

31. *Casta Paintings* (1785)

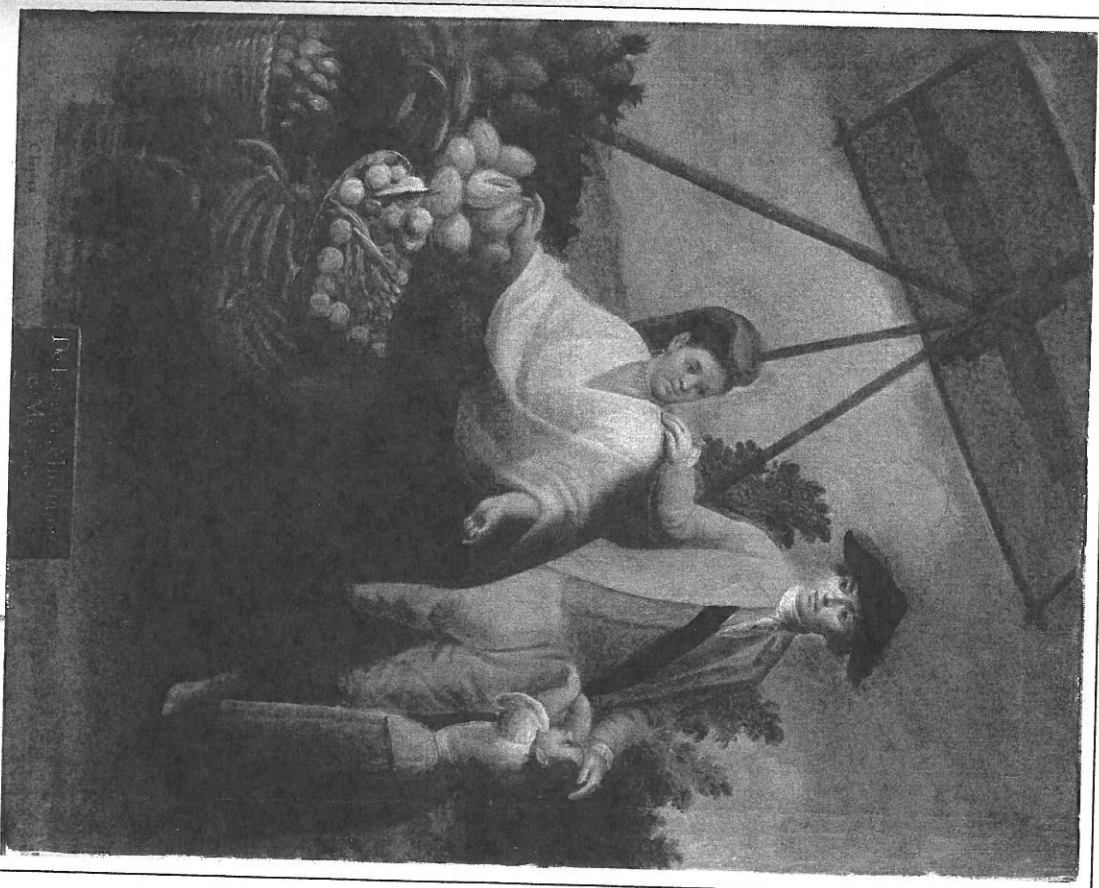


Casta paintings—visual depictions of intercultural mixing—were an artistic genre native to Latin America that emerged during the eighteenth century. Little is known about who commissioned them, but it is clear that they were intended for a predominantly Spanish audience, both *criollo* (American-born) and *peninsular* (Iberian-born); most of the works have resurfaced in Spain. They typically comprised sixteen scenes that recorded the intermixing of Spanish, Indian, and African blood. The offspring of parents of different racial groups are depicted in these carefully labeled family portraits.

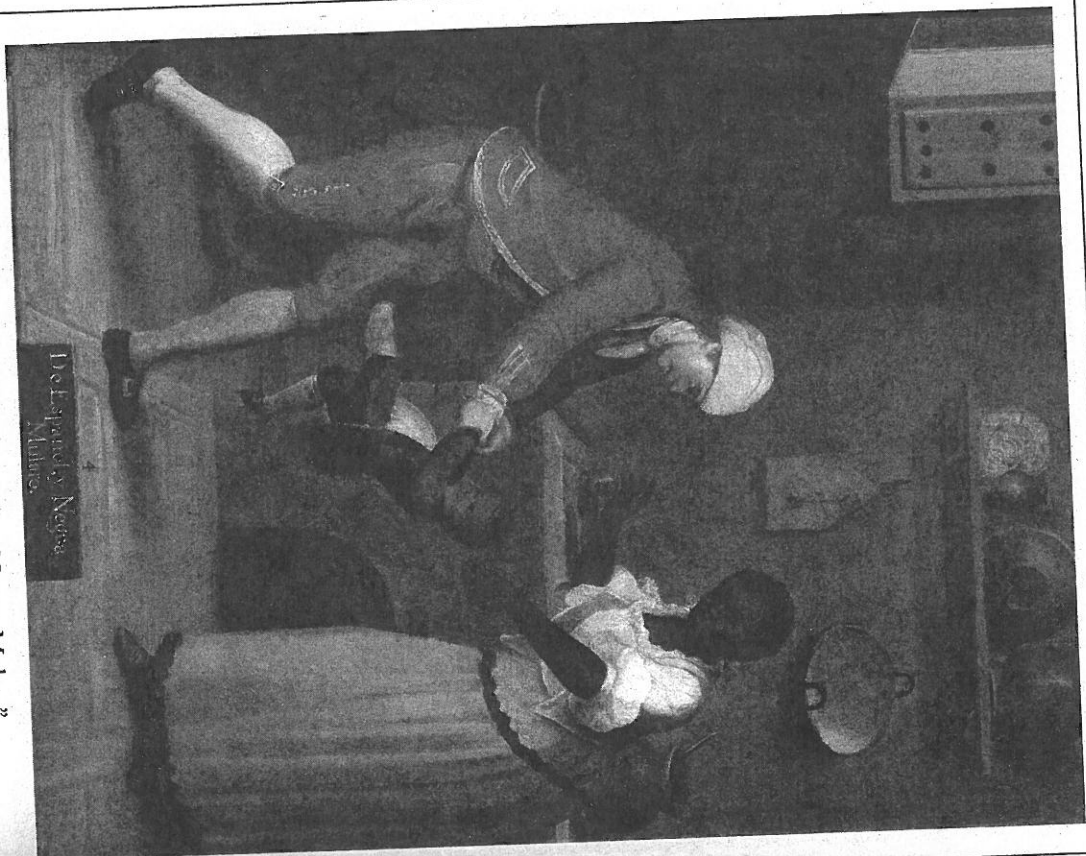
The artist of these two paintings, Francisco Clapera (1746–1810), produced a series of *casta* paintings datable to around 1785. Unlike every other known painter of such works, who were all American-born, Clapera was a Spaniard. He was born in Barcelona, but his career developed in Latin America. At age thirty, he traveled to Peru, then journeyed to Mexico three years later. There he met the Spaniard Jerónimo Antonio Gil, who would found New Spain's art college, the Royal Academy of San Carlos, in 1785. Clapera taught in the academy until at least 1791.

As well as illustrating the implications of race mixing, the pieces included here depict other features typical of the genre, including the celebration of the natural splendor of the New World and the careful recording of the material culture of daily life. In this way, *casta* paintings exemplify one of the central dilemmas that Spaniards in colonial Mexico confronted: racial anxiety about their inferior status vis-à-vis peninsular Spaniards, and at the same time pride in the distinctiveness that their connections to the bounteous New World conferred upon them. These tensions were exacerbated by the growth in the size of New Spain's *casta* population in this era and its increased social mobility.

What conclusions can be drawn about the attitudes about race mixing that these portraits promoted to their viewers? What associations might viewers of these works make with Spaniards, Indians, mestizos, blacks, and mulattos? Why did the artists always label the racial categories of each personage in these paintings? What was the purpose and effect of always depicting the phenomenon of race mixing in familial settings? What role does gender play in these images?



Francisco Clapera, "De Español y India nace Mestiza"
(From *Spaniard and Indian comes Mestiza*), c. 1775
Jan and Frederick Mayer Collection, Denver Art Museum



Francisco Clapera, "De Español, y Negra, Mulato"
(From Spaniard and Black, Mulatto), c. 1775
Jan and Frederick Mayer Collection, Denver Art Museum

Central Themes

Popular culture, gender, race and ethnicity

Suggested Reading

- Carrera, Margali M. *Imagining Identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003.
- Katzew, Ilona. *Casta Painting: Images of Race in Eighteenth-Century Mexico*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004.
- _____. ed. *New World Orders: Casta Painting and Colonial Latin America* (exhibition catalog). New York: Americas Society Art Gallery, 1996.
- Kellogg, Susan. "Depicting Mestizaje: Gendered Images of Ethnorrace in Colonial Mexican Texts." *Journal of Women's History* 12, no. 3 (2000): 69–92.

Images

- Casta Painting, 1777. Ignacio María Barreda. Real Academia Española, Madrid. Available at Vistas: Spanish American Visual Culture 1520–1820, http://www.smith.edu/vistas/vistas_web/gallery/detail/casta-pig_det.htm.
- Olson, Christa Johanna. "Casta Paintings: The Construction and Depiction of Race in Colonial Mexico." Available at: <http://hemi.ps.tsoa.nyu.edu/archive/studentwork/colony/olson/Casta1.htm>.

Related Sources

25. Afro-Mexicans, Mestizos, and Catholicism (1672)

32. Hidalgo's Uprising (1849)*

In 1807 Napoleon invaded Spain and installed his brother, Joseph Bonaparte, as ruler, thus presenting already disgruntled colonials in Spanish America with an opportunity to initiate challenges to colonial rule. On September 16, 1810, Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, a liberal parish priest from Dolores in the intendancy of Guanajuato, initiated Mexico's earliest insurgency with his *Grito*—a cry for independence from the exploitation of colonial rule. Economic grievances and social discrimination prompted the masses to join Hidalgo's movement, but these concerns varied widely from those of wealthier *criollos* (American-born Spaniards), who sought

*Gilbert M. Joseph and Timothy J. Henderson, "Hidalgo and the Siege of Guanajuato," in *The Mexico Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, pp. 173–175, 177–182. © 2002 Duke University Press. All rights reserved. Used by permission of the publisher.