



21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL

BEITRÄGE ZUR
KUNSTGESCHICHTE
UND VISUELLEN KULTUR

#2-2023

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Redaktion der Zeitschrift
21: Inquiries into Art, History, and the Visual –
Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte und visuellen Kultur
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BIBLIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION PUBLISHED BY THE DEUTSCHE NATIONALBIBLIOTHEK

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie;
detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

This journal is published at arthistoricum.net,
Heidelberg University Library 2023, under the Creative
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The electronic open access version of this work is permanently available on
<https://www.arthistoricum.net> and <https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2023.2>

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Cover & Layout © Kaj Lehmann, Zurich/Switzerland.

ISSN 2701-1569 / eISSN 2701-1550



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UNEASY DIALOGUES ACROSS ANCIENT
ART HISTORY, ARCHAEOLOGY, AND
CONTEMPORARY ART PRACTICE
IN THE AMERICAS

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UNEASY DIALOGUES ACROSS ANCIENT ART HISTORY, ARCHAEOLOGY, AND CONTEMPORARY ART PRACTICE IN THE AMERICAS

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#2-2023, pp. 165–188

<https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2023.2.95630>



ABSTRACT

The author lays out the problems and questions that prompted this special issue on “uneasy dialogues” across art history, archaeology, and contemporary art practice in the Americas. The art and visual culture of the Pre-Hispanic Americas is contested terrain. This essay discusses the temptation of “settler moves to innocence” in scholarship and in the contemporary art world. The author traces a surprising opportunity that emerges in a work by artist Gala Porras-Kim that, by accident, provides an ancient Moche captive bottle with conceptual liberation – not through return to bondage in northern Peru, but as escape to Yucatán. This text concludes by introducing the contents of this special issue that take the reader from the desert of New Mexico to the streets of Santiago de Chile.

KEYWORDS

Ancient American art history; Archaeology; Contemporary art; Settler moves to innocence.

I. Introduction

The past exists through conditions of the present, which are always in motion. The tissue that joins pasts and presents can be envisioned as a medium that grows thick and thin, dense and attenuated, as its living substance unfurls, doubles back, and extends again now quickly and then slowly through space and time. That living medium has itself taken historical form. The metaphoric shape of history has precipitated in tangible form through the work of writers, curators, and artists. Within the exhibition of her project *Estas ruinas que ves* at the Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil in Mexico City in 2006–2007, for example, artist Mariana Castillo Deball (born in Mexico City, based in Berlin) plumbed found objects of museological display to call attention to histories of institutional mediation.¹ The artist arranged empty vitrines from museum storage and the hollow modern molds made from iconic Mesoamerican sculptures: the Mexica (or Aztec) goddess Coatlicue unearthed within Mexico City's Zócalo in 1790 and episodically reburied, a jaguar *cuauhxicalli*, a Toltec *chacmool*, and the colossal Olmec head now known as San Lorenzo no. 5. In their installation, the hollow molds appeared like shed skins discarded on the gallery floor. Neither ancient monument nor modern replica, the membrane of the mold constituted the material remains of the modern mediation.

Castillo Deball has continued to work with the subject of monuments, molds, and the series of *objetos incómodos* ("uneasy objects") that she creates in her engagements with them.² In *No solid form can contain you* (2010), which was part of the exhibition *Mariana Castillo Deball: Finding Oneself Outside* at the New Museum in 2019 [Fig. 1], the artist created a different image of Coatlicue. By casting fiberglass surfaces from the mold of the original and piecing them together, leaving external edges as seams, Castillo Deball produced a paradoxical object that appears at once as a cast of the original (yet only an empty shell) and a mold (although it is, in fact, a positive form). The segmented, riveted surface of the deity's body is a reflection on original and copy; on modern technologies of reproduction although in its own time the Pre-Hispanic sculpture was also one of multiples;³ and on the absconding of the original from local communities as the monolith was unearthed, reburied, and cast for

1

Estas ruinas que ves / These Ruins You See (exh. cat. Mexico City, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes), ed. by Mariana Castillo Deball, Berlin/New York 2008, 122–151.

2

Catalina Lozano, *Atrapar el azar*, in: *Amarantus* (exh. cat. Mexico City, Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México), ed. by Mariana Castillo Deball, Mexico City 2021, 13.

3

Elizabeth H. Boone, *The "Coatlicues"* at the Templo Mayor, in: *Ancient Mesoamerica* 10/2, 1999, 189–206.



[Fig. 1]

Mariana Castillo Deball, *No solid form can contain you*, 2010, fiberglass, 250 × 120 × 120 cm. Installation view of Mariana Castillo Deball, *Finding Oneself Outside*, New Museum, New York, 2019. Photograph by Maris Hutchinson / EPW Studio.

foreign display repeatedly since the nineteenth century.⁴ The work may inspire multiple connotations that traverse the temporality of the sculpture's making and remaking: the Mesoamerican warrior-goddess's armor and/or the flayed skin of the *ixiptla* (the divine likeness, the sacrificial victim); encasement as colonial bondage, Catholic extirpation, or scientific "trap";⁵ the manufactured modern Mexican icon echoing Diego Rivera's visions of Coatlicue as an axis of unification for American ancestry and industrialization in Detroit and San Francisco;⁶ or a chrysalis for the emergence of the goddess reborn as contemporary Chicana symbol.⁷ The mediating matrix that joins past and present is neither fossilized nor fibrotic. It can be a generative matrix for emergences of new work and new life, not in spite of the conflicted histories it contains but because of them.

As a matrix for new emergences, the generative medium between past and present is always a space of struggle. It is a space of contestation, colonization, negotiation, appropriation, dispossession, protest, recolonization, reconnection, and reappropriation – both between and within colonial and Indigenous constituencies. So, too, are academic approaches to the past subject to struggle and emergent practices. The writing of history has never been apolitical or devoid of contested claims to authority. This collection of essays is designed to address the alternately conflictive and convivial relationships between art history, archaeology, and art practice in conversations on visual culture in the Americas – emphasizing, but not limited to, the visual and artistic traditions of the ancient past of what is now considered Latin America (i.e., "Pre-Columbian" or "Ancient American" art and visual culture). In the Americas, ancient artistic traditions are pushed and pulled between competing disciplines and between incommensurate claims to knowledge both within the academy and in communities far beyond institutional walls.

One site of academic contestation is located at the intersection of art history and archaeology, where former disciplinary siblings have become increasingly estranged. Ancient American art history first began to take shape – in the United States and in Europe – in the first half of the twentieth century, within primitivism and the demands of the market for "non-Western" art objects. These studies had a debt to anthropology, which had claimed American antiquity

⁴ Jennifer Reynolds-Kaye, *Circulating Casts of the Coatlicue*. Mariana Castillo Deball's Unearthing of the Aztec Earth Goddess's History of Reproduction and Display, in: *Sculpture Journal* 28/3, 2019, 365–380.

⁵ Throughout her work, Castillo Deball has invoked the ideas of *ixiptla*, skin, and traps. See Lozano, *Atrapar el azar*.

⁶ The sculptural form of the goddess, juxtaposed or conflated with the machinery of the stamping press, is a focal point in Diego Rivera's mural cycles *Detroit Industry* (Detroit, 1932–1933) and *Pan-American Unity* (San Francisco, 1940).

⁷ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera. The New Mestiza*, San Francisco 1987.

as its subject in the late nineteenth century and did so with methods born out of racialized evolutionary science. Although many art historians and archaeologists alike have labored to reject the extractive and colonialist origins and ongoing practices of these academic fields – through postcolonial theorization, decolonial rhetoric, the emergence of the field of Indigenous Archaeology, and active community partnerships – the study of the deep American past and its visual traditions remains contested territory.

In most of the American hemisphere, archaeology remains a subdiscipline of anthropology, often to the exclusion of more historicist or humanistic approaches. In Peru, Chile, and many other Latin American nations, the study of the Pre-Hispanic past is the near-exclusive academic domain of archaeologists. With important exceptions, for example in Mexico and Colombia, ancient American art history does not have a substantial programmatic presence within Latin American universities. Although archaeology and art history once shared central methodological concerns of style and seriation, iconography, and epigraphy, their paths have diverged since the latter twentieth century.

In the divide, mistrust and misunderstanding have grown. Art historians may criticize archaeologists for taking images at apparent face value, ignoring their rhetorical capacities, or regarding their makers as less-than their modern Western counterparts. Archaeologists, in turn, may accuse art historians of exclusive focus on objects and aesthetics of elite social echelons. Some archaeologists repudiate research on objects in museum collections that were not brought to light through controlled excavations (i.e., unprovenienced objects); illicit excavations drive the antiquities market and destroy the irreplaceable data that can be obtained from archaeological contexts.

Yet archaeological insistence in object studies on “context” – which itself can be variably defined and is always subject to selection bias⁸ – is not a simple matter. It remains common for archaeologists in Latin America (both foreign and domestic) to recover objects from graves without adequate consultation with and consent from local communities. Such contextualized objects are often celebrated on display, but most often the bones of the dead are relegated indefinitely to boxes in museum storerooms. In some exceptional cases, by contrast – such as in the Museo de las Tumbas Reales de Sipán and the Museo Cao, both in northern Peru – the bodies of the most illustrious dead are displayed surrounded by their funerary goods, as if lying in state within the museum as a modern mausoleum. These Latin American practices are antithetical to widespread US and Canadian prohibitions on museum display of Indigenous human remains. But some Indigenous communities in the Americas

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As Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson have written for art history, “context [...] is a text itself, and it thus consists of signs that require interpretation. What we take to be positive knowledge is the product of interpretive choices.” Bal and Bryson, *Semiotics and Art History*, in: *The Art Bulletin* 73/2, 1991, 175.

proudly embrace the public display of the physical remains of their ancestors.⁹ Laws, ethics, and attitudes toward the treatment and exhibition of the remains of the dead and the objects that accompanied them beyond death do not track the same from nation to nation, or from community to community – just as the terms of Indigenous self-identification can vary dramatically across political and social boundaries.

In some recent work on the “archaeology of art” outside of Americanist settings, archaeologists have been quicker to address contemporary art than they have been to engage with scholarship in ancient art history.¹⁰ In the Americas since at least the 1990s,¹¹ and increasingly in the last decade, contemporary artists have undertaken fruitful collaborations with ancient Americanist and early colonial Latin Americanist art historians.¹² Recent collaborations between artists and museum curators – such as Castillo Deball’s interventions in museums in Mexico, the United States, and Europe – have underscored the value of research to artistic practice and have empowered artists to both critique and raise the stakes of contemporary scholarship. Collaborations that cross all three poles of art history, archaeology, and art practice, however, remain less common.

Are these academic differences irreconcilable? Must scholarship on the past now be seen through a fractured lens of disciplinary dealignment? To what extent do scholarly disagreements mirror political differences in the world beyond university halls and academic publications? And to what extent do they reveal their irrelevance to the lived experience of communities now and in the past? What, historically, have been the roles of modern artists, architects, designers, and other makers in joining – or further estranging – divergent perspectives on the past [Fig. 2]? What roles can contemporary artists – as both practitioners and intellectuals – play in bridging the academic gap between ancient American art history and archaeology, or in forging their own histories that leave the petty squabbles of academia by the wayside? Is it possible to imag-

9

Lisa Overholtzer and Juan R. Argueta, Letting Skeletons out of the Closet. The Ethics of Displaying Ancient Mexican Human Remains, in: *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 24/5, 2018, 508–530.

10

See, for example, Colin Renfrew, Chris Gosden and Elizabeth DeMarrais (eds.), *Substance, Memory, Display. Archaeology and Art*, Cambridge 2004; Ian Alden Russell and Andrew Cochrane (eds.), *Art and Archaeology. Collaborations, Conversations, Criticisms*, New York 2014.

11

The Chicano Codices. Encountering Art of the Americas (exh. cat. San Francisco, Mexican Museum), ed. by Marcos Sanchez-Tranquilino, San Francisco 1992.

12

California-based artist Sandy Rodriguez’s engagement with art historian Diana Magaloni Kerpel’s scholarship on Bernardino de Sahagún’s “Florentine Codex” is a foundational part of the former’s creation of the Codex Rodríguez-Mondragón (2017–). See Ananda Cohen-Aponte and Ella Maria Diaz, Painting Prophecy. Mapping a Polyphonic Chicana Codex Tradition in the Twenty-First Century, in: *English Language Notes* 57/2, 2019, 22–42.



[Fig. 2]

Sofía Táboas, *Dorso*, 2011, Venetian tile, steel, cement, and brick, 90 × 200 × 120 cm (35.43 × 78.74 × 47.24 in). Installation view at Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil, Mexico City, 2011. © Sofía Táboas and Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil, Mexico City. Photo by Agustín Estrada.

ine an integrated form of deep historical study, wherein distinct perspectives on the past can be brought into symphonic company? Since the arts have fundamentally shaped how American antiquity and its histories have been envisioned, artistic practice offers itself as one potential site of scrutiny, and possibly reconciliation, of the friction between academic disciplines and public imagination. But are contemporary art and design not also dependent on neoliberal social and economic orders? In what conditions have they escaped those dependencies?

For this special issue, I invited some of the most creative thinkers I know to address the conflicts – as well as the possibilities of productive intersections – between art history, archaeology, and art practice in their own work and as they view the dynamics of this triangulation at large. Based in the United States, Peru, and Chile, the contributing authors are art historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, curators, philosophers, and artists of varied backgrounds and subject positions. The terrain of their subjects ranges even farther – from rugged landscapes of northern New Mexico; to ivied university campuses; to the museums of Lima; to Maya Revival architecture and its contemporary reclamations in Los Angeles; to design studios of Mexico City and digital space; and the Chilean *estallido social* (“social explosion”) that ignited in the streets of Santiago in late 2019. Our conversations on these topics have unfolded in writing and through video calls, in both English and Spanish, since October 2020, to produce the collection of texts that appears in this issue.

II. Decolonization, Desire, Discomfort

In a 2019 essay, I suggested that “in its future tense”, Pre-Columbian art history “bears significant decolonizing potential”.¹³ Four years later, I am not so sanguine. At least, I am not so sanguine about the capacity of academic projects, especially those developed within the neoliberal institutions of the university, to decolonize much of anything since “to truly decolonize an institution or self would entail a radical undoing”.¹⁴ So-called decolonizing historical projects that expand, revise, diversify, or critique institutions and traditions based in colonialism are distinct from – and should not be conflated with – the actual work of repatriating Indigenous land and life. In non-Indigenous hands, as Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang have so cogently written, decolonial metaphors – however well-intentioned and however important as historical critique – more often than not ultimately serve the interests of “settler futurity”, through

¹³

Lisa Trever, Pre-Columbian Art History in the Age of the Wall, in: *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture* 1/1, 2019, 100.

¹⁴

Renée Green (quoting Howie Chen) in conversation with Iman Issa, in: Huey Copeland, Hal Foster, David Joselit, and Pamela M. Lee, A Questionnaire on Decolonization, in: *October* 174, 2020, 3–125, at 59.

the satisfaction of settler desires and “settler moves to innocence”.¹⁵ And yet, the decolonial rhetoric that Tuck and Yang warned against more than a decade ago is actively proliferating in many areas of academic scholarship including Latin American and Latinx art history and visual studies.¹⁶

As a white, US-born person descended from European immigrants of modest means who fled economic and political hardships between the mid-nineteenth century and the 1920s; who was born outside of New York City and grew up in a rural upstate town that – as the setting of James Fenimore Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales* (1823–1841) – was once a literary cradle of North American settler mythologies;¹⁷ and who now occupies a privately endowed position in a university named allegorically for Columbus, in a place that still bears an ancestral Lenape name (Manahatta, the island of hills), within a city that has become one of the most powerful centers of global capitalism, it would certainly be a conspicuous move to innocence to continue to suggest, even obliquely and despite my best intentions and critical commitments, that my academic work is commensurate with decolonization. It is more useful and surely more honest to sit with the discomfort of one’s own settler position than to try to elide it; to resist facile narratives of innocence or white saviorhood that insidiously create yet further colonization; to “stay with the trouble”;¹⁸ to acknowledge the limits of what academic work on the history of *ante*-colonial art of the Americas can and cannot faithfully achieve; and to fortify the anti-colonial commitments that it can nonetheless serve. I maintain that nuanced academic study of the ancient and Indigenous artistry in the Americas, while not a “decolonizing project”, is a valuable critical project,¹⁹

¹⁵

Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor, in: *Decolonization. Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1/1, 2012, 1–40. In their words, a “settler move to innocence” can be explained as “a settler desire to be made innocent, to find some mercy or relief in face of the relentlessness of settler guilt and haunting”. Ibid., 9.

¹⁶

Copeland, Foster, Joselit, and Lee, A Questionnaire on Decolonization; Catherine Grant and Dorothy Price, Decolonizing Art History, in: *Art History* 43/1, 2020, 8–66.

¹⁷

“The *Tales* are credited with the constructions of the vanishing Indian, the resourceful Frontiersman, and the degenerate Negro: the pivotal triad of archetypes that forms the basis for an American national literature.” Tuck and Yang, Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor, 15. Cooperstown, New York has been touted as “America’s Most Perfect Village”, which is an image deliberately cultivated through long-term private patronage. See Nicholas Fox Weber, *The Clarks of Cooperstown*, New York 2007. The settler history that haunts its idyllic appearance surfaces ominously in Lauren Groff’s novel *The Monsters of Templeton*, New York 2008.

¹⁸

Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Durham, NC 2016.

¹⁹

Despite my skepticism toward what can be superficial “decolonial” rhetoric within academia, I find useful Zehra Jumabhoy’s wish to “de-colonialize” art history as a “discipline (with all its contradictions) [that] remains a space to be argued for”. Zehra Jumabhoy, responding to questions posed by the authors in Grant and Price, Decolonizing Art History, 31. In her words: “De-colonializing art history is about letting counter-examples disturb

“especially in the form of pedagogy and outreach”,²⁰ and all the more still, now in the early 2020s, as xenophobia has grown even more intense worldwide. This set of essays continues in that spirit, in its attention to conversations across academia and contemporary art practice that “open discussions about appropriation and authenticity – from the works of early twentieth-century modernists to contemporary Latinx artist-activists – and about competing claims to Pre-Columbian art and the authority to interpret and even reinvent its meanings in the present”.²¹

Modern and contemporary artists have long invoked the forms of ancient Latin American art in their own work especially at critical times in social, political, and art history. These have included nineteenth-century nationalism projects within Mexico, Peru, and elsewhere; early-twentieth-century primitivism and modern design in the United States and Europe; 1930s Mexican *mestizaje*; the Chicano Movement since the 1970s; and critical reflections on the Columbian Quincentenary in the early 1990s.²² The upswing in the number of recent exhibitions and gallery shows of works by contemporary artists and curators who are reengaging Pre-Hispanic and early modern Indigenous art of Latin America in their practices suggests that we are now within another of these critical periods of interest. A significant rise of Latinx and Indigenous art in the museum world was driven by exhibitions supported by the Getty’s *Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA* initiative in California (2017–2018) and marked in New York by the exhibition *Pacha, Llaqta, Wasichay: Indigenous Space, Modern Architecture, New Art* (2018), curated by Marcela Guerrero with Alana Hernandez at the Whitney Museum. When I first composed this essay during the last days of 2021, several such exhibitions and projects were on view: Denver Art Museum’s *ReVisión: Art in the Americas* (showing ancient to contemporary works, principally from the permanent collections); LACMA’s *Mixpantli: Contemporary Echoes* (a companion to *Mixpantli: Space, Time, and the Indigenous Origins of Mexico*); Castillo Deball’s retrospective *Amarantus* at the Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC) in Mexico City; the temporary *Intervenciones contemporáneas* installations within the permanent galleries of the Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI); as well as the sound installation *El eterno retorno. Interacciones prehispánicas* in the adjacent Parque de la Exposición; *Sandy*

canonical facts: it is a refusal to allow the myths of Euro-American art history to be taken at face value.” Ibid., 32.

²⁰

Treuer, Pre-Columbian Art History, 103.

²¹

Ibid.

²²

Much has been written about these histories. See, for example, Barbara Braun, *Pre-Columbian Art and the Post-Columbian World. Ancient American Sources of Modern Art*, New York 1993; Stacie G. Widdifield, *The Embodiment of the National in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexican Painting*, Tucson, AZ 1996; Mary K. Coffey, *How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture. Murals, Museums, and the Mexican State*, Durham, NC 2012; Laura E. Pérez, *Chicana Art. The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities*, Durham, NC 2007.

Rodríguez in Isolation at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art in Fort Worth, Texas; and Gala Porras-Kim's *Precipitation for an Arid Landscape* in the Amant Foundation galleries in Brooklyn. These exhibitions represented close collaborations between artists and curators within the institutional spaces of art museums, universities, galleries, and private foundations as well as the centering of social and ethical questions rooted in historical research.²³ At the same time, gallery interest in the works of contemporary Indigenous Amazonian artists – such as Sheroanawe Hakihiwe (Yanomami), Lily Sandoval Panduro (Shipibo-Konibo), Celia Vásquez Yui (Shipibo-Konibo), and Rember Yahuarcani (Uitoto) – has been gaining astonishing speed, even as millenarian traditions have at times been, perplexingly, shown under the title of “outsider art”,²⁴ recalling the central problematic of Castillo Deball's *Finding Oneself Outside*.

In her recent work, Gala Porras-Kim (born Bogotá, active Los Angeles) unsettles institutional practices of archaeological excavation, removal, and curation of the remains of the dead and the objects that once resided within tombs, temples, and living landscapes.²⁵ In *Proposal for the Reconstituting of Ritual Elements for the Sun Pyramid at Teotihuacan* (2019), Porras-Kim petitioned Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia to place her replicas of two monoliths within the empty spaces left by the removal of the originals from the temple. In another work – *Leaving the Institution through Cremation Is Easier than as a Result of a Deaccession Policy* (2021) – she wrote a formal letter to the director of the National Museum of Brazil, pleading for him to release the bones of “Luzia”, one of the oldest known human inhabitants of the Americas, which had been burned in the 2018 museum inferno, to allow what remained of her body to rest in peace instead of kept as an object of science. Working as a “spiritual coroner”,²⁶ Porras-Kim asks questions rarely posed in Americanist archaeology: What do the dead now desire? Can one litigate on behalf of Mesoamerican divinities? Who will defend the property rights of the rain?

The latter question underlies Porras-Kim's series *Precipitation for an Arid Landscape* (2021), wherein she symbolically returns to the Maya rain deity the precious objects that Harvard archaeologists

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Many recent exhibitions on these themes have been supported by major institutions and universities with substantial private funding, unlike most earlier Chicano/a projects of art making and social critique.

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Will Heinrich, *The Outsider Art Fair 2020: 7 Must-See Exhibits*, in: *New York Times*, January 17, 2020.

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Gala Porras-Kim, *Artist Talk*, Harvard Radcliffe Institute, September 25, 2019; Carlos Museum, Emory University, *In This Moment. Dr. Megan E. O'Neil, Carlos Museum Faculty Curator, Speaks to Artist Gala Porras-Kim*, October 6, 2020.

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Travis Diehl, *Spiritual Coroner: Gala Porras-Kim*, in: *Carla (Contemporary Art Review Los Angeles)* 20, 2020, 4–11.

dredged out of the Cenote Sagrado of Chichen Itza more than a century ago and that are today held in that university's Peabody Museum of Ethnology and Archaeology. Porrás-Kim interrogates the institutional history of the expedition and the legal and ethical questions that underlay it. Through multiple panels depicting precious objects made of greenstone, copper, gold, and copal – as well as human and animal bones – the artist endeavors to return their likenesses to Chaac [Fig. 3]. It is notable that she advocates on behalf of the divine authority and not the possible desires of the people whose bodies were cast (one might assume, unwillingly) into the cenote together with the riches they wore. Porrás-Kim invites the divinity's presence into the gallery – channeled through a slab-like sculpture of copal mixed with museum dust that is irrigated with local rainwater – to reclaim this pictorialized property. Throughout these works and others, Porrás-Kim renders symbolically the otherwise impossible returns of museum collections – returned to the ground, restored to the pyramid, submerged once more in the watery depths of the cenote – that exceed even the most liberal policy proposals for return, restitution, and repatriation.²⁷

Public support for the return of collections to the nations or communities from which cultural objects were taken appears to be growing stronger day by day, accelerated by France's 2018 report on the restitution of African cultural heritage.²⁸ Of course, the physical return of collections to a nation or community is not an undoing of colonial history. These acts do not bring back the dead. They do not recuperate the scattered bones of long-ago plundered graves. "The trauma [...] cannot be undone."²⁹ Nor do return, restitution, and repatriation signify the same from nation to nation, community to community within a nation, or even from object to object. Closer attention can draw out complications in narratives of national return.

Consider, for example, a Moche ceramic stirrup-spout bottle that was made on the north coast of Peru around 500–850 CE and that today also resides in Harvard's Peabody Museum [Fig. 4].³⁰

27

Pierre Losson usefully differentiates between "return" (return to a nation of objects that were removed prior to international conventions or national laws governing the protection of cultural heritage), "restitution" (return to a nation of objects that were removed after the implementation of such conventions and laws), and "repatriation" (return of objects to communities of origin, either within or across national boundaries). Pierre Losson, *The Return of Cultural Heritage to Latin America. Nationalism, Policy, and Politics in Colombia, Mexico, and Peru*, London 2022, 3–5.

28

Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, *Rapport sur la restitution du patrimoine culturel africain. Vers une nouvelle éthique relationnelle*, November 2018.

29

Aaron M. Hyman and Dana Leibsohn, Washing the Archive, in: *Early American Literature* 55/2, 2020, 422.

30

The accession card in the museum's registration documentation indicates that it came from either the Virú or Chicama Valleys of northern Peru. I thank Laura Costello for her remote research assistance during the pandemic.



[Fig. 3]

Gala Porras-Kim, *Precipitation for an Arid Landscape*, 2021, copal, dust from the Peabody Museum storage, institutional structure for rainwater; 254 Offerings for the Rain at the Peabody Museum; 615 Offerings for the Rain at the Peabody Museum; 931 Offerings for the Rain at the Peabody Museum; 2576 Offerings for the Rain at the Peabody Museum, 2021, color pencil and Flashe paint on paper. Exhibition view at the Amant Foundation, Brooklyn, December 2021. Photograph by author.



[Fig. 4]

Unnamed Moche maker (northern Peru), Stirrup-spout bottle in the shape of a puma attacking a nude prisoner with foreigner face paint, ca. 500–850, ceramic, 27 × 21 × 19 in. Gift of the Friends of the Museum, 1916. Courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 16-62-30/F727.

The body of the bottle was sculpted into an image of two figures. A seated man, stripped of his clothing, the red glans of his penis seen between his knees and a rope cord around his neck, is attacked by a puma that prepares to sink claws and fangs into the captive flesh. Within the visual traditions of Moche art, the puma was a powerful predator that served as allegory for martial domination as well as sacrificial practices. The puma's victim looks skyward, his eyes rolled back and mouth agape. The forelock of his hair and the face paint affiliate the man with neighboring communities in the northern highlands.³¹

The museum purchased the bottle in 1916 from anthropology alumnus Julio C. Tello, born in Huarochirí, Peru, who had acquired collections on behalf of Harvard. Tello has been widely hailed as “Americas first indigenous archaeologist”,³² although the adjective Indigenous (*indígena*) is one that many Peruvian communities descended from the Incas and other Pre-Hispanic groups have historically rejected and continue to avoid.³³ As the art market today increasingly celebrates the works of Indigenous artists, it is important to remember that that descriptor is not one that has been universally embraced by all communities with millennia-long histories in the Americas. Although some regard Tello as the authoritative prototype for the modern, scientific archaeologist in Peru, his own attitudes toward the extraction and sale of antiquities were, at least early in his career, ambiguous.³⁴ Tello was a vocal critic of grave robbers (*huaqueros*), but we know that he did not acquire this bottle through the kind of controlled excavation that he espoused and for which he has become known.

Like the history of this ancient Moche bottle's acquisition, the implications of its hypothetical repatriation are also paradoxical. If the bottle were returned to Peru, it would become property of the nation. It might end up in the new Museo Nacional (MUNA), near

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Janusz Z. Wołoszyn, *Enemy – Stranger – Neighbour. The Image of the Other in Moche Culture*, Oxford 2021, 51–52. See also *Moche y sus vecinos. Reconstruyendo identidades* (exh. cat. Lima, Museo de Arte de Lima), ed. by Cecilia Pardo and Julio Rucabado, Lima 2016.

³²

Richard L. Burger (ed.), *The Life and Writings of Julio C. Tello. America's First Indigenous Archaeologist*, Iowa City 2009. Tello's role in South American archaeology is still intransigently racialized in its celebration: “A full-blooded native Peruvian *serrano*, a highlander, he was a true genius.” Jeffrey Quilter, *The Ancient Central Andes*, Abingdon, Oxon/New York 2014, 14. Tello himself often encouraged this narration of his identity. Christopher Heaney, *Seeing Like an Inca. Julio C. Tello, Indigenous Archaeology, and Pre-Columbian Trepanation in Peru*, in: Ned Blackhawk and Isaiah Lorado Wilner (eds.), *Indigenous Visions. Rediscovering the World of Franz Boas*, New Haven, CT/London 2018, 344–376.

³³

Marisol de la Cadena, *Indigenous Mestizos. The Politics of Race and Culture in Cuzco, Peru, 1919–1991*, Durham, NC 2000; Frank Salomon, *Unethnic Ethnohistory. On Peruvian Peasant Historiography and Ideas of Autochthony*, in: *Ethnohistory* 49/3, 2002, 475–506; Walther Maradiegue, *Lo Moche en el museo. Etnicidad y neoliberalismo en la costa norte peruana*, in: Gisela Cánepa Koch and Leonor Lamas Zoeger (eds.), *Épicas del neoliberalismo. Subjetividades emprendedoras y ciudadanías precarias en el Perú*, Lima 2020, 199–216.

³⁴

Raúl H. Asensio, *Señores del pasado. Arqueólogos, museos y huaqueros en el Perú*, Lima 2018, 122–124.

Pachacamac, some 650 kilometers south of its likely origin place. Conceivably, one day archaeologists might be able to identify the original site of the bottle's origins through chemical analyses of paste or paint. Perhaps even – as we extend this mental exercise – the bottle could be repatriated to the north coast to the very Moche *huaca* or even to the specific tomb where it may have been laid at the side of the deceased (their long-ago discarded bones somehow recovered); or to the palace within which it had once sat; or to the ceramics workshop where its image was molded, painted, burnished, detailed by hand, and fired. But would the reversal of the object's voyage to its precise place of origin constitute the decolonization (real or rhetorical) of its human *subject* – the abject figure of the highland man in bondage? This imagined relay of repossession would return the subject's likeness back into the hands of his captors.

By a historical accident of museum documentation, this bottle and another burnished blackware Moche prisoner bottle sneaked like stowaways into Porras-Kim's artistic return of the Harvard objects to the Cenote Sagrado.³⁵ These two vessels – the latter collected decades after the former³⁶ – had been photographed in the Peabody Museum in the early 1980s, together with a copper disc from the Cenote Sagrado [Fig. 5],³⁷ and thus entered the object files that the artist consulted in her research for *342 Offerings for the Rain at the Peabody Museum*, in the series *Precipitation for an Arid Landscape* [Fig. 6]. In her rendering of the man beset by the puma, Porras-Kim omitted his genitals, not easily discernible in the low-res digital photograph in the museum file, removing the humiliation of his bodily exposure. The unintentional reappropriation of these Moche bottles to the Maya divinity creates a surprising detour for thinking through their imagined return. Might these ceramic prisoners have *preferred* this escape to Yucatán over repatriation to Peru? If we were to ask what these objects “want”³⁸ – that now-common rhetorical question that is especially fraught in colonial settings – it might be that what these ceramic prisoners *want* is not return, but liberation.

This conjectural rumination on subaltern objects' possible desires for escape is not an argument against return or repatria-

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I thank Gala Porras-Kim, Hugo Ikehara-Tsukayama, and Rachel Chamberlin for conversations on this particular happenstance, which I only became aware of late in the writing of this essay.

36

The blackware vessel is catalogued in the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University as 46-77-30/4980. Sam Lothrop collected it in Peru on behalf of the museum in the early 1940s. It was reportedly from the Hacienda Sausal in the Chicama Valley.

37

The photograph [Fig. 5] is attributed to museum staff photographer Hillel Burger. Laura Costello, email message to the author, March 9, 2022.

38

Martha Buskirk, *The Ethics of Dust*, in: *Artforum International* 60/7, 2022, 146–153.



[Fig. 5]

Late twentieth-century photograph of two Moche ceramic bottles from Peru on either side of a metal disk from the Cenote Sagrado of Chichen Itza, Mexico. Courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 16-62-30/F727, 10-71-20/C7412A, 46-77-30/4980.



[Fig. 6]

Gala Porras-Kim, 342 Offerings for the Rain at the Peabody Museum, 2021, color pencil and Flashe paint on paper. Photograph by author.

tion. Nor am I suggesting that Moche vessels should actually be tossed into cenotes. Rather, this example illustrates how repatriation in itself is neither the end nor the undoing of colonial processes. Objects like these have navigated the complexities of political worlds for millennia prior to their overseas removal and curation in the modern era. As national patrimony, works from internal subaltern traditions of deeper antiquity retain a status as colonized objects.³⁹ But there are hopeful prospects for anti-colonial forward motion. Resisting settler moves to innocence – be they individual or institutional⁴⁰ – requires “unsettling”⁴¹ what may be satisfying narratives that gloss over inconvenient complications. Forward motion requires uneasy conversations that keep differences, difficulties, and discomfort productively at the fore.

III. *Diálogos incómodos*. From the Desert to the Streets

The articles in this special issue begin in the desert of New Mexico and end with explosions in the streets of Santiago. Through these pages, the authors move widely through space within what is now the United States and Latin America: from penitent landscapes, into museums and institutional histories, to move again away from universities and museums to site-based installations, design studios, community spaces, digital environments, public landscapes, and city streets in revolt. As such, matters of place are central to each article. The articles are followed by a conversation (“debate”) in Lima, Peru between a curator, artist, and philosopher on the meaning of ancient American art and aesthetics now.⁴²

Several themes run through these essays, although none are absolute. As guest editor, I encouraged the authors to take their contributions in whichever directions they felt called, without prescribing a particular pathway or vocabulary, without mandating a common destination, and without trying to package the results into a tidy bundle. My opening academic questions generated respon-

³⁹

On the internal dislocation of monuments as national patrimony, see Sandra Rozental, *On the Nature of Patrimonio*. “Cultural Property” in Mexican Contexts, in: Jane Anderson and Haidy Geismar (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Cultural Property*, Abingdon, Oxon 2017, 237–257.

⁴⁰

The upswing in major institutional support for reflexive contemporary art projects coincides with a time of increasing public support for repatriation and rewritings of master narratives of art history. Without substantial reform of policies and practices, however, such support can be seen as institutional “settler moves to innocence” that defer critical responsibility for change onto artists and temporary exhibitions, while maintaining the corporate status quo. For a parallel discussion of museum interventions by contemporary artists with African collections, see Ugochukwu-Smooth C. Nzewi, responding to questions posed by the authors in Copeland, Foster, Joselit, and Lee, *A Questionnaire on Decolonization*, 90–93.

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Tuck and Yang, *Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor*, 3.

⁴²

I thank Catherine Nuckols for her assistance with this issue’s cover design by Kaj Lehmann, which is based on numeration used in the Post-Classic Maya *Dresden Codex*.

ses that are as political and personal as they are scholarly. The responses are neither formulaic nor forced. They do not settle into a single conclusion or resolve with orchestral satisfaction. Some stay close to the initial prompt. Others touch upon it only obliquely. In this collection of texts, the reader will find neither easy answers nor ready consensus on the questions of disciplinary relationships between art and archaeology, the roles of contemporary art making, or competing claims to the past and its visual traditions. None of the authors settle for simple decolonial metaphors. Rather, in their texts, one can sense what Tuck and Yang call an “ethic of incommensurability”. That ethic, “which guides moves that unsettle innocence, stands in contrast to aims of reconciliation, which motivate settler moves to innocence”.⁴³ Throughout these pages, the reader will find shared emphases on image making and mediation; aesthetics and value; collecting and curation; the shifting semiotics and politics of appropriation and reappropriation; the sensoriality of embodied experiences through movement and gesture; effects of dislocation and dispossession; and artistic processes over the physical products of art.

In the first essay, “Catholic Kinaestheology”, archaeologists Darryl Wilkinson and Severin Fowles present a study of Catholic images in rock art made by penitent pilgrims along the Via Crucis within the New Mexican desert in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Through discussion of embodied practices of religious image making – both pictorial and gestural – as well as their later prohibition (iconoclasm as well as “chiroclasm”), Wilkinson and Fowles offer us a rich discussion of image making as religious action, which they interpret within a frame of “kinaes-theology”. In “Some Thoughts on Latin American Art History in the United States. Colleges and Collections, 1870–2021”, art historian Mary Miller takes the reader through a tour of the little-known history of Latin American art history on US college and university campuses from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. Miller reveals the essential roles of collecting and photography in early university instruction – more central to art history than to other disciplines that were better served by the printing press – which has been revolutionized by new technologies for reproducing works of art. In the next essay, “Ritual Object, Funerary Offering, Work of Art. The Place of the Pre-Columbian Past in the History of Art in Peru”, archaeologist and curator Cecilia Pardo guides the reader through a parallel account of early collecting and display of ancient Andean art in Lima. This important text appears here in translation from the 2020 Spanish original.⁴⁴ The projects that Pardo and her collea-

⁴³

Tuck and Yang, *Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor*, 35.

⁴⁴

Cecilia Pardo Grau, *Objeto ritual, ofrenda funeraria, obra de arte. El lugar del pasado precolombino en la historia del arte en el Perú*, in: Marco Curatola Petrocchi, Cécile Michaud, Joanne Pillsbury, and Lisa Trever (eds.), *El arte antes de la historia. Para una historia del arte andino antiguo*, Lima 2020, 213–233.

gues at the MALI produced in the form of temporary exhibitions and permanent galleries – unknown to readers who have not had the good fortune to visit Lima multiple times in recent years – manifest the potential for collaborative partnership (*convivencia*) between archaeology and art history. In the service of the public, she reminds us, the “old, false opposition between art and archaeology” is already obsolete.

The issue continues with “*Ch’u Mayaa* and the Appropriation of the Past”, in which filmmaker and writer Jesse Lerner discusses Frank Lloyd Wright’s disavowal of creative debts to ancient American architecture and contemporary artist Clarissa Tossin’s (born Porte Alegre, Brazil, active Los Angeles) reappropriation of Wright’s Hollyhock House. Working with dancer and choreographer Crystal Sepúlveda, Tossin cites the imagery and gestures of ancient Maya art in their reclamation of Wright’s Maya Revival building (built on ancestral Chumash land that is now the globalized landscape of southern California) on behalf of ancient America. Lerner’s essay draws out the layers of appropriation, reappropriation, and disappropriation – the latter term borrowed from the writing of Cristina Rivera Garza – in the works of Wright, Tossin, and Lerner’s own collaboration with Mariana Castillo Deball and others in the project *Never Odd or Even*. In “Contemporaneity and Composition in Mexican Design”, anthropologist and curator of design Robert J. Kett puts to work critical terms from Paul Rabinow (contemporaneity) and Bruno Latour (compositionism) to explore contemporary debates over design, heritage, and public culture in Mexico. He engages ethnographically with a series of cases that include recent changes to Mexican copyright law on Indigenous design as well as the work of contemporary studios. Intended to protect Indigenous makers, the recent law would place management of design as cultural property in the hands of the state. As practitioners reckon with “design’s own positionality” in today’s environment, others have challenged the state’s role in the management of official culture through explorations of *lo popular* as well as dematerialized digital spaces where popular appropriation is positively encouraged as a means of resisting the modern order of twentieth-century cultural policy.

The articles continue with “‘Desobediencia es habitar la revuelta’. Revisitando la rebelión de los artefactos en el Chile del siglo XXI” (“‘To Disobey Is to Inhabit Revolt’. Revisiting the Revolt of the Objects in Twenty-First-Century Chile”), by archaeologist, anthropologist, art historian, and photographer Flora Vilches. In this powerful piece, Vilches takes the reader with her into the streets of Santiago during the massive social uprisings that exploded in October 2019. She frames the role of “disobedient” objects in the hands of protestors revolting against the neoliberal capitalist order as a contemporary version of the ancient Moche “Revolt of the Objects” – a pan-American myth of things turning against their masters during times of crisis. In the disobedience of the *estallido social* – the collective outrage, the risk of serious violence at the hands of the police,

the transformations of urban landscapes, and the largely anonymous visual production that widely invoked Mapuche symbols and history – Vilches describes decolonizing acts that do not rest upon metaphor. As an archaeologist, she sees the events in Chile as an opportunity to “archaeologically explore one of the failed projects of capitalist modernity” (“explorar arqueológicamente uno de los proyectos fallidos de la modernidad capitalista”) through the “constant succession of ephemeral events at a vertiginous pace that left material traces of very little permanence” (“constante sucesión de eventos efímeros a ritmo vertiginoso que dejaban rastros materiales de muy baja permanencia”). As an art historian, she observes how quickly the curation of those visual and material remains of the uprisings began, what was marked and selected for preservation, and how those preservationist filters often served to reinscribe social inequality. Invoking a frequent phrase from the uprising (“Mata a tu paco interior” [Kill your inner cop]), which reminds us that the power of the state has the potential to operate through each of us to perpetuate inequality, Vilches insists that we remember that “we always make choices, and for each thing we select, we always leave something else by the way” (“siempre hacemos elecciones y, por todo aquello que seleccionamos, siempre dejamos algo de lado”). In challenging internalized prejudices and blind spots, she suggests, the disobedience of the revolt might become an enduring way of life.

The articles are followed by an important conversation (“debate”) on this issue’s central questions between Ulla Holmquist – director of the Museo Larco in Lima – and artist Kukuli Velarde (born Cusco, active Philadelphia) with art philosopher Carolina Luna. Their dialogical contribution “Encontrar nuestra propia estética. Una conversación acerca de los límites de las disciplinas y las posibilidades de lo ‘precolombino’” (To Find Our Own Aesthetic. A Conversation about the Limits of Disciplines and the Possibilities of the “Pre-Columbian”) contains cogent critiques of both academic disciplines – archaeology for its othering, taxonomic stasis; art history for its Eurocentrism – as well as the coloniality of the university at large. Out of the critique emerges a highly compelling discussion of the possibilities that they see in ancient American art for the rediscovery of identity and an autochthonous “aesthetic” – by which they mean beauty but also a profound sense of knowledge, ethics, and self-possessed worth – as anti-colonial practice in art making, curation, and education. They call for recognition of aesthetic continuity – not as stasis of form or meaning, but as a continuity of the dynamic force of aesthetic creativity – as “loving self-recognition” (“auto-reconocimiento cariñoso”).

When I invited these authors to comment on the state of the art/archaeology divide and to discuss how contemporary art and design practice might intervene to open new avenues for thinking through the ancient American past, I expected that we might come away with an expanded set of best practices for interdisciplinary scholarship in the twenty-first century. That is not what has hap-

pened. At least not as I had envisioned it. The authors took the prompt and they turned it over, considered it, redirected it, wrote through it, plowed past it, and at times exploded it. What has emerged instead is an exceedingly thoughtful and thought-provoking collection of texts that are more unruly and, as a result, far more meaningful.

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ARTICLES BEITRÄGE

CATHOLIC KINAESTHETICS

Darryl Wilkinson & Severin Fowles

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
#2-2023, pp. 191–208

<https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2023.2.96030>



ABSTRACT

The study of Christian art is often synonymous with the study of Christian images. Yet in this article we adopt a different approach; examining a particular corpus of Christian art not as a collection of images, so much as the outcome of bodily gestures. Specifically, we analyze an extensive collection of rock art from the deserts of northern New Mexico as traces left behind by generations of Catholics, particularly the members of a lay fraternity known as the Penitentes. These penitents sought to manifest their piety through the pain and suffering incurred in the repetitive pecking of crosses onto basalt boulders. Even though the result of their actions was an image, we argue that privileging an iconographic analysis of such art fails to adequately capture the kinaesthetic theology that underlay its production.

KEYWORDS

Rock Art; Catholicism; Kinaesthetics; Penitentes; Descansos.

I. Introduction

For Catholics, the *Via Crucis* or “Way of the Cross” has long been an important generator of devotional imagery, particularly in the colonial Americas where *Via Crucis* iconography – sometimes created by Indigenous artists – has drawn significant art historical attention.¹ The term references Christ’s final journey through the city of Jerusalem, culminating in his execution and burial, and is traditionally divided into fourteen narrative beats, referred to as “stations”. Since antiquity, Christians have sought to walk in Christ’s footsteps along this redemptive path,² and prior to the seventeenth century, they did so through outdoor processions in which each station was marked by a simple cross.³ Today, we are more likely to encounter the *Via Crucis* inside a Catholic church and to find stations marked by iconographically rich paintings, carvings, or prints, each labeled with a Roman numeral and arranged around the walls of the nave. This variant of the *Via Crucis* is comparatively modern. In 1686, Pope Innocent XI granted the Franciscan Order the exclusive right to establish the Stations of the Cross inside their churches. He even permitted the Franciscans to grant indulgences (remissions from punishment in purgatory) to those who prayerfully processed through the stations,⁴ something the Church had previously only offered to pilgrims undertaking the arduous journey to sacred places in the Levant. In this sense, performing the *Via Crucis* in a Franciscan church and long-distance pilgrimages to the Holy Land became theologically equivalent.⁵

Despite the close attention paid to the devotional icons of the *Via Crucis*, its basic logic is more *kinaesthetic* than iconographic. We use this term in the sense put forward by the archaeologist

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On the California missions, see Norman Neuerburg, The Indian *Via Crucis* from Mission San Fernando. An Historical Exposition, in: *Southern California Quarterly* 79/3, 1997, 329–382, and George Philips Harwood, Indian Paintings from Mission San Fernando. An Historical Interpretation, in: *The Journal of California Anthropology* 3/1, 1976, 96–100. For a broader discussion, see Yve Chavez, Remarkable Native Paintings. Indigeneity and Exhibitions of California Mission Art, in: *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture* 2/3, 2020, 99–108. For Mexico, see John F. Swaller, Fr. Agustín de Vetancurt. The “*Via Crucis* en Mexicano”, in: *The Americas* 74/2, 2017, 119–137.

2

Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem and other holy places first becomes common during the AD 300s; see Pierre Maraval, The Earliest Phase of Christian Pilgrimage in the Near East (before the 7th Century), in: *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 56, 2002, 63–74.

3

See Neuerburg, Indian *Via Crucis*, 332–338.

4

See Anthony Wallenstein, St. Leonard of Port Maurice and Propagation of Devotion to the Way of the Cross, in: *Franciscan Studies* 12/1, 1952, 47–70.

5

In 1731, Pope Clement XII gave permission for stations to be set up in non-Franciscan churches, providing they were under the aegis of a Franciscan friar. The Franciscans’ exclusive right over the *Via Crucis* was not rescinded until 1857. For the historical development of the *Via Crucis* tradition, see Sandro Sticca, The *Via Crucis*. Its Historical, Spiritual and Devotional Context, in: *Mediaevalia* 15, 1989, 93–126.

Chris Tilley, who defines kinaesthetics as “the study of the active effects of imagery in relation to the human body, its balance, effort, postures, and gestures”.⁶ A kinaesthetic approach does not mean that we ignore images, but it does encourage us to rethink their analytical privilege. Rather than focusing on questions of iconographic content, stylistic elements, or critical reception, the image instead becomes a kind of road sign or set of directives in a field of significant bodily habits and movements. From a kinaesthetic standpoint, the gestural response in the presence of an image is of greater analytical interest than the image itself. Or following Hans Belting, one might say that the “image” is reimagined as an animating spark, leaping the gap between pictorial media – wood, canvas, stone, paint – to take up residence in the choreographed body of the viewer.⁷

II. The *Via Crucis* and the Penitent Body

Via Crucis imagery, in both orthodox and vernacular forms, has persisted across Latin America into the present,⁸ and in northern New Mexico, where our research is based, it is commonly found not just in Catholic churches but in outdoor settings as well, echoing the oldest manifestations of the phenomenon. In fact, the early missionization of New Mexico was carried out under the auspices of the Franciscans, and it was they who undoubtedly introduced the *Via Crucis* to the region. Ironically, the strong commitment to *Via Crucis* rituals among New Mexicans has sometimes been used as a symbol of the region’s autonomous or even deviant Catholicity. This is due to the influence of the Penitentes Brotherhood,⁹ a lay Catholic fraternity in New Mexico and southern Colorado best known for its outdoor processions during Semana Santa (Holy Week).¹⁰ The origins and early history of the Penitentes’ *Via Crucis* processions are debated – some trace their ancestry all the way back to the Lenten ceremonies practiced by Juan de Oñate during his journey

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Christopher Tilley, *Body and Image. Explorations in Landscape Archaeology* 2, Walnut Creek, CA 2008, 41.

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Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images. Picture, Medium, Body*, Princeton, NJ 2014.

⁸

See Neuerburg, *Indian Via Crucis*, 332–338.

⁹

Although popularly referred to as the Penitentes, the full name of the brotherhood is Los Hermanos de la Fraternidad Piadosa de Nuestro Padre Jesús Nazareno. For classic accounts of the Penitentes, see Marta Weigle, *Brothers of Light, Brothers of Blood*, Albuquerque, NM 1976; William Wroth, *Images of Penance, Images of Mercy. Southwestern Santos in the Late Nineteenth Century*, Norman, OK 1991. For a more recent revisionist history, see Michael P. Carroll, *The Penitente Brotherhood. Patriarchy and Hispano-Catholicism in New Mexico*, Baltimore, MD 2020.

¹⁰

For a recent ethnographic account of the Penitente practice of the *Via Crucis*, see Sylvia Rodriguez, *Procession and Sacred Landscape in New Mexico*, in: *New Mexico Historical Review* 77/1, 2002, 1–26.

north to settle New Mexico at the end of the sixteenth century¹¹ – but they seem to have intensified and taken on added cultural salience after the U.S. invasion of the region during the mid-nineteenth century. This is also when the first detailed descriptions were recorded by Protestant observers, who drew special attention to the Penitentes' allegedly excessive use of flagellation, and other techniques of "christomimetic bloodshed and pain".¹²

Mortification of the flesh has historically been a widespread Catholic practice with diverse variants, although large-scale processions of flagellants are mainly associated with the lay millenarian movements that emerged in Europe during the Later Middle Ages. As such, the Penitentes' continuation of this practice has been alternately regarded as problematically pre-modern by its critics, or as proud tradition, faithfully kept, by its advocates. Making note of the fact that most Catholics in New Mexico trace their ancestry through both settler and Indigenous lineages, some detractors have attempted to further portray the Penitentes' embrace of bodily pain as a degenerate practice, corrupted through centuries of contact with "primitive" Native traditions.¹³ Self-mortification was indeed an important component of initiation ceremonies among various Indigenous societies, and specific understandings of whipping as a means of conveying blessings, as well as of wounds as signs of fertility, had a particular theological significance within the Pueblo communities that encircled colonial settlements.¹⁴ But even allowing for such connections, the rigors of the Penitentes clearly had deep roots in European Catholicism as well.

A kinaesthetic approach to the analysis of images, as we have noted, is one in which bodily experience is centered. And in New Mexico, the Penitentes' *Via Crucis* can be read as an interpretive key to a broader tradition – a kinaes-*theology* – in which the Catholic principle of *Imitatio Christi* conjoins piety and "enfleshed sensa-

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For a first-hand account of Oñate's acts of penance, see Gaspar Pérez de Villagrà, *History of New Mexico, 1610*, ed. by Giberto Espinosa, Los Angeles 1933 [1610], 110.

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Mitchell B. Merback, The Living Image of Pity. Mimetic Violence, Peace-Making and Salvific Spectacle in the Flagellant Processions of the Later Middle Ages, in: Debra Higgs Strickland (ed.), *Images of Medieval Sanctity*, Leiden 2007, 137. See also William J. Purkis, Zealous Imitation. The Materiality of the Crusader's Marked Body, in: *Material Religion* 14/4, 2018, 438–453.

13

The New Mexican experience of *mestizaje* centers on the figure of the detribalized Indigenous captive, incorporated into Spanish colonial society during the eighteenth century as part of an emergent social class. Such captives and their progeny are locally referred to as *genizaros*, and some regard them as a key creative force in the local development of the Penitentes Brotherhood. On the *genizaro* history of New Mexico, see James Brooks, *Captives and Cousins. Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands*, Chapel Hill, NC 2002; and Moises Gonzales and Erique R. Lamadrid (eds.), *Nación Genizara. Ethnogenesis, Place, and Identity in New Mexico*, Albuquerque, NM 2021.

14

Severin Fowles, On Torture in Societies against the State, in: Geoffrey Emberling (ed.), *Social Theory in Archaeology and Ancient History. The Present and Future of Counternarratives*, Cambridge 2015, 205–230.

tions” in very particular ways.¹⁵ Three bodily experiences are especially noteworthy: procession (the physical movement from station to station following in Christ’s footprints), pain (which, for Franciscans, establishes a sensuous connection not just to the Savior but also to Francis of Assisi, the saint who famously suffered stigmata during the thirteenth century), and less obviously, *rest*. The Catholic sanctification of pain gets a great deal of – often sensationalized – attention. However, sanctified rest also plays an important role in the *Via Crucis* tradition. At the third, seventh, and ninth stations, Christ falls under the weight of the cross, temporarily laying down his burden. The fifth station also involves Simon of Cyrene briefly relieving Christ of the cross, providing him with another moment of respite. Suffering – even divine suffering – is never a continuous monotone. It manifests as a series of waves, defined as much by its troughs as by its peaks. Few things consume the conscious mind like pain, and someone in agony is frequently forced to abandon rational thought, opening up space for visions, transcendence, truth, and, in some cases, otherwise unobtainable sensations of communion.¹⁶ But it is in the contrasting moments of relief that penitent individuals are able to reflect on their suffering, relating it to Christ’s example.

III. Rock Art and Kinaestheology

Let us now return to the images associated with the *Via Crucis* – or rather, with a particular example located on the outskirts of the small village of Pilar (formerly Cieneguilla). Like many nineteenth-century rural villages in northern New Mexico, Pilar was home to a local chapter of the Penitentes, organized around a small *morada* (literally “dwelling”) or chapterhouse in which sacred objects were stored and indoor ceremonies were held [Fig. 1]. Today, the Pilar *morada* lies in ruins, its formal use as a Penitente structure having ended in the 1940s. Elderly members of the local community are slowly losing their memories of the devotional practices that once took place there, now only sharing with us fragmentary narratives of the *hermanos* (brothers) crawling over cactus, wielding *disciplinas* (whips), and dragging large *maderos* (carrying crosses).

Our archaeological surveys of the landscape surrounding the *morada* have revealed a dense network of features once associated with local *Via Crucis* performances. These include an abandoned *camposanto* or cemetery, a large wooden cross or *Calvario* where processions once culminated, a small rock shelter that may have served as a model of Christ’s tomb, and various connecting trails. Of particular interest, however, is the site’s abundant rock art, which

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The idea of *Imitatio Christi* has been variously interpreted. For some, it refers to an entirely immaterial and inward-focused spirituality, whereas others understand it as the outward bodily imitation of Christ. On “enfleshed sensations”, see David Morgan, *Visual Piety. A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images*, Berkeley, CA 1999, 66.

¹⁶

On the creative deployment of pain in the Abrahamic tradition, see Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular. Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Stanford, CA 2003.



[Fig. 1]

The Penitente *morada* at Pilar as it currently stands. Photograph by author.

includes hundreds of Catholic cruciform petroglyphs [Fig. 2 and Fig. 3]. The rock art appears to have been associated with the Penitente *Via Crucis* rites that took place around Pilar during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Similar to the painted images that mark the Stations of the Cross in nearby churches, such rock art panels likely served as focal points in processional movements of Catholic bodies. As such, they represent especially formalized and public manifestations of Catholic kinaestheology, drawing our attention to the principles of sanctified pain and rest that can help us interpret Catholic rock art in New Mexico more generally [Fig. 1, Fig. 2 and Fig. 3].

How are we to understand such images from a kinaesthetic perspective? We might begin by considering the bodily manner in which they were created. One of the most distinctive features of Catholic petroglyphs in northern New Mexico is that they tend to be very low to the ground. This spatial pattern is atypical of the region's non-Christian rock art and thus seems to be a characteristically Catholic phenomenon. Practically speaking, such images could only have been produced by a *kneeling* artist, whose body was pressed against the sharp volcanic rocks and low-lying cacti that cover the landscape of the *morada*. The gestural act of artistic creation would have been painful as well. Most Catholic rock art emerged through the repeated strikes of a hammerstone against a hard basalt boulder – a physically demanding act liable to bruise and cut the hand. The appropriate bodily stance for making such images, then, was one that enacted humility, produced pain, and generated small wounds from which a certain amount of blood would inevitably flow [Fig. 4].

Tempting though it might be to brush aside the rock artist's exertions as a mere side effect of image production, the significance of pain within Penitente theology demands that we consider such suffering as integral. Blood, as a material index of pain, is also an index of piety here, and it is worth recalling how these two are fused within the Franciscan tradition; with stigmata as the paradigmatic example. The artist's own blood presumably sometimes ended up on the rock alongside the pecked cross, in which case it may well have been regarded as both pigment and substance, effectively becoming part of the image itself. Blood on rocks exposed to the elements does not preserve long so we are unable to directly study this possibility today, but a measure of support is found in the occasional rock art panel where a deeply pecked cross has been subsequently painted with red pigment, as if the skin of the boulder had been pierced and the image itself were bleeding.

Bleeding images are a recurrent theme within the Christian tradition. "The story that most frequently recurs", observes David Freedberg, "is that of the Jew at Constantinople who stole a painting of Christ, struck it, and took it to his home to burn it; whereupon



[Fig. 2]
Penitente rock art and associated cacti at the Pilar Morada Site, New Mexico. Photograph by author.



[Fig. 3]

Detail of a Penitente rock art panel, depicting a kneeling supplicant holding a cross-embellished chalice at the Pilar Morada Site. Photograph by author.



[Fig. 4]

Two cross petroglyphs (highlighted in red) located along the Rio Grande gorge, approximately 6 km southwest of Pilar. One of the authors is shown kneeling in front of the images to demonstrate the bodily stance required to produce them. Photographs by author.

it issued blood from the place where it had been struck.”¹⁷ Within dominant art historical approaches, such stories tend to raise questions about the power and animacy of icons, if not of representation more broadly. But a kinaesthetic approach moves in a different direction, encouraging us to inquire instead into the role such images played as scripts for bodily actions performed in their presence. Here, we are reminded of another Penitente practice: that of using an obsidian blade to actually carve the cross into the flesh of ritualists during their Lenten processions along the *Via Crucis*. It is not difficult to imagine that the depiction of a bleeding cross on a rock was the very thing that prompted the creation of a bleeding cross on the Penitente’s body.

How else might subsequent “audiences” for a cross petroglyph respond? What would be the experience of a Catholic traveler who happened upon such an image well after it had been created? Today, the most commonly encountered crosses are the roadside *descansos* that mark places where motorists have died in car accidents [Fig. 5]. Although the term *descanso* refers to a memorial cross, in Spanish it literally means “a rest”, with the connotation of a pause or break that occurs during a journey. Interestingly, the reference is not to the rest of the deceased, nor does it have a direct link to the Latin epitaph *requiescat in pace* (“rest in peace”). Scholars of the New Mexican *descanso* tradition point out that its origins more precisely lie within funerary processions and the need for pallbearers to periodically pause, or rest, in the course of their labors. According to one account,

The first *descansos* were resting places where those who carried the coffin from the church to the *camposanto* paused to rest. In the old villages of New Mexico, high in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains or along the river valleys, the coffin was shouldered by four or six men [...] the procession made its way from the church to the cemetery. The rough hewn pine of the coffin cut into the shoulders of men. If the *camposanto* was far from the church, the men grew tired and they paused to rest, lowering the coffin and placing it on the ground. The place where they rested was the *descanso*.¹⁸

Descansos, then, are places where the *living* stop to rest, where the pallbearers take a brief respite from the painful burden of carrying the wooden coffin. We are reminded of the multiple Stations of the Cross where Christ was briefly relieved of his own burden. Moreover, the term *descanso* could refer to any place in the burial ground

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David Freedberg, *The Power of Images. Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, Chicago 1988, 310.

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Rudolfo Anaya, Juan Estevan Arellano, and Denise Chaves, *Descansos. An Interrupted Journey*, Albuquerque, NM 1995, 14–15.



[Fig. 5]

A modern *descanso*, marking the site of a roadside death along Highway 68, New Mexico.
Photograph by author.

where one paused to recite the rosary or offer a requiem.¹⁹ So again we encounter moments of sanctified rest alternating with moments of sanctified pain.

Modern *descansos* are typically made of painted metal or wood and erected along highways, but many older versions were pecked onto rocks and were positioned along foot or wagon trails, or on prominent landforms overlooking sites of tragedy. One elderly Hispano resident of the region told us the story of his uncle, who was thrown from his wagon while descending a steep mesa with a big load of firewood; he died, and his relatives returned to the location of the accident to peck a cross on a boulder. Prior to the twentieth century, when the region was a more politically contested space, travel through the landscape opened one to the added dangers of warfare, raids, and ambushes. For instance, about 10 miles south of Pilar is the site of a skirmish between the United States Army and a group of allied Hispano and Native insurgents in the wake of the 1847 Taos Revolt. Our archaeological survey of the site of the Battle of Embudo, as it has come to be known, documented a cluster of cross petroglyphs, pecked onto the rocks as memorials to the deceased insurgents.

Violent interactions between Spanish settlers and Indigenous communities seem to have generated a good many *descansos* right from the start of the colonial period. In fact, during the 1780s, Spanish colonial officials in New Mexico actually sought to prohibit the creation of crosses in the vicinity of major trails. The colony and its leaders were devoutly Catholic, and the spread of religious iconography had, up to then, been regarded as a desirable material extension of the missionary project. But the bloody struggles of the mid-eighteenth century changed things. Many Indigenous groups – notably the Apache and Comanche – now possessed horses and guns. As a result, raids on settler communities intensified. And crosses memorializing dead settlers dotted the New Mexican landscape, appearing in especially high densities along routes of movement where so much colonial violence took place.

In part, the worry was that the proliferation of *descansos* had begun to serve as a kind of tally of Indigenous military prowess, demoralizing settlers and emboldening the so-called barbarian enemies of the state. The semiotic status of the cross had shifted, in other words: no longer an iconic presence drawing viewers' thoughts toward Christ, crosses had begun to function as indexes of Indigenous agency and the failures of the colonial government.²⁰ But the more immediate problem with cross imagery was kinaesthetic. As the late Chicano writer and historian Estevan Arellano

¹⁹

See Holly J. Everett, *Roadside Crosses in Contemporary Material Culture*, Denton, TX 2002, 28–29.

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On the 1780s ban on *descansos*, see Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania. Public Feeling in America*, Chicago 2010, 83–84; James S. Griffith, *Beliefs and Holy Places. A Spiritual Geography of the Pimeria Alta*, Tucson, AZ 1992, 101–102.

explained to us one afternoon, the depiction of a cross at, say, the side of a road where a settler had perished would have compelled other Catholic travelers to stop and kneel. “The whole place is full of crosses, which I saw, and I prayed for those dead”, wrote Fray Miguel de Menchero in 1744, commenting on his devotions in the very same landscape that surrounded us as we listened to Estevan’s account.²¹ All the Apache had to do, observed Estevan, was to hide nearby, wait for pious settlers to kneel at these clearly marked locations, and then send a well-aimed arrow their way.²² Another death, another cross, more kneeling, another arrow, yet another cross – one can see how the situation might get tragically out of hand, and why the ban on *descanso* production briefly became a priority, even for a colonial government committed to Indigenous missionization.

Not all such crosses would have been pecked onto rocks. Many were likely wooden constructions that have not survived. Regardless, it is not the medium that defines the *descanso* phenomenon, so much as the kinaesthetic logic of the responses it engenders. Outside of formal burial grounds, *descansos* mark places of violent and sudden death. In this sense, they index a prior life unnaturally interrupted.²³ But they also project that interruption into the future, urging future travelers to pause in their own journeys, to kneel, and to rehearse pious bodily gestures. As such, they function less as a representation of something than as an instruction of how the pious should behave in their presence.

IV. Conclusion

One could read the eighteenth-century attempt to quell the proliferation of *descansos* as a kind of prohibition on images, but in truth the New Mexican authorities were really concerned about the gestures and practices that took place in their presence. Catholics who happened upon a *descanso* would feel compelled to pause in their journey, kneel, and pray. Such pious habits left them vulnerable to attack, and it was this bodily precarity that the authorities were ultimately seeking to prevent, not the images themselves.

Further vulnerabilities arose during the nineteenth century, in the wake of the U.S. invasion of New Mexico, when the bodily rigors of the Penitentes became targets of Protestant propaganda designed to undercut Hispano claims to land and local self-governance. Here again, it was not Christian imagery that drew condem-

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Fray Miguel de Menchero, Declaration of Fray Miguel de Menchero. Santa Bárbara, May 10, 1744, in: Charles Wilson Hackett (ed.), *Historical Documents Relating to New Mexico, Nueva Vizcaya and Approaches Thereto, to 1773*, vol. 3, Washington, DC 1937, 400.

²²

Estevan Arellano, personal communication, 2013. See also Anaya, Arellano, and Chaves, *Descansos*, 97.

²³

“Life is a journey, and for that person who tragically met his or her death on the highway, the journey was interrupted. We take a cross and place it where the accident occurred, there where the loved one met the shadow of death.” Anaya, Arellano, and Chaves, *Descansos*, 10.

nation so much as the Penitentes' pursuit of Christomimetic pain, which the invading Anglos portrayed as barbaric, irrational, and anti-modern. It was another tragic irony of colonialism. For by this point, the ranks of the brotherhood had filled with converted people with at least partial Indigenous heritage, whose ancestors had been forced to abandon their native ceremonial practices and to take up the bodily habits of Catholicism. And now a new wave of Christian invaders was using those very same Catholic habits to cast the Penitentes as "primitive" and to justify yet another round of dispossession. Perhaps the most influential manifestation of this anti-Penitente propaganda was the 1936 exploitation film, *Lash of the Penitentes*, in which the flagellant's whip became a focus for creating lurid and sensationalized images of "false religion".

Religious opprobrium towards gestures is not confined to colonial New Mexico and is something that we can identify in Christian contexts elsewhere. For example, bodily gestures were also a major point of contention between the Old Believers and the seventeenth-century reformist movement led by Nikon, the Patriarch of Moscow and head of the Russian Orthodox Church. Among other things, the reformers sought to suppress the traditional sign of the cross made with two fingers extended and replace it with a version where three fingers were extended.²⁴ One woman, Feodosia Prokopiyeвна Morozova – commemorated in a well-known 1887 painting by Vasily Surikov – was herself a prominent Old Believer and eventually suffered martyrdom for her insistence on signing the cross in the traditional fashion.²⁵ Just as the Old Believers raising their hands to make the sign of the cross provoked the ire of the Orthodox reformers, the Penitentes raising their *disciplinas* to scourge their flesh was perceived by Protestant colonizers as yet another *gesture* of flawed religiosity.

Interestingly, we lack a word to even describe this phenomenon. Everyone knows the term iconoclasm, as a struggle around offensive images that are themselves offended in return. But we have no term for its kinetic equivalent: the suppression or prohibition of sacred gestures. An appropriate neologism would perhaps be something like "chiroclasm". Yet, chiroclasm is more than simply the repression of gestures narrowly conceived as signs. The martyrdom of Morozova was a long and excruciating affair, in which she was subject to various tortures and eventually died of starvation. As a subject of martyrdom – perhaps the ultimate expression of Christomimesis – her experience of chiroclasm was one of profound and agonizing piety. And her tormentors no doubt thought themselves equally pious. Whereas iconoclasm focuses on violence towards images, chiroclasm highlights the waves of experiential intensity

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On the schism between the Old Believers and the Russian Church authorities, see Irina Paert, *Old Believers. Religious Dissent and Gender in Russia*, Manchester 2003, 23–30.

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For the biographical details of Feodosia Morozova, see Margaret Ziolkowski, *Tale of Boiarynia Morozova. A Seventeenth-Century Religious Life*, Lanham, MD 2000, 2–3.

and enfolded sensations that we previously underscored as central to kinaestheology more broadly. We cannot extract sacred gestures from the real bodies in which they are manifested.

The scholarly attention lavished on images contrasts markedly with how gestures continue to linger at the margins of archaeological, anthropological, and art historical theory.²⁶ Indeed, where gestures exist in articulation with images, we immediately jump to the assumption that it is the image or the icon that merits our analysis. Thus does each theory of human response become a treatise on the power of images.²⁷ Even when an act of physical destruction is pursued, we quickly slip back into the familiar terrain of image theory, transforming the iconoclastic gesture into yet another image, this time the image of anti-imagistic violence.

What, in the end, does it mean to assent to the conclusion that “image is everything”?²⁸ Our scholarly fixation on the ontology of the icon is largely a bias we have inherited from Protestantism, which has long nurtured an obsession with other peoples’ responses to images. Originally, the Protestant interest in others’ treatment of images existed in the service of anti-Catholic polemics, although today it has since been reconfigured in a variety of ostensibly secular directions. Whether pornography, flags, statues, cartoons in French magazines, or Andrew Serrano’s infamous photograph *Piss Christ*, the West has been fighting “image wars” of one kind or another for a long time.²⁹ Here, we have explored a different analytic, one in which the image is decentered in favor of a focus on the bodily worlds in which it operates.

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For exceptions in art history and archaeology respectively, see Lisa Trever, *Image Encounters. Moche Murals and Archaeo Art History*, Austin, TX 2022; Severin Fowles and Jimmy Arterberry, Gesture and Performance in Comanche Rock Art, in: *World Art* 3/1, 2013, 67–82.

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Freedberg, *The Power of Images*.

²⁸

W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*, Chicago 2005, 2.

²⁹

See Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (eds.), *Iconoclasm. Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion and Art*, Cambridge, MA 2002.

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SOME THOUGHTS ON LATIN AMERICAN ART HISTORY IN THE UNITED STATES

COLLEGES AND COLLECTIONS, 1870–2021

Mary E. Miller

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
#2-2023, pp. 209–223

<https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2023.2.96031>



ABSTRACT

This essay addresses the role of Latin American collections in U.S. museums, with particular attention to the college and university museum, and the accessibility of those collections to students and the public. At the same time, the essay considers the instruction of Latin American subjects, particularly in history and art history, that may or may not interface with the establishment of museum collections. The author argues for the role of technology in the dissemination and promulgation of Latin American visual culture.

KEYWORDS

Latin American art history; Latin American history pedagogy; U.S. college art museums; Provenance.

I. Introduction

Some years ago, I began to think about how technology has underpinned and shaped the discipline of the history of art in general, and in particular, how technology related to the discipline's development in the United States in the late nineteenth century and evolution over the early twentieth.¹ Art history's rise depended on publication and printing techniques, the fundamentals of visual dissemination. Lithography and photography were essential ingredients to the movement of knowledge in the beginning of study, as was the formation of collections that could be documented, and that would promote study and further publication. Because technology now changes more quickly than ever, whatever I write in these lines will be out of date by the time they see the cold light of your screen. Nevertheless, I make this attempt, looking backward and forward in 2023, and focused on institutional practice in the United States. What is also clear is that technology amplifies academic trends and practices, and this is true whether the resources are material or human. This is the case for Latin American art history as practiced in the United States.

Art history in the United States is a young discipline: broad humanistic inquiry grew slowly over the nineteenth century in institutions of higher learning, taking place with the study of classical languages based in memorization, as well as lectures in Christianity, philosophy, rhetoric, and mathematics. Here are some examples: by the end of the American Civil War, all students at Amherst College were expected to study French language to a level of reading literature, which did not include the modern novel.² At Yale College, until the advent of electives in the 1870s, the required curriculum in classics, recitation, oratory, and mathematics barely made room for "modern" subjects like the works of William Shakespeare or physics.³ Finding a place for art history, in general, required both an opening in the minds of educators *and* a technological advance that would allow its entry onto the stage of higher learning. Finding a place for Latin American art history, in particular, could come only after Latin American history itself was on the map – which would start at the University of California, Berkeley, before briefly taking

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I thank Suzanne Blier and The College Art Association, which first prompted me to ask some of these questions in 2017. After Lisa Trever asked me to write for this journal, I re-framed the concerns in light of Latin American art. Payton Phillips Quintanilla provided thoughtful feedback, as did various colleagues, and especially James Oles, in light of post-2020 publications and exhibitions.

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Amherst College, [History of the Department](#) (27 May 2023).

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George Pierson, *Yale College. An Educational History, 1871–1921*, New Haven, CT 1952, chapters 2 and 3.

hold at Yale, at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁴ The study of Latin American history returned to Yale with the sporadic entry of Hiram Bingham, although he was away in Peru much of the time, but it would still be the middle of the twentieth century before a language other than French or German was an accepted “modern language” on campus. Even then, the history of Latin America was framed as military narratives, conquests, and independence movements: Latin American *art* history had to get in line.

II. Beginnings

Humanistic inquiry had to start somewhere, but of course no one was keeping track at the beginning. Whether among the Maya or the Greeks, the development of scripts that replicated speech made it possible to develop communications that could be carried long distances by an inanimate vehicle, to be read by a literate recipient. Ahead of writing that replicated speech, words could be retained and recalled, of course, but the transmission of the word was vulnerable, even with script, until there were means of replication, dependent on elite materials of scrolls and ink, and dry places to preserve them. Copies and translations multiplied through time. Carvings in stone were usually made in situ (or nearby) out of necessity, and although they allowed for public words, usually evidence of standardization, orthodoxy, and political power, the visual always held the possibility of greater polyvalence. Unlike writing that represents speech, the visual can be read from up or down or from left or right, breaking the image into multiple forms of communication about time and human imagination. One of the remarkable advances came when the eye could be trusted with how it managed information, and when the hand could replicate what the eye saw, rather than what the brain knew; a hand-eye problem that waxed and waned around the world, and across time. This allowed for the very capture of time in representation, from the turned leaf that revealed an invisible breath of air, to views of the body that revealed that it was moving in time: even the most frozen representation was not static, whether the duration of a breath or a shriek, and nuance could be observed within the work of art.

Nevertheless, word, image, and text may have all been on some equal footing until the early modern period. With the advent of the printing press, the word triumphed over the image. Religious transmission was easier to standardize, share, and enforce with consistent replication. I will skate across the social and political transformations that such dissemination helped make possible, from the Reformation to the Enlightenment, to independence movements across Latin America and unifications into new nation-states across Europe. And then there was the belated discovery in Europe and North America, in the mid-nineteenth century, of how to make

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Ibid., 276.

cheap paper from wood pulp. Suddenly inexpensive words could be everywhere. If the text had been king, it was now the emperor: whether the words came from the prophet Isaiah or Shakespeare's *Hamlet* Act IV, they could be read by anyone literate: any edition or pagination, the same lamentations, the same Claudius and Gertrude. An individual denied an elite education, but literate, and with access – and recognizing that racism denied access to broad swaths of the population – to a Carnegie Library in the United States, could find their way to the same words that the most elite person in the world had at his fingertips. Was this dissemination criticized? Was it complete? Certain texts were expurgated, to address a perceived danger of the word, and to control those words. Still, the sources for interpreting the past – whether Bernal Diaz's description of the "True Conquest", or Suetonius's *Twelve Caesars* – could also be consulted, as translations flourished at the beginning of the twentieth century. The story of America's history was inculcated through the development of textbooks that emphasized a single narrative, generally told around the same great men and played against the gazetteer, the book of maps that also told a story of colonization, independence movements, and geography. Beyond these maps, illustrations were by and large reserved for zoology and botany textbooks, alongside religious images designed to promote standardized belief.

III. Art History as Academic Discipline

What did it take to launch the field of art history?⁵ It took much more than the text, or even texts about art. It was harder to launch the history of art than the history of music: sheet music, by contrast, was circulated widely, carrying notes to wherever a voice or piano could turn the printed page into sound, and music transcended the constraints of language. At its birth in the late nineteenth century, the history of art was the most elite of humanistic inquiries, requiring access to works of art themselves, *and* a library in which to consult earlier references. Even the road map to the locations of works of art had not yet been written, whether in the religious establishment or the elite palace, and whether in Japan or Sweden; such information was more often found in guidebooks for travelers. The market made some works more available, yielding published price, auction, or sales lists, while other works quietly slipped into new hands, sometimes less accessible, sometimes more. Collections were formed at some European universities, notably the Ashmolean at Oxford, which changed course in the nineteenth century from the expanded curiosity cabinet of its seventeenth-century foundations to an institution grounded in Classical and Asian studies and collections. Important collections of European paintings, particularly Dutch, Italian, and French paintings, were established in the nineteenth century at the Fitzwilliam Museum of Cambridge. Universi-

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See the informative essays in Craig Smythe and Peter Lukehart, *The Early Years of Art History in the United States*, Princeton, NJ 1993.

ties were often in the vanguard: the Yale University Art Gallery had walls of paintings hung floor to ceiling for students to study because of the acquisition of Colonel John Trumbull's works early in the nineteenth century; prints of the Trumbull paintings in turn circulated imagery of the American Revolution widely across the United States, a visual and selective narrative of largely white male heroism.⁶ The Yale museum would also grow to have deep collections of what we now call the early modern by the middle of the nineteenth century (1871 collection of James Jackson Jarves), enshrining largely Roman Catholic works in what was then a Protestant university. Particularly at U.S. private institutions, but sometimes at public ones, colleges and universities came to view works of art as bearers of unique cultural knowledge, and so worthy of collection and preservation. For Latin America, the great visual documentation – say, in the lavish publication of Alexander von Humboldt or Julio Michaud – was kept in locked cases in elite libraries.⁷ Art could tell a story that might not be characteristic of the text, whether in the richness of painted fabrics or the glance that deflected attention away from a principal subject. Art's power would be reflected in prints and emulations; its ability, through drawings and workshops and choice of material, to offer a window on both a practice and a maker in a given place and time, could be recognized.

IV. Collection Matters

And so, collections grew at the college and university, reflecting donor interests, by and large, and their experiences abroad. Protestant missionaries from American colleges and universities worked across the globe, from Haiti to Oklahoma to Madagascar to Taiwan, and often in the Holy Land. For example, alumnae brought works of African and Chinese art to Mount Holyoke College (MHC), and in 1837, the “missionary collection” was, according to the MHC website, housed together in the original Seminary Building as “curiosities” from around the world.⁸ In 1860, reliefs from the palace of Ashurnasirpal II arrived at Bowdoin College.⁹ Examples at Yale were

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In Latin America itself, European prints served to disseminate piety and religious practice. There is a vast literature on the subject: a recent entry is Aaron M. Hyman, *Rubens in Repeat. The Logic of the Copy in Colonial Latin America*, Los Angeles 2021.

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Alexander von Humboldt, *Vues des Cordillères, et monumens des peuples indigènes de l'Amérique*, 2 vols., Paris 1816–1824; Julio Michaud, *Album pintoresco de la República Mexicana*, Mexico City [ca. 1850]. For important reviews of the dissemination of both works and documentation of those works, see Fausto Ramirez, *Algunas ideas sobre las colecciones de arte mexicano del siglo XIX en el mundo*, in: *México en el mundo de las colecciones de arte. México moderno*, Mexico City 1994, 3–21; and Elena Isabel Estrada de Gerlero, *En defensa de América. La difusión litográfica de las antigüedades mexicanas en el siglo XIX*, in: *México en el mundo de las colecciones de arte. México moderno*, Mexico City 1994, 23–37.

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Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, *Early Missionary Gifts to the College* (May 17, 2023).

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Bowdoin College Museum of Art, *Explore Ancient Assyrian Reliefs* (May 17, 2023).

purchased directly from the British excavations.¹⁰ In 1894, Dalzell A. Bunker, a missionary in Korea for forty years, donated the first works from Asia registered at Oberlin College: two from China, and one from Korea.¹¹ Meanwhile, entrepreneurs and wealthy travelers acquired classical antiquities and European art works for their own private collections, the type of works that were also the bread and butter of American museums, whether university or civic. Such acquisitions supported the early development of academic art history alongside public interest more generally, as one can see took place at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.¹² Collections have shaped art history, just as art history has shaped collections. They matter.

But as in all such matters, Latin America was late to the party, if an invitation was even issued, at least from art museums. In the nineteenth century, natural history museums acquired works of Pre-Hispanic art, understood to be necessary for the studies scientists were conducting to understand the world's antiquity, including the very distribution of human beings and cultures across the planet. At the Yale Peabody Museum some acquisitions were opportunistic, such as the purchase of an important "Aztec calendar stone" [Fig. 1].¹³ Others were guided by the wishes of an alumni family, leading to the acquisition of a significant portion of the collection assembled by Emperor Maximilian in Mexico [Fig. 2], works that have no particular provenance but nevertheless form a snapshot of what was available for acquisition in the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁴ Roughly in these same years, Harvard's Peabody Museum launched an ambitious campaign of archaeology at Copan, Honduras, yielding important works that define the museum today although the large portion of the carved staircase and seated figure spent many years at the Fogg before the art museum curators found

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Yale University Art Gallery, *Relief: Human-headed genie watering sacred tree* (May 17, 2023).

¹¹

Charles Mason, The History of the Asian Art Collection at Oberlin College, in: *Allen Memorial Art Museum Bulletin* 53, 2003, 5–88.

¹²

Joanne Pillsbury, Recovering the Missing Chapters, in: Andrea Bayer with Laura D. Corey (eds.), *Making the Met*, New York 2020, 209–215.

¹³

George Grant MacCurdy, An Aztec "Calendar Stone" in Yale University Museum, in: *American Anthropologist* 12/4, 1910, 481–496. The interpretations proposed in 1910 were amplified by José Alcina Franch, together with a complete review of the Yale stone and others. Id., Cielo e inframundo en la cosmovisión mexica. Análisis iconográfico, in: *Anuario de Estudios Americanos* 50/2, 1993, 4.

¹⁴

Brooke Loukkala, Collections and Recollections of "The Greatest of Nineteenth-Century Don Quixotes". Maximilian I's Imperial Legacy at the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History, in: Andrew D. Turner and Megan E. O'Neil (eds.), *Collecting Mesoamerican Art before 1940. A New World of American Antiquities*, Los Angeles forthcoming.

it to be too ethnographic.¹⁵ Over the course of the twentieth century, collections of Pre-Hispanic art were being built in museums across the United States, including, as Matthew Robb has noted, at colleges and universities, among them Princeton, Duke, Notre Dame, Emory, and the University of Maine, among others.¹⁶

Nineteenth-century landscape painters across the Americas captured Latin America as subject – say, Frederic Church’s 1859 *The Heart of the Andes*, part of the Metropolitan’s permanent collection since 1909.¹⁷ José María Velasco received international acclaim for the Mexican landscape that he painted time and again, with prodigious output, and as Commissioner of Fine Arts of the Mexican delegation to the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, Velasco included his own paintings in the Mexican pavilion.¹⁸ Additionally, in the era of international arts and crafts revival, the decorative arts of Latin America, and particularly of Mexico, were keen subjects of acquisition by museums in the United States, especially Talavera ceramics.¹⁹ Although Latin America was often a subject of the U.S. and European gaze, modern currents pushing the course of art and, in turn, of art history, were focused in Paris and London, Berlin and New York, around 1900. The massive energies devoted by Archer Milton Huntington to the art and culture of Spain became manifest with the opening of the Hispanic Society in 1908, but in this venue, too, Latin America received little attention except as subject.²⁰ Huntington supported the training of professional art historians for the Society, but without a related teaching program at its founding, and with its project subsequently dampened by the long reign of General Franco, even Spanish art history languished in the United States, its great painters often seen

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Pál Kelemen, *Stepchild of the Humanities. Art of the Americas, as Observed in Five Decades*, Tucson, AZ 1979.

¹⁶

Matthew H. Robb, The 500 Faces of Teotihuacan. Masks and the Formation of Mesoamerican Canons, in: Larry Silver and Kevin Terraciano (eds.), *Canons and Values. Ancient and Modern*, Los Angeles 2019, 114–137.

¹⁷

Deborah Poole, Landscape and the Imperial Subject. U.S. Images of the Andes, 1859–1930, in: Gilbert M. Joseph, Catherine C. LeGrand, and Ricardo D. Salvatore (eds.), *Close Encounters of Empire. Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations*, Durham, NC 1998, 107–138.

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As recapitulated in the 2018 exhibition “Arte Diseño Xicágo. Mexican Inspiration from the World’s Columbian Exposition to the Civil Rights Era” at the National Museum of Mexican Art, Chicago.

¹⁹

Edwin Atlee Barber was one of the first to write about collections of Talavera ceramics in the United States. Id., *The Maiolica of Mexico*, Philadelphia 1908. Mexican decorative arts – textiles, ceramics, furniture – were all widely collected in the United States.

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An important exception is the Meadows Museum, at Southern Methodist University, dedicated to the collection of Spanish art and founded in 1965.



[Fig. 1]

Aztec calendar stone. Valley of Mexico, Mexico (YPM ANT 019231). Courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Natural History, Division of Anthropology, Yale University. Photograph by William K. Sacco.



[Fig. 2]

Stone statue of Xipe Totec. Puebla, Mexico (YPM ANT 008525). Courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Natural History, Division of Anthropology, Yale University. Photograph by William K. Sacco.

as unicorns rather than as part of a compelling tradition.²¹ The decision in 1929 of Samuel Kress to establish the Kress Foundation and disseminate over 3000 works, principally early modern paintings and sculptures of Italy, to museums across the country, especially college and university museums, further underscored a concept of a canon based in Europe, and generally in Italy, France, Holland, and Germany. By extension, it also underscored what was *not* in that canon. When considered at all, the religiosity and piety that defined much Latin American Viceregal art contrasted with the rich Italianate traditions that stood at the forefront of European early modern painting; and without the personalities put forward by Vasari in his *Lives of the Artists*, translated into English in 1908 and henceforth widely read in the college course, early modern Latin American art and artists remained to one side of a European mainstream, especially when a formal art history entered college curricula.

Modern art in general made a slow entry into the U.S. museum but important collections of Latin American works were assembled between the world wars – the Los Angeles County Museum of Art acquired Diego Rivera's *Flower Day* in 1925, the first major twentieth-century Latin American work to have a permanent U.S. home. MoMA and the Philadelphia Museum of Art were not far behind.²² Elizabeth Morrow gave key works by Diego Rivera to the Smith College Museum ahead of her acting presidency in 1939–40 (e.g., SC 1938.13.1), perhaps inspiring the donation years later of the famous self-portrait Rivera executed at the home of Irene Rich in 1941 (SC 1977.63.1). The accounts of Mexican muralists in the United States, as well as the work of U.S. muralists in Mexico is a complicated story: in terms of U.S. academic institutions, one of the signal events was the commissioning of José Clemente Orozco to paint the walls of the Dartmouth College library (completed 1934). Starting in 1963, what is now the Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas built the most comprehensive collection of modern Latin American art at any U.S. institution of higher learning, and the art history department (as well as a program in Latin American Studies) built a faculty to support Latin American history.²³ By comparison, the landmark exhibition at the Yale University Art Gallery of 1966, *Art of Latin America Since Independence*, had no impact on the museum's collections, and the scanty text did not serve undergraduate teaching. Major exhibitions, from *Vida Americana* (Whitney 2020), to *Painting the Revolution* (Philadelphia Museum of Art 2016), to *South of the Border* (Yale 1992) have promoted interest, but only the last took place in the context of an academic museum. The breadth

²¹ Lee Sorensen (ed.), "Brown, Jonathan M.," in: *Dictionary of Art Historians* (May 27, 2023).

²² Miriam Basilio, Deborah Cullen, Luis Perez-Oramas, Gary Garrels, Fatima Bercht, Harper Montgomery, Rocío Aranda-Alvarado, and James Wechsler, *Latin American & Caribbean Art. MoMA at El Museo*, New York 2004.

²³ *The Latin American Collection of the Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art* (May 27, 2023).

and range of Edward Sullivan at New York University, who has edited or written twenty-seven books or catalogues as of this writing, was transformative in shaping research and in training advanced students.²⁴ More recently, the Davis Museum, at Wellesley College, has developed collections across time and space of Latin America, forming one of the best “survey” collections in the United States.²⁵

These collections mattered and still matter. What is now clear is that the unique charismatic object, particularly deployed for historical inquiry or interrogated for meanings that may complicate or contradict a text, can open windows onto more nuanced understandings of the past by complicating the text-based narrative. The process of textual compilation so familiar to scholars transpires along a different axis in the world of art, where the practice of copying in one generation is more likely to lead to innovation in the next. There was probably a time that the replicated image was feared. Would photographs of works diminish the original? If a black-and-white print or photograph were available, would it discourage study of the original? We laugh now, because *that* replica was such a pale relative of the original, but what about the high-quality digital image, or the three-dimensional version that can be printed, for you to have and to hold? Those black-and-white photographs were expensive to produce: now it is faster to upload a picture and disseminate it than it is to type a text. But the original calls, and having the opportunity for students to gather around a work in person changes how one can and does see the world. That artificial intelligence will change the relationships in the very near term is more than a possibility.

Nothing could be more different from the circumstances of the reproduced art image at its birth. From nineteenth-century engraving and nineteenth-century photography, the nature of visual imagery marched along slowly, in increments that charted steady progress; color would replace black-and-white imagery. Still a very live practice when I began my studies, gaining knowledge of the world’s art principally took place by a student commandeering a large table, opening heavy and oversize books that might well not circulate, and beginning the study of the object, often with unillustrated catalogues and catalogues raisonnés juxtaposed with museum exhibition volumes and auction catalogues. Ambivalence was there from the beginning: the image of the work could not be adequately captured by other media, yet there was little other means for the study of works of art. The 1926 first edition of *Gardner’s Art through the Ages* was transformative, as were the boxes of University Prints (UPs) – they were ideal for the mental “collecting of images”, a visual data set in which all objects were leveled into black-and-whites at a single scale. For all their flaws and drawbacks, the UPs managed

²⁴
CAA News Today. *Announcing the 2023 Distinguished Scholar*, November 15, 2022 (May 17, 2023).

²⁵
James Oles, *Art_Latin_America. Against the Survey*, Austin, TX 2019.

to stay in business through the 1980s. But if the UPs are an index of art history as taught, they say a great deal: there were boxes of European art, parsed by period and medium: “Oriental” and Oceanic, African and Pre-Columbian, but nothing for Post-Conquest Latin America in the sales catalogues examined, whether of 1945 or 1957.²⁶ Black-and-white photographic images or color pictures clipped from magazines and mounted on gray carboard were the standard for student study for over fifty years at many institutions in the U.S., as were the clippings files that future-thinking slide librarians and others made for student consultation. When Dana Leibsohn and Barbara Mundy introduced *Vistas. Visual Culture in Spanish America 1520–1820*, it was a transformative source (born digital, but with an early version available as DVD) for teaching the art of the colonial period;²⁷ James Oles’s comprehensive text also brought images to the fore.²⁸

V. Looking Ahead for Latin American Art History

What had been a stable experience of the primary image for well over a hundred years has been disrupted: the image is where millions of individuals start their queries to search engines. And so, the visual basis for the teaching of Latin American art history, construed most broadly, has been amplified dramatically by the dissemination of images everywhere and by every means. This is good news: Latin American art is now unconstrained by physical location. Also good news is the commitment of institutions with comprehensive Latin American collections, especially the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, the Denver Art Museum, the Dallas Museum of Art, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, to making their images available digitally. But curating these digital images into course materials is the order of the day. Which ones to teach, and which ones to provoke the undergraduate mind, unlocking further inquiry? The wide-ranging Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros (CPPC) provides many entries to Latin American art, as do the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Artstor has increasingly limited value, succeeded as it has been by Google Images, but its metadata can point to little-known publications of an earlier day. Take the mural by David Siqueiros, *Tropical America*, painted in 1932, then restored by the Getty Conservation Institute in a project completed in 2012: available on Artstor are only pre-2012 photographs. There is still no one-stop shopping, even for the digital collections.

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The University Prints Complete Catalogue, Cambridge, MA 1957. Accessed through [HathiTrust](#) (May 27, 2023).

²⁷

Dana Leibsohn and Barbara E. Mundy, *Vistas. Visual Culture in Spanish America, 1520–1820*, 2015.

²⁸

James Oles, *Art and Architecture in Mexico*, London/New York 2013.

There is another impediment to studying Latin American art in the museum, and an increasing problem for Pre-Hispanic art: its problematic provenance. The nineteenth-century accounts, pointed to above, offered a way to understand an antiquity that differed from that of Europe, Asia, and Africa, and that was based on works that had survived European invasions. By and large, most Pre-Hispanic works were first seen in a direct archaeological context, and it was that specific context that provided much of their intellectual value. The systematic twentieth-century looting that was launched in the 1930s in Panama, and by 1940 in Mexico, underpinned a new commerce that has rarely been addressed in a systematic way.²⁹ This new commerce sought to erase, rather than to promote, specific context, and emphasized aesthetic values, especially in the years following World War II. As difficult as it is, and as troubling as it is, it is beyond time to acknowledge that this commerce was not a neutral exchange nor a victimless crime but rather a complex web of both individual and collaborative buyers and sellers, of corruption and crime, and most of all, a history that needs to be told. When that history is obscured or denied, our students and the public at large see a barrier, not the works, meaning, history, or power that scholars of the Pre-Hispanic past seek to bring into the twenty-first century. Good provenance work requires resources and research, a commitment that has been made by the Getty's Pre-Hispanic Art Provenance Initiative, but this can only be a beginning.³⁰

Finding the way post-pandemic to engage more individuals in front of works of art is imperative, whether in a museum or through public murals, such as those created from 1973 onward at Chicano Park, San Diego. Many institutions have kept their Latin American art in storage: as we come to the second quarter of the twenty-first century, more works need to come to the fore, whether in New Haven, Philadelphia, or Chicago. MoMA has rediscovered what is in their storerooms, and the Hispanic Society of New York City has recognized the potential of the Latin American works in their collections.³¹ The digital hand-held camera and even the selfie have unleashed an unprecedented wave of visual distribution of the museum object. But these, too, engage questions of the original – bringing the eye, for instance, closer to the daub of paint in some cases than could ever take place in reality – which draw the viewer back time and again, toggling between the image captured and the work itself. This is what happens to individuals who see a work, exploring the space between the work and themselves, experiencing an almost tactile sense in recognizing the creation of line, color,

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The Metropolitan Museum of Art has made a consistent and transparent record of provenance for every Pre-Hispanic object on its website.

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Nicknamed PHAPI; see Getty, *Pre-Hispanic Art Provenance Initiative* (May 27, 2023).

³¹

Patrick Lenaghan, Mitchell A. Coddington, Mencia Figueroa Villota, and John O'Neill (eds.), *The Hispanic Society of America. Tesoros*, New York 2000.

and form; of sensing the power of imagery, entering into the space between subject and object. No two viewers will ever see quite the same thing, given the nuance and subtlety of the visual: it cannot be constrained by the specificity of text. Especially for Latin American visual art, it has never been more important to do so.

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RITUAL OBJECT, FUNERARY OFFERING, WORK OF ART

THE PLACE OF THE PRE-COLUMBIAN PAST IN THE
HISTORY OF ART IN PERU

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21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
#2-2023, pp. 225–243

<https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2023.2.96113>



ABSTRACT

The debate on whether Pre-Columbian objects should be studied from the discipline of art history or from archaeology has been the subject of various research studies in recent decades. The present essay reflects on this debate in the context of museum curation in the Museo de Arte de Lima (Peru). It presents examples of recent temporary and permanent exhibition displays, focusing on the creation of new narratives and forms of sharing the past, derived from the study of the objects themselves while placing them in a wider context of updated archaeological research. The article concludes by proposing a new form of curation demonstrating that the coexistence of both disciplines is not only possible but necessary.

KEYWORDS

Art museums; Archaeology; Curation; Museology; Museo de Arte de Lima; Peru.

I. Introduction

The inhabitants of ancient Peru have left us a vast legacy that offers an understanding of their particular worldview. Despite the undisputable beauty of the pieces we find gathered in these galleries, they were not created as works of art, nor were they purely decorative objects or depictions of actual customs. In most cases, these pieces were conceived as symbols of power and elements for use in rituals of life and death.¹

This text greets the visitor to the new permanent galleries of the Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI) that present a panorama of art in Peru from the Pre-Hispanic era through the mid-twentieth century.² The thirty-four galleries are configured as thematic spaces within a principal organization that prioritizes chronological order. A display of more than a thousand objects – ceramic vessels, textiles, metal objects, paintings, sculptures, furniture, silverwork, photographs, and works on paper – offers the public a view – one among many possible views – of the history of art in Peru, a history of ruptures and continuities that reflects the complex social, political, and ideological processes that have occurred over the span of nearly three thousand years. Despite not having been originally created as “works of art”, the Pre-Hispanic collections constitute the necessary beginning of a Peruvian history of art [Fig. 1]. Otherwise, how would we understand, for example, the continuities of the Pre-Hispanic past with early colonial art – which materialized in objects like *queros* (drinking cups) or *tupus* (silver pins), which were probably not made as works of art either, and that were also made well into the twentieth century³ – or the effect of the Andean past on photography and on the early twentieth-century artists who endeavored to envision a national art?⁴

In such a setting, the question arises of how an object of Pre-Hispanic facture should be studied, interpreted, and presented in a museum. As an archaeological object or as a work of art? Or as both? Even though it was not conceived as either one or the other? In what follows in this essay, I explore the different ways that the

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Excerpt from the introductory text to the Pre-Columbian section of the new permanent galleries of the Museo de Arte de Lima. The collections of museums like the MALI grew from the activities of individuals who assembled important collections of archaeological objects during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century. See also: Cecilia Pardo (ed.), *Guía MALI*, Lima 2016.

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A version of this essay was originally published as Cecilia Pardo Grau, *Objeto ritual, ofrenda funeraria, obra de arte. El lugar del pasado precolombino en la historia del arte en el Perú*, in: Marco Curatola Petrocchi, Cécile Michaud, Joanne Pillsbury, and Lisa Trever (eds.), *El arte antes de la historia. Para una historia del arte andino antiguo*, Lima 2020, 213–233. Translation by Lisa Trever; published with permission of the Fondo Editorial, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú.

3

Ricardo Kusunoki, *Identidad andina. Memoria e invención*, in: Pardo, *Guía MALI*, 152–155.

4

Ricardo Kusunoki and Luis Eduardo Wuffarden (eds.), *Arte moderno. Colección del Museo de Arte de Lima*, Lima 2014, 140–143.



[Fig. 1]
Permanent gallery installation of Pre-Columbian art in the Museo de Arte de Lima, 2015.
Archivo Institucional, Museo de Arte de Lima. Photograph by Edi Hirose.

Pre-Hispanic can enter into curatorial work within art museums. Following a brief reflection on the aesthetic/archaeological opposition, and the place that objects produced by Pre-Hispanic Andean societies occupy within museums, I present a series of case studies – in the form of research and exhibition projects – that have depended on the cooperative coexistence (*convivencia*) of two disciplines, archaeology and art history, from a curatorial standpoint. I focus on the renovation of the permanent galleries of the MALI but also discuss a series of exhibition and publication projects undertaken within that institution in recent years.

II. The Debate between Anthropology and Art History

The debate between art and anthropology (and archaeology as a discipline derived from anthropology⁵) has been the subject of various studies in recent decades. Some begin from the premise that archaeologists classify objects by use, whereas art historians classify them by aesthetic value, school, or style. Many scholars question, nevertheless, whether Pre-Columbian objects made within a specific historical and geographic context should be inscribed within the modern idea of “fine arts” or “art history”, as such, which emerged toward the end of the eighteenth century in Europe.⁶ That ancient Andean societies did not have a word for the modern concept of “art” does not negate the fact that, behind the Pre-Hispanic objects that are exhibited in museums, there exists a clear sense of the aesthetic, similar to our current perception of beauty, in these works – objects of undeniable artistic quality and exceptional skill that reveal the great mastery achieved by those who made them.

Art collecting – a practice that took shape with the appearance of European cabinets of curiosities in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and later with the formation of the great encyclopedic museums of the nineteenth century – defined views of non-Western art, the category within which ancient Andean civilizations and their material culture were placed.⁷ Without writing systems, the ancient history of the New World seemed to lack sources for its study and because of that it was not considered to be part of “history”. It was then, as several studies have shown, that the ancient societies of the Americas became the subjects of other disciplines like the natural

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In the North American academy, Americanist archaeology is usually included within the academic programs of departments of anthropology, as opposed to the university program in Peru (e.g., Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú) where archaeology is taught within humanities.

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James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Cambridge, MA 1988, 189.

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Ibid.

sciences or geology.⁸ The research methods and associated practices of the natural sciences were thus applied to the incipient study of archaeology. In fact, this was what brought European travelers – many of them today considered to be the pioneers of Andean archaeology – to study the Andean past. Such was the case, for example, for Wilhelm Reiss and Alphons Stübel whose work was in great part defined by their interest in geology.⁹

The absence of precise research methods for the interpretation and presentation of the culture of Pre-Columbian societies persisted well into the nineteenth century. The museums that exhibited this material classified these objects as part of the natural sciences. As James Clifford has described, around 1900, non-Western objects were generally regarded either as primitive art or as ethnographic specimens. Prior to the modernist revolution associated with visual artists like Picasso, and the birth of cultural anthropology led by Boas and Malinowski, these objects were seen as antiquities, exotic curiosities, or simply as evidence of “early man”.¹⁰ With the rise of modernism, in the twentieth century, objects that until then had been considered “fetishes” began to be interpreted as part of material culture. It was then that the distinction between the aesthetic and the anthropological (or archaeological) gained greater emphasis. In art museums and galleries, non-Western objects were exhibited only for their aesthetic qualities, while in ethnographic museums they were represented within a broader cultural context.

In an example with parallels to the local context in Peru, Clifford described the case of the treatment of African tribal objects in an exhibition organized by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) of New York in 1984 under the title “*Primitivism*” in *20th Century Art. Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, in which the interpretation of the object as a work of art involved excluding its cultural context. As the text placed at the entrance to the exhibition explicitly stated, consideration of context was the job of anthropologists.¹¹ If one follows this line of thought, the cultural context is not required for aesthetic appreciation since the work of art would be universally recognizable. What was pleasing to the eyes of Picasso was good enough for MoMA. In this system of representation, the object was

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Stefanie Gänger, Philip Kohl, and Irina Podgorny, Introduction. Nature in the Making of Archaeology in the Americas, in: Philip L. Kohl, Irina Podgorny, and Stefanie Gänger (eds.), *Nature and Antiquities. The Making of Archaeology in the Americas*, Tucson, AZ 2014, 3–20; Joanne Pillsbury, Finding the Ancient in the Andes. Archaeology and Geology, 1850–1890, in: Kohl, Podgorny, and Gänger, *Nature and Antiquities*, 48–68.

9

Pillsbury, Finding the Ancient in the Andes; see also Johann Reiss and Alphonse Stübel, *The Necropolis of Ancon in Peru. A Contribution to Our Knowledge of the Culture and Industries of the Empire of the Incas*, Berlin 1880–1887.

10

Clifford, *Predicament of Culture*, 197.

11

Ibid., 189.

extracted from its environment, to move freely through a world of museums, markets, and collectors.

In Peru, in academia as well as in museums, Pre-Hispanic collections have generally been studied from the discipline of archaeology rather than art history.¹² These studies have privileged the iconographic study of works without archaeological context over analysis of the objects themselves as relevant sources of information. The latter type of reading has been much more present in the North American tradition.

In the 1960s, influenced by the primitivist vision of European modernism, the new Instituto de Arte Contemporáneo (IAC) of Lima organized a series of exhibitions of Pre-Columbian art. In a review of the show *Pinturas del Perú precolombino*, the critic Juan Acha credited modern art with “having the great merit to have rescued” primitive art “from archaeology and ethnology, where it was a simple document, and from the *bric-à-brac* where it was considered curiosity and exoticism, to definitively restore to it all of its aesthetic and human dignity”.¹³ In these same years, the Peruvian artist Fernando de Szyszlo, whose professional career would unfold within the IAC, referred in this context to the “erroneous value judgement of the artistic quality” of Chancay art “that we have inherited from archaeologists who used obsolete standards of critique”. Szyszlo insisted that it was only due to the recent developments in art in the twentieth century that “so-called primitive art has been given the importance that it deserves”.¹⁴ The example of Chancay is interesting because it perfectly illustrates this dichotomy, which we now question, of the different contrasting values that the discourses of archaeology and those of the art world and art collecting assigned to the Pre-Hispanic past.

With a few exceptions, curatorial work has continued to contribute to the reinforcement of this apparent opposition, exhibiting the object either from a strictly formalist perspective or from one that is purely archaeological. I propose that we venture to cre-

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Although some archaeology programs in Peru include modules on iconographic analysis for the study of ancient objects, courses on art historical theory and methods are absent.

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“Hoy, el arte primitivo encuéntrase ya completamente desagraviado de aquel injusto menosprecio estético que aún por desgracia, es dable advertir en mentes rezagadas o en sensibilidades adormecidas por los prejuicios excluyentes del naturalismo greco-romano. Y el arte moderno tiene el gran mérito de haberlo rescatado de la arqueología y etnología, donde era un simple documento, y de los ‘bric-a-brac’ donde era curiosidad y exotismo, para restituirle definitivamente toda su dignidad estética y humana.” Juan W. Acha, *Pinturas del Perú precolombino*, in: *Cultura Peruana* 21/155–156, 1961, n.p.

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“Cualquier propósito de evaluación de la Cultura Chancay desde el punto de vista artístico tiene que partir necesariamente de un intento de aclaración de algunos conceptos que han dificultado su apreciación. El primero de ellos es un errado juicio de valor sobre su calidad artística que nos fue legado por los arqueólogos que [...] usaron patrones de crítica obsoletos. Es necesario también tener presente que la tardía valoración del arte Chancay se debe a que ha sido solamente durante este siglo, y gracias a las transformaciones que ha sufrido el arte y, consecuentemente, la crítica de arte, que se ha puesto en valor, y se le ha dado la importancia que merece, el llamado arte primitivo.” Fernando de Szyszlo, *Miradas furtivas. Antología de textos 1955–1996*, Lima 1996, 1.

ate narratives within museums that start with the objects but that incorporate academic research, including information that can be obtained or inferred from known archaeological contexts whenever possible.

III. The Context in Peru

In Peru, the creation of the collections that allowed for the formation of a memory of the past had to start from private collections and isolated objects that have shaped the public collections of today. Although this process began at the end of the nineteenth century, it did not succeed in shaping an institutional museum framework until well into the twentieth century. The Museo Nacional, for example, founded through the individual efforts of Mariano Eduardo de Rivero, would be a fragile and under-funded institution for decades.¹⁵ In the face of this institutional frailty, the well-intentioned accounts that travelers and scientists like Humboldt, Markham, Squier, Baudelier, or Raimondi disseminated about Peru unfortunately ignited a sudden interest among both local and foreign collectors in the Peruvian past and the objects that represented it.¹⁶ Commercialization of archaeological objects thus began, leading to the departure of very important collections destined for the United States and Europe. The War of the Pacific, a tragic episode that brought with it the plundering of the Museo Nacional, as well as its temporary closure and suspension of the development of its collections, would leave a museal vacuum that seemed insurmountable. It was in this context that private initiatives emerged to build the public collections of the nation. For example, the history of the collection of Víctor Larco Herrera, which would end up being acquired by the state in 1924, reveals the important role that individuals' actions had in the creation of collections.¹⁷ This would also be the final destination of the collection of the politician and intellectual Javier Prado Ugarteche (Lima, 1871–1921), integrated years later into the recently founded MALI. It was through these individual efforts, marked by the personal vision of each collector, that it gradually became possible to broaden access to the vestiges of the past and outline a collective vision for history in Peru – an important but, no doubt, slanted vision.¹⁸

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Julio C. Tello and Toribio Mejía Xesspe, *Historia de los museos nacionales del Perú, 1822–1946*, in: *Arqueológicas* 10, 1967, 1–268.

¹⁶

Pascal Riviale, *Un siècle d'archéologie française au Pérou (1821–1914)*, Paris 1996.

¹⁷

Larco Herrera acquired collections from the Castillo and Estrada families of Chiclayo, the Black family of Chiquitoy, the Dieguez, Kosmann, and Neira families of Pacasmayo, and the Baglieto, Cossio, Urquiaga, and Vélez López families of Trujillo. See Tello and Mejía Xesspe, *Historia de los museos nacionales del Perú*, 119.

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For more information on the history of collecting in Peru, see Cecilia Pardo, *De lo privado a lo público. La formación de colecciones precolombinas en el MALI*, in: *De Cupisnique a los*

The case of the MALI is revealing in this context. Of the 17,000 works that today constitute the collections of the MALI, at least 7,000 form part of the Memoria Prado, the collection created at the beginning of the twentieth century by Javier Prado Ugarteche. Over the course of his law career at the Universidad de San Marcos, Prado began intense political and intellectual activities that would make him one of the most influential people in the country.¹⁹ His collection was born of the desire to bring together objects that could encompass the history of Peru and represent it through its principal periods, styles, and civilizations.²⁰ Prado created his own museum that was a product of his intellectual vocation, his interest in the past, but also his concern for contemporary Peru. His proposal involved integrating the Pre-Columbian past into narratives about the history of Peruvian art in various ways. This contribution – rarely explicitly recognized as such – set the tone for the collecting project of the museum and still defines the curatorial work of the MALI today. I would like to thus reflect here on how we worked as an art museum to construct narratives informed by the objects themselves – pieces of great artistic quality – that generally lack archaeological context but that allowed us to develop interpretations informed by archaeological research and, at the same time, that served to establish trans-historical dialogues with works from other moments and traditions that are represented in the collection.

IV. Three Exhibitions

Temporary exhibitions allowed us the opportunity to create new forms of presenting and sharing Pre-Columbian art. Such was the case with shows like *Modelando el mundo. Imágenes de la arquitectura precolombina* (Modeling the World. Images of Pre-Columbian Architecture), an exhibition that took place in the temporary galleries of the museum between October 2011 and February 2012. The concept began as an exploration of architectural images in the Pre-Hispanic world, ideas about their function, and whether they were understood as real or ideal representations of buildings, plazas, residences, and funerary chambers or as amplified and stylized versions of ceremonial constructions. These images in ceramic, stone, and other media juxtaposed the concrete reality of the monument and its representation with the idealized conception of space, scale, and geographic surroundings. At the same time, they led to consideration of their relationships with the people who took these objects with them to the great beyond, and of the rituals depicted in those spaces.

incas. El arte del valle de Jequetepeque (exh. cat. Lima, Museo de Arte de Lima), ed. by Luis Jaime Castillo and Cecilia Pardo, Lima 2009, 27–33.

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Felipe Portocarrero, *El Imperio Prado. 1890–1970*, Lima 2007, 103.

²⁰

Pedro Morales de la Torre, Javier Prado. Evocador de la castiza tradición limeña, in: *Mercurio Peruano* 7/42, 1921, 278–279.

The exhibition and the catalogue that accompanied it – which was born from a research project led by scholars in the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú and an international symposium that took place in June 2010 that brought together various specialists on the subject – presented a review of the most significant pieces that refer to architecture. The show addressed these works' functionality and relevance as objects of ceremonial use, or as idealized prototypes for construction, from the foundation of interdisciplinary study wherein architecture, archaeology, and art history converged. It called attention to those abstract elements of art that demonstrate ties to architecture, in the end questioning the use of these objects as maquettes or precise models for the architect's reference, leading to a discussion that resulted in ascribing a principally symbolic intent to these works. The exhibition included objects from the MALI and various other museums such as the Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Antropología e Historia del Perú (MNAAHP), the Museo Larco, the Museo Amano, and pieces that were recovered in the archaeological excavations of research projects at sites including Sipán, San José de Moro, and Huaca de la Luna.²¹

The show was designed along three principal lines. The first was a panoramic vision of architectural representations across time from Chavín to the Incas. Here the interpretation focused on the object and on the architectural traits that characterized each period. The second line presented cases related to archaeological discoveries on Peru's north coast, which related objects with the places where they were found. This included the example of the wooden Chimú maquette found within the excavations of the earlier Moche temple of Huaca de la Luna, together with a plan of a Chimú palace in Chan Chan, which allowed for explanation of the possible formal relationship between the object and the architecture. The clay maquettes from the Moche cemetery of San José de Moro offered a similar case where it was possible to hypothesize that the objects were closely tied to the individuals who were buried in the tombs in which they were found. Following the work of art historian Juliet Wiersema,²² the exhibition included a selection of bottles that allowed comparisons between ceramic representations and buildings at full scale. A third line of the exhibition was based on a more formalist perspective, centered on the objects and the processes of abstraction in Pre-Columbian representation. The importance of this project was based in proposing a dialogue across three disciplines, each with its own methods.

The conservation and *puesta en valor* (site development) project at Castillo de Huarmey took place in 2014, through an agreement with the Proyecto Arqueológico Castillo de Huarmey directed by

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For more information, see *Modelando el mundo. Imágenes de la arquitectura precolombina* (exh. cat. Lima, Museo de Arte de Lima), ed. by Cecilia Pardo, Lima 2011.

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Juliet Wiersema, La relación simbólica entre las representaciones arquitectónicas en las vasijas mochica y su función ritual, in: *Modelando el mundo*, 164–179.

the team of Polish archaeologists Miłosz Giersz, Patrycja Prządka, and Krzysztof Makowski. During the process of conserving a selection of objects recovered from the Wari mausoleum found at that site, located to the north of Lima, we planned an initial show that presented the research-in-progress on this funerary context [Fig. 2].²³ The exhibition *Castillo de Huarmey. El mausoleo imperial wari* (Castillo de Huarmey. The Imperial Wari Mausoleum) was envisioned as a preliminary interpretation of the burial ceremonies of the Wari elite (ca. 600–1000 CE) that also touched on other themes including the social status and political power of this group, the relationship between women and textile production, and the techniques used in various media including metal and wood.

This exhibition was a preliminary exercise of interpretation that allowed us to glimpse the importance of this discovery for Andean archaeology. The potential in having the intact context that was saved from looting marks a high point in our understanding of the tombs of the elite during the Middle Horizon. The discovery also became a platform for the discussion of broader topics within Peruvian archaeology. Wider issues also arose, like the diversity of styles of the Middle Horizon period that were found in one single context and sometimes in a single object, as well as the characteristics of the Wari political presence and the modalities of power that it exercised on the north coast of Peru after the Moche decline around 800 CE.

Within the reconstruction of the mausoleum chamber that was a central component of the exhibition, different sets of objects from the funerary assemblage – jewelry (metal, wood, and bone earspools, necklaces, pectorals, pendants, *tupus*, and rings), weapons (axes, knives, and spear throwers), paraphernalia (lime bottles, rattles, whistles), weaving tools (looms, spindles, spindle whorls, spoons with pigment), and vessels made of ceramic, metal, and carved stone (jars, bottles, flasks, vases, and bowls) – were presented with detailed descriptions and interpretations, arranged as they had been found within the particular setting of the tomb. The group of earspools in the exhibition was presented two ways: in a re-creation based on how they would have been worn by the Wari women and as individual objects with explanations of each one. For example, a pair of gold and silver ear ornaments that were embossed with the image of a human figure with an appendage emerging from the nose was placed in comparison to another image reproduced from a Wari glove now in the Brooklyn Museum in New

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In September 2012, the Proyecto de Investigación Arqueológica Castillo de Huarmey (PIACH) announced one of the most important archaeological discoveries of recent years. They uncovered a mausoleum of the highest Wari elite (600–1000 CE), constructed upon a ridge of bedrock at Castillo de Huarmey, an archaeological site located in the region of Ancash. The funerary chamber contained more than sixty mummy bundles – the great majority of whom were women – and more than 1,300 objects of exceptional wealth that formed part of the ceremonial assemblage and mortuary offerings.



[Fig. 2]

View of the exhibition *Castillo de Huarmey*, organized by the Museo de Arte de Lima, 2014.
Archivo Institucional, Museo de Arte de Lima. Photograph by Daniel Giannoni.

York.²⁴ Similarly, a group of openwork carved wooden ear spools was exhibited together with a lithograph of very similar pieces published by Reiss and Stübel 150 years prior.²⁵

This show also allowed us to give context to other collections, for example the group of textiles in the MNAHP that Heiko Prümers excavated at Castillo de Huarmey in the 1980s;²⁶ a selection of the Amano collection, which its namesake Yoshitaro Amano had recovered at the site during the 1970s; and the illustrations that Julio C. Tello had made of the site during one of his expeditions in 1919.²⁷

The third exhibition and publication project – *Moche y sus vecinos. Reconstruyendo identidades* (Moche and Their Neighbors. Reconstructing Identities) – which originated in the MALI and was presented between April and August of 2016 – was designed to give a wider audience access to advances in research produced within the academic field. Led by Peruvian archaeologist Julio Rucabado,²⁸ the show [Fig. 3] presented a selection of images associated with Moche art that conveyed the specific relationships that this culture had entered into with neighboring communities, principally from the mountains. This is the case of groups that migrated from the Recuay, Cajamarca, or Huamachuco regions toward the milder environment of the upper Moche and Chicama Valleys at the beginning of the Early Intermediate Period (ca. 100–300 CE). Through a set of symbols and visual narratives manifested in pieces from collections and archaeological discoveries, the show sought to convey the ideas developed by the Moche around the formation of their collective identity, which included both conflict and negotiation with their neighbors

Rucabado's work was supported by the interdisciplinary studies of a group of specialists who studied the concept of the foreigner in Moche art and society from different research perspectives.²⁹

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Castillo de Huarmey. *El mausoleo imperial wari* (exh. cat. Lima, Museo de Arte de Lima), ed. by Milosz Giersz and Cecilia Pardo, Lima 2014, 156–157.

²⁵

Ibid., 155.

²⁶

Heiko Prümers, “El Castillo” de Huarmey. Una plataforma funeraria del Horizonte Medio, in: *Boletín de Arqueología PUCP* 4, 2000, 289–312.

²⁷

Eugenio Yacovleff, Informe acerca del viaje a Huarmey III-1930, Box 18, Grupo Huaylas, fols. 601–620, Archivo Julio C. Tello, Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, Lima. For more information on this project, see Castillo de Huarmey, 27.

²⁸

See also Julio Rucabado Yong, Los otros, los “no-moche”. Reflexiones en torno a la formación y representación de identidades colectivas, in: Marco Curatola Petrocchi, Cécile Michaud, Joanne Pillsbury, and Lisa Trever (eds.), *El arte antes de la historia. Para una historia del arte andino antiguo*, Lima 2020, 259–290.

²⁹

The project's collaborators were Luis Jaime Castillo Butters (Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú), Solsiré Cusicanqui (Harvard University), George Lau (University of East Anglia, Norwich), Fred Longstaffe (University of Western Ontario), J. Marla Toyne (Uni-



[Fig. 3]

View of the exhibition *Moche y sus vecinos*, organized by the Museo de Arte de Lima, 2016.
Archivo Institucional, Museo de Arte de Lima. Photograph by Edi Hirose.

From those perspectives, the exhibition developed four topics that determined the spaces of the galleries: battles between Moche and non-Moche, the relationship between Moche and Recuay, the presence of Cajamarca in Moche iconography, and images that refer to a space that was foreign, exotic, and possibly associated with the tropical forests and the Amazon. The project prioritized the study of images with the support of archaeological data, an approach that characterizes the research that Rucabado has carried out with archaeologist Brian Billman in the middle Moche Valley, as well as the discovery of Cajamarca vessels in coastal sites like Huaca de la Luna and San José de Moro.³⁰

The opportunity to develop a project like this, that embraced understudied topics in Andean archaeology, enabled us to open new windows of interpretation on certain pieces. Such was the case, for example, with a Recuay style stone object belonging to the MALI that formed part of the Javier Prado collection and that had no specific information about its origins (provenience). Out of context, there was little that could be said about this piece – a representation in carved stone of a seated human figure that wore a headdress of human hands and that seemed to be associated with the Recuay culture. In the process of selecting works for the exhibition, we identified the piece in the museum collection and noticed that the figure was carrying something on its back but it was difficult to make out because of conservation problems. Thanks to Rucabado's research, it was finally possible to associate the object on the figure's back with the bags that appeared in scenes in Moche art and that, according to various scholars, were related to foreign groups. Thus, in the context of the museographic proposal, this object served as a linchpin to establish the link between the theme of ritual battles and the Recuay culture. This case revealed the importance of tying curatorial work to research carried out in the academic sphere.

V. 3000 Years of Art in Peru. The Permanent Galleries of the MALI

Representation of the Pre-Hispanic in an institution like the MALI necessarily depends on the nature of the collections and the manner in which they were formed. The majority of the museum's Pre-Columbian pieces was brought together by Javier Prado at the beginning of the twentieth century, when scientific archaeology was just taking its first steps in Peru.³¹ As happened with other collections formed during the same era, the objects lack information about

versity of Central Florida), Lisa Trever (University of California, Berkeley), Santiago Uceda (Universidad Nacional de Trujillo), John Verano (Tulane University), and Christine White (Tulane University).

³⁰

Moche y sus vecinos. Reconstruyendo identidades (exh. cat. Lima, Museo de Arte de Lima), ed. by Cecilia Pardo and Julio Rucabado, Lima 2016.

³¹

For more information on the history of collecting in Peru, see Pardo, *De lo privado a lo público*. See also Natalia Majluf, *Working from Objects. Andean Studies, Museums, and Research*, in: *Res. Anthropology and Aesthetics* 52, 2007, 65–72.

their archaeological provenience or precise context. For the same reasons, then, approaching the curatorial plans for the new permanent galleries of the MALI posed a particularly difficult challenge.³²

With only eight of the thirty-four rooms to represent the entire history of Peruvian art before the European conquest, the project had to prioritize the histories that had the greatest strengths in the museum's collections. Our desire to create what Jaime Cuadriello – art historian in the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México – calls “discursos inter-textuales” led to the creation of specific discourses within broader narratives.³³ Such is the case, for example, in the vitrines on representations of architecture, within the gallery dedicated to “Espacio y entorno” (Space and Environment), which developed out of the framework of the *Modelando el mundo* exhibition. In one vitrine, objects of various styles share a text on the possible function of these representations, whereas another displays a series of *yupanas* and discusses the possible uses of these objects for counting or as synthetic representations of buildings [Fig. 4].

A similar case was a section that forms part of the museum's textile gallery. Conceived of as a rotating exhibition space, given the fragility of the medium, the gallery was designed to convey three ideas: textiles as material supports of images and symbolic messages, as objects produced for death, and as distinctive elements of identity. In one subsection – as another mode of intertextual discourse – we exhibited a portion of the burial assemblage from the Middle Horizon funerary context at the site of Cerro de Oro in the Cañete Valley. This material served as the basis for a temporary exhibition that emerged out of a conservation and *puesta en valor* project of the discovery and the site itself.³⁴ This was also an opportunity to incorporate objects into the installation from collections of the MALI, the MNAHP, and from Huaca Malena, all of which may have come from the same original location.

A small section of the permanent galleries was dedicated to displaying a group of vitrines with objects that demonstrate designs that reveal the richness of Pre-Columbian art, composed of geometric motifs and abstractions that form decorative patterns. Although from a contemporary perspective we might understand these elements in purely formal terms, they generally result from

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After extensive renovation, the new permanent galleries of the MALI opened to the public in the Palacio de la Exposición at the end of 2015.

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Personal communication to the author, 2015.

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Located on the top of a hill that marks entry to the Cañete Valley, Cerro de Oro dominated the landscape of the south-central coast of Peru for about a thousand years (550–1500 CE). Archaeological research undertaken in recent years has created a clearer picture of the possible nature of Cerro de Oro: a Pre-Hispanic city that played an important role in a great sphere of regional interaction over the span of a millennium. The exhibition presented a selection of the findings of the research carried out in Cerro de Oro in the last years through a set of objects from the Proyecto Arqueológico de Cerro de Oro (PACO), led by archaeologist Francesca Fernandini, and from public collections.



[Fig. 4]
Permanent gallery installation of “Espacio y entorno” in the Museo de Arte de Lima, 2015.
Archivo Institucional, Museo de Arte de Lima. Photograph by Edi Hirose.

the extreme stylization of recognizable motifs. Icons like waves, crosses, steps, and triangles can thus be interpreted both as part of a symbolic language that expresses the cosmography of these societies, and as forms that were motivated by an aesthetic program. Here, more than in other examples, the installation expressed the virtues of the possible union of the two disciplines of anthropology and art history.

A dominant component of the Pre-Columbian section was the gallery dedicated to the north coast of Peru. The contents of that gallery were based on a research project that the museum began in 2007 and that led to the museum's acquisition of part of the collection created by Oscar Rodríguez Razzetto in the Jequetepeque Valley. This acquisition of seventy-three pieces enriched the small collection of Cupisnique, Moche, Lambayeque, and Chimú vessels already in the MALI collections. In the early twentieth century, when Prado formed his Pre-Hispanic collection, Nasca archaeology was booming, which could explain why he had greater access to collections like Nasca coming from the south coast than from the north coast. It has been possible to correct this imbalance in the original Memoria Prado with the acquisitions that have been made since the museum's foundation. In fact, thanks to the generosity of Petrus and Verónica Fernandini, the collection acquired from the family of Rodríguez Razzetto today constitutes one of the central pillars of the archaeological collection of the museum.

The transition from the Pre-Hispanic to colonial galleries was planned as a radical break: one case contains Inca pieces and a group of aryballos that closes the section, followed immediately by a European canvas that depicts the Virgin and Child, a work by the Italian painter Mateo Pérez de Alessio that dates to the early seventeenth century. This abrupt transition reflects the vision of art historian George Kubler, who emphasized the rupture that the Conquest signified, writing that "very few native art forms have so far survived this wreck".³⁵ Despite this visual shock, however, certain parallel continuities and colonial reinventions are suggested in the cases that exhibit groups of objects like *queros*, *pacchas* (libation vessels), *tupus*, and textiles in the gallery that explores the memory of the Pre-Hispanic past in early colonial art.

The installation suggested that even though there are traditions that have managed to survive, the visual culture has been largely run over, destroyed, and replaced by a new culture. The tour through the colonial, republican, modern, and contemporary collections is marked by galleries or vitrines that explore some moments or traditions in which artists turned their gaze to the Pre-Columbian past. This is the case in the gallery "Modelos para un arte nacional", which documents the rise of aesthetic nationalism in the early twentieth century, when artists like Elena Izcue, Camilo Blas, Antonino Espinosa Saldaña, and Manuel Piqueras Cotoí began to revalorize

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George Kubler, *The Shape of Time. Remarks on the History of Things*, New Haven, CT 1962, 107.

Pre-Columbian art as a source of inspiration for contemporary art. In this way, Pre-Columbian production becomes a counterpoint that allows visitors to imagine how the past is continuously recreated through time.

VI. Conclusion

In these curatorial projects at the MALI, we sought to work from the objects themselves, ascribing new readings to them. Certainly, when working with collections in art museums we are dealing with pieces of great artistic value, in which the mastery achieved by those who created them is revealed. But it is necessary to go beyond skill or artistic excellence, to comprehend the place that these objects occupied within the Pre-Columbian world. Unlike the modern artists who limited their understanding of the artistic to the formal, we have tried to return these objects to their social and cultural context. This does not contradict but rather emphasizes their aesthetic value. We have been finding our own way to approach them and, through them, the societies that created them. This approach leaves aside the old, false opposition between art and archaeology, by allowing the formation of projects that demonstrate that the *convivencia* of both disciplines is not only possible, but necessary.

Within the space of the art museum, the archaeological object can be shown at once as a ritual object, as a funerary offering, and as a work of art. Beyond the examples discussed here, there are many ways in which disciplines can be joined, through accessible content for the publics that visit museums, allowing objects to generate histories and at the same time transmit experiences. If not for the purpose of producing and sharing knowledge in spaces like museums and universities, there is no use in arguing about the quarrel – hopefully now obsolete – between archaeology and the history of art.

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CH'U MAYAA AND THE APPROPRIATION OF THE PAST

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21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
#2-2023, pp. 245–258

<https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2023.2.96033>



ABSTRACT

The short video *Ch'u Mayaa* (*Maya Blue*, 2017) by artist Clarissa Tossin uses the Barnsdall (or Hollyhock) House, one of five Southern California textile block homes by Frank Lloyd Wright built in the early 1920s, as the setting for a dance performance by the choreographer Crystal Sepúlveda. Without dialogue or narration, the video raises complex issues about the use and appropriation of imagery and designs from the ancient Americas, and the ways in which a structure from the past, now designated an architectural landmark, can be reframed by contemporary artists. The essay concludes with a brief discussion of the author's collaboration with Mexican artist Mariana Castillo Deball, a playful conceptual project which also highlights the relationship between the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright and that of the ancient Maya.

KEYWORDS

Maya Revival; Appropriations; Video art; Clarissa Tossin; Mariana Castillo Deball; Frank Lloyd Wright.

Any number of contemporary artists have made works based on twentieth-century Maya Revival architecture, from Eduardo Abaroa's epic fantasy of iconoclasm, *La destrucción total del Museo Nacional de Antropología* (2012–2016), to the late Lourdes Grobet's photographic essay *Neo-Olmayaztec* (1990), from Pablo López Luz's deadpan photographs of even more modest, vernacular examples of this style gathered in *Pyramids* (2019) to Andrés Padilla Domene's Yucatecan science fiction documentary *Ciudad Maya* (2016, set in the ruins of the Mérida nightclub of the same name).¹ All of these works sit at a crossroads, where modernism meets the Pre-Columbian past, where architecture, archaeology, contemporary art, and art history all intersect. Elsewhere I've explored the ways in which Maya Revival architecture – in Mexico (both within and beyond the Maya region of the southeast), in the USA, in Spain, and beyond – has been framed by forces of nationalism, manifest destiny, post-Revolutionary ideological debates, and regional pride.² In the wake of the European invasion of the Americas, the introduction to and assimilation of the radically different aesthetics of Mesoamerica produced little discernable impact on European art, and even less on European architecture. It was not until the late nineteenth century and the start of the twentieth that the first Western architects began to integrate references to these ancient structures into contemporary designs, in ways that were as diverse as the principal practitioners: Robert Stacy-Judd, Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin, Frank Lloyd Wright and his son, Lloyd Wright. In Mexico, and especially on Mexico's Yucatan peninsula, these references gathered another set of meanings and a different ideological charge, as evident in the work of architects there, especially Manuel Amabilis and Francisco J. Serrano. When taking these Maya Revival buildings as a point of departure, contemporary artists are confronted with a tangled knot of questions revolving around appropriations of the Indigenous past, tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and the legacies of the European Conquest. How can artists re-imagine these histories? A short, seventeen-minute video by Los Angeles-based artist Clarissa Tossin entitled *Ch'u Mayaa* (or in English, *Maya Blue*, 2017) enters into these debates with a choreography and montage that create a powerful, poetic intervention within one particularly beautiful, highly charged space, one richly suggestive of a productive dialogue between contemporary art practice, archaeology, and art (and architectural) history.

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Eduardo Abaroa, *La destrucción total del Museo Nacional de Antropología*, Mexico City 2017; Pablo López Luz, *Pyramid*, Paris 2015. Grobet's photo-essay has yet to be published in its entirety, but is available for viewing on her website [Lourdes Grobet](#).

2

Jesse Lerner, *The Maya of Modernism. Art, Architecture, and Film*, Albuquerque, NM 2013. More of the context for these exchanges and appropriations in architecture and design is provided by Wendy Kaplan (ed.), *Found in Translation. Design in California and Mexico, 1915–1985*, Los Angeles 2017.

Ch'u Mayaa is shot at the Barnsdall House (1918–1920, also known as the Hollyhock House), the first of five textile block homes Frank Lloyd Wright built in Southern California in the early 1920s. The building was commissioned as a private home by the millionaire oil heiress, arts patron, experimental theater impresario, and radical leftist Aline Barnsdall, who imagined it as the center of a sprawling arts complex called Olive Hill. During this interval in Southern California in the early 1920s, Frank Lloyd Wright and his office (especially Rudolph Schindler, Richard Neutra, and Lloyd Wright) designed – in addition to the Hollyhock House – Pasadena's Millard House (1923, also known as *La Miniatura*), the Ennis House (1923–1924), the Storer House (1923–1924), the Freeman House (1923–1924), as well as a never realized plan for the Doheny Ranch Development (1921), an ambitious proposal for what is today's moneyed Trousdale Estates neighborhood of Beverly Hills.³ The most notable commonalities shared by all these projects are the abstract geometric references to the ancient monumental architecture of the Maya region and the use of textured, cast concrete blocks, incorporating sand from the site, to add an element of the local earth tones. Numerous scholars have detailed the connections with ancient Maya ceremonial buildings,⁴ but Wright himself was loath to acknowledge “influences”, for fear that it might diminish perceptions of his originality or genius. “Resemblances are mistaken for influences”,⁵ Wright stated dismissively. Yet Wright did acknowledge that from an early age, “primitive American architecture, Toltec, Aztec, Mayan, Inca, stirred my wonder, excited my wishful admiration”.⁶ Later in his life, after his 1952 visit to Mexico City (and especially the newly constructed Ciudad Universitaria campus of the National University, or UNAM), he stated he was “more than ever sure that American Architecture needs only American influences originating in the Toltec area as the great basis of all future architecture [...] Swiss or French influence is now

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The Doheny Ranch Development would have comprised between two and three hundred textile block houses of different shapes and sizes sprawling over a 411-acre site, owned at the time by another petroleum multi-millionaire, Edward L. Doheny. See Greg Gilden and Sam Lubell, *Never Built Los Angeles*, New York 2013, 52–53. Frank Lloyd Wright was in Japan during much of this time, preoccupied with the construction of the New Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, and left much of the work on the Hollyhock House to Schindler, Neutra, and his eldest son, much to the consternation of Barnsdall. See Kathryn Smith, *Frank Lloyd Wright. Hollyhock House and Olive Hill, Buildings and Projects for Aline Barnsdall*, Santa Monica, CA 2006.

4

See, for example, Barbara Braun, *Pre-Columbian Art and the Post-Columbian World. Ancient American Sources of Modern Art*, New York 1993, 138–179; and Anthony Alfonsin, *Frank Lloyd Wright, The Lost Years, 1910–1922. A Study of Influence*, Chicago 1993, 221–260. Ruth Anne Phillips and R. Sarah Richardson argue that the architecture of the Inca, Tiwanaku, and other Andean sources were equally influential, if less often acknowledged: Phillips and Richardson, Stone, Water, and Mortarless Constructions. Frank Lloyd Wright and the Pre-Columbian Inca, in: *The Latin Americanist* 57/4, 2013, 97–129.

5

Frank Lloyd Wright, *A Testament*, New York 1957, 204.

6

Ibid., 111.

behind the American lighthouse and I hope it stays there”.⁷ These Mesoamerican resonances appear earlier in his work (the no-longer existent Midway Gardens, 1915, the A. D. German Warehouse, 1915, the Imperial Hotel, 1916–1922, and the Bogk House, 1917) and continue intermittently until some of his very last buildings (especially New York’s Guggenheim Museum, 1943–1959, a riff on Chichén Itzá’s “observatory”, popularly known as El Caracol). But unlike Amábilis and Stacy-Judd, who both wrote analyses and celebrations of ancient Maya architecture, albeit through highly idiosyncratic interpretations that flew in the face of the more orthodox archaeological understanding of their day,⁸ or those of other contemporaries mining these same sources, Frank Lloyd Wright’s appropriation of Native American sources is elided by his obfuscations and denials. “To cut ambiguity short: there has never been an external influence on my work, other than [...] the great poets”, he wrote in one autobiography. “As for the Incas, the Mayans, even the Japanese – all were to me but splendid confirmation.”⁹

Recently, a century after the construction of the Hollyhock House, there have been any number of unauthorized, popular interventions both in California and elsewhere in the USA attacking public and private monuments that mark the European invasion and Conquest. These attacks are part of a larger, national reckoning, in large part provoked by the brutal murders by police of Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Jordan Edwards, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and too many others, and a contentious reevaluation of how multiple histories of violence ought to be marked in public spaces and in official narratives. Authorities in Carmel, San Luis Obispo, and Ventura, California have removed and put in storage public statues of Junípero Serra (the Franciscan friar – and as of 2015, a saint as well – who led the evangelization of the Californias), similar monuments to Serra in San Francisco, Monterey, Santa Barbara, Sacramento, Mission Hills, Malibu, Los Angeles, and San Gabriel have been toppled, vandalized, or decapitated.¹⁰ Dozens of public

7

Frank Lloyd Wright to Carlos Lazo, November 15, 1952, in: Frank Lloyd Wright, *Letters to Architects*, ed. by Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, London 1984, 202. Wright’s use of the word “Toltec” likely reflects a now-outdated understanding of that culture’s influence in Mexico’s southeast. The first edition of Sylvanus Griswold Morley’s survey text *The Ancient Maya* (Stanford, CA 1946, 88) for example, states that around the tenth century, it is “probable that originally some of their ancestors at least had come from central Mexico, perhaps even from Tula, the ancient Toltec capital”.

8

Stacy-Judd’s treatment of the ancient Maya revisits many of the ideas of Augustus and Alice Le Plongeon and Charles Étienne Brasseur de Bourbourg; see his *Atlantis. Mother of Empires*, Los Angeles 1939. Amábilis’s esotericism reaches similar conclusions with an altogether different methodology; as in his *Los Atlantes en Yucatán*, Mexico City 1975.

9

Wright, *A Testament*, 205.

10

See the essays published in the section “Dialogues. The California Missions and the Arts of the Conquest”, in: *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture* 2/3, 2020, 53–111; as well as Charlene Villaseñor Black’s introduction, *Rethinking Mission Studies*, in: *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture* 2/3, 2020, 3–7. For a more general discussion of the contemporary

statues of Columbus across the USA have met similar fates, as have monuments commemorating the conquistadors Juan de Oñate and Ponce de León. While neither violent nor iconoclastic, Tossin's *Ch'u Mayaa* is also a reckoning with the history of the Conquest and of cultural appropriation. As this rash of demolitions suggests, her intervention (inevitably, and in too many ways to enumerate) takes place in a political and social context, and at a moment that is quite different from the time a century ago when the Barnsdall House was constructed. One important difference is that the Hollyhock House is no longer a private home, and Olive Hill is not (nor was it ever) the sort of ambitious artists' colony that Aline Barnsdall hoped it would become.¹¹ The southern and eastern parcels at the base of Olive Hill were sold off to private developers, and today are the site of a private hospital and a large shopping plaza housing a barber shop, a Thai restaurant, an Armenian grocery store, a drive-through fast food outlet, a faux half-timbered storefront selling fish and chips, a taco shop, and an Asian fusion restaurant. This is the part of the site where Barnsdall imagined constructing a series of studios, home for an artists' residency program that was never realized. Nor were Wright's plans for an open-air theater, an apartment building, artists' residences, and shops – except for two smaller structures, known as “Residence A” (often called the “Director's House”) and (the subsequently demolished) “Residence B”.¹² The Hollyhock House itself, however, has been preserved and restored, and is recognized on the US National Register of Historic Places. It is also, like the Maya ruins of Chichén Itzá, Uxmal, Calakmul, Palenque, Quiriguá, and Tikal, designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site; along with seven other Wright buildings, it is part of a multi-sited monument called “The 20th-Century Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright”.¹³ In short, the Hollyhock House is neither what it was when Barnsdall (briefly) lived there, nor what she imagined it would become today; it is rather now an architectural landmark, a monument.

re-evaluation of public art and monuments in the USA, see Laura Raicovich, *Culture Strike. Art and Museums in an Age of Protest*, London 2021, 126–131.

11

Pilar Tompkins Rivas, Civic Virtue. Intersections of Art, Agency, and Activism, in: *Civic Virtue. The Impact of the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery and the Watts Towers Arts Center*, Los Angeles 2011, 40–43. Barnsdall's relationship with the architect, who left for Japan during construction, and whom she blamed for cost overruns and the building's structural problems, was contentious. Her relationship with the city government, to whom she donated the building, was even more so. Wright returned to the site in 1954 for the Los Angeles presentation of his retrospective, *Sixty Years of Organic Architecture. The Works of Frank Lloyd Wright*, in a temporary structure of his design and the prototype for today's Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery. The Cultural Affairs department also operates a small theater on the site, though modest compared to the open-air theater Barnsdall dreamed of building.

12

After donating the Hollyhock House to the City of Los Angeles in 1926, Aline Barnsdall continued living in the much smaller Residence B. It was demolished in 1954, eight years after her death.

13

See The 20th-Century Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright on the website of the [UNESCO World Heritage Convention](#) (May 22, 2023).

While the Hollyhock House is not a tribute to a colonizer or an evangelist, it is nonetheless one fraught with colonial subtexts. However exceptional and however beautiful, it is like the countless monuments to Columbus, Fray Diego de Landa, Father Junípero Serra, and others, in that it is a product, a marker, and a celebration of the Conquest and of the subjugation of Indigenous Americans erected by Americans of European descent. While most such public monuments use a familiar sculptural style inherited from Europe, that of a bronze or marble bust or larger-than-life, idealized likeness placed on a pedestal and labeled with a commemorative plaque, Wright's monument is a house, designed for a modern, radical client, and replete with Mesoamerican quotations. When people of European descent in the United States hope to assert their "American-ness" and sever the umbilical cord with Europe, they often don red face and buckskin and put feathers in their hair. From the Boston Tea Party to fraternal organizations such as The Improved Order of Red Men and the New Confederacy of Iroquois, the Anglo tradition of "playing Indian" is part of what Philip J. Deloria calls "a still-unfinished, always-contested effort to find an ideal sense of national self".¹⁴ Wright's building performs a more sophisticated sort of architectural red face, an act of cross-cultural transvestitism that its author simultaneously acknowledges ("American Architecture needs only American influences originating in the Toltec area") and denies ("there has never been an external influence on my work").

Tossin's *Ch'u Mayaa* is a collaboration with the choreographer Crystal Sepúlveda, who performs dressed in jaguar print leotards, blue running shoes, and (occasionally) sheer blue dresses with high slits. Both the fabrics worn and postures assumed by the dancer suggest depictions of royalty or high priesthood in the paintings and bas reliefs of the ancient Maya. The "Maya blue" of the title, of the dancer's shoes and dress all reference the exceptionally stable pigment used in ritual costumes and body paintings as recorded in multiple pre-Conquest sources.¹⁵ The jaguar print pattern of the dancers' costumes might derive from that of one of the triumphant royals shown in the murals of Bonampak's room 2, or slightly further afield, the warriors clad in jaguar skins painted at Cacaxtla.¹⁶ But the movements are decidedly not a speculative reconstruction

¹⁴

Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian*, New Haven, CT 1998. See also Chad A. Barbour, *From Daniel Boone to Captain America. Playing Indian in American Popular Culture*, Jackson, MS 2016. The project has been exported to Europe as well; see, for example, the documentary *If Only I Were an Indian...* (John Paskievich, 1996).

¹⁵

See, for example, Constantino Reyes Valerio, *De Bonampak al Templo Mayor. El azul maya en Mesoamérica*, Mexico City 1993; and Nicholas Carter, Stephen D. Houston, and Franco D. Rossi (eds.), *The Adorned Body. Mapping Ancient Maya Dress*, Austin, TX 2020.

¹⁶

While outside the Maya region, the murals of Cacaxtla, Tlaxcala are done in a Maya style and probably represent a battle between armies from the Central Valley and the southeast. See Claudia Lozoff Brittenham, *The Murals of Cacaxtla. The Power of Painting in Ancient Central Mexico*, Austin, TX 2015.

of what Mesoamerican ceremonial dance might have looked like, far from the exotica styles adopted by Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn in *Xochitl* (1915), or Stacy-Judd's gesticulations in his *penacho* and full art deco-Maya regalia, as recorded in his home movies of 1932, filmed in front of the Ennis House.¹⁷ The garments are not anything like the sort of reconstruction of ancient Maya ritual wear we see in those dances, nor those in movies like *Chilam Balam* (Iñigo de Martino, 1955), *Kings of the Sun* (J. Lee Thompson, 1963), or other cinematic reconstructions. The costumes and choreography make even fewer gestures to evoke the era of the construction of the Hollyhock House: no flapper dresses, no shimmies, no Charlestons. The strategy deployed here is something entirely different, one that filters archaeology, art history, and modernist architecture through a lens of re-appropriation and re-conquest.

Ancient Maya dance, "widely represented in ancient imagery"¹⁸ if little studied, is largely the realm of speculation. While we can be sure that "the classic Maya paid great attention to the positioning of human bodies in space",¹⁹ and we can see many, many static depictions of bodies in movement on painted ceramics, murals, and in carvings, most of these ancient choreographies will always remain unknown. Presented as the inhabitant of the house, Sepúlveda greets the dawn, opens the windows, and walks onto a balcony. She gently caresses the cast concrete blocks and breaks into dance. Some of the dancer's movements are so suggestive of specific actions or sources that they invite comparisons to ancient sources. Sepúlveda's body rolls down the broad staircase leading to the terrace outside the music room like one of the bloody prisoners of war, splayed on the stairs depicted in room 3 in Bonampak. The building fragments and crops her body, isolating hands, arms, legs, like shards of broken artifacts. The camera is frequently positioned to leave most of her body out of view, blocked by the architecture. Her hand flits back and forth from an opening by Schindler's flower boxes on the house's eastern side [Fig. 1]. In another sequence, the columns around the garden courtyard obstruct our view of all of Sepúlveda's body except for an extended leg or arm. Like the fragments of human bodies depicted on countless potsherds (in Maya *teping*, or *tepalcates* in Nahuatl), these are isolated excerpts of gestures, extracted and divorced from any original context or meaning. Tossin's editing amplifies this sense of fragmentation. The repeated

17

Held in the Architecture and Design Collections of the University of California, Santa Barbara.

18

Mallory E. Matsumoto, *The Moving Body*, in: Carter, Houston, and Rossi, *The Adorned Body*, 175.

19

Stephen D. Houston, *Telling It Slant. Imaginative Reconstructions of Classic Maya Life*, in: Joanne Pillsbury (ed.), *Past Presented. Archaeological Illustration and the Ancient Americas*, Washington DC 2012, 392.

jump cuts interrupt the continuity of the dancers' movements, further fracturing the actions recorded.

But it is misleading to read too much here through the lens of ancient Maya. The house is named for the Hollyhock flower, Aline Barnsdall's favorite and a graphic source of much of the ornamentations. The *Alcea rosea* was imported from Asia to Europe, and from there to the Americas. A fixture of *Ukiyo-e*, and a symbol of the Edo (or Tokugawa) shogunate, the symmetrical arrangements of the leaves and brightly colored flowers would have been familiar to Wright, a collector and student of Japanese prints who was in Japan during most of the construction process.²⁰ At times, the abstracted concrete adornments on the house can lead us to wonder: is that a feathered serpent's tail or a stalk of hollyhock buds? The influences that shaped the house are not simply Mesoamerican, but like the small businesses housed in the strip mall below, they are Asian, European, and Mexican, in short, a result of the processes of globalization which the European invasion of the Americas accelerated immeasurably.

Other than a brief glimpse of Hollyhock flowers, the frequently contradictory narratives about the house offered by Frank Lloyd Wright and Barnsdall are entirely absent from *Ch'u Mayaa*. The architectural historian Alice T. Friedman has argued that the house's open spaces were conceived as a sort of open-air theater, and arguably Tossin's video returns to that neglected part of the building's original program.²¹ But the dramas surrounding the conflict between the demanding, doubtlessly difficult client and the largely absent yet authoritarian architect as well as the strange and convoluted history of the house following construction are all eclipsed by Tossin's re-taking of the space for an Indigenous subject, and that person's very physical and kinetic occupation of the restored neo-Maya house and the broad expanses of Southern California it surveys. It is, symbolically at least, a gesture of *Reconquista*, to use a loaded term, one which symbolically reclaims a building that borrows liberally from pre-Conquest Mesoamerica.

Tossin's current project – which the global pandemic put on hold – also reinvests a Southern California house with ancient Maya. For this project, she plans to use a Maya Revival house of the same period, the John Sowden House (popularly known as the “Jaws House”, 1926), designed by Wright's son, Lloyd Wright (who directed much of the construction on the Hollyhock House). Using replicas of ancient Maya wind instruments (based on 3D prints from scans of ancient prototypes), and in collaboration with a composer, Tossin will re-appropriate the space with a speculative reconstruc-

²⁰

Frank Lloyd Wright, *The Japanese Print. An Interpretation, and The Frank Lloyd Wright Collection of Japanese Antique Prints*, in: Bruce Brice Pfeiffer (ed.), *Frank Lloyd Wright. Collected Writings*, vol. 1, 1894–1930, New York 1992, 116–125 and 221–224.

²¹

Alice T. Friedmann, *A House Is Not a Home. The Hollyhock House as “Art-Theater Garden”*, in: *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 51/3, 1992, 239–260.



[Fig. 1]

Clarissa Tossin, *Ch'u Mayaa*, 2017, video still, framegrab at 5:54, total running time 17:57.
Courtesy of the artist.

tion of ancient Maya music, like *Ch'u Mayaa*, but now through the sounds these instruments produce rather than through dance.

To conclude in first person: in 2011, the Mexican artist Mariana Castillo Deball invited me to participate (along with Mario Bellatín, Pablo León de la Barra, Valeria Luiselli, and others) in a publication of a collection of dust jackets for a collection of books never written. The project, entitled *Never Odd or Even*, was published on the occasion of her exhibition of the same name at the Grimmuseum in Berlin. The palindrome title suggests its own reversal, an unresolved, perpetual back and forth, as well as an algebraic puzzle. The dust jacket for the unwritten book that I contributed to this speculative collection is for a volume called *My Debt to the Ancient Americas*, by Frank Lloyd Wright [Fig. 2]. Its graphic design is copied from, and the text itself (on the book flaps and back cover) channels the rhetoric of the books Wright published with Duell, Sloan, and Pearce in the 1940s.²² While I believe it looks convincing, the architect would certainly never have written such a book, any more than he would have recognized that the Hollyhock House (and the Ennis House, etc.) had been built on the ancestral lands of the Chumash. Unlike the collection's title, the non-existent book I proposed here is not a reversal of anything (least of all the Conquest), not even on a symbolic level, but it does make explicit a heretofore missing recognition.²³

This hypothetical book jacket and Tossin's video share, I believe, a similar spirit, what author and journalist Cristina Rivera Garza calls "disappropriation", an effort to return cultural production "to its plural origins".²⁴ Rivera Garza's neologism is developed in her wide-ranging collection of essays on writing during times of violence, especially the violence that engulfed Mexico following President Felipe Calderon's catastrophic declaration of a "war on drugs". While her collection addresses a range of diverse themes, from bilingualism and writing in a language that is not one's mother tongue to pedagogy and authorship, it repeatedly circles back to the possibilities and challenges of creating a text attributed to a single author based on the experiences of others, experiences of a community, and Rivera Garza's search for alternatives to the paternalistic fantasy of "giving a voice to the voiceless". She reflects on a range of artists and writers who employ very different strategies of appropriation, including Duchamp's ready-mades, Kathy Acker's post-modern cut-ups, and James Agee's "bold, mad, thrilling" collaboration with Walker Evans, the modernist account of Alabama

22

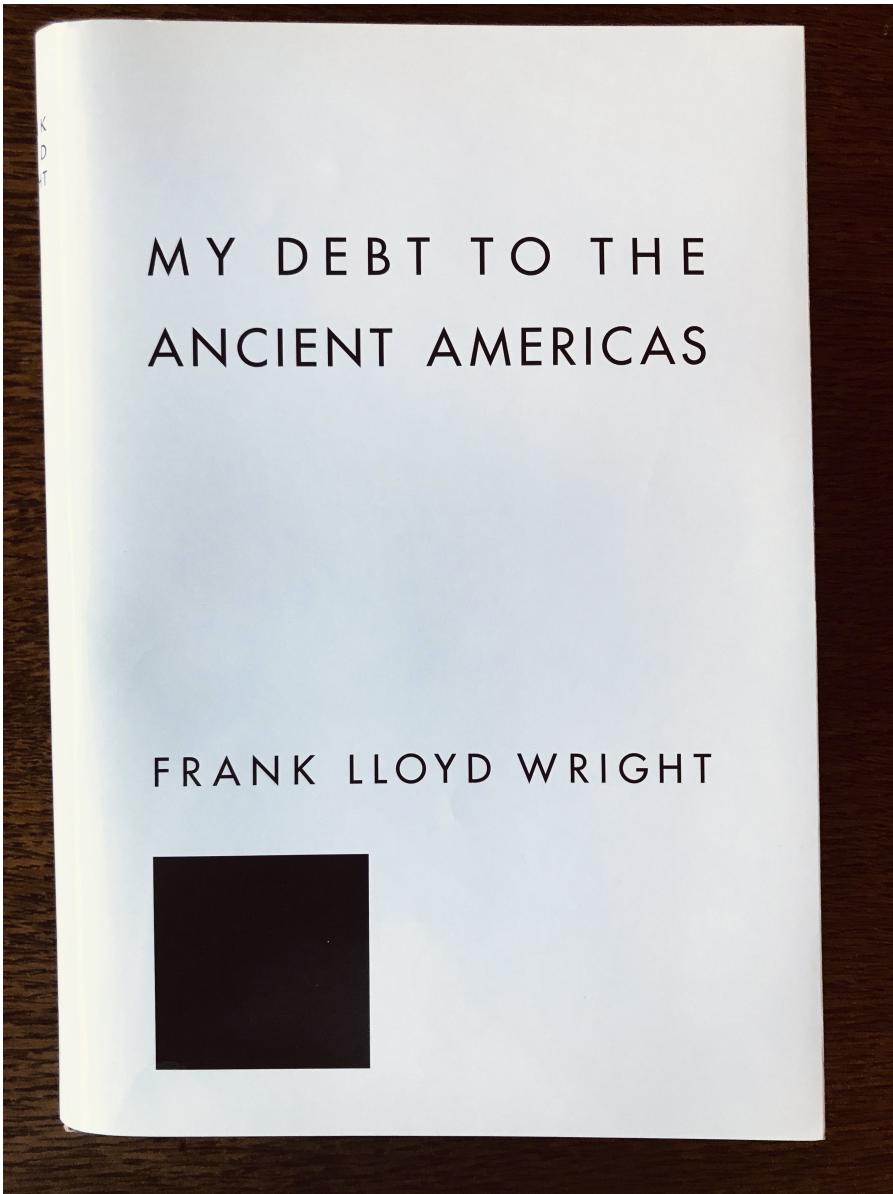
Frank Lloyd Wright, *On Architecture. Selected Writings on Architecture between 1894 and 1940*, New York 1941; id., *An Autobiography*, New York 1941; id., *Genius and the Mobocracy*, New York 1949.

23

Mariana Castillo Deball, *Never Odd or Even Volume II*, Berlin 2011.

24

Cristina Rivera Garza, *Los muertos indóciles. Necroescritura y desapropiación*, Mexico City 2020, 4. Translations by the author.



[Fig. 2]

Mariana Castillo Deball, Manuel Raeder, and Jesse Lerner, *My Debt to the Ancient Americas* by Frank Lloyd Wright, from the series *Never Odd or Even*, 2012, print. One of a collection of dustjackets for books never written. Photograph by author.

sharecroppers' lives *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, and proposes working toward a model which "exposes the plurality that precedes the individuality on the creative process".²⁵ So while Wright's building is both a collaboration (with Schindler, Neutra, and his own son), albeit an asymmetrical one, and a series of unacknowledged appropriations (principally from anonymous architects of ancient Mesoamerica), Tossin's video, like the dust jacket for Wright's unwritten book [Fig. 2], urges us to recognize what has for too long remained unacknowledged, albeit in oblique, poetic, and – certainly in the latter case – cheeky ways.

Disappropriation is a theoretical model to begin to think about alternative ways of writing others' stories and working collaboratively across cultural differences. One way in which *Ch'u Mayaa* resonates with this model is through fragmentation; rather than presenting a unified, coordinated whole (Wright famously insisted on designing the furniture, carpets, lighting fixtures for his buildings), the video relies on collaboration and fracturing, as argued above. In the same spirit, Castillo Deball's collection of dust jackets involves more than thirty collaborators, as well as evoking additional, unwitting ones like Wright. While the two are clearly very different sorts of cultural products in many ways, as are the writings of Rivera Garza, Agee, and Acker, all signal in their own ways a return of artmaking to a pluralistic and communal process, drawing on the experiences and contributions of multiple participants. Disappropriation is surely not a universal or facile solution to the complex ethical and political issues involved in representing the cultural heritage, class positions, and lived experiences of others. These issues will remain, and the examples discussed above – taken from experimental video, architecture, dance, literature, and other disciplines – all raise different and specific questions that deserve consideration. Though while neither addresses this explicitly, one significant commonality shared by the work of Tossin and Wright are the traumas of the historical backdrop: the European Conquest of the Americas and the ensuing dispossession of land, decimation of lives, and mass destruction of cultures. The auto-da-fé of Izamal, the burning of the Maya libraries, the Caste Wars of Yucatan, and the genocidal wars of Guatemala all destroyed parts of Maya cultures, thus making these cultures and their monumental ruins more susceptible for use as a blank screen onto which others project their own narratives and fantasies. Returning to the original prompt on the divide between art and archaeology, the questions that provoked these reflections, Tossin's video is a powerful catalyst for thinking through some of these issues.

²⁵
Ibid., 65.

[Jesse Lerner](#) is a filmmaker, curator, and writer based in Los Angeles. He is a professor in Intercollegiate Media Studies at the Claremont Colleges. His experimental documentary films have won numerous prizes at film festivals in the United States, Latin America, and Japan, and have screened at NYC's Museum of Modern Art, Mexico's National Anthropology Museum, the Guggenheim Museums in New York and Bilbao, and the Sundance, Rotterdam, and Los Angeles Film Festivals. His books include *The Maya of Modernism. Art, Architecture, and Film* (2011), *F Is for Phony. Fake Documentary and Truth's Undoing* (2006, edited with Alex Juhasz), *Ism Ism Ism/Ismo Ismo Ismo. Experimental Cinema in Latin America* (2017, edited with Luciano Piazza), *The Catherwood Project. Incidents of Visual Reconstructions and Other Matters* (2018, with Leandro Katz), *L.A. Collects L.A.: Latin America in Southern California Collections* (2017, edited with Rubén Ortiz Torres), and *The Shock of Modernity. Crime Photography in Mexico City* (2007).

CONTEMPORANEITY AND COMPOSITION IN MEXICAN DESIGN

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21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
#2-2023, pp. 259–272

<https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2023.2.96034>



ABSTRACT

This essay tracks a series of ethnographic episodes at the intersections of heritage and design in Mexico today. Rather than draw conclusions about the present and future of Mexico's cultural patrimony, these moments instead illustrate key tensions around the country's cultural politics in practice, the histories that condition them, and strategies for grappling with this landscape today. Drawing on the concept of contemporaneity and the idea of composition as a critical and creative technique, it outlines emerging formations within the world of design that seek to articulate new possibilities within a cultural field historically dominated by official interests and policies.

KEYWORDS

Design; Cultural heritage; Mexico.

I. *TEXTO*, Casa Prieto-López, Jardines del Pedregal, Mexico City, February 2020

On a cool winter evening, I joined a large audience assembled outdoors in the southwest of Mexico City. We were gathered behind the stark facade of Luis Barragán's Casa Prieto-López, seated between the home's swimming pool and the rough outcroppings of Pedregal's lava fields. The evening's agenda was to consider the future of artisanal textile practice – and cultural heritage more broadly – in Mexico and around the world. Those in the audience reflected the country's status as a highly visible center of artisanship as well as an increasingly important hub within the international art and design worlds. Some attendees dressed in their local *trajes* and whispered translations of the evening's remarks (delivered in Spanish and English) to one another. Others snapped photographs to document one of the most buzz-worthy events in a week full of openings, fairs, and parties across the city catering to the international art world, many of them dressed in textiles purchased at the outdoor market that formed the heart of the week-long event. The Jardines del Pedregal was an evocative context for these tensions – an elite housing development launched in the 1940s that promised to reinvigorate a site of ancient importance through modern design, “oscillating between the registers of the local and national pre-Columbian past and international modernist aesthetics”.¹

Before the evening's keynote address, Susana Harp – a well-known singer and recently elected member of the Mexican senate – took to the stage. Her presentation had been the subject of anticipation – the *début* of recently enacted changes to the country's copyright laws with implications for many in the audience. After greeting those gathered, Harp began by revisiting a string of recent controversies involving major global design brands. On a screen that glowed in the yard as the evening darkened, Harp navigated a slide presentation that juxtaposed “original” traditional motifs and designs with products by the likes of Carolina Herrera, Louis Vuitton, and Zara. Bold text labeled these latter objects copies, appropriations, and plagiarism and documented the steep prices they fetched on the global market. A purse that mimicked the plaid patterns and boxy form of common plastic market bags; a chair upholstered in the patterns of Tenango embroidery; dresses printed in the banded, neon colors of commercial *serapes*. These thefts, Harp argued, illustrated the need to recast the elements of Mexico's *arte popular* – previously understood as a common heritage subject to free use – as intellectual property held by communities to be protected and preserved.

In a floor speech to the Mexican senate weeks earlier, Harp had framed the reforms as a matter of urgent cultural preservation: “textiles [...] are codices the Spanish were unable to burn.” An

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Jennifer Josten, *Mathias Goeritz. Modernist Art and Architecture in Cold War Mexico*, New Haven, CT 2018, 74.

extension of copyright to acknowledge cultural knowledge as communal property would “limit the use and commercialization of elements of Indigenous cultures without compensation or attribution”. Under the reforms, state agencies would work to review proposed designs and, if possible, involve source communities in decision making about their viability and terms in keeping with practices of local governance. In cases where agencies determined such communities were “extinct” or when the cultural heritage under consideration was understood to be broadly held, the state would manage the use of elements of this (national) patrimony.²

In this essay, I track a series of ethnographic episodes at the intersections of heritage and design in Mexico today. Rather than draw conclusions about the present and future of Mexico’s cultural patrimony, these moments instead illustrate key tensions around the country’s cultural politics in practice, the histories that condition them, and strategies for grappling with this landscape today. Drawing on the concept of contemporaneity and the idea of composition as a critical and creative technique, I outline emerging formations within the world of design that seek to articulate new possibilities within a cultural field historically dominated by official interests and policies.

In the wake of the event at the Casa Prieto-López, I heard anxiety about the reforms in discussions among designers and design experts. Mexico’s design discourse has centered on the promise of generating opportunity through various forms of collaboration between artisanal manufacturers and those formally trained in design fields in recent years, framing these dialogues as a path to both a new national aesthetics as well as economic viability for the design offices, craft workshops, and communities involved. To them, the proposed policy seemed to impose overwhelming – and potentially capricious – barriers to an increasingly important mode of design production. Indigenous activists have also expressed concerns, including over the limited role of their communities in crafting the regulations and lingering questions concerning how community ownership will be determined, agreements negotiated, and funds distributed in practice. They also note the irony that the law places the management and commercialization of Indigenous heritage in the hands of the state – an entity historically understood as a primary appropriator of Indigenous cultural heritage.³

The reforms seemed to reverse longstanding, antagonistic state postures toward Indigenous and marginalized communities and

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Senado de México, Proteger uso no consentimiento de expresiones de culturas indígenas: Sen. Susana Harp (Morena), [YouTube](#) (January 15, 2021). Author’s transcription and translation.

3

Chantal Flores, Mexico’s Cultural Appropriation Ban Is Off to a Messy Start, in: [The Verge](#), February 12, 2022 (February 18, 2022). The country has recently witnessed broad debate over tensions between recent cultural policies in Mexico and histories of cultural appropriation on the part of the state. For example, see Daniel Hernandez, Mexico’s New Culture War. Did a Pyramid Light Show ‘Decolonize’ or Rewrite History?, in: [Los Angeles Times](#), October 16, 2021 (October 18, 2021).

communally held property as a lesson in the need for cultural respect and market restraint.⁴ What remained in question, however, was whether such an assertion of rights through law and an associated bureaucratization of cultural heritage would translate to new autonomies for source communities or more equitable collaborations in the world of design. As Haidy Geismar has demonstrated in her ethnography of efforts to square Indigenous worlds in the Pacific with the logics of Western copyright regimes, the application of standards of property to Indigenous cultural production can be “empowering for Indigenous people” but can also “merely recreate the existing power relations that so often subordinate them”.⁵ Others have shown how avenues of state recognition of Indigenous and marginalized peoples – though in theory working to correct historical inequities – can both subject communities to overwhelming standards of cultural “authenticity” and subsume sovereign cultural struggles within discourses of national cohesion.⁶

In Mexico, such efforts take place on historical terrain overdetermined by the cultural politics of the post-Revolutionary state. In reporting on the design appropriations Harp invoked, the fashion critic for *The New York Times* expressed surprise at the unprecedented involvement of government ministries in lodging formal complaints with the brands involved.⁷ Yet, such gestures are part of habitus in a country which has witnessed extensive state involvement in the management of what has been defined as national patrimony.⁸ The proposed policy seemed to extend this history of state management into the twenty-first century, in particular around those objects that reflect “common” heritage (e.g., the plastic market bag) or around the management of ancient Indigenous heritage for which the state does not acknowledge contemporary descendants. The lat-

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Since his election in 2018, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador and his administration have made a concerted effort to project a new relationship between the Mexican state and the country's Indigenous peoples. He has also been outspoken in denouncing past neoliberal efforts to dismantle the *ejido* – Mexico's most visible form of common property. However, the reality of the administration's relations with the *ejidos* has been more complicated, in particular with respect to popular opposition to the president's signature tourist infrastructure initiative, the so-called “Tren Maya”.

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Haidy Geismar, *Treasured Possessions. Indigenous Interventions into Cultural and Intellectual Property*, Durham, NC 2013, 3.

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For example, see Elizabeth Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition*, Durham, NC 2002; James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Cambridge, MA 1988; Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Ethnicity, Inc.*, Chicago 2009.

7

Vanessa Friedman, Homage or Theft? Carolina Herrera Called Out by Mexican Minister, in: *The New York Times*, June 13, 2019.

8

See, for instance, Rick A. López's account of the concerted “ethnicization” of Mexican official culture in the post-Revolutionary period and Mary Coffey's account of the officialization of the purportedly revolutionary work of the Mexican muralists. Rick A. López, *Crafting Mexico. Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution*, Durham, NC 2010; Mary Coffey, *How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture. Murals, Museums, and the Mexican State*, Durham, NC 2012.

ter problem is of particular difficulty in Mexico, where (post)colonial policies both celebrated the *mestizx* descendants of the colonial encounter and worked to disrupt practices of Indigenous knowledge transmission.

Looking past the immediate preservation or celebration of patrimony through state sponsorship, anthropologist Néstor García Canclini sees such involvement as a symptom of the persistence of “the ideology of the oligarchic sectors”, what he terms “substantialist traditionalism”. This traditionalism is substantialist in its quest for cultural stasis realized by establishing and “guarding aesthetic and symbolic models”, an attachment to “unaltered conservation” that resists processes of historical change.⁹ In this urge to “celebrate redundancy” (i.e., the continued veneration of a settled cultural canon and the maintenance of its associated social relations) García Canclini sees a fundamental conservatism which verges on the authoritarian. While state administration of patrimony can at its best safeguard cultural practices, support collective historical awareness, and facilitate public access, at its worst it serves to perpetuate “the founding cut” of the colonial condition, managing the boundary between settled (Indigenous) heritage and forward-looking, modern aspirations in ways that mirror the divides between the politically and culturally (dis)empowered.¹⁰

In this, Mexico’s cultural policy echoes a modern problematic writ large. As Bruno Latour has argued, modernity is characterized by an “illness of historicism” which works to document and manage modernity’s others (the “past”) in order to enable logics of progress: “They want to keep everything, date everything, because they think they have definitively broken with their past. The more they accumulate revolutions, the more they save; the more they capitalize, the more they put on display in museums. Maniacal destruction is counterbalanced by an equally maniacal conservation.”¹¹

These critiques center on the authoritarian threat of a repertoire of cultural patrimony posited and policed by the state, but a similar attention to the management of cultural, racial, and temporal boundaries can shed light on the world of design. The field’s growth in twentieth-century Mexico invited readings of hybridity, regionalism, and syncretism as Euroamerican disciplines met local contexts, but within Mexico itself design has functioned as one of the most visible conduits for the importation of aesthetic regimes con-

⁹ Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures. Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, trans. by Christopher L. Chiappari and Silvia L. Lopez, Minneapolis, MN 1995, 108–109.

¹⁰ Ibid., 111–112.

¹¹ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. by Catherine Porter, Cambridge, MA 1993, 69.

sonant with elite national aspirations.¹² The field's prestige means designers are experts similarly empowered to mediate (and define) the worlds of tradition and innovation, a fact which has invited debate around the field's place in the country's cultural politics.

II. *Pop, Populista, Popular. El diseño del pueblo*, Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, October 2019

As the evening in Pedregal brought to mind longstanding patterns in the place of patrimony in Mexican cultural politics, I thought back to another gathering several months earlier. Like the textile fair, the opening of *Pop, Populista, Popular. El diseño del pueblo* took place at a site thick with associations. On view in the upper galleries of the Palacio de Bellas Artes, only a slim wall separated the exhibition from some of the most significant statements of the official culture of twentieth-century Mexico – iconic murals by *Los Tres Grandes* and the art deco decorative program of Federico Mariscal that translated Maya motifs into the institutional aesthetics of his day.

Beyond the wall, however, the gallery bore more resemblance to the streets of the Centro's everyday periphery than the curated sites of national identity sanctioned by the state and frequented by tourists. Dominated by acid green, the exhibition's museography was an assemblage of steel scaffolding, shiny printed tarps, and floor mats made up of curly plastic hairs.

As the exhibition's title implied, its curators – Mario Ballesteros and the collective Tony Macarena – sought to revisit the concept of *lo popular* as a thread to survey Mexico's contemporary design landscape. The exhibition opened with a genealogy of *lo popular*, underlining its use in post-Revolutionary official culture to “cancel out conflict between the native (or the Indigenous), the foreign (or the colonialist) and the universal (or the modern)”. Like related discourses of *mestizaje* that ultimately worked to repress colonial traumas, these uses of *lo popular* as a unifying national imaginary, the curators argued, remained “exoticist, classist, and racist”.¹³

Yet, they also identified possibility in *lo popular*, working to use the term – and its more recent identification with the products of pop culture – to facilitate a dialogue between “what ‘the people design’” and “design for the people”. Under this framework, *lo popular* became a guide for “introspection about design and its role in Mexico today” and a means “to push design off of its comfortable and plush seat to embrace cultural openness, diversity of practices,

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Keith L. Eggner, for instance, has argued that critical lenses like critical regionalism may speak more to critics' imaginaries of design in non-Euroamerican settings than to the work of the designers they study: id., *Placing Resistance. A Critique of Critical Regionalism*, in: *Journal of Architectural Education* 55/4, 2002, 228–237.

¹³

Exhibition wall text, *Pop, Populista, Popular. El diseño del pueblo*, Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City.

empowering of the non-experts, and inclusion of sectors typically marginalized by the discipline and profession”.¹⁴

The display opened with a figurative (re)grounding of *lo popular* in the ancient and contemporary practices of Mexico’s Indigenous peoples, including a series of utilitarian and decorative objects from the collection of the Instituto Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas. From there, it made what the curators described as “a quantum leap to broaden our traditional idea of popular art and to conceive of popular design”. Subsequent vitrines included the mainstays of *arte popular* – plaited vessels, carved chairs, painted masks – but staged them next to very different kinds of artifacts. Anonymous designs for banquet chairs, neon soccer jerseys, plastic *molcajetes*, and elaborately decorated press-on nails joined works by celebrated furniture, textile, and fashion designers drawing on ancient techniques and the visual culture of the everyday to fundamentally recontextualize the traditional canon of *arte popular*.

One corner made the exhibition’s stake on the temporal politics of Mexico’s popular traditions particularly clear. Set immediately next to the Indigenous works at the exhibition’s opening, it juxtaposed some of these objects with selections from *Fingerprints of the Gods* by the design collective SANGREE – cell phone cases that applied ancient American mosaic techniques and motifs including the world tree and the profiled faces of pre-colonial codices to everyday accessories. The display’s backdrop was a printed tarp, itself a mosaic of close-cropped photo portraits depicting candidates – a neon grocery store-style label indicated – for casting with the modeling agency Guerxs. The agency’s name purposefully invokes the slang term for pale-faced friends. However, the mosaic showed how deeply the agency queers this term, first at the level of language (*Güeros* becomes *Guerxs*) but also in presenting a grid of faces that deliberately disrupt the Euroamerican and heteronormative aspirations of common commercial imagery in Latin America.¹⁵ As the agency describes, their mission is to forward an “inclusive perspective” and “cultivate careers that were never imagined” through an embrace of “everyday Mexican reality”.¹⁶

These faces that framed the view of ancient artifacts and contemporary experiments in folk art and design seemed to present heirs to the Mexican popular tradition. However, like Guerxs’s queer approach to the model, these heirs resisted easy identifica-

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Ibid.

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The persistence of battles over beauty standards, race, and identity have been on clear display in the recent featuring of *muxe* model Estrella Vazquez and Indigenous actress Yalitza Aparicio on the cover of Mexican *Vogue* and subsequent racist responses. David Agren, ‘We Can Do It’: Yalitza Aparicio’s *Vogue* Cover Hailed by Indigenous Women, in: *The Guardian*, December 21, 2018 (May 3, 2023). See also Mónica G. Moreno Figueroa and Megan Rivers Moore, Introduction, in: *Feminist Theory* 14/2, 2013, 131–136; Peter Wade, *Race and Sex in Latin America*, London 2009.

¹⁶

Guerxs, *About* (February 2, 2021).

tion, neither subscribing to legible ethnic or social categories nor celebrating any myth of unity through diversity.¹⁷

Rather than “acknowledge” and incorporate ancient, artisanal, and popular practices through the tools of modern design, the exhibition’s juxtapositions and the projects it contained sought to invite a reckoning with design’s own positionality. Design has benefited from the essentialist categories that lurked beneath post-Revolutionary social life, occupying a privileged position for wielding the expertise of a fundamentally Euroamerican discipline while also leveraging and translating local imaginaries. Like state cultural policy, it has also been led by national elites divorced – often purposefully – from both Mexico’s Indigenous peoples as well as the worlds of *lo popular*. As the racialized and classed encounters at the *TEXTO* fair made clear, existing approaches to design and state policy can often exist comfortably within these hierarchies.

The alternative strategies outlined by *Pop*, *Populista*, *Popular* sought to counter the maniacal historicism of official culture with a commitment instead to the fundamental contemporaneity of popular culture and varied practices of making. As Paul Rabinow has noted, contrary to common conceptions, “the contemporary is not especially concerned with ‘the new’ or with distinguishing itself from tradition”. Instead, contemporaneity is marked by an ongoing “process of declusterings and reconfigurations”, the construction of temporal assemblages that explore and reframe relations rather than determine them.¹⁸ These are what the curators described as “dirty, precarious and tentative objects” that forgo “cultural purity” in favor of “the tense complexity of contemporary interconnection”.¹⁹

III. SketchUp 3D Warehouse, 2014–2017

What does this contemporaneity look like in practice? A closer look at one of the works included in *Pop*, *Populista*, *Popular* can give purchase on the intentions – not only of the exhibition’s curators – but of a rising generation of Mexican designers interested in disrupting their discipline’s usual practices.

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Guerx’s linguistic and discursive practices resonate with both colonial and contemporary instances of the productive embrace of the ambiguities of identity as a strategy of resistance. In her reading of the concept of *Latinx*, for instance, Claudia Milian identifies a project of “speculative subjectivity” that works through “unexpected linkages”. In his analysis of the much earlier encounters of Jesuit missionaries and the Tupi people of what is now Brazil, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro locates purposeful strategies of “inconstancy” that point to a model of identity “conceived not as a boundary to be maintained but as a nexus of relations and transactions actively engaging a subject”. Claudia Milian, *Latinx*, Minneapolis, MN 2019, 3; Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul. The Encounter of Catholics and Cannibals in 16th-Century Brazil*, Chicago 2011, 18.

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Paul Rabinow, George E. Marcus, James D. Faubion, and Tobias Rees, *Designs for an Anthropology of the Contemporary*, Durham, NC 2008, 58.

¹⁹

Exhibition wall text, *Pop*, *Populista*, *Popular*.

Andrés Souto's micro documentary *El Grand Tour* does not take its viewers to Greece or Rome but instead through the virtual collections of the SketchUp 3D Warehouse, a free, online library of user-contributed models.²⁰ This tour is motivated less by the generic possibilities of this technical platform, but by its use as a site for the celebration, reproduction, and manipulation of Mexican patrimony. As Souto describes, his title (like the transformation of *Güeros* to *Guerxs*) is a purposeful undermining of colonialist and classificatory pretensions and the notion that expertise can properly order the complex traffic of creative practice and everyday life. Instead, it celebrates the fall of "good taste" and the democratization of access to aesthetic travel, whether virtual or physical.²¹

The video's main protagonist is César, a SketchUp "superuser" who is unidentifiable beyond his location somewhere on the outskirts of Naucalpan, a neighborhood Souto had been studying for its "real world" self-building practices. Set to Frank Zappa's synthesizer renditions of the Baroque compositions of Francesco Zappa, Souto tours César's SketchUp library, which includes *metates* and *molcajetes* rendered in virtual basalt; models of the Mexico City metro and his own home; fantastical architectures of domed cities; and a space elevator built upon a stepped pyramidal foundation. While César's "real" identity lives somewhere behind his internet persona, Souto's investigation shows his digital designs imbued with historical and inventive reality. As the architect reflects, César is representative of many who though "young or 'undisciplined' are already using the language and tools of design" within the framework of their own lives and cultural imaginaries.²²

The video ends with a tour of one of Souto's own contributions to the Warehouse: *La Más Nueva Basílica de Guadalupe / The Newest Basílica of Guadalupe*, an architectural composite of some of the most popular models on the platform [Fig. 1]. Assembled on a base of drastically enlarged cinderblocks, the basilica rotates in a digital void to the sounds of Handel to reveal its facets: self-built chapels, Romanesque buttresses, corbel arches, and brightly colored iron balustrades. The composition is crowned by the Virgin herself, her mantle made up of a patchwork of repeated tiles of emerald ground and golden stars and her interior hollowed to make space for a series of bright pink balconies.

Souto's choice of subject matter purposefully engages one of the most quotidian elements of Mexico's cultural history, "something everyone could relate to".²³ His approach also evokes García

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Andrés Souto, *El Grand Tour*, 2017 (also [online](#)).

²¹

Conversation with the designer, video call, January 25, 2021.

²²

Ibid.

²³

Ibid.



[Fig. 1]
Andrés Souto, Still from *El Grand Tour*, 2017, digital video, 05:32 min, 04:35. Courtesy of the designer.

Canclini's reading of the threat posed to traditionalist official culture by an embrace of contemporaneity. As García Canclini argues,

the worst adversary [of traditionalism] is not the one who does not go to museums or understand art but the painter who wants to transgress the inheritance by putting an actress's face on the virgin, the intellectual who questions whether the heroes celebrated in patriotic festivals really were heroes, the musician specialized in the baroque who mixes it with jazz and rock in his compositions.²⁴

Souto's project – unlike the collaborations that fuel much of today's design economy – does not seek to “buy or sell César's work” but instead to help others “know he exists and take his work seriously”.²⁵ Rather than commodify or “elevate” César's work through his own, Souto instead opens an engagement with César's methods and concerns. Like César's library, Souto's basilica now lives in the SketchUp 3D Warehouse. *El Grand Tour* closes by wondering “How will Mexicans interpret and appropriate it?” Elsewhere, Souto has continued this effort to empower everyday designers in the popular appropriation of physical and virtual space, creating playful tutorial videos in the style of public television that outline methods for imposing popular visions developed online in the real world (for example, through the DIY transfer of SketchUp patterns to real building facades).

This posture posits a vision of design as subordinate to preexisting popular concerns and subject to commentary, transformation, and reuse. It also models an active and creative relation between the citizen and national patrimony that challenges the “unaltered conservation” of official culture. This reading of popular appropriation as a strategy of resistance is at the heart of García Canclini's vision of the contemporary as a path to a more robust and equitable *public* culture: “A patrimony that is reformulated by taking into account its social uses – not with a defensive attitude, of simple rescue, but with a more complex vision of how society appropriates its history – can involve diverse sectors.”²⁶ Patrimony, he argues, should be viewed as “a *social process*” and “a space of material and symbolic struggle”.²⁷

This perception has gained broad sympathy with young designers in Mexico today. APRDELESP, an experimental architectural firm in Mexico City, has similarly declared the new role of the

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Garcia Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures*, 135.

²⁵

Conversation with the designer.

²⁶

Garcia Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures*, 142.

²⁷

Ibid., 136.

designer as one who works to “maximize opportunities for appropriation” within the projects they create, decentering the authorship of the building in architecture or the object in design in favor of an emphasis on preexisting context and the social processes that immediately decenter designers’ intent.²⁸ Together, these impulses insist on the social immanence of both patrimony and design as real-time strategies of cultural orientation and imagination, offering stages for the “declusterings and reconfigurations” key to Rabinow’s contemporaneity.

Souto’s conscious adoption of a strategy of composition in the creation of his basilica offers a path for enacting this view of design and patrimony as distributed social processes. Bruno Latour has suggested the possibilities that lie in compositionism as an avenue for the construction of a “common world”, a politics that sidesteps the enforced boundaries of modern and traditionalist thinking without denying the differences and conflicts of the contemporary. As he describes,

from universalism [compositionism] takes up the task of building a common world; from relativism, the certainty that this common world has to be built from utterly heterogenous parts that will never make a whole, but at best a fragile, revisable, and diverse composite material.²⁹

In place of unifying mythologies, the common world is made possible through an embrace of the mundane, a commitment to continuous deliberation, and the assumption that collective life is as disjointed as it is shared.³⁰

Much like the broad assertion of Indigenous ownership of *arte popular* through policy, this embrace of the popular and associated strategies of popular appropriation does not resolve questions of privilege and power. Behind these developments in policy and discourse lie persistent tensions within the political and cultural economy of heritage and design which determine (and constrain) the ability of communities to participate actively and equitably in negotiating the future of Mexican patrimony.

These contrasting ethnographic episodes – witnessing the intensified state management of heritage in response to cultural appropriation on the one hand and the rediscovery of popular

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APRDELESP, *A Manifesto on the Appropriation of Space. A Methodology for Making Architectural Projects*, Mexico City 2019, 8.

²⁹

Bruno Latour, *An Attempt at a “Compositionist Manifesto”*, Mexico City 2016, 13 (also [online](#)).

³⁰

An earlier theorization of the concept of composition by anthropologists Jane I. Guyer and Samuel M. Eno Belinga similarly framed compositional strategies as social alternatives to logics of accumulation or control. Guyer and Eno Belinga, *Wealth in People as Wealth in Knowledge. Accumulation and Composition in Equatorial Africa*, in: *The Journal of African History* 36/1, 1995, 91–120.

appropriation as a creative strategy in light of histories of hegemonic official culture on the other – outline distinct stakes within contemporary problematics concerning the relation of design, heritage, and public culture in Mexico: How can everyday Mexican reality make use of and transform design for its own purposes? Can Mexican design distinguish itself from a nationalism that reifies tradition without conforming to Euroamerican markets, aesthetics, and aspirations? What does an anti-colonial but non-essentialist (design) future look like? And what is required to cultivate broad-based, popular governance of the conditions and discourses of heritage and design?

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“DESOBEDIENCIA ES HABITAR LA REVUELTA”

(GRAFTI, SANTIAGO DE CHILE, NOVIEMBRE 2019)

REVISITANDO LA REBELIÓN DE LOS ARTEFACTOS EN EL
CHILE DEL SIGLO XXI

Flora Vilches

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
#2-2023, pp. 273–293

<https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2023.2.96035>



ABSTRACT

The Chilean social uprising of October 2019 led to intense, massive protests against the abuses people experienced under the modern neoliberal system. Several everyday artifacts and technologies became part of the protests. Santiago was constantly transformed at a vertiginous rate by ephemeral events that left low-permanence material traces. Part of the graffiti, flags, sculptures, and clothing alluded to Pre-Hispanic populations bearing witness to an apparent transversal solidarity to denounce the temporal depth of abuses against Indigenous peoples that continue to exist. Drawing on this social and political contingency, I identify some traits that contribute to the long-term Pre-Columbian art/archaeology debate explored in this special issue.

KEYWORDS

Social protest; Artifacts; Modernity; Indigenous peoples; Chile.

I. Introducción

Hace más de mil años, a través de escenas retratadas en vasijas de cerámica y paredes de sus templos, los Moche representaron vívidamente cómo una variedad de artefactos de su quehacer habitual adquiriría vida propia. Me refiero al clásico tema iconográfico del arte mochica conocido como *La rebelión de los artefactos* donde objetos comunes como jarras, herramientas y prendas de vestir cobraban vida tomando el control del mundo creado por los humanos.¹ Fuese esta una situación de anarquía causada por fuerzas mitológicas o por un ser humano, el arqueólogo Jeffrey Quilter cree que los Moche debieron haber experimentado una gran ansiedad, propia de un “mundo vuelto al revés” donde se rompe el orden establecido. Esa misma ansiedad frente a un mundo material que nos desafía quedó recientemente de manifiesto en Chile fruto de una profunda crisis social cuyo principal nodo de expresión fue la calle.

El 18 de octubre de 2019 marcó el inicio de lo que se ha conocido como “estallido social”. Chile literalmente explotó. Desde esa tarde hasta la llegada de la pandemia del COVID-19, se desarrolló un período de masivas e intensas protestas contra el abuso y maltrato del sistema económico y social neoliberal. La gente salió a las calles y junto con ellos una serie de artefactos y tecnologías de la vida cotidiana se rebelaron haciéndose parte de la protesta. La desobediencia fue la manera de habitar la revuelta y en ese proceso la ciudad se transformó, emergiendo como un nuevo espacio público que provocó ansiedad en más de uno a raíz de la serie de estructuras y conceptos que se transgredieron. Dentro de ese enjambre de experiencias atravesadas por la materialidad, es posible identificar algunos elementos que permiten contribuir al debate que propone Lisa Trever para este volumen.

Pero, ¿qué relación puede existir entre calles subvertidas por una revuelta social y la histórica disputa entre la historia del arte y la arqueología en contextos precolombinos? Pues bien, el estallido social en Chile permite explorar arqueológicamente uno de los proyectos fallidos de la modernidad capitalista, tal como lo han venido demostrando arqueólogos en otras partes del globo, como Alfredo González-Ruibal o Rodney Harrison.² Sabemos que es justamente en el corazón de la modernidad capitalista donde se gesta la disputa entre el arte y la arqueología. Si a ello sumamos el hecho que el divorcio entre arte y arqueología en Chile se expresa de manera más clara en las formas de exhibición de lo precolombino que en el debate académico propiamente, la calle adquiere aún mayor rele-

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Jeffrey Quilter, The Moche Revolt of Objects, en: *Latin American Antiquity* 1/1, 1990, 42–65.

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Alfredo González-Ruibal, Modernism, en: Paul Graves-Brown, Rodney Harrison and Angela Piccini (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of The Archaeology of the Contemporary World*, Oxford 2013, 306–320; Rodney Harrison, Surface Assemblages. Towards an Archaeology in and of the Present, en: *Archaeological Dialogues* 18/2, 2011, 141–161.

vancia en tanto espacio de representación material y visual de la crisis del modelo neoliberal actual.³

Si bien este proceso de re-modelación del espacio público se vivió en diversos puntos del país, solo me voy a referir a algunas experiencias que acontecieron en la ciudad de Santiago, lugar que habito y donde pude registrar algunas de ellas. La intensidad y envergadura de la protesta, de hecho, motivó la urgencia de muchos por registrar y comprender este fenómeno desde distintos enfoques y formatos.⁴ En ese contexto, la arqueología se presentó como una aproximación especialmente adecuada, ya que las modificaciones de la ciudad conformaron una constante sucesión de eventos efímeros a ritmo vertiginoso que dejaban rastros materiales de muy baja permanencia. Ollas, rejas, papeles, cucharas de palo, pintura, antenas satelitales, esculturas públicas, lápices, muros, veredas y semáforos, se movilizaron o fueron objeto de la movilización de otros artefactos, elementos (fuego), y seres humanos (manifestantes y fuerzas policiales) [Fig. 1, Fig. 2 y Fig. 3]. Al adquirir agenciamiento, un conjunto de objetos se rebeló, al más puro estilo moche, y encarnó el malestar de la población. La animación más radical de todas fue probablemente la del espíritu de un perro callejero de color negro apodado *Matapacos*.⁵ Pese a que el *Matapacos* había muerto hace un par de años, su espíritu luchador fue rememorado y objetivado en todo tipo de materialidades, incluyendo cuerpos humanos [Fig. 4].

El dinamismo y multidimensionalidad que caracterizó la movilización de artefactos de la revuelta, la diversidad de enfoques con que se han abordado los variados ejercicios de registro e interpretación de los mismos, así como muchas de las respuestas a la “nueva ciudad” por parte de sus habitantes, dan cuenta de la vigencia de cuestiones que James Clifford ha discutido extensivamente a propósito de la re-colección de objetos. En su cuadro del sistema arte/cultura bien señala cómo los límites del arte y ciencia, lo estético y lo antropológico, no son permanentes.⁶ Al contrario, son histórica-

3

La historia del arte precolombino en Chile no alcanza a constituir una disciplina de estudio consolidada como en los EEUU o Europa, o incluso en otros países latinoamericanos, pese a que existen algunos programas a nivel universitario. Digamos que la dimensión “artística” o “visual” de lo prehispánico se ha desplegado más bien como una de varias áreas temáticas de la arqueología antropológica que trata con imágenes, donde destacan los estudios de arte rupestre y de iconografía de diversas materialidades.

4

Para una síntesis de aproximaciones antropológicas al estallido social ver Francisca Márquez, *Anthropology and Chile's Estallido Social*, en: *American Anthropologist* 122/3, 2020, 666–683; ver también Francisca Márquez, *Antropologías en el extremo sur. Del silenciamiento al estallido*, en: *Vibrant. Virtual Brazilian Anthropology* 18, 2021; Carla Pinochet, *Disrupting Normalcy. Artistic Interventions and Political Mobilisation against the Neoliberal City* (Santiago, Chile, 2019), en: *Social Identities* 27/5, 2021, 538–554.

5

“Matapacos” refiere a que este perro solía acompañar a los estudiantes que protagonizaron las movilizaciones de 2011, enfrentándose y desafiando la represión policial. En Chile los carabineros o policías son apodados “pacos”.

6

James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Cambridge, MA 1988, 224.



[Fig. 1]
Manifestantes en barricada alimentada por artefactos varios, 2019. Fotografía © José Luis Rissetti.



[Fig. 2]

Manifestante con sartén y cuchara, 2019. Fotografía © José Luis Rissetti.



[Fig. 3]

Manifestantes con escudos reciclados, 2019. Fotografía © José Luis Rissetti.



[Fig. 4]
“Matapacos” entrevistado por periodista, 2019. Fotografía © Flora Vilches.

mente específicos, aun cuando en cada momento distintos tiempos y categorías tiendan a percolarse. Eso es lo que justamente ha quedado de manifiesto en las calles de un Santiago revolucionado.

II. La revuelta en clave indígena

Tal como lo hemos indicado, el estallido social de 2019 vino a coronar años de malestar, abuso y desigualdad; el alza de 30 pesos que la tarifa del metro experimentó en octubre sólo gatilló una indignación popular latente. He ahí que una de las primeras consignas de la protesta fue “No son 30 pesos son 30 años”, aludiendo a los años transcurridos desde el retorno a la democracia; suma que prontamente se extendió a “No son 30 pesos son 46 años”, agregando el lapso de la dictadura cívico-militar e instauración del modelo neoliberal. Sin embargo, la variante más reveladora y que nos demuestra el vínculo con la discusión que aquí nos convoca llega con “No son 30 pesos son 500 años”. Allí se establece la profundidad temporal de una lógica abusiva que excede con creces el modelo económico imperante, denunciando la condición estructural del trato que históricamente han recibido los pueblos indígenas en este territorio.

El sociólogo Alberto Mayol recurre a Marcel Mauss y a su ensayo sobre el don para interpretar algunas claves del estallido y la crisis del neoliberalismo.⁷ De acuerdo a su análisis, lo que promovió el quiebre fue una falla estructural del mecanismo de operación económica, pues en la lógica neoliberal no existe la reciprocidad.⁸ Sin embargo, lo más grave es que esta falla técnica iba acompañada de una falla ritual en el proceso de gestión política, ya que el gobierno fue incapaz de otorgarle un marco simbólico – y compensatorio – a la desigualdad material que produce el modelo. En otras palabras, durante años se acumuló una deuda que no es solo monetaria sino moral. De esta forma, dice Mayol, “los chilenos parecen haber hecho su propio *potlach* precisamente porque la institucionalidad no lo hacía”, un *potlach* cuya expresión material fue literalmente la revuelta de los artefactos: “se destruyeron bienes, se quemaron bienes, se distribuyeron bienes, se insultó a los poderosos”.⁹

Simbólicamente, este *potlach* era una forma de restituir la dignidad de los que nunca ganan. En efecto, la consigna “hasta que la dignidad se haga costumbre”, que también emergió en los primeros

7

Alberto Mayol, *BIG BANG. Estallido social 2019*, Santiago 2019.

8

Para Mauss el “don” es una institución de intercambio que supone reglas de reciprocidad y que ha sido fundamental en la organización de sociedades tradicionales. El don es un regalo que conduce a una acción recíproca y, en definitiva, a una cadena de intercambios obligatorios; el don es un acto de dar, recibir y devolver, todo junto. Una de sus formas es el *potlach*, ceremonia ritual propia de las sociedades de la costa noroccidental de Norteamérica, donde se llevan a cabo estas “prestaciones totales” en que se regulan los excedentes económicos. Para más detalles ver Marcel Mauss, *Ensayo sobre el don. Forma y función del intercambio en las sociedades arcaicas*, Buenos Aires 2009 [1925].

9

Mayol, *BIG BANG*, 110.

días del estallido, condiciona la duración del *potlach* hasta que éste se constituya como rito.¹⁰ Ahora bien, si el sentimiento de malestar ciudadano por una deuda material y moral del modelo neoliberal catalizó el estallido, no es de extrañar que la protesta se haya vestido de símbolos étnicos. Mayol sostiene que ante la desigualdad redistributiva la sociedad solo puede recurrir a la búsqueda de la justicia más simple, por ello se vuelca hacia el origen, “se pide el principio”.¹¹ Y ese principio en Chile está marcado por otra deuda del Estado, la deuda histórica con el pueblo mapuche que desde hace 500 años reclama derechos fundamentales como la autodeterminación. Tanto así que desde un comienzo llamó la atención en la movilización la ausencia de banderas de partidos políticos, en contraste con la proliferación de la bandera mapuche en dos de sus versiones. La más popular sin duda fue la *Wenüfoye*, adoptada en 1992 por el movimiento mapuche, y en menor medida, la que incluye un *Wüñelfe* o lucero de ocho puntas, cuyo uso se remontaría a inicios del siglo XVIII [Fig. 5].¹²

La solidaridad con el abuso histórico que ha sufrido el pueblo mapuche no se limitó a que los manifestantes portaran sus banderas, también se expresó en rayados y grafitis diseminados por la ciudad. Así lo demuestra el análisis de contenido de mensajes en frases escritas en muros y objetos adyacentes realizado por Darío Quiroga y Julio Pastén, donde “Pueblos Originarios” apareció como una de las 27 categorías identificadas.¹³ Al igual que las restantes, en todas ellas se cruzan dos grandes ejes narrativos: Abuso-Represión y Dignidad-Resistencia. “Pueblos Originarios” está cruzada por la persistencia de la memoria y la denuncia de violaciones a los derechos humanos que se expresa en las palabras *newen*, *werken* y *wallmapu*. Todas palabras escritas en *mapudungun*, idioma del pueblo mapuche, y que suelen ir asociadas a frases que aluden a jóvenes mapuche muertos a manos de agentes del Estado, como Matías Catrileo y Camilo Catrillanca: “catrillanca esto va por ti”, “catrillanca presente” o “esto va por ti matías catrileo”.¹⁴

Es destacable que en el registro de Quiroga y Pastén todo lo que refiere a pueblos originarios está representado exclusivamente por el pueblo mapuche, probablemente porque es el mayoritario en el

¹⁰ Esta consigna proviene de la canción “La dignidad se convierte en costumbre” del cantautor chileno Patricio Manns y que fue dedicada a Bautista van Schouwen, dirigente del Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR) desaparecido en diciembre de 1973.

¹¹ Mayol, BIG BANG, 195.

¹² Stanislas-Marie-César Famin, Los Araucanos, en: *Historia de Chile*, Barcelona 1839.

¹³ Darío Quiroga y Julio Pastén, *Alienígenas. El estallido social en los muros*, Santiago 2020. El estudio contempla el contenido de mensajes escritos en muros y objetos adyacentes registrados fotográficamente en nueve manzanas (36 cuadras) del centro de Santiago los días 6, 7, 8 y 9 de noviembre.

¹⁴ Ibid., 98.



[Fig. 5]
Bandera *Wenüfoye* (arriba) y bandera *Wüñelfe* (abajo), 2019. Fotografía © José Luis Rissetti.

país, pero además porque ha sido el movimiento más violentamente reprimido en las últimas décadas. Aun así, la frecuencia de estas frases y palabras está muy por debajo de otras categorías que refieren al Estado y al sistema neoliberal en general. Una forma de interpretar esta diferencia numérica, es que la eficacia simbólica (y ritual) del componente indígena reside justamente en su dimensión visual, como lo demuestra la multiplicación de banderas. A ello se suma la interpelación directa a instituciones que tratan con el pasado pre y post hispano de pueblos originarios: el Museo de Arte Colonial San Francisco y el Museo Chileno de Arte Precolombino. Aquí tampoco hay consignas, puesto que el mensaje consiste en la intervención de los nombres de las instituciones mediante el borramiento de aquellos términos que denotan la trama de dominación y exclusión del indígena: al primero se le tacha el término que lo designa: “colonial”, y al segundo su filiación político-republicana: “chileno”.

En esa misma línea de corregir la estructura de poder mediante un gesto performativo y visual más que por la palabra escrita, destacan las esculturas que fueron dispuestas por el *Colectivo Originario*, integrado por artesanos indígenas, en el epicentro de la “zona cero” a comienzos de diciembre. Se trató de tres figuras talladas en madera que representan a tres pueblos originarios: Mapuche, Diaguita y Selknam. La gente circula entre ellas, les cuelga banderas, deposita ofrendas, las retratan y se sacan *selfies*. Esta, sin duda, constituye una de las resignificaciones más potentes del espacio público. El colectivo dispuso las esculturas mirando al poniente, dando la espalda al monumento al General Baquedano, ícono patrimonial y republicano de la Plaza Italia [Fig. 6]. Esta plaza es además reconocida como un punto neurálgico de la capital donde suelen llevarse a cabo celebraciones de todo orden, pero también ha representado históricamente la frontera de la segregación social, separando espacialmente, en un eje este-oeste, a ricos de pobres. No es de extrañar que desde el inicio del estallido se haya transformado en el centro de la protesta, siendo prontamente rebautizada por los manifestantes como Plaza de la Dignidad. Aquí es donde más claramente se ha protagonizado una constante disputa de poder entre el gobierno y los manifestantes, la cual se ha expresado no solo en enfrentamientos directos sino en la intervención permanente de los símbolos materiales de ambas partes. Sin ir más lejos, durante la pandemia ambos símbolos dejaron de habitar el lugar. Primero las esculturas indígenas fueron “secuestradas”, para luego ser recuperadas por sus creadores y hoy están en exhibición en el Museo del Estallido Social; mientras que el monumento al General Baquedano tras largas disputas sobre su estado de conservación, fue removido indefinidamente por agentes del gobierno para su mantención durante el mes de marzo de 2021, dejando su pedestal vacío.

Por último, si la revuelta pudiera tener un rostro propio – en clave indígena, por cierto –, este sería el de Camilo Catrillanca, el joven comunero mapuche asesinado por fuerzas policiales en 2018 y cuya muerte marcó un caso emblemático de abuso institu-



[Fig. 6]

Esculturas en madera del *Colectivo Originario* en Plaza de la Dignidad – Plaza Baquedano, 2019. Fotografía © Flora Vilches.

cional, donde confluyó la mentira, la corrupción y el uso indiscriminado de violencia estatal en un territorio fuertemente militarizado como única respuesta del gobierno para lidiar con el “conflicto mapuche”. La imagen del rostro de Catrillanca aumentó significativamente a partir del aniversario de su asesinato, a mediados de noviembre, siendo reproducida en distintos soportes de la ciudad mediante variadas técnicas. El valor simbólico de su imagen es constantemente remarcado en complicidad con el ritmo vertiginoso de la revuelta. Esta última relación se traduce en la rápida y constante reconfiguración de los muros, cuyas intervenciones van produciendo nuevos significados conforme se van interrelacionando los diversos elementos allí dispuestos.

Tal es el caso de lo que sucedió con una de las serigrafías de Catrillanca que el colectivo *Serigrafía Instantánea* pegó el 14 de noviembre en el muro perimetral del Centro Cultural Gabriela Mistral (GAM), localizado a un par de cuadras de la Plaza de la Dignidad [Fig. 7]. A los pocos días, un lienzo de papel de las *Brigadas Territoriales* que dice “Organizarnos y luchar por una nueva sociedad!!!” queda levemente traslapando la parte superior de la serigrafía. Dos semanas más tarde, la serigrafía es intervenida por el colectivo *Museo de la Dignidad* cuyo *modus operandi* consistía en poner marcos dorados a diversas expresiones visuales dispuestas en muros de la zona cero con motivo del estallido.¹⁵ Así el rostro de Catrillanca quedó circunscrito por un marco rectangular de madera biselada pintada con spray dorado. En días posteriores en su margen inferior se agregó un *sticker* con la palabra “newen”.¹⁶ Poco más de un mes después, el 22 de diciembre, el ojo izquierdo de Catrillanca aparece tachado con una cruz roja, mientras que en el marco se escribe con tinta azul la frase “k vuelva Lautaro!!!”.

Las sucesivas intervenciones de la serigrafía de Catrillanca en el GAM son capaces de ilustrar la relación de recursividad que caracterizó a varias de las prácticas callejeras que acontecieron durante la revuelta. Vemos así como muchas intervenciones tienen directa relación con los diferentes sucesos que fueron ocurriendo en el marco de las movilizaciones. La cruz roja en el ojo de Catrillanca, por ejemplo, hace una alusión directa al creciente número de víctimas de daño ocular a manos de las fuerzas policiales durante las protestas.¹⁷ La frase “k vuelva Lautaro!!!” hace un guiño a la ausencia de líderes del movimiento, pero al invocar a Lautaro – uno de los líderes mapuche de la Guerra de Arauco en la primera

¹⁵

Damaris Torres, Museo de la Dignidad, la galería de arte a cielo abierto que está en plena Alameda, en: *Diario La Tercera*, 24 de diciembre de 2019 (consultado 2 febrero 2023).

¹⁶

Newen en *mapudungun* significa fuerza o energía.

¹⁷

Según cifras del Instituto Nacional de Derechos Humanos, la cantidad de víctimas por daño ocular durante la revuelta (entre octubre de 2019 y marzo de 2020), alcanzó a 400. Destacan los casos de Fabiola Campillay y Gustavo Gatica quienes sufrieron la pérdida total de ambos ojos.



[Fig. 7]

Serigrafía del colectivo *Serigrafía Instantánea* con el rostro de Camilo Catrillanca pegada en muro del Centro Cultural Gabriela Mistral (GAM) con marco del colectivo *Museo de la Dignidad* y otras sucesivas intervenciones anónimas, 2020. Fotografía © Flora Vilches.

fase de la conquista española –, también subraya el rechazo a que una desprestigiada clase política asuma dicho rol. El mensaje de las *Brigadas Territoriales*, por su parte, lleva implícito el deseo del 80% del país que en octubre de 2020 aprobó la redacción de una nueva Constitución a manos de una Convención Constitucional conformada exclusivamente por miembros elegidos popularmente, vale decir: “una nueva sociedad”. Deseo que fue ratificado en un nuevo acto democrático en mayo de 2021 cuando los constituyentes fueron electos por la ciudadanía.

III. ¿Desobedecer es habitar la revuelta?

A través de los casos presentados queda en evidencia cómo la desobediencia efectivamente habitó la revuelta, principalmente mediante transformaciones en la función, significación y localización de artefactos, personas y espacios. En varias ocasiones, dichos desplazamientos transgredieron reglas profundamente arraigadas en las conductas de la población, ilustrando la vigencia del cuadro de James Clifford. En lo que respecta a las intervenciones visuales de muros como los del GAM, resulta interesante que en la mayoría de los casos estas no fueron realizadas por artistas reconocidos como tales. Si bien existieron algunos ya consagrados y otros llegaron a serlo conforme el avance de la movilización, el grueso de las expresiones vino de la mano de personas anónimas. La rapidez e insistencia por dejar plasmadas sus huellas se tradujo en muros dinámicos de uso colectivo que pocas veces admitían la permanencia de individualidades y donde la división entre lo que constituye arte y no arte, poco importaba. Todo lo contrario a la lógica neoliberal que glorifica el individualismo.

No obstante lo anterior, por todo lo que se transgrede y desafía, también aparecen otras instancias más resistentes al cambio, dejando en evidencia categorías profundamente modernas que han calado hondo en el actuar de los propios manifestantes. El colectivo Museo de la Dignidad ilustra bien este caso. Su intención fundante era conservar algunas de las expresiones visuales de la protesta ante su eventual desaparición, ya fuera por la propia intensidad del fenómeno o por prácticas de censura estatal. Sin embargo, la selección de los casos pasó por optar por mensajes “no violentos” y que tuvieran relación con la palabra “dignidad”, abriendo un flanco de debate sobre lo que constituye un acto de violencia o sobre qué se relaciona con la dignidad. Este debate, aunque no vinculado al actuar del Museo de la Dignidad, fue una de las discusiones explícitas en el seno de las movilizaciones, quedando expuesto en una serie de rayados que aludían a la criminalización de la protesta por parte del gobierno.

Por otro lado, el medio de selección del colectivo fue el marco icónico del museo decimonónico y moderno, el cual probablemente pretendía otorgarle dignidad a las piezas seleccionadas que, coincidentemente, eran de autores conocidos. Debemos convenir en que el marco de la serigrafía de Catrillanca cumplió con el obje-

tivo de conservarla, impidiendo que sufriera intervenciones que comprometieran su integridad. Probablemente, el marco contribuyó a inspirar respeto a diferencia de otras serigrafías idénticas que fueron rápidamente tapadas por otras intervenciones gráficas. Sin embargo, otras expresiones visuales que fueron enmarcadas por el colectivo no corrieron la misma suerte, pues los propios manifestantes fueron progresivamente despojando partes de la estructura en la medida que las requirieron como material combustible de barricadas. Sería necesario observar si fue más bien la imagen de Catrillanca la que permitió la supervivencia del marco o viceversa. En otras palabras, ¿habrá sido el *newen* de la imagen del joven mapuche tomada y retocada solidariamente por quien fuera, *wingka* o no *wingka*, o bien, la investidura del marco decimonónico como gesto de protección?¹⁸ ¿Será factible, tal vez, la propia mezcla de ambas? Una expresión de suyo colectiva así como (in)voluntariamente descolonial posibilitada por, y aprovechada desde, el caótico “mundo al revés” de la revuelta.¹⁹

Desde la perspectiva de quienes realizaron registros de intervenciones callejeras, también afloran – y desde veredas ideológicas contrapuestas – dicotomías modernas largamente superadas por el propio debate arte/artefacto. Comenzando por los científicos sociales que efectuaron el registro de rayados y que explícitamente celebran este tipo de intervenciones en la ciudad, la elección del perímetro a registrar tuvo como primera convicción no seleccionar los rayados “bellos” o que más les llamaran la atención, sino que hacer un registro completo de cualquier palabra “aunque fuera [escrita] con plumón o lápiz pasta. [...Ellos...] representan una estética más bien prosaica y caótica, al punto de llegar a la saturación de los muros.”²⁰ Aparte de oponer lo bello y lo feo, lo armónico y lo prosaico, los criterios de selección también denotan la valorización de ciertas técnicas y materiales por sobre otros.

Desde un ángulo políticamente opuesto, el arquitecto y urbanista Iván Poduje en su *Crónica urbana del estallido social*, se refiere a las esculturas del *Colectivo Originario* con adjetivos no muy diferentes a los ocupados por los científicos sociales:

Uno de los componentes *más extraños* de esta apropiación del espacio público fue una *especie de memorial* con tres tótems de madera tallada (...) *Ninguno estaba muy bien tallado* y en conjunto con el suelo de tierra y el polvo que despiden las bombas lacrimógenas daba la impresión de *un lugar*

¹⁸

La palabra *wingka* en *mapudungun* es utilizada para denominar a quienes no pertenecen al pueblo mapuche.

¹⁹

Para una discusión sobre las “estéticas múltiples de la descolonización mapuche” ver Claudio Alvarado Lincopi y Enrique Antileo Baeza, *Gráficas Mapuche. Visualidades de un movimiento 1935–2018*, Valparaíso 2022.

²⁰

Quiroga y Pastén, *Alienigenas*, 22.

*abandonado y precario, pero con una mezcla de santería y devoción. Representaba muy bien la estética que comenzó a plasmarse.*²¹

Una estética que Poduje evalúa con resignación, en el mejor de los casos, mientras que los cientistas sociales comenzaron a apreciar con el tiempo: “En principio esto nos pareció una debilidad [no limitarse a seleccionar los rayados mas “bellos”], pero con el paso del tiempo nos ha resultado una extraordinaria oportunidad.”²²

Esta resistencia a una nueva forma de visualidad lleva a preguntarse hasta qué punto la desobediencia habita la revuelta o, en caso que llegara a habitarla, hasta qué punto es posible que se vuelva costumbre. Tal como reflexiona Nelson Beyer, una de las consignas que nos legó el estallido social fue “Mata a tu paco interior” [Fig. 8], cuyo ingenio reside en que logra captar que el uso de la fuerza por parte de la institución policial no es exclusivo de ella, sino que también define al Estado moderno, y es “constituyente de la subjetividad política que le es consustancial”.²³ Cabe preguntarnos, entonces, si nuestro paco interior está dispuesto a tolerar e inaugurar formas otras de expresión que efectivamente se alejen de la lógica neoliberal que tanta rabia y maltrato ha producido en la ciudadanía.

Esa misma pregunta podría hacerse extensiva a la profundidad del mayor gesto solidario de la revuelta objetivado en el mar de banderas mapuche que inundaron la ciudad y que, por un par de meses, nos permitieron olvidar varias de las diferencias modernas que aún nos acechan. ¿Serán suficientes para organizarnos y luchar por una nueva sociedad, donde las deudas económicas, morales e históricas se salden? ¿Estará en lo cierto el historiador mapuche Fernando Pairican al sugerir que la ubicuidad de la bandera mapuche nos revela como una sociedad más plurinacional de lo que la élite admite?²⁴

Pairican pareció estar en lo cierto cuando Elisa Loncon, mapuche y lingüista, fue electa presidenta de la Convención Constitucional en julio de 2021. No obstante, el proceso de escritura del nuevo documento reveló que entre las normas aprobadas que causaron mayor controversia, no sólo en la élite, están aquellas vinculadas a la agenda indígena: plurinacionalidad, autonomía y restitución de tierras. Aun así, Pairican mantuvo su optimismo al vislumbrar

²¹

Iván Poduje, *Siete cabezas. Crónica urbana del estallido social*, Santiago 2020, 126–127, énfasis mío.

²²

Quiroga y Pastén, *Alienígenas*, 22.

²³

Nelson Beyer, ¿La encarnación de una exigencia contradictoria? Algunas reflexiones en torno a la violencia policial, en: Kathya Araujo (ed.), *Hilos tensados. Para leer el octubre chileno*, Santiago 2019, 363.

²⁴

Fernando Pairican, La bandera Mapuche y la batalla por los símbolos, en: *Ciper Académico*, 11 de abril de 2019 (consultado 2 febrero 2023).



[Fig. 8]

Graffiti “Mata tu paco interior” en Barrio Lastarria, 2019. Fotografía © Flora Vilches.

la nueva Constitución como una vía política democrática capaz de encauzar el diálogo y canalizar las aspiraciones de los pueblos originarios en un marco jurídico justo. En ese sentido afirmaba que “... cuando tú te atreves a resolver estos conflictos también sanas a la sociedad no indígena de una construcción cultural que ha sido el racismo [...] El proceso de sanación también debe ser largo, porque larga ha sido la violencia.”²⁵ Violencia que el propio Pairican reconoce que se ha incrementado de parte de grupos del movimiento mapuche radicalizados, quienes se han negado al diálogo con el gobierno dando cuenta de la complejidad y heterogeneidad de toda sociedad. En septiembre de 2022, sin embargo, el optimismo de Pairican se diluyó cuando un aplastante 62% de los electores rechazaron la propuesta de nueva Constitución, confirmando que el proceso de sanación será más largo de lo anticipado.

IV. Epílogo (en desarrollo)

La desigualdad social contra la cual Chile se rebeló a fines de 2019 ha sido subrayada durante la pandemia y, para algunos, se profundiza con el rechazo a una propuesta constitucional que, pese a sus falencias, se fundaba en la garantía de derechos sociales e inclusión de grupos históricamente marginados. El proceso de autocrítica y de comprensión de este resultado ha sido complejo, pues las contradicciones abundan, y está lejos de concluir. Mientras tanto, se activó un nuevo episodio constituyente donde la próxima propuesta ya no será escrita por una “asamblea constituyente”, sino por una Comisión Experta designada por el Congreso y debatida por un Consejo Constitucional electo popularmente, con una clara disminución de la participación de pueblos indígenas. Un escenario completamente diferente al de 2019, donde la obediencia – o tal vez un tipo muy diferente de desobediencia, más reaccionaria y moderna – comienza a emerger desde distintos flancos.

En este contexto, a tres años de su montaje en 2020, sigue pareciendo notable la manera en que el Museo Precolombino finalizó su exposición “Mujeres: ecos del pasado, voces de hoy”, en la cual supo recoger el clamor de la calle no solo a propósito del estallido social sino que del mayo feminista de 2018.²⁶ El Museo convocó a un centenar de mujeres de diversas edades, condiciones social, territorios, pueblos, quehaceres y experiencias de vida, pidiéndoles que eligieran una figura femenina de sus colecciones precolombinas y que expresaran las ideas, pensamientos o emociones que esta les inspiraba, provocaba o sugería. Pues bien, la última sala, inmaculadamente blanca, sólo contenía una vitrina isla con un conjunto de piezas “mudas”, según las llamó el equipo curatorial.

²⁵
Andrés Gómez, Fernando Pairican, *Diario La Tercera*, 12 de mayo de 2022 (consultado 2 febrero 2023).

²⁶
Mujeres. Ecos del pasado, voces de hoy (exh. cat. Santiago, Museo Chileno de Arte Precolombino), ed. por Carole Sinclair y José Berenguer, Santiago 2020.

Son aquellas piezas arqueológicas que ninguna de las mujeres convocadas a dialogar con ellas eligió. Son las marginadas, las subalternas, las ninguneadas. Ello nos demuestra que siempre hacemos elecciones y, por todo aquello que seleccionamos, siempre dejamos algo de lado. Aun así, esta vez el museo se las arregló para acogerlas y dejar que hablaran por sí mismas, más allá de si son arte o artefacto. Me parece toda una rebelión, un gesto noble que es de esperar se convierta en costumbre, en medio de un proceso de sanación que se advierte largo, pero ojalá no tanto, como para que sus actores no se conviertan en nuevas piezas de museo condenadas al dilema binario moderno.

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DEBATE
DEBATTE

ENCONTRAR NUESTRA PROPIA ESTÉTICA

UNA CONVERSACIÓN ACERCA DE LOS LÍMITES DE LAS
DISCIPLINAS Y LAS POSIBILIDADES DE LO
“PRECOLOMBINO”

Ulla Holmquist, Kukuli Velarde & Carolina Luna

CAROLINA LUNA – *Desde la arqueología así como desde las artes visuales, sus proyectos profesionales proponen modos de relacionarse con lo precolombino que superan las divisiones y categorías de la academia. ¿Cómo se gesta esta mirada integradora en ustedes?*

KUKULI VELARDE – Desde que cursé mi bachillerato en artes plásticas, presentí una separación casi intransitable entre la teoría del arte y mi quehacer artístico. No me encontraba a mí misma en aquellas disquisiciones profundas acerca del arte. Uno de los motivos para ello era que yo no era una artista preocupada por encajar en la versión contemporánea del arte occidental, ese recuento histórico lineal creado por otros, cuya estética nunca incluyó a personas como yo. En ese contexto, la producción artística “innovadora” la hacían los hombres blancos como Jasper Jones, Jackson Pollock, Robert Rauschenberg... Son ellos a quienes se consideraba contribuidores, y a quienes la historia del arte encumbra por razones muy válidas, pero también por motivos políticos.

Al no reconocermé en esta tradición, empecé a formular mis propias guías, aquellas que hicieran posible mi propia producción como artista. Decidí, entonces, atenerme a lo que yo conocía: a lo que me había formado, me gustaba y sentía como mi patrimonio. Para mí, mi camino es trabajar con lo que me es familiar, porque de otro modo, ¿cuál sería la posibilidad? Yo no pertenezco a ese otro mundo como para poder transformarlo y no solo degustarlo; yo soy una persona de mi país, y el arte precolombino es lo que he visto y me ha formado estéticamente.

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#2-2023, pp. 297–310

<https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2023.2.96036>



ULLA HOLMQUIST – En el caso mío, diría que mi relación con lo precolombino parte de haber sentido siempre estar parada en una frontera. Así como para Kukuli, la pregunta por quién es occidental también ha sido un componente esencial de mi propia reflexión: siendo una persona nacida de una relación entre una peruana y un danés, mi peruanidad es muy “combinada”. Tomando esto en cuenta, mi elección por la arqueología no pasa por el gusto del descubrimiento o los hallazgos, sino por una búsqueda de identidad.

Es por ello, precisamente, que mi quehacer curatorial excede lo disciplinario y se centra en la experiencia vital, en la conexión. Siempre he tratado de acercar experiencias museísticas desde la vivencia que las personas puedan tener en relación a eso que llamamos patrimonio y que puede consistir en una diversidad de vínculos. Así, este entendimiento del patrimonio me permitió ser crítica de lo disciplinario y preguntarme: ¿por qué no escapar de ello y desarrollar otras maneras de categorizar más cercanas a nuestra vivencia? Considero que es eso lo que ha marcado mi quehacer curatorial: mi relación personal de descubrimiento y de vínculo afectivo con este patrimonio, mi propia búsqueda identitaria [Fig. 1 y Fig. 2].

CAROLINA LUNA – *En el Perú, ¿cuáles son los discursos dominantes acerca de las culturas precolombinas? ¿Qué buscan exaltar? ¿Y qué han olvidado?*

KUKULI VELARDE – Lo primero en lo que pienso es que el discurso dominante tiene un elemento de sorpresa continua. Lo que escucho en los elogios a obras como Machu Picchu o Sacsayhuaman, por ejemplo, es una pregunta subrepticia: “¿cómo pudieron ellos haber hecho esto?” Y a partir de esto, además de otros elementos, percibo una desconexión total entre nosotros en tanto sociedad occidentalizada y el valor de las culturas antes de la conquista.

Todo esto fue pergeñado desde el primer momento en que llegó la cultura occidental aquí, a este territorio. Durante las primeras décadas ocurrió de manera más arbitraria, y ya desde 1570 de una forma completamente organizada, destructiva y despreciativa de lo que existía. Algo que siempre encuentro interesante es que los españoles llegaron e iniciaron la destrucción de la cultura empezando por el espíritu, la religión. Para ello, arrasaron con los santuarios, las huacas, sin siquiera darse cuenta del avance astronómico de los incas y que ellas, en su complejidad, enunciaban. Su noción feudal del cosmos les impidió entender el profundo conocimiento que hubo aquí. La consigna, pues, fue clara: al no entender, despreciar y destruir.

Y considero que eso es el origen de la desconexión que mencionaba anteriormente. Me parece que el discurso dominante siempre está socavando el nivel de desarrollo de las culturas precolombinas, de su gente, hasta dejar solo objetos inexplicables. Permanece lo anecdótico y se borra lo humano.



[Fig. 1]
Kukuli Velarde, San Cristóbal, 2012, Serie *CORPUS*, 82 cm (alto) × 44 cm (diámetro),
collection of the artist © Kukuli Velarde.



[Fig. 2]

Creador no identificado, Tambor de cerámica Nasca, 44.5 cm (alto) × 27 cm (ancho), Museo Larco, Lima-Perú, ML013683 © Museo Larco.

ULLA HOLMQUIST – En adición a lo que menciona Kukuli, yo creo que la arqueología se ha apropiado del discurso sobre lo precolombino. Y es importante resaltar esto, porque significa que la voz autorizada para hablar de nuestras culturas es una voz disciplinaria. Organizamos todo en cronologías y categorías, tiempos y espacios disciplinarios siempre disociados del presente. Hablamos, pues, de un otro.

Es ese el rasgo principal de los discursos dominantes: hablamos de otros desaparecidos y al hacer eso, no indagamos en hallar una suerte de continuidad. Esta posibilidad fue exterminada por la colonialidad al decir que lo que existió ya no existe más. Por lo tanto, estudiamos un “pasado” y no un conocimiento que puede seguir presente, un “monumento” y no un lugar que continúa siendo espacio de vida.

Pensemos, por ejemplo, en el término *pre-colombino*, que de por sí nos habla de algo previo, de algo que dejó de ser. Las disciplinas, enfocándose en la idea del estudio del patrimonio en tanto vestigio material, buscando “patrimonializar” el “pasado”, han olvidado que los conocimientos de las culturas originarias son propios de este territorio y que siguen estando presentes.

KUKULI VELARDE – Sí, es interesante reflexionar acerca del término “patrimonio”. Y me pregunto: ¿qué rol juega el patrimonio precolombino en un país mestizo? Por ejemplo, ¿cuál es el patrimonio estético que tenemos nosotras, que somos peruanas urbanas y que, sin embargo, no somos hacedoras reales de la cultura occidental, sino, más bien, seguidoras? La idea de patrimonio forjada desde las disciplinas nos impide sentir una continuidad. Quizá un término más apropiado y que invite a reconocer aquella continuidad sea “herencia”.

ULLA HOLMQUIST – Y en los últimos años ha habido un renacer de la búsqueda de aquella herencia, curiosamente orientada por los hallazgos de la misma disciplina arqueológica. Hay una nueva búsqueda de vínculos, un deseo de volver a considerarse Moche, Ichma, Wari, entre tantos otros. Y, sin embargo, si bien ha habido esfuerzos y estudios antropológicos para llevar esto a cabo, la arqueología no trabaja con ese supuesto. De hacerlo así, tendríamos que aceptar que estamos excavando las casas y cementerios de nuestros abuelos y abuelas.

La arqueología en el Perú ha operado desde esa distancia para impedir que fluya el afecto que estaría presente de entender nuestra herencia más allá de esta disciplina occidental. Y los arqueólogos y arqueólogas peruanas hemos usado sus categorías, porque de no haberlo hecho, hubiésemos tenido que cuestionar varios parámetros sobre nosotros mismos.

KUKULI VELARDE – Cuando escucho a Ulla, no puedo evitar pensar en la arqueología en tanto obstáculo; algo que se interpuso entre el pasado y la población, haciendo de las culturas un motivo de

estudio. Hay muchos otros factores por los cuales esto ocurrió, pero esta disciplina ha sido uno de los mecanismos a partir de los que se ha generado un quiebre en la continuidad cultural.

CAROLINA LUNA – *Hablemos acerca del mundo del arte en el Perú, particularmente en Lima. ¿De qué manera es que este ha propiciado, o no, la continuidad cultural que mencionan?*

KUKULI VELARDE– No conozco muy a fondo el contexto. Sé que hay muchos esfuerzos por descolonizar el mundo del arte en Perú; tanto por curadores urbanos como por curadores y colectivos indígenas. Pero, en términos muy generales, el mundo del arte limeño es un contexto abocado a continuar la estética occidental. Yo veo la continuidad cultural de la que hablamos en el arte popular, más bien.

Pero retornando al mundo del arte, creo que es importante que, desde América Latina, nos reconozcamos como occidentalizados, en lugar de occidentales. Como mencioné anteriormente, no hemos sido creadores de la cultura occidental, aquella que reproducimos desde el mundo del arte *mainstream*, sino que hemos sido obligados a seguirla.

¿Qué podemos hacer? Como artista, que además trabaja y aspira al contexto del *white box*, considero que mi labor es empezar a cuestionar, incluso sabiendo que no se llegarán a responder todas las preguntas. Uno de los primeros pasos para hacer este cuestionamiento es reconocer la importancia de la creatividad humana, sin necesidad de jerarquizarla; entender que hay tantas formas de relacionarse con las artes y que todas deben ser valiosas. Para ello, es clave cuestionar la elitización del arte a través de sistemas como las disciplinas académicas, el mundo del arte y, particularmente, los estudios universitarios de maestría en arte.

ULLA HOLMQUIST - Y en adición a esto, considero que es vital para la continuidad cultural de los lenguajes estéticos originarios que quienes trabajamos dentro del mundo del arte y estamos en contacto con el material milenario promovamos que este sea reconocido y apropiado por la ciudadanía en general. Y esto no puede ocurrir si es que no pasa por una apertura de los gestores de este material, que por mucho tiempo han accionado monopolizando estas creaciones, y circunscribiéndolas a un estudio disciplinario que tan solo nos permite entender *algunos* de sus aspectos. Para acercarnos a la vivencia y contemplación públicas, es necesario que sintamos que es un material sobre el cual todos tenemos derecho, por tratarse de un lenguaje propio de esta tierra.

Pondría, entonces, mucha responsabilidad en los curadores de arte precolombino, para entender esta importante función que no solo es hacer estudios, sino es abrir el material a la ciudadanía, dentro de lo cual quiero hacer énfasis en colectivos de creadores y creadoras contemporáneas, que hoy llamamos artistas. Creo que el término debe ampliarse, pues veo muchas posibilidades de con-

tinuidad entre lo originario y el diseño, la economía naranja, la creación musical, incluso el mundo empresarial. En la ciudad, desde pequeños hemos estado alejados de estos lenguajes, y sin embargo, son lenguajes que podemos usar en sus más amplias posibilidades.

CAROLINA LUNA – *Kukuli, has hecho énfasis en el potencial crítico de las artes visuales ante una historia colonial, y considero que desde tu obra logras resignificar la continuidad cultural quebrada por la colonialidad y los discursos disciplinarios. ¿Qué nos ofrecen las artes visuales para reconocer, recordar y remediar esa ruptura?*

KUKULI VELARDE – Como he sugerido anteriormente, para mí es importante no solo saber de dónde venimos, sino reconocer quiénes somos estéticamente. Junto con Ulla, hablábamos una vez sobre mi serie CORPUS,¹ y acuñamos la frase: “somos bellos y bellas, seámoslo siempre”, apropiándonos e interviniendo la letra del himno nacional, que inicia con la frase “somos libres, seámoslo siempre”. Este es un llamado no solo a mirarnos a nosotros, sino a entender que el concepto de belleza que manejamos no es universal, sino que fue forjado por otros rostros y otros cuerpos. Al llegar occidente y traer su estética, de pronto nos convertimos en “feos” y, con los siglos, nos hemos convencido de que “la belleza” no nos contempla. Mi investigación se concreta en eso, en encontrar nuestra belleza sin parámetros ajenos, mirarme con nuestros propios ojos, aprender a encontrar la belleza en nosotros, y desde nosotros sentir todo lo que nos rodea.

Algo fundamental que una puede hacer, entonces, es encontrar belleza en sí misma e irradiar esa belleza hacia todo lo que nos pertenece desde el punto de vista histórico-visual, y cuando digo eso me refiero simplemente a aquello que hemos visto siempre. Y quizá yo hago un énfasis muy fuerte en la importancia de afirmar lo que hemos visto siempre porque pienso sinceramente que eso es lo que nos marca y nos define.

CAROLINA LUNA – *¿Y desde los museos, Ulla? ¿Cómo reparar la narrativa de lo precolombino?*

ULLA HOLMQUIST – Quizá primero sea importante reconocer que los museos son una institución surgida de una práctica colonial. Si bien tenemos antecedentes muy antiguos de la necesidad de mostrar lo que se conoce del mundo, los grandes museos han sido espacios para mostrar un orden del mundo desde un marco epistemológico occidental. Creo que hoy los museos son más conscientes de que existe la posibilidad de hacer visible cómo estos construyen sentidos del mundo y que estos no son inocentes. Ahora bien, son conversaciones que felizmente se vienen dando, y considero que en la circunstancia más reciente ha salido a la luz que no hace falta

¹

Kukuli Velarde. CORPUS (exh. cat. Charleston, SC, Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art), ed. por Katie Hirsch, Charleston, SC 2022.

que los museos lleven a cabo grandes revoluciones. Hay gestos muy potentes que dan cuenta de la intención de empezar una reflexión y para tratar de generar cambios.

Hablando específicamente desde mi quehacer en el Perú, considero que el tema clasificatorio es algo que podemos cambiar con mucha facilidad, dando un mensaje de que ya no estamos frente a museos disciplinarios, sino ante museos en los que es lícito conectar con las creaciones desde diversas perspectivas. Así, considero preciso dar movimiento a las colecciones, tanto en el sentido real como en el metafórico. Hemos de observar cómo hablamos de ellas, qué nos permitimos imaginar y, entonces, preguntarnos: ¿son estas las maneras de conocer estas creaciones? ¿Qué dejamos de lado al enfocarnos únicamente en el objeto en tanto ente estático? ¿Es que nos estamos olvidando, por ejemplo, de dialogar con su dimensión performativa o con el gesto productivo en ellas? Se trata de empezar a luchar contra la inmovilidad de los objetos.

Y para ello, resulta imprescindible crear nuevas fórmulas de mostrar y de usar en las que las distancias se acorten. En el Perú, ya hemos estado llevando a cabo algunas que han dado resultados positivos; por ejemplo, involucrar la emoción lo más que se pueda, no con la intención de convertir al museo en un espacio únicamente emotivo, sino de integrar un elemento que nos permita abrir el conocimiento desde otro lugar, desde otra pregunta, desde otra relación.

Además, es vital buscar conectar con distintas narrativas y así incorporar los conocimientos de disciplinas, voces y saberes diversos, permitiendo que hablen sin censura. Hay que permitirnos un acercamiento al arte, a la metáfora, a la poesía, a la espiritualidad, para así conectarnos con la expresión creativa de nuestros lenguajes originarios. El museo debe tener conciencia y propiciar su carácter de foro.

CAROLINA LUNA – *¿Es la historia del arte una disciplina colonial? ¿Qué posibilidades ofrece para pensar lo precolombino?*

KUKULI VELARDE – Toda la epistemología científica de principio tiene un carácter colonial, simplemente porque está suponiendo un nivel paradigmático de conocimiento, y eso incluiría a la historia del arte. La historia del arte opera únicamente desde la estética occidental y, por ello, omite. Como mencionaba anteriormente, es algo que percibí durante mis estudios de bachillerato, al notar que, en los libros de historia del arte, lo precolombino consistía en un anexo, un arte satelital.

Todes estamos de acuerdo en que la historia es un recuento manipulado en el cual quienes ganaron las guerras son quienes tienen héroes; y yo creo que esta subjetividad de la narración de la historia se extiende a la historia del arte, pues consiste en una visión subjetiva de ciertos procesos estéticos. ¿Cómo podría, entonces, la disciplina de la historia del arte precolombino estudiar una producción creativa como esta desde el punto de vista de la esté-

tica occidental, desde toda esa epistemología con bases científicas elaboradas con y desde otras realidades? No existe posibilidad de entendimiento.

Pienso que a lo mejor la arqueología tiene un acercamiento más honesto, pues no busca entender y explicar la génesis estética del objeto, sino comprenderlo desde el punto de vista de su uso, de su relación con otros elementos culturales que se pueden encontrar o ver. Una historia del arte precolombino solo tendría sentido si se ocupara de la continuidad estética en la población de hoy. De realizar algo que contribuya al presente. Si no, ofrecerá solo definiciones a partir de conceptos gastados, utilizando terminología de segunda mano y aplicada a otra realidad, insistiendo en hacer que encaje.

Considero que el camino sería el siguiente: en primer lugar, comenzar por reflexionar sobre cuál es la connotación profunda que tiene el término “precolombino” y, en segundo lugar, ocuparse de la continuidad estética de lo originario en lo contemporáneo [Fig. 3 y Fig. 4].

CAROLINA LUNA – *¿En qué consiste una obra de arte? ¿Es legítimo hablar de un arte precolombino, considerando el origen occidental del término “arte”?*

KUKULI VELARDE – Yo considero que toda producción o intención estética es artística. El arte no es un adjetivo donde uno esté tratando de determinar cualidad. El arte es simplemente una acción de crear. Si esa acción es exitosa o no ya es otra cuestión y, como he mencionado, es subjetivo. ¿Es legítimo hablar de un arte precolombino? Es legítimo hablar de arte en toda acción creativa.

ULLA HOLMQUIST – Personalmente, al momento de referirme a lo tradicionalmente denominado “arte precolombino”, he optado por utilizar el término “creación” en su sentido amplio. Al hablar de creación, se incluye desde la intención del proceso hasta el resultado, y se tiene implícito el gesto del creador. Desde mi formación, siempre he pensado que el uso del término “arte” enfatiza un resultado y la mirada impuesta sobre este.

A propósito de esto, me parece relevante transformar dicha mirada, como lo propone Walter Mignolo en su artículo “Reconstrucción epistémica/estética. La *aesthesis* decolonial una década después”,² y pasar así de la experiencia estética a la experiencia *aesthetica*, en tanto el gesto creativo más allá de la mirada o la clasificación, pues ambas ya están apropiadas justamente por la tradición occidental. Tenemos que pensar en transformar nuestro lenguaje; nuestra tradición debe tener la posibilidad de plantear sus propios términos y maneras de conocer.

2

Walter Mignolo, Reconstrucción epistémica/estética. La *aesthesis* decolonial una década después, en: *Calle 14. Revista de investigación en el campo del arte* 14/25, 2019, 14–32.



[Fig. 3]
Kukuli Velarde, La Purificada, 2012, Serie *CORPUS*, 89 cm (alto) × 50 cm (diámetro),
collection of the artist © Kukuli Velarde.



[Fig. 4]
Creador no identificado, Cántaro de cerámica Mochica, 25.9 cm (alto) × 17 cm (ancho),
Museo Larco, Lima-Perú, ML006622 © Museo Larco.

KUKULI VELARDE – Le tengo mucho respeto al trabajo de Mignolo, pero ¿podemos verdaderamente descolonizar utilizando solo terminología occidental? Ambas palabras propuestas en dicho texto, *estética* y *aesthesis*, tienen un origen griego. Entiendo la variación en el significado de lo *aesthesico*, que resalta el sentir y alude a la génesis de lo que se llama hoy “estética”. Sin embargo, para mí, su propuesta es cuestionable de principio ya que continúa operando dentro del marco de la cultura occidental.

Personalmente, como trabajadora del arte, yo me apropio de la palabra arte y de la palabra estética. La estética occidental no es la única; debemos aceptar e integrar la idea de un *pluriverso* donde existen diferentes formas de sentir y ver. Lo interesante es el reconocimiento y respeto de otras formas de ver.

ULLA HOLMQUIST – De acuerdo, y sin embargo considero que, al realizar un esfuerzo por utilizar un término que se acerque más al creador y a su proceso, hay un aporte en la propuesta de Mignolo. Retorno a la palabra creación, a pesar de que está en español, porque considero que tenemos responsabilidad en la búsqueda de cuáles son esos procesos creativos y de ver si en nuestras propias culturas originarias se encuentran estas palabras, nociones y procesos. El término creación nos permite empezar a realizar el esfuerzo de ir eliminando el bautizo taxonómico de las cosas por procesos más dinámicos. Lo otro es muy estático. Es preciso entender que el lenguaje te puede detener en el tiempo y que, sin embargo, la inercia puede removerse con el solo uso diferente de la palabra. Desde hace mucho tiempo en los museos peruanos, hemos insistido en la importancia de mostrar lo que creemos que el objeto es, y no hemos pensado en lo que este posibilita. Hay que pensar en esas posibilidades.

CAROLINA LUNA – *¿Cómo continuar pensando lo precolombino desde una institución como la universidad?*

KUKULI VELARDE – El reconocimiento de los límites de la academia es esencial. En el contexto de la academia euroamericana y respecto a las perspectivas decoloniales, ¿cómo puede descolonizar alguien que colonizó y aún coloniza?

Es un tema difícil, y lo comparo con el momento de pánico que el hombre blanco atraviesa actualmente en Estados Unidos, al ver que su posición en el poder está transformándose tras cientos de años de privilegio. Me pregunto si la academia está teniendo la misma actitud pero con más decoro; si su apuesta por los estudios decoloniales consiste, en realidad, en una estrategia para mantenerse a cargo de los discursos en torno al conocimiento.

Parte de la apertura consistiría, quizás, en el encuentro con estudios decoloniales de América Latina. Esto, desde un previo reconocimiento de nuestra occidentalización, nuestra clase social, y nuestra ubicación geográfica. Y debemos tener cuidado, pues desde la ciudad no podemos hablar por las comunidades rurales. Yo no

sé si la academia tenga la capacidad de descolonizarse, pero quizá podría aprender de dichas comunidades.

CAROLINA LUNA – *Hemos hablado acerca de la necesidad de desarrollar una mirada y un actuar más comprehensivo y dinámico acerca de lo precolombino. Se ha resaltado la urgencia de apertura por parte de las disciplinas académicas hacia los saberes originarios, así como la necesidad de un cambio de actitud respecto de los motivos y modos según los cuales nos conectamos con estos saberes. En el Perú, ¿qué podemos hacer para lograr esto?*

KUKULI VELARDE – Es un camino muy complejo y largo. Y realmente creo que tanto Ulla como yo estamos trabajando desde nuestras trincheras en ello y que a través de nuestros propios conocimientos, gustos y labores hemos coincidido. Yo creo que nuestro acercamiento es un acercamiento genuino en el que buscamos otras formas de mirar. Es por eso que nos entendimos desde el comienzo. Una de las cosas que aprecié mucho al conocerla fue que me dijo que encontró en mi obra la continuidad de la que hemos conversado. Es una labor de todos nosotros ver hasta dónde podemos llegar a cambiar algo que es una maquinaria mucho más grande de lo que imaginamos.

ULLA HOLMQUIST – Yo incluiría un ámbito que no hemos comentado hasta acá y que considero importante, sobre todo considerando esto como un trabajo a largo plazo: la educación. Creo que es indispensable que la escuela se vuelva a vincular con nuestra estética en tanto referente de punto de partida para nuestra formación, por ejemplo, a la hora de empezar a hacer trazos, de reconocer especies vegetales, animales, ideas y nuestros propios rasgos. Un referente para representarnos personal y colectivamente. Y ahí creo que la arqueología, la iconografía, la historia del arte y los creadores artísticos podrían tener una confluencia muy feliz, sabiendo que los esfuerzos hechos van a dar sus frutos en una gran posibilidad creativa y, sobre todo, en un auto-reconocimiento cariñoso. Tenemos material de sobra para que lo nuestro sea un referente que nos posibilite un espejo amable y ajeno al prejuicio.

KUKULI VELARDE – Y así encontrar nuestra propia estética.

[Ulla Holmquist Pachas](#) is the Director of the Museo Larco in Lima, Peru. She has curated national and international exhibitions of ancient Peruvian art including, most recently, *Machu Picchu and the Treasures of Ancient Peru* at the Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, Paris (2022). A former Minister of Culture of Peru, Holmquist has held directorships and leadership positions at the "Inca Garcilaso" Cultural Center of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Peru, the Museo Central, the Museo Larco, the Museo de Arte de Lima, and the Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Antropología e

Historia del Perú. She is currently a professor in the MA program in Museology and Cultural Management at the Universidad Ricardo Palma and in the MA Program in Art History and Curatorship at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú.

Kukuli Velarde is a Peruvian artist based in the United States since 1987. She has received many awards and grants including a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Pollock Krasner Foundation grant, a United States Artists Knight Fellowship, a Pew Fellowship in Visual Arts, an Anonymous is a Woman award, and a Joan Mitchell Foundation grant, among others. In 2013 her project *CORPUS* won the Grand Prize at the Gyeonggi Ceramics Biennial in South Korea. Her exhibition credits include: *CORPUS* at Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center (2022); *Kukuli Velarde. The Complicit Eye* at Taller Puertorriqueño, Philadelphia (2018–19); *Kukuli Velarde* at AMOCA, Pomona (2017); *Plunder Me, Baby* at the Yenggi Ceramics Museum Biennial of Taipei, Taiwan (2014); *CORPUS (Work in Progress)* at the Gyeonggi International Ceramic Biennial, South Korea (2013); *Kukuli Velarde. Plunder Me, Baby* at the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art in Kansas City (2013); *Patrimonio* at Barry Friedman Gallery, New York (2010); and *Plunder Me, Baby* at Garth Clark Gallery, New York (2007). She is married to sculptor Doug Herren and they have a daughter named Vida. They live in Philadelphia.

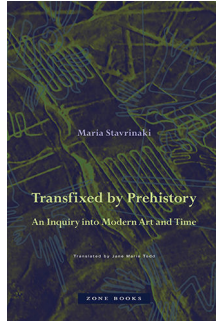
Carolina Luna is a scholar based in Lima, Perú. She holds a B.A. and a Lic. in Philosophy from Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP) and an M.A. in Arts Administration from Columbia University in the City of New York. She is currently a lecturer of Contemporary Philosophy and Museum Studies at PUCP. Formerly, she has worked for the Center for Book Arts and the Brooklyn Museum in New York, and has been a research assistant at PUCP and Princeton University research projects.

REVIEWS REZENSIONEN

MARIA STAVRINAKI, *TRANSFIXED BY PREHISTORY. AN INQUIRY INTO MODERN ART AND TIME*

Translated by Jane Marie Todd

New York: Zone Books 2022, 448 pages with 78 b/w ill.,
ISBN 978-1-9421-3065-9 (Hardcover).



Reviewed by
Alex Potts

This important study throws new light on the nineteenth-century European “discovery” of prehistory and the modern re-imaginings of time associated with such opening out to a deep past extending beyond the reach of established narratives of the history of the world and humankind. The phenomenon, Stavriniaki argues, had significant implications for subsequent radical questioning of humanist and historicist mappings of the past as a continuous, largely progressive linear development. Her study’s perspective is thus very much in tune with the contemporary preoccupation with the nonhuman and with a postmodern/poststructuralist dissolution of inherited notions of historical time. In contrast with much present day cultural and art theoretical speculation on such issues in cultural and modern art studies, however, her analysis grows out of a finely researched history of early European encounters with and scientific interpretation of natural formations and residues of human life originating from well before any previously imaginable past.

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<https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2023.2.96038>



Stavrinaki identifies three distinct concerns within this discovery of a distant and incommensurable past as it got underway in the earlier nineteenth century – prehistory as a term first gained currency in the 1830s. For a start there was the geological discovery of an extended prehuman past that threw into disarray established chronological reckonings of the origins of the world deriving from the Bible. Following on from this was speculation about humanity's prehistory based on the discovery of human relics in the more recent strata of an extended geological history of the earth. Finally came speculation about the prehistory of art as manifest in carved artefacts and cave paintings found alongside residues of very early human habitation. At stake in such encounters with a prehistorical past and the resulting imagining of a new *longue durée* of history were three origins, that of the world, that of humanity and that of art. It is Stavrinaki's central contention that such origins as they entered the modern European imaginary were of their essence shrouded in obscurity and were inconceivable as events anchored in chronological measures of time. The inherent obscurity of such projections of a deep time was in her view a source of both fascination and anxiety for the modern European mind, and in particular for an avant-garde receptive to the idea of a temporality that escaped humanist and historicising appropriation.

While detailing the history of modern engagement with the material residues of a prehistoric past forms a substantial portion of the book – namely much of the first two chapters – the main focus is more specific. In the end her central concern is with affect-laden responses to the artistic remains of prehistory, ones of astonishment, or being “transfixed” as the title has it. In the latter part of her book, the responses of this kind that receive the most attention are self-consciously modern or avant-garde ones in which the artefacts of prehistory were seen as testifying to an “originary” human capacity for artistic creativity, and to possibilities of unmediated immersion in the material fabric of a prehistoric world. Within the terms of this mindset, intensive engagement with the residues of prehistory went hand in hand with attempts to break out beyond the bounds of a discredited, historicised understanding of artistic precedent. The prehistoric was in this way brought into alignment with the radically modern and made integral to the latter's temporal imaginary. Towards the end, Stavrinaki's book, which begins as a broader study in cultural history and history of science, eventually devolves into a narrower examination of modern and contemporary art work in which a fascination with the material residues and *longues durées* of prehistory can be seen to play a formative role. Symptomatically, an introduction by Stavrinaki to the contents of her book appeared in the journal *Artforum* shortly before the book's publication in English.¹ This said, a substantial reward of the book in art historical terms is the distinction it establishes between artistic

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Maria Stavrinaki, All the Time in the World, in: *Artforum* 56, March 2018, 204–214.

engagement with issues of time and prehistory and the now much discredited fetishising of the archaic associated with primitivism.

Of the artists whose work Stavrinaki cites in making her case that the prehistoric mindset she has identified played a vital role in modern art, Robert Smithson stands out as the most compelling instance. With Smithson, a deeply held fascination with the prehistoric and a strong belief in the overriding predominance of the prehuman or nonhuman in the world's longer history and destiny are integral to his art's material processes and conception. Dubuffet's painting (and sculpture) and its uncompromisingly antihumanist materialism is another obvious case in point, and possibly too some of Cézanne's landscapes with their depopulated expanses and bare geological formations. In most other instances on which Stavrinaki dwells (Matisse, de Chirico, Ernst and Miro for example), the engagement with and immersion in the material residues and temporality of prehistory tends to be more indirect, by way of iconographical or representational reference, or collateral verbal explanation. The conjuncture between a prehistoric imaginary and an art work's formative logic and evident resonance can often seem a little tenuous. Such uncertainty hovers over the recent contemporary work by Thomas Hirschhorn and Pierre Huyghe featured in the book's conclusion.

The discovery of Palaeolithic cave painting that got underway in the 1890s functions in Stavrinaki's analysis as a symptomatic instance of the "astonishment" of coming face to face with the reality of a prehistory that defied conventional historical mapping. Smaller artefacts decorated with carvings could more readily be accommodated within traditional understandings of a history of art evolving from primitive or archaic beginnings to more elaborate and sophisticated formations. But the more striking cave paintings, particularly those discovered in Western Europe, brought such understandings up short. Here were ambitious works on a large scale exhibiting a vivid naturalism in their depiction of animals that defied standard notions of the archaic or primitive and that considerably predated the much more simplified abstract representations found in subsequent Stone Age work – and also in the earliest known artefacts and monuments of ancient Mediterranean civilisations. The cave paintings were works known to be from the earlier hunting-gathering Palaeolithic phase of human history, which saw the first human tool making and shaping of hard materials, prior to the later Neolithic phase and the advent of agricultural cultivation and settled communities.

What accounted for this outburst of a striking naturalism on a scale that seemed to have no historical precedent and no progeny in a known early history of artistic fabrication? What was the significance of these sophisticated works produced by a people about whom nothing was known, and whose existence was lost in the mists of a time far distant from the documented beginnings of human civilisation? Such questions acquired particular urgency in a moment when the foundations were being laid for a systematic history of

artistic development based on stylistic analysis of artistic form. Not only did the cave paintings defy mainstream assumptions that the earliest artistic forms would have evolved from simple archaic and abstract beginnings to more truthful naturalist representations. They did not sit easily either with recent attempts to incorporate the possibility of an inverse evolution from the naturalistic to the abstract alongside the widely recognised trajectory of ever-increasing naturalism. They lacked any evident historical framing. They could not be anchored as a phase within a long-term evolutionary development. Faced with them, the modern viewer seemed to be brought into direct contact with a naked prehistory unmediated by available forms of historical understanding. A similar response, as Stavrinaki examines in some detail, was activated by the great later Neolithic monuments, such as Stonehenge, by which a host of modern artists as diverse as Henry Moore and Robert Morris were at one time or another captivated.

The phenomenon of Palaeolithic European cave painting becomes less astonishing when seen through the lens of the more progressive forms of modern rethinking of the nature of so-called primitive art. Franz Boas in his *Primitive Art*,² published in the same year as Georges Bataille's meditations on Lascaux and the birth of art, finds no cause to see anything astonishing about the level of artistic achievement and vital naturalism of work such as the Lascaux cave paintings. The artefacts of hunter-gatherer societies, in his view, displayed varying degrees of abstraction and naturalism such that each had their own sophistication. Abstract symbolic representation and perspectival naturalist representation were two alternatives, neither inherently more or less artistically developed. The vivid representation of animals in the European cave art such as the Lascaux paintings was unusual and perhaps exceptional but not inexplicable, nor unique testimony to primordial origins by way of which, as Bataille put it, one could confront prehistory in a "feeling of presence – of clear burning presence".³

Stavrinaki's story takes a different more apocalyptic turn when dealing with the modern mindset that emerged in the postwar period in the wake of the inhuman destructiveness unleashed by the Second World War and the Nazi Holocaust, and culminating in the threat of total annihilation posed by the newly invented atomic bomb. In these circumstances, the immediate possibility of a post-historical, posthuman world presented itself in urgent terms. The dialectic of radical regression and radical modernisation at work within those currents of the modern imaginary that interest Stavrinaki was taken to more extreme lengths, issuing in present day thinking about the self-annihilating effects of human overreach that the onset of irreversible and lethal climate change has brought into

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Franz Boas, *Primitive Art*, New York 1955, 77.

3

Quoted in Stavrinaki, *Transfixed by History*, 284.

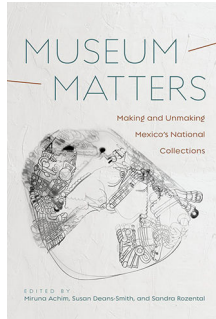
focus. Posthistory began to take over from prehistory as a basis for imagining the realities of a world without humans or human consciousness. The *longue durée* of a history empty of humanity was in effect closing the narrow temporal gap encompassing human presence in the world with its elaborate fabrications and its often self-destructive interventions in nature.

Stavrinaki's book leaves one with some questions about the mindset informing these apprehensions of history, particularly their radical negation of notions of human agency informing other conceptions of time and history originating in the nineteenth century – most notably perhaps Marx's vision of men making their own history (but not as he added, as they please, in circumstances of their own choosing). Signs of radical political impulse do make their appearance from time to time in the modern rethinkings of temporality that preoccupy Stavrinaki, but their implications for the case she is making remain unexplored. While she draws on thinkers such as Benjamin and Bloch, their revolutionary aspirations, being rather at odds with the general drift of her analysis, are largely left out of account. Stavrinaki's inclusion of the reactionary musings of Ernst Jünger and their rather disconcerting implications could be cited too in this connection.

One reason that the earlier phase of the modern discovery (and invention) of prehistory set out in Stavrinaki's study seems productive nowadays is the way it goes against the grain of subsequent more radical-seeming understandings. It keeps alive a dialectic between awareness of the impenetrable obscurity of the vast tracts of prehistory and actively engaged attempts to make historical sense of this "mute" past. It was a mindset that did not just remain transfixed by the prehistorical and linger on its visions of a nonhuman world. It still held onto prospects for active human intervention in and some level of understanding of the vast workings and *longues durées* of inhuman process and forces. Such a dialectic often erred on the side of a human overreach that without doubt had catastrophic consequences. At the same time, the mindset informing a radical modern (or postmodern) fascination with the prehistoric, and with the expanses of a prehuman and posthuman time, holds out little prospect for a human agency that might begin to tackle human-induced causes of disastrous climactic change.

MIRUNA ACHIM, SUSAN DEANS-
SMITH, AND SANDRA ROZENTAL
(EDS.), *MUSEUM MATTERS. MAKING
AND UNMAKING MEXICO'S NATIONAL
COLLECTIONS*

Tucson: University of Arizona Press 2021, 312 pages,
ISBN 978-0-816-53957-4 (Hardcover).



Reviewed by
Christian Stenz

The history of museums and their collections has long been told as a cumulative process. In this view, collections grew steadily and were transformed from a state of initial chaos to a strict order. Thereby, the objects in the collections would unfold their supposed inherent meaning. This also holds true for the histories of the national collections in Mexico City. As one of the editors of this volume, Miruna Achim, states, the history of the Museo Nacional de Antropología has mainly been told “as one of the smooth unfolding and unveiling of a national essence” (p. 221). For some time now, however, this narrative has been called into question. Arjun Appadurai (1988) and Lorraine Daston (2000), among others, have already cogently shown that the use and meaning of objects depend on the context in which they are embedded and are therefore not intrinsic but highly contin-

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<https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2023.2.96039>



gent and contested.¹ J. M. M. Alberti (2009) and James Delbourgo (2017) drew on these approaches in their ground-breaking studies of the Manchester Museum and the British Museum respectively.² Chris Gosden and Frances Larson (2007) further introduced the idea of the “relational museum” in their pioneering study on the collections of the Pitt Rivers Museum, where they convincingly demonstrate that the meaning of an object depends on its entanglement in social and political relations.³ Following these more recent approaches, the panel “Matters of State, Matters of Dispute”, organized by Miruna Achim in 2018, invited the participants to “generate a conversation among historians, philosophers of science, archaeologists, and anthropologists who work on the convoluted histories of Mexico’s collections” (p. ix).

The insightful volume *Museum Matters. Making and Unmaking Mexico’s National Collections* resulted from this conference. Carefully compiled and well designed, the editors Miruna Achim, Susan Deans-Smith, and Sandra Rozental bring together ten essays by anthropologists, archaeologists, and historians of science, all of whom are among the leading experts on Mexican collections and their histories. While most of the essays focus on the collections or particular objects from the Museo Nacional de Antropología and the former Museo Nacional de México, some of the authors also cover other national collections like the Museo de Historia Natural or the Museo Nacional de las Culturas. All of the essays, however, “seek”, as the editors highlight in their inspiring introduction, “to historicize and complicate the emergence, consolidation, and dispersal of Mexico’s national museum complex by telling the stories of the objects that were part of the national collections at different moments” (p. 12). In doing so, they fundamentally contradict the nationalist narratives that still prevail in some collections and exhibitions. These narratives regard especially the Museo Nacional de Antropología as “a storehouse of collections presented as the collective heritage of a homogenous national whole” (p. 8). But, as the editors convincingly argue, neither do the individual objects have an intrinsic meaning as national heritage, nor do the collections and museums represent a fixed entity.

In order to show the contingency of the meaning and use of the objects and the constant instability and fluidity of the collections and exhibitions, the book is organized in three thematic parts. The three essays of the first section – “Canons” – investigate how par-

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Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge 1988; Lorraine Daston (ed.), *Biographies of Scientific Objects*, Chicago 2000.

2

Samuel J. M. M. Alberti, *Nature and Culture. Objects, Disciplines and the Manchester Museum*, Manchester 2009; James Delbourgo, *Collecting the World. The Life and Curiosity of Hans Sloane*, London 2017; Chris Gosden and Francis Larson, *Knowing Things. Exploring the Collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum, 1884–1945*, Oxford 2007.

3

Gosden and Larson, *Knowing Things*.

ticular objects, collections, and institutions may have contributed to the formation and transformation of canons. In doing so, the essays aim to “illuminate how categories of inclusion and exclusion are configured and reconfigured over time as collecting practices, values, and tastes change” (p. 13). Therefore, Susan Deans-Smith’s essay “‘A History Worthy of the Grandeur of the Spanish Nation’. Collecting Mexican Antiquity in the Viceroyalty of New Spain” goes farther back in time than the other essays to study how the meaning and value of some pre-Hispanic objects changed when they were placed in the Real Academia de San Carlos at the end of the colonial period. Incorporated into this prestigious royal institution in the urban space, they were detached from their rural-indigenous contexts and served “as evidence of a glorious past” worth studying. Their meaning and value, however, remained contested. Indigenous inhabitants of Mexico City started to venerate a publicly exhibited monument, leading the viceroy to rebury the “idol”. At the same time, the European classicism that dominated royal institutions in Mexico excluded pre-Hispanic artefacts from what were considered “beautiful” works of art.

This perception of pre-Hispanic objects, however, changed in the nineteenth century as Miruna Achim and Bertina Olmedo Vera pointedly demonstrate in their essay “Forgery and the Science of the ‘Authentic’”. In order to illustrate this change, the authors examine a collection of forgeries or “fakes” which were deposited in the storerooms of the Museo Nacional de Antropología carefully separated from the “authentic” objects. Based on the fact that it became increasingly important to distinguish “authentic” objects from fakes, Achim and Olmedo Vera deduce an increased value of Mexican artefacts. Simultaneously, they postulate “an epistemological connection between fakes and ‘authentic’ objects in the museum” (p. 59). With striking examples, they show how, on the one hand, experts in museums became increasingly familiar with craft techniques of pre-Hispanic artisans. On the other hand, this would also have been true for the forgers, who imitated these ancient techniques, making it again difficult to distinguish the “authentic” from the fake. In the last contribution to this section, “Body Objects in Transit. National Pathology between Anatomy Museums and the Museo Nacional de México, 1853–1912”, Laura Cházaro looks at some “anatomical pieces” which circulated between different collections in the second half of the nineteenth century (p. 81). Thereby, Cházaro argues that the meaning of these objects did not just depend on the institutional context in which they were exhibited or stored. The meanings also depended on who produced, collected, and donated them. Moreover, even though by the end of the nineteenth century most of these objects were incorporated into the same canon and were to function as expressions of a specifically Mexican pathology in an increasingly racialized medicine, their meanings remained contingent.

The second part of the book – “Fragments” – looks at objects that, at least for a certain time, have been forgotten or fragmented

or have completely disappeared from sight. Thus, in the nineteenth century, many pre-Hispanic objects were indeed broken into pieces. This also holds true for the Cross of Palenque whose trajectory is studied by Christina Bueno in her essay "The Tangled Journey of the Cross of Palenque". The effort to bring back together the scattered parts of the Cross of Palenque during the government of Porfirio Díaz symbolizes for Bueno their increasing interest in effectively controlling all the territories within its borders as well as the meaning of the pre-Hispanic past. This was, as Bueno further argues, not just a matter of domestic political control. Rather, the Porfiriato wanted to show the international community that they were a sovereign, modern state, capable of fully controlling the material culture that existed within its territory. Frida Gorbach studies quite a different kind of objects in her essay "Past and Present at the Museo de Historia Natural". Focusing on five natural history specimens from the Museo de Historia Natural de la Ciudad de México, Gorbach does not just demonstrate how many specimens got lost or were withdrawn from different collections, she also reveals their deep entanglement with colonialism and deconstructs the temporality attributed to these objects in natural history collections. While the essay is undoubtedly one of the most interesting and stimulating in the whole book, Gorbach addresses almost too many topics in the relatively short contribution, which makes it difficult to follow the argumentation at certain points.

The two last essays in this section "Clues and Gazes. Indigenous Faces in the Museo Nacional de Antropología" and "Unsettled Objects. The Pacific Collection at the Museo Nacional de las Culturas" by Haydeé López Hernández and Carlos Mondragón, respectively, discuss particular "ethnological imaginaries" prevailing in some mid-twentieth-century collections in Mexico City (p. 192). López Hernández for his part looks at a collection of photographs from the basement of the Archivo Fotográfico de Etnografía. Because it is not evident from the existing records why the photographs were made and by whom, it is difficult to decipher the exact meaning they should have in the collection. López Hernández assumes they were taken to visually document the Mexican ethnicities. Such an effort would date back to the nineteenth century when anthropologists tried to visualize "the supposed historical continuity of the populations" (p. 176). However, as the author further argues, the photographs are strikingly different from those of the nineteenth century. Depicting people in everyday situations, the photographs seem to adapt stylistic elements from the emerging photojournalism. Equally torn between the ethnological imaginary from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is the collection of 214 objects from Oceania. Mondragón shows how these objects served to stabilize the idea of the Olmec as the "mother culture" of ancient Mexico, which diffused throughout the region and would seem to differ significantly from those of other regions, such as Oceania (p. 198). Whereas this idea strongly resembles the diffusionism of the nineteenth century, Mondragón points out that by focusing on

stylistic elements rather than social evolutionism, the collection represents at the same time a break with this approach.

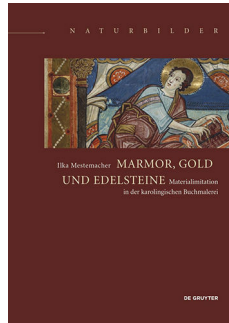
In the last section of the book – “Disturbances” – the essays deal with the silencing and violence inherent in the museum space and collections. Thus, Mario Rufer emphasizes that it is precisely the aspect of violence which is often made invisible. In “Conjuring Violence Away with Culture. The Purépecha National Emblem in the Museo Nacional de Antropología” he convincingly uses the Purépecha National Emblem as a case study to show how a symbol of war became an expression of artisanal skills of the Purépecha people in the museum space. While the exhibition paints a picture of the peaceful coexistence of different indigenous cultures within the nation, outside the museum space the Purépecha continue to fight against the expropriation of their communal lands. The two other fascinating and insightful essays of this section, “Tehuantepec on Display. Tlalocs, Theodolites, Fishing Traps, and the Cultures of Collecting in the Mid-Nineteenth Century” by Miruna Achim and “A Monolith on the Street” by Sandra Rozental coherently follow this line of reflection. Achim studies two ceramic objects from the island of Manopostiac which entered the collection together with minerals and plants removed during a survey in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Thereby, Achim lucidly analyses how the engineers considered not only the attitude of the local indigenous population towards the pre-Hispanic objects to be backward and useless, but also their actually highly elaborate fishing techniques. By looking at the long history of the huge monolith from San Miguel Coatlinchan, which stands today at the Paseo de la Reforma in Mexico City, Rozental observes the same dichotomies between “resource and waste, conservation and destruction” (p. 237). Thus, the handling of the monolith by the local indigenous population was portrayed as useless and even harmful by the “experts” in the museum and the engineers who were commissioned to transport the object to Mexico City. By highlighting these dichotomies, the essays of this final section highlight once more a central theme that runs through this entire book. Moreover, they clearly show that the practices and narratives of the engineers and museum experts were violent towards both the indigenous people and the objects themselves. The monolith now stands in a harmful urban environment and some of the statues from the island of Manopostiac were destroyed during their removal.

Overall, all the essays collected in this stimulating book consistently follow the questions raised in the introduction, demonstrating how the meaning and use of objects in the national collections in Mexico have always been, and still are, contingent and contested. It is further immediately apparent throughout all the contributions that the authors are not only very familiar with the latest approaches to the history of museums and collections, but also have an excellent knowledge of the objects and collections they study. Finally, the variety of historical sources studied in *Museum Matters* is outstanding. The authors work with written sources like museum

catalogues and protocols, visual sources such as photographs, oral sources such as interviews, and especially with material sources ranging from pre-Hispanic objects to fishing traps and fakes and forgeries. Thus, the breadth and quality of the scholarship, together with the innovative use of a wide range of historical sources offer an inspiring and insightful read.

ILKA MESTEMACHER, *MARMOR, GOLD
UND EDELSTEINE.
MATERIALIMITATION IN DER
KAROLINGISCHEN BUCHMALEREI*

Naturbilder/Images of Nature 11, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter 2021,
392 pages with 155 color ill., ISBN 978-3-11-071077-9 (Hardcover).



Reviewed by
Beatrice Kitzinger

Realia and representation. More questions for the “court
school”

The decades just around 800 were a good time for book-making in the Frankish kingdoms. At this time painters, draftspeople, and patrons invested prodigious experimental energy and, often, hefty material resources in re-imagining visual aspects of the codex form. Some 1200 years down the line, the decade since the anniversary of Charlemagne’s death in 814 has proven a good time for the study of these consummately rich books – whether “rich” is construed primarily in a visual, intellectual sense, or includes a manuscript’s material to boot. While Lawrence Nees’s nimble new catalogue of Frankish manuscripts spotlights the diversity of genres and production levels that flourished in the eighth and ninth centuries,¹ a number of notable studies have looked afresh at the cluster of stunning gospel books traditionally known as the “Court School”

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Lawrence Nees, *Frankish Manuscripts. Seventh to Tenth Centuries*, London/New York 2022.

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<https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2023.2.96041>



manuscripts, following Wilhelm Koehler.² Befitting a family of book paintings that includes several innovative renditions of a composition often dubbed the “Fountain of Life”, a constellation of colleagues working in multiple languages and with varied methodological commitments has gone to the well and drawn deep.³

The impetus for this brief contribution to 21 was a review request for one of the new additions to the constellation: Ilka Mestemacher’s *Marmor, Gold und Edelsteine. Materialimitation in der karolingischen Buchmalerei*. In view of the journal’s broad art historical remit I have taken the occasion not to weigh merits and desiderata in this particular study, but rather to present Mestemacher’s book as an invitation to think with early medieval art when approaching core questions of representational culture. For one thing *Marmor, Gold und Edelsteine* does very well is to bring out the kaleidoscopic ways the Court manuscripts pose a set of questions about the nature of representation in pictorial media.

The prompt for Mestemacher’s study is the fact that early medieval book painters – spectacularly, but not solely, in the Court group – consistently used their own medium and materials to harness others. Mestemacher’s title enumerates three of the most prevalent natural materials rendered in manuscript painting of the time: marble, gold, and gemstones. These rendered materials generally appear in, or as, settings for textual, numeric, or figural contents. Marble, gold, and gems most commonly adorn and help to structure the indexing apparatus for the four gospels known as the canon tables, which usually begin a gospel book. The canon tables comprise lists of textual sections that facilitate cross-reference among the evangelists’ distinct texts. In elaborate renditions, the tables are often presented in colonnades. This form has practical value in ordering the lists of numbers and supporting comparison across them, but the colonnade also articulates an architectural metaphor key to contemporary thinking about the harmonious relationship among the four discrete gospels. Later in the manuscripts, painters regularly reprised the arch forms of the canon tables to house

2

The term is increasingly contentious. The studies mentioned here consistently engage it (with more or less discussion of its difficulties) for lack of another efficient moniker to encompass both the conceptual unities of the corpus and the persistent uncertainty about the production history of its members. In the primary study discussed, Mestemacher keeps the term in play with qualifications, sometimes opting for “Hof-Handschriften”, which foregrounds the court’s social and intellectual context above the production-implications of “school”. The book includes a catalogue of key manuscripts that lays out their known connections to royal circles. My review title tips a hat to the late Theo Jülich, who weighed the “Court School” category primarily on the ivory side: Jülich, *Fragen an die Hofschule*, in:

Peter van den Brink and Sarvenaz Ayooghi (eds.), *Karls Kunst*, Dresden 2018, 57–73.

3

Not a comprehensive list, but one that gives a flavor of this variety, should include Cécile Voyer, *Orner la parole de Dieu, le livre d’Évangiles et son décor (800–1030)*. Paris, Arsenal, ms. 592, Paris 2018; Elizabeth Lane Fischer, *The Depiction of Spatial Experience in Early Medieval Gospel Books, 787–814 CE*, PhD Dissertation, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2018; and the substantial contributions to Michael Embach, Claudine Moulin, and Harald Wolter-von dem Knesebeck (eds.), *Die Handschriften der Hofschule Kaiser Karls des Grossen. Individuelle Gestalt und europäisches Kulturerbe*, Trier 2019. Forthcoming work by Lawrence Nees, Anne-Orange Poilpré, and the “Textures of Sacred Scripture” project at the University of Zurich, *inter alia*, testify to continuing investment in the corpus.

images of the gospel writers; pictured marble and gemstones, along with gold, define these settings too. Moreover, in several Court-sphere books, patterned settings featuring related motifs encase the gospel texts on every page.

Significantly, the potent natural materials of marble and jewels are almost always depicted here in highly worked forms, whereby stone is polished and cut to pillars; gemstones carved and intricately set. The need to observe this distinction between the natural and the worked already indicates several of the most pressing and interesting questions arising from the painters' practice – questions that turn on the ability of one medium and/or material to represent another, and the consequences of its relative success. What factors assure us of the imitation of one material by another in the first place? When should we look for meaning in the pictorial invocation of a specific material? When does the pictorial invocation of another medium (like architecture, or jewelry) or craft (like carving) matter more than the citation of a specific material (like marble)? How does picturing affect the (idea of an) imaged material, and how does it affect the character of the imaging medium, in turn?

When the mimesis of particular pictured materials and their worked forms is historically situated, probing the practice yields a wide range of cultural connotations. These oscillate among the properties or origin stories ascribed to materials themselves, and the range of association that can accrue to particular pairs of material and form (that is, when iconography gets involved). The topic of cross-media mimesis can also be framed more generally. Then, the representation of natural materials, especially in worked forms, can become part of a larger conversation about painters' rendition of crafted things *qua* crafted things. The depiction of books-within-books is a classic for the early medieval corpus, for instance; pictured textiles offer other rich ground.⁴ In this light, pictorial cross-reference among recognizable materials and forms can prompt exploration of varied possible intellectual ramifications that follow when painters incorporate the world "outside" into the purview of their images. The practice of such cross-reference, though, also circles back on itself to urge other lines of inquiry based in questions of convention, innovation, and participation in established pictorial traditions. In turn, questions about pictorial tradition call for attention to themes of process as well as themes of image. What does it mean to participate in a particular pictorial tradition in a particular time and place? How do pictorial choices ask us to think in balance between artistic transmission (in the sense of emulation or reproduction of other works) and painters' direct observation of the world around them?

A study like Mestemacher's is generative in the way it at once seeks responses to all these (and other) questions in the historical sphere of the primary sources, and also fosters at least this reader's

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Explored, *inter alia*, by Anna Bücheler, *Ornament as Argument. Textile Pages and Textile Metaphors in Early Medieval Manuscripts*, Berlin/Boston 2019.

desire to convene a book club around the core phenomena that would bring diverse studies into conversation. The work is already necessarily in dialogue with recent discussions of the particular focal materials, with their many uses and connotations.⁵ It would be productive to read together with studies of material rhetoric keyed to other matters;⁶ and likewise all those concerned with the practices and terminology of evocation and allusion.⁷

In the tighter context of renewed work on the “Court School”, highly productive dialogue grows between analysis focused on pictorial rhetoric, and the strides in physical material analysis this corpus has increasingly enjoyed.⁸ The more we know about the literal materials and processes that produced such sophisticated books, the more complex our understanding of their verbal and visual rhetoric becomes. Gold, for instance, seems to function rather differently to pictured marble. It can work representationally, but straightforwardly embodies itself at the same time – together with the other values attached to such precious matter (aesthetic, economic, theological, or natural-philosophical values, for example).⁹ However, especially in a literary culture that frequently uses gold as a metaphor, and prizes the bright qualities associated with the metal as much as the metal *per se*, it makes a real difference to know the fact and the types of admixtures that could stand in for gold, even in the highest-end book production. It makes a difference to know, in one case, that the purest gold available was used for the halo of a Christ figure. This matters not primarily because such a match of weighty iconography and material grade confirms ready expectations about the way the quality of materials can effect the expression of theological priorities. Instead, the example points up the way the *distribution* of matter becomes part of a book’s material rhetoric. This case concurrently emphasizes the way the ability to *make* different kinds of paint in the first place becomes part of

5

E.g., Fabio Barry, *Painting in Stone. Architecture and the Poetics of Marble from Antiquity to the Enlightenment*, New Haven, CT/London 2020.

6

E.g., Ittai Weinryb, *The Bronze Object in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge 2016.

7

E.g., Margaret S. Graves, *Arts of Allusion. Object, Ornament, and Architecture in Medieval Islam*, New York 2018. I have kept these suggestions for triangulation essentially in the medievalist sphere; Mestemacher’s bibliography contains more such, and the book engages with many works I also highlight here. Other titles treating more varied artistic traditions, however, could readily be swapped in.

8

A touchstone in the important ongoing work with the books’ material composition is Charlotte Denoël, Patricia Roger Puyo, Anne-Marie Brunet, and Nathalie Poulain Siloe, *Illuminating the Carolingian Era. New Discoveries as a Result of Scientific Analysis*, in: *Heritage Science* 6, 2018, 1–28.

9

On the status of metal in manuscripts, see now: Joseph S. Ackley and Shannon R. Wearing (eds.), *Illuminating Metalwork. Metal, Object, and Image in Medieval Manuscripts*, Berlin/Boston 2022. Robert Fuchs and Doris Oltrogge discuss the terminology of illusion relative to gold in their contributions to Patricia Carmassi and Gia Toussaint (eds.), *Codex und Material. Jenseits von Text und Bild?*, Wiesbaden 2020.

material rhetoric, no less. In other words, in full knowledge of the materials and techniques used in book production, the question of “material imitation” or “material illusion” becomes not one of picture alone – and not one of matter alone – but also one of craft and process.¹⁰

One especially intriguing aspect of the medial alchemy Carolingian book painters performed concerns scale. Marble pillars of grand dimensions in the real-world referents at Aachen or Rome dwindle next to the outsize figures of the gospel writers. Carved gemstones bespeaking those designed to be brooch-sized or ring-sized – or palm-sized at best – appear (relatively) as large as a keystone when they are set at the top of a drafted arch. These distortions are dizzying when contemplated as part of the relationship constructed by painters among images, natural materials, and their crafted forms. But further, much like asking how the actual material qualities of paint meet pictured material qualities, the plays of scale end up drawing attention to the painter’s own work in setting the visual terms of the book.

One of the best moments in *Marmor, Gold, und Edelsteine* appears when Mestemacher explicitly turns to the question of value. The point is key, to my mind, because characterizing value in the products goes hand-in-hand with understanding the painters’ work of imagination and production. There is a historically specific context to the issue of value: the focal manuscripts were made at a time of debate and dissent about the role of art within the Church, and the capacities of art to represent things of real worth (in contrast to scriptural texts or the proper performance of liturgy, whose spiritual and social value was not in doubt). It has long been recognized that the Court-sphere evangelists are a particularly self-reflexive bunch: the gospel writers are represented throughout the group as active scribes, making precious books. Several of the manuscripts go on to make treasure a prominent theme in the gospel quotations written out in the evangelists’ pictured codices. At stake in this move is the differentiation between treasure on earth and treasure in heaven, and a location of the manuscripts themselves relative to the idea of true value. Material things and images might be theologically suspect, but Mestemacher draws attention to the painters’ investment in crafted objects’ metamorphic power. In the form of a materially precious book donated to a church treasury – and especially an image-rich book that comments on its own form – earth-derived matter, even lucre itself, may transmute to spiritual worth.

This is a valuable reading not least because it creates space to see art’s work in harnessing one material to image another as a bait-and-switch. On one level, the pictorial evocation of precious things helps to communicate the worth of the gospel book as religious text. More trenchantly, though, such mimesis renders painting itself

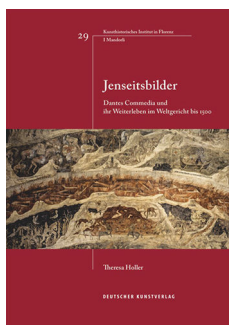
¹⁰

On this theme see now Henrike Haug, *Imitatio – Artificium. Goldschmiedekunst und Naturbe-trachtung im 16. Jahrhundert*, Vienna 2021.

legible as a model of transmutation. The importance of treating manuscripts' likely functions (here, as donation) as inseparable from their visual rhetoric also cannot be overstated. This point brings us back to the place we began. The turn of the ninth century in Frankish lands is an important time to think about books and what their medium can encompass, because its bookmakers were doing the very same thing. The visual experiments and painterly fireworks of the time exist in relation to artistic tradition, *realia*, natural philosophy, theology, and more. But they occurred first and foremost in the context of a manuscript culture that saw people interrogating form time and time again, asking over and over what a painted book can do.

THERESA HOLLER, *JENSEITSBILDER. DANTES COMMEDIA UND IHR WEITERLEBEN IM WELTGERICHT BIS 1500*

Italienische Forschungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes
in Florenz, I Mandorli 29, Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag 2020, 378
pages with 30 color and 119 b/w ill., ISBN 978-3-4229-8131-7
(Paperback).



Reviewed by
Péter Bokody

The title of Theresa Holler's book, *Jenseitsbilder*, engages the reader in a comparable dynamic as *l'au-delà* in the title of Jérôme Baschet fundamental work on the subject, *Les justices de l'au-delà. Les représentations de l'enfer en France et en Italie (XII–XV siècle)*, first published in 1993. Michael Camille, in his review of the latter, highlighted the insufficiency of the term “beyond” to grasp the polyvalence of the word, since it equally references spatial and temporal aspects. Similarly, *Jenseits* can simultaneously stand for “afterlife” and “otherworld”, linking it to a new space and a new time in Christian imaginary. The comparison with Baschet is instructive also for the scope of the project. The French scholar attempted a comprehensive study of the representations of hell in the context of the *Last Judgment* in France and Italy. Dante's *Divine Comedy* was a relative latecomer to this stage whose significance, albeit recognized, nevertheless faded in the light of the previous textual and visual contributions to the subject. It was a hell among many other infernos. Holler's focus on the *Divine Comedy* provides an alternative entry to

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<https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2023.2.96043>



this tradition that attempts to capture Dante's formative intervention to the imagery on its own right.

Furthermore, emphasis on the Florentine poet allows framing the project in terms of reception studies, which means the widening of the investigation to visual and cultural parallels beyond the confines of the iconography of hell. The book addresses these phenomena in four chapters, each constructed around a key case study that exemplifies typical attitudes: Giotto di Bondone's work in the Arena Chapel (Padua, 1303–1305) stands for fictionality, Buonamico Buffalmacco's work in the Camposanto (Pisa, ca. 1333–1336) for paradoxicality, Nardo di Cione's work in Santa Maria Novella (Florence, ca. 1350–1357) for poetics, and Bartolomeo di Tommaso's work in San Francesco (Terni, ca. 1448) together with Luca Signorelli's in the Cathedral of Orvieto (1499–1504) for liminality. A common thread in all these chapters is the creative dialogue between literature and mural painting. Holler makes a compelling argument for the ways the spatiality of Dante's vision was a catalyst for the subsequent visual reception of his work since the literary setting of the otherworld required a meticulous rendering of pictorial space.

Chapter 1 revolves around the relationship between Giotto's *Last Judgment* fresco in the Arena Chapel and the *Divine Comedy*. The author, rightly, steers away from the question of direct influence in both directions without fully excluding its possibility. Instead, she interrogates the underlying metatextual and metapictorial matrices that made these works possible. Giotto in the Arena Chapel (and possibly already in Assisi) engaged with the constructed nature of representation and demonstrated the wide range of visual possibilities inherent to naturalism. The depiction of the doors of Heaven behind the blue sky, which is rolled up, is a telling example. Holler convincingly argues that Giotto's metapainting finds its cultural parallel in Dante's metapoetry, evident in the virtuous handling of diction but also in the different reality levels assigned to hell, purgatory, and paradise. Although this convergence cannot single-handedly explain their subsequent success, it supports the hypothesis that in their seminal roles for painting and literature, self-awareness and self-referentiality played an important part, besides the obvious appeal of naturalism.

The analysis of Buonamico Buffalmacco's frescoes in the Camposanto provides a comprehensive overview of the entire program in Chapter 2. Instead of trying to disguise the contradictions of the cycle, the author emphasizes the paradoxical duplications of hell (Lucifer's realm, and the mouth of the Leviathan), judgment (Christ and Mary's realm, and the particular judgment), and paradise (Christ and Mary's realm, and the Thebaid). The suggestion that the contrast between the temporal earthly existence of the particular judgment and the Thebaid located at the sides, and the universality of the Last Judgment in the center reflects period debates around *visio beatifica* is a plausible one. Although it is clear that the *Divine Comedy* cannot account for all these aspects of the iconography, it undeniably contributed to the representation of hell. Holler's

careful reading catalogues the access to Dante's text in Pisa and the presence of Muhamad together with some heretics (probably antipope Nicholas V and Ludwig of Bavaria) in the imagery. She notes the established links to the papal context of the late 1320s and early 1330s. Perhaps the strongest section of the chapter is the discussion of the mage-necromancer Erichtho and the decapitated heretical poet (Arius/Bertran de Born). The author shows the topicality of these figures in the *Divine Comedy* and in clerical circles in Pisa, and she also makes a strong case for the overlap between the perception of magic and poetry in the epoch. Although the negative views on poetry questions the reliance on Dante for some elements of the program, they may actually explain the limited integration of his text into the iconography. In any case, the promotion of *visio beatifica*, the defamation of Nicholas V, and the condemnation of sorcery were all in line with Pope John XXII's policies, and the author proposes that these relevant themes provide some overall coherence to the program.

Chapter 3 on Nardo di Cione and the Santa Maria Novella Dominican monastery in Florence accounts for almost half of the entire book, and even if it contains remarkable material at times, better structuring could have improved its coherence during the editing process. The importance of the cycle in the Strozzi Chapel as a close illustration of hell from the *Divine Comedy* has always been clear. In the reconstruction of the commission, the author examines the complex context of the chapel: it was dedicated to Saint Thomas Aquinas, decorated with an extensive *Last Judgment* cycle, and financed by the Strozzi family, probably by Tommaso. Several members of the family were friars, therefore the divide between the monastic community and the commissioner is not clearcut. It is likely that the strong cult of Saint Thomas Aquinas and Dominican interest in Dante's text, presumably because of its utility for preaching and inquisition, led to the combination of the titular saint and the iconography. Holler points out the link between the positioning of the saint and the depiction of the heretics, which may indicate an attempt to bring together the diverse agendas. The close reading of the fresco cycle itself is insightful, supported by detailed photographs and a diagram. Given the poor preservation of the murals, they are an essential addition to the understanding of the chapel. Particularly relevant interpretations include the figures of Minos, Sisyphus, the suicides, and the eighth circle.

Besides the synthesis of the iconography, the author engages with a natural-scientific history of hell ranging from the materiality of the ground to hydrography. This section provides the broader context of Dante's text and to some extent of the imagery, especially the intriguing parallel between a vista of a quarry in Carrara and Nardo's hellscape. The analysis of paradise emphasizes the centrality of order, harmony, and music; and this part sits outside the parameters of the *Divine Comedy*, even if the significance of music for the Dominican order is amply demonstrated. The chapter concludes with an excursus on the poet-theologian in the writings

of Giovanni Boccaccio and the Dominican friar Jacopo Passavanti from Santa Maria Novella. Holler's intention is to capture the shift from the condemnation of poetry in Pisa to its more inclusive handling in Florence. Although the comparison is perceptive, since Boccaccio persuasively vindicates the recognition of poetry as a source of divine truth, Passavanti rejects this position; and in the end, this may suggest that Dante's text was appreciated because of its rich topography of sins, instead of being a poetic form of revelation.

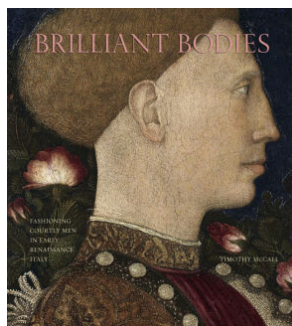
Chapter 4 is a comparative study of the cycles by Bartolomeo di Tommaso in Terni and Luca Signorelli in Orvieto. The common thread of the chapter is the liminality of time and space after death, an in-between that is linked to the iconography of the purgatory. Bartolomeo di Tommaso's frescoes have been little studied, and the author presents an extensive analysis of the chapel. This attention is justified in the sense that the position of the viewer is fully integrated into the imagery, which results in a dynamic topography of purgatory, hell, and paradise. However, as Holler notes, Dante's influence on the decoration remains generic at best, and it is addressed in the context of the patchy research history of the site. This part concludes with the reception of the *Divine Comedy* within the Franciscan order, a useful contrast to the earlier Dominican engagement with the text. Luca Signorelli's frescoes, on the other hand, betray the direct influence of Dante. The main question of the Cappella Nuova is the compartmentalization of this influence in the lower section of the chapel in fictive monochrome niello reliefs and its very limited bearing on the overall iconography of the polychrome *Last Judgment*. These marginal details include pioneering compositions, like the depiction of shadows in the otherworld or the fictive marble reliefs of humility, which can equally be taken as an example of *paragone* (the competition between painting and sculpture) and *parergon* (the creative liminal space of the by-work). Together with the author portraits of this zone (the only identifiably one is that of Dante's) they constitute a self-aware reflection on the status and skill of the painter, possibly Luca Signorelli's attempt to a metapictorial credo.

The volume is generously illustrated with appropriate halftones throughout and a set of color plates at the end, which support the close visual reading of the works. All in all, it offers a multifaceted discussion of Dante's *Divine Comedy* in mural painting in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italy. The reconstruction of the role of the Dominican order in the reception of his work and the connections between pictorial and poetic creativity are relevant contributions to the complex history of the *Last Judgment*. However, at times the links to Dante appear rather loose and this affects the overall coherence of the book. Not necessarily for being irrelevant, but one wonders whether, with a more condensed presentation of the sites and the contexts, the author might have had the opportunity to also address the anthropological dimensions of the works. Is there a way to detect Dante's influence on a more humanistic approach towards

sin and punishment in late medieval and early Renaissance Italian imagery? Similarly, is there a shift in the perception of gender, or does the inherent misogyny of ecclesiastical ideology remain dominant? The empathy towards the sinner is usually hailed as the principal characteristic of the *Divine Comedy* and its transformative potential can extend beyond the iconography or the topography of the frescoes. In any case, Theresa Holler's erudite study will certainly figure in the forefront of these discussions.

TIMOTHY MCCALL, *BRILLIANT BODIES. FASHIONING COURTLY MEN IN EARLY RENAISSANCE ITALY*

University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press,
2022, 240 pages with 36 color and 50 b/w ill.,
ISBN 978-0-271-09060-3 (Hardcover).



Reviewed by
Rembrandt Duits

In the opening sequence of Stephen Frears 1988 cinematographic costume drama *Dangerous Liaisons*, set in eighteenth-century France, we see the two protagonists, the Marquise de Merteuil and the Vicomte de Valmont, readying themselves for an impending contest of wits and wills that is to end in open warfare. Attended by servants, they are each strapped into their courtly “armour”: chemise and shirt, dress and coat, puffs of powder, wigs, and hats. Their battle gear does not consist of steel plate and weaponry, but of an attire that conforms to etiquette, just as their duel does not take place in a fencing ground, but in an arena of courtly customs, where the outcome is to be determined by how far each of them dares to stretch, twist, and bend the rules and can afford to be seen doing so.

Frears’s ingenious visualisation of the preparations for the fight highlights, among other things, how the detail of the male aristocrat’s *tenue* is fussed over with equal attention to that of his female counterpart. This sartorial equivalence between the sexes, which are subjected to similar regiments of propriety, was to erode gradually in the centuries after the *Ancien Régime* that is being rendered here in film. For an eighteenth-century audience, the relative equal-

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<https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2023.2.96044>



ity of the male and female morning rituals shown by Frears would have been a matter of course, while by the early twenty-first century, it has become a trope of romantic comedies that women take forever to dress up for an evening out while men in T-shirt or at best jacket over jeans are impatiently tapping their watches.

The difference in attention to appearance between men and women has become a new, if perhaps temporary, normative system in western society. For us living in this system, it may be a challenge to realise that of all the persistent forms of gender disparity, this one has increased rather than decreased in the era of women's emancipation, and is probably, in world cultural history, an exception rather than a common feature. It is perhaps only in our current clothing climate that the publication of a book such as Timothy McCall's *Brilliant Bodies*, lavishly produced by Pennsylvania University Press, fully makes sense (and if one were really picky, only in a context shaped by northern-European Protestantism; I have a very traditionally masculine Greek cousin who never travels with fewer than two large suitcases with sets of clothes for various occasions).

The principal subject of McCall's book is masculine (self-)fashioning, corporeally as well as in clothes, not among the French aristocracy of the Rococo period, but among Italian courtiers of the Early Renaissance. And the message that is presented throughout its pages is that there was no such thing as smart casual for the noblemen of fifteenth-century Italy. In public (and with the relative openness of palaces at the time, "public" ranged further than we might appreciate today), their bodies and costumes were the subject of constant scrutiny, and both were fine-tuned to express wealth, status, and authority in every aspect.

McCall has devoted different chapters to different facets of visual deportment, including armour and luxury fabrics, jewellery, body shape, and hair and skin colour. There are common strands that run through each of these sections. The first of these concerns the fact that, contrary to the societal cliché of today, men of means were highly fashion conscious. So much so, that in an anecdote already anticipated in the introduction and then narrated in full in Chapter 1, Duke Galeazzo Maria Sforza of Milan, in 1476, became an easy prey for an assassin having refused to wear a cuirass that he felt made him look fat. McCall, who writes well and with humour, calls him a "(proto)martyr for fashion and a veritable Renaissance fashion victim" (p. 27; it is somewhat of a let-down when one page later, we learn that with fourteen stab wounds, perhaps even from a poisoned dagger, the self-conscious duke might well have perished even if he had kept the detested piece of protection on).

A second thread that, as in a brocaded textile weave, keeps surfacing, is that male finery of the fifteenth century was conspicuously shiny. This is another aspect of past fashion that differs from the dominant western trend of our own time. Even though behaviour is shifting, for many of us, sequins continue to be considered girly, male jewellery is often limited to a single understated earring,

and even a regular suit of material that is reflective may well be thought of as tacky. At the Early Renaissance court, however, men gilded their suits of armour, preferred to be seen in priceless fabrics where the sheen of velvet and satin was rivalled by the sparkle of gold-thread patterning, and sported abundant rings, pedants, and badges of precious metal studded with pearls and gems. The primary purpose of all this ostentation was of course the underlining of economic might – a precedent, within its own parameters, of what the Marxist thinker Thorstein Veblen would much later, and for a very different civilisation, dub “conspicuous consumption”: the deliberate demonstration of a purchase power that outstripped the functional budget of the common people. McCall, while acknowledging the flaunting of wealth, also emphasises the metaphorical radiance of the ruler that was expressed in this literal way.

A third and final recurring theme is that men of the fifteenth century liked to show off their bodies through their clothes. McCall is keen to contrast this again with customs of the present day, when the revealing of underlying anatomy through material and tailoring is more prominent in women’s dress than in men’s. It should be said, though, that the preoccupation with body shape in general is an area where our genders may have started to draw more level now that there is increasing pressure on men to spend hours pumping iron in the gym and males unable to comply with such a fitness regime can even buy fake abs to simulate a six-pack under a tight T-shirt. The greater distance from the fifteenth century is in the type of male body that is being idolised. Whereas our own male ideal is decidedly Herculean, stimulated by the popularity of body-builder film actors, the fifteenth-century public admired male muscularity in a slenderer package, closer to what we might associate with a ballet dancer. McCall reminds us repeatedly, and with a noticeable fondness of the adjective “svelte”, that male outfits of the time put a marked emphasis on shapely legs.

Many of McCall’s observations have of course been made before in literature on Renaissance fashion, from Rosita Levi Pisetsky’s monumental *Storia del costume in Italia* to Jacqueline Herald’s *Renaissance Dress in Italy 1400–1500* and beyond. Not all the relevant literature seems always to be acknowledged. Given that *Brilliant Bodies* has a significant section on luxury armour, it is odd that Marina Belozerskaya’s *Rethinking the Renaissance* is in the bibliography, but her 2006 *Luxury Arts of the Renaissance*, with its extensive discussion of armour, is not. Similarly, Lisa Monnas’s 2008 *Merchants, Princes, and Painters* touches upon many of the same themes of glitter in costume as a status symbol, but is not cited. Nonetheless, these omissions should not take away from McCall’s contribution by devoting a study specifically to masculine appearance and attire and underlining how much this was part of the overall construction of princely identity in the era when Galeazzo Maria Sforza ruled over Milan. His book brings together a wealth of source material that shimmers as richly as the costumes to which it refers.

That said, *Brilliant Bodies* is not entirely as flawless as the visage of a fifteenth-century nobleman was supposed to be. One could argue that the book is overly long for the principal message that it is trying to convey. At the same time, while purportedly covering the Italian peninsula, an ambition that is effectively narrowed down to the courts of Northern Italy in the introduction, the main case studies are practically limited to the Sforza in Milan and the Este in Ferrara, with a few other rulers mentioned more in passing, and the aspiring court of the Medici in Florence thrown in for comparison. This is not a problem per se, but there are points where one wonders if a more targeted study on Sforza Milan or courtly culture as portrayed in Borso de'Este's frescoes commissioned for the great hall of the Palazzo Schifanoia might not have been equally or more effective for discussing the same ideas. The book includes digressions about female dress the relevance of which is not always self-evident, and a section about the predilection for black servants and the appreciation for their skin tone feels a little as if it is a moral justification for writing about a period when a blanched complexion and blonde hair were unabashedly held up as the standard worth striving for. Due to McCall's talent for finding catchy source texts, these passages have plenty of interest, but one cannot escape the sense that they would warrant books in their own right.

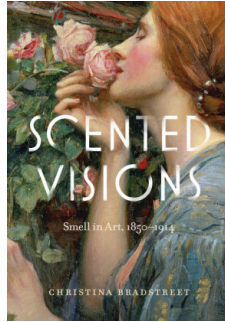
Perhaps the greatest issue with *Brilliant Bodies* is that it does not always make as careful a distinction as one would hope between lofty projected ideal and the actual situation on the ground. The main sources that McCall bases his narrative on are anecdotal observations about court life in texts and visual evidence found in paintings. Many Renaissance textual passages, even if purportedly describing real-life events, are coloured by their writers' desire to please a patron or impress an audience. When Basinio di Parma states about Sigismondo Malatesta that "when Apollo rises [...] he spreads his light over all the earth and the smaller stars become hidden by the new splendour, so illustrious was Sigismondo in his armour" (cited on p. 136), it is obviously a rhetorical flourish that may not have corresponded to how any observer, including Basinio, perceived the real Lord of Rimini, but only to how the Lord himself wanted to be seen. Paintings, similarly, are as likely to portray propaganda as to record reality. They tell us as much about fifteenth-century men as illustrations from fashion magazines about women in the twenty-first century or the sculpted physique of film stars about contemporary men. In *Brilliant Bodies*, this discrepancy between evidence and the real world is occasionally acknowledged, and there is a fascinating section called "How Do I Look?" at the end of Chapter 4 that deals more consistently with the struggles of princes to live up to the aesthetic expectations of their era, but in many other places, those without further background knowledge could be forgiven for taking McCall's analysis as one that is about historical truth rather than (partially) manufactured fiction.

Yet, while it might be wise to exercise some caution in using it uncritically as a reference work, *Brilliant Bodies* has unmistakable

quality. It is written with a genuine gusto for the subject that works contagiously on the reader. The book is attractively designed with a pleasing lay-out and a great array of high-quality illustrations. It will appeal to professional art and cultural historians, students, and the general interested public in equal measure. It highlights topics that deserve attention around changes in the image of masculinity and in the visual manifestation of power over time. It offers more than one kernel that could grow into a future project of research. All in all, some minor hesitations aside, it cannot be denied that McCall has done a job as brilliant as the bodies he describes in bringing a somewhat neglected chapter of the history of fashion to the fore.

CHRISTINA BRADSTREET, *SCENTED VISIONS. SMELL IN ART, 1850–1914*

Perspectives on Sensory History, University Park, PA: Penn State University Press 2022, 290 Seiten mit 42 Farb- und 32 s/w-Abb., ISBN 978-0-271-09251-5 (Hardcover).



Rezensiert von
Christian Sauer

Mit ihrer Untersuchung zum Motiv des Riechens und der Darstellung von Gerüchen in der Kunst zwischen 1850 und 1914 knüpft Christina Bradstreet an aktuelle Fachdiskurse an, wie sie vor allem im englischsprachigen Raum geführt werden. Sinneswahrnehmungen werden in ihrer wechselseitigen Abhängigkeit verstärkt in den Blick genommen und als bewusste, durch Erziehung und soziokulturelle Praxen, Verfahren und Regelwerke, Medien und Dispositive geprägte Tätigkeiten diskutiert. Der programmatisch gewählte Titel *Scented Visions* kennzeichnet Sehen entsprechend als intermodalen Vorgang und spielt auf die Faszination für synästhetische Phänomene im ausklingenden 19. Jahrhundert an.

Bradstreet versammelt eine Vielzahl von Gemälden und bettet sie in ein spannungsreiches Geflecht, das literarische und kunsthistorische Bezüge ebenso berücksichtigt wie zeitgleiche Debatten der Medizin, Psychologie oder Urbanistik. Der Schwerpunkt der Arbeit liegt dabei auf der viktorianischen Malerei, die die Autorin durch Beispiele aus der europäischen und nordamerikanischen Kunst ergänzt, ohne diese aber in derselben Tiefe zu analysieren.

Geht es um die Darstellung von Gerüchen beziehungsweise des Riechens, so stehen KünstlerInnen vor der schwierigen Auf-

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
#2-2023, S. 343–347

<https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2023.2.96046>



gabe, ein unsichtbares, ephemeres Phänomen visuell zu fassen. Die Kunstgeschichte hat hier verschiedene Lösungen entwickelt: allegorische Darstellungen, der Verweis auf Attribute, die Darstellung körperlicher Reaktionen oder die metonymische Evokation olfaktorischer Phänomene durch die Wiedergabe der Geruchsquellen im Bild. Bradstreet gliedert ihre Untersuchung in zwei Hauptteile, die sie mit „Seeing Smell“ sowie „Decoding Smell“ überschreibt. Diese Zweiteilung in die Analyse ikonografischer Darstellungsmuster einerseits und die Hermeneutik von Gerüchen andererseits wird allerdings methodisch immer wieder unterwandert.

Bereits in der Einleitung thematisiert die Autorin unter Rückgriff auf Kant und Darwin die historisch gewachsene Dichotomie der Sinne, wonach Sehen als epistemischer, männlicher Sinn dem als irrational und subjektiv geltenden, weiblich konnotierten Geruchssinn gegenübergestellt wird. Entsprechend konzentriert sich die Ikonografie des Riechens in der viktorianischen Malerei auf die geschlechtsspezifische Darstellung sinnlicher Weiblichkeit, oftmals kombiniert mit einer westlich geprägten Vorstellung „orientalischer“ Erotik, Krankheit, Tod und Trauer. In all diesen Darstellungen spielen olfaktorische Evokationen eine wichtige Rolle, um ein ganz bestimmtes Frauenbild zu illustrieren.

The Fallen Angel (1. Kapitel) setzt ein mit einer Analyse von George Frederic Watts Porträt *Ellen Terry* (*Choosing*) (1864). Hier klingt leitmotivisch bereits eine Vielzahl der inhaltlichen Kategorien an, auf die Bradstreet im weiteren Verlauf immer wieder zurückgreift. Watts zeigt Ellen Terry im Profil, die Augen sinnlich geschlossen, während sie mit der rechten Hand eine üppig blühende, rote Kamelienblüte zu sich zieht, um an ihr zu riechen. In der linken Hand hält sie, auf Höhe ihres Herzens, ein paar Veilchenblüten. Das Bild lässt sich zunächst als Kritik am Gesichtssinn lesen: Während die Kamelie als überzüchtetes Produkt nach nichts riecht und nur an den Gesichtssinn appelliert, verströmen die unscheinbaren Veilchen einen betörenden Geruch, gehen aber optisch unter. Das Auge allein ist nicht in der Lage, die tatsächlichen Qualitäten zuerkennen, es braucht auch den Geruchssinn, um ein Urteil zu fällen und nicht der optischen Verführung zu erliegen. Diesen moralisierenden Unterton nimmt auch die zweite Lesart auf. Sie thematisiert den voyeuristisch verstandenen männlichen Blick, der die junge Frau taxiert und ihrer Schönheit erliegt, während diese unwissend agiert, sich aber selbst in sinnlichen Genüssen verliert. Die folgenden Ausführungen setzen bei der Symbolik der Blumen an und kreisen um den in Parenthese gesetzten Untertitel des Gemäldes, *Die Entscheidung*. Entscheidet sich die junge Frau für das bescheidene Veilchen und damit für ein häusliches Leben, oder lässt sie sich von der geruchslosen Kamelie blenden, die spätestens seit Alexandre Dumas' *Kameliendame* (1848) für den ausschweifenden Lebensstil der Halbwelt steht?

Das zweite Kapitel, *Art and Stench*, bildet den inhaltlichen Gegenpart: nun sind es Gestank und übler Geruch, der die Bildwelten prägt. Vor dem Hintergrund politischer Debatten um die

urbanistische Erneuerung Londons (Edwin Chadwick, *The Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain*, 1842) und den Ausbau eines modernen Kanalsystems, das die Bürger vor schädlichen Miasmen schützen sollte, versammelt die Autorin eine Vielzahl unterschiedlicher Bilder, in denen Übelgerüche thematisiert werden. Einmal mehr wird die moralisierende Deutung von Gerüchen deutlich, wenn Künstler wie Spencer Stanhope (*Thoughts of the Past*, 1859) oder Dante Gabriel Rossetti (*Found*, 1853) Prostituierte vor dem Hintergrund der stinkenden Themse zeigen. Gestank und die üblen Körpergerüche ungewaschener oder kranker Leiber werden zum sozialen Ausschlussmerkmal: Riechen ist nicht zuletzt, wie Georg Simmel bereits 1907 in seiner *Soziologie der Sinne* festhielt, ein „dissoziierender Sinn“.

Die enge Verschränkung von Malerei und Dichtung, die sich durch die gesamte Untersuchung zieht, prägt auch *Smelling Pictures* (Kapitel vier). Hier geht Bradstreet zunächst auf rezeptionsästhetische Fragen ein und vergleicht die bildliche Evokation von Gerüchen mit olfaktorischen Metaphern in zeitgleicher Prosa und Dichtung. Als Kronzeugen zieht sie unter anderen den Maler Charles Courtney Curran sowie den Physiologen Alexander Bain heran, die beide die geruchliche Imagination als intellektuelle Leistung eines empfindsamen Publikums thematisierten. Sie verfolgt diesen bis in die frühe Neuzeit reichenden Lebendigkeitstopos und seine Implikationen jedoch nicht weiter. Stattdessen rekonstruiert sie facettenreich die medizinhistorische Debatte um den pathologischen Aspekt der „viktorianischen Hyperästhesie“ (S. 103), der sich nach damaliger Überzeugung vor allem bei Frauen in nervlicher Überreizung bemerkbar machte. Ärzte wie Max Nordau verurteilten die Fähigkeit, Gerüche zu imaginieren, als Atavismus und deuteten sie vielfach als Symptom einer hysterischen Veranlagung. Hinzukam die sexuell stimulierende Wirkung von Düften und ihre Fähigkeit, innere Bilder und Halluzinationen auszulösen. Die Stimme Sigmund Freuds, der in *Das Unbehagen der Kultur* (1930) das Riechen marginalisiert und in den *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie* (1905) bewusst unter den Tisch fallen lässt, fehlt im Kanon Bradstreets. Sie verdeutlicht, auch wenn sie den im Buch präsentierten Meinungen widerspricht, die hohe Relevanz des Riechens und von Geruchsphänomenen im damaligen Diskurs.

Immer wieder kommt Bradstreet auf die Verschränkung von Gerüchen und weiblicher Identität zurück. So sind es nicht nur Frauen, die auf Düfte besonders stark reagieren oder deren moralische Gesinnung durch olfaktorische Codes als tugendhaft oder lasterhaft kommentiert wird. Vor allem Blumen dienen als beliebtes Attribut, um weibliche Erotik zu repräsentieren oder sie olfaktorisch zu unterstreichen. In Gemälden von Charles Courtney Curran, John William Waterhouse oder Léon Henri Marie Frédéric wird die Rose zu einer inhaltlich oszillierenden Metapher für Weiblichkeit, bei der sowohl die Optik der noch leicht verschlossenen Blütenknospe als auch ihr Duft eine wichtige Rolle spielen. Der Deutungsbogen reicht dabei von Verweisen auf Jungfräulichkeit und eheliche

Treue bis hin zu erwachender sexueller Lust und Selbstbefriedigung, wenn das Riechen an Rosen metaphorisch als Anspielung auf Masturbation gedeutet wird (S. 185–186).

Bradstreets Untersuchung profitiert von ihrer tiefen Kenntnis zeitgleicher medizinhistorischer, psychologischer und soziologischer Diskurse, vor deren Hintergrund sie die Bilder analysiert und einordnet. Dabei wird deutlich, wie eng die Verbindung zwischen Malerei und Literatur ist. Zum Teil erschließt erst der Rückgriff auf die literarische Vorlage das Motiv des Riechens oder des Geruchs in seiner vollen inhaltlichen Tiefe. Fehlt diese oder ist der Bezug eher lose, so geraten Bradstreets Kategorien ins Schwimmen und verlieren an Kontur. Dies hängt auch damit zusammen, dass die Gemälde inhaltlich mehrdeutig sind und sich der schematischen Lesart, die Bradstreet vorschlägt, verweigern. Medientheoretische Reflexionen über die Verbindungen des Optischen mit dem Olfaktorischen und das Motiv des inneren Sehens, das vielfach durch die geschlossenen Augen im Moment des Riechens signalisiert wird, werden mehrfach angedeutet, jedoch nicht ausführlich thematisiert (S. 104, 109, 148).

Die Arbeit konzentriert sich mit wenigen Ausnahmen auf die englische Malerei zwischen 1850 und 1914. Einer Lesart von Geruch vor dem Hintergrund der bekanntlich hochgetriebenen geschlechtsspezifischen Stereotypen der viktorianischen Epoche folgend, stehen dabei hauptsächlich Frauendarstellungen im Mittelpunkt. Spannend wäre es, die Konstruktion dieser Stereotypen mit zeitgleichen Männerdarstellungen und der dort verwendeten Geruchscodierung abzugleichen. So stellt der von Zigarettenrauch umgebende Edvard Munch in seinem *Selbstporträt* von 1895 ein Paradebeispiel heterosexueller Männlichkeit dar, während Frank Holland Days *Hypnos* (1896) bewusst mit den Darstellungskonventionen spielt und sexuell ambivalent angelegt ist. Soziale Codierungen, wie sie die Porträts Marie Antoinettes (Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun, 1783) oder Kaiserin Eugénies (Edouard-Louis Dubufé, 1854) mit Hilfe von Rosen vornehmen, werden in den Folgejahren vielfach kopiert und dienen als beliebtes Motiv. Sie relativieren Bradstreets Interpretation entsprechender Frauendarstellungen als „gefallener Engel“ (S. 46), wie sie sie im Fall von Viktor Schramms *The Perfect Scent* (1897) vornimmt. Für die kunstwissenschaftliche Auseinandersetzung mit den lange vernachlässigten Phänomenen des Olfaktorischen und seinen Diskursivierungen erschließt *Scented Visions* Neuland und stellt eine wichtige und fundiert recherchierte Quelle dar, die sich nicht zuletzt durch eine opulente Ausstattung auszeichnet.

Gerade die Debatte um die sogenannten *Smellscapes*, die den urbanen wie ländlichen Raum über seine olfaktorische Dimension zu erschließen sucht (zum Beispiel Victoria Henshaw, *Urban Smellscapes. Understanding and Designing City Smell Environments*, New York 2014) beziehungsweise unter dem Vorzeichen der Atmosphäre die olfaktorische Dichte zu einer räumlichen Dichte in Bezug setzt (unter anderen Gernot Böhme, *Asthetik. Vorlesungen über Ästhetik*

als *allgemeine Wahrnehmungslehre*, München 2001), profitiert von Bradstreets Darlegungen. Sie setzen die aktuellen Überlegungen zur Konstruktion geschlechtlicher, kultureller, sozialer oder ethnischer Identität in einen historischen Kontext und demonstrieren ihre Diskursivierungen. Inhaltlich greifen die Kategorien, die Bradstreet dem Buch zugrunde legt, Jonathan Reinarz' *Past Scents. Historical Perspectives on Smell* (2014) auf. Mit ihrem Fokus auf die viktorianische Malerei ergänzt sie dessen Ausführungen um die visuelle Komponente und in die Tiefe gehende Analysen. Lange galt der Geruchssinn als einer der Sinne, die sich epistemologisch am wenigsten eignen: zu subjektiv sind seine Wahrnehmungen, zu ephemere seine Gegenstände, zu wenig abstrahierbar die körperlichen Eindrücke. Im Zuge der *embodiment theories* bekommt aber gerade diese Verbindung zwischen den körpergebundenen Wahrnehmungen und der Frage nach Bewusstsein in seinen unterschiedlichen Ausprägungen eine immer größere Bedeutung. Wahrnehmung als eine aktive Form der Wissensgewinnung und Sichtbarmachung findet in olfaktorischen Phänomenen eines der noch am wenigsten erforschten Materialien der Kunstgeschichte. In ihnen bekommt das Formlose (*Formless. A User's Guide* (Ausst.-Kat. Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou), hg. von Yves Alain-Bois und Rosalind Krauss, New York 1997) eine neue Qualität. Die Schärfung des Bewusstseins für sinnlich vermitteltes Wissen rückt nicht nur den eigenen Körper als Ort ästhetischer Erfahrung in den Mittelpunkt der Betrachtungen, sondern sensibilisiert auch für historisch tradierte Identitätskonstrukte, die, wie Bradstreet dargelegt, ihre Wirkung bis in die Gegenwart zeitigen.

