Popping (Post)modernism: Joaquín Torres-Garcia & Latin America's Pop Art Movement

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POPPING (POST)MODERNISM: JOAQUÍN TORRES-GARCIA & LATIN AMERICA’S POP ART MOVEMENT

BY
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SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

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This thesis comes with great privilege and would not be possible without the stories, writing, and creative production of many Latin Americans. I thank my parents for planting the seeds for what would become my passion for art of the Hispanic world. Growing up observing their careers as a photographer and Spanish teacher, my world view was shaped by visuals and learning about Hispanic culture. I have distinct memories of the family programs on Sundays at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and their 2008 Frida Khalo show, where I fell in love with her portraits. From climbing the long flights of steps to the main entrance, to bending my neck as far as it would go to look up at the Alexander Calder in the Great Stair Hall, and even to begging my parents to hurry my brothers out of the armor gallery, the Philadelphia Museum of Art has been an important part of my childhood and inspiration to study art history. I also attribute my love for art to my Harriton High School art teacher, Ms. Carter, who spent countless hours chatting with me while I drew, painted and sculpted.

Most of all, I thank my thesis readers and professors, Dr. Rosalia Romero and Dr. Marina Perez de Mendiola, who have dedicated their time, patience, and advice to developing this thesis from an idea into a full research paper. Dr. Romero’s course Latinx Modern Art at Pomona College and our many conversations during office hours were instrumental in forming my understanding of Latin American art and arriving at my thesis topic of Latin American Pop art. At Duke University, Dr. Romero also worked on Esther Gabara’s exhibit Pop América, whose exhibition catalogue and curation inspired my artist selection for this thesis. In her course Euskal Herria at Scripps College, Dr. Perez de Mendiola provided many resources and insights for understanding decolonial practices. Dr. Phyllis Jackson’s Pomona College course Black
Aesthetics and the Politics of (Re)Presentation was also fundamental for my critical lens towards art history and visual studies.

In this thesis, I write about Latin American history, including its history of European colonialism and US/European imperialism. I am in great admiration of the many Latin American artists who have dedicated their lives to creative and political practices, especially because artistic creation within colonial systems can be life threatening. Most importantly, African and Indigenous American art is fundamental to Latin American aesthetics. The art that I focus on in this paper would not be possible without these creative influences. Lastly, I acknowledge that I wrote this thesis with the resources from institutions that inhabit Tongva land. The Tongva peoples’ generosity has privileged my education immensely.
Introduction

If any art should be edible, it’s pop art. I remember my mouth watering as a high school student when I stood at the foot of the Philadelphia Museum of Art’s iconic steps and saw the giant exhibition sign hanging on the museum’s pillars. The sign displayed Belgian artist Evelyne Axell’s 1964 painting *Ice Cream* (see fig. 1), as a promotion for the 2015 *International Pop* exhibit. Coated in the bold primary and pastel colors of advertising aesthetics, the painting depicts a woman indulging in an ice cream cone. Taking on the form of a magazine cut-out collage, the woman’s monochrome face and hand rest atop layers of bright, graphic colors that form the background, the ice cream, and her hair. The painting’s consumer-based, bold colors compete for dominance against the unsaturated tones of her body. I asked my mother to take me to visit the exhibition. She was pleasantly surprised at my desire to attend the museum for anything other than the gift shop or cafeteria. Upon entering, it felt as if the gift shop and the cafeteria had become one with the exhibition: commercial imagery, including food labels, lined the canvases that echoed their intrigue throughout the gallery space. I became a real-life kid in a candy store as the gallery sucked me into its abundant, sugar-coated world. The frosted shine of the cola bottles in Tom Wesselmann’s 1963 *Still Life #35* (see fig. 2) triggered my sweet tooth, while the central woman in Tadanori Yokoo’s 1966 painting, *Slavor* (see fig. 3) stared me down with her mouth gaped open and drool sagging from her lips. Eager billboard-style graphics were ready to consume me. Under the spell of their temptation, I wanted to both purchase and eat.

It is no wonder I am so drawn to the bright colors, bold shapes, and graphic style of pop art. Pop art popularizes the aesthetics that advertisers have invented to activate the psychology of consumption. As English Pop artist Richard Hamilton defined it, “Pop Art is: Popular (designed for a mass audience), Transient (short-term solution), Expendable (easily forgotten), Low cost,
Mass produced, Young (aimed at youth), Witty, Sexy, Gimmicky, Glamorous, Big business.”¹

Pop art in the United States and Britain signifies a movement from the 1950s through the 1970s, during which artists introduced advertisement and popular culture aesthetics to the realm of the fine arts.² The artwork activates our impulse to indulge in the commercial through a variety of media: Andy Warhol’s prints, Richard Hamilton’s collages, Tom Wesselmann’s paintings, and Robert Indiana’s sculpture. Even though the canon of Western Art History has attributed the Pop movement to the US and the UK, artists from around the world have made significant contributions to pop art and formed their own Pop movements.

The familiar mouthwatering sensation returned during my junior year of college when I sat in Prof. Rosalia Romero’s office and paged through Esther Gabara’s Pop América, the 2018 exhibition catalogue for the first traveling art exhibition to frame pop as a hemispheric movement across the Americas. I had declared an art history and Spanish major, and had lived abroad in Spain for several summers where I studied the language and deepened my appreciation for art of the Spanish-speaking world. The Pop América artworks came alive on the pages I touched. While the International Pop exhibit framed pop art as a movement that manifested uniquely in each global region, Pop América emphasizes the political activity of Latin American pop. The exhibition’s works embody the dynamism of “pop as a verb,” as the lead curator, Esther Gabara, explains in the introduction to the catalogue.³ She characterizes Pop in Latin America as a dynamic set of actions that incorporate “lively exchanges” between many creative

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¹ “Pop art – Art Term,” Tate, tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/pop-art.
² L. E. Shiner, The Invention of Art: A Cultural History, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); In his book The Invention of Art, Art philosopher Larry Shiner conceptualizes fine art as a “systems, concepts and institutions,” (6); This art system emerged from the European enlightenment, and like modernity, which I will define in this introduction, is a system inscribed by gender, class, and race hierarchies. “Fine art” refers to the elitist, art system that the enlightenment created.
and political entities. From this catalogue, I arrived at the three artists I will focus on in this investigation: Felipe Ehrenberg, Antônio Henrique Amaral, and Juan Dávila.

In 1968, Ehrenberg left his home country of Mexico for England due to the political unrest as a result of Mexico’s socioeconomic inequality. Two years later, in 1972, Amaral moved to New York City to pursue his art practice away from Brazil’s political unrest as a result of its military’s overthrow of the government. In 1974, Dávila left his home of Chile and fled to Australia during the Pinochet dictatorship. These artists lived through contentious domestic political climates that differed from the Cold War nationalism that birthed the patriotic, consumer-based aesthetics of US American and British pop artists. They also had the privilege of leaving their countries when most Latin Americans did not. The right-wing governments in Mexico, Brazil, and Chile inflicted murder, censorship, and oppression onto people who dissented the state’s authoritarian rule. Even after Latin American countries reached independence from Portugal and Spain between 1810 and 1825, the US and European nations maintained colonial control in Latin America into the twentieth century. The governments under which these artists existed perpetuated modernity’s imperialist war tactics on its own people. Amaral, Ehrenberg, and Dávila grappled with internal upheaval within their countries and the outside pressures of colonial imperialism. This characterizes them as part of what the Puerto Rican cultural theorist Nelson Mandonado-Torres calls the “sub-ontological,” or those whose

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4 Jerry Dávila, *Dictatorship in South America*, (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2013). Accessed May 7, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central; Dávila’s book focuses on the dictatorships of the 1960s and 70s in Argentina, Brazil and Chile. In the introduction, he explains that the dictatorships arose at a time of left-wing radical social activism in Latin America, such as the Cuban Revolution and liberation movements in Africa and Asia. Latin American militaries retaliated through their right-wing ideologies, validated by the US Cold War ideology. The militaristic governments stepped over their own limitations of power and enabled their own corruption by violating the human rights of their own people. These violations included rape, kidnap and murder. These dictatorships arose from divisions within their countries that come as a result of histories of dependence and imposed colonial pressure to modernize in Latin America. European and United States ideals of modernization cause wealth inequalities in Latin America that feed into the ideological polarization that causes upheaval.
Being exists as a target of unethical war tactics. At the same time, they exchanged aesthetic ideas with artists from the imperial countries they fled to. They both appropriated and promoted those aesthetics. Latin American artists developed their own visual languages that confront coloniality by localizing their aesthetic practices, and inflicting humorous mockery towards the Western art world.

This thesis argues that Amaral, Ehrenberg, and Dávila’s artworks reflect their dynamic selfhoods during a post-independence era (1822-present) within increasingly globalized political, economic, and aesthetic climates. Decades before the emergence of the pop art movement in Latin America, the Uruguayan artist Joaquín Torres-Garcia subverted modernism, an inherently European epistemological and aesthetic system. Torres-Garcia had a complicated career. He received modernist artist training in Catalonia, Paris and New York, which he later opposed. Over the span of his career, Torres-Garcia developed a style that was uniquely his and writing that explicitly contested cultural imperialism in the Americas. This thesis also proposes that Torres-Garcia’s art and approach to selfhood allows us to consider him as one of the precursors of a “decolonial” intervention: one that questions the outside pressures of modernity’s colonialism and imperialism.

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5 Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept,” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2007), 247; Mandonado Torres explains that Christians in Ancient Rome and the Middle Ages decided that they could legitimately enslave war enemies. Therefore, Christian human rights and ethics values in Christian countries did not apply to enslaved peoples. This is what Christians used to rationalize non-ethical war tactics against enslaved people. Mandonado Torres defines these war tactics as rape and murder. This framework also allowed Europeans to justify enslavement based on race because they defined African and Indigenous Americans as enemies.

6 Joaquín Torres-Garcia, “Essays on Latin American Art,” in *Modern Art in Africa, Asia, and Latin America: An Introduction to Global Modernisms*, Chichester, ed. Elaine O'Brien, (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 391-401; Torres-Garcia’s essays “The School of the South” and “The New Art of America” in which he vehemently opposes cultural imperialism. He remarks that Europe does not allow South America to “thrive.” He calls for “severing our ties with Europe as an attempt both to perpetuate the native culture and to repudiate the bastard culture that has taken hold of our continent.” Torres-Garcia advocates for the understanding of indigenous cultures as a means to understand the world and universal concepts. He emphasizes South American locality as fundamental for forming the universal and severing ties with Europe.
Torres-Garcia sowed some of the seeds of pop art’s budding “trans-modernity”—an approach to thinking about modernity through the voices of the sub-ontological—in the second half of the twentieth century. Ehrenberg, Amaral, and Dávila’s unifying aesthetic choices and unique local sensibilities forge their pathways towards decolonizing art. While the currents of modernism and modernity and their manifestations in Europe and Latin America can be described as complicated at best, one common thread strings them together: subjectivity. Also ingrained in this thesis is my own subjectivity as a US American art history student who is attracted to the aesthetic qualities of Latin American pop art. I also have chosen to approach the study of this art from a decolonizing angle because I take particular interest in decolonizing practices.

**Modernity, Modernism & European Subjectivity**

Modernity marked a shift in European selfhood during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and infiltrated selfhood in the Americas. In his essay “A Disenchantment Called Postmodernism,” Norbert Lechner defines modernity: “Modernity is, above all, a process of secularization: the slow transition from a received order to a produced order.” Through secularization, modernity highlights a philosophical change in the European sense of selfhood from looking to higher Christian powers for knowledge and understanding of the world to looking within the self. Science, mathematics and Philosophy gained epistemological superiority in Europe, which Europeans imposed onto the Americas. Maldonado-Torres cites two other main components of modernity: race and capitalism. He adds that coloniality—or longstanding

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colonial power that is entangled with the conception and perpetuation of colonization—plays a fundamental role in modernity.

These entities work together to create an interlocking system of domination that causes what Maldonado-Torres describes as the coloniality of Being: “the radical betrayal of the trans-ontological by the formation of a world in which the non-ethics of war become naturalized through the idea of race.” In the Americas, European colonists used war tactics such as rape, murder, and enslavement against African and Indigenous American people to enforce their constructed stratifications of gender, class, and race. This definition also applies to other targets of colonialist and imperialist war tactics such as the artists I focus on in this discussion. As a result of the colonial imperialism of Latin America, these artists all escaped their home countries for imperial powers during times of internal militaristic repression. Maldonado-Torres refers to recipients of war tactics as the sub-ontological. Coloniality of Being as a concept articulates the systematic entanglement of modernity within the selfhoods and existence of inhabitants of the Americas, their relationships to one another, with their nation-states, and with the rest of the world.

Modernity and its global economies pressured Latin American countries to define themselves in relationship to Europe and the US through modernization, which included projects such as infrastructure development and demonstrations of modernization through creative production on a global scale. Art historians Mary K. Coffey and Roberto Tejada outline three cultural stages of modernity in twentieth century Latin America: “first, the determination to produce art and ideas on par with those of metropolitan centers, chiefly those of Europe; second,

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8 Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being.” 260; Maldonado-Torres also notes that the Coloniality of being creates a world in which “exceptions to ethical relationships become the norm,” (259). Here, Maldonado-Torres’ use of “idea of race” emphasizes that race is a construct and an invention to promote white supremacy.
a bold rejection of those models; and finally a third-stage integration of the regional and cosmopolitan."\(^9\) These stages reflect how artists began intervening with modernity and its aesthetic counterpart that ruled the global art scene in the 19\(^{th}\) and 20\(^{th}\) centuries: modernism.

As the “first truly global visual culture,”\(^10\) modernism signifies the aestheticizing of self-consciousness. Art historian T.J. Clark’s book *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* summarizes European modernist artwork in a few words: “the terms of modernism—even or especially those that seemed to be given in the simple act of painting—were also constructs.”\(^11\) The key concept here is the construct. Modernism introduced a self-consciousness to artwork: art was no longer a mere reproduction of life on a canvas, but its own creation. Modernist artworks are self-reflexive. They embed acknowledgements of their identities as works of art through pronounced media—such as Berthe Morisot’s 1880 painting *The Wet Nurse Angele Feeding Julie Manet* (see fig. 4) and its thick, Impressionist brushwork that pronounces its painterly qualities\(^12\)—and compositional framing that implies the subjective perspective of an observer. Clark articulates this emerging separation of objects and their visual representations when he writes, “the highest wisdom is knowing that things and pictures do not add up.”\(^13\) Belgian surrealist painter René Magritte’s 1929 painting *The Treachery of Images* (see fig. 5) quintessentially exemplifies Clark’s point. Magritte’s painting depicts a pipe with the caption “Ceci n’est pas une pipe,” signifying that it is not a pipe but a picture of a pipe, and emphasizing the self-reflexivity of the painting. As modernism progressed in the twentieth

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century, it began to value abstract forms, including rigid, geometric ones. Because Enlightenment ideas are central to modernity, their aesthetic scientific and mathematical manifestations can also appear in modernist artwork.

Like modernity, modernism exists through the creation of “otherness” in order to establish the “modern” self, reducing the “other” to a sub-ontological “existence.” The appropriation and exploitation of African and indigenous people in art plays a fundamental role in modernist aesthetics and by extension the artistic modern notion of selfhood. In her essay “Going Native: Paul Gauguin and the Invention of Primitivist Modernism,” American art critic Abigail Solomon Godeau defines this visual exploitation as “a white, Western and preponderantly male quest for an elusive object whose very condition of desirability resides in some form of distance and difference, whether temporal or geographical.” This cultural appropriation and fixation on difference forms modernism’s own sense of self-hood. Twentieth century modernism has also homogenized Latin America’s diverse creative practices through the formation national cultural identity. In Mexican art historian Rita Eder’s essay “Modernismo, modernidad, modernización: piezas para armar una historiografía del nacionalismo cultural mexicano,” she warns that the Mexican nationalism that developed from 1925 to 1960 gave rise to a one-dimensional portrayal of Mexican art. Cultural nationalism perpetuates colonialism

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14 Here, it is important to keep in mind the distinction and interrelation between modernism and modernity. Modernism aestheticizes modernity, so it includes visual representations of sub-ontology.
16 Rita Eder, “Modernismo, modernidad, modernización: piezas para armar una historiografía del nacionalismo cultural mexicano,” in El Arte En México : Autores, Temas, Problemas, ed. Rita Eder (México: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 2001); Eder also notes that the proposal for a national gallery of colonial painting influenced the formation of a national identity of Mexican art; The many national galleries exist in countries all over the world highlight the global pressures to conform to cultural nationalism. For Latin America, these cultural nationalistic pressures Latin America to modernize and reinforce colonial dependence.
because the nation itself is a homogenizing, European construct imposed on its colonial territories.

In what follows, I will show that as a Uruguayan artist, Torres-Garcia both embraced and rejected modernism through his artistic practice and conception of selfhood, which evolved significantly throughout his career. As an evolving modernist artist, Torres-Garcia’s work encompasses all three aesthetic stages of modernity that Coffey and Tejada outline. Born in Uruguay in 1874 to a Catalan father and Uruguayan mother, Torres-Garcia’s intake of the world began with the international influences within his family. His artistic career reached maturity in 1926 upon his arrival to Paris, after spending the beginning of his artistic career in New York City and Catalonia. Art Historian Luis Pérez-Oramas characterizes Torres-Garcia as an “arcadian modern,” which refers to his paradoxical embodiment of rustic, organic aesthetics, and modernism’s rationality and rigid structure. His career in Constructive Universalism, a style of art he created, draws upon modernist techniques and opposes Modernism’s emphasis on progression, and mathematical reasoning through its assertion of the essential, ancient, and natural.

As modernity created its scientific classification of nature, Torres-Garcia constructed his own aesthetic language based on essential symbols that constitute and express human nature to unite people. He integrated Incan symbolism with the lines and structure of French painter Piet

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18 Pérez-Oramas makes the distinction between Constructive universalism and the constructivism movement. Torres-Garcia’s Constructive universalism was based on his idea of fundamental elements of visual art that constitute a universal aesthetic language, 28.
Mondrain’s neoplasticism\(^{19}\) to create a human element to the work, a subjectivity that subverts the prescribed homogeneous objectivity that modernity forces.\(^{20}\) While it would be a whole different task to decipher the pre-Hispanic roots of Torres-Garcia, two things remain clear. First, his return to Uruguay did not necessarily mean he was returning to his indigenous roots through Constructive Universalism. As Estrella Diego states in her essay *Return to The Native Land: the Invention of an Origin*:

> In fact, if we accept the idea that fiction is implicit in anyone’s story of his or her own life, perhaps in seeking pre-Hispanic roots through the supposedly “Indian blood” in his veins Torres-Garcia was looking a sign of belonging to a certain past that he wanted and needed to make his own.\(^{21}\)

Second, aside from any debate surrounding his use of indigenous forms, Torres-Garcia was against Europe. In his 1942 essay *The New Art of America* Torres-Garcia calls for “severing our ties with Europe,”\(^{22}\) and for Pan-American unity through a return to nature. Even though his inclusion of Incan symbolism plays into European appropriation and exploitation of indigenous culture, Torres-Garcia’s creation of his own aesthetic language within a European art scene rejects the ability of Modernism to define him and his art.

> He visualizes this rejection in his 1943 pen and ink drawing *América Invertida* (see fig.

\(^{19}\) “Neo-Plasticism,” Tate, Tate, https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/n/neo-plasticism; Neo-plasticism refers to the modern art developed by Dutch painter Piet Mondrian. Mondrian published an essay “Neo-Plasticism in Pictorial Art, in which he defined his vision for abstract forms. Rather than natural forms, Mondrian advocated for the use of straight lines and primary colors for an “aesthetically purified” abstract form. These visual elements were thought of as basic, fundamental aesthetic building blocks. As I discuss in this paper, Torres-Garcia’s Constructive Universalism also seeks essential building blocks of art and humanity as a whole, but localizes them to be uniquely Uruguayan.


6). While simple in its form and stylistic technique, this map literally turns the world upside down. Depicting the continent of South America with its southern cone facing north, *América Invertida* contests the hegemonic cartographic imaginary of the Americas. Its stick figure sun shines over the continent with the moon hovering on the opposite side. “X”’s form a constellation by the moon, and while a ship and fish float in the ocean below. Two lines intersect the continent. “Ecuador” labels the lower line. At the top tip of the continent, the drawn capital letter “S” stands for south, reversing the invented association of the north with the top of the map. Even though Torres-Garcia created this piece in the 1940s, it provided a framework for more Latin American artists to offer unique representations of Latin America that flip, challenge, interrogate hegemonic ones.

As another form of map fundamental to Torres-Garcia’s development as an artist, grids embody a complex combination of modernism, universalism and spirituality. Like Torres-Garcia (especially during this stage of his career), grids have a paradoxical relationship with modernism through their “spiritualism and science.” The use of grids in art is no easy history to trace or decipher. In her 1979 essay “Grids,” historian Rosalind Krauss argues that grids bring out the surface of the work in a modernist self-reflexive form. Krauss writes, “indeed if it maps anything, it maps the surface of the painting itself.” The grid’s mapping of the painting itself connects to the self-awareness that modernist artwork communicates on its surfaces. Intuitively, the grid’s nature as a structure would signify its relationship to modernism too; as modernism and modernity value sequential order and categorization. Krauss complicates this instinct when she writes, “we have also discovered that one of the most modernist things about it is its capacity

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24 Ibid, 52.
to serve as a paradigm or model for the antidevelopmental, the antinarrative and the antihistorical.” Are development, narrative and history not all symptoms of modernism? According to Krauss, the grid is so fundamental to modernism that it is impervious to change and serves as a modernist emblem. At the same time, Krauss argues that grids provide a structure for artists to hold spirituality and mythology in their work. She also describes the grid as, “the staircase to the universal.” While I infer this universality to reference modernity’s form of universality—and Torres-Garcia’s use of it is most-likely modernist in the early stages of his career—the grid’s integration of spirituality provides the opportunity for Torres-Garcia to later use the grid for his own agenda.

Popping the Postmodern through “Transmodernity”

The aim of this thesis is to analyze the artworks of Amaral, Ehrenberg, and Dávila, which revolutionize selfhood in the postmodern era through their building on the aesthetic principles of Torres-Garcia and his disturbance of modernism. Postmodernism in the US and Europe signifies a break from the stylistic progression of modernism and towards the appropriation and resurgence of pre-existing styles. Pop art paved the way for this movement in the US and Europe, as it shocked the elitist art world with its commercial imagery and “low-brow” art style. Specific to Latin America, postmodernism includes both aesthetics and politics because

25 Ibid, 64.
26 Ibid, 54.
27 Vicki Goldberg, “Still Subversive After All These Years,” The New York Times, (September 19, 1993), https://www.nytimes.com/1993/09/19/arts/still-subversive-after-all-these-years.html; In this New York Times article, art critic Vicki Goldberg discusses the shock that pioneer pop artists, such as Roy Lichtenstein, brought to the art world in the 1960s. Not only were critics outraged, but so were artists. Goldberg notes that in 1962 Abstract Expressionists Robert Motherwell and Mark Rothko left the Sidney Janis Gallery the gallery put on a Pop show; James Meyer et al “Back to Tomorrow Pop Art,” Artforum, (October 2004), https://www.artforum.com/print/200408/pop-art-7606; See art critic Clement Greenberg’s early 1960s “Pop Art” talk (the exact time and location are unknown);
aesthetics were inherently political. According to Lechner, Latin American Postmodernism signifies a disenchantment from the promised harmonious outcomes of modernity. He postulates that while postmodernism rejects modernism’s homogeneity, it fails to actively embrace difference or promote collectivity.

In order to situate Latin American pop in an autonomous role that jolts Europe’s aesthetic and political systems, we must look beyond postmodernism as the model for understanding late twentieth century artwork. Instead, this thesis chooses another critical lens, one based on Maldonado-Torres’s suggestion of transmodernity as the transition away from modernity that occurs in Latin America and towards decolonization. Transmodernity, he explains, “is an invitation to think modernity/coloniality critically from different epistemic positions according to the manifold experiences of subjects who suffer different dimensions of the coloniality of Being.” Here, Maldonado-Torres proposes a form of unity that embraces subjective, personal selfhoods. Ehrenberg, Amaral and Dávila’s subversive uses of materiality, the grid, and iconography create a unifying thread that connects them back to Torres-Garcia. The inclusion of the three pop artists’ localities and experiences in their work creates the unique diversity necessary for transmodern work. As Torres-Garcia shares some of their aesthetic qualities, his

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When I thought about Pop’s controversial entry into the art world, I immediately thought, “what did Clement Greenberg think as one of the most quintessentially elitist art critics of the twentieth century?” Greenberg was instrumental in supporting modernism and hegemonic fine-art systems in the twentieth century. As an embodiment the art historical cannon of this period, he wrote his famous text, “Avant Garde and Kitsch,” in which he hierarchizes abstract expressionism above kitsch, which he characterized as working-class “low” art. Greenberg opposed art that was accessible to the masses and preferred the elitism and exclusivity of abstract expressionism, whose covert messaging was harder to de-code. Pop art’s commercial imagery perpetuated the aesthetics of mass culture that rubbed against Greenberg’s value for abstract expressionism. Pop’s ability to infiltrate “high” art through “low” imagery confused critics like Greenberg. While he did not hate pop art, it underwhelmed him. He appreciated its presence in the elite art system, but in his talk claimed, “Pop art has not yet produced anything that has given me, for one, pause; moved me deeply; that has challenged my taste or capacities and forced me to expand them.” It is surprising that Greenberg did not completely oppose pop art because of its commercial nature.

legacy provides a valuable framework a decolonizing subversion of modernism’s homogenizing universality.
Activating Art: Felipe Ehrenberg’s Caja no 25495

When Ehrenberg returned to Mexico in 1974 from his six-year exile in England, he found his home country in a confused state. Mexico was implementing modernizing projects to become a democracy;30 but the wounds of its 1968 military massacre that originally led to the artist’s exile remained open and ignored. The military massacre occurred one week before the 1968 Mexico City Olympic Games when the government led the militant kidnapping and murder of hundreds of student protestors at Tlatelolco.31 Characteristic of Ehrenberg’s use of politics to inform art and vice versa, Ehrenberg contributed to the student activist movement through his mail art. He utilized the mail system32 to disperse information about the rebellion to potential readers.

30 Luis M Castañeda.,Spectacular Mexico : Design, Propaganda, and the 1968 Olympics, A Quadrant Book, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); See Castañeda’s book for an in-depth analysis of how the 1968 Olympics design demonstrate these modernizing efforts by the Mexican government. Mexico’s Miguel Alemán’s 1946-1952 administration initiated a string of administrations that prioritized infrastructure, industrialization, and global economic metrics, such as GDP. This created the illusion of economic prosperity that ignored the polarizing economic disparities of the country. The Olympics was a project to appear as modern and developed on an international scale after the Mexican revolutionary wars from 1910-20. Mexico’s advanced transit systems, athletic stadiums and graphics for the Olympics served as visual demonstrations of its economic development on an international stage. The Mexican state patronized this imagery to create and promote a Mexican national identity that would participate in the global economic and ideological exchange of imagery. The state also utilized this patronage to undermine, censor and inflict violence upon efforts opposing its political agendas.

31 Elena Poniatowska, La Noche De Tlatelolco: Testimonios De Historia Oral. 44. ed. Biblioteca Era. (México: Ediciones Era, 1985). In the limited preview of this book available online, Mexican journalist Elena Poniatowska lays out a photo essay narrative that stages the buildup to the Tlatelolco massacre. Multiple student protests took place. One of the largest ones was on August 27th, 1968, in which 300,000 people participated. Signs included statements for freedom from government oppression such as, “¡Libertad a los presos politicos!” (Freedom for Political prisoners) Students also wrote the names of the police chiefs to expose their corruption. 

32 Zanna Gilbert, “Converting the Systems into Poetry: Art and the Mail” arara, no. 11 (2011), https://www1.essex.ac.uk/arthistory/research/pdfs/arara_issue_9/gilbert.pdf. Art historian Zanna Gilbert has written extensively on mail art. In this particular essay, she opens with Felipe Ehrenberg’s idea of “converting the systems into poetry” through mail art. Ehrenberg believed in manipulating governmental and capitalistic systems as a social activism strategy. This activism interrogates capitalism’s forced dependence on systems that do not benefit everyone. Gilbert eloquently describes mail art as transforming “the mundane into the marvelous.” Ehrenberg’s mail art and its legacy in twentieth century art, exemplifies his use of politics to inform art and art to inform politics; Oliver Basciano, “Felipe Ehrenberg: Fi Fa Fo Fum,” Art Review, (07 August 2015), https://artreview.com/september-2014-feature-felipe-ehrenberg/. In this 2014 ArtReview interview with Ehrenberg, he discusses his early adoption of mail art in 1968 as part of the student activism rebellions against the Mexican government. Ehrenberg used mail art to distribute information about the rebellions, but fled to England after realizing the danger of continuing subversive work in Mexico. Ehrenberg continued experimenting and working with print in England. The interview takes place before the 2014 World Cup in Brazil when Ehrenberg created a collage series that he also characterized as letters from Brazil. The themes of the world cup throughout the collages directly link the artwork to Brazil’s presence on the international stage. This resurfaces the contextual significance of his 1968 painting Caja no. 25495 during the Mexican 1968 Olympic Games which I discuss in this section. The
supporters. After the government hounded his close colleagues for censorship violations, Ehrenberg and his wife decided to flee the country to protect themselves and their family. Ehrenberg left Mexico during a moment of political upheaval within Mexico itself and the broader global politics of student activism and the Cold War. Student uprisings broke out in Uruguay and France, while Vietnam War and Civil Rights activists protested US militarism white supremacy in the United States.

Mexico’s hosting of the Olympics masked its contentious internal political climate through the promotion of Mexican nationalism on an international stage. The Mexican government took this as an opportunity to visually demonstrate the progress, infrastructure, and economic prosperity that modernity values. The new stadiums, transportation systems, and Olympic graphics illustrated a re-branding of Mexican national identity that hid the disparate effects of modernity beneath their shiny surfaces. The Olympics did not completely avoid the human rights activism occurring globally. During its ceremonies, two Black American track runners, Tommie Smith and John Carlos, raised their fists during the United States national anthem as a symbol of protest and Black activism. These acts represent global civilian interventions to the nationalism. When Ehrenberg returned from England six years after the Olympics, it became even more apparent to him that the promising effects of modernity and

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Olympics and the World Cup both demonstrate the modernization of the countries where they take place and play into the illusions of development that Castañeda considers when they take place in Latin America. Ehrenberg’s repetition of these themes over three decades apart demonstrates the longevity and perpetuation of this illusive modernization in Latin America; Also, see Chilean artist Eugenio Dittborn’s artwork for more examples of profound mail art in Latin America.

33 See Susana Draper’s 1968 Mexico: Constellations of Freedom and Democracy for an analysis not only of Mexico in 1968, but also the global significance of that year. Draper proposes the singular-plural idea as a model for looking at 1968 globally. Singular-plural serves a as a means to understand unifying circumstances while remaining attentive to the nuances each country or culture. Draper cites student uprisings in France and Uruguay as noteworthy parallel movements occurring internationally. In Mexico specifically, the Tlatelolco massacre and Olympics define the year. Draper calls for the examination of these events not only for their individual significances, but also their relation to one another.
nationalism led the country to be scattered; the upper classes with power were the sole beneficiaries of the government and economy.

Repairing Mexico was a big undertaking that no one person could tackle. But puzzles excited Ehrenberg. He took a political approach to art and an artistic approach to politics that he utilized to interrogate complicated and contradictory socio-political and aesthetic dynamics in Mexico. These complications refer to Mexican art’s response to both local currents and the US/European art movements that dominated the international art scene. Long before the nationalist aesthetics of the Olympics, nationalism defined Mexico’s art and culture in the first two decades of the twentieth century. In the 1970s, Mexican artists still followed the ghost of nationalism’s unfulfilled promises in its aimless direction.

Ehrenberg sought to create more cohesive Mexican artistic communities to unify Mexican art. His essay East and West – The Twain do Meet captures his artistic and political ambition that emerges from the poetic ease of his narration. The essay articulates his drive to lead artistic creation that problematized modernity’s hegemonic universality through “intuition rather than intellect.” Ehrenberg writes, “It finally dawned on me that universality is a matter of who writes art history, of who calls the shots.” He offers context as a viable replacement to universality, emphasizing locality and selfhood’s essential role in artistic narration. He ends his essay with the insight, “I believe that events have taken a splendid turn when people begin realizing that cultural progress lies not in the cold hardwares of the mind and the market but in

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35 Tracy Charlotte Teran, “Freelance : A Felipe Ehrenberg Monograph,” Dissertation, (California State University, Long Beach, 2012); Ehrenberg self-identifies as a neologist, meaning he uses various visual languages to create his own. Like Torres-Garcia, language is at the core of his work.
36 Luis Pérez Oramas, “The Anonymous Rule,” 12. Pérez Oramas notes that Torres-Garcia valued intuition as the defining feature of visual art. Here marks another connection between Ehrenberg and Torres-Garcia in not only their visuals, but their artistic philosophies.
the warm softwares of the heart and the community.” Here, Ehrenberg departs from Modernist philosophy by emphasizing the creativity that comes from communal connection. This opposes the thought and reason that European imperialism imposes on the Americas. His emphasis on self-definition as a formation of the collective precisely embodies the transmodern approach that I put forth in the introduction to this paper.

Collectivity is more than a theoretical concept for Ehrenberg. His practice centers a collective approach through his focus on education, artist collaboration and activism. Mail art is one example. Another is his work in as a contributing artist on the visual and poetic magazine *El Corno Emplumado*: a key revolutionary collection of art and literature published between (1962-1969). The magazine used its geographical location of Mexico City to critique the United States’ imperialist warfare in Latin America and Southeast Asia during the Cold War. From this standpoint, *El Corno Emplumado* applied its political stance to its artistic production, as its aesthetics embodied anti-imperialism against the United States and anti-capitalism. In 1977, Ehrenberg joined the experimental art movement *Los Grupos*, which Mexican artist collectives formed in reaction to the Tlatelolco massacre. Ehrenberg’s particular artist group, *Grupo Proceso Pentágono*, created socio-political experimental works that confronted capitalism and imperialism. Their 1981 editorial project *Sur-norte* (South North) responded to the North-

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37 Felipe Ehrenberg, “East and West—The Twain Do Meet,” 146.
38 Roberto Tejada, “Printed Matters,” 125.
39 Karen Benezra, “Introduction to Felipe Ehrenberg's “In Search of a Model for Life’”. ARTMargins, no. 1 (2012): 120–124; Benezra contextualizes Ehrenberg’s “In Search of a Model for Life,” through explaining Ehrenberg’s instrumental work in Mexican activist communities. After returning to Mexico, Ehrenberg Co-Founded one of the first Grupos, *Proceso Pentágono*, which was part of the experimental art movement *Los Grupos*. This movement emerged in part out of *Tlatelolco* and was part of a rise in artist groups both in Mexico and abroad. *Los Grupos* advanced the transition the visual arts underwent in Mexico from academicism to experimentalism. This phased art out of the systematic confines of the academy and used art to activate political agendas and vice versa; Tracy Charlotte, “Freelance: A Felipe Ehrenberg Monograph”; Teran provides several examples of Ehrenberg’s extensive activism through his work as an educator, writer, and artist. Ehrenberg’s ran for Mexico City political office in 1982 under Mexico’s socialist party, Partida Socialista de Mexico. Teran also mentions Ehrenberg’s incorporation of activism to his work as an educator. At the Art Institute of Chicago in 1984 and 1988, Ehrenberg
South Summit in Cancun, Mexico. Officially, this meeting attended by Ronald Regan and Margaret Thatcher was called the International Meeting on Cooperation and Development. Its emphasis on “cooperation” and “development” indicates its imperialistic intentions of modernization. While unpublished in the newspaper Unomásuno due to funding constraints, the work visualized capitalistic imperialism through photographs of palm trees, businessmen, and helicopters. The group’s intentions for its publishing in a newspaper demonstrate their political methods of disseminating their messages. Grupo Proceso Pentágono also explicitly references their collaborative process in their work through inclusion of a table with four chairs in several of their installation pieces. This brings their conversations, exchanges and group work into the exhibition.40

Ehrenberg’s construction of his own universality furthers the locality that Torres-García’s universality established decades prior. The rustic materiality and iconographic language of Ehrenberg’s 1968 pop painting Caja no 25495 (Box no. 25495) (see fig. 7) emulate Torres-García’s employment of these techniques in his 1944 painting Composición. Ehrenberg revolutionizes this aesthetic legacy in Latin America through the deeper relationship he forms with locality in his work. It allows his voice and selfhood to break the paint’s surface. Ehrenberg’s encouragement of locality provides the space for community-oriented artistic practices and the decolonial, uniquely Latin American universality that emerges through pop.

Dropping us into his world the year he fled Mexico, Ehrenberg’s pop painting Caja no 25495 locks us into a visual spiral. With its bold, pop technique and captivating composition, the

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painting keeps our eyes glued to its acrylic-on-wood surface. Comprised of three bright, primary-colored panels, Caja no 25495 incorporates a composition of bold shapes, including repeated figures, and a serial number. Through these visual elements, Ehrenberg creates his own language that interrogates Western capitalist imperialism from a Mexican standpoint. While mainstream pop aesthetics of the United States and Europe often embrace capitalist consumer culture through their use of the bright, graphic visual language from advertising, Ehrenberg uses these techniques subversively. Ehrenberg thought of mainstream pop aesthetics as contrary to Mexico⁴¹ because of pop art’s embodiment of capitalistic, advertising aesthetics from imperialist cultures. His painting complicates the methodical, industrial pop aesthetic with a handcrafted sense of liveliness and authenticity. Ehrenberg’s combination of pop aesthetics, materiality, iconography, and locality works to achieve this subversion of pop art’s US and European origins.

These visual techniques provide traceable footprints to Torres-Garcia’s 1944 painting Composición (see fig. 8) that disturbs modernism decades earlier. Created two decades before Ehrenberg’s Caja no 25495, the cardboard material in Torres-Garcia’s painting peeks through its primary color palette. Red, yellow and blue quadratic shapes hold iconographic symbols that are thickly outlined in black. The quadratic structure and primary colors resemble the rigid, geometry of Mondrain’s work. The painting style’s rustic style, however, distinguishes it. The brushstrokes contain the whimsical, imaginative nature of their frayed edges and minimal forms. Both paintings create uniquely Latin American visual languages that aggravate US and European aesthetic and political systems in their respective time periods.

Ehrenberg’s use of color and texture creates a bold industrial style that partners with the painting’s rough materiality to create depth. The painting utilizes a bright primary color palette

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whose bold, consistent colors lie flat on the surface. While bright and eye-catching like a billboard, the colors hold added layers of depth and handmade qualities from the materiality of the wood box. Indenting below the surface of the work, the blue plane forms a drawer. The drawer deepens the painting and adds dimension to the flatness of its color. The white upper edge of the blue plane accentuates this indentation through its reveal of the box’s structure. The yellow plane’s circular cutout mirrors the indentation’s effect. It reveals a shimmering gold surface underneath the plane, caressed by a shadow from above. The metallic accents also appear through a swirled grey paint texture on the rectangle in the lower right of the painting and the arrow hovering above it, which contributes to the painting’s industrial feel. The chipped edges that surround the piece, however, reveal the brown wood underneath the bright colors. The integration of the wood plays into the painting’s appeal of a found object, counteracting the elitism of the flat white surfaces that Western modernists established.\textsuperscript{42}

As Caja no 25495 combines found material with Pop’s graphic aesthetic, Torres-García’s painting integrates found material to modernist stylistic techniques for a subversive effect. Composición emulates the style of Dutch modernist painter, Piet Mondrian through its grid-like arrangement of primary colored quadratic shapes enclosed by thick, black outlines. Torres-García, on the other hand, depicts his shapes through loose painting techniques that leave a

\textsuperscript{42} Brian O’Doherty’s famous essay series for Artforum that he later turned into his book Inside the White Cube problematizes modernism’s normalization of plain, white, gallery spaces. O’Doherty challenges the so-called neutrality of white surfaces in art spaces. Inscribed in these surfaces, is not a plain background to highlight art but an assertion of modernist ideologies. The white wall frames its artworks as sacred and attempts to seal off the outside world from corrupting their precious purity. This hierarchizes art and wedges a divide between art that the modernist art system favors and art that it deems as inferior. Furthermore, Modernism’s expansion beyond the confines of the pictorial frame allows the white walls that surround the artworks to become part of the art itself. This is especially true for Abstract Expressionism, whose forms often extend beyond the borders of the canvas and into the expansive space of the white wall. This creates a continuity between the canvas and the wall, uniting the two. This infinite quality of Abstract Expressionism fed into Greenberg’s obsession with the Abstract Expressionist movement, which clarifies the apparent elitism of the white wall. https://www.artforum.com/print/197603/inside-the-white-cube-notes-on-the-gallery-space-part-i-38508
whimsical impression with an imaginative touch. This, in conjunction with the material, forms a rustic impression that distinguishes Composición from that of Mondrian’s. The exposed cardboard border reveals the cardboard box material whose brown surface peeks through the gaps of the paint strokes. This allows the materiality to integrate throughout the composition. While Ehrenberg’s Caja no 25495 has tighter lines and brighter billboard-like colors than Torres-Garcia’s painting, he also uses ordinary material of a wooden box. The box pertains to the transportation of goods, alluding to Ehrenberg’s mail artwork that the artist used for activist works. Though their found materials, both paintings interrogate the orderly, polished US and European stylistic techniques of their respective eras.

In the context of its style, Composición’s iconography interrogates Western notions of progress and modernity. In its composition, the painting features a boat, fish, waves, ladder, letter “x,” number eight, clock, human figure and a star. Appearing in the form of line drawings, even the modern icons leave a simplistic, rustic impression through their rough lines and dark shadows. The numerical and Roman alphabetical figures integrate colonial linguistics into the painting. Not only does this integrate Romance languages into the painting—such as Spanish, English and Portuguese—but it also emphasizes the written histories that colonists imposed upon indigenous oral histories. The ladder and clock represent linear progression: a key rationalization for modernity. The presence of the sea imagery and boat resembles the travel of Europeans to the Americas, which brought the imposition of modernity. The style of these symbols and their simplistic, organic forms on found material subverts the rigidity of the modern concepts the symbols represent. The painting also introduces Torres-Garcia’s use of the structural grid. The grid served as a modernist way of structural organization to create universality.\(^{43}\) Torres-Garcia’s

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\(^{43}\) David Williams, *Condorcet and Modernity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Williams’s book discusses how eighteenth century French philosopher and mathematician Marquis de Condorcet promoted
use of the grid strays from Europe’s imposed universality. His iconography lays out a universal language, but its rustic style makes it uniquely his and Latin American.

Ehrenberg’s iconography of the arrows contributes to the *Caja no 25495*’s critique of capitalist imperialism. Coming from the bottom and right, arrows serve as key symbolic elements of Ehrenberg’s painting. The arrows diverge from their iconographic meaning in hegemonic visual culture. Arrows move in a unilateral direction, indicating progress from one point to another. They can serve as a visual representation of Sr. Isaac Newton’s linear time born out of the Enlightenment. European colonial systems use Modernity and its Enlightenment ideas to rationalize their colonial imperialism of Latin America. The convergence of the arrows’ directions within this work, however, means they do not lead to the unilateral direction that modernity promised to Latin America. Instead, the arrows point to the dashing figures who run to the edge of the painting. They draw attention to the painting’s other important iconographic element: the serial number.

The numbers and figures introduce us to the painting’s seriality and aestheticize a critique of Modernism’s capitalist value for production and control. “25495” stamped in white over the red background creates a serial number. As if flashing before our eyes in a stop-motion film, two faceless human figures lie on the blue panel. They follow another figure who appears on the right edge of the work, moments ahead of the others. Intermittently moving towards the edge of the painting, the figure’s blue head, which matches the background on the left, creates a footprint.

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enlightenment ideas through his intertwining of math and politics. His applied his concept of ‘social arithmetic’ to apply mathematical concepts to everyday life and systems of law, economics, and politics. Condorcet’s ideas and ties to the Enlightenment demonstrate how mathematics contributes to universality.

44 Stefan Tanaka, *History Without Chronology*, (Amherst, Massachusetts: Lever Press, 2019): In this book, Tanaka argues that historical understandings of time have relied too heavily on Newtonian Enlightenment ideas of linear time. Tanaka advocates for the incorporation of non-modern societies’ ideas of time to look beyond chronology as the all-encompassing time standard.
The positioning of the repetitive figures next to the serial number and their facelessness contribute to the figures’ anonymity. The number, as opposed to a name or personal identification, alludes to the homogenization of many people who exist within a system of higher power, such as a prison, labor or immigration system. Resembling puppets bobbing up and down to the rhythm of a story, the figures’ repetition and flatness contribute to the stiffness of their movement. While we see these figures escaping, our eyes stay intrigued within the work. Its composition of arrows, colors and figures lead us to look at its elements over and over again, putting our mind through the repetitive process of an assembly line. The anonymity and puppet-like nature of the faceless figures suggest a connection to the large-scale controlling forces of colonial imperialism.

Through these figures, Ehrenberg could also undermine modernity’s obsession with individuality. He carefully inserts irony and satire to the broader politics of his work. Even though puppets move under the control of the puppeteer—and therefore associate the work with broader controlling forces—they simultaneously function as anonymous toys. The puppet allusion through the figures of Caja no 25495 contributes to the playful side of the painting. Tejada points out that the box contains marbles inside that are hidden from viewers, which turns his work into an actual toy. The toy that comes to mind is the wooden labyrinth, where the user tilts a wooden box to move a marble through a maze and avoid the holes. When the marble falls down a hole it disappears. The marbles were invisible to viewers at the Pop América exhibition. Their hidden, playful nature turns the painting into a puzzle. This resembles the problem-solving approach Ehrenberg took to his confrontational art.

45 Roberto Tejada, “Printed Matters,” 125; Tejada discusses Ehrenberg’s interest in critiquing the cliché, through which he played with the seriousness of traditional Spanish art, such as the work of Diego Velázquez, Francisco Goya, and El Greco.
In the 1940s, when Torres-Garcia created *Composición*, he took an adamant stance against cultural imperialism. Torres-Garcia wrote his essay “New Art in America” when he reached a critical point in his career upon his return to Uruguay. He urged for a Latin American divorce from modernism’s cultural imperialism and instead, advocated for “a spiritual union based on a profound relationship that goes beyond the concept of states.” He envisioned a Latin American universality that emphasized local cultural practices to create a union among the uniqueness that each holds. This was meant to create a new visual culture aside from modernism’s effect in Latin America. He writes, “We should also reject the family of colonialism, of the invader, and of the pseudo-culture it created: a bitter drink brewed from the worst kinds of alcohol.” While Torres-Garcia’s work begins to implement this vision through his appropriation of modernist techniques, Ehrenberg’s work brings Torres-Garcia’s vision to life through his more explicit visual anti-imperialist and anti-colonial messaging. This highlights Ehrenberg’s overt political involvement throughout his career and Torres-Garcia’s a-political stances before the 1940s.

Ehrenberg’s painting reflects the complex local and global political climate within which it was born. It utilizes the graphic, advertising aesthetic of Western pop art and subverts it to interrogate US capitalist imperialism in the midst of the Cold War and its reverberations in Latin America. While any explicit political meanings of the painting remain unclear, Ehrenberg politicizes pop and creates a uniquely Latin American aesthetic that disturbs those of the Western world. Ehrenberg’s work uses the language of the mass media to politicize the arts, leaving both the arts and politics in flux. In a world driven by the visual culture of advertising, the use of this

language serves as a legible, accessible mechanism to disrupt the art system and promote anti-imperialist activism. Simultaneously, his painting’s ambiguity helps aid its avoidance of any governmental censorship regulations. This reveals the unique revolutionary power of Latin American aesthetics in a globalized era: communication that transcends structural political boundaries.
Devouring Modernity: Antônio Henrique Amaral’s *Sem saida*

Brazilian artist Antônio Henrique Amaral’s artworks force the viewer to dive into them head first. His works’ luscious, detailed textures and candy-colors lures us into a world that confronts us with its vulgarity: open mouths, rotting fruit, and opposing tensions. The artist aestheticizes a raw depiction of existentialism during a tumultuous period of Brazilian history. Primarily working in print and painting, Amaral’s entered the international art stage at the age of 23, when he exhibited his work in Santiago, Chile in 1958. From 1968 to 1975, Amaral created two series of banana paintings, *Brasiliana* and *Campos de batallha*, which continues to be his most recognized work. The up-close nearly touchable portraits of bananas rot in front of our eyes, with their brown and yellow flesh bursting out from the ropes that bind them. The bananas embody modernist realism through their tactility. Amaral subverts this modernist technique.

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50 The bananas reference Francisco Goya’s early nineteenth century paintings of rotting meat that critiqued Spain’s drastic economic disparities and luxurious consumption of the rich. These disparities in Spain came as a result of the French revolution (1789-1799), Napoleonic wars (1803-1815) and struggle for national independence. Amaral’s bananas interrogate Brazil’s internal political climate and its relationship to European colonial imperialism. In 1964, the Brazilian coup d’état occurred: the events that led to the military overthrow of João Goulart, a central leftist, for an authoritarian, right-wing government. During this time, the Brazilian government acted as a US economic puppet by pressuring the production of bananas and exploiting their laborers. Amaral’s bruised and bound bananas represent Brazil’s tense, violent state of affairs at the time and its intertwined economic human exploitation through the banana industry;

Harris, Enriqueta. *Goya*. New York: Phaidon; distributed in the U.S. by F.A. Praeger, 1969; Harris articulates a detailed exploration of Goya’s life and artistic career. Goya parodied the Spanish state, even in his work as a court painter. Goya was appointed as First Court Painter in Spain, but maintained his unconventional touch when he painted royal subjects. Despite their lofty, official appeal, Goya did not do their looks any favors. Harris writes, “But while following traditional compositions for these state portraits, Goya creates an effect of pomposity rather than majesty and the faces of his sitters reveal a penetrating scrutiny of character,” (14).
through the bananas’ rotting, which localizes them. The bananas metaphorically visualize the torture of political dissidents and the wealth inequality’s devastating effects during Brazil’s military dictatorship from 1946 until 1985. The emotion of these paintings comes from its bright colors that cause us to do a double take as they rot before our eyes. After further investigation, however, I learned that color was not always the focus of Amaral’s work. I visited Amaral’s website expecting immediately to be engulfed by the rotting browns and yellows of his bananas, but became quickly distracted by the black and white and pastel palette hidden gems of his career: prints.

During his print phase, Amaral quit his job as an advertiser in 1966 to become an artist. Amaral had finished studying at the Pratt Graphic Institute in New York City, where he also lived with internationally recognized Japanese printmaker Shiko Munakata for three months. Through his Japanese influence, Amaral imbued more emotion into his prints. He reached a pivotal moment in his career in the chaos of the 1964 military coup d’état. Intending to instill capitalism and modernize Brazil, a military regime overthrew the left-wing president João Goulart. Under this military repression and censorship, artists were torn between pursuing political agendas and the risk of censorship. They also faced criticism from both the left for not being grassroots enough, and from the right for being too communist. As art historian Claudia Clairman describes in her book, *Brazilian Art under Dictatorship: Antonio Manuel, Artur Barrio and Cildo Meireles*, artists “began to navigate the newly hazardous social and cultural terrain of a changed nation.”

According to art historian Maria Alice Millet’s interview with the artist, Amaral had difficulty deciding whether or not to become a full-time artist in this contentious political climate. His instructor, Livio Abramo responded, “Look, Antonio Henrique, if you’re

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going to wait for things to become easy before you start work, you’ll never get started! People have to learn to work in the middle of mess and confusion, because everything tends to get more complicated.”

And this was the decisive moment when Amaral dedicated his career to printmaking. Amaral’s work reflects the challenging navigation that artists underwent in the 1960s and 70s in Brazil. During this time, aesthetics meant life or death. Like other artists, Amaral walked the fine line between covert and explicit political confrontations toward the state: changing history, while avoiding censorship regulations.

Because of censorship, many artists maintained anonymity in their work. Even though this meant present-era artist groups and manifestos could not be formed, Amaral referenced past artist collectives in his work. As Edward Sullivan’s 1993 essay *A View from Abroad* describes, Amaral’s close awareness of the past as a whole takes a prominent role in his work. He explores the past through its local history and creative legacy in Brazil. As the great nephew of the Brazilian modernist painter Tarsila do Amaral, Amaral utilized her style in his own work. He also contributed to Brazil’s *Tropicália* movement (1970s), which arose from a revival of interest in the art of Tarsila. In 1928, Tarsila created her painting *Abaporú* and showed it to her husband, the poet Oswald de Andrade. The painting depicts an indigenous figure with giant feet and hands sitting down next to a cactus (see fig. 9). The title, *Abaporú* means “man eats” in the dictionary of the Tupi-Guaraní, the indigenous tribe who were known to colonists as cannibals. Tarsila’s painting inspired de Andrade’s 1928 *Manifesto antropofágico*. The manifesto calls for

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Brazilian *artistic* cannibalism as an assertion against the colonial state.\(^{55}\) This critical aesthetic approach subverts colonialism’s consumption of Brazilians through satiric humor. De Andrade’s cannibalism ingests the colonial state and excretes its unusable surplus. Cannibalism contributes to the larger themes of the body under dictatorship that appears in Brazilian twentieth century art and the work of Amaral. The rotting flesh of the bananas cannot be far removed from the human lives lost under the Brazilian military regime. Furthermore, the restitution of teeth and tooth-like sharp edges in his prints evoke harsh feelings of consumption.

Amaral’s prints foreground his career trajectory of intimate depictions of Brazilian humanity. The cannibalistic, existentialist imagery of his prints put these three-dimensional themes into two dimensions and use the language of pop to communicate them. The same year Oswald de Andrade wrote *Manifesto antropofágico* that informed Amaral’s work decades later, Torres-Garcia created his 1928 sculpture, *Planos de color con dos madeas superpuestas* (see fig. 10). Torres-García’s sculpture and Amaral’s 1967 woodcut print on paper, *Sem saida* (No Way Out) (see fig. 11), both complicate historical legacies of print in Europe and the Americas. *Sem saida* was created within the context of the print movements in Latin America during the 1960s and 70s.\(^{56}\) These print movements subvert a historical modernist print legacy in Europe.

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\(^{55}\) Oswald de Andrade (1991) “Cannibalist Manifesto” (translated by Leslie Bary). *Latin American Literary Review* 19(38): 38-47; Artists groups in Brazil formed in the first two decades of the twentieth century to address the Brazilian government’s hypocrisies. In the 1920s, São Paulo was thriving in a modern sense: the coffee industry thrived, and the city increased its infrastructure. The Brazilian government took this economic prosperity as an opportunity to “whiten” the country by allowing an influx of European immigrants to work there, while many Afro-Brazilian immigrants came to the city at the same time. Modernization further divided the wealth disparities in Brazil and only benefited the privileged socioeconomic classes. The cannibalism themes in the manifesto subvert and satirize the state’s oppression and consumption of its people. De Andrade exposes the European biases that construct hegemonic historical narratives and offers a re-thinking of history through a Brazilian lenses. Instead of allowing European culture to consume Brazil, he encourages the devouring of Europe.

\(^{56}\) Jennifer Josten, “Revolutionary Currents: Pop Design Between Cuba, Mexico, and California” in *Pop América*, 72-124; Modern art historian Jennifer Josten discusses the Latin American printed poster’s 1961 initiation in Cuba. The poster came from the founding of the ICAC (Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos),\(^{56}\) which was the first post-1959 revolution cultural organization in the country. The ICAC wanted to create Cuba’s own cinematic tradition to overlook US cultural imperialism. During the revolution and prior to the founding of the ICAC, printing served as a key export in Cuba, but the tradition of the graphic poster started with promotional
Amaral’s print takes this subversion a step further by localizing the imagery in his print to resist the militarism of the Brazilian state.

Print posters subvert modernity’s imposition on the nation state and capitalism. In some cases, they uphold nationalist agendas because the posters are nationalist and capitalist by nature. This comes as no surprise, given the historical legacy of print in Europe and its influence on Latin America. Europeans adopted the use of the printing press in the early fifteenth century. From the beginning of Spanish conquest in Latin America in 1492, colonists used language, books and print to evangelize indigenous communities. As cultural and intellectual centers, Mexico City and Lima held the first Latin American printing presses to serve the needs of universities. These printing presses were critical for disseminating Christian manuscripts, established a colonial legacy of print in Latin America. While printed public notices have existed in Europe since 1480, posters became particularly popular and well known in nineteenth century Paris. Because Paris was not an economic capital at the time but a cultural one, the posters advertised experiences and therefore appealed to the eye. Print posters in Europe became overtly political in 1914, at the beginning of the first world war. This meant the posters appealed to nationalist needs and international positions. Not only was the printed poster a modern medium because of its European prosperity in the modern era, but also because of its cinematic posters from the ICAC. There were a few factors that led to the graphic style of these posters. Budget constraints restricted ink use to limited colors and fifty percent of the poster space. As Cuban posters during a time of globalization, they adopted internationalist themes and styles. Also, certain prominent designers had influence over the designs. Artist Raul Martinez, for example, had a professional background in commercial art, like US American pop artist Andy Warhol. Cuba’s prints preceded the canonized 1962 prints of Warhol’s Marilyn Monroe. Cuba established its own network of print poster making with Mexico and the United States, particularly through Chicano movements and Black Panther Party in San Francisco, California. This network produced politically active posters that contested their respective governments. In Mexico, however, printed posters for the 1968 Olympic games in Mexico City upheld the nationalist incentives of the Olympics.

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dependency on modernity to exist. In her essay “Posters: Advertisement, Art, Political Artifact, Commodity,” Susan Sontag poses that print posters relied on capitalism’s mass consumption and the large ideology-driven public of the nation state.  

This was the environment that birthed Modernists’ interest in the poster. Art Nouveau, for example, popularized the poster aesthetic at the turn of the twentieth century in Paris.  

During his years in Paris, Torres-Garcia created *Planos de color con dos madeas superpuestas*, which takes on print poster qualities through its sculptural form. The quadratic, grid-like structure of both Amaral’s print and Torres-Garcia’s sculpture emulates the graphic nature of print making. Both artworks centralize thick, black outlines in their compositions, which creates the highly contrasted, graphic aesthetic of advertising and posters. *Sem Saida*’s structure gives it a comic book appeal because of its sections with different scenes inside of them. Each section acts as a part of a greater story, just like the print is part of a larger series of prints. In addition to its comic book nature, Amaral’s puzzle of fitted rectangles looks like the compositional layout of a magazine where text, titles and images create a harmonious composition. The division of Torres-Garcia’s sculpture into quadratic sections creates sections not only looks like magazine print material, but these lines also highlight the grid itself. The grid serves as an emblem of modernism and a structure that holds myths and spirituality. Art historians usually trace Torres-Garcia’s use of grids, lines, and primary colors to Dutch Modernist Neo-Plasticists Piet Mondrain and Theo Van Doesburg. When Torres-Garcia created *Planos de color con dos madeas superpuestas*, however, he was unaware of their movement and had not met them yet.

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59 Ibid.  
He could have gained this stylistic influence through working in Parisian art circles at the time.\textsuperscript{62} These interactions between artists were *exchanges*; other artists could have been influenced by Torres-Garcia, as he was influenced by them.

Torres-Garcia’s sculpture consists of a rectangular wood plank and a painted spiraling grid of primary color and black rectangles, thickly outlined in black. At the bottom center of the composition, a circular wood piece with painted quadrants sits on top of the base wood plank. A small hole penetrates the wood at the top, as if a nail could tack the sculpture up on a wall. This gives the sculpture character of a poster or public notice. While the sculpture inhabits a poster-like form, the wood material gives it a found objecthood whose individuality challenges mass-production. The sculpture’s painted wood surface contributes to its poster appeal. As its rough texture reveals the impression of the wood underneath the paint, the surface emits a worn feel. The prominent wood crack and the rough texture of its surface accentuates the sculpture’s materiality. This relates to Ehrenberg’s *Caja no 25495* and its apparent use of wood through its box form. While a box and poster take on different roles, they both relate to the dissemination of information or goods.

Perpetuating local Brazilian print culture, *Sem saida* functions as two types of print: posters and distribution-based printing. The print’s existence as a freestanding poster within a series fuels this duality. Originally presented all together in a metal folder, *Sem saida* is a part of the 1967 portfolio of woodcut prints, *O meu e o seu: impressões de nosso tempo* (Mine and Yours: Impressions of Our Time). For this reason, *Sem saida* can stand on its own as a poster.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid, 200. In 1928 Torres-Garcia puts together the exhibition, *Cinq peintres refusées par le jury du salon d’Automne* (Five painters rejected by the jury of the Salon d’Automne), which features the work of him and four other French artists: Daura, Hélion, Alfred Aberdam, and Ernest Engel Rozier. The show attracted other artists, such as Theo van Doesberg, who works with Mondrian’s Neo-Plasticist movement. Hélion in particular utilizes primary colors and shape arrangements in his work, which are some of the qualities of Neo-Plasticism.
displayed on a wall, but also as part of a series of many prints that communicate together. In a similar manner, printed distributed magazines acts as a collection of visual (and written) material. Furthermore, the print’s composition alludes to magazine prints. Thick black lines break the print into sections, where repeated imagery of aggressive open-mouthed profiles of human faces fill each quadratic space. As one of Amaral’s first breakthroughs using color, the print’s purple and red bring *Semsaida*’s cannibalistic narrative-style print to life. Furthermore, the ink reveals the grainy texture of the white paper underneath. Lastly, the print’s apparent woodcut print origins enrich its printed qualities. As a woodcut print, *Semsaida* includes organic, woodcut-shaped lines that reveal the materiality of its original stamp. Milliet draws the connection between this print series and the Brazilian tradition of *literatura de cordel*: booklets of woodcut prints that depict fable narrative. Originally from Portuguese colonial traditions of ballad and broadside poetry, these booklets have become part of Brazilian folk art traditions. Amaral localizes his work through bringing this Brazilian folk art tradition into the large-scale platform of pop.

*Semsaida* also leans into local decolonization in Brazil through its cannibalistic imagery. Dripping with hostility and humor, the print portrays a cannibalism-infested doll house scene. Thick black lines divide the poster into four square segments on top and three rectangles on the bottom, which like a doll house, allow us to see all the rooms at once. On the ground floor, profiles of human faces with open mouths and protruded tongues line the outer sides of the outer rooms and face each other. Behind them, windows reveal a peaceful scene of birds outside. Doors divide the rooms from the middle room. Meanwhile, a face disrupts the center room’s

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middle-class conventional living room scene. Jutting out of the back wall, with its eyes glaring upwards and lips sternly closed, the face wears an arrangement of eight open mouths with their tongues and teeth protruding out on its forehead. In stillness, a chair and television set sit to the sides of the face. The upper quadrants include more aggressive tongue imagery. In the outer squares, two profiles belligerently face each other. The profiles in the inner two squares face each other with their tongues out and palms extended from their mouths in mockery. The grotesque repetition of the mouths visualize human consumption.

*Sem saida*’s strong sense of locality stands out among its aesthetic unity with Torres-Garcia, Ehrenberg and Dávila’s work. The inverted colors and symmetry of the opposing mouths create a binary between both sides of the image: a demonstration Brazil’s hostile political climate in the 1960s. These opposing sides, along with the use of teeth, enforce rivalry and cannibalism. Interrogating the contentious relationship between the Brazilian state and its people in this era, *Sem saida* contributes to the broader themes of cannibalism in Amaral’s work. The opposing mouth imagery also appears in many of Amaral’s prints, such as his 1967 print *Diálogo Frustrado* (see fig. 12). In his 1993 essay *The Body Against the Metals of Oppression*, Federico Morais offers that these mouths in *Diálogo Frustrado*, in addition to their title, represent the dialogue between the militaristic, authoritarian rule and its people. As the two sides literally face each other, the symmetry of the graphic’s arrangement in both of these prints reinforces this binary opposition. It could also be read as a reinforcement of Modernity’s creation and imposition of binary oppositions.

Perpetuating this act of eating and consumption, the teeth re-contextualize Oswald de Andrade’s 1928 *Manifesto antropofágico* in another era: an era when the Brazilian state forced higher production rates at the expense of human exploitation. Furthermore, the hand facing
outwards and touching the tongue exudes mockery and teasing. Here, Amaral plays with humor and irony within the seriousness of the print’s political context, challenging the legitimacy of the realism that supports modernity and modernism. This contributes to his subversion of modernist artistic styles, such as surrealism, to which art critics attribute his existentialist themes. *Sem saida* is Amaral’s way of cannibalizing the Brazilian states’ corruption that resulted from US colonial imperialism. The placement of these grotesque scenes occurring in a middle-class home disrupts the middle class’s complacency during the dictatorship and intervenes in the class polarization that occurred.

Amaral’s print makes the visual statement clear that Oswald de Andrade wrote earlier in the twentieth century: “Magic and life. We had the description and allocation of tangible goods, moral goods and royal goods. And we knew how to transpose mystery and death with the help of a few grammatical forms.” Oswald de Andrade describes a Brazilian artistic tradition of digesting and interpreting the coloniality of Being: one that takes absorbs colonial oppression and from it, produces something uniquely Brazilian. Amaral’s print acknowledges Brazilian state oppression and the colonial imperialism within it and creates a masterful work of art ingrained with local Brazilian printing traditions. *Sem saida*’s intimate ties to *Manifesto antropofágico* from the same year of Torres-Garcia’s sculpture perpetuates local decolonization movements. These further the groundwork Torres-Garcia lays.

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64 Oswald de Andrade (1991) “Cannibalist Manifesto.”
Flipping off Modernity: Juan Dávila’s *El Liberador, Simon Bolivar*

“If Dávila’s got anything at all, it’s shock value,” writes Justin Clemens in his 2007 article, “Juan Dávila haranguing the nation.”65 Dávila’s artwork reflects the escape of oppression and censorship, with a simultaneous challenge towards modernity. In 1974, Dávila left his home of Chile and fled to Australia during the Chilean Pinochet dictatorship (1973-1990). Bursting at the seams of political and sexual repression, Dávila’s work interrogates modernism’s status quo and the nationalism that upholds it. Charles Green expands on this in his 1995 book *Peripheral Vision: Contemporary Australian Art 1970-1994* when he states, “Dávila’s paintings were edged with a hostility and anger produced by the radical politics of his Chilean origins and coloured by his representation of homosexual desire.”66 Green describes Dávila’s paintings as having the power of a virus, seeking modernism as its greatest victim. Dávila achieves his subversion of modernism through a provocative collaging of modernist allegory and late twentieth century mass culture, such as television media, comics and pornography. His work offers a representation of Latin American history that disturbs hegemonic portrayals of Latin America in European international art scenes. In 1990, Dávila wrote to Guy Brett expressing his disapproval for the representations of Latin American art at a 1989 exhibition in London’s Hayward Gallery. In his letter, he describes the representations as, “a mere reproduction of dependence.”67 By subverting its seriousness, Dávila’s work adds parody and humor to history that has enforced the dependence of Latin America on its colonizers.

Dávila’s 1993 oil on metal painting *El Liberador, Simon Bolivar* (see fig. 13), was nothing short of shocking to the international audiences it confronted, as part of a 1994 Chilean government-funded exhibit of modern Chilean artists at the Hayward Gallery in London. *El Liberador, Simon Bolivar* depicts a partially dressed, eccentric version of Simon Bolivar: the historical figure credited with liberating several Latin American countries from Spanish rule between 1819 and 1822. Resting on a large bouquet of flowers that sits behind him, Bolivar rides a horse. From left to right, the horse fades from a multi-colored grid-like pattern to the metallic contouring of the horse’s figure. The most striking part of this image is how Bolivar addresses the viewer with his middle finger erect. The painting directly opposes postmodernism through its overtly insulting address to its international, postmodern-centric audience. Dávila’s image presents Simon Bolivar as sexual, expressive and full of attitude. *El Liberador, Simon Bolivar* gives off the impression that it operates from a different plane, set of standards and values. Bolivar’s middle finger is the icing on the cake: an insult to the academy, Western art world, and othering of Latin American art in the international art scene.

Even a quick Google search of this painting will reveal headlines from mainstream US newspapers, such as the Washington Post’s 1994 article “BOLIVAR: NOT A PRETTY PICTURE” and the LA Times’s 1994 article “CULTURE: Lewd Painting of Revolutionary Draws Outrage in S. America: Some intellectuals warn that flap over the portrait of independence leader Simon Bolivar may fuel censorship.” This particular headline refers to Venezuela, Colombia and Ecuador’s formal governmental protest of this image for its assault on their nationalist historical icon. The involvement of international ambassadors through these formal protests brought this event to US headlines. The LA Times’s emphasis on censorship emphasizes Chilean government control. This reinforces the binary opposition often crafted by
the United States between their freedom and Latin American control. Although Bolivar did not liberate Chile, he still stands as a nationalist figure in Latin America. His iconography feeds into the glorification of nationalism and modernity that plagues governmental propaganda in Latin America. It covers up the systematic dependency on imperial powers that remains intact, despite the official independence. Peeling back the performative layers of independence, Dávila undresses the concept of liberation in this image. This undressing and Bolivar’s feminine body reveal the many instrumental women in the liberation process, who are often left out of historical narratives.

Modernist formal elements—such as the grid and iconographic symbols—constitute Torres-García’s 1919 collage Hoy (see fig. 14), highlighting their subversive function in El Liberador, Simon Bolivar. Hoy depicts an urban landscape through its many iconographic visual elements: a clock, words, the Roman alphabet, numbers and symbols. Intersecting lines tie the iconographic symbols together, leaving the impression of one the point perspective in Dávila’s grid. Torres-García created this collage two decades earlier than his most radical awakenings in the 1940s when he took an explicitly critical approach. As a keen observer of modern urban life in Cataluña, he was a sponge of modern life in 1919. Still, Torres-García’s collage nuances modernism. At the time, Torres-García created his own unique portrayals of urban life in Cataluña that distinguish themselves from modernist depictions of city life, such as French Impressionist painter Edgar Degas’s 1876 painting Café Concert (see fig. 15). Hoy critiques traditional impressionist painting through its eclectic mixed media, laying the groundwork for his

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68 Outcry is not an uncommon response to provocative works like this one. In 2019, protests erupted opposing Mexico City’s Palace of Fine Arts’ display of Painter Fabián Cháirez’s 2014 painting La Revolución. The painting depicts Mexico’s revolutionary figure and nationalist icon of Emiliano Zapata naked, on horseback and wearing a pink sombrero. It provokes the misleading nationalist illusions the Mexican government continues to perpetuate; Sarah Cascone, “Protesters Storm a Mexico Museum Over a Painting That Depicts Revolutionary Emiliano Zapata Nude (and Wearing a Pink Sombrero),” artnet news, (2019), https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/nude-zapata-painting-sparks-protests-1729050.
later case against modernism. Nonetheless, Torres-García’s implementation of the grid and iconography serve as a point of comparison for Dávila’s later, explicitly confrontational use of the modernist visual elements. Dávila’s painting critiques modernism by subverting them through humor and mockery. *El Liberador, Simon Bolivar*’s shamelessly individual stance, in conjunction with its use of iconography, the grid and materiality contribute to its transmodern unity.

The painting’s inflammatory modernist iconography begins with Simon Bolivar’s costuming and its interrogation of constructed gender binaries. This challenges hegemonic visual representations of history, which typically depict their important figures as formal and serious people. Take Charles Turner’s 1827 portrait *Simon Bolivar* as an example: Bolivar stands in front of a blank background in a confident, upright pose, dressed in formal, ornate attire and carries a staff. Bolivar’s partially nudity in Dávila’s depiction pushes the boundaries of the masculinity that hegemonic historical depictions uphold. Dávila integrates suggestions of femininity with typical masculine royal clothing of the nineteenth century. Bolivar wears a regal purple cape, whose purple and white contrast provides a metallic effect. His shirt’s sleeves emit a similar shine. Over his left shoulder, falls an Epaulette, with twisted gold highlights. Gold leaf embroidery climbs from Bolivar’s waist and around his neck collar through the red torso of his shirt. A metal waistband gathers his garment at the waist, while a gold seal at the top gathers the ends of the cape. On his legs, he wears glossy riding boots. Sheer, patterned black stockings ascend from his boots up to his mid-thigh. Revealing his skin underneath the fabric, pink coloring peeks behind black and grey paint strokes. The grey strokes create a glosed-over, sheer effect in their long horizontal nature. Dark black curved strokes overlay the grey and pink ones forming a pattern in the sheer fabric that appears to be animal print.
Bolivar’s body presentation follows the clothing’s blurring of the gender binary. His skin contains rosy undertones and purple shadowing. The brushstrokes collide and layer, leaving the impression of tarnished metal on his skin and the superficiality of a doll’s face. Bold miscellaneous paint strokes decorate his skin. Bolivar’s bright red lips, wide droopy eyes, chiseled cheekbones, and raised, curvy eyebrows give the impression of makeup or theatrical performance. His greased, wavy hair and singular folk earring contribute to his eccentric aura. Most apparently, his shirt remains open in the center, revealing a large portion of his breasts. At the same time, his male genitals peak from behind the saddle he sits in. Dávila’s gender fluid and nude portrayal of Bolivar shocks the traditional veiling of these expressions that almost never make an overt appearance in modernist artwork.

The only appearance of historical figures in Torres-García’s Hoy are figures on the stamps that overlay the paper surface of the collage. The stamps and their fragmented travel ticket counterparts serve as collectible mementos amidst the orderly chaos of the cityscape. While the stamps are far from Dávila’s radical iconographic use of a historical figure, both Dávila and Torres-Garcia re-contextualize historical iconographies in their work. Torres-Garcia suspends the nationalistic icons within his unique collage as a Uruguayan in Catalonia. The title, which means “today” in Spanish, suggests Torres-Garcia’s observance of urban modern life. Other iconographic elements of the collage also enforce a notion of time and travel. The lines at the center of the composition intersect, depart, and point to flags, creating methodical web of a train line. A clock ticks its hour hand towards one o’clock as the passing street signs head further into the distance of a moving train.

Through these visuals, we are placed as an actor in the public spaces of Torres-Garcia’s daily modern life. In his years living in Barcelona and New York, Pérez-Oramas notes that
Torres-Garcia acted as a *Flaneur*. This describes the Baudilarian\(^{69}\) modern concept of male observer who would leisurely sit Parisian public spaces and reflect them in his creative practices. *Café Concert* exemplifies this male observational gaze. Torres-Garcia’s Barcelona cityscapes planted the seeds for their blossoming during his two years in New York, from 1920 until 1922. While these cityscapes reflect the jumbled geometric forms of Cubism and bold commercial graphics, they also combine his own element of chaos. The frayed brush strokes and earth tones stray his work from European Modernism’s prescribed order. Torres-Garcia demonstrates his connection to modern influences and modern life, while establishing his own unique touch.

The train lines at the center of the collage form a grid and a map to various flag locations. The grid, as Krauss argues, is a modernist map. In this experimental stage of Torres-Garcia’s career well before his rejection of European cultural imperialism, his grid likely reinforces modernism. Krauss also argues, however, that the grid contains spirituality and forms a universality. Torres-Garcia’s use of the grid could be a footprint of universality that builds towards what becomes his own subversive universality. Later, in *El Liberador, Simon Bolivar*, Dávila uses the grid both subverts the grid’s historical legacy in modernism and represents the erosion of history. Housed in thick, black outlining, colorful quadratic shapes orient towards an imagined vanishing point to the upper left of the image. The brightly colored blocks that constitute the grid add eccentricity to the modernist legacy of the grid. Not only does Simon Bolivar’s disruptive confrontation disturb postmodernism, but the grid also flips off the legacy of

\(^{69}\) Charles Baudelaire, from *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863), in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. Jonathan Mayne (New York: Da Capo, 1986), 1-18 and 26-40. Baudelaire’s famous text serves as a modernist manifesto. He discusses two types of beauty: one that is eternal and the other, present. Baudelaire acknowledges the importance of studying academic classical painting, but emphasizes the necessity of modern painters to observe present daily life. The paintings of Degas and the café concerts exemplify Baudelaire’s concept of the flaneur: the male observer of modern life. Degas’s works imply the perspective of an observer through their angles and the spaces they occupy. The quick brushstrokes of Impressionism also demonstrate the capturing of the moving and evolving present.
modernism in the twentieth century. Eroding history, the grid consumes the painting as it fades further into Bolivar’s horse. The materiality of the painting amplifies the grid’s erosive quality. The grid eats away at the metal and wood that constitute the painting. This could be read two ways. On the one hand, the grid could represent modernity’s erosion of Latin American history. On the other hand, the grid’s eccentricity could demonstrate a radicalized historical narrative taking over a westernized historic legacy. Either way, Dávila manipulates the grid to expose the modernity’s historical hegemony.

Similar to the works of Torres-Garcia, Amaral and Ehrenberg, Dávila’s painting reveals its metal and wood materiality. The left half of the horse’s grid pattern reveals wood. Outlining the shapes, a black background fades into a brown background, revealing the wood material underneath. Constituted of a thin layer of paint, quadratic shapes make up the grid, adding depth to the color through its darker background. Through the silver color of the horse and the bright white highlights on Bolivar’s body, the wood fades into the metallic surface of the rest of the painting. Dávila’s painting builds upon the materiality of Ehrenberg’s. The semi-transparent paint on wood closely connects to Ehrenberg’s *Caja no 25495* and the illusion of depth its darker background brings to the paint. While Ehrenberg creates metallic allusions through his paint techniques, Dávila literally uses metal in his work, bringing more prominence to the material. Nonetheless, both artists emphasize wood and metal, creating an industrial tone that their use of locality subverts. Also like Ehrenberg’s *Caja no 25495, El Liberador, Simon Bolivar’s* exposed wood emulates that of Torres-Garcia’s paintings on wood. In the case of *Hoy*, the collage’s torn edges reveal the subtle layers of cardboard that make up the base of the collage. The cardboard frames the industrial nature of the image with organic edge. Furthermore, the painting takes the shape of the horse and its rider. This, along with the painting’s materiality, demonstrate the
expansion of painting beyond the square canvas: a visual strategy that developed in Latin America during the constructive universalism movement of Torres-Garcia’s final years.70

Dávila’s use of iconography, grid structure, and materiality creates the traces of a universality among him, Ehrenberg and Amaral. These unifying visual elements work with the painting’s fierce individuality to create the beginnings of the transmodern. At the beginning of this thesis, I explained my intentions to frame Latin American pop art outside of the Western postmodern. Instead, I chose Puerto Rican Maldonado-Torres’s transmodernity as a means to understand Latin American pop art’s decolonizing effects. Green, however, describes Dávila as a postmodernist because of his art’s “decentralization of the metropolis, sense of self that intertwines with discourse, and blur between private and public life.”71 These qualities are consistent with the aesthetic qualities I have mentioned in Dávila’s work, and therefore, fit his work within Green’s definition of postmodernity. Here, the Maldonado-Torres’s transmodernity and Green’s postmodernity overlap. Green’s aspect of postmodernity, “intertwining of the self with discourse,” is fundamental to transmodernity. Even though Green’s definition postmodernity describes Dávila’s work and is useful for understanding it, Green utilizes a western system to describe and categorize decolonized art. Still, his postmodernity definition is useful for understanding Dávila’s work because “intertwining of the self with discourse,”

70 Osbel Suárez, García María Amalia, Erica Witschey, and Fundación Juan March, Cold America: Geometric Abstraction in Latin America (1934-1973), (Madrid: Fundación Juan March, 2011), 34; During global geometric abstraction movement, the irregular frame was born out or the Buenos Aires artist collective magazine Arturo from the artist Rhod Rothfus in his essay, “El marco: un problema de la plástica actual” (The Frame: A problem in Contemproary Art). Rothfus believed in the artwork forming the frame, as opposed to the frame constricting the artwork. Torres-Garcia likely influenced Rothfus’s conceptualization of the irregular frame. Rothfus visited Torres-Garcia’s studio in Uruguay in 1943, where he saw Torres-Garcia’s experimentations with wood. In the 1920s, when Torres-Garcia was in Paris, he worked with cubist wood pieces and experimented with irregular edges in his painting. Planos de color con dos mades superpuestas is a great example of Torres-Garcia’s experimentation at the time. Even though the sculpture has a rectangular form, it pushes the limitations of the perfectly straight canvases that ruled modernism. The irregular frame arrived to Europe when Ellsworth Kelley saw it in Argentina and spread the idea.
articulates what Dávila achieves in *El Liberator, Simon Bolivar*. Dávila himself is flipping off the art world through Simon Bolivar.
Conclusion

When Joaquín Torres-García created his map, *América Invertida*, he flipped hegemonic depictions of the Americas and visualized his own. Maps, which we ingest as universal representations of the world, reflect the local ideologies of their origins. As maps have been hegemonized by Europe, so has the visual culture that ingrains itself in how we interpret the world around us. Visuals not only reflect ideologies, but construct them.\(^7\) Europe has imposed its modern ideologies on Latin America as if they are universal, which visuals play an active role in perpetuating.

Torres-García, whose formative years of artistic training took place in Europe and the United States, developed a visual language over his career that posits an alternate interpretation of the universal. Torres-García’s Constructive Universalism creates a world in which his uniquely Uruguayan language constitutes unification among people. Since the end of Torres-García’s career in the 1940s, Latin American artists evolved their visual languages to become more localized. At the same time, their art advances unifying aesthetic strategies that compose a Latin American universality. Art that promotes subjective positions and embraces the universal simultaneously, embodies what Maldonado-Torres calls the transmodern. Transmodernity sets the stage for *decolonizing* effects.

Ehrenberg, Amaral and Dávila’s artwork has begun to fill in the space between the lines of Torres-Garcia’s map. As the map inverts the cartographic imaginary that Europe has invented, their art inverts the legacy of visuals that have both constructed and perpetuated modernity. It

\(^7\) Stuart Hall, Sut Jhally, Sanjay Talreja, and Mary Patierno. 2002, *Representation & the media.* (Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation); leading cultural theorist Stuart hall explains how representation constructs meaning and his concept of “representation as constitutive.” Representation does not simply reflect an event after it occurs, it is constitutive of it.
contributes to a Latin American universality that disturbs Europe’s. In this thesis, I have discussed how these artists lean into their localities to form personally decolonizing art. These localities, however, are just a few versions of the many Latin Americas that make up the whole continent. The pop art of Ehrenberg, Amaral and Dávila is printed on the pages of *Pop América* and has hung on the walls for audiences at Duke University’s Nasher Museum. In 2015, the internationally iconic Museum of Modern Art in New York City held a grand retrospective of Torres-Garcia. The pop artists and Torres-Garcia have successfully entered international museum spaces that continue to exclude the creations of the many indigenous Americans and Africans that have shaped global visual culture. They have explored self-liberation through creating their own Latin American aesthetic languages, but under recognize their indigenous and African foundations.

In order for a decolonizing art movement to fully develop in a communal and radical manner, it needs to both foster and promote the works of African and indigenous artists. The concept of interculturality helps form this vision. In his 2012 essay, “The Poetics of Sumak Kawsay on a Global Horizon” Armando Muyolema advocates for intercultural practices for global collaboration. To break down social hierarchies and interlocking systems of domination, interculturality goes beyond theoretical decolonization and calls for attention to concrete situations and voices. This involves listening to individuals and learning from indigenous cultures. To further a decolonizing art movement, the study and promotion of specific and diverse indigenous and African art is imperative.

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Still, Ehrenberg, Amaral and Dávila contribute to an evolving personally decolonizing art in Latin America by confronting the dominant systems that enable colonialism on an international scale. Pop art demands a reaction. These artists utilize elements of the advertising aesthetics that have intended to open up the wallets of the masses, but create their own highly personal and political visual languages. Their work demands a response from gallery viewers, other artists, and international governments.
Images

Fig 1. Evelyne Axell, *Ice Cream*, oil on canvas, 1964, 37.5 x 27.5 inches, Artsy accessed April 29, 2021 https://www.artsy.net/artwork/evelyne-axell-ice-cream


Fig. 6. Joaquín Torres-García, *América Invertida (Inverted America)*, 1943, ink on paper, 22 x 16 cm (Fundación Torres García, Montevideo), Research Gate accessed April 30, 2021, https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Figura-3-america-invertida-Joaquin-Torres-Garcia-1943_fig1_274197560.
Fig. 7. Felipe Ehrenberg, *Caja no. 25495* (Box no. 25495), 1968, acrylic on wooden box with marbles, 39.37 x 31.49 x 4.33 inches, Collection of the Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC) de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), Mexico City, Nasher Museum accessed April 29, 2021, https://nasher.duke.edu/exhibitions/pop-america-1965-1975/.


