

PAINTINGS AT AN EXHIBITION: 1966

*The Yale-Texas Exhibition of Latin American Art** 1800–1965

Richard P. Schaedel, University of Texas

MOST LATINAMERICANISTS WILL BE INTERESTED AND SOME FASCINATED BY the aesthetic import of this epoch-making exhibit, jointly organized and presented by the Yale University Art Gallery and the University of Texas Art Museum. The purpose of this brief statement is to indicate some of its more important repercussions on the social scientist and historian which have potential research value. The first and obvious value lies in the fact that the catalogue presents in one compact volume all of the outstanding stylistic developments in painting, and to a lesser extent in architecture and engraving, from early Independence times to the present day. From a purely documentary point of view, excepting the few authentic, extant architectural remains, painting is the only medium that gives visual expression to the developments in the first half of the 19th century; so that the exhibition provides a basic research tool towards determining what the graphic representation of the socio-political developments of the period were. Even for the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this concentrated panorama supplies us with representative perceptions of how Latin Americans conceptualized themselves and their cultural traditions. We base our remarks on the paintings themselves and on an excellent representative catalogue. Catlin, director of the exhibit, with his collaborators (Griender, Davidson, Deredita, and Faulhaber) will soon begin work on a scholarly volume which will interrelate the aesthetic developments with the social, economic and political developments of Latin American history in a thoroughgoing study.

To those not fortunate enough to see the original exhibition, the catalogue entitled *Art of Latin America since Independence* by Stanton L. Catlin and Terence Griender, should be recommended as a necessary basic document. It is constituted by brief but cogent resumé of the cultural trends as reflected in the art of the times; the actual reproductions of 116 selected paintings, draw-

* *Art of Latin America since Independence* consisting of almost 400 pieces from sketches to frescoes has been exhibited in the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, and the University of Texas Art Museum this spring. From July 2nd to August 7th it will be at the San Francisco Museum of Art; from August 27th to September 30th it will show in the La Jolle Museum of Art; and it is scheduled for the Isaac Delgado Museum of Art, New Orleans, in late October. After that tentative arrangements have been made for a show in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington.

ings, prints, and sketches; an invaluable dictionary of biography on 273 painters; and a selected bibliography of principal sources. Our purpose here will be to glean from the statements in the catalogue some of the preliminary observations of the authors and to raise certain questions which are implicit in the exhibit and which would probably occur to other social scientists and historians in the hopes that future research may provide some of the answers. A review of the over all experience of what is and is not reflected is our point of departure.

Exhibition and catalogue are organized in chronological order with major subdivisions as follows: 1800–1835; 1835–1875; 1875–1910; 1910–1945; 1945–1965.

The authors of the catalogue give us to understand that despite the subdivisions within the nineteenth century, "this phase was dominated by the sophisticated luxury loving, international monied aristocracy whose world centered in Paris, whose literary models were French novels, whose artistic tastes were based on those expressed in the Paris Salons." In viewing the paintings, we see that this statement characterizes most of what is represented. When the genre elements of every-day life in the country or the urban market-place are portrayed, they are referred to as "costumbrista" tendencies. As nearly as I can equate this term, which is used in a precise way in aesthetic parlance, to sociological phenomena, it would appear to be the upper class conceptualization of the more picturesque aspects of lower class society.

From this vantage point, within the gamut of nineteenth century painting, there is little that would surprise the Latin Americanist. There is the expectable output of portraits of important military and political leaders, distinguished representatives of the social and professional elite, "costumbrista" portrayals of rural life and tranquil landscapes, and a smidgeon of epic, highly glorified battle scenes. The authors rightly emphasize the importance of the European influence and models of neoclassicism and romanticism followed by a conservative adherence to the beaux art tradition in the latter nineteenth century throughout Latin America. Surprisingly little that would reflect the birth of independent national traditions is discernible. The anonymous painting of "Pola goes to the gallows" is a strong statement of the heroic martyrdom that marked the Independence period. Gil de Castro, who is singled out to us as the possessor of the "first consistent art style of Latin American Republican idealism," is soon lost in a host of more technically accomplished Europeanized and indeed European artists, lacking for the most part his assertiveness.

Since currents that might reflect nationalist stirrings are not particularly obvious as a trend until the close of the century, some of the paintings which fulfill particularly well the documentary function should perhaps be pointed out at this time. In the field of internecine warfare for the first half of the 19th



The Martyr Olaya (El Mártir Olaya) 1825
José Gil de Castro (Peru, ?–1841?)

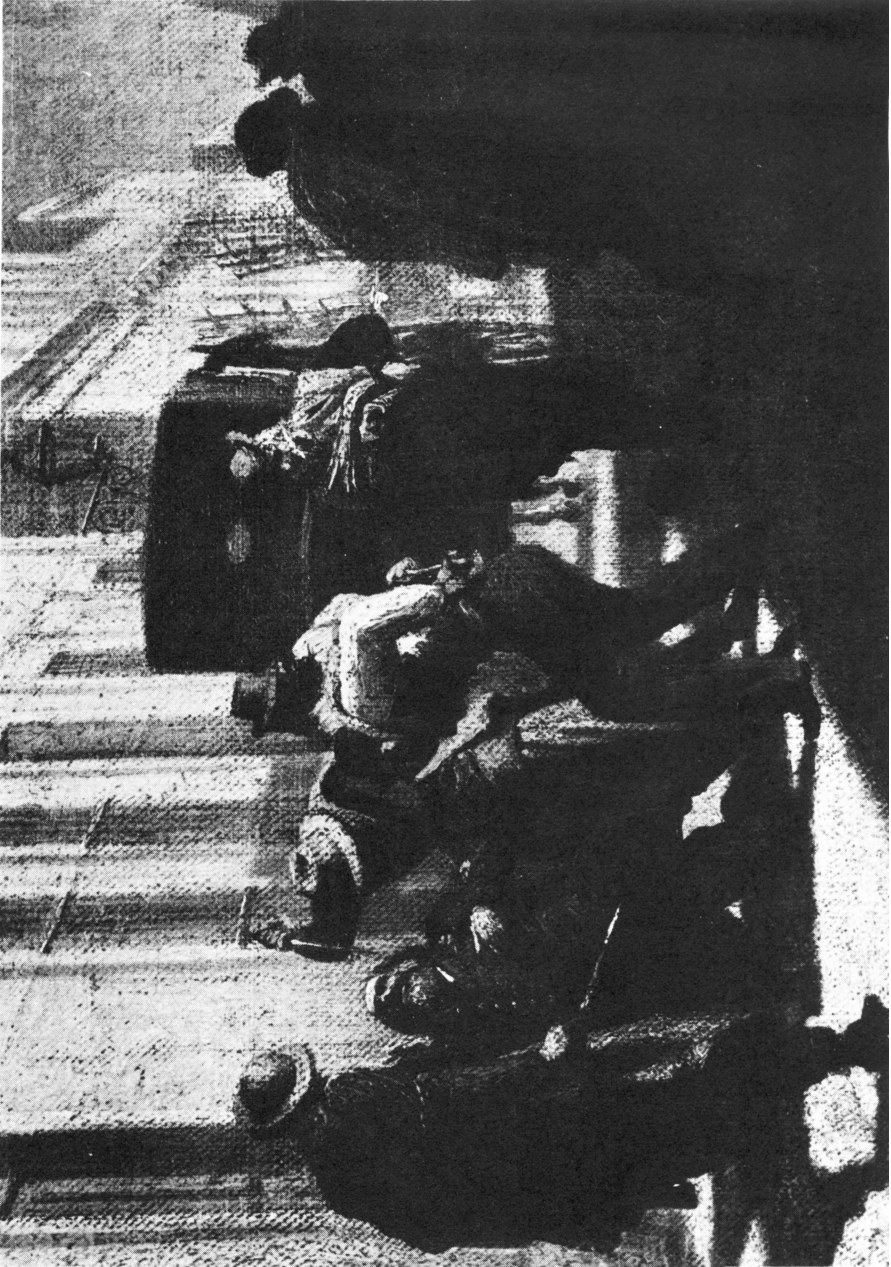
century an interesting watercolor by Juan Fossa (Argentina) is noteworthy in showing horse combat with boleadores and lances; an early Blanes shows us something of the military organization at mid-century. "San Juan en Otovalo" by the Ecuadorian Guerrero shows a fiesta scene in what appears to be the original settlement form corresponding to the "reducción"; Arrieta (Mexico) provides a posed but useful social cross section of a provincial town in "Market scene: the Surprise"; and Pallière in "The Store" provides a glimpse of commercial activity. For a fine Early Republican interior Pellegrini's "Minuet" is to be recommended.

Very few paintings break through the European overcast with faint lights of what may become the makings of national or regional art. Such is the almost insolent painting of the Peruvian Laso, a strong Indian portrayal, and Troya's Ecuadorian coastal landscape which reflects an appreciation of the humid tropics from within. Although landscapes form a significant component of the Latin American 19th century artistic production, there were no Fontainebleau-like traditions and only a few landscape painters like José Maria Velasco of Mexico who concentrated on the idiom. Most unusual of all is the unorthodox comet-like appearance and disappearance of Pancho Fierro whose watercolors present the total mid-19th century cultural milieu of Peru with considerable satire.

As the authors remark, "in no country was Independence followed by any basic change in the social and economic order carried over from the Colonial period," but there are certain large developments signified by the casting off of Spanish allegiance and the opening of Latin America to other international currents that could have been expected to have had greater impact upon the artists. The poverty of church themes in the exhibition is perhaps indicative by default of the gradual diminution of church influence. Except for an occasional painting, reflecting pride in the civic architecture or the obviously commissioned commemoration, there is notable lack of either a positive or negative reaction to caudillismo and the internecine rivalries that marked the political history of the 19th century.

Another point little touched upon by the artists was the search for beauty in the various ethnic mixtures which reached their apogee in the nineteenth century. With the exception of the Amôedo (Brazil) study of a very Europeanized "Indian girl," physical types conform to standard Caucasoid variations. Were not the authors over-selective in the case of Brazil, or was the advent of Negro admixture in aristocratic families only admitted late and begrudgingly?

The period from 1875–1910 which the authors have isolated for the late nineteenth century phase of aesthetic developments (corresponding largely to the Impressionist period) appears to reflect no directly corresponding socio-cultural phase in Latin America. We should prefer to say that from 1880–1920



The Assassination of Gen. Benancio Flores
(Asesinato del Gral. Benancio Flores)
Juan Manuel Blanes (Uruguay, 1830–1901)

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there are two tendencies in the painting. One seems to reflect some of the social change produced by incipient industrialization in the La Plata countries and is first represented by Blanes of Uruguay. In Juan Manuel Blanes, we have a precursor of a nationalist tradition. His scenes of assassination, epidemics and pampa life clearly reflect heroic intensity from which true national expression can emerge.

Herran and Ruelas in Mexico and Gordon in Chile reflect this same trend. Paintings of the Indian and the more worldly themes, as well as self-portraiture and new conceptualization of religious subjects reflect the artists' immediate concern with social reality and no longer a detached view of a bucolic paradise. Most acrid and penetrating of these precursors was Posada, the Mexican engraver, who far more than Pancho Fierro reminds one of the acrimonious late epoch of Goya.

The second tendency appears to be a conscious rejection of the heroic developments characterized by massive immigration and the agricultural and industrial growth in East Coast Latin America and Chile which certainly highlighted the main socio-economic trends of the last half of the 19th century. They find little echo in the show, and presumably in the actual output of the artists. The conquest of the pampas, the building of railroads, the subjection of the Araucanians (with the exception of Della Valle's late "Return from the Raid") and the cacao boom all pass unnoticed.

It is highly significant I think that the direct impact of French Impressionism, which the authors show to be highly diluted if not retarded in Latin America, was slight. This in spite of the fact that the Latin American bourgeoisie, who had partially supplanted during the 19th century the landed aristocracy and whose rise to prominence with the economic growth of the late 19th century, actively sought European inspiration. They seem to have preferred to retrench themselves by following the conservative academicians of the Beaux Arts school than admit the radical innovations of impressionism, not only in techniques and treatment, but more interestingly in subject matter. There was no attempt to glorify the new enterprises and struggles that brought them their wealth, but rather a harking back to traditional, Colonial themes and nostalgic regret for a passing age.

The period between World Wars is a period in which sociocultural and aesthetic developments correspond to a high degree. The middle class intellectuals involved in the Indigenista movements in Mexico and Peru are quite clearly responsible for the so-called Mexican Renaissance, and even in the Latin American countries with slight indigenous population, their influence appears to have forced into the open a concern for expression of the underprivileged of both the white and blue collar categories.

In Uruguay, Figari, Cuneo and Gonzalez follow the path blazed by Blanes

and the trio present us with an artistic panorama which is recognizably Latin American both in theme and expression. In Argentina, Lasansky and Berni reflect the same tendency, and in Chile, of those represented in the exhibit, Israel Roa and Faz are clear exponents.

With Siqueiros, Rivera and Orozco, of course, a nationalistic trend was formulated in Indo-American terms, and the mural which had been much in the background during the previous periods assumed stage center position. While Rivera and his colleagues painted the Indian, other Mexicans like Covarrubias and Castellanos concerned themselves with middle class strivings and the mixed ethnic groups of the towns and cities; and Antonio Ruiz has a most interesting commentary on class mobility. Mendez' strong caricatures reflect the same concern and recall the mood set by Posada.

Peru, Brazil and Ecuador appear to have followed this lead. In Peru, Sabogal, Blas and Urteaga dominated the scene for the period with conscious efforts to portray the autochthonous, not only Indian but the Negro and Zambo components of the population; and they tried to evoke not only the human but the physical features of the Andes. In Brazil, Cavalcanti and Portinari conceptualized during the 30's and 40's forceful expressions of the lower orders involved in urban and rural activities.

In Ecuador Diogenes Paredes with "Las Cebolleras" gives a strong representation of lower class vendors of the coast while Kingman in "Guandos" and Guayasamín in "Fatigue" present the overburdened Indian of the highlands. Guayasamín also is represented by a powerful portrait of J. G. Navarro in which essentially mestizo facial features are emphasized. This is in radical contrast to the portraiture of the 19th century.

Apparently these tendencies to use the common man as a medium of expression reached later or lingered longer in Colombia, Bolivia and Panama, judging by the dates of Lara Centellas' "Sleeping Figures" (Bolivia, 1960), Botero's "Our Lady of Fatima" (Colombia, 1963), and Thibault Maldonado's "Los Héroes" (Panama, 1961).

The aristocratic tradition was by no means dead in the interbellum period. Its practitioners adapted the new "modernist" styles of Europe and reworked them in highly individualistic ways, many of them performing as full or part-time emigrés. Such was the role of Reverón in Venezuela, Obregón in Colombia, Matta in Chile and Fader in Argentina.

We wonder what kind of cross-fertilization took place between these two painting traditions in this period. As naive social scientists might we not inquire if artists from one country, whatever their tendency, did not tend to gravitate toward a certain common palette or gradation of tones? Should it be possible to detect in an exhibit of this scope the colors or tonalities that might be said to characterize an incipient national style? A changing color scheme

within one country produced by the changing human ecological adaptation over time might also be expected to be reflected. As we view Figueroa's "Early Paradise" the strong juxtaposition of clashing colors that is so characteristic of urban Mexico appears to be clearly expressed. The change wrought in the rather subtly light and green color scheme of pre-1930 Caracas by the advent of the vari-colored ranchos that now gird the city cannot fail to have affected the contemporary Venezuelan artist. The stark two dimensional aspect of Peru, the sober tone gradations of Chile—are these reflected in the establishment of artistic canons that mark regional or national styles? The individualistic painters concerned themselves with experiments in color during this period—and it is rewarding to compare for example the Chilean Burchard, the Venezuelan Monsanto, the Argentine Malharro, and the Cuban Wifredo Lam to see if these ecological differences of habitat, human and natural, are reflected in the canvases.

An early post-bellum tendency worth remarking is the constructivist tradition which was manifested principally in architecture of which the University of Caracas and the new museums of Mexico are examples. In painting, however, the striving toward abstraction appears to have prevailed. In certain painters this abstraction is still phrased in social terms, such as with Codesido's "Andes" and do Amaral's "The Negress," but in most, the expression is largely of mood and intensely personal. The authors label this trend "Informalism."

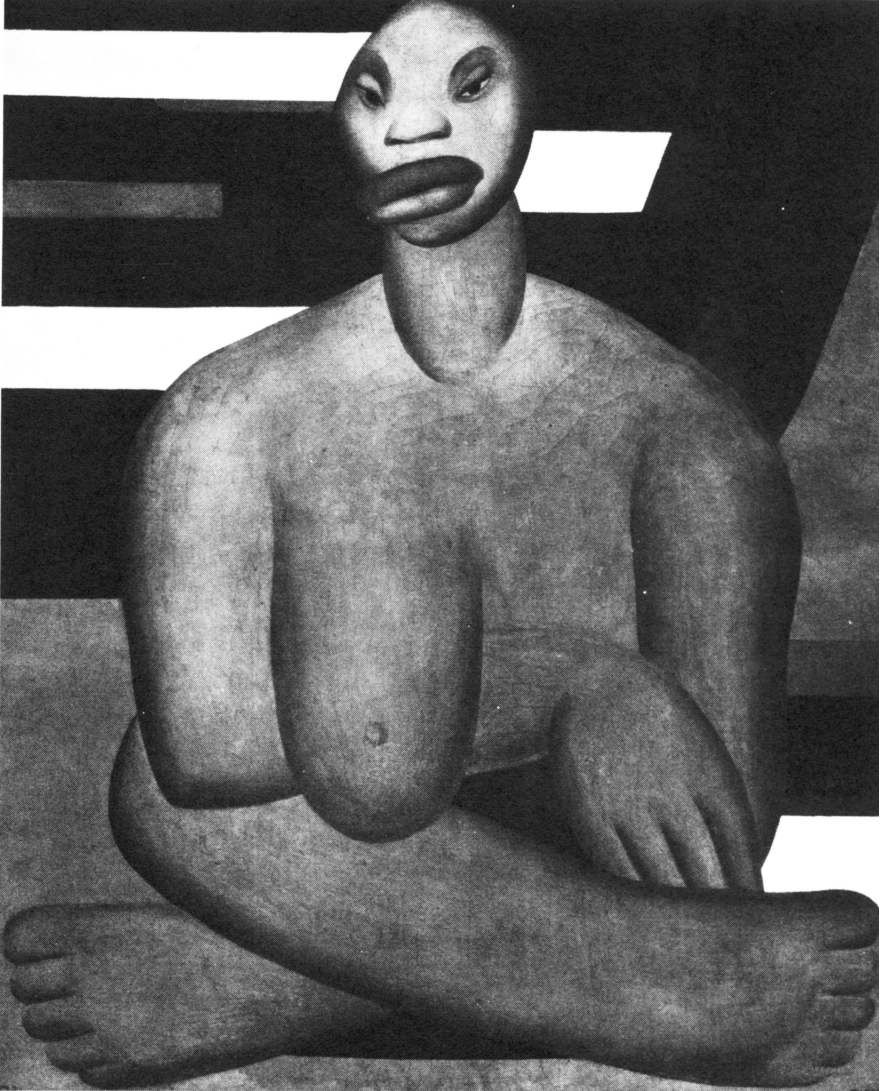
The stark message of Barreda's "Embrasure" may be revealing of this change in Latin American artists' outlook. Is the artist imprisoned? Have the direct means of expression of social reality been denied him? Is he at a loss to find the appropriate mode of expression? Does he flee toward introspection or react against what may be a sort of saturation with social consciousness?

What were the artists trying to express? The authors of the catalogue say:

An identifiably individual, artistic style, often esoteric, sometimes involving impulsive, automatic or accidental methods of execution, but requiring the organic consistency of artistic form and the allusive quality of poetic metaphor, generally became and remains the prevailing objective among a majority of contemporary Latin American painters today.

The authors indicate that the establishment of standards through the biennials and a proliferation, largely from private sources, of modern art museums are also trends since World War II. Perhaps both these circumstances have helped nourish and diffuse international "Informalism?" With patrons like International Petroleum, Kaiser and the National Banks some of the more blatant expressions in social protest art might be expected to become somewhat muffled.

In this brief commentary on the significance of the exhibit, we have tried



The Negress (A Negra)
Tarsila do Amaral (Brazil, active since 1920's)

to hint at possible correspondences between principal social trends and the aesthetic developments. We have not yet indicated that this exhibit and corresponding catalogue represents a milestone in Latin American art history. We have numerous volumes on Latin American pre-Colonial art; there are a few comprehensive studies of Latin American Colonial art on a country by country basis. The art on the nineteenth century in Latin America has never even been systematically reviewed, much less brought together in one exhibition. Similarly for the early 20th century there are a few general reviews of the major tendencies in certain countries, but no general country-by-country survey of the main streams and the numerous swirls and eddies that characterized this crowded epoch.

Through the pictures in this exhibition the art historian, for the first time, has been able to get a total view of the range of artistic development and variation in a block of nations with a shared heritage and over a broad sweep of history. Here is an opportunity for the rest of the Latin Americanist scholars to measure the role of the artist over time in their particular area of interest. Although it is not so hoped, this kind of assemblage may be unique because of the immense investment in time, money and expertise that were necessary to bring the exhibition about. In the latter event it would be not only regrettable, but unpardonable for a student of Latin America to remain ignorant of the content of this event.

[This brief sketch of impression at an exhibition is tendered with great trepidations by your editor and with apologies to the art historians. While Messrs. Catlin and Goodall graciously helped to orient this unwary neophyte, time did not permit them to produce a review of this exhibition, which would have been truly commensurate with its quality and significance.]

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL COMMENT

Stanton Catlin and Terence Grieder

According to the authors, no systematic program was followed to sift and analyze available literature for correlations between the form and content of works of Latin American art and intellectual trends or social conditions of the period under consideration. This was left for research on the book to follow the catalogue as the next stage of the project. It was found that correlations of this nature were mostly general, and interpretive of assumed fact, specialized by subject or fragmentary. However, a number of works were found useful to the formation of perspectives, and a few considered of basic importance. A se-

lection is given below, which includes some publications not in the catalogue bibliography. This list is composed largely of histories, monographs, and articles on art which, more frequently than most, refer to social and intellectual issues suggested by the content of individual works of art or which follow the principal of recourse to overall background as areas of reference in determining artistic content.

In the majority (but not all) of these sources, the primary objective seems to be to determine the nature of qualitative values centered in the work of art itself rather than to clarify social and intellectual sources of influence or to illustrate social and intellectual trends. On the other hand, literature on social evolution and intellectual history that uses works of art as a primary source of reference in the investigation of Latin American intellectual history or social evolution, remains to be explored.

Among the potentially useful sources from the inter-disciplinary point of view are the new publications on costumbrista art, the area of artistic statement which borders most closely and consistently on fields having to do with the Latin American social environment. Outstanding among these works is the *Documenta Iconográfica* by Bonifacio del Carril, published by Emecé, Buenos Aires, 1964.

An unpublished series of essays on "Intellectual Backgrounds of Artistic Evolution in Latin America, 1800–1965," commissioned by the present exhibition project, together with discussion by their authors at a two-and-a-half day symposium, March 2–5, at Yale University, will shortly be available to students at the Latin American Exhibition Office at the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut. At this symposium, organized to provide fresh source material and up-to-date opinion for the inter-disciplinary aspects of research for the book, over 70 scholars and critics from Latin America and United States universities, museums and other institutions participated. The names and papers of the 19 principal contributors are also listed below, in the order of discussion. The taped discussion that followed the presentation of each paper is now in process of transcription and can be consulted, on request, after June 15 of this year. (Address, Latin American Exhibition office, Yale University Art Gallery, Box 2006, Yale Station, New Haven, Connecticut)

It should be observed that the present catalogue is no more than an introductory sketch of the potential content and opportunities for investigation in the inter-related fields of art and intellectual and social history. The bibliographical opportunities were neither fully explored nor assimilated. The catalogue is, therefore, largely the product of direct observation of works of art rather than systematic study of all literary resources. Furthermore, it should be added that Messrs. Catlin and Grieder are trained in the art historical discipline and, despite their effort to balance this with the requirement of their

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broader perspective, there perhaps is a natural bias in the treatment of the period prefaces in the catalogue toward the interpretive and observational affinities of their own discipline. On the other hand, the graduate research assistants who did a great part of the investigation and basic writing in the biographical section of the catalogue came from such other disciplines as History (Davidson), Spanish Literature (Deredita), and Romance Philology (Faulhaber).

*Intellectual Backgrounds of Artistic Evolution in
Latin America, 1800–1965**

Sr. Guillermo Meneses, Cronista, Ciudad de Caracas, Venezuela
"Cultura Venezolana entre 1800 y 1835"

Prof. Santiago Sebastian, Universidad del Valle, Cali, Colombia
"El Neoclasicismo en Colombia"

Fray José María Vargas, O.P., Convento de Santo Domingo, Quito, Ecuador
"El Ambiente intelectual en la evolución artística en Chile, 1800–1900"
1835"

Arqs. José de Mesa y Teresa Gisbert, Universidad Mayor de San Andrés and
Bolivian National Artistic Patrimony, La Paz, Bolivia
"El Arte en Perú y Bolivia, 1800–1840"

Sr. Luis Luján Muñoz, Guatemala City
"Panorama de las artes plásticas guatemaltecas desde mediados del siglo
VXIII hasta finales del siglo XIX"

Prof. Justino Fernández, Director, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, Uni-
versidad Nacional Autónoma de México
"El Ambiente intelectual de la evolución artística en Mexico, 1800–1910"

Prof. José Luis Romero, Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina
"El Ambiente intelectual de la evolución artística en Argentina y los países
del sudeste de América del Sur, 1835–1910"

Sr. Alfredo Boulton, Caracas, Venezuela
"El Ambiente artístico de Venezuela, mediados del siglo XIX"

Prof. Eugenio Pereira Salas, Universidad de Chile, Santiago
"El Ambiente intelectual en la evolución artística en Chile, 1800–1900"

Sr. José Roberto Teixeira Leite, Rio de Janeiro
"O Ambiente intelectual da evolução artística no Brasil, 1800–1900"

* Unpublished series of essays discussed at symposium held March 2–5, 1965, Yale University.

- Dr. Francisco Stastny, Director, Museo de Arte, Lima, Peru
 "El Ambiente intelectual en la evolución artística en América del Sur, 1910–1940"
- Arq. Lionel Méndez Dávila, Director General de Cultura y Bellas Artes, Guatemala
 "Artes Plásticas en Guatemala, Siglo XX"
- Prof. Ramón Xirau, Universidad de las Americas and Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, D.F.
 "Pintura moderna de México y cultura mexicana"
- Prof. Leopoldo Castedo, Inter-American Development Bank, Washington, D.C.
 "La Nueva Arquitectura en México, Venezuela y Brasil"
- Sra. Marta Traba, Directora, Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá, Colombia
 "Latinoamerica, 1940–1965"
- Mr. Thomas B. Hess, Editor, *Art News*, New York, New York
 "A Tale of two Cities"
- Sr. Fernando de Szyszlo, Artist, Lima, Perú
 "Latin American art and the Latin American artist in the contemporary world"
- Prof. George Kubler, Yale University
 "The History of Art and the History of Ideas"

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