

Forward:

Envisioning colonial art in the 19th century: art criticism, exhibitions and schools in Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Mexico

Leticia Squeff

Professor at Art History Department – Federal University of São Paulo – UNIFESP

Jens Baumgarten

Professor at Art History Department – Federal University of São Paulo – UNIFESP

The Project “Global Baroque: transcultural and transhistorical approaches to Latin America” was a continued partnership between the art history departments of the Federal University of Sao Paulo (UNIFESP) and of the University of Zurich (UZH), into the “Connecting Art Histories” program supported and sponsored by The Getty Foundation, USA. It intended to deepen and broaden questions about criteria, methods, and theoretical approaches for a transcultural comparison of visual art and architecture in Latin America within a global system of circulation and transfer.

The baroque, as a seemingly universal stylistic phenomenon, connecting the early modern, the modern, and the contemporary periods, shall be analyzed as a case and model of globalization of art and art history. The transcultural approach to the baroque covers the cross-cultural impact of its style, the intercultural and local differentiation of its forms and meanings, its function as a means of cultural hybridization and amalgamation, and its uses as a means of national identity building. The transhistorical approach points to the alleged historical transcendence and universality of the baroque style, as established by late 19th century art history, and aims at analyzing the ensuing ideological and aesthetic constructions of history by the means of baroque style in Latin America. An outcome of this project was the possibility of reevaluating local and national theoretical standards by offering a critical perspective on the issue of cultural exchange, which aim was to contribute to the development of a transnational art history and its debates.

* * *

The idea of this volume emerged after the participation of some of the authors in the workshop “Theoretical Challenges: the historiography of colonial art in the Iberian world”.¹ The main objective of the workshop was to rethink the historiography of colonial art in the Iberian world, especially in the Americas, challenging its theories and categories of analysis: the debates about styles, schools, the problems of authorship and materiality, issues of identity and the relationship between the arts and politics, among others. The texts here deal with these issues from various points of view, but they have a common basis: all discuss the 19th century approaches to colonial art. The nineteenth century becomes a kind of topic (or problem?) associated with the discussion on colonial art and their categories. The relationship between the nineteenth century and the art of the colonial period demands the necessity to remove some misconceptions that have become common in historiography, and propose new ways of understanding the dialectic between local tradition and its relationship with European models- two vital issues for a reflection on the historiography of art in the Americas.

* * *

Traditionally, art history of Iberian America was inspired by foreign models. The intention to create a linear history, marked by the idea of progress – following the example of art history in Europe – has led sometimes to the definition of a cronology for art in the Americas based upon pre-existing structures. The interpretation of American phenomena followed the chronology of history in Europe. The history of art in the Americas was divided roughly between what was defined as “pre-Columbian” and what occurred after the conquest. In the post-conquest, artistic phenomena were organized based on a timeline associated with social and political history: colonial art, art of independent nations, and finally, the so-called modern art in 20th century Hispano-American countries. In some nationss, colonial period would be associated with Baroque style, and the art of independent Nations to academic art, also referred to generically as neoclassical in several manuals. The shift between a stylistic period to another was established by some authors in the Independence of Iberian nations, by others in the introduction of neoclassicism.

Among artistic manifestations after the conquest, the so-called “colonial art”, that produced under the Spanish and Portuguese Empires, was for a long time what more attracted attention. The religious painting, pictures, materials used in sculptures and sacred objects, the representation of

¹ The workshop took place on 3rd-5th June 2015, in Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, Brazil. Many thanks to all involved in the organization of the workshop: Jens Baumgarten, Tristan Weddigen, Gabriela Siracusano, Fernando Guzmán, Ana Paula Salvat, Charlotte Matter. We also thank Carolina Vanegas Carrasco for her comments on this introduction.

multi-ethnic groups, amongst others tastes of collectors and have attracted the interest of historians. This interest in colonial art also led, for example, the organization of major textbooks on “art in Latin America”. Already within, the “colonial” or “Baroque art” would be motto for speeches about “local identities or even about a” Latin American “identity”. The “Baroque” America, America “Surreal” are some of the definitions that align to these schemes of thought.

Nineteenth century art of the Americas was associated with the national celebrations, as if its production would be a direct result of nation building and their political projects. Or as if many colonial practices have not resisted through the political upheavals of the new nations. In addition, the architecture of styles and academic practices were classified as “eclectic” by modern and modernist approaches. Nineteenth century artists and architects seemed simple repeaters of formulas created overseas. Creativity and identity in the arts would have been rescued by the Latin American avantgardes only in 1920s. Indigenism, Anthropophagy, the revaluation of African American practices would promote a renewed interest for the history of American nations. However, what happened in the 19th century would remain “in the Middle” of these two poles – that of the colonial times and that of the avantgardes.

* * *

Fortunately, Global art history, postcolonial studies, Visual Studies, among others have been renewing the research in history of art in the Americas. Rigid stylistic approaches grounded in the “isms” as well as the biographies of artists hand over space for studies that include materiality, the trajectory of the objects and the geographies of art. Research aligned with “global baroque” or “global classicism” include the Americas in a broader perspective, also challenging the very discipline of art history in its traditionally Eurocentric concepts.

Some studies have shown, for example, that artists classified as “Baroque” by certain historians, have made a creative appropriation of the eighteenth-century visual traditions available. Several scholars have shown, on the other hand, how images until recently associated with the national State and with local identities were articulated with artistic and/or literary genres, as well as with the dynamics of the international circulation of goods and objects (costumbrismo and travel albums, for example). Some scholars also point out how artistic practice is constituted by different appropriations, avoiding to approach it as simple identity or nationality’s pure manifestation.

On the other hand, some researchers are pointing not only to the need to contextualize vague terms like “academic art”, as well as the importance of considering the complexity of the artistic

formation and the choices made by artists of the Americas in the nineteenth century. Life and work of artists such as José Gil de Castro, Rugendas, Cicarelli, Monvoisin, among others, who travelled through different parts of the territory, have traced geographies of art created by internal contingencies. A comparative approach among different parts of the Americas have allowed renewed visions of landscape painting and history painting. What was once explained based on nation and identity now gains new nuances, to challenge and explore the dialectics between international styles and local demands and the appropriations by artists and groups. Exhibitions, collectors, the circulation of artworks and artists through several cities and exhibition venues, as well as images traditionally considered outside of art history, like prints are among the new topics of recent studies. This volume is aligned with these researches.

* * *

This volume deals with the history of ideas about art and the circulation of artworks drawn from case studies in Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Mexico from the second half of the 19th century. The essays consider the art criticism, exhibitions, the circulation of values through magazines and engravings, illuminating also cultural heritage and the invention of traditions since the early 1840 onwards. The volume opens with the contribution of Jens Baumgarten, who makes a theoretical discussion about the concept of global baroque and its meaning as an instance of confrontation between the history of art in Europe and the Americas. Baroque becomes a case of globalization of art and art history. This approach allows Baumgarten to discuss the ideological and aesthetic construction of the Baroque made by historiography. In fact, historiography is put at stake by several articles of this volume.

The chapters by Fernando Guzmán and by Marcela Drien shed light on two different aspects of the artistic culture in Santiago of the years 1850: the religious and the secular art. Guzmán makes a survey of publications about art in public and private libraries of Santiago, dealing with the circulation of critical models and aesthetic values. The author indicates how the knowledge of authors such as Vasari and Winckelmann have inspired members of the elites to defend the destruction of baroque altarpieces of Santiago. The replacement of colonial images would promote the *buen gusto* in Santiago by fostering new forms of devotion.

Marcela Drien argues that exhibitions from the years 1850 on have promoted different opinions regarding history and art of the colonial period. Writing about these exhibitions in catalogues and reviews, men like Miguel Luis Amunátegui (1828-1888) and Benjamín Vicuña

Mackenna (1831-1886) examine colonial art and reflect on how to insert it into a narrative of the local history of art. The essays by Guzmán and Drien are complementary, illuminating two aspects of the formation of an artistic field in Chile: one concerning the religious art and other secular, that begins to change under the impact of the opening of the private exhibitions and the foundation of the Academy.

Leticia Squeff's article sheds a new light on a well-known topic about Brazilian critic Araújo Porto-Alegre (1806-79), reexamining his approach on Baroque art and architecture. Baroque is a central subject of studies in Brazilian art. And Porto-Alegre is known as the first critic to use the concept of baroque, as well as the first to develop a negative interpretation of baroque buildings and objects. The article suggests another interpretation of Porto-Alegre's approach about colonial art. Inspired by Luigi Lanzi and other authors, Porto-Alegre adopts the idea of school in his essays about colonial painting. Thanks to it, the historian did not present a critical view of the Baroque style, as was pointed out during a long time. On the contrary, Porto-Alegre's interpretation of the past included artists from the colonial period into a coherent vision, defined as history of Brazilian art.

In his essay Juan Ricardo Rey-Márquez sheds light on the various temporalities that overlap in critical discourse and history about colonial art. The author reveals the different layers of meaning assigned to an object over time, pointing the shaky ground and what we call "patrimony". The painting *Martyrdom of San Sebastián (c.1700)*, which was object of devotion when viewed in its original site, the chapel of Jesús Nazareno, becomes just another piece of art in the Museo Nacional de Colombia. Furthermore, the author also shows how the interpretation of colonial art in Colombia was developed, since the years 1860, around racial concepts. The reference to "castizo", concerning the Spanish heritage, and "mestizo" – in allusion to the intermixing that took place in the American territory-polarizes discussions regarding the quality and the importance of the art of New Granada. Rey-Márquez also points out the strength of a derogatory interpretation about colonial art that endured for more than a century. The historiography of art in Colombia would have a deep racist and Eurocentric bias.

Invited specially to participate in this volume, Ray Hernandez-Durán investigates the history of the Academy of San Carlos and of the constitution of the historiography of art in Mexico. The author reconstructs the history of Mexican Academy and the organization of the so-called Old Mexican School of Painting gallery. He compares the interpretations of the history of colonial art by two authors: the Mexican José Bernardo Couto (1803-1862), author of the well-known *Dialogo sobre la historia de la pintura en Mexico* (1872), and the American Robert Henry Lamborn (1835-1895), magnate and collector of art, who published in 1892 the book *Mexican Painting and*

Painters: A Brief Sketch of the Development of the Spanish School of Painting in Mexico. The comparison between the ideas of the American businessman and the director of the Mexican Academy regarding colonial art shows how historiography was pervaded by nationalism and partisan politics. Hernández-Durán points out the centrality of the colonial past to identity formation and to the history of Mexico.

The collection of essays considers critical aspects of nineteenth century art in the Americas. First, the role of the art academies in fostering a secular artistic circle. Hernández-Durán's essay suggests similarities between the story of the Mexican Academy and that of the Academy in Rio de Janeiro during the years 1850-60. The gallery of Old Mexican School of Painting was organized at Academy of San Carlos a few years before the first attempt of display the paintings as *galleria progressiva* in 1859 exhibition at Academy of Rio de Janeiro. In the years 1850, Araújo Porto-Alegre wrote about a Brazilian school of Painting. "And in 1879 the Academy of Rio de Janeiro organized the first version of the Collection of National Paintings forming the Brazilian School". In addition, the two collections of paintings, the "antigua escuela mexicana" and the "Escola Brasileira" are created in public institutions, the academies of Mexico and Rio de Janeiro. And fluminense. In contrast, in Chile are private collections that gathered colonial paintings among academic artworks, as shows Marcela Drien. Hence, the debate between "local" tradition and academic art began initially as a private endeavor, reaching the public sphere through texts published in catalogues and others. Second, some essays shed light on the connections between the organization of exhibitions and the emergence of art criticism and historiography. The essays by Drien, Squeff and Hernández-Durán indicate that 19th century historiography is articulated to the broader artistic system of exhibitions and art collections. Finally, articles by Guzmán and by Rey-Márquez deal with the effort made by intellectuals and artists to arrange colonial past in a narrative of general art history.

At this point, there are many similarities between the various interpretations of colonial art by critics and intellectuals of different artistic circles in the Americas. Vicuña Mackenna in Chile, Araújo Porto-Alegre in Brazil, José Manuel Groot in Colombia and José Bernardo Couto in Mexico seek to comprise colonial art in to a broader narrative of art history from each country. They intend to tune art of their countries with European values: be it comparing local artists with "primitive" Italians, or by including these colonial artists in the local history. The comparison of colonial artists with Italian primitives, the belief in the superiority of Christianity as a civilizing force, the conservative bias that permeates the speeches are among the commonalities of the authors discussed here. The Essays on this volume indicate how much the knowledge about colonial art in the Americas relates to 19th century ideologies such as nationality, race, progress, museum, among

others. Therefore, this volume clarifies that colonial art is not only a subject of the 19th century, but is also, perhaps, another one of its inventions.