

“Nombres dignos de memoria”: Writing the History of Mexican Art in the Nineteenth-Century

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ABSTRACT A review of the earliest publications on colonial art in Mexico from the mid to late nineteenth century reveals the roles of nationalism and partisan politics in the documentation and interpretation of colonial works of art. In the 1840s and 1850s, numerous articles were published in newspapers that describe various viceregal churches and monasteries. By mid-century, the Academy of San Carlos would take the lead in the process of defining a history of Mexican art and reframing colonial works of art as works by national artists. José Bernardo Couto, president of San Carlos started by building the collection of painting representing the Old Mexican School and then writing the first sustained history of painting in Mexico. When looking at the early development of art history writing in Mexico in the latter part of the nineteenth century, it is equally important to recognize that Mexican art during this period was drawing the attention of individuals from outside of Mexico, specifically in the United States. One such individual was Robert Henry Lamborn, a railroad mogul and art collector whose research and writing on the subject must be seen, not exclusively but in large part, as an outgrowth of his business interests. Comparing the work of someone like Robert H. Lamborn to Couto’s underlines the degree to which politicized nationalistic tendencies were shaping the narratives that were being written in Mexico City, and how that vision differed in relation to foreign perspectives of the same.

KEYWORDS Academy of San Carlos, colonial art, conservative, dialogue, liberal, Mexico, Nazarene, nineteenth century, New Spain, Old Mexican School, painting, Porfiriato, railroad, United States.

“[M]y main objective is to document the few items of information I have gathered so that they are not lost, and to motivate other artists and experts who are more capable than I so that they focus their attention on this material...”¹

A review of the earliest publications on colonial art in Mexico from the mid to late nineteenth century reveals the roles of nationalism and partisan politics in the documentation and interpretation of colonial paintings as works by national masters and of a Mexican School of Art. Among the earliest post-independence publications addressing colonial art we find reviews in conservative and moderate liberal newspapers that describe historically significant architectural sites. An article published in 1856 in *La*

¹ Rafael Lucio, *Reseña histórica de la pintura mexicana en los siglos XVII y XVIII* (Mexico City: J. Abadiano, calle de las Escalerillas num. 13, 1864), 4.

Cruz, a politically conservative newspaper, explains the reasoning behind conservative interest in documenting Mexico's rich cultural heritage. The relevant excerpt states:

Just as our country suffers considerable retardation in all branches of public wealth due to its continuous revolutions, note that the taste for the fine arts develops on a daily basis. We can well say that concerning the arts, we are almost at the same level as the most civilized nations, at the same time that our political aberrations, resulting from the overpowering inexperience with issues related to government, call attention and cause scandal.²

In the 1840s and 1850s, numerous articles were published that describe various viceregal churches and monasteries with varying degrees of historical and cultural context; most of these reviews included lithographic illustrations of the referenced sites. Another article published in *La Cruz* in 1856 focuses on the Jesuit complex, the Church of San Felipe Neri, also popularly known as, *El Templo de la Profesa* and begins by providing the building's historical background:

Its foundation dates from the year 1592, the work of the Jesuits, who, in order to complete its construction, obtained pious donations; however, the exact dates of its reconstruction by the Jesuits are unknown to us. When the latter were expelled in 1767, the Colegio de San Ildefonso was established in that building, until the Fathers of the Oratorio de San Felipe Neri purchased it, taking possession of it on March 25, 1771.³

The text focuses on the architectural forms and describes certain interior structures, such as the main altarpiece; here, it is significant that the author brings the illustration accompanying the text to the reader's attention. The relevant excerpt states:

The church, whose interior view accompanies this article, is oriented from west to east, and consists of three naves, sustained by eight columns, the central nave being wider and taller than the lateral naves. Note, in its architectural aspect, the same style that has predominated in the construction of the first churches in Mexico, possessing much of the Gothic style, particularly in the columns. The main altarpiece, which appears more modern, consists of two sections, one, dominated by the Ionic order, while the Composite order is found in the other.⁴

Although an attempt is made to historically contextualize these sites by providing dates, there is no identification of the general period as colonial or viceregal. There are, however, indications of the

² See, "Bellas Artes: Una visita a la Academia Nacional de San Carlos", *La Cruz*, volume 1, number 11 (January 10, 1856), 351.

³ See, "El Templo de la Profesa", *La Cruz*, volume 1, number 18 (February 28, 1856), 574.

⁴ *Ibid.*

perception of these constructions, both architecture and painting, as products of national masters, evincing a formative national identity and a developing historical consciousness.⁵ By mid-century, the Academy of San Carlos would take the lead in the process of defining a history of Mexican art and reframing colonial works of art as works by national artists.

As the Academy of San Carlos' reopening was being planned ca. 1843-45, a competition was held in Europe to identify a new professor of painting. Among the list of applicants, which included an Italian, a German, and a Frenchman, the Spaniard, Pelegrín Clavé (1811-1880) stood out. (Fig. 1) Mexican art historians, among them, Esther Acevedo, have suggested that it is undeniable that the Mexican official, José Montoya, who was charged with hiring the new painting instructor hired Clavé due to his Catholic affiliation and identification with the Nazarenes.⁶ Clavé was offered the position and in 1846, he relocated to Mexico City and began to teach at the academy.



Fig. 1: Pelegrín Clavé, *Self Portrait*, 1835, oil on canvas.

⁵ *Ibid.* 577. See, Manuel Orozco y Berra, *Historia de la dominación española en México*, 3 Volumes, Intro. Genaro Estrada (Mexico City: Antigua Librería Robredo de J. Porrúa e hijos, 1938) [first edition, 1849]; see also, Justino Fernández, *Estética del Arte Mexicano: Coatlicue/El Retablo de los Reyes/El Hombre*, Second Edition (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1972), 173-372.

⁶ Esther Acevedo, Rosa Casanova, *et. al.*, “Modos de decir: la pintura y los conservadores”, *Estudios Históricos* (Mexico City: INAH, 1984), 78-79.

In the early nineteenth-century, the Nazarenes were a group of primarily Austrian and German artists working in Rome, who emulated what they saw as the inspirational, spiritual art of the medieval and renaissance periods; focusing on biblical subjects, they were critical of what they perceived to be the superficial virtuosity that had become characteristic of European painting. (Fig. 2) Contemporary figures like Burckhardt and Goethe were critical of the Nazarenes and by the 1840s, their brand of painting fell into disfavor; however, in Mexico, the Nazarene movement would find new life, thanks, in large part, to the conservative ideology dominating the academy and Clavé's work as a member of its faculty.



Fig. 2: Johann Friedrich Overbeck, *Easter Morning*, 1818, oil on canvas.

From the 1840s through the 1860s, the conservatives not only directed the Academy of San Carlos and other cultural institutions in the capital but also began to extend their authority into other spheres. Antonio López de Santa Anna (1794-1876), who governed Mexico at various times from the 1830s through the 1850s, contributed to, both, the academy's revitalization and the creation of what would become the first gallery of colonial Mexican painting at San Carlos, a collection of primarily

religious art. (Fig. 3) In April 1849, the same year that the academy introduced its annual art competition and public exhibition, the Minister of Justice and Ecclesiastic Affairs circulated a memo to the Regular Prelates of the Republic communicating the interest of the president, Antonio López de Santa Anna:

The president wishes to establish a conservatory in the Academy of the best paintings, originals and copies of classic works, most of which are found in religious convents where the lack of attention and ignorance have allowed them to deteriorate. Consequently, the prelates are asked to circulate this request among the convents under their jurisdiction so that the latter may offer some paintings for said conservatory.⁷



Fig. 3: Carlos Paris, *Antonio López de Santa Anna*, 19th century, oil on canvas.

⁷ See, Documents 5630 and 5631, Archivo de la Antigua Academia de San Carlos, Biblioteca Lino Picaseño, Facultad de Arquitectura, UNAM, Mexico City; Eloísa Uribe, “1843-1860”, *Y todo ... por una nación: Historia social de la producción plástica de la Ciudad de México. 1781-1910*, Second Edition, ed. Eloísa Uribe (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1987), 67-111; Widdifield (1996); and Eduardo Báez Macías, *Historia de la Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes: Antigua Academia de San Carlos, 1781-1910* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas, 2009).

Various officials received the memo, however, nothing came of it, perhaps due to Santa Anna's hasty retreat from Mexico City that same year.

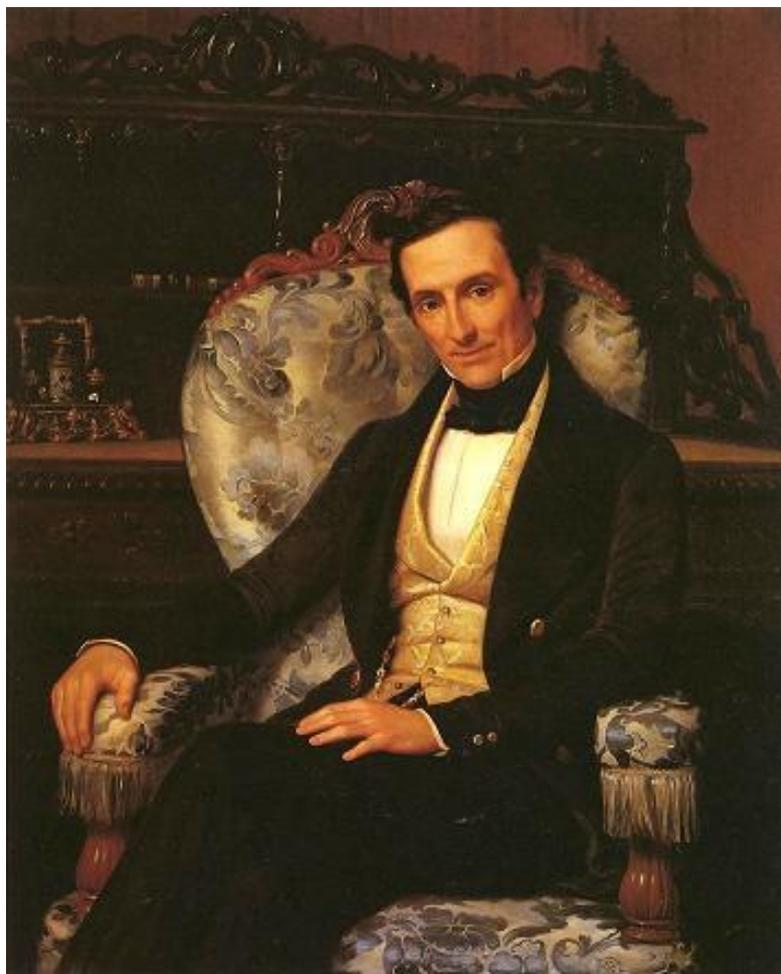


Fig. 4: Pelegrín Clavé, *José Bernardo Couto*, 1849, oil on canvas.

In 1855, shortly following the final return to Mexico City by Santa Anna, another letter was sent to the minister of relations expressing the interest of the president, yet again, in forming a gallery of national art; this time, the new request was directed to José Bernardo Couto, distinguished lawyer and president of the Academy of San Carlos. (Fig. 4) Responding to the government's request, Couto began contacting churches and religious orders in and around Mexico City in spring 1855 to inquire about specific paintings. From 1856 through 1863, in addition to the acquisition of donated or purchased works, the government was reminded of the sizable body of viceregal paintings stored in convents, such as *La Encarnación*; it was from these assorted paintings that Couto drew exemplars of the Old Mexican School. These works were displayed in the academy galleries, where they were to serve not only as instructional models for academy students but, ideally, as a source of national pride for Mexican citizens. The first version of the so-called Old Mexican School of Painting gallery was installed in 1855-57, with an expansion a few years later in 1860-1861. (Fig. 5)



Fig. 5: Manuel Benabad, detail of the Old Mexican School Painting Gallery, Academy of San Carlos, ca. 1898, albumen print.

Although Couto has been credited with writing the first sustained historical treatment of colonial Mexican painting, there was another project to gather information on colonial painting being conducted around the time that he was reinstalling the colonial painting galleries at the academy and writing his text, ca. 1860-61.⁸ The publication in question was an article by Dr. Rafael Lucio Nájera, which was initially published as a series of notes in 1863 and then later again, in a more developed form in 1864.⁹ (Fig. 6) Lucio was a collector of viceregal paintings who traveled around central Mexico examining in-situ works of art located in different churches. He had compiled a list of artists limited to those whose names had been signed on canvases he encountered. Lucio based the content of his text on his own collection, and possibly on the collections of acquaintances, as well as on the art he saw in his survey of churches in and around Mexico City.

⁸ José Bernardo Couto, *Diálogo sobre la historia de la pintura en México*, Intro. Juana Gutiérrez Haces (Mexico City: Cien de México, 1995) [first edition, 1872].

⁹ Rafael Lucio's notes were first published in, *Boletín de la Sociedad Mexicana Geográfica y Estadística* (Mexico City, 1863), and then as, *Reseña Histórica de la Pintura Mexicana en los Siglos XVII y XVIII* (Mexico City, 1864). It should be noted that the earliest post-1821 publication to address the subject of colonial art in Mexico was written by the Italian traveler, J. C. Beltrami, who published a travelogue of his visit, titled, *Le Mexique* (Paris, 1830).

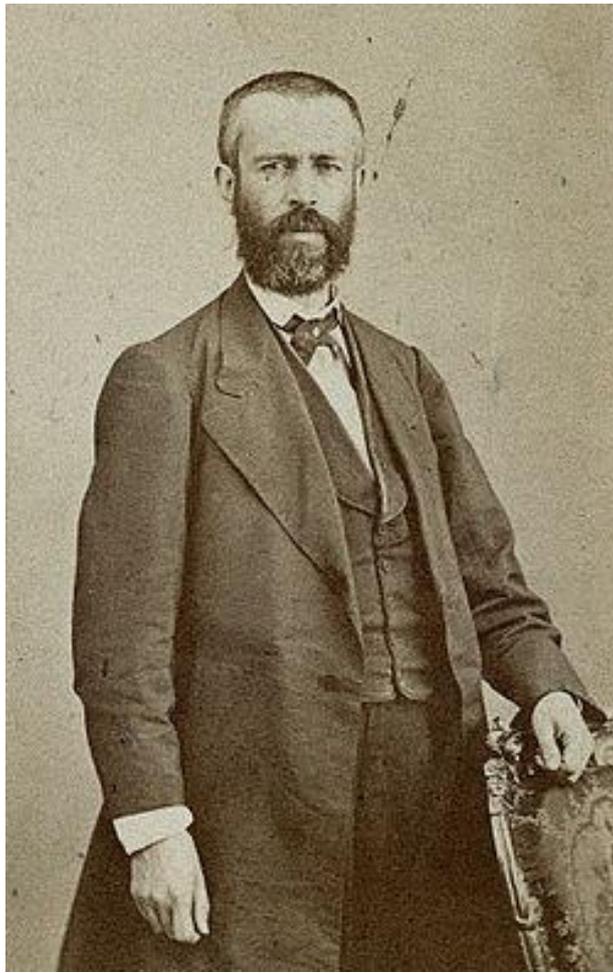


Fig. 6: Cruces y Campa, *Dr. Rafael Lucio*, n.d., photograph.

Lucio's analysis lacks a historical or narrative component; the main body of his text consists primarily of an inventory of names and titles, along with personal observations. His comments display limitations in his understanding of history, as well as his personal biases. Some of Lucio's more noteworthy claims include: 1) art was brought fully formed from Spain; 2) there is no regional distinction between painting in Mexico City and that of Puebla; and 3) the first known signed painting was from 1603, a work presumably by the artist Baltasar de Echave, whom he identifies as the first known painter in New Spain (sixteenth-century works were absent from this list). In regard to the late seventeenth-century painter, Cristobal de Villalpando, Lucio commented that although the artist had much invention, he also exhibited bad taste, bad drawing, and bad coloring.¹⁰ He added that Mexico's revolutions had contributed to a significant loss of colonial art and that many paintings were destroyed when altarpieces were disassembled or hidden by religious and government officials, who either kept them or exported them abroad. He states that high-quality Mexican paintings had been misattributed to European painters and exported across the Atlantic for sale. In the 1864 publication, Lucio notes that Couto had told him about two unsigned sixteenth-century paintings he had come across. Lucio was

¹⁰ Lucio (1864), 8.

aware of the collection that Couto was in the process of building at the academy and wrote the following, “I should note, in praise of the director, don Bernardo Couto, who has acquired some Mexican works for the academy, which, although far from forming a complete collection, have been gathered with intelligence and with time will inspire interest in the history or art.”¹¹

In 1861, as part of the art collection of Old Mexican masters was being hung in a renovated gallery space, José Bernardo Couto began writing what would become, *Diálogo sobre la historia de la pintura en México* (1872). Couto’s text takes the form of a conversation between three principal characters. The event takes place one morning in the final months of 1860 in the painting galleries of the Academy of San Carlos on the occasion of their reinstallation, which includes the integration of recently acquired Old School works. The narrative begins as Couto and his cousin, the poet, José Joaquín Pesado, enter the galleries and cross paths with Pelegrín Clavé. Clavé takes the opportunity to return a document to Couto that lists the names of Old School Mexican painters, including the titles and dates of some recently identified or attributed canvases. Since all three men are gathered in the gallery, Pesado suggests using the inventory as a guide with which to view the works, which were in the process of being installed. The ensuing conversation between the three men reflects the knowledge of Mexican art at that time and the academic criteria guiding all three participants’ perceptions of pre-Hispanic, viceregal, and contemporary (i.e., academic) art. Although it is unclear whether this conversation actually occurred it is highly probable that Couto visited the galleries on various occasions with Pesado, Clavé, and perhaps others, and later reviewed notes, editing sections as he constructed his narrative. The structuring potential of Couto’s personal vision was noted by Luis-Martín Lozano, who stated, “In becoming patrons of the arts, individuals such as Javier Echeverría and Bernardo Couto would now be able to project their own identity: their values and beliefs, their manner of understanding the world, and their particular vision of how to construct the Mexican nation.”¹² It is here that Couto’s political tendencies need to be considered since in addition to being academy president, a curator, and a patron of the arts, it was his role as writer of the first history of Mexican art that yielded the more significant legacy.

In the introductory section, the speakers set the stage for the works to be discussed. Pesado begins by stating the three primary criteria for inclusion in this collection: 1) works had to be by national masters of great renown; 2) the works were gathered in order to preserve the memory of said masters; and 3) the works were to provide models for Academy students.¹³ Couto leads the conversation while Clavé presents a European perspective – at one point he states that Novohispanic

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4 and 5.

¹² Luis Martín Lozano, “Renovación estética en la Academia de San Carlos: el purismo en la pintura de mediados de siglo”, *Arte de las Academias: Francia y México, Siglos XVII–XIX* (Mexico City: Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso, 1999), 61.

¹³ Couto (1995), 67.

art is the Mexican branch of the Spanish school.¹⁴ Although the academy had long held viceregal works in its collection, Pesado notes that the school had not maintained nor represented the Old Mexican School in its exhibitions, necessitating that this now-defined body of work be not only conserved but also expanded with new additions. Couto adds that through the creation of a painting gallery, the history of art in Mexico could be seen and not just read.

Pesado proceeds to list the criteria that, according to his conservative, academic opinion, qualified a “true” work of art; these included, “correct” drawing, chiaroscuro, perspective, and a taste for “beauty” and “grace.” To this statement, Clavé adds that the most important elements for an artist were regularity and beauty, and that “deformed” paintings were repugnant, that is, an anti-esthetic from the academic perspective, which may have also been a veiled, Nazarene-inspired critique of colonial baroque painting, in addition to its more direct reference to pre-Hispanic art. These opening statements culminate with Pesado declaring pre-Hispanic art as alien to later painting (i.e., post-conquest), which, according to him, was completely European. Anchoring “the origin of the art among us”, as he called it, to a different moment in time serves as a point of departure for the narration of the history of painting in Mexico; in doing so, he distinguishes two periods of Mexican history, the pre-contact and the colonial. Not surprisingly, it is Pesado, the first person to speak, who in his introductory comments identifies colonial painters as, *maestros nacionales*, and colonial painting as, *la antigua escuela mexicana*.¹⁵ The three men walk through the gallery and discuss each artist and the paintings they encounter in chronological order. Couto concludes the conversation by stating, “Dear sirs, whoever takes on the challenge of writing the history of this art in Mexico will have no lack of material, and should find names worth remembering”, or, “nombres dignos de memoria.”¹⁶

By writing and publishing the dialogue, Couto achieved a number of things: 1) he initiated the development of a modern canon; 2) he nationalized viceregal material; 3) he reinforced the emerging tripartite historical narrative: pre-contact indigenous state, the period of European intervention, and the modern nation; and 4) he modeled for Mexican citizens how to behave in a museum and how to look at and talk about art.¹⁷ Although many liberals, and perhaps other members of the elite Mexican social classes, considered the viceregal period a time of oppression of Mexican cultural and economic development at the hands of the Spanish Crown and the Catholic Church, Couto configured it as an early national phase by presenting the Academy of San Carlos as a link that unified the colonial, culturally, if not politically, with the modern independent period. This permitted the presentation of a linear and coherent historical narrative, beginning with the conquest through the present, facilitating the

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁷ Regarding the dialogic format, see, Jon R. Snyder, *Writing the Scene of Speaking: Theories of Dialogue in the Late Italian Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 48-55.

reevaluation and appreciation of colonial works of art across a range of often conflicted political ideologies. If contemporary work belonged to a new school, then works produced before 1821 could be positioned as representing an old school. This relationship implied a lineage that possessed a common cultural and historical thread in spite of any perceived disruption in the transition from viceroyalty to nation.¹⁸

Art historians, Fausto Ramírez and Juana Gutiérrez Haces both noted the importance of religion, according to the conservatives, as a useful tool in the creation of Mexican national identity. Ramírez wrote, “the most important influence in Mexican artistic production of the mid-nineteenth century was the conservatives’ emphasis on religious tradition...for being, ‘the only common link that unites all Mexicans when all the rest have been torn asunder’ (as Alamán stated).”¹⁹ Gutiérrez Haces noted that Couto and his academy colleagues perceived the existence of one sole Mexican school across time and socio-political states united through a shared subject matter. She wrote, “religious subject matter becomes one of the characteristics of the Mexican school...the only link between the two periods and the two schools.”²⁰ However, as previously noted, the presentation of predominantly religious material was purely circumstantial due to financial and logistical limitations, and did not represent the entire spectrum of Novohispanic-cum-colonial art production. Given the conservative belief in the necessary role of the Church in government and society, and thus of the significance of religion and religious art, this serendipitous fact did not present a problem. Rather, it visually reinforced certain aspects of conservative and Nazarene ideology, and provided evidence of a unified Mexican tradition linked across time by its supposedly coterminous religious subject matter.

When looking at the early development of art history writing in Mexico in the latter part of the nineteenth century, besides tracking references to colonial art by Mexican authors or identifying early Mexican publications on the subject, it is equally important to recognize that Mexican art during this period was drawing the attention of individuals from outside of Mexico, specifically in the United States. One such individual was Robert Henry Lamborn. (Fig. 7) Lamborn was an art collector, scientist, and railroad mogul born on October 29, 1835 in Chester County, Pennsylvania.²¹ With a liberal arts education under his belt and interested in civil engineering, he pursued his graduate education in mining and metallurgy in Europe. After completing his doctoral degree at the University

¹⁸ See Juana Gutiérrez Haces, “Algunas consideraciones sobre el término ‘estilo’ en la historiografía del arte virreinal mexicano”, *El arte en México: Autores, temas, problemas*, ed. Rita Eder (Mexico City: CONACULTA/Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2001), 90–193; and Ray Hernández-Durán, *A Historiography of Colonial Art in Mexico, ca. 1855–1934* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, forthcoming).

¹⁹ Fausto Ramírez, “Pintura e Historia en México a mediados del siglo XIX: El programa artístico de los conservadores”, *Hacia otra historia del arte en México: De la estructuración colonial a la exigencia nacional (1780-1860)*, ed. Esther Acevedo (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 2001), 90.

²⁰ Couto (1995), 54.

²¹ Carrie B. Aaron, “Biographical Notice of Robert Henry Lamborn”, *Proceedings of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia*, vol. 53, n° 2 (1901), 486.

of Giessen in Germany, he briefly studied in Paris before returning to the United States, which was in the midst of the civil war.²² Shortly after arriving in the U.S., Lamborn joined the army and after the war, he began working for the Pennsylvania Railroad and was eventually promoted to General Manager of several different railways. In this capacity, he introduced various innovations to the railways located west of the Mississippi.



Fig. 7: Photographer Unknown, *Robert Lamborn and Dalton Dorr in Lamborn's Gallery at the Pennsylvania Museum at Memorial Hall, n.d., photograph.*

Lamborn's decisions on how to best develop the railroad reflected the general attitude of Americans and their interest in investing in railway expansion. By 1865, the United States already had more miles of railroad tracks than any other country in the world, and in the following three decades, that number tripled.²³ Because of a strained relationship between Mexicans and the English, Mexicans were more than eager to allow Americans to extend their railroad lines south of the border starting in 1880.²⁴ This enabled railroad workers to move beyond the United States and make a profit constructing railroads in Mexico. The completion of the first Mexican railroad occurred in January 1873 when Mexican president, Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada took a celebratory trip from Mexico City to Veracruz.²⁵

²² For more on the Civil War and the Battle of Antietam, please see, William Frassanito, *Antietam: The Photographic Legacy of America's Bloodiest Day* (New York: Scribner, 1978); Kerry Graves, *The Civil War* (Mankato, MN: Capstone Books, 2001); and Brooks D. Simpson, Stephen W. Sears, *et. al.*, eds., *The Civil War* (New York: The Library of America, 2011-2014).

²³ William Chafe, *The Rise and Fall of the American Century: The United States from 1890s-2009* (New York/London: Oxford University Press, 2009), 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

²⁵ David Plecher, "The Building of the Mexican Railway", *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 30, n° 1 (1950), 26.

With the completion of the Mexican railway extension, both U.S. and Mexican travelers were spared what had been arduous, if not dangerous traveling conditions. One visitor to Mexico, William P. Robertson, had remarked on the deplorable condition of the roads, providing an idea of the challenges of travel before the railway construction; he wrote, “The road from Jalapa to Puebla in some parts, was terrific, for though paved, the large blocks of stone were everywhere loosened, and lying about; while great holes and ruts sent us jumping, every now and then, towards the roof of the coach.”²⁶ This development brought people like Lamborn to Mexico, where they not only toured the country’s cities and towns but photographed colonial churches and other notable historical sites.



Fig. 8: Photographer Unknown, *Porfirio Díaz*, ca. 1904, photograph.

While in Mexico, Lamborn purchased 72 paintings, which he researched and wrote about. He published the work he did on his acquisitions, along with a general history of Mexican art in 1892 under the title, *Mexican Painting and Painters: A Brief Sketch of the Development of the Spanish School of Painting in Mexico*, a book of which five hundred copies were released.²⁷ When Lamborn began writing his book on colonial art, Mexico was governed by Porfirio Díaz, a military figure during the War of 1846 who rose to power on November 24, 1876 when he entered the capital and declared himself the president of

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ See, Aaron (1901), 489; also, Robert H. Lamborn, *Mexican Painting and Painters: A Brief Sketch of the Development of the Spanish School of Painting in Mexico* (Philadelphia: Allen, Lane & Scott: 1891).

Mexico.²⁸ (Fig. 8) During the so-called Porfiriato, the country's foreign investments increased thirty times, and money for railroad construction received 30% more than any other area of spending.²⁹ Lamborn's art collecting and writing can be seen as an index of how the railroad not only facilitated but also motivated U.S. Americans to travel south and familiarize themselves with Mexican culture, to learn about Mexico's history, and to cultivate an appreciation for its art. While the exact reasons for Lamborn's decision to write this book remain a mystery, it seems probable that he published the book to generate interest among members of his social and professional circles in the U.S. in the hope of increasing tourism and attracting investors south of the border. Because Lamborn was a railroad mogul and not an art scholar, like most men who were collecting and writing about Mexican art at that time, his research and writing on the subject must be seen, in large part, as an outgrowth of his business interests.

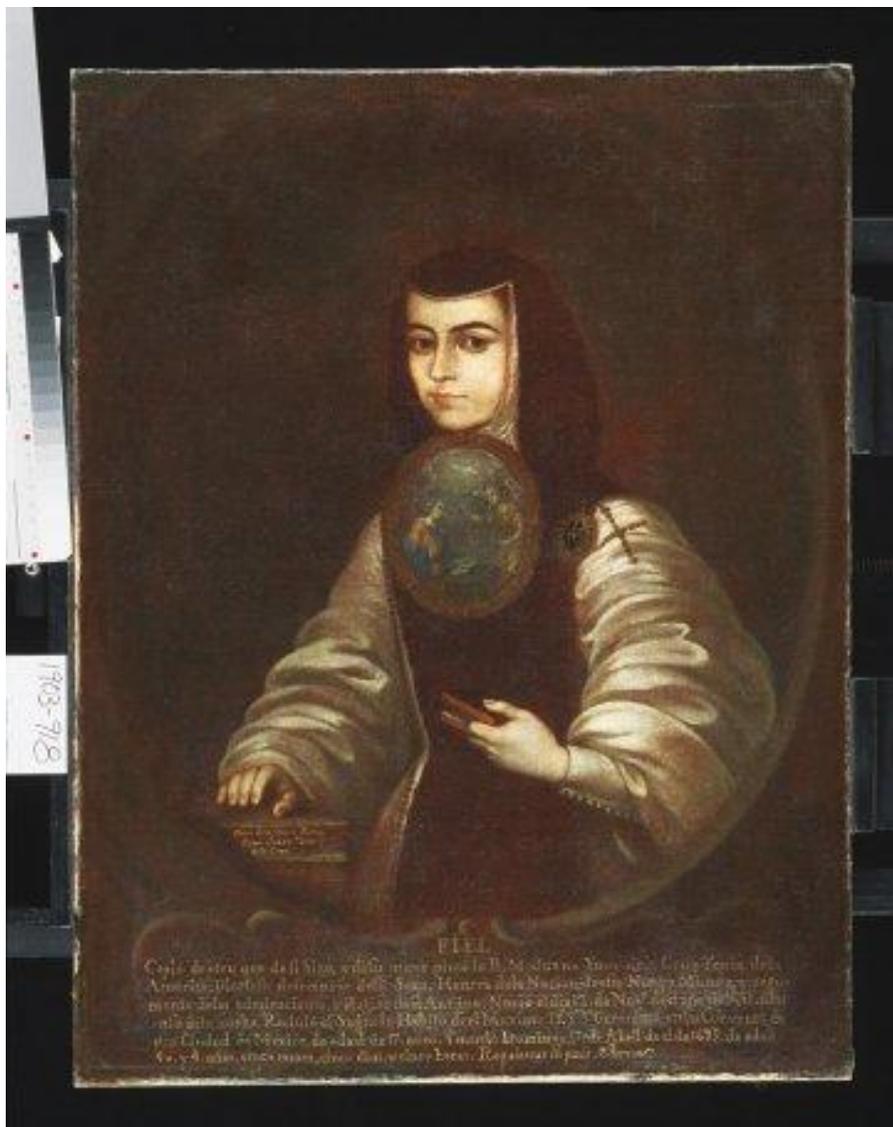


Fig. 9: Nicolás Enríquez de Vargas, *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*, 18th century, oil on canvas.

²⁸ Charles Johnston, "Porfirio Diaz", *The North American Review*, vol. 176, n° 554 (1903), 115 and 121.

²⁹ Teresa van Hoy, "La Marcha Violenta? Railroads and Land in 19th Century Mexico", *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, vol. 19, n° 1 (2000), 35.

In his book, Lamborn seeks to educate the American public by discussing an era of Mexican art history, which he felt had been neglected. Although his painting collection is the main focus of the book, he provides a brief index of the Mexican colonial painters with which he was familiar. He begins his book by introducing and discussing two colonial paintings in his collection. The first painting, attributed to Nicolás Enríquez de Vargas (Mexico, 1722-1787), is a portrait of the renowned, late seventeenth-century, Novohispanic nun, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, dated 18th century, who Lamborn describes as an academic and an artist.³⁰ (Fig. 9) The second painting, by Juan Rodríguez Juárez (Mexico, 1675–1728) is a religious image of the Peruvian nun, Santa Rosa de Lima, ca. 1710, the first American saint.³¹ (Fig. 10) Lamborn’s reasons for opening with these colonial images are not entirely clear although it is possible he wanted to highlight the cultural achievements of the viceregal period while featuring two of the strongest works in his collection. Interestingly, he does not cite any of the Mexican publications on the topic, with the exception of a brief mention of José Bernardo Couto.

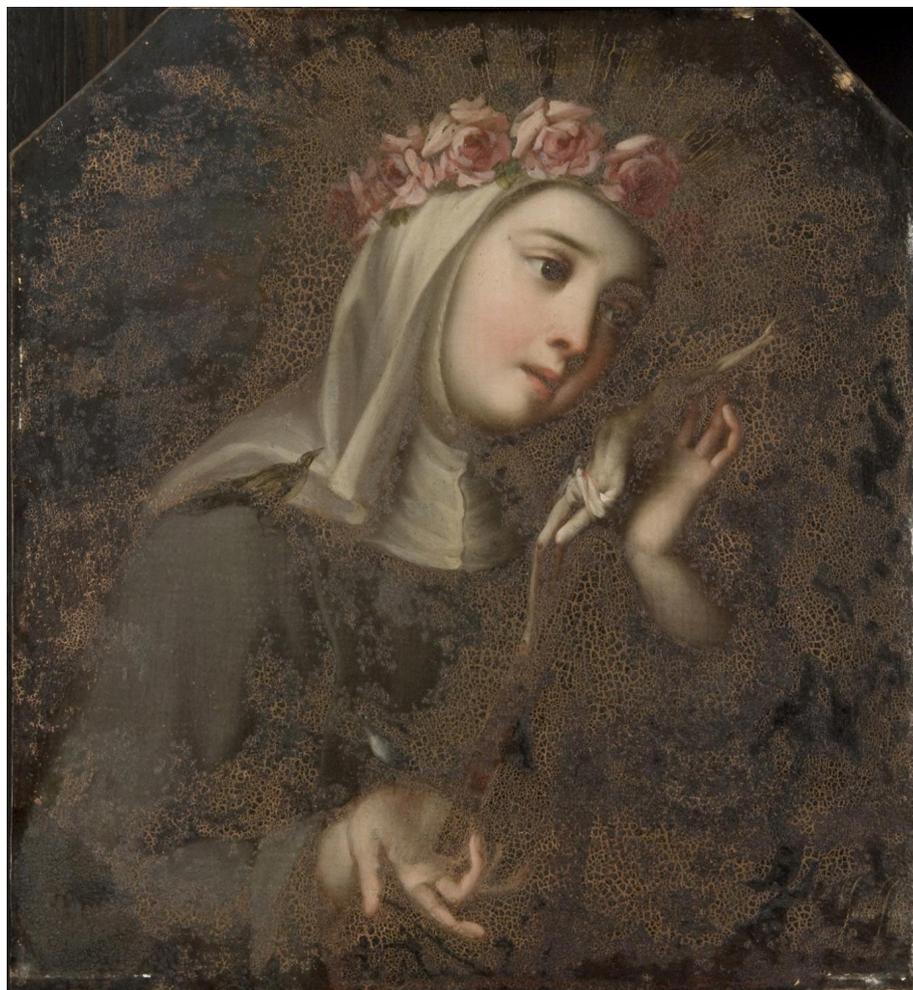


Fig. 10: Juan Rodríguez Juárez, *Santa Rosa de Lima*, ca. 1710, oil on canvas.

³⁰ Philadelphia Museum of Art: Collections Database at: www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/39031.html; The Dr. Robert H. Lamborn Collection, 1903; consulted on August 11, 2017.

³¹ *Ibid.*, www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/39015.html?mulR=17734425403; The Dr. Robert H. Lamborn Collection, 1903; consulted on August 11, 2017.

In the first chapter, Lamborn laments how tragic it is that Mexican colonial art has been neglected while scholars have exclusively focused on European art; he adds that while there are numerous encyclopedic surveys covering European painting, there is no equivalent scholarship for Mexico. He then discusses the great civilizations of Egypt and Rome, up to the Italians and the Dutch, pointing out the economic and cultural elements necessary for civilization to bloom; notably, he includes the United States in this section, focusing on its coal production, steam, and electricity, references that indirectly allude to the railroad industry, as factors evincing the U.S.'s high level of civilization and prosperity.

It is important to note that as an American who had traveled extensively, his perspective is more global than that of coeval Mexican art historical publications; he not only focuses on Mexico and colonial art but attempts to bring that material into conversation with the larger span of European art history. For example, according to him, the Council of Trent laid forth the type of religious paintings that were to be used in churches, art forms that the Spanish brought to the Americas and shaped the resulting artwork in New Spain. He claims that churches in New Spain were decorated with artwork by Spanish Old Masters, such as Diego Velázquez and Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, and he seems to quote Lucio's observation that during the independence period, many of these works of art were sold for money, concluding, that, as a result, the majority of the artwork in Mexican churches was produced by native artists. Lamborn explains that when religious orders came to the Americas in 1521, they requested religious paintings in large numbers to be used during their masses and baptisms.³² He adds that the desire for religious paintings was so large that the religious orders had to train native artists in order to keep up with the demand.³³ Significantly, and contrary to the Mexicans, Lamborn characterizes this era of Mexican art as a branch of the great Spanish school of art. As a U.S. American, he is not invested in Mexican nationalism or motivated to reify a Mexican national identity; rather, his perspective and interests lay elsewhere. It is no coincidence that, given U.S. ventures in Mexico and the Mexican government's interest in attracting foreign investment, in the years following Lamborn's publication, tourism to Mexico grew and U.S. investments in Mexican railroads would increase to \$644,300,000 by 1911.³⁴

Reviewing art historical writing about colonial Mexican painting from the mid to late nineteenth century reveals the gradual consolidation of national identity and the incorporation of Mexican art into larger discussions of Mexican history and culture. In Mexico, the Academy of San Carlos takes center stage as the secular, educational locus where the first colonial painting collection was gathered and displayed to the public, and also, where the first art historical text on the subject was

³² Lamborn (1891), 32.

³³ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁴ John Skirius, "Railroad, Oil, and Other Foreign Interests in the Mexican Revolution, 1911–1914", *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 35, n° 1 (2003), 25.

conceived and produced. José Bernardo Couto's dialogue on the history of painting in Mexico was not only shaped by an interest in defining a distinct Mexican culture and esthetics, but also by a conservative political agenda with its emphasis on Catholicism as a unifying framework, both, historically and culturally. Comparing the work of someone like Robert H. Lamborn to Couto's underlines the degree to which politicized nationalistic tendencies were shaping the narratives that were being written in Mexico City, and how that vision differed in relation to foreign perspectives of the same.