have survived enormous upheavals, various gods, and political regimes. They are also the authors of a strange and fascinating creation, Mexican Catholicism, that imaginative synthesis of sixteenth-century Christianity and the pre-Columbian ritualistic religions. Deeply religious, traditional, stubborn, patient, suffering, communal, immersed in a slow-moving time made of rhythmic repetitions—one can imagine their distress and their difficulties in adapting to the ways of life in the United States, with its frenetic individualism. What will be the final result of this encounter—a clash of two sensibilities, two visions of time?

The case of the Cubans is quite opposite. It is a new wave of immigrants expelled by the Castro regime, and one that is largely middle class: lawyers, doctors, businessmen, technicians, professors, or engineers. They did not have to leap into modernity; they were already modern. That—and their immense vitality—alerts intelligence, enterprise, and capacity for hard work help to explain their rapid and successful integration into American life. It is unfair to compare the Cubans to the Puerto Ricans; the Cuban immigrants had, from the start, an advantage that many of the Puerto Ricans lacked—a modern culture.

Nevertheless, the achievements of the Puerto Ricans are hardly insignificant. One of them, in fact, is extraordinary and worthy of all our admiration: not only have they preserved their national character, also they have revitalized their culture.

The differences imposed by geography, blood, and class, are also the differences of historical times. The peasant from Oaxaca who has immigrated to the United States does not come from the same century as the journalist from Havana or the worker from San Juan. But one thing unites them: they are outcasts of history. The Mexicans belong to a country in which various civilizations have raised pyramids, temples, palaces, and other magnificent constructions, yet it has not been able, in this century, to house all of its own children; the Cubans and the Puerto Ricans—fragments of a great dismembered empire, Spain—have been the object of American imperial expansion, and now, for the Cubans, of Russian [maneuvers] . . . The other groups of Hispanics who come from Central and South America are also fugitives from history. We Latin Americans are still unable to create stable, prosperous, and democratic societies.

No matter how terrible and powerful the reasons for leaving their countries, the Hispanics have not broken their ties with their places of origin. No sooner had [Fidel] Castro allowed the exiles to visit their parents and relatives in Cuba than the island was full of visitors from Miami and other places. The same has occurred with the Puerto Rican and Chicano communities. In the north of Mexico and in the south of the United States there is now a subculture that is a mixture of Mexican and American traits. This geographical proximity has fostered exchange and, at the same time, strengthened the bonds of the Hispanic communities with their native places. It is a fact that is full of future; communication between the Hispanic minority and the Latin American countries has existed and will continue to exist. It is inconceivable that it will ever be broken. It is a true community, neither ethnic nor political nor economic, but cultural.

In sum, what seems to me particularly notable is not the diversity of the Hispanic groups and the differences among them, but rather their extraordinary cohesion. A cohesion not expressed politically, but in collective acts and attitudes. North American society is founded on the individual. The origin of the preeminence of the individual as a central value is twofold, as I have noted; it comes from the Reformation and from the Enlightenment. Hispanic-Catholic society is communal, and its nucleus is the family, that small solar system that revolves around a fixed star: the mother. The predominance of the maternal image in

Latin American society is no accident; it is a confluence of ancient Mediterranean female divinities, Christian virgins, pre-Columbian and African goddesses: Isis and Mary, Coatlicue and Yemanyá (who is venerated in Cuba as the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre and in Brazil as Santa Bárbara). Axis of the world, wheel of time, center of motion, force of reconciliation, and the mother is the fountain of life and the storehouse of religious beliefs and traditional values.

Hispanic-Catholic values express a vision of life quite different from what prevails in North American society where religion is above all a private matter. The separation between public and private, family and individual is less clear and emphatic among the Hispanics than among the North Americans. The ethical foundations are the same; both are part of the Christian heritage. Nevertheless, the differences are marked; in the two versions of the North American ethic, the Puritan and the neo-hedonist, the prohibitive and the permissive, the center is the individual; in Hispanic morals the true protagonist is the family. This primacy of the family is not entirely beneficial. The family is a priori hostile to the common good and general interest. Family morals have been and continue to be opposed to generous and disinterested actions (one need only recall various evangelical condemnations). The root of our apathy and passivity in political matters, as well as the patrimonial-ism of our leaders—with their nepotism and corruption—is the family egotism and narrow vision. Moreover, precisely because the individual is confined to a more constricted space, individual action often becomes manifest in two equally pernicious ways: strict order and violent rupture. Cohesion and dispersion: the patriarch and the prodigal son, Abraham and Don Juan, the political boss and the lone sniper.

The continuity of these traditional models of living together is not, of course, entirely explained by loyalty to one's own culture and the influence of the family. Persecutions, inequalities, humiliations, and daily injustices have also been decisive factors in the strengthening of the cohesion of the Hispanic communities. This is especially apparent in the cases of the Puerto Rican and Mexican minorities, constant victims of discrimination and other indignities. To these circumstances one must add another, equally powerful one, with its economic ramifications: the difficulty in obtaining higher education. All of this—culture, tradition, and communal cohesion, as well as discrimination—has influenced the state of the intellectual and artistic achievements of these groups. The Hispanics have excelled in painting, music, and dance; on the other hand,

they have not produced notable writers. It is not difficult to understand why. Language is the soul of a people; in order to write works of the imagination—poetry, fiction, plays—one must transform the language in which one wants to write. This is what [Herman] Melville, [Walt] Whitman, and the other great writers did with English: they planted themselves in America, and they transformed the language. The Spaniard George Santayana wrote in a prose that is admirable for its transparency and elegance—a prose that, at heart, had little to do with English—but he had to sacrifice his life as a poet. On the other hand, in the visual arts—painting and sculpture above all—the Hispanics have expressed themselves with energy and delight. Not because the genius of the community is visual rather than verbal, but for the reasons I have outlined above. The visual image *speaks*, but what it says does not need to be translated into words. Painting is a language sufficient unto itself.

ART AND IDENTITY

This book and the exhibition of contemporary Hispanic art that it documents provide an excellent opportunity to hear what the Hispanic artists are saying; to hear them with our eyes and with our imagination. Gathered together here is the work of thirty artists. Some of them have already achieved renown, but most are little known, both to the critics and to the general public. In this sense, the book and exhibition constitute a true act of discovery. I do not propose to talk about the artists themselves: it is not the intention of these comments, nor have I the authority to do so. Moreover, I think it is impossible in an essay such as this to evaluate thirty artists effectively. One need only read the chronicles of [Charles] Baudelaire and [Guillaume] Apollinaire on the “salons” of their time to realize that no one—not even the greatest—escapes the vices of that genre of writing: polite vagueness, flip generalization, smatterings of insipid praise, and peremptory dismissal. On the other hand, these two great poet-critics were nearly always on target when they were talking about the specific artists who corresponded to their own tastes. A good critic is born from sympathy and a wide exposure to the work.

Although I cannot and do not want to speak of the artists presented, I can venture an opinion on the selection of works represented here. That selection has been exacting but wise, resulting in a collection both rich and diverse, one

that frequently startles. Here is a living, restless, changing reality. Most of these artists—contrary to the general tendency in contemporary art—do not paint as a “career” but rather out of an *inner necessity*. More precisely, they paint out of an inner necessity to affirm and express themselves to an external reality that often ignores them. It is impossible to forget that many of these works were made far from the artistic centers of the country, in isolation, poverty and distress. This is not an exhibition of people satisfied with what they have found, but rather of artists who are searching.

. . .

For the ancients, the *phantasma* was the bridge between the soul, prisoner of the body, and the exterior world (worlds). For the surrealist poet and painter, the oneiric image is the messenger of the inner man. Poetry and art allow that prisoner, transfigured, to escape: to escape to desire, and to the imagination buried from the first day by prohibitions and institutions. The apparition of these images in the works of the Hispanic artists is disturbing. They are hieroglyphs of vengeance, but also of illumination, poundings on a closed door. Their paintings are neither metaphysics nor the knowledge of inner man nor poetic subversion, but rather something more ancient and more instinctual: icons, talismans, altars, amulets, effigies, travesties, fetishes—objects of adoration and abomination. The *phantasma* is, once again the mediator between the world of *here* and the world of *there*. How can one not see in these works another face of North American art...? A face still undrawn, but whose traces are now discernible. An art of the image not as a form in space but as an *irradiation*.

V.1.5 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1065232

HOMOGENIZING HISPANIC ART

Shifra M. Goldman, 1987

HOMOGENIZE:

To blend (diverse elements) into a uniform mixture; to make homogeneous.

—*Webster's Dictionary*

I think it's a very handsome, very attractive show. The one criticism I would level is that many Hispanics have been involved politically, and any social or political context has been edited out of the work.

—*Luis Jiménez*

CHICANO ARTIST

I am angry because a show such as this does not recognize the Hispanic experience which began as a "grassroots movement." Once again our resources are being appropriated and North American aesthetic tastes are determining what Latin American art is.

—*Nilda Peraza*

PUERTO RICAN, DIRECTOR OF THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY HISPANIC ART, NEW YORK

I heard from the artists that the curators were looking for specific imagery: something very ethnic, very exotic, expressionistic, representational, funky looking.

—*Inverna Lockpez*

CUBAN, DIRECTOR OF INTAR LATIN AMERICAN GALLERY, NEW YORK

Co-organized by Houston's Museum of Fine Arts (MFAH) and the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., the exhibition *Hispanic Art in the United States: Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors* lays to rest whatever skepticism might surround the assertion that Latin American artists in the United States can match the work of

any other group. Accompanied by an Octavio Paz lecture, a symposium with six speakers, and a panel discussion, the exhibit opened at the MFAH the weekend of May 1, 1987, and will be at the Corcoran from October 10 to January 17, 1988. There is no question as to the excellence, the splendid outpouring of high energy, and the high quality of the artistic productions represented by this exhibition. However, the curatorial premise, with its focus on the identifying term “Hispanic,” and its “primitivistic” emphasis, is problematic.

WHAT’S IN A NAME?

As recently as ten years ago there was no nationally recognized category known as “Hispanic art” unless one was referring to the art of Spain or its Hispanic-American colonies in the New World. In the late 1970s, “Hispanic” became a term used for government and marketing purposes “to package” a heterogeneous population¹ composed of recently resident Latin Americans from many nations, as well as Mexicans (or Chicanos), Puerto Ricans (or Nuyoricans in New York), and Cuban Americans. Lost in the “Hispanic” usage were national and racial/cultural signifiers (particularly Indian and African) employed as proud reaffirmations of identity during the 1960s and 1970s in face of prevailing and rampant racial, cultural, and political—not to mention economic—discrimination. “Hispanic,” then, was the first signifier of homogenization; it is now defended as convenient, comprehensive, and universally acceptable. Many Latin Americans, however, admit that they use the term only for governmental and funding sources; among themselves they prefer their own designations.

The curators Jane Livingston and John Beardsley of the Corcoran generally focused on large works, some of them commissioned for the show, with a fairly good balance of painting and sculpture, and the inclusion of a series of very interesting drawings by Mexican Martín Ramírez (1885–1960), a self-taught institutionalized schizophrenic, which formed a linchpin of their concept.

Under the rubric of sculpture were such varied works as Chicano Gilbert Luján’s customized low-rider located in the lobby, Jesús Moroles’s sophisticated architectonic stone carvings, Cuban Pedro Perez’s elaborately gold-leafed and cut glass structures with a satirical twist, figurative works in painted bronze and classical acrobatic bronze figures by California Chicanos Manuel Neri and

Robert Graham, and beautifully carved and painted saints and an altar screen by New Mexican woodcarvers Félix López and Luis Tapia. Two installations by Texas-born artists were also included: a finely crafted traditional altar dedicated to Frida Kahlo by Carmen Lomas Garza; and Luis Jimenez's exciting celebration of Southwestern working-class culture, *Honky Tonk*, featuring some fifteen life-size figures.

Paintings were also very varied. Particularly outstanding were Chilean Ismael Frigerio's huge epic canvases dealing with the Spanish Conquest, Cuban Paul Sierra's luminous dark impasto landscapes with figures, Puerto Rican Arnaldo Roche's large and obsessive figural images, and, among the Chicanos, Carlos Almaraz's car wrecks and coyotes, John Valadez's stunning realistic triptych, Gronk's explosive works from the Titanic series, Rolando Briseño's cutout paintings, and César Martinez's neighborhood personalities.

The handsome catalogue contains essays by curators Livingston and Beardsley [SEE DOCUMENT V.1.6] and by Mexican poet Octavio Paz [SEE DOCUMENT V.1.4]. In it, the two curators make the following claim: "In reviewing the sum and substance of what is here, we think it will be apparent to all but the most prejudiced observer that the predominating values in this book and exhibition are artistic, not sociological. What we have cared about above all else is the strength of an artist's work, not conformity to some preconceived notion of what constitutes a Hispanic 'style' or 'school.'" Their concerns, they state, derive from "our observations of what is *good* about Hispanic art." Having said this, Livingston and Beardsley set about to establish precisely what is disclaimed: their own "sociology" of what constitutes Latin American art in the United States, and their own aesthetic standards. In the process, they jettison the history and resulting particularities of the heterogeneous populations they have undertaken not only to explain, albeit to unify according to their own vision. In the process, the cultural manifestations that are part and parcel of that history are obscured.

According to the catalogue essays, "ethnicity"—as the glue that holds together artists of diverse populations and marks them out from the dominant society—is the major characteristic they wish to explore. However, the curators' view of ethnicity is shallow and even "primitivistic." It is composed of what is folkloric, naïve, popular, exotic, religious, and traditional.

Another characteristic pertaining to some of the artists is that of “style.” This is a strange hybrid invented by Livingston called “Latino/Hispanic Modernism.” This style comprises influences from “Joan Miró, Pablo Picasso, and the Mexicans, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Diego Rivera, and Rufino Tamayo” as well “latter day Latino/ Hispanic Modernists Wifredo Lam, Roberto Matta, André Masson and Joaquín Torres-García,” and even Henri Rousseau (apparently French Surrealists and Naïves are also “Latino”). This combination results in “chromatic and compositional lushness” and “a kind of timeless, mythic, often primitive imagery.” Thus, almost in one fell swoop Livingston has explained the “style” of most Chicanos and Cubans in the exhibit, one of the Puerto Ricans, and the single Uruguayan. I believe these categorizations are intended to account for surrealist, social realist, and constructivist influences on the artists. The rest of Livingston’s essay is an attempt to either cram “Hispanics” into this Procrustean bed or to qualify the numerous exceptions. The result is so murky that it defies analysis. The only antidote would be a good course in the history of Latin American art—a commodity unfortunately in short supply in most U.S. universities—or a meaningful working association with curators and art historians who are familiar with this history.

There is a common cement that binds Latin Americans together, and it is the cement of two conquests: that of Europe over the New World, in which Spain was a primary participant; and the later conquest by the United States, which, under the rubric of Manifest Destiny and the White Man’s Burden, took over the remnants of Spanish empire in the late nineteenth century, absorbing the Philippines, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, to add to its earlier conquest of independent Mexican territory which now forms the U.S. Southwest. Latin American culture today is the result of a historical process of rich synthesis between the indigenous Indian cultures, those of imported labor forces (African and Asian), and of Euro-Americans. [Moreover, a culture as such] is also marked by resistance—from both independent nations and national groups, to further economic colonization and cultural homogenization. Any consideration of Latin American culture in Latin America and in the U.S. must start from this base. Affirmation of ethnicity is only one aspect of a political and social whole, and is relevant primarily to populations of long-standing residence who have had to resist attacks against their national cultural attributes as part of a pattern of economic, political, and social domination.

A NUMBERS GAME

Even within its own terms, the exhibit is not representative of work being done in Latino communities across the country, or even of its own participants. Despite Beardsley's brief dip into Chicano movement history (he obviously did not investigate the Puerto Rican political movement or the affinities of artists from Latin American nations), painters and sculptors who have consistently focused on community or political issues, or social criticism, were noticeably missing from the exhibit. Such important Chicano artists as Rupert García, Yolanda López, and Mel Casas; as Puerto Ricans Juan Sánchez (who was asked to collect slides of artists, but not invited despite his national reputation) and prize-winning Marina Gutiérrez; and as Chilean Alfredo Jaar—to mention only a tiny fraction of possibilities—were left out.

Even among the participating artists, the curators seemed to have been motivated more by “sociological” rather than aesthetic principles. Luis Jiménez said he was puzzled by their choices, which by-passed the great number of his fiberglass sculptures containing his most trenchant social satire. In the case of Cuban Luis Cruz Azaceta, the emphasis is on his latest, more introverted and cool-hued paintings rather than on those disturbing and passionate autobiographical works that have been his responses to urban violence and alienation during the last decade. Ismael Frigerio commented on the fact that the curators were particularly interested in a huge serpent painted on untrimmed burlap. According to the artist, it was the “primitive” quality of the ground that excited interest. Word has it that well-known Puerto Rican artist Rafael Ferrer declined to participate in an exhibition focused on “folklore and ethnicity.”

Numbers even enter into the discourse. It takes careful reading of the catalogue to identify exhibition participants by that important national background which often determines pictorial and sculptural ideas and forms. No argument is being made here for quotas; however, when an enterprise bills itself as “Hispanic Art in the United States” (the “Thirty Painters and Sculptors” was a very late addition to the title in response to considerable criticism from the Latin American arts communities), it is to be expected that given equal or higher quality, the choices would allow for gender considerations and a broad spectrum of nationalities as well as style and content. The numbers break down as follows: four Latin Americans from Chile, Colombia, and Uruguay; four Cubans; three Puerto Ricans; and

nineteen Chicanos, including one who is half Puerto Rican. Of the thirty, three are women. Given that the largest Spanish speaking groups in the United States within a total population of about twenty-five million are the Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans; and that the Eastern seaboard, particularly New York, has one of the largest populations of Latin American artists in the Northern hemisphere, outside Mexico, the minimal representation of Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and other Latin Americans is surprising, to say the least.

THE IDEOLOGY OF MUSEOGRAPHY

The Houston show was marked at its entrance by a large colorful banner emblazoned with the word “Hispanic,” which guaranteed the flow of traffic in a single direction. Walking through, the viewer becomes aware of ideological disposition in the very arrangement of the rooms and how they are viewed. Work by a “primitive” such as Martín Ramírez—neither Chicano nor contemporary—is associated with the sophisticated abstract sculpture of Jesús Morales, which echoes pre-Columbian art. If one starts with the mistaken notion—held by so many and so categorized in art history texts—that pre-Columbian art is “primitive,” then the above equation can perhaps be justified by an appeal to “affinities” (a misused concept at the controversial Museum of Modern Art show “*Primitivism*” in 20th Century Art held in 1984).²

The first several rooms develop this tendency, not as a historical progression but as an historical fusing into one denominator of self-taught artists (including an elderly Puerto Rican toymaker and a New Mexican animal carver), traditional folk artists, and academy-trained contemporaries. All but one of the self-taught and traditional artists are of Mexican descent, yet they lay a primitivistic “floor” under the entire exhibit. Thus, for example, a secular altar by Carmen Lomas Garza and several neoexpressionist paintings on Afro-Cuban themes by Paul Sierra link the opening rooms with the main portion of the exhibit, the naïve and folkloric with “the primitivism in modern art,” so to speak, as if Latino art in the United States (with the exception of those who entered the mainstream by avoiding “ethnicity”) is automatically identified by its ethnic/primitive characteristics. Implicit in this equation is the inference that Latin Americans are emotive and visceral to the exclusion of more cerebral art forms such as geometric abstraction or conceptualism.

The second major theme is “Hispanic” neo-expressionism and new image painting. Livingston, who came to the Corcoran from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), claims in the catalogue that a 1974 LACMA show of Los Four (Luján, Almaraz, and Frank Romero of Los Four are in the present exhibit) was “so good, so open-ended, and so prescient of what was to come in mainstream art everywhere, that it seemed to call for resuscitation and elaboration.” In other words, Latino artists who had been expressionists long before it became fashionable were now in vogue.

Spatially, the core of the exhibit at Houston is devoted to figurative and semi-abstract, neo-expressionism—not tragic neoexpressionists such as the international trans-avant-garde, but *ethnic* neoexpressionists. The last room and exit corridor feature the “mainstream” artists Neri and Graham. They represent “success” and acceptance by the art market, and what the curators promise is the same success to all the Latino artists in the exhibit. There is no question that most of them richly deserve it; and I for one wish them every success and access to major museums and galleries. For the artists, “Hispanic Art” is an important breakthrough: a merited recognition of their talent, persistence, and hard work, and the promise of recognition and some financial security.

The big question still remains: what is the nature and contribution of Latin American art in the United States? This question has not been answered by this well-funded (about a million dollars), and well-publicized event.

1

According to historian Rodolfo F. Acuña, the Nixon administration consolidated Latin Americans into a national minority called “Hispanic” in order to manage them more easily. See Acuña, *A Community under Siege* (Los Angeles: Chicano Studies Research Center Publications, University of California, Los Angeles, 1984), 180. In 1978, José Gómez-Sicre, director of the Museum of Modern Art of Latin America (OAS), referred in a catalogue to Cubans billed as Latin Americans of the southeastern United States by the Lowe Art Museum of Miami as “Hispanic American artists.”

2

See Thomas McEvilley, “Doctor, Lawyer, Indian Chief,” *Artforum* (November 1984): 54–60, for a trenchant discussion on the relationship between modernity and “primitivism,” a hotly debated issue.

V.1.6 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1065252

THE POETICS AND POLITICS OF HISPANIC ART: A NEW PERSPECTIVE

Jane Livingston and John Beardsley, 1991

THE EXHIBITION *HISPANIC ART IN THE UNITED STATES*: *Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors* was conceived in 1983 and organized by the authors over a three-year period, from 1984 to 1987. Its premise was that there exists a concentration of talent and stylistic affinity among contemporary artists in the United States who are of Hispanic descent and who express in their art a political and cultural self-awareness derived from their origins in or links to Latin America.

The large exhibition that resulted from this premise was organized by and premiered at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; it toured various United States cities, including Washington, D.C., Miami, Santa Fe, Los Angeles, and New York. The exhibition was sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation and ARCO; the national tour was supported by AT&T. It was the most comprehensive and nationally visible exhibition of its kind yet undertaken—and, not unexpectedly, it has stimulated a wide range of responses from the public and from the special community it addresses.

The following remarks are made in a spirit of reflection on the show's inception and execution—and on some of the reactions that have so far been elicited by its presence in the world. An exhibition is not unlike a photograph: it may be assumed to be a relatively accurate representation of reality. Yet, like a photograph, an exhibition freezes time; it can only express the state of art or the state of scholarship at any given moment. Moreover, it can only represent so much. In photography, it is generally true that the larger the aperture, the shorter the depth of field; in an exhibition, too, breadth of gaze comes at the expense of sharp focus.

It is widely acknowledged that in photography, much depends on who is holding the camera. The choice of subject, the type of lens, the angle of vision, the moment chosen for looking—all determine the character of the image. We

know the same to be true of exhibitions. The utterly objective exhibition, like the completely unmediated photograph, is a phantasm. What strikes us as critical in this analogous construct is to recognize the point of view of the hypothetical curator behind the lens. Sometimes that viewpoint succeeds best the more it empathizes with the subject matter; sometimes it requires a mixture of empathy and objectivity.

Such considerations are relatively unimportant, however, in the monographic exhibition. One curator's view of one artist's production—though necessarily partial in every sense of the word—is adequate if competently presented. But when the subject is as large and complex as the art of an entire culture or, more accurately in the case of the exhibition we curated, an entire group of cultures, one curator's point of view cannot possibly represent all of the distinct images that different viewers would create, even though all would appear to be looking at the same subject. Thus the various publics of an exhibition such as *Hispanic Art in the United States: Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors* presented a challenge to us as its curators: how to include many of those publics' points of view without sacrificing two fundamental requirements of any exhibition, coherence and a strong underlying assertion of aesthetic will.

In the main, when we embarked upon the exploratory phase of an exhibition involving Hispanic artists all over the United States, we were without specific stylistic preconceptions. Such biases as we had favored the possibility that pleasant surprises might lie in store, rather than disappointments. We were aware that a handful of Hispanic artists had begun to make their presence felt in the mainstream art world, some in a fairly universalized style, others in a more particularized one. We knew of a few self-taught, seemingly isolated Hispanic artists, and knew their work was beginning to have an effect on that of more schooled painters and sculptors. But aside from a gut-level suspicion of a larger phenomenon, we brought few prior assumptions and no predetermined agenda. We thought this might actually be our chief strength, for it would allow the kind of open-minded exploration that could result in both the most empathic approach and the most evenhanded one.

At the outset, we were guided by two intuitions, both of which proved to be confirmed. The first was demographic. We assumed that the regions of the country with the highest and longest-standing concentrations of the various Hispanic populations would be where we would find the largest number of Hispanic

artists. Thus we began our search in the obvious places: San Francisco and Los Angeles, the Southwest, Texas, southern Florida, New York, Puerto Rico, and later Denver, Chicago, and San Diego. Our other intuition was that our best leads in locating artists and movements would come from artists themselves and from the institutional network that supports them within their respective communities. Beginning with the handful of recognized Hispanic artists, we sought advice on which studios to visit, which exhibitions to see, and which curators and critics to consult. Surprisingly, little skepticism greeted our inquiries. Although one noted artist declined, after lengthy (and friendly) discussions, to be considered for the exhibition, most artists, curators, and arts administrators seemed to agree that it was time the larger American institutions took note of Hispanic art. Indeed, we could hardly have begun, much less pressed on, without the full cooperation of the artists with whom we communicated, whether or not they were in serious contention for the exhibition itself.

In many places, we found a highly organized, preexisting cultural network that made our exploration quite straightforward. This was especially true in the more homogeneous communities—as among the Chicanos in Los Angeles, San Diego, or San Francisco respectively, for example, or the Cubans in Miami. It was even somewhat true in more heterogeneous places such as the various boroughs of New York, where the many Hispanic organizations have developed effective links with established communities and even with new immigrants. And always we found it essential to scratch beneath the surface, to keep our antennae out, to find the artist who had elected not to make contact with the Hispanic organization or had otherwise escaped the notice of organizations or even fellow artists.

If within most cities or states we found more or less organized subcultures, the same was not true everywhere. For example, in Texas and the Southwest geographic spread has worked against organizational effectiveness. And it was certainly not true on a national scale. When our exhibition opened at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, we discovered that no artist in it was familiar with all, or even half, of the other artists in the show. This again reflects the fact that we were exploring not a single culture, but a set of related ones. Similarly, the Hispanic community arts organizations in various cities tended to know their own scene thoroughly, but not to have a national focus. While a lack of resources that would allow outreach certainly accounts in part for this striking

localism, some organizations deliberately maintain a focus on a particular region or national group.

The first phase of our project, then, consisted of amassing as much information as we could on the many Hispanic visual artists in the United States. The second and more difficult task was to shape this information into a coherent exhibition. We had seen in one context or another the work of over six hundred artists, and knew that we could show only a small percentage of them. To begin the challenging process of selection, we established several organizational guidelines.

The first was that this would be an exhibition of contemporary art, as we knew we could not do justice both to the history of Hispanic art and to its contemporary state. Learning that more historical surveys were under discussion at the Bronx Museum of the Arts and at the University of California, Los Angeles, we were even more drawn to limiting our scope to more contemporary work. This meant that some of the more important historical figures might not be included in our exhibition if they were no longer as active as they had been. It also precluded an examination of some of the most familiar manifestations of Hispanic art, urban murals and political posters. These seemed to be, at least to outsiders, the primary focus of Hispanic artistic activity—especially among Chicanos—in the late sixties and into the seventies, and a thorough familiarity with these kinds of works was important to us in developing an understanding of present-day Hispanic art. But, again, we found what we had originally suspected: that though some of the subject matter and style of these works has been carried over into more recent painting and sculpture, the mural and the poster are no longer the dominant forms of expression among the best Hispanic artists.

Moreover, from the outset we saw no reason not to focus purely on painting and sculpture. That is, we saw no reason to depart from the format one would ordinarily use in introducing any large body of unfamiliar new art. This admittedly excluded some powerful art forms, including photography, video, and performance art. As worthy as Hispanic art in these media may be of exhibitions in their own right, though, we were certain that a clear focus on the rich activity in painting and sculpture was the logical first step in bringing an awareness of Hispanic art to a mainstream audience.

Third, we decided to show the work of each artist selected for the exhibition in some depth. We knew the potential limitations of the kind of survey exhibition in which each artist is represented by a single work, or two works: there is

no way to judge whether the individual painting or sculpture is anomalous, or an indication of mature and sustained accomplishment. In a groundbreaking exhibition such as ours that was a particularly critical issue, for a superficial survey could easily result in questions about the depth and the staying power of Hispanic artists. If we could show the mainstream audience that thirty Hispanic artists were producing substantial bodies of accomplished painting and sculpture, we felt viewers would be more inclined to look beyond our exhibition for further demonstrations of achievement in the larger community of Hispanic artists.

Organizational guidelines are relatively easy to define. The aesthetic realities that ultimately prove most important in shaping an exhibition are less so. We knew we wanted the underlying spirit of this exhibition to be artistic, not sociological, though of course we knew that, especially in this case, art and social context are inseparable. Within Hispanic art, one cannot be unaware of a constant tension that often is connected with a split between work that draws its impetus and meaning from the community (and that often takes the form of the mural, the publicly commemorative sculpture, or the mass produced poster) and simple painting or sculpture of a more private character, produced in the studio. However, the art museum is still widely defined in our society as the arena for the more purely artistic and poetic impulses of the individual. We largely concur with this definition, and we saw no reason not to conform to the usual museum practice of concentrating on painting and sculpture. By definition, we thought, the museum exhibition provides a context for artists to express their more personal artistic natures.

All this is not to say that we were either unaware of or predisposed against the more community-based forms of Hispanic art. Indeed, the popular and didactic symbols and vocabulary of Hispanic culture—the complex values of family and religion, both worshiped and rebelled against; the myths from the pre-Columbian and African pasts; the obsession with patterns of conquest and totalitarianism were everywhere in the exhibition. They may have tended to be more subtle than they would be in works intended for mass edification, but they were there. When in the studio, artists often tend to leave behind the overtly political or didactic agendas they may pursue as a matter of conscience in order to communicate something more subjective and private.

In selecting work for the exhibition, we struggled for a balance among the widely differing styles practiced by contemporary Hispanic artists. The matter

of diversity within Hispanic culture seemed to us especially important to convey. It led us, for example, to juxtapose the gestural abstractions of Ibsen Espada with the geometric abstractions of Jesús Bautista Moroles, or the devotional sculptures of Félix López with the parodic paintings and sculptures of Pedro Pérez. We interpreted diversity to mean the inclusion of both self-taught and highly trained artists. We even allowed this inclusiveness to embrace the extraordinarily sophisticated classical figure sculptures of Robert Graham, an artist securely placed in the mainstream establishment and seldom identified as Hispanic.

At the same time, we wanted the exhibition to express some underlying coherence. To the rare person highly familiar with Hispanic art, it may be understood as a phenomenon with far more range in subject matter and style than we were able to convey. Yet we felt a responsibility to that great majority of our audience, both Hispanic and non-Hispanic, for whom the works in this exhibition would be largely if not completely unfamiliar. Any audience is likely to be alienated if the presentation is either too narrowly didactic or too encyclopedic. So we certainly did, if sometimes half-consciously, allow certain images or themes to recur throughout the exhibition, in works of widely differing characters. The image of the Madonna, the icon of the outlaw or the dispossessed, the mask, the figure that is half-human, half-animal—these and other subjects became a kind of echoing, layered refrain throughout the exhibition and catalogue. These themes were not arbitrarily imposed: they reflect the concerns of Hispanic artists as we found them.

Finally, within our organizational guidelines and within our quest to somehow reconcile coherence and diversity, selections for this exhibition, as for any other, expressed the personal aesthetic judgments of the curators. The processes by which these are made is perhaps the most complex aspect to define of any in the crafting of an exhibition. For these judgments are in some measure intuitive, based on years of familiarity with many forms of art, both historical and contemporary. No experienced curator should consider these judgments to be absolute: we are all too well aware that prevailing standards are subject to change. Nor can they be considered universal: different cultures value different things in a work of art. And different individuals gravitate to special subjects and particular moments in history. Yet we believe that there are enough shared forms and concerns in art to permit us to look across cultural frontiers with confidence that we would eventually comprehend and empathize with our subject. And it

seems to us far more unfortunate, in art as in political diplomacy, that this intercultural communication should not occur than that it should fail to be perfect.

It happens, in the case of this particular subject—Hispanic visual culture within the United States—that for us, its interpreters, certain personal experiences sensitized us to the language of the art. For example, a childhood in southern California and, consequently, exposure to Mexican American culture may have triggered an initial curiosity about and gravitation toward this aesthetic. But once we were fully engaged in a systematic exploration of the subject in all its complexity and fluidity, whatever early imprints in our consciousnesses that initially may have led us to deal with it were soon superseded by the realities we encountered.

The fact is that our subject was essentially American art, albeit American art of a somewhat distinct sort. Though it is created in its own hybridized language, it is a language fraught with mythic and popular Americanisms. Much of the work that was in the exhibition is done in a spontaneously expressionistic style, with formally or parodically exaggerated compositional elements, jarring chromatic juxtapositions, disjunctive linearism, and distorted space—all the “new expressionisms” now prevalent in mainstream American art. It was one of the premises of the exhibition that Hispanic artists anticipated, even helped establish, the hegemony of this recent and still-current style.

Even were it not the case, however, that the work of Hispanic artists overlaps at every turn with that of their mainstream compatriots, the exhibition still would have addressed a fundamentally American phenomenon. It affirmed a classic pattern in American history of distinct cultures colliding with the mainstream and attempting somehow to reconcile the competing claims of resistance and assimilation. Thus we were not merely representing Hispanic art to the mainstream: we were representing American art to itself, and arguing (as we have in other exhibitions) for a more fluid, more heterodox vision of American culture.

In sum, we were confident that our aesthetic would be fundamentally in agreement with, first, that of the artists we were exhibiting, and, second, that of the wider art world. Moreover, we were certain that the disagreements that would arise over our aesthetic judgments would be in some ways identical to those that surround all contemporary exhibitions, which by nature introduce rather than resolve qualitative debate. Any survey exhibition invites questions as to why one artist and not another was included, why this work and not that

work; ours would be no exception. But we were proven correct in our assumption that if we trusted our aesthetic inclinations, we could shape an exhibition that would establish Hispanic art as a phenomenon specific not only to a culture but to a historical moment, and as an artistic movement of a high order of achievement. Indeed, insofar as there was criticism of our exhibition, it almost categorically was on other than aesthetic grounds. Even the most severe critics agreed on the high caliber of Hispanic art, as demonstrated by the works selected for the exhibition. None argued about its timeliness.

While popular and critical reaction to the exhibition was generally positive, often jubilantly so, a number of writers dissented. To some degree, the criticism tended to be an extension of long-established debates about the position of Hispanic culture relative to the American mainstream. Moreover, it expressed the preexisting wide range of opinion and attitude among the various groups of Hispanics. Peter Applebome summarized the debate this way for the *New York Times*:

[Much] of the reaction to the show has reflected the differences in Hispanic culture at least as much as the common elements. Within the Hispanic world, it has been criticized in Los Angeles for leaving out the angry, political Chicano art, and in New York for not including enough art by Puerto Ricans. It has been accused of favoring stereotyped folkloric art and, conversely, of offering too much of an academic, art-for-art's sake response to a visceral, ethnically rooted art form.¹

As Applebome went on to observe, some of the bitterest criticism attending the exhibition's debut in the spring of 1987 related to a perceived lack of political content. We acknowledge that the overt politics of revolution or dissent did not play the strong role in this exhibition that they sometimes have historically in Hispanic art. Likewise, we recognize that public murals and some temporary installation art with an almost exclusively political focus are still being made in the United States and Latin America alike; some of these works are of great quality and interest. But murals are not transportable and installations are generally so site-specific or ephemeral as to preclude their inclusion in a three-year traveling exhibition.

In the main, however, we would argue strongly with the imputed lack of political content in our show. As discussed above, the exhibition was saturated with images of social alienation, dispossession, and even confrontation, though they were usually more subtle, and certainly more complex, than the slogans

one encounters on the street. Moreover, given the general nature of institutions, the fact of the exhibition itself—and therefore its content—cannot fail to make a political and sociological point, no matter how pure the aesthetic intent. Indeed, it seemed to us a greater risk that the exhibition would be dismissed as purely political, and therefore become *artistically* invisible, than that it should distort the true character of Hispanic art by stressing artistic values over political ones.

A related criticism holds that the exhibition tore Hispanic art from its community roots and thus transmuted or somehow distorted its character. This view was advanced by, among others, Jane Addams Allen in the *Washington Times*, who spoke with Tomás Ybarra-Frausto. Criticism, she wrote, centers on the elimination of what many call the core of Hispanic art in the United States, its communal base and content.

“European art is usually art based on technical matters, while Latin American art is based on social content,” says Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, Stanford University Professor in the department of Spanish and Portuguese Literature. “Hispanic art is an art which has an outward thrust to the social arena, a linkage of the imagination with society, and that linkage is what is fundamental about Hispanic art,” continues Mr. Ybarra-Frausto. . . . “I think the show is a magnificent introduction to Hispanic art in the United States. But it does not present the basis for the expression which is community-based and politically grounded.”²

In various guises, this debate has swirled around Hispanic art for a number of years now, especially as the art has begun to be acknowledged by mainstream institutions. In the review of an exhibition of mural paintings on canvas by Chicano artists held at Los Angeles’s Craft and Folk Art Museum in the early 1980s, for example, art historian and critic Shifra M. Goldman [SEE DOCUMENT V.1.5] charged that the exhibition “placed a framework around East Los Angeles muralism which decontextualizes it and violates its function.” For Goldman, the issue for Chicano artists was whether they should remain true to “the same matrix of social change and community service that brought their movement into existence” or join the mainstream, “perhaps shedding in the process their cultural identity and political militancy.”³

One of the artists in the exhibition, Judithe Hernández de Neikrug, took exception to the idea that growing stature in the mainstream would compromise her self-identification or commitment as a Chicano. She asked, “Are Chicano artists so shallow and corruptible that at their first chance at mainstream

success they'll forget who they are?" Answering her own question, she wrote that although their work would no doubt change, "Chicano art and Chicano artists, I am sure, will always pay homage to the traditions of the Mexicano Chicano culture."⁴

In statements such as this we came to understand that many Hispanic artists themselves do *not* see their inclusion in a mainstream artistic context as an abandonment of their community roots. Our exhibition, like that at the Craft and Folk Art Museum, both expressed and intensified this recognition and inclusion of "ethnic" art as part of the mainstream culture. No museum exhibition, even if it wanted to, could present work in the same way it is seen in its original context. . . .

It is perhaps inevitable in any survey exhibition, especially one that attempts to examine as large a phenomenon as Hispanic art in the United States, that one will be faulted for failing to present the subject in all its complexity. The most explicit charge of this nature against our show came from Shifra M. Goldman in an article entitled "Homogenizing Hispanic Art." . . . The principal rationale for charging us with homogenization, however, seems to relate to our use of the designation *Hispanic*. In an introductory note to her essay, Goldman wrote that the term came into use in the late 1970s "for government and marketing purposes to 'package' a heterogeneous population."⁵

By implication, therefore, our use of the term *Hispanic* is inherently homogenizing. By using it we do concur that it is "convenient, comprehensive, and universally acceptable." However, we state again, as we have on other occasions that we did not particularly like the term ourselves, and wrestled endlessly with alternatives. No other term seemed any better. To use *Latin American* seemed to suggest that the artists were not North American; in fact, nearly two-thirds of them were born in the United States. *Latino* seemed to exclude the Spanish Americans of the Southwest. *Chicano* excluded those not of Mexican origin. Compelled by necessity to include some descriptive term in the title of the exhibition, we decided "Hispanic" was the least incorrect (it is also used by organizations such as the Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art in New York). Moreover, we think it reflects fairly the fact that there are legitimate shared characteristics, both in terms of subject matter and style, among artists in the North American environment who share New World Spanish—Native American roots. That is, there are ways in which "Hispanic culture," no matter how diverse internally,

is distinct from mainstream European American or African American culture, a point to which Octavio Paz [SEE DOCUMENT V.1.4] addressed himself at great length in our catalogue.

Goldman found homogenization also in a supposed emphasis on “primitivism” within the exhibition. She wrote, “The curators’ view of ethnicity is shallow and even primitivistic: it is composed of what is folkloric, naïve, popular, exotic, religious, and traditional.”⁶ Leaving aside the issue of whether or not generally visible elements of folkloric, religious, or traditional imagery are “shallow and primitive” expressions of culture, much in the exhibition disputed this claim. The artists in the show, after all, are individuals whose hard-won achievements are as much the product of European and Latin American modernism as of popular or traditional culture. Moreover, their own feelings for which of their works would most truly and advantageously represent them figured importantly in what was selected for this show. It is difficult to impute a tendentious motive to anyone dealing with these artists when the subjects of their efforts are not only alive and kicking, but effectively vigilant about their best political and artistic self-interests. In any case, a close reading of Ms. Goldman’s text reveals that her primary objection to our notion of ethnicity is that we failed to equate it simply with economic and political colonization.⁷

...

Finally, whatever the precise terms of the debate about our exhibition, we recognize two things about it. First, it was motivated by a sincere interest in the way Hispanic art is perceived by the mainstream and thus by a concern for what position this distinctive culture ultimately will achieve with respect to the dominant one. Second, the debate was similar to that which surrounds any large survey exhibition of contemporary art. Thus we are certain that the debate will continue to have a productive life well beyond that of our exhibition, at least among those who are directly touched by it.

We view the most damaging criticism instead to have been of a less-accessible kind: that of indifference to or disdain for, not the work itself, but the very notion of our project. Much of the direct or implied criticism of this sort, always off the record, came from our mainstream professional colleagues. This was perhaps to be expected: the exhibition posed a challenge to customary ways of looking at art. The avant-garde is no less an academy than anything else.

Our exhibition suggested that curators can and should look for demonstrations of achievement outside the establishment to which they are bound and which they help sustain. Apparently, many people still view this kind of enterprise as inherently more compromised by political or sociological concerns than other exhibitions.

The articulate criticisms from one large part of our audience those deeply invested in our subject—and the skepticism of some of our institutional colleagues suggest that there is a great deal of negativity about this kind of exhibition, perhaps so much as to extinguish the motivation for doing future exhibitions of this sort. Yet we hope others will not be deterred from projects of a similar nature. . . .

1

Peter Applebome, "The Varied Palette of Hispanic Art in America," *New York Times* 21 June 1987, sec. 2.

2

Jane Addams Alien, "Hispanic Artists, Scholars Condemn Show," *Washington Times* 9 October 1987, sec. E.

3

Shifra M. Goldman, "Chicano Art: Looking Backward," *Artweek* 12 (20 June 1981), 3–4.

4

Judithe Hernández de Neikrug, letter in "Reader's Forum," *Artweek* 12 (1 August 1981), 16.

5

Shifra M. Goldman, "Homogenizing Hispanic Art," *New Art Examiner* 15, no. 1 (September 1987), 31. [SEE DOCUMENT V.1.5]

6

Ibid., 31.

7

The pertinent passage here is as follows: "Affirmation of ethnicity is only one aspect of a political and social whole, and is relevant primarily to populations of long-standing residence who have had to resist attacks against their national cultural attributes as part of a pattern of economic, political, and social domination." *Ibid.*, 32.

V.1.7 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1065274

MINORITIES AND FINE-ARTS MUSEUMS IN THE UNITED STATES

Peter C. Marzio, 1991

IN THEIR ARTICLE IN THIS VOLUME, Jane Livingston and John Beardsley [SEE DOCUMENT V.1.6] give a vivid account, from a curator's point of view, of the organization, philosophy, and analysis of the exhibition *Hispanic Art in the United States: Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors*. I agree with their analysis and would like to comment further on their carefully worded description of the "silent criticism" from professionals within the art establishment. The lesson that is clearest in my mind—as described by Livingston and Beardsley—is that those of us who care about making the minority arts a vital part of mainstream museum programs must work together. When curators, art critics, college professors, and museum directors debate about exhibition format or style, we must remember that we are trying to improve our efforts, raise our standards, and make our message clearer to a larger audience. The enemy is not within our group but beyond the debating arena. Apathy and disregard among the general public and professionals toward minority art, particularly when that art is placed in the general art museum environment, must be changed to cooperation and understanding. We must keep that ultimate goal in mind as we explore this complex subject.

My duty here is to give the museum director's point of view. As director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, which organized *Hispanic Art in the United States*, assumed financial risks, and raised the funds, I was impressed by how difficult this project was. When I gave the curators a mandate to find the best art, I had no idea of the problems that would follow.

Despite the fact that many people "know" about contemporary Hispanic art, we found not a single individual who had both strong curatorial credentials and a catholic viewpoint on the subject. This meant that the curators—Livingston and Beardsley—had to carry out in-depth, primary research on a national scale; and they had to do it quickly enough so that the word *contemporary* in the

exhibition's title retained its meaning. If the ARCO Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation had not stepped in at the research stage of this project, the exhibition would not have been possible. The reason: basic research is expensive. Since contemporary Hispanic art is not studied in many universities or reviewed in professional or mass-circulation periodicals, information about the artists and their works is not coherent or easy to locate. The curators had to spend enormous amounts of time assembling the kind of fundamental information that is readily available for the traditional art historical disciplines in any library. Because contemporary minority art, by virtue of its recency and subject, has not been researched, one must prepare to undertake a massive effort if one wants to do the job well.

Gathering the information and putting it in a narrative form may be sufficient for the art historian, but it is only the start for a curator. These curators were looking for the "best." There were few art dealers who could advise and guide them in this process; many Hispanic arts organizations had local or regional missions, and their recommendations had to be translated to a national level. A process as simple as gathering slides for comparison became a complex project. Every step along the path that led to selecting the artists and the artworks was difficult. There were no well-illustrated *catalogues raisonnés* or university slide libraries of Hispanic art. The curators often went back two or three times to view an artist's work. Comparing and sorting art for an exhibition of contemporary minority art is expensive and time consuming.

Within the contexts of basic research and looking for great works of art, this project, like all large contemporary exhibitions, was the topic of endless discussion and debate. In the field of contemporary art, everyone has an expert opinion. Add to this the ethnic element. Some people debated that non-Hispanics had no right to curate a Hispanic exhibition, and others complained that one Hispanic group was being favored over another, and some leaders in Hispanic arts organizations fought against the exhibition because they felt that the art and artists were being taken from the Hispanic organization's sphere of influence. In organizing this kind of exhibition, an enormous amount of time must be spent in communication with the minority establishments. Silence can be misinterpreted and can lead to fear, mistrust, and malicious, destructive rumors. An efficient communication system will not eliminate all these evils, but it helps to create a foundation of understanding that is essential in an exhibition of this kind.

This is a significant difference from most of the art exhibitions that I have worked on during my twenty-year museum career.

My goal in directing this project was to help broaden the programming in mainstream art museums and to begin a long-term commitment to bringing the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, closer to the diverse Hispanic communities that make up the city's population. This latter goal is in concert with the belief broadly shared among art museums that they must provide educational and community service to all constituents. During the time that the exhibition was in Houston, there were approximately 150,000 visitors. Approximately thirty percent were Hispanic, based on sample audience surveys. There were major symposia, film festivals, artists' and writers' book festivals, concerts, family days, tours in Spanish and English, and a host of other activities in Houston during the run of the exhibition. A special committee of fifty Hispanic community leaders helped the museum with outreach and publicity. When the exhibition closed in Houston this committee remained with the museum, helping the Education Department to recruit Hispanic docents and to bring general art education into the Hispanic communities via church groups, schools, and other organizations. Moreover, the museum was introduced to numerous Hispanic businesses and organizations that now work with and for the museum on a regular basis. In short, the exhibition was a small but important step forward in bringing the general art museum and the Hispanic peoples of Houston closer together.

In another sense, the exhibition went against the tide of today's art museums. Most directors I know believe that great museums must specialize. In this sense, adding a new kind of exhibition to the program can be seen as confusing an institution's identity and taking funds away from an older, dedicated purpose. This exhibition is a good example. Approximately one-half of the cost of the exhibition was paid out of the operating budgets of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the other five museums on the tour. The other half came from grants from the Rockefeller Foundation, the ARCO Foundation, the AT&T Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).

In the long run, the barrier to placing minority arts in the general art museum may be part of a much larger issue. Despite the enormous success of art museums in the United States during the last two decades, the fact remains that among the 150 top museums all but a handful are undercapitalized. Look closely at their budgets and you will see that few of our museums have the funds

needed to carry out basic research or to expand into new program areas. For more and more institutions an overwhelming effort is being put into raising funds and earning income—not to create massive expansion programs, but to remain effective at present levels. Also, the traditional funding mechanisms for eleemosynary institutions are being altered gradually, making program innovation and expansion even more difficult. First, the budgets of the NEA and the National Endowment for the Humanities have remained relatively flat in the last eight years, losing ground to inflation. The incentives for philanthropy in the private, corporate, and foundation sectors have been reduced and in some cases eliminated by changes in the Internal Revenue Code. By reducing federal funding for the arts and eliminating incentives, the federal government has forced, and even encouraged, art museums to earn a higher percentage of their incomes. I have argued elsewhere that this pressure has tended to make art museums and other nonprofit institutions act like commercial or profit-oriented entities. This pressure to earn revenue has many ramifications for minority arts. Whether anyone is willing to say it or not, the question museum directors must ask themselves is simple: Can the large, established art museum afford minority art exhibitions? Can the cost be offset by income? If a director does not ask that question, then he or she should look for another job.

The challenge for those of us who are dedicated to placing high quality minority exhibitions in the broad context of general art museums is to find a way to make these projects a part of “normal” operations. In Houston there was concern that attendance would be low for an exhibition of Hispanic art. As I have said, the result was nearly 150,000 visitors, which is considered very good by Houston standards. A special public relations plan, aimed at the major Hispanic neighborhoods and carried out by a Hispanic firm, was a huge success. In addition, while the exhibition was open in Houston, two other popular exhibitions were on view: *Drawings by Holbein from the Court of Henry VIII* and *The Quest for Eternity*, a major exhibition of Chinese tomb sculptures including life-size soldiers and horses from Xian. Hispanic Art in the United States benefited from the crossover attendance stimulated by these two great exhibitions. In addition, the visitors attracted by Hispanic art in the United States were treated to great works of art from other cultures that may not have interested them initially.

I feel strongly about the role of general art museums in the presentation of minority exhibitions because in my experience, while minorities appreci-

ate exhibitions dedicated to their unique art forms, people do not want a steady diet of their own work. The message that the Museum of Fine Arts received was loud and clear: make the broad range of fine art understandable and accessible to minorities.

...

In exhibiting minority artists in the same manner as Italian Renaissance artists or French Impressionists, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, also addressed another controversial issue: How much interpretive information should be provided and how should it be presented? In our ongoing programs related to the permanent collection, we follow a fairly rigid philosophy. Exhibition labels are kept to a minimal size to encourage visitors to focus on the works of art themselves. We do not believe in installations that try to place art in context by installing large reproductions or long labels that “explain” the art.

This approach is balanced by our Education Department, which aggressively provides visitors with tours, pamphlets, catalogues, films, teacher-student packets, and other pedagogical tools. This translates into the belief that a minority artwork should be able to stand alone apart from its cultural context, if you will—just the way a panel painting from a Renaissance *predella*, for example, may hang alone, out of context, in a museum. In our philosophy, the context is supplied in educational materials.

I mention this because in doing this exhibition I found an attitude that puzzles me to this day: the belief that contemporary minority art needs a kind of anthropological or sociological interpretation. I am not against museums that follow this attitude, but I—as director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston—want the right to exhibit contemporary artists the way I exhibit Old Masters.

In emphasizing the general art museum’s role in presenting minority art, I am not in any way denigrating the institutions that specialize in African American, Hispanic, or any other minority art. On the contrary, the general art museum cannot function in this area without the specialized museum. Unfortunately, in my experience I have not seen much of an established network between the mainstream, and minority spheres. The fault lies on both sides. The director of the general art museum is racing full speed ahead just to keep his or her institution operating at its current level. The directors of minority-oriented institutions, on the other hand, are sometimes fearful that cooperation will somehow hurt

their identity and their unique role in their communities. And when it comes to the funding formulas of various government agencies—city, county, state, and federal—I have seen too much confrontation: too often battle lines are being drawn between big and little, general and specialized, minority and establishment. When art museums fight among themselves, everyone who cares about art loses. Our goals must be to enlarge audiences, to increase funding, to work together to rise above the status quo, and to make innovation a popular cause. I say this because my experiences with the *Hispanic Art in the United States* exhibition as well as other exhibitions of minority art tell me that while bigotry is, to a certain extent, ingrained in our society, the real obstacle to overcome is the lack of exposure and, therefore, the lack of experience of the general public and art history professionals. This simple fact is not sufficiently understood by those of us who want to expand the aesthetic boundaries and definitions of fine art. We expect too much from any single exhibition or book on minority art. These high expectations are the products of frustration and hype. Artists who finally get a chance to be seen by the general public and professionals might have expectations that are unrealistic. Curators who work for years on a minority exhibition find out that it is received like any other exhibition. And that is just the point. Moreover, as museums strive to fund an exhibition and stimulate attendance, they can, easily overemphasize the words first or new and create expectations that are not met. I see each exhibition and book as building blocks, parts of a large edifice that includes academic, critical, and commercial elements as well. All are needed to establish and sustain any vital art form in our society. I hope we will arrive at a point where the minority exhibition will be received with the same thoughtful review process that serious Old Master exhibitions receive, with the same potential commercialism, and with the same in-depth study. Those will be the ultimate signs of acceptance.

V.1.8 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1065293

THE LATIN AMERICAN SPIRIT

Luis R. Cancel, 1988

In his “Introduction” to *The Latin American Spirit: Art and Artists in the United, 1920–1970*, the exhibition’s organizer and then director of the Bronx Museum of the Arts, Luis R. Cancel (born 1952), outlines the objectives of this ambitious project. Situating the scope of the exhibition within a fifty-year period, between 1920 and 1970, and into six historical categories, Cancel explains how its purpose is to record the participation of key Latin American figures in the cultural milieu of the United States. Moreover, as an American arts administrator of Puerto Rican extraction, Cancel strives to integrate the contributions of U.S. and island-based Puerto Ricans into the show, making it one of the first to consider the cultural production of both groups on equal footing with Latin American artists. This excerpt is taken from the original English-language edition [Luis R. Cancel, ed., *The Latin American Spirit: Art and Artists in the United. 1920–1970*, (New York: The Bronx Museum of the Arts in association with Harry N. Abraham, Inc., Publishers, 1988), 7–11].

INTRODUCTION

At the outset of this publication I want to state what the goals of the The Bronx Museum of the Arts have been in organizing the exhibition and publication *The Latin American Spirit: Art and Artists in the United States, 1920–1970*:

- I. To document and examine the participation of Latin American artists in the cultural life of the United States over a fifty-year period.
- II. To demonstrate how broadly based the Latin American participation has been, including the contributions by artists not generally mentioned by U.S. critics and art historians.
- III. To record and evince the cultural activity of Puerto Rican artists, as Latin Americans, both on the island and in the continental United States.

Despite the ambitious scale of this project it is not intended to be definitive, but rather to stimulate the organization of other exhibitions and to indicate directions for more detailed research along the lines of the thematic issues touched upon here. Although much new material is brought forth here, there still exists a substantial history worthy of continued investigation. From the outset, this exhibition was designed to examine a very specific slice of American art history as it was played out by Latin American and Hispanic American artists. Artistic “presence” in the United States is the central tenet; but during the course of the fifty years under review, there have been literally thousands of Latin American artists who have exhibited in the United States.

This fact necessitated the establishment of certain criteria for the inclusion of an artist in the book and exhibition. The six art historical categories that constitute the project—Constructivism and geometric art, socially concerned Latin American art, New World Surrealism, abstraction, figuration and Realism, and the multifaceted art of the 1960s—share the same basic premise that each of the selected artists had a prolonged and substantive professional career as an artist in the United States, including numerous exhibitions, the receipt of commissions, grants and fellowships, reviews by the critical media, etc. One or two group shows or undergraduate study alone was not sufficient for inclusion. This clearly removed from consideration many talented and, in some cases, significant artists from south of the border who never were directly involved with this country or who were present here before 1920 or after 1970. Important artists such as Anita Malfati (Brazil), who was active in New York in 1917, and Claudio Bravo (Chile), who first showed at Marlborough Gallery in 1971, have therefore been omitted.

This still left a very sizable group, larger than would be realistically possible to include in one exhibition, outside of the final selection. This is one of the reasons why this exhibition and publication are not definitive. It would be presumptuous to suggest that there is a “short list” of artists worthy of attention: the pool of talented artists in this period is vast and worthy of additional review. The Bronx Museum hopes that by providing this broad “road map,” scholars will make their own ancillary investigations. It is through the cumulative effect of these various independent research efforts that “definitiveness” emerges.

The decisions to organize the exhibition into six stylistic groups and to limit it to the period from 1920 to 1970 emerged after holding a series of long and

stimulating planning meetings at The Bronx Museum involving many scholars. Through these conversations, a consensus slowly emerged that recognized Latin American artists had usually been presented and discussed by North American critics and curators in ways that placed undue emphasis either on national boundaries or on the notion that there exists some globally unifying style called “Latin American art.” Some of the elements that supposedly constitute that art are brash colors, violent or energetically gestural brushwork, and “native” or folklorist references. In the quest to establish this unifying aesthetic, those artists whose styles did not conform to these preconceived notions were considered problems and therefore often ignored. Artists such as Amilcar de Castro, whose minimal sculptures emerged from the Brazilian Concrete and Neo-Concrete movements of the 1950s and 1960s, were considered “derivative” of American and Western European artists who were working contemporaneously. During his short stay in New York in the 1960s, his sculptures were not once shown to derive from a vigorous intellectual movement in his native Brazil, which also included architects and poets.

One can cite dozens of similar examples in the experiences of Latin artists. They were typecast as members of the “Bold and Colorful” movement, or their work was dismissed as derivative of prevalent art movements. In either case, the contributions of these artists have been undervalued; their personal histories have been overlooked by art historians. They are the “Invisible Men” (and women) of twentieth-century art history. Part of the goal of this exhibition and publication, therefore, is to challenge the standing premise under which Latin American art is discussed in this country. The stylistic structure of the exhibition is our attempt to encourage art historians and critics to include the works of Latin American artists when they are discussing formalist topics and to break with the earlier notion that Latin American art is monolithic in nature.

Furthermore, the essays have been written to convey historical data on the activities of these artists in the United States as a way of providing a context for further scholarly research on these artists. Where did the artist come from? What personal and cultural forces have a bearing on the art that he or she produced? This book will serve as the starting point in the quest to answer such questions about most of these artists.

The fifty years the exhibition embraces covers a complex period in art history, but from the exhibition organizers’ point of view, the activities of the

Latin American artists could be discussed within the formal categories already described. After 1970 the numbers of artists and the variety of movements increases to such an extent that the exhibition would have become unwieldy, obscuring the earlier histories that are being resurrected.

In our efforts to facilitate a deeper understanding of the issue of context, additional essays were included to provide social and historical information on the two largest Hispanic population groups in the United States. Jacinto Quirarte [SEE DOCUMENT V.2.1], who has already written two books on the activities of Mexican American artists, has contributed a useful overview of the interrelationship between Mexican, Mexican American, and American artists. Marimar Benítez accepted the challenging task of providing both a historical framework for understanding the relationship that exists between the United States and Puerto Rico and conveying a synoptic art history course on the activities of Puerto Rican artists—most of whom are totally unknown to audiences outside of the island.

The origins of this exhibition date back to my undergraduate days in the early 1970s, when I first wanted to learn more about my Puerto Rican heritage and Latin American art in general. What started out as simple undergraduate curiosity evolved into a passionate mission perhaps a bit too evangelical at times—to eliminate some of the basic obstacles that confronted me. I share the following personal experience in order to illustrate a broader general condition that still exists and that this exhibition and publication attempt to redress in part. Both as an undergraduate (Pratt Institute) and graduate student (Columbia University and New York University) I was unable to find any art history courses at the schools I attended that addressed my interest in twentieth-century Latin American or Puerto Rican art. If I had been interested in the history, literature, or pre-Columbian cultures of this region, I would have fared considerably better, and as a consolation I did take several courses in those areas. But in my field of choice, in the area of knowledge I truly thirsted for, I had to resort to self education, independent research, and the marshaling of a diverse group of resources, including fellowships and special exhibition grants, to satisfy my intellectual interest in the Latin American art of our century.

What does this illustrate? At some of the most prestigious and influential art history departments in the country where past, present, and future curators, museum directors, and art critics interact here is virtually no exposure to the rich and complex art history that exists south of the Rio Grande. Eighty-five

to ninety percent of the course offerings at the Institute of Fine Arts at NYU, for example, concern European and other Western cultural history. I am sure the Institute is not unique in this regard. Since it helps to form the movers and shakers of the American art world the very group that is responsible for the organization of museum exhibitions and publications on Western material culture—its graduates will have had little or no exposure to the postcolonial cultures of most of the Western Hemisphere. It should not be surprising, therefore, that there is a paucity of exhibitions or publications on this subject. What exists are mostly monographs on individual artists who, for a combination of reasons, are viewed as having “risen above” their cultural context and therefore worthy of study.

The implications of this are significant when you consider what is at stake: the ability of US citizens to understand Latin American culture and society and promote hemispheric cooperation. The “Latin” stereotypes that exist in the minds of most North Americans are generally shaped by what sources are available to them: newspaper stories or popular films and television shows that almost never discuss cultural issues: on the rare occasion when they do, they will invariably cover either the pre-Columbian or the colonial period. In the popular imagination then, Latin American cultural history has yet to enter the twentieth century. Only art history doctoral students, whose theses are specifically focused on a Latin American artist or private collectors, will deviate from this perceptual mold of contemporary life south of the border.

I don’t think I belie the truth when I say that most Americans have no idea what Latin American movements or artists have been important to twentieth-century art. This lack of knowledge also applies to most undergraduate and graduates of American art history departments who possess at best a superficial knowledge of a handful of artists from that region. One of the central goals of this exhibition then is to go beyond the seven or eight names that come to mind when one discusses Latin American art: first, *los tres grandes*, [Diego] Rivera, [David Alfaro] Siqueiros, [José Clemente] Orozco (who are very often thought of as one persona with little differentiation between their individual histories); then [Joaquín] Torres-García, [Roberto] Matta, [Wifredo] Lam, [Rufino] Tamayo, [Fernando] Botero, and, since the feminist movement, Frida Kahlo. This exhibition attempts to broaden the limited perspective and to document an aspect of American art history that has been buried in archives, filing cabinets, and fine art storage areas.

One of the important insights one can glean from this exhibition is the cyclical nature of the American fascination with Latin America. The essays by Eva Cockcroft, Jacinto Quirarte, and Félix Ángel in the present volume give an overview of periodic waves of exhibitions in American museums. These museum exhibitions represent the peaks of a broader social and political interest in specific regions at various times in American history. During the 1930s and 1940s there were a number of major exhibitions organized by numerous American museums that focused on the artists and culture of Mexico. This was at a time when Washington was concerned with the rising tide of fascism in Europe and wanted to bolster hemispheric solidarity. To cite a few exhibition examples: the Metropolitan Museum of Art, *New York Mexican Arts* (1930–31); The Museum of Modern Art, New York, *Diego Rivera* (1931–32) and *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* (1940); Detroit Institute of Arts, *Diego Rivera* (1931); and the Institute of Modern Art, Boston, *Modern Mexican Painters* (1941). Similar exhibitions were held in major museums in Philadelphia (1939, 1943), San Francisco (1939), and many other cities. Often these exhibitions, sometimes consisting of thousands of objects, would travel to five or six American venues, thus providing tremendous exposure.

Likewise, after the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 and the formation of the Alliance for Progress in 1961, a similar wave of Latin American exhibitions materialized both in American museums and galleries. At that time it was Washington's concern with Communist movements in Latin America that momentarily focused our attention South. That upsurge was short-lived and was not as broadly based as that of the late 1930s and 1940s. Within the last two years another upswing in the organization of Latin American exhibitions has begun, and South and Central America are once again the focus of the U.S. media and popular attention. The Detroit Institute of Arts organized a major retrospective of Diego Rivera, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the Corcoran Gallery collaborated on the exhibition *Hispanics in the United States*, which is circulating widely, and every monthly art publication brings us news of one-person shows by both mature and younger Latin American artists. Will the current wave survive long? If history repeats itself the wave will probably crest within a year or so.

And yet there is an opportunity to gain some lasting beneficial effects from the current crop of activity. If serious efforts are made to enlist educators to follow up with activities in the public schools and in art history departments, then the knowledge base with respect to Latin American art and culture can be broad-

ened. What is disheartening, though, is the manner in which the art historical data from the earlier peak periods of interest were treated during the nadir years: Latin America just dropped off the art historical map. Later, new generations of curators and audiences had to “discover” Latin American art all over again.

This brings me to what may be the most controversial of the three goals I mentioned at the outset: the elucidation of the cultural activity of Puerto Rican artists. Why should a straightforward exposition of historical data be so emotionally charged? Because it goes to the root of the legal and political question of the status of Puerto Rico. Puerto Rican art and artists are unknown in this country due in large measure to the fact that their cultural activity is not considered part of American art history by North American scholars, for they uniformly say it is part of Latin America—and Latin American art historians consider Puerto Rico a part of the United States and therefore none of their concern. Only the [Argentinian-born] Colombian critic Marta Traba attempted to situate Puerto Rican art in a Latin American context. Most critics and art historians from both continents, however, have ignored whatever took place in the visual arts on the island.

Additionally, Puerto Rican artists collectively tend to have strong views on the issue of the commonwealth’s status. The vast majority favor independence for the island. Their sympathies for that political position gave birth in the 1950s to an influential school of artists centered in San Juan who identified with the independence movement and embraced a very populist and social role for their art. Three role models: Lorenzo Homar, Rafael Tufiño, and Carlos Raquel Rivera, although acutely aware of international art movements, spurned any identification with the “metropolis” and pursued their creative activities in defiance of mainstream art. They were important artists who would exhibit and achieve recognition in international exhibitions in Europe and Central and South America, especially not pursue exhibition opportunities in the United States. This posture was prevalent among their generation and continues to be so among Puerto Rican artists today.

Two powerful factors—the ambiguous role of Puerto Rico among nations and the artists’ objections to being identified with the metropolis—have contributed to the lack of critical literature on Puerto Rican art. Several of the Puerto Rican artists who will be discussed in the thematic sections and in Ms. Benítez’s essay may initially react with concern at seeing themselves placed in a North American art historical context. But the premise of this exhibition—to document

the activity of Latin American artists in the United States—is not conditioned to mean only “mainland” United States but also to include Puerto Rico. Therefore, Puerto Rican artists on the island, as *Latin Americans*, have contributed to this history, irrespective of whether they were setting their sights on the continental United States or embracing the rest of the world. In historical and humanistic terms, Puerto Rico is part of Latin America, and its literature, poetry, and music have found ready acceptance as such. Only in the visual arts, where the language is universal and therefore not obviously Hispanic, is this issue of categorization such an obstacle to the diffusion of their culture.

One can argue the political and moral issues of whether or not Puerto Rico should be part of the United States, but for all intents and purposes, since the Treaty of Paris in 1898 Puerto Rico has been linked to this country, and since the Jones Act of 1917 every Puerto Rican is born a citizen of the United States. The organizers therefore felt that the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico should not be excluded when examining the role of Latin American artists in the United States.

This exhibition may not succeed in convincing Puerto Rican artists and American art historians to reevaluate their positions with respect to the inclusion of Puerto Rican artists in general art history texts; but for those who are willing, it does help to point the way toward a rich and exciting culture that has received very little critical attention.

The Latin American Spirit has from its inception been viewed by its organizers as an ambitious, high-stakes venture aiming to redefine the way Latin American art is viewed and discussed in this country, opening up the playing field so that many other Latin American artists could be reexamined—a venture that goes beyond the accumulation of pretty pictures, an exhibition that will ask more from its viewers than just a passing visit. . . .

V.1.9 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1065311 AND 1065330

ART OF THE FANTASTIC

Holliday T. Day and Hollister Sturges, 1987

As with the exhibition *The United States Collects Pan American Art* which was organized by Joseph Randall Shapiro at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1959 [SEE DOCUMENT III.4.10] in celebration of the Third Pan American Games, *Art of the Fantastic* (June 28 to September 13, 1987) coincided with the tenth edition of the games held in Indianapolis in August 1987. Hollister Sturges—a curator of European art at the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha, Nebraska, who went on to organize the exhibition *New Art from Puerto Rico* for the Springfield City Library and Museum in Massachusetts (1990)—and the well-known scholar of American art, Holliday T. Day, champion their version of intercontinental relations through an exhibition based on the construct of “the fantastic.” As stated in their “Prologue,” responding to a suggestion of the Argentinean critic and art historian Damián Carlos Bayón, the curators investigated the use of fantastic imagery across the region, focusing on the six key forces at play: Catholicism; the colonial past; the influence of pre-Columbian cultures; political and military oppression; the role of the “fantastic” within Western culture; and a recurring sense of isolation. Day and Sturges apply what they describe as a “North American” curatorial approach guided by the factual, as opposed to the supposedly more “poetic readings” of the matter by their South American counterparts. Strongly criticized by key Latin American intellectuals, including Aracy Amaral and Mari Carmen Ramírez, [SEE DOCUMENTS V.2.5 AND V.2.6, RESPECTIVELY], the exhibition took on a life of its own as a benchmark and a tour de force of exoticism. Undoubtedly, it led to the publication of *Beyond the Fantastic: Contemporary Art Criticism from Latin America*, the influential volume edited by Gerardo Mosquera (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press/Institute of International Visual Arts, 1996). These excerpts are from the source [Holliday T. Day and Hollister Sturges, *Art of the Fantastic: Latin America, 1920–1987* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art, 10–11, 38–40).

PROLOGUE

Art of the Fantastic: Latin America, 1920–1987, organized by the Indianapolis Museum of Art in celebration of the Tenth Pan American Games, explores one of the most

powerful modes of expression in Latin American culture: the fantastic. Twentieth-century Latin American artists use fantastic imagery as a vehicle to define their special cultural identity that developed over a period of 400 years. While the different regions and nations represented have distinct characteristics, they share a common history: their Catholic faith; their colonial past; their pre-Columbian and African heritage; their constantly changing political institutions; their struggle for political, economic, and cultural independence from Europe and the United States; and finally, their isolation from the centers of Western culture.

Our arrival at the thesis for this exhibition depended on many sources. Initial research for the exhibition revealed several startling facts: (1) A preliminary search of the literature showed that no major museum in the United States had mounted a large Latin American group exhibition for twenty years; (2) Except for the work of three or four artists who had spent extensive time in the United States, Latin American art was virtually unknown here other than by specialists in the field; (3) United States art libraries with a few exceptions had almost no literature on the subject after 1965; (4) While there were experts on the art of individual countries or time periods, there were few scholars widely versed in Latin American art.

Nevertheless, we resolved to proceed. We began to assemble a group of museum officials, scholars, and critics as advisors to the project. After a series of trips to Latin America, extensive conversations with the advisors, and a thorough study of the existing literature, we selected a time period for the exhibition extending from the introduction of European Modernism to Latin America until the present, covering three generations. Argentine art historian Damián Bayón suggested that the exhibition focus on the art of the fantastic and we identified the six themes or cultural forces that this work addressed. We would limit the size of the exhibition to a few artists explored in depth rather than attempt to represent every country in a cursory fashion. Entire selection of the works was ours, and Edward Lucie-Smith would provide a general background essay on the Latin American art of the past to present the Latin American viewpoint, Damián Bayón would also contribute a general essay, while a Latin American critic or scholar would write a separate article on each artist represented.

By this approach, we hoped to address in depth one aspect of the enormous richness and diversity of Latin American art. Many vital elements, however, we could not explore: the rich history of abstract or concrete art, the enor-

mously varied and fascinating folk traditions, or the mural movement initiated in Mexico. Another factor in our selection of artists was to prefer those working in Latin America while recognizing that exile (both voluntary and involuntary) was also a strong tradition. Several other upcoming exhibitions in this country will include the work of Latino artists in the United States. The nationality of an artist in the larger sense is not always a clear-cut issue: We found that birthplace and current passports were not always the best indicator of artistic nationality.

In many cases we were faced with difficult choices, particularly when several artists from the same generation explored similar themes in a similar style. We felt we could only include one. Even so, our original goal of twenty artists expanded to twenty-nine. In some instances, we found the logistics and expense of bringing the art to Indianapolis were prohibitive factors, especially given our limited time of eighteen months in which to assemble the exhibition.

Throughout the planning stage of the project, the development of the idea of the fantastic was important because of its defining role in establishing Latin American art within the framework of twentieth-century Western culture. Since the fantastic often represents the collision of several cultures whose values are in conflict, Latin American art has sometimes been misinterpreted as an aberration or less powerful derivation of an existing mode of art. It is indeed these variations, however, and the continued use of seemingly outmoded styles that give Latin American art its vitality and extend the idiom in a meaningful way. Moreover, it must be remembered that the aesthetic values of the Latin American public are not the same as those of European or North American audiences. Poetry, mystery, dramatic impact, metaphor, and spiritual ambiance are valued in particular over the empirical or literal, or what sculptor and critic Donald Judd has called “thereness.”

Critical and art historical writing likewise reflects this difference in attitudes. In Northern writing, interpretation depends on the organization of factual information about the art and artist. If we can demonstrate that an artist’s ideas derive from the experience of another work of art, we do so. The Latin American critic, on the other hand, puts value on his or her feelings while viewing the work and on the imagination and poetry that the artist is able to inspire in the viewer. He or she does not feel it necessary always to be as scientific as the North American critic in drawing conclusions about the art, because in some sense the assumption is made that the facts are obvious and to repeat them would insult

the intelligent reader. This was brought home to us once when we expressed to a Latin American curator our admiration for an essay written by a North American on a Latin American artist. The factual nature of the writing made the intent of the artist clear to us, but to this curator the essay “lacked insight and consisted only of facts.”

In our writing we have necessarily taken the North American approach and allowed the Southern viewpoint to be expressed in the section titled “Another View.” Whether it is Carlos Fuentes’s soaring poetic response to Jacobo Borges or our own efforts to understand the culture that conditioned Borges’s work, the reality of his extraordinary painting remains a gripping and powerful experience. Thus we hope that the presentation of both the Latin and Anglo viewpoints will promote a greater understanding of the works in this exhibition, as well as an appreciation of the many different and valid ways of writing about art.

INTRODUCTION

The important contributions of Latin America to Western art and literature in the twentieth century are only beginning to be known to Europe and North America. Exploited as colonies of Spain and Portugal for 300 years, racked by almost constant warfare throughout the nineteenth century, and catapulted into the industrial age in the twentieth, Latin American countries have received short shrift in the cultural scheme of things. The growth of modern communications, however, from the trickle of transatlantic ocean liners in the early twentieth century to the flood of jet flights today, has transformed Latin America’s artistic energies into a dynamic force. Aviation has not only linked South America with Europe and the United States but has also connected the major cities within each country. And with industrialization and rapid transportation has come an increasing realization by each country of its own unique identity.

Art and literature reflect that quest for identity. While Latin American writers have been acknowledged internationally since the literary “boom” of the sixties, only a few visual artists have achieved comparable reputations, although many of their themes are the same. Both writers and artists have drawn on fantastic imagery to express the cultural forces that shaped their land. Fantasy in art has appeared throughout the twentieth century, most notably in Surrealism, but Latin American artists and writers have employed it with particular genius.

Whereas Surrealism was a consciously intellectual movement first articulated in the [1924] manifesto by André Breton, the fantastic imagery of Latin Americans has not been rooted in doctrine. Surrealism and the fantastic in Latin America share in the primacy they give to imagination and intuition, but they evolved historically from different sources. Inspired by French symbolist literature and Freudian psychoanalysis, Breton reacted against the limits of Western rationalism; artists in Latin America drew from their own cultural history, including pre-Columbian religious myths and practices.

As Rogelio Novey, one of the advisors to this exhibition, has written, “Latin American ‘reality’ contains many distinct cultural elements which give the art produced there a fantastic effect.” Stemming from something fundamentally Latin American rather than from an intellectual theory, the fantastic is more spontaneous and direct than programmatically surrealist. When Miguel Angel Asturias and Gabriel García Márquez, for example, create stories like *Mr. President* or *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, their concerns are not so much the liberation of the unconscious as the exploration of the cultural and the sociopolitical systems in which they live.¹

Fantastic art is characterized by the juxtaposition, distortion, or amalgamation of images and/or materials that extend experience by contradicting our normal expectations formally or ichnographically. Devices such as metamorphoses, incongruous hybrids, dislocations in time and space, and shifts in scale and materials create fantastic images that break the rules of the natural world. Although all of these elements may be present in Surrealism, Magic Realism, or Expressionism, fantasy itself is not an “-ism.” Nor is it what is merely exotic to North American eyes, a toucan, for instance, or a folk mask. A far broader concept, the fantastic may be an ingredient in almost any style, including geometric art. As a means of explaining the inexplicable in the external world, it may be perceived as a utopian element well, in the sense that a mythic account, such as a creation story, can contain essential universal truths independent of actual historical events. By transcending the norms of perceived reality, the fantastic transports the viewer into a world where the implausible becomes plausible.

By employing fantastic imagery, Latin American artists of the twentieth century confront six major cultural forces, which are common to all these former colonies of Spain and Portugal. From the time of the conquistadors to the present, the Catholic Church has played a significant role in Latin American

culture. For some a source of stability, continuity, and spiritual nourishment, for others a source of reaction and oppression, the Church has represented a potent force open to various interpretations. Not unexpectedly, the artists in this exhibition approach the Church with widely varying attitudes, emphasizing different aspects of their Catholic heritage.

Similarly, many Latin Americans perceive the period of conquest and colonial history with deep ambiguity. In Mexico, where the Mestizo population overwhelmingly prevails, the race of the conquerors has, through centuries of miscegenation, become the race of the conquered. The so-called rape of the country by the Spanish invaders and subsequent economic exploitation of a subjugated population by the colonial ruling classes have shaped the social structure of modern Latin America. Today, the most potent images of the Spanish colonial tradition—aristocratic portraits, old master paintings, and icons of the Virgin—offer a rich source of material to be reworked in a contemporary idiom.

The influence of pre-Columbian Indians and imported African slaves on Latin-American life has been continuous and profound. In many countries they created Mestizo and Mulatto populations that strongly affected the Iberian culture of the colonizers. Since the European Avant-Garde acknowledged the power and beauty of the art of Third World cultures at the beginning of this century, so-called primitive art has had a great impact on modern artists. For Latin Americans, especially in modern Mexico, Guatemala, and the Andean regions where advanced Indian civilizations once thrived, the pre-Columbian heritage has become a source of pride, affording contact with ancestral roots in the distant past. Pre-Columbian forms and motifs thus offer significant sources for twentieth-century artists seeking to assert their cultural identity. The wealth of animal imagery used by modern Latin American artists, for example, is an explicit affirmation of the way of life of Indian civilizations, with their special, even sacred, bond with nature. Pre-Columbian cultures saw religious value in images combining human and animal forms (e.g., jaguars, eagles, and serpents); modern artists also invest animal motifs with spiritual power.

The absolute monarchies of Spain and Portugal and the armies of conquistadors left an enduring legacy of periodic tyranny in Latin America. While the artists in this exhibition refrain from attacking specific leaders, they do investigate themes of political and military oppression. They also explore Latin

America's contribution within the broader context of Western culture. Traditionally, Latin American artists have often spent long periods abroad; this interaction with Europe and the United States extends beyond the stylistic influences of an avant-garde center on a peripheral region. A dialogue ensues between Old World and New, and traditional images of power, eroticism, or the grotesque are transformed to illuminate modern situations. The interaction between Latin America and the United States, most evident in the youngest generation of artists discussed here, often concerns the impact of the United States' material culture. Latin Americans have assimilated and adapted elements of the United States' popular culture, often juxtaposing cherished traditional images (the Madonna, a revered ancestor) with the consumer goods that dominate our domestic and public environment today.

The last common theme in Latin American art of the twentieth century is a recurring sense of isolation, both psychological and geographic. In the earliest days of colonization, when Spain established Peru as the seat of the viceroyalty, Argentina had to import all its European goods through Peru—that is, across the Atlantic, into the Pacific and then back over the Andes Mountains. Distances remain great even today, with modern air transportation, and flights are often infrequent between Latin countries. Moreover, wars between adjacent countries have hampered communication among neighbors. Brazil's huge size and Portuguese language have isolated it from the Andean nations and at various times, for political reasons, from Argentina. Beyond its physical isolation Latin America shares with the world the psychological alienation typically suffered by men and women everywhere in the twentieth century. As elsewhere, ordinary life has been depersonalized and has lost its roots through urbanization and industrialization.

The six themes enumerated here—the Catholic Church, colonial past, pre-Columbian and African influence, political oppression, Latin America's role in Western culture, and its isolation—are generally explored by artists of all three generations, but in different styles and with different aims in mind. Each generation responds to its particular age as well as to its national identity.

V.1.1.10 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1065350

LATIN AMERICAN ARTISTS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Waldo Rasmussen, 1993

This is Waldo Rasmussen's "Introduction to an Exhibition," published in the catalogue *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century*, commissioned by the Comisaría de la Ciudad de Sevilla and organized by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) under the aegis of its International Council in celebration of quincentennial of the "Discovery" of the Americas (on view June 6–September 7, 1993). Rasmussen (born 1928)—the director of the museum's International Program since 1969—presents a broad history of MoMA's exhibiting and acquisition of modern Latin American art from its inception in 1929. He tracks his own relationship with Latin American art since joining the museum in 1954 and reflects on the people and events which shaped the institution's commitment to this field. After nearly forty years of informed contact with the region, Rasmussen's essay offers a much less stereotypical perspective on Latin American art than some of the other exhibitions profiled in this anthology. The author questions MoMA's decision to present the work of Latin American artists in a separate gallery beginning in the 1950s through the museum's renovation in 1964; instead, he advocates for the works to be shown together with those of their North American and European counterparts as part of a broader, more inclusive politics of display. This excerpt is taken from the essay's original publication [Waldo Rasmussen, "Introduction to an Exhibition," *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1993), 11–17].

INTRODUCTION TO AN EXHIBITION

...

For a North American curator, selecting work for a broad survey of modern Latin American art is a delicate undertaking, especially in the aftermath of the quincentennial commemorations—celebratory, critical, or mournful—of the European discovery of the new world.¹ Thus, it is particularly important that curatorial and institutional positions are made explicit at the outset. The Canadian critic Bruce Ferguson has suggested that exhibitions are a form of language spoken by art museums to an audience, but that in order for this communication

to be reciprocal, questions regarding an exhibition's aims, its "hopes and desires," the audience to which it is directed, and the intentions of the exhibition's curator should be articulated. Ferguson has noted that it is especially useful to ask whether an exhibition "admits to its own necessary contradictions and multiplicities."² It is the aim of this essay to stimulate dialogue through a discussion of the origin and purpose of the exhibition *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century*. A twofold narrative—both institutional history and autobiography—is required by this approach. Having evolved from personal experiences that extend back some thirty years, this project intersects with The Museum of Modern Art's longer history of some sixty years of involvement with Latin American art, a history that shapes the present exhibition and, I hope, one that may in turn be illuminated by it.

The Museum of Modern Art was the first institution outside Latin America to exhibit and collect the art of that region. In 1931, only two years after its founding, the Museum presented an exhibition of Diego Rivera's work that was attended by nearly 57,000 visitors, a record-breaking number.³ This was the second one-person show held at the Museum (the first was of the work of Henri Matisse), and only its fourteenth exhibition. Rivera was, in many respects, a logical choice; he was among the most famous and influential artists in the world in the early 1930s, and in 1928 he had met Alfred H. Barr, Jr., soon to become the Museum's first director, while both were visiting the Soviet Union. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller (Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.), one of the three founding patrons of the Museum, was a great admirer of Rivera's work and provided a grant that enabled the Museum to invite the artist to paint seven fresco panels especially for the exhibition.⁴ Only one of these, *El agrarista Zapata* [The Agrarian Leader Zapata] of 1931, entered the Museum's collection; it was purchased in 1940 through the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Fund. In 1933 an exhibition of ancient art from *Latin America, American Sources of Modern Art* (Aztec, Mayan, Incan), was the first in a series of ethnological shows held at the Museum. *Art in Our Time*, the exhibition inaugurating the Museum's new building in 1939, included works by Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Candido Portinari.⁵ Latin American exhibitions at the Museum in 1940 included *Portinari of Brazil*, a one-person show of works by the Brazilian social-realist painter and muralist,⁶ and *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art*, an early "blockbuster," which filled the entire Museum with material ranging from pre-Columbian sculpture and colonial paintings to works by contemporary

artists, with folk art shown in a “Mexican market” in the Museum’s garden.⁷ In 1944 *Modern Cuban Painters* was shown at the Museum and afterward seen in twelve cities in the United States.⁸ The Museum’s Department of Circulating Exhibitions, begun in 1933 under the direction of Elodie Courter, sent Latin American exhibitions throughout the United States during this period, beginning with *Three Mexican Artists* (Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros) in 1938 and 1939. Between 1938 and 1946 twelve Latin American exhibitions were circulated.

. . .

I moved to New York in 1954 to study at the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University; soon after arriving I was hired by Porter McCray and joined the staff of The Museum of Modern Art’s International Program. At that time it was circulating in Europe a major exhibition of American art, *Modern Art in the United States: Selections from the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art*. It was in many ways a successor to the 1938 exhibition of American art sent to Paris, once again representing all of the Museum’s curatorial departments. On this occasion, however, American paintings and sculpture, especially Abstract Expressionist works, were received with much greater enthusiasm. During the remainder of the 1950s the International Program focused on sending recent American art abroad.

In New York in the 1950s there was an entire gallery in The Museum of Modern Art devoted to works by Latin American artists, chiefly the Mexicans Rivera, Orozco, Siqueiros, and Tamayo. This was a feature of the “permanent” installation of the collection until the building was remodeled in 1964. Works by [Roberto] Matta were always on view in the galleries devoted to Surrealism, and Wifredo Lam’s *La Jungla* [The Jungle] of 1943 was given a prominent position in the Museum’s lobby by Alfred Barr, a hanging of arguable merit that has persisted to the present day. Latin American exhibitions of note in the 1950s included *Ancient Arts of the Andes*, directed by René d’Harnoncourt in 1954,⁹ *Latin American Architecture since 1945* in 1955, and the 1957 retrospective of Matta’s work, which was the first exhibition at the Museum organized by William Rubin,¹⁰ who later became director of the Department of Painting and Sculpture. In 1961 *Orozco: Studies for the Murals at Dartmouth College* was shown at the Museum and afterward circulated in the United States and Scandinavia.

During its first decade the international Program assumed responsibility for sending exhibitions representing the United States to major international

festivals, including the Venice Biennale and the São Paulo Bienal, there being no government agency charged with this function. Unlike the venerable Venice Biennale, which was begun in 1895, the São Paulo Bienal was a recent addition to the art festival circuit, established as a means of acquainting the Brazilian public with international developments in modern art, as well as providing Brazilian and other Latin American artists with an exhibition forum. At the urging of Nelson Rockefeller, before the International Program was established, the Museum organized the exhibition representing the United States at the first Bienal in 1951, a presentation of 124 works by fifty-eight artists, selected by a committee drawn from The Museum of Modern Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, The Brooklyn Museum, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. For the second [São Paulo] Bienal in 1953, the Museum sent Picasso's *Guernica* of 1937 (then on long-term loan to the Museum from the artist) to a special exhibition honoring the artist; and a large exhibition of works by Alexander Calder, organized by René d'Harnoncourt, which received great acclaim. With the aid of a subsidy from the International Program, the San Francisco Museum of Art sent an exhibition of the work of West Coast artists to the third Bienal in 1955.

I first traveled to Latin America accompanying the United States representation prepared for the fourth Bienal in 1957, the exhibition *Jackson Pollock: 1912–1956*, which had just closed at the Museum. Along with the Pollock retrospective was a group show of the work of five painters (James Brooks, Philip Guston, Grace Hartigan, Franz Kline, and Larry Rivers) and three sculptors (David Hare, Ibram Lassaw, and Seymour Lipton). I supervised the assembly, packing, and shipment of the exhibitions and assisted Porter McCray with their installation. Barr was the United States Commissioner for the [Third São Paulo] Bienal and also served on its international jury, which gave a special citation to the Pollock exhibition.

The fourth Bienal featured works by a number of emerging Latin American artists including Frans Krajcberg (who received first prize for a painting by a Brazilian artist), and artists working in various styles of geometric abstraction—among them Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica, Sérgio Camargo, Edgar Negret, Alejandro Otero, and Eduardo Ramírez Villamizar, who are included in the present exhibition and book. I must admit, however, that at the time I was too absorbed by Abstract Expressionism to respond very strongly to their work, which today I greatly admire. More important to me was the experience of Brazil itself, to which I felt an immediate connection, and my first exposure to the international

art world. In retrospect, the most positive aspect of the Bienal as an art event for Brazilians may have been juxtaposing exhibitions of work by established artists (including a group show of Bauhaus artists and shows of works by Marc Chagall, Paul Delvaux, René Magritte, Ben Nicholson, and Egon Schiele) alongside works representing contemporary developments in a wide range of styles. The [São Paulo] Bienal provided an unparalleled opportunity for Latin American artists to show their work in an international context. The fly in the ointment, however, was a system of awarding prizes that created a false sense of nationalist competition, which I feel was very damaging to the artists.

The next project for the International Program in which I was engaged was a major exhibition devoted to Abstract Expressionism in America. *The New American Painting* was organized at the request of the museum directors Willem Sandberg of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Robert Giron of the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, and Arnold Rüdinger of the Kunsthalle in Basel. The exhibition was directed by Dorothy C. Miller, curator of Museum Collections, with the help of the poet Frank O'Hara, who was on the staff of the Museum until his death in 1966. I assisted with the show's organization and its installation in Basel, where the exhibition—which was shown jointly with the Pollock retrospective—had its inaugural presentation in 1958. The response to *The New American Painting* was extraordinary. European critics acknowledged that the United States had produced a new kind of painting, signaling the graduation of American art from a provincial role to a position of central importance in the modern movement. For the first time in our history, American artists had invented a plastic language capable of altering the course of art; its influence spread internationally. During the following years, a series of one-person exhibitions of work by Abstract Expressionist artists—[Franz] Kline, [Mark] Rothko, Robert Motherwell, [David] Smith, [Willem] de Kooning, Helen Frankenthaler, and Barnett Newman—was circulated by the International Program in Europe. It was deeply satisfying to be associated with those exhibitions and to play an active role in gaining respect for the achievements of the American Abstract Expressionists. It is my great hope that the present exhibition and book will make a similar contribution to the understanding and acceptance of work by Latin American artists.

In 1962 the International Program changed direction. After a decade of organizing the official United States representations to international festivals, including those of São Paulo, Venice, Tokyo, and New Delhi, The Museum of Modern Art announced that it would no longer undertake that role and encouraged the government to assume responsibility for it. The Museum gave its International Program an expanded charge, sending circulating exhibitions on wider itineraries. In this elaboration of earlier Museum policies, Latin America was a particular priority as a part of the world still lacking major public collections of modern art. Therefore, funds were raised specifically for exhibitions to circulate in Latin America, and prominent Latin Americans were invited to join The International Council. Following the resignation of Porter McCray, and with the counsel and encouragement of René d'Harnoncourt and The International Council's president, Elizabeth Bliss Parkinson (now Mrs. Henry Ives Cobb), I began to direct the International Program.

Abstract Drawings and Watercolors U.S.A. was the first of more than forty exhibitions in many fields of modern art, architecture, photography, and film that have since been circulated by the International Program in Latin America. It was selected by the art historian and critic Dore Ashton and represented Abstract Expressionism with works by Pollock, de Kooning, [Arshile] Gorky, Kline, and Motherwell; geometric abstraction in works by Burgoyne Dillier, Fritz Glarner, and Ludwig Sander; and the younger neo-Dada generation with pieces by Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg. Besides introducing recent developments, this exhibition's tour to twelve cities in 1962 and 1963 established what were to become long-term working relationships with museums and cultural institutions throughout Latin America. Other milestone exhibitions in the series included *The School of Paris: Paintings from the Florene May Schoenborn and Samuel A. Marx Collection*, shown first at the Museum and in 1966 at the Museo de Arte Moderno in Mexico City, where it was installed by René d'Harnoncourt. It included forty-five paintings by fourteen artists, among them six by [Henri] Matisse, fourteen by [Pablo] Picasso, six by Georges Braque, and others by Giorgio de Chirico, Juan Gris, Fernand Léger, Joan Miró, Amedeo Modigliani, and Chaim Soutine. In 1968 *From Cézanne to Miró* presented a range of painting by European masters from the late nineteenth century to 1940, lent by seven museums and twenty private collectors in the United States. Its tour to Buenos Aires, Santiago, and Caracas established

attendance records and made it possible for many in those cities to see original works by modern masters for the first time. In 1971 and 1972 *Surrealism*, drawn from the Museum's collection, traveled to six countries, including a showing in Santiago at the invitation of President Salvador Allende. One-person exhibitions circulated in Latin America have included selections of paintings by Josef Albers (1964–65) and Hans Hofmann (1964); sculpture by Jacques Lipchitz (1964) and Alexander Calder (1970–71); and prints and drawings by Gorky, Miró, Motherwell, and Picasso. *Latin American Prints from The Museum of Modern Art* toured ten cities in 1974 and 1975. Major exhibitions during the 1980s included *Four Modern Masters: De Chirico, Ernst, Magritte, and Miró* in 1981 and *Contrasts of Form: Geometric Abstraction, 1910–1980* in 1986, which presented works drawn from the collections of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and The Museum of Modern Art, including ones by the Latin American artists Marcelo Bonevardi, Negret, Rivera, and Jesús Rafael Soto. Both exhibitions were circulated to Buenos Aires, São Paulo, and Caracas.

As I traveled to a number of countries with the Museum's exhibitions in the 1960s, I was able to meet many of the artists in those countries and view their work, and I was profoundly affected by the powerful art created during that period. In Venezuela the kinetic art of Alejandro Otero, Carlos Cruz-Diez, and Jesús Rafael Soto was gaining widespread acceptance. Their work was championed by Miguel Arroyo, who built the collection of the Museo de Bellas Artes in Caracas with great daring and taste, acquiring, for instance, Jacobo Borges's *Ha comenzado el espectáculo* [The Show Has Begun] in 1964, the year it was painted, as well as a great collection of the works of Armando Reverón. Arroyo was also the first museum director in Latin America to begin to acquire a wide range of art from Latin American countries other than his own. Among the many exhibitions I saw during Arroyo's tenure, the installation of Gego's *Reticulárea* in 1969 was especially magical.

Another innovative museum director during this period was Marta Traba, who directed Bogotá's Museo de Arte Moderno when it was located on small galleries in the Universidad Nacional. An ardent feminist and a brilliant critic, Traba encouraged an entire generation of gifted young artists, including Beatriz González, whose enamel portrait of Simón Bolívar was the first in a series of ironic tributes to national heroes, and Ana Mercedes Hoyos, then beginning a series of geometric abstractions, a series whose later works appeared to dissolve into pure light. The Colombian Fernando Botero, living in New York throughout

the 1960s, had already sold his *Mona Lisa, a los doce años* [Mona Lisa, Age Twelve] of 1959 to The Museum of Modern Art. His success, in spite of his independence from international influences, was an inspiration to artists even younger than he.

In Buenos Aires during the 1960s the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella was one of the most provocative and stimulating avant-garde centers of music, dance, theater, and the visual arts anywhere in the world. It was under the direction of Jorge Romero Brest, a former director of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes and a great teacher and influential critic. He was also an international figure in the arts, frequently serving on art commissions and juries around the world. It was at the Instituto in 1964 that I first encountered the Nueva Figuración group of artists—Jorge de la Vega, Luis Felipe Noé, Ernesto Deira, and Rómulo Macció—and felt immediate sympathy for their work, related as it was to my own predilection for contemporary expressionist painting. Other artists reacting against the dominant tradition of Argentine geometric abstraction during this period included Marta Minujín, with her early Environments and Happenings, and those practicing local variants of Pop art (Delia Cancel, Juan Stoppani, and Susana Salgado).

New approaches to Conceptual art were formulated by artists in several countries, notably Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark in Brazil and Víctor Grippo in Argentina. Other prominent Conceptual artists came to the United States during the 1960s; Lilita Porter and Luis Camnitzer are two of particular importance to me. Many of the aforementioned artists created affecting political statements during the most repressive periods of military dictatorship in their countries.

A contemporary and close friend of René d'Harnoncourt's since his early days in Mexico was Fernando Gamboa, who directed the Mexican government's international exhibitions for many years. During the 1970s he was director of the Museo de Arte Moderno in Mexico City, where he presented several shows from the International Program to supplement his own exhibitions of Mexican art. The critic Mário Pedrosa was a crucial figure in the development of art in Brazil; he served as Secretary General for the 1961 São Paulo Bienal, to which the International Program had sent exhibitions of the work of Motherwell, Reuben Nakian, and Leonard Baskin.

In 1966 Alfred Barr traveled to the Bienal in Córdoba, Argentina, and selected a group of works by Latin American artists exhibited there that were later acquired by The Museum of Modern Art. These acquisitions included works by Jorge Eielson of Peru, Rodolfo Mishaan of Guatemala, and Eduardo Mac

Entyre, Rogelio Polesello, and César Paternosto of Argentina. In 1967 the exhibition *Latin American Art: 1931–1966* presented these and other works from the Museum's collection.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Latin American artists continued to be featured occasionally in exhibitions at The Museum of Modern Art. *Information*—the first important exhibition of Conceptual art, organized by Kynaston McShine in 1970—was one of the very few international surveys of its time to include artists from outside Europe and the United States.¹¹ Among the Latin American artists represented were Hélio Oiticica, with an installation, Cildo Meireles, the New York Graphic Workshop (Luis Camnitzer, Liliana Porter, and José Guillermo Castillo), and Marta Minujín. In 1971 *The Artistas Adversary: Works from the Museum Collection* included Orozco's fresco *Dive Bomber and Tank* of 1940, which had not been on view for many years, as well as works by Botero, Marisol, Rivera, Antonio Ruiz, and Siqueiros, and a print section featuring the popular graphics by the Mexican satirist José Guadalupe Posada and those of the Taller de Gráfica Popular [People's Graphic Workshop] of Mexico City from the 1930s and 1940s. The Projects series of exhibitions by contemporary artists, begun in 1971, has included installations by Luis F. Bénédict (1972), Porter (1973), Rafael Ferrer (1974), Meireles (1990), Guillermo Kuitca (1991), and Felix Gonzales-Torres (1992). A Happening by Minujín, titled *Kinappening*, took place in the Museum's sculpture garden in 1974. *Mexican Art: Selections from The Museum of Modern Art* was shown in 1978. The Department of Photography mounted shows of works by the Mexican master Manuel Álvarez Bravo in 1956 and 1971, and in 1979 the Projects series included Martín Chambi and Edward Ranney, in which photographs of social life in Cuzco during the 1920s and 1930s by the Peruvian Chambi were shown with the American Ranney's photographs of Inca monuments and the Peruvian landscape. The Department of Architecture and Design organized *The Architecture of Luis Barragán*, an exhibition of work by the brilliant Mexican architect, in 1976,¹² and Roberto Burle Marx: *The Unnatural Art of the Garden*, featuring the work of the Brazilian landscape architect, in 1991.¹³ Deborah Wye, curator in the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books, organized *Committed to Print: Social and Political Themes in Recent American Printed Art* (1988), which presented political art by both Latin Americans working in the United States and American Latino artists, including Rupert García, Luis Cruz Azaceta, Camnitzer, Juan Sánchez, Marisol, Josely Carvalho, Alfredo Jaar, and Luis Jimenez.¹⁴ In 1991, *Art of the Forties*, an interdepartmental show drawn from

the Museum's collection, exhibited Orozco's *Dive Bomber and Tank* after a twenty-year absence from public view and temporarily moved Lam's *Jungle* from the lobby to the exhibition galleries.¹⁵ Works by Frida Kahlo, Matta, Siqueiros, Tamayo, and Joaquín Torres-García were also included.

It is important to record these events, but if we consider that Latin American artists have been included in only fourteen exhibitions at the Museum during the past twenty years, it is clear that interest in Latin American art has not exactly been flourishing recently, nor has the situation been appreciably different in other major museums in this country and Europe. It was this relative indifference to Latin American art that first led me to develop a project for a major exhibition of this art, which I hoped might help redress the situation. Having been strongly influenced by Stanton [L.] Catlin's *Art of Latin America since Independence*,¹⁶ held in 1966 at the Yale University Art Gallery in New Haven, I envisioned an exhibition that would represent a still wider range of the visual arts in Latin America of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including photography as well as painting and sculpture. Feeling that Europe might be more receptive than the United States to such an exhibition, I proposed it in 1976 to John Drummond, and then director of the Edinburgh international Festival, and he accepted it with enthusiasm for a showing in 1981. But after more than two years of preparation, numerous difficulties made it necessary to cancel the project.¹⁷

After so long a period of neglect by cultural institutions of the United States and Europe, Latin American art has been examined in retrospectives of works by individual artists and the subject of several survey exhibitions during the past few years. The present exhibition is perhaps the most ambitious of the latter efforts, as it represents the work of more than ninety artists with over three hundred examples, beginning in 1914 with the first generation of Latin American modernists and extending to contemporary artists, including Latino artists working in the United States today.

In organizing the exhibition I have sought to present a broad view of the many complex strands in the work of Latin American artists, stressing on international perspective by grouping the works chronologically rather than by nationality; it is important to counter the strong tendencies toward nationalist interpretation. I do not assume that Latin American artists share a common identity that can be defined easily or that separates them from other Western artists, and I have therefore avoided concepts—such as those that stress the exotic,

folkloric, surrealist, or political—that reduce the complexity of the artists’ contributions. Instead, I have attempted to explore the intensely rich body of work by Latin American artists as inclusively and openly as possible.

The survey format was selected for the exhibition and publication because I felt it could best provide a broad historical view of the context in which the work of Latin American artists has developed. The very scope of the survey format implies certain limitations and dangers, especially, in Guy Brett’s words, “the inevitable oversimplification and homogenization of another reality.”¹⁸ Despite my affinity for the work of Latin American artists, the selection remains an outsider’s mapping of a vast area, with the strengths and weaknesses that implies. I have attempted to counter some of the limitations of the survey form by representing many of the artists with several works or large-scale examples. Nevertheless, a number of important figures in the history of Latin American art could not be included. An important aim of this exhibition and the publication that accompanies it is to stimulate further study and research in this field, especially scholarly studies of neglected individual artists and specific periods and movements in Latin American art.

In many ways I have conceived of the exhibition in relation to the Museum of Modern Art’s collection—not only to place works from it in the overall context provided by this survey, but in a sense to provide a kind of ideal collection by featuring major artists of earlier generations who are not and, in many cases, can never be represented in the Museum’s collection. This is not to point a finger at what Barr called, with reference to collecting, “the sins of omission,” which he felt were much more serious than “the sins of commission” because they could not be rectified; rather, it is with the hope that this exhibition and publication will generate new interest at the Museum of Modern Art and elsewhere in collecting and researching Latin American art.

As noted above, during the 1950s Latin American works from the collection, primarily those by Mexican artists, were shown in a separate gallery. I am far from advocating a return to this arrangement. I hope that in the future more works by Latin American artists will be incorporated within the international context of the Museum’s collection, so that Torres-García, for example, may be presented as part of the Constructivist tradition in which he was an important innovator, and that Mexican works of the 1930s and 1940s may be shown together with their North American counterparts. Similarly, I hope that Latin American

artists will increasingly find open to them inclusion in major international exhibitions and publications. My deepest dream is for Latin American artists to join more fully the world community of artists on the terms of equality and dignity they deserve.

1

Earlier versions of *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century* were shown in Seville, Paris, and Cologne in 1992–93. The first of these showings was commissioned by the city of Seville as part of its Columbus quincentenial celebration. See *Artistas Latinoamericanos del siglo XX / Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century*, essay by Edward J. Sullivan (Seville: Comisaría de la Ciudad de Sevilla para 1992, 1992); *Art d’Amérique Latine 1911-1968* (Paris: Musée National d’Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1992); *Amériques Latines: Art contemporain* (Paris: Hôtel des Arts, 1992); and Marc Scheps, ed., *Lateinamerikanische Kunst im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1993).

2

Bruce Ferguson, “Dialogues in the Western Hemisphere: Language, Discourse, and Culture” (paper delivered at the conference “Artistic and Cultural identity in Latin America” the Memorial da America Latina, São Paulo, September 22–25, 1991).

3

See *Diego Rivera*, introduction by Frances Flynn Paine, notes by Jere Abbott (New York: The Museum of Modern Art and W. W. Norton, 1931); Hayden Herrera, *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 131; and *Diego Rivera: A Retrospective* (New York: W. W. Norton; Detroit: Detroit Institute of Arts, 1986), 79.

4

Rivera’s history with members of the Rockefeller family continued when in 1932 he was commissioned to paint a mural for the lobby of the RCA building at Rockefeller Center, then under construction. Painted the next year, *Man at the Crossroads Looking with Hope and High Vision to the Choosing of a New and Better Future* commented explicitly on the evils of capitalism and the benefits of socialism and included a portrait of Lenin. When Nelson A. Rockefeller asked that the portrait be removed, Rivera refused and scandal ensued when he was dismissed from the project. The mural was covered, and in 1934 it was destroyed. Rivera re-created the composition on a wall at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City. See *Diego Rivera: A Retrospective*, 85–89.

5

See *Art in Our Time* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1939).

6

See *Portinari of Brazil* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1940).

7

See *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1940).

8

See “Modern Cuban Painters,” *Museum of Modern Art Bulletin* 11, no. 5 (April 1944): 1–14.

9

See Wendell C. Bennett, *Ancient Arts of the Andes*, introduction by René d’Harnoncourt (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1954).

10

See William Rubin, *Matta* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1957).

11

See Kynaston McShine, ed., *Information* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1970). Kynaston McShine is now senior curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture.

12

See Emilio Ambasz, *The Architecture of Luis Barragán* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1976).

13

See William Howard Adams, *Roberto Burle Marx: The Unnatural Art of the Garden* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1991).

14

See Deborah Wye, *Committed to Print: Social and Political Themes in Recent American Printed Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1988).

15

See *Art of the Forties*, essay by Guy Davenport, introduction by Riva Castleman (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1991).

16

See Stanton L. Catlin and Terence Grieder, *Art of Latin America Since Independence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966). [SEE DOCUMENT IV.2.4]

17

Essays by Latin American art historians had been commissioned for a planned accompanying publication, and much hard work had been done, when there arose difficulties in fundraising and in obtaining the cooperation of several Latin American governments. In addition, a proposed European tour, following the Edinburgh showing, had been accepted by only one institution, the Kunsthalle in Düsseldorf. The essays were eventually published in Damián Bayón, ed., *Arte moderno en América Latina* (Madrid: Taurus Ediciones, 1985).

18

Guy Brett, "Preface: Assembly," in *Transcontinental: Nine Latin American Artists* (London and New York: Verso, 1990), 5.

V.2

QUESTIONING STEREOTYPES

V.2.1 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 833783

MEXICAN, MEXICAN AMERICAN, CHICANO ART: TWO VIEWS

Jacinto Quirarte, 1973

The noted Chicano art historian Jacinto Quirarte (born 1931) presents two contrasting viewpoints on Mexican American and Chicano art through this summary of interviews held in the summer of 1970 with San Antonio artists such as Mel Casas and Rudy Treviño and California-based artists Esteban Villa and José Montoya. For Treviño, branding oneself a Chicano artist is irrelevant in the realm of art since, in his view, aesthetic value must prevail. Conversely, more politically engaged artists such as Casas—whose responses foreshadow his later involvement with the San Antonio group Con Safo (C/S)—discuss their varying degrees of involvement with Mexican American culture and offer early definitions of Chicano art. This excerpt is from the document's original publication [Jacinto Quirarte "8. Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano Art: Two views," *Mexican American Artists* (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1973), 132–136].

SERIOUS STUDENTS OF CONTEMPORARY ART would find it difficult to identify an artist by nationality if confronted with his works and no other information. In this respect, American artists of Mexican descent—outside the small towns of northern New Mexico, where artisans have continued to work in the old ways—are indistinguishable from other American artists. They have been affected by the same events that have revolutionized twentieth-century art. Still, antecedents have to be kept in mind. The Mexican American artist straddles several traditions, which at times seem irreconcilable. On the one hand, he is indirectly related to the Spanish colonial and Mexican republican periods of American

history and directly involved with American culture of the twentieth century. On the other hand, the ties with Mexico remain strong, and in certain parts of the Southwest there appears to be a concerted effort to emphasize them more strenuously than ever before.

One of the questions asked the artists interviewed during the summer of 1970 had to do with background and the influence that this had on their development as artists. Two representative types of response to these questions are presented here—the first given by Mel Casas [MC], Emilio Aguirre [EA], and Rudy Treviño [RT], all of San Antonio, and the second by Esteban Villa [EV] from Sacramento, California. The most extensive treatment is given to Villa's response, since he has not been discussed in the main body of this study, as have the others.

Casas defines a Mexican American as an outsider, "because once he's not an outsider, he's not a Mexican American anymore." Aguirre was more concerned with the Mexican American label. "Why don't we delete this word Mexican? Why not American of Mexican descent instead of Mexican American?"

RT: I think it all evolves out of search for identity, pride. Therefore, you are going to call attention to this.

MC: I think it goes with the times. Because I remember when I was in school in El Paso. Whenever we had to fill out forms for job applications, the teachers made us write down Mexican where it says nationality. We were not Mexicans, but this is what Texas did at that time.

EA: Well, I don't think there is any need to say Mexican American really. You are an American first of all. This is the way you should be treated. A Mexican is someone born in Mexico. Like Treviño said, pride. I don't think pride has anything to do with that, because you know what you are and that's it.

RT: Socially and politically, I think it could be appropriate, but in the world of art I don't think that it has any relevance. The minute you bring that phase of your kind of struggle into your work—propaganda—then it shouldn't be taken as art. It should be taken as a propaganda movement. Now, politically and socially, there is a great difference. No one is going to call you an American. You're a Mexican

American. That's an accepted thing. Once you accept it then you can take off from there and you can progress.

EA: Now, I don't have to say that I am a Mexican. All you have to do is look at me. [Everyone laughs.]

MC: You ask whether we paint because we are Mexican Americans. Well, we would paint whether we were Chinese, Anglo, or French, or what have you. Now my work does deal with my relation to the culture, the environment. My painting is propaganda. But then all painting is propaganda...whether you paint just squares. You are pushing a formal school.

RT: The aesthetic value is more important in my view. Now, the material you deal with would have to do with artistic value. I don't say that your paintings are not artistic [to Casas].

MC: You may. Other people have said it. [Laughter.]

RT: But it isn't social propaganda, all the time.

MC: I can't deal without propaganda because of the American ideal. The concept of American beauty is not only physical beauty; it's also racial beauty. We are bombarded by this, constantly, on TV. This is what I base it on.

RT: See, what you're doing is competing with the country or with the world and not a little social thing like the Southwest versus the North or whatever. What you're doing is taking a larger scope. You're not dealing with the Mexican against the Anglo. This is a wider spectrum that has a deeper psychological meaning than just a racial problem. You're dealing more with aesthetic value.

MC: I'm dealing with the power of the cinema, the power of advertising, as in TV.

QUIRARTE [JQ]: Do the Mexican muralists mean anything to you or are you more in touch with New York-based artists?

MC: Much of what I am interested in depended upon my schooling. We seldom went into Mexican art, and when we did it was very superficial. There were names like Orozco, Rivera, Tamayo, Siqueiros, three muralists and an easel painter: the foremost artists of Mexico. That was it. In a sense, their iconography was very different. We were constantly bombarded with West European concepts. It was difficult to relate to Mexican art. But somehow you were expected to relate to it more. That's like expecting a Chinese to know more about watercolors than you because he's Chinese. It's ridiculous. We did have more contact with Mexican art simply because we were next door to [Ciudad] Juárez, Mexico. But the choice was that. It was more the American type of imagery. I knew how to read and write in Spanish before I learned English. So when I went to school in Mexico [as an adult] it was like a rediscovery of all this. I remember distinctly one time asking questions about Mexican art when I was a student. I was put down immediately. Mexican art was propaganda, especially Rivera's work. It was Communist propaganda, too socially conscious. This was in 1954. Now you find America doing the reverse. American art is very conscious of the environment and Mexican art is very international.

JQ: Is there a movement or a group of Chicano artists in San Antonio?

MC: Efforts have been made in the past to start such movements. When I had a studio downtown I would invariably get involved with people who wanted to talk in those terms. But what bothered me is that we were not talking about art, we were talking about its racial aspects. In other words, we happen to be Mexican Americans, let's form a group that way. But no one questioned the validity of such a position. It meant nothing and it sort of bothered me. Because I am of Mexican descent and I readily admit it. But that doesn't make me an artist. I am not a professional Mexican.

(Casas then related a story that demonstrated his attitude toward this problem as well as clarified local conditions in San Antonio. Each year an artist is selected as "Artist of the Year" by the Art League. Several years ago he was chosen for this honored position, but only for three days because they had made a mistake. The selection was withdrawn because of ideological and aesthetic conflicts. The following year a less controversial artist was chosen.)

MC: To give you an idea of what both mentalities are [I will tell you a story]: During the exhibition of the artist's works at the Witte Museum, one of the ladies from the Art League said, "Isn't it nice to have a Mexican American artist of the year when we're having so much trouble in the [Rio Grande] Valley?" Now, what does that have to do with it? What I'm trying to get at is this: *we are truly outsiders*. To me being an outsider is the next thing to being an artist. I think we are lucky to be born outsiders: the other thing. You think because you eat tortillas or you think in Spanish or in the Mexican tradition that this identifies you. I don't think it's quite true. You find us using certain materials in our work, Liquitex, canvas, stretcher boards, *no usamos bastidores* [frames] or *manta* [burlap]. So we are a mixture, so there is no sense in trying to say that we are a pure this or that. We are entirely different. We're neither Mexicans nor Anglos. We are in-between.

Esteban Villa and José Montoya have been very active in the Chicano art movement in California for a number of years. Their interest goes back to their student days at the Oakland School of Art and Crafts. Their major manifesto came under the heading of MALAF, the Mexican American Liberation Art Front. This is a group founded in the San Francisco-Oakland Bay area in early 1970. The founders were Villa, René Yáñez, Manuel Hernández, and Malaquías Montoya.

EV: The main purpose of this group is to use Chicano artists to create new symbols and images for *la nueva raza* [the new race] [Reading from a paper, Villa says]. "It is an effort to present in visual form an artistic account of the Chicano movement. The group also wishes to establish traveling art exhibits to tour the country, to be able to set up training workshops in Oakland or wherever, to publish posters and magazines of Chicano art and artists, and to take exhibits into the working people's areas."

That was the beginning and I would like to take pride in the fact that it was kind of a conscious effort to get the thing going, to establish it as Chicano art. Now there was a lot of negation of the group, of the movement itself, of Chicano art. People would come up and say, "Is there such a thing as Chicano art and if there is where is it?" And also, "Where is the evidence of it? We want to see it." So that was some of the questioning that came out right away. Then, in applying for jobs in colleges, Chicano artists would come up to the art department and say that they do Chicano art. This immediately offended the people who were interviewing the artist. They would say, "We don't want any militant artists." This

is really an ironic thing because to me art has always been equated to ideas and change. So we had a kickback there, a hurdle to overcome. Then the critics that review art shows—exhibitions in the community—also came down on the MALAF group because they felt that we were separatists. “[We’re] trying to separate art and break it down into ethnic presentation.” They think art is universal so “why try to break it down?” MALAF, in effect, is a kind of a radical change in the history of art. It’s a new concept. It’s a new direction and it hasn’t been accepted yet.

JQ: I wanted to ask you whether the reorientation is complete or whether the MALAF people are still ignored.

EV: They started out by ignoring us. But recently I was asked to give some accounts of what I consider Chicano art. When I say “art” I am also including poetry, literature, painting, sculpture, music, and drama. So let’s take, for example, the poetry of [José] Montoya. I remember when he first wrote his bilingual poetry; it was an innovation. He submitted his work to the *Atlantic Monthly* magazine and they liked it very much. They wanted to publish it but finally they sent it back. They rejected it, saying it had too many Spanish words in it. It was something that the total population of the States could not pick up on. So it was a detriment to the sales of their magazine. So then *El Grito* came into being. Octavio Romano in Berkeley put this journal together and he thought it was great. “*Échale más. Échale más pochismos, palabras mexicanas*” [C’món, c’món, use more Americanized slang, more Mexican words]. So that was accepted. José [Montoya] also writes short stories.

Then in drama you have the birth of the Teatro Campesino. It’s a new Chicano art form which is already being imitated by the San Francisco Mime Troupe, and it’s also being viewed and reviewed as far away as France. So that’s new. Then you have poster art, which is a Chicano thing coming up now; the idea of posters is not new but Chicano posters are new. There are some other art forms that have been started in sculpture.

Chicano culture, Chicano art, seems to be like a merger of that *que viene de México* and contemporary American society—a kind of marriage of the two. And from this you’re going to come out with biculturalism. And this is where Chicano art is right now. It’s just beginning. There are some art forms that are starting to come out. And they are very different from what you would find even in the magazine that you have here [Villa refers to the *Humble Way* magazine].

JQ: Within this context, the formal aspects of Chicano art may bear a superficial resemblance to other American art, but I assume that it would be in the thematic area that it would differ.

EV: Yes, I think the context [and] the themes are important. Let me give you some examples. This is the thing that intrigues people the most: “Well, exactly what is Chicano art? Show me.” As far as themes are concerned, I like to get on an idea and then develop a series based on it. I have done a series on the “Gallo,” drawings on the *gallo* [cock, rooster], any art media that I can use. Stay with the theme, because the *gallo* is a *machismo* symbol. If you call a Chicano a *gallo*—man, that’s a compliment. You feel good. “Yo soy un gallo.” It comes out in the *corridos* in the *música mexicana*. But the Anglo, if you call him a rooster—man, that’s an insult. It’s too close to being called a chicken. “Nobody calls me a chicken.” So that’s one thing: the *machismo* symbol. Then I would like to do a series on “La Llorona,” [The Weeping Woman] that is, Mexican folklore. Everybody’s heard of “La Llorona,” “El Cucuy,” [The Cuckoo] “La Lechuza,” [The Witch Owl] and “La Húngara.” [The Hungarian Lady] These are symbols that you find in the Mexican families, the Mexican people. But they haven’t been brought out. And this is our rebuttal to the people that say: “you’re trying to separate art, man. Let’s keep it universal.” Well, if anything, they don’t seem to realize that—when we present new symbols and imagery that deal with *machismo* and *chismes* [gossiping]—really what it does is that an Anglo can come and look at it and start asking questions about it. “Well, what’s with the rooster? What does that mean? What does the word *chisme* mean? What does *carnalismo* [brotherhood, familiarity, friendliness] mean?” And he’s getting informed. So you hope that when he gets out of there, he will have a closer understanding. So, rather than separating us, Chicano art is bringing us together.

JQ: And in the process the Chicanos themselves are accepting so many of these things that they’ve only had in the home but not outside.

EV: And it’s something you don’t find in the schools, the colleges, and art instruction. So that’s another thing that we’re trying to get Chicano artists to hit on—the ethnic approach—because, so far, the Mexican people are not recognized as an ethnic group in this country.

JQ: Mexican Americans don't exist.

EV: Yes. And the thing that points this out is when you go into the army. You might be as black as I am, but to them I am a Caucasian. I am classified as white. OK, in school you're told George Washington is the father of your country. Like this poet once said, "Man, if he's the father of my country, how come he's not Chicano." Also in the U.S. census form it says: "Please list your race or nationality." So they list White, Korean, Hawaiian, Oriental, and Black. The word *Mexican* is completely left out. They're implying that we don't exist, like you said. And what we're trying to do, then—through our art—is bring it to their attention, that we DO exist, that we are here and not only do we exist but we also have a culture of our own.

V.2.2 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 847134

TURNING IT AROUND: A CONVERSATION

Rupert Garcia and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, 1993

This is an outstanding interview of Rupert Garcia (born 1941)—one of the leading artists in the Chicano movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s—conducted by San Francisco-based Mexican performance artist and writer Guillermo Gómez-Peña (born 1955). Garcia discusses his views regarding Chicano art, particularly vis-à-vis postmodern theoretical trends, describing the multifaceted strategies he employs to escape being pigeonholed as just a “radical poster-maker.” Also, the interview offers a more complete context for Garcia’s work at a turning point in his career as he moved between his early political posters and his much more subtle, but no less political, production of the mid-1990s. Excerpts are taken from the interview’s original publication in the catalogue for the exhibition *Aspects of Resistance: Rupert Garcia* held at the Alternative Museum in New York (on view December 7, 1993–February 19, 1994) [Rupert Garcia and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, “Turning it Around: A Conversation,” *Aspects of Resistance: Rupert Garcia*, (New York, NY: Alternative Museum, 1994), 13–35].

THE CHICANO COMMUNITY, like many other communities in the United States, is currently suffering from serious intergenerational conflicts. Many *veteranos* [old people] see my generation as too theoretical, eclectic, and experimental—we are perceived as irreverent, politically confused and ungrateful. For us, nothing is fixed or sacred. As a reaction to this typecasting, we tend to stereotype our *padrinos* [godparents, sponsors, connections] as unnecessarily nationalistic, morally righteous, and aesthetically conservative. Rupert Garcia, however, defies all stereotypes. An unquestionable *veterano* of many cultural wars, his rigorous artwork and challenging ideas have never stopped speaking to us, nor has he stopped listening to us.

I first met Rupert in the summer of 1984, during an ambitious “intercontinental art conference” that took place in San Francisco. Artists from throughout Latin America, the U.S. and Canada gathered to compare notes on the various aesthetic and political tendencies coming out of the multiple arts communities in the Americas. I was there as a journalist for *La Opinión* (Los Angeles), and my English wasn’t exactly great. I met him at a party. We spoke in English, Spanish, and *Spanglish*. I was impressed by his generosity of spirit and by the breadth of his vision. At a time when nationalism was relatively rampant, Rupert was talking about the need for Chicanos to define themselves in relation to all the people of color in the Americas. He was opposed to simplistic ideas about identity, art making, and the social role of the artist. His thoughts resonated very strongly in my irreverent psyche. Since then, we have been friends, and his philosophical, aesthetic and political ideas have continuously influenced my work and the work of many of my colleagues.

Nine years later, Rupert and I sit at a table at San Francisco’s Café Picaro in the heart of the Latino Mission District. It’s early May. I hope our conversation will reveal those other sides of Rupert that are often ignored—mainly his work as a social thinker and cultural critic. *Comenzamos*. [Let’s get started!]:

GP: What are you up to?

RG: The most important thing for me is to continuously produce works of art.

GP: ¿Por qué...? [Why?]

RG: For the same reason it was so important to me as a youth living in Stockton (California)—because it gave me and still gives me a great sense of spiritual and political power and connectedness to something larger than myself. As a maker of objects, I need to continuously experience this undivided relationship between a profound spirituality and my socio-historical self. It allows me to feel existentially safe, to think critically, to want to continue living. If I lose the sense of wonderment and skillful accomplishment when I make art, I feel disjointed, disconnected. I fall apart.

GP: When critics approach your work, they often overlook its philosophical and spiritual dimensions and concentrate on the political content. Are you bothered by the art world's general inability to understand the multiple facets of your work?

RG: I've been pigeonholed since the late 1960s because of my involvement with the Chicano and Civil Rights movements. It has taken me almost twenty years of "contestation" to alter somewhat the stereotype of Rupert Garcia as the "radical poster-maker." Of course, I'm bothered by this pigeonholing, especially when it objectifies me, reduces me to a simple-minded thinker. But I don't mind that people consider me a critical Chicano artist, as long as they understand the complexity of the term. To be "Chicano" is above all to be a concerned human, and to be this means to be complex and multifaceted. It is true that my work is sometimes explicitly and suggestively political, but I am also concerned with many other things. A democracy demands that its citizens be critical, political, and vociferous, or in my case, also *visce-ferous*.

GP: Besides constantly having to fight the stereotypes that the dominant culture has conveniently assigned for us, we also have to face another dilemma. When the dominant culture expresses interest in our work, what it really wants is to *commodify* it; again, to strip from it its aesthetic and political complexities to make it palatable and marketable. In our case, what is wanted from us is Chicano art without thorns or chili.

RG: The commoditization of ethnicity, or of anything else, for that matter, is a big business in America, *que no...*? Euro-America loves to "embrace" other cultures, but this embrace can be fatal. It can make us spurious and plain. Works of art

by “successful” artists of color, curated by and for major institutions, generally appear very “beautiful” and “different,” but to succeed in that context, they must be sufficiently disconnected from the “not so beautiful” socio-political and aesthetic complexities that characterize the everyday life of most people of color.

Don’t misunderstand me! I’m not saying that works of art that do not clearly reference social reality in a certain way are wrong or incorrect, while work that does is correct. I am saying that despite a few recent, partially successful exhibitions, the tendency of some major museums and galleries is to curate more shows that include “inoffensive objects.” The representation of the artistic community by mainstream institutions is unbalanced. Artists usually make what they must, but curators select what they will.

“Artists of color,” whether Chicano, Latino, African American, Asian American or Native American, who create genuine works of contestation and great beauty are often talked about within extremely limiting parameters of “ethnicity” or “identity,” and always with the critical discourse of the so-called “Other.” The “ethnic artist” is often written about as existing and creating in a context unconnected from American history and culture, as if we were never part of it until now. We have always been part of American history and culture. We have always been part of the global cultural movements. The unspoken goal of the commoditization of ethnicity may be aimed at discrediting this fact and making us forget why these works of art exist in the first place.

The question of “identity” and ethnicity” is not only a *problem* for “people of color.” All people contend with these issues. Why? Because—and in addition to the intrinsic presence of the human spirit—human beings map and praxis their identity, and do so in a sociocultural context through time and space. It almost makes me crazy when I hear or read that we have a problem with identity, as if it fell from the sky directly on us and somehow missed so many other folks, and hence, that we alone created this problem.

As I see it, human beings are globally defining what it means to be a human being enigmatically hovering on a rotating, living sphere in the mysterious and wonderful cosmos. However, the way things seem to be going, and if we want to live peacefully together, we must work together nationally and internationally to creatively and critically mediate with those different and specific historically based material and ideational circumstances that have given rise to and perpetuate our present global crises.

GP: Rupert, give me a few examples of the commoditization of ethnicity.

RG: The Mexican icons of Emiliano Zapata and Frida Kahlo. For the U.S. dominant culture, Zapata seems to be always connected to a romanticized heritage of Mexico and to a Hollywood-ized portrayal of him by Marlon Brando, but to various Chicanos, making a picture of Zapata is something much more complex. It speaks to the indigenous and *mestizo raíces* [intermingling roots] of our direct identification with Mexico, but also speaks of Zapata's social struggle, and how that struggle impacted our own Chicano and Mexicano families and communities inside and outside Mexico. It helps us understand the reasons why and when many of our families came to the United States in the first place. Similarly, Kahlo seems to represent to many Americans the ultimate "Other." Miss Exótica, a Mexican trinket, something reified to be consumed. For me, Frida represents artistic and social commitment. Her intense and beautiful paintings and the will to make them are inspiring. Her dedication to things Mexican and to social justice is empowering. Despite the fact that our umbilical cord with Mexico has been politically severed, icons such as Zapata and Kahlo can give us a multi-faceted sense of continuity. But of course, this entire critical dimension is basically irrelevant to many in the United States. What the culture industry really wants is to simplify potentially perplexing cultural icons of any sort so they can be easily consumed. We are a society of cultural consumers. Here, anything can be made into a commodity. If you put on enough jelly and sugar, anything, absolutely anything, can be consumed—even "political art," most of the artists who are openly critical of the state are currently being shot by the seemingly invisible arrows of commoditization. To what extent will they be diluted? Time will tell.

GP: Many of us are not even aware we have been wounded by these arrows. To me the tricky discourse of "the Other" is a very effective strategy of exclusion and separation. There are *other* equally effective strategies. You have talked about how the so-called "post-modern" discourse has been used to exclude Latin Americans and US-born Latinos from the topography of contemporary American art.

RG: Absolutely. Some U.S. theoreticians say that postmodernism began in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but they forget to say that it began at that time mainly for them. For the oppressed people of the Americas, it really began at the outset

of the European conquest of this hemisphere, in 1492. Why do I say this? Because, as far as I can tell, modernism since the European Renaissance clearly defines a path of unprecedented ideas and practices of exploitation as well as a mechanical and disenchanting science and an exaggerated ego fractured from the collective. It is also the artistic expression of capitalism, Western humanism, and Euro-centrism understood as the measure of all things—the universal pretense,¹ the disconnection of the spirit from the body and nature. Modernism's ultimate objectives apparently are to “purify,” to collect, to quantify, and to separate the “Other” and nature from the dominating cultural and economic institutions and their supporters. And the result is the convenient historical amnesia that usually informs the mind of the colonizer.

For our indigenous and African ancestors, things were quite different. The moment that the Native Americans were colonized and Africans enslaved to be shipped to this continent, I mean, five minutes after they were captured, they began to protest. That's when post-modernism began. The battle against the conquest, colonization, and enslavement was and continues to be a critique, a “deconstruction” of the dominant social and cultural structures. When someone says, “I'm not going to accept your bullying me into believing that I am nothing, so you can believe you are everything,” to me that's post-modernism. If you believe that you are nothing, as the modernists would have liked, then you are effectively objectified and then, the only job left for you as a colonized artist is to uncritically emulate the European and Anglo-American aesthetics—avant-garde or not—rather than produce from what is truly a hybridized context.

GP: Let's talk about how the post-modernism of the late 1970s and early 1980s effectively excluded other forms of post-modern practice and thought. This post-modernism reigned in the U.S. academy and “mainstream” art world, which is the art marketplace, until the mid 1980s when it was made more complex by the debates on multiculturalism. When I first came to the United States from Mexico in the late 1970s, artists and critics were talking about their version of post-modernity as if it were a universal condition. To them, all Mexican art was caught in the spider web of pre-industrial romanticism. I was always raising hell and reminding them that only a handful of countries on the entire planet were undergoing the severe crises of advanced capitalism that produced their culturally specific version of post-modernism.

RG: You are right. “Writers and artists of color” have been talking about the re-mapping of European-based post-modernism. The fact is that the European and Anglo-American theoreticians of post-modernism rarely and insufficiently addressed issues of race and ethnicity. They infrequently recognized that many U.S. “artists of color” were by definition opposed to modernism, and a number of us saw modernism as historically based but a historical—as non-regional and as mono-disciplinary. Much of our recent artistic practices of the 1960s and 1970s, and its continuing legacy, have always contradicted many aspects of modernism. Chicano artists were almost always historical, regional, and figurative. We used the figure as connected to our particularities, specific regions, and heritages. We made pictures that created illusions of space and time that ignored the flatness of the canvas, if you will, and that spoke about the politics of protest and change. And this is, in many ways, a variety of post-modernism. Modernism is not only about art and ways of seeing, it is also, in part, about the international and national subjugation of and defiance by “non-European people,” and of their cultures, and about the oftentimes victorious attempts to control us and our natural resources, to exclude and push us away from the centers of power. Thus we have been variously opposed to modernism for centuries to save our very lives.

GP: Since the 1960s, Chicano and Mexican artists have been using such techniques as borrowed imagery, quoting, juxtaposition of image and text, and so on. We knew we were critiquing aspects of modernism, but we didn’t call ourselves “post-modern.”

RG: Sure. To us it was a mere strategy of *critique and resistance*. We didn’t make art to be just “intellectually interesting” or “aesthetically fashionable.” Our concerns—though at times essentialist and unfulfilled—were genuine. It was a popular and populist form of post-modernism connected to our social and cultural struggles, and it existed in various aspects all across the United States, and was, in many instances, “internationalist.”

Some critics have written that painting died and then came back to life, and, to paraphrase Kenneth Baker, that the restoration of American figurative art happened about the late 1970s, early 1980s. These critics must be talking about that narrow slice of American culture called the “art marketplace.” Many Latino and other “artists of color” have been involved with the figure since at least World

War II. If I read this right, when we do “A” it is seen, if it is seen at all, as insignificant by the culture industry, but when “A” is done by the Euro-Anglo-American artist in the context of the “art marketplace,” it is perceived as not only spectacular but somehow “universally meaningful.” What’s going on here? Is this the old wine of the racist “white man’s burden” in a new bottle?

GP: You always talk about the importance of regionalism as political and cultural praxis. The “discourse of universality” has also been used to exclude the art of Third World people inside and outside the U.S.

RG: Before I became more discerning, I used to believe in the pretense of universality as we know it and which I believe came out of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. It’s a very elitist French, a very elitist German idea. European bourgeois intellectuals were obsessed with a self-seeking definition of what truth and beauty is, of what science is. What they actually did was to develop a paradigm, “determining” the origin, nature, method, and limits of human knowledge, and then they imposed it on other cultures. They “forgot” to consult the people in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Though the ideas of the Enlightenment were extremely regional and historically specific, Europeans saw them as “universal” and “timeless;” their particular identities and idiosyncrasies were turned into a hegemonic banner that everybody else was supposed to unquestioningly carry around. Paradoxically, their most sinister contribution to universal thought was the fictional construction of a point of view and an ideology that determines who exists inside the human sphere of universality and who is outside it, “the Others.”

You know, Guillermo, some wonderful ideas and practices have unquestionably come (and still come) from Europe. Many of them stimulated revolutionary and national liberation movements worldwide and Western science has both saved as well as destroyed innumerable lives. The problem lies for me in the binary application of European epistemology—they are right and others are wrong. This Eurocentric arrogance and dominating point of view and behavior for one-sided economic and socio-cultural profits and power are what drive this vulgar praxis. And by the way, and obviously, one need not be Anglo or European alone to be greedy and exploitative. What I’m talking about is a certain point of view of the world. And that can potentially be internalized by any human being.

GP: But this philosophical arrogance existed even before the Enlightenment. I mean Columbus, Cortés & Company were already major practitioners of “universality.”

RG: Even before them. The Christian crusades of Europe in the Middle Ages went on a bullying tour around the Middle East for the “recovery” of the “Holy Land” from the Muslims. They successfully bullied other cultures and religions into believing they were not universal, simply because they didn’t look and think or behave like “Europeans.” They managed to physically and psychologically persuade other peoples into believing they were ugly, unintelligent, primitive, and therefore that they were inherently slaves. Of course the Europeans who created this mythology proposed themselves as the only saviors, the teachers and impresarios of truth and beauty.

GP: Many people still think like this nowadays. You are describing the mentality of a Hilton Kramer or a Jesse Helms as well as many “patriotic” and Christian American neo-conservatives. You are also describing the U.S. international policy. This country has inherited and expanded European colonial practices.

RG: Yes, and it frightens me very much to know this. The notion of universality is still used along with guns, economic pressure, and psychological suppression of “minorities.” The idea of universality still informs the myth that Western civilization is the one and only civilization. The only way to become human is to uncritically accept the paradigms of Western civilization, thus to be “willingly” colonized. It informs contemporary racism, sexism, and homophobia. It distorts our sense of self; it mutilates our dignity. Those who perpetuate this transcendental pretense of social and cultural being are also causing damage to themselves. This arbitrary binary construct must be dismantled if the idea of a diverse human family is to be affirmatively realized.

GP: What gestures and strategies do you use in your own work to dismantle all these various discourses of exclusion we’ve been talking about?

RG: The spiritual endurance to carry on is one such gesture. The perseverance of the work of many cultural practitioners testifies to this kind of persistence. In

terms of aesthetic strategies, the multi-panel—or the divided space of a single panel—format offers me a platform to dialectically address ideas, experiences, and cultural artifices that are usually perceived as contrary. The *multi-panel field* allows me to bring together these apparently “different” images, ideas, feelings, and colors into one visual and conceptual space. This synthesis reveals the mythology and danger of rigid, binary thinking.

I am determined to do my best to denounce the falsehood of the traditional binary construct of human understanding that, I believe, goes back to Plato. If we indiscriminately accept the existence of binary thinking, we are also accepting the fact that *there is* only a right way and a wrong way. While an either/or binary may be true for some things—either you eat food and drink water and live or if you don’t you will die. But it is quite another matter to say that a certain perspective on life as a whole is absolute and that differing points of view are not only irrelevant albeit unworthy of consideration!

Limiting constructs were obviously created to keep one side “pure” and in power, since the other side is seen as mongrel and weak. As *Mestizos y Mulattoes* how can we possibly subscribe to this refuted belief?

Another useful strategy is the mobility across disciplines. I am always moving from painting to drawing to posters to prints and back to painting again. This constant going back and forth from one medium to another is a great strategy to escape simplistic definitions, to remain in flux and therefore gather more freedom. I never feel that I am fixed to only making one kind of art. I love to move around just as in life. I mean, one is not just a cab driver, or just a father. The same cab driver might also be an aspiring actor or a labor activist, and many other things. By practicing a variety of media, I try to represent this multiplicity of identities.

Another strategy is what you call “expropriation,” *o sea* [I mean,] the subversive appropriation of images from multiple sources, both “dominant” and “marginal”; I constantly borrow images from history, from the media, from politics, from Pop culture, from Mexican folk culture, you name it.

GP: That’s fine, but nowadays everybody is into borrowing images from multiple sources. So what’s the difference between what you and other Chicanos do, and what some commercial post-modernist artists are doing?

RG: I think that many artists don't really understand the sources from which they draw, nor the original context of the images they borrow. They seem to not research the sources. They often blindly use this or that image because they find it cursorily striking, and that's all. They don't really "expropriate," they merely do pastiche. Pastiche is a very surface-oriented conglomeration of elements superficially borrowed from different cultures and eras, without an understanding of their profound implications. You know, the "post-modernist thing" that everything goes, and everything equals everything else. While everything is everything, they are not necessarily all equal in significance.

GP: What about the notion of *multi-contextuality*...? To exhibit or perform in multiple contexts and sites can also be very empowering and a very effective strategy to dismantle exclusionary discourses.

RG: I exhibit my work in major museums in the United States and other countries as well as in civic, university, and local community spaces. To me, all are possible venues. I show in all kinds of places because it counters the notion of exclusion and exclusivity. The objective is to always be open, to go wherever you want to go. The exclusionary notion is also a product of binary thinking: if you can do this, you can't do that. If you want to dismantle that dangerous notion, then you show wherever you want to show. From MoMA (New York) or the Tamayo Museum (Mexico City) to the Galería de la Raza (San Francisco). I mean, the value of human experience and the quality of art aren't exclusively determined by the exhibiting context. In other words, the context of MoMA alone shouldn't make my paintings more valuable than the context of the Galería.

GP: How do you see Chicanismo in the 1990s? I don't expect you to speak as a representative of all Chicanos. I am fully aware that yours is only one among a myriad of opinions.

RG: My perspectives on the historical "Artes Chicanos" (there existed more than one perspective) haven't changed much. To me, some of the ideas and practices of Chicano art continue to be concerned with the complex demand of art making and a complex struggle not exclusively about Chicanos. It is about the various struggles of the human family. However, the provincial and restrictive binary cultural

models historically developed by some Chicano theorists and artists can be *un-*prosperously used by any artist living and working in a context of adversity, but Chicanos with both a critical eye on the “outside world” of influence and domination and the “inside world” of Chicano culture and an inclusive consciousness can produce singular visions—culturally specific visions—that at the same time accept and acknowledge the profundity and plight of other cultures. To repeat, what I see as very important for Chicanismo in the 1990s is to not emulate the example of the limiting and essentializing cultural nationalism of the 1960s and 1970s. Given its context that kind of Chicanismo was affirming but it only partially worked then, and will only partially work now. Why? Because this particular discourse held the notion: there this is a single and unchanging “authentic Chicano-ness” hovering above history. It is intolerably exclusionary. It also creates “Others” not only between Chicanos and non-Chicanos but also among Mexican Americans themselves; it reproduces the same dominant and divisive paradigms that must be re-evaluated, dismantled and carefully reconstructed.

1

I am indebted to Robert C. Solomon’s book *The Bully Culture* (Lanham, Maryland: Littlefield Adams Quality Paperbacks, 1993), in which he critically examines Enlightenment and the idea of universality.

V.2.3 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 782463

ON OUR OWN TERMS

Felipe Ehrenberg, 1988

Felipe Ehrenberg (born 1943), the Mexican multidisciplinary artist, writes the introductory essay for the exhibition *¡Adivina! Latino Chicago Expressions*, organized by the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum (now the National Museum of Mexican Art). *¡Adivina!*—on view in Chicago from April 22 through July 10, 1988—was one of the first exhibitions on U.S. Latino art to have traveled to Latin America (Museo de Arte Moderno in Mexico City). Ehrenberg explores relationships being brokered at that time between the U.S. cultural establishment and those artists whose work had trickled “out” of barrio art centers and into the

mainstream. He describes a process that paradoxically acted as a wedge that further divided these artists' already embattled communities. Furthermore, he calls into question how these specific artists were chosen to represent North American Hispanics and asks whose criteria had been enforced in the wave of exhibitions on Hispanic art organized during the late 1980s and early 1990s [SEE SECTION V.1]. Ehrenberg concludes by calling for U.S. Latinos to define their Hispanicism "on their own terms." This is a transcription of the text's original publication [Felipe Ehrenberg, "On Our Own Terms," *¡Adivina! Latino Chicago Expressions*, (Chicago: Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum, Sept. 22–Oct. 30, 1988), 4–7].

A SERIES OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS within the art world and well beyond it indicate that Latino artists throughout the United States are poised on the brink of major reappraisals on the part of established historians, art critics and, not surprisingly, dealers. Members of the nation's fastest growing minority—more and more artists of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Chilean, Cuban, Salvadorian and other extractions—are seeing their work being virtually conjured out of their homes and studios, out of hardy little community galleries and out-of-the-way (read: *ethnic*) cultural centers, to be placed tantalizingly closer to the forefront of mainstream art and its coveted showcases. A parallel development is evident as the U.S. recognizes the worth of more artists from other countries in Latin America.

To be sure, it's still a mere handful of carefully selected individuals whose works trickle "out," but the phenomenon suggests that Hispanic and Latin American arts, in particular the visual arts, will soon snowball into a breakthrough of historic proportions.

"They're finally paying attention to us" seems to be a feeling growing among Hispanic art circles. At the same time, though, these attentions on the part of mainstream institutions, with their selective singling out of a few, are creating an atmosphere of mistrust. When one hears that so and so "sold out," that someone else has "gone commercial," that yet others have turned their backs on their communities' concerns, one can't help worrying over the possibility that the success of a few artists, instead of stimulating a sense of pride among their peers, is actually acting as a wedge, dividing the embattled communities over particular issues. I've even heard the concern voiced that the strict conditions surrounding mainstream's growing admittance of Latino art is precisely what is

undermining the various Hispanic's cultural universes which, as they offer each group a clear sense of belonging and identity, assures Hispanics their survival in a hostile environment.

The fact is that the number of major, national shows of Latino art seen in the last twenty years have been so few they can be counted on one hand, and the particularity they all share can be exemplified by two noteworthy ones that come to mind: the *Ancient Roots, New Visions* travelling exhibit organized nearly a decade ago by the Fondo del Sol in Washington, D.C. and the *Hispanic Art in the United States* [SEE DOCUMENTS V.1.3-V.1.7] organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and currently on a national tour. Both these and the others were, without exception, organized and funded by Anglo institutions. The works included were submitted to a rigorous screening process and—though spokespeople from different Hispanic art communities were consulted—the final criteria established by the organizers. Therefore, the question of *how* artists are called on to represent North American Hispanicism, by *whose* criterion is their work judged acceptable, and as a consequence, what the nature of their interaction with the greater society might be, becomes a most intriguing matter.

Since we can safely assume from this trend's thrust that these artists and the ones to come can play key roles in the country's cultural and social panorama, we shall have to take a much closer look at the show that concerns us here, which gathers the works by eighteen very high-caliber visual artists. What I'm saying is that we cannot afford to approach it as one more group exhibit by "local" and "Latino" artists as presented by *barrio* art centers in the past, but as a significant trailblazing exhibition for the particular reason that it has been organized by one of the only three existing Hispanic museums of art in the whole of the U.S., precisely at this point in time.

This approaching boom is fascinatingly complex. Reasons for it can be traced to the realm of aesthetics, certainly; but also to the clearly identifiable sociological, economical and, of course, political circumstances that accompany the plight of Latinos in the U.S. More importantly though, there are all too many reasons to be found in the new set of relationships currently being established by the U.S. between it and the rest of the American continent, not the least one being the fear of a Hispanic backlash over U.S. involvement in Central America.

In all likelihood, this catalog will be read by quite different sets of readers: firstly, we can be sure it will be examined closely by the exhibiting artists, and secondly by those artists in Chicago who were not included in the exhibit. If these two contingents are in any way like people in Rio de Janeiro, New York or Ouagadougou—and I've no indication they aren't—we can predict the former will enjoy a certain feeling of, well, smugness; whereas the latter might find themselves, let's say, dissatisfied. That is, they will be at odds with each other and divided in their feeling toward the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum.

The third group may be a Latino public who, though uninformed about the finer points of art, have the disposition and the sensibility to be moved (perhaps even changed) by the works here presented. It's very likely they will study and enjoy this exhibit and its catalog unconditionally, that is, oblivious to the difficulties and conflicts faced by the organizers behind the scenes.

In the fourth place, these notes will surely reach a larger—non-Latino public—some of which may be familiar with Hispanic cultures and with the great differences that exist between Cubans and Salvadorians, between Chileans and Mexicans, between Puerto Ricans and Nicaraguans; and some others who might, for the first time ever, discover that there actually exist artists of worth, who are Hispanic (and who live and work in Chicago, to boot!). For these it is important to offer as much information as possible about the many contradictions Latino artists face in their daily life and which are quite different to those faced by their Anglo colleagues.

Finally, we can hope that the referential nature of this catalog assures its worth and usefulness to as many people as possible, all unknown, for years to come. Whatever the conditions may then be (and we shouldn't be too optimistic) it will be important for that future public to be aware of the specific circumstances that conditioned the development of a minority's art.

If I've elaborated on the obvious and sketched a likeness of the readers I hope to reach, it's because too many things remain unspoken and thus escape analysis. I'm convinced the only possible high-profile negotiators who will be allowed to speak out loud and clear for the Hispanics, for the many different communities that constitute this 20 million strong minority, are precisely the artists and their works. Art among the Latino people actually contains the power to move and change. And it's through art that both, Latin Americans and North American Latinos can express our essence.

The times call for us to *close ranks* and define our Hispanicism *on our own terms*.

Carlos Fuentes, in a beautiful essay called “The Discovery of Mexico,” says: “I believe I then had the intuition that I would not rest until I came to grips myself with that common destiny which depended upon still another community: the community of time. . . . Events “made me understand that only in an act of the present can we make present the past as well as the future.” Let us then thank the artists gathered here today, and let us thank the dedicated people who, directly and indirectly, have given their time and energy to encourage the arts to flourish even under the most adverse conditions. Let us join forces with them knowing that before being Hispanic or Latino, the flight of imagination is simply human.

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LATIN AMERICAN ART’S U.S. EXPLOSION

Shifra M. Goldman, 1989

Shifra M. Goldman explores the “extra artistic” agendas behind the so-called Latin American art “boom” of the late 1980s in her critical essay from 1989. As she demonstrates, electoral politics, foreign policy, and even international and domestic market forces yielded considerable influence in rekindling an interest for Latin American and Latino art in the U.S. during the decade. Moreover, the essay urges readers to question how exhibitions on Latino and Latin American were organized and structured and draws attention to the underlying influences at play. Echoing Felipe Ehrenberg [SEE DOCUMENT V.2.3], Goldman concludes by demanding that Latin American art be valued on its own terms. The author first published the essay as “Latin American Art’s U.S. Explosion: Looking at a Gift Horse in the Mouth” in 1989 [*New Examiner* 17, no. 4 (December 1989), 25–29] and it was subsequently included in *Dimensions of the Americas: Art and Social Change in Latin American and the United States*, an anthology of her texts [“Looking at a Gift Horse in the Mouth,” (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 317–325], from which this transcription is made.

THE DECADE OF THE 1980s has ushered in an amazing proliferation of Latin American art shows at major U.S. art museums and numerous galleries, a phenomenon unknown since before World War II and, indeed, unknown since the cross-fertilization between Mexico and the United States during the 1930s and 1940s. At that time, U.S. exhibitions of Mexican art were common practice and North Americans learned about murals from the Mexicans. Historically, blockbuster shows of Latin American art have appeared at politically strategic moments. Such was the case with the 1930 *Mexican Arts* show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art during the Depression years, when Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco were becoming known in the United States. Scheduled ten years after the end of the Mexican Revolution, it was one of the earliest events triggered by U.S. needs for Mexican petroleum, an issue that remained a vital plank of U.S. foreign policy from 1919 until the 1970s oil crisis.¹

Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art at New York's Museum of Modern Art was mounted in 1940 (a year before the United States entered World War II), when it sought support and allies among Latin American countries that were also being wooed by the Nazis. The traveling exhibition *Masterworks of Mexican Art* took place in the 1960s, when the cold war was in full swing. It was followed fifteen years later by the yearlong "Mexico Today" Symposium in 1978, when U.S. petroleum and natural gas negotiations were again at stake. As the closest nation and the most important Latin American trade partner (to say nothing of the fact that Mexico has been a major artistic force throughout all the Americas during the twentieth century), it is not surprising that the U.S. has directed great attention toward Mexican art. But this is now changing. Though Mexico still has primacy, the art of other Latin American nations is becoming increasingly visible. Not . . . free [enough] from distorted museum presentations, not sufficiently [visible] to have any kind of parity with the Euro-American axis, but, nevertheless, no longer invisible. Recent traveling blockbusters begin and end with Mexico. *Diego Rivera: A Retrospective* opened at the Detroit Institute of Arts in 1986; *Hispanic Art in the United States: 30 Contemporary Painters and Sculptors* [SEE DOCUMENTS V.1.3-V.1.7] started its odyssey at Houston's Museum of Fine Arts in 1987; *Art of the Fantastic: Latin America, 1920-1987* [SEE DOCUMENT V.1.9] was organized by the Indianapolis Museum of Art in 1987; the Bronx Museum of the Arts opened *The Latin American Spirit: Art and Artists in the United States, 1920-1970* [SEE DOCUMENT V.1.8] in 1988; the same year, the Dallas Museum of Art received *Images of Mexico* from the Schirn Kunsthalle of Frankfurt.

UCLA's Wight Gallery is organizing *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation* for 1990, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art is scheduled for the largest Mexican art show ever (so rumor has it), also in 1990.² All, of course, are or will be accompanied by luxurious, well-illustrated catalogues which help to fill the lacuna created when the last survey of modern Latin American art in English went out of print in the United States.³ (How accurate and balanced a view is presented by the catalogues is, of course, another matter. The best of the catalogues, obviously, will be those whose editors turned to essayists conversant with the field.) Thus far, the exhibitions have been handsomely mounted in their home institutions—though some have suffered on the road—and many were complemented by programs of various kinds, from concerts and films to symposia.

All of these shows have been (or will be) surrounded by a flurry of reviews in each of the locations they visit. But judging by what has already appeared there is little analysis and even less critical evaluation. Critics—to say nothing of art historians—know very little about Latin American art. Therefore the reviews, with important exceptions, have generally ranged from gushing to stereotype. This essay undertakes to explore an aspect of the “boom” in Latin American art that has not been previously considered: the extra-artistic agendas behind the scenes.

Recent art criticism has tended to scrap older notions about art such as its “transcendentalism” or its universal aesthetic appeal, and focus on social forces and the art/investment market which frame the presentation of art today. (*Art in America* even published an extraordinary issue in July 1988 on “art and money.”) Some historians and critics (including this one) are faced with the uncomfortable realization that everything they write is, willy-nilly, grist for the art market mill. Nor is this a new phenomenon; the workings of the art market have been traced back to the whole concept of the modernist avant-garde in a provocative article revising our views of cubism.⁴ What is new, in the United States, is its application to Latin American and Latino art suddenly become “fashionable.”

It is probably more comfortable (and not necessarily contradictory) to be an idealist, with faith in the ultimate capabilities of the human race to create social structures in which art is not simply a commodity but has a communicative and emotional function not tied to its exchange value for a tiny elite group of international collectors. Nevertheless, facing the conflictive and manipulative world in which we presently live, the tendency (and the responsibility) is to continue to

deconstruct the surface appearance of things, looking for the reasoning behind the many dense ideological smokescreens that mask our apparent realities. Thus, while one celebrates the fact that U.S. mainstream art institutions have opted, throughout this decade, to seek funds for, to research, and to mount an unprecedented number of exhibitions featuring the art of Latin Americans—whether they reside in their native countries, in Europe, or in the United States—it is necessary to take a closer look at the projects and intentions of the presenters. There is also the need, in my opinion, to cast a critical eye at the actual configuration of these exhibits: their inclusions and exclusions of artists and movements, their *museography*, their publicity, their catalogue essays, their surrounding events, and their funding sources. Last, but not least, is the need to consider the social, political, and economic relationships that provide the framework and ambience for exhibitions that in a sense violate “the usual course of things.” Why these exhibitions, why at this moment in time?

“The use of artworks as symbolic carriers, as mediators of politics and as propaganda for secular and religious ideologies . . . is an old phenomenon.”⁵ The imperial Greeks and Romans were the first to recognize that the aesthetic power of artworks transcends their creators by enhancing the identification of the audience with that power. So, too, the status of the artworks’ sponsor, in a halo effect, is enhanced in the eyes of that audience. If the artworks are of universal significance, speaking across cultural boundaries so is their discerning patron or owner. However, the presentation of the artwork must be carefully orchestrated if the patron is to reap the benefits of the desired “halo.” Patrons today range from national to local governments, from giant corporations to smaller businesses, from oil companies to banks, from private foundations to private collectors.

Such orchestration has become more complicated and more necessary in recent years, as the world’s great artworks have been increasingly used in the competition between various national powers and are assigned various roles in international propaganda.⁶ What is presented here is a suggested outline for considering the relationship between the phenomenal increase in the number of Latin American art shows and the electoral politics, foreign policy, and international economics of the United States during this period.

ELECTORAL POLITICS

Mexicans in the U.S. have traditionally been Democrats, and Mexicans represent the largest Spanish-speaking voting bloc in the country. It was already clear during the 1988 elections to what lengths the Republicans would go to capture what might be a swing vote in the Southwest. Candidates for the presidency and for local offices in the Southwest, New York, and Miami are forced by sheer demographic considerations to appeal to the Latino vote. Supporting and promoting the arts and culture has been one of the methods used. Three bits of news spanning two Republican administrations point to those connections:

- (1) The appointment by Ronald Reagan of Texan Lauro F. Cabazos, president of Texas Tech University in Lubbock, to be Secretary of Education and the first “Hispanic” (for which we can read “Mexican”) in a U.S. Cabinet post. In the words of *Time* magazine, Cabazos was proposed “as a lure to draw Hispanic votes from the Democrats in November [1988].” The irony of this appointment is that it occurred during the waning months of the Reagan administration, which had not been known during its eight years for its interest in Latino politicians or in the mass of impoverished Mexicans living in the U.S., or, for that matter, in the problems of Mexico itself. George Bush (so proud of his command of Spanish on the campaign trail) was similarly careful to appoint Manuel Luján to his cabinet as Secretary of the Interior.
- (2) The presentation, by former President Reagan, of the prestigious Hispanic Heritage Award for a visual artist, to an almost unknown Colombian artist from Laguna Beach, California, whose fifteen years in the United States passed with no ties to the large Latino arts population of nearby Los Angeles. This truncated Latino, calling himself Orlando A.B. (his surnames “Agudelo-Botero” apparently being too much for non-Spanish speaking patrons to master), seems to have had as his major virtues the fact that he enjoyed apparent commercial success, that he publicly supported Nancy Reagan’s pet anti-drug project, and that he painted a picture described as one containing a dancer, the American

flag, the words of the Bill of Rights, and the words of the Battle Hymn of the Republic. The award was considered an insult by Representative Albert G. Bustamante of Texas, chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, because longtime resident Latino artists who participated with and contributed to the community were ignored. No one seems to have mentioned or considered the quality or importance of the artist's work.

- (3) The appearance of a special July 11, 1988, issue of *Time* magazine titled "Hispanic Culture Breaks Out of the Barrio," and subtitled "A Latin Wave Hits the Mainstream." Featured on the cover was a hastily painted mural portrait of Chicano actor Edward James Olmos. Apparently Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican visual and performance artists of the United States, the primary (though not the only) ones featured, have "arrived" when they are not only noticed but given major space in *Time*. The magazine presented a *mélange* of visual and performing arts, literature, food, fashion, and design. Ostensibly, the coverage in *Time* was to advise readers that the U.S. was ever ready to borrow the best from other cultures and that a new chic wave of Hispanic influence was exploding into the American cultural mainstream. Tucked away in one of the *Time* articles, however, was a more mundane consideration. According to this source, the past ten years have seen an explosive increase in U.S. immigration from Latin American countries and, consequently, "major advertisers are eager to tap the estimated \$134 billion in spending power wielded by Spanish-speaking Americans."

FOREIGN POLICY

The proliferation of modern Latin American art shows in the U.S. seems to begin in the early 1980s. The Reagan administration came aboard in 1981 with an ideological commitment to upset the Sandinista government in Nicaragua and to quell whatever revolutionary aspirations the peoples of El Salvador and Guatemala entertained toward ridding themselves of military dictatorships and oppressive living conditions. No easy solutions were forthcoming with military intervention via the "Contra" forces in Nicaragua, nor through the militarization of Honduras, nor through massive military assistance to El Salvador and Guatemala.

These were (and still are) unpopular wars for a majority of North Americans, who want no repeat of Vietnam. By 1982–83, opposition to Central American policies arose among major Latin American countries as well. Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, and Panama formed the first Contadora Group suing for political rather than military solutions in Central America. By 1986, they were joined by Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, and Peru. These eight countries contain more than 80 percent of the total population of Latin America, and, it might be mentioned, they also include countries with the greatest names in modern art. Their political weight and influence on world opinion were not to be taken lightly. It is hardly surprising, therefore, to discover that it was indeed in January 1986 that Frank Hodson, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and a firm Reagan supporter, made a special appearance at the meeting of the American Association of Art Museum Directors held in Puerto Rico to offer funds for cultural exchange between the United States and Latin America. NEA funds in sizable amounts have been channeled into exhibits already mentioned, and more exhibits are on the drawing board.

The reasons why artworks are considered politically useful vary depending on the speaker. According to Norton Simon, Los Angeles industrialist and Medici-like art collector: “Art can take a person and open him up in a way you couldn’t any other way.” Peter Solmssen, Advisor on the Arts for the U.S. State Department in 1976, was more explicit: “A visitor who has spent some hours admiring masterworks from a foreign collection is unlikely to have his political views significantly altered . . . [but] if the visitor acquires in the process a better understanding of the culture *which produces the art, and of the people who now treasure it*, that has political value for the U.S. [emphasis mine].” Others continue to insist on the traditional notion that art is above politics: “At its highest,” said *New York Times* editor Walter Goodman in 1977, “art has an integrity that sets it apart from the unending give and take of politics.”⁹ While this may be so for the artist—though the production of art that is directly political in its content might gainsay even that idea—it certainly has not been the case for extra-artistic organizers of art events. The ultimate irony is that nonpolitical works of art, and works of art in opposition to the ideology of the users, can just as readily be pressed into service.

Finally it can be said, and documented, that when a group of high quality artworks are too embarrassingly political in their open opposition to the ideology of the presenters, they can be eliminated. It is difficult for an art critic to

complain about exclusions in any art show unless such exclusions can convincingly be shown to be ideological in nature. Such was the case with a collection of exhibitions of modern Mexican art that circulated throughout the United States for an entire year as part of the “Mexico Today” program in 1978, which was conspicuous (with a few exceptions) for the absence of any artists connected with the Mexican School—including Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros—and of any younger artists with socially critical artworks. By Mexico Today’s focus on three artists (of great merit) who comprise the “aesthetic” or “contemplative” wings of contemporary Mexican art, the public’s view of Mexican art in general was distorted.

INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC ECONOMICS

To pursue the relationship between art and economics demonstrated in the “Mexico Today” year, it would be interesting to consider the implications of Central America and the Contadora nations once more, this time economically. It is hard to believe that economics doesn’t enter into consideration when one recalls that U.S. intervention today is occurring within a region whose countries were long known as “the banana republics” and dominated by the United Fruit Company. Company names change; Coca-Cola and other industries have entered the arena, but the dynamics remain similar. For the Contadora countries, there is the question of the foreign debts, great portions of which are owed to U.S. banks. When such countries talk about, and even implement, cessation of interest payments or renegotiation of interest rates, the discussion must turn to political economy. It must be recalled that Mexico and Venezuela, both of whom are major oil producers and major debtors, were the original organizers of the Contadora peace activities. If Latin American art exhibits can demonstrate U.S. goodwill, in spite of these formidable problems, their use becomes warranted.

Touching on domestic economics, it is only needful to recall the interesting statement called from *Time* magazine about the potential \$134 billion of possible sales to the Spanish-speaking community. This community is largely working class, but it also boasts a growing and prosperous middle class, increased by the Chicanos and Puerto Ricans who fought for higher educational opportunities in the 1960s and 1970s. Slick magazines now represent this upwardly mobile group and advertisers fill the pages of the magazines and local newspapers. Hard- and

soft-drink manufacturers have been in the forefront of solicitation for goodwill, and the polishing of their images, within these communities. Among them are: Miller, Budweiser, and Canadian Club whiskey, which have made considerable outlays for Latino art shows across the country. Canadian Club, with its three years of circulating the *Mira!* Hispanic art show is a case in point. The Colorado-based Coors Beer Company opened its *Expresiones Hispanos* touring art show in 1988, aiming to rectify (without a great degree of success) years of union busting, racism, and other ultra right activity. Big contributors to art shows have been the Rockefeller Foundation and the ARCO Corporation who underwrote the expensive traveling exhibit *Hispanic Art in the United States: Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors*.

On a purely local level in Los Angeles (and surely there are similar stories in other cities), the large supermarket chain Vons opened a Mexican-style bilingually labeled supermarket called “Tianguis” in East Los Angeles. In addition, a well-known gourmet restaurant, Spago’s, collaborating with TELACU, which is a huge nonprofit group geared to supporting Mexican small businesses, opened the Tamayo Restaurant (supported by the artist in person), which plans for crossover business by luring non-Mexican clientele to a normally avoided Chicano neighborhood where they will dine in luxury along with the Chicano middle class.

The biggest and most direct economic impact on Latin American art and artists, however, is found within the confines of the art market. This began on an international scale in 1977, almost concurrent with the “Mexico Today” program, when Sotheby Parke Bernet of New York opened its first auction of modern Mexican art. So successful was it that Sotheby’s has continued with modern Latin American art auctions every six months since. As the market for Old and Young European “Masters” soared, investors and speculators (including many Latin Americans) looking for high returns in a crisis market turned to Latin America, where prices were—and still are—relatively low on the international art market. Since the “boom,” prices for Latin American works have been raising, though not nearly as fast or as high as the works of Europeans and North Americans.

As a result, galleries throughout the country that previously had no interest whatsoever in Latino or Latin American art are rushing to find artists, and new galleries open continuously. The “instant success” of a small number of U.S. artists (just like “instant success” for many present day international “stars”) has not always been salutary. “From murals to mainstream,” “from rags to riches,” “from politics to personalities” might be the slogans. Nevertheless, this exposure

is to be welcomed when it brings into public view artists and original art forms that were held in scorn just a few short years ago. It is hoped that this is not just a fashion, or a passing fad.

Raised here briefly, and perhaps in an oversimplified manner, are some of the cogent points about extra-artistic considerations in the national phenomenon being experienced vis-à-vis Latin American art. These remarks are meant to offset the overly easy reaction heard repeatedly from Latin American artists and their supporters: “Oh,” they say, “finally we are being recognized; finally people are having a change of heart about our cultures.” It is more accurate to suggest that the change of heart is not based wholly on aesthetic considerations. But beyond that, Latin American art should be presented and valued in the international arena on its own terms. Young artists should not be swayed to tailor their work to what sells, or to what is acceptable to the art establishment. This is the ultimate consideration if Latin American art is to maintain the power and originality, the sense of fantasy as well as the sense of social purpose, the irony, wit, and sardonic criticism, the quality of the regional in fusion with the international that have inspired admiration even when this art was not “fashionable.” That is why it is necessary to look this gift horse in the mouth: to see if it really is a gift.

1

In 1927, Dwight Morrow of J.P. Morgan and Company, an astute and diplomatic man who had similarly intervened in Cuba during its 1921 sugar crisis, was appointed U.S. Ambassador to Mexico. His agenda was to persuade the [Plutarco Elías] Calles government not to enforce Article 27 of the revolutionary Mexican Constitution, which mandated that Mexican resources not remain in the hands of foreign interests. In the course of his activities, Morrow commissioned Diego Rivera to paint a fresco in the Cuernavaca town hall, thereby appealing to Mexican national pride. Between 1927 and 1930 (when the Metropolitan exhibition opened), Morrow convinced Calles to safeguard the interests of foreign capitalists who invested in Mexico. The principal holders of petroleum interests at the time were Great Britain and the United States. In 1932, two years before his political attack on Rivera (who had received mural commissions in the 1930s from Edsel Ford in Detroit and Nelson Rockefeller in New York), David Alfaro Siqueiros painted a mural in Los Angeles in which a portrait of the traitorous Calles was juxtaposed with one of J. P. Morgan.

2

The Diego Rivera retrospective featured 248 paintings, drawings, and mural studies; *Hispanic Art* includes thirty artists (five works each) from six countries, including the U.S.; *Art of the Fantastic* had twenty-nine artists from eleven countries with 125 works; over 230 works were chosen for the *Latin American Spirit* from 160 artist and fourteen countries, including the U.S.; *Images of Mexico* had over 350 works. (All figures are based on catalogues, checklists, or publicity of the original shows.) In 1990, the Metropolitan Museum of Art opened the blockbuster exhibit *Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries*.

3

Gilbert Chase's *Contemporary Art in Latin America* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1970).

4

See Robert Jensen, "The Avant-Garde and the Trade in Art," *Art Journal* 47, no. 4 (Winter 1988): 360–67. An earlier consideration of the ideology of vanguardism and its market relationship is Nicos Hadjinicolaou's "On the Ideology of Avant-Gardism," *Praxis*, no. 6 (1982; originally 1978): 39–70.

5

Judith Huggins Balfe, "Artworks as Symbols in International Politics," *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 1, no. 2 (Winter 1987): 5 (195).

6

Balfe, "Artworks as Symbols in International Politics," 5 (195).

7

"Milestones," *Time*, August 22, 1988: 69.

8

Betty Cuniberti, "An Artist's White House Award Draws a Puzzled Look from Latinos," *Los Angeles Times*, Orange County edition, September 16, 1988, Part V: 1.

9

Cited in Balfe, "Artworks as Symbols in International Politics," 6 (196).

V.2.5 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 776644

"FANTASTIC" ARE THE OTHERS

Aracy A. Amaral, 1987

Aracy A. Amaral originally presented this essay at a symposium held in conjunction with *Art of the Fantastic: Latin America, 1920–1987* at the Indianapolis Museum of Art [SEE DOCUMENT V.1.9]. The Brazilian art historian examines the significance of the term "fantastic," its association with fantasy and the subconscious, and its connotation of inferiority. Amaral criticizes what she considers to be the premise of the exhibition: a distorted, partial, and one-dimensional perspective on Latin American art offered to an uninformed international audience for whom *Art of the Fantastic* may have represented its first and only exposure to this specific field. Moreover, "'Fantástico' são outros" denounces the concept's dangerous potential to be used as a reductive catchall for the region's otherwise heterogeneous artistic production. The manuscript version of this text remained unpublished until 2006 when

it was included in her anthology that brought together writings produced over twenty-five years [“‘Fantástico’ são outros,” 1987, *Textos do trópico de Capricórnio: artigos e ensaios (1980–2005)*, *Circuitos de arte na América Latina e no Brasil*, vol. 2, (São Paulo: Editora 34 letras, 2006), 43–48].

WE BEGIN OUR REFLECTION on the theme of this exposition by consulting a primary source, the dictionary, and we find that “fantastic” (derived from the Greek *phantastikós* and from the Latin *phantasticu*) refers to that which exists only in fantasy or in the imagination: imaginary, illusory, unreal, fanciful, extravagant, phantasmagoric, unbelievable, extraordinary, prodigious, simulated, invented, that which exists solely in the imagination.¹

Plato instructs that apparitions are shadows and reflections produced by real things [*The Republic*] and, as such, he defines fantasy as the representation that emerges from “appearing.” In this sense, it opposes knowledge or reality. Rather than produce forms or ideas, fantasy begets “images.” Along that same line of thought and for that reason, a figure like Saint Augustine believed that “fantasy was a psychic power of inferior character, more closely associated with the emotional than the rational.”²

That dichotomy—which devalues, on one hand, the expression or the imagery associated with fantasy and the unconscious and privileges, on the other, the *erudite* expression based on intellect—leads Ida Rodriguez Prampolini to highlight the undue use of the term “surrealist” (frequently used as a wildcard in artistic terminology) whenever an artwork features “predominately exorbitant shapes and elements of fantasy or of the imagination.” Thus, according to her, the art of people of a “mythic or pre-logical mentality,” was described as surrealist on more than one occasion. It is even more curious to observe, according to the scholar from Mexico, that when the first Surrealism in Mexico exhibition took place in 1940, the works featured under the label “savage art” included pre-Columbian pieces as well as masks from New Guinea and of other origins.³

By depicting Latin America’s plastic production, the present exhibition focuses on the “unconscious” expression, that is the expression of magic, witchcraft, spirituality, or of the inner life depicted in paintings. Could this be a “trendy” moment for the art of our days, or is it the hegemonic countries’ cliché

way of viewing Latin America? Perhaps it is both. At a time when the Kassel Documenta appears to privilege the spiritual aspects of artistic expression, Indianapolis focuses on Latin American art as “fantastic”; the Bienal de São Paulo prepares a wing for the so-called “fantastic art” of Brazil; while La Villette, in Paris, prepares an international exposition of ecumenical character entitled *Les Magiciens de la Terre* [The Magicians of the Earth] which will open in December 1988.

When the major centers of cultural hegemony turn to a culturally rich continent such as Latin America, what do they really expect? Certainly, they expect some magic, which brings with it a stereotyped character, despite the global village in which the great artistic media of the Western world lives. But what do Europeans or North Americans know about the Latin American reality? In fact, nothing or next to nothing. They view us as a harmonious whole against the backdrop of dictatorships and, by extension, corruption, or (in an exoticist view) as living in a tropical paradise which, in reality, is only true for part of Latin America. Latin America’s urban culture paradoxically coexists with various levels of poverty and with a rural reality in the violent world in which we were created, a world which is also the source of our versatility [and our] ability to coexist with different realities—[this is] something the inhabitant of the First World could never even fathom.

For that reason, we are struck by the lack of sensitivity and understanding demonstrated by Michael Gibson, a correspondent for the *International Herald Tribune*, who, while visiting the last Bienal de São Paulo for three or four days, symptomatically pauses to reflect on the environmental works of two Brazilian artists—Alex Vallauri and Fernando Lucchesi—who come to the Bienal with their own perspectives on artistic production in a country like Brazil. (He does not even acknowledge Guto Lacaz, who is more closely associated—in terms of creativity—with technology.) The first environmental work depicts a spicy kitschiness in all its tropicalist glory; and the second is assembled with precarious materials, debris from an industrialized society, [and] utilized in a way intended to depict, according to the author, “the enthusiastic exuberance of Brazil’s historical baroque into a favela idiom.”⁴

Does the Indianapolis exhibition permit the unveiling or revealing of Latin America’s magical creativity, an aspect of our production which shows the “quintessential” side of our art, one that is different from that of the great

centers? Would this Latin American art that they want to be hot, tropical, (samba, cha-cha-chá, and tango) not first be an evasion of the reality before a hostile world or an affirmation before a mythic world of overwhelming force, imposing its presence as a unique power over cultures in which pragmatism does not reign, but whose cultural richness derived from its diversity offers a fertile “non-white art”? Could it be that when Gibson refers to Brazil as a country “full of potential talent, but which is handicapped by a cultural inferiority complex (derived from a colonial past) and an excessive concern with the aesthetic idiom spoken in the wealthier parts of the globe” that he is forgetting that the observation also rings true for the United States before World War II? And perhaps the way the organizers of this exhibition on “the fantastic” in Latin America want to represent our continent is how he wants to see Brazilian art.

But, in reality, the contemporary expression of Latin American art can be characterized as constructivist; having concrete (Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil) and kinetic (Venezuela) tendencies; especially depicting, through its urban elite, the *ordering of chaos*, as art critic Federico Moraes said; or aspiring to integrate itself into the orderly and industrialized universe of the First World.

It is nothing new for Latin Americans to rebel against the focus of our colleagues in the developed world who—in their inability to read or pinpoint our reality, our behavior, and our artistic expression—choose to understand our expression as that of *the alien*, “the fantastic.” That is, according to the great hegemonic centers (Paris, London, Berlin, New York), “the others” are “fantastic.” The “real” (what is real?) dimension belongs to the First World. Magic and exoticism are the polar opposite of that erudite reality. It is a cliché: the civilized person cannot easily fathom a universe different from his own, but it is a cliché that equally exposes his limited ability to comprehend a different environment. What is thus identified is an expression at the periphery of the great centers, like differentiating between “civilized” art and the art of marginalized people or the art of the people from the most remote corners of Antiquity, the Middle Ages, or from those groups belonging to theocratic societies in which rituals are mixed with life, branding their visual arts with their symbolism.

As [the Mexican writer] Carlos Fuentes observed, fantastic realism “is nothing more than a tropical label placed on surrealist literature from Latin America,” and that label, according to him, enables literature produced on our

continent to “penetrate the European and North American markets.” Rejecting labels for his works, which employ urban themes, Fuentes notes that the wave is stronger: “Abroad, all Latinos bear that label. It is more or less like saying that all Sicilians are mafiosos.” In any case, he confirms that this label represented a form of affirmation, and “today, there is a homogenous culture, a new literary cosmopolitanism, without metropolitanism where culture is said to be headquartered” in the literary realm, which overcame the “Latino trauma.”⁵

Could the same occur in the field of the visual arts? We have a number of questions regarding the art selected for display. It seems to us that this exhibition is extremely heterogeneous, despite the difficulty that arose since, in addition to wanting to conceive “fantastic art” as a global, artistic phenomenon, the exhibition aspired to focus Latin American art as an expression of themes like the search for or the affirmation of identity: particularly visible in the contributions of Wifredo Lam, Tarsila [do Amaral] and [Joaquín] Torres-García (who discovered their native “reality” vis-à-vis their contact with Europe), or Rufino Tamayo, [Fernando] Botero and Francisco Toledo. As a result and because of the extremely singular personalities, there emerges on our continent not-so-easily classifiable art such as the dolorous work of Frida Kahlo that can be placed alongside the surrealist contribution given the way in which the artist exposes herself in her work; [the paintings] of Ismael Nery, on the same generational track in Brazil; not to mention Xul Solar’s fascination; the ever-so-peculiar universe of Armando Reverón; and the surrealism of Roberto Matta. Though, why not the dream-like and time-defying environments of Pedro Figari? Why not the fantastic social realism of Antonio Berni? Artists who, because of their gestural-expressive charge were classified as “fantastic,” opposed to this peculiar group linked to Surrealism. Such is the case of Jacobo Borges, Antonio Henrique Amaral, and [Jorge] de La Vega. Evidence of the metaphysical side emerges in Roberto Aizenberg and in the sensuality of Armando Morales; popular taste as adapted by the artists is evident in the work of Beatriz Gonzalez and Vallauri, even though Carlos Zepa, from Venezuela, and Juan Camilo Uribe as well as Antonio Caro, both from Colombia, are noticeably omitted.

One cannot fail to notice the presence of eroticism—or wantonness, in the words of Eduardo Serrano from Bogotá—in the works of Colombian Jim Amaral or Leonel Góngora, which the very same critic termed “perverse ferocity.”

Perhaps this erotic and sexual tendency inescapable in Latin American art is also emphasized by the multidimensional shapes in the ceramic pieces of [Francisco] Brennand of Pernambuco, Brazil.

The climate of interiorization in artists like [Tilsa] Tsuchiya, Siron Franco, and the young [Guillermo] Kuitca stands in opposition to the magical landscapes with political overtones of Francisco González Gamarra and the sophisticated magical realism full of suggestive quotations by Alberto Gironella, next to which we can see the montages of Famese de Andrade or the altars displaying an uninhibited religiosity of the aforementioned Fernando Lucchesi. Obviously, we are familiar with the limitations and obstacles faced by an international exposition, the organizers of which did not put forth its best effort to ensure its successful execution. While we cannot comment on the works of the other artists because we are not familiar with all of them and although we have seen the first installation of the 1 Bienal de la Habana by José Bedia of Cuba, we know that they are paying attention, to some degree, to international fads. In this regard, it becomes more difficult to find continental singularity in the great urban centers.

Perhaps what disturbs us is the preoccupation with assigning labels to these artists, the assembly of whose work in Indianapolis enables the slight raising of the curtain that has heretofore obscured certain elements of Latin American art, revealing its rich creativity in the visual arts.

1

Aurélio Buarque de Holanda, *Novo dicionário*, 2nd ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1986).

2

José Ferrater Mora, *Diccionario de filosofía abreviado* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1975).

3

Ida Rodríguez Prampolini, *El surrealismo y el arte fantástico de México* (Mexico: UNAM-Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1969).

4

Michael Gibson, "São Paulo Showcases International Art," *International Herald Tribune*, 19–20 October 1985.

5

Cristina Grillo, "O escritor Carlos Fuentes dispensa etiquetas literárias," *Folha de S. Paulo*, May 1987.

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BEYOND “THE FANTASTIC”: FRAMING IDENTITY IN U.S. EXHIBITIONS OF LATIN AMERICAN ART

Mari Carmen Ramírez, 1992

Mari Carmen Ramírez (born 1955), the Puerto Rican-born curator and art historian, offers her take on the controversial survey exhibitions of Latin American and Latino art of the 1980s and early 1990s [SEE SECTION V.1]. Moving beyond a mere denunciation of the neo-colonial politics at work in this so-called exhibition boom [SEE SHIFRA M. GOLDMAN'S ANALYSIS OF THE “EXTRA-ARTISTIC” INFLUENCES BEHIND THIS PHENOMENON, DOCUMENT V.2.4], Ramírez analyzes some of the shortcomings of the Euro-American curatorial approach and the aesthetic biases revolving around exhibitions such as *Art of the Fantastic* [SEE DOCUMENT V.1.9] and *Hispanic Art in the United States* [SEE DOCUMENTS V.1.3–V.1.7]. Not only did these shows perpetuate reductive and homogenizing models of representation, but they also negated the possibility of developing exhibition criteria from within the region or among U.S. Latino artists. Moreover, in charting out a productive agenda for the 1990s, Ramírez issues a twofold call: to place Latin American/Latino U.S. artists on equal footing with Euro-America through increased self-representation and to resist demands to conform to preexisting conceptual models. The essay first appeared in the College Art Association's *Art Journal* [Mari Carmen Ramírez, “Beyond ‘the Fantastic’: Framing Identity in U.S. Exhibitions of Latin American Art,” *Art Journal*, vol. 51, no. 4, “Latin American Art” issue (Winter 1992), 60–68]. It was later reprinted in the volume *Beyond the Fantastic: Contemporary Art Criticism from Latin America* [Gerardo Mosquera, ed., (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press/Institute of International Visual Arts, 1996), 229–246] on which this version (with minimal corrections by the author) is based.

ART EXHIBITIONS ARE PRIVILEGED VEHICLES for the representation of individual and collective identities, whether they consciously set out to be so or not. By bringing together works produced by artists, as individuals or as members of a specific community, they allow insights into the ways those artists visually construct their self-image. This identity-projecting role of exhibitions has been at the heart of controversies surrounding the unprecedented number of shows of

Latin American/Latino art organized and funded by U.S. institutions (museums, galleries, alternative spaces) over the past decade or so. The exhibition boom has taken place at a time when the heightened visibility of the more than thirty million Latinos in the USA (as well as that of other Third World peoples and ethnic minorities) is forcing a series of unresolved problems on museums throughout the country. The denunciation by artists, art critics and supporters of the Latin American/Latino community of the cultural stereotypes presented by these exhibitions has brought the issue of the representation of this marginal culture directly into the heart of the U.S. mainstream.¹ At stake is not only the question of whether the image of the Latin American or Latino *other* that emerges from these shows truly engages the cultural constituencies it aims to represent, but also how museums and the art establishment at large respond to the cultural demands of an increasingly influential community.

The reasons why exhibitions are such contested vehicles for the definition and validation of Latin American art in the USA are deeply embedded in the neo-colonial legacy that has shaped U.S./Latin American relations since the nineteenth century. Despite the North American fascination with the exoticism of peoples south of the border, U.S. policies towards them have been characterized by attempts to undermine their sovereignty through outright intervention, exploitation of resources, financial manipulation and racial discrimination. As Shifra M. Goldman [SEE DOCUMENT V.2.4] has effectively argued, the Latino exhibition boom of the 1980s was no exception to this play of neo-colonial politics. Behind the exhibition glitter lay a web of political and diplomatic factors, ranging from U.S. attempts to dominate Central American governments and alienate their Latin American supporters, to the strategies of marketing firms attempting to corner the U.S. Latino consumer population (a factor that significantly influenced the emergence of a highly successful Latin American/Latino art market).²

The perception and representation of Latin American art in the USA have not only gone hand in hand with U.S. foreign policies but have also replicated the uneven axis of exchange between both continents.³ Latin American/Latino art, for instance, is not formally studied in art history programs except as “exotica” or as a manifestation of cultural ethnicity. The contributions of important artists from this culture, present on the U.S. scene since the 1920s, have until recently been largely ignored by the academic and art world establishment. With some notable exceptions, these artists are represented in only a handful of museum

collections. This unequal axis of exchange can also be blamed for the application of different standards of professionalism and scholarship to the organization of exhibitions of Latin American/Latino art in mainstream museums from the standards applied to other exhibitions. To wit: the majority of such exhibitions have been organized by curators of modern European art who are not versed in the language, history or traditions of the many countries that constitute Latin America. This factor, together with the relatively small quantity of art historical material available in English and the comparatively poor network of visual arts information originating in the countries themselves, has helped to entrench an easily stereotyped and marketable image of Latin American/Latino art in the USA.

The elaboration of an effective agenda for the 1990s, however, requires that we step beyond denunciation of the neo-colonial politics at work in the Latin American/Latino exhibition boom and focus more precisely on the ideological and conceptual premises that guided the organization of these art shows. At the heart of this phenomenon lies the issue of *who* articulates the identity of these groups. As the debates surrounding these exhibitions demonstrated, the most powerful agents in this process were neither the producers, nor the cultural groups represented, nor the audiences, but the North American exhibition curators who set out to *construct* specific narratives to define Latin American art.⁴ We may well ask how curators steeped in the values and symbols of a hegemonic culture can attempt to speak for, or represent, the very different, heterogeneous traditions embodied in the Latin “other-ness.” The answer is inevitably tied up with the conceptual crisis confronting the North American art museum as a result of the challenges that ethnic groups and new social movements are mounting against its self-centered exclusivist practices.

At the core of this problem lies the inadequacy of the conceptual framework that informs North American curatorial practices to deal with the complex logic that gave rise to modern art in a continent recently described by the Argentine cultural theorist Néstor García Canclini as the continent of the “semi,” i.e., *semi-modern, semi-developed, semi-European, semi-indigenous*. Any attempt to address the issues posed by modern art in Latin America has to start by questioning the validity of the term “Latin American art” itself, for in reality no single identity for the countries south of the border exists. Far from being a homogeneous region, Latin America is a conglomerate of more than twenty countries of diverse economic and social make-up, which in turn encompass a broad mixture of races and

several hundred ethnic groups. Behind the shared legacy of European colonialism, language and religion lie highly mixed societies in which the dynamic of “trans-culturation” has produced not a single hybrid culture but what can be more adequately characterized as a “heterogeneous ensemble.”⁵ Unlike Eastern or Native American indigenous cultures, Latin American culture, by reason of its colonial legacy, is inscribed in the Western tradition and has always functioned within its parameters. The specificity of its “alternate way of being Western” resides in its appropriation, recycling or “repossessing” of Euro-American culture to respond to the needs of Latin American realities.⁶ The same logic applies to the Latino population of the USA. Latinos do not comprise one sole race, or *ethnia*, but rather an amalgam of races, classes and national heritages that elude any attempt at easy classification. This admixture includes “conquered” citizens—such as Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans—as well as immigrants from South and Central America and the Caribbean.⁷ In this sense there is no Latino art per se, but a broad gamut of expressive modes and styles, each of which is socially and politically specific.

Despite the variety of themes and exhibition formats, it is possible to identify at least one pervasive exhibition model exemplified by the historical or contemporary surveys organized by large mainstream museums in the mid 1980s in response to demographic and art market trends. This model reflects the ideological framework of Euro-American (i.e., First World) modernism that constitutes the conceptual basis of the North American art museum network. Predicated on the tenets of a rational society, progress, universality and the autonomy of the aesthetic, this ideology however, is revealed as inherently flawed when it engages the concept of cultural or racial difference embodied in peripheral societies. There modernity has been at best delayed or incomplete and artistic developments have frequently evolved in tension with the prevailing mode of Western modernism. Curatorial practices tend to mask this intrinsic limitation by proceeding on the assumption that artistic production can be separated from its sociopolitical context (i.e., the notion that an “aesthetic will” exists over and above the parameters of culture), and that the role of museum exhibitions is to provide contexts for the presentation and contemplation of the “more purely artistic and poetic impulses of the individual.”⁸ Such practices rely on a teleological view of art based on sequences of formal change that privileges the concept of aesthetic innovation developed by the early twentieth-century avant-garde. They

also subscribe to an absolute notion of “aesthetic quality” that transcends cultural boundaries. In this way they select, elevate or exclude works to their own preordained and preconceived standards.

The historical or contemporary survey is the preferred vehicle for this approach as it allows for the organization of extensive bodies of artistic production into neat categories of aesthetic evolution into which the seemingly chaotic and disparate developments of the periphery can be made to fit. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of exhibitions of Latin American/Latino art organized in the 1980s followed the survey format so as to present and define in one fell swoop the difference that sets apart Latin American/Latino artists from their First World counterparts. In order to achieve their purposes they either applied the categories of the evolution of modern art in Europe or constructed their own.

On the other hand, at the heart of Euro-American modernism there has always been a uni-linear concept of enlightened progress that was destined to justify colonialism. The absorption or domination of less materially developed cultures, i.e., “others,” led in turn to the compilation of a vast reservoir of “primitive,” “exotic” sources that since the early part of the twentieth century has resulted in an alternative projection of modernity based on the irrational, the primitive and the unconscious. Curatorial practices based on this perspective, therefore, are not only incapable of viewing the arts of non-First World societies without the ethnological lens that resulted from colonialism, but also tend to divest these arts of the complexity of their origins and development. Such practices invariably replicate the us/them perspective whereby the achievements of the colonized subject are brought up for objective scrutiny to determine their degree of rationality or authenticity, thereby reducing them to derivative manifestations or variations of already existing tendencies. In the specific case of Latin American/Latino art we must point toward the legacy of Surrealism, that subversive child of the Western imagination, as having played a paramount role in shaping Euro-American conceptions of this art. From the point of view of a North American or European curator, only Surrealism can provide the repertoire of irrational, exotic sources by which to accommodate the development of the types of societies represented in Latin America. This attitude is, in turn, historically grounded in the enthusiasm of André Breton and the Surrealists for “the realities” of the New World embodied in Latin America, as well as the visibility among their ranks of such recognized artists as Wifredo Lam, Roberto Matta and Frida Kahlo.

Because of their impact, the way in which they tapped key themes of the Latin American/Latino experience, and the degree of controversy that they elicited, three exhibitions—*Art of the Fantastic: Latin America, 1920–1987* [SEE DOCUMENT V.1.9], organized by the Indianapolis Museum of Art in 1987; *Images of Mexico: The Contribution of Mexico to Twentieth-Century Art*, organized by the Frankfurt Kunsthalle and presented at the Dallas Museum of Art in 1988; and *Hispanic Art in the United States: Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors*, organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, in 1987—provide useful case studies for analyzing the shortcomings of the Euro-American approach toward Latin American/Latino art. *Art of the Fantastic* focused on the historical development of the Latin American version of modernism. It brought together more than thirty of the most distinguished Latin American artists of the twentieth century in an attempt to characterize the specific nature of their contribution to the modern art tradition. *Images of Mexico*, the largest exhibition to date on this subject, dealt with the development of modern art in Mexico from 1910 until approximately the early 1960s. The Houston show, on the other hand, presented the contemporary production of a group of thirty Latino artists from across the USA. It was the first such exhibition ever undertaken in a North American museum and the first attempt to legitimate Latino art in the context of the mainstream.

...

Art of the Fantastic best exemplifies the tendency toward reductionism and homogenization that underlay the representations of Latin American identity in these exhibitions. In defining the criteria for the show its curators, Holliday T. Day and Hollister Sturges [SEE DOCUMENT V.1.9], left aside the multiple viewpoints provided by the works themselves in order to zero in on their own concept of “the fantastic,” which they claimed was a “vehicle for twentieth-century artists of Latin America to define the special cultural identity that developed over a period of 400 years.” Identity here, as well as in the other two exhibitions, was conceived of in terms of a primal, ahistorical and instinctual essence that was presumed to convey the peculiarities of the Latin American character by allowing itself to be expressed through art. Thus, more than a formal resource originating in historically specific tendencies or artistic movements, the conception of *the fantastic* set forth by Day and Sturges denoted a system of collective representation based on the “juxtaposition, distortion or amalgamation of images and/

or materials that extend experience by contradicting our expectations formally or iconographically. . . . The fantastic may be an ingredient of almost any style, including geometric art.”⁹ As a result, the conception of Latin American identity conveyed through “the fantastic” came to signify something outside the real, predicated in opposition to the real, and articulated around the Latin/European, irrational/rational dichotomy. In each case the attempts by Latin American artists to solve aesthetic and formal problems similar to those confronted by their European counterparts—whether Piet Mondrian, Pablo Picasso, or Sandro Chia—were erased in favor of the instinctual impulse that gave rise to their artistic expression. The authority of the Euro-American discourse also led the curators to classify as “fantastic” other areas of rational endeavor, such as Latin American art history and criticism, which from their point of view were practiced as “poetic, intuitive and non-scientific” activities. Thus the contributions by Latin American scholars to *Art of the Fantastic* were printed at the end of the catalogue under the revealing heading of “Another View.”

The construction of “the fantastic” elaborated by Day and Sturges can be seen as an attempt to approximate to the concept of “lo real maravilloso” [marvelous realism], which has been present in Latin American art and culture since the 1940s and which could have served to illustrate the *trans-cultural* relationship between Latin American art and the European tradition. Yet Day and Sturges’s definition of “the fantastic” is at odds with the role that marvelous realism has played within the Latin American tradition.¹⁰ As Charles Merewether has argued, following Alejo Carpentier’s original formulation, in Latin America the marvelous is not outside the real, but an integral part of it; it exists within the real as a faith that carries the potential for a transformation of perception and thereby consciousness.¹¹ The literary critic Jean Franco also ascribes a productive function to the Latin American concept of the fantastic, as it allows for “ancient beliefs to coexist with modern ones as part of living memories,” in a way that offsets “Western notions of normality that mask terror, injustice and censorship.”¹² Thus, insofar as it asserts the possibility of a different reality, the Latin American version of the fantastic, whether expressed in the literature of Jorge Luis Borges or Alejo Carpentier, stands not for an irrational but rather for a rational project charged with connotations of emancipation and liberation.

The Surrealist and ethnographic bias of Euro-American modernism was nowhere better expressed than in the *Images of Mexico* exhibition. Here Mexico

emerged as the unspoiled reservoir—i.e., the land of “un-programmed Surrealism” (a description coined by the French Surrealist poet Antonin Artaud)—where, in the words of Erika Billeter, the exhibition’s curator: “poets, writers, and photographers found values which the highly civilized Western world could no longer provide.”¹³ These values were translated into the quality of “authenticity” that provided the underlying rationale for the exhibition. “Authenticity” for Billeter implied the search for a primal Indian essence not too muddled by the “programmatic” (i.e., political) objectives of Mexican muralism.

For Billeter it is the manifestation of this authentic spirit that constitutes the contribution of Mexico to twentieth-century art. Anything that departs from the representation of indigenous themes represents a “corruption” of this tradition. Her choice of works, therefore, deliberately left aside the public discourse and achievements of Mexican muralism, as well as the abstract and geometric movements of the 1960s and 1970s. It concentrated instead on the artistic production of Mexican artists as revealed in the more intimate vehicle of easel painting, which focused on depictions of everyday life, festivities, love, and death—areas where presumably the primal spirit of the Mexican people manifested itself. The search for *authenticity* also led Billeter to exalt the inaccurate fact that “in no other country have artists with little or no training achieved fame and honor as in Mexico,” and she proceeded to put forward the art of two women, Maria Izquierdo and Frida Kahlo, and an introvert, Abraham Ángel, as examples supporting the modernist myth of the marginalized, untrained artist. Billeter’s selection concluded with Francisco Toledo, in whose work the “Indian spirit continues to survive.”

The notion of *authenticity* however belies a fallacious Romantic construct, with no basis in the culture in which it is supposed to reside. The very process of *trans-culturation* from which Mexican society emerged cancels the validity of such a concept. Moreover, the image of the Indian that Billeter so zealously upholds was a construct of the political and cultural elites of the Mexican Revolution in order to facilitate national unity and development. It hid the defeat of the popular movements of the Mexican Revolution (represented by the forces of Villa and Zapata) at the hands of a middle class that was far removed from the reality of the exploited Indian population.¹⁴ Therefore, to continue to uphold such notions of *authenticity* as the basis for the selection of works to be included in exhibitions of Mexican or Latin American art is to reduce the artistic expression of these regions

to a one-dimensional or false mode of expression. This error ultimately functions to limit the potential of artists from these regions to engage the manifestations of European art on equal terms.¹⁵

If *Art of the Fantastic* and *Images of Mexico* set the framework for the discourse of the fantastic and Surrealism in the context of Latin American and Mexican art, the *Hispanic Art* show achieved something similar for the production of artists of Latin American descent.¹⁶ The homogenizing bias of modernism was at work from the start in the use of the controversial term “Hispanic” to lump together artists of such diverse origins as Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Chileans, Uruguayans, and many others of Latin descent. Not surprisingly, the curators approached “Hispanic art” as American art of a somewhat distinct sort, whose strategies of resistance and cultural affirmation only confirmed the “classic pattern” of a pluralistic society such as that of the USA, where different cultures have traditionally vied for recognition from the mainstream.¹⁷ Such a view obscures the status of Latinos as conquered peoples or immigrants that resulted from U.S. foreign policies towards Latin America, as well as the long-standing Latino tradition of political and cultural activism. In its place it upholds the image of an all-embracing and benevolent U.S. society. Identity here was reduced to ethnicity, as the glue that holds together artists of widely diverse populations and marks them out from the dominant society. Thus the exhibition set out to identify those areas where artists maintained their distinctiveness, while at the same time seeking to be part of mainstream America.

More than any of the other exhibitions mounted during the 1980s, the Houston show brought to the fore the mechanisms at work in the *aestheticizing bias* of European modernism. The curators’ insistence on underscoring the strong “aesthetic will” that manifested itself through Latino art—over and above the particularities of social and cultural development (termed the “sociological” aspects)—masked unwillingness to deal with the harsh realities of discrimination that have shaped the experience of Latino groups within North American society and have found strong expression in their art. Such a position also implied a task of justifying and elevating the expression of these groups from their marginal, grass-roots position to the realm of high art. In the words of John Beard-sley, co-curator of the exhibition, the selection of works “provided the basis for investigating the degree to which an enduring sense of ethnic distinctiveness

can enter the legitimate territory of high art;”¹⁸ the external us/them relation was then exemplified by the liberal-populist curators attempting to vindicate the artistic expression of the underdog. The *aestheticizing bias* was also responsible for the range of media chosen by the curators to represent the work of Latino artists. Leaving aside the important role that posters, prints, photography and video have played in Latino art, the curatorial choice was limited to painting and sculpture—the traditional media of high modernism. Undertaken in a decade that saw the return to painting of a neo-Expressionist, primitivistic bent, the selection focused almost exclusively on works that revealed, or rather mirrored, these tendencies, complemented with naïve and folk styles.

In line with the aesthetic emphasis of the exhibition, Beardsley’s co-curator Jane Livingston attempted a “stylistic” analysis of the work of Latinos. Moving from the “self-taught” to the folk and naïve artists, and ending with a sub-genre of “Latino/Hispanic modernism,” which she designated “Picassquesque Surrealism” (i.e., “Picasso via Lam, Matta and Miró”), she attempted to show how these artists evolved a common aesthetic out of their shared cultural legacy, combined with the influences of modern art.¹⁹ Rather than addressing the specificity of Latino visual expression, however, Livingston’s analysis revealed a displacement of European modernism’s concern with primal forms of organic identity, unspoiled means of expression and nostalgic reversion to craftsmanship vis-à-vis the aesthetic production of Latino artists. The first of these paradigms refers to the notion of the Latino subject as a primitive outcast or outsider inhabiting a space closer to nature and the pre-industrial, pre-modern world than his or her European or North American colleagues. This outsider/outcast paradigm was poignantly underscored by the selection of Martín Ramírez, a self-taught institutionalized schizophrenic of Mexican origin, as emblem for the exhibition. In turn, landscape images, such as those by Patricia González and Carlos Almaraz, came to define the primitive, magical space inhabited by the Latino “other-ness.” The primal, close-to-nature condition exalted by the exhibition framework was further echoed in the metaphors and images of animalism and animal-related phenomena used by art critics in their reviews of the show. For instance, Paul Richard, writing in the *Washington Post*, marveled at the half-human, half-animal characteristics of Hispanic art and the ability of artists to “shift their shapes,” becoming dogs, birds, sharks or tigers. While, according to

Richard, this dual nature has inevitably plunged the Latino artist into isolation, it is his or her ability to walk the edge between both worlds, to “look back towards one world while seeking out another,” that explains the strength and impact of his or her art.²⁰

Complementing the outsider/outcast paradigm is the emphasis on ritual and communal values that presumably characterize the life experience of Latino artists. As “the fantastic other,” deprived of a real place in the social structure of the dominant culture, Latino artists can find a signifying system only in the nostalgic remnants of the collective identity that ties them to their past and their origins. As a result the selection of works focused on the contextual elements of tradition, popular rites and communal lifestyles that define the marginal locus of the fantastic. Thus, in the *Hispanic Art* show, works by consciously naïve artists, such as Carmen Lomas Garza, or those working in folk traditions, such as Felix López or Felipe Archuleta, came to define the particular style grounded in the ethnicity of Latino artists. This type of characterization reveals that what the discourse of the fantastic upholds as “different” about these forms of art, and therefore what constitutes the “identity of the other,” remains tied to a traditional past or to a primitive, mythical or atavistic world view. Absent from the visual representation of the fantastic are examples of those works that stress the urban and cosmopolitan character informing much of the contemporary artistic production of Latino artists. By insisting on the ritual character of this art the discourse of the fantastic obliterates the fact that while such forms may be linked to the Latino artist’s cultural experience, that experience remains tied to his or her life in thriving urban spaces rather than to anything that is purely ethnic or exclusively a question of cultural identity. In addition, this discourse sidetracks the fact that the artists involved often approach these traditions with a critical perspective that questions the very conventions they set out to recover.

The third paradigm (the reversion to craftsmanship) relates to the formal signifiers of “the fantastic,” summarized by a bold, tropical color range; “chromatic and compositional lushness”; “impatience with the material” in favor of gut, savage expression and/or a ritualistic approach to formal conventions.²¹ While the formal qualities of North American art are seen as resting on rational analysis and the description of visual or emotional phenomena, the formal novelty of the Latino artist is seen to lie in his or her manipulation of the

materials of painting, mainly through such stylistic and expressive conventions as distortion, fractured lines and abusive color harmonies, whose effect is that of lifting the viewer past conventional reality into a realm of phantoms or a “material dream.”²² This view presupposes modernism’s fascination with the materiality of the painting medium itself as expressive objectification and assertion of the subject.

In the minds of the curators of these exhibitions, what justifies the construction of “the fantastic other” in the terms we have described thus far is the legitimizing category of Western “aesthetic quality.” By claiming that this quality can be recognized over and beyond any cultural or ethnic consideration, they are ultimately asserting the privileged position of the First World curator while simultaneously separating the form from its Latin American meaning. As a result the selection of artists and works in these exhibitions invariably functioned not as representative of what is “different” in Latin American art and culture but as a reflection of the modernist values and ideology of the First World museum curators. Rather than establishing a paradigmatic difference, the works selected for these shows ended up mirroring the fascination and concern with the elements of the exotic and the primitive implicit in modernism’s self-gratifying discourse. This condition explains the absence in the *Art of the Fantastic* and *Hispanic Art* shows of artists or artistic movements whose driving force either was not predicated directly on the tenets of European modernism or was based on a conscious rejection of all or certain aspects of modernism. Such was the case with the radical Chicano art movement, as well as that of Puerto Rican artists whose weapon against colonialism was the refusal to play the role of “modernism’s other.”

The construction of identity in the terms laid out by these exhibitions exposes the predicament of Latin American/Latino artists and intellectuals: it forces them to stage “authenticity,” and to insist on the configuration of a particular cultural image, as a means of opposing external, often dominating alternatives. Yet this is in every way a no-win situation, for modernism’s claim to the *representation of authenticity* exclusively in terms of formal innovation over and above the particularities of content has led to restricting the Latin American/Latino artist’s contribution to the expressive content of his/her images. Confronted by the more developed institutions and cultural structures of the West, the “difference” that marks the art of Latin American/Latino groups is cited as having no poten-

tial or capacity for formal or aesthetic innovation, remaining tied to an inherited system of artistic conventions. The authority of this discourse allowed the British art historian Edward Lucie-Smith, writing for the *Art of the Fantastic* exhibition catalogue, to sum up their contribution to Western art in the following terms: “The real strength of Latin American art now seems to lie in the ability to conjure up memorable images with great poetic power while only rather cautiously extending the limits of conventional formats.” . . . Latin American artists “have an ability to come close to the actual nerve of life, often while making a stand from a purely subjective viewpoint, which is missing from the work of most of their European and North American contemporaries.”²³

In this way “the fantastic” construct exposes social and political structures that underlie the Euro-American/Latino axis, i.e., it reasserts the dominance of the Western subject’s art over that of the Third World “other.” Deprived of any power of logic, reasoning or artistic innovation, “the fantastic” can only revel in its primal and exotic Third World of colors and emotions while being upheld as a picture or an image for aesthetic gratification. This phenomenon suggests that even the artists’ cultural identity, and therefore the nature of art production itself, can be manipulated through the representations of these particular visual discourses. This process—as Goldman has pointed out—becomes super-exploitation when applied by a developed to a dependent country.²⁴

Given the far-reaching implications of the representation of “the fantastic,” it is important to question the function of this discourse at the end of a decade when postmodernism has thoroughly attacked and dismantled many of the myths of modernism. On one hand, it could be argued that such a representation of Latin American art—which continues to be upheld by many U.S. museums—may be useful at the present moment of exhaustion of the modernist tradition and the art market’s transformation of the art object into the ultimate financial instrument. Like the primitive and naïve artists of high modernism, Latin American/Latino artists have emerged as substitutes for the role of pure artistic agent who reclaims value for a debased Western art. On the other hand, however it is useful to recall postmodernism’s recognition that “the other” is a mirror-construct or illusion of the West’s own making, a product of the hegemonic stance of modernism that has never produced anything but the fatal misappropriation and misrepresentation of other people’s cultures. Thus, if “the

fantastic other” can still be a relevant category with which to approach Latin American art, it is because the neo-colonial mind-set still governs museum practice in both continents.

It is precisely the process of homogenization at work in the modernist model that must be called into question if we want to arrive at an understanding of the fundamental logic implicit in the artistic production of the many societies that make up Latin America—and their counterparts in the USA. To attempt to reduce the complexity of these cultural groups to models of representation predicated on categories of Euro-American aesthetic development is to continue to perpetrate the legacy of exclusion, incorporation and domination. From this point of view, the principal issue at stake for the post-1992 agenda is not so much that of denouncing the self-centered authority of Europe or North America as that of engaging the specificity of the Latin American/Latino realities. In order to understand the overall implications of the project we must approach it from the perspective of the artists themselves and their traditions. From this vantage point it is the USA and Europe that constitute “the other.” This condition suggests a dual role for modern art in Latin America; one that is never recognized on account of the hegemonic nature of Western discourse but that is clearly manifest in the attitude of Latin American artists and intellectuals towards the cultural legacy of the West.

Néstor García Canclini has argued that Latin American society is the product of a complex process of blending in which different logics of development have intersected to create a culture that straddles various levels of tradition and modernity.²⁵ The two key questions that follow from this are: what did it mean to produce modern art in societies where the old and the new coexist at conflictive levels, indifferent to each other; and what was the nature of the modernism that developed there? The answers to these questions, in turn, call for recognition of the historical and ideological forces that have shaped the relationship of Latin American artists with Western modernism as well as a critical revision of such fundamental notions as *cultural identity*, *authenticity* and *appropriation*. As James Clifford has argued, these concepts do not stand for static, fixed essences but for a relational system based on a tactical, political or cultural invention.²⁶ The pervasive notion of *cultural identity* in the Latin American discourse, for instance, constitutes a specific ideology invoked by national elites at different historical

junctures in response to a confrontation with First World powers. From this point of view the consistent claims by Latin American/Latino artists on behalf of “cultural identity” constitute both a form of resistance to what can be termed “the appropriating gaze of the West,” and a way to secure a legitimate space for their artistic and cultural production.²⁷ This partly explains why, despite its pluralism of identities and modes of expression, a common trait of art produced in Latin America is its constant reference to the social or geographical context in which it was produced.

At the core of these issues lies the notion of *appropriation* and the particular role it has played in the Latin American/Latino version of modernism to counteract the ethnocentric discourse of the West. Whether self-consciously assuming their colonial condition, exalting their Mestizo [intermingled] “race,” or reclaiming after [Jorge Luis] Borges their “citizenship of the West,” Latin American/Latino artists have approached the artistic legacy of the West as an endless reservoir of conventions, images and motifs.²⁸ This has yielded a symbolic system based on hybridization and synthesis that has traditionally been condemned by Western authorities. And yet in this context appropriation assumes a positive function. Rather than leading to a pool of formal signifiers aimed at revitalizing a symbolic system or recreating its mirror-image, it may be considered, as Luis Camnitzer has observed, “a process of enrichment that can generate syncretistic work, helping to absorb and digest the impact of the imposed [or dominant] culture.”²⁹

Within this framework, a more accurate approach towards the representation of Latin American/Latino art implies a thorough questioning of the centrality of prevailing curatorial practices and the development of exhibition criteria from within the traditions and conventions of the many countries that make up Latin America or even the different groups that make up the Latino population of the USA. It implies, as Gerardo Mosquera has suggested, shifting the vertical axis of neo-colonialism to a horizontal one based on intercultural dialogue and exchange; it also calls for developing new exhibition formats.³⁰ This task, however, requires an interdisciplinary framework of analysis that current curatorial practices are unable to provide. The new framework would allow for the adequate analysis of the works of art within the structural web of meanings in which they are inscribed in the community for which they were generated. Such an approach, in turn, involves expanding the expertise of museums by the

incorporation of professionals versed in the Latin American/Latino heritage, experimenting with innovative exhibition formats and installations that will allow for the presentation of the points of view of those being represented, and ultimately revising the role and function of curators to turn them into mediators of cultural exchange. If demographic trends continue pressuring U.S. museums to respond to specific constituencies, the role of curators and exhibition organizers will have to change from one of exclusive arbiters of taste and quality to one closer to that of “cultural brokers,” whose function will be to mediate between the groups whose works they exhibit and audiences unfamiliar with the cultural traditions represented.

It is evident that the survey format is not only biased, but also outdated for these purposes. Finding an alternative however is a complicated issue. The conceptual quagmire in which many mainstream museums find themselves as a result of budgetary constraints and changes in constituency have shifted this responsibility to institutions outside the mainstream’s sphere of influence. In the past few years a number of such institutions have sought to correct the distortions imposed by what was clearly an untenable strategy of representation, with exhibitions that address the issues of Latin American and Latino identity from a revisionist perspective. For instance, *The Decade Show*, organized in 1990 by three New York institutions—the Studio Museum in Harlem, The New Museum of Contemporary Art and the Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art—provided a starting point by questioning prevalent museum practices. Instead of upholding the univocal perspectives of one or two curators, they introduced a comparative, thematic format grounded in the team efforts of curators from each of the communities that the exhibition purported to represent. Such valuable efforts, however, have suffered from their reliance on the mainstream for approval and sanctioning of their points of view, and therefore have not yet produced an adequate working model.³¹ What are needed in turn are more specifically focused exhibitions that allow for in-depth analysis of particular movements or groups of artists, as well as the establishment of comparative frames of analysis.

We can conclude that if North American curators are to arrive at a different, more equal, approach—that is, if they are to substitute for Latin America’s role of passive object that of being the subject of its own narrative—they will need to rethink the categories and parameters of their analysis beyond the limita-

tions imposed by the Euro-American framework. In turn, those of us working from within the Latin American/Latino perspectives will have to resist pressures to produce exhibitions that conform to the conceptual parameters of the mainstream. Such a rethinking and revamping of curatorial practices along these lines should open up the possibilities of apprehending the complex issues posed by Latin American/Latino art that the exhibition phenomenon of the 1980s buried under such artificial constructs as “the fantastic.”

1

For in-depth reviews of these shows as well as critiques of the myths and cultural stereotypes they projected, see Shifra M. Goldman, “Latin Visions and Revisions,” *Art in America* 76, no. 5 (May 1988), 138–47; 198–9; Edward Sullivan, “Mito y realidad: Arte latinoamericano en los Estados Unidos,” *Arte en Colombia* 41 (September 1989), 60–66; Charles Merewether, “The Phantasm of Origins: New York and the Art of Latin America,” *Art and Text* 30 (1989), 55–56; and Coco Fusco, “Hispanic Artists and Other Slurs,” *Village Voice*, August 9, 1988, 6–7.

2

Shifra M. Goldman, “Latin American Art’s U.S. Explosion: Looking a Gift Horse in the Mouth,” *New Art Examiner* 17, no. 4 (December 1989), 25–29. [SEE DOCUMENT V.2.4]

3

For an analysis of previous exhibition booms and their relationship to U.S. foreign policies, see Eva Cockcroft, “The United States and Socially Concerned Latin American Art: 1920–1970,” in Luis R Cancel et al., *The Latin American Spirit: Art and Artists in the United States, 1920–1970*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1988), 184–221. [SEE DOCUMENT V.1.8]

4

For more on these issues, see Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), especially 11–24; 151–58.

5

The concept of “trans-culturation” was originally introduced by the Cuban [ethnographer and researcher] Fernando Ortiz. It refers to the dynamic whereby different cultural matrices have a reciprocal impact—though not from positions of equality—to produce a heterogeneous ensemble much like “el ajiaco” [a Cuban stew with chili sauces] mentioned by Ortiz. See George Yudice, “We Are Not the World,” *Social Text* 10, no. 2–3 (1992), 209.

6

Ibid.

7

For more on the composition and ethos of the Latino community, see Juan Flores and Georg Yudice, “Living Borders/ Buscando América: Languages of Latino Self-Formation,” *Social Text* 24 (1990), 57–84.

8

Jane Livingston and John Beardsley, “The Poetics and Politics of Hispanic Art: A New Perspective,” in Karp and Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures*, 108–09. [SEE DOCUMENT V.1.6]

9

Day and Sturges, “Prologue,” *Art of the Fantastic*, 38. [SEE DOCUMENT V.1.9]

10

For an analysis of the impact that European Surrealism had on important Latin American cultural evolution such as “mundonovismo,” [Alejo] Carpentier’s “marvelous realism,” and [Jorge Luis] Borges’s fantastic literature, see Roberto González Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 108–29.

11

Merewether, “The Phantasm of Origins,” *Art and Text* 30, 54–56.

12

As paraphrased in Goldman, “Latin Visions and Revisions,” *Art in America* 76, 142–43.

13

Erika Billeter, ed., *Images of Mexico: The Contribution of Mexico to Twentieth-Century Art*, exhibition catalogue (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 1988), 21.

14

I have dealt extensively with this aspect of the representation of the Indian in Mexican art in “The Ideology and Politics of the Mexican Mural Movement,” Ph.D. dissertation (University of Chicago, 1989).

15

It should be noted that “the authenticity” bias also determined the selection and framework of the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s blockbuster exhibition *Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries*, in which Frida Kahlo had the honor of being the last “authentically Mexican” artist to have been included.

16

The term “Hispanic,” introduced in the 1970s by government and marketing technocrats to package a heterogeneous population, not only links these groups with the legacy of the Spanish Conquest, but also homogenizes the cultural, geographic, and racial differences that characterize the Latino population. The term “Latino” (from Latin America) is more inclusive, designating those who come or descend from a racially and culturally diverse geographical region where the Spanish legacy is dominant but not exclusive. See Shifra M. Goldman, “Homogenizing Hispanic Art,” *New Art Examiner* 15, no. 1 (September 1987), 31; and Lucy R Lippard, *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), 32–33.

17

Livingston and Beardsley, “The Poetics and Politics of Hispanic Art,” (1991), 110–11.

18

Beardsley, “And/Or Hispanic Art, American Culture,” in John Beardsley and Jane Livingston, *Hispanic Art in the United States: Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1987): 46.

19

Livingston, “Recent Hispanic Art: Style and Influence,” *Hispanic Art in the United States*, 106.

20

Paul Richard, “The Brilliant Assault,” *Washington Post*, October 10, 1987.

21

Livingston, “Recent Hispanic Art: Style and Influence,” *Hispanic Art in the United States*, 106.

22

Mark Stevens, “Devotees of the Fantastic,” *Newsweek*, September 7, 1987, 66.

23

Edward Lucie-Smith, "A Background to Latin American Art," in *Art of the Fantastic*, 35.

24

Shifra M. Goldman, "Re-writing the History of Mexican Art: The Politics and Economics of Contemporary Culture," in Jerry R. Ladman, ed., *Mexico: A Country in Crisis* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1986), 113.

25

Néstor García Canclini, *Culturas híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 1990).

26

James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988), 12.

27

Jean Fisher, "Magiciens de la Terre + Bildung," *Artforum* 28, no. 1 (September 1989), 158.

28

Jorge Luis Borges, "El escritor argentino y la tradición" (1928), *Obras completas* (Buenos Aires: Emece, 1972), 162–89.

29

Luis Camnitzer, "The Politics of Marginalization," paper presented at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, April, 1988.

30

Gerardo Mosquera, paper-presented at the international symposium "Arte e Identidad na América Latina," Memorial de América Latina, São Paulo, September 1991.

31

I did an analysis of the limitations of the multicultural model that guided these exhibitions in "Between Two Waters: Image and Identity in Latin American Art," paper presented at the international symposium "Arte e Identidad na América Latina," Memorial de América Latina, São Paulo, September 1991.

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LATIN AMERICAN CULTURES: MIMICRY OR DIFFERENCE?

Nelly Richard, 1983

Nelly Richard, the French-born cultural theorist and art critic based in Santiago, wrote this text for the catalogue of the 5th Biennale of Sydney in 1984. Richard had moved to Chile in 1970, the same year of the democratic election of the socialist president Salvador Allende.

Following the violent coup d'état and subsequent death of Allende on September 11, 1973, in a C.I.A. supported military coup, Richard mobilized and led a network of cutting-edge artists and intellectuals who protested the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet. The members of this *Escena de Avanzada*—a name that Richard herself devised for the Chilean avant-garde of the 1970s and 1980s—radicalized their aesthetic and literary pronouncements just as the de facto regime thwarted opposition and dissent through both torture and targeted repression. Her essay “Culturas latinoamericanas: ¿Culturas de la repetición o culturas de la diferencia?” draws attention to the need for the cultural counter-establishment to develop a cryptic language through which to denounce—and escape—censure and persecution. Deliberately taking a sometimes obscure, theoretical approach, Richard brings to the fore the peripheral practice of mimicry that appropriates international referents as well as aspects of its own supposedly primitive difference to produce work that is relevant and meaningful. The essay was first published in English in the catalogue for the 5th Biennale of Sydney [Nelly Richard, “Cultures of Repetition or Cultures of Difference,” in curator Leon Paroissien’s *5th Biennale of Sydney* (Sydney: Art Gallery of NSW, 1985)]. Santiago’s Galería Sur also published a version in Spanish as part of a catalogue sent to Australia [Nelly Richard, “Culturas latinoamericanas: ¿Culturas de la repetición o culturas de la diferencia?,” *arte & textos* 11 (Santiago: Galería Sur, December 1983), 1–3]. This translation is made from the Spanish text that Richard wrote in August of 1983.

I. FORMS OF REPRODUCTION

...

2. For those of us from Latin American countries, simply showing up in the international arena is challenging; it involves the historical struggle for our own legitimacy within a framework that tends to subordinate any sort of ancillary [marginal or peripheral] activity to the [artistic] forms promoted as paradigms by the international hegemony of the center. Fatally, the products of our cultures seem to be doomed to the role of mere duplications; any one of our forms then appears as dependent on other forms, internationalized by metropolitan cultures—as plain repetition or copy, imitation, dependent on the original registered by the international trademark. The totalitarian imprint of that international reading pattern leads to an interpretation of the whole set of phenomena within a unified

recording of the historical sequence—even if it comes from disagreement between accounts or contradictions. A pattern, as such, does not take into account the different processes specifying every history as the history of a minority—even as a form of dissidence with regard to the international dogma of Modernism.

Our forms, then, are “deprived” of recognition within their own fields of national and historical sanctioning; the order in which their circumstances are deployed is obliterated. The specificity of the sociocultural web determining the *here and now* of its emergence is thus deleted.

3. Peripheral cultures have great difficulty reversing the process that mutilates their ability to engage in dialogue; so they are doomed to being merely the recipients of impositions, just approving the messages of others. Deprived of the capacity of exchange, these cultures of ours are defined by “what is purely passive”; [this is] an attitude that, by and large, ratifies what has already been expressed. Therefore, the one-sidedness of international communication imposes upon [peripheral cultures] the condition of being mere subscribers to prevailing forms.

Incomplete elements in our cultures stem not only from the limited amount of information (quantity), but also from a deficit in our access to that information; a link [nevertheless] that the dominant cultures force us to keep with their monopoly of information (quality).

4. In forming themselves, our cultures have lagged behind historically and geographically, and such a delay is thus identified not by the production of forms but by their reproduction. Historically it has always been their fate to have belated contact with international models through copies. Therefore, for us, a work is nothing but the remains of itself: a delayed signal of something that has already happened, and whose value as an event has been canceled through repetition.

The art world excludes us as actors and even as witnesses, always presenting us after the fact—in a moment that is no longer there—and through several sorts of translations through which we become dubbed cultures.

Ours are also the cut-out cultures: they are shattered by the photographic device selecting images that are presented to us as excerpts and thus severed from their original contexts.

5. Every country that has been involved in the process of colonization can be defined by its own patchwork clothing; [in other words,] by the remnant character of its tradition. The recollection of its past is comprised of pieces of “alien” histories, shaped according to hybrid traces, several strata, and by the residue of petrified forms of language.

The international mechanism of imposing signs does not take into account the national specificity of productive complexes into which those signs will be inserted. Hence, our production appears uneven, and its series of references heterogeneous. So our histories feign a linear succession, a false continuity. Crowded by additions and adjustments, they imitate social correlation. As the clones of something else, they are alienated and relate to culture through mere substitution.

II. PRODUCTION OF FORMS

. . .

2. Even though we have to struggle against international mechanisms of empowerment operating over a consciousness whose evolution has been denied and to oppose the hegemonic pressures of Europe and the USA against our cultures, we cannot stop the fighting. We need to take advantage of every bit of information originated in those countries that we can gather, as well as to reprocess this information for our own purposes.

If colonization is alienating, equally alienating (in the sense of myth-making) is the longing to sanction the authentic “Latin American-ness” that only exists in the remains of the pre-colonial past.

The mythologizing of Latin American identity (based on “what is primitive”) in art aspires to [form] aboriginal caricatures of that identity. The exotic—the myth of the savage as a return to nature, the myth of native culture as a legendary spring, as folkloric memory—as well as the picturesque, lead Latin American culture into a regression of identity. The origins (indeed, what is the pre-cultural) may be the only legitimate skeleton key for unlocking a history abbreviated to the memory of its past and thus unable to participate in the real dynamics of the present.

Myth in our continent is a substratum nurturing its own forms of culture to yearn for the virginal, purely indigenous forms of culture free from all

foreign interference means to subtract Latin American culture from the whole process of a dialectical reading of history. In erasing the traces of conflict among different cultural backgrounds that have clashed during the diverse processes of colonialism, the possibility of a Latin American consciousness that is wide-open to a process of self criticism regarding its own contradictory condition—pierced by histories in disarray—is denied.

3. The gap between international and Latin American forms; the lack of synchronicity in the key movements; the backwardness of practices in relation to current international standards; and moreover, the difficulty, for example, of making sense of the “trans avant-garde’s” aesthetics in regions as marginal as ours imply failure. The wretched consciousness is severed [in two]: [on one side there is] the incomplete and failed consciousness that we have of our history, and on the other side is the satisfied consciousness of Europeans who relate to the past in terms of a history full of references. Such a historical overabundance leads European countries to art that gives way under the weight of their own display of references. In the case of Europe, any innovation is about to become a quote. Why? Because every form has necessarily been anticipated by a predecessor, and the new form [is simply absorbed] into [historical] continuity. The accumulation of references and proliferation of quotations, then, leads European cultures to constitute themselves in a web of both presuppositions and reminiscences.

In the case of Latin American practices, the movement is double-sided: born of deprivation (from not belonging) and stemming from residues (i.e., the remains of satiated cultures). [In Latin America,] tradition can hardly be considered as a heritage simply because it is based on a series of acts of dispossession. The game of quoting would only be a parody of history, a history into which a consciousness has been disinherited by limitless resources [dedicated to] expropriating life.

4. Refusing annexation by becoming the cultural territory [of someone else] does not mean shutting ourselves off from foreign contributions on behalf of so-called authentic, local consciousness. It means working on adequate forms of critical consciousness that allow evaluating such contributions in accordance with our own historical interests and pondering data and information received in relation to our own standards of value. Indeed, it means designing tactics with which we

struggle to permit ourselves to take advantage of what is imposed on us by *distorting* the original frame of reference.

The very same heterogeneity of references that formed our own “cut-out” identity; this historical shattering and disparity of our productive web; [and] this lack of continuity of our processes of cultural reference, [all] lead to a call for our [art] practices to become conceptual. This statement is made in a way that stresses marginalization—to the point of becoming productive. That is, shifting the whole process off-center.

For instance, our practices try to render through their own material processes the technological inequality between imposing signs and the local structures receiving those signals. [In doing so,] our practices reveal the social stratification that results from the incompatibility of different modes of working that are anachronistic.

More recently, Latin American [art] practices take as their theme (and even dramatize) their conditions of production. They generate a dynamic of signification capable of assimilating the charges addressed by the work insofar as it is divided among cultural processes antagonistic to each other.

5. In an ongoing rebellion against their origins, the Latin American “signs” [in the semiotic sense] struggle within the innermost spaces of our own discourse, so that they are transferred from one zone to another, conveying their respective [semantic] charges in a state of conflict. Imbedded in [our speech] are different levels of the process of developing culture—to which our histories have been submitted—that clash with each other. At the core of every “sign,” different levels of social historicity vie for position. A pair of opposing forces representing each of our histories struggle: one “from the outside” imposing meaning as if it were an international norm, the other, “from the inside,” assuming its own defense—which is not Native—in overt opposition to the external frame of reference.

The regime of censorship that reigns throughout Latin American countries impacting our cultures takes a double form. It stems from the imperialism of international cultural forces that make marginal our production with respect to the metropolitan webs of artistic signification. It is also due to the authoritarianism of *de facto* regimes under whose official modes of repression our countries are politically entrapped. [It implies] a double silencing, a double law of censorship that we have the responsibility to fight with all modes of discourse to create a

maneuvering field. In fact, that is the only place within reach where we can imprint the gesture of our disobedience. The discourse in our [art] practices becomes, in itself, such a *battlefield*, such an *emergency exit* for a meaning that subverts all kinds of totalitarian regimes.

The underlying tactics of resistance and of combat against “what is proscribed” is being developed to perfection as a subculture occupying the hidden face of the codes. [It involves] the sort of activity working through clandestine references; the one that disguises itself by means of techniques akin to asserting a transvestite meaning, where order is a parody in which the register of the law becomes a metaphor.

[In sum,] only by archaeologically [examining] our discourses will we be able to unearth the strata which lie beneath domination itself; [in other words,] in all that has been exhumed from so many graves.

VI

THE MULTI- CULTURAL SHIFT

INTRODUCTION BY MARI CARMEN RAMÍREZ

Catalina Parra's *What's It To You?*, 1982, mixed media, published in the essay "Border Culture: The Multicultural Paradigm," in the exhibition catalogue *The Decade Show* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, 1990), 98. [SEE DOCUMENT VI.1.1]. Courtesy of Catalina Parra, New York, NY.

MARI CARMEN RAMÍREZ

The Multicultural Shift

THE LAST DECADE OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY was no less critical for the ongoing effort to (re)define Latin American and Latino art than earlier, especially active and pivotal periods like the 1920s and 1960s. Given the debates featured in Chapters I through V, it would be logical to assume that by the end of the century the dialectical opposition between identity and modernity would have dissolved, opening up the possibility for some kind of synthesis; in reality, this did not happen.¹ As the documents gathered in this chapter will demonstrate, rather than disappearing or being resolved, many of the debates concerning *the existence or not* of Latin America or a Latin American art became especially heightened during this period. A series of political, economic, and ideological factors extending well into the initial decade of the twenty-first century contributed to the ongoing persistence of the identity/modernity debate. During the 1980s, the most important economies in the region (Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, and Chile) embraced neoliberalism—an economic philosophy based on the power of free markets and of deregulation to stimulate both short- and long-term economic growth. The success of these policies not only led to their widespread adoption throughout the area, but also paved the way for Latin American countries to become players in the newly emerging global order. By 1990, globalization was in full swing, threatening to tear down national boundaries in favor of porous borders and the unfettered traffic of individuals from one end of the globe to the other. This dynamic also paralleled the ascent of Postmodernism as the leading cultural ideology of late twentieth-century global capitalism. As its name suggests, Postmodernism represented an epistemological break with the ideological and philosophical absolutes stemming from the Enlightenment, which served as the foundation for Modernism. In this way, Postmodernism signaled the end of the so-called *grands récits*, or broad, teleological accounts and explanations (such as Nationalism), as well as of the structures and institutions (such as the national State) that supported all these metanarratives. Instead, Postmodernism promoted the values of

pluralism, relativism, and notions of borderless-ness, recycling, hybridism, and margins *versus* centers.

To the extent that these transformations questioned fundamental values that historically shaped Western hegemony, they served to empower peripheral societies and ethnic communities to take control of their own political and social agendas. This was a turning point in the history of these groups, shifting them from the margins to the center. In the United States (and later in Europe), the combined claims of ethnic and gender minorities gave rise to a new social movement known as Multiculturalism. This movement sought to usher in the utopian dream of a multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and multi-lingual society. In contrast to the melting pot model, the type of multifaceted society urged by Multiculturalism hinged on the peaceful and productive coexistence of its various ethnic groups, including the Latino, Asian, African, and Native American communities. The key to the success of this model lay in achieving a delicate balance between the specific cultural identities of the (sub-)groups and their impelling drive to participate in the broader mainstream culture. The impetus for Multiculturalism can be traced to the “Culture Wars” of the late 1980s and early 1990s waged by minority and new left-oriented groups against conservative forces that sought to undo the social and political gains of the Civil Rights era. Informed by both Post-structuralism and post-colonial theory, these groups set out to question entrenched inequalities, to tear down established canons, and, in the process, to redress the imposed silences, gaps, and outright biases of either hegemonic or official histories. Given its rooted idealism and overarching goals, Multiculturalism can be considered the last utopian movement of the twentieth century. From this point of view, the crucial role that it plays in the documents throughout Chapter VI provides a fitting closure to the present volume which began with the utopian ideologies related to the period of “Discovery.”

The selected documents in this chapter explore the multicultural shift of the 1990s from the perspective of its impact on both U.S. Latino and Latin American art. Unlike previous decades, the dynamic associated with globalization brought these two fields into closer contact with one another. On one hand, the trend toward worldwide integration of financial markets set in motion by globalization stimulated the interaction between U.S. and Latin American markets, creating the conditions for the increased flow of both real (economic) and symbolic (cultural) capital across the Americas. On the other hand, an ascendant

demographic trend in national statistics placed U.S. Latinos at the center of the multicultural movement serving as spokespersons for its radical claims. Hence, as early as 1989, Guillermo Gómez-Peña—one of the most emblematic personalities of the period—observed: “A major paradigm shift is taking place in front of our very eyes. The East Coast/West Coast cultural axis is being replaced by a North/South one. The need of United States culture to come to terms with the Latino American ‘cultural other’ has become a national debate. . . . The First and Third Worlds have mutually penetrated one another. The two Americas are totally intertwined” [SEE DOCUMENT VI.1.1]. At stake was the actual realization of the old dream of uniting divided Americas through active exchange between U.S. and Latino American culture.

The Latin American and Latino U.S. writers featured in this chapter—artists, critics, curators, art historians, and cultural studies specialists—represent a new breed of critical intellectuals trained in or exposed to postmodern theory (a combination of Marxism, Post-structuralism, psychoanalysis, semiotics, post-colonial studies, and the emerging disciplines of cultural and gender studies).² This explains *why* their discourse is far more abstract than the more literary or journalistic approach of the early twentieth-century *pensadores*. Prominent among this group is the newly empowered figure of the curator who—as a key agent of the increasingly fluid and globalized art world—took over the emblematic roles of artistic arbiter and spokesperson, previously assigned to the art critic. Because curators are essentially *mediators* between artists, institutions (museums, auction houses, galleries), and private interests (collectors, patrons), they were especially well positioned to respond to the demands of the new global system characterized by transnational flows, border exchanges, and the brokering of both symbolic and material goods. In tandem with the rise of the curator’s role, the art exhibition emerged during this decade as a *de facto* battleground for debating issues of identity or cultural representation [SEE CHAPTER VI], thereby consolidating a trend already in place since the 1980s.

VI.1 The section provocatively titled “Ideology Between Two Waters” captures the radical utopian zeitgeist of the early 1990s in the United States through two interrelated tropes: the notion of America as *living* border and the active mixing or blending of races—i.e., *mestizaje*—that results from ceaseless border interactions. In “Border Culture: The Multicultural Paradigm”—a masterful, manifesto-

like text that, much like David Alfaro Siqueiros's "Three Appeals" [SEE DOCUMENT II.1.2], served as a passionate call-to-arms for the new Latino generation of artists and intellectuals—Mexican writer, activist, and artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña summed up the spirit of the decade when he proclaimed: "Today, if there is a dominant culture, it is border culture" [SEE DOCUMENT VI.1.1]. The "border" alluded to by Gómez-Peña, as well as the other authors represented in this section, is both real and symbolic. As the Chicano curator Patricio Chavez points out, at 1,952 miles the Mexico/United States border is "where perceptions of the so-called First and Third Worlds thrive: the conquerors and the conquered, the rich and the poor." Its significance ultimately derives from the fact that it put both worlds "in collision, conflict, and competition" [SEE DOCUMENT VI.1.5]. The fluidity of the border and its function as a *place of confluence* for all the cultures of the Americas, in turn, led Latino cultural critics George Yudice and Juan Flores to propose the notion of a "living border." In their view, "the trope of a border culture is not thus simply another expression of postmodern aesthetic indeterminacy. . . . It corresponds to an ethos under formation; it is practice rather than *representation* of Latino identity. And it is on this terrain that Latinos wage their cultural politics as a 'social movement'" [SEE DOCUMENT VI.1.3].

Supported by an unprecedented demographic shift that positioned Latinos as the most rapidly rising minority in the United States, notions of mixing, racial blending, or *mestizaje* also emerged as key tropes of this decade. Now, however, the construct involved was not promoted exclusively by Latin American or Latino intellectuals, but it also found powerful advocates in the white liberal intelligentsia. In her landmark 1990 book *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America*, the American art historian, critic, and political activist Lucy R. Lippard argues that the multicultural model that had been so successful in Latin America since the colonial period now held the key to the long-term survival of the United States as a global society. In Lippard's view, to mix "means both to mate and to battle. Mixing is the central metaphor, the active social component of the intercultural process." Observing how this metaphor was being embraced by artists from all ethnicities and nationalities, she envisions—somewhat optimistically—a *rainbow future* "when everyone is of 'mixed race' and the barriers of race-as-class are destroyed. . ." [SEE DOCUMENT VI.1.2]. On this issue, Lippard's argument is informed by the projection that by the year 2000 the U.S. white population would be surpassed by Latinos and other peoples of color and by the fact that the

United States was also on track to be the second or third largest Spanish-speaking population in the world. Indeed, according to the 2010 census, the U.S. Latino population had exceeded 50 million citizens. Partly responding to these trends and realities, Lippard, like Luis Valdez, Shifra M. Goldman, and many other authors before her [SEE DOCUMENTS IV.1.1. AND IV.1.4], condemns the failure of the melting pot model in favor of “the prospect of a society that is cooperative rather than co-optive, syncretic rather than synthetic, multicultural rather than melted-down.” She thus advocates for “a gradual meeting of cultures, in which they are neither subsumed nor forgotten but are instead respectfully and equally recognized in their various degrees of autonomy” In Lippard’s view, Latin America offers more liberal attitudes toward racial purity as well as historically proven models of a mixed society that would be of use to U.S. multicultural groups in their struggle for legitimization.

Compounding the multicultural shift was the complexity and fluidity of the social formations at stake and the challenges that they posed for historians, sociologists, and anyone trying to make sense of them. Hence, not surprisingly, all the authors represented in this section call attention to the fact that the heterogeneity that characterizes Latinos is so broad and multifaceted that it is impossible to adequately define or categorize the many diverse peoples who are placed under this umbrella term. Unlike other ethnic groups, Latinos, as Yudice and Flores observe, are not a homogeneous racial or ethnic minority but rather a “very heterogeneous medley of races, classes and nationalities.” This medley includes “native-born U.S. citizens (predominantly Chicanos—Mexican-Americans—and Nuyoricans—‘mainland’ Puerto Ricans) and Latin American immigrants of all racial and national combinations. . . .” For this reason, the authors grouped together here agree that the existing terminology to describe or classify these groups (“Hispanic,” “ethnic,” “minority,” “marginal,” or “Third World”) was either biased or insufficient. This limitation also applied to the theoretical language associated with Postmodernism. Thus, as in earlier decades of the century, there arose the need to—once again—find a new terminology, a new iconography, and a new set of categories and definitions with which to engage the Latino experience. To satisfy this need, Gómez-Peña calls upon Latino artists to “re-baptize the world in our own terms.” This naturally led to a new coinage aimed at describing the frequently schizophrenic experience of juggling two cultures while resisting assimilation into the dominant one. Terms such as “bor-

derness" [GÓMEZ-PEÑA, DOCUMENT VI.1.1], "not-neither" [SEE SANDRA MARÍA ESTEVES, QUOTED IN DOCUMENT VI.1.3], and "between two waters" [MARI CARMEN RAMÍREZ, DOCUMENT VI.1.4] were concocted to describe productive positions from which artists and intellectuals could speak.

The emphasis on the border paradigm and on *mestizaje* as models for cultural production displaced the stress on cultural and aesthetic purity that characterized mainstream approaches toward art making in favor of biculturalism and hybridism as legitimate experiences. In this context, movements such as Chicano art emerged as exemplary cases of syncretic artistic manifestations. Tomás Ybarra-Frausto's classic 1990 essay "The Chicano Movement/The Movement of Chicano Art" and Chon A. Noriega's provocative "Barricades of Ideas: Latino Culture, Site Specific Installation and the U.S. Art Museum," engage two specific cases of art movements or genres guided by hybridism and a border ethos. Ybarra-Frausto locates one of the key differences at the core of the Chicano art movement in its unabashedly syncretic, *rasquache* (underdog) sensibility. According to him, *rasquachismo* is "neither an idea nor a style, but more of a pervasive attitude or taste" that expresses the experience of the working class "rooted in resourcefulness and adaptability." In contrast to the mainstream artist's generally restrained, disciplined, and comparably more staid practice, the *rasquache* artist manipulates materials "mindful of aesthetics" in an unrestrained, flamboyant way that privileges strident, shimmering colors, with a baroque tendency to cover every single inch of space with intricate forms or patterns [SEE DOCUMENT IV.1.6]. Noriega, in turn, makes the case for Latino installation art—in particular, the altar—as a form of art that owes as much to "the baroque and its synthesis with the indigenous practices and rituals of Our America than it does to the avant-garde and postmodern." In this way, he is able to locate the origins of Latino installation practice in vernacular traditions that lie outside the parameters of Eurocentric Modernism [SEE DOCUMENT IV.1.7].

In Ybarra-Frausto's and Noriega's claims for Latino art we can detect echoes of ideas espoused by writers from the early part of the century featured in the first chapters of this anthology, underscoring the cyclical nature of these central debates. Both authors, for instance, share a belief in Latino art as a specific manifestation of a much broader pan-American or pan-Latino identity, the roots of which extend as far back as the writings of the Cuban José Martí, some of which are featured in Chapters I and IV. In such a view, the fluid border loses its

relevance as it opens up to an undeniable continental community. Ybarra-Frausto asserts that “new cultural undercurrents among Chicanos call for an awareness of America as a continent and not a country. In the new typology, an emergent axis of influence might lead from Los Angeles to Mexico City, then from there, to Bogotá, Lima, Buenos Aires, Managua, Barcelona, and back to the *barrio*. For artists, such new political and aesthetic filiations expand the field with hallucinatory possibilities” [SEE DOCUMENT IV.1.6]. Martí’s concept of “Our America” [SEE DOCUMENT I.3.4] lies at the core of Noriega’s interpretation of site-specific art as an artistic modality particularly suited for the Latino cultural project. Noriega invokes Martí’s idea that anti-imperialism in the Americas requires a “pan-national American identity.” Like Martí, he imagines a co-lateral, democratic, hemispheric community capable of dislodging the hegemonic claims of either Europe or the United States. Also reminiscent of José María Torres Caicedo’s notion of the Multi-Homeland [SEE DOCUMENT I.3.3], Noriega’s community involves not one nation but “a class of nations” in an ethical relationship with one another that elevates them above issues of race or class. He thus envisions Latino art as a continuation of Martí’s project to “remap” America [SEE DOCUMENT IV.1.7].

Nevertheless, the racial and ethnic utopia envisioned by U.S. multicultural theorists was not exempt from contradictions and biases grounded in the harsh historical and political realities of both Latin America and the U.S. Latino groups. The intrinsic optimism of those who espoused a pan-national view of “our America” was quickly challenged by the distance separating the experience of U.S. Latinos from that of South and Central American citizens. As noted by Gómez-Peña, this continental zone of conflict represents “one of the most painful border wounds imaginable.” For that reason, those of us who enjoy a bicultural status—straddling “two waters”—found ourselves occupying an ideal vantage point from which to elaborate a critique of Multiculturalism in the early 1990s. During this period, I, like others who dwell in this “in-between” place, drew on my perspective as an “Islander” Puerto Rican curator working in the United States to examine critically the impact of the multicultural shift on the representation of Latin American and Latino art in U.S. museum and exhibition circuits. The most problematic issue facing Multiculturalism, I argued at the time, was the paradoxical blurring of the distinctions that constitute the groups gathered under the broad Latin American/Latino construct [SEE DOCUMENT VI.1.5]. In the multicultural strategy, these groups were lumped together “for

the sake of an overarching identity based on the common experience of racism and oppression.” Such a model was clearly inadequate to explain—and least of all *represent*—the disparate identities of marginal groups of Latin American artists. These ranged from U.S.-based Chicanos and Nuyoricans to Mexicans, South Americans, Central Americans, and Caribbean artists who, despite living in the United States, enjoyed strong ties to their countries of origin. Moreover, by placing the emphasis on *difference*, Multiculturalism was perpetrating the unequal division between “us” and “them,” since the “Other” is required to authorize this operation within an unequal axis that guarantees that “our” difference will never be recognized on its own terms.

VI.2 The multicultural shift was not exclusive to the U.S. Latino community and had significant repercussions in the Latin American artistic and cultural milieus as well. In each case, the challenge was to attempt to (re)define—one more time—the elusive concepts of Latin America(n) or Latino art. This time, however, the process of definition and redefinition occurred within the parameters of an increasingly global world and a postmodern discourse that claimed to privilege *difference*. The texts included in “The Transnational Mise-en-Scène” engage this debate while underscoring the problematic issues raised by the representation of Latin American and Latino art(ists) in contemporary art exhibitions organized in the United States and abroad in the 1990s, all within a more international, multicultural, and presumably borderless art world. Unlike previous displays focused on national or regional representations, a new slate of shows—rehearsing global flows and border metaphors—sought to tear down geographic and chronological categories in favor of more flexible, thematic groupings. Within this framework, the exhibition *Ante América* (1992) represented a brave initiative on the part of curators Gerardo Mosquera, Carolina Ponce de León, and Rachel Weiss to organize what was perhaps the first exhibition of Latin American art that embraced a multicultural, pan-Latin American model. As explained by Mosquera in the catalogue’s introduction: “*Ante América* [Facing the Americas] is a discourse of integration. South American, Caribbean, Central American, Native ones, Chicano, Afro-North American, Latin American and exiled artists in Europe take part in [this exhibition]. In a nutshell, this bundle of diversities that we classify—but cannot adequately represent—under the general designation of Latin America, or, better still, of *Nuestra América*, to use José Martí’s term, represents the Southern

Hemisphere, even if some of these artists live in the big cities of the North.” From the curators’ perspective, these artists constituted “a cultural, historical, economic, and social community, beyond obvious differences” or geographic classifications [SEE DOCUMENT VI.2.1]. In the increasingly globalized context of the early 1990s, *Ante América* was a critique of both the endogamy and seclusion promoted by exhausted nationalisms across the region as well as of the exacerbated concern with both the *Other* and *Otherness* as espoused by Postmodernism. While nationalism tended to erase the multi-ethnic and multi-racial complexity of the individual countries, the concern with *alterity* only masked a renewed hegemonic thirst for the same old story: exoticism. Hence, as Mosquera emphasizes, “The strategy of the dominated is geared towards integration, starting from what unites them, and [following Nelly Richard] by activating their difference ‘in face of the predominant international post-modern factor’” [SEE DOCUMENT VI.2.1].

At the opposite pole of *Ante América*’s integrationist model lies the premise of *Cartographies*, an international show organized by Brazilian curator Ivo Mesquita for Canada’s Winnipeg Art Gallery (1993) that directly questioned the multicultural model in favor of an updated version of the cosmopolitan position—now globalized—at play in these debates since the 1920s. Taking advantage of the expeditioner’s terminology popularized by globalization, Mesquita’s exhibition set out to examine whether “what we have come to call ‘Latin American’ in the visual arts is capable of describing and interpreting (in a holistic and productive manner) the art produced in the corresponding continent” [SEE DOCUMENT VI.2.2]. Like Traba and other writers from previous generations, Mesquita is convinced that the term belies an integration of the continent that, for the most part, does not exist. His position is based on a critique of both nationalism and Multiculturalism as ideological frameworks supported by an elaborate institutional network that promoted the “ghetto-ization” of Latin American art into artificial categories. His aspiration is thus to propose “another cartography” for contemporary art produced in Latin America, one that “broke with the limits imposed by geopolitics and institutionalized relationships.” The ultimate goal is: “to promote the possibility that the art which is produced there [in Latin America] ceases to be the other which is spoken of in order to guarantee it the full exercise of languages, preserving the specificity and autonomy of the poetics” [SEE DOCUMENT VI.2.2]. Complementing and expanding Mesquita’s argument is Paulo Herkenhoff’s “Incomplete Glossary of Sources of Latin American Art” [SEE DOCUMENT VI.2.3]. This brilliantly

conceived and ironical text consists of para-definitions of words and terms associated with Latin American art that deconstruct each other in an ongoing, circular loop. Through this cross-reference exercise, Herkenhoff manifests a postmodern skepticism toward all attempts to categorize or define Latin American art, thereby underscoring the futility of such efforts. Herkenhoff, together with Aracy A. Amaral and Frederico de Moraes, was—at that time—among the small number of critics championing Latin American art in Brazil. Despite a broader-based approach, there are traces in *Cartographies* of the Brazilian exceptionalist position vis-à-vis Latin America that we have seen articulated by others throughout this volume [SEE DOCUMENTS IN SECTION I.6].

The majority of authors who explored the impact of globalization on Latin American art and culture did so from the “big picture” perspective. That is, they focused on the macro-effects of capital flows, speculative investment, and other related factors on the dynamics of representation at play in exhibitions and museum or private collections generated inside or outside the region. In this context, literary and cultural theorist Nelly Richard’s “Latin American Art’s International Mise-en-Scène: Installation and Representation,” provides a rare example of a text that, while not completely eschewing the big-picture approach, seeks to delve deeply into the *micro* level [SEE DOCUMENT VI.2.5]. Specifically, Richard considers the impact of global staging operations on the reception of the art objects themselves. Richard proceeds from the fundamental question: Is it possible for artworks to convey issues of context that informed their creation to audiences unfamiliar with the culture in which they are inscribed? Moving beyond traditional issues of “quality,” Richard combines insights from anthropology and literary theory to develop a novel approach for assessing the critical performance and cultural translation operations at work in an audience’s reception and understanding of Latin American art works displayed in international exhibitions. And she concludes that “when applied to the postmodernist scenario of *difference*, the power of cultural representation is still an issue in terms of who controls the means of *staging the discourse* that will address the meaning of difference.”

At the core of the transnational mise-en-scène also lay the social and economic disparities and distortions reproduced with new intensity by globalization. The flattening and blurring of identities promoted by this economic phenomenon triggered reactions at the local level, as communities staged a defense of vernacular values and traditions. For Australian art critic and curator

Charles Merewether, the emphasis on accumulation promoted by both economic and mass media circuits had a detrimental effect on the representation of Latin American culture in the global centers. In his view, such attempts tended to subsume the historical specificity, heterogeneity, non-synchronous development, and struggle for self-representation of local groups into “the vertiginous circuits of exchange and consumption, and spectacle of a transnational and mass visual culture.” In this way, “the cultural condition of Latin America is globalized while the very real crisis of underdevelopment is left intact” [SEE DOCUMENT VI.2.4]. Undoubtedly, in a new world order that clearly benefits transnational interests as well as alliances between the private sector and the State, popular cultures—which constitute the vast majority of the populations of these countries—are the outright losers.

As we reach the end of this volume, the tone of some of our featured authors becomes more contentious. Confronted by the failure of global and multicultural agendas to deliver on their promises of a more porous, egalitarian, and multifaceted society, curators and critics have grown extremely wary of the ideological constructs with which the complexity of the region continues to be—if not pigeonholed—at least homogenized and standardized. For Mosquera, writing a decade after *Ante América*, the persistence of this issue reveals that art and culture in Latin America have suffered from “a neurosis of identity that is not completely cured” [SEE DOCUMENT IV.2.8]. For many others, the advantage of hindsight led to an entire century of ceaseless efforts focused on *resisting categorizations* that have resulted in an absolute dismissal of the very terms of this debate. As summarized by the Peruvian art historian and curator Gustavo Buntinx: “‘Latin America’ ended up being a French joke; ‘Iberoamérica,’ a [Francisco] Franco-period hyperbole; [and] Panamerica, a crass, gringo term. And the intermittent efforts to establish North-South axes or momentum have often responded to U.S. interests more than to a legitimate need for symbolic exchanges” [SEE DOCUMENT VI.2.7]. In a similar vein, after examining the decline of the concept of “Latin America” through three key moments of Latin American art—the international-leaning and utopian 1960s, the repressive 1970s, and the return to democracy in the 1980s—Mexico-based Argentinean cultural anthropologist Néstor García Canclini speculates about whether or not it “would be better to let go of Latin Americanisms or ‘the Latin American’” [SEE DOCUMENT VI.2.6] once and for all. However, as he

argues, this would go against the ever-increasing institutionalization of this category in political, cultural, and academic circles so that, although “one can doubt the existence of Latin America, it is evident that there are plenty of Latin Americanisms.”

While the options are limited, there is a general feeling that advances have been made and not everything is lost. As noted by Mosquera in 2003, since the 1990s the field of Latin American art has undergone significant transformations impacting the spheres of artistic production, art and cultural circulation and reception as well as institutions. Despite its limitations, globalization succeeded in opening up the international circuits for artists from Latin America and in stimulating a greater visibility and acceptance in international exhibitions, biennials, and museum collections. As a result, “Latin American art is beginning to be valued as an art without surnames. Instead of demanding that it declare its identity . . . [it] is now being recognized more and more as a participant in a general practice that does not by necessity show its context and that on occasion refers to art itself.” This leads Mosquera to outline the possibilities for transforming art historical perspectives and approaches, shifting from “Latin American art” to “art in Latin America” to “art from Latin America.” In his view, to stop using the category “Latin American art” means “to distance oneself from a simplified notion of art in Latin America and to highlight the extraordinary variety of symbolic production on the continent” [SEE DOCUMENT IV.2.8]. However, the Cuban critic is savvy enough to recognize that a mere semantic shift is not going to erase the axis of inequality and subordination that has characterized—until now and despite the gains of the last few decades—the Third World-like relationship between the region and the First World. Indeed, it is because of the persistence of this inequality that the debate over the so-called “identity” of Latin America has endured until today. Hence, the need, according to Mosquera, “to invert the direction of the current, not by reversing a binary scheme of transference but rather by contributing to pluralization in order to enrich and transform the existing situation.” For Buntinx, the solution needs to be more radical: the only “lasting, legitimate activation of something we could call the Americas” has to take place outside the logic and interests of the metropolitan centers. From this point of view, the decisive issue is *empowering the local*. That is, building structures—museums, collections, discourses, publications, archives, markets, circuits, and relationships (personal

and institutional) that “respond to our own symbolic needs, while facilitating an exchange with the cosmopolitan circuits, an exchange not characterized by subordination” [SEE DOCUMENT VI.2.7].

To conclude this anthology with the writings of Mosquera and Buntinx is appropriate, as both authors stress the key issue that has guided this entire volume: namely, that the terms “Latin America” and “Latino” are, among other things, inventions. In other words, they are constructs that served the ideological and political needs of artists and intellectuals throughout the twentieth century in their authentic struggle to identify the region in the face of the hegemonic assaults of Europe or the United States. To paraphrase these authors, in proposing a potential agenda for the immediate future, we can move forward, guided by the understanding that if Latin America does not exist, we can always reinvent it.

1

Eduardo Devés Valdés makes this point in *El pensamiento latinoamericano en el siglo XX. Tomo II: Desde la CEPAL al neoliberalismo (1950–1990)*, second edition, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2008), 310–11.

2

The majority of the authors included in this chapter formed part—at some point or another—of the U.S./Latin America Cultural Studies Network, an intellectual platform sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation to foster debate on issues affecting culture and society in the Americas.

VI.1. IDEOLOGY BETWEEN TWO WATERS

VI.2. THE TRANSNATIONAL MISE-EN-SCÈNE

VI.1

IDEOLOGY BETWEEN TWO WATERS

VI.1.1 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1065568

THE MULTICULTURAL PARADIGM

Guillermo Gómez-Peña, 1990

This is Guillermo Gómez-Peña's contribution to the catalogue for the exhibition *The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s* organized in 1990 by the Studio Museum in Harlem, the New Museum of Contemporary Art, and the now-defunct Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art (MoCHA) in New York. The Mexican-born writer and performance artist—who helped establish San Diego's Border Arts Workshop in 1984—declares that U.S. culture is becoming increasingly and fundamentally multicultural. Furthermore, Gómez-Peña states that the “border experience” has refashioned the United States into a pluralistic entity without a discernible dominant culture. In his critical texts and art performances of the 1980s and early 1990s (“Border Culture” included), he articulated key concerns of a new generation of Latino artists in the United States. Primarily, they demanded that mainstream culture rethink its outdated and limited understanding of Latin American and Latino art. In this essay, Gómez-Peña signaled an unprecedented effort to encourage Latino artists to align themselves with other minorities in the promotion of Multiculturalism. The present version comes from the essay's original publication [Guillermo Gómez-Peña, “Border Culture: The Multicultural Paradigm,” *The Decade Show*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, 1990), 93–103].

BORDER CULTURE¹

It's 1989 in this troubled continent accidentally called America. A major paradigm shift is taking place in front of our very eyes. The East Coast/West Coast cultural axis is being replaced by a North/South one. The need of United States culture to

come to terms with the Latino American “cultural other” has become a national debate. Everywhere I go, I meet people seriously interested in our ideas and cultural models. “The art, film, and literary worlds are finally looking south.” To look south means to remember, to recapture one’s historical self. For the United States, this historical self extends from the early Native American cultures to the most recent immigration from Laos or Guatemala. It’s 1989 in this troubled country mistakenly called America. The current Latino and Asian immigration to the United States is the direct result of international conflicts between the so-called “First” and “Third Worlds.” The colonized cultures are sliding into the space of the colonizer; and in doing so they are redefining its borders and its culture. (A similar phenomenon is occurring in Europe with African immigration.)

The First and Third Worlds have mutually penetrated one another. The two Americas are totally intertwined. The complex demographic, social, and linguistic processes that are transforming this country into a member of the “Second World” (or perhaps Fourth World?) are being reflected in the art and thought produced by Latinos, blacks, Asians, Native Americans, and Anglo-Europeans. Unlike the images on television or in commercial cinema, depicting a mono-cultural middle-class world existing outside of international crises, *contemporary United States society is fundamentally multicultural, multilingual, and socially polarized. So is its art.*

Whenever and wherever two or more cultures meet—peacefully or violently—there is a border experience.

In order to describe the trans-, inter-, and multicultural processes that are at the core of our contemporary border experience as Latino artists in the United States, we need to find a new terminology, a new iconography, and a new set of categories and definitions. “We need to re-baptize the world in our own terms.” The language of postmodernism is ethnocentric and insufficient. And so is the existing language of cultural institutions and funding agencies. Terms like “Hispanic,” “Latino,” “ethnic,” “minority,” “marginal,” “alternatives,” and “Third World,” among others, are inaccurate and loaded with ideological implications. They create categories and hierarchies that promote political dependence and cultural underestimation. In the absence of a more enlightened terminology, we have no choice but to use them with extreme care.

My artistic sensibility as a de-territorialized Mexican American artist living a permanent border experience cannot be explained solely by accepted

historical notions of the twentieth-century Western vanguard (from Dada to techno-performance). I am as Western and American as Laurie Anderson or Terry Allen. Yet my primary traditions are Chicano and Latin American art, literature, and political thought. We must realize that the West has been redefined. The South and East are already in the West. And being American today means participating in the drafting of a new cultural typography.

Let's get it straight: America is a continent not a country. Latin America encompasses more than half of America. Quechuas, Mixtecos, and Iroquois are American (not United States citizens). Chicano, Nuyorrican, Cajun, Afro-Caribbean and Quebecois cultures are American as well. Mexicans and Canadians are also North Americans. Newly arrived Vietnamese and Laotians will soon become Americans. United States Anglo-European culture is but a mere component of a much larger cultural complex in constant metamorphosis. This pluralistic America within the United States can be found among other places in the Indian reservations and the Chicano barrios of the Southwest, the black neighborhoods of Washington or Detroit, or the multiracial barrios of Chicago, Manhattan, San Francisco, Los Angeles, or Miami. This *sui generis* America is no longer part of the First World. It still has no name or configuration; but "as artists and cultural leaders, we have the responsibility to reflect it."

Despite the great cultural mirage sponsored by the people in power, everywhere we look we find pluralism, crises, and no synchronicity. The so-called dominant culture is no longer dominant. Dominant culture is a meta-reality that only exists in the virtual space of the mainstream media and in the ideologically and aesthetically controlled spaces of the more established cultural institutions. Today, if there is a dominant culture, it is border culture. And those who still haven't crossed a border will do it very soon. All Americans (from the vast continent America) were, are, or will be border crossers. "All Mexicans," says Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, "are potential Chicanos." As you read this text, you are crossing a border yourself.

INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

The social and ethnic fabric of the United States is filled with interstitial wounds, invisible to those who didn't experience the events that generated them, or who are victimized by historical amnesia. Those who cannot see these wounds feel

frustrated by the hardships of intercultural dialogue. “Intercultural dialogue unleashes the demons of history.” [The New York-based artist] Arlene Raven once told me, “In order to heal the wound, we first have to open it.” In 1989, we are just opening the wound. To truly communicate with the cultural other is an extremely painful and scary experience. It is like getting lost in a forest of misconceptions or walking on mined territory. The territory of intercultural dialogue is abrupt and labyrinthine. It is filled with geysers and cracks, with intolerant ghosts and invisible walls. Anglo-Americans are filled with stereotypical notions about Latinos and Latino American art. Latin Americans are exaggeratedly distrustful of initiatives toward bi-national dialogue coming from this side/*otro lado*. Bicultural Latinos in the United States (be they Chicanos, Nuyorricans, or others) and mono-cultural citizens of Latin America have a hard time getting along. This conflict represents one of the most painful border wounds, a wound in the middle of a family, a bitter split between two lovers from the same hometown.

Fear is the sign of the times. The 1980s were characterized by a culture of fear. Everywhere I go, I meet Anglo-Americans immersed in fear. They are scared of us, the other, taking over “their country,” their jobs, their neighborhoods, their universities, their art world. To “them,” “we” are a whole package that includes an indistinct Spanish language, weird art, gang activity, drugs, “illegal aliens,” and potential terrorism. They don’t realize that their fear has been implanted as a form of political control: that this fear is the very source of the endemic violence that has been affecting this society.

Border culture can help dismantle the mechanisms of fear. Border culture can guide us back to common ground and improve our negotiating skills. Border culture is a process of negotiation towards utopia: but in this case, utopia means peaceful coexistence and fruitful cooperation. The border is all we share: *La frontera es lo único que compartimos*.

My border colleagues and I are involved in a tripartite debate around separatism. Some Chicano nationalists, who still haven’t understood that Chicano culture has been redefined by the recent Caribbean and Central American immigrations, feel threatened by the perspective of intercultural dialogue and Pan Americanism. Meanwhile, sectors of the Mexican intelligentsia, viewing themselves as “guardians of Mexican sovereignty,” see in our proposals for bi-national dialogue “a disguised form of integration” and pull back. Ironically, the conservative Anglo-Americans, who are witnessing with panic the irreversible

multiculturization of the United States, tend to agree with Chicano and Mexican separatists who claim to speak from the left. The three parties prefer to defend their identity and culture, rather than to dialogue with the cultural other. The three parties would like to see the border closed. Their intransigent views are based on the modernist premise that identity and culture are closed systems, and that the less these systems change, the more authentic they are.

In 1989, we must realize that all cultures are open systems in constant process of transformation, redefinition, and re-contextualization. What we need is dialogue, not protection. In fact, the only way to regenerate identity and culture is through ongoing dialogue with the other. Then, the question is, what does dialogue mean. Some thoughts in this respect include the following:

“Dialogue is a two-way ongoing communication between peoples and communities that enjoy equal negotiating powers.”

Dialogue is a micro-universal expression of international cooperation. When it is effective, we recognize ourselves in the other and realize we don’t have to fear.

Dialogue has never existed between the First and Third Worlds. We must not confuse dialogue with neocolonialism, paternalism, vampirism, tokenism, or appropriation.

Dialogue is the opposite of national security, neighborhood watch, racial paranoia, aesthetic protectionism, sentimental nationalism, ethnocentrism, and mono-linguality.

In order to dialogue, “we must learn each other’s language, history, art, literature, and political ideas.” We must travel South and East, with frequency and humility, not as cultural tourists but as civilian ambassadors.

Only through dialogue we can develop models of coexistence and cooperation. Only through an ongoing public dialogue in the form of publications, conferences, and collaborative intercultural art and media projects, can the wound effectively heal. “It will be a long process. It might take thirty to fifty years. We cannot undo centuries of cultural indifference, domination, and racism overnight.” All we can aspire to is beginning a dialogue. This document is a humble contribution. I ask you to join in. A whole generation of artists and intellectuals has begun the dialogue. It is mostly artists, writers, and arts administrators (not politicians, scientists, or religious leaders) who are leading the effort. And from

these people, the most vocal and enlightened are women. In the late 1980s, the true cultural leaders of our communities were women.

THE OTHER VANGUARD

United States Latino culture is not homogeneous. It includes a multiplicity of artistic and intellectual expressions—rural and urban, traditional and experimental, marginal and dominant. These expressions differ from one another according to class, sex, nationality, ideology, geography, political context, degree of marginality or assimilation, and time spent in the United States. California Chicanos and Nuyorricans inhabit different cultural landscapes. Even within Chicano culture a poet living in a rural community in New Mexico has very little in common with an urban cholo-punk from L.A. Right-wing Cubanos from Miami are unconditional adversaries of leftist South American exiles. The cultural expressions of Central American and Mexican migrant workers differ drastically from those of the Latino intelligentsia in the universities, *ad infinitum*. Even this document, which attempts to present multiple voices and concerns, cannot possibly reflect all sectors of our communities. There is no such thing as “Latino art” or “Hispanic art.” There are hundreds of types of Latino American art in the United States. Each is aesthetically, socially, and politically specific.

The United States suffers from a severe case of amnesia. In its obsessive quest to “construct the future,” it tends to forget or erase the past. Fortunately, the so-called disenfranchised groups who don’t feel part of this national project have been meticulously documenting their histories. Latinos, blacks, Asians, women, gays, experimental artists, and nonaligned intellectuals have used inventive languages to record the other history from a multicenter perspective. “Our art functions both as collective memory and alternative chronicle,” says [San Francisco-based Chicana artist] Amalia Mesa-Bains. In this sense, multicultural art, if nurtured, can become a powerful tool to recapture the desired historical self. The great paradox is that without this historical self, no meaningful future can ever be constructed.

Métier is being redefined. In Latin America, the artist has multiple roles. He/she is not just an image-maker or a marginal genius, but a social thinker, educator, counter-journalist, civilian-diplomat, and human rights observer.

His/her activities take place in the center of society and not in specialized corners. So-called minority artists in the United States have also been forced to develop multidimensional roles. In the absence of enough institutions that respond to our needs, we have become a *sui generis* tribe of community organizers, media interventionists, and alternative chroniclers. And the images, text, and performances we produce are an integral part of these activities. The models are much more pertinent to our times than those of the established art world.

“Unlike modernist times, today’s avant-garde has multiple fronts,” or, as Steven Durland has stated, “the avant-garde is no longer in the front but in the margins.” To be avant-garde in the late 1980s was to contribute to the decentralization of art. To be avant-garde means to be able to cross the border, back and forth between art and politically significant territory, be it interracial relations, immigration, ecology, homelessness, AIDS, or violence toward disenfranchised communities and Third World countries. To be avant-garde means to perform and exhibit in both artistic and non-artistic contexts, to operate in the world, not just the art world.

According to [border artist] Emily Hicks “nothing is intrinsically marginal. Margins are constantly shifting. What today is marginal tomorrow becomes hegemonic and vice versa.” In order to articulate our present crises as multicultural artists, we need to constantly invent and reinvent languages. These languages have to be as syncretic, diversified, and complex as the fractured realities we are trying to define.

Postmodernism is a crumbled conceptual architecture, and we are tired of walking among someone else’s ruins.

Border artists use experimental techniques and performance-derived practices to intervene directly in the world. The permanent condition of political emergency and cultural vulnerability we live in leaves no other choice. “If our actions are not daring, inventive, and unexpected, they won’t make a difference, and border reality, with its overwhelming dynamics, will supersede us instantly.” In this sense, the experimental nature of border art is informed more by political and cultural strategies than by postmodernist theory. Like artists operating in other politically sensitive parts of the world, border artists understand that “formal experimentation is only worthwhile in relation to more important tasks” such as the need to generate a bi-national dialogue, the need to create cultural spaces for others, and the need to redefine the asymmetrical relations between

the North and the South and among the various ethnic groups that converge in the border spiral. Confronted with these priorities, the hyper specialized concerns of the art world appear to be secondary.

Much of the contemporary work produced by the Latin community is often regarded as anachronistic and traditional by the art world. Why? Innovation for innovation's sake. New York's art obsession doesn't really make sense to us. "Innovation is not a value *per se* in our culture." What we consider avant-garde or original generally deals with extra-artistic concerns or concerns related to our traditions and the historical moment. Because of this, our art never seems experimental enough to a mono-cultural observer.

The misunderstanding increases when the art world discovers that most of us aren't that interested in the gratuitous use of high technology or in the creation of special effects as an end in itself. Our rejection of unnecessary technology is seen as an underdeveloped attitude rather than a political stance. There are, in fact, many Latino artists working in computer art, media art, video, audio, and sophisticated multimedia languages, but they use technology in a socially responsible manner to reveal the contradictions of living and working between a preindustrial past of mythical dimensions and a postindustrial present in permanent states of crises.

When validating contemporary Latino artistic expressions (and this can also apply to black, Asian, and Native American art), Anglo critics must take off the ethnocentric glasses of innovation and approach the work within its own framework. To understand this framework, they have to do their homework. Artistic quality is also relative. Hegemonic centers like New York, Paris, and Mexico City have manufactured sacred canons of universality and excellence that we are expected to follow to break out of regionalism or ethnicity. But these dogmas are crumbling. The multicultural process that the United States is presently undergoing implies a shift of center, a decentralization of aesthetic canons and types, and therefore a multiplication of validating criteria.

In 1989, we must always use multiple repertoires to analyze and appreciate a work of art or literature, especially if it comes from a non-Anglo-European source. Cultural multiplicity and aesthetic relativism must be familiar notions to contemporary curators, critics, journalists, arts organizers, panelists, and funding agents. [As the Cuban-born, New York-based writer Coco Fusco states:] "*When the opportunity opens, and we jump in so quickly, what are we doing to ourselves?*"

THE LATINO BOOM

What exactly is the “Latino Boom”? The artists’ answer

- A. A kind of smoke screen to hide reality.
- B. A prestidigitation act to distract us from politics.
- C. The green light for us to become rich and famous.
- D. A major opportunity to infiltrate and speak from within.
- E. A contemporary version of the “good neighbor” policy toward Latin America.
- F. The logical result of the Chicano and Nuyorrican movements.
- G. A caprice of a Madison Avenue tycoon.

(Choose one of the above answers.)

In 1987, just like 1492, we were “discovered” (rediscovered to be precise). We have been here for over 2,000 years; yet, according to *Time* magazine and many other publications, we “just broke out of the barrio.” Today Latinos are being portrayed as the new “up and coming” urban *sofisticados*. We are suddenly in, fashionable and grantable, and “our ethnicity is being commoditized.” Why?

According to [the theoretician] Gayatri [Chakravorty] Spivak, “otherness has replaced postmodernism as the object of desire.” We are undetermined “objects of desire” within a meta-landscape of Mac Fajitas, La Bamba crazes, MTV border rock, Pepsi ads in Spanish, and Chicano art with thorns. In the same way the United States government needs and wants a cheap undocumented labor force to sustain its agricultural complex without having to suffer Spanish language or unemployed foreigners in their neighborhoods, the contemporary art world needs and desires the spiritual and aesthetic models of Latino culture without having to experience our political outrage and cultural contradictions. What the art world wants is a “domesticated Latino” who can provide enlightenment without irritations, entertainment without confrontation. “They don’t want the real thing. They want microwave tamales and T-shirts of Frida Kahlo.” They want ranchero music sung by Linda Ronstadt not Lola Beltrán [(the “queen” of Mexican-ranchero music)],” the *mexicorama* look of *Milagro Beanfield War* and not the acidity of Chicano experimental video.

We must politely remind the art world that image is never a substitute for culture. It is reality that must be addressed, no matter how painful or complex it might be. Like the border graffiti says, “Simulacra stops here” (at the border).

In this Faustian moment of perplexity and sudden attention given to “Latinos” by major cultural institutions and mainstream media, we are concerned about the way “Latino art” is being presented and represented. “We feel that some mistakes have been made and there is still time to correct them.” Some frequent mistakes include homogenization (“all Latinos are alike and interchangeable”); de-contextualization (Latino art is defined as a self-contained system that exists outside Western history and political crises); curatorial eclecticism (all styles and art forms can be showcased in the same vent as long as they are “Latino”); folklorization and exoticization (needless to explain)...

Latino artists are being portrayed as “magical realists,” pre-technological “bohemians,” primeval creatures “in touch with ritual,” hypersexual entertainers, “fiery revolutionaries,” or “amazing success stories.” Our art is being described as “colorful,” “passionate,” “mysterious,” “exuberant,” “baroque”—all euphemistic terms for irrationalism and primitivism. These mythical views only help to perpetrate the colonizing notions toward the South as a wild and exotic pre-industrial universe ever awaiting to be discovered, enjoyed, and purchased by the entrepreneurial eye of the North. It is mainly the artists who voluntarily or unknowingly resemble the stereotypes, who end up being selected by the fingers of the Latino boom; but where are the voices of dissent who delineate the boundaries of the abyss? Where are the artists experimenting with the new possibilities of identity? Where are the sharp-edged conceptual artists working in performance, video, or installations, the more political ones? And where are the Latinas? Women have been instrumental in the creation of a Latino culture in the United States. Why are all these key artists being left out of the blockbuster Hispanic shows and the all-encompassing Latino festivals?

Some people think that these questions are an expression of our permanent dissatisfaction and ungratefulness. My response to them is simple. By asking out loud, we are merely trying to clean the mirror of true communication.

Many of us are ambivalent about the effects of the boom. On one hand, it has opened doors to many talented artists whose work was practically unknown outside the Latino *milieu*. On the other, it has brought foreign values to our *milieu*.

Those who are chosen are pressured to become more slick, professional, individualistic, competitive, and to produce twice as much as they used to. The result is devastating: museum-quality art framed by cultural guilt and spiritual exhaustion. And on top of that, it has produced a confused community, divided by those who were chosen and those who weren't. Those left behind are slowly poisoned by jealousy and defeat. Many of us don't aspire to make it in Hollywood or New York. We want something even more ambitious. And that is to be in control of our political destiny and our cultural expressions. What the boom has done is to provide us with a handful of opportunities to "make it" at a very high spiritual cost. But it has not contributed to the betterment of the conditions of our communities.

There is a fatal discrepancy between the colorful image of prosperity broadcast by the boom and the bloody reality that no one wishes to address. Today, Latinos have the highest school dropout rate. We are the largest population in the prisons of the Southwest. The majority of babies born with AIDS are Latino and black. Police brutality, alcoholism, drugs are quotidian realities in our communities. Even our physical space is being threatened. Gentrification is pushing our families and friends outside our barrios as we witness with melancholy and impotence the arrival of real estate lords, insensitive yuppies, trendy restaurants, and commercial galleries. So, what exactly is booming?

The Latino boom is clearly a media-produced mirage, a marketing strategy designed with two objectives: to expand our consumer power and to offer exotica to the American middle class. Our participation in national political and cultural processes remains restricted to token individuals who are generally conservative. "We want understanding, not publicity." We want to be considered intellectuals, not entertainers; partners, not clients; collaborators, not competitors; holders of a strong spiritual vision, not emerging voices; and, above all, full citizens, not exotic minorities.

PARADOXES AND PROPOSALS

We are living a paradoxical moment. At the peak of the Latino boom, we witness in utter perplexity the most arrogant behavior of the current administration perpetrated against minorities, immigrants, and Latin American countries. In the very moment Eddie Olmos, Luis Valdez, Ruben Blades, and Los Lobos are becom-

ing national celebrities, the United States government is threatening to dismantle bilingual education and affirmative action and proposing to build a ditch on the United States–Mexico border.

Just as my colleagues and I are being asked to perform and exhibit in the main spaces of Manhattan and San Francisco, the border patrol is dismantling labor camps in North County (San Diego); and the California police are declaring open warfare against Latino gangs. On the same TV channels that show us glamorous commercials for Taco Bell, Colombian coffee, or Mexican beer, we also witness sensationalist accounts of Mexican criminals, drug dealers, and corrupt politicians on the evening news. The current media war against the Latino cultural other is intercut with eulogies to our products. Blood and *salsa*, that's the nature of this relationship.

It's all very confusing, but we are determined to find the underlying connections between these facts. For these connections can reveal important information about the way contemporary United States culture deals with *otherness*. In this abrupt context, my colleagues and I encourage our fellow artists, writers, journalists, curators, and cultural organizers to participate in this continental project, to collaborate (truly collaborate) as much as possible with the cultural other, inside and outside our borders, and to learn to share decisions and power with people of non-Anglo European descent. Only through a continuous and systematic rejection of racism, sexism, and separatism can we come to terms with *otherness*. From within, we must help the United States become an enlightened neighbor in this continent and respectful landlord in its own house.

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Author's Note: The following text was drafted after conversations with over thirty artists and cultural leaders from around the country. Quotes by colleagues are intertwined with my own views on the historical moment we are living as "Latinos" in the United States. Given the vertiginous speed with which contemporary culture metamorphoses, this document carries the risk of soon becoming outdated. The quotes that appear without attribution are apocryphal statements found in the chaotic pages of my traveling notebooks. I don't remember who said them, yet I feel that it is important to keep them as quotes to emphasize the paradigmatic and consensual nature of the text. *Border culture* is a culture of *recyclément*. "The multicultural paradigm" will appear in different formats and contexts, including newspaper, magazines, performances, conferences, arts, and political events. What matters is to keep the debate rolling and slowly help to dissipate the smog. These are times of debate. We all are preparing ourselves for the 1990s.

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MIXING

Lucy R. Lippard, 1990

In this text, American activist and curator Lucy R. Lippard (born 1937), an early champion of feminist art, announces the failure of the “melting pot” in the United States. She highlights the Latin American example of *mestizaje* (racial intermingling) as the better example of how a new hybrid culture could be generated from the combination of local and other cultures. “Mixing” reads as an alternative, multicultural history of art in the U.S. since the 1970s, and it also serves as an endorsement of collaboration and community activism. Additionally, Lippard underscores the role of socially-motivated artistic innovations spurred by the economic and political marginalization of minorities (Latinos, Asians, African Americans, and Native Americans). As with her other writings, the prolific Lippard sanctions art that finds its value in its social rather than monetary aspects, and she urges her readers to find unity and understanding in racial and cultural difference. This text was one of the earliest to offer an American perspective on the issue of Multiculturalism and to consider its innovative potential for U.S. Anglo Saxon culture. “Mixing” is adapted from its original publication [Lucy R. Lippard, “Mixing,” chapter IV, *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America* (New York: Pantheon Books/Random House Inc., 1990), 151–199].

A GREAT MANY CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS from hugely diverse backgrounds are currently approaching the prospect of cultural mixing on a grander, if more carefully scrutinized scale than ever before. As a result, a magnificent tangle of contradictions arises. To mix means both to mate and to battle. Mixing is the central metaphor, the active social component of the intercultural process. It incorporates the interethnic violence that characterizes the history of this hemisphere, as well as the possibility of a “rainbow future,” when everyone is of “mixed race” and the barriers of race-as-class are destroyed. The term applies here not only to “racial” blending, albeit to cultural and even esthetic mixtures and collaborations, introducing a full spectrum of contradictory decisions about identity and change.

Faced with the facts of nomadism and displacement, many artists are trying to form a new hybrid cultural identity and to locate themselves therein. Those involved in this enterprise include white North Americans who, like many immigrants and exiles, are also alienated from the forced and false homogeneity that corporate multi-nationalism has brought to the United States—those who don't love "America" unconditionally, but would rather change it than leave it. Recognizing the failure of the melting pot and the stubborn survival of cultural heterogeneity, these artists are considering anew the prospect of a society that is cooperative rather than co-optive, syncretic rather than synthetic, multicultural rather than melted-down. As James Baldwin said, "This world is white no longer, and it will never be white again."¹

Latin America offers models and cautionary tales for this country's accelerating *mestizaje*, or mixing.² As it painfully kicks over the last traces of colonialism, Latin America (including Mexico, Central America, and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean) is haunted by the question of how to build constructively on its often socially inequitable mixture of indigenous, African, and European roots. Latin Americans are far more sophisticated about the mixing process than most North Americans. They have lived several centuries of it with more liberal (if not less cruel) attitudes toward "racial purity" than those imposed by Anglo-Saxons on the northern continent. Like the French in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in North America, the Spanish in Latin America eventually saw miscegenation as a means of assimilation (first into, then over and above the Indian populations),³ while the English tended to enforce rigid segregation, resulting in U.S. laws that forbade even voluntary unions. The outcome was the many dissimilar—if equally disastrous—experiences of indigenous peoples in North and Latin America. Each Latin American country has dealt differently with the double-edged sword of mixture, and each has a differently mixed population, from almost wholly European in Argentina and Uruguay, to mostly mestizo in Chile and Venezuela, up to nearly half Indian in Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, and Guatemala, to a large black and mulatto population in the Caribbean, to a black majority in Brazil, to a more equal distribution of white, mestizo, Indian, and African in Colombia, to the almost fifty percent Asian population of Surinam and Guyana.⁴

So here we all are in North America. Some estimates state that by the year 2000 there will be no white majority in many parts of this country. "We are the

next chapter in the story of the Americas,” declared Henry Cisneros, then mayor of San Antonio, at the Hispanic Annual Salute in Denver in 1988. There are California and southwestern cities today where Caucasians are already in the minority. The process will no doubt accelerate, and in the next decade artists will be exposed to a vast range of cultural attitudes and images that today are still invisible to closed minds and closed eyes.

It cannot be taken for granted that mixing will resolve the potentially permanent tension between “races.” There are other models. One is *apartheid* (appropriately pronounced “apart-hate” and not confined to South Africa), characterized by continued racism, ignorance, and brutal repression—and genocide, as in Guatemala. Another is voluntary separation stemming from cultural pride and resistance to assimilation, although this is relatively rare in the disjunctive climate of the twentieth century, when most people have moved out of traditional societies and are unsure where they belong, where the boundaries are drawn.

The problem of emphasizing cultural identity—which can encourage rigidity rather than openness and flexibility in self-definition—is accompanied by that of intertribal racism. Tribal stereotypes, says Peter Marris (using the word “tribal” in a general sociological sense, rather than as a synonym for “primitivism”), can “express, crudely, the diversity of cultures: but in defining the distinctiveness of one’s own group, they tend to become moral categories, classing others as inferior.”⁵ When disparate groups are thrust together and treated by outsiders as though they were “all the same,” they may draw together defensively and/or emphasize their uniqueness to exploit disparities, replacing geographical distance with social distance. Tribalism in this sense is a perverted, embattled form of community.

Although an idealized form of *mestizaje* has long been offered as the socialist solution to the inequities and racism operating in Latin America, Marxists on both continents have actually had uneasy relationships to indigenous peoples. On one hand, it was (is) agreed that the “primitive” or “spiritual” relationship of Native peoples to their land—in the modern political context of holistic ecological sensitivity—is what makes them Indian, and that the “Indian-ness” of idealized indigenous communal economics can be a model for social change in the future.⁶ On the other hand, it is precisely those qualities that are seen as impeding economic progress and, ultimately, as necessary sacrifices to modernization.

These intertwined positions are challenged by Arif Dirlik, who along with some other Third World-oriented theoreticians (of color, or white), insists that culture is not a thing, but an activity, a relationship “that expresses contradiction as much as it does cohesion.” Dirlik defines “Culturism” as “that ideology which reduces everything to questions of culture, but has a reductionist conception of the latter as well,” and blames it for a “preoccupation with the cultural gap . . . in the study of thought in Third World societies.” Culturism, like historicism, is a reaffirmation, “in the midst of global history, of the separateness of the society we study.”⁷ The basic truth of Dirlik’s analysis seems self-evident, but it poses its own dilemmas. Granted, notions of culture are often ideologically charged, the product of specific social relations. This does not alter the fact that cultures can realize and name themselves, and that traditions do exist, often providing the channel through which change flows. At the same time, memory is a tool with which to make connections, but it can be swamped in nostalgia. At what point does dependence on the past preclude transition into an independent view of the present and future?⁸ And, as Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano has asked, “Can a national culture really be achieved in countries where the material foundations of power are not national, or depend on foreign centers?”⁹

Few, if any, nations can claim a “pure” national culture. The assimilated, if still somewhat *dangerous* multiculturalism (or “pluralism”) once touted as unique to the United States, is now familiar to European and Asian nations as well. And in Latin America, cultural pluralism has meant that artistic responses to internationalism and modernism or postmodernism are as diverse as the countries themselves. In some changing societies, artists are clinging to the worst of un-rooted internationalism, while in others they are forging a new art conscious of all the operating socio-cultural factors. Where traditional or indigenous culture is still strong, international styles or approaches can be positive ingredients in an inevitable new blend. Where traditional cultures have been weakened, suppressed, or destroyed, the negative effects of imported modernism (such as denial of social content or scorn for local concerns) often outweigh the positive. When rebellion against the loss of national identity occurs, the challengers sometimes refuse to maintain any aspect of cultural colonialisms, in effect throwing the baby out with the bathwater and returning to vestiges or to an undeveloped and over literal pre-modernism. There is a fine line between erasing differences in the

name of a homogenous “universal” (usually defined and imposed by a dominant culture) and protesting the “universal” as dismissive of differences (which can promote provincialism).

As the volatile relationship between Latin America and North America evolves, new elements or vantage points are revealed along each freshly visible fault-line. Part of the crippling bias of ethnocentrism in this country comes from the fact that we learn geography mostly from imperialism, discovering other nations when our government chooses to interfere in their sovereignty. We learn from the same sources that “there’s no art down there; they’re too poor, or too influenced by us, or too isolated. High art just isn’t part of their culture.” In fact, many Latin American exiles are the products of a sophisticated European-oriented education and find North American art, like North American arrogance, based in an extraordinary ignorance of history and politics. The ambivalence of many Latin Americans living in the United States is rooted in anger about the ways they are treated as second-class citizens, as beggars outside the mainstream.

Some of our national imperviousness can be blamed on the manic pace at which we absorb culture; on the inadequate, biased information we receive from the trade media; and on the invisible processes of hegemony itself, which blinds us to the unfamiliar by conflating all “otherness.” On the other hand, from the viewpoint of a cultural democrat, I worry about Latino artists leaning too far over the brim of the melting pot, falling in, and depriving us of their unique voices. But who am I, after all, to imply that any artist who wants to shouldn’t have a chance at “making it” in the mainstream? Doesn’t the dominant culture already impose just such limitations? Is my wish to maintain a diverse practice just another sort of matronizing ethnocentrism?

Susana Torruella Leval rejects the notion—popular in the United States—that Latin American artists are only preoccupied with “the search for individual identity” and offers a more complex explanation. They are, she says, searching not for an identity “but rather for the means of analyzing a powerfully felt sense of historical identity that has long fascinated Latin Americans in general and artists in particular.”¹⁰

Many artists arriving in the United States from Third World countries bring with them a concept of internationalism that does not fit the ethnocentric view of the U.S. artwork. Leval says that the Latin American sense of reality is revealed through “a natural affinity to fantasy,” dreams, mystical experiences,

at the same time that it is “profoundly tied to the idea that art has social as well as esthetic meaning. . . . It is always relative, comfortable with contradictions and surprises, a dialogue of many levels, real and imagined.” Its deeply held and unabashed humanism, grounded in figuration—Cubist or Surrealist has been devalued in the United States, where it is considered “romantic, idealistic, and sentimental.”¹¹

The notion that those on “the margins” or in the Third World have something to teach us is not easy for Eurocentrically oriented art scholars to swallow. The Cuban art critic Gerardo Mosquera [SEE DOCUMENTS VI.2.1 AND VI.2.7] points out that for Third World nations and artists being drawn into modernization/Westernization, “it is not a matter of resuscitating pre-capitalist solutions. . . . It is a matter of making Western culture on our own terms and at our own convenience . . . of bringing the ancestral to the modern, rather than the reverse.” He recommends: “activating the Third World’s values” so that Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans “make occidental culture, just as the ‘barbarians’ made Christianity.”¹² Mosquera’s suggestion that the Third World become an international catalyst is not just the pipe dream of an intellectual from a tiny island that has miraculously assumed geopolitical power. He is not implying that the features of hitherto “peripheral” cultures will disappear into some new Third World center, but that they will reappear, looking different in relation to other disregarded parts of the whole.

. . .

The unmarked borders between cultures in the inner cities are a microcosm of the marked *fronteras* between the United States and Mexico, where the border culture that has flourished for years has recently been noticed outside the Southwest. As Alan Weisman writes: “The border is not a line, but a full circle. Centuries ago, with the encouragement of Rome, Spain expelled the Moors who had already changed its life and language. Together, Rome and the southern European nations of Iberia forged a religious imperialism that contradicted the growing reformation in northern Europe. The descendants of these two adversaries confront each other today along another frontier. Enriched by the hues of Native Americans, resilient Africans, and venturesome Asians, they meet at a border established by two countries, the United States and Mexico, and pull the world along behind them.”¹³

Judy Baca, muralist, activist, spokesperson for the Chicano community, and professor at the University of California at Irvine, is best known as the director and instigator of *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*, which covers half a mile of flood channel in the San Fernando Valley and may well be the longest mural in the world. Its subject is the history of *Califas* (California) from the viewpoint of those usually written out of the histories. Baca recalls that at the beginning of the Chicano *movimiento*, artists were searching for a language that would express their own experience. They looked to Los Tres Grandes (the Mexican muralists Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and especially David Alfaro Siqueiros); to the all-important family structures of their communities; to the *rasquache* [underdog] worldview; to *corridos*, the popular arts, *milagros*, *monitos* [comic strips], home altars, low-riders, and decorated cars, and they began to see them all as subjects for art, as works of art in themselves. Baca explains: “For me the process of making art is the transforming of pain. First there’s rage, below that rage is indignation, below that indignation is shame, below that hope, and at its corniest base, love. After I got through all of that I could love myself, my art, my people, who I really was. That’s how *The Great Wall* got done. The art process takes pain to its furthest transformation.”¹⁴

Baca was involved in the *movimiento* and teaching in a city art program when she began to spend time in the Los Angeles city parks, hanging out with teenagers and learning about their visual subcultures—tattooing and graffiti: “Kids with tattooed tears on their cheeks! What does that say about how the kids feel about themselves? . . . Visual symbols, calligraphy basically, were a focal point in their life on the street. You could read a wall and learn everything you needed to know about that community . . . all in what they call *placayasos*. In the sixties, it was more political slogans; now, it’s about territory. It has to do with people saying: “Listen, I own nothing here. So I own your wall. Here’s who I am.”¹⁵

These experiences led Baca first to form a mural team, then the Citywide Mural Project, which completed 250 murals, about 150 of which she directed in person. And the rest is history, or rewriting history. Baca has been called a “cultural diviner” for the cross-cultural educational work she has done in the process of executing *The Great Wall*. For its site she chose not the graffiti-rich barrios of “East Los,” but the San Fernando Valley, a suburban area settled by white flight from those expanding barrios. The muralists were young people from various eth-

nic communities in LA, some of whom were recruited through the juvenile justice system and given the choice between reform school and mural painting. Subcultures have been described as “being different in packs,” and Baca is an expert at navigating the labyrinthine channels through the various cultures and subcultures of southern California, guaranteeing her muralists safe passage through the turf of rival gangs, working with their various communities, and enlisting the aid of the City government and the Army Corps of Engineers. *The Great Wall* was created through an extraordinary educational process in which Baca brought in ethnic historians to teach and correct as images were being created. One of her strategies has been “overlapping legends”—the similar images and traditions discovered in different communities during the process of research. She devised games with the kids to expose the stereotypes they had of each other. She developed a protective surface for her murals (ironically against graffiti), which she arranged to have manufactured by a cottage industry in the neighborhood so no one else would profit from it.

Baca’s works are as much organizing structures as mural paintings. She tries to integrate her art into the social as well as the physical space of a community: “That’s changing everything and not just the façade The thing about muralism,” she says, “is that collaboration is a requirement The [Great Wall’s] focus is cooperation in the process underlying its creation.”¹⁶

Baca is now planning a *World Wall*, inspired by the peace initiatives of Hopi elders. It is a portable mural that offers the kind of balance of representation for the world that *The Great Wall* offers for California. Sections will be produced in various countries, and she recently traveled to the Soviet Union to recruit a collaborator there. In addition, she is working in Guadalupe, a farm workers’ community in central California that is virtually a labor camp for agribusiness. Its people are Portuguese, Chinese, Japanese, and Basque, as well as Chicano. She spends a lot of time in the fields, gathering firsthand testimonies from which to design a historical colonnade in a public park. Baca has also worked with homeless and street people, making a mural on Skid Row in Los Angeles that maps local social services, laying out the lifelines. A recent collaborative billboard warns the community: “Be Skeptical of the Spectacle. Respect Your Own Perspective.” Baca does not, however, advocate separatism so much as strength in a home base from which to move outward. She has devoted herself to “the reinvention of the American experience through the immigrant eyes of the Pacific Rim—not

a dual culture between Anglo and Other, but the struggles and connections between the groups themselves so artists will have the whole global palette to work with.”¹⁷

...

How clear, how blurred, then, should the boundaries of a culture be? What might be the model for a genuinely and respectfully mixed society? There is no rule that would be appropriate for every culture, or even for every microcosmic interaction within any one culture. In the arts and in social life, debates continue about the virtue of “separatism”—a much-misunderstood concept. It is somehow assumed by the dominant culture, or by most Caucasians, that pride in one’s origins—if they are not Western—constitutes an automatic enmity to the society we all share; or else it is a form of childlike play that has little to do with the “real world.” When black artists and women artists in the ‘60s chose to reserve private spaces of their own in which to grow, while coping with the larger social space on an everyday basis, they were accused of separating themselves out, and they/we were warned that such voluntary “ghettoization” put us literarily beyond the pale. (White or white male organizations and groupings are, of course, exempt from such a process, since they *are* society and need not worry about losing touch with the centers.) It is always difficult to know whether such assumptions are engendered by fear that marginal groups may draw strength from their own company, or whether they stem from pure paternalism and condescension: “separate yourself from me, and you’re nowhere.”

Even those artists who refuse to tolerate cultural and social boundaries often insist on their privacy. Yet if they incorporate subject matter that is relevant to their origins, they may be automatically excluded from “universality.” The other side of the “not Indian enough” argument is Robbie McCauley’s complaint that she gets asked, “Is your art *just* Black?” If an artist tries too hard to refute such an oversimplification, however, s/he may get called an Uncle Tom or Tomahawk, an Oreo, Apple, Banana, or Coconut (black, red, yellow, or brown on the outside, white on the inside). The divisiveness inherent in all of these internal insults is yet another result of pervasive bias.

The components of bias for or against a “traditionalist” stance include ignorance and deep misunderstanding. Differences in the most basic cultural values regarding objects are responsible for some of the incomprehension. For

example, views of antiquity vary considerably among cultures. The old or “vintage” object is revered in many places for its wisdom or for the spirit it incorporates. In the West it is also respected for its financial value. Elsewhere it may be valued for the very process of its creation, rather than for its physical presence. J. V. S. McGaw cites Inuit carvers “to whom only the act of giving tangible form was important, after which the objects themselves tended to be discarded.”¹⁸ Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe has written, “Visitors to Igboland are shocked to see that artifacts are rarely accorded any particular value on the basis of age alone. . . . When the product is preserved or venerated, the impulse to repeat the process is compromised.”¹⁹

Igbo scholar Chike Aniakor dispels the illusion that there is no change or invention in traditional art as social change takes place: “it is unproductive to lament changes that reflect current realities. Continuity with earlier forms will always be found.” Jaune Quick-To-See Smith points out that a vanishing culture does not make art and that a culture that changes is surviving. Thus, change happens, and always has, but it has the most positive effects when its process is conscious, if not voluntary.

How, then, can development of a consciously intercultural esthetic be reconciled with cultural grounding and modernism/postmodernism be achieved without either total assimilation or the polarization of cultural groups? Ideally, the goal would be gradual meeting of cultures, in which they are neither subsumed nor forgotten but are instead respectfully and equally recognized in their various degrees of autonomy. Groups working for cultural change and new cultural policies have suggested strategies that will unite people rather than separate them in a process that Arlene Goldbard and Don Adams of the Institute for Cultural Democracy have called awakening a social imagination. “Racism Is a Lack of Imagination; Is Anyone Really White?” queried a graffito in the Black Artists/White Artists (BAWA) installation in Washington, D.C. BAWA is a multiracial discussion group working out of Washington that sometimes performs and makes art together. Actor Rebecca Rice, who is black, says the group “means coming together to surround an issue. It’s a tide pool. . . . [to] reduce issues like racism to more manageable levels. We hold a mirror to our deformities, and plan for a future without blindness—or at least where blindness is ‘seeable’.”²⁰

Jolene Rickard is more wary about the possibilities of coalitions with white people: “When I think of us coming together—well, it’s about time, but

we'll be last on the list. I hate to see it as them against us. So who's 'them'? All the people who aren't willing to share."²¹

Raymond Williams pointed out that most of what we call communication is in fact one-way, or transmission. Risk is made much of in the art world, but the real risk, real originality, is not just another twist of the picture plane or the creation of something unfamiliar. It lies in venturing outside of the imposed art context—both as a viewer and as an artist, in and out of one's work—to make contact with people both like and unlike oneself. Perhaps the best that can come of postmodernism's shattering of modernism's mirror is the subsequent reevaluation of the artist's role in the reconstruction of a more multifaceted, just, and satisfying society. Here again, cultures excluded from the centers will have a potential advantage; much coalition work is being done between the various excluded cultures, and they know more about those occupying the center than is known about them.

These tentative coalitions being forged between the various so-called minority cultural communities are not only providing a respite from the confrontational aspect of *white/other* relationships, but are providing tremendous emotional support and a broader, kinder buffer zone within which to ally and act. As Amalia Mesa-Bains said of a moment when women artists of color were discussing these issues: "When each woman told her stories, the room filled up with sadness and absolute beauty. We were all the same person."²² Although that moment—in which what is shared overcomes real differences—cannot last in a world like this one, there is a common ground on which to hope for more such moments. That hope is articulated in the delicate balance between maintaining a cultural identity and participating in the mainstream culture, changing both in the process. The *mixing* that is happening today in the United States can restore a dignity to the arts that has been denied them for most of the twentieth century.

1

James Baldwin, *Notes for a Native Son* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).

2

It was in the arts—albeit the hopelessly romanticized "indigenist" arts beginning with the *Comentarios reales* (1609) by Garcilazo de la Vega, who was half Inca, half Spanish—that *mestizaje* [intermingling] emerged as a fact of life in Spanish-speaking America, and the dream of a unified Latin America began.

3

However blood quantum was an object of fascination in eighteenth-century Mexico, there were more than twenty different varieties and degrees of *mestizaje*, ranging from the Mestizo, product of Spaniard and Indian,

to the now-unheard terms *castizo*, *barcino*, *chamiso*, and *coyote* (which is still used in New Mexican communities to denote half white).

4

See *Peoples of the Earth*, vol. 4 (Danbury, Conn.: Danbury Press, 1972), 131.

5

Peter Marris, *Loss and Change* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Doubleday, 1975), 74.

6

Not only in the future; Marx and Engels studied American Indian societies and governmental forms, and the Iroquois “became in Marxist theory the ideal to which industrial communism would return once the workers smashed private property, classes, and the state . . . but the image quickly lost any connection with the Iroquois or any other Indian group.” (Jack Weatherford, *Indian Givers*, 162).

7

Arif Dirlik, “Culturalism as Hegemonic Ideology and Liberating Practice,” *Cultural Critique* no. 6 (Spring 1987), 15.

8

The relation from culture to national liberation can’t be treated here, but this book was originally inspired by the cultural activities in Cuba and Nicaragua, and within the liberated zones of El Salvador.

9

Eduardo Galeano, quoted in *Third Text* no. 1 (Autumn 1987): 4.

10

Susana Torruella Leval, “Latin American Art and the Search for Identity,” *Latin American Art* no. 1 (Spring 1989), 41.

11

Ibid.

12

Gerardo Mosquera, *Contracandela* (Havana: Editorial José Martí, forthcoming) [Caracas: Monte Avila, 1995].

13

Alan Weisman, *La Frontera*.

14

Judy Baca, “Mixing It Up II,” Radio Station KGNU, Boulder, Col., April 7, 1989.

15

Baca, “Our People Are the Internal Exiles,” *Cultures in Contention*, ed. Doug Kahn and Diane Neumaier, 66.

16

Ibid, 75.

17

Baca, “Mixing It Up II,” n/p.

18

J. V. S. McGow, “Western Desert Acrylic Painting—Artefacts or Art?” *Art History* (June 1982), 214.

19

Chinua Achebe, “Foreword,” in Herbert Cole and Chike Aniakor, eds., *Igbo Arts: Community and Cosmos* (Los Angeles: Museum of Cultural History, UCLA, 1984), ix.

20

“Black Artists/White Artists,” *Cut Across*, 5.

21

Jolene Rickart, “Mixing It Up II.”

22

Amalia Mesa-Bains at the “Autobiography” conference at Mills College, Oakland, Cal., March 1989 referring to the “Mix It Up” symposium in Boulder, Colorado.

VI.1.3 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 841662

LIVING BORDERS/BUSCANDO AMERICA: LANGUAGES OF LATINO SELF-FORMATION

Juan Flores and George Yudice, 1990

In this 1990 text, the U.S.-based cultural theoreticians Juan Flores (born 1943) and George Yudice (born 1947) examine the social, political, and aesthetic construction of Latino identity and its corresponding struggle over language. The authors choose to pursue a “new social movement” approach to these issues, noting that this is better suited to considering Latino identity formation than the two prevailing scholarly trends in ethnicity theory (i.e., the 1950–60s construct of the “melting pot” and the “new ethnicity”) [SEE DOCUMENT VI.1.1 BY GUILLERMO GÓMEZ-PEÑA FOR ANOTHER APPROACH TO THESE ISSUES]. Written at a time when the English-only movement in the United States was gaining momentum, this text underscores the fact that Latinos—in contrast to other U.S. immigrants whose language is lost when the second generation becomes assimilated—continue to use the Spanish language to overtly negotiate diverse forms of social and political enfranchisement. Through this practice, Latinos shaped a “border” identity in an Anglo Saxon society, thus affirming self-worth in the public sphere and facilitating the construction of a new multicultural America. The text is excerpted from its original publication [Juan Flores and George Yudice, “Living Borders/Buscando América: Languages of Latino Self-formation,” *Social Text* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), no. 24 (1990), 57–84].

1. LATINOS AS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

“My grandparents didn’t get special language instruction in school. In fact, they never finished high school because they had to work for a living.” Latinos

hear this and similar statements every time the question of bilingual education comes up; such statements highlight an important difference—the maintenance of another language and the development of inter-lingual forms between this “new” immigrant group and the “older,” “ethnic” immigrants. The fact is that Latinos, that very heterogeneous medley of races, classes and nationalities¹ are different from both the “older” and the “new” ethnics.² To begin with, Latinos do not comprise even a relatively homogeneous “ethnicity.” Latinos include native-born U.S. citizens (predominantly Chicanos—Mexican Americans—and Nuyoricans—“mainland” Puerto Ricans) and Latin American immigrants of all racial and national combinations: white—including a range of different European nationalities—Native American, black, Arabic, and Asian. It is thus a mistake to lump them all under the category “racial minority,”³ although historically the U.S. experiences of large numbers of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans are adequately described by this concept.⁴ Moreover; both of these groups—unlike any of the European immigrant groups—constitute, with Native Americans, “conquered minorities.”⁵

If not outright conquered peoples, other Latin American immigrants, heretofore inhabitants of the “backyard” over which the United States claims the right of manifest destiny, have migrated here for both political and economic reasons, in part because of U.S. intervention in their homelands. From the time of Jose Martí [SEE DOCUMENT 1.3.4], who lived in New York for over one third of his life during the 1880s and 1890s, slowly establishing the foundations for the Cuban independence movement, to the 1980s sanctuary movement for Central American refugees, U.S. actions (military incursions as well as economic sanctions) in Latin America have always generated Latin American migrations. The policies of U.S. finance institutions (supported by the U.S. government and, at times, by its military), moreover, have brought enormous foreign debt to Latin America and with it intolerable austerity programs that have induced many to seek a living in the United States.⁶

The result is a U.S. Latino population projected to be over 30 million in 1990, a minority population unprecedented in the history of the United States. Sheer numbers are in themselves influential but the way in which the numbers increase is more important: as a result of continuous immigration over the last 30 years, as well as the historical back-and-forth migration of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans and more recently of other national groups, Latinos have held

on to Spanish over more generations than any other group in history. 90% of U.S. Latinos/Latin Americans speak Spanish.⁷ In contrast, speakers of Italian dwindled by 94% from the second to the third generation.⁸ The civil rights movement spurred new forms of consciousness and political action among Chicanos and Nuyoricans. They and other Latinos have been able to use the language issue as a means to mediate diverse types of political enfranchisement and social empowerment: voting reform, bilingual education, employment opportunities, and so on. In fact, the conditions for identity-formation, in all its dimensions (social, political, and especially aesthetic), have been largely provided by the struggle over how to interpret language needs and the adjudication and legislation, on that basis, of civil rights directed primarily (but not exclusively) to Latinos.

In recognition of these conditions, which were not in place when the two major trends in ethnicity theory (the “melting pot” of the early twentieth century and the “new ethnicity” of the ’50s and ’60s) emerged, we feel that there is greater explanatory power in a “new social movement” approach to Latino identity. By “new social movements” we refer to those struggles around questions of race, gender, environment, religion, and so on, which cannot be fully encompassed under the rubric of class struggle and which play out their demands on the terrains of the body, sexuality, language, etc., that is, those areas which are socially constituted as comprising the “private” sphere. This is not to say that the inequalities (and causes rooted in relations of production) referred to by class analysis have disappeared. On the contrary, from the perspective we adopt such inequalities (and their causes) can be seen to multiply into all spheres of life. Capitalist society does not cause racism any more than it does linguistic stratification; it does, however, make all these differences functional for the benefit of hegemonic groups. A social movement approach does not so much disregard class exploitation as analyze how racism, sexism, linguistic stratification, etc. are mobilized through “both discursive positions and control of the means of production and coercion.”⁹ Under these circumstances, political agency is, according to Stanley Aronowitz, “constituted in the gap between the promises of modern democratic society and its subversion by the various right-wing states. Politics renews itself primarily in extra-parliamentary forms which, given the still potent effectiveness of the modern state form, if not its particular manifestations of governance, draws social movements into its orbit. Some call this cooptation, but it is more accurate to understand it as a process related to the economic and cultural hege-

mony of late capitalism, which draws the excluded not only by its dreamwork, but by the political imagery that still occupies its own subjects.”¹⁰

What is particularly different about the new social movements is that they enter the political arena by “address[ing] power itself as an antagonist,” such that they must deploy their practices in the cultural as well as economic spheres. To understand Latinos, then, we must understand the conditions under which they enter the political arena. Among these conditions, which were not in place when the “ethnic” (European) immigrants negotiated their enfranchisement in the U.S., are the welfare state (which in part brought to the fore the terrains of struggle and which neoconservatives are currently attempting to dismantle) and the permeation of representation by the consumer market and the media. In what follows, we explore how Latino identity is mediated and constructed through the struggle over language under such “postmodern” conditions.

2. THE STRUGGLE OVER LANGUAGE

First of all, the name, “America.” Extrapolating from Edmundo O’Gorman’s [SEE DOCUMENT I.1.7] meditation on the “invention of America,”¹¹ we might say that “America” has been conceived over and over again throughout history. The name “remains the same,” but it has had successive re-conceptualizations (it is rewritten in the Borgesian sense that Pierre Menard rewrote Don Quixote) and with each one the terrain changes. The current mass migration of Latinos to the United States engenders such a process of re-conceptualization, bringing to mind F. J. Turner’s notion of America as a moving frontier and giving it another twist so as to invent a new trope: America as a “living border.” If the “discovery” of “America” transformed the ocean into a frontier on whose other side lay a “new” world, and if that new world was subsequently defined by the westward movement and capitalization of the margin, underwriting “the record of social evolution”¹² or modernity and providing a “‘safety valve’ for the discontent of a new industrial proletariat”¹³ largely comprised of European immigrants, then the latest re-conceptualization of America, by Latinos, is a cultural map which is all border, like the inter-lingual speech (or Spanglish) of Chicanos and Nuyoricans.

“[I] opt for ‘borderness’ and assume my role: My generation, the *chilangos* [slang term for a Mexico City native], who came to “el norte” fleeing the imminent ecological and social catastrophe of Mexico City, gradually integrated itself

into otherness, in search of that other Mexico grafted onto the entrails of the *et cetera* . . . became Chicano-ized. We de-Mexicanized ourselves to Mexi-understand our- selves, some without wanting to, others on purpose. And one day, the border became our house, laboratory, and ministry of culture.”¹⁴

Contemporary Latino artists and writers throw back the anxiety of ambivalence cast upon them as an irresolvable perplexity of naming and placing. [The Mexican performance artist and writer Guillermo] Gómez-Peña talks of “this troubled continent accidentally called America” and “this troubled country mistakenly called America.”¹⁵ *AmeRícan*, announces Tato Laviera in the title poem of his third book of Nuyorican poetry, “defining myself my own way many ways Am e Rícan, with the big R and the accent on the I.”¹⁶ The hallowed misnomer unleashes the art of brazen neologism. The arrogance of political geography backfires in the boundless defiance of cultural remapping. The imposed border emerges as the locus of re-definition and re-signification. The cover illustration of *AmeRícan* boasts a day-glo Statue of Liberty holding aloft a huge *pilón* [post] of liberty, the majestic torch of *comida criolla*, *ajo y plátano* [Caribbean food with garlic and bananas]. Latino taste buds water with *mofongo* and *mole*. [Fried bananas and pork crackling with sauce] “English only Jamás!” [or] “Sólo inglés, no way!

Latino affirmation is first of all a fending off of schizophrenia, of that pathological duality born of contending cultural worlds and, perhaps more significantly, of the conflicting pressures toward both exclusion and forced incorporation. Another Nuyorican poet, Sandra Maria Esteves, thematizes this existential split in much of her work: “I am two parts/ a person boricua/ spic past and present alive and oppressed.”¹⁷ Esteves enacts the bewilderment, darting back and forth between unreal options and stammering tongues: “Being Puertorriqueña Americana/ Born in the Bronx,/ not really jíbara/ Not really hablando bien/ But yet, not gringa either,/ pero ni portorria,/ pero sí portorria too/ Pero ni que what am I?”¹⁸ She cannot “really” be both, she realizes, but she senses a unique beauty in her straddling position, and is confident in the assertion, which is the title of her poem, that she is “Not Neither.”

Contrary to the monocultural dictates of the official public sphere, the border claims that it is “not nowhere.” This first *gestus* of Latino cultural practice thus involves an emphatic self-legitimation, a negation of hegemonic denial articulated as the rejection of anonymity. Though no appropriate name is avail-

able in the standard language repertoires, whether English or Spanish, namelessness is decidedly not an option. Whatever the shortcomings and misconceptions of bureaucratic bilingualism, alinguality is neither the practiced reality nor a potential outcome of Latino expressive life. The inter-lingual, border voice characteristically summons the tonality of the relegated “private” sphere to counter the muzzling pressure of official public legitimization.

The trope of a border culture is not thus simply another expression of postmodern aesthetic indeterminacy, along the lines of [Jacques] Derrida’s decontextualized framework or *parergon*: “the incomprehensibility of the border at the border,”¹⁹ or a Baudrillardian *simulacrum* (neither copy nor original).²⁰ The trope emerges, rather, from the ways in which Latinos deploy their language in everyday life. It corresponds to an ethos under formation; it is practice rather than *representation* of Latino identity. And it is on this terrain that Latinos wage their cultural politics as a “social movement.” As such, Latino aesthetics do not pretend to be separate from everyday practices but rather an integral part of an ethos that seeks to be politicized as a means to validation and self-determination. And it is precisely the projection of this ethos into the culture at large and into the political arena that threatens the dominant “Anglo” culture with loss of control of its physical and metaphorical borders. As the shrillest voices of the English-Only movement have put it, such Latino language and cultural practices threaten national unity and security.²¹ Latino disregard for “our borders” may result in the transformation of the United States into a “mongrel nation.”²² “There are misguided persons, specifically Hispanic immigrants, who have chosen to come here to enjoy our freedoms, who would legislate another language, Spanish, as co-equal and co-legal with English. . . . If Hispanics get their way, perhaps someday Spanish could replace English entirely. . . . [We] ought to remind them, and better still educate them to the fact that the United States is not a mongrel nation.”

Language has been accurately characterized “an automatic signaling system, second only to race in identifying targets for possible privilege or discrimination.”²³ Unpack the discourse against the language of Latinos and you’ve got a panoply of racist and classist repudiations: “These children [of undocumented immigrants] will remain part of that population which never learns English, and threatens to make America a bilingual country, costing the American taxpayer billions of dollars. Token citizenship will not help poor, unskilled Hispanics when

they find themselves in a permanent underclass, isolated by a language barrier. The hopes that brought them here in the first place will turn to despair as they become dependent upon government handouts. . . . Congress has presented the indigenous population of Mexico with an open invitation to walk across our Southern border.”²⁴

Language, then, is the necessary terrain on which Latinos negotiate value and attempt to reshape the institutions through which it is distributed. This is not to say that Latino identity is reduced to its linguistic dimensions. Rather, in the current sociopolitical structure of the United States, such matters rooted in the “private sphere,” like language (for Latinos and other minorities), sexuality, body, and family definition (for women and gays and lesbians), etc., become the semiotic material around which identity is deployed in the “public sphere.” The purpose always seems to be to maintain hegemony or to negotiate empowerment of those groups which have been discriminated against on such bases.

The attack on the perceived linguistic practices of Latinos is a vehicle for attacks on immigration, bilingual education, inclusion of Latinos in the services of the welfare state, and above all, a repudiation of the effect that Latinos are having in reshaping U.S. culture. Furthermore, such attacks highlight the influence that the dominant groups in the U.S. expect Latinos to have on foreign policy. Their rhetoric harbors the fear that U.S. imperialism in Latin American countries is boomeranging and eroding U.S. hegemony.

The language question then is a smoke screen for the scapegoating of Latinos on account of recent economic, social and political setbacks for the United States. “Anglo insecurity” looks to the claims of Latinos and other minority constituencies for the erosion of the United States’ position in world leadership, the downturn in the economy, and the bleak prospects for social mobility for the next generation.²⁵ In fact, now that dominant U.S. national rhetoric seems no longer able to project a global communist bogey, on account of political changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, this rhetoric will increasingly consolidate its weapons against Latinos as the drug-disseminating enemy within. The War on Drugs will increasingly become a War on Latinos and Latin Americans, as the recent brutal U.S. invasion of Panama has demonstrated. Furthermore, U.S. intervention in Latin America will increase as “the Pentagon searches for new ways to help justify its spending plans.”²⁶

3. TOWARD A MULTICULTURAL PUBLIC SPHERE (VERSUS HEGEMONIC PLURALISM)

The effect of dominant U.S. reaction to the special language needs that Latinos project and the rights that they claim on that basis has been to strengthen the moves toward unity on the part of diverse Latino communities. Otherwise divided by such identity factors as race, class, and national origin, there are economic, social and political reasons in post-civil-rights U.S. why Latinos can constitute a broadly defined national and trans-national federation which aspires to re-conceptualize “America” in multicultural and multi-centric terms that refuse the relativist fiction of cultural pluralism. It is for this reason that we have proposed to look at Latino negotiation of identity from a social movement perspective rather than a (liberal-sociological) ethnicity paradigm.

It is a commonplace among contemporary theorists of ethnicity in the U.S. that the assimilation-ist or “melting pot” paradigm of the first half of the century “failed to explain what it most needed and wanted to explain—the persistence of racial stratification”²⁷ The “new ethnicity” paradigm, which emerged to remedy the failure of assimilation theory and, as we stated above, to counter the gains made by blacks and other “racial minorities” in the wake of civil rights activism, makes the basic claim that ethnicity becomes the category around which interests are negotiated when class loses its moorings in postindustrial society. The “new ethnicity” can be understood to form part of what [Jürgen] Habermas has posited as a “neoconservative postmodernism,” that is, the rejection of “cultural modernism,” because it has eroded traditional moral values, and the continued espousal of infrastructural modernity or capitalism cum technical progress and rational administration.”²⁸ The false premise of this argument, of course, is that the economy can be independent of culture; this theory thus serves the purpose of providing a cultural (or ethnic) politics in postindustrial society with no need to resort to economically based categories such as class: “In trying to account for the upsurge of ethnicity today, one can see this ethnicity as the emergent expression of primordial feelings [or “re-enchantment”], long suppressed but now reawakened, or as a ‘strategic site’ chosen by disadvantaged persons as a new mode of seeking political redress in the society.”²⁹ The falsity of the model, of course, is that blacks and other “racial minorities” can be equated with white “ethnic” groups.³⁰ The result is reinforcement of existing class inequalities expressed in ethnic/racial terms.³¹

“Racial” movements could be understood to be the first of the “new social movements” or “new antagonisms” that call into question forms of subordination (bureaucratization and consumer commodification of “private” life) in the post World War II U.S. They do not, however, retreat from “cultural modernism”³² (the erosion of traditional moral values undergirded by class, race, and gender discriminations) but rather extend it to the point of questioning “infrastructural modernism.” Among the challenges is the push to legitimate the adjudication and legislation of rights on the basis of group need rather than the possessive individualist terms that traditionally define rights discourse.³³ “New ethnicity” theory is only one of a panoply of strategies by which neoconservatives have sought to contest the extension of rights on the basis of group criteria (affirmative action, Head Start programs, anti-discrimination statutes, and so on). The result has been the acknowledged loss of foundations for rights and the shift to a paradigm of interpretability. Group rights must take place, then, in a surrogate terrain, like language or the family. According to [Martha] Minow: “One predictable kind of struggle in the United States arises among religious and ethnic groups. Here, the dominant legal framework of rights rhetoric is problematic, for it does not easily accommodate groups. Religious freedom, for example, typically protects individual freedom from state authority or from oppression by private groups. Ethnic groups lack even that entry point into constitutional protection, except insofar as individuals may make choices to speak or assemble in relation to a chosen group identity.”³⁴

If the framework of rights is an impoverished one for the struggles of the new social movements, then what has been the means to greater political participation? One alternative has been to engage in the struggle of needs interpretations. According to Nancy Fraser, “political issues concerning the interpretation of people’s needs [are translated] into legal, administrative, and/or therapeutic matters,”³⁵ differentially according to the identificatory features (race, class, gender, religion, and so on) of the group.

. . .

Arguments for and against bilingual education aside, our point is that the struggle needs interpretations—in this case around the need for special language education—and is what in the present historical conjuncture in the U.S. mediates accumulation of value politically, economically, and socially. Latinos, after all,

have made significant gains (they have professionalized) in the educational system because they can more easily qualify for the job requirements (Spanish language literacy) of bilingual education. Language, as we shall demonstrate below, is also the terrain on which Latino “aesthetics of existence” or affirmative self-formative practices operate. According to [Jürgen] Habermas, oppositional, resisting discourses emerge when the validity of legal norms is questioned from the perspective of an everyday practice that refuses to be depoliticized by the “steering mechanisms” of law, bureaucracy, and consumerism.³⁶ Through such resistant everyday practices, Latinos have contributed to reshaping the public sphere of American society. Or perhaps it would be more exact to say they have contributed to the emergence of a contestatory “social sphere” which blurs the public/private dichotomy because needs “have broken out of the domestic and/or official economic spheres that earlier contained them as ‘private matters’.”³⁷ Another way of conceiving this contestation is to imagine social space as networks of conflicting and allied public spheres. What is defined as “private” from the purview of one is “public” or political from the purview of another.

The relevance of casting Latino negotiation of identity as a contribution to the creation of an alternative public sphere can be brought out by situating it within Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge’s expanded understanding of the concept. They do not limit it to (1) the institutional settings of public opinion (media, parliaments, etc.) but extend it to (2) “the ideational substance that is processed and produced within these sites,” and (3) “a general horizon of social experience,”³⁸ or “drive toward self-formation and self-reconstruction” (in the collective sense of “self”) which is limited or crippled by the first sense.³⁹ An alternative model can be culled from [Mikhail] Bakhtin’s writings on “behavioral ideology” and the constitution of identity through the re-accentuation of speech genres. Ideological or discursive production is institutionally bound but is generally (except in cases of outright force) open to modulation whereby persons “author themselves” or make discourse “one’s own” in the media of speech and behavioral genres.⁴⁰ Our utterances are necessarily enunciated and organized within such genres, which bear institutional marks. Self-formation is simultaneously personal and social (or private and public) because the utterances and acts through which we experience or gain our self-images are re-accentuated in relation to how genres have institutionally been made sensitive or responsive to identity factors such as race, gender, class, religion, and so on.

In postmodernity, “private” identity factors or subject positions may become unmoored from institutionally bound generic structures, turning “intimacy . . . the practical touchstone for the substance of the public sphere.”⁴¹ Experience, situated thus, is what fuels the utopian and contestatory potential of self-formation. What is even more significant is that subjective or psychological phenomena are now increasingly seen as having epistemological and even practical functions. Fantasy is no longer felt to be a private and compensatory reaction against public situations, but rather a way of reading those situations, of thinking and mapping them, of intervening in them, albeit in a very different form from the abstract reflections of traditional philosophy or politics.⁴²

Alternative public spheres, with their different, situated knowledges, are, for Negt and Kluge, constituted by the conflicting back and forth crossover of everyday experience and fantasy over the boundaries of the hegemonic public sphere.⁴³ On the other hand, the hegemonic public sphere itself “tries to develop techniques to reincorporate fantasy in domesticated form.” This is precisely the function of “new ethnicity” theory: to co-opt the alternative public sphere of a multicultural society in such a way that ethnic difference is reduced to its superficial signs, or from Negt and Kluge’s perspective, a sublimation of the “unconscious practical criticism of alienation.”⁴⁴

. . .

6. TRANS-CREATING A MULTICULTURAL AMERICA

Rubén Blades has insisted that a culturally effective crossover, which he prefers to call “convergence,” is not about “abandonment or sneaking into someone else’s territory. I propose, rather, convergence. Let’s meet half way, and then we can walk either way together.”⁴⁵ At the end of the interview he adds that he does “not need a visa” for the musical fusion which he seeks. He does not want “to be in America” but rather participate in the creation of a new America. The lyrics of the title piece of his *Buscando América* (Elektra/Asylum, 1984) make this point. . . .

Latinos, then, do not aspire to enter an already given America but to participate in the construction of a new hegemony dependent upon their cultural practices and discourses. As argued above, the struggle over language signals this desire and the opposition to it by dominant groups. This view of language,

and its strategic operationality in achieving a sense of self-worth, is the organizing focus of Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera. The New Mestiza*.⁴⁶ "Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself."⁴⁷ Like [César Miguel] Rondón's arguments about salsa,⁴⁸ the language of the new *Mestiza* is the migratory homeland in which "continual creative motion . . . keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm."⁴⁹ Anzaldúa acknowledges that her projection of a "new mestiza consciousness" may seem cultureless from the perspective of "male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos;" for her, on the contrary, she is participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet.⁵⁰

Another way of constructing Anzaldúa's mestiza poetics is as follows: all cultural groups need a sense of worth in order to survive. Self-determination, which in this case focuses on linguistic self-determination, is the category around which such a need should be adjudicated and/or legislated as a civil right. In order for this right to be effective, however, it would have to alter the nature [or, to be more exact, the social relations] of civil society. Such a claim, constructed in this way, only makes sense in a social structure that has shifted the grounds for enfranchisement from one of rights discourse to the interpretations that underpin such discourse. What is the justification, however, for needs interpretation? Our claim is that group ethos, the very stuff (or the "ethical substance," in [Michel] Foucault's terminology)⁵¹ of self-formation, is what contingently grounds the interpretation of a need as legitimate so that it can be adjudicated or legislated as a right. Another claim is that *group ethos* is constituted by everyday aesthetic practices such as the creative linguistic practices of Latinos which in the current historical conjuncture do not amount to subalternity, but rather to a way of prying open the larger culture, by making its physical, institutional and metaphorical borders indeterminate, precisely what we have seen that the dominant culture fears.

Latino self-formation as trans-creation—to "trans-create" the term beyond its strictly commercialist coinage—is more than a culture of resistance, or it is "resistance" in more than the sense of standing up against concerted hegemonic domination. It confronts the prevailing ethos by congregating an ethos of its own, not necessarily an outright adversarial but certainly an alternative

ethos. The Latino border trans-creates the impinging dominant cultures by constituting the space for their free intermingling—free because it is dependent on neither, nor on the reaction of one to the other, for its own legitimacy. Dialogue and confrontation with the mono-cultural other persists, but on the basis of what [Michel] Foucault has called “the idea of governmentality,” “the totality of practices, by which one can constitute, define, organize, instrumentalize the strategies which individuals in their liberty can have in regard to each other.”⁵²

. . .

Ethnicity-as-practice is primordially genealogical, intent as it invariably is on a recapturing and re-constituting of the past. It relies, as Michael M.J. Fischer terms it, on the “post-modern arts of memory,” the collective power of recall that is only a power if it functions actively and constitutively. This retrospective, testimonial search is for Fischer “a (re)invention and discovery of a vision, both ethical and future-oriented. Whereas the search for coherence is grounded in a connection to the past, the meaning abstracted from that past, an important criterion of coherence, is an ethic workable for the future.”⁵³ The “alternative chronicle” is more than merely recuperative: it is eminently functional in present self-formative practice and anticipatory of potential historical self-hood. Sandra Maria Esteves, in a poem cited earlier (“I am two parts/a person boricua/spic”), bemoans the forcible, physical loss of her antecedence: “I may never overcome the theft of my isla heritage... I can only imagine and remember how it was.” But that imagination and remembrance enliven her dreamwork, which in turn “realizes” that lost reality in a way that leads to eventual and profound self-realization. Her poem ends, “But that reality now a dream teaches me to see, and will bring me back to me.”⁵⁴

In the post-modern context, the mnemonic “arts” of border expression are conducted in “inventive languages,” a key phrase of Gómez-Peña signaling the characteristic expressive tactic of this process. Language itself, of course, is the most obvious site of Latino inventiveness. Whether the wildest extravagance of the bilingual poet or the most mundane comment of everyday life, Latino usage tends necessarily toward inter-lingual innovation. The interfacing of multiple codes serves to de-canonize all of them, at least in their presumed discrete authority, thus allowing ample space for spontaneous experimentation and punning.

Even for the most monolingual of Latinos, the “other” language looms constantly as a potential resource, and the option to vary according to different speech contexts is used far more often than not. “Trans-creation,” understood in this sense of intercultural variability and transferability, is the hallmark of border language practice.

The irreverence implicit in trans-creative expression need not be deliberately defiant in motive; it reflects rather a largely unspoken disregard for conventionally bounded usage insofar as such circumscription obstructs the need for optimal specificity of communicative and cultural context. The guiding impulse, articulated or not, is one of play, freedom, and even empowerment in the sense that access to individual and collective referentiality cannot ultimately be blocked. Inter-lingual puns, multi-directional mixing and switching, and the seemingly limitless stock of borrowings and adaptations attest to a delight not only in excluding and eluding the dominant and exclusionary, but in the very act of inclusion within a newly constituted expressive terrain. Rather than rejecting a language because of its association with a repressive other, or adopting it wholesale in order to facilitate passage, Latino expression typically “uses” official discourse by adapting it and thereby showing up its practical malleability.

Nuyorican vernacular includes the verb “gufear,” from which has derived the noun “el gufeo.” The colloquial American word “goof” is clearly visible and audible, and certainly the *Spanglish* usage has its closest equivalent in the phrase “goofing on” someone or something. But as a cultural practice, “el gufeo” clearly harkens to “el vacilón,” that longstanding Puerto Rican tradition of funning and funning on, fun-making and making fun. Popular culture and everyday life among Puerto Ricans abound in the spirit of “el vacilón,” that enjoyment in ribbing at someone’s or one’s own expense, for which a wider though overlapping term is “el relajo.” . . . “El gufeo” takes the process even one step further: Latino “signifyin(g)” in the multicultural U.S. context adds to the fascination of its home country or African-American counterparts because of its inter-linguality. Double-talk in this case is sustained not merely by the interplay of “standard” and vernacular significations but by the crossing of entire language repertoires. Border vernacular in fact harbors a plurality of vernaculars comprised of their multiple interminglings and possible permutations. The result is not simply an extended range of choices and juxtapositions, the kind of “splitting of tongues”

exemplified by border poet Gina Valdés at the end of her poem “Where You From?”: soy de aqui y soy de alla/ I didn’t build this border/ that halts me the word frontera splits on my tongue.”⁵⁵ . . .

For, as Gómez-Peña suggests, in order for the “multicultural paradigm” to amount to more than still another warmed-over version of cultural pluralism, the entire culture and national project need to be conceived from a “multi-centric perspective.” It is at the border, where diversity is concentrated, that diversity as a fact of cultural life may be most readily and profoundly perceived and expressed. It is there, as Gloria Anzaldúa describes it in her work *Borderlands/La Frontera*, that the Mestiza “learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode. . . . Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else.”⁵⁶ Renato Rosaldo sees in Anzaldúa’s Chicana lesbian vision a celebration of “the potential of borders in opening new forms of human understanding”: “She argues that because Chicanos have long practiced the art of cultural blending, ‘we’ now stand in a position to become leaders in developing new forms of polyglot cultural creativity. In her view, the rear guard will become the vanguard.”⁵⁷

Understood in this sense, multiculturalism signals a paradigmatic shift in ethnicity theory, a radically changed optic concerning center and margins of cultural possibility. The presumed “subcultural” tributaries feel emboldened to lay claim to the “mainstream,” that tired metaphor now assuming a totally new interpretation. Tato Laviera once again is playing a pioneering role in this act of re-signifying: in his new book, entitled *Mainstream Ethics*, Laviera demonstrates that it is the very concurrence of multiple and diverse voices, tones and linguistic resources that impels the flow of the whole culture of “America.” The challenge is obviously aesthetic and political in intent, but it is also, as the title indicates, an eminently ethical one. “It is not our role,” the book’s introduction announces, “to follow the dictates of a shadowy norm, an illusive mainstream, but to remain faithful to our collective and individual personalities. Our ethic is and shall always be current.”⁵⁸ Appropriately, the Spanish subtitle of the volume, “*ética corriente*,” is more than a translation; it is a “trans-creation” in the full sense, since “current” or “common,” with its rootedness in the cultural ethos of everyday life, stands in blatant contrast to the fabricated, apologetic implications of “mainstream” in its conventional usage. The Chicano poet Juan Felipe Herrera has an

intriguing *gufeo* fantasy. “What if suddenly the continent turned upside-down?” he muses. “What if the U.S. was Mexico?/ What if 200,000 Anglosaxicans [*sic*]/ were to cross the border each month/ to work as gardeners, waiters,/ 3rd chair musicians, movie extras,/ bouncers, babysitters, chauffeurs,/ syndicated cartoons, feather-weight/ boxers, fruit-pickers & anonymous poets?/ What if they were called waspanos,/ waspitos, wasperos or wasbacks?/ What if we were the top dogs?/ What if literature was life, eh?”⁵⁹

The border houses the power of the outrageous, the imagination needed to turn the historical and cultural tables. The view from the border enables us to apprehend the ultimate arbitrariness of the border itself, of forced separations and inferiorizations. Latino expression forces the issue which tops the agenda of American culture, the issue of geography and nomenclature. . . . For the search for “America,” the inclusive, multicultural society of the continent has to do with nothing less than an imaginative ethos of re-mapping and re-naming in the service not only of Latinos but all claimants.

1

We agree with Guillermo Gómez-Peña that “[t]erms like ‘Hispanic,’ ‘Latino,’ ‘Ethnic,’ ‘minority,’ ‘marginal,’ ‘alternative,’ and ‘Third World,’ among others, are inaccurate and loaded with ideological implications. . . . In the absence of a more enlightened terminology, we have no choice but to utilize them with extreme care.” See “The Multicultural Paradigm: An Open Letter to the National Arts Community,” *High Performance* (Fall 1989): 20 [SEE DOCUMENT VI.1.1].

2

We have decided to emphasize “Latino” for, unlike “Hispanic,” it is not an identity label imposed by the politicized statistics of the Census Bureau and the market who seek to target particular constituencies for political and economic manipulation. As for the shortcomings of “Latino,” we hope that this article contributes to their critique. In a nutshell, the term “older immigrants” refers to the way in which assimilationist or “melting pot” sociologists (from Robert Park to Milton Gordon) constructed the experiences of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century immigrants according to a dynamic of contact, accommodation, and assimilation that eventually amalgamated them into the dominant culture. The term “new ethnics” refers to the period of (white) ethnic revival, largely coinciding with civil rights struggles and their aftermath, in which “racial minorities and white ethnics became polarized on a series of issues relating to schools, housing, local government, and control over federal programs.” This revival has also been understood as the dying flash of white ethnicity in a longer historical process of acculturation. Cf. Stephen Steinberg, *The Ethnic Myth. Race, Ethnicity, and Class in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1982), 48–51. See also Richard H. Thompson, *Theories of Ethnicity. A Critical Appraisal* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1989), for whom the “rediscovery of ethnicity [by its American observers] is largely a response to the black protest movement of the 1960s, the state’s subsequent definition and legitimiza-

tion of that movement as an ethnic (but not primarily a class) movement, and the resulting increase in the United States of other ethnically defined movements by Hispanics, Asian-Americans, and “white ethnics,” who, observing the ‘success’ of black organization and the state’s receptivity to it, have quite un-mysteriously followed a similar tack.” (p. 93).

3

“Racial minority” is a term used to distinguish the historical experiences (enslavement and/or institutional exclusion from political, economic, and especially social enfranchisement) of certain groups (viz. African-Americans, Latinos, Asian-Americans, and Native-Americans) from those of European immigrant groups for whom the dynamics described by ethnicity theories made possible the enfranchisements denied to the former. Cf. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).

4

The historical discrimination against Mexican-Americans and Puerto Ricans is an experience that cannot be permitted to disappear by projecting Latinos as an overarching group. Such discrimination involves a complex of racial, class, and “otherness” factors that often make middle-class sectors of other Latino groups anxious and seek to dissociate them. On the other hand, the fact that discrimination has been directed at all Latino groups contributes to a pan-Latino rejection of discrimination aimed at any particular group.

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Cf. Steinberg, *The Ethic Myth* (1982), 24, 40, *et passim*.

6

The increase in the Latin American population in the United States can be more accurately compared with the overall European influx rather than with the numbers of any one particular group. If Latin American immigration, in conjunction with the high fertility rate of U.S. Latinos, continues into the next century (which is likely), then proportionately the number of Latinos will rival or supersede that of the European immigrants since the turn of the nineteenth century. From 1820 to 1930, the estimated “net immigration of various European nationalities” is as follows: Germans, 5,900,000; Italians, 4,600,000; Irish, 4,500,000; Poles, 3,000,000; Canadians, 2,800,000; Jews, 2,500,000; English, 2,500,000; Swedes, 1,200,000; Scots and Scots-Irish, 1,000,000.

7

Cf. Michael Lev, “Tracking The Hispanic TV Audience,” *The New York Times* (Dec. 13, 1989): D 17. Lev’s figures are taken from a Nielsen Hispanic Television survey funded by two of the largest Spanish TV networks, Univisión and Telemundo Group, Inc.

8

Such decreases are comparable to other European immigrant populations in the United States. Cf. Joshua Fishman, et al., *Language Loyalty in the United States* (The Hague: Mouton, 1966), 42–44.

9

Stanley Aronowitz, “Postmodernism and Politics,” *Social Text*, 18 (Winter 1987/88): 108. Re-printed in Andrew Ross, ed., *Universal Abandon? The Politics of Postmodernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 46–62.

10

Ibid.

11

Edmundo O’Gorman, *The Invention of America. An Inquiry into the historical nature of the New World and the meaning of its history* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961). [SEE DOCUMENT I.1.7]

12

Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt, 1920), 11.

13

Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment. The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800–1890* (New York, NY: Atheneum, 1985), 40. In the case of African-Americans, of course, it was not such a "safety valve" but the racist state that contained their discontent.

14

Guillermo Gómez-Peña, "Documented/Undocumented," in *Multi-Cultural Literacy. Opening the American Mind*, eds. Rick Simonson and Scott Walker (Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 1988), 127.

15

Gómez-Peña, "The Multicultural Paradigm," (1989): 20.

16

Tato Laviera, *AmeRícan* (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1984), 95.

17

Sandra Maria Esteves, *Yerba Buena* (Greenfield Center, NY: Greenfield Review, 1980).

18

Sandra Maria Esteves, *Tropical Rains* (New York: African Caribbean Poetry Theater, 1984).

19

Jacques Derrida, "The Parergon," *October*, 9 (Summer 1979): 20.

20

Cf. Jean Baudrillard, *De la Séduction* (Paris: Galilée, 1979). Apropos of the simulacrum, Latin Americans have dealt with problems of cultural identity in terms of the "neither-nor" since the conquest. The difference between "neither-nor" and "not neither" (or "not nowhere") is that the former is usually expressed by elites who feel in an ambivalent position vis-à-vis metropolitan cultural valuation while the latter is situated in the struggles of subordinated groups against a cultural "nonexistence" which elites are too often willing to exploit. [Chilean poet, playwright and novelist] Enrique Lihn has parodied the *ninguneísta* discourse in *El arte de la palabra* (Barcelona: Pomaire, 1979). "We are nothing: imitations, copies, phantoms: repeaters of what we understand badly, that is, hardly at all: deal organ grinders: the animated fossils of a prehistory that we have lived *neither here nor there*, consequently, anywhere, for we are aboriginal foreigners, transplanted from birth in our respective countries of origin" (p. 82; our emphasis). This is a parody of the anxious discourse of those elites who seek to define the nation. Roberto Schwarz has written an in-depth critique of this kind of "national problem." "Brazilian Culture: Nationalism by Elimination," *New Left Review* 167 (January/February 1988): 77–90.

21

Cf. R. Butler, "On Creating a Hispanic America: A Nation Within a Nation?" quoted in Antonio J. Califa, "Declaring English the Official Language: Prejudice Spoken Here," *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review*, 24 (1989): 321.

22

Terry Robbins, Presentation at Florida International University (Oct. 8, 1987), quoted in Califa, 321. Terry Robbins is a former head of U.S. English operations in Florida.

23

Deutsch, "The Political Significance of Linguistic Conflicts," in *Les États Multilingues* (1975), quoted in Antonio J. Califa.

24

An English First analysis of Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, Pub. Law No. 99-603, 1986 U.S. Cong. Code & Admin. News (100 Stat.) 3359, quoted in Califa, 313. Califa, "Declaring English the Official Language: Prejudice Spoken Here," *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* 24 (1989): 328.

25

Cf. Joshua Fishman, "'English Only': Its Ghosts, Myths and Dangers," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 125, 132 (1988), quoted in Califa, 329.

26

"Government and private experts agree that the threat of war with the Soviet Union is diminishing. As a result, the nation's military services argue that a portion of the Pentagon budget in the 1990s must be devoted to combating drugs and being prepared to bring American military power to bear in the third world." Stephen Engelberg, "In Search of Missions to Justify Outlays," *The New York Times* (Jan. 9, 1990): A14.

27

Thompson, *Theories of Ethnicity* (1989), 90.

28

Cf. Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity-An Incomplete Project," in *The Anti-Aesthetic. Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), 14.

29

Daniel Bell, "Ethnicity and Social Change," in Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, eds., *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1975), 169, as quoted in Thompson, (1989), 99.

30

According to Michael Omi and Howard Winant, the formation of the concept of ethnicity in the United States is rooted in a different historical conjuncture than ours and, thus, occludes this difference if invoked to account for the negotiation of value by non-European immigrants: "But both assimilationist and cultural pluralism had largely emphasized European, white immigrants, what Kallen called 'the Atlantic migration.' The origins of the concepts of 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic group' in the U.S., then, lay outside the experience of those identified (not only today but already in Park's and Kallen's time), as racial minorities: Afro-Americans, Latin Americans, Native Americans and Asian Americans (blacks, browns, reds and yellows). The continuity of experience embodied in the application of the terms of ethnicity theory to both groups—to European immigrants and racial minorities—was not established; indeed it tended to rest on what we have labeled the immigrant analogy." *Racial Formation in the United States* (1986) 16–17.

31

As Stephen Steinberg argues, "Kallen's model of a 'democracy of nationalities' is workable only in a society where there is a basic parity among constituent ethnic groups. Only then would ethnic boundaries be secure from encroachment, and only then would pluralism be innocent of class bias and consistent with democratic principles." *The Ethnic Myth*, (1982), 260–61. The reference is to Horace Kallen, "Democracy Versus the Melting Pot," in *Culture and Democracy in the United States* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1924). This critique extends to later studies like Nathan Glazer, *Affirmative Discrimination* (New York: Basic Books, 1975).

32

"[N]umerous new struggles have expressed resistance."

33

Emesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*

(London: Verso, 1985), 184. See also Martha Minow, "We, the Family: Constitutional Rights and American Families," in *The Constitution and American Life*, ed. David Thelen (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 319.

34

Minow, "We, the Family," (1988), 332.

35

Nancy Fraser, "Women, Welfare, and Politics," in *Unruly Practices. Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 154.

36

Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Vol. I. *Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 365.

37

Fraser, "Women Welfare and Politics," (1989), 156.

38

Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, "The Public Sphere and Experience: Selections," trans. Peter Labanyi, *October*, 46 (Fall 1988), 60, translator's note.

39

Fredric Jameson, "On Negt and Kluge," *October* 46 (Fall 1988): 159.

40

Cf. V.N. Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik (New York, NY: Seminar Press, 1973), 91–97 and M. M. Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vem W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 61–102.

41

Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Geschichte und Eigensinn* (Frankfurt an Main: Zweitausendeins, 1981), 944, quoted in Jameson (1988), 172.

42

Jameson, "On Negt and Kluge," (1988): 171.

43

Jameson (1988): 78.

44

Ibid.

45

An interview with Rubén Blades, *Chicago Sunday Times* (Jan. 26, 1987).

46

Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera. The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunte Lute, 1987).

47

Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* (1987), 59.

48

"[E]l barrio es el hilo conductor"; "[la salsa] representa plenamente la convergencia del barrio urbano de hoy [porque asume] la totalidad de ritmos que acuden a esa convergencia"; "La salsa no es un ritmo, y tampoco es un simple estilo para enfrentar un ritmo definido. La salsa es una forma abierta capaz de representar la totalidad de tendencias que se reúnen en la circunstancia del Caribe urbano [incluyendo Nueva York] de hoy; el barrio sigue siendo la única marca definitiva." Cf. César Miguel Rondón, *El libro de la salsa. Crónica de la música del Caribe urbano* (Caracas: Editorial Arte, 1980), 32–64 passim.

49

Anzaldúa, (1987), 80.

50

Anzaldúa, (1987), 81.

51

The “ethical substance” is one of the four dimensions that comprise “ethics.” It delimits what moral action will apply to: for example, the pleasures among the Greeks, the flesh among the early Christians, sexuality in Western modernity, and, we argue, group ethos-ethnic, feminist, gay, lesbian, etc. in multi-cultural societies. Cf. Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure* (New York : Vintage, 1986), 26-28.

52

Michel Foucault, “The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom,” in *The Final Foucault*, eds. James Bemaer and David Rasmussen (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), 19.

53

Michael J. Fischer, “Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory,” in James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 196.

54

Gina Valdés, “Where You From?” *The Broken Line/La Línea Quebrada* 1, 1 (May 1986).

55

Anzaldúa, (1987), 79.

56

Renato Rosaldo, *Truth in Culture: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon, 1989), 216.

57

Tato Laviera, *Mainstream Ethics* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1988).

58

Juan Felipe Herrera, “Border Drunkie at ‘Cabaret Babylon-Aztlan,’” *The Broken Line/La Línea Quebrada* 1, 1 (May 1986).

VI.1.4 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 820488

BETWEEN TWO WATERS: IMAGE AND IDENTITY IN LATINO-AMERICAN ART

Mari Carmen Ramírez, 1991

In this essay, Puerto Rican-born scholar and curator Mari Carmen Ramírez, writing from the “double perspective” afforded by her position as a Latin American operating from within the United States, examines the contradictions implicit in the multicultural model and its unavoidable implications for the representation of Latino American art. Written at a time

when the mainstream's engagement with minority art was particularly pervasive, "Between Two Waters" warns against the "fusion of identities" and other reductive notions of U.S. Latin American/Latino "identity" resulting from this apparent openness. In Ramírez's view, Multiculturalism homogenizes the marked differences among Latino Americans, imposing an "overarching identity" based on certain (but not all) common experiences. Paradoxically, even the more radical hybrid culture proposed by Guillermo Gómez-Peña through his Border Arts Workshop [SEE DOCUMENT VI.1.1] can potentially negate the heterogeneous character of Latino culture. The author first presented "Between Two Waters" at the symposium "Arte e identidade na América Latina," held September 23–25, 1991, at São Paulo's Memorial da América Latina which celebrated the opening of the 21st São Paulo Biennial. Gerardo Mosquera, Charles Merewether [SEE DOCUMENTS VI.2.1 AND VI.2.4, RESPECTIVELY] and Nelly Richard also took part in the symposium. This transcription of the essay is based on a 1994 version [Mari Carmen Ramírez, "Between Two Waters: Image and Identity in Latino-American Art," *American Visions/Visiones de las Américas: Artistic and Cultural identity in the Western Hemisphere*, eds. Noreen Tomassi, et al. (New York: Arts International/Institute of International Education), 8–18].

ANY ATTEMPT TO ANSWER THE QUESTION "Which Latin America?" from the vantage point of a Puerto Rican (thereby Latin American) curator active in the United States implies approaching the problem of the identity/representation of a peripheral culture from the "inside" perspective of the political and economic center of power. The center has traditionally functioned as the space of co-optation of the marginal identities of the periphery. Yet, for those of us who continually debate ourselves inside its limits, the space of North American culture also offers a shifting perspective to test or question strategies of resistance and affirmation elaborated on each side of the border.

This "double perspective," that we can also characterize as having "a foot between two waters," has allowed me to appreciate with a critical eye the transformations that have taken place since the end of the 1980s with respect to the representation of Latin American art in the United States, with the intent of determining their implications for art and artists south of the border.

I refer specifically to the impact that the phenomenon of Multiculturalism has had on the representation of Latin American art in North American cultural circuits. The starting point for this topic is the surge of activity that has

surrounded Latino-American art in the United States since the second half of the 1980s. Although Latino American artists have been present in the United States since the 1920s, not until now have we seen any serious appreciation of their art in mainstream circles. We can ascribe the increased visibility of this group of artists to two interrelated factors: first, the demographic trends that have been reconfiguring North American society since the 1960s, as a result of migrations from Central, South America and other Third World countries. It is predicted that the Hispanic population will swell to over 30 million by the year 2000. Second is the emergence of a new model of cultural interaction that has come to be known as *Multiculturalism*. The multicultural model is linked to the struggle of racial and ethnic minorities to defend a space for cultural and political equality within North American society.¹ These minorities include the Latin-, Asian-, African-, and Native American communities. The intensity with which Multiculturalism has erupted in the North American art scene during the last five years has generated an intense debate over the conditions for the representation of the identity of these marginal groups.² Yet, while the multicultural debate promises to redefine the parameters of the actual "canon," it is not clear to what extent it will promote a true sense of cultural diversity. At the present time, it poses a series of problems regarding the identities of the group of artists that it purports to represent.

The implications of this phenomenon for Latin American artists transcend the traditional struggle for recognition or the function that the United States has performed over the last forty years as *legitimizer* of the artistic expressions of the periphery. With the second highest growth rate in the United States, the Latin community is destined to assume a protagonist role in the process of multicultural reconfiguration of U.S. society. This fact alone suggests the emergence of a new dynamic of cultural exchange that promises to redefine the image of Latin American art and culture from *inside* the dominant center. The effects of this dynamic should not pass unnoticed to the Latin American community in general. In what follows I will attempt to identify those problems as they affect both the U.S. Latino artistic community and its broader Latin American counterpart.

In respect to the position of Latino artists (Mexican-American, Puerto Rican and Cuban], and Latin Americans (South Americans, Central Americans and Caribbean ones),³ who have been the object of discrimination by mainstream cultural institutions, we can point out two significant changes resulting from

the multicultural debate. On one hand, over the past ten years there has been considerable opening up of educational and cultural organizations to these marginal groups. As a result there has been an increase in exhibitions, acquisitions by museums and collectors, and other opportunities for personal and professional development. These developments have taken place notwithstanding the fact that the principal museums still resist acceptance of these groups of artists within *their* established “canon.”⁴

On the other hand, perhaps a more problematic issue has been a blurring of the distinctions that constitute the groups gathered under the Latino/Latin American art category. This fusion of identities between groups of U.S Latino artists—meaning Mexican-American, Puerto Rican and Cuban-and Latin-American artists—those proceeding from Central, South America and the Caribbean—has been promoted by both mainstream and marginal institutions and critics. For instance, four years ago the exhibition *The Latin American Spirit*⁵ (one of the first shows to document the presence of these various groups of artists in the United States) dealt with the problematic of Latin American and Latino artists as parallel phenomena. The critical discourse of the last few years, however, assumes a common identity for the various groups that make up the Latino community on the basis of the colonial Hispanic legacy that unites them all, as well as on their experience of displacement and marginalization by the center. This was the guiding premise of *The Decade Show*, organized by three “non mainstream” institutions, The Studio Museum in Harlem, the New Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art. Under the sole category of “Latino/Latin-American,” this exhibition presented a broad spectrum of artists from Central and South America, comparing them as a bloc to that of the African-, Asian-, Native- and Anglo-American artists.⁶

The blurring of the distinctive traits that constitute both Latino and Latin American identity in the U.S. context should alert us to the danger of homogenization implicit in the construct “Latino/Latin American art,” invoked by both the art establishment and advocates of Multiculturalism. It thus suggests the need to *rethink* the question of the representation of these two groups. My contention is that this rethinking must go beyond the usual arguments surrounding Latin American art in the United States, such as the denunciation of cooptation by the mainstream, the authenticity or un-authenticity of the supposed Latin American

art “boom,” or the impact of the colonial, imperialist strategies of the manifest destiny on artists from this region. The task at hand, then, is to unravel, both practically and theoretically, the problems posed by the category of “Latino/Latin American” art promoted by Multiculturalism.⁷

Many of the difficulties of taking on this task originate in the ambivalence and contradictions of the multicultural model itself. Especially when we consider the indiscriminate ways in which this model has been adopted in the cultural-artistic field. Although it is impossible to summarize the complex issues posed by Multiculturalism within the limitations of this paper, it is necessary to distinguish—if only schematically—the two versions of this model which are relevant to this discussion. The first conception of Multiculturalism is in opposition to the old assimilationist model of the “melting pot.” In this version of Multiculturalism the center allows the co-existence of different racial and ethnically constituted minority groups.⁸ It presents itself as capable of accepting “otherness” and legitimizing their “difference” with regard to white society, thereby positing a model of egalitarian coexistence.

The radical version of the multicultural model conceives of America as a single continent—extending from South America to the United States and Canada—composed of different racial minorities that are redesigning the space of the dominant culture.⁹ Such a model—exemplified in the writings of Gómez-Peña and the Border Arts Workshop—is based on the concept of a hybrid culture that exists along the Mexico–United States border providing a different mode of relations among ethnic groups. This hybrid “border” culture exemplifies the vision of the Latino groups of a new America of dialogue and collaboration. While in theory it is possible to distinguish the ideological subtleties of the two versions of Multiculturalism, in practice, the strategic alliance of minority groups among themselves and with entities of the dominant center makes it impossible to distinguish one version from the other. This suggests that deep down both participate of the same strategy of “crossing-over” to the center.

Notwithstanding the ideological attractiveness of this model, in practice it presents a series of problems. The first concerns the way in which it favors the racial category of the minority groups’ struggle over all the other determinants of social class, nationality, or ideology. In the case of Latinos, this type of racial classification is highly problematic, especially when we consider them with other

ethnic groups. Unlike Asian or African Americans, Latinos do not constitute a “race” or “ethnia” by themselves; they are rather an amalgam of races, classes, and nationalities that resists easy classification or categorization.¹⁰ We have to keep in mind that what is considered the Latino or Latin-American community of the United States is the result of immigrations proceeding from Central and South America at different historic periods.

The groups who have sought refuge in the United States have fled from economic oppression, the violence of dictatorships, as well as the effects of the Manifest Destiny or other political and economic strategies of the United States in relation to its neighbors to the South. The resulting amalgam of races and ethnic groups includes at least three or four generations of U.S. citizens of Latin-American origin, such as Mexican-Americans and Puerto Ricans, as well as South and Central American immigrants, each comprising in turn a wide variety of races and nationalities amongst which can be included whites, blacks, Arabs and Asians.¹¹ The Latino artistic community reflects this diversity in its multiplicity of approaches to art. In Gómez-Peña’s own words: “There is no such thing as ‘Latino art’ or ‘Hispanic art;’ there are hundreds of types of Latin-American art in the United States. And each one is aesthetically, socially, and politically specific.”¹²

All of the above suggests—contrary to what seems to be upheld by the multiculturalist doctrine—that the problematic of identity of U.S. minorities, with respect to the dominant U.S. culture, differs significantly from that of the peripheral groups that are inscribed in this same context. If both are a product of geographic and cultural displacements brought about by colonialism in its several historic phases, in practice they all exhibit differences in relation to their cultures of origin, as well as with the phenomenon of inequalities associated with the Third World. These disparities are more palpable when we attempt to group artists that come from Mexican-American or Nuyorican communities, whose experiences have developed at the margins of North American urban culture, with South Americans and Puerto Ricans, whose identities have evolved outside the parameters of this culture. How can we explain, for example, the phenomenon of the South American artists whose identities are grounded in the traditions of their countries of origin, but whose artistic development has benefited from the expanded opportunities provided by their life in metropolitan centers? In which latitude is this production situated? Or, within this scheme, how can we explain

the position of Puerto Rican artists, physically and socially distanced from the center, whose artistic practice is grounded in the possibility of declaring their independence from that very center?

The point I am trying to make here is the following: for Mexican Americans, Nuyoricans, and other Latino minorities, the focus of identification is located in their experience on the margins of North American culture; for South, Central American and Puerto Rican artists, however, this focus is found in their identity as citizens of the periphery or the colony. What distinguishes this second group is the fact that their identity is articulated on the basis of cultural traditions that lie *outside* the scope of their U.S. experience. These traditions can encompass a broad range of sources from pre-Columbian art, syncretic myths, or the literature of Jorge Luis Borges. Therefore, in order to understand the level of assimilation or non-assimilation of each group, their relation with the dominant culture, and the impact of these processes in their artistic practices, we must first understand how the identity of these various groups of artists is constituted proceeding from two different cultural axes: that which has been provided by their grassroots experiences in the United States or by their countries of origin.

We can sketch out some examples to illustrate the principal points of this argument. First, we have the case of Mexican-American artists whose ethnicity has always been a political issue. The majority of artists from this group is of working class origins and identify with the tradition of political struggle established in the 1950s and 60s by the Chicano movement. As we know, the latter attempted to unite this community through a nationalist project to construct an identity based on the recovery of their Mexican roots and their experiences in North American cities. Up to the early part of the 1980s, the Mexican-American artistic community situated itself in direct confrontation with the mainstream. Such a stance implied developing activist tactics to call into question the institutional mechanisms of the North American artistic milieu. In harmony with their objectives of political and cultural affirmation, the Chicano artists reclaimed the public space as a sphere for their activities, emphasized the community roots of their artistic production (versus the exacerbation of individualism among North American artists), and in their visual discourse inaugurated the strategies of appropriation and recycling of images from Hispanic and North American culture. From this point of view, Chicano art presents an interesting dualism: on one

hand, it is an art that depends on collective memory, just like the pre-Colombian and Mexican popular art traditions, as the basis for the construction of identity; on the other hand, it presents these traditions filtered through the artists' experience in North American urban culture.

Another instance, less analyzed, is the one that presents the situation of Central and South American artists who are active in the United States. The majority of them come from the South American upper and middle classes. They arrived in this country as exiled adults for political or economic reasons. Many of them are double exiles in the sense that their families had already emigrated from Europe to Latin America. Disregarding the number of years that they have lived in the United States, the majority of them resist integration into North American culture, insisting not only on retaining the identity of their countries of origin, but frequently adopting a second identity through North American citizenship or permanent resident status. This double identity has allowed them to participate in national and international exhibitions as either representative of their countries of origin or of the United States. It has also led to their being reclaimed by their original countries for their art history, museum collections, and encyclopedias of national art. In the last few years, the final collapse of political dictatorships in Latin America has encouraged the constant traffic back and forth of these exiled artists between the two continents, contributing to the consolidation of this hybrid identity, an identity that is suspended between two waters.

The developments of the 1980s as they relate to Multiculturalism have raised a number of problems for this community of artists, forcing them to decide what elements of their heritage they wanted to retain and what elements of North American culture they wanted to assimilate or leave behind. Worth noting in this respect is the common complaint among the group who arrived in the 1960s who perceived the climate of that decade as more receptive to cultural *difference* than the present context of the late 1980s and 1990s.

Contrary to minority groups in the United States, the constant movement of Central and South American artists between the metropolis of the center and the periphery has produced artistic forms that defy easy classification by country or region. Despite attempts by curators and art historians to classify or explain these artists according to their original nationality, the artistic languages of this group reflect their double identity in the way in which they combine—in

one work—references to both global and local traditions. These can range from allusions to the art and culture of the indigenous and popular sectors of Latin American countries, to elements of the urban environment of the European or North American metropolis. In addition, the art of this group juxtaposes the modernist concern with issues of cultural and political affirmation with such strategies as appropriation, pastiche, and irony associated with postmodern languages. In their art, however, the postmodern vocabulary assumes a different function. That is to say, its aim is to recycle the artistic modes generated by the artistic movements of the center. All of these elements make the production of U.S.-based Central and South American artists difficult to locate and classify in the context of U.S. “mainstream” culture.

An even more problematic case is that represented by Puerto Rican artists, divided between “Islanders” and “Nuyoricans” or “Continental.”¹³ If, for “Nuyorican” artists, the fight against white racism constitutes a nucleus of daily struggle in the urban context of the metropolis, for “Islander” artists the racial issue is only one ingredient within the insidious problem of Puerto Rico’s status as the last colony of this hemisphere. As a result, for this later group, immersed in the pessimism of a politically undefined status quo, Multiculturalism is not only a distant phenomenon, albeit one that does not address the realities of their immediate condition.

The disparity between the experiences of both groups also manifests itself in the differences that separate their artistic languages. Despite the exposure of “Islander” artists to mainstream tendencies, contemporary art in Puerto Rico exhibits a much more conservative profile than that of other Latin American countries or even that of “Nuyorican” artists, whose proximity to the “mainstream” has imprinted a different character to their production. Taken as a group, with counted exceptions, the “Islander’s” art is hardly ever understood in the North American art world, even after the latter has been shaken by the visual discourse of ethnic groups. The reasons for this phenomenon go further than a mere localism or provincialism, and therefore deserve to be considered with more attention.

The conservatism (and here must be clarified the relativity of the term, in other words, *conservatism* when it is compared to contemporary tendencies from the United States or Europe), and marginal status of present Puerto Rican art, finds its roots in the resistance toward avant-garde art in general that marked

the tradition of nationalistic struggle of the Puerto Rican artistic class since the beginning of this century. In most Latin American countries, the introduction of modern art went hand in hand with the process of political consolidation and modernization initiated by national elites. In Puerto Rico, however, the transference of the Island from Spain to the United States in 1898 interrupted the process of national consolidation for the sake of a second colonial order.¹⁴ An opposite effect was produced: instead of experiencing the openness toward experimental forms of art that other countries experienced, the Puerto Rican visual arts “clammed-up” into an attitude of rejection of any “imported” style that could be potentially associated with dominating powers. This posture led to the rejection of avant-garde modes in favor of the exaltation of the nineteenth century, natural version of “jíbaro” [redneck] culture. Both came to represent ways of resisting the North American cultural influence. Thus, from Francisco Oller to the generation of the 1950s, Puerto Rican artists insisted on their own tradition of resistance, manifested in ideological postures and artistic practices “against the grain” of the international artistic world.¹⁵ The moral persistence of this legacy continues to imprint a *sui generis* character to contemporary Puerto Rican art, despite the new openness experienced by the Puerto Rican arts community during the last two decades. As a result, while the international art world is immersed in Post-modernism, Puerto Rican art continues to be engaged in the modernist project of consolidation and definition of a national identity, in communicating with the public, and in creating the structures that will facilitate and legitimize the art production in an environment that (even in 1991) lacks an operative cultural infrastructure. All of these factors have contributed to and accentuated the marginality of Puerto Rican artists with respect to the North American and international art world circuits.

One could conclude, on the basis of everything stated until now, that far from clarifying the specificity of the Latino-American groups, Multiculturalism tends in a paradoxical manner to homogenize the differences among them for the sake of an overarching identity based in the common experience of racism and oppression. On a practical level, this concept is inadequate to explain the identities of marginal groups of artists, their relations among themselves, as well as with the dominant culture. In making this critique, I am not trying to revert to an essentialist or Manichaeian position. What I am trying to emphasize instead is the need for a type of analysis that can take into account both

the ways in which the diverse groups of Latino American artists *construct* their identity and how the latter becomes manifest in their visual discourse and artistic practice.

The contradictions of the multicultural position become more evident when we analyze the central role that both versions of this model grant to the *difference* that characterizes the marginal groups. In general terms, Multiculturalism foregrounds the racial, ethnic and cultural *difference* of these groups as a value in itself, irrespective of whether in practice it is true or not. This premise has led these artists to express themselves exclusively in terms of *difference* that (in itself) legitimizes their inclusion and egalitarian acceptance in the new “center.” Such a dynamic was present in, for example, *The Decade Show* where instead of presenting the work of the African-American, Asian, and Latin artists in terms of their production—which can or cannot be differentiated from that of the North American or European artists—the emphasis was placed on the *different* manner in which they work. As a result, each ethnic group ended up represented on the basis of their cultural attributes, which served as significant points of differentiation to the dominant culture. Thus, the selection of works by Native American artists emphasized references to the land and nature; the selection of Puerto Ricans and Nuyoricans was characterized by references to the Island’s culture and symbols of the pro-independence struggle; finally, the work by Anglo-Europeans stressed the utilization of resources derived from advanced technology, such as videos, electronics, and laser screens.

The problems associated with the celebration of *difference*, are ultimately related to the mainstream’s function as interlocutor and/or *legitimizer of the difference* that marks the marginality. In other words, this dynamic can only function if there exists an “Other” who will authorize this *difference*, a situation that continues to perpetuate both the division between “us” and “them” and the inequality through which *difference* can function autonomously. For this reason, it should not surprise us that the mainstream’s answer to the demands of Multiculturalism has been one of penance, openness and celebration. To the claims of minority groups, the mainstream has responded with an apparent regret of its exclusionary practices, the “correction” of its institutional politics and its acceptance of multicultural production. Nonetheless, we have to ask ourselves whether the emphasis on *difference* of artistic modes and motives employed by the Latin artists, does

not correspond—once again—to the space that the “mainstream” allows them to articulate their identity in terms of the parameters of the dominant culture.

In the case of the multicultural phenomenon, the absolute authority of the mainstream with respect to the celebration of marginality can be explained in terms of its transformation experienced during the 1980s. While these are too complex to be fully discussed here, it must be pointed out that Multiculturalism’s arrival surprised the mainstream in a moment in which its distinction not only between art and market was collapsing, but also the distinction between the institutional sphere and artistic practices. This has resulted, on one hand, in the indiscriminate openness of the mainstream to all that is produced in the artistic world, including the peripheral and marginal expressions, and on the other hand, in the cessation of the function of the alternative spaces that propagated during the 1960s, among which the marginal museums of ethnic orientation could be included.¹⁶

We should also not be surprised by the fact that the same openness generated by Multiculturalism has already promoted the emergence of one or several “multicultural” stereotypes in the production of Latin American artists. In the artistic production field, Chicano art, which as we have pointed out, has the most consolidated tradition, has provided an important model for the rest of the Latin groups. Resources such as the narratives extracted from memory, the exaltation of popular art to the level of “kitsch,” the ironic inversion of stereotypes, the rejection of technology in the name of craft techniques, as well as ritual-based themes like altars and fetishes, have come to replace the exotic and primitive stereotypes that predominated in exhibitions of Latino American arts organized by North American institutions during the 1980s.¹⁷

In a similar way, the narratives of marginality that characterize the existential experience of artists as members of oppressed groups have assumed the form of a parallel discourse accompanying their artistic production, thereby establishing the parameters for the interpretation of the work. In general terms, nonetheless, the implications for South American, Central American, and Puerto Rican artists that do not conform to the new rules are the same as twenty years ago. If, in the past, their work was rejected because it was not in line with international trends, today it is rejected because it does not reflect the new type of “multicultural” art. Despite the veneer of receptivity of the art world,

mainstream representatives still exhibit the same level of ignorance with regard to Latin American cultures and traditions. That is to say, they are still unable to distinguish a Peruvian from a Honduran, a Chicano from a Puerto Rican. This suggests that the richness and complexity of Latino American art will continue to be undermined by the North American art world, and its contribution to the Western art tradition will continue to be slighted for the sake of the global celebration of Latinism promoted by Multiculturalism.

No matter from which angle we approach Latino-American art, the issue of representing the identity of the groups of artists is and will continue to be a fundamental problem. Hence there arises the urgent need for a critical framework that will take into account the construction of the identities of different Latino groups outside the parameters of the multicultural discourse. This type of framework has to go beyond theory, serving as the basis to elaborate a practice of exhibitions that will reflect the fluidity of identities and relations in Latin American contemporary artistic practices, taking into account their relation to both the margins of the center and to the periphery.

The first question we should ask ourselves is to whom are these exhibitions directed, and who benefits from their accomplishments? From this perspective, one would have to re-evaluate the format of independent exhibitions, freeing them from the demands and wants of the U.S. art world. *The Decade Show* established an important precedent in this when it initiated a questioning of traditional curatorial practices and introduced, instead, a comparative thematic format to analyze the artistic production of the three ethnic groups represented in the exhibition. From my point of view, this effort failed because of the importance that it placed on the mainstream as *legitimizer of the difference* among the represented groups. Still nowadays, the dominating mentality—even in non-mainstream, culturally specific museums—is one that appropriates the format of the mainstream to produce “equivalent” shows. The aim of this tactic is to “sanction” the production of minority artists within the parameters of the dominant culture. Curatorial practices continue to utilize traditional criteria for the determination of quality, even if it attempts to define quality in a more general way than the one utilized by the mainstream. The analysis of the different ways in which diverse groups produce their work would require an interdisciplinary collaboration as well as an understanding of the problems from the perspectives of various disciplines. This type of framework will allow us to explore more ample ques-

tions based on how different groups approach similar artistic propositions within extra-ethnic parameters.

Furthermore, and perhaps the more disturbing aspect of the current multicultural climate of the United States, are the implications of the defense of Multiculturalism by Latino radical intellectuals, whose marginal position had functioned in the not-so-distant past as a weapon against the system. This position reveals the deep-seated contradictions of this model. Those who less than five years ago constituted a significant opposition to the center today have reorganized themselves around the model of *differential co-existence* of groups in the “decentralized” center, governed by the rhetoric of equality and difference.¹⁸ At the heart of this switch, is the more problematic issue of how to structure an artistic practice outside the parameters dictated by the center. The model of national affirmation and consciousness that informed the Chicano and Nuyorican struggles of the 1960s and 70s has been redefined within the multicultural context in terms of acceptance and celebration of the cultural “hybridity.” Faced with the legacy of conflict originating in the confrontations of these groups with white Anglo culture, Multiculturalism presents itself as an, if not easy, at least tolerable *exit*.¹⁹ If, in politics, resistance has given way to strategic alliances that facilitate “entrance” and “access” to the center, in the artistic productions of these groups, resistance has given way to a literal representation of identity, expressed through cultural symbols and emblems such as the ones described earlier. From this point of view, the task at hand continues to be the elaboration of conditions for the acceptance of racial and cultural diversity, from the point of view of the affirmation of a culture whose priorities do not match the values of the dominant culture.²⁰ This means that the way toward the acceptance of cultural diversity on the basis of intercultural dialogue cannot be found in the simple repositioning of the Latino American “Other” into the center of the “mainstream,” but in the reconfiguration of the latter to correspond to the need of these and other groups.

Finally, I wish to return to the original question, “Which Latin America?” This question is even more relevant at the present moment when a series of economic and political transformations are significantly altering center/periphery relations. Among these transformations we can cite three factors: the “Third-World-ization” of the United States and, the shift among the important Latin American countries toward privatization and free market economies,

and the alliances of financial groups from these countries with their counterparts in the United States. All of these factors have blurred the binary opposition between center and peripheries, bringing about a greater interdependence between both spheres.

Within this context, the multicultural position that defends the concept of a single continent of collaboration and dialogue between races and ethnic groups can turn into a double-edged instrument. In its most radical version, it can be viewed as a utopian attempt to redefine Latin America from “inside” the center that is, using as a model the experience of U.S. Latino groups with Multiculturalism. Its principal attractiveness resides in the way in which it counterposes a dynamic and fluent model, capable of absorbing and recycling influences from both sides of the border, to the essentialist and static model that dominates the discourse of Latin American identity. The latter still being characterized by polarities (national/universal, regional/international, etc). Nonetheless, it is not clear what type of subject the new hybrid proclaimed and exalted by this model will be. And, to what extent the acceptance of its complex cultural legacy will represent conformism. Ultimately, the vagueness and imprecision of this model are insufficient to counteract the complex legacy of colonialism of Latin American countries, resulting in wielding a highly effective but ultimately rhetorical utopia.

On the other hand, we have seen the other edge of this model appear very recently in the appropriation of the multicultural discourse by First World interests of the periphery. Such was the case with the exhibition *Myth and Magic*, organized in 1991 by MARCO, the new contemporary art museum of Monterrey, Mexico.²¹ Based on a model of de-territorialization and elimination of borders, this exhibition brought together for the first time artists from Canada, the United States and Latin America, thereby exploring the richness of visual arts expression in the 1980s in the whole continent. And yet, despite the broad interpretive framework laid out by its curators, the institutional politics that led to the organization of *Myth and Magic* ultimately used the multicultural model as an access flag to the “mainstream.” This took place precisely at a time when Mexico is reclaiming equal access to the North American economic circuits. In this case, the identities of the artists of an entire continent were homogenized for the sake of the self-centered, business interests of groups of private individuals. The long-term perspectives of this strategy, now originating in the periphery, should alert

us to the problems implicit in the multicultural model, and the need to revise the definitions and tactics originating in the view “from the center.”

1

The words of the Mexican artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña illustrate a more optimistic vision of this process: “. . . the United States are no longer the heirs to Western European culture. In its place, they have become a bizarre laboratory in which all races and continents are experimenting with their identity, trying to find a new model for co-existence.” Guillermo Gómez-Peña, “On Nationality: Thirteen Artists,” *Art in America* [September 1991], 126.

2

The most lucid and exhaustive analysis of this problem can be found in Lucy R. Lippard's *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990). See also the collection of texts edited by Russell Ferguson, Cornel West et. al., *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* (New York and Cambridge, MA: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and MIT Press, 1990).

3

Almost all the terms currently used to denominate these groups, such as “minorities,” “ethnic,” “marginal,” “Third-World-ists,” etc., are problematic due to their racial or discriminatory connotations. Because of the lack of other terminology I have made cautious use of them. On the other hand, since in this article I am dealing with so-called “Latino” artists [Mexican-American and Puerto Ricans], as well as their South American, Central American and Caribbean counterparts, I will be referring to them with the term “Latino-Americans.” For more on terminology, see Lippard, 15–17; 29–36.

4

The high visibility of Latino-American artists inside the North American art world is a recent phenomenon noticeable only since 1985. In the early 1980s, for instance, critics like Lucy R. Lippard lamented the art world's complete lack of appreciation for the production of these groups. See Lippard, “Ethnocentrifugalism: Latin Art in Exile,” *The Village Voice* (July 12, 1983).

5

Luis R. Cancel, “Introduction,” *The Latin American Spirit: Art and Artists in the United States, 1920–1970*, exh. cat. (New York: Harry N. Abrams and The Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1988). [SEE DOCUMENT V.1.8]

6

The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s, exh. cat. (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art and The Studio Museum in Harlem, 1990).

7

The aforementioned book by Lippard, as well as the work of Shifra M. Goldman and Susana Torruella Leval, represent significant points of departure for this type of analysis. See Goldman, “The Manifested Destinies of Chicano, Puerto Rican and Cuban Artists in the United States” (paper presented at the 19th Annual Conference Meeting, College Art Association, Washington, D.C., February 1991) and Susana Torruella Leval. “Identity and Freedom: A Challenge for the Nineties,” *The Decade Show*, 146–157.

8

In the words of the Asian artist Margo Machida: “‘Melting pot’ and ‘cultural diversity’ are sometimes equated, but in fact, they are opposing notions. The melting pot is a concept from a previous era, which many people now reject because it implies that people of color will melt into one big, mega American stew. Cultural diversity, on

the other hand, is something entirely different: it is about pluralism, whereby many types—different types—of groups can exist on an equal basis in this society. It's a more respectful and more accurate description of what's going on." Cited in *The Decade Show*, 143.

9

Cf. Guillermo Gómez-Peña, "The Multicultural Paradigm. An Open Letter to the National Arts Community," *High Performance* (Fall 1989): 22; reproduced in *The Decade Show*, 92–103. [SEE DOCUMENT VI.1.1]

10

The same point could be argued with reference to the African-American and the Asian communities that constitute the largest spectrum of North American minorities. The African-American community has highly diverse and complex origins extending to the many countries and communities of the African continent. This is not counting the fact that this community has continued to evolve through recent migrations from Africa and the Caribbean. In a similar manner, the "Asian" category blends in one common denominator Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, Koreans, Thais and many other groups. See Lippard, 29–36.

11

Juan Flores and George Yudice, "Living Borders/Buscando America (Searching for America): Languages of Latino Self-Formation," *Social Text* 24: 57. [SEE DOCUMENT VI.1.3]

12

Gómez-Peña, "The Multicultural Paradigm," (1989): 22.

13

Here I use the terms "Puerto Ricans" and "Nuyoricans" as geographical referents in order to distinguish the physical location of each group with respect to the center. It must be understood, nonetheless, that both are Puerto Ricans.

14

Puerto Rico was ceded by Spain to the United States in 1898 as a result of the Hispanic-American War. Not until 1952 did the Island experience a change of political status with the creation of a commonwealth government under the tutelage of the United States: The E.L.A. [Free-Associated State]. Under the present status, Puerto Ricans have United States citizenship [per the Jones Act of 1917]; they enjoy the privileges of a "welfare state," but do not have the right to the presidential vote or to parliamentary representation in Congress. Almost 1.5 million Puerto Ricans reside in the United States. The political status of the Island is currently being debated once again.

15

For a more detailed analysis of this subject see Mari Carmen Ramírez et. al., *De Oller a los Cuarenta. La Pintura en Puerto Rico, 1900–1948*, exh. cat. (Río Piedras, PR: Museo de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1988); and Ramírez, *Puerto Rican Painting: Between Past and Present*, exh. cat. (Trenton, NJ: Squibb Corp., 1987).

16

Laura Trippi and Gary Sangster, two contributors to the catalogue of *The Decade Show* analyze this process without acknowledging the negative implications of this process for the development of multiculturalism. See Laura Trippi and Gary Sangster, "From Trivial Pursuit to the Art of the Deal: Art Making in the Eighties," *The Decade Show*, 70–73.

17

The type of show that perpetrated this stereotype of Latino art as exotic and primitive was exemplified by *Hispanic Art in the United States, Thirty Contemporary Artists*, Houston Museum of Fine Arts, 1987. [SEE DOCUMENTS V.1.4–V.1.7]

18

Nelly Richard has formulated a similar critique of this model in her article, "The Postmodern Centro-Marginal Condition," *American Visions/Visiones de las Américas: Artistic and Cultural identity in the Western hemisphere*/Noreen Tomassi et al. eds. (New York: Arts International/ Institute of International Education, 1994).

19

Cf. Néstor García Canclini, "Salida," *Culturas híbridas/Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (Mexico City: Conaculta/Grijalbo, 1989), 329–48.—Ed.

20

The following citation by Uruguayan artist Luis Camnitzer is appropriate: "... the focus must not be on our access to the 'mainstream,' but on the access of the 'mainstream' to us. Only in this way can it function as a sound box for our activities without eviscerating us The fundamental point is that we remain in the task of building a culture, and that we know as precisely as possible which culture we are building and to whom it belongs. . . . [Such] is a position emphasizing that what has commercial value is not necessarily useful to our interests, while the abolishment of colonialism is." Luis Camnitzer, "Access to the Mainstream," *New Art Examiner* (June 1987): 23.

21

Mito y Magia en América: Los Ochenta, exh. cat. (Monterrey: MARCO, 1991).

VI.1.5 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 809385

MULTI-CORRECT POLITICALLY CULTURAL

Patricio Chávez, 1993

In this essay, Chicano curator Patricio Chávez discusses the sociopolitical and cultural conditions that led to the conception of the exhibition *La Frontera/The Border: Art About the Mexico/United States Border Experience* at Balboa Park in San Diego in 1993. Here, he addresses both the problem of Multiculturalism and the institutionally entrenched prejudices that fuel "culture wars" and make genuine, balanced Multiculturalism impossible. A unique collaboration between a large mainstream museum and a small community cultural center, this exhibition countered the prevailing trend (during the late 1980s and into the 1990s) of major museums co-opting Chicano border art and turning "the border" into strictly a metaphoric, non-political concept [SEE THE WRITINGS OF GÓMEZ-PEÑA IN THIS REGARD, MAINLY DOCUMENT VI.1.4]. Though not exclusively comprised of Chicano/Latino artists, *La Frontera/The Border* exhibition maintained the focus on the frontier as a geographical site in-between and on its sociopolitical reality. This excerpt is from the text's original

publication [Patricio Chávez, "Multi-Correct Politically Cultural," *La Frontera/The Border: Art About Mexico/United States Border Experience*, exh. cat. (San Diego, CA: Centro Cultural de la Raza/Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, 1993), 3–11].

SELF-DETERMINATION, INDEPENDENCE, migration, immigration, domination, and the flourishing of the human spirit through the creation of art are the themes addressed by *La Frontera/The Border: Art about the Mexico/United States Border Experience*. This exhibition and catalogue bring together art by Chicano, Mexican, Asian, and Euro-American artists and writers who create their works about a historically complex region and subject in a time of turbulent hemispheric and global change. But *La Frontera/The Border* is about more than border art. It is also about the process and politics of institutional collaboration between the Centro Cultural de la Raza and the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, and about coming to terms with the meaning of multiculturalism for the arts in the United States. In the 1990s, we face the challenges of negotiating and controlling cultural identity and knowledge, both powerful "commodities" in our society. What do we need to know about cultural and institutional collaboration to understand this exhibition? What do we need to know about the history and reality of the border to understand border art? We will look at these questions, and some possible answers, in the pages to follow.

THE U.S. CULTURE WARS

Currently, there is a great deal of debate in the cultural and educational communities about what multiculturalism really means. Unless we address the realities of institutional racism and the historic inequities in the arts, education, and our society at large, there can be no genuine multiculturalism. The last decade has been an especially hostile time for artists and cultural organizations. One of the extreme Right's most vocal representatives, Pat Buchanan, has declared that there is a "culture war" taking place in the U. S. , and that the attacks on the arts, many of which he has spearheaded, are part of the larger battles taking place in many areas of American society. Attacks on gays, lesbians, the poor, immigrants, progressive thought, and the rise of racism, bigotry, and intolerance are part of

the extreme Right's strategy—"friendly fascism," as Bertram Gross calls it—all under the guise of God and Country: "Pat Buchanan, former director of communications in the Reagan White House, summed up the New Right's position clearly in the August 1991 issue of his publication, *From the Right*. Declaring that there was "a rising demand on campus for black studies, for black fraternities, and multicultural education," Buchanan concluded by quoting an official from the American Immigration Control Foundation that "*the combined forces of open immigration and multiculturalism constitute a mortal threat to American Civilization.*"¹

Buchanan is correct to frame the attacks as "culture wars." These assaults are all about the extreme Right's quest for domination, power, and control over our experience, both in how we define our reality and in the tools we use for understanding our shared experience in this society. These battles require access to resources, money, and information. They also involve manipulation of television, film, radio, newspapers, magazines, education, history, and the arts. These media and disciplines are all part of the validation of ourselves and our cultures. These "hearts and minds" battles—a phrase coined during the Vietnam War for U.S. government propaganda efforts—continue today in other ways: art = pornography; public funding = support of pornography, multiculturalism = attacks on America.

Well before the most recent attacks from the Right, artists and organizations of color had great difficulties obtaining support and resources in the arts. I believe it is no accident that the assaults on the National Endowment for the Arts [NEA] are directly related to the gains organizations and artists of color, gays, and lesbians have made at the Endowment. One of the cynical manifestations of the ongoing struggle over multiculturalism is the tendency of mainstream institutions and funders to go "multicultural." The resources stay in the loop because the same one-million-dollar-a-year-plus institutions continue to get funded, but now it is for "outreach" and "multicultural" programming. Organizations which have been doing committed ethnically-specific or multicultural community-based programming for years get passed by because of the same institutional barriers—institutional racism, prejudice against smaller or mid-sized organizations, and the basic ignorance regarding non-mainstream groups—that have existed all along. Historically, the pattern has been: those who have, get. The status quo is thus maintained, and efforts to assert cultural identity are co-opted.

BORDER STRUGGLES/POLITICS OF COLLABORATION

The Centro Cultural de la Raza came into being as part of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement 23 years ago. The Centro was established in 1970 after a group of Chicano artists demanded a working exhibition space from the city of San Diego. This “demand” was in the context of many other issues then confronting the Chicano community in San Diego. The history and foundation of the Centro set the tone for its approach to *La Frontera/The Border* and the collaboration with the MCA, both literarily and philosophically. . . . Los Toltecas en Aztlán, represented by Salvador Torres and Luis Espinoza, presented a three part proposal stating: “1) That the Ford Building be turned over to the Toitecas en Aztlán board of directors to be converted into a Centro Cultural de la Raza. 2) That in the event another building is offered by the city, such a building must be of comparable size to the Ford Building and be located in Balboa Park. 3) That the city commits itself to match the funds that the Toltecas are able to raise with an equal amount.”²

The community prevailed. Thus was born the Centro Cultural de la Raza, founded on principles of self-determination, mutual self-respect, and self-sacrifice—setting aside personal differences for the greater good of the organization. In 1989, the then La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art’s *Dos Ciudades/Two Cities* project was funded by the NEA Special Artistic Initiatives program. The *Dos Ciudades/Two Cities* project, of which *La Frontera/The Border* is a part, consisted of several components, including exhibitions, publications, billboards, public arts projects, and lectures and symposia. Previously, the MCA had mounted one exhibition of the Border Art Workshop—*911: A House Gone Wrong*,—and also exhibited the works of several individuals, as well as purchased a modest number of works for its permanent collection.³

. . . When I arrived at the Centro in the Fall of 1989, one of the first decisions I was involved in was how to, or whether or not to, participate in the *Dos Ciudades* project, which included a border art exhibition and catalogue. Members of the BAW/TAF [Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo] and the Centro’s Visual Arts Advisory Committee, however, questioned the appropriation of language and ideas about border art by the MCA, and we felt it necessary to continue the dialogue established between Hugh Davies, Director of the MCA, and the previous Acting Director of the Centro, Victor Ochoa. Ochoa had reviewed and advised on the initial NEA proposal submitted by the MCA. Still, for some, at issue

was: the appropriation, the commodification, and the exploitation of border art by the art mainstream.

The situation presented a difficult challenge for us. The Centro had been dealing with issues facing the border community since its inception. We debated as to the most appropriate action for us to take, given our concerns. Should we simply maintain a position of neutrality and let a project take place that dealt with issues of art on the border and raise our concerns from the outside, or demand equal participation from within the project? The Centro's Visual Arts Committee (which included several members of the BAW/TAF), the Director of the Centro at the time, Ernesto Guerrero, and I, decided to participate if certain conditions were met that would make it a meaningful and equitable collaboration. The two organizations developed a statement of understanding in the summer of 1992. The basic outline of the agreement was the following: that there would be shared and administrative decision-making in the border art show and catalogue, a shared curatorial fellow, a philosophical statement about the collaborative nature of border art, and that the BAW/TAF support the Centro's participation.

The collaboration between the Centro and the MCA represents a search for an enlightened model of institutional collaboration. How do we overcome the historic inequity and oppression that is part of the foundation and fabric of U.S. society so that all may share in the basic rights and opportunities for all human beings? How do we bridge the gaps between those who have and those who do not, as represented in our distinctly different institutions, when the very premise of some institutions and their support system is to continue to prop up historical amnesia and the erasure of whole cultures? Our collaboration is an attempt to establish and address a true multicultural agenda. I believe these basic premises are the most important factors in collaborations: financial or resource equity, fair division of input and responsibility, and equal participation in the full development of a project from its inception. . . .

LA FRONTERA: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BORDER REGION

The current dramas of racism, national identity, migration, immigration, cultural self-definition and determination, and economic violence are the results of the inherited relationships, systems, and structures of institution building in politics, culture, and the arts. This exhibition, the collaboration between the

Centro and the MCA, and border art itself are a direct result of these conflicts and the attendant realities. The United States's mind is a young one with a short memory. The border, as it now exists, is very new. We are still shaping our national identity and culture next to Mexico, a nation that is also negotiating its own past, present, and future.

By virtue of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed in 1848 after two years of war between Mexico and the United States, Mexico lost the territory that is now California, Nevada, Arizona, Utah, New Mexico, Texas, and parts of Wyoming, Colorado, and Oklahoma. During the negotiations, many in the U.S., both public officials and private individuals, argued that it was the "Manifest Destiny" of the U.S. government to acquire these lands, and some advocated the taking of all of Mexico. Several arguments were put forward both to acquire all of Mexico or territories that included Baja California and much of the Mexican mainland. Some said that the U.S. government would be willing to forgive the massive Mexican debt were Mexico to surrender Baja California. Even then, some politicians, concerned about slavery, race, and other issues, opposed the acquisition of Mexico and the granting of U.S. citizenship to Mexicans.⁴ The region that was created—the Mexico/United States border region—put the so-called first and third worlds in collision, conflict, and competition. The people of the border region have developed a unique and complex culture—language, food, economy, politics, and art,—all specific to this confluence of cultures. Each area along the border has its own character and challenges, but there is always the reality of *La Línea* [the line], which artificially divided—and continues to divide—communities and families.

BORDER MIGRATION/IMMIGRATION

The Tijuana/San Diego border is the most traversed border checkpoint in the world, and the Mexico/United States border, at 1,952 miles, is currently the longest international border. The border is the last psychic frontier of the American West, where perceptions of the so-called first and third worlds thrive: the conquerors and the conquered, the rich and the poor, the "civilized" and the "uncivilized." This psychic frontier is expressed by the oversized Marlboro Men billboards and the huge U.S. flags flying all along the border, reminding residents who is in charge. In El Paso, Texas, a local bank lights up dozens of floors at night in the

image of the U.S. flag, facing Ciudad Juárez, Mexico a few hundred yards away.

The creation of art about the border is one result of both the psychic and literal border crossings that occur every day. Globally, millions of people are adjusting to the tectonic border shifts of the 1980s and 1990s that are re-configuring whole nations and national identities. *La Frontera/The Border* seeks to stimulate discussion on the meaning of the border, for people regionally, nationally, and internationally. Public sentiment, official and unofficial U.S. government policy, and Mexican government collision regarding the presence and migration of Mexican people to the U.S. has changed with the ebb and flow of U.S. economic needs. Through programs such as the Bracero Program during World War II, massive numbers of Mexican workers migrated to the U.S. More recently, the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act—and now the North American Free Trade Agreement—officially limit the migration and immigration of Mexican people into the U.S.

Since the nineteenth century, Mexican workers have heavily subsidized the U.S. economy, often doing those jobs that U.S. workers would never touch. Historically, people of color and poor European immigrants provided the labor that built the United States into the most powerful nation in the world, and provided the middle and upper classes a standard of living higher than anywhere else. Mexican people have picked our food, cleaned our homes, raised our children, built our buildings, landscaped, and worked in *maquiladoras* [factories on the border owned by the U.S. or other countries], working for less than a dollar an hour. Yet, when hard times hit, they become a favorite target, scapegoats blamed for every social ill from lack of jobs to disease and overpopulation. In some instances, the forced repatriation of Mexican people some of whom never lived in Mexico to begin with—has taken place.

The social and economic pressures that influence immigration policy also have been manifested in violence against Mexican people, much like that against immigrants of other countries. In the summer of 1943, as a result of the hysteria whipped up in the media against “Zoot Suit Hoodlums” and “Pachuco gangsters,” hundreds of U.S. military personnel went on the rampage for weeks in Los Angeles, cruising the city in taxicabs, attacking any brown person they saw. These sailors, none of whom were arrested, concentrated on Zoot Suiters, primarily Chicanos, who adopted a particular style of dress. These events came to be known as the Zoot Suit riots.

In the 1990s, anti-Mexican sentiment in the border region is rising dramatically. The primary reasons given for recent federal reinforcement of the border are drugs and crime. In 1992, a thirteen-mile steel fence was installed from the Pacific coast inland by the U.S. military and the U.S. Border Patrol. This fence is made of [Operation] Desert Storm landing material. Two years ago, citizens groups, such as “Light up the Border,” made up primarily of the local white middle class and formed by the promotion and endorsement of a popular AM radio talk show host—indicted ex-Mayor Roger Hedgecock—met weekly on the border to protest the “flood of illegal aliens” into the U.S. At dusk, they pointed their vehicles toward Mexico, their lights on, with the goal of bringing attention to “illegal aliens,” who; in their view, bring disease, crime and drugs, overcrowd schools and hospitals, take jobs from U.S. citizens, and contribute to the national debt. In opposition to these activities, many organizations and individuals formed a coalition to protest what they saw as an over-simplified and racist anti-immigration movement. Arts groups such as The Border Art Workshop and Las Comadres [Godmothers, Old Wives, Neighbors] participated with community groups in counter protests, with large banners carrying statements such as “Another Berlin Wall?,” “No Apartheid on the Border,” “Our Prosperity Depends on Their Poverty,” and “Stop Militarization of the Border.” . . .

BORDER LANDS

Chicanos are among the heirs to the 500-year history of conquest in this hemisphere. By blood, Chicanos are the descendants of the Europeans and Indigenous people of the Americas, and by nation-state power politics, the conquered inhabitants of an occupied homeland. Land is—and always has been—the basic struggle of Indigenous people in the U.S. The importance of the land and the relationship to the land are themes woven throughout much of the work in *La Frontera/The Border*, from aesthetic and spiritual inspiration to the more direct interpretation of the sociopolitical issues on the border.

The history of conflict in the establishment of the Mexico/United States border revolves around the struggle over land. Territory that originally was home to a large and diverse Native population now supports Americans of myriad backgrounds. It is important to speak of Native people in the context of the border because they have lost the most. The Mexico/United States boundary cuts right

through the lands and communities of many people who have lived in the region for millennia. Yet, since the initial displacement and attempted destruction of the Native people of the Americas and Africa through genocide, disease, slavery, forced relocation, reservations, and the establishment of nation-state boundaries, Indigenous peoples have struggled to survive. In taking the land, the U.S. used a divide-and-conquer strategy to pit Mexican people against Native people. However, loyalties based on homeland, blood, or nations still guide indigenous and Mestizo peoples. Today, throughout the U.S. Southwest, there are contemporary indigenous and Mestizo cultures flourishing in spite of continued systematic abuse and neglect.

LA DUALIDAD/THE DUALITY

In the interior of the Centro [Cultural de la Raza] there is a large mural entitled *La Dualidad* [The Duality]. This mural, which emerged out of a search for self-identity, represents part of the roots of the Chicano and Mestizo consciousness. It recognizes both the positive and negative aspects of life, the elements (fire, water, air, and earth), and the reality of the mixed-blood heritage of the conqueror and the conquered, the victim and the oppressor, the European and the indigenous. This duality is a key to how Chicanos approach and experience their lives, and this ability to work within two worlds is what has enabled Chicanos to survive. . . .

This movement from the center (dominant culture) to the margins (so-called minority cultures) eliminates the use of the language of margins and centers. The border region then becomes the place of confluence exemplifying America's (as in all of the Americas) cultures. A similar duality characterizes the experience of the *La Frontera/The Border* collaboration and border art itself. . . .

1992 represents a paradigm shift, a turning point in the consciousness of people the world over. Columbus no longer benignly "discovered" America. He invaded a world already populated by highly developed cultures. Through these awakened post-Columbian eyes, the Mexico/United States border—seen in the global context of border redefinitions—represents a prism through which we have the opportunity to analyze honestly the spectrum of our contemporary reality. History can begin to mean something to all of us as we shed the states of personal, institutional, and historical denial. . . .

1

Nancy Murray, “Columbus and the USA: From Mythology to Ideology.” *Race and Class: The Curse of Columbus* (London: The Institute of Race Relations, 1992), 55. Emphasis added by Chávez.

2

Philip Brookman and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, eds., *Made in Aztlán* (San Diego, CA: Centro Cultural de la Raza, 1986), 19 and 21.

3

For more details about the history of border art at the MCA, see the catalogue foreword.

4

See Oscar J. Martinez, *Troublesome Border* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1988).

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THE CHICANO MOVEMENT/THE MOVEMENT OF CHICANO ART

Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, 1986–88

In this seminal text, U.S.-born cultural critic and scholar of Chicano art Tomás Ybarra-Frausto (born 1938) outlines the development of Chicano art since the 1960s. In his view, Chicano art is closely connected to and reflective of *El Movimiento*—the parallel Chicano political project—whose first critical task was to repudiate readings of Mexican Americans as mere receptors rather than broad generators of culture. His text situates the iconography, styles, and media of Chicano artistic production as an extension of a larger, ongoing project integrating multiple aesthetic traditions that have shaped Chicano art and have kept it from becoming a monolith. Ybarra-Frausto introduces his notion of the underdog aesthetics of *rasquachismo* (underdog-ism); popular among *los de abajo* (the lower classes or the underdogs), *rasquache* implies an adaptable framework that transfers the aesthetics of everyday Chicano culture to the visual arts. This text is a reworking of the author’s unpublished manuscript “Califas: California Chicano Art and Its Social Background” (1986–88). Sections have been excerpted in *Chicano Expressions: A New View in American Art* [(New York: INTAR Latin American Gallery, 1986)] and *The Mural Primer* [(Venice, CA: Social and Public Resource Center, 1987)]. The passages presented here are from a version published in 1995 [Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, “The Chica-

no Movement/The Movement of Chicano Art,” Gerardo Mosquera, ed., *Beyond the Fantastic: Contemporary Art Criticism from Latin America* (London, and Cambridge, MA: The Institute of International Visual Arts and MIT Press, 1995), 168–82].

BORN IN THE TUMULTUOUS DECADE OF THE 1960s, Chicano art has been closely aligned with the political goals of Chicano struggles for self-determination. As an aesthetic credo, Chicano art seeks to link lived reality to the imagination. Going against mainstream cultural traditions of art as escape and commodity, Chicano art intends that viewers respond both to the aesthetic object and to the social reality reflected in it. A prevalent attitude towards the art object is that it should provide aesthetic pleasure while also serving to educate and edify. In its various modalities Chicano art is envisioned as a model for freedom, a call to both conscience and consciousness.¹

PHASE 1, 1965–75: CREATION OF THE PROJECT

Although struggles for social, political and economic equality have been a central tenet of Chicano history since 1848, the efforts to unionize California farm workers launched by Cesar Chavez in 1965 signaled a national mobilization, known as La Causa [The Cause], among people of Mexican descent in the USA. The Chicano movement, or El Movimiento, was an ideological project closely aligned with the tactics, formulations and beliefs of the civil-rights movement; the rise of Black Power; the political agenda of the New Left; the onset of an international student movement; and liberation struggles throughout the Third World. In retrospect, the Chicano movement was extremely heterogeneous, cutting across social class and regional and generational groupings.

Impelled by this mass political movement, Chicano artists, activists and intellectuals united to articulate the goals of a collective cultural project that would meld social practice and cultural production. A primary aim of this project was to surmount strategies of containment by struggling to achieve self-determination on both the social and aesthetic planes. It was the Chicano movement—through various political fronts such as the farm workers’ cause in California, urban civil-rights activities, the rural land grant uprisings in New Mexico, the

student and anti-war movements on college campuses, the labor struggles of workers without documentation, and the rise of feminism—that gave cogency to the cultural project.

Artists were integrated into the various political fronts of *El Movimiento* in unprecedented numbers and in significant ways. They organized, wrote the poems and songs of struggle, coined and printed the slogans, created the symbols, danced the ancient rituals and painted ardent images that fortified and deepened understanding of the social issues being debated in Chicano communities.

An urgent first task was to repudiate external visions and destroy entrenched literary and visual representations that focused on Mexican Americans as receptors rather than active generators of culture. For the creative artist—whether painter dancer, musician or writer—this meant appropriation of his or her own self. The novelist Tomas Rivera further defines the enterprise: “The invention of us by ourselves is in actuality an extension of our will. Thus, as the Chicano invents himself he is complementing his will. Another complement. This is of great importance because these lives are trying to find form. This development is becoming a unifying consciousness. The thoughts of the Chicano are beginning to constantly gyrate over his own life, over his own development, over his identity, and as such over his own conservation. Chicano literature has a triple mission: to represent and to conserve that aspect of life that the Mexican American holds as his own and at the same time destroy the invention by others of his own life. That is—struggle, conservation, and invention.”²

This triad of conservation, struggle, and invention became a theme of Chicano literature. It served also as a core assumption in the production of energetic new forms of visual culture.

Sustained polemics by artists’ groups throughout the country established the forms and content of Chicano art. Though few collective manifestos were issued, aesthetic guidelines can be gleaned from artists’ statements, community newspaper accounts and oral interviews. Typical of this florescence of socially engaged artistic consciousness was the formation of the Mala Efe group (Mexican American Liberation Art Front) in the San Francisco Bay area. The artist Esteban Villa recalls: “It was for this reason that in around 1968. . . the era of the Grape Boycott [the Delano Grape Strike] and the Third World Strike³ [January 1969] in Berkeley [that we] would meet regularly to discuss the role and function of the artist in *El Movimiento*. At first our group was composed mainly of

painters and we would bring our work and criticize it. Discussions were heated, especially the polemics on the form and content of revolutionary art and the relevance of murals and graphic art. Posters and other forms of graphics were especially discussed since many of us were creating *cartelones* [posters] as organizing tools for the various Chicano *mitotes* [spontaneous ‘happenings’] in the Bay Area. . . . Our group kept growing and soon included local poets and intellectuals like Octavio Romano. In March of 1969 we decided to hold an exhibition in a big old frame house on 24th Street here in Oakland. The spacious but slightly *rasquache* [underdog] house had been christened ‘La Causa.’ The exhibition was called *Nuevos Simbolos for La Nueva Raza* [New Symbols for the New Race] and attempted to visually project images of ‘el hombre nuevo’: the Chicano who had emerged from the decolonization process. Opening night was *a todo dar* [fun] with *viejitos*, *wainitos* and *batos de la calle* [old people, drunkards, and vagrants] walking in, checking it out and staying to rap. *Algunos poetas locales* [some local poets] read their work and there was music and *plática muy sabrosa* [good conversation]. We all sensed the beginning of an artistic rebirth: *un nuevo arte del pueblo*.”⁴

This “new art of the people” was to be created from shared experience and based on communal art traditions. Necessarily, a first step was to investigate and give authority to authentic expressive forms arising within the heterogeneous Chicano community. In opposition to the hierarchical dominant culture, which implicitly made a distinction between “fine art” and “folk art,” attempts were made to eradicate boundaries and integrate categories. An initial recognition was that the practices of daily life and the lived environment should be primary constituent elements of the new aesthetic. In the everyday life of the barrio art objects are embedded in a network of cultural sites, activities and events. “The way folk art fits into this cultural constellation reveals time-tested aesthetic practices for accomplishing goals in social, religious and economic life. And these practices are ongoing; they do not point to an absolute standard or set of truths.”⁵ Inside the home, in the yard, and on the street corner—throughout the barrio environment—a visual culture of accumulation and bold display is enunciated. Handcrafted and store-bought items from the popular culture of Mexico and the mass culture of the USA mix freely and exuberantly in a milieu of inventive appropriation and re-contextualization. The barrio environment is shaped in ways that express the community’s sense of itself, the aesthetic display projecting a sort of visual biculturalism.

As communal customs, rituals and traditions were appropriated by Movimiento artists, they yielded boundless sources of imagery. The aim was not simply to reclaim vernacular traditions but to reinterpret them in ways useful to the social urgency of the period.

...

RASQUACHISMO: A CHICANO SENSIBILITY

Beyond grounding themselves in vernacular art forms Movimiento artists found strength from, and recovered meaning sedimented in, consistent group stances such as *rasquachismo*.⁶ *Rasquachismo* is neither an idea nor a style, but more of a pervasive attitude or taste. Very generally, *rasquachismo* is an underdog perspective—a view from *los de abajo* [the lower classes or the underdogs]. It is a stance rooted in resourcefulness and adaptability, yet ever mindful of aesthetics.

In an environment in which things are always on the verge of coming apart (the car, the job, the toilet), lives are held together with spit, grit and *movidas*. *Movidas* are whatever coping strategies one uses to gain time, to make options, to retain hope. *Rasquachismo* is a compendium of all the *movidas* deployed in immediate, day-to-day living. Resilience and resourcefulness spring from making do with what is at hand (*hacer rendir las cosas*). This utilization of available resources makes for syncretism, juxtaposition and integration. *Rasquachismo* is thus a sensibility attuned to mixtures and confluence; communion is preferred over purity. Pulling through and making do are not guarantors of security, so things that are *rasquache* possess an ephemeral quality, a sense of temporality and impermanence—here today and gone tomorrow. While things might be created using whatever is at hand, attention is always given to nuances and details; appearance and form have precedence over function.

In the realm of taste, to be *rasquache* is to be unfettered and unrestrained, to favor the elaborate over the simple, the flamboyant over the severe. Bright colors (*chillantes*) are preferred to somber, high intensity to low, the shimmering and sparkling over the muted and subdued. The *rasquache* inclination piles pattern on pattern, filling all available space with bold display. Ornamentation and elaboration prevail and are joined with a delight in texture and sensuous surfaces. A

work of art may be rasquache in multiple and complex ways. It can be sincere and pay homage to the sensibility by restating its premises, i.e. the underdog world view actualized through language and behavior as in the dramatic presentation *La Carpa de los Rasquaches* by Luis Valdez. Another strategy is for the artwork to evoke a rasquache sensibility through self-conscious manipulation of materials or iconography. One thinks of the combination of found materials and the use of satiric wit in the sculptures of Ruben Trejo, or the manipulation of rasquache artifacts, codes and sensibilities from both sides of the border in the performance pieces of Guillermo Gómez-Peña. Many Chicano artists continue to investigate and interpret facets of rasquachismo as a conceptual lifestyle or aesthetic strategy.

FRONTS OF STRUGGLE, FORMS OF ART

The initial phase of the Chicano cultural project (circa the mid 1960s) was seminal in validating emancipatory communal practices and codifying the symbols and images that would be forcefully deployed in adversarial counter-representations. By that time visual artists had been well integrated into the various political fronts of El Movimiento, within which they were gestating a Chicano art movement that would be national in scope and develop outside the dominant museum, gallery and arts-publication circuit. Fluid and tendentious, the art produced by this movement underscored public connection instead of private cognition.

Artists continued to evolve *un arte del pueblo* that, inscribed in many areas of agitation, aimed to close the gap between radical politics and community-based cultural practices. The rural farm workers' cause and the urban student movement are prime examples of this rapprochement.

La Causa—the farm workers' struggle—was a grassroots uprising that provided the infinitely complex human essence necessary for creating a true people's art. One of the early purveyors of *campesino* expression was the newspaper *El Malcriado* [The Ill-Bred]. Established primarily as a tool for organizing, the periodical soon came to function as a vehicle that promoted unity by stressing a sense of class-consciousness while building cultural and political awareness. In artistic terms *El Malcriado* lived up to its name by focusing on art forms outside the “high-art” canon, such as caricature and cartoons. The pervasive aesthetic norm was *rasquachismo*: a bawdy, irreverent, satiric and ironic world view.

In California, among the first expressions of this rasquache art were the political drawings of Andy Zermano, which were reproduced in *El Malcriado* from 1965 on. With trenchant wit Zermano created Don Sotaco [Mr. Shorty], a symbolic representation of the underdog. Don Sotaco is the archetypal rasquache, the dirt-poor but cunning individual who derides authority and outsmarts officialdom. In his cuttingly satirical cartoons Zermano created vivid vignettes that are a potent expression of *campesinos*' plight. His drawings clearly point out the inequalities existing in the world of *el patrón* [the boss] and the agricultural worker. To a great extent these graphic illustrations of social relations did much to awaken consciousness. With antecedents in the Mexican graphic tradition of José Guadalupe Posada and José Clemente Orozco, the vivid imagery of Andy Zermano is a striking example of art created for a cause. . . .

Simultaneously with the cultural expression of the farm workers' cause, a highly vocal and visible Chicano student movement emerged during the mid 1960s. Related to the worldwide radicalization of youth and inspired by international liberation movements—especially the Cuban Revolution, the Black Power movement and varied domestic struggles—the Chicano student movement developed strategies to overcome entrenched patterns of mis-education. Institutionalized racism was targeted as a key problem, and cultural affirmation functioned as an important basis for political organization.

Chicano culture was affirmed as a creative hybrid reality synthesizing elements from Mexican culture and the social dynamics of life in the USA. Scholars such as Octavio Romano published important essays debunking orthodox views of Chicano life as monolithic and ahistorical; Chicano culture, contrary to these official notions, was celebrated as dynamic, historical, and anchored in working-class consciousness.

Within the student movement art was assigned a key role as a mainstay of human communication and as a powerful medium that could rouse consciousness. Remaining outside the official cultural apparatus, the student groups originated alternative circuits for disseminating an outpouring of artistic production. As in the nineteenth century, when Spanish-language newspapers became major outlets for cultural expression in the South West, contemporary newspapers functioned as purveyors of cultural polemics and new representations. Although varying in emphasis and quality, most student-movement periodicals

shared a conscious focus on the visual arts as essential ingredients in the formation of Chicano pride and identity. For many readers it was their first encounter with the works of the Mexican muralists, the graphic mastery of José Guadalupe Posada, the Taller de Grafica Popular, and reproductions of pre-Columbian artifacts. Equally important, Movimiento newspapers such as *Bronze*, *El Machete*, *El Popo*, *Chicanismo* and numerous others published interviews with local Chicano artists while encouraging and reproducing their work.

Knowledge of the Hispanic-Native American art forms of the Southwest came from neither academic nor scholarly sources, but rather from elements within the movement such as *El Grito del Norte*, a newspaper issued from Española, New Mexico, launched in 1968. This journal had a grassroots orientation and placed emphasis on preserving the culture of the rural agrarian class. Often its articles included photographic essays focusing on local artisans or documenting traditional ways of life in the isolated *pueblitos* of northern New Mexico. Cleofas Vigil, a practicing *santero* [carver of saints] from the region, travelled widely, speaking to groups of artists. The carvers Patrocinio Barela, Celso Gallegos, and Jorge Lopez—all master *santeros* whose works were collected, documented and exhibited by Anglo patrons during the first part of the century—gained renewed influence within the budding associations of Chicano artists. Old and tattered exhibition catalogues, newspaper clippings, and barely legible magazine articles that documented their work were examined and passed from hand to hand to be eagerly scrutinized and savored. Primarily through oral tradition and the informal sharing of visual documentation Chicano artists became aware of a major ancestral folk art tradition. And aside from the Movimiento press, literary and scholarly journals such as *El Grito* and *Revista Chicana Riqueña* often published portfolios of artists' works. All these alternative forces inserted art into life, propagating enabling visions of Chicano experience.

Asserting that Chicano art had a basic aim—to document, denounce, and delight—individual artists and artists' groups resisted the formulation of a restricted aesthetic program to be followed uniformly. The Chicano community was heterogeneous, and the art forms it inspired were equally varied. Although representational modes became dominant, some artists opted for abstract and more personal expression. Artists in this group felt that internal and subjective views of reality were significant, and that formal and technical methods of presentation should remain varied.

ALTERNATIVE VISIONS AND STRUCTURES

By the early 1970s Chicano artists had banded together to create networks of information, mutual support systems and alternative art circuits. Regional artists' groups such as the Royal Chicano Air Force (RCAF) in Sacramento; the Raza Art and Media Collective in Ann Arbor, Michigan; the Movimiento Artístico Chicano (MARCH) in Chicago; the Con Safos group in San Antonio, Texas; and many others, persisted in the vital task of creating art forms that strengthened the will and fortified the cultural identity of the community.

With both militant and protective strategies, Chicano arts organizations developed and shared their art within a broad community context. They brought aesthetic pleasure to the sort of working people who walk or take the bus to work in the factories or in the service sector of the urban metropolis. In its collective character, in its sustained efforts to change the mode of participation between artists and their public, and, above all, as a vehicle for sensitizing communities to a pluralistic rather than a monolithic aesthetic, the Chicano alternative art circuit played a central and commanding role in nurturing a visual sensibility in the *barrio*. . . .

MURALS

The *barrio* mural movement is perhaps the most powerful and enduring legacy of the Chicano art movement nationwide. Created and nurtured by the humanist ideals of Chicano struggles for self-determination, murals functioned as a pictorial reflection of the social drama. Reaching back to the goals and dicta of the Mexican muralists—especially the pronouncements of David Alfaro Siqueiros—in the mid 1960s Chicano artists called for an art that was public, monumental, and accessible to the common people. As in Mexico, the generative force of Chicano muralism was a mass social movement but the artists as a whole did not have the same kind of formal training as the Mexican muralists, and they fostered mural programs through an alternative circuit independent of official sanction and patronage.

For their pictorial dialogue, muralists used themes, motifs, and iconography that gave ideological direction and visual coherence to the mural programs. In the main the artistic vocabulary centered on the indigenous heritage (espe-

cially the Aztec and Mayan past); the Mexican Revolution and its epic heroes and heroines; renderings of both historical and contemporary Chicano social activism; and depictions of everyday life in the barrio. Internationalism entered this vocabulary via iconographic references to liberation struggles in Vietnam, Africa and Latin America, and motifs from cultures in those areas. The muralists' efforts were persistently directed towards documentation and denunciation.

Finding a visual language adequate to depict the epic sweep of the Chicano movement was not simple. Some murals became stymied, offering romantic archaizing views of indigenous culture, depicting Chicano life uncritically and portraying cultural and historical events without a clear political analysis. Successful mural programs, however, were highly significant in reclaiming history. As the community read the visual chronicles it internalized an awareness of the past and activated strategies for the future. Apart from its aesthetic content, muralism was important in actualizing a communal approach to the production and dissemination of art. Brigades of artists and residents worked with a director who solicited community input during the various stages of producing the mural. Through such collaborative actions, murals became a large-scale, comprehensive public education system in the *barrio*.

In retrospect it can be affirmed that Chicano art in the 1960s and 1970s encompassed both a political position and an aesthetic one. That art underscored a consciousness that helped define and shape fluid and integrative forms of visual culture. Artists functioned as visual educators, with the important task of refining and transmitting through plastic expression the ideology of a community striving for self-determination. A Chicano national consciousness was asserted by a revival in all the arts. Aesthetic guidelines were not officially promulgated but arose within the actual arena of political practice. As opposed to mainstream art movements, where critical perspectives remain at the level of the work (art about itself and for itself), the Chicano art movement sought to extend meaning beyond the aesthetic object to include transformation of the material environment as well as of consciousness.

PHASE II, 1975-90: NEUTRALIZATION AND RECUPERATION OF THE PROJECT

The late 1970s and the 1980s marked a dynamically complex juncture for the Chicano cultural project. Many of its postulates and aims have come to fruition during this time. Three of these aims are:

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- 1) The creation of a core of visual signs, a bank of symbols and images that encode the deep structures of Chicano experience. Drawing from this core of commonly understood iconography, artists can create counter-representations that challenge the imposed “master narrative” [*grand récit*] of elite art practice.
 - 2) The maintenance of alternative art structures, spaces and forms. For more than two decades Chicano arts organizations have persisted in the arduous task of creating a responsive working-class audience for art. A principal goal of these efforts has been to make art accessible, to dispel its rarefied, elitist aura and especially to reclaim art from its commodity status with the ideal of returning it to a critical role within the social practices of daily living.
 - 3) The continuation of mural programs. Although there has been a diminution in the number of public art forms such as murals and posters, what has been produced since 1975 is of deeper political complexity and superior aesthetic quality.

According to the muralist Judith Baca: “Later works such as *The Great Wall* of Los Angeles developed a new genre of murals which have close alliance with conceptual performance in that the overall mural is only one part of an overall plan to affect social change. Muralists such as ASCO (a performance group) began to use themselves as the art form, dressing themselves like murals and stepping down off walls to perform. Experiments with portable murals and new social content continue. There is a shift of interest from the process to the product. While fewer murals are being painted, they are of higher quality and the forms of image-making continue to be viewed as an educational process.”⁷

Such accomplishments are especially praiseworthy in that they transpired during a period of intense change in Chicano communities. The utopian buoyancy that sustained a national Chicano art movement has eroded. As the groundswell of collective political action has dispersed, as more Chicanos enter the professional class and are affected by the social mobility implied by that, and as public art forms have diminished in frequency, tracings of a new agenda of struggle have surfaced.

Given demographic data indicating that the number of people of Latin American descent in the USA is growing, and given sociological data indicating that Spanish-speaking groups remain definitely “other” for several generations, new cultural undercurrents among Chicanos call for an awareness of America as a continent and not a country. In the new typology an emergent axis of influence might lead from Los Angeles to Mexico City, then from there, to Bogotá, Lima, Buenos Aires, Managua, Barcelona, and back to the *barrio*. For artists, such new political and aesthetic filiations expand the field with hallucinatory possibilities. As the performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña points out: “The strength and originality of Chicano-Latino contemporary art in the USA lies partially in the fact that it is often bicultural, bilingual and/or bi-conceptual. The fact that artists are able to go back and forth between two different landscapes of symbols, values, structures and styles, and/or operate within a ‘third landscape’ that encompasses both.”⁸

To-ing and fro-ing between numerous aesthetic repertoires and venues including mainstream galleries, museums and collections as well as alternative infrastructures created by El Movimiento, Chicano artists question and subvert totalizing notions of cultural coherence, wholeness and fixity. Contemporary revisions of identity and culture affirm that both concepts are open-ended and offer the possibility of making and remaking oneself from within a living, changing tradition.

In contemporary Chicano art no artistic current is dominant. Figuration and abstraction, political art and self-referential art, art of process, performance and video all have adherents and advocates. The thread of unity is a sense of vitality and continual maturation. The mainstream art circuit continues to uphold rigid and stereotypical notions in its primitivistic and folkloristic categorizations of “ethnic art.” This is an elite perspective that blithely relegates highly trained artists to a nether region in which Chicano art is inscribed in an imagined world that is a perpetual *fiesta* of bright colors and folk idioms—a world in which social content is interpreted as a cultural form unconnected to political and social sensibilities.

For the denizens of the arts establishment Chicano art is uneasily accommodated within two viewpoints. It can be welcomed and celebrated under the rubric of pluralism, a classification that permissively allows a sort of supermarket-like array of choices among styles, techniques and contents. While stemming

from a democratic impulse to validate and recognize diversity, pluralism serves also to commodify art, disarm alternative representations and deflect antagonisms. Impertinent and out-of-bounds ethnic visions are embraced as energetic new vistas to be rapidly processed and incorporated into peripheral spaces within the arts circuit, then promptly discarded in the yearly cycle of new models. What remains in place as eternal and canonical are the consecrated idioms of Euro-centered art. Seen from another perspective, the power structure of mainstream art journals, critics, galleries and museums selectively chooses and validates what it projects, desires, and imposes as constituent elements of various alternative artistic discourses. In the case of "Hispanic" art, this selective incorporation often foregrounds artwork deemed "colorful," "folkloric," "decorative," and untainted by overt political content. While these elements might be present in the artistic production of "Hispanic" artists, they do not necessarily cohere into consistent and defining stylistic features.

Belonging to a wealth of class-based and regional traditions, Chicanos in the USA have activated complex mechanisms of cultural negotiation, a dynamic process of analysis and the exchange of options between cultures. In an interconnected world system traditions are lost and found, and angles of vision accommodate forms and styles from First and Third World modernist traditions as well as from evolving signifying practices in the *barrio*. What is vigorously defended is a choice of alternatives.

In the visual arts this process of cultural negotiation occurs in different ways. At the level of iconography and symbolism, for example, the Chicano artist often creates a personal visual vocabulary freely blending and juxtaposing symbols and images culled from African American, Native American, European and Mestizo cultural sources. Resonating with the power ascribed to the symbols within each culture, the new combination emerges dense with multifarious meaning. Beyond symbols, artistic styles and art-historical movements are continually appropriated and recombined in a constant and richly nuanced interchange. Current Chicano art can be seen as a visual narration of cultural negotiation.

At present in the USA, entrenched systems of control and domination affirm and uphold distinctions between "us" and "them," Dichotomies such as white/non-white, English-speaking/Spanish-speaking, the haves/the have-nots etc. persist and are based on social reality. We should not dissemble about this fact, but neither should we maintain vicious and permanent divisions or

permit dogmatic closure. My own sense of the dialectic is that in the current struggle within the Chicano community for cultural maintenance and parity, there are two dominant strategies vying for ascendancy. On the one hand, there is an attempt to fracture the mainstream consensus with a defiant “otherness.” Impertinent representations counter the homogenizing desires, investments and projections of the dominant culture and express what is manifestly different. On the other hand, there is the recognition of new interconnections and filiations, especially with other Latino groups in the USA. Confronting the dominant culture leads to recognition that Anglos’ visions of Chicanos and Chicanos’ visions of themselves support and to an extent reflect each other.

Rather than flowing from a monolithic aesthetic, Chicano art forms arise from tactical, strategic and positional necessities. What Carlos Monsiváis has called “la cultura de la necesidad” [the culture of necessity] leads to fluid multi-vocal exchanges among shifting cultural traditions. Two consistent objectives of Chicano art have been to undermine imposed models of representation and to interrogate systems of aesthetic discourse, disclosing them as neither natural nor secure but conventional and historically determined.

Chicano art and artists belong within a multiplicity of aesthetic traditions, both popular and elite. Their task is to recode themselves and move beyond dichotomies in a fluid process of cultural negotiation. This negotiation usually reflects cultural change, variation by gender and region, and tensions with and among classes and groups of people, such as Mexican nationals or other ethnic minorities in the USA. In the dynamism of such a contemporary social reality, interests are culturally mediated, replaced and created through what is collectively valued and worth struggling for. The task continues and remains open.

1

My analysis parallels ideas in James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988).

2

Tomas Rivera, *Into the Labyrinth: The Chicano in Literature* (Edinburg, TX: Pan American University, 1971).

3

The Third World Strike led by the UC Berkeley Third World Liberation Front in 1969 led to the creation of the university’s Ethnic Studies Department.—Ed.

4

Esteban Villa, taped interview in 1979, in possession of the author.

5

Kay Turner and Pat Jasper “La Causa, La Calle y La Esquina: A Look at Art Among Us,” in *Art Among Us: Mexican American Folk Art of San Antonio* (San Antonio, TX: San Antonio Museum Association, 1986).

6

See the catalogue Jesús Helguera, *El Calendario Como Arte* (Mexico City: Subsecretaría de Cultura/Programa Cultural de Las Fronteras, 1987).

7

Judith Baca, “Murals/Public Art,” in *Chicano Expressions*, (1986): 37.

8

Guillermo Gómez-Peña, “A New Artistic Continent,” *High Performance* 9, no.3 (1986), 27.

VI.1.7 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 862121

BARRICADES OF IDEAS: LATINO CULTURE, SITE SPECIFIC INSTALLATION, AND THE U.S. MUSEUM

Chon A. Noriega, 1993

In this essay Chicano cultural theorist Chon A. Noriega (born 1961) uses the model of identity articulated by José Martí [SEE DOCUMENT I.3.4] to construct a broader, more accurate understanding of U.S. Latino cultural expression and, specifically, of Latino installation art. He analyzes the nexus between installation art and the institution of art as it relates to Martí's conception of national identity within, between, and against two examples of imperialism (Spain and the United States). Within this framework, Noriega considers contemporary U.S. Latino political discourse and artistic expression, and he argues for a view of Latino art as a collective process geared toward dissolving institutional borders. “Barricades of Ideas: Latino Culture, Site Specific Installation and the U.S. Art Museum,” was included in the anthology *Performing Hybridity* [May Joseph and Jennifer Natalya Fink, eds., (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 182–96]. An earlier version of this essay appeared in the catalogue for *Revelaciones/Revelations: Hispanic Art of Evanescence*, an exhibition that Noriega and José Piedra curated for Cornell University in 1993 [(Ithaca, N.Y.: Hispanic American Studies Program/Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, November 6–December 19, 1993)].

RE-PLACING LATINO IDENTITY

Caught between the ironclad ships of two empires, one in decline (Spain), the other emergent (the United States), José Martí [SEE DOCUMENT 1.3.4] codified the culture of imperialism, locating the point of resistance to it in the indigenous, mestizo, and African-descent peoples and cultures of “Our America.”¹ Written in 1891, Martí’s essay is a call to Latin America to become “one in spirit and intent” in the face of both continued imperialism and the impact of “imported methods and ideas” for governance in the newly independent nations. Although Martí died in 1895 fighting Spanish armies in Cuba, his idea persists that anti-imperialism in the Americas requires a pan-national “American” identity in order “to fit liberty to the body of those who rebelled and conquered for it.”²

Martí’s predicament and solution provide the basis on which to rethink contemporary U.S. Latino identity and cultural expression in general, and Latino installation art in particular. I examine the latter because it enacts many of dilemmas of the former, while also being somewhat self-reflexive about its location within social space: installation refers at once to a new genre of art whose display is about display (rather than edification-cum-market value), and to the very practice of museum exhibition whereby art is installed within a designated space to serve a specific function. A closer examination of Martí’s essay “Our America” provides terms with which to situate contemporary “identity” discourses within the paradox central to Martí’s own project.

If Martí critiqued national, racial, and class hierarchies, he also mobilized them as he attempted to locate identity across local, national, and international domains. He did so by locating its desired effects across these domains: local knowledge became a cultural resource, state power (as an orchestration of local knowledge) defined national identity, and universal democracy existed as an international ideal that provided “space” for the new nations of Latin America. Thus, Martí made their interactions the basis for different history, one that could include *our* America. But, by starting with Martí, I am also able to suggest another point of origin for installation art—an origin that grounds modernity and modern art within imperialism, rather than within a genealogy of aesthetic influences. Martí’s articulation of identity within, between, and against two empires provides a model with which to understand how installation art speaks within and to the institution of art.

In considering “Our America” and other attempts to locate identity within geopolitical space, emphasis must be placed on the *style* in which such a space is imagined across competing discourses and temporalities.³ Indeed, as an essayist, Martí has been understood in fairly straightforward terms as a political theorist and cultural critic. Little attention has been given to his prose style, even though his poetry is seen to anticipate and exceed Latin American modernism. Interestingly enough, that other dimension can be found in the religious metaphors that often provide a phantom structure for his writings. In “Our America,” Martí’s prophetic symbolism, which builds to a kaleidoscope of images and metaphors, mirrors the numbers, beasts, and other apocalyptic figures of the Book of Revelation, which closes the Christian Bible. Early in the essay, Martí makes repeated use of the biblical number seven to describe the opposition that exists both outside (seven-league boots) and inside (seven-month weaklings) the emergent nation. He then sets these against the forces of independence, which are figured as both body (a hundred apostles) and idea (Last Judgment). The end of the essay appeals to the reader’s imagination for a “new America,” but does so in the style of the Book of Revelation, with its evocation of a “new Earth” no longer torn by political strife. In this manner, Martí binds Revolution to Revelation in order to create the logic of an inevitable, yet evanescent, moment, a “proper time,” when an idea will stop the ironclad ships and big sticks to the north.

The use of religious metaphors is a recurrent strategy in Martí’s writings, one in which imperialism is pitted against itself, such that Christianity provides a metaphoric language for speaking against modernity. In an unfinished letter written the day before he was killed, Martí (who had spent the latter part of his life in the United States) claimed, “I have lived in the monster, and I know its entrails—and my slingshot is that of David.”⁴ But Martí’s letter is not a simple expression of faith per se. In fact, Martí’s belief was anything but simple, reflecting his contention that Latin American nations were formed in the “senseless struggle between the book and the lance, between reason and the processional candle.” Thus, the religious metaphor must be seen as tactical insofar as the monster, “the giant with seven-league boots,” proclaimed its actions in the name of reason, science, and progress, but placed its trust in God. If Martí wrote *against* modernity he did not reject reason (he advocated secular education in the Americas), but rather placed its social consequences within an ethical discourse by way of biblical narratives.

More revelation than manifesto, Martí's essay incarnates an idea within the non-European body of Our America. But, if Martí incarnates a particular set of bodies, he also rejects the universalism of biblical revelation and its secular counterpart. As Ernesto Laclau observes, "The modern idea of a universal class and the various forms of Euro-centrism are nothing but distant historical effects of this logic of incarnation."⁵ In other words, European imperialist expansion required the logic of incarnation in order to justify its project under the guise of a universal function (i.e., to civilize); but, in a crucial variation, European culture displaced or particularized the notion of a universal human essence, becoming itself the obscure object of (self-)incarnation. "As a result," Laclau concludes, "the resistances of other cultures were presented not as struggles between particular identities and cultures, but as part of an all-embracing, epochal struggle between universality and particularisms—the notion of peoples without history expressing precisely their incapacity to represent the universal."⁶ For Martí, however, incarnation does not produce a privileged agent, whether in the service of God or of History. It produces communities-in-relation. In order to understand this distinction, one must look first at the complex and contradictory way in which Martí figures the "people" of national communities.

In describing the body of those who fought for the independence of Our America, Martí refers to the *mestizo* (mixed race), *indio* (indigenous), and *negro* (black). Martí, however, wrote from the perspective of a *criollo* ruling class. Thus, although he promoted a mixed-race ideal (*mestizaje*), he also manifested (and utilized) the conflicted notions of race in Latin America, where "race" functions on a number of levels other than that of color: cultural resource, class identification, and index of the nation (*la raza*). Martí speaks about specific races (as cultural resources), yet privileges a mixed norm (as national ideal), all from an implied *criollo* or "white" position (as ruling class or state formation). Then, turning to the international arena, he denies race altogether: "There can be no racial animosity, because there are no races." Here, racial difference becomes an effect of nations, but it is rejected as the basis for international relations and replaced by the "universal identity" of humanity. For Martí, however, such "universal identity" is the product of nature, not reason, and "springs forth from triumphant love and the turbulent hunger for life." Its violation is a "sin." Such statements are more than the last gasps of Romantic idealism. Rather, within his layered discourse, Romantic idealism functions as a tactical element (as do race and faith), not as

the predominant paradigm, wherein Martí sought to articulate a national identity within the context of hemispheric and global politics.

In talking about the nation, then, Martí necessarily imagines the hemispheric community necessary to dislodge the imperialist claims of Europe and the United States. It is not *a* nation. One nation could not stand against the United States; and, if it could, it would merely replace it as the universal. Instead, Martí invokes the idea of a class of nations, in order to establish a lateral (“democratic”) relationship within the Americas as well as within the Western Hemisphere. “If democracy is possible,” Laclau argues, “it is because the universal does not have any necessary body, any necessary content. Instead, different groups compete to give their particular aims a temporary function of universal representation.”⁷ Whereas Laclau writes about democracy within the nation, Martí applies this process both within and among nations. In the former, race structures the nation; in the latter, a supra-racial “universal identity” places nations in an ethical relationship to one another. Such an approach shifts the predominant terms of national discourse from a spatial framework—of territorial boundaries and center-margin relations unfolding in linear time—to a temporal one. Thus, in his simultaneous appeal to ideas, actions, and the Last Judgment, Martí steps outside the time frame of modernism, because its notion of linear progress conspires against Our America, and instead he suggests the “proper time” of an apocalypse. But it is a repeatable apocalypse that signals not so much the “end of history” as a thwarting action against the “universal” history of the West.

In *Nation and Narration*, Homi K. Bhabha describes a “double time” of the nation, in which the people are represented as both pedagogical object (“an *a priori* historical presence”) and performative subject (“that continual process by which the national life is redeemed.”)⁸ What makes Martí’s narrative different, however, is that it is pan-national, rather than national, and its double time is torn between the present and the future, rather than the past and the present. Furthermore, while Benedict Anderson’s analysis of nationalism leads him to ask why nations “celebrate their hoariness, not their astonishing youth,”⁹ Martí celebrates the newness of Our America when compared to the hoariness of the United States and France: “Never in history have such advanced and united nations been forged in so short a time from such [disparate] elements.” This sense of a social formation rooted in violence-become-hybridity often divides the pedagogical

objects of Latin American national identities between the archaeological and the propositional, the residual and the emergent, the past and the future.

Martí, then, initiates a future-tense performative discourse for Latin American politics, one that asserts the power of the idea over the object, because, in fact, the object-as-referent does not yet exist, nor will it come into existence without the expression of the idea. Besides, as Martí knew all too well, the object is evanescent in a way that the idea is not: “Barricades of ideas are worth more than barricades of stone.”

PERFORMING AN INEFFABLE HISTORY

In contemporary U.S. Latino political discourse and artistic expression, one can see many of the same features found in the writings of José Martí: the search for indigenous, or autochthonous, knowledge articulated by an intelligentsia using the very language of “the West” itself (as a *part* of “the West”), and played out against the ubiquitous power of the United States. In these contradictions, U.S. Latino narratives perform a “national” identity in which the stable categories of Western thought are fractured and reset into creative functional mixtures. The resultant rhetorical gestures, hybrid forms, and ephemeral objects, speak to a future that will bridge the rupture between the past and present: pre-Conquest and postcolonial. The present, then, becomes the site of performance where two ineffable histories (one residual, the other emergent) are installed, producing a provisional context or space within which to imagine Latino communities and cultures.

It is for these reasons that Latino artists often engage in strategies of collective memory, archaeology, and cultural reclamation. In this respect, Latino art represents a collective process that permeates the borders of institutional space, not to achieve some naïve “postmodern” dissolution of traditional categories, but to continue Martí’s project to “remap” America.¹⁰ But this process is easily misconstrued as the discrete appearance of the “political” and “folk” within the art museum; or, in terms of institutional motivation, dismissed as an appeal to demographic shifts and as a concession to political pressures. Rather than engage the work itself, critics write about the contextual factors that make close visual analysis unnecessary—that make “Latino” and “art” irreducible terms. Thus,

if Latino art remaps America, it does so precisely within this contested terrain wherein funding sources, public exhibitions, art collection, and critical discourse determine the proper name for art.

I am especially interested in Latino art that works within an ephemeral or evanescent format, an “installation,” insofar as the histories and practices that are given “voice” do not at the same time acquire the usual “object” or commodity status within the museum/art market. Given its placement within the “white cube” of the museum or gallery, certain questions arise about the historical parameters for installation art. For all the sound and fury over its political content and market ramifications, installation art has yet to become the focus of sustained critical or historical analysis.¹¹ Its precursors tend to be found in the theatrical aspects of pop art, especially the “happenings” of the 1960s, so that installation art becomes identified as a “new genre” (sometimes of the 1970s, sometimes of the 1980s) grounded in the divide between modernism and postmodernism in the arts. Such a history—which is more often implied than stated—is little more than the history of the museum or gallery itself, in which the history of a form begins (and ends) with its arrival in an art space. If, for example, the authors of *Installation Art* argue that “installation, as a hybrid activity is made up of multiple histories” defined by the modernist “impulse to establish some equivalence” between aesthetic and social spaces,¹² their history nonetheless remains contained within a discourse of art for art history’s sake.

To be fair, installation presents itself, somewhat disingenuously, as an art form that exists in opposition to museum practices and the art market: it is “unsalable,” labor-intensive, and short-term. Moreover, installations can be quite critical of their location. Documentation becomes their displaced product; the installations themselves are dismantled and either recycled in some other form or thrown away. What is central, then, is the experience of the installation within a specific time and place. Documentation becomes the poor—if at times expensive—substitute for the residue of revelation within the body of the viewer. Of course, site-specific installations have been bought and sold, not to mention traveled to other sites so we are left with an apparent contradiction.

But if we follow a genealogy of forms across multiple spaces, another history emerges, one in which, for Latinos at least, the art installation owes as much to the baroque and its synthesis with the indigenous practices and rituals of Our America as it does to the avant-garde and postmodern. Thus, in follow-

ing an installation practice such as the Latino altar as it traverses the church, home, community *centro*, museum, and public sphere, one goes beyond the provincial history of aesthetic influences, charting instead the production of social space around sacrificial elements of Latino expressive culture. Such an approach reveals not just hybrid formations geared toward shifting notions of cultural affirmation, maintenance, and resistance,¹³ but the fundamental role of gender within cultural politics. The home altar becomes an access point for a female discourse that initiates a movement from one institutional space (church) to another (museum), but makes these parts of a trajectory through the intimate space (home) and public space (*centro cultural*) of a lived community. All of this is quite different from suggesting that the Latino home altar is postmodern *avant la lettre* because it collapses traditional categories: New and Old World belief systems, the sacred and the profane, high art and popular culture, patriarchal and matriarchal, America and América. Rather, in being more attentive to space, one can see how Latino artists participate in the circulation and transformation of cultural traditions and collective practices, from the archaeological to the contemporary, within the contexts of home, community, and museum.¹⁴

In her work as a curator, writer, and artist, Amalia Mesa-Bains exemplifies the history and process by which the Latino home altar (as a form of what she calls “intimate space”) extended its reach into the Latino community as well as the art museum. As a curator and writer, Mesa-Bains has played a central role in defining Chicano and Latino art in terms of vernacular forms.¹⁵ In the traveling exhibition *Ceremony of Memory* (1989–91), for example, she proposes a Latino genre based on the secular transformations of ceremonial or spiritual art forms found in the everyday life of Hispanic communities.¹⁶ Concurrent with the cultural politics of their curatorial premise, Mesa-Bains’s exhibitions also represent a significant entry point into the art museum for Latino artists.¹⁷

Mesa-Bains’s own career as an artist begins with home altars produced for Chicano art spaces and university museums. Although Mesa-Bains apprenticed under traditional altar-maker Yolanda Garfias-Woo in 1975, she relocates the altar from private to public setting, from domestic worship to secular exhibition, while retaining the altar’s ritual function as a female auxiliary to the patriarchal institution of the Catholic church.¹⁸ Mesa-Bains’s altars often celebrate Mexican and Chicana women who have acquired iconic status within the national imaginary (whether of Mexico or of the United States), albeit at the expense of their

gender, sexuality, or ethnicity: Frida Kahlo (1977, 1978, 1987), Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1981), and Dolores del Río (1983, 1987, 1989–90, 1990–93). By expressing difference through national icons, the altars become what Jennifer Gonzalez calls a “museum of the self” that is at once personal and social, private and public, self-representation and cultural commentary.¹⁹

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In contrast to these “domestic” installations, I would like to end by briefly considering and comparing the work of two artists who play with language and situation: Daniel J. Martinez and Celia Alvarez Muñoz.²⁰ Martinez draws on Situationist, Constructivist, and Fluxus concepts about art and social intervention.²¹ His work tends to be confrontational and is designed to generate a visceral response and media discourse. As such, Martinez uses the idiom and icons of popular culture itself. Whereas Martinez deconstructs the dominant language, Muñoz works within the space between cultures and languages. Rather than elicit an open confrontation, Muñoz prefers the *indirecta* (innuendo), bilingual pun, and structured absence, modes of address that Muñoz uses to work on the viewer from behind a sentimental and nostalgic façade.²² Muñoz’s image-text installations also reference commercial photography and graphic arts—where, as with Andy Warhol, she began her career. It is in this juxtaposition of two languages and one image that Muñoz’s work comments on what Bryan Wolf calls a twofold path—“the disappearance of the body and the rise of mass culture”—as part of her agenda “to render visible the processes of cultural invisibility.”²³

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In order to show what is at stake in such a direct and interactive address, I will consider Martinez’s performative installation in more detail. First, in typical fashion, Martinez’s title for the piece drew on “dominant” rather than “minority” discourses: “*Museum Tags: Second Movement (Overture) or Overture con Claque—Overture with Hired Audience Members.*” This time, however, rather than parody the mass culture of popular television advertisements, Martinez parodied the elite culture of the opera house or symphony hall. This shift worked not just in terms of the Whitney Museum’s status as elite institution, but also in terms of its main ritual, the three openings that precede the actual exhibition. These openings are by “invitation only,” and are limited, for the most part, to the cultural elite and art critics

who sustain the art world. As an “overture”—or an instrumental introduction to an extended musical work—Martinez’s museum tags made the opening audience itself into the players or instruments, drawing attention to their role in establishing the critical and commercial framework for the exhibition.

But, in confronting the cultural politics of an exhibition that was dubbed the “Multicultural Biennial,” Martinez also puns on the word *overture*, which can also mean a first offer or proposal, providing a critical allusion to the lauded political “openings” taking place in other countries, from *apertura* to *perestroika*. In his use of the word *overture*, Martinez draws attention to the fact that “openings” are first offered or proposed by the system that has kept various freedoms closed. In effect, Martinez questions whether the underlying assumptions about cultural capital and racial difference have changed; that is, whether the aesthetic overture is congruent with the social one.

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What are the possibilities, then, for the exhibition and critical evaluation of works that engage such multiple references and spaces? To date, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban-American, and other Latino works of art are not considered part of “American” art or of the U.S. national culture. The major “American” museums and galleries have resisted the necessary shift toward a curatorial agenda that embraces the diverse cultural practices within the United States.²⁴ Consequently, Latino artists are excluded from “American” exhibitions, or included at the “affirmative” level, without a significant reorientation of central concepts and aesthetic criteria. Given that dynamic, a more troubling trend has been the brokering of Latino artists into U.S. museums by way of exhibitions of Latin American art. What could otherwise be a provocative exploration of pan-national aesthetics, of Our America, becomes another form of the denial of citizenship.

Latino artists today face the same dilemma Martí did a century earlier: the need to imagine an inclusive context—Our America in contradistinction to America (the United States). Unlike the exile Martí, however, Latinos-cum-citizens cannot claim to be within the “monster” without also being one of its constituent parts; that is, although the pan-national point of identification may be

the same (Our America), the national context is its antithesis (America). After all, Latinos *are* U.S. citizens. Framed in this way, the constitution of a differential Latino identity becomes contingent on the simultaneous achievement of universal access and rights within a national context. Laclau sees this contingency as a paradox in which “the price to be paid for total victory *within that context* is total integration within it.”²⁵ But Laclau’s formulation, like the assimilation paradigm, assumes an ahistorical and inflexible context unmarked by difference. Clearly, the failure of that national context to assimilate racial minorities suggests that total integration cannot occur without also changing the context, especially insofar as that “context” depends on the exclusion of racial minorities.

Latino cultural expressions have been for the most part constituted as the other side of what passes for the “critical distance” of modern or postmodern belonging. Latino artists are seen as too “sincere”; and, as such, there is assumed to be no mediation or attention to the signifier in their cultural expressions. But sincerity is no simple matter, because, like irony, it is asserted in the face of multiple contexts; as such, both are hybrid discourses. Tellingly, Martí’s last book of poetry, *Versos Sencillos* [Simple Verses, 1891], written at the same time as “Our America,” begins with the famous line, “Yo soy un hombre sincero” [I am a sincere man]. But the simplicity and sincerity of these poems is misleading if taken at face value. Thus, when Martí, *el hombre sincero*, proclaims “Our America,” irony becomes a matter of faith—as Tomás Ybarra-Frausto has noted about Latino art—rather than a calculated, distanced, intellectual pose.²⁶ More quixotic than Brechtian, Martí engages in a future-tense performative discourse, in which a pan-national “American” identity and its context are sincerely proposed against an ironic awareness of present-day realities. There are, then, two sets of contexts—the present and the future; the national and the pan-national—and a differential identity constitutes itself as the negotiation between these two sets of points.

Two observations need to be stressed about such a differential identity.

First, Latino art is a cultural, political, aesthetic, and market phenomenon. For better or worse, it does exist. But, given the different registers within which it is produced, exhibited, spoken about, and acquired, Latino art cannot add up to one thing or remain entirely distinct from other aesthetic categories. Making matters more difficult, neither exhibition history nor scholarship pro-

vides the basis for understanding “Latino” art as an aesthetics-in-process that has critical mass, inter-textual associations, internal complexity; and, above all, considerable range that overlaps with other types of art. Therefore, rather than start with the premise of cultural or racial otherness (that is, posit Latino art as a genre equivalent to its exclusion), I want to propose that we sometimes start with general questions about an *art* genre, where the consequent analysis will not be so bound by ethnicity, but neither will it deny cultural and social determinants. In a survey of Latino installation artists, for example, one cannot help but be struck by the complex and contradictory nature of the work, whether charted within an individual career or across categories of aesthetics, ethnicity, and national origin. In fact, in this instance, it may not make sense to foreground ethnicity as much as genre, although such subtleties are lost on many in the art world, where Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and other Latinos—despite their cultural differences from each other and aesthetic similarities with installation artists more generally—share a history of being excluded that is as persistent as it is unspoken.

Second, Latino-identified artists break the rules of two cultures, two traditions, without at the same time blurring the boundaries between them. Instead, their iconic overlays and hybrid forms are always made with an eye toward the unequal power relations that exist between and within cultures. In this sense, their art reveals the need, not for an essential truth, an underlying coherence, but rather to sustain contradictory images, shapes, languages, and frames of reference—all within the evanescent moment of the installation. The paradox of my essay, of course, is that I have been making declarative and definitive statements about what Latino artists do—all the while insisting that, what they do is *undo* declarative and definitive statements in order to remap social space by performing hybridity. As such, everything I have written is misplaced.

1

José Martí, “Our America,” *Our America: Writings on Latin America and the Struggle for Cuban Independence*, trans. Elinor Randall, ed. Philip Foner (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977), 84. Unless otherwise noted, subsequent quotations of Martí are from this essay. [SEE DOCUMENT I.3.4]

2

This essay has an epigraph by José Martí: “A powerful idea. Waved before the world at the proper time, can stop a squadron of ironclad ships, like the mystical flag of the Last Judgment.” (“Nuestra América,” 1891).—Ed.

3

As Benedict Anderson argues, “communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.” *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*,

rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 6. I discuss this in relation to contemporary Latino political discourse in “El hilo latino: Representation, Identity, and National Culture,” *Jump Cut* 38 (June 1993): 45–50.

4

Letter to Manuel Mercado, May 18, 1895, in José Martí, *Obras Completas*, vol. 4 (Havana: Editorial Nacional de Cuba, 1963), 168; my translation.

5

Ernesto Laclau, “Universalism, Particularism, and the Question of Identity,” *October* 61 (summer 1992): 85. Reprinted in *Emancipation(s)* (London: Verso, 1996), 20–35.

6

Laclau, “Universalism,” (1992), 86.

7

Ibid., 90.

8

Homi K. Bhabha, “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 291–322.

9

Quoted by Bhabha “DissemiNation,” (1990), 293.

10

On the remapping of “America” as part of a Latino social movement, see Juan Flores and George Yudice, “Living Borders/Buscando America: Languages of Latino Self-Formation,” *Social Text* 24 (1990): 57–84. [SEE DOCUMENT VI.1.5].

11

For the first book-length study, see Nicolás de Oliveira, Nicola Oxley, and Michael Petry, *Installation Art* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994).

12

De Oliveira et al., *Installation Art* (1994), 7 and 11.

13

See Shifra M. Goldman and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, *Arte Chicano: A Comprehensive Annotated Bibliography of Chicano Art, 1965–1981* (Berkeley: Chicano Studies Publication Unit/University of California, 1985), 3–55.

14

In the early 1990s, culminating in the 1993 Whitney Biennial, installation-based exhibitions became the target of popular criticism based on their reputed “PC” [“politically correct”] identity politics. There was more at stake, however, insofar as these installations openly called into question the relationship of the art museum to all those spaces it stands against: laboratory, ethnographic display, fun house, peep show, movie theater, video store, public library, and the home.

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See Amalia Mesa-Bains’s essays “Contemporary Chicano and Latino Art,” *Visions* (fall 1989): 14–19, and “El Mundo Femenino: Chicana Artists of the Movement—A Commentary on Development and Production,” in Richard Griswold del Castillo, Teresa McKenna, and Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, eds., *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965–1985* (Los Angeles: UCLA Wight Art Gallery, 1991), 131–140.

16

Cf. Mesa-Bains, *Ceremony of Memory: New Expressions in Spirituality among Contemporary Hispanic Artists* (Santa Fe, NM: Center for Contemporary Arts of Santa Fe, 1988).

17

For other exhibitions curated by Mesa-Bains, see her *Ceremony of Spirit: Nature and Memory in Contemporary Latino Art* (San Francisco: The Mexican Museum, 1993); and René H. Arceo-Frutos, Juana Guzmán, and Amalia Mesa-Bains, *Art of the Other Mexico: Sources and Meanings* (Chicago, IL: Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum, 1993).

18

Cf. Kay F. Turner, "Mexican American Women's Home Altars: The Art of Relationship," Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1990.

19

Jennifer A. Gonzalez, "Rhetoric of the Object: Material Memory and the Artwork of Amalia Mesa-Bains," *Visual Anthropology Review* 9.1 (spring 1993): 82–91.

20

Interestingly, whereas Mesa-Bains and Maria Brito-Avellana appeared in the alternative exhibition *The Decade Show*, Muñoz and Martinez were among the first Chicanos, or Latinos, included in a Whitney Biennial (1991 and 1993, respectively).

21

For an overview, see Martinez's artist book *The Things You See When You Don't Have a Grenade!* (Santa Monica, CA: Smart Art Press, 1996), which includes essays by Coco Fusco, Mary Jane Jacobs, Susan Otto, and others.

22

Karin Lipson, "Making It to the Show," *New York Newsday*, April 19, 1991, 66–67; Anita Creamer, "An Artist of Two Worlds: Contradiction Is Inspiration for Celia Muñoz," *Dallas Life Magazine*, January 22, 1989, 8–12, 18–19.

23

Bryan Wolf, "The Responsibility to Dream," *Profession* 95 (1995): 19, 20–21. Wolf examines Muñoz's mixed-media piece, "Which Came First? Enlightenment Series #4" (1982).

24

For a critical overview of Latino and Latin American exhibitions, see Mari Carmen Ramírez, "Beyond the 'Fantastic': Framing Identity in U.S. Exhibitions of Latin American Art," *Art Journal* (winter 1992): 60–68; reprinted in Gerardo Mosquera, ed., *Beyond the Fantastic: Contemporary Art Criticism from Latin America* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996), 229–46. [SEE DOCUMENT V.2.6]

25

Laclau, "Universalism," (1992), 88–89.

26

Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, conversation with the author.

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AESTHETIC MOMENTS OF LATIN AMERICANISM

Néstor García Canclini, 2004

In this essay from 2004, Mexico City-based Argentinean cultural studies theoretician and anthropologist Néstor García Canclini (born 1939) traces the decline of the concept of “Latin America” through an examination of three twentieth-century manifestations of Latin Americanism. The first of the moments he highlights emerged in the 1960s as a result of the widening and facilitating of communication between the region’s peripheries and the mainstream. At a time when many Latin American artists connected with the global market and international patronage circuits, as well as with each other, a yearning for a transcendental future surfaced for the first time. Coup d’états and military conflicts throughout that decade, however, stifled this utopian dream and the potential for its resulting artistic innovations and interconnections. The second manifestation which involved the art production following the Dirty Wars of the 1970s (most notably in Argentina, 1976–1983) featured “memory” as its main tenet and oscillated between two opposing genres: testimony and farce. The third and current period began as soon as the region returned to democracy in the mid-1980s. García Canclini also reflects that during long decades when disenchantment with the past and lack of faith in the future were pervasive, Latin American artists channeled a broad, societal concern for “the instant” and for “velocity,” fostering both a culture and an aesthetic of the “here today-gone tomorrow.” The author is one of the most influential postmodern thinkers in Latin America, and he has been internationally recognized for his anthropological readings on hybridity [See *Culturas híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (Mexico City: Conaculta/Grijalbo, 1989), available in English as *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995)]. Translated by Patricia Legarreta, this text was taken from its original publication [Néstor García Canclini, “Aesthetic Moments of Latin Americanism,” *Radical History Review* (New York University/published by Duke University Press), no. 89 (Spring 2004), 13–24].

I CAN IMAGINE AN EXPLORATION OF THE PAST in which we are able to compare three ways in which arts are related to social time. In the 1960s, art worked as a

herald of utopia, trying to include in the present a future that seemed feasible. In the 1980s and 1990s, it was a memory of the defeat—seeing to it that the future that could never be would continue to have a place in the present, albeit by evoking the dead and the losses, the exiles and the hopelessness. Since the 1990s, a large number of artists speak of the instant: instead of works that portray long-term possible or historic scenes from history or long-term possibilities, they put forward installations and performances to be seen right now.

By taking up the issue of aesthetic moments, I am not adopting the latter perspective. Inasmuch as I am suggesting a rethinking of “the Latin American” or “Latin Americanism” as it relates to three different situations of the last forty years, I am interested in trying to understand a certain amount of time. However, I am not able to find any conception of Latin American history, or of the ways in which the arts are situated in each moment, that allows one to conceive them as stages or periods, part of a larger evolutionary or involutory logic. Certainly, there are other keys to understand what happened in the arts and what is now happening in the arts. Here I offer a reading of three moments that become less and less enigmatic to me when I explore their relationship with the present.

What I attempt to understand is how art has participated in the development of three styles of Latin Americanism. I have chosen the 1960s as the first moment because at that time, the issue of what was Latin America was reformulated from the internationalizing projects and the vanguards that redesigned artistic and literary fields. “Foundational functions” had existed since the nineteenth century in literature, according to Doris Sommer, where readers learned to compare their countries to the others on the continent.¹ During the first half of the twentieth century, Antonio Berni, Diego Rivera, and Joaquín Torres García, among many others, experimented with how to implement the formal elements of cubism, futurism, and abstraction to create a new iconic body of Latin American symbols. In Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and other countries, the renewal of cultural languages was associated with economic modernization or political battles, and with the growth of popular voices. However, only in the middle of the twentieth century were conditions created to allow an alliance between artistic innovation and the internationalization of culture. Industrialization and urban expansion created the basis for this step, which together with advances in high school and college education extended the audiences for arts and literature and made the populations’ tastes more sophisticated. New means of communication

increasingly and simultaneously connected the periphery societies with each other and with the metropolis.

Various utopias found institutions and other circuits to spread their message in those years. The vanguard artists and critics were sponsored by foundations like the [Francisco] Matarazzo in Brazil, which financed the Bienal in São Paulo, and by the [Torcuato] Di Tella enterprise, which backed the Art Institute in Buenos Aires. Weekly journals sprang up promoting developmental-ist imaginary and more cosmopolitan consumer habits. In Mexico, Colombia, and Venezuela museums of modern art and networks of galleries were created and connected to the international market. On the one hand, various metropolitan organizations (the Pan-American Union, the Organization of American States, the International Council of MoMA [Museum of Modern Art], and assorted transnational corporations) supported modernizing programs and offered international awards, grants, and exhibitions, especially for those who experimented with alternatives to social realism. On the other hand, those who criticized the de-politicization of exhibitions and museums for their sole interest in vanguard formalism found in the unionist effervescence and in the new social movements—as well as in institutions like Casa de las Américas [in Cuba]—a broadened sociopolitical and international horizon that encouraged their proposals.

After examining the manifestos and actions of the vanguards of that time [in Argentina], Andrea Giunta concludes that artists had the conviction that “anything was possible.”² I would add that, with different perspectives, those who were integrated by philanthropy, as well as those who were rebellious militants, painted, wrote, and filmed as if time belonged to them. Those whose ambition was to leave the domestic workshops and galleries for New York, or to go out onto the streets of their own cities, felt they were chasing after a transcendental future. In a more extensive forum, we would be remiss not to explore all of the political and aesthetic differences between each of these artists, but here I am more interested in pointing out that hundreds of Argentines, Brazilians, Colombians, and Venezuelans worked at ease in the belief that their experiences would become part of a broader and brighter future. Some aspired to be recognized in the capital cities of the artistic market; Latin Americanists rejected the “lesser” or “marginal” space that the metropolises had attributed to them in the history of modern art, and they searched for unique and renovating images.

These tendencies did not always oppose one another. Sometimes, the same artists would spend years in Paris, then in New York, and later they would go to Havana and join in solidarity with the insurrectionist movements of their countries. With no pretensions of summarizing the diversity of the artistic movements of this moment, or in the two that follow, I would like to highlight the utopian sense, or at least the prospective utopian sense, within the arts of that moment. It is not easy to use these terms in a purely positive manner; the exaltation of the revolutionary promises often intermingled with a Manichaeian blindness toward censorship or intellectual and aesthetic simplicities that some leftist groups imposed on the present.

It is necessary to investigate—as a Mexican artist used to tell me—the moment in which those artists decided to return home and what they confronted. At the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, they returned to see the combined frustration of the aesthetic and political vanguards, which eventually brought an end to their weak cooperation. After the 1964 coup d'état in Brazil, other military interventions in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and Central America removed the democratic context in which developmental-ist modernization, the irreverent actions of the Left, and so-called disciplinarian U.S. policy had contested each other. Inter-American institutions—controlled from Washington, D.C., or New York—were quickly losing their interest in Latin American art or were discredited on discovery of their true political motivations, indicated, for example, by some CIA grants. Student and labor movements in Córdoba (Argentina), Mexico City, Montevideo, and Rio de Janeiro—also the echoes of Paris and Berlin in 1968—criticized the cultural institutions, not only in these cities, which had embodied artistic innovation since the mid-1960s. Alternative exhibition spaces and forms of political protest, artistic action through mass-media communication, and the alliances among artists, writers, filmmakers, and social scientists all changed the ways in which art and society articulated. Artists sought out other audiences, and some social sectors began to expect new applications of art. Even today, the attraction that moment holds does not lie in the fact that the relationship between art and politics reached its most intense point, but rather in that it shows precisely this interconnection's utopian aspect: complicities and misunderstandings between the aesthetic and political vanguards' imaginaries. Only a few of those who sought recognition as Latin Americans found

resonance, always fleeting and fragile, in an increasingly plural metropolitan market, where abstract art was ceasing to be the obligatory style. In addition, there was the expectation that Latin Americans represented a subordinate cultural difference, one that had never fully disappeared, rather than fashionable formal institutions. Those who chose to modify their approach (or to abandon it completely) in order to participate in sociopolitical insurrections had only a few years and even fewer places without repression to develop their craft.

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During the “dirty wars,” the dictatorships and the exiles cancelled out the sociopolitical and institutional conditions that had encouraged aesthetic innovation during the 1960s: the epic of the metropolises’ cultural conquest, the epic of insurgency, and the parodies of order. Later, art, literature, and film that spoke of the fall of the utopias, or of what followed, oscillated between two very different genres. On the one hand, drama emerged as the prevailing way to narrate testimonies of disappearances, tortures, and deaths; on the other, farce lent its tone to many novels, films, installations, and performances, which no longer found any victories or heroes in a history understood as an absurd tragicomedy.

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The identity and continental solidarity claims are replaced by concealment and disguises: fake ex-combatants who are not Argentinean but Chilean act as though they had fought in the Falklands, and fake army volunteers prefer to be taken prisoner by the English in order to meet the Rolling Stones.³ ... According to [Martín] Kohan, there is no need to choose between drama and farce, because the war was both: “In literature, the Falkland Islands War needs not be repeated first as a tragedy and then as a comedy, because already from the start, the war was a comedy. According to the testimonies of the soldiers, the War should be repeated, not to change from a tragedy into a comedy, but so that the tragedy of the defeat may transform into a triumphant epic.”⁴ Even if the tension between drama and parody helps us to move beyond the frequent Manichaeism pointed out in the previous period, we need to understand the legitimacy of each enunciative style according to who participates in the fight over the representation of history, and from what perspectives.

The question of how to represent memory and defeat is still in force in various Latin American countries through exhibitions and monuments that memorialize the victims. It is not frivolous to situate this process, as Andreas Huyssen does, in a set of complex evocative exercises taking place on a global scale in the last two decades: the restoration of historic centers, the expansion of museums, the emergence of retro fashions, the boom of biographies and novels about bygone epochs, and the revision of the Holocaust.⁵ . . .

Not everyone shares the same interest in revising or recording history. In Chile, the agreements of the transition to democracy tried to shut down the debate about the dictatorship in the name of “consensus,” which Tomás Mulián defines “as the highest degree of forgetting.”⁶ The studies of Nelly Richard show that only minorities, mostly artists and writers, attend to the reflection on old wounds and, facing the complete silence by politicians and the media, the tasks of memory remain bound to the audacity of the vanguards and to the “inadaptability” of madness.⁷ In Argentina . . . political “arrangements” ended up providing amnesty to the repressors and painting memory into the corners of the marginal fields of art and madness (“crazy women” is one of the names given to the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo). The history of media and institutional censorship proves that even an explicitly public action such as the construction of a monument/ memorial to the victims of state terrorism can be relegated to architects-cum-artists, as if the search for ways to “collectively express memory” and “think about the limits of life and death” characterized this specialized field.⁸ . . .

Where are we now? We are at a moment when whatever is left of utopias is becoming globalized, but above all, the difficulty of creating them and making them endure is “globalizing.” We live in times of wars and domination headed by minorities, and the globalization of defeat of almost everybody. To be Latin American is to share with the majorities from other continents the drama and the farce of attempting to be somebody. Somebody who is represented in decision-making circuits, somebody who is able to give rise to memory when a few are able “to globalize” deprivation and obstruct national, ethnic, urban, and personal projects. Nevertheless, the experience of defeat and memory is not the same in the First World as it is in the Third World continents. If there are still any doubts about the shared condition of the two, however, take a look at all the migrants from the Third World in the First World (10, 15, 20 percent, depending on the

country), looking for space, utopia, and a way to keep memory alive. Conversely, those from the First World fear that their own utopia—the American Dream or European prosperity—is being snatched away from them and do not really know what to do about the memory of their wars and holocausts. Is it possible that by speaking about these memories, by telling these stories of wars and holocausts, and of migrants from the Third World in films and novels, at museums and art exhibits, and through e-mail and on the Web, the danger of history repeating itself looms over us? Faced with the difficulties of not knowing what to do about the past or the future, young cultures are dedicated to the present and devote themselves to the instant. . . . In music, if anything happens to unify us as Latin Americans, it is the coincidence of the absence of melodic narratives in techno, the fight to tell stories in a world with an occluded future exhibited by the *narcocorridos*,⁹ and the sputtering clips in erotic funk and rock music. The here-today-gone-tomorrow world of music is typified in the hyper-reality of the instantaneous, the fleeting nature of records that must be listened to this week, the speed of information and cheap communication that fosters oblivion. There is a huge chasm between the 1960s philosophy of the aesthetics that nurtured open, unfinished works, and the philosophy that now feeds the aesthetic of instants that come about with no connection whatsoever, leading nowhere in particular. Zygmunt Baumann has stated that today “beauty is a characteristic of the event, not of the object,” and that “culture is the ability to change topics and sides very quickly.”¹⁰ . . .

Today, there seems to be a general disbelief about what happened in the past and what is yet to come in the future. Can one only trust in what is actually happening? Everything occurs so fast that the model of social triumph is to be an ex-Big Brother. If you want to live in the hyper-present, you have no time for memory or for utopia: the oddity before the lost temporality conspires with the high-tech simulations of Jurassic recollections of the past and intergalactic star wars of the future, ever so similar. . . .

. . . It occurs to me that if we are going to get out of our current indigence, it can be neither by repeating a past that we should never forget, nor by creating apocalyptic prophecies of our future. In a way, everything happens in the instant, and the task is about grasping its density. I find company for this statement, and for its aesthetic elaboration, in authors whose last names, and who knows why,

all begin with the letter B: Benjamin, Borges, and Berger. In the text in which he wonders why he is so intrigued with a man who had built the almost infinite Chinese Wall—the emperor Shih Anang Ti—yet who ordered all books burned prior to his reign, Borges closes with a definition of aesthetics: “Music, the states of happiness, mythology, aged faces, certain twilights, and certain places, want to tell us something, or something they said that we shouldn’t have missed, or they are ready to tell us something; the imminence of a revelation that does not occur, is, perhaps, the aesthetic fact.”¹¹

Half a century later, John Berger explores how to operate, abreast the deep pockets of the financial empires, from the rebelliousness of pockets of resistance. He dedicates his last book to the pockets conforming within the arts. His aesthetic theory comes close to that of Borges and to the current celebration of the present. He is not at ease with this, but notes that “the future has shrunk and the past has become redundant.”¹² On the one hand, we cannot live in the “sudden anguish of mourning over things that no longer exist.” On the other, “To imagine is too easy and too wasteful.” Let us pay attention, then, to what still exists. This has been—from Paleolithic cave paintings up until our century, according to Berger—the task of visual arts: to state “the visible world that surrounds us and continuously appears and disappears. If it weren’t disappearance, perhaps the impulse to paint would not exist, because the visible world would have the certainty that the painting attempts to capture.” . . .

. . . The painter, the writer, and the musician continually try to discover or stumble on “the place that will contain and surround their present act” of painting, writing, or singing. Ideally, there should be as many places as paintings. According to Berger, “The problem is that many times a painting does not successfully become a place. When it is not achieved it remains as a representation or a decoration: furniture.” Moreover, “When one finds a place, it is somewhere between the boundaries of nature and art. It is like a hole in the sand within which the border has been erased.” We have, as you can tell, almost arrived at the Benjaminian version of *aura*, which occurs in the whole of time, the “now-time,” the present as transition.¹³ It is very close, indeed, to “the imminent revelation” that according to Borges constitutes the aesthetic act. Does Latin America still exist? If we do not want to lose what it once was, nor drown the future still to come, then it is necessary to look for a way of grasping hold of the quality and

density of the present. Aesthetics may contribute to that effort if it is in fact true that it allows us to see an imminence in absence, or, in the words of Berger, “that which begins over and over again.”¹⁴

What can we conclude? With such dizzying changes from utopia to defeat and from memory to the encapsulation of the instant, theory has jet lag. In spite of all my searching, I am unable to realize any conception of Latin American history that aptly organizes the three moments under consideration as periods. I said utopia, memory, and instant with fear, because there no longer exist any bulletproof concepts. What is to imagine, what is to remember, and what is to seize the day at the beginning of the twenty-first century? These vacillations are connected to the debate about the diversity of names for Latin America: Native, Afro, modern, postmodern. The cultural and aesthetic options complicate the issues that modernizing rationalism on the one hand, and magical realism on the other, once simplified. There are utopian Latin Americanisms, and therefore epics—some dramatic and others tragic as they are forced to revive memory. I wonder whether there will also exist ways of working with the present that will not force us to avoid the questions of what used to be and what can be?

One possible conclusion is that so much variety makes us dizzy, and that it would be better to let go of Latin Americanisms or “the Latin American.” There continue to be Latin American studies centers, however, and multinational corporations who fancy us altogether as a market. Latin American presidents and ministers of culture—with less power than the multinational companies—continue to sign declarations and appear in pictures together two or three times a year. Publishers, television networks, and music industries all want to reach their clientele in Spanish. Then there are also the Latin American Studies Association conferences, and, finally, the disquieting American Free Trade Agreement proposed for 2005. One can doubt the existence of Latin America, but it is evident that there are plenty of Latin Americanisms.

In these spaces or along these lines I handle questions about styles that open up new perspectives to rethink current dilemmas. I beg my readers not to assume that I am giving questions of form and style the final say in the matter. Neither can we expect much from aesthetics, which is not a very dazzling discipline today, let alone a well-equipped toolbox. Besides, it is always better to avoid the risks of shifting from politics to art as though we were repeat-

ing the transition from social disillusionment to the consolation of intense personal emotions.

The old question of how to relate art and society reappears, then. I would like to pose it by taking into account the analysis of the place of culture in capitalism. For example, how is present-ism in art and media bound to the long-term structures of social processes? The expansion of markets also happens in time, because it occurs through an apparent denial of temporality, which is the planned obsolescence of products to attain the marketing of new ones. . . . These agents do it by pretending that neither the past nor the future matter, but they are able to transform the acceleration and discontinuity of tastes into a permanent way of life for the consumers. They are achieving, through an upgrading of products and expansion of sales, a guaranteed and durable reproduction of capital.

We are not going to relapse into the old idea of an economic determination over the symbolic, nor its consequent conspiratorial hypothesis: in post-modernity, the processors of capital would be making use of the “absolutized present-ism” as a manipulating resource in order to optimize their profits. . . . Doesn’t the aesthetic of the instant-without-history have anything to do with unstable trends of investments and profit that hide the negotiation policies of capital and infrastructure (factories, banks, control over transportation and means of communication)? In macroeconomics, the past and the future are certainly important. This does not seem too hard to demonstrate even in the unstable cultural industries, despite the inconsistent and excited rhythm that forces them to constantly be on the lookout for best-sellers, their competition, and business mergers. . . .

It is necessary to make these kinds of connections in order to understand how to open up the instant to history. Because of that, I would like to investigate a possible articulation between aesthetics and society, between art and place, which is not as boring as the telluric perseverance of those who insist on “building a home in the neighborhood of the autochthonous” as the only possible solution. I would like to search for a more convincing articulation than the romantic utopianism of drama and protest songs; a project with memory and drama aware of the conflicts not relapsing into the Manichaeian antagonisms of those who reduced politics to war; an elaboration of failures that does not remain jumping from one crisis to another, or, as its aesthetic equivalent, the illusion that each event lacks history.

The decline of “Latin America” did not occur by chance, let alone by the apparent arbitrariness of a passing fad. There must be some way to pry that out of the instant that speaks of the failed utopias and the neglected memories. To enjoy the present, would it not be appropriate to wonder whether there is a way to narrate temporality other than in the ways of those who gamble in the casinos of investment or govern the succession of our acts so that we will pay the fee? Perhaps we may be able to imagine an aesthetic that finds out how to invent performances that will not diminish our future nor make our past redundant.

1

Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

2

Andrea Giunta, *Vanguardia, internacionalismo y política: Arte argentino en los años sesenta* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2001), 15.

3

Rodolfo E. Fogwill, *Los pichy-cyegos* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la flor, 1983); Juan Forn, *Nadar de noche* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1991); Rodrigo Fresán, *Historia argentina* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 1993).

4

Martín Kohan, “El fin de una época,” *Punto de vista*, no. 64 (1999): 7.

5

Andreas Huyssen, *En busca del futuro perdido: Cultura y memoria en tiempos de globalización* (Mexico City: FCE-Goethe Institut, 2002).

6

Tomás Mulián, *Chile actual: anatomía de un mito* (Santiago, Chile: Ediciones Lom/Arcis, 1997), 37.

7

Nelly Richard, *Residuos y metáforas: Ensayos de crítica cultural sobre el Chile de la transición* (Santiago: Editorial Cuarto Propio, 1998).

8

Graciela Silvestri, “Memoria y monumento” *Punto de vista*, no. 64 (1999): 44.

9

“Narcocorrido” refers to the popular music from the north of Mexico that narrates the stories of drug dealers.

10

Quoted in Flavia Costa, “Lo que queda de la belleza,” interview with Zygmunt Baumann, *Clarín*, Cultura y Nación supplement, December 7, 2002.

11

Jorge Luis Borges, “La muralla y los libros,” in *Obras completas* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1994), 13.

12

John Berger, *La forma de un bolsillo*, trans. Paloma Villegas (Mexico City: Biblioteca Era, 2002), 39. Following quotes, pp. 39, 32, 12, 13, 19, and 21, respectively.

13

Walter Benjamin, "Tesis de filosofía de la historia," in *Discursos interrumpidos*, trans. Jesús Aguirre, vol. 1 (Madrid: Taurus, 1973), 175–91.

14

Berger, *La forma de un bolsillo*, 24.

15

Julio Ramos, *Por si no nos da el tiempo* (Rosario: El Escribiente, 2002), 23.

VI.2

THE TRANSNATIONAL MISE-EN-SCÈNE

VI.2.1 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1065586

FACING THE AMERICAS

Gerardo Mosquera, 1992

Cuban art critic and theorist Gerardo Mosquera (born 1945) introduces the exhibition *Ante América*—held in Bogotá’s Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango (on view October 27–December 20, 1992) and curated jointly with Carolina Ponce de León and Rachel Weiss. Mosquera’s essay describes the common social, political, and economic framework that fostered the art of what he refers to as “el Sur” (the South) or “Nuestra América” (Our America). Expanding on the continental construct first articulated by José Martí [SEE DOCUMENT I.3.4], Mosquera’s “Nuestra América” is a concept not strictly defined by geography; instead, it is an imaginary region that, in addition to artists working in the continent, includes Latin Americans living in exile in both Europe and the United States, African Americans, Chicanos, and others. Although these artists are characterized by substantial heterogeneity, they undoubtedly share a common “cultural, historical, economic, and social community.” What unites the members of this almost limitless “community,” Mosquera argues, is the fact that they all have conflicted relationships with economic centers and that they experience extreme sociocultural contradictions within their own local contexts. As a result, the art produced by artists working in “el Sur” tends to be especially concerned with its social context and exhibits a tendency toward postmodern appropriation. During the early 1990s, Mosquera emerged as a key voice in the reframing of contemporary art produced in the heterogeneous context of Latin America. In this text, he introduces many important concepts and terms central to the discussion of postcolonial theory and contemporary Latin American art. This translation is made from the text’s original publication [Gerardo Mosquera, “Presentación,” *Ante América*, exh. cat. (Bogotá: Banco de la República/Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, 1992), 12–16].

ANTE AMÉRICA [FACING THE AMERICAS] is a discourse of integration. South American, Caribbean, Central American, Native, Chicano, Afro-North American, Latin American, and exiled artists in Europe take part in [this exhibition]. In a nutshell, this bundle of diversities that we classify—but cannot adequately represent—under the general designation of Latin America, or, better still, of *Nuestra América*, to use José Martí's term [SEE DOCUMENT 1.3.4], represents the Southern Hemisphere,¹ even if some of these artists live in the big cities of the North. [We speak of a] Southern Hemisphere defined not by geography, but by a cultural, historical, economic, and social community beyond obvious differences.

In a short story by [Jorge Luis] Borges, a Colombian character says that being Colombian is an act of faith.² This statement could extend to Latin America and to this exhibition. But so-called postmodern anthropology has conferred a cynical connotation to the statement by showing that identities stem more from deliberate structure than essence, especially in the cases of cultural diversity and syncretism. These structures materialize from common experiences and interests as schemes resulting from the pursuit of goals with shared benefit for those involved.

We Latin Americans, who have so much in common, are driven to integrate ourselves while at the same time accepting our complex diversity. The longing elicits general approval, but realistically leads to little progress, due to local pettiness that persists to this day and shatters the continent. The problem is typical not only of Latin America but to the entire Third World. One of the Southern Hemisphere's puzzles is its lack of horizontal integration and communication, which is in sharp contrast to its vertical—and ancillary—connection with the North. In Latin America, it stands out even more because of our cultural, geographic, and historic proximity [to one another]. Yet all the Southern cultures and countries, despite their differences, still face common problems stemming from the post-colonial situation that has created structural similarities encompassing diversity. It is the *mosaic effect*, making it so difficult for us to make the most of things. How rhetorical indeed it is to “speak of the Third World and throw into the same bag Colombia, India, and Turkey,”³ as if ignoring what unites us or could unite us in a confrontation with hegemonic powers, even if [that common bond is] only poverty.⁴ These cultures need to know and reflect on themselves, exchange experiences, undertake common projects. Nevertheless, a radical

relativism must not foment isolation, as we distance ourselves from the effort to approach and learn from the Other (even from what we don't like, as [the architect Robert] Venturi would say). If postmodernity places *otherness* in the foreground, it does so through a process of infinite differentiation that eliminates the very need to choose.⁵ The strategy of the dominated is geared toward integration, starting from what unites them and by activating their difference "in face of the predominant international postmodern factor."⁶ South-South [self-reliant, Robinson] Crusoe-ism only benefits the centers, which support the North-South verticalism.

The question puts in the foreground the issue of intercultural relations, one of the great subjects of the moment, introducing a more complex and multifarious consciousness. However, the intercultural challenge begins at home. How will Latin America confront the horizontal dialogue of [multiple] cultures if it has hardly solved it within [individual] countries where a large part of the population remains alienated from a supposed national integration scheme? The ideology of *mestizaje* [racial intermingling], a rhetorical approach aimed at resolving in a harmonious and equitable manner socio-ethnic diversity, has contributed a great deal to removing us from the problems of our otherness. Latin American countries find it hard to acknowledge their pluralism because the criollo bourgeoisie that shaped them blueprinted national outlines through accounts of totalizing identity that disguised the ethnic diversity and social marginalization of large groups of population.

As integration can only be reached through dialogue and respect for differences, the false consciousness misleading our nations into feeling integrated only hampers, paradoxically, an authentic integration process that has failed to take place in the vast majority of them. Such a false consciousness [or ideology] does not merely float in the air: it weighs on the discriminatory economic, social, political, and cultural structures of Latin American countries. Present events in the ex-Soviet Union and Eastern Europe demonstrate the weakness of such structures when imposed by hegemonic groups instead of by plural consensus. In Latin America, the situation is more fluid, even though it provokes identity conflicts and confusion due to lack of consciousness of the problem.

Even speaking in the most general terms, we Latin Americans suffer from a problem of self. Whenever Latin American art or culture is discussed,

the question of identity resurfaces like incurable herpes. We have yet to accept ourselves as we are, taking for granted our diversity and contradictions. We consider ourselves second-rate Europeans once-removed, either rushing to solve our complexes by using [a strategy of] Euro-North American mimicry; or we believe ourselves to be “Indians” or “Blacks” who have nothing to do with the Western culture, rebuffing it en bloc. Moreover, we dream of the utopia of *mes-tizaje* as a “cosmic race”;⁸ or we despair as victims of chaos, in order to seek refuge in both nihilism and cynicism. Our complexity either befuddles or intoxicates us. We fail to accept it with naturalness; we always need a chronicle that sets us into an ontological model of being and behaving. More than a century ago, José Martí said that, “by holding a book in front of our eyes,” we failed to see that the governing of “a hybrid and unique land” should include “all the elements . . . which rose to found it.”⁹ And the book turned out to be many books, and, unhappily, all of them portended adverse fortune.

Such detours arise from our sociocultural heterogeneousness, which goes back to the tremendous collision of cultures five hundred years ago. [The tendency to take these detours] stems from our original hodgepodge, of being simultaneously Western and non-Western; of belonging to the periphery while wearing a wristwatch showing the same time as New York; of being marginal yet eminently acquainted [with what is going on] in the centers of power; of enduring the conflictive structural diversity of our societies, where people live a stone’s throw from some of the world’s greatest megalopolises that are just adjacent to [areas for] hunting and primitive agriculture; [and of living in a state] of dependency with its economic, social, and cultural distortions. [The Argentinean anthropologist Néstor García] Canclini (paraphrasing Perry Anderson) speaks of “the continent of semi-,” where we find a mixture of “a dominant semi-oligarchic order, a semi-industrialized capitalist economy and semi-transforming social movements.”¹⁰ At least in Asia and Africa, despite bad conditions in some countries, things prove to be less ambiguous.

It has been said that we lack artistic identity, that “we were unable to forge a Latin American art concept.”¹¹ Indeed, this is not inconsistent with the contradictions outlined above, but rather arises from them. Much of this has been intertwined with the complexity of the context, yet, more importantly, art has faced up to the complexity, has confronted it, serving as an example to

politics or economics, which have done so little in this regard. I am not referring to the social role of symbolic production despite its coherence with the surroundings from which and for which it is made. The contradictions and insufficiencies that at times are indicated by the art of Latin America frequently reflect its acceptance of the contradictory structure of society itself, of its operations from the inside out. This has led it either to go astray or to score a bull's-eye, to become either barren or fruitful. But never has it avoided culture's dirty work. Thus, a general trait of art on the continent has been its active link with context, to the point that there has been mention of an "inextricable relation with reality" which determines "an immature concept of the symbolic," meaning that aesthetics becomes continuously saturated with meaning from abroad.¹²

Along with all this, another general feature would be the "postmodern" ability for inclusion and appropriation, to make "the foreign something of one's own, something intimate," in [Ricardo] Forster's words.¹³ It is a question of taking over our diversity without prejudice and using it to our advantage. According to [E.M.] Cioran, the Latin American intellectual typified by Borges, lets his spirit stretch in all directions. It is a scheme of "selective cannibalism," of *différence*, formulated by the Brazilian modernists,¹⁴ whose early "Postmodernism" claimed it as a viable bit of cunning for Latin America's contemporary culture.

Although the tricky question of "who's eating whom?" remains more or less present in this as in any other intercultural relation, the process, albeit under circumstances of domination, instead originates in "give and take," to quote Cuban ethnologist Fernando Ortiz. A long time ago [Franz] Boas, [Robert] Lowie, [Alfred] Kroeber, [Melville] Herskovits and other anthropologists stressed the active role of those innovators who receive alien elements—[namely,] the ones choosing, adapting, and transforming them. Nonetheless, the task is arduous because it goes forward on occupied instead of neutral grounds, thus underscoring a praxis that assumes, for tactical purposes, the contradictions of both dependency and post-colonial distortions. It was Simón Rodríguez in the past century who ironically asked why, if we were such good imitators, we didn't imitate originality.

Therefore, the *Ante América* exhibition intends to offer a vision of contemporary art on the continent, emphasizing all these and other complexities. [This goal] is expressed in the invitation extended to artists of extremely varied back-

grounds: here, probably for the first time, Chicano, Uruguayan, Native, Caribbean, Afro-North American, and Colombian artists are exhibiting together in a show asserting Latin America, whether it is in a New York suburb or on an English-speaking island. The exhibition in itself is an open essay on the continent, as the artists have been chosen because they propose in their works a consciousness of what America implies. Such a consciousness is communicated in quite different ways, often far-removed from the literal. Threaded into the artistic work, such consciousness can be aesthetic, cultural, social, religious, or even based on first-hand experience. The participants vary in age and degrees of recognition, but all of them are actively involved in the formulation of the continent's contemporary culture.

Furthermore, the exhibition strives to improve the dissemination and knowledge of contemporary Latin American art in the continent itself, where, for instance, such an intense artistic scene as Jamaica is almost unknown, or Chicano or New York–Puerto Rican cultures remain often ignored or looked upon with suspicion. Countless obstacles are not only placed between North and South—as a consequence of the center–periphery power relationship—but also within the very South, due to post-colonial distortion. Such an attempt at communication is conveyed, on the one hand, through works discussing problems in our context and enriching what [the Cuban artist] Juan Francisco Elso used to call “a Latin American spirituality.” On the other hand, it aspires to present in the United States an image of Latin American art that is conceived from the South and delves deeply into our problems and is thus far-removed from clichéd expectations.

Latin American art—and the same is true for the rest of contemporary, non-traditional production in the Third World—has traditionally been undervalued and marginalized in the centers. And this increases every time the international circuits of Art History unveil the latest of accounts in the Euro-centered art history field. Even in exhibitions such as *Primitivism in 20th Century Art* or *Magiciens de la terre* [Magicians of the Earth], the Latin American presence was insignificant, despite the fact that it would have made an important contribution to those shows especially by probing and bringing to the fore [Latin America's] problems and perspectives.¹⁵ Aside from the power mechanisms in play, this art has not been understood from the point of view of its response as committed to its own context. A myth of authenticity has made it difficult for it to be appreciated as

a live reaction to the post-colonial contradictions and hybridizations, since the myth demands “originality” be carried to the Nth degree or to be closely tied to tradition and ancient cultures pertaining to a situation that is no longer germane.

One of the greatest prejudices of art history and criticism is to undervalue Latin American art as “derivative” of the Western tradition. Latin American artists are continually required to show their identification papers; their luggage is searched because of suspicions that they may be smuggling stuff from New York or Milan. In order to have their visa of originality stamped, they must be “fantastic” [SEE DOCUMENTS V.2.5 AND V.2.6] and not resemble anyone or, instead, resemble Frida [Kahlo]. The sensible thing would be to analyze how the art of a given country or region satisfies the aesthetic, cultural, social, communicative, and other demands of the community from which and for which it is made. The reply is usually mixed, relational, an appropriation that is, indeed, “inauthentic” and, therefore, inadequate to confront its current reality [of the *here and now*.] Although one has to guard against colonialism, which in general certainly weakens much contemporary art of Latin America and the Third World, it cannot be done with an attitude of nostalgia for masks or pyramids.

The postmodern interest in the Other has opened up some space in so-called “international” circles for Latin American art. It has introduced, however, a new thirst for the exotic—a carrier of a passive or second-degree Eurocentrism—that instead of making its own paradigms universal, makes certain cultural productions of the peripheral world agree with paradigms that the center typifies for its own consumption. Many Latin American artists and critics seem well disposed to “become the other” of themselves for the sake of the Western culture. In the final analysis, the resulting greater distribution and the relatively high prices favor above all artists who best fulfill the expectations or a rather stereotyped Latin American-ness which is suitable for the renewed insistence on the exotic. That is why [Diego] Rivera is held in much greater esteem than [José Clemente] Orozco and Remedios Varo valued more than [Joaquín] Torres-García [and so on].

Held in the United States, this exhibition will attempt to challenge such a perspective, taking advantage of the space [available] and widespread public interest. It supports a more plausible dialogue that contributes to a critical knowledge of Latin American art viewed from its own bases. It does so knowing that the reverse of exclusion and silence becomes *token-ism*. Even though postmodern

times have introduced heterogeneous possibilities in the opposite poles of center-periphery and hegemony-subordination, such diversity was an imposition controlled from the center, thus reproducing domination. Being disguised as relativism, the center “threatens to sweep away to the periphery its main character as the alternate,” according to [Nelly] Richard,¹⁶ and to dull its opposing edge, swallowing it up. The postmodern interest in Other-ness is, once more, hegemonic and Eurocentric, a movement originating from the dominant toward the dominated; in other words, the other one is always us.

One of the inescapable challenges of subordinated cultures—more post-colonial than postmodern—is to transform the dominant culture for their own sake; the move being to de-Euro-centralize it without harming its capacity for action in current times. Many of the artists gathered here work, either spontaneously or consciously, in that direction. *Ante América* is a discourse of integration and also an act [of faith]. Furthermore, it is a provocation to more critically look in-depth at the art from the continent and at the continent through its art. This [strategy] can enlighten us greatly about the processes that are taking place today in our milieu, lowering some “books” from in front of our eyes. But *Ante América* is also a contribution to aesthetic enjoyment through abundant works of assorted insights. . . .

1

The dual and simplifying terms South–North, center–periphery, Third World–First World, etc., are as vulnerable to criticism as they are shop-worn. There are many centers and peripheries and relations in-between, just as there is a Third World in every First World and a First World in every Third World, as pointed out by Vietnamese filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha. I adopt these categories for practical purposes.

2

Jorge Luis Borges, “Ulrica,” *El libro de arena* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1975), 27. —Ed.

3

Néstor García Canclini, “Modernismo sin modernización?” in *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, (Mexico City) 51, no. 3 (July–September 1989): 170.

4

Mirko Lauer, “Notas sobre Plástica, Identidad y Pobreza en el Tercer Mundo,” in *Debate Abierto: Tradición y Contemporaneidad en la Plástica del Tercer Mundo*, Third Havana Biennial (1989): 19–27.

5

Geeta Kapur, “Tradición y Contemporaneidad en las Bellas Artes del Tercer Mundo,” in *Debate Abierto*, op. cit., 11. Reproduced under the title “Contemporary Cultural Practice: Some Polemical Categories,” in *Third Text*, London, no. 11 (Summer 1990): 109–117.

6

Nelly Richard, "Latinoamérica y la Postmodernidad," in *Revista de Crítica Cultural*, Santiago de Chile, 3, no. 3 (April 1991): 15. The author defines Latin America as "a zone of experience (namely: marginalization, dependency, subordination, de-centering) common to all the countries of the continent located on the periphery of the Western dominant model of centered modernity."

7

Criollo is not equivalent to *Créole*. The latter term refers to West Indies culture and is applied to a broad range of cultural manifestations, from food and the African-influenced dialect common in the Caribbean islands, to the white and mixed-race descendants of French or Spanish settlers. By contrast, Criollo is used to refer to individuals of European—namely Spanish—descent born in the Americas. For the most part, the term identifies members of the white Latin American bourgeoisie.—Ed.

8

"Here we have, then, on the continent, all the elements of a new humanity. . . . Only the Iberian part of the continent has at its disposal the spiritual, racial and territorial factors necessary for the great venture of starting the universal era of humanity." José Vasconcelos, "La Raza Cósmica," in his *Obras Completas*, Volume 2, (Mexico City: FCE, 1972), 941–942. [SEE DOCUMENT IV.1.2]

9

José Martí, "Madre América" (1889), in his *Páginas escogidas*, vol. 1 (Havana: Imprenta Nacional de Cuba, 1971), 193.

10

García Canclini, "La Modernidad después de la Postmodernidad," in Ana Maria de Moraes Belluzzo, *Modernidade: Vanguardas Artísticas na América Latina* (São Paulo: Memorial da América Latina, 1990), 220–221.

11

Juan Acha, "Las Posibilidades del Arte en América Latina," in *Arte Bienal* (Cuenca, Ecuador) no.4 (October 1991): 7.

12

Ángel Kalenberg, interview in *Journal. Southern California Art Magazine* (Los Angeles) no. 25 (December 1979): 17 and 19.

13

Ricardo Forster, "Latinoamérica: el diálogo desde los márgenes," typescript report in *Simpósio Identidade Artística e Cultural na América Latina* (São Paulo: Memorial da América Latina, 1991).

14

In 1928, the *Revista de Antropofagia* was founded in São Paulo, in the first number of which appeared the "Manifesto Antropófago" written by Oswald de Andrade. For a critical appraisal of his ideas see Zita Nunes, *Os Males do Brasil: Antropofagia e a Questão da raça*, série papéis avulsos no. 22, Rio de Janeiro, CIEC/UFRJ, 1990. English version as *Cannibal Democracy: Race and Representation in the Literature of the Americas*. [SEE DOCUMENT I.5.7]

15

Rasheed Araeen, "Our Bauhaus Others' Mudhouse," in *Third Text* London, no.6, (Spring 1989): 3–14; James Clifford, "Histories of the Tribal and the Modern," in *Art in America*, New York (April 1985): 164–177, in *The Predicament of Culture*, Cambridge and London, 1988; Gerardo Mosquera, "Primitivismo y contemporaneidad en jóvenes artistas cubanos," in *La Revista del Sur*, Malmö, Sweden, 2, no. 3–4, (1985): 52–55.

16

Richard, "La Centro-Marginalidad Postmoderna," typescript report in *Simpósio Identidade Artística e Cultural na América Latina* (São Paulo: Memorial da América Latina, 1991).

VI.2.2–VI.2.3

CARTOGRAPHIES

The two documents in this section relate to the exhibition *Cartographies: 14 Artists from Latin America* held at the Winnipeg Art Gallery (Manitoba, Canada) in 1993. In “Cartographies,” Brazilian curator and art critic Ivo Mesquita (born 1951) establishes that the key question explored by the exhibition is whether or not the construct of “Latin American art” could in fact adequately describe contemporary art produced in the continent. Furthermore, he considers the newly institutionalized role of the curator of contemporary art. Borrowing from the work of Brazilian psychoanalyst Suely Rolnik [*Cartografia Sentimental, transformações contemporâneas do desejo* (Porto Alegre: Editora Sulina/Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul Editora, 1989) and *Micropolítica: Cartografias do Desejo*, Rolnik’s collaboration with Félix Guattari, (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes Ltda., 1985)], Mesquita proposes the concept of metaphorical cartography. He posits this as a productive working method that transcends map-making’s close association with the limitations of geopolitical boundaries, and he grounds his argument in the conceptual territories of desire, sensibility, and knowledge. As a curatorial proposal, *Cartographies* invokes an imaginary set of maps that delineate the relationships and circuits through which contemporary artists from Latin America—José Bedia and Marta María Pérez Bravo (Cuba), Germán Botero (Colombia) María Fernanda Cardoso (Colombian-born and Sydney-based), Gonzalo Díaz (Chile), Guillermo Kuitca (Argentina), and Alfred Wemmoser (Venezuela), among others—transform outmoded concepts of Latin American Art.

For his part, Rio de Janeiro-based critic and curator Paulo Herkenhoff (born 1949) wittily crafts a useful postmodern narrative in “Incomplete Glossary of Sources of Latin American Art.” Using humor, sarcasm, and irony, Herkenhoff’s glossary of terms and ideas dismantles entrenched stereotypes, defines seminal concepts and historical personages, and makes essential connections relevant to contemporary Latin American art. *Cartographies* opened in Winnipeg in December of 1993 and travelled to Caracas, Bogotá, Ottawa, New York, and Madrid between 1994 and 1995. These translations by Stephen A. Berg are from the texts’ original publication [Ivo Mesquita, “Cartographies” and Paulo Herkenhoff, “Incomplete Glossary of Sources of Latin American Art,” in *Cartographies*, Jon Tupper ed., exh. cat. (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1993), 7–12 and 13–61].

VI.2.2 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 807646

LATIN AMERICA: ANOTHER CARTOGRAPHY

Ivo Mesquita, 1993

I. INTRODUCTION

As an event—an action in time and space—the *Cartographies* exhibition has two objectives: first, to present a sample of the production of contemporary Latin American art and participate in the current debate about this alleged category of art; second, to propose a curatorial methodology capable of approaching the production of contemporary art, critically standing up to institutionalized tradition and preserving the specificity of the plastic discourses. *Cartographies* intends to examine whether what we have come to call “Latin American” in the visual arts is capable of describing and interpreting (in a holistic and productive manner) the art produced in the corresponding continent. The project also debates the role of the curator of contemporary art in face of her institutionalization as a mark of knowledge and power in the contemporary visual arts circuit.

Although the exhibition’s title suggests maps, it does not refer to the making of maps for crossing the geographical home territories of its artists. Nor does it propose to exhibit maps made by artists. It refers, in fact, to imaginary maps, based on the relationships and circuits that were established so that *Cartographies* might take place and that, in many ways, broke with the limits imposed by geopolitics and institutionalized relationships. As of 1989, when this project began, my successive travels through the Americas; the communications networks (fax, telephones, mail, couriers); the network of collaborators set up for support and dissemination (the Winnipeg Art Gallery, curators, artists, sponsors, collectors, services, other venues); all the documentation and registers compiled during the journey and the show itself—all these describe real and mental trajectories that constitute a territory different from that of real physical space. They are virtual maps. Together with these imaginary maps, and on the other side, *Cartographies* also refers to maps of the imaginary, for it sees the artists’ works as projections of

their minds, concretizations of desire—a drive that is primal and previous to any form. The mind, in this case, is conceived as a vast prairie, from which the works emerge as landmarks of a territory under constant transformation.

The exhibition therefore requires of the visitor the traveler's disposition: a being with history and identity, guided by the senses through the territories he traverses and discovers. It proposes that each visitor transform himself into a cartographer and invent his own territory. For, by extension, it also intends to make explicit an attitude toward life: to be a traveler means to seek an almost permanent existence in the present, in constant displacement and in the condition of the eternal foreigner, with roots not in nationality but in those territories under the rule of desire, sensibility and knowledge. After all, it is of life we speak when we think about art.

...

III. LATIN AMERICA: ANOTHER CARTOGRAPHY

In the space of Western civilization, Latin America appears as the result of the expansion undertaken by the Discoveries and as an image of the bankruptcy of the European project of colonization that wound up relegating it to the condition of "the other" at the periphery. Although this process is not confined to Latin America (for the discourses of the hegemonic centers have distributed generalizations of every sort worldwide), there are certain particularities and distortions that Western History has attributed to this part of the world: on one hand, the notion of a territory of the eternal primitive, the exotic, of the folkloric and innocent; on the other hand, the notion of a space of endless revolutions and social uprising, of the lack of political will and the democratic exercise of citizenship, that disqualifies these societies from conceiving of a Utopia. But despite the political instability, the striking economic contrasts, the diversity of coexisting cultural identities, or even the urgency of social problems and the waves of fashion that present Latin America as yet another consumer product in the order of the day, each Latin American country continues to think about its Utopias as societies constituted from the heritage and traditions of the West, seeking to become visible and clamoring for their place in History. The presence of Latin America on

today's political and cultural scene is therefore always marked by the urgency of its political, social and economic situations, and by some stereotypes regarding its strong and varied cultural tradition.¹

Latin American does not exist under a single identity. . . . "Latin American" as a concept, however, presupposes an integration of the continent that frequently does not exist in the countries themselves, whether because of social and economic or racial and cultural differences. The efforts of political and cultural institutions to promote continental integration are restricted to formal agreements, sealed by diplomacy; they never convert themselves into an effective relationship in the development of common projects seeking the interchange of experiences and knowledge. For example, there is, within the frame of post colonialism, much more cooperation within each country than among the separate countries. Thus, "Latin American" becomes one more operational category of postmodern anthropology, not unlike the ample notions of center and periphery, First and Third World, and so on. As has been previously observed, there are many centers and peripheries with distinct and complex relationships among themselves, just as there is a Third World within every First, and a First World within every Third.²

In the territory of the visual arts, Latin America has been registered and qualified by historiography and art criticism since the advent of modernism as a generator of two segments of the visual imaginary:

- 1) On one hand, its artistic production is approached through an interpretative posture that delimits a group of works inspired by popular tradition and seeking to recover oppressed nationality. Latent in this production is the idea of the recovery of the popular as a restorative of nature (pure) forgotten by Western civilization (impure). It supports itself on figurative images that refer to the continental mythologies (pre-Columbian, Afro-American, Amerindian), to religious and mythic iconography, and to well-known images from the Surrealist repertoire. . . . This production works with a dilution of Surrealism, but is recognized regionally and internationally as "Magic Realism" or "Art of the Fantastic"; it creates images that reinforce the myth of the continent as a land of the noble savage, of an El Dorado forever lost by civilization.³

-
- 2) On the other hand, its artistic production is recognized as a space of political militancy, creating an art engaged in the service of education and consciousness-raising of the masses and the transformation of society. Associating itself with the tradition founded by Mexican Muralism, the only Latin American artistic movement recognized by the compendia of Western art history, this production seeks more to answer the demands of political and social emergencies than to debate issues intrinsic to the production of language and knowledge.

It is not that these productions do not exist or are not constituent of a certain “Latin America.” They exist and are part of the artistic activity in the continent. In the meantime, as a group representative of artistic production in Latin America, they can only fail in their intent to demarcate a territory for the Latin American, for they affirm the existence today of an autochthonous culture, of an identity that expresses the authenticity of a pure and revolutionary culture. They incorporate the discourse of the other about “us” and create systems of representation that are rapidly crystallized in icons of identity, emptied by the violent dynamics of reality in which they are inscribed: an intermediate territory between the cultures of the pre-Columbian past and the unrealized Utopia proposed by the despotism of the colonizers. [As Ricardo Forster states]: “Latin America may perhaps be this space ‘in the middle,’ a territory without fixed margins where plurality is at once hope and failure, opportunity and difficulty, utopia and catastrophe. . . . We are the space of the crossing cultures, the meeting of travelers, of prophecies and chimera. . . . Restless figure, simultaneously ancient and youthful, it seems to regiment all the epochs in order to dream of a Latin American identity, a species of archetype that would unite all inhabitants south of the Rio Grande. However, in breaking the mirror, we are confronted by the fact that our reality has always been constituted among fragments, looking almost in the same act, inwards and outside and discovering the labyrinthine and Babel nature of our identity.”⁴

In a more recent past, under the aegis of postmodernism and the ideology of the politically correct, a series of artistic productions collaborated in the conquest of important spaces for crucial issues: minority identities—political, ethnic, sexual; the environment—both natural and social; social and cultural

relations; miscegenation, multiculturalism, and so forth. In this way, new categories have emerged in the cultural debate purporting the specificity of new productions: the work of feminists, gays, lesbians, greens, African-Americans, Natives, Hispanics, Chicanos, etc. These new categories, however, eventually create *ghettos* where these productions should exist. In their wake, the concept of “Latin American art” was repotentialized and won greater validity, without engendering significant change in the understanding of the artistic productions and the countries on the continent. There was no productive and critical displacement of traditional concepts.⁵ On the contrary, this process has proven surprisingly reiterative of the already institutionalized, and has to some extent blocked the emergence of other signs of differences, of singular practices which might stress in a positive way the relations between art production and the circuits in which it is inscribed.⁶

To consider art in Latin America is to propose a confrontation between the strategies of artistic production and the policies of cultural institutions. “Latin American” plasticity is a definition whose conditions for manifestation currently depend on the degree of articulation of those institutions whose needs it produces. The only way to define a position that would account for the peculiarities of this plasticity is to strengthen transverse institutional tactics among the many organizations that are at work on the dissolution of the new forms of “modern primitivism.”⁷ If the Western world has sought this artistic production—and this is no place to discuss its interest in such action—it is up to us, Latin Americans, to make ourselves visible according to the pluralistic qualities of our culture. If the native past, Catholic and syncretistic religions, Latin languages, and ethnic mixtures are a common background, artistic practices point toward the territory of difference, of singularity. The fact that we live on the periphery obliges us to become cosmopolitan as the sole means of escape from the asphyxiation imposed by geopolitics and the confinement of desire. Without a fixed place—and it is this which makes us so interesting—we reside in mobility and live in a constant state of redefinition, where the question of cultural identity is permanently open. [I agree with Forster’s argument:] “In the midst of fractures and decadences, perplexed by our history and our present, devoid of a self-sufficient identity, we Latin Americans, especially artists and intellectuals, find ourselves faced with an unprecedented opportunity: to consider our time starting from the ecumenical,

carving the cultural provincialisms, recovering the legacy of an illustrious and cosmopolitan West, but definitely entrenched in the knowledge which emanates from our own faults, from our suspect skepticism of those dreams we were promised by the American utopia.”⁸

Thus, to propose another cartography for the contemporary art produced in Latin America is to investigate possibilities for transformation. In particular, it is an attempt to change the comprehension of this production through a de-territorialization of the rigidly held positions of twentieth-century art history. What is important is to promote the possibility that the art which is produced there ceases to be the other which is spoken of in order to guarantee it the full exercise of languages, preserving the specificity and autonomy of the poetics. So the curator/cartographer goes off on expedition seeking to describe strategies in the production of Art, so as to reveal the collision of these productions with the issues that make up contemporariness. What truly matters is to perceive the firepower of the artistic production in Latin America, to constitute strategies enabling the emergence of an intelligent and original form of contemporary art in Latin America.

1

If we consider that the pre-Columbian past is composed of more than the Inca, Maya, and Aztec cultures—that the people who lived here during that period developed different degrees of civilization, that not all countries had slavery, that the migratory fluxes of Europe and of the Orient were directed, at different times, to different regions of the continent—we see that there were added to the colonial heritage of Latin and Catholic tradition so many diversifying factors that it becomes extremely reductive to invoke a common background in the formation and development of these societies. The “Great America” (of which Brazil is no part by virtue of its colonization by the Portuguese) dreamt of by the Hispanic liberators, for example, fragmented into many countries, and in each one of them lives a multiplicity of identities and cultures. In all the countries to a greater or lesser degree, white people, blacks, natives and an enormously varied *mestizagem* [intermingling] of all of them coexist. Nevertheless, it is profitable to observe that this racial plurality is not a privilege of Latin America, but of America, the New World, as a whole.

2

On this subject, see among others, Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-Ha and Cornel West, eds., *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* (New York /Cambridge: New Museum of Contemporary Arts/MIT Press, 1990); Lucy R. Lippard, *Mixed Blessings* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990); Jean Hubert Martin, *Les magiciens de la terre* (exh. cat.) (Paris: Centre National d’Art Moderne Georges Pompidou, 1989); Gerard Mosquera, “Presentación,” *Ante América* (exh. cat.) (Bogotá: Banco de la República/Biblioteca Luis-Ángel Arango, 1992); Nelly Richard, *La Estratificación de los Márgenes*, (Santiago de Chile: Francisco Zegers Editor, 1989); Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

3

These figurations are perceived from the standpoint of the Surrealist experience. It is necessary to remember the importance of André Breton in the revelation of a significant number of original and important artists of Latin American origin. However, these productions are now supported by the “belief in the persistence of the international Surrealist movement, as emulating a universal and timeless Surrealist approach. Although the survival of a “surrealistic mentality” is justified by the theoretical refusal to consider Surrealism as a style (and thereby explaining its historical permanency), all productions connected in one way or another to this belief betray their own anachronism, as evidenced by the fact that they end up by converting into a matter of style the most original and transgressive formal devices of Surrealism. It is not by mere chance that a major part of this production has been dedicated to representations of oneiric evocations, especially in the trend set by [Salvador] Dalí.

4

Ricardo Forster, “Latinoamérica: el diálogo desde los márgenes,” (symposium paper), *Identidade Artística e Cultural na America Latina* (São Paulo: Memorial da América Latina/Arts International, 1991).

5

It is curious to perceive that the categories created by political correctness seek to map, on this side of the world, the differences and singularities that would put together an American picture, that is, of the three Americas. . . . However, this procedure reveals itself to be as arbitrary and merely operational as all the categories previously mentioned: center and periphery, First and Third World, etc. If this were not so, then why is Québec not included when we speak of “Latin America”? Are not the “Québécois” a Latin, Catholic culture produced in America? Would there not be similarities or affinities between their political, social and cultural claims and those of the peoples below the Rio Grande?

6

In the great majority of recent exhibitions of art from Latin America—*The Art of the Fantastic in Latin America*, Indianapolis, 1988; *The Latin American Spirits*, New York, 1988; *Latin American Art*, London, 1989; *Twentieth Century Artists from Latin America*, New York, 1992–93, among others for example—it is always presented as a “survey” with a univocal point of view, homogenizing all the peculiarities of its visual production. The concept of a hegemonic thought supported by geopolitics and incapable of revealing the struggles in the constitution of a modern and contemporary visuality is what prevails in these exhibitions.

7

Justo Pastor Mellado refers to the interest in the search for a new primitivism that exists today in the dominant centers for Third World art. See Justo Pastor Mellado, “Un caso de producción de identidad artística,” *Identidade Artística e Cultural na America Latina* (São Paulo: FMAL/AI, 1991).

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Forster, “Latinoamérica: el diálogo desde los márgenes,” (1991).

VI.2.3 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 808171

INCOMPLETE GLOSSARY OF SOURCES OF LATIN AMERICAN ART

Paulo Herkenhoff, 1993

AMERICA: A pluri-vocal geographic denomination of a continent, in honor of the navigator Amerigo Vespucci, who was from Italy, a country which has not been involved with colonization. In the United States, the term has a double meaning: for the nation it stands for their own country (i.e., the United States of America). However, this has the pragmatic meaning of the Western continent, when, under the Monroe Doctrine [SEE DOCUMENT III.1.1], the U.S. came to use the Big Stick of interventionism. In Latin America it is a univocal term meaning the New World, whereas the Monroe Doctrine was usually a unilateral application. To leave this clear some call Latin America “Nuestra America” [Our America]. [See LATIN AMERICA below] . . .

ARGENTINIDAD: “It is a mistake,” says Jorge Luis Borges in referring to the nationalistic demand of local color in poetry. To deal problematically with the subject, he brings the example of the Koran where in spite of the absence of camels, one would not claim it as not being Arab: “I believe that we, the Argentineans, could resemble Mahomet, we could believe in the possibility of being Argentineans without abounding in local colour. . . . The nationalists propose to venerate the capacity of the Argentinean spirit, but they intend to limit the poetical exercise of this spirit to some poor local themes, as if the Argentineans could speak only about villages and “estancias” and not about the universe. [See EVERYTHING and RHETORIC] The Venezuelan critic Rina Carvajal mentions that the Argentinean painter Guillermo Kuitca is not inspired “from an autochthonous tradition, but comes within the context of an urban environment that seeks an international aesthetic and a contemporary visual language,” Kuitca, dealing with Western culture and history, shares Borges’s concept of problematic *Argentinidad* beyond the nationalistic fatality and the national mask. . . .

BANANA: Plant originally from Asia, from the family of the Musaceae. It was introduced in America in the sixteenth century. In popular culture it has a very broad set of meanings (erotic, depreciative, etc.). Brazilian Modernism was very dependent on bananas, while nineteenth-century Academicism (Agostino José da Motta and Estevão Silva) preferred watermelons. [See WATERMELON] In one of the very few important paintings that she made in Brazil after returning from New York, Anita Malfatti presents, in her canvas *Tropical* (c.1917), a basket of fruits from bananas to pineapple. “It is certainly the first time that the national theme is focused within modern art in Brazil,” says Malfatti’s biographer Marta Rossetti Batista. Right after his definitive immigration to Brazil (1923), [Lithuanian-born] Lasar Segall introduced a joyful expressionistic landscape of a banana plantation with a certain post-cubist spatial character. In the late-1920s *antropofagia* [see CANNIBALISM,] large banana-tree leaves with vegetal bodies dwell in the cannibal native landscape of Tarsila do Amaral (since *A Negra*, 1923). These same leaves will appear in Livio Abramo’s early anthropophagus period woodblock prints. In the late 1960s, Brazilian Antonio Henrique Amaral, after his Pop departure, slowly moved to a hyper realistic amplification of bananas which are being submitted to painful operations—like being tied up or hung with string, or cut with forks and knives—as a metaphor for the dark political times of the prevailing dictatorship of torture and murder. The negative symbolism of Latin American countries as “Banana Republics” (as a post-Colonial alliance of local corrupt oligarchies, either civilian or military, with foreign interests and presently with United States interventionism) finally finds a morbid yet truthful portrait, in spite of some efforts of modernization in certain societies of the continent.

CANNIBALISM: The indigenous cultural pattern of cannibalism has provided Brazilian artists and writers of the twentieth century with a source for a modern theory of cultural absorption: *antropofagia* = cannibalism. The 1928 “Manifesto Antropófago” [SEE DOCUMENT 1.5.7] by poet Oswald de Andrade—taken from the painting *Abaporu* (1928) by Tarsila do Amaral—states that only cannibalism unites Brazilians socially, economically, and philosophically. The law of the man-eater indicates an interest in Otherness, unlike the importation of canned consciousness. In this stage of Brazilian modernism, it was no longer enough to update art with the international scene. A national culture would be open to devour any

influence, to digest it for new meanings and possibilities. The primitivist model is transformed into a barbarian pattern against the oppressive censorship of civilization. Andrade advocates “the permanent transformation of taboo into totem.” References to Sigmund Freud and Surrealism indicate the precedent he finds in Francis Picabia’s cannibalism. In Brazil, the “*antropofagia* project” has both historical and contemporary validity. It is a dialectic method that is far deeper than the superficial postmodern principle of image quotations. . . .

COLONIALISM: “Art is no longer an instrument of intellectual domination,” said Hélio Oiticica (1967). It is up to the artist to overcome post-colonialist aesthetics, in spite of the remnants of colonialism in the international circulation of art. Both the exclusion from history and an interpretation that includes references only to European sources are forms of colonialist censorship. . . .

CRISIS: 1492 sets a dual crisis. A multi-level crisis—from religion to knowledge—reaches Europe. A Portuguese Map (1519) by Lopo Hornen creates a southern territorial link between America and Africa, as a last effort to revalidate the Ptolemaic geographic notions. A permanent crisis was set for the natives of the Americas, from cultural survival to life itself. After independence, Paraguay underwent genocide and strangulation from its neighbors. Brazilian critic Mário Pedrosa discussed the “Crisis of the Artistic Conditioning” (1966) due to the use of alien cultural roots. Pedrosa added that this crisis of modern art was due to the crisis in the levels, of social function and communication (1972). Argentinean critic Jorge Romero Brest wrote *La Crisis del Arte en Latinoamérica y en el Mundo* [The Crisis in the Art of Latin America and that of the World] (1974). He discussed the notions of crisis and development in art and stressed a dialectic contradiction between the order of human needs and the order of artistic demands. Besides, the many specific crises Latin American artists are dealing with, like perception (Waltércio Caldas and Alfred Wenemoser), the critic Nelly Richard [SEE DOCUMENT VI.2.5] points to a fundamental contemporary crisis [between imitation and difference]. The Chilean group CADA [Colectivo de Acciones de Arte/Collective for Art Actions] (Raul Zurita, Diamela Eltit, Juan Castillo, Lotty Rosenfeld, and Fernando Balcells) in the claiming of a “discourse of the crisis,” [they] “had learned to mistrust any new illusion regarding ‘totalitarian totality’: may we call it either revolutionary utopia, myth, or ideology.” (Nelly Richard) [See UTOPIA]. . . .

DEPARTMENT OF STATE: The United States government organ for foreign affairs. According to Aracy Amaral: “It was not by chance that abstract expressionism had a world repercussion after the Second World War. During this period, in the midst of the Cold War, that tendency was exalted by the painters of the Museum of Modern Art of New York, the traditional right arm of the Department of State in the cultural area.”

DICTATORSHIP: Art dictatorships established aesthetic models as mandatory sources or monopolistic presences following the very pattern of governmental dictatorships. Most of the time they produced an alliance between the Stalinist aesthetics and right wing governments. They end up as the biggest market phenomena in their countries. Art critic Marta Traba mentions that Joaquín Torres-García has put Uruguayan modern art in the prison of this cold and desiccated idealism, with his ferocious civilist discipline. She also says that Oswaldo Guayasamín does to modern painting in Ecuador what The Three Great muralists did to modern Mexican painting: “He imposes terror and establishes an aesthetical dictatorship, outside of which it seemed impossible to survive.” For Shifra M. Goldman, in the fifties the dense intimate graphic work of Jose Luis Cuevas represented a reaction against the public aesthetics of the muralists. . . .

DUALITY: Where does the Third World end and the First World begin in this world? (Or vice versa). [See THIRD-WORLDLINESS] Is Latin American art in alignment with European and North American art? Or is it the setting of a local tradition? The Shakespearean dilemma evolves to “Tupi or not Tupi, that is the question” (pronounce “to pee”), where the name of this Native people gives Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade the possibility of condensing in a synthesis the fundamental doubt of national identity at the crossroad of cultures and historical times. [See CANNIBALISM] Tunga’s installation *Palindrome Incest* (1991) claims to have the structure of the human mind. “I’m trying to annul the terms of exterior and interior, of inconsequential and consequential,” the artist states. . . .

ESPEJISMO: Spanish term [for mirage] (derived from “espejo” = mirror) to describe that tendency in Latin American culture of reflecting foreign dependency or influence, usually from the hegemonic Northern Hemisphere countries. Borges speaks of the “passive aesthetics” of the mirrors and the active aesthetics of the

prism. [For a theory of cultural absorption, see CANNIBALISM] The trend of “quotations” in art in the eighties distorts the “reflecting” character of many artists.

EVERYTHING: “Everything human is ours,” said the Peruvian [José Carlos] Mariátegui (1926). In the prologue of *The Book of Imaginary Beings*, Borges writes: “the name of this book would justify the inclusion of Prince Hamlet, the point, the line, the surface, the hyper cube, all generic words and maybe each one of us and the divinity. On the whole, almost all of the universe.” Elsewhere Borges says that “We may touch all European themes, and to touch them without superstitions. . . . I repeat that we should not fear; we should think that the universe is our patrimony and try all themes.” For Borges, Xul Solar lived recreating the Universe [with his “Pan-lingua” (world language)]. One may now conclude that everything could be a genuine source for art in Latin America, because it has the right to the universe, plus it holds a secret. [See SECRET] Borges offers the broadest challenges to the imagination of many artists, be they Argentineans (Kuitca, Liliana Porter or Jacques Bedel) or non-Latin-American (Joseph Kosuth). In his *Biblioteca de Babel*, Borges deals with a library where we may find that everything expressible in any language has been printed. One generation after the other has gone through the library in search of The Book. Some called this library: Universe.

EXCLUSION: The writing of art history is an exercise in power of exclusion as well as inclusion. Someday, like the history of the defeated proposed by Walter Benjamin, one should write the history of those excluded from the dominant art history. This would include such artists as Gego in Venezuela, Oiticica, Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape and Amílcar de Castro in Brazil, or some from the Madi group in Argentina. . . .

GHETTO: Beyond the historical ground and identity [see LATIN AMERICA], the setting of specific space as an authorized territory for the expression and self-representation of ethnic groups and minorities may end. Exhibitions could become a geopolitical strategy, resulting in prison camps for art. Patronizing appreciation then ascribes intellectual quality to the confines of an artistic ghetto with a calculated ethnic apportionment. Brazilian artist Tunga declared: “Geographically I am a Latin American and professionally I am an artist. Because all art belongs to mankind, the attempt to organize thinking about art in

geographic or geopolitical terms is, at best, a crude approximation of what art really represents to the human spirit.” Artists like Cildo Meireles, Alfredo Jaar or Juan Dávila are engaged in revitalizing and giving voice to the ghetto. . . .

HISTORY OF LATIN AMERICAN ART: In spite of previous denials [see SECRET], from the continent or abroad, the art of Latin America also substantially nourishes itself from the History of Latin America which is a tradition in its own right and can be observed in constructive art. The work of the atelier of Torres-García in Montevideo, Asociación de Arte Constructivo (1934–40) was key to the formation (as voluntary identification) of the Buenos Aires groups and Madi in the 1940s, whose artists exhibited in Rio de Janeiro (1953) and influenced the Brazilian [Neo-] Concretist artists. The Neo-Concrete group (Amílcar de Castro, Clark, Pape, Oiticica, Weissmann) is a reference for the artists of the 1970s Brazil (Cildo Meireles, Antonio Manuel, Ivens Machado, Waltércio Caldas, Tunga, Fajardo, José Carvalho, Iole de Freitas) on many levels, such as phenomenology, poetics, aesthetics, philosophy and ethics (and less in formal aspects). Younger artists (Jac Leirner, Fernanda Gomes, Ernesto Neto, Waleska Soares, Frida Baromek) refer to both previous generations as well as to other international art movements. In Brazil, this is a cultural dynamic of transformation of ideas rather than a series of aggressive ruptures. . . .

INDO-IBERIAN AMERICA: A term proposed for Latin America in an editorial of the Mexican magazine *América Indígena* (vol. XIX; no. 2, April 1959): “The name Latin America can suggest that those who inhabit this great territorial extension are individuals who descend only from the so-called Latin European peoples. . . . We believe in the name Indo-Iberian America, since its inhabitants are descendants both of Indians and of ancestors from the Iberian Peninsula, or rather Spanish and Portuguese.” . . .

INSULARIZATION: Cities and continents can be insularized in the international art system. “I play chess alone right now,” wrote Marcel Duchamp to the Arensbergs during his sojourn in Buenos Aires (1918–19) as if he were sitting on the desert, Andean landscape. The geographic isolation of Manaus in the jungle and La Paz in the Andes, the boycott of Cuba, the long political, economic and cultural process of suffocation of Paraguay with its neighbors, in the 1870s after the war

are denotative of the circumstance of exiled societies and groups. However, the island of Cuba has transformed its insularity into a cosmogonic character, like in Brazil where cannibalistic modernism gave a character to cultural exchange. In his painting *Visión de La Isla desde lejos* [View of the Island From Afar] (1991), painted abroad, José Bedia depicts the image of an island-man. Cuba is now embodied in a mythical mountain-individual: nature flourishes from his body, labor energy flows in boats, trains, airplanes; life abounds from the archetype. Two Cuban artists, Ibrahim Miranda Ramos and K'cho present the problems of the historical and contemporary environment. The latter makes maps of Cuba in the form of kites and baskets, and there is an Aristotelian character in this transportable space. K'cho's Cuba is seen as transparent structures and devices for the movements of the imaginary. Miranda Ramos' metamorphoses turns maps of Cuba into archetypal lizards [alligators]. For him, Cuba has a long history of dictatorship, bribery and lies. The reinforcement of this unstable quality and the spread of incredulity in history have enabled the Lizard [Alligator]-Island to survive as an identity and to dwell in the poet José Lezama Lima's "invisible gardens" of the "insular night." . . .

LABYRINTH: From the North to the extreme South, a continent wanders between the *Labyrinth of Solitude* and the Labyrinth itself, as if a totality of diverse fragments were a continuum from Octavio Paz to Borges. In turn, Hélio Oiticica situates himself in a flow of desire: "I aspire to the great labyrinth." . . .

LATIN AMERICA: A continent of moving boundaries. Some are under dispute (Malvinas versus Falklands). Argentinean Kuitca has interpreted the individual distress and abandonment, the pain and silence that originated in the Malvinas conflict. Other limits are shrinking, especially in the jungle. This results from the Yanomani territories, recently established in areas of what are still "Brazil" and "Venezuela." The tension regarding the present territorial rights of Natives has raised the solidarity through art works by artists such as Brazilians Cildo Meirelles, Bene Fonteles and German Lothar Baumgarten. Cláudia Andujar has chosen to live among the Yanomanis, to turn her photography into a weapon for their benefit. Other frontiers are expanding to the North: they already comprise 25% of the population of Texas, as territory gained by the means of an "illegal" act (now migration instead of war, as dealt with by Chilean Alfredo Jaar and

Uruguayan Luis Camnitzer, respectively). Frida Kahlo, with *Self-Portrait on the Border between Mexico and the United States*, is a master geographer defining the limits and differences between two cultural universes, from history to nature, economy and ideology. . . .

MANIFESTO: Latin America adopted the European modernist strategy of writing manifestos as tactical declarations of principles against conservative force or opponents, or as an effective social means of circulating ideas. Some hundreds of manifestos in all fields from art to music were written on the continent. Manifestos were intended to give “visibility” to ideas. When art historians take exhibitions and manifestos as the sole or main historical process, they are distorting the cultural dynamics. This unconsciously reflects the Latin American literary tradition in dealing with art. Manifestos are not the absolute source of art and this produces a shadow over isolated artists like the Brazilian Oswald Goeldi, certainly the most rigorous Brazilian spirit in modern art from the 1910s until his death in 1962. That distortion by national historians leads to a second wave of opacity with foreign authors quoting the former. They have fallen into the trap of “manifestoism,” a new manifest destiny, now in art. . . .

MARVELOUS: For Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier: “lo extraordinario no es bello ni hermoso por fuerza. Ni es bello ni feo, es más que nada asombroso por lo insólito. Todo lo insólito, lo asombroso, todo lo que sale de las normas establecidas es maravilloso” [“Extraordinary things are not necessarily pretty or beautiful. They are neither beautiful nor ugly; they are, more than anything, astonishing for their unusualness. [Thus] everything that is unusual, awesome, everything that escapes established norms, is marvelous”]. (1975). Iraset Paes Urdaneta wrote that “the essence of Hispanic American marvelous realism is its obsession to name and to find America in its natural objects and its historical facts,” through the means of a dialectical and baroque discourse which attempts the interpretation of a society of solitude and violence. Many artists attempt to transpose from literature to art such non-rationalist patterns as the “marvelous real,” “fantastic realism,” “fantastic fundamentalism,” etc. As a result of constructing Latin America as a pre-logic continent [see *LATINO AMERICANIDAD*], foreign bias defines that idealized essence, where knowledge, science or philosophy would find neither a place nor a social meaning. Crisis and critical consciousness would travel only

under non-disruptive authorization in this marvelous territory, a Western reserve of romantic difference. . . .

NATIVE: The indigenous presence in Latin American art varied thematically in the early European representations from the idea as a source and contribution to the national identity, to primitivist references, to subjectivity of Native self-representation and individual self-expression. Cuba has very little native heritage, since the indigenous population was exterminated in the first decades of colonization. Also the *mestizaje* [intermingling] process rendered different approaches to self-identification regarding the ethnic origin. The native gaze has been absorbed throughout Latin America, as in the Andean paintings of the Cuzco, Potosi and Quito schools or in the baroque of the Jesuit Missions in Paraguay. Some groups have also shown their distaste for the colonization of their people, like [Peru's] Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala [author of *Nueva Crónica y Buen Gobierno* or *The First New Chronicle and Good Government*, completed around 1615]. The long history of indigenous art has many chapters. In the nineteenth-century Brazilian academy, as commonly as elsewhere, Indians did not correspond to their ethnic group. This anthropological falsehood was reinforced with Catholic morality. Native nudity would appear only in dying Indians and corpses (like in Victor Meireles's *Moema* of 1866), or in a Christian situation, like *The Last of the Tamoios* (1883) by Rodolfo Amoedo. What was indigenous gained strength in Andean countries and Mexico in the last century. As early as 1855 Peruvian Francisco Laso painted *The Indian Potter*, an individual full of dignity and an inheritor of history. In Mexico, the indigenous was symbolic in nationalism and modernization. Under the pressures of foreign oppression and exploitation national identity appeared in the last quarter of the nineteenth century in the paintings of José María Obregón, Félix Parra and Leandro Izaguirre (*Torture of Cuauhtémoc*, 1893). The muralist movement brought the indigenous to public spaces, building for Mexico the broadest set of symbolic images, with artists such as Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Fernando Leal, Jean Charlot, Francisco Goitia, among others. In European primitivism there was a relatively smaller reference to the indigenous heritage of Latin America, as with Henry Moore. Returning from his long European stay, Torres-García came back to Uruguay in 1934 for his final search for universal symbolism in native culture. Also Modernism in the region faced the apparent contradiction of looking to the past. This movement sought to regain the identity

that had been lost, distorted or constructed in the colonial past. From the Peruvian magazine *Amauta* (1926) by José Carlos Mariátegui . . . to the painting *Abaporu* by Tarsila do Amaral and to “The Anthropophagous Manifesto” (1928) of Oswald de Andrade this modernist attitude was widespread in the continent. Some contemporary artists are absorbed by the vast and silent Andean landscape as marked by the pre-Columbian cultures, others with the grief of the Conquest. The aesthetic, which searches for an indigenous metaphysical space is evidenced in the work of Peruvian Fernando de Szyszlo, Colombians Carlos Rojas, Edgard Negret and Ramirez Villamizar, Uruguayan Nelson Ramos, in the books of Argentinean Jacques Bedel, and in the photography of Brazilian Sebastião Salgado. More recently some artists such as Cildo Meireles, Cláudia Andujar and Bene Fonteles in Brazil and Uruguayan José Camarra, with his literary historical landscapes aligned their work against the genocide of Indians. In spite of the richness of this theme, historical domination remains as a constraint to the self-expression of Native groups in Latin America. This appears also in the work of Chileans Gonzalo Diaz and Eugenio Dittborn. On the other hand, “art” as a Western category is foreign to indigenous cultures. Can we call the symbolic artifacts of the ceremonial life of such cultures “art”? As the German artist Lothar Baumgarten has dealt with in his work, this can touch, as an act of linguistic appropriation, the very first movements of the Conquest: the giving of European names to the geography of the New World. . . .

OTHER: 1492 was “an astonishing revelation of *Otherness* (people, lands, cultures) beyond the confines of the Old World,” wrote Mari Carmen Ramírez [SEE DOCUMENT VI.1.5]. Contemporarily, Martin Heidegger’s influence has been the awareness of an “existence among Others” within the irremediable separation between the I and the Other. Since the early 1960s, Brazilian artists developed—as a strategy for dealing with a period of social and political crisis and psychological distress—an art that was an alliance with the Other. For such artists as Clark, Oiticica and Meireles, among others, art would perfect its existence and realize its full potential as a significant period and an irreplaceable experience only through the action of the Other. At the same time, in Buenos Aires, Luis Felipe Noé published his *Antiestética* (1965). He discusses the making of art in a chaotic reality; then, art becomes an adventure, involving oneself and the Other. [See

SOCIAL COMMITMENT]. In the present system of hegemonies, the truth is that the “Other” is always us, never they, observes Cuban art critic Gerardo Mosquera [SEE DOCUMENT VI.2.1]. . . .

PAN AMERICANISM: The exacerbation of the Cold War in the 1950s and the Cuban Revolution (1959) led to the ideological confrontation. Latino-Americanidad was substituted for Pan Americanism as a way of excluding and isolating the United States. Latin American solidarity was claimed against continental integration, which would incorporate the expansion of American capital and military intervention in the Southern Hemisphere. . . .

PRIMITIVISM: The impact of futurism in Latin America in the first decades of the century was gradually replaced by Primitivism as a general trend. Primitivism was closer to the reality of Latin America, more coherent to the impact of the social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer than the futurist ideas of social progress and technology. This modernity offered a possibility of a connection with the past and cultural reality of Latin America. Thus, Primitivism was not now an approach to the Other but rather a search for oneself through the national identity. Furthermore, Primitivism was a filter between Latin America and some tribal societies. Tarsila do Amaral’s painting *A Negra* (1923) is the major modernist work dealing with Brazilian African heritage. However she found her sources of primitivism in [Constantin] Brancusi’s sculpture and [Swiss poet] Blaise Cendrars’ ideas of “Negritude” in a sojourn in Paris that year. . . .

RHETORIC: “I accuse my generation of continuing the same methods of plagiarism and rhetoric as the former generation,” said Peruvian poet César Vallejo (1927), while Borges saw the mandatory reference to tradition as rhetorical. His skepticism was not based upon the difficulty in solving the problem, but upon its very existence. [See ARGENTINIDAD] In art, formalist quotations by artists superimpose the elaborate visual baroque rhetoric on religious rhetoric, thus hiding the political aims in Counter Reform. Quite often the visual art falls within the verbal rhetoric. Some argue that the visual rhetoric of most prints by the [late-1930s] Mexican Taller de Gráfica Popular is propaganda, pure “ideological vassalage.”. . .

SECRET: Since Latin American art has been widely discriminated against in art history (books and exhibitions) it remains widely unknown. Therefore it is a secret, known only to the artists of the region. Therefore these artists have more sources than the artists from elsewhere, since they have any source [see EVERYTHING] plus this SECRET one, so far, for their exclusive use. . . .

SOCIAL COMMITMENT: It is quite common for the individuality of a Latin American artist to be denied or required to represent some aspect of the region. This happens both in regard to foreign expectations and local demands, to which he/she might be aligned in a “South-American sensibility” (Chantal Pontbriand). Living amidst a hard social reality, and yet in a less individualistic society, Latin American artists in general never believed in the absolute autonomy of art. Historically this belief in the social character of the cultural project has led artists to search for a national identity and to engage social change. Ida Rodríguez Prampolini reached the conclusion that “since Mexico obtained its independence from Spain in 1821, if any quality has remained around the trajectory of critical and artistic production up to 1950s it is the entailment of art, politics and society.” The historical process altered such a commitment. Says Argentinean artist Luis Felipe Noé: “As a change we are now in a society in which the artist lives with the consciousness of the ‘I and the Other,’ ‘I and the world in front,’ ‘I and the Others,’ ‘I and world around mine’.” This way he finds himself in adventure, not implicitly in a collective adventure but in wonder. He has the tendency to meet society, however without halting his own mission, his own “sense of being.” Brazilian sculptor Carlos Fajardo—with his investigation and invention of the poetic possibilities of materiality—offers a level of sociability that is pertinent to contemporary times. Working within a tradition, the rigorousness of his project and the transparency of his method, Fajardo opens new approaches to knowledge as an experience of clarity. This is the commitment to the Other in a contemporary social dimension.

SURREALISM: Since *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1868) of Lautréamont . . . by the Uruguayan Isidore-Lucien Ducasse (1846–1870), the Surrealist process of dissociation was created by “the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissection table.” Quite often Latin America is given as a surrealist continent, as Mexico has been a haven for the surrealist exiles [especially in the 1930s and

40s], “everyday life in Latin America proves that reality is full of the most extraordinary things,” remarked Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez. Surrealism and other affinities [see MARVELOUS] reinforce the idea of unconsciousness and irrationality, sometimes assigned to Latin American culture. When a Brazilian poet declares that “we had already the surrealist language”—in his “Manifesto Antropófago” (1928) [see CANNIBALISM,]—there is an indisputable historical dimension. He was in the process of establishing a national project of culture; therefore, the past and native origin (i.e., the language) had a contemporary meaning (i.e., it was surrealist, that is to say, it had the character of the then predominant international cultural movement). Such is [Oswald de] Andrade’s dialectical perspective of culture. . . .

THIRD-WORLDLINESS: An unhappy and self-indulgent attitude pervades the work of many artists and photographers as the only possibility for images of Latin America, distorting its totality. The fear and refusal of this “Third-worldliness” is however another veiling of reality, hiding hegemonic interests. The cultural differences and economic degrees of regional development are another level of reality that leads to economic, political and cultural colonialism, which is now internal colonialism and discrimination (a regionalist racism). What is the role of cities like São Paulo, Mexico City, Buenos Aires or Caracas in their respective countries today? [See UNDERDEVELOPMENT] The prevailing standards of the Third World in Latin America led to phenomena such as mass communication in a society with high illiteracy rates and dictatorial regimes and Pop Art in societies with large groups of marginal consumers. Artists like Antonio Dias and Rubens Gerchman [in Brazil], conveyed highly violent image of politics, sex, consumption, labor, and cultural industry to deal with the structural tensions. This peculiarity is the major contribution of Latin America to Pop Art. In Argentina, Antonio Berni was still imbued with his classic Marxism, when he proceeded with a radical formal change to convey a new social perspective in his work. Earlier in the 1930s he was under the impact of the Mexican muralists, organizing his work through the classical view of oppression in class society. In his Juanito Laguna series (1960s) the inclusion of *objets trouvés* had a pictorial value, as in the work of Robert Rauschenberg, but it made a diverse presentation of a consumer society: the lumped child is at the very border of the border. The allegory of exclusion from consumption is a melancholic denial of the capitalist heaven.

In Pop Art, the work of Brazilian-born Oyvind Fahlström (São Paulo, 1928) shows a deep political commitment. He included economic differences, imperialism, militarism, and underdevelopment in his art, reflecting his qualities as a “citizen of the world,” as Pontus Hultén named him. More than twenty years later Chilean artist Juan Dávila returned to Juanito Laguna in the series *Wuthering Heights* (1990), as if showing how historical perversion had fulfilled all promises to the body.

TRANSLINGUISTIC DETERRITORIALIZATION: This glossary has been originally written in English, Portuguese being the mother-language of the author. This de-territorialization is meant to compare to the answer given by the Argentinean artist Miguel Uriburu, when asked by the British customs to spell his last name: “You are I, be you, are you?” In such Babel of otherness and identity, U-r-i-b-u-r-u developed his artistic project of dumping green color in the water of important geographic points (the Hudson River in New York, the Grand Canale in Venice, etc.). Color was the unifying element derived from visual language in a world of growing internationalism and disrupted by de-territorializations. . . .

UNDERDEVELOPMENT: During the 1960s the concept of underdevelopment was dominant in political and economic debates in Latin America. Aware of the national particularities of each country (developed, capitalist, socialist, underdeveloped, colony), Brazilian critic Ferreira Gullar proposed a dialectical vision of the international character of culture in *Vanguarda e Subdesenvolvimento* [Avant-garde and Underdevelopment, 1969]. Underdeveloped countries would adopt a truly internationalist attitude only when developing the knowledge of their own reality. This true internationalism would be achieved as the countries become conscientious about their own specificities and identities. Such conscientiousness would lead them jointly to mutual identification with art, to having more power over changing international global-ism. Since underdeveloped countries are consumers of the art of the developed ones, Ferreira Gullar affirms: “The definition of avant-garde art in an underdeveloped country should appear from the examination of the social and cultural characteristics appropriate to this country and never from the acceptance and mechanical transference of a concept of avant-garde that is valid in developed countries.”

UTOPIA: According to Sir Thomas More [SEE DOCUMENT I.1.2], Utopia was very close to South America, just some fifteen miles from its coast. Maybe that is why the Americas have been a fertile field for the projection of utopias. Since 1492, like utopia under a nightmare, “the beau sauvage” has continuously been faced with and resisted genocide. Since the 1960s, Cuba represented a real and possible social utopia for a continent of great inequalities. Living in Belgium, the Cuban artist Ricardo Brey has written about present times: “I was born in Cuba. That was Utopia. The cathedral, too. Now we need to reconsider things. Maybe there’s no longer a place for cathedrals.” . . .

WATERMELON: The heraldic fruit for Mexico is the watermelon [due to the colors of its flag]. Quite often it appears as color intensity, as in the painting of Frida Kahlo and Rufino Tamayo. The painting of Dulce María Nuñez takes the fruits of the fertility of the land as symbols of a historicity derived from artistic tradition. There are watermelons and pineapples in *Mermaid* (1990), bananas in *Dutch Huitzilopochtli* or corn, deified by the ancient Natives. The Brazilian poet Mutilo Mendes called the open watermelon “the red bread suspended in front of the mouth of the poor, a spectacle to the stomach, on view.” [See BANANA]. . . .

VI.2.4 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1065604

SIGNS OF A TRANSNATIONAL FABLE

Charles Merewether, 1991

Australian-based art historian and writer on contemporary art Charles Merewether argues against the overwhelmingly homogenizing concept of “Latin American culture” leveraged by states and corporations in order to promote the illusion of cultural unity and political and economic stability in the region. In his view, the result of Latin America’s ceaseless “exchange and consumption” of mass culture is a “double movement” in which its culture has become globalized while its “crisis of underdevelopment” remains unaddressed. Merewether—who has worked across the Americas, Australia, the Middle East, and, more recently, Singapore—

puts forth the notion of “the border” as a potentially productive focus for imagining how differences, exchange, and translations could be “negotiated.” The author first presented the essay at the symposium “Arte e identidade na América Latina” held in 1991 at São Paulo’s Memorial da América Latina in conjunction with the opening of the 21st São Paulo Biennial. As with the other scholars at the conference [SEE MARI CARMEN RAMÍREZ’S CONTRIBUTION TO THE SYMPOSIUM, DOCUMENT VI.1.4], Merewether was highly critical of fixed notions of Latin American identity and art promoted by a number of U.S. and European survey exhibitions of Latin American art during the late 1980s and early 1990s, including *Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries*, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (1990). This excerpt from “Signs of a Transnational Fable” is taken from its 1994 publication [*American Visions/Visiones de las Américas: Artistic and Cultural Identity in the Western Hemisphere*, eds. Noreen Tomassi, et al. (New York: Arts International/Institute of International Education, 1994), 47–50].

WHICH LATIN AMERICA? Who is it who asks this question and to whom is it directed?

I believe the question “Which Latin America?” provokes several answers, all of which have their place, their destination, but which are faced always already with institutional frames and structures which not only return us to their form of correspondence, but which address their movement of translation, transmission and transference. Or as [Chilean artist] Eugenio Dittborn has recently suggested in relation to his airmail paintings: “The traveling is, thus, the political element of my paintings.”

We have to recognize how the fragmentation, non-synchronous development and heterogeneity of cultures within Latin America are re-figured or re-functioned in such a way that their historical specificity and local struggles toward self-representation are subsumed into the vertiginous circuits of exchange and consumption, and spectacle of a transnational and mass visual culture. It is a double movement; the cultural condition of Latin America is globalized while the very real crisis of underdevelopment is left intact.

Modernizations and the reproduction of Latin America are about a politics of disappearance and culture of primitivism. It is about the “de-territorialization” and the attempted homogenization of a nation space under military or authoritarian rule and local economies of internationalism, trans-nationalism,

multi-nationalism, etc., disarticulating gender, racial and ethnic differences and rights to participate in processes of social democracy.

As with the conception of “Pan America” there exists within the continuing use of the term “Latin America” a flashpoint of intersecting connections, a horizon of hope. This horizon has been reached most recently in the questions raised around the subject of and in the context of the border, of border crossings, a practice, such as explored along the Mexican/US border, which recognizes the breakdown of first, second, third, and fourth world categories, and notions of mono-cultural authenticity and origin in the constitution of identity. It challenges the search for the native, the native informant as the representative of the purity of race, the figure who speaks the truth and therefore obviates the relational production of knowledge and meaning. The kind of critical perspective that has emerged as a consequence of the border issue can, I believe, serve as a useful point of reference in articulating the politics of multiculturalism and trans-nationalism, or in distinguishing different ways the border is crossed. The historical formation and contemporary crisis of the modern State in Latin America (with the exception of Brazil) demonstrates both a common point of reference, i.e., Latin America and the need to draw out the distinct cultural formations and ongoing strategies of incorporation and underdevelopment and resistance occurring across different sites within Latin America.

In this I mean that the question of border, in the marking of differences, in the demand for an exchange, of simultaneity in translation makes it not only once, but three times a subject of address:

First, in the moment of colonization; second, at the time of independence; and third: in the period of the trans-nationalism and the “new world order.” Within this trajectory lie modernity and the nation, emergent formations across Latin America within the same historical space of the second half of the nineteenth century. At this moment, modernity becomes, as [Walter] Benjamin writes [with regard to future], “a homogeneous empty-time,”¹ to be organized and filled by the State.

Cultural myths of national integrity and organicism are built, repressing the uneven development of capitalism and the conflictual character that represents the condition of the nation. Such a condition is repressed by the construction of the nation-state. In the narration of the nation, museums, archives,

anniversaries, festivities, monuments, sanctuaries become important sites for the triumph of nation and history. A new iconography of the past is created to forge a national identity and legitimate those in power. As in Africa, the processes of colonization, the construction of nation states and the post-colonial period cannot be looked at in terms of a Manichean opposition of the West and its other, of within and outside, but as alliance that worked laterally across these distinctions.

There exists an importance in developing a critique of structures from within rather than to imagine the possibility of working outside. There is no outside, but rather invisible frames, limits, borders to the text. The question becomes not one of artistic authorship—i.e., intentionality and individual identity—as much as exploring the relations of filiations and affiliation and institutional circuits of circulation, the reception and consumption.

This issue of filiations and affiliations involves not only considering the production of exchange value and the commodity through the relationship of gallery to the market system, but the constructing of filial identities and re-functioning of signs, i.e., popular cultures and art, through the orbit of museum exhibitions. Museum exhibitions and preservation of objects are linked in this movement. They destroy the social life; sacralize it as objects of abstract contemplation, as frozen archives. Latin America then is conceived and viewed in the context and terms of the Center, in terms of origin, rather than in reverse where the Center is conceived and viewed as subject to or within Latin America and therefore in terms of destination. These exhibitions obscure and re-present what they appropriate, assimilate. They empty out the specificity of knowledge and meaning in these works in the process of constructing their object of study or display. Equally, such terms as syncretism and hybridity, which have become strategically important in opposing notions of purity, origin and authenticity, nonetheless can also become fixed signs of otherness, congealing the transaction, tensions and contradiction that constitute their existence, their filiations and affiliations.

Signs of primitivism confirm the modern conception of “the other” in terms of origin and the experience of death. Producing the other, whether it be “primitive” or of the past, is to speak of it as something already dead and buried. Memory and popular consciousness are erased for a narrative of historical

progress. James Clifford says ethnography is like sacrifice; bringing culture into a book, one simultaneously destroys oral life. Ethnography consumes cultures, turning them into nature or natural. Indigenous cultures are aligned to nature and therefore viewed as outside of the movement of humanity that is characterized by death in the West. Non-Western cultures are brought to stand outside of history as a kind of mythological dream world whose disappearance makes possible civilization.

The fascination of the primitive and folk is nostalgia for the recently outmoded. As Renato Rosaldo has noted, there is in this a kind of nostalgia, often found under imperialism, where people mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed. The outmoded serves as the limit-text of Western culture.

Those who have become increasingly involved in the circuits of circulation represent class forms of accumulation increasingly dependent on the global economic system. This is nowhere better illustrated than by the recent *México/Splendors of Thirty Centuries* exhibition held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, primarily funded by Televisa, the largest media conglomerate in Mexico with substantial interests and therefore audience in the United States, and supported by the Mexican government.

What has been first of all excluded from, and now increasingly appropriated into this circuitry, that is in the reconstruction of the State, have been popular cultures. In questions of both modernity and the nation-state, popular cultures have provoked a crisis. And within the configuration of a “new world order,” the alliances between the private sector and the State serve to violently deny the recognition and social development of popular cultures, placing them as before, as a kind of substratum, the original ground, the material, the productive power of labor, the earth beneath our feet. Latin America is again defined by way of cross-sections that serve bilateral and trans-national agreements.

The repression of popular culture takes different forms. Cultural nationalism of the State and the bourgeoisie put into circulation popular culture under the aegis of folklore and primitivism. They represent a kind of speech chosen by history, but one that conceals the voice that speaks, passing off as a “natural” statement that which is both historical and cultural. This is a politics of conformity, a redemption that aestheticizes difference and naturalizes memory.

The functioning of the mass media and communication networks—their steady growth and the importance played in national politics—represents perhaps the key instance by which the historical heterogeneity of popular cultures throughout Latin America is being socially reproduced as a mass culture through the process of consumption. This mass culture is organized around the relations between the exigencies and needs of everyday life for the majority of people and the ability of the private sector to answer those needs. This is the figure of underdevelopment and impoverishment. The concept of Latin America provides a common ground upon which transnational corporations can collaborate in the social reproduction of these people. The term Latin America in the hands of this sector allows for the erasure of popular memory, the politics of everyday life and difference in a fundamental and large-scale way. It serializes the population, symbolically we might say, through processes of identification with the “telenovela,” but more drastically in the rationale of capital which at once makes everyone subject to the processes of modernization and therefore filled with the illusion of social change yet leaves them always, already the disenfranchised and dependent subjects of the State.

Latin America is re-articulated within the transnational institutions and circuits of exchange, on the one hand in the circuits of the market, galleries, museums, magazines, catalogues, etc., and on the other land, through television, video and networks of global electronic transmission. Both sectors find themselves disempowered, de-territorialized, transformed into signs of the other and therefore the subject and object of transnational exchange.

1

Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” XVIII-B, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 264.—Ed.

VI.2.5 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 755084

LATIN AMERICAN ART'S INTERNATIONAL MISE-EN-SCÈNE: STAGING AND REPRESENTATION

Nelly Richard, 1994

In this 1993 text, Nelly Richard analyzes the problematic process through which the international art circuit brings to the fore an often stereotypical and market-driven version of Latin American art. The French-born, Chile-based critic takes a sociological approach to cultural studies, and, echoing Mari Carmen Ramírez [SEE DOCUMENT V.2.6], she denounces the minimal consideration given to the works' background and context. In the wake of a number of Latin American art exhibitions challenging the monocultural discourse in the Western Hemisphere [SEE SECTION V.I.], she cites *Les magiciens de la terre*—an exhibition organized by Belgian curator Catherine de Zeghers at the Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris, 1989)—as an interactive proposal. In her view, the exhibition situated the presented works within their appropriate socio-political contexts and acknowledged both tensions and contradictions inherent to museums' role and influence. Richard presented the essay at a colloquium addressing comparative perspectives on identity in the Americas that was organized by UNAM's Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas in Zacatecas, Mexico, September 22–27, 1993. This translation is based on the version of the text published in the event's proceedings [Nelly Richard, “La puesta en escena internacional del arte latinoamericano: montaje, representación,” *XVII coloquio internacional de historia del arte: Arte, Historia e Identidad en América Latina*, vol. III (La presencia de la modernidad artística europea en América), eds. Gustavo Curiel, Renato González Mello and Juana Gutiérrez Haces (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México/Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1994), 1011–16].

LATIN AMERICAN WORKS OF ART that achieve recognition in international art circles are the ones that are exhibited in museums, which contribute their established platform for artistic promotion and cultural validation. We know that museums, in their modernist incarnation, have been “catalysts for the articulation of tradition, heritage, and the canon.” They have also “contributed to the development of cultural legitimacy”¹ by assembling symbolic repertoires—the collections—that both archive and validate historical references which provide

a community with a basis for self-definition. We also know that the symbolic cultural paradigm contributed by museums has helped to “define the identity of Western civilization, drawing external and internal boundaries that are influenced by exclusion and marginalization as well as by positive codification.”² Definitions of the heritage archived by museums affect the criteria used in the selection and organization of cultural assets based on established values that sketch the outline of our symbolic identity. These boundaries define the content of that identity, setting the property limits that separate “us” from *others*.

The modernist concept of the museum has undoubtedly undergone many changes in terms of form and content as a result of the different scenarios to be found in postmodern culture. Postmodernism’s renewed appreciation for “the other” (for what is different, marginal, or peripheral) has obliged museums to broaden and diversify the definition of their limits, and to include images and representations that had, until now, been censured or dismissed by the hegemony of the mono-cultural ideal imposed by the dominant Western tradition. We have certainly seen some “gradual but significant progress during the past decade with regard to references to hidden or repressed aspects of the past and a greater interest in under-represented or falsely represented traditions”³ that are newly visible thanks to the trend of redrawing the museum’s boundaries, influenced no doubt by the modern debate on Multiculturalism.⁴

But we must not forget that this “progress” is, first of all, very fragile (it is constantly at risk of being reversed by neo-conservative attacks) and, secondly, it is very doubtful because it is under siege by the misunderstandings, ambiguities, and contradictions prompted by the deceptive postmodernist rhetoric concerning “the other.”

I would just like to clarify some of those misunderstandings, ambiguities, and contradictions arising from problems facing Latin American art that have been created by the international environment.

CONTEXT, DIFFERENCES, AND TRANSLATION

The hierarchical imbalances created by international art networks mean that the identification and selection of Latin American works of art that are promoted internationally depend—almost exclusively—on the people responsible for managing metropolitan centers of artistic interchange and transaction. Exhibitions

are scheduled and produced by museum directors and international curators who are generally—as pointed out by Mari Carmen Ramírez [SEE DOCUMENT V.2.6]—not well informed on “the language, history, or traditions of many Latin American countries.” That factor, “together with the relatively small quantity of art historical material available in English, and the comparatively poor network of visual-arts information” in Latin American countries will tend “to entrench an easily stereotyped and marketable image of Latin American/Latino art”⁵ in international circles.

The first question in these circumstances is therefore: How to articulate the value assessment of the peripheral (Latin American) work of art arrived at by an international circuit artistic director who is unaware of the context of references and meanings that define and classify the particular work?

The most conservative answer to that question is expressed by those who adopt an aesthetic perspective to defend the value of “quality” with regard to a work conceived as a “visual and sensory experience” or as “originality and invention,” as happened at the Paris exhibition *Les magiciens de la terre*⁶ [Magicians of the Earth]. [Benjamin] Buchloh reminded us, when he interviewed J.H. Martin, that “the main tool used by the hegemonic (white, male, Western) culture to exclude or marginalize is the concept of ‘quality.’”⁷ And we have, in fact, learned (most especially from feminist theory) that culture is not at odds with metaphysical idealism—the pure, superior (unselfish) language of universal transcendence. The traits of “transcendence” and “universality” have been given a rhetorical spin by the dominant male-Western culture in order to submit them as arguments in support of their self-mastery in the field of representation. These are the traits that this culture interprets as privileges—self-awarded privileges—inspired by a sense of superiority that prompts it to identify itself as the subject of “identity” on the (upper) abstract-general level, while the other subject, the “difference,” is brought down to the (lower) specific-particular level. It is not true that culture communicates in a transparent, neutral language (that is, indifferent to differences). Its images and expressions of fantasy symbolize the way in which differences are regulated by the hierarchical systems of the cultural power that establishes the dominant and subordinate levels of representation. The violence of the struggles to possess-appropriate the power of identity symbols is hidden behind a fetishist image of art and culture as *dematerialized* products that, in the idealist-bourgeois tradition, express an interior and superior subjectivity. The

“quality” formalist category belongs to the idealist-bourgeois tradition of art that seeks to exclude from its field of appreciation the full range of socio-contextual interplay of variables of meanings that historicize (condition and revitalize) opinions and values. To say that the “quality” of a work of art—as *a value in and of itself*—transcends any variable (of race, class, sex, and genre) is to introduce a double negation on the material and ideological levels. It negates the work’s production context, stripping it of its right to claim a particular specificity of operations; and it negates the context of whoever denies that right, disguising a centrist strategy that is based on a tradition that—through fundamental abuse—believes itself to be “the measure of all things.”⁸

But if we renounce that value of “quality”—because we do not trust its agenda of disguising and justifying the “interests, privileges, control, and exclusion”⁹ of Eurocentric dominance—what other category should we use instead to evaluate the works? When Buchloh asked Catherine de Zegher (curator of the *America: Bride of the Sun* exhibition presented in Belgium) this question, she answered as follows: “If a concept of quality could be created or defined in terms of dissuasive radicalism, negativity and irony; or if ‘quality’ could imply the development of new strategies and resources for the articulation of new voices and audiences, then that would be the concept that would guide me.”¹⁰

As distinct from the idea advocated by the metaphysical aesthetic of the Paris exhibition (*Les magiciens de la terre*), de Zegher’s answer suggests that any consideration of the work should take into account its *role and performance* (the position it adopts) as an expression inserted into a sociocultural milieu. This is a departure from the concept of objectification—a simplification of the work as a product to be contemplated—in order to analyze the art itself as a signifying process that mobilizes language resources on behalf of a particular model of *critical functionality* applied to a *situation*. That model, whose purpose is to *interact* within a particular context of discourses, works with random codes and meanings that vary according to where its expository and communicative site fits in the cultural organization system. It would seem, then, that the (inte)lligibility of the model of artistic meaning orchestrated by the work requires the [dialectical] recreation of *dialogue, replica, and confrontation*. This *situates* the work in terms of the discourses that surround it, whose presumption of meaning is already present and involved in the work, which responds tacitly to external demands. Therefore, it appears that there is a lack of situational knowledge concerning the code interventions

that assemble and disassemble the work because they are all local interventions that create a combined meaning of affirmation–negation–interrogation vis-à-vis certain force lines in art and cultural circles. With no knowledge of those force lines (from complicated intersections—on the periphery—with multiple powers and resistances), it is impossible to measure the “arsenal of counteroffensive tactics”¹¹ engaged by Latin American works of art to mock the cultural hegemony.

Perhaps that explains the demands that “an exposure to the art of ‘the periphery’ should include the broadest possible contextual information (political, socioeconomic, ideological, and so on).”¹² The introduction of context—the additional information that the museum should provide to document the work’s situation—would compensate for the loss of meaning suffered by the work when the transfer of contexts disconnects forms from functions and distorts signs when they are interpreted according to the central culture’s conventions and stereotypes. But to what extent can that additional documentation recreate the material density of the articulations of feeling that animate the works in their respective contexts? And, taking it a step further, how to reconcile the “critical regionalism” that represents micro readings of the work, whose validity is above all context, with “the impossibility of totally renouncing trans-cultural opinions” that guarantee the “common horizon of our interchange with others” referred to by [Tzvetan] Todorov?¹³

Those questions lead to the process of *translation* (a *mediation and communication*) between cultures, with all the risks of interference and linguistic short-circuits that are inherent to the process. There’s no reason to think that those translation flaws could or should be eliminated.

The myth that those flaws are obstacles (barriers) to any harmonious transparency of intercultural communication is based on a nostalgic concept of meaning—like purity and origin, like the purity of origin that finds any *translation* guilty of *treason*. When “translation experiments” multiply, these flaws appear as a red flag to the *problematic issue* of the meaning. According to James Clifford, the “imperfect translations” between cultures are what keep the viewer of the artworks in a permanent state of alertness and tension. “Imperfect translations” activate the viewer’s *critical tension*, provoking confrontations between points of view during every distortion of meaning and intersection of perspectives. Clifford believes we should then demand “exhibitions that position themselves in specific intercultural articulations” and that are prepared to specify the risk of using those

unstable articulations to refute the absolutism of universal opinions; exhibitions “whose selection principles are open to criticism” as far as exhibiting “the discrepancies” of values and meanings produced by the collision and strained readings of “the objects displaced” by contexts.¹⁴ These “discrepancies” energize the viewer’s gaze by questioning the enunciative and communicative conditions that set the rule—according to the pragmatism of the cultural authority concerning “who talks to whom, why, where and when, and under what conditions.”¹⁵

THE POWER OF REPRESENTATION

The dominant Western modernity designed “the great notice board of clear and distinct identities” that—according to [Michel] Foucault—“was established against the unsettled, undefined, faceless, and somewhat indifferent background of differences.”¹⁶ This notice board of historical and philosophical modernity separates the *same* (the self-centered mind of transcendental rationality) from the *other* (the negative, clandestine heterogeneity of its opposites—madness, death, sexuality, and so on—that are censured by universal *logos*.) A chain of connections based on similarities and analogies weaves relationships of inclusion (the same) and exclusion (the other) that divide subjects into representatives of the light—human, Christian, European, civilized, male—and representatives of the sinister: animal, pagan, Indian, savage, female. The antinomian polarization of the identity–difference axis resets the division between culture and nature that separates the structured (the discursive) from the unstructured (the pre-symbolic).

The most typical representation of Latin American art is entirely conditioned by that dualism—nature (body)–culture (mind)—that expresses a primary, virgin identity that has not yet been influenced (not been contaminated) by the conspiracy of symbols. Magical, surreal, and fantastic are the internationally successful artistic categories¹⁷ responsible for associating Latin American work with a candid image of total fusion with the world; a fusion that preceded the trafficking in codes that left it adulterated and de-naturalized. Magical, surreal, and fantastic are the categories of Latin American art that sublimate the image of a lost paradise (nature in its virgin condition) in a state of naked innocence to which the First World must return in order to redeem itself of the consumer sins of a society that has become degraded by an overabundance of postindustrial

icons. That sublimated, ghost-like return to its primitive roots represents—by transference and regression—the mass-influenced subject’s return to a state of grace in a time *before the codes*. Many images of Latin American art are a result of that magical-religious synthesis that seeks to capture Latin America in a state of pre-rationality/irrationality and keep it like that in the face of discourse or historicity. That capture of an identity–origin frozen in a mythical time subtracts the Latin American subject from the live temporality—in progress—that constructs social and historical narratives and positions (freezes) the subject in a non-evolutionary, *a-historical* space. A space devoted to “the authentic” that is nostalgically reduced to the traditional, and from the traditional it is reduced to the pre-modern; Latin American art is denied access to the modernity of change and transformation and is kept chained to the essentialist ritual of its origins.

But that same Latin American art takes pleasure in the transcendentalist search for an ontological reservoir of “being.” The international art world just uses the images in which Latin American substantiation of its origins has become the basis for its metaphysical demand for identity. The purity stereotype stresses a very archaic dimension of the “search for Latin American identity” (sources, roots) that was conceived as an essentialist repository of permanent, definitive values that guarantee the continuity of “the appropriate” and defend that continuity against threats of intervention by the improper. However, the same features of Latin American modernity which make it seem un-centered, fragmentary, and residual, make it clear that “appropriate” does not mean a pre-set content, but rather the intercultural tension that derives from heterogeneous forms of appropriation, dis-appropriation, and counter-appropriation. This tension exacerbates the meaning of the *mixture*,¹⁸ and energetically denies the vision of Latin American identity as a homogenous substance. If hybrids and Mestizos have forever caused Latin American production to be lumped together under the sign of *impurity*, why seek the key to its identity in a romanticized version of the purity of origin as an indigenous guarantee of unalterable values?

Looking beyond suspicions concerning the widespread and confusing term “postmodernity,” the postmodernist re-emphasis on certain issues, such as modernity and Latin American cultural identities, will help us—at least—to critically strengthen its *hybrid* nature. This hybrid quality portrays Latin American modernity as an unstable product with a variety of sedimentations that combine dissimilar formations. We could use a certain deconstruction of

metaphysical thought about identity—another postmodern subject—to provide a critical response to the Latin American myth of “authenticity” that is the basis of identity as a *presence*. We could also use it to propose this identity as construction and relation, “inventive and mobile”¹⁹ across a range of registers of symbolic and cultural definitions. The best way to portray metaphysical construction—and essentially—“the other” (Latin American) as the remote, the primitive, therefore the exotic, might be to use the series of substitutions and appropriations, loans and reconversions, and conflicts and negotiations that weave Latin American identity and culture into tapestries of local and foreign symbols. These new constructions claim that “*cultural difference* is no longer a stable otherness”²⁰ but a collection of local tactics critically designed to set the range of difference between *the borders and the middle ground* of cultures. These new constructions of cultural identity tell us that otherness is “a question of power and rhetoric rather than of *essence*.”²¹ That is because otherness is, above all, a question of *representation*.

The economy of colonial discourse reveals that the initial violence directed at the “other” is the violence of representation exerted by the symbolic power: “the act or process of representing implies control, it implies accumulation, it implies confinement, it implies a certain kind of distance,” as noted by [Edward W.] Said.²² The act of representing—of staging discourses to outline the “other”—means exercising cultural power that derives its legitimacy from occupying a higher position. This higher position—which consists of managing the discursive device—generates an imbalance of power between the subject of identity and the subject of difference. It portrays the former as a subject that writes/describes; while “the second one is *described*” as a category (with a set name and image) and assumes the “passive role” of being the object of knowledge.²³ That role makes the representative a “non-active, non-autonomous, and non-sovereign subject”; that is, a “possessed, understood, and defined non-subject that is treated” by those who administer the means of cultural representation in a non-participatory manner.²⁴

When applied to the postmodernist scenario of *difference*, the power of cultural representation is still an issue in terms of who controls the means of *staging the discourse* that will address the meaning of difference. What we should ask ourselves, among other things, is whether international Postmodernism’s discourse on the pluralism of multicultural differences is sufficient to prompt a *multiplication* of discursive mechanisms that articulate and represent those differences.

Relations between the center and the periphery that promote a certain fantasy about *cultural dependency* (which was of particular significance during the Latin American anti-imperialism of the sixties) have experienced many changes and redefinitions during the postmodern period. Globalization of our economy and culture, and the current proliferation of markets and information all conspire to make it seem as though distances have evaporated and a powerful explosion has obliterated lineal opposites such as the center-periphery. At the very least it seems as though they have been affected by a multi-polarity of antagonisms and resistances that go beyond the parameters of North-South or First World-Third World. And it is true that we inhabit a communicative landscape of multiple transfers and interchanges, in which identities and cultures are crisscrossed by messages in circulation and in transit. That *dislocation* of the lines that underpinned dominance-subordination relationships based on the center-periphery polarity, suggests that we should replace this lineal counterpoint design with “an alternative cartography of social space, based mainly on notions of ‘circuit’ and ‘frontier’”²⁵ that are more compatible with the circulatory fluidity of symbols on the postmodern map. That fluidity has also influenced images produced in the center. On the one hand, margins abound in the interior under the transversal pressure of minorities who “Third-World-ize the metropolis.” On the other, its image as the symbol of power centered in a particular place that was once considered the unquestionable point of reference has become tarnished as a result of the postmodernist critique of the totality and centrality of universal hierarchies. All this twisting of axes has exacerbated a structural dispersion effect that changes the centers and the peripheries; they are no longer fixed locations but multi-positioned functions that move and are reconstituted as multiple, crisscrossed relationship systems. But, though we witness a loss of territorial significance among symbols of power, this does not mean that they have ceased to function as indicators of dominance. It means that the logic that guides them is far more segmented and complex than it used to be.

This logic has also become more complex as a result of a certain “‘center-marginality’ aesthetic influence,” to quote [George] Yudice who spoke thus about the postmodernist re-assessment of the margins (the frontiers, the borders, and the peripheries) which was stimulated by critiques of the superiority of the culture of the center. This postmodernist re-assessment of the margins is ambiguous because its essential gesture still derives from the network that holds

a symbolic–discursive monopoly. We know that the center’s privileged position is not based solely on its role as holder and distributor of financial wealth. It is also based on the authority vested in it that makes it a central point for *accumulating* information and *transmuting* meaning, according to unilaterally agreed parameters. The postmodernist debate over “the other” is facilitated by the circulation of the prevailing Euro-North American theory that carries a great deal of weight in the field of international discourse. The power endowed by that weight provides legitimacy for the function that is performed/occupied by cultural discourse institutions of Postmodernism’s “American International” ([Andreas] Huyssens). In that sense, the discursive hegemony of the postmodernist theme is set by a paradigm of authority that is articulated through reflection and discussion “centers” that decide validity issues, sanction uses, distribute distinctions, and so on. The “center” is then re-created as a function–center in any of the situations that produce knowledge–acknowledgment according to parameters that have been legitimized by a predominance of authority.

The defense of Multiculturalism by many institutions in the center and the circulation of the postmodernist theme of *difference* has re-arranged the center–periphery issue in the center (decentralizations, re-centralizations)–margins. In spite of the fact that the center currently lives and presents itself under the image of decentralization, that center (its universities, publications, and museums) re-codify—re-territorialize—the margins by managing them rhetorically under the banner of international Postmodernism. That is why the problems associated with the exaltation and celebration of differences are ultimately related to the function of the center in its role as interlocutor and grantor of legitimacy vis-à-vis the difference defined by marginality. That is, this dynamic can only function if there is a separate “other” that will authorize and acknowledge that difference, a situation that perpetuates the division between “us” and “the others” and the unequal position that guarantees that the latter’s difference can never function autonomously.²⁶

This approach, however, is not hermetically sealed. There are several theoretical and discursive loopholes which allow us to take advantage of and benefit from the ambivalences and paradoxes of the conduct of “punishment, opening, and celebration”²⁷ practiced by the un-centered center in terms of the margins. These loopholes can be accessed by taking advantage of the most porous aspects, the most flexible articulations, and the most tortured directions of

the postmodernist debate. That is how we can establish dynamic interactions between the critical potential of certain operations carried out by institutions in the center and the forces of resistance and opposition that are massed along the borders of the cultural organization system by certain peripheral or semi-peripheral practices.

1

Andreas Huyssen, "From Accumulation to Mise-en-scène: The Museum as Mass Medium" (lecture presented at the First International Meeting on the Theory of Visual Arts, Caracas, March, 1992, organized by the Armando Reverón Institute).

2

Huyssen, "From Accumulation," (1992).

3

Ibid.

4

"Multiculturalism should be understood here as the process of demographic reconfiguration that North American society has been experiencing since the sixties as a result of migrations from the Third World, the subsequent struggles of ethnic groups to defend their right to cultural and political equality, and the discourse in favor of racial diversity generated within this context to legitimize the demands of old and new groups." Mari Carmen Ramírez, "Con un pie entre dos aguas: imagen e identidad del arte latinoamericano desde los márgenes del centro," presented at the Simpósio Identidade Artística e Cultural na América Latina, Memorial de América Latina, São Paulo, September 1991. [SEE DOCUMENT VI.1.4]

5

Mari Carmen Ramírez, "Beyond 'the Fantastic': Framing Identity in U.S. Exhibitions of Latin American Art," *Art Journal* no. 51 (Winter 1992). [SEE DOCUMENT V.2.6]

6

These quotes are taken from the preface to the exhibition catalogue *Les magiciens de la terre*, (organized by the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris), *Les cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne* (1989), no. 28..

7

Benjamin Buchloh, "Entretien avec Jean-Hubert Martin," *Les magiciens de la terre*.

8

Guy Brett, *Border Crossings* (London: Transcontinental-Verso, 1990).

9

Catherine de Zegher, cf. "America: A Written Exchange," *America: Bride of the Sun* (Antwerp: Royal Museum of Fine Arts, 1992).

10

De Zegher, "America" (1992).

11

Eugenio Dittborn, "Una blanca palidez; entrevista con Adriana Valdés," (London: Mapa-ICA, 1993).

12

De Zegher, "America" (1992).

13

Tzvetan Todorov, "Nous et les autres," interviewed by François Poiré, *Art Press* no. 136, Paris, (May 1989).

14

James Clifford, "The Global Issue: A Symposium," *Art in America* (July 1989).

15

Bruce Ferguson, "Dialogues in the Western Hemisphere: Language, Discourse, and Culture," a lecture presented at the Simpósio Identidade Artística e Cultural na América Latina, São Paulo (September 1991).

16

Michel Foucault, *Las palabras y las cosas* (México City: Siglo XXI, 1976). English translation *The Order of Things* (1970).

17

For a discussion on these categories, see the (1992) article by Mari Carmen Ramírez quoted above.

18

See the theses by José Joaquín Brunner, *Un espejo trizado* (Santiago, Chile: FLACSO, 1988); and Néstor García Canclini in *Culturas híbridas: estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (México City, Grijalbo, 1989).

19

Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988).

20

Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (1988).

21

Ibid.

22

Edward Said, "In the Shadow of the West," *Discourses: Conversations in Postmodern Art and Culture* (New York, NY: The New Museum, 1990).

23

Abdel Malek quoted by Edward W. Said *Orientalism* (Madrid: Libertarias, 1990), 127.

24

Ibid.

25

Rouse quoted by García Canclini, *Culturas híbridas* (1989), 292.

26

Paper presented by Mari Carmen Ramírez at the College Art Association Annual Meeting of 1991.

27

Ibid.

VI.2.6 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1065640

EMPOWERING THE LOCAL

Gustavo Buntinx, 2005

Peruvian curator, critic, and art historian Gustavo Buntinx delivered “El empoderamiento de lo local” at the symposium *Circuitos latinoamericanos/Circuitos internacionales. Interacción, roles y perspectivas*, organized by arteBA—Buenos Aires’s contemporary art fair—in May of 2005. Directed explicitly to his Latin American colleagues, Buntinx’s paper challenges them to refocus themselves on the most fundamental purpose of their work, namely on radically reinventing the art of their region. He explains that they will do this only by ceasing to seek the approval of North American “metropolises” and, instead, by developing their own local art scenes. These specific art milieus, he argues, must be committed to the democratic idea of art as integral to the construction of “local” meaning. It is worth noting the breadth of Buntinx’s lecture, which draws on themes such as cultural theory, art history, exhibitions, and linguistic theory. He also develops his argument by drawing on Nelly Richard’s criticism of Multiculturalism [SEE DOCUMENT VI.2.5]; his own research on the formation of the Museum of Modern Art’s (MoMA) collection of Latin American art in 1942 [SEE TEXTS BY ALFRED H. BARR, JR. IN THIS VOLUME, DOCUMENTS III.4.6 AND III.4.7, AS WELL AS WALDO RASMUSSEN’S ACCOUNT OF THE AMASSING OF MOMA’S COLLECTION, DOCUMENT V.1.10,]; Mari Carmen Ramírez’s and Héctor Olea’s exhibition *Inverted Utopias* at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (2004); and the work of French Post-Structuralist philosopher Jacques Derrida. This is the first English translation and publication of Buntinx’s text [Gustavo Buntinx, “El empoderamiento de lo local,” typescript, 2005].

LET’S NOT BE NAÏVE. AND LET’S NOT BUILD UP OUR HOPES. “Latin America” ended up being a French joke; “Ibero-America,” a [Francisco] Franco-period hyperbole; “Pan America,” a crass gringo term. And the intermittent efforts to establish North–South axes or momentum have often responded to U.S. interests more than to a legitimate need for symbolic exchanges between the United States and everything that stretches out below it (assuming that we accept the current cartographic conventions). I include here the acknowledgements that have come from the various politics of Multiculturalism. As Nelly Richard [SEE DOCUMENT VI.2.5]

and others have already pointed out, the risk is that *the difference* itself be acknowledged, only to be articulated from the seat of power. Just as *the periphery* tends to be incorporated into the center only in order to be named and reconfigured from there. Just like the sad names they invent for us, which also have the sense of being terms in an inventory: Latin America, Ibero-America, Pan America. . . . These are ideological constructs imposed on the radical complexity of a region where political borders rarely coincide with cultural borders, and both are becoming increasingly fragile and porous.

A meaningful precedent took place in 1942, when only a few weeks after Pearl Harbor, the Museum of Modern Art in New York decided to contribute to the war effort by literally buying the goodwill of the contemporary art world of Latin America. In scarcely more than one single transcontinental trip, it acquired in one fell swoop scores of artworks that it would exhibit one year later as MoMA's great Latin American collection. On other occasions,¹ I have already analyzed some details of that pilgrimage of Lincoln Kirstein through southern lands [on behalf of MoMA], a trip that could be characterized as having enacted the repressed primal scene of the postmodern curatorial trip with which we are all too familiar with by now. The fact that the initial expedition, which was almost an initiation, would also be used for political and war-related espionage is perhaps too characteristic.

Undoubtedly so is the rapid oblivion into which it all fell—including the MoMA Latin American collection—once the exigencies of war were exhausted. It will be interesting to observe over time the whitewashed recovery of that experience sought by exhuming and showing those works in a temporary exhibition along with new Latin American works barely a year ago [2004] at the Museo del Barrio. The venue is revealing in itself and suggests an interesting postscript to the bitter polemic generated by that institution's change of direction when it abandoned its original founding definition as a Nuyorican museum, [and adopted instead an identity as] a community museum, a museum *of the barrio* (precisely). It made this change in order to reorganize itself as a transnational Latin American museum in a paradoxical response to the globalizing demands of the metropolis. The subject is complex and requires a review impossible in the brief format of this paper: it suffices for now to point out the contrast between what an institution that is in the process of consolidating itself has already gained and the consequences of what detractors of that process consider "gentrification" (thus taking advantage of the Anglicism). These critics interpret the reorganization [of

Museo del Barrio] as putting the local communities of Caribbean origins on hold in favor of more abstract and internationally prestigious notions of what is Latin American: the remote *other* used to camouflage and disadvantage the *other* that is too immediate.

Debates like this are also decisive for those of us who speak from the South–South perspective (there is also a South in the North, and vice versa). This is because they finally highlight the only lasting, legitimate galvanization of something we could call the Americas. It would have to rise up beyond the logic of the metropolitan purview whose sights represent a renewed form of Imperialism that has been given the misnomer of [or aptly mislabeled] *post-colonial*. And in that critical perspective, the decisive factor—in both the short and the long term—would be *that it empowers the local*. The empowerment I am talking about is not only of local artists, or even of the art itself, strictly speaking; it rather includes the complex net of personal and institutional relationships that constitute the actual experience of art. Artworks and their creators, certainly, but also museums, collections, discourses, publications, archives, markets. . . . Circuits. And above all, especially, necessarily, *a critical project*.

The development of the support necessary involves the simultaneous construction of at least three components: the consolidation and diversification of nascent markets for contemporary art; the creation of an artistic infrastructure that can be considered our own; and the coordination of artist communities with a critical project that is viable but profoundly committed to the democratic agenda, which is an urgent prospect for the entire continent today.

The democratic agenda is of vital importance. Many of those involved in discussions stirred up by this forum have—that is, *we* have—participated in different initiatives aimed at the cultural overthrow (sometimes also actual overthrow) of the dictatorships that for two or three decades tried to redefine—in the worst way—the very sense of what it means to be Latin American. Instead, these days almost all of us are involved in the *cultural construction of democracy*. And this entails the hard work of building a new set of institutions, including institutions in the republics of the arts. There are some very thorny problems. On the one hand, there is the formalization and consolidation of alternatives that originate with individual, utopian actions, such as [Virginia Pérez Ratton's] TEOR/ética in Costa Rica or [Ticio Escobar's] El Museo del Barro in Paraguay, without naming projects in which I myself am involved. But beyond these, there is also

the far more arduous and unavoidable mission of making new both state and public art institutions in order to penetrate and transform their ineffective museums and academies, their devastated archives, and their anachronistic schools. In this way, we may contribute to the radical, critical reform of administrations that are so often responsible for the inequities and underdevelopment of our societies today.

In each case, the decisive issue is *empowering the local*, building structures and relationships that respond to our own symbolic needs, while facilitating an exchange with the cosmopolitan circuits—an exchange not characterized by subordination. The still incipient experience in Buenos Aires is perhaps a useful example because of the almost systemic nature of the different initiatives, including some that work in opposite directions but are ultimately complementary. In recent years, these initiatives have revolutionized Argentina's art institutions—although in general, they have been introduced through private channels. The simultaneous energies of proposals [in Argentina] such as arteBA, MALBA, the Fundación Espigas, the renewal of cultural centers, new publications, alternative spaces, and moody academic spaces have been implemented in the local art milieu—even at an international level—in ways that are extremely effective. Certainly they are more effective than some million-dollar donation to an institution such as New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, within which some Buenos Aires fortunes anxiously seek to create an isolated, individual space for themselves in the North–North social life.

At this point the subject of *productivity* arises, a matter that must be seriously tackled. Experiences as opposite as those of Chile under [Augusto] Pinochet and Cuba under Fidel [Castro] shine a bright light on the differentiating power of an investment in the shortest term. Whether from the perspective of the opposition or that of officialdom, it is the critical operations background of the best moments of the Avanzada de Santiago and the Havana Biennial that—at least—suggests the fantasy of the artists' own power to destabilize the vertical orientation of the North–South axiologies. And while their results are tangible, at this point, they are insufficient.

There is an irritating contrast between all this and the sterility of private, personalized initiatives, in which the *intuitive strategies* (note the deliberate paradox of this term) of other artists, curators, and collectors are exhausted. After the apparent inclusion that arose with globalization, there tended to be finer (or

more perverse) forms of exclusion; as Gerardo Mosquera has rightly pointed out, in too many ways, the world is still divided between cultures that are curators and cultures that are curated—and that distorts everything. To get to the bottom of what this means, it will suffice to perform a no-holds-barred analysis of the difficulties and traps imposed on a “*Sudaca*” curatorial project such as that headed up by Mari Carmen Ramírez² (actually including Mosquera³). This project committed the insolence of trying to *rewrite* certain modern art histories from within the [Museo] Reina Sofía—funded in part by the museum’s budget, which stirred up no end of resentment in certain Spanish circles.

Not long ago, this exhibition was presented again [with a new catalogue] at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston⁴—with all the necessary support and all the necessary appreciation for its essentially critical perspective. Perhaps this will help place these issues in a sharper (and more revealing) perspective. Here we have the interesting paradox of a battle for prestige among the apparent North and a supposed South turned into a competition of assessments between two so-called First World privileged art scenes (Madrid and Houston). But perhaps what we have to confront in situations like this is the growing erosion of such geopolitical categories and descriptors—actually part of the broader erosions of our time. A time in which whole states in the United States are progressively—and silently—being integrated into what they persist in calling “Latin America.” A time in which Spain has disintegrated into a Europe that is reorganizing based on autonomies and fragmentary identities.

Perhaps the new maps that take shape in this way will weaken geopolitical nomenclature itself [and] even the meaning of descriptors such as North–South. And [perhaps they will] help coordinate its radical inversion (South–South): the perpetual utopia of axiologies that are new, alternative, pathetic from the periphery [but] going through the periphery; that are sensitive to bringing back art and the art world’s potential imagery to renew communities of sense, communities of feeling; and that are capable of taking the crucial historical step from deconstruction to what is to be reconstructed.

[Jacques] Derrida, the acknowledged father of deconstruction, already said as much: “Today, emancipation has once more become an enormous question. I have no tolerance for those who are ironic with the great discourse of emancipation, whether they are deconstructionists or not.”⁵ Perhaps there is too much cynical irony in our godless, soulless times: too much irony or not enough

commitment. May all deconstruction feed the reconstructive impulse! A challenge for the radical imagination, in both meanings of that overworked term “radical”: thinking about things from their roots means taking them to their extremes. (Or at least reviewing them from bottom to top.)

The wonders of dialectics: if my arguments started out in sync with the justified, melancholy skepticism of the [Brazilian art critic] Paulo Herkenhoff in yesterday’s conversations, today, I am reaching conclusions that seem to resonate better with the utopian thought defended by my colleague Lillian Llanes on the same occasion. To conclude this self-contradiction, even if it only seems that way, I would like to suggest that if Latin America did not exist, perhaps we would have to reinvent it.

1

See, for example, my unpublished book, “*Another Goddamned Gringo Trick*”: *MoMA’s Curatorial Construction of “Latin American Art” (and Some Inverted Mirrors)*. Portions of that study were presented for the first time in 1999 at the University of Texas at Austin and later in several forums in Argentina and the United States, including one in November 2002 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. To go over the argument set forth there, point-by-point, see: Gustavo Buntinx, “El eslabón perdido: Avatares de *Club Atlético Nueva Chicago*,” Adriana Lauría, ed., *Berni y sus contemporáneos. Correlatos* (Buenos Aires: MALBA, 2005).

2

Héctor Olea and Mari Carmen Ramírez, *Heterotopías: medio siglo sin-lugar 1918–1968*, exh. cat. (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2000).—Ed.

3

Gerardo Mosquera, *No es sólo lo que ves: pervirtiendo el minimalismo*, exh. cat. (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2000).—Ed.

4

Héctor Olea and Mari Carmen Ramírez, *Inverted Utopias*, exh. cat. (London and Houston: Yale University Press/The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2004). See Holland Cotter, who called the exhibition one of the two most important of the decade, in “Depending on the Culture of Strangers,” *New York Times*, January 3, 2010, 23.—Ed.

5

Quoted in: Simon Critchley, Richard Rorty, Jacques Derrida, et al.: *Desconstrucción y pragmatismo* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1998). A sentence articulated in the context of an earlier debate (1993) between Derrida and Rorty.

VI.2.7 DIGITAL ARCHIVE 1065622

FROM LATIN AMERICAN ART TO ART FROM LATIN AMERICA

Gerardo Mosquera, 2003

In this essay from 2003, Gerardo Mosquera considers the uselessness of overarching concepts such as “Latin American art” that, in his view, do not adequately reflect how contemporary artists from the Americas make and exhibit their work. He urges his readers to consider the term “Latin American” as an externally imposed, colonial, and imperialist *invention*. Despite Latin America’s entry into what he terms the “global mall,” Mosquera warns of the traps into which the art of the region is apt to fall with the globalization of art and culture. In this context, Latin American art that insists on being branded as such risks being reduced to a postmodern cliché: being seen as derivative of the art of Western center or engaging in “self-exoticism” (“otherizing” themselves). Instead, the Cuban critic proposes that artists from Latin America should be understood as part of what he calls a “third scene,” where difference and displacement are accepted as fundamental aspects intrinsic to globalization. “Del arte latinoamericano al arte desde América Latina” is notable because it demonstrates Mosquera’s interest in aligning Latin American art with other post-colonial discourses and their engagements with Marxism and Post-structuralism. He uses V. Y. Mudimbe’s question “What is Africa?” as a point of departure and asks “What is Latin America?” [ALSO SEE EDMUNDO O’GORMAN’S *THE INVENTION OF AMERICA* (1961), DOCUMENT I.1.7, WHICH PREDATES MUNDIMBE’S *THE INVENTION OF AFRICA* (1988)]. Adopting French structuralist terms to consider Latin American art as a problem, Mosquera urges his readers to think about systems of production and reception, and, especially, about the emphasis on what is “signified.” This translation is based on the essay’s original publication [Gerardo Mosquera, “Del arte latinoamericano al arte desde América Latina,” *Art Nexus* (Bogotá/Miami), no. 48 (April 2003), 70–74].

CULTURE IN LATIN AMERICA HAS SUFFERED from a neurosis of identity that is not completely cured and of which this text forms a part [albeit] in opposition. I could attest to it when (in 1996) I published an article entitled: “El arte Latinoamericano deja de serlo”¹ [Latin American Art is no longer as such], which

provoked strong reactions. Nevertheless, by the end of the 1970s, [Brazilian art critic] Frederico Moraes had linked our identity obsession with colonialism and proposed a “plural, diverse, and multifaceted idea of the continent,”² a product of its multiplicity of origin. Yet the very notions of Latin America and Iberoamerica have always been very problematic. Do they include the Dutch and Anglo Caribbean? Chicanos? Do they embrace indigenous peoples who often do not even speak European languages? If we recognize the latter as Latin Americans, why do we not do so with indigenous peoples north of the Rio Grande? Is what we call Latin America part of the West or the non-West? [IN THIS REGARD, SEE DOCUMENT 1.2.11] Does this contradict both, emphasizing the schematization of such notions? In any case, today the United States, with more than thirty million inhabitants of “Hispanic” origin, is without doubt one of the most actively Latin American countries. Given the migratory boom and the growth rate of the “Hispanic” population (migration without movement), in a not so distant future, the U.S. may come to have the third largest Spanish-speaking population, after Mexico and Spain. In some stores in Miami there are signs that say “English Spoken.”

Nevertheless, just as the idea of Africa is considered by some African intellectuals to be a colonial invention, the idea of Latin America has not yet been discarded.³ The self-consciousness of belonging to a historical-cultural entity misnamed Latin America is maintained, but problematical. [V.Y.] Mudimbe’s question, “What is Africa?”⁴ is increasingly valid if we transfer it to our region. What is Latin America? It is, among other things, an invention that we can reinvent.⁵

The generalized continuance of this recognition may appear strange since we, as Latin Americans have always reflected on who we really are. It is difficult to know, given the multiplicity of components in our ethno-genesis, the complex processes of creole-ization and hybridization and the presence of large groups of indigenous peoples who are excluded or only partially integrated into postcolonial nationalities. We have to add the impact of vast immigrations of Europeans and Asians throughout the twentieth century and the strong emigrations within the continent and toward the United States and Europe, principally in the final part of that century and until today. Such an intricate plot is further complicated by a very early colonial history, somewhere between the medieval and Renaissance eras, with, from the outset, a permanent and massive settlement of Iberians and Africans. At the same time and as a result of the pressure to enhance or to

build identities of resistance in the face of Europe and United States, we have been inclined to define a Latin American self by means of all-encompassing generalizations, which have coexisted with the fragmentation imposed by nationalisms.

There are many answers to the question, perhaps not yet well outlined, of whether we are Western or not, African or not. Our labyrinths have confused or intoxicated us. We are now beginning to situate ourselves more within the fragment, juxtaposition, and collage, accepting our diversity at the same time as our contradictions. The danger is that of coining—against modernist totalizations—a postmodern cliché of Latin America as a realm of [outright] heterogeneity.⁶ On the other hand, pluralism can become a prison without walls. [Jorge Luis] Borges told the story of the best labyrinth: the immensurable amplitude of the desert from which it is difficult to escape. Pluralism in the abstract or controlled by the self-decentralized centers may weave a labyrinth of indetermination that limits the possibilities of a socially and culturally active diversification. Borges can perhaps offer us another key: upon conclusion of the obligation of drawing each and every one of our [identities and/or] diversities, perhaps only a portrait of each draftsman will appear.

Another trap is the assumption that Latin American art is simply derivative of the Western centers without considering its complicated relationship in the more and more problematic notion of West. Frequently the works are not even looked at: passports are requested beforehand, and baggage is checked under the suspicion of contraband from New York, London, or Berlin. Often the passports are not in order since they respond to processes of hybridization and appropriation, the result of a long and multifaceted postcolonial situation. Their pages appear full of the re-significations, reinventions, “contaminations”⁷ and “misunderstandings”⁸ that have been in evidence from the times of baroque art—yet more so in our own epoch, which is marked by so much cultural transformation and hybridization in which complex re-adaptations of identities occur while borders mutate and become porous.

The new fascination for alteration is specific to the “global” fad and has permitted greater circulation and legitimization of art from the peripheries. But all too often only those works that explicitly manifest difference or satisfy expectations of exoticism are legitimated. As a result, some artists are inclined toward “other-izing” themselves in a paradox of self-exoticism that becomes increasingly indirect and sophisticated. The paradox is still more apparent if we ask ourselves

why the “Other” is always ourselves, never them. Self-exoticism reveals a hegemonic structure, but also the passivity of the artist, of being complacent at all costs, or at most indicates a scant initiative. Moreover, this has been perpetrated by local positions that confront foreign intrusion. I refer to nationalist mythologies where a traditionalist cult of the “roots” is expressed, supposedly protecting against foreign interferences, and the romantic idealization of conventions about history and the values of the nation. Frequently nationalistic folklorism is to a large extent used or manipulated by power to rhetoricize a so-called integrated, participative nation. In this way the real exclusion of popular strata, especially that of indigenous peoples, is disguised. This situation thus circumscribes art within ghettoized parameters of circulation, publication, and consumption that immediately limit its possibilities of diffusion and legitimacy and reduce it to predetermined fields.

When I said that Latin American art was ceasing to be Latin American art, I was referring to two processes that I observe on the continent. One is located in the sphere of artistic production, and the other in that of circulation and reception. On the one hand, there is the internal process of overcoming the neurosis of identity among artists, critics, and curators. This brings with it a tranquility that permits greater internalization in artistic discourse. On the other hand, Latin American art is beginning to be valued as an art without surnames. Instead of demanding that it declare its identity, art from Latin America is now being recognized more and more as a participant in a general practice that does not by necessity show its context and that on occasion refers to art itself. This corresponds to the increase of new international circuits that are slowly overcoming the pseudo-internationalism of the mainstream. The consolidation of this “third” scene is part and parcel of the processes of globalization. In this way, artists from Latin America, like those of Africa or Southeast Asia, have begun, slowly and yet increasingly, to exhibit, publish, and exercise influence outside of ghettoized circuits. As a result of this, many prejudices are confronted and everybody wins, not only those circles with less access to international networks.

However, new problems have emerged, characteristic of a period of transition. If the danger of self-exoticism in response to the expectation of “primitivism” and difference exists, its opposites also exist: abstract cosmopolitanism that flattens out differences and the mimetic “internationalism” that forces the appropriation of a type of international postmodern language,

much like an “English of art” that functions like the *lingua franca* of the increasingly numerous biennales and international exhibitions.⁹ The fact that artists from all corners of the globe now exhibit internationally only signifies a quantitative internationalization. The question remains: to what extent are the artists contributing to transformation of the hegemonic and restrictive status quo in favor of true diversification instead of being managed by it? They are reduced to well-stocked suppliers of the “global mall.” The Brazilian modernists used the metaphor of *antropofagia* [as cultural cannibalism]¹⁰ in order to legitimize their critical appropriation of European artistic tendencies, a procedure characteristic of postcolonial art. But we must qualify this process to break with connotations that make the battle that this relationship implicitly carries—of who swallows whom—transparent.

The question in its entirety is more complex. Take the case of a good part of Brazilian art. One could describe the principal tendency in its practice to be the development of a neo-concrete, post-minimal inclination, directed toward a mainstream without a local base or an interest in popular culture. But, as the [film] critic Paulo Emilio Sales Gomes caricatured it, the good fortune of Brazilians is that they copied badly,¹¹ creating a particular way of speaking the “international language.” However polemic it may be, Sales Gomes’s schematization is rich in meanings. If Brazilian art, like the mistaken dove of [Spanish poet] Rafael Alberti, desired to go north but went south, in the end it is less about disorientation than de-orientation. Such a dynamic has allowed Brazilian artists a highly original participation within an “international” post-minimal, conceptual tendency. They have charged it with an expressivity that is almost existential, shattering a prevailing, tedious coldness, and have introduced sophistication into the material itself and at the same time a human proximity towards it. They have diversified, made more complex, and yet subverted the practice of this “international language.” The personality of this anti-samba aesthetic is not produced as frequently occurs with Caribbean and Andino people—through representations or important activation of vernacular culture, but rather through a specific manner of making contemporary art. It is an identity disinterested in “identity,” an identity through action, not through representation.

By virtue of the characteristics of an early colonization that Europeanized this vast area, the culture of Latin America, and especially that of the visual arts, has frequently played on the rebound. That is to say, artists have returned

the balls that arrived from the North, appropriating hegemonic tendencies and thus turning them into their own individual creativities within the complexity of their context. Critical discourses have emphasized such strategies of re-signification, transformation, and syncretism in order to confront the constant accusation of being copycats and derivatives that, not without reason, we have suffered from—in fact, only the Japanese surpass us in the art of copying. Post-modernity, with its discrediting of originality and its validation of the copy has been of great help to us. But equally plausible would be the displacements of focus that would recognize how Latin American art has enriched the framework of the “international” from within. For example, José Clemente Orozco is always analyzed within the context of Mexican muralism. It would be much more productive to see him as one of the key figures of Expressionism, as he is without doubt. Although Wifredo Lam is considered to have introduced specific elements of African origin to Surrealism, only recently has he been recognized for having used modernism as a space for the expression of African-Caribbean content, thus affirming an anti-hegemonic position.

It is problematic that dominant centers always get the kick-off. One cannot continually move in the same North-South direction according to the dominant power structure. No matter how valid a different and opposing trans-cultural strategy might be within the dominant structure, it implicates a perennial condition of response that reproduces this hegemony. . . . It is equally necessary to invert the direction of the current, not by reversing a binary scheme of transference but rather by contributing to pluralization in order to enrich and transform the existing situation. A horizontal, South-South volley would also be welcome, tending toward the development of a truly global network of interactions on all sides. Cultural exchanges within globalization still appear to be laid out from the centers in a radial schema, with insufficient connections. A structure of axial globalization with its zones of silence designs economic, political, and cultural circuits that macro-conform the entire planet. Globalization has speeded up and pluralized cultural circulation, but has done so following the structure of the economy, reproducing in a certain measure its structures of power. Hence the difficulty of achieving the modifications in the flows to which I have referred, since the currents usually move according to where the money is. Fortunately, the processes of internationalization that globalization has triggered appear to

lead us gradually toward a more fluid cultural interaction. We are living through a slippery moment of transition, a post-utopian epoch that seeks changes within existing structures rather than changing the structures themselves.

When I stated that the best thing that was happening to Latin American art was that it was ceasing to be Latin American art, I was also referring to the problematic totalization that the term carries. Some writers prefer to speak of “art in Latin America” instead of “Latin American art,” as a de-emphasizing convention that tries to underline, on the very level of language, its rejection of the suspicious construction of an integral, emblematic Latin America, and beyond this, of any globalizing generalization. To stop being “Latin American art” means to distance oneself from a simplified notion of art in Latin America and to highlight the extraordinary variety of symbolic production on the continent. Art in Latin America has been intermittently displacing the paradigms that had guided its practice and valuation. These paradigms were related to certain generalizations that are still recognized as depictions of a slippery Latin American cultural identity or of some regions in particular: magic realism, the marvelous (both related to the surrealist proclamation about Latin America made by André Breton in Mexico), *mestizaje* [intermingling], the baroque, the constructive impulse, revolutionary discourse, etc. These categories, however justified, served the efforts of “resistance” against “imperialist” cultural penetration. They had a notable rise in the 1960s within a militant Latin Americanism that was characteristic of the historical period marked by the Cuban Revolution and guerrilla movements. However, those ideologies came to over-construct the categories with a totalizing effect, so that they became stereotypes for the outside gaze. To speak of magic realism or miscegenation as global etiquettes today sounds almost like an *El Zorro* movie.

Latin America has participated in the global development of what we could schematize as a minimal and conceptual “international, postmodern language.” But to a considerable extent it has done so in its own manner, and by introducing differences. Many artists work as much “toward the inside” as “toward the outside” of the art, using post-conceptual resources in order to integrate the aesthetic, the social, the cultural, the historic, and the religious without sacrificing specific artistic research. We might say that in reality they are empowering artistic discourse by taking it into new territories and expanding its capacity

for dense and refined meaning. These artists are strengthening the analytic and linguistic tools of post conceptualism in order to struggle with the complexity of society and culture in Latin America, where multiplicity, hybridization, and contrasts have introduced contradictions as well as subtleties.

This plan contradicts a certain “militant” tradition of Latin American art, in favor of another very different tradition of fluidity and complexity in the manner in which the culture of the continent has actively dealt with the social problem. The former operates with greater clarity on the plane of the signified than on that of its signifiers and is in keeping with contemporary practices in other peripheral areas. Moreover, it has to do with a projection that is more individual and derivative of the artist himself, than with any partisanship or militant sense that places art in a position subordinate to political and social discourses that tend to endow art with a merely illustrative function.

This difference in terms of meaning is one of the changes enacted with respect to the totalizing paradigms to which I have referred; such paradigms procured a characteristically Latin American language right from the start. These new artists seem less interested in showing their passport. Cultural components act more within the context of discourse than visually, even in cases in which these were based upon the vernacular. This does not mean that there is no a Latin American *look* in the work of numerous artists, or even that one cannot point to certain identifying traits of some countries or areas. What is crucial is the fact that these identities begin to manifest themselves more by their features as an artistic practice than by their use of identifying elements taken from folklore, religion, the physical environment, or history. This development implies the presence of the context and of culture understood in its broadest sense, and internalized in the very manner of constructing works or discourses. But it also implies praxis of art itself, insofar as art establishes identifiable constants by delineating cultural typologies in the very process of making art, rather than merely accentuating cultural factors interjected into it. Thus, much Brazilian art is identifiable more by the manner in which it refers to ways of making art than just projecting contexts.

To emphasize the practice of art as the creator of cultural difference confronts the orientation of modernist discourses in Latin America. These tended to accentuate a contrary direction, that is to say, the manner in which art corresponded to an already given national culture. Artists worked, to a certain extent,

to legitimize themselves within the framework of a prevailing nationalism to which they contributed. Beyond this confrontation, context is a basic factor in the works of the artists who have established a new perspective that, more than representing contexts constructs *works from* them. Physical and cultural identities and social environments are performed more than being merely represented. They are in fact identities and contexts concurrent in the “international” meta-language of the arts and in the discussion of contemporary global themes.

In a departure from the previous discussion, one could outline a historical perspective that runs perhaps from “provincial European art” to “derivative art” to “Latin American art” to “art in Latin America” to “art from Latin America.” I do not refer to the character of this production in different historical moments, but to the prevalent epistemologies. The last of these terms emphasizes the active participation of art in “international” circuits and languages.¹² It refers to an intervention that brings with it anti-homogenizing differences and its legitimization within the international arena. That is to say, it identifies the construction of the global from the position of difference, underlining the appearance of new cultural subjects in an international arena that until recently was under lock and chain. We cannot say that this arena is now open, but that it does have more doors, and that these can be opened with different kinds of keys.

1

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Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988).

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Edmundo O’Gorman’s *La invención de América* (1958). See English version included in this volume, [SEE DOCUMENT I.1.7].—Ed.

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Mónica Amor, “Cartographies: Exploring the Limitations of a Curatorial Paradigm,” *Beyond the Fantastic. Contemporary Art Criticism from Latin America*, ed. Gerardo Mosquera (London and Cambridge, Mass: Institute of International Visual Arts/ MIT Press, 1995).

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Jean Fisher "Editorial: Some Thoughts on 'Contaminations,'" *Third Text* no. 32 (Autumn 1995): 3–7.

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Boris Bernstein, "Algunas consideraciones en relación con el problema 'arte y etnos,'" *Criterios*, nos. 5–12 (January 1983–December 1984): 267.

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Mosquera, "¿Lenguaje internacional?" *Lápiz*, Madrid, no. 121 (April 1996): 12–15.

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See Oswald de Andrade's 1928 manifesto, included in this volume [SEE DOCUMENT I.5.7].—Ed.

11

Ana Maria de Moraes Belluzzo in conversation with the author.

12

Thus the subtitle of my anthology from 1995.

EDITORS' BIOGRAPHIES

Héctor Olea

(Mexico City, 1945)

Héctor Olea, a Mexican architect, art critic, writer, and translator, serves as the International Center for the Arts of the Americas (ICAA) Publications and Translations Editor. Specializing in Latin American modern art and theory, he has collaborated on literary magazines and written about many avant-garde artists, including Xul Solar, Luis Felipe Noé, León Ferrari, Jesús Soto, Carlos Cruz-Diez, Artur Barrio, Ferreira Gullar, and Waldemar Cordeiro.

Olea curated the exhibition *Heterotopías* (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 2000) and, with Mari Carmen Ramírez, co-curated *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde Art in Latin America* (Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2004), which was named the “Best Thematic Show Nationally” in 2003–04 by the International Association of Art Critics (U.S. chapter). Olea also edited the catalogue that accompanied *Inverted Utopias* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). The symposium publication for this exhibition earned first prize for scholarly journals in the Museum Publications Design Competition of the American Association of Museums in 2007. Olea and Ramírez served as co-editors for the exhibition catalogues *Carlos Cruz-Diez: Color in Space and Time* (Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2011) and *Building on a Construct: The Adolpho Leirner Collection of Brazilian Constructive Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston* (Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; distributed by Yale University Press, 2009).

As a translator, Olea has been responsible for several noteworthy “trans-creations”—a genre

of translation that involves well-researched recreations of important writings in a language different than that of its original publications. In this genre, he has been responsible for the creative translation of Mário de Andrade's masterpiece *Macunaíma* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1977; second edition (Barcelona: Octaedro, 2005). He has also translated manifestos, poems and experimental prose by Oswald de Andrade into Spanish in *Obra Escogida* (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1981). Olea's creative writing focuses on experimental approaches in poetry and prose. His last novel, *Tenoche Me Reonda* (Austin: Whichever Press, 1999), designed with Henk van Assen, received the 2000 AIGA Prize of the American Institute of Graphic Arts for book design. When the book *Grande Sertão: Veredas* (first edition, 1956) celebrated fifty years, Olea published *O Professor Riobaldo: um novo místico da Poetagem* (São Paulo: Ateliê Editorial/Oficina do Livro, 2006).

Mari Carmen Ramírez

(San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1955)

Mari Carmen Ramírez is the Wortham Curator of Latin American Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and founding director of the International Center for the Arts of the Americas at the MFAH. Prior to this appointment, she was curator of Latin American Art at the Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art and adjunct lecturer of the department of art and art history at the University of Texas at Austin. She has also served as director of the Museo de Antropología, Historia y Arte de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, at Río Piedras campus. Ramírez received her Ph.D. in art history from the University of Chicago in 1989.

Ramírez has curated many groundbreaking exhibitions of Latin American art including *Carlos Cruz-Diez: Color in Space and Time* (Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2011); *Joaquín Torres-García: Constructing Abstraction with Wood* (Houston: The Menil Collection in association with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2009); *The Adolpho Leirner Collection of Brazilian Constructive Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston* (2007); *Hélio Oiticica: The Body of Color* (Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2007; traveled to Tate Modern, London, England); *Gego: Between Transparency and the Invisible* (Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2005; traveled to The Drawing Center, New York, 2007); *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde Art in Latin America*, with Héctor Olea (Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2004); *Heterotopías: Medio Siglo sin Lugar, 1918–1968*, with Héctor Olea (Madrid: Museo Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2000); *Cantos Paralelos/Parallel Cantos: Visual Parody in Contemporary Argentinean Art* (Austin: Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, 1999); *El Taller Torres-García: The School of the South and its Legacy*, with Cecilia Torres (Austin: Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery, The University of Texas at Austin and University of Texas Press, 1992). Ramírez has also published extensively on topics pertaining to Latin American art history, curatorial studies, exhibitions, and the politics of representation in Latin American and Latino art.

Ramírez was named one of the twenty-five most influential Hispanics in America by *TIME Magazine* (2005). She has received the Award for Curatorial Excellence from the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College (2005) and the Award for Curatorial Excellence from the Peter Norton Family Foundation (1997).

Tomás Ybarra-Frausto
(San Antonio, Texas, 1938)

Tomás Ybarra-Frausto recently retired as Associate Director for Creativity and Culture at the Rockefeller Foundation in New York. His work with the division includes the Humanities Residency Fellowship Program, the Recovering and Reinventing Cultures through Museums Program, The U.S.–Mexico Fund for Culture, and PACT (Partnerships Affirming Community Transformation). Prior to joining the Rockefeller Foundation, Ybarra-Frausto was a tenured professor at Stanford University in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese. He has served as the chairperson of the Mexican Museum in San Francisco and the Smithsonian Council, and he has written and published extensively, focusing primarily on Latin American and U.S./Latino cultural issues. He has edited, co-edited, and contributed to a number of texts that consider Latino expressive culture through art and literature, including: *Velvet Barrios: Popular Culture & Chicana/o Sexualities* (co-edited with Alicia Gaspar De Alba, 2002); *Signs from the Heart: California Chicano Murals* (co-edited with Amalia Mesa-Bains and Shifra M. Goldman, 1990); *Arte Chicano: A Comprehensive Annotated Bibliography of Chicano Art, 1965–1981* (compiled with Shifra M. Goldman, 1986); and *Chicano Literature: Text and Context* (compiled with Antonia Castaneda Shular and Joseph Sommers, 1972); and the forthcoming *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*. In 1998, Ybarra-Frausto was awarded the Joseph Henry Medal by the Smithsonian Institution Center for Latino Initiatives for exemplary contributions to that institution which included the donation of his invaluable collection of documentation on Chicano art and culture (now at the Archives of American Art).

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RESISTING CATEGORIES: LATIN AMERICAN AND/OR LATINO?

This first volume of the *Critical Documents of 20th-Century Latin American and Latino Art* series published by the International Center for the Arts of the Americas at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, presents 168 crucial texts written by influential artists, critics, curators, journalists, and intellectuals whose writings shed light on questions relating to what it means to be “Latin American” and/or “Latino.”

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