



# TWENTIETH- CENTURY ART OF LATIN AMERICA

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BARNITZ

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FRONTISPIECE: Rubens Gerchman, *O rei do mau gosto*. Courtesy Evandro Carneiro, Rio de Janeiro.  
Photo: Vicente de Mello.

TO MY TEACHERS  
AND MY STUDENTS

Latin America does not have a survey of its modern art like those that exist for the art of Europe and the United States. Although several books have contributed greatly to an understanding of Latin American modern art, none fills the need for a structured, sequential discussion of this art in its diverse contexts and interrelationships. Recent multiauthored exhibition catalogs and general surveys offer helpful information and insights, but these are often fragmentary and do not provide the broader historical context that helps to explain the art as a whole.<sup>1</sup> The tendency to stereotype and exoticize this art as a whole has cast a negative shadow on the notion of a survey such as this. Although I am fully aware of the inherent danger posed by one individual's interpretations of the art of so many different times and places, for the purpose of studying and teaching such a subject, the same coherence that has been afforded the study of European and United States art by individual authors for decades seems equally justified for the study of the modern art of Latin America. The fact that it has become increasingly difficult to stylistically classify the art from the 1970s on, not only in Latin America but in most countries of the Western world, does not imply the absence of identifiable trends and patterns in the art of Latin America from earlier years. It is the purpose of this book to identify these patterns in their appropriate contexts.

As is the case for surveys of modern European art, this study centers around the major movements and artists who have contributed innovative forms and new directions to the art of their country. The material included is necessarily selective and therefore leaves out many groups as well as deserving individuals that are not very well known abroad. Without this selectivity, however, this book would have resulted in an unwieldy listing of names, and it seemed more appropriate to discuss fewer examples in greater depth.

It is my hope that the artists I have excluded will not take my omission as a

dismissal of their work or its artistic value. In many cases, it is *because* of their originality (as exceptions to the rule) in not conforming to a given tendency that they do not have a place in my discussion. I am aware that any form of selectivity results in a partial truth. The selection is therefore predicated on how representative the groups and artists are of their time and place as well as on the need for clarity in presenting such a broad subject. In addition to artists, several countries have been excluded: the Central American ones, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Paraguay. This inverse choice was dictated by the fact that before the 1970s, the art of these countries offered no new paradigms and, in some cases, followed the Mexican model. A significant portion of this book is devoted to this earlier period in order to establish the setting for some of the movements and artists that followed.

Because of its long history of colonization by the Spaniards, British, French, and North Americans and its proximity to the United States, Latin America has remained a volatile subject and its art has not benefited from the type of unbiased treatment other areas have received. For one, it has been subjected to the vicissitudes of fashions and political as well as economic factors outside Latin America, rather than to a serious dedication to its history. Second, writings on Latin American art have tended either to favor romantic perceptions of what it should be or to uphold an image of Latin America as a victim of oppression and predatory powers. While both views have some validity, in themselves they are exclusionary, leaving out a whole range of art forms that do not conform to them. The temptation—for outsiders especially—to invent Latin America, rather than to look at what is actually there, is always great.

For this reason I have attempted to be as straightforward as possible about presenting this subject and considering the major contacts between Latin America, Europe, and the United States—contacts that have too often been downplayed for

## PREFACE

fear of making Latin American art seem derivative of other art. But this fear is unjustified. It is no more derivative than the art of other areas in the Western world. But far from being merely a factual exposé of the art itself, this study also addresses questions of cultural and social context and takes into account some of the revisionist positions in recent literature because of the insights they contribute.

I have basically followed a stylistic system of classification for the period prior to 1970. But this system breaks down after that time as art increasingly crossed stylistic boundaries. Therefore, the later period is treated primarily in terms of theme and medium. Each period is first identified by the patterns common to several artists, then developed in terms of individual artists. In cases where a single artist established a new direction with widespread ramifications, more space is devoted, such as the case of the Uruguayan Joaquín Torres-García, who is the subject of a whole chapter.

The material presented here is based on research conducted over a period of some forty years. It includes a study of writings and statements by Latin American critics, historians, and artists who have furnished valuable keys to the interpretation of their works or ideas. It is also indebted to the scholarly work of a few pioneering individuals, in and outside Latin America, who have contributed greatly to this field over the years.<sup>2</sup>

Intellectual currents, as well as social and historical events contemporary with the art, serve as a framework throughout most of this book. For instance, José Vasconcelos left his mark on the early phase of the Mexican mural program, and José Carlos Mariátegui left his on a generation of Peruvian artists in the 1930s. The art-critical community in individual countries has, to a great extent, affected the direction of each country's art. Before World War II, writers tended to situate their country's art

within a national discourse. This practice still exists in some countries. It is also common for novelists and poets, rather than art critics, to write about art, and they often provide literary equivalents rather than critical or art-historical analyses of the art. After the war, the need to accommodate new forms of art, especially abstraction, led a handful of influential critics—such as the Argentines Marta Traba and Jorge Romero Brest; the Brazilians Ronaldo Brito, Ferreira Gullar, and Aracy Amaral; and scores of others—to embrace new critical approaches to art based on a blend of social history, French art-critical methods, and, more rarely, formalist criticism. But the latter—a system generated in the United States by critics such as Clement Greenberg—proved inappropriate. Its exclusion of content (as irrelevant) from a reading of the art poses a problem, since content was rarely absent from Latin American art and was usually integral to its meaning, no matter how abstract. However, with the displacement in the 1970s of formalist criticism in the United States by postmodern and feminist debates, both of which opened the way for more flexible and inclusive systems of critical inquiry, content was back in favor. As indicated by the numerous exhibitions of modern Latin American art that took place in the United States, England, and other Western countries after 1980, a broader public was now better prepared to appreciate it.<sup>3</sup>

The recent art of Latin America has come to be relatively well known, but that of the earlier period is less so, and a considerable portion of this book is devoted to the latter. This study covers the major movements, groups, and artists in Mexico, Cuba, Haiti, and most of South America, including Brazil, from the turn of the twentieth century to the 1980s and begins with an overview of the nineteenth century. In the following chapters, each country is discussed in terms of its most significant and influential contributions and the conditions that fostered them.

The material is divided into two parts: before and after World War II. The first

period ends with social and *indigenista* art,<sup>4</sup> surrealism, and the utopian idealism of Torres-García's constructive universalism. The second begins with the spread of abstraction and the resulting need for artists to redefine their cultural identities within the new modes. The two sections are further subdivided chronologically by decade or, in the case of the 1930s and 1940s, by two decades. This method has made it possible to identify corresponding historical events and ideological currents that affected artists at given times and places, and has also helped to dispel stereotypes based solely on thematic tendencies.

The use of specific terminology like *indigenismo* and *modernismo* is explained within the appropriate chapters. However, some amplification is useful here for terms such as *modernism* and *contemporary*. Earlier in the twentieth century, *modernism* referred to the art of the impressionists through that of the cubists, futurists, and expressionists. In recent years it has come to include most nonrepresentational art up to the late 1960s. Here I use it specifically to refer to avant-garde art of the 1920s (Brazilians defined their avant-garde movement as *modernista*). When I use *modernism* in its broader sense

to include art through the 1960s, I specify so. In order to avoid confusion between *modernism* as avant-garde and *modernismo* as the equivalent of symbolism as well as the name of the literary movement led by the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío and of a widespread form of painting in Latin America based on Spanish models, I use the Spanish term for the earlier art (which included symbolism, art nouveau, impressionism, and postimpressionism) and the English one for the avant-garde styles of the 1920s.<sup>5</sup> The term *contemporary* here is not synonymous with *modernism*. It refers to art or an event occurring contemporaneously with something else. It is used to designate an occurrence simultaneous with the art under consideration, or to refer to an ever-fugitive present.

The system I present here is by no means the only possible model for structuring nine decades of Latin American art, but it is the one that has worked best for me in the classroom. With that challenge in mind, I have designed this book to be accessible to a general educated public as well; it presupposes no special knowledge of art history or its terminology on the part of the reader.



By the turn of the twentieth century, many artists in Latin America had rejected academic art and embraced bolder forms of expression that synthesized elements of symbolism, art nouveau, impressionism, and postimpressionism. Most prevalent among the new tendencies was *modernismo*, a name borrowed from literature to define a type of art that was widely practiced in Hispano-America (excluding Brazil) in the first three decades of the century. A blend of symbolist and postimpressionist tendencies, *modernismo* was kin to turn-of-the-century Spanish painting like that of Hermenegildo Anglada-Camarasa, Joaquín Mir, Isidro Nonell, Joaquín Sorolla, and Ignacio Zuloaga, among others. Originally, *modernismo* referred to the literary movement initiated by the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío that had its artistic equivalent in symbolism. In Brazil, where the French rather than the Spanish influence had prevailed throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European terminology like *impressionism*, *art nouveau*, and *symbolism* remained in use when parallel phenomena developed in art. The term *impressionism* was also commonly used in Spanish-American countries to describe paintings in which light and loose brushwork played central roles.

*Modernismo* did not develop in a vacuum. It corresponded to a time of rapid urban growth. In Mexico City, São Paulo, and Buenos Aires, newly built national theaters designed by Italian architects became the centers of heightened cultural activity. In Mexico City, construction of the Teatro Nacional (now the Palacio Nacional de Bellas Artes), designed by Adamo Boari, was begun in 1904 under the government of Porfirio Díaz.<sup>2</sup> In Buenos Aires, the development of the elegant Avenida de Mayo and the construction of the Teatro Colón, designed by Victor Meano and Francisco Tamburini and inaugurated in 1908, helped make Buenos Aires a fashionable and international cultural center in the Southern Cone. In São Paulo, the Teatro

*Modernismo* AND  
THE BREAK WITH  
ACADEMIC ART,  
1890-1934<sup>1</sup>

ONE

Municipal, designed by Domiziano Rossi and inaugurated in 1913, was to become infamous in the 1920s for its daring avant-garde performances, poetry readings, and art exhibitions.

The identification of *modernismo* in art with Rubén Darío's Hispano-American literary movement had a historical and philosophical basis. Darío, who had lectured in Central America, South America, and Spain and had spent several years in Argentina, felt frustrated by the "restrictions of a language which as yet had no names for his experiences" as a Latin American. At issue was American Spanish versus Castilian. As a solution, he advocated an injection of French and Italian sources into the Spanish language to pump fresh blood into Latin American literature, thus diluting the Spanish influence and making it more cosmopolitan.<sup>3</sup> He advocated a synthesis of these literary sources to meet the modern needs of Latin Americans within their own frame of reference.

The new art was the visual equivalent of Darío's literary movement. One of *modernismo's* contributions to painting was to make artists aware of their need for an art that expressed their own culture and experiences as Latin Americans. They began to take a closer look at their own daily lives, the things that surrounded them, the local people, landscapes, and contemporary life, in more personal and subjective ways than the previous generation had. They examined their immediate surroundings at close range instead of from a distance. They became the painters of modern life, not as viewed through European academic eyes but through the lens of their own lived experience. In paintings of landscapes or figure compositions, this experience also led to a radically different treatment of pictorial space within a continuing naturalistic idiom. Artists eliminated deep space and brought the background close to the surface of the canvas, so the subjects seemed to challenge viewers, sometimes through daring eye contact.

In Mexico and Peru, Spain had remained a strong cultural force through the nineteenth century. By the turn of the twentieth, this kinship with Spain was strengthened, as it was in other countries, by the apparent need to create a foil against U.S. incursions.<sup>4</sup> Spanish painting was seen in numerous exhibitions from the turn of the century on; however, it was not unequivocally well received. In 1910, when Mexican President Porfirio Díaz sponsored a centennial exhibition to commemorate the anniversary of Mexican independence from Spain—which, ironically, was shown in a centrally located building constructed especially for the purpose in Mexico City and featured work by the Spaniards Zuloaga, Sorolla, Eduardo Chicharro, Ramón Casas, Darío de Regoyos, Anglada-Camarasa, and Julio Romero de Torres, among others—some Mexican artists objected. A few days after the opening of the exhibition, the much angered painter Gerardo Murillo (better known by his pseudonym "Dr. Atl," meaning "water" in Nahuatl) hastily put together a smaller counterexhibition of work by contemporary Mexicans at the San Carlos Academy.<sup>5</sup> Centennial exhibitions of Spanish art elsewhere were received with less controversy. In Buenos Aires, the centennial was given special prominence in a glass-and-iron building that had been brought over piece by piece from Paris, where it had served as the Argentine pavilion in the 1889 Universal Exposition. In Santiago (Chile), it was commemorated in an international exhibition of fine and industrial art objects and designs that included Chilean artists as well as Spaniards.<sup>6</sup>

Although artists adopted some of the recent European models in art, the unorthodoxies present in the art of Latin America have never been fully explained except as chronological disjunctions. One explanation could be that Latin American artists who went abroad saw several styles or types of art all at once rather than as they had developed sequentially over a period of several decades in Europe. As a result, they often synthesized

these multiple styles in their work rather than follow the specific characteristics of a single style. They understood what they saw not so much as new formal problems but as new means through which to redefine their own cultures.

The sequence of these modes as they developed in European art was often inverted in Latin America. For instance, symbolism and art nouveau, which first appeared in Europe between the late 1880s and the turn of the century some twenty years after impressionism, preceded impressionism in Latin America. The reason symbolism and art nouveau came to the New World near the same time as they appeared in Europe is that they did so through literary sources, journal illustrations, and industrial design, whereas impressionism and post-impressionism had to await exposure in gallery exhibitions. Consequently they were known and adopted later.<sup>7</sup>

#### SYMBOLISM

By the turn of the twentieth century, art nouveau and symbolism were well established in the New World, especially in Brazil and Mexico. Not only was art nouveau prevalent in magazine illustration and design in the first two decades of the century, it was also present in architecture, notably in São Paulo, Buenos Aires, and Mexico—in their national theaters for instance. In painting and illustration, symbolism was often an aggregate of art nouveau. Art nouveau was characterized by its graceful curvilinear compositions incorporating plant forms and can generally be found in industrial design, whereas symbolism comprised decadent, morbid, or sacred and profane subject matter, with an emphasis on eroticism and death, sadism and satanism. The latter characteristics may account for the infrequent adoption of European symbolism in many Latin American countries, where the Catholic Church had remained a dominant force. When artists embraced symbolism, it

was more often in its allegorical form as Greek mythological and Old Testament themes. In the second decade of the century, these subjects were evident in illustrations by the Brazilian artist Emiliano di Cavalcanti, better known for his collaboration with the Brazilian vanguard of the 1920s. Di Cavalcanti had especially admired Aubrey Beardsley's pen-and-ink drawings for Oscar Wilde's *Salome* and in 1921 had himself illustrated a translation of Wilde's *Ballad of the Hanged One* in a Beardsley-like style.

Although Beardsley's style was known elsewhere, especially in Mexico and Brazil, symbolism as a form was not as widespread in painting and sculpture as it was in journal illustration, at least in its more blatant forms. Outside of Brazil and Mexico, artists who took up symbolism tended to avoid its more profane aspects until considerably later, when they sometimes incorporated it into their art as a way to satirize the clergy. In Argentina and Uruguay, symbolism was cloaked in religious metaphors and moon imagery—the latter for its bewitching qualities—rather than simultaneously morbid subject matter.<sup>8</sup> When symbolism occurred in Andean countries like Ecuador, Peru, or Bolivia, it tended to reflect a continuing preoccupation with biblical subjects that were the legacy of colonial and nineteenth-century art rather than the more typical decadent ones. Not until the 1940s and after did artists sometimes incorporate allusions to the sacred and profane in those countries, for instance, in the paintings of the Bolivian Arturo Borda discussed in a later chapter. In Colombia, where the church was especially powerful, artists responded to symbolist trends in ambiguous ways with themes of chastity and the human body. Chastity as a subject was initially treated in Colombia by Jorge Isaacs in his nineteenth-century romantic novel *María*; and the human body played a central role in the work of later twentieth-century Colombian artists. Although there was no major symbolist group in Colombia,



individual artists manifested aspects of it in their work, as Marco Tobón Mejía (1876–1933) did in his small bronze reliefs of academic nudes created from 1910 to 1930. In France, Mejía had befriended Auguste Rodin, whose work includes female nudes in seductive poses, sometimes with their genitals in full view. In European symbolist art, the female was often treated as a seductress and a threat to males, as is visible in paintings by Edvard Munch or drawings by Beardsley. Mejía's representations of the female body fall into this category, although without the monumentality of Rodin's work. All of Mejía's works were very small, such as his bronze relief of Salome kissing the mouth of the decapitated St. John the Baptist. Another small, enigmatic relief, *Vampiresa* [*Female Vampire*] (c. 1910), measuring no more than about five by three inches, shows a delicately curved body of a crouching female nude whose outstretched arms and batlike wings are nailed in place like a crucified Christ (FIG. 1.1).<sup>9</sup>

FIGURE 1.1

Marco Tobón Mejía,  
*Vampiresa* [*Female Vampire*], c. 1910, bronze,  
12 × 8.5 cm. / 4 1/4 × 3 3/8 in.  
Courtesy Museo  
Nacional de Colombia,  
Bogotá.



Symbolism, in its more literal form, did not in itself contribute to the establishment of a country's artistic identity and culture, as other forms of *modernismo* did. But it did play a major role in liberating literature and art from their traditional nineteenth-century modes, and it paved the way for further innovations. Literary groups sprang up in most of the major capitals, along with journals championing *modernismo* and, by extension, symbolism, and artists joined their circles by contributing caricatures and vignettes to the journals.

In Mexico at the turn of the century, symbolism meant the rejection of the bourgeois values associated with the presidency of Porfirio Díaz and his positivist entourage. Literary journals were rallying points for artists as well as writers, many of whom took up a Bohemian lifestyle in emulation of Charles Baudelaire and Edgar Allan Poe.<sup>10</sup> Several artists, including Angel Zárraga, Germán Gedovious, Saturnino Herrán, and Roberto Montenegro, experimented with symbolism for a time. Even José Clemente Orozco manifested symbolist characteristics in his early portrayal of women. However, none was as true to the symbolist line as Julio Ruelas (1870–1907). Even though Ruelas spent relatively little time in his country, he played an important role among *modernista* intellectuals in Mexico. He had apparently already become familiar with symbolism through illustrated European journals before he left Mexico. In Europe, he traveled to Holland, Belgium, and France and studied at the Karlsruhe Academy of Art in Germany between 1892 and 1895. After a seven-year stay in Mexico from 1897 to 1904, he returned to Paris, where he died at the age of thirty-seven from health problems precipitated by excesses and dissipation.<sup>11</sup>

Orozco later described Ruelas as “a painter of cadavers, satyrs, drowned men, and spectral lovers returning from a suicide's grave.”<sup>12</sup> Ruelas's themes revolved around death, lust, and Greek mythology. In *El ahorcado* [*The Hanged One*] (1890), a skeleton holding a scythe with a decapitated male head hanging from it places a noose around another man's neck (FIG. 1.2). According to Teresa del Conde's interpretation, the two victims are portraits: the decapitated head, of a writer friend of Ruelas's, and the one about to be hanged, of his brother. A barely visible figure of Ruelas in a corner in the background implies that he will be the next victim. Unlike José Guadalupe Posada's extroverted and satirical *calaveras* of the same years, Ruelas's skeleton conveys a

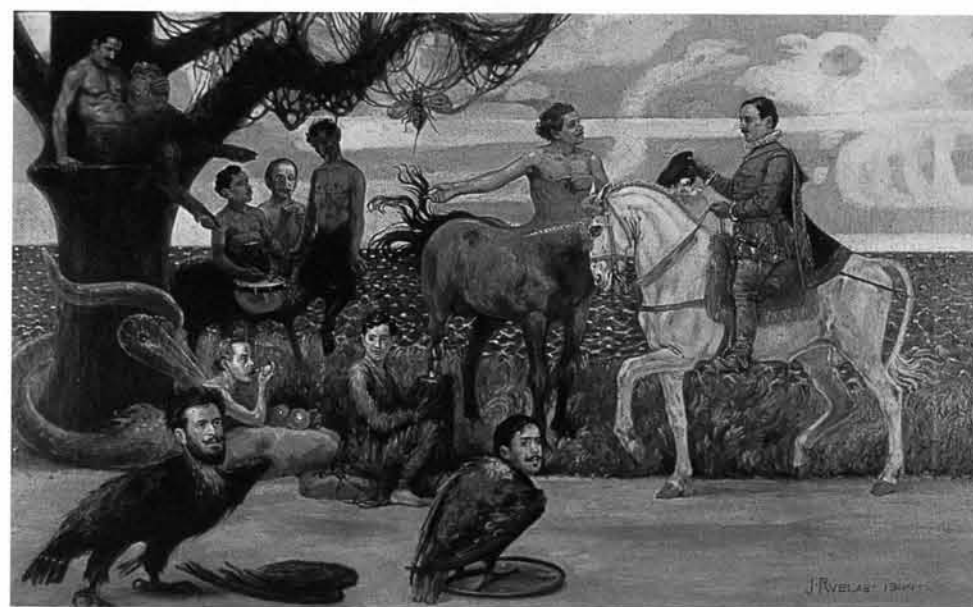


PLATE 1.1

Julio Ruelas, *Entrada de don Jesús Luján a la "Revista Moderna"* [*The Initiation of Don Jesús Luján into the "Revista Moderna"*], 1904, oil on canvas, 30 × 50 1/2 cm. / 11 3/4 × 19 7/8 in. Collection Manuel Arango, Mexico City. Archivo Fotográfico del IIE/UNAM.

sacrilegious and awesome fatalism typical of late-nineteenth-century death imagery liberated from earlier romantic connotations.<sup>13</sup>

In Mexico, Ruelas was affiliated as an illustrator with the *Revista Moderna* (1898–1911), whose benefactor Jesús Luján had saved the journal in 1902 from economic failure.<sup>14</sup> Other artists collaborating with this journal included Leandro Izaguirre, painter of *El suplicio de Cuauhtémoc* [*The Torture of Cuauhtémoc*] (1892), and Germán Gedovious, a deaf-mute artist known for *Desnuda* [*Nude*], a luscious turn-of-the-century painting of a reclining woman. Ruelas paid homage to Luján in a small work, *Entrada de don Jesús Luján a la "Revista Moderna"* [*The Initiation of Don Jesús Luján into the "Revista Moderna"*] (1904), painted just prior to Ruelas's return to Europe (PL. 1.1). Teresa del Conde's detailed reading of this work identifies the subject as a Moreau-like allegory of the journal's benefactor and his colleagues in which they all appear as fantastic mythological creatures: the writer Jesús Valenzuela, as a centaur, greets Don Jesús Luján, who is attired in seventeenth-century costume and mounted on a splendid white unicorn; Jesús Contreras, a sculptor, is shown as an eagle with its right wing broken off, in allusion to the artist's amputated right arm; the writer and

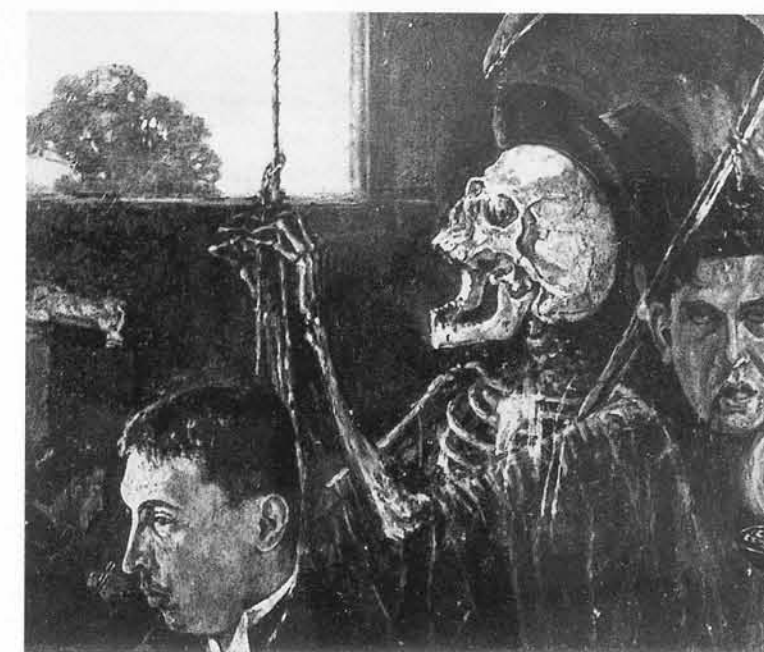


FIGURE 1.2

Julio Ruelas, *El ahorcado* [*The Hanged One*], 1890, oil on cardboard, 12.5 × 15 cm. / 5 × 6 in. Collection Lic. Severino Ruelas Crespo. Photo: From Teresa del Conde, *Julio Ruelas* (pl. 2.). Reproduction authorized by Teresa del Conde.

critic José Juan Tablada is a bird with colorful plumage, in a reference to his role as a spokesman and critic; the writer Jesús Urueta is transformed into a serpent with dragonfly wings coiled around the base of a leafless tree whose limbs are caught in a loose net; two other writers playing musical instruments share the body of the same quadruped, alluding to their homosexuality; Izaguirre appears as a satyr seated in the tree, and Ruelas, predictably, as a dead satyr hanging from one of its branches.<sup>15</sup>





FIGURE 1.3  
Saturnino Herrán, *El trabajo* [Work], 1908, oil on canvas, 93.5 × 213 cm. / 36 $\frac{7}{8}$  × 83 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. Casa de la Cultura de Aguascalientes. Photo: Archivo Fotográfico of the IIE/UNAM. Courtesy of Instituto Cultural de Aguascalientes.

Elements of symbolism were often integrated into *modernista* painting along with reminders of its Spanish sources from Zuloaga, Sorolla, Romero de Torres, Anglada-Camarasa, and others. Among Mexicans to take up this type of painting were Saturnino Herrán, Jorge Enciso, Fernando Leal, and Diego Rivera, in the work the latter did in Spain between 1907 and 1913. Saturnino Herrán (1887–1918), as the major Mexican exponent of this form, represented regional Mexican types, including Indians and mestizos. According to Orozco, Herrán painted “the Creoles he knew at first hand instead of Manolas à la Zuloaga” (a reference to Zuloaga’s paintings of courtesans from Madrid) at a time when Mexicans were taking “stock of the country they lived in” for the first time.<sup>16</sup> Herrán never went to Europe. He studied at the San Carlos Academy in Mexico City with Izaguirre, Gedovious, and the Spaniard Antonio Fabres.<sup>17</sup> *El trabajo* [Work] (1908), an early painting by Herrán, is in a naturalistic style that manifested little of the *modernista* characteristics of his later work (FIG. 1.3). Although this painting is unusual in its

early representation of men physically laboring and seems like a precedent for the worker theme taken up later by the mural painters, Herrán’s worker has more affinities with nineteenth-century allegories of seasonal labor than with twentieth-century versions (he used the work theme again in 1910 in an allegorical series). In *El trabajo*, the focus is on the family the worker supports and protects, in an allusion to the life cycle, more than on the grueling conditions of labor.

By early in the second decade, Herrán’s subjects included popular dances, local customs, regional types, old blind people, and, from 1914 to his death four years later, Indians in a distinctly *modernista* style. In his paintings of local types, such as *El rebozo* [The Shawl] (1916), he makes ample use of Mexican subjects with symbolist overtones (FIG. 1.4). In this painting, a naked woman, seated on a spread of embroidered fabrics with Mexican designs and holding her rebozo, temptingly offers fruit to the viewer, who is thus drawn into the scene. She holds an apple in front of one of her breasts, for which it substitutes. A sombrero on the ground next to

her implies the presence of a male. The Sagrario Metropolitano, adjacent to the cathedral in Mexico City’s *zócalo* (main square), is visible in the background. The symbolism in this painting is evident in the juxtaposition of the sacred (the church) with the profane (the temptress with the man’s hat). All the elements of the composition are tightly interwoven in a shallow space characteristic of Spanish painting of that period, but the painting’s references are Mexican.<sup>18</sup>

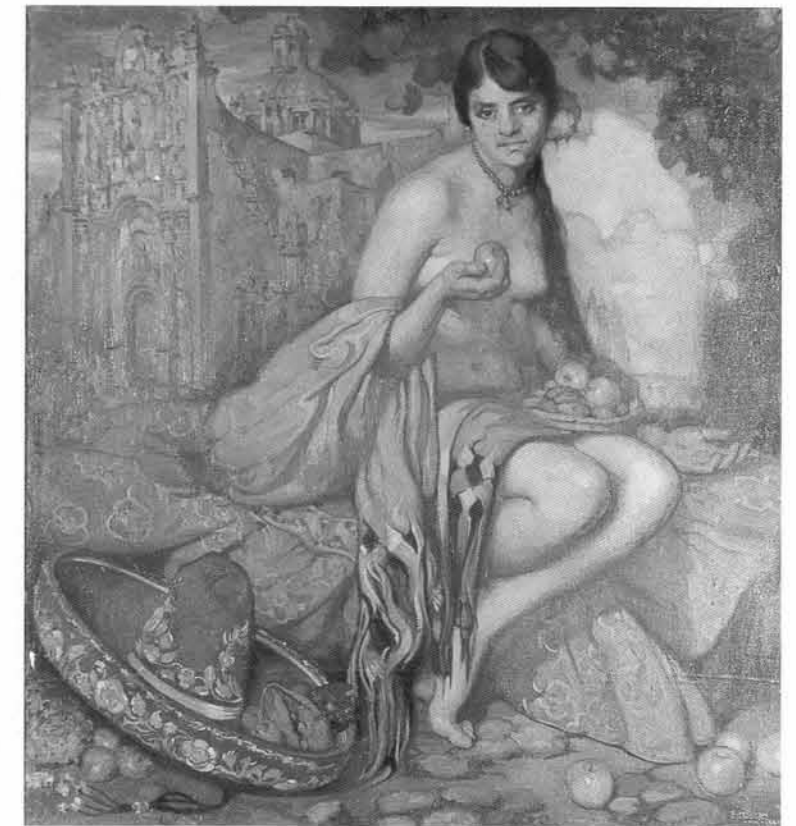
In *La ofrenda* [The Offering] (1913), commemorating the Day of the Dead, Herrán explored folk customs. A family shown in a close-up view solemnly rides on Lake Xochimilco in a barge filled with *zempoalxochil*, the yellow flower that is taken to the graves as an offering on the Day of the Dead (PL. 1.2). The figures, seen from above, are compressed within a shallow pictorial space; some are cropped by the canvas’s edge, and the horizon is near the top of the picture. *La ofrenda* symbolizes the cycle of life from youth to old age and, ultimately, death by the presence of three generations—children, parents, and grandparents on their way to visit deceased relatives.

In 1914, Herrán was commissioned to paint a frieze for the interior of the National Theater in Mexico City (now the Palacio Nacional de Bellas Artes). This work, planned as a sequence of three oil paintings on canvas to be titled *Nuestros dioses* [Our Gods], was to consist of life-sized figures. But the work remained unfinished due to the artist’s early death. The left-hand panel is the only one to have been finished as a painting; the other two exist today only in the form of drawings. In its finished state, the work was to consist of two horizontal paintings, each representing a procession, converging on a third central, vertical painting, *Coatlicue transformada* [Coatlicue Transformed] (1918). On the left, Indians are shown kneeling and chanting in a trancelike state as they carry offerings of fruit to their deity. In the drawing of the Spanish counterpart, the conquerors and friars bear offerings and carry an image of the Virgin on a bier

in a procession toward their Lord. The two processions lead to the large central image showing the awesome figure of Coatlicue (Lady of the Serpent Skirt)—which is based on the massive sculpture of this deity found beneath the *zócalo* in the late eighteenth century—merged with the crucified Christ, in an allusion to Mexico’s cultural and religious synthesis (FIG. 1.5).

Instead of re-creating a Mexican past as a historical event, as did Obregón or Izaguirre, Herrán invoked an archaeological past as a symbol of Mexican identity. But in his work, this identity consists of the fusion of the Indian and the Spanish legacies. Although based on academic studies of classical nudes, Herrán’s depiction of Indians is also the result of renewed interest in Mexican pre-Hispanic art prompted by the discovery early in the century of a great number of pre-Columbian artifacts and by recent archaeological excavations, particularly at Teotihuacán just north of Mexico City. Herrán was among several artists who, along with the painter Francisco Goitia, illustrated these found objects. Herrán

FIGURE 1.4  
Saturnino Herrán, *El rebozo* [The Shawl], 1916, oil on canvas, 120 × 112 cm. / 47 $\frac{1}{2}$  × 44 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. Museo Nacional de Arte (INBA, Mexico City). Photo: Archivo Fotográfico of the IIE/UNAM. Reproduction authorized by the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura, Mexico City.





## PLATE 1.2

Saturnino Herrán, *La ofrenda [The Offering]*, 1913, oil on canvas, 74 × 150 cm. / 29 1/8 × 59 in.

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## FIGURE 1.5

Saturnino Herrán, *Coatlícué transformada [Coatlícué Transformed]*, from *Nuestros Dioses [Our Gods]* series, 1918, crayon and watercolor on paper, 39.4 × 31.5 cm. / 15 5/8 × 12 3/8 in. Museo Nacional de Arte (INBA, Mexico City). Photo: Archivo Fotográfico of the IIE/UNAM. Reproduction authorized by the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura, Mexico City.



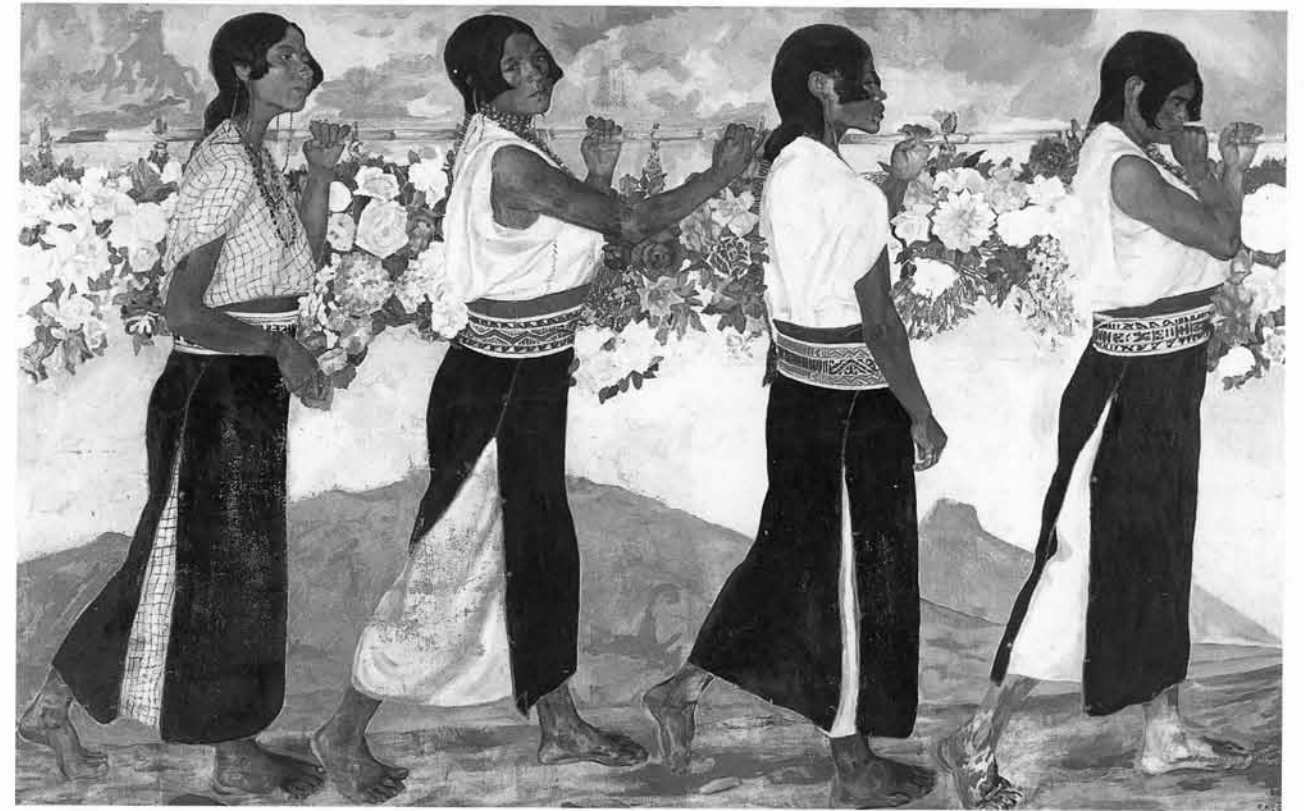
had also worked for the Archaeological Inspection Department in 1910 recording the newly discovered objects, and he had used some of his drawings as a basis for *Nuestros dioses*.

Like Mexico, Ecuador was the site of new archaeological investigations at about the same time. Not only did the Ecuadorian painter Camilo Egas (1899–1962) depict Indians in the 1920s, he also collected pre-Columbian art. Nonetheless, Egas, who turned to social themes and surrealism in the 1930s, had also lived in Italy and Spain. In the

latter country, he had seen the work of Zuloaga and Sorolla and had met Anglada-Camarasa. Shortly after his return to Ecuador in the early 1920s, he was commissioned by the Ecuadorian historian and archaeologist Jacinto Jijón y Caamaño to do a series of oil paintings on the theme of Indians for the second-floor landing of his Americanist library (now the Museo Jijón y Caamaño de Arqueología y Arte Colonial) in Quito. Jijón y Caamaño also owned a collection of pre-Columbian pottery, and Egas, who collected Ecuadorian folk art as well as pottery, used some of these objects as models for accessories in his paintings.<sup>19</sup>

Between 1922 and 1923, Egas painted fourteen horizontal panels—whose width was almost four times their height—of scenes depicting the daily life of Indians from before the conquest to the present (1920s). Indians are shown participating in ancient religious and agricultural rituals, at wakes or dances, in processions, as well as at various contemporary occupations such as in *Camino al mercado [Going to Market]* or *Fiesta indígena [Indian Festival]* (1922; PL. 1.3). Egas's use of classical poses is similar to Herrán's, but Egas leaves more space around his figures. Although he was later known as an *indigenista* painter, his incorporation of archaeological artifacts in some of his works and the poses of his figures in this series correspond to a *modernista* vision. In *Fiesta indígena*, a group of women carry flowers in a ritual-like procession against a mountainous landscape as a background foil.

Like Egas, the Peruvian José Sabogal and the Bolivian Cecilio Guzmán de Rojas are considered *indigenistas* whose major production belongs to the 1930s. But their early paintings more properly belong to *modernismo*. Sabogal's *El alcalde indio de Chincheros: Varayoc [The Indian Mayor of Chincheros: Varayoc]* (1925) is an example of *modernismo* rather than of *indigenismo* (PL. 1.4). Nonetheless, Sabogal is discussed more fully in another chapter. In the 1920s, Guzmán de Rojas



(1900–1950) painted scenes with Indians filled with symbolist allusions to Bolivia's ancient heritage rather than with references to the Indians' contemporary existence. In his work of the 1920s, it is the imprint of his teacher—the Spanish symbolist Julio Romero de Torres, with whom he had studied in Madrid—that is most evident, especially in Guzmán de Rojas's portraits of women.

His paintings of Indians of this period, like those of Herrán and Egas, represent them dressed or naked in classical poses and in local settings. In *Triunfo de la naturaleza [The Triumph of Nature]* (1928), painted in Spain just before his return to La Paz, Guzmán de Rojas depicted an Indian couple propped up against an ancient stone tomb bearing a half-hidden frontal image of the god Viracocha holding staffs (FIG. 1.6). This image of the deity was based on the low relief carving on the frieze of the monolithic Gate of the Sun in Tiahuanaco near La Paz. The arabesque patterns formed by the sleeping nude female and the standing nude male bending over her, or “sensuous



## PLATE 1.3

Camilo Egas, *Fiesta indígena [Indian Festival]*, 1922, oil on canvas, 97 × 155 cm. / 38 1/8 × 61 in. Courtesy Museo Nacional del Banco Central del Ecuador, Quito. Photo: Judy de Bustamante.

## PLATE 1.4

José Sabogal, *El alcalde indio de Chincheros: Varayoc [The Indian Mayor of Chincheros: Varayoc]*, 1925, oil on canvas, 170 × 105 cm. / 67 × 41 1/2 in. Municipalidad de Lima. Photo: Daniel Giannoni.



FIGURE 1.6  
Cecilio Guzmán de Rojas,  
*Triunfo de la naturaleza*  
[*The Triumph of Nature*],  
1928, oil on canvas, 90.25 ×  
126 cm. / 35½ × 49⅝ in.  
Courtesy Museo Nacional  
de Arte, La Paz.



FIGURE 1.7  
Cesáreo Bernaldo de  
Quirós, *El pialador* [The  
Lassoer], 1927, oil on  
canvas, 157.1 × 99.6 cm. /  
61⅞ × 39¼ in. Private  
collection. Photo  
courtesy of The Hispanic  
Society of America,  
New York.



rhythms" as Guzmán de Rojas liked to call this type of flowing composition,<sup>20</sup> blend with a landscape of Bolivian mountains and swirling clouds that echo the contours of the two figures. The key to this painting lies in the tomb's symbolism: the couple, as the descendants of the defeated pre-Columbian civilization (Viracocha), are awakening from a long sleep and a remote past to foster the race like a new Adam and Eve. Their fusion with the landscape also makes them a part of nature and, by extension, of the land itself.<sup>21</sup> Although the woman's features look as Spanish as they do Indian, the artist had painted an allegory of the Indian race with which he felt intellectually—if not physically—bound.

In Argentina, Cesáreo Bernaldo de Quirós (1881–1968) took up the representation of gauchos in a manner analogous to the treatment of Indians by Herrán, Egas, Sabogal, and Guzmán de Rojas. Socially, the gaucho enjoyed a better status than the Indian and sometimes even owned a bit of land. He was, nonetheless, often poor, and his racial mixture—a blend of Indian, Spanish, and sometimes black blood—and his proverbial illiteracy made him into a potential outcast. In the Río de la Plata region

(which includes Argentina and Uruguay on either side of the River Plate), the gaucho as a type came to represent the counterpart (although not completely indigenous) of the Andean and Mexican Indian, and Cesáreo Bernaldo de Quirós made this figure a major subject of his art in the 1920s. Before World War I, he had spent many years in Florence, Rome, Mallorca, and Sardinia, and he returned to live in Italy after the war. His acquaintance with the work of Sorolla, Anglada-Camarasa, and other Spaniards, seen during his travels, is evident in his own style of painting. But during the years he spent in Argentina, he explored his own culture by living among gauchos for several months in the province of Entre Ríos (between the Paraná and the Uruguay Rivers in northeast Argentina) to observe and record their daily activities. While there, he did a series of drawings in which these figures dominate the pictorial space like photographic close-ups. Already then, gauchos, whose history was barely two centuries old, were a waning group, and Bernaldo de Quirós wanted to capture aspects of this rural Argentine tradition before it died out completely. His drawings and sketches were the basis for a series of paintings finished in 1927. In this series, Bernaldo de Quirós represented his subjects as individual portraits at their daily tasks, alone near their shacks, relaxing with their families, as healers, butchers, minstrels, hunters, or lassoers at rest rather than in action (*El pialador* [The Lassoer]; FIG. 1.7). The artist emphasized their rough and sunburnt features but also gave them dignity. He depicted them as he imagined them to have been in the 1850s and 1860s in the time of Pallière or Blanes. But in contrast to their more generic, romanticized, and sometimes documentary nineteenth-century counterparts, Bernaldo de Quirós's paintings manifested a shallow pictorial space, swirling colorful impastos, and an emphasis on the close-up view of his subjects.<sup>22</sup>

#### IMPRESSIONISM

In cases in which both impressionism and postimpressionism appeared as major ingredients in a work, critics applied the European term *impressionism* sometimes to postimpressionist as well as impressionist works. As a term, *postimpressionism* was not used in Latin America. But *impressionism* became a catchall term used to define any brightly colored impastoed painting, usually of a landscape with or without figures, in which light and color played an important part. Impressionists from Latin American countries, like their early French counterparts, generally worked outdoors. But instead of focusing only on the fleeting atmospheric effects typical of the French impressionists, many Latin American impressionists sought to retain the solidity and tonal qualities of naturalism as well.

Some variant of impressionism existed in Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Uruguay, and Brazil. Impressionism was introduced in Ecuador by the French-born painter Paul Alfred Bar, who had gone to Ecuador in 1912 and taught landscape painting at the Quito School of Fine Arts in the years 1910–1929. In Peru, besides Carlos Baca-Flor (1867–1941), who spent the greater part of his life outside Peru and was as well known abroad as he was in his own country, very few artists took up this mode. Baca-Flor was born in Chile and trained at the Academy of Fine Arts in Santiago and at the Julian Academy in Paris. Between 1908 and 1929, he made a small fortune painting portraits in Paris and New York, including several versions of the banker J. P. Morgan. In Chile, where a strong Francophile current ran, impressionist landscape painting was widely practiced. The Chilean impressionists, who included Alfredo Valenzuela Puelma, Alberto Valenzuela Llanos, and Juan Francisco González, combined French characteristics with Spanish ones in their landscapes and figure compositions.<sup>23</sup> The first two—both Paris-trained—put a romantic stamp on scenes of parks, trees, and the distant mountains



of the Chilean countryside. González concentrated on close-ups of flowers in luminous, Monet-like colors. On the other hand, the Uruguayan painter Pedro Blanes-Viale (1879–1926) adopted Spanish luminism, a type of impressionism characterized by brilliant effects of sunlight that was developed at the turn of the century in Spain, where Blanes-Viale lived for many years.<sup>24</sup> *Palma de Mallorca*, an undated early-century painting, is typical of the sun-drenched landscapes he painted in Mallorca as well as in Uruguay. The Brazilian impressionists, like Eliceu Visconti (1867–1944), tended to follow the French model. This phase of Visconti's work, mainly in the 1920s and 1930s, comprised Paris scenes and sun-dappled garden settings in Rio de Janeiro in which he included members of his family.

Mexicans, Argentines, and Venezuelans were among the most original Latin American impressionists. Impressionism's rapid rise in popularity in Mexico was due as much to the emergence of open-air schools during the years of the Mexican Revolution as to the presence of European models. In 1913, shortly after his return from Europe, Alfredo Ramos

Martínez (1875–1946), known for his paintings of delicately colored figure compositions in oil and pastel, founded the Barbizon School of Santa Anita, named for its location in Santa Anita just outside of Mexico City (Barbizon was a reminder of the site near Paris made famous by its landscape painters). Santa Anita was the first of several such schools to open within a short span of time. Not only did Santa Anita provide a setting for *plein-air* painting (the French term for open-air or outdoor painting), it also functioned as an alternative to the San Carlos Academy, which had been the site of a student strike in 1911 to protest its antiquated methods.<sup>25</sup>

More than a refreshing break from the academy, Mexican impressionism became a means for artists to focus on their own native culture and popular roots.<sup>26</sup> Of the many open-air schools that followed the example of Santa Anita, few survived. Those that did, lasted until well into the 1930s but in a new form. After 1927 they were turned into urban centers known as People's Painting Centers, where aspiring artists, including children, from all classes of society could work free of



PLATE 1.5  
Joaquín Clausell,  
*Ixtacalco*, n.d., oil on  
canvas, 123 × 155 cm. /  
48½ × 61 in. Museo  
Nacional de Arte,  
Mexico City. Archivos  
Fotográficos del Centro  
Nacional de  
Investigación,  
Documentación e  
Información de Artes  
Plásticas (CENIDIAP),  
Mexico City.

charge. A major objective of these centers was to awaken in the students an awareness of Mexico's artistic resources.

The interest in making local culture accessible and intelligible to a broader segment of society, as well as in liberating art from academic restraints, had existed since the early 1920s under the administration of Alvaro Obregón. The painter Adolfo Best-Maugard had developed a theory for teaching art in his book *Método de dibujo* (1923), translated as *A Method of Design* the following year. The theory was based on the notion that an infinite number of design variations could be obtained by combining seven basic universal signs also found in pre-Columbian art.<sup>27</sup> Dr. Atl (Gerardo Murillo, 1875–1964) was a great advocate both of impressionism and of Mexico's popular culture.<sup>28</sup> In 1921, he organized an exhibition of popular art for which he wrote a two-volume study, *Las artes populares en México*. Because of the interconnections between impressionism and mass education in Mexico through the open-air schools, impressionism had more populist connotations there than elsewhere, and most artists adopted this mode for depicting their own landscape and customs.

The two artists who made the most original contributions to Mexican impressionism were Joaquín Clausell and Dr. Atl (the latter in a less orthodox way). Both artists were avid walkers and lovers of nature and together took long walks through the countryside to sketch and paint. Instead of the vast panoramas in Velasco's paintings, Clausell and Atl chose bold perspectives that gave the viewer the sense of being inside the landscape. Clausell (1866–1935), a criminal lawyer and polemicist who had received his law degree in 1896, traveled to Europe between 1892 and 1893 during the Porfiriato.<sup>29</sup> Dr. Atl had encouraged him to paint, and today Clausell is better known as a painter than a lawyer. According to Orozco, Dr. Atl came back from his first trip to Europe in 1904 with "the rainbow of the impressionists in his hands and . . . all the



audacities of the Parisian School," and he conveyed his enthusiasm to his Mexican colleagues with flamboyance.<sup>30</sup>

None of Clausell's paintings are dated, but most of his better-known works were done after 1904. Although Clausell's style bears some resemblance to that of Monet, whom he may have met in Europe, he used complementary colors and, according to Dr. Atl, was concerned with the "vibrations of light"; typically Clausell never completely relinquished the solidity of form. As is evident in some of the titles of his works—*Santa Anita*, *Ixtacalco* (PL. 1.5), *Texcoco*, *Tlalpan*—he sought to record specific locations as much as momentary atmospheric effects. His subjects included seascapes, close-ups of waves

PLATE 1.6  
Gerardo Murillo (Dr. Atl), *El Volcán Parícutín en erupción* [*The Parícutín Volcano Erupting*], 1943, oil on canvas, 127 × 78.5 cm. / 50 × 31 in. Colección Seguros Comercial América, S.A. de C.V. Courtesy Fomento Cultural Banamex, A.C. Reproduction authorized by the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura.



and rocks, beaches, rivers, canals, mountains, volcanoes, parks, and trees in the surroundings of Mexico City, in the state of Michoacán, and on the Pacific coast. Clausell's notoriously stormy life (as a lawyer he often took up unpopular causes) came to an end in 1935 when he accidentally tripped over some rocks where he had been painting and died of the resulting injuries.

Dr. Atl, who was an early proponent of a mural movement in Mexico, is more difficult to classify. The body of his work cannot be confined to a mere two decades nor to a given style.<sup>31</sup> He invariably incorporated into his work changes that were constantly occurring in the arts, and he remained active until his death in 1964. His numerous interests also made him the epitome of the Renaissance man. He was a vulcanologist, essayist, journalist, poet, and orator as well as a painter. In 1906, he invented a type of crayon known as Atl colors made of pigments, resin, and wax that could be used over watercolor or oil to heighten their intensity.<sup>32</sup> Besides impressionism, Atl had been taken with the murals of the Italian Renaissance as well as futurism in Italy. During his second trip to Europe, from 1911 to 1914, he studied vulcanology in Rome and also became enamored with Italian futurism, a style that was not especially popular in the art of Latin Americans. Atl and Siqueiros (the latter discovered it a few years later), were the only ones in the 1920s and 1930s to apply its dynamic qualities quite literally to their work. In Italy, futurism had developed in 1911 at a time of high industrialization and urban expansion. It opposed the romantic aspects of symbolism (for instance, the moon was equivalent to a street lamp, with none of its earlier mystique). Futurist art was also characterized by a focus on energetic movement rather than on the figure or object itself. Both Atl and Siqueiros sought to represent motion and dramatic action in their work by applying these characteristics to landscape and figures.

Throughout his life, Atl applied these elements in drawings and paintings of landscapes and volcanoes he did from life, sometimes under perilous conditions. In 1917, he had climbed Popocatepetl to paint it in an active state (he was to paint the same volcano seen from the window of an airplane in the 1950s). By the 1930s, he was combining elements of futurism, expressionism, and curvilinear perspective (a system that took into consideration the curvature of the earth) into his landscapes.<sup>33</sup> In the 1940s, some years after *modernismo* had waned, he began a new series of paintings of volcanoes in a dynamic form of expressionism. When the Parícutín volcano first emerged in a farmer's field in the state of Michoacán in 1943, Atl risked camping on its rising and smoldering banks to study, draw, and paint it in its various stages of activity (*El Volcán Parícutín en erupción [The Parícutín Volcano Erupting]*; PL. 1.6).<sup>34</sup>

In Argentina and Uruguay, impressionism took a more traditional direction than it did in Mexico. Argentina's and Uruguay's history was much more recent than Mexico's, and *platense* artists applied impressionism as well as more synthetic forms of *modernismo* to themes developed in nineteenth-century landscapes and scenes of rural life. Ranches, open plains, and grazing cattle formed the very basis of their culture.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, after the turn of the century, artists looked at these subjects through different lenses, those of impressionism and *modernismo*. The Argentine art historian and painter Romualdo Brughetti stated that "*modernismo* and impressionism, at this level, allied themselves in the need to create an art that transfigured reality through their legitimate values."<sup>36</sup> Artists looked to France and Germany as well as Spain for impressionist models, often fusing them into an idiosyncratic form that can be considered the visual equivalent of Argentine and Uruguayan symbolism in literature (Leopoldo Lugones, for instance).

Argentines had ample opportunities to become acquainted with impressionist

art. Paintings by Monet, Renoir, Bonnard, Vuillard, and Albert Marquet were shown in Buenos Aires in an *International Art Exhibition* in 1910—in the same year and in the same glass-and-iron pavilion as the centenary exhibition of Spanish art.<sup>37</sup> The work of Maurice Denis and of the Spaniards Anglada-Camarasa and Nonell was also exhibited in Buenos Aires galleries; in addition, most artists traveled to Europe.<sup>38</sup> Although *impressionism* became a catchall term by the 1920s, it best applies to the work of Faustino Brughetti (Romualdo's father), Martín Malharro, Fernando Fader, and Guillermo Butler.

Faustino Brughetti and Malharro are credited with being the first Argentine impressionists. Malharro (1865–1911) belonged to the same generation as Ernesto de la Cárcova, Eduardo Sivori, and Angel della Valle, but his first exhibition in Buenos Aires in 1902 revealed a new direction in Argentine art. His compositional simplifications and bold use of complementary colors differed dramatically from what his contemporaries were doing.

During a trip to Tierra del Fuego (at the tip of South America) in 1891, Malharro had first become captivated by the island's atmospheric luminosity. After an initial period of study in Buenos Aires, he spent seven years (from 1895 to 1902) in France painting Monet-like landscapes and haystacks. But his adoption of the bold brushwork and tonal opacities of the Spanish artists soon placed him in a distinct category. In *En plena naturaleza [The Fullness of Nature]* (1901), a landscape painted in Auvers (France) and exhibited in Buenos Aires in 1902, he made use of complementaries, not as small adjoining brush strokes but as two separate zones in the manner of postimpressionism. The foreground consists of a band of modulated yellow, and the background, of blue clouds and distant hills. However, the absence of oppressive subject matter and anguished brushwork removes him from a postimpressionist classification.

Although Malharro painted some of his best-known work in France, it had much in common with Argentine literary *modernismo*. His interest in effects of light was not confined to sunlight, but extended to night scenes and moonlight. His paintings revealed the presence of a symbolist current typical of Argentine literature. In *Nocturno [Nocturne]* (1902), a playful moon hides behind trees and clouds, outlining their edges with its sulphuric light. Moon and night imagery was a dominant subject in both art and literature in the Río de la Plata through the 1930s. In literature, besides being a major theme in the work of the symbolist poet Leopoldo Lugones, it was the subject of some of Jorge Luis Borges's poems of the 1920s, as well as for other writers.<sup>39</sup> This subject is also present in the work of two Uruguayan painters, Pedro Figari and José Cuneo. It is a ubiquitous presence in Figari's patio and pampa scenes and in Cuneo's fractured expressionist ranch scenes of the 1930s, in which enormous moons threaten to engulf the landscape. Malharro painted this theme more than once. In a later version of the same subject done later in the same year, *Nocturno* (1902), a rural house framed by a dark blue sky and trees in warm shades of green is bathed in pale yellow-green moonlight (PL. 1.7).

Malharro's pioneering role in Argentine art was not recognized until many years later. During the years 1910–1929, his reputation was eclipsed by that of his better-known colleague Fernando Fader. As the son of a German immigrant, Fader (1882–1935) chose to go to Germany in 1900 rather than France, and he studied painting with Heinrich von Zügel at the Royal Institute of Arts and Sciences in Munich.<sup>40</sup> Fader's German production was in the free style of the Berlin secession painters Max Lieberman and Max Slevogt rather than that of the impressionists. An early example is *La comida de los cerdos [Feeding the Pigs]* (1904), for which Fader received an award in a Munich exhibition. He returned to Argentina the same year. His impressionist



PLATE 1.7  
Martín Malharro,  
*Nocturno* [Nocturne],  
1902, oil on canvas, 38.5 ×  
55 cm. / 15¼ × 21⅝ in.  
Courtesy Museo  
Nacional de Bellas Artes,  
Buenos Aires.

PLATE 1.8  
Fernando Fader, *Los  
mantones de Manila*  
[Shawls from Manila],  
c. 1911, oil on canvas,  
116 × 140 cm. / 45¼ × 55  
in. Courtesy Museo  
Nacional de Bellas Artes,  
Buenos Aires.



phase began shortly after the 1910 *International Art Exhibition* in Buenos Aires and quite possibly as a result of it.

Fader was among the first Argentine artists to form an artists' collective in Buenos Aires. In 1907 he cofounded the Nexus group with the painter Pio Colliadino. This group initially helped to establish a sense of community among artists, who more often worked in isolation, not only in Argentina but in other Latin American countries as well. Malharro had initially been a member of the group but soon left because of differences and rivalries.<sup>41</sup> Although most of the Nexus affiliates—who exhibited twice as a group, in 1907 and 1908, before disbanding—considered themselves impressionists, only Fader practiced impressionism in its more orthodox sense. The other artists in the group followed a more naturalistic direction in their work.<sup>42</sup>

Despite the brevity of Fader's group affiliation, he enjoyed considerable success as an individual in the years following the disbanding of the Nexus group. During his Buenos Aires period, from 1905 to 1916, he painted interior scenes with figures as well as landscapes. In *Los mantones de Manila* [Shawls from Manila] (c. 1911; PL. 1.8), which earned him first prize in the *Third National Salon* of 1914 in Buenos Aires, four women, one of whom is naked, examine the flowery shawls. The manner in which the women's figures, hair, and background fuse and flow into the overall design and patterns of the shawls indicates Fader's familiarity with the work of Zuloaga, Nonell, and especially Vuillard. In comparison with Saturnino Herrán's near contemporary *El Rebozo*, in which the shawl was Mexican, Fader perhaps typically depicted imported shawls.<sup>43</sup>

Fader's commercial success and the advantages of the cultural ambience of Buenos Aires did not keep him from moving in 1916 to a quieter and more serene location on a farm in Ischilin near Córdoba in the interior of Argentina. There he began one of the most produc-

tive periods of his career as an impressionist. He worked out-of-doors and focused on effects of changing light at different hours of the day and in different seasons. In 1917 he painted a series of eight versions of his own farmhouse ranging from dawn to dusk, all titled *La vida de un día* [The Life of a Day] and identified individually by the specific time, such as *La mañana* [The Morning] (FIG. 1.8). But unlike Monet's haystacks and Rouen Cathedral facades, Fader's views functioned as a collective portrait of the farm itself in different color combinations, in addition to recording fleeting atmospheric effects playing on its surface. Over the years, his colors became increasingly clear and luminous, but he never abandoned the subject's palpable solidity.

Fader's frequent inclusion of peasants in his landscapes reveals an interest in the life of the local populations in scenes of rural life in which the implied poverty and sadness of the subjects exists as an undercurrent downplayed by attractive color combinations and bold brushwork. In *La mazamorra* (1927; FIG. 1.9), a farmhand sits beneath a tree eating a lunch of *mazamorra*, a thin corn soup traditionally consumed by the poor, while his wife, who is not eating, sits by with an expression of profound resignation and melancholy watching the soup pot steaming over an improvised fire. The scene is bathed in warm luminous shades of pink, red, lavender, purple, and blue. Fader painted such subjects more by default than because of a commitment to social causes. He viewed farmhands as part of the landscape rather than as individuals whose lives deserved to be explored for their own sake.

For Guillermo Butler (1880–1961), the landscapes themselves were the central subject. Butler, a Dominican priest, sought to make art into a religious experience by infusing his landscapes with mystical serenity. In Paris, where he lived between 1911 and 1915, he had joined



FIGURE 1.8  
Fernando Fader, *La mañanita* [The Morning], from *La Vida de un Día* [The Life of a Day] series, 1917, oil on canvas, 100 × 80 cm. / 39½ × 31½ in. Courtesy Museo Municipal de Bellas Artes "Juan B. Castagnino," Rosario. Photo: Ron Jameson, from slide by the author.

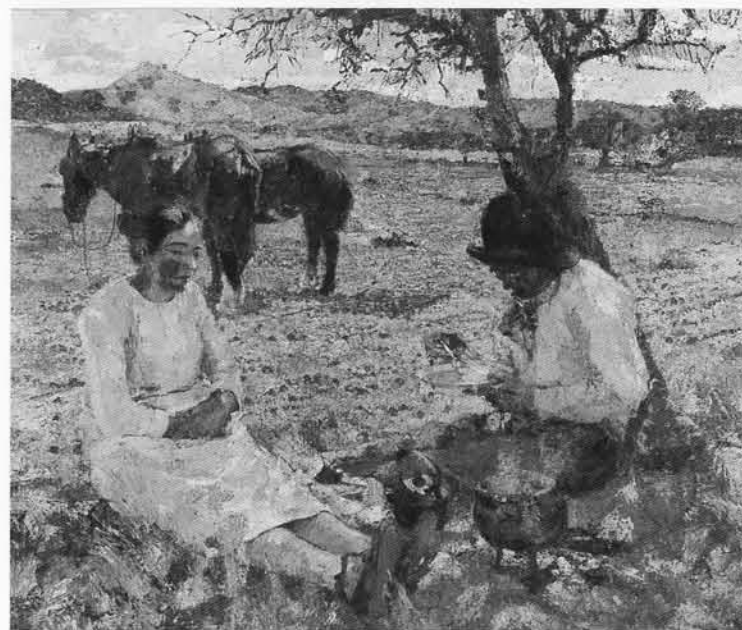


FIGURE 1.9  
Fernando Fader, *La mazamorra*, 1927, oil on canvas, 100 × 120 cm. / 39½ × 47¼ in. Courtesy Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires. Photo: Mosquera.

Maurice Denis's Association des Artistes Chrétiens, and in 1936 he founded his own version of it, the Sociedad de Artistas Cristianos, in Buenos Aires.<sup>44</sup> He conveyed the idea of nature as a religious experience in his tranquil landscapes and reductively simple church facades painted in delicate atmospheric colors undisturbed by sharp contrasts. For a while, he practiced a form of pointillism with cool, analogous colors similar to those of Maurice Denis to obtain what became his trademark, a sense of balance and silence.

In Argentina, impressionist landscape focused on rural tranquillity in a manner that evoked such scenes in nineteenth-century painting. In Venezuela, impressionism became a means to convey tropical luminosity. Impressionism was known early in the century in Venezuela through book and journal illustrations, but a number of Venezuelan artists also had direct contact with French impressionism. Many had traveled to Paris from the mid-nineteenth century on, and although these artists had gone to Paris to study with academic painters, while there, many of them were drawn to impressionism. The nineteenth-century painters

Rojas and Michelena came close to impressionism toward the end of their lives. The first Venezuelan to become an impressionist was Emilio Boggio (1857–1920), who went to France in 1905 and, like Michelena and Rojas, studied at the Julian Academy with Jean Paul Laurens. But Boggio also associated with Zuloaga and Sorolla, who were living in Paris at the time. He painted figures and landscapes of Paris and Auvers-sur-Oise that also synthesized French impressionist light and color with the solidity of the Spanish painters.

But though Boggio's art made an impact on Venezuelan painting because of its color and luminosity, his was not the only source of impressionism in his country. When he returned briefly to Venezuela in 1918, he associated with other artists who became major exponents of impressionism there and whose sources preceded Boggio's return. A student rebellion against the Academy of Fine Arts in Caracas and a strike in 1912 to denounce the academy's policies had paralleled the strike against the Mexican academy. In Venezuela, it led to artistic reforms at the academy that included the adoption of impressionism and plein-air painting.<sup>45</sup> It also motivated students and writers to take things into their own hands. Several of them banded together to form the *Círculo de Bellas Artes*, a dissident group under the leadership of the polemical writer and journalist Leoncio Martínez. During the four years of the *Círculo's* existence, its members organized lectures, literary meetings, and collective exhibitions, and they held annual salons that included awards to make up for the academy's failings. Although by 1916 the *Círculo* gradually disbanded for lack of sustained leadership, the way was paved for a major change in the Venezuelan art scene.

Some of the *Círculo's* members had included the painters Manuel Cabré and Antonio Edmundo Monsanto, known for their light-drenched landscapes and views of Monte Avila near Caracas,<sup>46</sup> and, after 1915, Rafael Monasterios and Armando

Reverón, both of whom had just returned from Spain. These artists were the first in the twentieth century to focus on the landscape of their own country. They were especially taken with its tropical luminosity, which had been explored in the nineteenth century by Fritz Melbye and Camille Pissarro. Their interest in an impressionist treatment of light was also fueled by the 1916 arrival from Europe of two war exiles: Samys Mütznér, a Rumanian impressionist, and Nicolas Ferdinandov, a Russian stage designer and exponent of art nouveau known for his predilection for blue. Both those artists painted coastal scenes of La Guaira near Caracas and Isla Margarita just off the coast, where Mütznér settled until his return to Europe in 1919.

The Venezuelans formed a close bond with the two artists, Monsanto (1890–1947) with Mütznér, Monasterios and Reverón with Ferdinandov, and Cabré with both. The Venezuelans all sought atmospheric effects in their landscapes, and Cabré made Monte Avila his main subject, as Mont Sainte Victoire in Provence had been for Cézanne. Of the four Venezuelans, Monasterios and Reverón—who had known each other in Spain—were the most daring in their treatment of light and color. Monasterios (1884–1961) painted still lifes as well as landscapes. In *Bodegón* [Still Life] (1930; PL. 1.9), he fused the structure of Cézanne with the colors of Renoir. He had noted that light absorbs color, and by the 1930s, some of his paintings were all but drained of color.

The absence of color had already characterized Armando Reverón's brand of impressionism a decade earlier. Reverón (1889–1954) studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Caracas and, between 1911 and 1913, at the School of Arts and Crafts and Fine Arts in Barcelona and the San Fernando Academy in Madrid, where Monasterios was his fellow student. After a brief stay in Venezuela in 1912, Reverón returned to Spain until 1915. He met



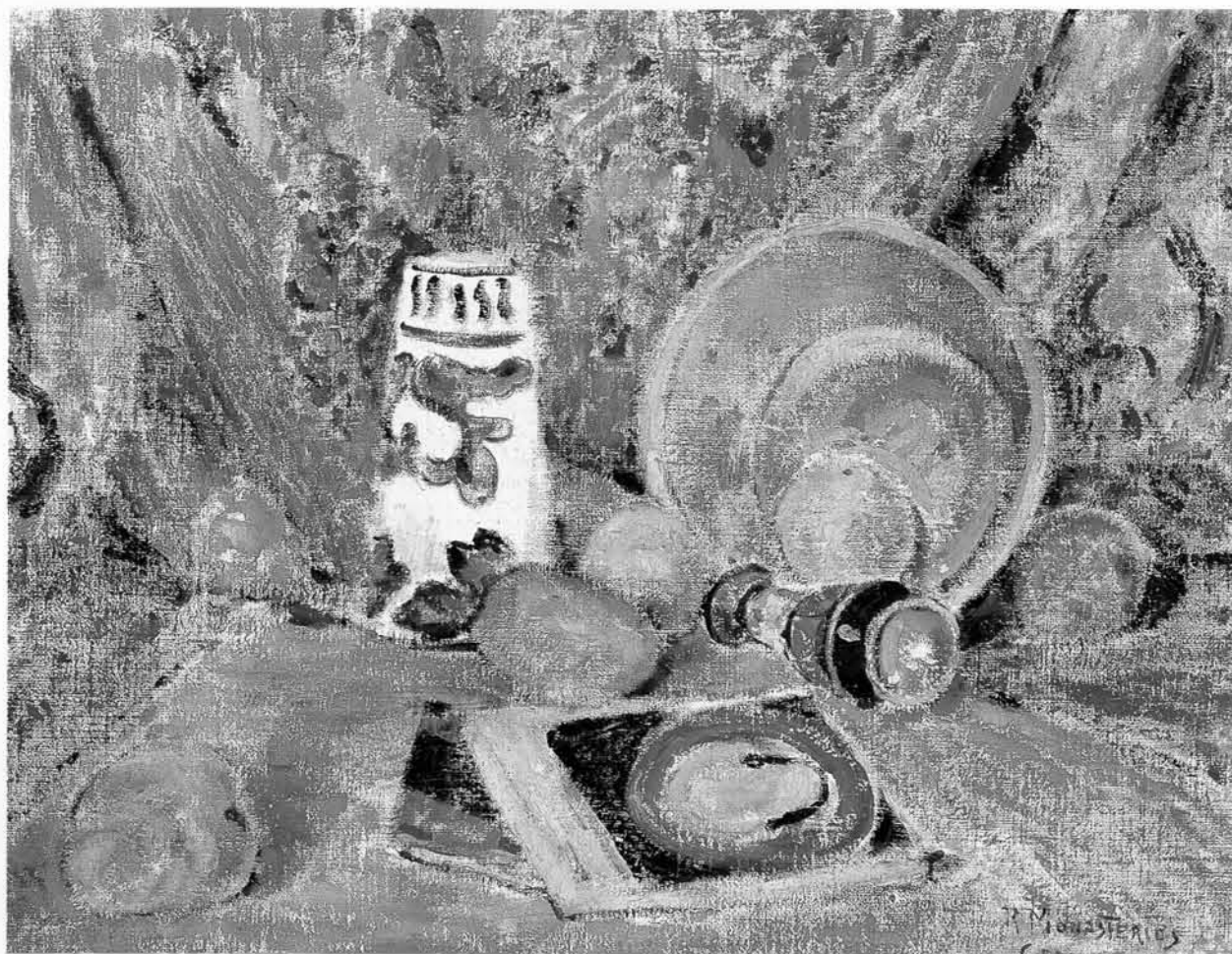


PLATE 1.9  
Rafael Monasterios,  
*Bodegón [Still Life]*, 1930,  
oil on canvas, 53.3 × 69.6  
cm. / 21 × 27½ in.  
Courtesy Dr. José Jaime  
Araujo Paul, Caracas.  
Photo: Miguel Angel  
Clemente.



PLATE 1.10  
Armando Reverón, *La  
cueva [The Cave]*, 1919, oil  
on canvas, 153.7 × 161.25  
cm. / 39¾ × 61¾ in.  
Former Collection  
Alfredo Boulton,  
Caracas. Photo: Ron  
Jameson, from Alfredo  
Boulton, *La obra de  
Armando Reverón* (pl. 5).

Zuloaga during a visit to Paris and associated with *modernista* painters in Spain. He had also been drawn to the work of Diego Velázquez and Francisco Goya. In 1915, an exhibition of over six hundred works by Goya at the Palacio del Retiro in Madrid made a lasting impression on Reverón. The impact of Goya's dressed and naked *majas* is evident in Reverón's *La cueva [The Cave]* (1919; PL. 1.10), in which two reclining half-naked women with veiled eyes blend into an overall vaporous blue shadow. Although his use of blue in the work of this period can be traced to his association with Ferdinandov, Reverón's *La cueva* synthesizes different modes into a symbolist representation of women, in this case, two prostitutes awaiting their customers. The painting's title is in itself suggestive, implying that these women, as potential sources of pleasure, are also threats to a male, since they might engulf him.

Reverón turned to impressionism after meeting Boggio, Mützner, and especially Ferdinandov in 1916. During the following five years he adopted Ferdinandov's blue tonalities in several paintings; however, over time he gradually eliminated blue and most other bright colors from his palette, and by the mid-1920s his paintings were virtually bled of all color. He began using a predominance of white after moving to the coastal town of Macuto near Caracas in 1921. Macuto, now known as a sprawling resort, was a quiet little town in the 1920s. There Reverón built his own home out of palm thatch and wooden posts, with rough canvas curtains at the windows, and lived there for the rest of his life with his companion and model, Juanita Motta.<sup>47</sup>

Reverón's move to Macuto was seen by some critics as an escape from an overindustrialized urban environment to a more primitive way of life. The late Argentine critic Marta Traba noted that this move coincided with the development of the oil industry in Venezuela.<sup>48</sup> In Europe it was the postimpressionists,



FIGURE 1.10  
Armando Reverón, *El  
playón [Landscape, or The  
Little Beach]*, 1929, oil  
and tempera on canvas,  
91 × 106 cm. / 35¾ × 41¾  
in. Collection Eduardo  
López de Ceballos,  
Caracas. Photo: Ron  
Jameson, from Alfredo  
Boulton, *La obra de  
Armando Reverón* (pl. 18),  
courtesy Sylvia Boulton.

not the impressionists, who were alienated and who turned against over-industrialization. Reverón's life had some of the legendary aspects of Van Gogh's and Gauguin's lives. He became a recluse and later suffered mental breakdowns on several occasions, attributed by some to complications after a bout with typhoid at the age of twelve, and by others to his complex relationship with a negligent mother. Nonetheless, as an artist, his concerns with atmospheric effects and luminosity were those of the impressionists.<sup>49</sup>

Reverón's years in Macuto belong to his mature period. Of the three periods identified in his work—the blue before 1921, the white from about 1925 to 1934, and the sepia one from about 1936 to 1949—his most original work belongs to the white period. Some of these paintings have the vaporous haze of Monet's late work, particularly Monet's *Houses of Parliament* series (London). But for Reverón, the phenomenon of light was also a direct response to his immediate experience in a tropical setting. By the mid-1920s, the subjects of his paintings emerge as barely revealed visions in a haze of blinding white light painted with broad brush strokes on unprimed canvas. His subjects included reclining figures and coastal land and seascapes. In the





FIGURE 1.11  
Armando Reverón,  
*Autorretrato con muñecas*  
[Self-Portrait with Dolls],  
c. 1949, charcoal, chalk,  
crayon, and pastel on  
paper on cardboard,  
64.66 × 83.5 cm. / 25½ ×  
32¾ in. Courtesy  
Fundación Galería de  
Arte Nacional, Caracas.  
Photo: CINAP.

landscapes, trees, mountains, and beaches can be detected as pale bluish or beige shapes in an otherwise white painting. The natural tone of the canvas, visible between the brush strokes, is integral to the composition. In *El playón* [Landscape, also known as *The Little Beach*] (1929; FIG. 1.10), the barest touches of ocher, lavender, and pale blue with broad sweeps of white define trees, a beach, the sea, and a distant coastline. In *Marina* [Marine] (1931), a distant coastal landscape can be identified through white haze that is similar to one Fritz Melbye had painted in the nineteenth century. Reverón's exploitation of the bare canvas as background and use of painted white areas also bring to mind Pissarro's technique of allowing the white paper to convey effects of brilliant light in his drawings and watercolors. In spite of Reverón's elimination of all he considered unessential and his overall white surfaces, his paintings have structure and remain surprisingly solid.

Reverón's way of approaching his painting was as unusual as the finished work. The act of painting itself became a performance resembling a ritual dance that combined penitent and erotic gesturing as part of the process. He worked bare from the waist up, tightly cinching

his waist and plugging his ears with cotton in order to shut out all distractions. He then attacked the canvas with lunges, grunts, and what he perceived as a necessary rhythm.<sup>50</sup> Unlike Jackson Pollock, who poured and dripped color onto a canvas laid out on the floor as an extension of his actions, Reverón's motions were not intended as gestures or as expressions of the individual. Rather, they evoked a trancelike state that led, through a ritualistic dance sometimes resembling a bullfight, to a finished painting as the product of this concentrated ritual.

Reverón's subjects also included indoor scenes. He depicted his thatch home looking from the inside out with the same predominance of white as in his landscapes to convey the impact of blinding light experienced as one goes from the dark interior to the sunny exterior. In many compositions he also included figures, some of which were painted from live models, others from the life-sized rag dolls he had made. These eerie, lifelike dolls with real hair and glass eyes that Reverón treated like members of his family are now part of the museum display. They can be found standing, seated, or reclining with their offspring on couches throughout the complex. Dolls appear in one of Reverón's later works, *Autorretrato con muñecas* [Self-Portrait with Dolls] (c. 1949; FIG. 1.11), one of several such works in which he is a part of the family group. Regardless of the psychological complexities of Reverón's character, the dolls, like the rest of his household in Macuto, should be seen as a significant part of his artistic production.

Reverón exhibited little during his lifetime. His first and only individual exhibition took place in Caracas in 1933, and a short time later, he exhibited in Paris. It took another generation of artists such as Jacobo Borges and Alejandro Otero to appreciate the value of Reverón's contribution to Venezuelan art.

#### POSTIMPRESSIONISM

As is evident in the work of Fader and Reverón, impressionism became a source for idiosyncratic mutations in Latin America. On the other hand, postimpressionism, because of its broader definition independent of any single style, was widespread. Some of postimpressionism's characteristics were implicit in *modernismo* and some symbolist art, but it also existed on its own, even though it did not have a name in Latin America at the time it was occurring. The popularity of postimpressionism can be attributed to its synthetic adaptability that could even accommodate elements of expressionism as well as Gauguin's flat design. Many postimpressionists admired Cézanne and Van Gogh as well as Gauguin for their use of color or brushwork. Two major exponents of postimpressionism were the Colombian Andrés de Santa María and the Uruguayan Pedro Figari.

Santa María (1860–1945), like Reverón, had been something of an anomaly in his country during his lifetime. But rather than being alienated like Reverón, Santa María was misunderstood by his compatriots, and his art was not appreciated until after his death. Until the late 1950s, Colombian art consisted primarily of various forms of naturalism and Mexican-inspired social realism. Santa María's work presented too much of a departure from these traditions to be appreciated at the time. Perhaps for this reason, he spent only thirteen years of his eighty-five-year life in Colombia. He was taken to Europe at the age of two and lived first in England, then France. Following the pattern of other artists from Latin American countries, he studied at the Fine Arts Academy in Paris and participated in several Salon des Artistes Français exhibitions. He also met Zuloaga and Rusiñol in Paris, and later studied with Rusiñol in Spain. Consequently, his formation incorporated both the French and Spanish schools.

As both sculptor and painter, he worked in Colombia on two occasions, from 1893 to 1897 and from 1904 to 1911. During his second stay in Bogotá, he taught art, directed the School of Fine Arts, and established a School of Decorative Arts and Industries as an annex for ceramic and silver work, bronze casting, and wood and stone carving.<sup>51</sup> But in spite of his efforts, he found a hostile environment in his country, and when he exhibited in Bogotá in 1911, his work was ill received. He returned to Europe the same year, settling in Brussels until his death.

Santa María's early career straddled both the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. In the 1890s he painted genre scenes that reveal an interest in capturing fleeting effects of light and shimmering water, but there was more of Jean-François Millet and early Sorolla in his work than of the impressionists. In *Las segadoras* [Gleaners] (1895), he makes a clear reference to Millet's *The Gleaners*, but in Santa María's version, the gleaners are three Colombian women shown in the highland Colombian savannah wearing traditional costumes and the bowler hats typically worn by Andean Indian women. Santa María went through a short-lived impressionist phase from about 1904 to the middle of the following decade when he worked in Colombia and Macuto (where Reverón was to live a few years later).

Santa María's postimpressionist phase began in the 1920s, but instead of embracing Van Gogh's or Gauguin's undulating designs, he adopted the expressionist distortions of his contemporaries Oskar Kokoshka and Chaim Soutine tempered by the naturalism of Spanish painting. The sense of discomfort generated by Santa María's paintings comes not from the distortions, which in his work are limited to figural elongations, but to his perverse color combinations. In *Anunciación* [Annunciation] (1922; PL. 1.11), all of the traditional iconography for this subject is present: the Virgin's book, lilies, and the dove of the Holy Spirit. But the Virgin

and the archangel appear as contemporary aristocratic types dressed in black against a vivid red background. This color inversion gives the painting a profane symbolist twist more appropriate for a satanic ritual.<sup>52</sup> Santa María's taste for contradiction is also evident in *Bodegón con figura [Still Life with Figure]* (1934; PL. 1.12), in which a woman, clearly recognizable as the same individual as the Virgin in *Anunciación*, stands behind a gargantuan spread of fish, cheeses, fruits, ham, and an earthen jug of wine—all of which takes up the whole foreground of the picture. The arrangement of figure and table is a take on Henri Matisse's *Harmony in Red* of 1909. But in contrast to Matisse's appealing colors, Santa María used color in the manner of the German expressionists to jolt the viewer's sensibilities. His banquet consists of thick layers of dark reds, ochers, and prunes that emphasize a repulsive, rather than an appetizing, side of this culinary overload. The unappealing mass of food is also at odds with the gracious, aristocratic female figure. Except in his early works, Santa María's subjects were not identifiably Colombian but were international. Perhaps for this reason neither his status as a Colombian citizen nor his importance as an innovative painter was acknowledged until the 1960s. Only then did a change in critical attitudes in Colombia bring a new awareness of Santa María as Colombia's first modernist.<sup>53</sup>

Conversely, the Uruguayan Pedro Figari (1861–1938), a contemporary of Santa María's, preferred the decorative arabesques and appealing color of Vuillard and Bonnard. Figari also made Uruguay's and Argentina's landscape, creoles, and blacks his main subjects, imbuing them with poetic qualities.<sup>54</sup> Born to an Italian immigrant father and an Uruguayan mother, Figari was strongly motivated by the youth of his country (founded just thirty-one years before his birth) to contribute to its cultural development and to the formulation of an appropriate artistic expression. As a

lawyer, an educator, a journalist, a parliamentarian, a philosopher, and a writer as well as a painter (another Renaissance man like Dr. Atl), he had actively participated in the country's political and legal arena before the turn of the century.<sup>55</sup>

Figari expressed his commitment to his culture in his abundant writings, and he believed that art should be an expression of this culture. He set down his ideas in a three-volume book, *Arte, estética, ideal* (1912), illustrating his peculiar position as a progressive intellectual whose theories incorporated elements of positivism, Darwinism, Marxism, and the ideas of the French philosopher Henry Bergson. The latter had been especially influential on late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century European artists.<sup>56</sup>

In 1910, Figari had developed a method of industrial design and art education based on the notion that "either a country industrializes itself or others would industrialize it."<sup>57</sup> He sought to establish a program of mass education in the industrial arts for the purpose of awakening a "national soul" and producing "worker/artists."<sup>58</sup> In a parallel with the Mexicans, Figari believed that a method of design could be developed based on "our flora, our fauna, our virgin archaeology," in light of the "anguished exhaustion experienced by the peoples of the old world."<sup>59</sup> He truly believed in the possibility of a cultural renewal through art and industry independent of Europe. But his plans for educational reform in Uruguay were thwarted by bureaucracy and rivalry. Nevertheless, his pioneering work in the art education of his country did not go unnoticed by his Mexican colleagues. In appreciation, the Mexican artists Julio Castellanos and Manuel Rodríguez Lozano, who were visiting Buenos Aires when Figari lived there in the early 1920s, presented him with a signed copy of Adolfo Best-Maugard's book *A Method of Design*.<sup>60</sup>

Although Figari had painted in his spare time for many years, he began to devote full time to his art after his move to Buenos Aires in 1921. He had studied



PLATE 1.11  
Andrés de Santa María,  
*Anunciación [Annun-  
tiation]*, 1922, oil on canvas,  
132 × 173 cm. / 52 × 68 1/8 in.  
Courtesy Museo Nacional  
de Colombia, Bogotá.

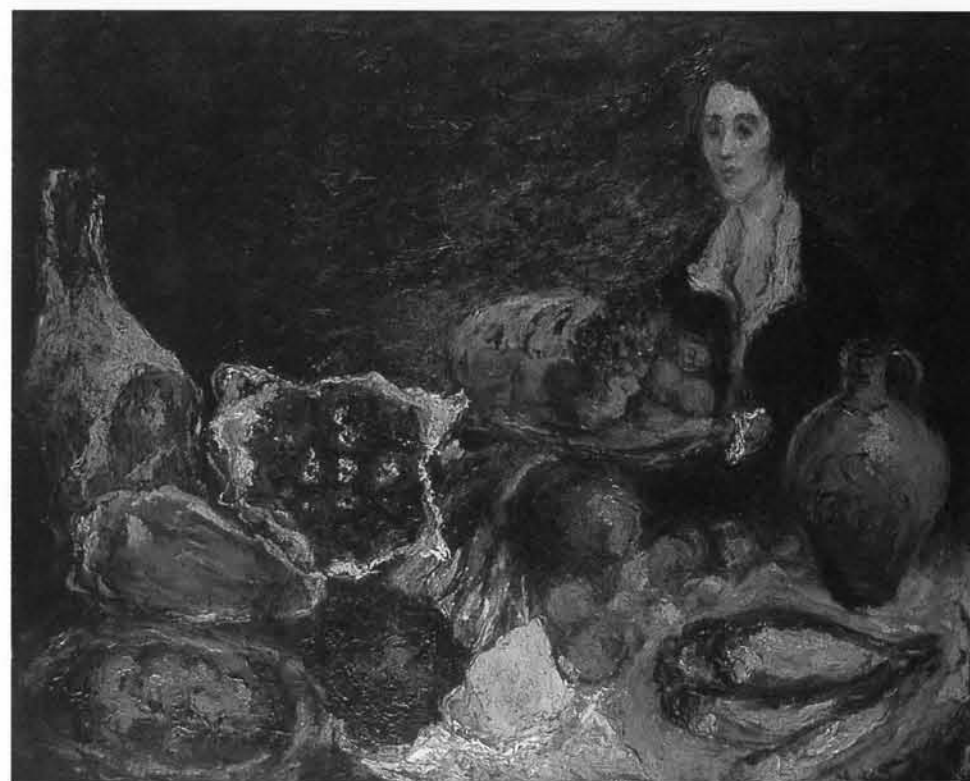


PLATE 1.12  
Andrés de Santa María,  
*Bodegón con figura [Still  
Life with Figure]*, 1934, oil  
on canvas, 60 1/2 × 63 1/2 in.  
Courtesy Museo Nacional  
de Colombia, Bogotá.





FIGURE 1.12  
Pedro Figari, *Baile criollo* [*Creole Dance*], c. 1925, oil on cardboard, 52.1 × 81.3 cm. / 20½ × 32 in. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the Honorable and Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss. Photograph © 1997 The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

briefly in Montevideo with Godofredo Somavilla and possibly earlier in Venice in 1886 during his first trip to Europe. His early paintings have some of the characteristics of Spanish *modernismo*, but by 1919 the impact of the intimists Bonnard and Vuillard had taken over. His friend and fellow painter Milo Beretta, with whom he had gone on painting trips in Montevideo, owned works by Van Gogh, Bonnard, and Vuillard that he had brought back from Europe. Like Vuillard, Figari painted on cardboard and adopted Van Gogh's and Anglada-Camarasa's sinuous brushwork.<sup>61</sup> But Figari, unlike the Europeans, gave up using models in favor of memory, or what the Argentine writer Victoria Ocampo referred to as his "far away and long ago" with brushes (an allusion to the title of a book on the customs of La Plata by the nineteenth-century Argentine-English naturalist Guillermo Henrique Hudson).<sup>62</sup> Figari eschewed scenes of contemporary life in favor of evocations of earlier events, particularly those of colonial salons and nineteenth-century life in the Río de la Plata region.

In his paintings and drawings, Figari sought to capture and record a vanishing *platense* history by creating his own vision of a genesis of the pampa. His sequence ranged from primeval scenes of naked Indians looking over an endless plain in peaceful coexistence with grazing cattle through Argentine and Uruguayan nineteenth-century traditions and folklore. Although Figari used sketches as a basis for his paintings, the fact that he painted from imagination allowed him to eliminate what he considered unessential elements, including shadows, a feature that resulted in a timeless quality in many of his paintings. His richly painted skies suspended over ranches or patios seldom betray the time of day or night except for the frequent presence of the moon hovering near the edge of a tree, near a cloud, or above a patio as in *Baile criollo* [*Creole Dance*] (c. 1925; FIG. 1.12). A sense of timelessness was a characteristic in some postimpressionist painting, particularly that of Cézanne, whose notion of time represented a Bergsonian synthesis of many moments. But Cézanne's paintings

were identifiably day scenes, whereas Figari's were ambiguous. A night moon might appear in what otherwise looks like a day scene.

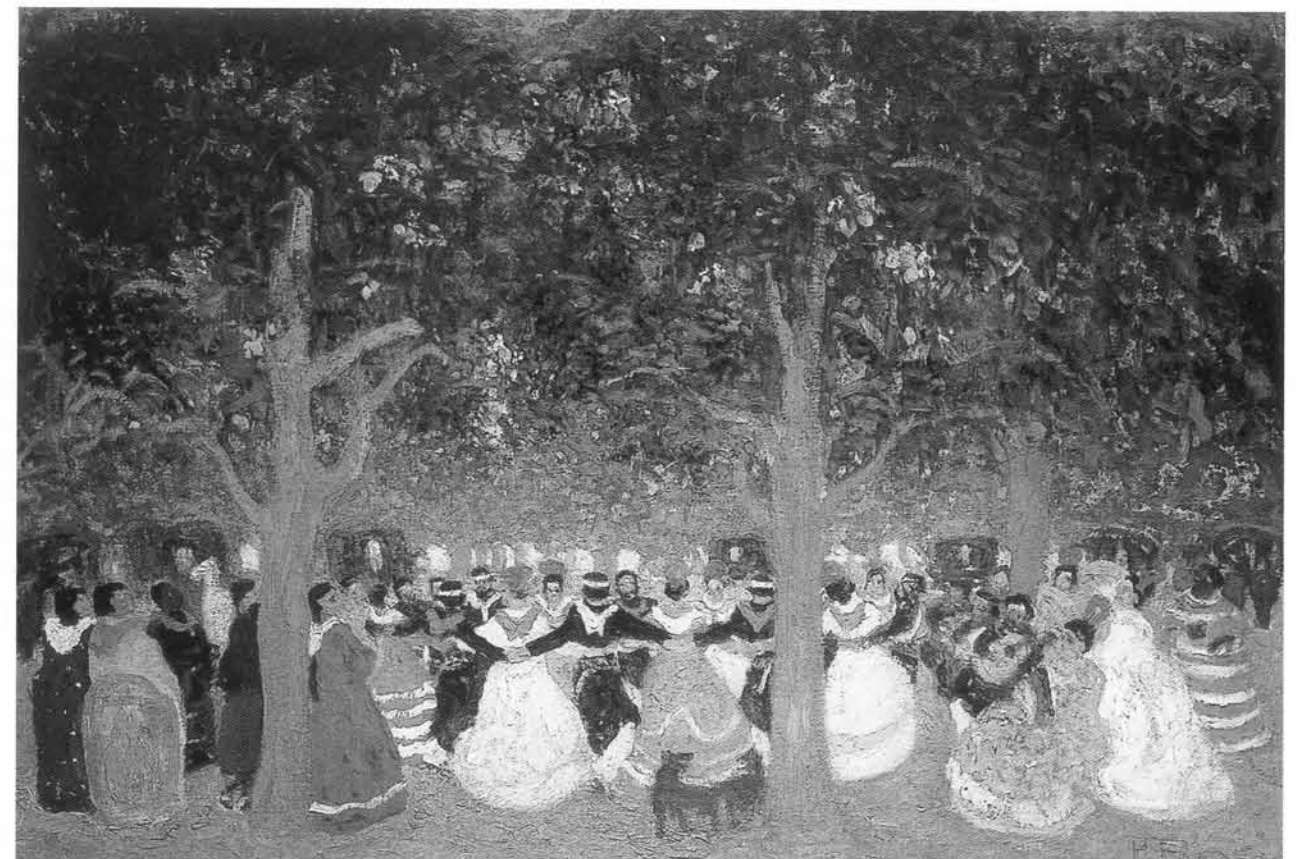
Many of Figari's themes were the same ones Carlos Pellegrini had painted almost a century earlier. They included nineteenth-century upper-class salons, popular dances, and *tertulias* (conversation gatherings). But unlike Pellegrini's detailed scenes, Figari preferred the blurred effects of a dreamed reality filtered through his imagination or memory. He also injected an element of caricature in his work. In his paintings of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century salons, he satirized the pretentiousness of his subjects in this manner. These figures converse or dance in rooms hung with ornate crystal chandeliers and the inevitable portrait of some forebear on a wall. In some paintings, he alluded to a specific historical moment, as is the case in the undated *Media caña federal* (the *media caña* is a creole dance), which shows a ball during the time of Juan Manuel Rosas and his Federalist Party. The event takes place in

a red room in which all the ladies are also dressed in red.

In Argentina, Figari also began painting scenes of *estancias* (Argentine ranches) and the pampa with grazing cattle. He had formed a close friendship with the writer and *estanciero* Ricardo Güiraldes, author of the novel *Don Segundo Sombra* (1926) about an old gaucho and Argentine ranch life. Figari's association with Güiraldes led to a productive exchange. Figari inspired Güiraldes as he wrote the novel, and in turn, Figari's visits to Güiraldes's *estancia* outside Buenos Aires prompted him to paint some of his most memorable ranch scenes. *Fiesta en la estancia* [*Fiesta at the Ranch*], an undated painting of his Buenos Aires period, depicts a group of women in crinolines and men dancing in front of an *estancia* under a moonlit sky.

Figari painted numerous scenes of creole and black dances. The creole dances represented gauchos and their ladies dressed in nineteenth-century crinolines dancing to popular rhythms in pink- or white-walled patios or under the

FIGURE 1.13  
Pedro Figari, *Pericón bajo los naranjeros* [*Pericón beneath the Orange Trees*] (titled *Pericón Creole Dance*, no. 30 in Marianne Manley, *Intimate Recollections of the Río de la Plata: Pedro Figari*), n.d., oil on cardboard, 70 × 100 cm. / 27½ × 39¼ in. Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires. Photo: Ron Jameson, from Marianne Manley, *Intimate Recollections of the Río de la Plata: Pedro Figari* (p. 6). Courtesy Museo de Artes Plásticas, Montevideo.





## PLATE 1.13

Pedro Figari, *Candombe*, 1924, oil on cardboard, 60 × 80 cm. / 23 3/8 × 31 1/2 in. Collection Leonardo Grozovsky, Buenos Aires. Courtesy Leonardo Grozovsky.



trees. Scenes of rural dances, such as *Pericón bajo los naranjeros* [*Pericón beneath the Orange Trees*] of the 1920s (FIG. 1.13), are like creole counterparts of French scenes such as Auguste Renoir's *Dancing at the Moulin de la Galette* or Georges Seurat's *Sunday Afternoon at the Isle of the Grande Jatte*. But Figari used color more expressively and emulated the sinuous brush strokes of Van Gogh. He also assigned specific meanings to color, as he did with red in paintings with references to Rosas's times. While these are post-impressionist characteristics, some of his scenes—though not all—are filled with the joyful exuberance of the impressionists rather than the anguish and sense of alienation often present in Van Gogh's art. Figari translated local scenes as well as the endlessly flat and uneventful pampa landscape into memorable effects of earth and sky.<sup>63</sup> When he exhibited some of his paintings at the Drouet Gallery in Paris in the early 1930s, Vuillard and Bonnard, who were among the visitors to the exhibition, commented that Figari was lucky to have found such "lovely, fresh and poetic" things to paint, and that they too would have liked to paint them.<sup>64</sup> But for Figari these subjects

were as commonplace as Vuillard's and Bonnard's interiors and gardens were to them.

Figari's representations of Uruguayan and Argentine blacks at leisure in their own homes; visiting one another; attending wakes, weddings, and funerals; or dancing the *candombe* (an Afro-Uruguayan dance) were more controversial. Although black culture was the rage in Paris and New York during the 1920s, Figari was the first artist in the Southern Cone, where racism was rampant, to represent blacks as independent citizens instead of as subordinates of white masters.<sup>65</sup> Many of his paintings showed blacks dancing *candombe*, a profane blend of a European quadrille and an African (Bantu) rhythm (not to be confused with the Brazilian *candomblé*, which is a religious ritual combining elements from African and Catholic religions and practiced widely in the northeast and other coastal regions of Brazil). The *candombe* was danced by Uruguayan and sometimes Argentine blacks on special occasions such as carnival, Christmas, Easter, the Day of Kings, and other Catholic holidays. Since the custom of dancing the *candombe* had all but died out by the time Figari took up the subject in his paintings, he based his

representations of it on written and verbal accounts. He had also studied the ways of blacks as a youth when he visited a rooming house in a black community in Montevideo and sketched its inhabitants from life.

In Figari's *candombe* scenes, the dancers are shown wearing the clothes they inherited from their white masters, for whom they had worked as domestics. The women usually wore flowery crinolines, and some of the men, crepe-hung top hats and tuxedos.<sup>66</sup> Except for the undated *Candombe federal*, whose title specifically refers to the time of Rosas's administration in Argentina, most of the paintings of this subject had the same title. In *Candombe* of 1924, a "king" and "queen," traditionally elected for the day, preside over the dance from their respective positions on either side of an altar with three cult figures on it set up in a room (PL. 1.13). The cult figures have the double attributes of African deities and Catholic saints. On the left, a drummer plays a *tamboril* (a type of bongo drum), and a master of ceremonies on a stage next to him directs the dance that takes place in the foreground.<sup>67</sup>

Figari chose blacks as subjects less for their exotic appeal than for their embodiment of his radical theories about Western society. In the process, he unwittingly stereotyped his subjects in a manner that would be seen as racist by today's standards. In a parallel with Gauguin, who found in Tahitians a return to innocence, Figari saw in blacks an example of all the qualities missing in contemporary white civilization. Because, according to him, they had spiritual integrity without hypocrisy and were unburdened by Christian morality, they were better adjusted to normal human experience than were

overcivilized whites, since blacks followed their instincts.<sup>68</sup> At the time, his beliefs were the commonplace ones of many artists who sought in non-Western cultures ways to reinvigorate their own art. Figari's familiarity in the early 1920s with French art and literature on black culture undoubtedly played a role. Taken in the context of his time, his introduction of blacks and popular creole types as the subjects of his paintings was, to a conservative Argentine and Uruguayan public, both daring and provocative.

Figari belongs to the *modernista* generation of Herrán, Egas, and Bernaldo de Quirós, all of whom introduced local and rural types from the lower or marginalized classes in a new anti-academic style. These artists painted a class of society never before represented with such boldness and candor in a South American country. They had replaced the safe and distant visions of nineteenth-century Eurocentric painting with images of a reality that had been there all along but that they were now presenting from an uncomfortably close point of view. The *modernistas* had discovered their own popular traditions and landscape, and they presented them in a new vernacular form based on a clever synthesis of Spanish, French, and Italian tendencies that paralleled Rubén Darío's *modernismo*. These artists' manner of representing their subjects was also contemporary with Rivera's depictions of Mexican Indians of the 1920s. But Rivera was a member of a new avant-garde generation whose style derived from cubism. It was left to this new generation to establish the linguistic and visual codes that were to be the basis of later art. But the *modernistas* paved the way.