Asociación Internacional de Críticos de Arte.

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FRANCISCO DE MIRANDA
OUR FIRST ART CRITIC

By Rafael Pineda

INTRODUCTION

The merit that Caracas be the host of the Sixteenth Extraordinary Congress and of the Thirtysixth General Assembly of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA), is deserved entirely by the President of the Republic, Dr. Luis Herrera Campins, who, together with UNESCO, is sponsoring this meeting.

"The Congress will be an honor for Venezuela," we were told by the President, when last year we visited him, accompanied by the International President and Secretary General of the AICA, in order to inform him about the idea we had of celebrating here this meeting as part of the Bolívar's Birth Bicentennial celebrations. With that sentence, President Herrera Campins made of the duties of any sponsoring country, a motive of pride for Venezuelan culture, and chiefly for its art critics, who have the responsibility of communicating the public with the plastic or visual arts, and whose procedures are based upon the old axiom saying that four eyes see better than two.

This is the second time the AICA meets in an American country. The first time, twenty years ago, was in Mexico. It is a very timely occasion, if we consider, besides the crucial situation artistic activities are passing through, the historical and socio-economic context which one way or the other has a bearing on a higher or lower degree of creativity. It is because of that, precisely, that the subject of this Congress is about "Perspectives of Latin American art-regional sources and international scope," from pre-Columbian art to the present. In fact the already mentioned two eyes, no matter how keen, are not enough. We shall have to borrow the one hundred eyes or Argus, and I am afraid that would not be enough either. But to see also implies to look under the worst world difficulties.

With the assistance of AICA International, the Venezuelan Chapter undertook the monstruous task--and it is not an exaggeration--of organizing this Congress, in the best possible way. Luckily enough we had the generous cooperation of the following institutions: the Consejo Nacional de la Cultura (CONAC), and the Oficina del Bicentenario del Natalicio del Libertador; FUNDARTE, the Governorship of Caracas, and the Municipal Council of the Federal District.

But we must also acknowledge the enthusiastic cooperation of these persons and institutions, without whose generous help this Congress would not have been possible: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Galería de Arte Nacional (GAN), and its additional space in the Ateneo de Caracas, Asociación Venezolana de Artistas Plásticos (AVAO), Comité Venezolano del Consejo Internacional de Museos (ICOM), Centro Simón Bolívar, Universidad Central de Venezuela, Museo de Bellas Artes, Fábrica de Ron Santa Teresa, Museo de Arte de Maracay, the Government of the State of Aragua, Ateneo de Valencia, the Government of the State of Carabobo,

Asociación de Ganaderos del Estado Carabobo, Asociación de Artes de Fuego, Galería Braulio Salazar of the Carabobo University, Casa Guipuzcoana, Club Camurí Grande, Taller de Artes Gráficas (TAGA), Instituto Autónomo Biblioteca Nacional, Museo de Arte del Hipódromo La Rinconada, Alfredo Boulton, several collectors of the works of Armando Reverón, Museo de Arte Colonial, Arnoldo Zingg, Metro de Caracas, C.A.Nacional Teléfonos de Venezuela (CANTV), Museo de Arte Moderno Jesús Soto, CORPOANDES, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, LAGOVEN, Eventos Nacionales e Internacionales (EVIN), Coromoto Perdomo, Carlos Rivodó, Venezolana Internacional de Aviación (VIASA), Comisión Nacional de Artes Visuales, the Museums, and so many others to whom we are indebted. We have also a great debt with journalists. Several private art galleries decided to present special exhibitions as a homage to this Congress, an initiative that we all fully appreciate.

Notably absent from this Congress will be Giulio Carlo Argan, who is ill in Rome, suffering from male in cuore, in other words, he has had a heart attack. We wish for his prompt recovery. At the last minute, our Russian colleagues, Nikolai Ponomarev, Vladimir Gorianov, Galina Choumiatskaia and Alexandr Rojin, who had promised to attend our meetings, have excused themselves.

On the other hand, the American President of AICA, David Bourdon, has asked the Puertorican delegate, Ernesto Ruiz de la Mata to represent him in this forum.

Some colleagues from Spain, despite all their efforts, were unable to obtain the necessary resources to come to Caracas. Pity.

In contrast, what an army has come from Argentina and the Dominican Republic, France and Belgium, South Ireland and Iraq, Finland and Portugal, Colombia and Brazil! What may have happened with the Nicaraguan delegates? They promised to attend, but at the moment they haven't arrived. Perhaps the reason is precisely the one you are thinking of.

We are also awaiting the Guyana delegation, whose inscription documents, according to a phone-call received yesterday, are on their way to Caracas.
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To all of you, from Venezuela and abroad, a cordial welcome!

Next Thursday, the President of the Republic has decided to have an act, which would make us reflect upon the artists' destiny. On that day, the mortal remains of a painter and writer will be moved to the National Pantheon. They are Martin Tovar y Tovar (1827-1902), whose paintings gave Venezuelan history Olympian dimensions; the other is the writer and antiquary Aristides Rojas (1826-1894), whose great-nephew, the art critic and collector Alfredo Boulton will deliver the address.

And now, I shall read a paper on a subject which you, as acute critics that you are, will judge, which has a special significance for this Congress.

FRANCISCO DE MIRANDA
OUR FIRST ART CRITIC

By Rafael Pineda

Nobody gives credit to eyes or ears. In the case of Francisco de Miranda, the young man of Caracas who, at the end of the seventeenth century, leafs through, one by one, what he called the "Great Book of the Universe," any surmise, no matter how unlikely, is possible. And it should be so, due to his historical and cultural voracity which places him "beyond the hidden corners of his soul," according to Lavater. Furthermore: the famous phisiognomist and theologian who was visited by Miranda in Switzerland, asked him to sit for an unnamed painter, with the purpose of keeping his portrait, now at the Vienna Museum. Says Lavater, "He is a man really made up of a world of men."

But in the very Age of Enlightment, the fact that Nature perfected all its designs in a single person is also a cause of perplexity, within or without the limits of the Encyclopédie. For instance, the Bey of Corinth, whilst overwhelming Miranda with cups of coffee and tobacco pipes, wants to know what is the purpose of so much travelling to all points of the compass. Miranda, who always had a ready answer for everything, told him that he had a letter of credit, the skeleton key for the accustomed grand tour he is carrying out. Allah himself would have felt satisfied with that explanation.

With others, the suspicious ones, Miranda is always a step ahead, even if they try to simulate their suspicions with the twinkling of stars, as was the case of the Prince of Hess who, in Schleswig, Denmark, insisted upon reading his horoscope. Miranda, who is more interested in the Prince's artistic knowledge, disarms him with a Rousseaunian confession --he has already foreseen his own future, which is nothing less than the "old principle" of spending it living in a cabin. Did the Prince felt himself ashamed of the innumerable riches surrounding him? One wonders.

From post to post, under sunshine or snow, along ardous roads, the traveller rolls on with his ever growing collection of books, to which he adds a bouquet of artificial flowers bought in Genoa and, at the slightest change, an engraving, either bought or received as a present, for Miranda, from the very moment of his arrival in Spain, in 1771, is deeply interested in graphic productions, mainly landscapes and maps. The Swiss mountains remind him of the old Spanish road linking Caracas to La Guaira. And talking of La Guaira, we are again reminded of the boring business with customs, as detestable yesterday as they are nowadays, which overflows the patience of a man who has become a travelling library. Some doors are ready open, but in most of them Miranda has to find all kinds of explanations to justify the dynamite a book may be, that is, what appears on the screen of suspicion, the X-ray detector of those times. And if the explanation is not enough, there is always the tip to buy yourself a cup of cocoa.

The lackey Miranda hires, always faithful and stable, the Swede André Fröberg, who will accompany him even in the darkest hours of the French Revolution, looks after the rest --where to stay, in a pension, hotel, palace, or on the bare flee-ridden floor if such is the case, for the sybarite in Miranda was also a man who knew how to adapt himself to the humblest circumstances. Fröberg distributes his master's introductory letters, takes care of his ever more worn-out clothes; and, as customary, the faithful servant has already talked to some "nymph"--the younger the better-- with whom Miranda may celebrate solemn Venusian rites--a subject which makes blush most of his biographers, although it never caused himself the slightest shame to describe the whole thing in full detail in his Diary. Then, the illustrious insatiable philanderer sends his valet to enjoy himself at the Marseilles Carnival, for example, although sometimes he takes him himself to the place of pleasure. Soon the artistic enthusiasm of Miranda's is transmitted to his valet, and then it is the latter who suggests certain places to explore, for instance the Odin stones in the North. But now the strategist, duly authorized, visits also arsenals and forts, or even inspects a company of troops.

Miranda's expectations when approaching each place, whether he knows about it, its people, its history, customs, and things, or not, rigidly follows Dr. Marshall's norms, an Englishman who does not rely on anything else but those things seen and noted down "sur le champ". In Spain, Miranda translated him and kept his work with him as St. Christopher his staff. In brief: never judge the whole after its parts, or what would be worst, do not systematize any of them. You either know the whole, or you will be carried off the logical conclusion, the road to "some general truths." The rest will be done by the "supreme ardor" the traveller puts into anything he does to improve his culture. The great talents who will be his confidents, understand that the "indiano", the first to arrive in Europe, has a supreme goal--to make of himself "a magnum opus," in other words, to obtain what usually can only be obtained through experience and study, i.e., "a full time culture." Since his "tender years," as Miranda writes in an exposition addressed in 1785 to the King of Spain, he had understood that acquiring a culture was his ultimate goal. That is the reason why, on the first opportunity, he puts on the legendary seven-league boots. In him, Europeans rediscovered America, in the words of the Russian author Joseph Grigulievich Lavretsky. Humboldt discovered the other one--America's nature.

The very strange mixture of Miranda's mind-exoticism, reasoning and liberalism, will do the rest. On the other hand, since Nature was particularly generous towards him, and gave him a high stature, it is difficult for him to pass unnoticed anywhere. Ofter, while he is absorbed reading in a library, or studying a cabinet of natural science, or in a palace, museum or gallery, studying architecture, painting, and sculpture, chance puts him on the path of some important person, nobleman or commoner. Usually the chance meeting will lead to an invitation to a salon, to a theatrical representation, to a country-side tour, where he will talk ceaselessly about America. The audiences following him are always generous to him, because he knows how to fascinate them thoroughly.

It is a sort of marvellous aura which surrounds Miranda, which, in part, chiefly after his trip to Russia, and the credentials Catherine the Great gave him, helps to keep him safe from the Spanish lion's paws. His celebrity is so extreme in every activity that his words have the sound of an oracle. It is enough for him to utter one word, and "the Golden Trumpet of Fame" will be heard. It is what Elia Martin, the painter, is waiting for, as he demands an interview from Bath.

Russian popular dances, are they not as lewd as the Spanish fandango or seguidilla? But, listen! The hunting horns, capable of producing the effects of an organ, are already sounding in Jerson. Anyway, the indiano will have heard much Italian opera, much of Gluck, and Moliere. What does he think of Frenchmen as persons? Full of affectation. And what about those strolling players he saw in Asti? The decadence of the Commedia dell'Arte. "But, where shall we leave our Spain?" The Empress arrives followed by her shadow, Potemkin. The banquet is served, there is card playing, the dancing starts. Well, who could have imagined that Miranda, so full of grace and movement, would confess himself incapable of doing the minuet or the contredance? But anyway, Madam, if you insist.... Catherine, without distracting herself from her cards, observes the superb foe of Spain and the Inquisition. She sends him messages, even an orange! And through her ministers she lets him know that he is authorized to wear the cuirassers' uniform; besides, he will receive a pension of 2,500 rubles, and a credential assuring him diplomatic protection from Russia in Sweden, Denmark, Holland, Prussia, Saxony, Austria, and France. If necessary, asylum is granted in any of the Russian embassies. In his passport his name becomes Russified. It is another precaution Catherine takes. Miranda kisses the Empress' hand "for her motherly tenderness" (sic!), in spite of the naughty stories about her, common since those days. Anyway, Miranda has a fixed idea, since he visited the Imperial collection at the Hermitage where "the miracle of invention" is mixed with "pastiches": "how much a single man possesses, and how little the others have!" Finally, farewell, Russia, where Miranda has spent his longest stay, ten whole months, until September 1787.

The pale sunshine of the North, is not compensated by the luminosity of Rubens in Antwerp? Quite incredible: in Stockholm he sees for the first time Winckelmann's book. Miranda keeps on travelling along two routes--where the coach or the ships carry him, and through reading, as he discovers new authors when passing through each city--Rousseau's Confessions and La Nouvelle Héloïse, Erasmus's Praise of Folly, illustrated by Holbein, even Virgil's Georgics. He considers that the climax in Gil Blas is "better observed" than in Don Quixote, whom, on the other hand, the French translator transformed into "admirable" instead of "ingenious." In Dresden, how much Mediterranean light is to be felt in Correggio, and what subtlety in Rembrandt's engravings: ".....his first sketch of Jupiter and Ganimede, when compared to the perfection to which he soon arrived, is astonishing, the one with scarcely any visible design, and the other displaying a most brilliant fancy and masterly execution," as he wrote, originally, in English, in his Diary.

And, what is it now--night or day? Miranda is astonished contemplating Rembrandt's Night Watch, as it was known then the painting now called Sortie of the Banning Cock Company, seen at its former location before it became part of the Rijksmuseum. Continuing his pilgrimage he suddenly discovers a work of lace in stone--Strasburg's cathedral. In Switzerland, another surprise awaits him--Mengs writings which he didn't know either. Miranda faces himself, and exclaims, "Barbarity and ignorance be damned!" He perhaps said the same when, some time later, he saw for the first time Vasari's Lives.

Anyway, Miranda has already developed the clairvoyance of one who, having to find his own way, goes directly to each subject, risky or not, for experience is what matters. And, in art, that acuteness of perception only the trained eye can give. During his tour through the South of France, the schoolchildren of St. Remy's, among olive trees and white mulberries, take him to the Roman ruins, and later on present him with an engraving of the mausoleum. In their small eyes, did he see, perhaps, the similarly curious child that he was in Caracas? It is possible, and soon after, entering Tarascon, he stops to look at the Tarasque, "an animal similar to those made in my country for the Corpus Christi festivities"---a tradition that has disappeared in Caracas.

Eclectic as he was, Miranda soon becomes a sort of cultural sniper, equally stimulated by the amplitude and abundance of sights which appear before him ever since he first arrived in Spain on March 1st, 1771, when he was barely twenty. Travelling to Madrid, via Santa María-Jerez, the young man of Caracas receives the first revelation of European culture in situ--the Roman world. He starts then his Diary, which will fill 63 volumes!, thus writing about the road: "It is a very beautiful cobbled road, with two lovely marble columns at the entrance, crowned by figures of the same material." With this still shapeless language, he starts his European adventure, looking for beauty in plastic images, having as a previous experience only those modest representatives of Spanish baroque art in Caracas--Francisco José de Lerma, Juan Pedro López, and the Schools of the Landaetas. And, as for sculpture, he only was familiar with the wooden carvings in some altar pieces as may be still be seen in St. Francis church in Caracas.

The step from the trivium to the quadrivium was taken by Miranda when he had inscribed himself with his brother in Caracas at the Royal and Pontificial University of Santa Rosa, where they remained for one year, from 1766 to 1767, out of the three normal ones. That is all his cultural baggage. His horizon is clouded with Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas, occasionally pierced by a thunderbolt of experimentalism. This controversy is well reflected in a letter Valverde wrote to Count of San Javier, of which Miranda carried a copy when he left La Guaira for Cadiz. He was mainly interested in Valverde's quotation about the theory of light and colors, as it had been formulated by Newton in Cambridge. "A fact that would seem incredible," added Valverde, "to anyone not knowing that optics, and the whole theory of vision, is explained entirely through lines, and is subject to the rules of Geometry." Miranda also included in his luggage two documents first published by Josefina Rodríguez de Alonso quite recently, which already announced the enclopedic inclinations of young Miranda--one on the possibilities of cacao cultivation, and the other on a method to fix clocks.

While in Spain, all of Miranda's efforts, without abandoning his progress in artistic education, were polarized in the drama to define his status as a servant to the Crown, which was settled when he bought the title of Captain for eight thousand pesos, and his wish to be declared a hidalgo. Miranda paid for both with cacao, and finally with blood. His military mobilization, as the one that took him to the siege of Melilla, is alternated with his vision of the other Spain--Spanish culture in general. Nevertheless, although Miranda's Diary is rather scant in this aspect, it contains some basic information covering Andalousia, Madrid, La Granja, El Escorial, Segovia, and Toledo. He is dazzled with the plafonds by Giordano, Giaquinto, Tiepolo, and Mengs, and has started to examine some northern painters. He calls "Velasquillo" ["Little Velazquez"] the painter of Philip V, perhaps because he is thus called in Madrid. He takes him very seriously. In Madrid, he could admire the Bufón Calabacillas (now at the Cleveland Museum), which he describes in detail. In Lebrija, he saw other five paintings by Velazquez, "worthy works," he writes, and later he will find him again at the Hermitage, "excellent," and in Geneva, but here "without drawing" under the dazzling paint, says Miranda.

Spanish sculptors? Mena, Cano, and inevitably Gutiérrez, the author of the Madrid Cibeles. Near here, at the Museo de Bellas Artes, is being exhibited at present a painting by Goya, lent by El Prado. It is El Quitasol. When Miranda arrived in Spain, Goya was already a rising star, who had started surpassing his master and father-in-law Francisco Bayeu. Miranda identifies the latter, and soon after, "Bayeu Junior," possibly Goya, unless it was one of the brothers of the director of the Santa Barbara Tapestry Works, where Goya worked, already seduced by the colorful aspect of the majos and majas, and acquiring already a personal style quite different from his master's with whom it is easy to be confused at this early stage of his career. Besides the engravers Carmona and Palomino, Miranda mentions also Cano and Olmedilla, who in 1775 did an engraving of a map of South America in eight plates, which was destroyed by royal command. Of this very rare piece, there is a copy, belonging to our Biblioteca Nacional, which is at present being exhibited also at the Museo de Bellas Artes. Miranda saw another one in a private collection in London.

From 1783 to 1784, Miranda is wandering about the eastern coast of the United States, after taking part in the siege of Pensacola, and after having visited Havana and Jamaica. In rural North America, Miranda found only three interesting works of art--one by Salvatore Rosa, at Newport; the portrait gallery by Charles Wilson Peale "which gives light on history and shapes patriotic ideas" in Philadelphia; and the openwork in New England buildings. He considers of "medium quality" Pitt's statue by the Englishman Joseph Hilton, in the Greco-Roman style, which the critic finds "a strange idea." It is in Charleston. In his opportinity he will also be sculpted according to the neo-classical scheme, as it happens in an engraving by the Frenchman Gaucher (Academia de la Historia, Caracas). Miranda plays on the flute on a Sunday, thus scandalizing the Georgetown Quakers. Well, ladies and gentlemen, I'm very sorry, and the instrument goes back to its case. They are the same Quakers who oppose the theater, in Philadelphia, to overcome which, some strolling

players find a stratagem to elude the prohibition--each one of them reads froms a paper on the scene, a resource which would be unearthed almost two centuries afterwards by Charles Laughton. But the sophistic solution fails, and the cast is punished with sticks and fists, while the actresses faint. To recover from this terrible experience, Miranda says that he took "two purgatives."

In those days Washington passed through Philadelphia, and Miranda had the occasion to attend a dinner party in his honor. He found him sad and taciturn. Apparently, the war in the United States was made with home-made weapons, thanks to the gun-makers of Providence, who produced 1200 cannons. But Miranda considers that American industrial future lies in the production of tar, pitch, turpentine, furs, timber, and masts. And this child of nature who is already an expert in sophisticating reality, there being no paintings, he celebrates the rosy cheeks of Quaker girls, whose color rival, he says, those of Rubens and Tizian in Newport.

In the approach to the work of art, Miranda applies a shape-color reading with the technical procedures. In the first case, he distinguishes the importance of the volumetric projection in space, and it is the one he celebrates, for instance, in the Moscow statue of Peter I by Falconet, a monument which, nevertheless, is criticized by him because it shows a certain affectation. Miranda reacts instantly to the intensity of coloring. This is what happens when he contemplates the paintings by the Italians (Leonardo, Raphael, Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto, Correggio, Domenicchino, Guercino, Carracci), and the nordics he so much admired, from Dürer, Brueghel, Luca of Leyden, Holbein, and Van Dyck, passing through Rembrandt and Rubens. Some other soft spots of his? Guido Reni, Claude Lorrain, Teniers, Hoggarth. Enough for Winckelmann to have kept him at a prudent distance.

In his conversations with the artists he met, Miranda inquires about the various techniques, which he studies closely, as the stencilling in the sketch for the School of Athens by Raphael, which "outshines" everything else at the Ambrosian Library in Milan, "the best pictorial composition in existence," and a notable performance if it is considered that the artist used the extremes of his palette. Miranda visits the library several times, to repeat his "visual banquet," but also to see DaVinci's Last Supper, a master of distances, as it can be seen through the frecoe's window, which was already quite deteriorated. Miranda has the opportunity of seeing the camera obscura in full operation, handled by a traveller who is "photographing" the Lauffen waterfall, in Switzerland. The lack of perspective in the placing of the work of art, ruins the interest of the "most enthusiastic" as Miranda is, who, on the other hand, does not know weariness or headaches each time he has to climb more and more stairs until he finds the most favorable vantage point to contemplate cities and landscapes. What an inadequate point of view interferes, from above, the appreciation of the horses of St. Mark in Venice, for instance; and from below, at the Pantheon and Michaelangelo's Moses in Rome. On the other hand, Bernini's St. Theresa becomes volatilized at the adequate height,

"conforted by a nude angel who seems to be looking for something else," adds Miranda, tongue-in-cheek. And, talking about proportions, to study an architectural work, nothing more appropriate than the scale model like the one of Pont-du-Gard which was being made in Nimes by the sculptor de Vaude. In Paris, Miranda visited the atelier of Houdon, who had aready by then his Washington, now at the Capitol of Richmond. But by then the Venezuelan is already involved in the storm of French Revolution, and he just mentions his encounter with the great marble master.

Within and without Italy, Miranda immersed himself thoroughly in his art studies. To study architecture, he started by analysing the plans, whose circularity he appreciated above all things. Later on, he climbs the Pont-du-Gard, walks over it, and takes measurements from one end to the other; among its reliefs he locates a quadruple Priapus which was considered to be a hare! --a perfect example of "Roman audacity and magnificence." But the importance of scale does not lie, necessarily, in monumentality, as it is proved by the Temple of Virile Fortune in Rome, a small delightful masterpiece when compared for instance, with "the very precious antiquity" of the Trajan and Antoninian columns, or with the thermae which were adapted by Michaelangelo in the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli.

In gothic and Baroque art what disconcerts Miranda is the decorative sumptuousness, although in the latter case he rends homage to the masters of Turin, Juvarra and Guarini, and never, in Rome, before Borromini. In Venice, he is enthusiastic about Sansovino, but above all, Palladio, "the most 'imminent' [sic] artist." Miranda, in the Veneto region, goes to the Rotonda: "What proportions, what distribution, what symmetry, what solidity! Long live Palladio!" The Gothic he prefers is the one he calls "uncluttered," like the style of the Frederiksvaerk Cathedral, in Denmark. Contemplating the Sans Souci Trianon in Potsdam by Knobeldsdorf, in Caserta by Vanvitelli, in St. Andrew by Rastrelli in Kiev, Miranda goes from joy to joy. Did you think that Miranda was not a sentimental person, sometimes? Well, yes. He cried before the tomb of Margarette Waldemar in Frederiksvaerk, and at Strasburg, before Marshal Saxe's monument by Pigalle. And that very afternoon he also cried at the theater. Bernini will make him cry with his Fountain of Rivers in Rome, but this time through sheer joy. In Pompeii, he had a feeling of something déja vu when he saw the Mediterranean house, part of which was still lying under lava, for its plan, through Spain, had reached the colonies with the conquerors. On the other hand, he cannot bear the perspective in the paintings, either in Pompeii or in Herculane, all of them surpassed by the famous girl with the stylus on her mouth, now in Naples.

When climbing the Acropolis of Athens, Miranda coincides with the French painter Fauvel, who is drawing the Parthenon, first affected by Venetian guns, and then by Turkish neglect. The same soon will be victim to the horrid mutilations carried out by Lord Elgin. Miranda exclaims before Pericles' dream: "All I have seen until now is worth nothing in comparison!" Canova will say the same, who considered himself in possession of the secret of classic marbles, when seeing the Greek originals. Very soon, also, in the Paris jail, Miranda will meet the architect and critic Quatremere de Quincy, another victim of La Terreur. Finally both will meet again in the underground, and Miranda, remembering the Acropolis, proposes to the French theoretician to write about

a possibility not to be discarded anyway (as it will happen, indeed)--the confiscation of the Italian works of art by Napoleon, many of which Miranda had admired and written about in his Diary.

Continuing his grand tour accross the Mediterranean region, Miranda goes to Turkey. I once went to Istambul having as a baedecker Miranda's Diary. Everything is more or less the same, excepting those buildings destroyed by fire. For some reason, Miranda does not like mosaics, whose oriental splendors he has already "dismissed"--another of his expressions''when visiting St. Mark in Venice. He will also ignore them in Istambul, while visiting the mosques. St. Sophia's dome does not quite convince him due to its "squat" shape. The inside he finds sublime, but he always prefers St. Peter Vatican or St. Paul in London, whose background goes back to Rome and to this Byzantium he is now visiting, all of which, of course, he knows.

Who would have told Miranda that in the furtherst part of his travels, Russia, he would meet two Frenchmen who, globetrotters like himself, had been to Caracas? They were the Count of Ségur, who was in this town in 1783, the very year when Bolivar was born, and the Count De La Mette. They still remember the Aristeguiete girls, and the Arrechederas of Tőcome, "a paradise." Ségur, to frequent Catherine's court as the French Minister he was, dresses himself "in sequins like an opera singer," a frivolity that shocks Miranda, always confident in his own natural elegance. The alliance between France and Spain soon predisposes Ségur against the ever larger favors the Empress and Potemkin bestow upon Miranda; all of which worsens when Charles II's minister, to put a trap to the Venezuelan "creole," challenges him to explain his title of count and other privileges he enjoys. Frightened of "his own shadow," Ségur does not dare now to stand the despising look of Miranda's, invulnerable to the Spanish intrigue, due to Catherine's protection. The Spaniard and the Frenchman, what would not have said, had they been aware that Miranda was leaving Russia, authorized by the Empress, among other things, to use the uniform of a Potemkin cuirasser?

The mentality of Miranda, an ecologist avant la lettre, forecasts our own times with his observations, culminating, for instance, in the taming of nature by the Dutch. When visiting gardens, he feels passionate about this art, in which he prefers the English sinuosities to the Italians' precise symmetry, although Villa d'Este and Caserta are matchless. The art critic has to share his time with the sociologist, always observant from the two extremes. Here in Morborg, Holland, for instance, country people live like their counterparts in Estremadura, sharing their houses with their cattle, perhaps because they want to keep warm during winter with the breathing of bulls and cows. The pre-industrial Europe with its artisans appears, as everything else, in every page of Miranda's Diary. And if it is a matter of emulating the miners of Sweden, Norways, and Denmark, the Venezuelan goes down with them to the dark galleries of iron, silver, and copper. How profitable an idea the seminar on mining in Christiania. In Bern, a certain Madame Karn specializes in the manufacturing of chains, and thus, anti-feminist gentlemen, "women show that they may be useful in more than one way."

Cotton is mechanically carded in Denmark, using animals for driving the machines in Norway, thus cheapening costs. Giving another example of how he could be ahead of his time, Miranda observes with one of his usual and beautiful mataphors: "manufacturing in body and soul" should be where the raw material is produced. And what a treasure would be for Caracas and Buenos Aires if they would imitate that example of Copenhagen, where American cotton is carded, the best, because "its fiber is longer and finer."

About prevailing penitentiary systems, the most daring reformers speak through Miranda's mouth. What horrible methods of torture are applied equally to men, women, and children, if they are not more chastised in their cells through promiscuity and hunger, disease, and vice. Prisoners in fetters sweep the streets of Basel. Those of Genoa ask for alms from the prison windows, and part of this income goes to the jailer's pockets. The orphans of Stockholm learn how to read and write, and in the sporting grounds they have a mast to climb and do all kinds of monkey tricks, through which perhaps the daring and vocation to be sailors will wake up in them. To reconquer their right to live, Amsterdam's prisoners weave hemp and wool. An oratorium takes place at the orphanage in Venice, where the inmates get some money by offering seats to the public. Naples' musical progress is paid through the price of putti castration. The children of Stockholm are very devoted to drawing. After visiting the school for deafs and mutes in Vienna, shall we go on talking about disabled people? And why in Moscow everything is taught in Latin, as if the Russian tongue had not its own expression? No library was overlooked by Miranda, and among the thousands of them he visited, the ambulatory one in Copenhagen was a "very rare example in Europe."

Talavera ceramics "breathes with bad taste," according to Miranda; while, in a few years, the one of Capodimonte has improved. Meisen and Dresden ceramics are "superb," "the best in the world." Nothing, of course, as Brussels for laces and tapestries which can be confused with Rubens and Titian, chiefly those from Van der Borght. The primacy of brocade, velvet, and satin belongs to Lyon, while Moscow is not far behind in solidity and color, but there is still some need for "more correction and taste" in design. The coral factory of Marse employs 340 people, but "they do not care about perfection" in the manufacturing, since it is intended for "moors and blacks." This cracking of bones to be heard in Vienna is produced by the effort of some lady to raise her hand overburdened with so many jewels. It is the cracking of El Dorado which resounds in Miranda's mind when, in Vienna also, he sees the Aztec codex and Cortés' letter to Charles V. To use one of his favorite expressions, "O tempora!"

Miranda's name, as so many others, is inscribed in the Arc of Triomphe in Paris. It remembers his participation in the French Revolution, this former Spaniard turned sans-coulotte, as he tells himself in a letter to Catherine's minister, which means, as it was to be expected, the end of imperial favours. No matter. The new historical situation is not the most adequate to lead

Miranda toward American independence? The Venezuelan contributes to the Prussian defeat in Valmy, and puts a siege around Maestricht; as a commander, he takes Antwerp and finally, Dumouriez, commanding the French troops, is defeated by the Austrians. All this happens between September 1792 and March 1793. Soon after, Miranda will be the victim of another battle front which was opened by Jacobins and Girondins. The Convention has him arrested, and his cause is substantially connected with the distance separating victors from vanquished. He makes his own defense, and the tribunal absolves him. The public behind the bar carry him on their shoulders. But even so, Robespierre has not struck out his name from his black book, and Miranda, together with his books is put to prison again. Later on, he will live in the underground, and finally, in disguise, he will escape to England in 1798. He could not return, for Fouché would capture him. The road to American independence thus starts in London.

But for the cherished project to succeed it is necessary that England puts her weight to work. Miranda also contributes pawning his precious library of six thousand volumes, and finally throws himself into the American adventure. In December 1805, Jefferson receives him in Washington. Then he goes to the Caribbean, to form with volunteers the crew for his three ships. Two of these are captured with more than forty men on board, when trying to capture Puerto Cabello in April 1806. In the third ship Miranda will reach the coast at Vela de Coro on August 2, where for the first time the flag is raised. It had been designed by himself, and it had the three colors, and it would become the national emblem of Venezuela, Colombia, and Ecuador. As for his proclaim of sublevation against Spain, it ellicited no response. On the contrary, his effigy was burned in several places. For the purpose it was used perhaps the anonymous engraving printed in Barbados, now to be seen at the Catholic University, Washington. In the flames the flag is also consumed, for which Miranda, the lover of colors, and fully knowledgeable about them, combined the three primary ones--yellow, representing American gold; blue for the sky; and red representing the blood of men. As his own, the Harbinger of Independence.

When independence was declared in 1810, two young men from Caracas, the humanist Andrés Bello and another young man, Simón Bolívar, who is starting his career, go together to London, looking for England's backing, and looking also for Miranda, who is needed by the new situation. He is a living legend, who arrives in Caracas, at the end of the year, riding a white horse, widely acclaimed. The tragedy of the First Republic will also affect Miranda, and ends with the San Mateo capitulation, in July 1812. Venezuela and Miranda are "blessés au coeur," as he would say in his last expression. But there is another term, "bochinche" [uproar], which Miranda, at the moment of supreme bitterness, pronounces when he sees himself abandoned to his own fate. With the qualification of "monster", the Spanish authorities put him in jail, first in Puerto Cabello, then in Puerto Rico, and lastly in La Carraca, in Cádiz, where he dies on July 14, 1816, and is buried in the common grave. There, "the old soldier started his last watch," as William Spence Robertson says. The other watch is the one each one of us should keep here in America, or all of us will be lost.

I want to propose this "synthesis-man" as Mariano Picón-Salas called Miranda, our first art critics, as honorary president of this Congress of the International Association of Art Critics. If you, who have been patient enough to listen to me, are agreeable, I beg you so to express in the custommary manner.