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AMERICANISMS: THE FAILURE OF COLONIALISM AND NATIONALISM AS CRITICAL CONSTRUCTS

Dale McConathy

Americanisms:
The Failure of Colonialism and Nationalism as Critical Constructs

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I have chosen to discuss a topic that at first glance may seem to have little to do with criticism but rather with cultural or political history. Latin America and the historical or social phases that seem to have produced it--colonialism and nationalism--are pervasive underlying assumptions in our critical discourse. My purpose is to indicate with some degree of scope how little these rubrics have to do with art and indeed how much their repetition has tended to obscure the work of artists to whom they are applied.

Just as Canada is subsumed under North America in the Dewey decimal system, the countries of Central and South America are bracketed under Latin America in the most commonly used index in the libraries of the United States. My assumption is that such a classification is not neutral even in an index and that it reveals a set of mind that extends throughout may other means of sorting information. South America, often blurred as an entity to include Central America, represents a history of ideas that have emerged over a long period of time but always in reference to North America. And yet in spite of their apparent solid grounding in geographical reality, they are both integrally northern designations.

Further, while North America is made up principally of Anglophones, South America is commonly referred to as Latin America in making even more clear that its differentiation was imposed externally to further heighten the distinction between North and South. Using the same tenets, would not North America be more appropriately Anglo-America?

The burden of these ideas is tied up in what are called Latin American Studies although few North American universities deal extensively with Hispanic culture or have scholars involved in the study of Spanish literature or Spanish art. This is not surprising perhaps since the teaching of Romance languages did not begin until the 1870s when French, Spanish, and Italian were first offered at Harvard by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. What is even more telling is the almost total absence of Spain much less colonialist Spain from the study of European history. And more specifically, the non-existence of a major museum or collection devoted to Hispanic culture in the United States. Even more frequently, Latin American studies are an adjunct of economic and political inquiry whose end result is intended to be highly pragmatic.

But history and culture, as Edward Said has so cogently indicated in Orientalism, cannot be understood without the "configuration of power" also being studied. The relationship between North and South America, between Europe and South America, is implicitly understood in terms of superiority, power, and uneasy interdependence. Europe has cast South America in the role of former colonies and to a greater or lesser extent since the fifties as part of the unwieldy agglomeration called the Third World. Europe and North America do not see South America in the same light. Because of its origins in the eighteenth century, North America does not comprehend the revolutions of the nineteenth and twentieth cen-

turies and their legacies. Moreover, North Americans are profoundly troubled by Bolivar's conception of "revolution by export."

Latin America as a cultural idea enters the American consciousness at the time of the Spanish American War, an episode so absurd in its theatricality that it has disturbed American external affairs ever since. Ostensibly, William Randolph Hearst and Teddy Roosevelt intended to throw off the final shackles of Spanish colonial rule in the Western hemisphere. What they succeeded in doing was moving Cuba into the twentieth century subjugated to American business and annexing the Philipines. The "Latin" in Latin America became important because it represented what North America intended to save South America from. The crystallization of this white Anglo-Saxon premise into a cultural idea was appropriately self-serving since it cast all of South America in the same helpless lot and became the basis of much of the later conflicts between North and South.

The concept came to be highly useful since it could be used to rationalize why the United Fruit Company, American Sugar Refining Company, and later Standard Oil were necessary to move the Latin American natives out of their archaic agricultural economy into the world marketplace. In turn, the mercantile missionary efforts of the North Americans helped to produce banana republics that represented not so much the results of the exploitative nature of North American business enterprise as the faults in Latin American character. O. Henry's novel Of Cabbages and Kings is an orchestration of these imperialist themes.

But mañana, the philosophical position supposedly inherent in South American life with its implications of laziness, greed, and stupidity, should not be taken as an empty projection of those who were in many instances lazy, greedy, and stupid. Mañana and the myth of Latin America it represents cannot be dispelled as so many lies or the propagandistic rationalization of exploitation. These and similar ideas have become the received wisdom about the Other Americas--knowledge that is promulgated and acted upon. New knowledge that is acquired does not shake this system of ideas but is re-interpreted to fit the system. Our cultural ideas and our cultural judgments are part of that system.

Let me make it quite clear at this point that I am not talking about a sort of delusionism that exists only north of the border between the United States and Mexico. Rather, these ideas are ones that we both participate in--with the understanding that North Americans are inevitably opposed to South Americans and that distinctions such as Latin American or Hispanic American can form the basis for discourse or that such distinctions are useful in making critical judgments.

Again, and Said's observations about Orientalism are immensely helpful here, we must recognize that this social, political, and cultural bracketing of South America serves to perpetuate a "positional superiority"--Said's phrase--from which both sides take their lead. On the one hand, Said points out that an extraordinary formal structure was imposed on the foundations of the simplistic opposition of East and West:

> Under the general heading of knowledge of the Orient, and within the hegemony over the Orient during the period from the end of the eighteenth century, there emerged a complex Orient suitable for study in

> the academy, for display in the museums, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial and historical theses about mankind and the universe, for instances of economic and sociological theories of development, revolution, cultural personality, national or religious character. (Said, p. 7)

This of course suggests precisely the model of Latin America on which President Reagan is acting. Because South America is inferior--does not know what it is doing--it must be corrected along North American lines.

Said sees Orientalism as far more than a structure of misinformation, an idea "shot through with doctrines of European superiority, various kinds of racism, imperialism and the like, dogmatic views of 'the Orient' as a kind of ideal and unchanging abstraction":

> Additionally, the imaginative examination of things Oriental was based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged, first according to general ideas about who or what was an Oriental, then according to a detailed logic governed not only simply by empirical reality, but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections. (Said, p. 8)

The imagination of Latin America, its image, is something each of us has collaborated in creating, the sum of our individual statements and our acquiecence in overriding but significantly unquestioned and unanalyzed sovereignity. Thus, our desires, our repressions, our investments and our projections have perpetuated a received wisdom that of necessity speaks of art but not of artists.

Just as Latin American art conceals the work of the very artists who supposedly have produced it, "colonial and national" are no more effective as terms of critical discourse than is "Latin American." Yet, these are the generalizations with which we must deal if we are to identify and understand the individual even in its most troubling and overpowering immediate circumstance, what Said identifies as the "by no means passive or merely dictatorial, general and hegemonic context."

I

What is crucial however is that we do not view this context as existing in some intellectual realm--on paper and in books--that does not impinge on everyday life. The idea of Latin America we have briefly just explored has its own energy and, if current events are to be taken into account, its own agenda. But we are not interested here in the larger life of the idea although it certainly permeates all of what we are about to discuss but rather the reflection of that idea--its shadow-life or mirror image--in critical judgment. Yet, even this is not a neutral area of consideration, since critical judgment inevitably must proceed from the politics and economics of art.

I am often asked particularly by South American students why Latin American art is so badly received in America [sic]. The question is forthright

enough although perhaps in light of the assumptions we have just underlined it might be better stated as why are South Americans so badly received in North America. The answer to both questions is complex.

Little Latin American art is shown in the United States--little contemporary art when compared to Italy and West Germany, the leading stylistic innovators of the movement, or to France, the traditional model for the United States. Latin American artists are shown mainly in Latin American galleries, galleries that are carefully identified and carefully avoided. Yet, in spite of this circumstance, Latin American art is one of the areas that has shown the most rapid growth at auction, not at international auction, but at auctions in New York and Miami. If the list of buyers is reviewed, the great preponderance are not North American but South American. South American money is buying Latin American art.

In the general scheme of things, this is not unusual. Art collectors in the United States, certainly collectors of contemporary art, buy works by the artists of the United States or more bluntly New York. South American writers, however, have moved to the center of the cultural arena. Even though the United States sinks closer and closer to the bottom of the top ten of nations in terms of translation from a foreign language, certain South American writers are regularly translated. They are consulted as oracles of the future by the New York Times Magazine and other serious, albeit middlebrow American publications. As with Gabriel Garcia Marquez and One Hundred Years of Solitude, a stand-out continuing bestseller, their verbal vision of South America--the collision of the remnants of colonialism and volatile nationalism, the splitting effects of tri-culturalism--seem to suit the preconceptions of Latin America, particularly in North America.

One South American writer was transposed almost immediately into the North American pantheon from the first translations of his poetry by the University of Texas Press to his first appearance in the New Yorker. Jorge Luis Borges in his first North American lecture tours emphasized his debt to writers in English, especially Edgar Allen Poe. That his mother read him Walt Whitman virtually in the cradle only heightened the Anglo-Saxon appeal of his legend. For North Americans, this relic of Paris in the twenties, a linguistic dandy and spiritual exile along the lines of Joyce, Nabokov, and Beckett was most appealing. He had left Argentina to become civilized and once again to become famous.

Thus, while the visual arts of South America have become eclipsed in the past three decades, the literary ones have not. Fifty years ago, the reverse was almost certainly true. The first tentative explorations of South American art began in the twenties where American artists such as Georgia O'Keefe and Marsden Hartley pointed the way with their visits to New Mexico, opening the way for others to seek out Mexican artists and to sample the various revolutionary experiments going on there in the arts. Projects such as Paul Strand's film The Wave and his later portfolio underlined the radical innocence of the Mexican people and reinforced the assumptions of North American political and economic superiority.

Orozco and Riviera were introduced in an important way to the New York art world by Nelson Rockefeller, whose mother had been one of the founders of the Museum of Modern Art. Rockefeller, one of the first to espouse the

Good Neighbor Policy, saw great potential in the economic development of South America and he became an expert on South American culture, even learning to speak Spanish. As manager of the Rockefeller Center, he asked both Orozco and Riviera to contribute murals as decorations for one of the vast lobbies. He admired their broad grasp of history and their efforts to depict the Mexican people as a race but he was affronted by the Marxist element in their work. His efforts to suppress the murals is an outstanding example of twentieth century censorship but the traps inherent in corporate support of the arts. Rockefeller, even after the extended public embarrassment of his fight with Orazco and Riviera, continue to collect Latin American art and was a prime mover in the collections put together by the Museum of Modern Art and the series of influential exhibitions that grew out of it.

South American art is no longer a chief interest of the Museum of Modern Art. Rumor has it, unconfirmed by the museum staff who refuse to comment on it, that the museum's collection of Latin American art has been given to the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, Texas. The Austin center has become the chief source for information and exhibitions about South American culture--the only such authoritative source in North America. With the deaths of many in Nelson Rockefeller's generation, the Center for Inter-American Relations, generously aided in the past by Rockefeller money, has faltered badly. Few of its exhibitions were of high enough quality to warrant wide public interest. The Pan-American Union in Washington, D.C. long ago ceased to play a decisive role in disseminating South American culture.

Other more recent events are more evocative of the current status of South American art. Mayor Thomas Bradley of Los Angeles place a cultural surtax on a large building development in what had been a Spanish-speaking enclave in the center of that city. Enough funds were generated to build a major museum and the board appointed by the mayor debated what sort of a museum should be erected. City planners and arts consultants after surveying the West Coast proposed that a facility dedicated to Hispanic culture would serve an important purpose--providing a sense of the contribution of Spanish people to North American life and giving a focus for the burgeoning Hispanic community. Their recommendation was turned down and a highly controversial museum of contemporary art will open shortly to take its place.

South American art is virtually not shown in North America. The history of South American art is not taught nor are there examples that can be readily seen and examined.

In her fictionalized account of the nineteenth century career of the Bishop of Santa Fe, Willa Cather describes how the French Bishop Lamy who was sent to head the vast diocese of New Mexico was troubled and frightened by the elements of the Indian religion that had been tolerated by the Spanish missionaries and he set out to destroy the last vestiges of Spanish baroque grandeur by building an austere Romanesque cathedral.

This parable of taste is not isolated in its effects. Colonialism and nationalism have been the countermanding polarities in North American cultural development as well. The Museum of Modern Art was going to be devoted to French masters, Alfred Barr the founding director said, because

he wanted to show American artists what real art was. North American art, the New York School, only entered the mainstream after the international style had been appropriated as an antidote to American regionalist painting. Abstract expressionism was an indigenous style simply because North American painters didn't have to leave home to acquire it--European exiles brought it with them. "I'm American painter," Barnett Newman would say. "I don't need Europe." But that was before his paintings began to sell in the European market.

II

Such chauvinism carried to its logical extremes make the conventional distinctions between high and low art; fine and applied art extremely difficult. In part, Newman was countering the sort of elitism that had caused Barr to champion French art over the art he saw being produced in the United States during the twenties. Barr was not only protecting the collections of the rich patrons who had formed the Modern but he was also espousing a model for artists to follow if they were to be admitted to the Modern. In a little less than twenty years his formulation had taken effect through the influence of the influx of Surrealists, largely French, who served to wean the regionalists away from American to international themes.

Cultural nationalism had of course played a significant role in Western civilization since the early nineteenth century as linguistic groups began to self-consciously examine their heritages. These perceptions became politicized as wave after wave of revolution swept Europe and South America. The crucial questions in the visual arts became whether the persisting folk expression was not a more true reflections of the people than the fine arts tradition imported from Western Europe. This became a central issue in the Russian cultural crisis and reached its ultimate statement in Tolstoi's What Is Art?

For both the Americas, the question of a visual arts tradition was not so easily stated. Indian art might have a clear source of inspiration but both the Protestant and Catholic churches had condemned the Indian's work as inspired by the Devil and use their non-materialistic pantheism as a weapon in almost four centuries of genocide. Motifs were borrowed from the early settlers but the acceptance of folk art was long in coming in both North and South America and then most generally under the heading of "colonial art."

Nineteenth century historicism and the concommitant archeological discoveries and re-invention of the past did much to popularize pre-Columbian art and architecture but after much fabulistic conjecture. North American Indian mounds were though to belong to the tenth lost tribe of Israel and visions of El Dorado persisted and still persist in the search for gold and other treasure in jungle-clogged ruins.

Much of that early speculation which fed directly into the formation of anthropology was that view that primitive peoples were fossilized cultures with much field work devoted to proving that assumption. While anthropologists such as Malinowski and Boas quickly moved away from that position, Latin America was seen as the archaic past on hold except for an overlay of colonial aristocracy who upheld Western European values.

In fact, such assumptions continue to be so widespread even in intellectual circles that a book claiming that the Aztecs were cannibals because of protein shortages in their diet has provoked ongoing debate. Headhunters, poisoned arrows, and cannibalism are part of the mythology of the opening of the Amazon jungle to superhighways. Cannibalism is of course one of the great bugaboos of the reports left us by missionaries in both North and South America: They never saw anybody being eaten but the tribe in the next village always claimed that their enemy tribe, the worst barbarians, would stop at nothing including eating human flesh.

Such views have produced a fast market for Pre-Hispanic items from South America--from shrunken heads to pre-Columbian artifacts, both categories not so artfully faked. These specimens of the archaic are visual evidence that the phenomenon of Latin America that I earlier sketched in. And North and South American museology does much to support these prejudices, from the Metropolitan Museum of Art's so-called primitive wing to the Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City that treats the Indian material culture it contains not so much as the product of specific societies and technologies, the result of the complex economic and cultural systems that Levi-Strauss analyzed in the Brazilian jungles, but as miraculous artifacts rescued by the scientist from ruin.

No wonder a Venezuelan artist once berated me for comparing the accomplishment of the Olmecs, Aztecs and Mayans to Greece and Rome. The Caribbean is our Mediterranean, I had said. Never, he answered. Where was the literature and philosophy?

Nevertheless, I take those faked artifacts from a faked past more out of novels and movies than history, to be the real trade in Latin American art. They provide the measure of a myth that inhabits every level of cultural exchange from postcards and key chains to exhibitions of Peruvian gold at the American Museum of Natural History. Unless Latin American art bears the stamp of the folkloric, the low art of the nineteenth century, it has small chance of being consumed. There is relatively little difference in the emotion involved between the thousands of paintings of wide-eyed Mexican children that are available in factory outlet galleries in large cities on both coasts of North America and the more limited number of Zuniga stoical Indian women wrapped in blankets that stand incongruously in front of an expensive Park Avenue apartment house or fill the windows of a Madison Avenue gallery. The real difference is price: the buyer is willing to pay to experience such sorrow and such pity.

There was an element of the same superiority in the fame accorded Orozco and Rivera. They had tapped the folk spirit but they had also given it a grandeur and arrogance that superseded any desires for domination. Not so with the work of Rufino Tamayo whose use of folk motifs made his paintings vastly successful in the forties. His themes were blatant but he was also clever enough to give his images an edge that kept them from being bland or banal. His skill as a painter also prevented his repetitions use of subject matter from slipping over into the expected and he early on learned from advertising the reassuring virtues of the trademark.

Tamayo also recognized the poetics of the myth of the archaic that had become grounded in the North American perception of Latin America. He

dealt in easy oppositions--the pleasure principle of the watermelon juxtaposed with the stern Protestant otherworldliness of his North American audience and the howling dogs of the Day of Death in the midst of a sterile death-denying society. The ubiquity of these symbols is not as evident I believe as when the paintings were first seen. Malcolm Lowry's novel Under the Volcano, a product of the same epoch, is evidence of their familiarity.

That Tamayo understood the thrust of the cultural ideology in which he worked is manifest in the museum opened in his name in Mexico City. The collection is clearly and self-evidently the result of trading his work with the artists he knew and met during his years of international success. The collection is faceless in the sense that there is no indication of a controlling sensibility in its formation--Tamayo is absent. But the collection is also faceless in its opportunism--Tamayo was apparently unable to distinguish among his peers who or what was worthwhile, of lasting distinction or value. In answering the demands of the art public, Tamayo as an identity lost himself and what we have are the remains of a career but not of a body of work, his own work.

Out of this issue of identity all the other issues surrounding South American art proceed. As much as I dislike talking about art, let us continue a bit further in our exploration of this generalization. Recently, after a lecture, a woman who thought of herself as a collector asked me what sort of art was being done in the Caribbean. Tourist art, I said, using shorthand for the discussion we have just had. But surely, there are artists who are doing something more. You asked about art, I said. Now, artists are something else.

III

The perception of Latin America, as the shadow of North America, has become a dominant mode of sorts in North American psychology, reflected in issues of masculinity and femininity, in judgments of character, in food and dress, in doubles and mirror-images. I often think of the small Mexican hidden by his enormous sombrero asleep under a palm tree, a favorite motif on the cheap crockery of the forties, or a Carmen Miranda, a zany goddess of fortune who used English badly but who was very funny.

Out of these juxtapositions between the hardworking North and the pleasure-loving South comes a critical concern: North American music may be "rhythmic," even "syncopated," but it is never "passionate." North American drama may be "serious" or "profound" but never "elemental." North American comedy may be "slapstick" but never "childish" or "silly." North American dance may be "visceral" but never "raw" and "uncontrolled." North American sculpture may be "earthy" or "immediate" but never "primitive." North American painting may be "experimental" but never "chaotic." The vocabulary is a series of contrasts picked up from a fast reading of New York newspapers over a month's time during the peak of the cultural season--reviews that might have appeared side-by-side in the same newspaper.

Such an unscientific selection proves nothing except how impoverished the word choice of most day-to-day newspaper critics is. But a random scan-

ning of the coverage of South American cultural events brings into bold relief the stereotypes and pre-judgments that are tied into the North American vision of what is Latin American.

In the sixties, the makers of cultural policy decided that along with fair employment practices and the move toward the integration of social institutions that public museums should represent the interests of all of their constituencies including minorities. That attitude was considerably reinforced by the students' call for decentralization in France. What resulted in New York and have survived on an ongoing basis are a series of museums and galleries in the boroughs or in specific ethnic enclaves. The disposition of these satellites to major institutions is of great significance to our topic. The Studio Museum was begun in Harlem with a sort of Kunsthalle format to encourage the introduction and professional growth of Black artists. On the East Side, a Museo del Barrio was opened that was not directly aimed at the work of Hispanic artists but hoped to feature the life of the "neightborhood," the euphemistic translation of Barrio. The Studio Museum has managed to achieve a fairly high level of acceptance and professionalism. The Museo del Barrio remains a huge, largely empty hulk of a building--disdained because of its Puerto Rican connections and misunderstood by younger Hispanic artist who are not aware of its original mission.

What then is the status of South American art in the capital of the art world if the press echoes the received ideas that surround the South American phenomenon, and the supposedly relevant institutions from the Museum of Modern Art to the Museo del Barrio afford no effective channels for seeing or integrating what is being done "down there?"

Perhaps, it is wise here to consider the exceptional success of Fernando Botero--exceptional because it has so overshadowed the work of every other South American artist in the United States. Botero, indeed, is one of the few painters of worldwide reputation whose images are readily identified. A Botero is immediately recognized everywhere. From postcards to posters, Botero is sought out. His work makes a statement that immediately appeals to the superior position of the North American. He has found a visual equivalent for <u>mañana</u> but a visual equivalent that is of great psychological density and complexity. His subjects are not fat. They are generalized and inflated, a burlesque of babies costumed as adults. They have none of the sags, folds, or creases that might shock or alarm. Their soft edges and rounded features do not distract as a character study might. They are appealing and amusing as illustrations for a children's book are. As illustrations, they succeed. As illustrations, they remain.

North Americans have recognized this quality and exploited it. Earlier on, Botero's might illustrate a <u>Vogue</u> article on how to lose weight. Later, after Botero had begun to command impressive prices, his work would illustrate Garcia Marquez in the newly revived <u>Vanity Fair</u>. Both artist and author well suited to the North American projection of what life is in South America.

Botero's subjects are not only like inflated children. They also seem to be playing at the roles in which they are depicted. They may be dressed as the clergy or the military or in morning coat with top hat but strip the facade away and there is the self-indulgent baby flesh that is their

common denominator. Botero's eye is undermining because it refuses to take adult society seriously, seeks out the soft center of things even at the heart of social structure.

Consciously or not, Botero has recognized the lines of force at work in the dichotomy between North and South America and understood the doubling and shadow-play inherent in the art and literature of the two opposing but interlinked cultures. What he provides--and I believe this is at the core of his success--is a shadow that is only subliminally disturbing, a shadow stripped of apparent desire and greed, an image that reassures the dominant and exploitative culture that not only are they right but that their victim has always been ripe for the plucking. Botero has constructed a psychological trap of great cunning because it exploits the exploiters, indulges the worst aspects of North American superiority in a guiltless and humorous way. Perhaps, when this insidious and noble insult is finally comprehended in its full force, Botero's success will fade. Or the mirror will be shattered.

IV

Botero's smiling irony comes from his view from both perspectives of the Latin American mirage. Now comes the moment to consider the other side of the phenomenon: How South American artists have dealt with the dilemma of having an identity imposed on their work from without, of working inside a culture created under great pressure by external social and economic forces over which until fairly recently they have had no control.

Revolutionary movements from both the right and the left in this century have made wide use of the arts to coalesce national identity and to provide impetus for their various program. In this sense, there is no significant objective contrast between the purpose that produced the Mexican murals in Federal buildings, the Nazi monuments to German manhood and womanhood, Cuban pageants or art factories in the China of today. All of these artistic expressions were intended to supply a common historic experience for a vast segment of the world's population that until this century were nameless and faceless. The previous history of great men would no longer serve the emergence of the masses. Even in the United States, for example, with its two hundred year-old democratic form of government, two-thirds of the population were disenfranchised until Roosevelt's presidency. The media provided an art form for the masses.

Indeed, nations as we know them did not begin to emerge until the nineteenth century was well underway. The interest in language, folk lore and folk art anticipated nationalism and inevitably formed the basis for national collections--a statement not only of cultural independence but also an indictment of institutions formed along imperialist lines. A major part of the liberalist creed everywhere was national integrity and that became the basis for the majority of the wars and revolutions fought in this century.

This excursion in history is necessary because the phenomenon of Latin America, the sum of perceptions North and South, propelled into more extreme positions the question of national identity in South America. To be Bolivian or Colombian or Peruvian was self-evidently one way of opposing the blanket definition of the Latin American. Or was it? Artists, as

we shall see, were particularly tormented by these distinctions. If art is universal, or even international, is there national art or even Latin American art? for the cultural bureaucrat and those involved in the system, the answer was yes. Art, after all, was the source of national identity.

Artists, individual artists, when they heard these slogans were told they were choosing either to serve their country or to serve themselves. If they were political activists, they were part of the new order. If they followed only their own careers, they were part of the old, decadent order.

Of course, in the West, only in France have either artists or intellectuals had much to say about politics or government. In North and South America, artists have remained largely marginal. At times, if the dealers and collectors were fortunate, their work might bring large prices but that was usually long after the work had left the artist's hands and value had accrued by sale and re-sale.

Generation after generation of artists have found they were better off to migrate, to find their way to cities where the art market was large enough to accommodate large numbers of creative people and where there was enough money to support the culture industry, cities where they could study, learn and have access to information.

The paradigmatic example of this pattern, perhaps historically the most important artist to be produced in either North or South America, is Camille Pissarro. His work has been so thoroughly absorbed into the history of Impressionism and post-Impressionism that no one cares where he was born. He is indubitably French.

But Pissarro is paradigmatic for more than one reason. He was marginal in every sense of the word--the son of a Jewish storekeeper whose family migrated throughout the Caribbean. Pissarro was rootless and because he was rootless every destination along his route to Paris did not leave his mark. His destiny was to be an artist and the place of his birth was negligible in its significance to his formation. Thus, his childhood and youth in the Caribbean, his nearly two years in and around Caracas, the sum of his years seem to have left no mark on his later output.

What does seem to have marked him is his perception of his marginality and his ability to empathize with others. He was considered a radical among the artists of his time but there is a sense of conscience and understanding that softens and humanizes his stance. His paintings of peasants and the onslaughts of industrialization on the landscape are filled with an atmosphere of lost wholeness, a fall from beauty. Capitalism and materialism are the enemy because they threaten the fragile integrity of the individual who easily is ground under by the machinery of society and the demands of the economy. These are insights that must have come from Pissarro's position as an outsider but they are also the insights of someone who has come from a world on the wane, a world poised on the brink of industrialization and capitalist exploitation.

Was Pissarro a South American artist? Art history has subscribed him on the list of avant garde French artists. Or perhaps, more to the point,

was there something intrinsically South American in his vision? That question can be seen in one of two ways: Was his mind imprinted with some entity that later stamped everything he saw? Is there a coherent South American vision? On the other hand, is there some genetic pool that make South Americans see in a different way? The answers to both these questions should give us pause.

Moreover, what did Pissarro find in French sunlight and landscape that he did not find in the Caribbean? Surely, sunsets are more spectacular and colors more vivid in the Caribbean--subjects more exotic. But our pursuit is circular. Why did Pissarro leave South America? No one answer is conclusive but certainly one answer is convincing: His work.

If we jump ahead a century, other aspects of this problem emerge. When is art Latin American and when is it art? The career of Soto is a complex of forces at work in South American culture since the war. Soto to left Venezuela but he returned to reap the benefits of the reputation he had made elsewhere. Soto was an international artist before he chose to become a Latin American artist. He had identified the source of power outside the limits of South America. He understood that if he were to transform himself; if he were to achieve the ultimate deracination, he had to obliterate himself and his identity in a force so large that the force itself would contend with the image that the Latin American phenomenon had placed in the work of artists in South America.

His exile from the weight of these cultural stereotypes involved the steady appropriation of an international style, an immersion in abstraction so complete that his origins were wiped clean. His conversion was not unlike many of the other conversions that took place after World War II--ideologies replacing religion. What Soto found in his Paris was a sanction for a life cut free from the past--a slangy popularization of Existentialism. He found himself among artists who were infatuated with the new materials of industry. Because of their cleverness and mastery of technology, they were more inventors than artists in the conventional sense. The Groupe de Recherche Visuelle that showed at the Denise Renée Galerie included disaffected engineers and would-be scientists who had dropped out of the establishment. Where Soto was from didn't matter. They relished his sense of design and his ability to see plastics and industrial materials with a new eye. Soto was quickly absorbed.

Soto had found an excellent counterpart in Denise Renée. She to was an outsider to the Paris art world. A former furrier, she had the cash to stand the traditional collectors on their head with her stable of new artists and she understood the value of publicity. The work in the gallery caught on and eventually some of her artists became known throughout the world--Victor Vasarely a veritable industry in himself. Soto profited from the association not just because of Denise Renée's prowess as a dealer but because the other artists in the gallery helped to provide a context for what he was doing. Anywhere else, what he was doing might have appeared glib or simply decorative. In contrast to what else was going on in Paris, Soto seemed to have hit on an artistically viable bridge between the School of Paris and the latest breakthroughs in technologies. After all, he too was experimenting with light, color, and movement.

The sixties were boom years for new art. Paris, London, and New York were clearing houses for a generation that had seemingly broken with the past. Internationalism, particularly abstract art, was in rapid eclipse. The emphasis on French art as opposed to British art as opposed to North American art put Soto in an uncomfortable position. He was international but he was not French.

The petroleum industry came to his aid. Venezuelan oil and the consumer economy that resulted made it possible for Soto once again to become comfortably Venezuelan. His reputation had been made outside, his stock was high and a new national identity was being forged. Soto was politically neutral, he had the backing of one of Venezuela's most aristocratic critics and his message was safely abstract--excellent ingredients for public works of art.

Soto became re-Latinized but he also kept his contacts outside. Petro dollars had legitimatized his return and petro dollars helped to fuel his career outside. Soto also had the good fortune to be Latin American at a time when international diplomacy and backing needed to showcase Latin Americans. As a result, exhibitions such as the retrospective at the Guggenheim in New York, one of the last major exhibitions given a Latin American in the United States, seemed to bury his reputation. The international style was dead; abstraction outmoded and his work indecipherable in stereotypical Latin American terms.

Soto's career, his circumscribed achievement as an artist, is some indication of how deeply the ambivalence about Latin American identity has invaded the thinking and work of the individual. Soto's excape from this ideology, not unlike Stephen Dedalus' flight from the tyranny of Ireland and Irish culture, led to his subjecting himself to yet another social and intellectual structure that on the surface gave him greater freedom. Constructivism was not however a salvation. The art market forced his return to Venezuela and his apotheosis as the quintessential Latin American artist.

This crisis of values which has darkened the careers of two generations of artists makes Belgica Rodriquez's book Arte Constructivo en Venezuela all the more valuable. For many, abstraction became an internal exile, a way of remaining true to themselves while resisting the twin forces of nationalism and the monolithic phenomenon of Latin Americanism. Perhaps, the time is not yet right but surely the story of what this resistance meant and its unrecognized influence on their art must be one of the most revealing statements of this century. Abstract art has played a highly ambiguous role as a style. Totalitarian regimes and the Roman Catholic Church have opposed it. Nelson Rockefeller has praised it as the highest expression of individuality. But for some, abstraction must have offered a means for remaining silent, a protest against the use of cultural force from above, from without and within.

Other artists, nonetheless, have taken a quite different tack than Soto on the subject of national identity. Marisol, one of the early leaders in the American Pop movement, preferred to present herself as a sort of international aristocrat, Venezuelan in origin but bred in Paris and savvy enough to survive in the Manhattan art world. The references in her work have been mainly autobiographical in a keenly personal way but recently

she has turned to more public themes, including a polychrome wood statue of Simon Bolivar. Last year, the National Art Gallery of Venezuela set out to acquire one of her works, a bill of sale was drawn up but at the last minute the artist intervened to stop the sale. She did not want to be represented in an exclusively Venezuelan collection. Why? The answer lies, I believe, in the issues we've been discussing.

Finally, this question of national identity and art must be seen from the perspective of politics and the economy. Art has been used in the past by nationalism as a basic tool for forging the national identity. Inevitably, art is pre-empted by the government as a means of national development. To gain some insight into how this works, let's step aside for a moment from our consideration of the Latin American phenomenon to see how this manipulation of art and artists has worked in Canada. Canadian art has been less successful in the United States than Latin American art and for many of the same reasons. In the past two decades, Canada has struggled more and more forcibly with the hegemony of "American" culture.

Canadian government represents a form of socialism far more advanced than any other country in the Western hemisphere and as a result artists are provided a remarkable range of benefits and assistance. Because there are few museums and commercial galleries, the government has sought not only to give the artists more opportunities for being viewed and even to support their work through purchase. The Art Bank, begun about a decade ago, purchases work at prime prices to be rented to decorate Federal offices. Because there are few collectors and virtually no market, the government has become the sole patron of Canadian art. This circumstance has become exacerbated by a growing nationalist movement that among many artists has been fairly effective in helping out foreign work and foreign artists. In addition, the isolationism has been exaggerated by the refusal of the cultural bureaucracy to sponsor exhibition outside Canada. The major government supported art magazine was censured because of lack of Canadian content and articles on foreign artists such as Miro and Picasso. In Canada, more and more artists are directly or indirectly working for the government. The Canadian sense of inferiority, the inability to win attention on the international art market by individual Canadian artists, has forced a withdrawal from the international scene--rationalized by the requirements of national identity.

V

The examples of Soto and Marisol are an indication of the pervasiveness of the idea of Latin America as both an internal and external construct. The historicising rationalization that this phenomenon is indeed changing, that the idea of Latin America is in flux and that the primitive, colonial and national are only phases that are leading to something else is one of the most powerful political and cultural fictions of the end of the century. The supposed alternatives of democracy and totalitarianism are belied by the continued interference from the outside--most notably from Great Britain and the United States whose support is supposedly on the side of democracy but whose commitment in the past has been on the side of the military right. Whatever political significance these actions have do not concern us here but we are immediately involved in the cultural meanings of the power positions and the idea of Latin America we have been

exploring.

In the year celebrating the bicentennial of Bolivar's birth, the evolution of the idea of a Latin America is compelling to examine in retrospect because of the highly charged and multivalent elements that made it up. The brilliance of Bolivar was not so much in recognizing that independence from Spain was inevitable but knowing when the Spanish Bourbons were no longer strong enough to maintain control. Spanish America could no longer continue without a capital city or become a kingdom without a king. Communications necessitated both a local leader and a workable reorganization along political and geographical lines. His proposal for a Gran Columbia to effect this transformation has cultural implications I will touch upon in a moment. What the Bourbons did not comprehend was that Spanish America was responding to issues that had little to do with Spain--something Bolivar masterfully turned to his own ends.

Even then, the split was not between the Spanish empire and national aspirations. Colonialism was looked upon as a not totally unfortunate episode. Andres Bello, in admitting the "new order of prosperity" set in motion by the Spanish Caracas Company in the eighteenth century, went further, "if such institutions must be regarded as useful when societies in passing from infancy no longer need the leading strings with which they made their first steps toward greatness."

La America Española became Latin America. Those "leading strings," held by Spain, were taken over by other foreign powers in South America, by missionaries and merchantile interests, by direct and indirect governmental interference, by the multinational corporations that replaced imperialism in the century after independence. Spanish America had an identity that was tied to Spain. Latin America had no such identity except in the hands of those who had named it. Spanish America was an entity of solid proportions -- a social, cultural and economic entity that broke with its European ties. The Bolivar phase maintained this integrity. The United States was to play no role in the continent he imagined.

But even before Bolivar's death, the neighbors to the North had begun to distort even the geographic realities. Central America and South America gained their significance only in reference to North America just as the Near and Far East existed only in reference to the West or the New World in relationship to the Old. Latin America became a phenomenon just as the East had become a phenomenon for Europeans.

There was no resistance possible to this subtle transmutation since its roots were in the hatred of the Indian throughout the Western Hemisphere and had been percolating long before the early nineteenth century. The phenomenon itself did not accounce its inception but became a subtle cast of mind inherent in the Monroe Doctrine and bursting into full flower with the Spanish American War--a war that was conducted with Spain but not on Spanish soil.

Up until the past two decades, South America relied upon external institutions--such as the Museum of Modern Art and its highly influential travelling exhibitions--to interpret the international scene in the visual arts. Now, a greatly changed economy and a different political point of view about culture has place new emphasis on the role of South American museums

to originate their own programming. The danger of "museumification"--what museums do to the fabric of living culture--is to appropriate too easily the categories of "colonialism" and "nationalism" and to perpetuate the collecting patterns of the rich with museums and galleries of fine arts that have little to do with indigenous expression. Museums to truly function must be open to ideas rather than ideologies--even ideologies that are hidden in currently accepted conceptions of history that inevitably refer to the North/South axis.

Colonialism and nationalism, the North American definition of the South American experience, can only perpetuate the distinction between high and low art--just as the invention of art history in the late nineteenth century validated Northern Renaissance or German art, almost directly paralleling the ascendance of Prussia and Haupt Deutsch ambitions. Visual expression is at floodtide in South America but in forms that until now have not been susceptible to conservation and interpretation. Yet surely, these ephemeral artifacts, often anonymous, are of as great significance in the formulation of a pluralistic South American culture as the elitist representations of high taste in painting and sculpture.

But my concern is not whether paintings or sculpture or pots or bows and arrows get collected but once again how the museums are shaped--North and South--by the phenomenon of Latin America. Museums set up to protect the investments of the rich in the high arts are part of the past. If museums are to collect and study material culture no matter what form it takes then they must at least examine the boundaries that the conception of Latin America places on them. We as art critics must work to identify this phenomenon and how it shapes and distorts what we see and say, must take the side of the artists rather than art.

An epiphenomenon has appeared in the last three decades that in spite of the efforts of the wealthier nations to force it into the old classification has achieved an independent existence that both interlocks with and subsumes categories such as Latin America. The idea of the Third World has wreaked havoc with nationalism since it is a global phenomenon. Movements such as Tropicalism that began in the sixties in Brazil have attempted to deal with the issues of the Third World in every area of the arts. But once again the idea has only been effectively presented in individual works.

That I see is the cultural import of Bolivar's Gran Columbia, founded in geographical and social realities in his region. The Caribbean Basin does represent a cultural whole whose material culture if seen in the context of the total history of the Western Hemisphere might yield important knowledge that would undermine the conception of North and South America as separate entities or at least make us more skeptical about the narrowness of our present studies and speculations. Certainly, French historian Fernand Braudel has given us a new vision of the Mediterranean through his studies of Philip II. What is alarming is that President Reagan, however simplistically, has siezed on this conception as a political and military strategy determined to make of the Caribbean a North American lake. In calmer days, perhaps we can return to this proposition and consider the whole of the Caribbean as a corrective to the limitations of "colonialism" and "nationalism" as critical markers.

Once again, we have seen the position taken by Soto and Marisol on this issue or rather one should say seem to have take since my description of certain incidents in their careers is a matter of interpretation. Such exile is of course a commonplace of the arts in this century--a sub-theme in the intermingling of nationalism and internationalism, a reprise on the positions taken by Vasily Kandinsky and Marc Chagall after their experiment with Russian revolutionary art.

But there is an alternative to exile, the inner exile of those who cannot leave their parts behind them. And that perhaps is an even more prevalent aspects of the lives of artists and writers than we are yet able to know.

There is then another aspect to Soto and Marisol's escape--Stephen Dedalus' Non Serviam. I take that motto not necessarily to be a manifesto--and certainly it is that--but to be a stance that is deeply imbued with Stephen's cunning, the means by which the artist/artifex constructs his own means of escape.

That memory of the labyrinth and its symbolic and emblematic role has become a central myth of creation in this century with artists and writers selecting elements of the larger myth with which to identify. Picasso saw himself as the Minotaur, a creature caught between the human and the bestial, terrible in its aspect but an ineluctable aspect of being alive. Borges cast himself as the labyrinth-maker, his words forming spiralling structures in which the imagination might find itself reflected. And so on.

But the artist/artifex has another face that is dark and hidden, an understanding of the mysteries, an initiation into the line between life and death, life and art. Out of that nature came the part of Daedalus, the proto-artist, that created the mechanical cow for Pasaphae to inhabit so she could be penetrated by the Minotaur. That is the side of the artist that sees sexuality as the one private realm over which solely the imagination can hold sway.

That I think is the inner exile of Matta whose work still eludes interpretation as South American or Chilean. He has positioned his work in such a way that its origins no longer matter in its perception.

He has made his madhouse of forms so distinctly personal yet so obvious in their reference that they transcend the labels such as Surrealism that were first attached to them. There is a feverish excitement and intensity that prevent them from being an exercise in a particular idiom or a pastische of other styles. His brush or his pencil are alive with the interlocking penetrability of forms. The images are extension of his probing eye, an identification with both the masculine and feminine, an interplay of the dominant and the yielding. Yet, this polymorphous universe of pleasure does not coalesce into hierarchies of sensation. Each form is conceived and rendered in its delight.

Not since Hieronymous Bosch perhaps has there been such a celebration of carnality but in il Bosco there is always the sense that this circus of lubicity is somewhere beyond--a hill into which all humanity is on the verge of slipping or a paradise so remote and odd that it is unattainable. Bosch's vision is serious, judgmental.

Matta is alive with humor and playfulness. His variations on the anatomy and on the genitalia is witty and ingenious, all roseate shading and protuberances. He has looked at mankind with a telescope so detached and eroticized that all that remains is the most characteristic behavior. This might be point of view of an anthropologist or a zoologist but Matta does not permit himself any generalizations. His creatures are thier anomalies. There are not two sexes or permutations of the sexes but hundreds of variations thereof. He seems to posit that fingers and noses and the toes are potentially generative as well and the full complexity of delight has not been charted.

But finally what is most compelling is that he does confine himself to the study of singles or couples or even threesomes or foursomes but whole convocations. No one else among his peers has so jubilantly orchestrated groups, crowds, masses without lining them up for a march.

When one begins to talk about art or its subdivision movements, Matta quickly becomes an exception. Once, like many who seemed to be working in the same mode, he was consumable and thereby ade his way into the right collections. As a result of the Good Neighbor Policy, he was included in shows of Latin American artists. He work continued steadily on outdistancing his lable and passing ito semi-obscurity. His sone Gordon Matta-Clark, a major avant-garde figure in the early seventies, had some of his independent stance but died young. His sizable corpus, as self-referential and indecipherable as fragments of a forgotten kingdom, awaits wome future discovering. Matta has outlived most of his enemies and many of his friends.

What matters now is not where he was born or what language he spoke but what he did.

VI

I have covered a great deal of territory, perhaps stretching my generalities too far to indicate the extent and depth to which the Latin American phenomenon has inalterably changed our view of art and artists. Art will take care of itself but I'm not so sure of artists. Botero, Tamayo, Soto, Marisol, and Matta have been seen. Other artists have not been as fortunate. I've described the distortions, as I see them, of the context in which they were seen. But nevertheless they have been seen.

Now, I would like to turn myself to the most annihilating aspect of the Latin American phenomenon, the virtual invisibility to which it condemns its shadow half. The sources of this invisibility are in a world view in which everything is separated into polarities--North and South and the euphemisms that denote superiority and inferiority such as Latin America and Hispanic America. This is partially the function of such critical and intellectual labels as primitivism, colonialism, and nationalism. Moreover, it is the principle of inclusion and exclusion in "museumification." What isn't seen doesn't exist.

I briefly sketched in how this principle works in the New York art world but it is also an internal mechanism that operates within South America

itself. South America acts as if it should be invisible, as if its artists should not be seen.

This invisibility exists on an ascending series of levels, each more telling in its obliteration of visual life. Because all culture is directed to and disseminated by the large city, there is value placed on the visual life of the village and town. The visual culture of the Indians and marginales has long been on the eclipse so they remain in a limbo far more profound than those who live in the towns and villages. Slums and suburbs are invisible to those who live in the city so their visual live is hidden. The city is made up of the rich and poor. The poor do not exist for the rich so their visual expression is non-existent. The rich doubt themselves and their museums sothey look at art that has been sanctioned by Europe and America. The government sees none of this. Artists work in hiding because they are not worthy to be--unless they have gained visibility elsewhere. The cultural bureaucrats dare offend no one. They protect the artists by not showing them. They comfort the government in its blindness and they acquiese to the rich because they are the patrons of the art from somewhere else. So, the judgments inplicit in the idea of Latin America are self-actualizing: There are artists in Latin America but there is no art. Because there is no art, it must be imported and so on.

Now, this same song can be sung to the time of colonialism, "The only art is Spanish;" or primitivism, "The only art is Amazonian;" or nationalism, "The only art is Patagonian." You'll recall what similar patriotic anthems did to the artists of Canada. But the social life of art doesn't concern us here. The simple way to break the ugly spell of invisibility is with the magic word diffusion.

By diffusion, I mean letting the work of artists be seen everywhere--inside and outside.

We have no record, no ongoing documentation, of the numbers of individual artists who over the past four centuries have passed into obscurity in South America.because their effort was not validated by the outside world, whose body of work disappeared or was destroyed because it could not find a market, whose corpus did not survive for later "museumification." These are the artists excluded from the process of colonization or nationalization, whose ideas and expression were not suited to the oppressive and limiting vision of Latin America. In the struggle for cultural power, they are the unknown soldiers whose lives passed unnoticed and unremarked --invisible and unsought.

I have in general a distrust of the myth of the undiscovered talent--artists whose careers are spent in a garret while the great world swirls by. Even such extreme figures as Van Gogh whose works did not really begin to sell until after his death was hardly unrecognized nor his achievements overlooked by his small circle of artist-friends. His supposed isolation served to increase the legend of his eccentricity and growing madness. Van Gogh is indeed prime evidence of the co-existence of genius and insanity and his loneliness the price of his contribution to art. Poetic justice of the most sentimental sort.

While I am unconvinced that many talents glow under bushels, I am certain

that the dominant strain of cultural superiority that has infected the sensibility of Western Europe at last since Roman times has taken its toll on the colonized peoples held in thrall by imperialism. I am equally sure that the conquistadores were no more able to understand, much less appreciate, the cultures they vanquished than their Roman horse soldier forebears.

But the Greeks and Romans were remarkably open in their dealings with their colonies. They offered citizenship or at least the means through language and style of participating in a larger cultural whole. The European colonizers, except for the English, extracted what they wanted and ran--market value still established in Madrid or Paris or Lisbon, and eventually New York and Washington, D.C.

There too were the standards of cultural exchange maintained and the stock of the few South American artists who had made it out watched with great care. No one contradicted that representative list of Latin talent. Those names, while their fame lasted, were gilt-edged. Curators and cultural bureaucrats reckoned with them. Beyond their bright circle was a darkness into which few dared venture.

But outside the glare of that cultural lamp post existed a world--perhaps a shadow world, at that, we have seen--full of possibilities that were unimaginable in the order of things as it was understood. Latin America, as seen by Europe and the United States, would produce art only in the image of history, art colonized and nationalized until it was recognizable to the North and East.

Among those who were rendered invisible was Armando Reveron (1889-1954), the Venezuelan artist whose lifetime coincides with the most intensely oppressive phase of the Latin American phenomenon.

Reveron, whose work and character are the stuff that major international reputations are made of, slipped from one level of obscurity to another, virtually unknown outside Caracas except for a handful of collectors. What might have happened to this master painter if he had been shown and recognized in Europe? How might the course of art history have been changed and the cause of other South American artists championed? The truth is Reveron did exhibit once in Paris in 1933 when Reveron was forty-four and in full command of his most painterly and voluptuous style. But that was also the year of one of his most serious breakdowns.

These recurring breakdowns led him into psychiatric treatment and his psychiatrist, sympathetic but untutored in art history, tried to help by pointing out to Reveron that Van Gogh when he suffered his most serious depressions continued to work. The misinformation served no efficacious purpose. Van Gogh had not worked under similar circumstances and neither did Reveron.

Cultural psychiatry has indicated a high incidence of schizophrenia in former colonies, largely produced by the extraordinary stress between the paternalistic world power and the feelings of helplessness and rage in the colonial dependency. Whatever the nature of Reveron's imbalance, it took place against and was exacerbated by the phenomenon of Latin America in which he was forced to work. His paintings are a triumphant celebration

of the fleshly paradise that the hegemony so devoutly hated.

A graduate of the Fine Arts Academy in Caracas, Reveron saw no need to connect himself to an international style. His gestural use of the brush was an intense exploration of territory covered by both Impressionism and Expressionism. He conveyed the sense of drawing directly on the canvas, swiftly recording not only his sensations but a pleasure in the paint and a delight in having his work on the canvas that sets him apart even in the twentieth century tradition of immediate and virtuoso painting.

There is a world-as-dream side to Reveron's painting that removes it from the conventional treatment of the nude or the human face. As full of sensuality, even lust, as Reveron may be, he renders the flesh as if it were the film on the surface of something more profound. In his favorite top hat, Reveron is the impressario of a theatre of illusions in which sexuality flickers and beckons like a forbidden but omnipotent dream, rising and falling with the rhythms of life. Reveron make palpable and perceptible the sweet fleeting sadness of enjoyment, grasping it on the canvas like the fluttering of some great bird's wings.

In 1921, Reveron moved to Macuto on the Venezuelan coast near where the Spanish had established a port. Within sight of the coastal road, Reveron built a house he called Catillet or the little castle. There he lived and worked for thirty-three more years.

A shadow seems to move across Reveron's work in 1938--five years after his exhibition in Paris and five years after the breakdown that propelled him unquestionably toward insanity. In his fifties, Reveron began to make a series of dolls, lifeless forms he created and then used as subjects for his paintings. It was almost as if he were re-inventing the world he had feasted on with his eyes--making claim to the sights with which he had filled his vision.

Reveron then belongs in our discussion of Latin American art not because of his participation in the phenomenon but by his almost total exclusion from it. Reveron stands for all those who did not leave, who could not afford or would not afford passage to New York or Paris; those whose refusal to let their work be subsumed by an external style made them unfashionable. A great deal of power is needed to make an artist invisible but art and culture can conspire to make the most honest and decent expression illegible. His individuality, his carefully held identity, were smudged out by the events that surrounded him. Unseen by the rich, his paintings were hardly part of the colonial mold, a definition of the artist's role lasted in an attenuated way even after World War II. Nor was Reveron's work political. He could not easily be appropriated by nationalism. He was neither primitive nor cosmopolitan. Reveron was an inexplicable anomaly in the development of the complex of ideas termed Latin American culture.

Reveron stands at the center of our discussion because he represents the absolute resistance of the artist to the established order--Virgil on his deathbed threatening to burn the Aeneid in defiance of Augustus Caesar who has come to collect it. Reveron contradicts all our knowledge of Latin America. In his refusal to yield, in defiance of his invisibility, Reveron unwittingly calls into question the dense body of information with

which we have been filling libraries, schools, and museums; undermines the theory of Latin America that has permeated theses and dissertations, guidebooks and travel brochures, the universe of the mass media. Reveron's freedom comes from an implacable need to make his own place and to live his own history, to be his own man.

Now the time has come for an analysis of the character of life in South America--not on any such global level but in terms of the oppositions and contraries that make up the cultural personality. The study of mankind is not Man but men and women, individuals who both accept and refuse the notions of time and place, who more or less incorporate into themselves and their work the "sovereign Western consciousness."

Just as colonialism did in the past, nationalism is providing a self-serving logic for both North and South America. What is needed is an overriding sense of the economic and historical process in which we are involved. That I believe was part of what Bolivar intended by his geo-political construct Gran Colombia. Only at that remove can we begin to perceive the forces at work in our daily lives and thinking. The Caribbean is a common but ambiguous source of experience for Americans and one important context in which to see our art. Perhaps, there we can recognize the elements in our common identity.

The past two centuries have hardly exhausted the goals of the French Revolution: As the cultural historian James Billington pointed out the goal of the American Revolution was liberty, or the right to own property; the Bolivarean revolutions sought fraternity; and equality had to wait until the twentieth century and the revolutions in Russia and China.

Equality, if it is to exist, must come from both sides in a new willingness to speak and to listen--and to see and be seen.