

Painting in Colonial Latin America

Clara Bargellini

As he advanced toward Tenochtitlan (today's Mexico City) in 1519, Hernán Cortés replaced native "idols" with crosses and images of the Virgin Mary.¹ His actions demonstrate that Cortés conceived the relationship between images and power to be fundamental, and that they were to be understood within the context of religious belief. Images were essential for Roman Catholic practice at the time of Cortés, and this one fact goes a long way to explain the countless paintings and sculptures made for and throughout the enormous geographical area that is now called Latin America between the sixteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Since conversion was the justification for conquest, indigenous peoples had to be initiated into the Christian religion, and the European colonists had to be able to continue their ancestral religious practices. Both circumstances, tied as they were to vast ambitions of expansion, demanded great quantities of images. With time, the ambitions were fulfilled, and the need for pictures as well as sculptures grew in number and in kind as New World societies became more complex.

The mere thought of attempting to comprehend in some sort of unified way all of the art, or even only the painting of colonial² Latin America provokes a sense of exhaustion. Furthermore, the number of studies is small in contrast to the visual richness confronting even the casual observer. The sheer challenge of so much to look at, and so much to think about, provides the exhilaration necessary to plunge in, however. In this paradoxical frame of mind, I offer the considerations that follow, beginning with thoughts on the historiography, moving on to a chronological account of salient artistic events and tendencies, anchored in observations of some specific works, and ending with a few comments.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

More than half a century ago, when studies were far fewer than they are today, Robert Smith and Elizabeth Wilder found it to be "a startling fact that no single work deals comprehensively with the history of art in the Latin American countries."³ They seem to have thought that such a work, which would have had to include far more than just painting and cover five centuries, was desirable and possible. The main problem they envisioned was allegedly simple: "Whether

this art is interpreted as a consistent whole, or as a group of related but independent cultures, depends largely upon whether one approaches it from the diversified present or from the common heritage of the past.”⁴ In other words, with political history as a guide, all would fall into place. To their credit, however, they acknowledged that “on the whole it is fortunate that we have not been flooded by immature surveys of a field where so much spade-work remains to be done.”⁵

In Latin America itself, the approaches to art were national, probably more for practical reasons than anything else; to this day there are far fewer art historians in Latin America than its wealth of art deserves. National studies, however, often slid onto nationalistic ground. Within the discipline of art history, nationalistic formulations found support in the pervasiveness of the Renaissance paradigm. By this I simply refer to the presuppositions that to a great extent have defined what the modern and contemporary Western world means by “art,” which were put into writing in sixteenth century Italy by Giorgio Vasari, and by many others since. For scholars in Latin America, the imperative was clear: to define “schools” that developed in an orderly way, and to identify the colonial works closest to the great European achievements in order to prove the worth of the art of their respective countries.

Despite the predominance of national studies, however, there has long existed among Latin American intellectuals a persistent search for identity and unity in culture that often drew on the visual arts. “It is in its arts that Latin America’s essence is to be found,” as Leopoldo Castedo would put it.⁶ On the one hand, Latin Americans sought a place of their own with respect to Europe and its standards. On the other, the power and influence of the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries also demanded definitions and differentiation. The very formulation of “Latin America,” which had had its origin in an earlier center of empire, nineteenth-century France, was accepted to distinguish the area from the Anglo north.⁷

In this light, the dependence on comparisons to European works is self-defeating. Thus, it is not surprising that a survey of Latin American art history texts reveals constant attempts to somehow contrast or at least complement the entrenched story, in which colonial artists were always at the receiving, lower end, with everything European valued as of higher quality. One way out was to define Latin American culture in general as predominantly “baroque,” that is, in stylistic terms, as anti-Renaissance, therefore anticlassical, and thus in rebellion from

Europe.⁸ However, the main counterweight has not been in the realm of stylistic definitions, but rather in the focus on native artistic traditions. In the particular case of painting, the sixteenth-century murals (fig. VI-1) and manuscripts of New Spain⁹ and the painting of Cuzco (cat. VI-99)¹⁰ were two areas signaled out for attention since the early twentieth century.

By the 1960s, scholarship on colonial painting in Latin America had achieved a degree of consistency in factual information. It had received significant international attention as well, particularly in Diego Angulo’s survey.¹¹ It was around this time, too, that a spate of monographs appeared. Before then, the only colonial painter celebrated in a

VI-1
Painting, sixteenth century, wall painting,
Tehuacan, Mexico



book-length study had been Gregorio Vásquez of Bogotá.¹² José de Mesa and Teresa Gisbert of Bolivia were the most prolific authors of this genre, and their first choice was Melchor Pérez Holguín.¹³ In Mexico, meanwhile, the singularity of Cristóbal de Villalpando¹⁴ and Miguel Cabrera was recognized.¹⁵

In the last three decades, new comprehensive treatments, though mostly organized according to current borders and not dedicated exclusively to painting,¹⁶ and a growing density of art historical studies, including monographs on painters, have been accompanied by renewed international interest, and a willingness on the part of younger Latin American scholars to look outward. Careful examinations of specific circumstances have largely replaced the center-periphery paradigm. Racial categories as such no longer hold as much interest as in the past, although individual racial identities do, since they concern the circumstances that made creation possible. Considerations of iconography and iconology have flourished.

THE FOUNDATIONS

At the beginning, the enormous need for images that was the basic condition within which New World painting originated and developed was met in three different, coexisting ways: through imports, through formal training programs for natives, and through the immigration of European artists. The emphasis was on fulfilling the immediate need for cult images, but also on providing the conditions for the production of paintings in the new contexts that were sure to need them for many years to come.

The very earliest reception of European works that looked decidedly to the future occurred within the schools set up by Franciscan friars to train indigenous converts as artists for the *Nueva Cristianidad* that they envisaged. Educated in the arts and armed with European prints, the Fleming Pieter van der Moere, better known as Pedro de Gante (in New Spain 1523–72), established the first such school at San José de los Naturales in Mexico City in 1524; the Augustinians also had similar schools in New Spain.¹⁷ In Quito, too, the Franciscans initiated training in the arts at their monastery in 1535, practically when the city was founded. As in Mexico City, the friars were Flemish: Joost de Rijcke, known as Jodoco de Rique (1498–1575), and the painter Pieter Gosseal (Pedro Gocial).¹⁸ Although information is scant, there is evidence for the existence of Franciscan and Augustinian schools for natives in Peru as well.¹⁹

It is tempting to think that there may have been a specific plan behind the fact that all the programs in artistic training for indigenous people known to us in the first half of the sixteenth century were established by Flemish friars, but beyond testifying to the pioneering role of the Franciscan order in evangelization and to the fundamental role of images, not much more has been proved. The differences in results, however, suggest how much the context of reception must have influenced the outcome. What remains of the first Christian indigenous painting is to be seen chiefly on the walls of the monasteries built by all the mendicant orders in central Mexico (see fig. VI-1), as well as in feather mosaics, manuscripts, and maps of New Spain. In contrast, the only painting that can surely be related to the Franciscan school of Quito is the 1599 *Portrait of Don Francisco de la Robe and His Sons Pedro and Domingo* by Andrés Sánchez Gallque (cat. VI-70), who had studied there after 1553. We should remember that in central New Spain, wall painting had been expertly practiced before the Spaniards arrived, so it is not surprising that pre-Columbian elements appear on Christian monastery walls, especially given the willingness of the first generations of friars, steeped as they were in the Renaissance humanism of Erasmus, to engage with their converts.²⁰ When serious technical studies are eventually carried out in sufficient quantity, it is likely that evidence of pre-Columbian materials and processes will be found as well. Furthermore, utopian ideals could be given freer rein in the indigenous, rural towns of New Spain, where in the sixteenth century the friars controlled how life was organized. In contrast, the pre-Columbian cultures of Ecuador did not have a tradition of figurative wall painting, and Quito was a city of European colonists, where natives



VI-2
Pereyrs (in New Spain 1566–89), *Saint*
her, late sixteenth century. Oil on canvas.
olitan Cathedral/CONACULTA, DGSMPC,
City



FIG. VI-3
Mateo Pérez de Alesio (Italian, 1540–c. 1632),
Saint Christopher, late sixteenth century. Fresco.
Cathedral of Seville, Spain

were clearly subordinate. Moreover, the fact that colonization in the Andes began later than in New Spain, and under more conflictive conditions, must also be taken into account.

Whatever the complexities and differences, in both the Andean and Mesoamerican contexts the friars did establish foundations for future painting. The introduction of new tools, techniques, and materials, and the use of prints as models as well as stimuli for invention were their instruments. The typological image content can be summarized in two basic categories: iconic human figures for cult, devotional, and commemorative purposes, associated with notions of the “true” portrait and hierarchical categories; and narrative in the form of representations of figures within specific spaces, taking part in particular events in sequential episodes. In conventional art historical stylistic terms, the works made in the Americas in the earliest period, and the ornamental vocabulary that accompanied them, corresponded to what was to be seen in Spain at the time: a mix of late medieval and Renaissance traditions. The early success of the friars is clear from the praise accorded to named native artists,²¹ as well as in the quality of the work that survives, but also in the courses taken by subsequent developments.

IMMIGRANT MASTERS AND IMPORTED WORKS

By the middle of the sixteenth century, the importation of paintings seems to have increased. Spanish and Flemish works arrived from Seville, the Habsburg gateway to the Americas. Statistics indicate that Spain was the principal market for paintings from Flanders between 1543 and 1545,²² and certainly many ended up in the New World. In 1553, for example, Cuzco cathedral had “an altarpiece showing the image of Our Lady with the Child Jesus in her arms and Saint Joseph, from Flanders.”²³ By then, too, European artists, seeking their fortunes, had made their way to the New World, and another phase in the history of Latin American painting was under way.

The majority of the artists who crossed the Atlantic Ocean were not very famous. For that matter, neither were most of the artists who traveled from Flanders and Italy to work in Spain. As in the case of the Christian indigenous artists, we have more names than works that can be attributed to them, but we do know that there were enough painters in Mexico City in 1556 to establish a guild.²⁴ We also know that there were a few painters from Europe whose talents were more than ordinary, and who had a clear sense of themselves as artists in the Renaissance mold. I shall examine briefly here only three, and mention some others, in order to suggest the variety of artistic practices in this early period, which would set the scene for all that followed.

The first European painter of importance to arrive in the New World was Simón Pereyng (in New Spain 1566–89). From Antwerp, he had sought his fortune in Lisbon and Madrid, whence he went to New Spain in 1566 with the viceroy Gastón de Peralta. His presence attests to the appreciation for Flemish art in a Romanist mode in the Spanish world (fig. VI-2).²⁵ However, Pereyn’s problems with the church in 1568 (he was under suspicion of, among other things, preferring secular to religious themes), even if probably brought on by an envious colleague, point to the vigilance that artists had to exercise, especially after the Council of Trent (1545/63). Pereyngs overcame his difficulties and lived to take on important commissions, many of them in indigenous towns, such as the main altarpiece of Huejotzingo, on which he worked in the 1580s with the Sevillian, and also Romanist, Andrés de Concha (in New Spain 1568–1612).²⁶ It is very possible that the two artists also painted sculptures, as stipulated by guild ordinances, but this genre of painterly activity has barely been studied in Latin America.

Mateo Pérez de Alesio (1540–c. 1632), now identified as Matteo Godi da Leccia, born near Volterra in Tuscany,²⁷ also accompanied a viceroy to the New World, García Hurtado de Mendoza, who took him to Lima in 1590. Matteo Godi had begun his career with Michelangelo in the 1560s, was an engraver as well as a painter, and had worked in and around Rome: he painted *Saint Michael Driving the Devils Away from the Body of Moses* in the

Sistine Chapel, and participated in the frescos of the Oratory of the Gonfalone. In 1577 he worked in Malta, before going to Seville (fig. VI-3) and thence to Peru. There, he had a shop, entered mining ventures, and even took an interest in Inca antiquities. He married, and his son, who followed his father's profession, entered the monastery of Santo Domingo, where his miniatures can be seen in some of the choir books. The details that have been unearthed on the painter's life indicate that all along Matteo had been an agent of the Medici, which facilitated his return to Italy sometime between 1609 and 1613, and guaranteed his reaching old age in comfort in his native land. Matteo's early work was, of course, strongly marked by Michelangelo, but in Malta his compositions turned much quieter and his figures less muscular and contorted. This more Raphaelesque style is thought to be closer to what he painted in Peru, which is confirmed in a small painting of the Virgin and Child (private collection, Lima).²⁸

The presence in Peru around the same time as two other Italians, the Jesuit lay brother Bernardino Bitti (1548–1610), who arrived in 1575, and Angelino Medoro (in Peru 1599–1629?),²⁹ was fundamental for the development of art in South America, since all these painters had followers.³⁰ Though all three produced clear and grave depictions of religious subjects, akin to the Romanism of Pereyris and Concha in New Spain, their individual styles are dissimilar, and the activities and motivations of Pérez de Alesio and Medoro, who made their careers in metropolitan contexts, were different from those of Bitti. Bitti was the first Jesuit painter to be sent to the missions, and his religiosity has led one critic to call him a sixteenth-century Fra Angelico.³¹ His presence in native communities in the southern Andes, particularly in Juli, can be detected in the figures, scenes, and framing devices of wall paintings in churches of the area.³² His activities there must have been analogous to those of the founders of the earlier Franciscan schools in New Spain and in Quito. Later, Bitti would be emulated by his fellow Jesuits—some of them also Italian, and others from France and central Europe—at the South American missions.³³ Although we do not know any works by them, we must note that there were Jesuit artists in late sixteenth-century Brazil as well.³⁴

Baltasar de Echave Orio (1558–c. 1623) is the last painter I shall cite for this early period.

He was in Mexico City by 1582, where he established a practice that would be continued by his descendants for several generations.³⁵ His work is based on the then-current Spanish amalgam of Flemish coloring and brushwork with Italian drawing and gravity. Author of a defense of his native Basque language published in 1607, he “writes and paints so well, that with style and color he honors the brush and the pen.”³⁶ Clearly an example of the intellectual painter, Echave had at that time just signed and dated the first known replica of the Mexican Virgin of Guadalupe (fig. VI-4), a work in which he demonstrated his complex understanding of the miracle story surrounding the original image, which is both a relic and a portrait.³⁷ His were many of the major commissions in Mexico City at the time, including some of the paintings for the altarpiece at Xochimilco (fig. VI-5).

The activities of these and of other European artists testify to the extensive establishment of painting in European modes in colonial Latin America by the early seventeenth century. However, the differences among these painters and the heterogeneity of their styles, introduced at various times and places, could not but lead to the creation of distinct local traditions, which would be developed in the work of native artists. By “native,” I mean not only Native American, but also the artists and artisans of European descent (*criollos*), as well as the many of mixed racial ancestries, all born in the New World. Imports and immigration from Europe by no means ceased, but they diminished, and with time there was a settling down and looking inward, as an ever growing number of locally trained artists were engaged in processing what had come from Europe in order to provide pictures for local audiences, in religious as well as secular contexts.

FIG. VI-4
Baltasar de Echave Orio (Spanish, 1558–c. 1623),
Virgin of Guadalupe, 1606. Oil on canvas. Private
collection





FIG. VI-5
Main altarpiece of the Church of San Bernardino/
CONACULTA, DGSMP, Xochimilco, Mexico

The production of painting came to be centered in cities where there was enough work to support a number of shops: certainly Mexico City and Puebla in New Spain; and Lima, Cuzco, Bogotá, Quito, and Potosí in the Andes. In Brazil, there were painters in Rio de Janeiro, Salvador, and later, Ouro Prêto. There were also painters established in Caracas, Sucre, Havana, and many other places, no doubt, at different times. The concentration of work in urban centers was related to the dominance of church patronage for art, and ecclesiastical authority had by the seventeenth century passed definitively into the hands of bishops, who necessarily resided in cities. A few of them would stand out prominently as significant patrons, such as Juan de Palafox y Mendoza (1640–1648) in Puebla, and Manuel de Mollinedo y Angulo (1673–1699) in Cuzco. However, studies are still lacking everywhere that will make more comprehensible the functioning of the urban shops and their relationships to other types of production, such as that of a good number of New World painters who were clerics or belonged to religious orders, or that of the connections between the large cities and the smaller settlements, native towns, and mission centers that continued to be established until the end of the colonial period.

THE CONSOLIDATION OF TRADITIONS

The naturalism and marked *chiaroscuro* of the early seventeenth century, as it was practiced in both Seville and Rome, soon somehow worked its way into the painting of the viceroyalties. Much has been made of the impact of Francisco de Zurbarán (1598–1664), and the importation of his works is documented especially for South America.³⁸ In New Spain, at least, I want to note the presence of a number of Caravaggio copies, notably a *Crucifixion of Saint Peter* (fig. VI-6). In any case, painters throughout the viceroyalties were working, in the first half of the seventeenth century, in styles reminiscent, on the one hand, of the earlier linear Italianate traditions, and on the other, in ways that demonstrated baroque concerns for the depiction of emotional expression and visible reality. In Peru, for example, the exquisite idealizations of Bitti (cat. VI-68) and Medoro (cat. VI-69) gave way to such works as Lázaro Pardo Lagos's *Martyrs in Japan* (cat. VI-71). In Mexico City, Luis Juárez's gentle figures, clothed in ample plays of angular, highlighted drapery (cat. VI-11), were succeeded by the more solid, naturalistically clothed and expressive figures of his son, José (cat. VI-14).

Perhaps the single most important seventeenth-century event for the history of painting in Latin America was the arrival of compositions by Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), an artist who was to continue to have a presence well into the eighteenth century. It began as early as the 1630s. A 1632 *Assumption of the Virgin* in Cuzco by Lázaro Pardo Lagos (active 1630–1669) recalls the 1626 Rubens composition engraved by Pontius.³⁹ No paintings actually by Rubens crossed the Atlantic, as far as we know, but copies of his compositions did, as did



FIG. VI-6
Copy of Caravaggio (Italian, 1571–1610), *Crucifixion of Saint Peter*, Church of San Bernardino/CONACULTA, DGSMPC, Xochimilco, Mexico

paintings by Spaniards who had had direct experience of works by the Flemish master.⁴⁰ Rubens's own shop organization was set up to handle not only the production, but also the reproduction of his work in paintings and prints. The scheme was commercially successful, and it also facilitated the diffusion of his images to all parts of the Christian world. Rubens's religiosity and closeness to the Jesuits may well have encouraged him to make some of his compositions available for export because of the appropriateness of their content.

The Assumption was, indeed, one of the most repeated images of the Antwerp master in Latin America. Others were the Raising of the Cross, The Lance, and the Deposition; the Triumph of the Eucharist and the Triumph of the Church from the Descalzas Reales tapestries; the Stigmatization of Saint Francis, the Education of the Virgin, various Adorations of the Shepherds and of the Magi, Holy Family compositions, the Woman of the Apocalypse, the Conversion of Saint Paul, the Apostles, and the Franciscan Allegory in Honor of the Immaculate Conception (fig. VI-7), an especially important composition for Latin America, since its iconography centers on the Spanish Habsburg support of Franciscan missions. These were not the only Rubens compositions known in the New World, of course, but they were the most frequently repeated, judging from what is preserved.⁴¹ The selection abounds in works whose iconography is of particular relevance for evangelization in the New World, and one



FIG. VI-7
 Peter Paul Rubens (Flemish, 1577–1640), *Franciscan Allegory in Honor of the Immaculate Conception*, 1631–32. Oil on panel, 21 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 30 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches (53.7 × 78.4 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art, John G. Johnson Collection, 1917

wonders about the mechanisms by which certain models were sent across the Atlantic, while others were not, or why some Rubens compositions were more popular in some places than others, for example, the Education of the Virgin in Brazil. In any case, it was not only Rubens's iconography that was assimilated in Latin America but also something of the movement and vivacity of his figures and compositions, as well as the freedom of his brushwork. It must be said, however, that most painters in the New World were consistently more conservative in their handling of space.

In order to better understand the impact of Rubens, we must remember that Spanish trade with Flanders picked up again after 1585, when Spain reestablished its control there, and it continued until the middle of the seventeenth century.⁴² Paintings arrived in Spain in great numbers along with books, prints, textiles, leather goods, musical instruments, and other furnishings and luxury goods, and much went on to the New World. Among all the objects that eventually reached Mexico City were *láminas de mil colores* (paintings on copper of a thousand colors) from Antwerp, according to the poet Bernardo de Balbuena.⁴³ The emphasis on color in paintings on copper from Flanders is precisely to the point, since it was only through actual paintings that the quality and handling of color could be studied by New World artists.

The generalized knowledge of Rubens's iconographic inventions did not, of course, result in artistic homogeneity throughout Spain and its kingdoms and viceroyalties, because the consolidation of local processes continued. The attempt by thirty-two painters in Lima in 1649 to found a guild,⁴⁴ though unsuccessful, testifies to the existence of shops there and a situation of stability, just as the establishment of a guild in Mexico City in 1556 had signified that a group of painters was working there, and meant to continue to do so. Indeed, from the seventeenth century onward the importance and stability of Mexico City production is evidenced in the shipping of paintings thence to other places in New Spain, and later to South America and

Europe as well.⁴⁵ The statutes of both the Mexico City and the proposed Lima guilds were based on those of Seville, but one wonders if the Lima painters may not have had Mexico City in mind as well in their wish for institutional status. In any case, we know that artists were organized in religious confraternities, at least. That a conflict and break occurred in Cuzco in 1688 between the indigenous painters and those of European origins is evidence of the organization of both groups.⁴⁶ The subsequent success in commercializing the huge production of Cuzco paintings covered with gold ornamentation testifies to the strength of that local tradition.

The accumulated experience of artists in various centers resulted in extraordinary works throughout colonial Latin America in the last decades of the seventeenth century. For example, in 1671 the Franciscans of Lima chose the four best painters of the city to represent the life of their founder in a series of large canvases.⁴⁷ Some of these have survived, full of fascinating details, including a self-portrait of Francisco de Escobar (active 1649–1676) in front of his easel. This is only one of several self-portraits from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, significant, of course, in terms of how painters valued their individuality and profession. Cristóbal de Villalpando (c. 1645–1714) in Mexico City also portrayed himself around 1685, in one of the six huge canvases that cover the walls of the cathedral sacristy (fig. VI-8). The painter placed himself among the bishop and clerics of the cathedral chapter in the *Apparition of Saint Michael on Monte Gargano*, represented as an allegory of the church in New Spain. He thus claimed religious learning and identified himself with his city, as did Melchor Pérez Holguín in his 1712 *Entry of the Viceroy Morcillo in Potosí*.

Some of the best paintings of the second half of the seventeenth century are very large, and fortunately, still in place. Unlike the architectural decoration of earlier periods, these are complex figure compositions that take over walls and vaults, breaking through them by the use of perspective and foreshortening, as in the aforementioned work by Villalpando in the sacristy of the cathedral of Mexico City. The same artist went on to paint in 1688–89 the dome of the apse chapel of the cathedral of Puebla with an illusionistic composition that is a vision of Mary, bearing a monstrance, with the Trinity, angels, and saints among clouds (fig. VI-9).

The theme combines two fundamental Hispanic cults—of the Immaculate Conception and of the Eucharist—with concerns about the role of light in religion and art.⁴⁸ The only dome decoration of its kind in Latin America, Villalpando's painting is probably related to nearly contemporaneous works in Madrid, while at the same time achieving formal and iconographic integration with the rest of the chapel. Though very different from Villalpando's work in their linear definition, the huge compositions in the cathedral of Cuzco by Basilio de Santa Cruz Pumacallao (active 1661–1700) make analogous claims on the attention of viewers. Their carefully rendered perspective views of monumental architectural spaces are at the

same time playful in their details and fairytale vistas—reminiscent of Flemish and Italian works of earlier times—but also disconcerting in the contrasts of scale and illumination. The sacred personages, small in comparison to their surroundings, act out their roles in the Bible narratives



FIG. VI-8
Sacristy, Metropolitan Cathedral, Mexico City



FIG. VI-9
Cristóbal de Villalpando (Mexican, c. 1645–1714),
Glorification of the Virgin, 1688–89. Oil on canvas
mounted on wall, dome of the Cathedral of Puebla,
Mexico



FIG. VI-10
Basilio de Santa Cruz Pumacallao (active 1661–1700),
Presentation in the Temple, c. 1680–90. Oil on canvas.
Cathedral of Cuzco, Peru



FIG. VI-11
Choir book, Cathedral of Guadalajara, Mexico

in a conventional way, but often belied by dramatic diagonal placements, lighting, and intense facial expressions, which remind us that we are in front of late seventeenth-century compositions (fig. VI-10).

The painters of the second half of the seventeenth century produced energetic and visually compelling work, and theirs was a time of the creation of memorable images grounded in specific New World experiences.⁴⁹ Besides portraits, depictions of religious and civic ceremonies (cats. VI-19, VI-73), and the city views already alluded to, they elaborated compositions that integrated pre-Columbian with colonial history, such as the stories of the conquest in New Spain (cat. VI-82) and the genealogies that began with Inca or Aztec rulers and continued with the kings of Spain from Carlos I onward (cat. VI-115). Sacred images whose origins were in the New World and their narratives were especially important. Just as the sanctuaries of these cult figures were often situated at the margins of cities, between urban and openly rural spaces, in places where people of all classes and conditions would come together, so the legends and the stories were inclusive, combining native elements with others of European origin. Prominent among these were images of the Virgin (cat. VI-116) and of the crucified Christ (cat. VI-114). The canonization of the first New World saint, Saint Rose of Lima, also resulted in the creation of iconographies throughout Latin America.⁵⁰ In all of these cases, we can follow the processes by which images signified in different contexts, how they remained local or were made inclusive, and even international, over time.⁵¹

Of particular interest is the relationship between the production of pictures and the concern with orthodoxy. The learning that would guarantee correct representation was generally a clerical prerogative, although some painters could be trusted to understand and interpret

complex issues. Indeed, a few of them insisted on their role as “inventors” of images.⁵² Nevertheless, the peculiar insistence on the written word within many colonial paintings (cat. VI-92 and others), and its integration with representation, suggests the close participation of intellectuals in the making of paintings. We have an explicit confirmation of this in an elaborately illuminated choir book belonging to the cathedral of Guadalajara, Mexico (fig. VI-11). The complex pages, full of figures and inscriptions, are signed with two names: “Don Sebastián Carlos de Castro, Inventor y Escritor,” and “Juan de Dios Rodríguez Leonardo faciebat.” Obviously, Castro was the learned cleric who “invented” the compositions, and his intervention was considered inseparable from writing. Rodríguez Leonardo, without the title of “don,” executed the paintings. The frequent presence, furthermore, of the concept of “invention” in the inscriptions on engravings, recalls how the accurate copying of prescribed visual models had been associated with good painting in the New World from its very beginnings in the monastery schools. It is not surprising, therefore, that painters would include not only texts in their paintings but engravings as well (fig. VI-12), and that the topic of the creation and reproduction of images should have been the subject of representation throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as well as the stimulus for thinking about images both in New Spain and South America.⁵³

NEW PAINTING FOR A NEW CENTURY

The dynastic change in Spain in 1700, from Habsburgs to Bourbons, and the consequent attention to French fashion, did not create an alteration in painting at once. All of the iconographies and topics just discussed continued to be subjects for colonial art in the eighteenth century.



FIG. VI-12

José de Ibarra (Mexican, 1685–1756), *Baby Jesus with Canons of Puebla Cathedral*, first half of the eighteenth century. Oil on canvas. Cathedral of Puebla/CONACULTA, DGSMP, Mexico

Baroque tendencies of realism and drama persisted, but an awareness of neo-classical artistic concerns is evident as the century progressed. Rococo vocabulary, with its associated lighter palette and open spaces, became pervasive. The assimilation of these international trends did not require by this time more than the continued importation of prints, books, a few paintings, and luxury goods that might serve as models and stimuli, and the demands of patrons and the market, exactly as was the case in Europe. The larger artistic centers, each with its own tradition, were by then well established, and could respond quickly and with ability to the new demands for nonreligious pictures and display, while continuing to fulfill older needs as well.

A case in point are *casta* paintings, a secular genre apparently unique to the New World.⁵⁴ The first known canvases dedicated exclusively to the depiction of anonymous individuals representing different New World racial mixtures date from the second decade of the eighteenth century. These early *castas* show individuals (cat. VI-47) and family groups realistically interacting with one another (cat. VI-48) against dark, neutral grounds. Viewers in New Spain could easily have comprehended these paintings as sympathetic depictions of everyday reality in their own land. Some may also have sensed that they might be attempts at domesticating troubling realities that could erupt in violence. Europeans would have been both fascinated and disconcerted—even disgusted—by the confusion. The tone of later *casta* paintings, like the 1763 series by Miguel Cabrera (1695?–1768), is remarkably different (cats. VI-49–VI-62). They are situated in specific places and the colors are lighter, but most importantly, the figures are posing.

They look out at the viewer self-consciously, and the series as a whole is a systematic presentation of a New World curiosity. The architecture included by Cabrera is spare and in accordance with neoclassical tastes; other painters of *castas* insert rococo details. The unique *castas* painted in Lima by Cristóbal Lozano (1705?–1776) for Viceroy Manuel Amat y Junyent, to be sent to the natural history cabinet of King Carlos III in Madrid, is even more systematic (Museo de América, Madrid). Whatever the complexities of the readings of all these paintings, their production is proof of the professional status and capabilities of painters in Mexico City and Lima. Cabrera, painter to the archbishop of Mexico City, was the historically conscious product of an uninterrupted tradition that dated back more than two centuries; and Lozano, equally self-aware, was the talented beneficiary of cosmopolitan, enlightened patronage in Lima, after the ruin of the 1748 earthquake.

In portraiture, too, eighteenth-century painters throughout Latin America were able to integrate the traditional conventions, established as far back as the sixteenth century, with fresh coloring and expression for new individual and group needs (cats. VI-39, VI-64).⁵⁵ Local demands for portraits of many kinds, often commemorative of the intersections of private and public life, provided the opportunity for precise observation of character, as well as commentary and documentation of domestic, social, civic, and religious details and events.

In newly built or decorated churches of the eighteenth century, painting continued to fulfill its religious role on walls and altarpieces. However, by mid-century altarpieces had become almost entirely sculptural, and large paintings served as counterpoints and complements, or they filled subsidiary spaces such as sacristies and cloisters where narrative series continued to be required (fig. VI-13). Occasionally, large canvases were also painted as illusionistic, as well as cheaper, substitutes for entire sculpted altarpieces. As for vaults and ceilings, although Villalpando had some following in New Spain, the most numerous and notable illusionistic ceiling paintings of Latin America were created in Brazil, beginning around 1730 in Rio de Janeiro, with the work of Caetano da Costa Coelho.⁵⁶ These ceilings go beyond the illusionism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and adopt the *quadratura* tradition, as propagated



FIG. VI-13
Interior of church, Taxco, Guerrero, Mexico

FIG. VI-14
José Joaquim da Rocha (in Brazil 1764–1807), ceiling,
Church of Nossa Senhora da Conceição da Praia,
Salvador, Bahia, Brazil



by Andrea Pozzo, and also practiced in Spain and especially Portugal. In fact, José Joaquim de Rocha (in Brazil 1764–1807) seems to have immigrated to Brazil from the mother country. His 1772–74 ceiling of the church of Nossa Senhora da Conceição da Praia in Salvador, Bahia (fig. VI-14), is an expert rendering of a complex architectural space in perspective, one that opens up and out to a vision of Mary in heaven. The adoption of the rococo is clearly to be seen on the ceiling of the church of Saint Francis in Ouro Preto, painted between 1801 and 1812 by the local artist Manoel da Costa Ataíde (1762–1830) (see Sullivan fig. E-13).

The huge paintings in the public spaces inside churches had their counterparts in the plethora of small works made for private devotion. The outlines of this genre are fairly clear for New Spain, where it was the continuation of a production with antecedents at least as far back as the early seventeenth century, centered especially in the local making of paintings on copper (cats. VI-33, VI-43). By the eighteenth century, every major Mexico City artist was producing these small works for close inspection and meditation.⁵⁷ This type of painting existed elsewhere, for example in the work of Manuel Samaniego (1767–1823) in Quito.

The final phase in the history of Latin American colonial painting must be framed within the history of academic neoclassicism. For local painters, the establishment in 1785 of the Royal Academy of San Carlos in Mexico City represented the fulfillment of longstanding ambitions for professional standing and freedom from the guild. Ironically, however, they soon found themselves marginalized by the largest influx of Spanish immigrant artists since the sixteenth century. Formal academies were not founded elsewhere in Latin America, but the new purism was introduced both by immigrant painters, such as Matías Maestro (1766–1835) in Lima, or by local painters looking at foreign models, as they had done for generations.

IN CLOSING

Latin American colonial painting encompasses a huge number of disparate and imperfectly known objects; some are still practically unknown even today, and many of them are in danger of disappearing through destruction, mistreatment, and theft. There certainly is a great need to continue to map works and artists,⁵⁸ and there is no dearth of challenges in all the other areas of research already explored. Two recent approaches, however, seem to offer fresh promise. One is a growing tendency to break out of national boundaries and look for comparisons horizontally, that is, among artistic traditions within Latin America, and in analogous situations elsewhere.⁵⁹ The resulting juxtapositions often suggest new questions. The second is the attention to material and technical studies joined to art historical analysis.⁶⁰ The discoveries of how native and imported materials were combined for particular effects throughout the colonial period, while suggestive of redefinitions of painting, are also beginning to put a new face on the old notion that native traditions are the locus of creativity in colonial Latin American art. In any case, with so many inviting problems and questions, whether we will ever make sense of it all as a whole is cause for celebration rather than concern.

NOTES

1. Toussaint 1965, p. 14.
2. I use this word because of the difficulties with other general terms in parts of Latin America and elsewhere. The problems with terminology are symptomatic of the complexity of the art and of its study.
3. Smith and Wilder 1948, p. 1.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
6. Castedo 1969, p. 11.
7. Phelan 1969.
8. A telling instance, which resulted in the term "Ultrabaroque," is Murillo 1925: *Iglesias de México*, vol. 3, *Tipos Ultrabarrocos*, *Valle de Mexico*.
9. Toussaint 1965, pp. 1–32. Though published posthumously in 1965, this text was essentially finished in 1934.
10. Cossío del Pomar 1928.
11. Angulo Iniguez et al. 1945–56.
12. Pizano Restrepo 1926.
13. Mesa and Gisbert 1956.
14. Maza 1964.
15. Carrillo y Gariel 1966.
16. Bayón et al. 1989, in which the chapter on "Brazilian Colonial Painting" was written by Myriam Ribeiro de Oliveira and Aurea Pereira da Silva; Sebastián López et al. 1992.
17. Toussaint 1965, pp. 20–22; Kubler 1948, chap. 8.
18. Navarro 1991, pp. 26–31. This book, like Toussaint's, was left unpublished at the author's death in 1965.
19. Gisbert 1992, p. 79.
20. Peterson 1993; Escalante 1997.
21. A particularly important native painter in New Spain was Marcos Griego; see Ángeles Jiménez 2004.
22. Vermeulen 1999, pp. 16–19.
23. Mesa 1992, p. 179.
24. Toussaint 1965, p. 37.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 54–62; Ruiz Gomar 2004 "Expressions"; and see Brown 2004, pp. 19–20, for a clear exposition of the stylistic situation in which Perey's moved.
26. Berlin 1958.
27. Palesati and Lepri 1999; Bernardini 2002, pp. 95–98.
28. Francisco Stastny, in *Copper* 1999, pp. 247–50.
29. It seems that his name was actually Medoro Angelini; Palesati and Lepri 1999, pp. 166–67.
30. Sebastián López et al. 1992, part 1, 28:408–20; and the synthetic treatment of this problem by Wuffarden 2004 "Escuelas," p. 81.
31. Sebastián López et al. 1992, part 2, 28:408.
32. Flores Ochoa et al. 1993.
33. Plá 1999; Bailey 1999, pp. 155–164.
34. Bardi et al. 1982, p. 46.
35. Victoria 1994; Ruiz Gomar 1994.
36. Villalobos 1607.
37. Bargellini 2004, pp. 85–86.
38. Serrera 1988; Navarrete Prieto 1999 *Zurbarán*.
39. Wuffarden 2004 "Escuelas," p. 83.
40. Gutiérrez Haces et al. 1997, pp. 40–43.
41. See Ruiz Gomar 1998; and Vergara 1999, pp. 41–45, 80–87, for the Eucharist series and the Prado *Adoration of the Magi*, respectively. I am grateful to Helga von Kügelgen for sharing with me her soon to be published work on this topic.
42. Marchi and Van Miegroet.
43. Balbuena 1963.
44. Wuffarden 2004 "Catedral," p. 274.
45. For example, Silva Santisteban 1989; and Duarte 1998.
46. Sebastián López et al. 1992, part 2, 29: 550–553.
47. Wuffarden 2004 "Catedral," pp. 275–76.
48. Bargellini 1999 "Villalpando."
49. See the essay by Ilona Katzew in this volume.
50. Vargaslugo 1976; and Mujica Pinilla 2001.
51. See Cummins 1996 for a comparison of Cuzco and Lima and their images.
52. My thanks to Karin Hellwig and Helga von Kügelgen for having discussed this question with me.
53. Mues Orts et al. 2001; Bargellini 2004.
54. Katzew 2004; and Wuffarden 1999.
55. Despite all the problems resulting from poor information, Martín Soria seems to have been a pioneer in his notice of the outstanding portraiture of New Spain: Kubler and Soria 1959.
56. Oliveira 1995, pp. 294–96. My thanks to Jens Baumgarten for discussing these works with me.
57. Bargellini 1999.
58. See the considerations of Kaufmann 2004, especially part 3.
59. Two recent collections of essays explicitly point in this direction: Gutiérrez 1995; and García Sáiz and Gutiérrez Haces 2004.
60. Siracusano 2005.