

Afro-Latin American Art

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It is a remarkable moment, barely perceptible, tucked at the edge of the image. Titled “Mercado de Escravos,” the 1835 Johann Moritz Rugendas (1802–58) lithograph depicts a group of African slaves who wait to be purchased, while some potential buyers walk around and a notary or scribe appears ready to make use of the only visible desk (see Figure 10.1). In the background, a Catholic Church coexists harmoniously with the market and overlooks a bay and a vessel, perhaps the same ship that brought those Africans from across the Atlantic. While they wait, most of the slaves socialize, sitting around a fire. Others stand up, awaiting their fate, between resignation and defiance. One slave, however, is doing something different: he is drawing on a wall, an action that elicits the attention of several of his fellow slaves (see Figure 10.1A).

What was this person drawing on the wall? What materials was he using? Who was his intended audience? Did these drawing partake of the graphic communication systems developed by some population groups in the African continent? Was he drawing one of the cosmograms used by the Bantu people from Central Africa to communicate with the ancestors and the divine? (Thompson 1981; Martínez-Ruiz 2012). Was he leaving a message for other Africans who might find themselves in the same place at

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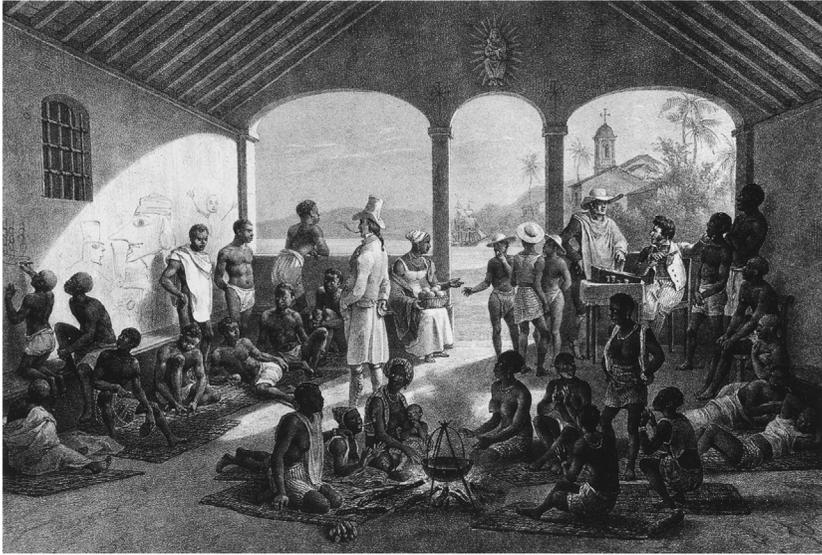


FIGURE 10.1 Johann Moritz Rugendas, *Mercado de Escravos*, 1835, lithograph. Courtesy of Fine Arts Library, Harvard University.

some point in the future? The slave seems to be drawing a ship, perhaps a slave ship, but this representation may well be a function of Rugenda's own expectations.

We may never be able to answer these questions, or to rescue the visual representations that the Africans arriving in the New World used to cope with the uprootedness, isolation, and despair produced by enslavement and the middle passage. What the Rugendas lithograph does capture, regardless of its romantic undertones, is how even the most dehumanized circumstances, the moment in which slaves were traded as commodities, were "punctuated by . . . episodes of resistance" (Johnson 1999, 9) and by the slaves' attempts to counteract how they were being represented by others.

As slaves confronted the unknown and sought to shape their circumstances, re-create lost worlds, and construct new imaginaries, they engaged in art. Mackandal's brave new world, a world without masters, was, at least according to Alejo Carpentier (2006, 24), contained in "an account book stolen from the plantation's bookkeeper, its pages showing heavy signs drawn in charcoal." Afro-Cuban carpenter José Antonio Aponte, the leader of a famous anti-colonial, abolitionist revolt, was also

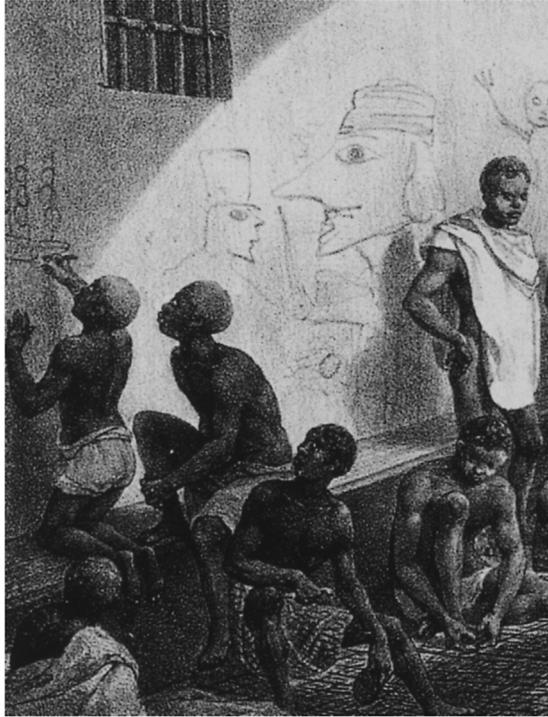


FIGURE 10.1A Ruggendas, *Mercado de Escravos*, detail.

an artist. Aponte's views about history, justice, race, and freedom were articulated in a "book of paintings" populated by black kings, soldiers, and mythical creatures. The book has not been found, but colonial officials in early nineteenth-century Cuba used it to ascertain Aponte's intentions and were terrified by his images and collages (Palmié 2002; Childs 2006). And in his famous slave autobiography, Juan Francisco Manzano (1996, 67–68) remembered with sadness the day that his father "took away [his] box of colors," "prohibited [him] from taking up [his] paint brushes," and destroyed an image that Manzano had painted, in which a joyful witch was helping a sad-looking demon. Manzano does not elaborate on the reasons behind his father's actions, but it is possible that he perceived rebelliousness and anticipated danger in his son's pictorial musings. What did Manzano's witch and demon look like?

Conflicts over representation and authorship lie at the heart of what we may term Afro-Latin American art. Most of the art produced by the

Afrodescendants themselves, particularly prior to the twentieth century, has been lost. This would include the vast body of ritual artifacts produced by the Africans to support themselves and to cope with enslavement. As with the Rugendas lithograph, we are frequently unable to ascertain the identity, personal histories, aspirations, and training of the producers of such artifacts, which hold a foundational place in Afro-Latin American art. We know that Africans were able to reconstruct kinship networks and cultural practices in the colonies. Religious practices, customs, spirituality, beliefs, and musical forms survived the middle passage and were reconstituted under enslavement (Thornton 1998; Sweet 2003). Music, rituals, and the transmission of knowledge implied the production of instruments, representations, and ritual objects – that is, they sustained artistic creativity, often in hidden spaces. As art historian Leslie King-Hammond states, “artistic innovation” was key to the constitution of “safe and sacred ‘spaces of blackness’” where a new sense of identity could be nourished in the New World (2008, 58). The widespread belief that colonial blacks or people of color were talented craftsmen and artists (Arrate 1949; Araujo 2010, 1:16; Alacalá 2014, 32) is probably anchored not only on Iberian associations between manual labor and dishonor, but on the skills and sensibilities of the Africans who arrived in the Americas. Slave owners contributed to the development of these skills, as they placed young slaves as apprentices with master artists, many of whom were themselves of African origin or descent. Traditional African techniques and visual cues found their way into colonial societies, contributing to the functionality and aesthetics of a variety of sumptuary and common-use objects. Even if these traces are not always easily identifiable, they must be taken into account as we seek to conceptualize Afro-Latin American art. The important work done by scholars of Afro-diasporic visual cultures represents a fundamental contribution to these studies (Thompson 1981, 1983; Blier 1995; Lawal 2004; Martínez-Ruiz 2010, 2012, 2013).

One possible approach to this question identifies the art of the various Afro-Latin American populations of the region with the personal and racial background of the creators. In this view, Afro-Latin American art is the art produced by people of African descent, regardless of theme, inspiration, or purpose. Emanuel Araujo’s pathbreaking exhibit, *A Mão Afro-Brasileira*, organized to reflect on the centennial of abolition in Brazil (1988), is perhaps one of the best articulations of this view (see Figures 10.2 and 10.3). The exhibit did not link “Afro-Brazilian” art to any particular expression, theme, epistemology, or school, but to the artists’ ancestry.

A MÃO AFRO-BRASILEIRA

I - O BARROCO E O ROCOCÓ



25 de Agosto a 25 de Setembro de 1988

mam Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo Parque do Ibirapuera Tels: 549-9688 - 549-2342



Ministério da Cultura

Programa Nacional do Centenário da Abolição da Escravatura - Secretaria de Difusão Cultural - Banco do Brasil - 180 Anos

Vera Cruz Seguradora

FIGURE 10.2 *A Mão Afro-Brasileira I*, exhibition poster, 1988. Courtesy of Emanuel Araujo.

A MÃO AFRO-BRASILEIRA

III - ARTE POPULAR



25 de Agosto a 25 de Setembro de 1988

mam Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo Parque do Ibirapuera Tel.: 549-9688 - 549-2342

Ministério da Cultura - Secretaria de Intercâmbio e Difusão Cultural
Programa Nacional do Centenário da Abolição da Escravatura - Banco do Brasil - 180 Anos



Vera Cruz Seguradora

FIGURE 10.3 *A Mão Afro-Brasileira III*, exhibition poster, 1988. Courtesy of Emanuel Araujo.

All the participants, including the curator, were widely perceived to be black. As Araujo (2010, 1:15) explains, his goal was to search for concrete illustrations of the “cultural contributions of blacks and their descendants to our arts since the arrival of the first groups of slaves in Portuguese America.”

Araujo’s *The Afro-Brazilian Touch* sought to conceptualize the Afro-diasporic art of Brazil away from the racially tinged *arte negra* of the past, a label that was infused with primitivist and derogatory meanings associated with the European gaze on African and other world cultures (Cleveland 2013, 12). Furthermore, his vision of what constituted Afro-Brazilian culture was capacious enough to include not only historical references to the links between African cultures and Brazil, but also contemporary art forms that did not explicitly comment on traditional African cultural forms, such as religion.

By 1988, however, the term *Afro* was widely used to denote a wide variety of cultural expressions, processes, and practices. Although linked to populations of African descent, these practices made reference to processes of creolization, hybridization, syncretism, and cultural nationalization that could not be reduced to the creativity of a racially defined group, a move that some critics and scholars criticized as essentialist (Angola and Cristancho Álvarez 2006; Conduru 2012, 9). Indeed, a definition of Afro-Latin American art tied to the ancestry of its creators would not only imply an endorsement of the primacy of racial genealogies, but would likewise negate the Africans’ own abilities to borrow, appropriate, and re-create elements of European cultures. Afro-Latin American art cannot be conceived outside the (asymmetrical, to be sure) processes of exchange, recognition, and borrowing that took place in colonial societies, not only between the Africans and the Europeans, but among Africans of different origins as well. Recognition means, precisely, knowing again – a fundamentally creative process. Even in areas inhabited by large contingents of Africans from the same region or linguistic family, borrowings and learning were unavoidable, as the Africans were forced to experiment with new materials and tools and to produce in the context of new communities, environments, and constraints.

That is why some scholars favor definitions of *Afro* art centered on thematic elements and influences. Some, like anthropologist Mariano Carneiro da Cunha, highlight the connections between Afro-Brazilian religions and art. Cunha (1983, 994) defines “Arte afro-brasileira” as a “conventional artistic expression that plays a role in the cult of the Orixas or deals with a subject related to the cult.” Curator and anthropologist Kabengele Munanga (2000, 104) concurs with this position, noting that

“the first form of real Afro-Brazilian art is a ritual, religious art.” Others, however, include secular expressions as well. Brazilian anthropologist Marta Heloísa Leuba Salum (2000, 113), for instance, conceptualizes Afro-Brazilian art as a contemporary phenomenon “encompassing any expression in the visual arts that recaptures, on one hand, traditional African aesthetics and religiosity, and, on the other, the socio-cultural context of blacks in Brazil.”

A definition of Afro-Latin American art would then combine thematic and authorial elements. First, following Araujo’s lead, the label would include artworks produced by Africans and by people of African descent in the region, regardless of theme, style, or influence. The known corpus of this production is considerably richer for the twentieth and twenty-first centuries than for previous periods, but we do have information about some artists of African descent in the colonial period and the nineteenth century. The artistic production of maroon communities would be included in this group (Price and Price 1999). African background was fundamental in the constitution and organization of runaway communities, which provided a safe haven for the proliferation of African artistic practices (Thornton 1998). Yet these communities could not survive in total isolation and incorporated materials, references, and techniques from their surrounding world, including those linked to indigenous groups. As Sally and Richard Price argue, “the arts of the Maroon represent a unique balance of continuity and change that makes them, in the fullest sense, Afro-American” (1999, 277).

Second, Afro-Latin American art would encompass works that either claim or display African influences, particularly but not exclusively in the areas of religion, music, and dance, regardless of the ancestry and personal circumstances of the author. Finally, a significant body of Afro-Latin American art encompasses works that comment on blackness and on issues of race, difference, and nation in the region. With deep roots in the colonial period, this production has processed anxieties concerning purity and miscegenation; channeled ethno-racial conflicts over questions of inclusion and access to resources; and contributed to the development of racial imaginaries that portray Latin American nations as racially homogenous, usually through the metaphor of *mestiçaje* or *mestiçagem*.

This capacious definition of Afro-Latin American art includes representations that could be characterized as openly racist, as well as those that celebrate blackness as “a reference point against which whiteness and a future of whitened modernity could be defined” (Wade 2001, 855). It conceives Afro-Latin American art as a distinctive discursive space

where multiple, contradictory visions of race, origin, difference, and nation are articulated and debated through a variety of visual media. Afrodescendant artistic producers represent a distinct and fundamental voice in these debates, but their creative work cannot be placed outside broader processes of colonialism, slavery, and imperial expansion.

This conceptualization of Afro-Latin American art has important disciplinary implications as well. Anchored in Parisian fascinations with primitivism, the study of black art or *l'art nègre* was frequently the domain of anthropologists preoccupied with questions of cultural survival and ethnic origins. As physician and ethnologist Raimundo Nina Rodrigues (1904) asserted in his pioneer study of “black sculptures” in Brazil, such pieces had “real ethnographic value” and represented “a phase in the development of [the country’s] artistic culture.” Some of the best-known scholars of the African presence in Latin America (Fernando Ortiz 1906, 1952–1955; Arthur Ramos 1946; Pierre Verger 2000) worked in this tradition. By contrast, the study of Afro-Latin American art, in any of its national variants, is preoccupied primarily with the artistic production of Afrodescendants and with the thematic approaches previously discussed. As sources, images can be used to raise different, perhaps new, questions. Their study is undertaken by scholars working on a variety of disciplines besides anthropology, including growing numbers of art historians, historians, and art critics.

This body of scholarship has increased significantly in the last few decades, in tandem with the rise of the Afrodescendant movement in the region and the deployment of art as a weapon in the struggle against racism. Exhibits such as *A Mão Afro-Brasileira* in Brazil, *Queloides* (1997, 1999, and 2010–12) in Cuba, and the creation of Afro-Brazil Museum in São Paulo in 2004 are all important moments in this itinerary. Some of the questions addressed by scholars working on visual art, which I will discuss later in the chapter, connect with larger questions in Afro-Latin American studies. For instance, research on the influence of African aesthetics in the production of colonial art and objects, made in many cases by African slaves, speaks to wider debates about the ability of Africans to reproduce cultural systems in the Americas (Gomez 1998; Thornton 1998; Sweet 2003; see Chapter 12) and can benefit from recent scholarship that analyzes creolization processes within Africa (Ferreira 2012; Candido 2013). The study of visual representations of blacks during colonial times can add new perspectives to the analysis of the Iberians’ perceptions of Africans and their descendants (Sweet 1997; Brewer-García 2015). A similar argument can be made about the

development of nationalist iconographies after independence. Were images of black deployed for nationalistic purposes in ways similar to those of indigenous people, studied by Earle (2007)? In the twentieth century, the visual arts are central to debates concerning the content and meaning of processes of cultural nationalization (Martínez 1994; Moore 1997; Chasteen 2004; Andrews 2007; Hertzman 2013). Ideologies of *mestizaje* and racial fraternity found frequent and powerful articulation in visual arts, with social effects that are still open to debate. Also debatable, to end, is whether efforts to denounce racism through art can be dismissed as culturalist efforts (Hanchard 1994) or constitute effective means of social action.

This chapter offers a historical overview of Afro-Latin American art, as previously defined, since colonial times to the present. The chapter seeks to identify how this production changed over time, in tandem with broader shifts in the history of Afro-Latin America (Andrews 2004), to highlight some of the main contributions to this area of artistic creation, especially among Afrodescendant artists, and to suggest questions for future research. It seeks to delineate the contours of the known corpus of Afro-Latin American art and its serious limitations, which are grounded on utterly inadequate research into this production. The chapter does not use specific media (painting, photography, sculpture, installation) as a basis for analysis, although many of the artists discussed below worked on a variety of art forms.

COLONIAL ART

Afrodescendants left important traces in colonial art, both as authors and as subjects of representation, in secular as well as religious art. As producers, they were particularly active in the religious sphere, as it was frequently through the labor of enslaved Africans that churches were built and chapels, altars, retables, and liturgical objects and images were made. The “making of altarpieces involved coordinating specialized artists, including sculptors, joiners, gilders, and painters” (Katzew 2014, 152) and it was not unusual for master artisans to own and to employ slaves as assistants and apprentices in their shops (de la Fuente 2008a). This allowed African workers to make use of a variety of skills and to insert their own interpretations and aesthetic sensibilities into such products, however difficult it may be to single out and to identify such contributions with any degree of precision. Indeed, the development of specific methodologies and the identification of sources that would allow us to study how

African visual idioms and techniques shaped the production of colonial religious art and other objects constitutes a fruitful area for future research (Conduru 2012). Archaeologists have made important contributions to the study of these aesthetic interventions. In Brazil, for instance, scholars have studied how body scarification signs and patterns used by some African populations were reproduced in pottery and pipes (Torres de Souza and Agostini 2012). In his study of two Jesuit wine-producing estates in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Nasca, Peru, archaeologist Brendan Weaver (2015, 335) has found remains that allow him to argue that slaves chose to embellish some of their tools, including notably those for personal use, with “African stylistic elements.” These archaeological studies open up new and exciting opportunities for further research into the aesthetic sensibilities and interventions of African slaves; scholars of Afro-Latin American art would benefit from studying their methods and results.

The famous mural of the Señor de los Milagros in Lima, dated around 1650 and attributed to an anonymous slave from Angola, is one of the earliest known art images produced by African slaves in the New World (Costilla 2015). The image was probably linked to the Andean god Pachacámac and became the subject of a broad popular cult (Rostworowski. 1998). In Brazil, the Rio de Janeiro-born Manuel da Cunha (1737–1809) represents one of the earliest known examples of a painter in the Americas who was born to an enslaved mother and also one of the first identifiable Afrodescendant artists to produce religious works. Thanks to the protection of a powerful patron, da Cunha obtained his freedom, studied in Lisbon, and returned to Rio, where he established a school and devoted himself to the production of religious paintings, portraits, and sculptures (Teixeira Leite 2010a). Also in eighteenth-century Brazil, but better known, are the examples of Antônio Francisco Lisboa (Aleijadinho) (1738–1814) and Valentim da Fonseca e Silva (Mestre Valentim) (c. 1745–1813), two mulatto artists that modernists would elevate in the 1920s to the status of foundational figures of Brazilian national culture (Andrade 1965).

A gifted architect and sculptor born to a female slave, Aleijadinho designed the church of São Francisco de Assis in Ouro Prêto and carved ornamentations in this and several other religious buildings, including pulpits, retables, choirs, chancels, and statues. Almost all of the artist’s known works are of religious nature (Ribeiro de Oliveira 2010). He probably learned his trade from his Portuguese father, architect Manoel Francisco Lisboa, who immigrated to the Minas Gerais region around

1720 and who was responsible for the planning and execution of several important buildings in the region (Ribeiro de Oliveira 2000). Aleijadinho drew inspiration from, or, in the language of Brazilian modernists (Andrade 1928), cannibalized European engravings and architectural treatises to produce an original and highly personal synthesis that occupies a singular place in the history of Luso-Brazilian rococo. Aleijadinho is said to have made extensive use of African formal conventions (Cunha 1983) but other authors emphasize his stylistic debts to European influences, particularly to German rococo (Ribeiro de Oliveira 2010).

Unlike his contemporary Aleijadinho, sculptor, woodcarver, and architect Mestre Valentim received a formal education in Portugal and is mostly remembered today for his contributions to civil architecture and the urbanization of Rio de Janeiro. His earlier works (1770s), however, are mostly religious, including ornaments in the church Nossa Senhora do Carmo, and he continued to produce religious works until the end of his life, as exemplified by the carving of the altar of the church of São Francisco de Paula in Rio, which he executed between 1800 and 1813 (Pontual 2000). But it was as the planner and executor of major public works, particularly of Rio de Janeiro's Public Promenade or *Passeio Público*, that Mestre Valentim is remembered today. Guarded by an iron gate, this majestic park was inspired by European urbanization developments and filled with fountains, pavilions, terraces, waterfalls, and stone benches. Perhaps its most interesting innovation was Valentim's inclusion of local elements, particularly in the form of locally produced bronze statues celebrating tropical fauna and vegetation, which replaced the more traditional dolphins and tritons found in European parks (Ribeiro de Oliveira 2010).

Outside Brazil, Afrodescendant artists also made important contributions to the development of colonial art. Like Aleijadinho and Valentim, some of these artists are today remembered as key, even foundational figures of their respective national pictorial traditions. In the case of Puerto Rico, this perspective is illustrated by the figure of José Campeche (1751–1809) (Quero Chiesa 1945). The son of a freedman and a Spanish woman from the Canary Islands, Campeche was a gifted painter, woodcarver, architect, and musician who probably learned some of the basics of his various trades from his father, a gilder and church decorator who also played music in the cathedral of San Juan (Libin 2006; Temin 2006). As was usual at the time, ecclesiastical institutions and elite patrons commissioned most of Campeche's works, which were devoted to religious themes and portrayals of the island's colonial elite (Traba 1972;

Sullivan 2014). Despite his close personal connection to slavery, black subjects rarely appear in his paintings. When they do, as in his 1792 portrait of Governor Don Miguel Antonio de Ustáriz, they are placed in the background, as anonymous workers paving the way to Bourbon progress (Temin 2006, 164).

Contemporary to Campeche was painter Vicente Escobar (1762–1834), the son of pardo parents who were members of the upper echelons of the free colored community of Havana. Escobar's father and maternal grandfather were both officers in the Colored Militias in Havana and belonged to families with long and distinguished military pedigrees (Barcia 2009). Thanks to his family's networks and resources, Escobar managed to study at the San Fernando Royal Academy of Arts in Madrid and to establish his own atelier in Havana, devoted mostly to the production of portraits and religious paintings (López Núñez 1997). It is significant that Escobar obtained an appointment as a painter of the Royal Chamber in 1827, but only after getting a dispensation under the *cédula* of *Gracias al Sacar*, by which people of mixed parentage could obtain a certificate of legal whiteness (Twinam 2014). Although critics have described his work as formulaic and unimaginative (Méndez Martínez 2013), Escobar's claim to fame was guaranteed by Cuban novelist Cirilo Villaverde, who referred to him as “the famous Vicente Escobar” (Villaverde 2005, 55) in *Cecilia Valdés*.

Blacks also entered colonial art as objects of representation, both in religious and secular art. In addition to a handful of black saints such as St. Benedict of Palermo, Santa Iphigenia and Saint Martin de Porres, Africans were frequently included in representations of the adoration of the magi, which “acquired the status of a pictorial paradigm for an entire art industry” around the time of the European expansion into Africa and the Americas (Koerner 2010, 17). The dissemination of these images increased in the late sixteenth century across the Spanish empire and some representations did not cast blackness in a negative light (Brewer-García 2015). Blacks were occasionally represented as devout Christians, as illustrated by Guamán Poma de Ayala's *Cristianos Negros* (1615) and by José Campeche's *Exvoto de la Sagrada Familia* (ca. 1778), in which three fully dressed black women kneel piously before the Holy Family (Taylor 1988, 13; Brewer-García 2015, 117).

Representations of black Christians raise questions of belonging, creolization, and civility, but it was in profane art that those questions found a privileged space. As visual artists represented Africans and their descendants, they spoke to the tensions and anxieties that surrounded the

creation of creolized, multiracial societies in the Americas. *Negros* did not fit comfortably with the metaphor of the two republics, Spanish and indigenous, which functioned as the organizing principle of colonial society. On the one hand the Africans and their descendants were deemed to be *gente de razón* and as such they were subject to the jurisdiction of the Inquisition. In at least some social relations, they were vassals of the Crown and given access to benefits such as *vecindad* (Bennett 2003). On the other hand, however, blackness was a debased and dishonorable social condition. Colonial authorities made significant efforts to equate blackness and African origin with enslaved status, which leads some authors to categorically state that blacks did not have access to vassalage (O'Toole 2012).

Painters and engravers processed these tensions concerning difference, inclusion, and notions of purity and lineage in a variety of ways. An early and remarkable example is that of *Los Mulatos de Esmeraldas*, a 1599 portrait of Francisco de la Robe, the leader of an African community in the Ecuadorian coast, and his two sons. Executed by an indigenous painter trained in the arts school of Quito, Andrés Sánchez Galque, the painting offers an extraordinary combination of visual cues to illustrate the lack of civilization of these barbarous subjects (indigenous facial gold ornaments, arrows) as well as their acceptance of Spanish rule, illustrated by their poise and clothing (Cummins 2013). The portrait is also an early illustration of processes of mixture and creolization, as the subjects combine European, indigenous, and African attributes. Francisco de la Robe was himself a *criollo* born to an African slave and an indigenous woman from Central America.

Although Sánchez Galque portrayed these individuals in ways that were legible to the King – the painting was commissioned as a gift for Philip III – it conveyed the exoticism of its distant colonial subjects. A similar sense of exoticism can be appreciated in the ethnic paintings executed by an otherwise very different artist, Albert Eckhout, who differentiated individuals according to origin, ethnicity, skin color, and levels of civility. Part of an effort by the Dutch West India Company to study and document the land and inhabitants of its newly acquired Brazilian colony in the mid-seventeenth century, the paintings of Eckhout portrayed several indigenous groups, blacks, and people of mixed Afro- and Indo-European ancestry. Missing, however, are portraits of Dutch and Portuguese subjects, which reinforces “the strangeness of the country” and the “natural history perspective” chosen by the author (Boogart 2012, 229–30).

These paintings also highlight a central feature of colonial societies and a key preoccupation of colonial art: heterogeneity. On the one hand these representations – of which the *casta* paintings of the eighteenth century are the most elaborate example – sought to capture the multiplicity of factors that produced a bewildering number of ranks, qualities, and social stations among colonial populations. Eckhout's rendering of a mulatto, for instance, differs from his indigenous and black subjects not only in skin color, but also in terms of clothing – a primary marker of difference in the early modern world (Wheeler 1999) – in his access to what Arnold Bauer (2001) called “civilizing goods” (musket, sword), and even in the surrounding background. Whereas commercial tropical plants (sugarcane) escort the mulatto, the semi-naked indigenous people are surrounded by the wilderness of the rainforest (Boogart 2012).

On the other hand, these visual representations marked the dividing line between Europeans and a creolized, diverse, multiracial, and increasingly mixed underclass. The *casta* paintings of the eighteenth century sought to convey precise information about different types and degrees of mixture, but they did so by reinforcing the association between “*castas*” and “mixture” in general. Perhaps because of their sheer complexity, these taxonomies conveyed the notion that a large portion of the colonial population was of mixed parentage and that the socially relevant line was not between different forms of mixture, but between a racially mixed Creole population and a small and allegedly pure elite of European ancestry. By the late eighteenth century the label “*castas*” was applied in Mexico to people of mixed descent regardless of origin (Cope 1994) and similar capacious and inclusive terms had emerged in other areas of the colonial world. In the Nuevo Reino de Granada, for instance, the multiracial lower classes were included in the category of *libres de todos los colores* (free people of all colors) (Rappaport 2014). The early *casta* paintings contributed to the rise and consolidation of new criollo feelings and identities in New Spain during the seventeenth century and conveyed a certain pride about the land and its peoples (Katzew 2004; Katzew 2014). In this sense they represented an early and precocious response to Europeans' disparaging views about the New World, an early articulation of an American vision in which mixture was not a mark of inferiority and impurity (Martínez 2008), but a point of pride.

The existence of a multiracial and racially mixed plebeian world was occasionally captured in other forms of colonial art as well. A folding screen produced in Mexico City circa 1660, for instance, represents the main square of the city as a space inhabited by laborers of various

backgrounds and colors, including some Africans or Afrodescendants, “without any tension between the ethnic groups” (Fracchia 2012, 202). Likewise, the workers depicted in the background of Campeche’s portrait of Governor Ustáriz (1792) appear to be a multiracial crowd in which blacks labor alongside workers from other backgrounds (Taylor 1988, 20).

Criollo elites would be able later to construct narratives of American mixture and harmony that built on these colonial precedents. Indeed, it may well be that discourses of harmony and *mestizaje* were first articulated in the visual arts, a point that requires further research and that would alter established chronologies of Afro-Latin American history. When issues of representation came to be discussed at the Cortes de Cádiz, the criollos countered Spanish concerns about mixture and disorder with discourses of interracial intimacy and harmony that decried *casta* classifications as the barbarous policies of a decrepit, crumbling empire (Lasso 2007). Colonial tensions surrounding difference, inclusion, social worth, and community were not solved by independence, but the elimination of *casta* distinctions and the dissemination of republican egalitarian ideals and practices created opportunities for the development of new imaginaries of race and nation. At the same time, notions of equality were promptly contested and circumscribed by a powerful new body of knowledge that anchored older notions of human difference in the new language of biology and, later in the nineteenth century, evolution (Fredrickson 2002). Scientific racism would generate a new and powerful language, including visual language, for discrimination and exclusion.

INDEPENDENCE AND NATION MAKING

Although the wars for independence forced questions of race, origin, and belonging to the forefront of the political arena, historians of Latin American art have devoted minimal attention to the important question of how such tensions and debates may have been echoed by the visual arts. The dearth of research is particularly acute when it comes to representations of blacks, despite the well-known fact that Afrodescendants made up a significant portion of both patriot and royalist armies. Their prominent participation in the wars allowed slaves and blacks to inject their own visions and aspirations into the political and legal agendas of the nations in the making (Ferrer 1999; Andrews 2004; Reales 2007; Blanchard 2008; Sartorius 2014; Echeverri 2016). Indigenous themes and

allegories have received more scholarly attention, among other reasons because America was sometimes represented as an indigenous woman since colonial times (Ades 1989) and also because after independence indigenous civilizations were invoked as historical precedents to construct new genealogies for the emerging nations (Gisbert 1980; Earle 2007). Even in places with large populations of African descent that lacked indigenous people, such as Cuba, Amerindian images were deployed for nationalistic purposes (Niell 2016).

Afrodescendants entered the iconography of the new nations either as part of the vast patriotic iconography that sought to celebrate the heroes of independence, through abolitionist art or, most frequently, through the romantic and ethnographic gaze of foreign traveling artists and scientists who visited the region during the nineteenth century. The postindependence years were not only years of self-exploration and nationalist myth-making, but also of intense exploration by outsiders bent on depicting and translating the new, exotic republics to the world (Catlin 1989). With roots in colonial representations, the views of scientific and traveling artists frequently adopted the language of “types,” by which different human groups were classified using a variety of physical, phenotypical, cultural, and environmental attributes. Such classification efforts were anchored in bodies of biological and racial knowledge that allocated different civilizational worth and mental abilities to different groups. Similar concerns and ideas informed the production of *costumbristas*, local artists interested in capturing local colors, customs, and costumes.

Since a relatively large number of people of African descent rose to positions of prominence within the patriot armies, it is not surprising that at least some of them were subsequently memorialized among the heroes and martyrs of independence. This process, however, was not free from conflict, as some of the most prominent black patriots were conveniently whitened in order to insert them among the founders of the new nations. Among these was patriot and statesman Vicente Guerrero, who was president of Mexico in 1829. Representations of Guerrero vary, depending on the purpose of the artist. Those who sought to portray him as a member of the nation’s military and political elite tended to lighten his complexion, offering a whitened version of Guerrero. Those who sought to portray the individual, however, tended to represent him as a person of mixed race, with a darker complexion similar to that of many Mexicans of African descent (Ballesteros Páez 2011).

Like Guerrero, other Afrodescendant patriots were visually inserted in the pantheon of the martyrs of independence during the nineteenth

century even though (or perhaps because) they fell victim to the racial conflicts and tensions that frequently surrounded processes of nation making. Many of these figures were represented posthumously as part of broader efforts to construct a historical genealogy for the new republics. Examples of this iconography would include the portraits of Admiral José Prudencio Padilla and Colonel Leonardo Infante, created in the 1870s–1880s by nationalist painter and historian Constancio Franco Vargas (1842–1917), or the portrait of the Venezuelan General Manuel Carlos Piar, authored by Pablo Hernández (1890–1928), probably in the early twentieth century. Neither Padilla nor Piar nor Infante died in combat. Rather, they were subsequently executed by their former comrades in arms, who frequently opposed the social ascent of individuals of mixed and Afrodescendant ancestry (Helg 2004; Lasso 2007; Reales 2007).

The creation of a visual register of the heroes of independence in South America owes much to the work of José Gil de Castro (1785–1841), an Afro-Peruvian painter who has been rightly termed “the painter of liberators” (Majluf et al. 2012). The legitimate son of a free *pardo* and a black freedwoman, Gil de Castro painted some of the best-known images of the heroes of independence, from Simón Bolívar or José de San Martín to Bernardo O’Higgins. He also authored the best-known portrait of José Olaya, an Afro-Peruvian courier who served the republican forces and was executed by the Spaniards in 1823. Gil de Castro’s representation of Olaya is fully dignified and lauds his courage and service to the homeland.

Born in Lima, Gil de Castro produced some of his work in Chile, where he joined the famous regiment of *Infantes de la Patria*, a military formation composed by free *pardos* (Blanchard 2008). Despite achieving prominence as a republican painter and despite his own efforts to distance himself from a family background that was painfully close to slavery, Gil de Castro died in obscurity and was later dismissed as a minor painter, graphically described as “el negro Jil” (Majluf 2015, 49).

Another Afro-Peruvian artist, Francisco “Pancho” Fierro (ca. 1807–79) made a fundamental contribution to documenting black patriotism after independence (see portrait in Figure 10.4). The son of a slave mother and a white *criollo* who grew up as a free mulatto in Lima (León y León 2004), Fierro’s watercolors depict black participation in processions and other public displays of support for independence and the republic. In 1821, the same year that José de San Martín proclaimed the independence of Peru, Fierro produced several images that captured Afro-Peruvian support for independence. Particularly interesting is a trilogy devoted to the “civic processions of blacks” on occasion of the declaration of



FIGURE 10.4 Estudio Courret Hermanos, Lima, Peru, *Portrait of Francisco “Pancho” Fierro*, ca. 1870–80. Courtesy of Fine Arts Library, Harvard University.

independence, analyzed by Melling (2015). The trilogy depicts black subjects of a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds – as inferred by their clothing and poise – as well as of various gender and age categories. Some are barefoot, others are clothed in middle-class garb, wearing hats and walking canes. What unites all these characters is their celebratory tone, as indicated by the festive nature of the procession and the display of flags and other symbols of republican allegiance.

The characters in the trilogy appear to be all Afro-Peruvian, but other Fierro watercolors that speak to issues of patriotism and citizenship depict cross-racial crowds. In another watercolor probably produced around the same date as the trilogy (1821), Fierro displays a patriot soldier holding the effigy of Saint Rosa, a symbol of independence, surrounded by a crowd of men and women of various ethnic and racial backgrounds (see Figure 10.5). The crowd is clearly celebrating, as indicated by the dancing and by the accompanying fireworks.

It is difficult to determine whether some of the Afrodescendant subjects portrayed in these and other images were enslaved. As Melling (2015, 192)

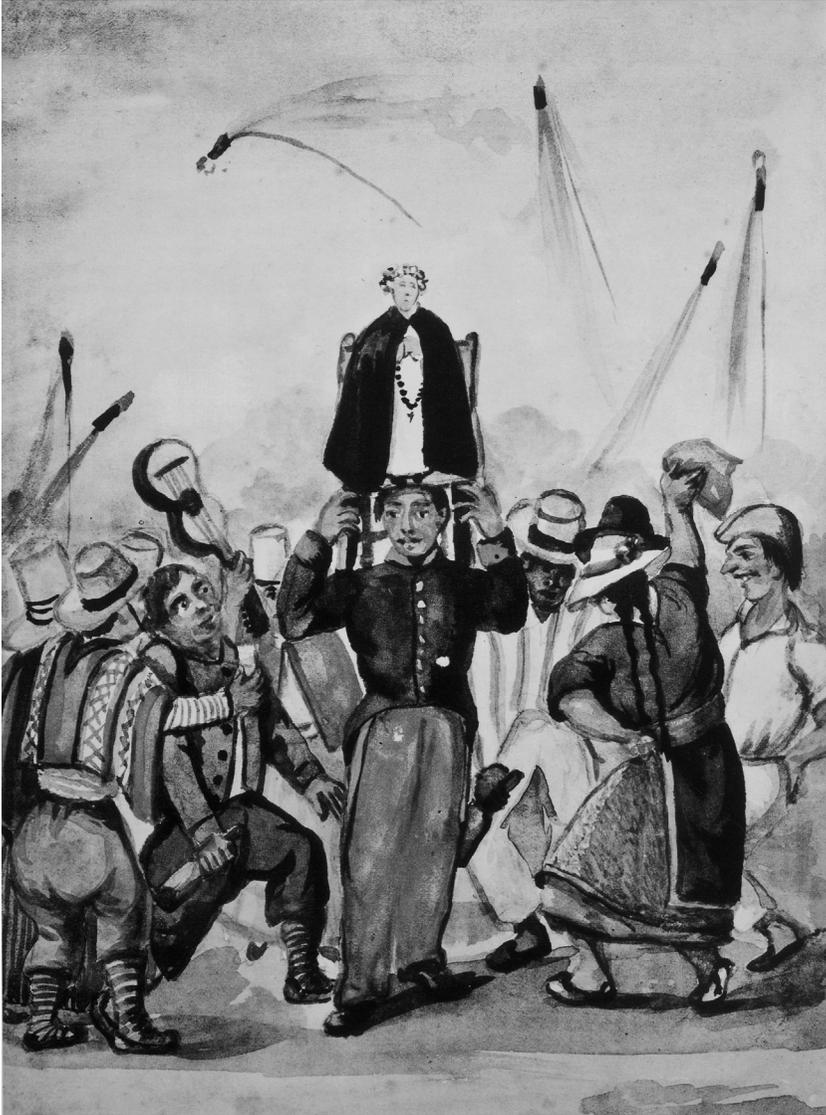


FIGURE 10.5 Pancho Fierro, *Effigy of Saint Rosa of Lima*, ca. 1821, watercolor on paper. Courtesy of Fine Arts Library, Harvard University.

notes, “the range of black types portrayed indicates that they would potentially be representative of a variety of occupations . . . they may also be free, slaves, *libertos* or any combination of these.” The wars of independence dealt a significant blow to slavery across much of Latin

America, but the road to emancipation proved to be much longer and tortuous than many of the slaves who participated in the wars probably anticipated. In areas where conflict was minimal, such as Brazil or in the Spanish colonies of the Caribbean – Cuba and Puerto Rico – slavery actually expanded, fueling the development of plantation agriculture. This expansion took place in an adverse international context, however, as abolitionist forces gained steady ground throughout the century.

Abolitionists used print culture to disseminate their message and believed that “images were very effective tools to proselytize their cause” (Patton 1998, 75). Such images sought to humanize blacks and appealed to the public’s sentiments and to their sympathy for fellow humans. Examples of this genre exist in Latin America, as illustrated by the work of Francisco Oller (1833–1917) in Puerto Rico (Sullivan 2014; Temin 2006) and by Juan Jorge Peoli’s (1825–93) sympathetic representation of an aging slave to illustrate Anselmo Suárez y Romero’s abolitionist story “El Guardiero” in Cuba (Ramos-Alfred 2011). In Brazil, abolitionist Joaquim Nabuco described the massive graphic work of Angelo Agostini (1843–1910) in Rio de Janeiro’s *Revista Ilustrada* in the 1870s as “an abolitionist bible for those who do not know how to read” (Wood 2013, 136). By then abolitionist discourse and mobilization were in full swing in Brazil, but sympathetic representations of Afro-Brazilians circulated at least since the 1850s, when a leading newspaper in Rio, *Marmota Fluminense*, edited and owned by abolitionist Francisco de Paula Brito, published a sympathetic portrait of the enslaved sailor Simão, who became famous for saving the lives of thirteen white individuals during a shipwreck. The lithograph disseminated in Brito’s newspaper was based on an oil portrait authored by José Correia de Lima (1814–57). Exhibited at the Imperial Academy’s 1859 salon, Correia de Lima’s portrait offered a positive and dignified representation of the slave (Cardoso 2015).

Antislavery sentiments in Europe help explain why traveling artists and scientists produced a significant visual corpus of Africans and their descendants in Latin America. Representations of slaves and of blacks appear in the works of traveling artists such as Claudio Linati (Mexico), Johann Moritz Rugendas (Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Peru and Bolivia), Jean-Baptiste Debret (Brazil), Thomas Ender (Brazil), Armand Reclus (Panama), Camille Pissarro (Venezuela), and Frédéric Mialhe and Eduardo Laplante (Cuba). Some of these representations were highly stereotyped and critical, but others were sympathetic and denounced slavery’s violence. Linati’s clearly

pejorative representation of an Afro-Mexican couple from Alvarado, Veracruz, is an excellent example of the former. His *Nègre d'Alvarado etendu dans son Hamac, faisant travailler sa femme* (1828) depicts a black man who rests on his hammock while whipping his working wife. Of a different sort, but equally unsympathetic, are Laplante's representations of sugar slaves in Cuba. A celebration of the technologically advanced mills that made Cuba a world leader of sugarcane production, Laplante's lithographs present "anonymous slaves dressed in monochromatic uniforms [who] are either pegs in a mechanical system, visually indistinguishable from the actual machinery around them, or black dots scattered in a natural landscape" (Ramos-Alfred 2011, 104; García Mora and Santamaría García 2006). On the other end of the spectrum, however, are Debret's sympathetic depictions of slave life in Brazil. Debret not only captured how slaves performed every imaginable form of labor in the country, but he also denounced, in graphic and striking ways, the various forms of punishment and torture that slaves were forced to endure (Wood 2013).

Travelers and artists from within the region also engaged in efforts of recognition, representation and dissemination that frequently included people of African descent. In Colombia, Ramon Torres Méndez (1809–85), often labeled as the country's first national visual artist, produced a large number of watercolors that captured popular customs and "types," some of whom were of African descent (González 1986). The illustrators that accompanied the Comisión Corográfica, a nationalist scientific project that sought to map the territory of Colombia and to document the country's varied geography and riches, also produced visual representations of the Afrodescendant population of Colombia, particularly numerous along the Pacific coast (Villega Vélez 2011; Appelbaum 2016). In Ecuador, Afrodescendants are registered in the watercolors of musician, painter, and educator Juan Agustín Guerrero (1818–80), founder of a "democratic school" of art that privileged local landscapes, customs, and topics (Hallo 1981).

Many of these representations refer to generic and abstract "types," a discourse that early photography helped to consolidate (Catlin 1989). Even some individual portraits, like the *Retrato de Mulata* (1875) painted by Mexican artist and educator Felipe Santiago Gutiérrez (1824–1904), who traveled to Colombia in the 1870s, seek to capture a socio-racial type rather than an individual. Gutiérrez's *Retrato* portrays a dignified, well-dressed, middle-class Afro-Colombian woman, but her individual identity remains buried under and subsumed by the "mulata" label

(Morton 2014; Vásquez 2014). By contrast, his portraits of white women frequently referred to individuals (Garrido et al. 1993). Only exceptionally did prominent individuals of African descent get individualized in nineteenth century paintings. Examples include Pancho Fierro's watercolor portrait of doctor José Manuel Valdéz, who was appointed Protomedicato General de la Republica, the top medical post of Peru, in 1830; Francisco Oller's portrait of Afro-Puerto Rican schoolteacher Rafael Cordero; and Rodolpho Bernadelli's (1852–1931) portrait of abolitionist and engineer André Rebouças (Temin 2006; Melling 2015; Cardoso 2015).

These artists created a body of work of significant historical value and left powerful and graphic testimonies about popular customs, celebrations, dress, labor activities, class distinctions, and gender and racial norms in the new republics. Latin American costumbristas are frequently credited with being the first exponents of a new, criollo nationalist art. Fierro, for instance, has been characterized as the first Peruvian artist who interpreted “the figure and soul of its people” (Sabogal 1945, 31). Torres Méndez is described as the artist who achieved “the pictorial emancipation” of Colombia (Sánchez 1991, 17). In Cuba, Victor Patricio Landaluze (1828–89) has been described as “the most clearly Cuban artist of the nineteenth century” despite his Spanish origin (Ramos-Alfred 2011, 162). Criollo art conveyed the image of plural, multiracial, and harmonious social settings that superseded the caste distinctions of colonial societies, thus contributing to the creation of new nationalist imaginaries that sought to reconcile republican notions of political equality with socio-racial distinctions (Majluf 2008).

At the same time, costumbrista criollo artists displayed a fascination for the exotic and the popular that was frequently indistinguishable from the ethnographic gaze of traveling and scientific artists. Costumbrista images illustrated travel books and albums and shaped the perceptions and representations of traveling artists. Although frequently characterized as local, the costumbrista genre produced commercial images for the international market, trespassing “the national frontiers that the genre helped to construct” (Majluf 2008, 45). The images of the new nations were produced in dialogue with international markets, preferences, and ideas and in response to tourists' needs (Villegas 2011).

This dialogue took place in a context in which notions of racial difference acquired new scientific credence. Race explained not only individual differences, but the alleged backwardness of entire nations as well. “What we term national character,” the Count of Gobineau

(1856, 31) wrote, “is the aggregate of the qualities preponderating in a community. . . . The same is the case with the races . . . the black race is intellectually inferior to the white.” On top of that, race mixture, so prevalent in Latin America, led to debasement of the superior white race and ultimately to degeneration. “If there is a decided disparity in the capacity of the two races, their mixture, while it ennobles the baser, deteriorates the nobler,” explained Gobineau (1856, 159–60). By the late nineteenth century, American and European scientists had produced a significant body of research demonstrating that miscegenation resulted in “mongrelization” and decadence (Tucker 1994). Visiting Brazil in the 1860s, Swiss-American naturalist Louis Agassiz commented on the deleterious effects of racial mixture: “Let any one who doubts the evil of this mixture of races, and is inclined, from a mistaken philanthropy, to break down all barriers between them, come to Brazil. He cannot deny the deterioration consequent upon an amalgamation of races, more widespread here than in any other country in the world, and which is rapidly effacing the best qualities of the white man, the negro, and the Indian, leaving a mongrel nondescript type, deficient in physical and mental energy” (Agassiz 1868, 293).

Agassiz (1868, 124) noted the absence of “a pure *type*” among Brazilians, a loaded scientific concept that permeated the language and representations of local costumbrista and traveler painters (see Figure 10.6). This notion implied that humans could be divided and classified into discrete groups or categories and that group boundaries could be determined through a variety of phenotypical, cultural, and intellectual features. Artistic depictions of popular “types” echoed the racialized, scientific misgivings that were associated with the trope of human types and conveyed ambivalence about the Latin American nations’ capacity for civilization and progress.

For instance, a comment published in a Bogotá magazine in 1852 apropos of Torres Méndez’s aquatint *Champán en el Río Magdalena* (1851), which depicts black rowers or *bogas* transporting a white family (Torres Méndez 1860), noted that this was not the main form of transportation on the river and that steamboats, “that powerful agent of civilization,” were “slowly replacing the barbarous and primitive system of the champanes and canoes” operated by the bogas (Sánchez 1991, 39). The representations commissioned by the Comisión Corográfica shared these civilizing concerns, which were tied to ideas of race. The Commission sought to highlight Colombia’s potential and to attract white, European migrants that would develop the country’s vast natural

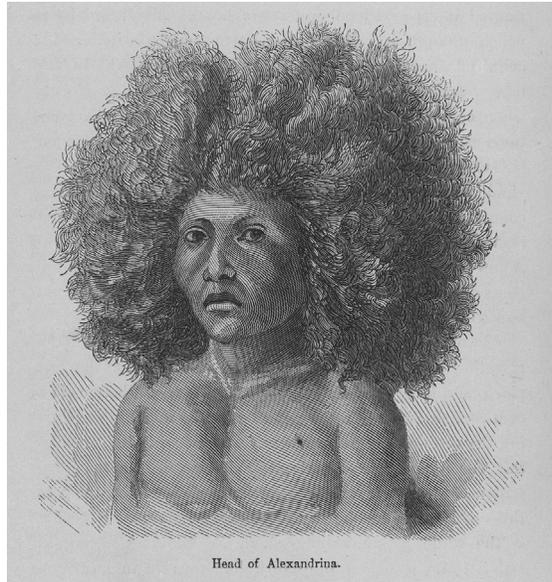


FIGURE 10.6 “Head of Alexandrina.” “The adjoining sketch is a portrait of my little house-maid, Alexandrina, who, from her mixture of Negro and Indian blood, is rather a curious illustration of the amalgamation of races here.” From Louis and Elizabeth Agassiz, *A Journey in Brazil*. Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1868, 245–46. Courtesy of Widener Library, Harvard University.

resources (Villega Vélez 2011). Many of the “types” of Quibdó in the Chocó province, represented by the Commission’s artists, are individuals of visible African descent who appear poorly clothed and barefooted (Hernández de Alba 1986). These individuals were placed beyond the Commission’s racial improvement hopes, which were centered on the “absorption of the indigenous race by the European” and the formation of a “homogeneous, vigorous and well conformed population” (Villega Vélez 2011, 107). In Cuba, costumbrista painter Victor Patricio Landaluz constructed highly stereotyped images of Afro-Cubans and captured elite fears concerning the possible Africanization of the island after the mid-nineteenth century (Ramos-Alfred 2011). In Argentina, caricatures of grotesque black subjects were deployed to illustrate their barbarism and that of the Juan Manuel de Rosas regime, with which blacks were supposedly allied (Ghidoli 2016c).

Even Pancho Fierro’s depictions of black patriotism and citizenship are burdened by stereotypical representations linking blackness with music,

dance, and entertainment. The characters participating in patriotic processions carry flags and other republican symbols, but they invariably carry musical instruments as well, as if no other form of black political demonstration was conceivable. The same images that celebrate black citizenship, then, also introduce “the prevalent association of blackness with leisure, entertainment and festive pursuits of a public nature in the post-independence visual tradition” (Melling 2015, 190).

These anxieties concerning race, civilization, and progress had a deep impact on cultural production and public policy in Latin America toward the late nineteenth century, as many members of the elite felt that the region’s future depended on its ability to embrace European civilization and whiten its population. To achieve these goals, they promoted two sets of interrelated policies. On the one hand, many countries promoted whitening through state-sponsored immigration programs that sought to attract European settlers to the region. On the other hand, African cultural forms were conceptualized as obstacles to progress, incompatible with the creation of modern nations. Latin American white elites launched what George Reid Andrews (2004, 118) has aptly called a “war on blackness.” In the 1880s, Afro-Cuban *cabildos* were prohibited from forming *comparsas* – street carnival musical and dance formations – and taking them to the streets. Brazilian authorities banned capoeira in 1890. The Peruvian church prohibited the “*Son de los Diablos*,” an Afro-Peruvian dance form captured masterfully by Pancho Fierro in several watercolors, from being performed in religious celebrations as early as 1817. Brazilian authorities launched “a kind of war” against *Candomblé*, even if repression was neither consistent nor effective (Reis 2015, 145). Everywhere African-based religious practices were seen as primitive, retrograde, and potentially criminal (Moore 1997; Andrews 2004; Feldman 2006).

In this context, the production of Afro-Latin American art other than ritual art probably hit a low point. During the nineteenth century painting was transformed, from a mechanical trade performed by low-class individuals, to a refined form of academic creation. Majluf (2015) notes that not a single artist of African or indigenous descent can be identified in Chile and Peru after Gil Castro. Pancho Fierro would be an exception, but Fierro was a self-taught aquarellist, a minor genre compared to painting. In the Rio de la Plata region, where a large population of African descent lived by the time of independence, it is possible to identify only a handful of Afrodescendant artists during the nineteenth century. In addition to Fermín Gayoso (1782–1832), a late colonial portrait painter who was

born a slave but obtained his freedom, there is reference to three other figures: Juan Blanco de Aguirre (1855–92), Rosendo Mendizábal (1810–79), and Bernardino Posadas (1861–?). Little is known about their lives and work. Blanco de Aguirre studied in Florence with a government fellowship, opened a school of painting in Buenos Aires, and taught at the prestigious Colegio Nacional of Buenos Aires. Unlike the others, he also left an important body of written work, including several texts devoted to issues of race. The son of two free pardos, Mendizábal specialized in the production of hair art, a genre that was popular during the Victorian era, and devoted much of his time to politics. Posadas was a student of Blanco Aguirre who also taught drawing at the Colegio Nacional (Andrews 1980; Picotti 1998; Cirio 2009; Ghidoli 2016a, 2016b).

In Brazil, a few black and mulatto artists managed to graduate from the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts, transformed into the National School of Fine Arts in 1890, but their work conveys little sense of their ancestry and little concern for some of the social themes that had preoccupied the costumbrista painters. Indeed, some scholars and critics contend that the only way for these artists to survive was by embracing the dominant whitening cultural project under which they lived (Teixeira Leite, 2010b). In this predicament painters were not alone. All over Latin America, black middle-class individuals distanced themselves from Africa and from African-based cultural practices, seeking standing and respectability in openly racist societies (Andrews 2004; de la Fuente 2001).

These trends are perhaps best exemplified by the careers and works of two of the most successful and accomplished Afrodescendant artists of the period, the Rio de Janeiro-born Arthur Timótheo da Costa (1882–1922) and the Havana-born Pastor Argudín Pedroso (1880–1968). Both artists received academic training. Argudín attended the San Alejandro Fine Arts Academy, while Costa entered the National School of Fine Arts in 1894. Both gained some notoriety and obtained support to continue their education in Europe. Costa won a prize at a national art exhibit in 1907 and traveled to Paris to continue his studies there. In 1911 he returned to Europe, this time to work on the Brazilian pavilion at the Turin International Exhibit. Argudín traveled to Spain in 1912, with a fellowship from the city council of Havana, to study at the Royal Academy San Fernando in Madrid. Upon graduation in 1914, he moved to Paris, where he seems to have lived until 1931, when he returned to Havana (Marques 2010; Teixeira Leite 2010b; Comesañas Sardiñas 2008). In 1935, the “Cuban Negro artist” (*New York Times*,

Feb. 15, 1935) exhibited his work at the Harmon Foundation in New York City, thanks to the support of Arthur Schomburg, in whose house Argudín lived and whose portrait he painted.

Although it has been argued that impressionism had a limited impact on Latin American art (Ades 1989), both Costa and Argudín appear to have incorporated some of the language and the palette of French impressionists during their European travels. Neither artist appears to have seriously explored issues of African ancestry or social themes concerning race in their oeuvre, although Costa did devote several portraits to Afrodescendant subjects.² Costa also produced a *Self-Portrait* (1908) that “puts the viewer face to face with a serious-looking, twenty-six-year-old artist who brandishes his brushes fiercely, almost as a shield to defend himself against the envious slings and arrows sure to be launched in his direction after winning the travel prize to Europe in 1907” (Cardoso 2015, 502). The artist is properly clothed in middle-class fashion, but there is no visible whitening effort in the canvas. A later *Self-Portrait* (1919), however, shows a significantly less-defiant Costa who appears to be considerably lighter, if not white. It is a remarkable transformation, one that coincides with wider efforts by middle-class blacks in the region to escape from blackness (Cardoso 2015).

Whitening found one of its most coherent pictorial expressions in Modesto Brocos’s (1852–1936) graphically titled *The Redemption of Ham* (1895). Brocos was himself an immigrant and his canvas depicts the successful whitening of a Brazilian family that in three generations of miscegenation has transited from black to mulatto to white. The image captures the centrality of sex and reproduction to national dreams of racial improvement, a process that constructed women’s bodies as the sites where progress and modernity were literally gestated (Stepan 1991). The white father looks approvingly at his light-skinned baby, while the black grandmother looks up to heaven to say thanks for the redemption of her progeny. Whitening was also promoted through visual representations that clearly depicted black subjects as cultural and national outsiders, as exemplified by the Buenos Aires cartoons studied by Frigerio (2011) and Ghidoli (2016b, 2016c).

This fascination of Latin American elites with Europe had contradictory and unexpected consequences. On the one hand, the immigrants who did arrive in Latin America were Europe’s working poor, not the cultured

² It should be noted, however, that Argudín’s career and work are vastly understudied. A serious look at his work may change the assessment advanced here.

and allegedly superior “stock” imagined by elites. As these immigrants sought to make opportunities for themselves and their families in their new homes, they moved into the poor and working-class areas of Latin American cities such as São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Havana, or Montevideo. They joined multiracial working-class communities where African-based cultural forms such as music, dance, and religion were common. They moved into the Brazilian *cortiços*, the *conventillos* of Montevideo, and the *solares* of Havana. In those spaces they contributed to the processes of mixture that elites envisioned as the path to progress, but they also adopted local cultural forms, frequently of perceived African origin, to claim national belonging (Andrews 2007). Instead of cultural and demographic whitening, the integration of immigrants into Latin America resulted in cultural browning. Aluisio Azevedo captured this process masterfully in *O cortiço* (1890), where several of the novel’s main characters are European immigrants who mingle with Afro-Brazilians, adopt local ways, and succumb to the “lascivious virus” of Brazilian culture (Azevedo 2000, 155).

Ironically, Europe also contributed to the reassessment of African-based cultural forms and practices in Latin America. Artists from the region frequently traveled to Paris to continue their studies and to absorb European culture, but in the process they encountered Paris’s fascination with *l’art nègre*. To the white avant-garde that embraced “negrophilia,” blackness was a marker of their own modernity, even if their voyeuristic gaze helped to reaffirm Africans and their cultures as primitive and exotic. Afrodescendant artists made use of these spaces to advance their careers and to express their own visions of worth and modernity, but they frequently had to “fit primitivist projections that better suited the vanguard’s taste for vitality, sexual potency, and things African” (Archer 2014, 136).

Paris made yet another important contribution: it provided a shared space where artists from all over Latin America came together and recognized each other. Paris was the place where it became possible to articulate “transnational connections stitching together racial and national schemas throughout the Americas” (Seigel 2009, 238). In the 1920s and 1930s over 300 artists from Latin America traveled to Paris and it was there that the first exhibit of “Latin American art” was ever held. This exhibit, the *Exposition d’Art Américain-Latin* (see Figure 10.7) at the Galliéra Museum (1924) brought together over 260 works by forty-two artists from Latin America, many of whom were Paris-based or had exhibited there before (Greet 2014). It was in Paris, and only in Paris, where artists such as Afro-Cuban painter Pastor Argudín could meet and



FIGURE 10.7 Musée Galliéra, *Exposition d'Art Américain-Latin. Catalogue* (Paris, 1924).

exhibit with Latin American luminaries such as Tarsila do Amaral (1886–1973), who completed her famous *A Negra* in Paris in 1923, and with Uruguayan Pedro Figari (1861–1938), who exhibited two of his candombe paintings at the Galliéra Museum exhibit, where Argudín also displayed his works. The organizers of *Exposition d'Art Américain-Latin* described the exhibit as a moment of self-recognition for the “nearly one hundred million men” of the region, whose “similar ethnicity, religion, historical tradition, customs, and democratic ideals” informed the collective will to shape “humanity’s future” (Greet 2014, 216–17).

In this search for commonalities and in the urge to shape their future, Latin American intellectuals and artists turned to indigenous and African roots, reassessing their importance and value. What Paris admired as exotic is what Latin America was precisely made of. The alternative modernity that Negrophile Paris intellectuals searched for had been achieved already. Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade, at the time married to Tarsila do Amaral, summarized the new vision beautifully in “Manifesto Antropófago” (1928): “Without us, Europe would not even have its wretched declaration of the rights of man. The golden age proclaimed by America. . . . We already had communism. We already had the surrealist language.” Latin America was the future and this future was imagined, at least in part, through the exaltation, incorporation, and nationalization of black culture.

MESTIZO DREAMS

As previously noted, the Creole art of the late colonial period and some of the patriotic art after independence anticipated visions of Latin American plebeian societies as multiracial and mixed. More elaborate ideas of racial mixture and blending as something quintessentially Latin American began to circulate in the late nineteenth century in various forms, and they were systematized into dominant nationalist visions in the 1920s–1940s. The two world wars raised serious doubts about the alleged superiority of European culture, including the racial science that linked mixture to degeneration and backwardness, a link much emphasized by American scholars. After World War II, racial science in general, including the very concept of race, came under serious scrutiny and was generally rejected (Barkan 1992; Tucker 1994). Indeed, by the time international agencies sought to understand how, in a world beset with racial conflicts and Nazi genocide, some nations had managed to create

racially harmonious societies, they turned to Latin America, particularly to Brazil, which was seen as “one of the rare countries which have achieved a ‘racial democracy’” (Métraux 1952, 6; Maio 2001).

The articulation of nationalist myths of *mestizaje* or *mestiçagem* and racial democracy is usually tied to the writings of a few prominent intellectuals such as Manuel Gamio, José Vasconcelos, Gilberto Freyre, Andrés Bello, José Martí, and Fernando Ortiz. However, the origin of these ideologies is invariably linked to episodes of popular mobilization and to the intellectual contributions of Afrodescendant thinkers (Andrews 2004; Alberto 2011; see also Chapters 6 and 8). Although these were national ideologies, they were created in conversation with, and as creative reactions to, ideas of social Darwinism and scientific racism that condemned all Latin American nations to perpetual subordination and backwardness. At least in part, it was in response to allegations that “mongrel-ruled” Latin America was hopeless, as Lothrop Stoddard put it in *The Rising Tide of Color against White World-Supremacy* (1920), that intellectuals in Latin America began to speak of cosmic races and mixed, tropical civilizations.

National cultures were central to these debates. Whitening was always a demographic and cultural project and black inferiority was frequently explained in cultural terms. Because Latin American constitutions embraced notions of equality and legal impediments to citizenship and voting rights were not articulated in the language of race (Engerman and Sokoloff 2005), racism was experienced “not in legal form, but as a set of ‘dogmas’ about racial and cultural inferiority” (Alberto 2011, 36). Debates about race, equality, and nation were consequently waged in cultural spaces linked to music, dance, carnival, and literature (Moore 1997; Andrews 2004; Chasteen 2004; Hertzman 2013).

Such debates also found expression in the visual arts. Ideologies of *mestizaje* articulated myths of history and origins, but they were essentially utopian visions about Latin America’s future. When Afro-Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén referred to “Cuba’s soul” as “mestizo” in *Sóngoro Cosongo* (1931), he was referring to a historical process of national formation, but one that served as the foundation for a future nation: “it is from the soul, not the skin, that we derive our definite color. Someday it will be called ‘Cuban color’” (Guillén 1974, 1:114).

The visual arts were a privileged space to weave these historical narratives about the future, a place where new identities could be visually represented and where tensions between the local and the modern, as well as inclusion and exclusion, could be negotiated. Although systematic

comparative scholarship on this artistic production is lacking, the avant-garde movements that swept the region after the 1920s articulated discourses of race and nation that rescued the cultural contributions of African and indigenous groups and celebrated mestizaje and fusion as the very essence of the region. Even in countries where the whitening project was most successful, as in Argentina, representations of the “people” and “criollismo” implicitly acknowledged processes of mestizaje and racial mixing (Adamovsky 2016a).

In Brazil, the artists linked to the modernist movement in the 1920s and 1930s epitomize this new vision (Ades 2014; Conduru 2012). Even if these artists were not the first to represent black subjects (Cardoso 2015), they articulated a new national discourse grounded on racial mixture, racial pluralism, and the importance of black and indigenous contributions. Cândido Portinari’s (1903–62) famous *O Mestiço* (1934), painted after his inevitable pilgrimage to Paris, is perhaps the best-known representation of Brazilian mestizagem and racial democracy. Portinari’s Brazil is linked to the dignity and strength of a racially mixed rural labor force that proudly displays its African heritage (Ades 2014). In Cuba, the Vanguardia of the 1920s and 1930s also sought to articulate a new national identity based on the recovery of black cultural forms and the celebration of mestizaje. Along with musicians and writers, visual artists embraced afrocubanismo, a cultural movement that identified cubanidad with its African roots (Kutzinski 1993; Martínez 1994; Moore 1997; Anderson 2011). Cuba’s mestizaje was visually articulated by Victor Manuel (1897–1969) in his *Gitana Tropical*, a 1929 canvas painted during a trip to Paris. Widely recognized as “the first classic of Cuban artistic modernity,” the painting portrays a racially mixed woman who, in Victor Manuel’s own words, is “a mestiza, a mulata, but I gave her the almond shape eyes of an Indian from Peru, Mexico” (Vázquez Díaz 2010, 92, 97).

Afrodescendant subjects were also represented in visions of mestizaje that were constructed primarily around indigenous contributions. The Mexican muralists, for instance, included black subjects in representations of the working class or to highlight the slave-like condition of the peon (Ades 2014). In Colombia, the artists of the *Bachué* group (1920s–1940s), named after a deity of the Muisca people, celebrated indigenous elements as a fundamental contribution to Colombian culture (Pineda García 2013). However, some of their paintings made reference to blacks, as in Ignacio Gómez Jaramillo’s (1910–70) fresco *La Liberación de los Esclavos* (1938), part of his murals in Bogota’s National Capitol.

Art historian Raúl Cristancho Álvarez describes this mural as “the first important work in Colombian visual arts that thematically is fully devoted to Afro-Colombians” (Maya Restrepo and Cristancho Álvarez 2015, 28). Like many artists of his generation Gómez Jaramillo studied in Europe, but he also traveled to Mexico in the mid-1930s to study the work of the muralists (Solano Roa 2013). The movement appears to have had a limited impact on the Colombian Caribbean coast, although the artistic production of this crucial area of Afro–Latin America is seriously understudied (Lizcano Angarita and González Cueto 2007). The early work of Cartageno painter Enrique Grau (1920–2004) can be included in these artistic movements, especially his *Mulata Cartagenera* (1940) (Márceles Daconte 2010), although Grau himself did not recognize such influences on his work (Goodall 1991).

Rightly described as “sensual” (Rodríguez 2003, 16) Grau’s *Mulata* illustrates some of the racial, gender, and discursive tensions that animated these avant-garde pictorial movements. Representations of black subjects varied widely. Despite their claims to originality, some artists echoed ingrained stereotypes and reproduced visual cues from the traditional costumbrista genre, presenting Afrodescendants as sensual, dancing, and musically-oriented subjects. Some titles – “The Negress,” “A Mestizo,” “Tropical Gypsy” – suggest that nineteenth-century idioms concerning *types* carried over into the 1920s and 1930s. Figari’s renderings of candombe in Uruguay, Emiliano di Cavalcanti’s (1897–1976) representations of Afro-Brazilian samba, Jaime Colson’s (1901–75) *Meringue* (1938) in the Dominican Republic, and works by Eduardo Abela (1899–1965) and Mario Carreño (1913–99) in Cuba illustrate this approach (Cunha 1983; Martínez 1994; Ades 2014).

Interested in downplaying the histories of conflict and violence through which actual mestizaje took place, some of these artists celebrated mestiza women as symbols of national beauty, the site where racial conflicts were solved and national harmony achieved (Kutzinski 1993). In the process, they contributed to the “sexual objectification” (Conduru 2012, 58) of the black female and reproduced stereotypes about black sexuality and eroticism. Brazilian scholar Mariano Carneiro da Cunha (1983) even questions whether these representations should be included in studies of Afro-Latin American art at all.

At the same time, these artists, who have variously been described as modernist, avant-garde, populist, and nationalist, did what artists do best: they created opportunities for new imaginaries and social practices. On the one hand, several artists emphasized not only processes of racial

fusion, but used their work to highlight class stratification and conflict (Ades 2014). A few artists of African descent, such as Alberto Peña (a.k.a. Peñita) (1897–1938) in Cuba, offered a radical reading of social realities. They painted strikes and unemployment, denounced the shortcomings of nationalist ideals, and highlighted the specificity of the plight of black workers (Martínez 1994; de la Fuente 2001). Most importantly, after the 1940s a new group of artists, building on the cultural spaces opened up by their predecessors in the 1920s and 1930s, began to study African-based religions seriously and to explore new ways to incorporate ritual knowledge, idioms, and objects into national art. As the pioneer and most accomplished of these artists, Afro-Cuban Wifredo Lam (1902–82), put it, they wanted to go further and create a new language that was authentically African, not a “pseudo” national art for tourists. “I refused to paint cha-cha-cha. I wanted with all my heart to paint the drama of my country, but by *thoroughly expressing the negro spirit* . . . I could act as a Trojan horse that would spew forth hallucinating figures with the power to surprise, to disturb the dreams of the exploiters . . . a true picture has the power to set the imagination to work, even if it takes time” (Fouchet 1976, 188–89, emphasis added). New figures, new pictures, new imaginations, all based on an authentic “negro spirit,” that lived – could only live – in the popular sectors. Artists such as Lam took some of the avant-garde anticipations and dreams to their logical consequences. And such consequences, even when expressed in non-realist (surrealist) languages, were almost inevitably African.

The search for African authentic idioms was animated by three additional interrelated factors. First, African decolonization processes in the 1960s and 1970s created new hopes, new paradigms, and new spaces for Afro-diasporic cultural forms. International events such as the World Black and African Festivals of Arts and Cultures (FESTAC) in Senegal (1966) and Nigeria (1977), and the First Congress of Black Culture of the Americas (Cali, 1977), provided opportunities for artists from across the diaspora to come together and share their work. International organizations such as OSPAAAL gave Third World decolonization and anti-imperialist movements a platform and a singular motif for artistic creation (Frick 2003). Second, the civil rights movement in the United States and the struggle against apartheid in South Africa provided powerful examples for international antiracist movements worldwide – movements that found in Africa a common link.

Last, but certainly not least, many black artists and intellectuals became frustrated with the shortcomings of populism, racial democracy, and

mestizaje, and with the lack of real social change in their countries. As the ideologies of mestizaje transited from utopian dreams to state-sanctioned dogmas, they were deployed as tools to stifle popular mobilization and to delegitimize demands for racial justice. In countries such as Brazil and Cuba this transit produced contradictory consequences. On the one hand, it created some opportunities for artistic creation and facilitated the development of cultural and diplomatic relations with African nations. Artists from Brazil attended the World Conferences of 1966 and 1977 (Conduru 2009; Alberto 2011; Cleveland 2013). Cuba was apparently not invited to Dakar in 1966 (Kula 1976), but artists from the island did participate in FESTAC 1977 (Bettelheim 2013). On the other hand, attempts by black intellectuals to transform these international gestures into opportunities to debate racism and discrimination at home met with hostility and outright repression (Moore 1988; Alberto 2011; Guerra 2012).

The work of Afro-Brazilian activist, writer, cultural promoter, and self-taught artist Abdias do Nascimento (1914–2011) exemplifies some of these trends (photograph in Figure 10.8). Nascimento was a member of the Frente Negra Brasileira in his youth and the creator of the Teatro Experimental do Negro in 1944, an organization that combined cultural promotion with antiracist activism. By the 1960s, under the military dictatorship, Nascimento became a fierce critic of Brazilian racial democracy and went into exile (Alberto 2011; Hanchard 1994). It was then that he began to paint, developing a body of work that celebrated the vitality and currency of Afro-Brazilian Candomblé. He defined the central problem of his art as “the restoration of the values of African culture in Brazil” and, using language similar to that of Lam’s, noted that his main concerns were not aesthetic, but “the spiritual vitality of the black race in my country” (Cleveland 2013, 48).

Other artists, in Brazil and beyond, have expressed similar concerns about spirituality, “the values of African culture,” and artistic expression. In Brazil, following Cunha’s (1983) lead, one would have to include artists usually grouped under the “primitive” and “popular” labels, whose work reflects African influences not only thematically, but also in terms of formal expressions. Also in this group would be artists whose production is squarely placed within ritual art, such as sculptor Mestre Didi (Deoscóredes Maximiliano dos Santos, 1917–2013) and those who articulate their Afro-Brazilian religious grounding through new formal solutions and visual languages. Among these would be Rubem Valentim (1922–91), São Paulo female artist Niobe Xandó (1915–2010), and Ronaldo Rego (b. 1935) (Salum 2000; Conduru 2009; Cleveland 2013).

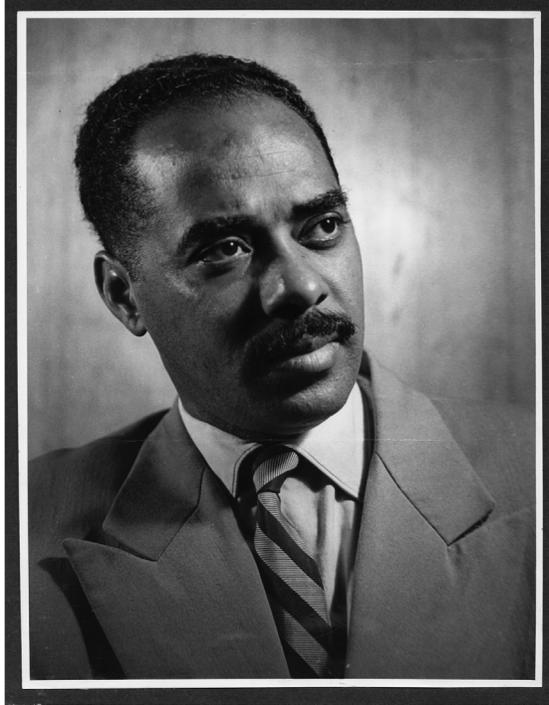


FIGURE 10.8 Abdias do Nascimento (ca. 1950) Coleção Fotos Correio da Manhã, PH/FOT 35917. Acervo do Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil. Courtesy of Paulina Alberto.

There are important parallels between the proposals and concerns of these Brazilians artists and the work of their peers in Cuba. In the 1960s and 1970s sculptors such as Agustín Cárdenas (1927–2001), Rogelio Rodríguez Cobas (1925–2013), and Ramón Haití Eduardo (1932–2008); sculptor and engraver Rafael Queneditt Morales (1942–2016); and painter Manuel Mendive Hoyo (b. 1944) created a body of work that was openly celebratory of Afro-Cuban Santería and its orishas. Like Nascimento in Brazil, these artists did not see African-based cultural practices as a root or a heritage, but as vital expressions of Cuban popular culture. Many of them appear to have shared the vision, articulated by Afro-Cuban intellectual and activist Walterio Carbonell (1961), that Santería represented a progressive intellectual and cultural force in the construction of Cuban socialist society. This vision, however, was not shared by Cuban authorities, who in the late 1960s actively discouraged all religious

practices, and any artistic production related to them (Ramos Cruz 2009; de la Fuente 2013; Martínez-Ruiz 2013).

The search for African connections and black spirituality was not confined to Brazil and Cuba, although it found its most visible and numerous exponents in those countries. Afro-Uruguayan painters Ramón Pereyra (1919–54) and especially Rubén Galloza (1923–2002) devoted a good portion of their work to reconstruct and disseminate the religious practices and popular culture of Afro-Uruguayans. Pereyra was, along with Figari, the artist best represented in an exhibit commemorating the one-hundred-year anniversary of slave emancipation in Uruguay, organized by the National Commission of Tourism in 1942. Some of the titles of his works – *Barrio Negro*, *La Comparsa*, *Spiritual* – reflect his involvement with Afro-Uruguayan popular culture (Diggs 1952). He shared this trait with Galloza, the son of a black domestic servant who grew up in the working-class neighborhood of Barrio Sur in Montevideo. Galloza became a tireless promoter of candombe and other forms of popular culture, subjects that dominated his vast body of work (Olivera Chirimini 2001; Sztainbok 2008). Pereyra and Galloza were also activists involved in civil rights struggles for racial equality and cultural recognition in mid-twentieth-century Montevideo (Andrews 2010). The work of Carlos Páez Vilaró (1923–2014) was animated by similar concerns. In the 1950s, he opened his studio in one of the popular conventillos of Montevideo, which facilitated his immersion in Afro-Uruguayan culture and the production of a later body of works with explicit denunciations of racism and colonialism. For instance, one section of his famous *Roots of Peace* 1960 mural at the tunnel connecting the buildings of the Organization of American States in Washington, D.C., is devoted, precisely, to the “struggle against racial discrimination” (Kiernan 2002; Sztainbok 2008).³

In Colombia, the work of Afro-Colombian painter Cogollo (Herberto Cuadrado Cogollo, b. 1945) illustrates superbly how international anti-racist movements such as Black Power, and artistic influences such as Wifredo Lam’s surrealism, shaped the work of individual artists elsewhere. Cogollo settled in Paris in the late 1960s and began a process of research and discovery of African cultural influences without Western filters that was very much akin to that of Lam (Fabre 1980; Rosemont and Kelley 2009; Medina 2000). This search resulted in the creation of a

³ I thank Roberto Rojas, from the Department of Social Inclusion of the OAS, for showing me the mural, which is not easily accessible to the public.

personal catalog of “Afro-Caribbean symbols” (Márceles Daconte 2010, 225). In 1973, on the occasion of a personal exhibit at Galerie Suzanne Visat in Paris, Cogollo even defined himself as an African sorcerer, a “nohor” who had the ability to see and represent the entrails of others (Cogollo 1973).

It is probably not a coincidence that many of these artists were or are themselves of African descent and that many of them grew up in families and communities where African-based cultural practices were common. Lam was born in a sugarcane community and was exposed to Afro-Cuban religiosity since his childhood. Nascimento was the grandson of slaves. Mestre Didi, himself a Candomblé priest, grew up in a religious family in Bahia and was initiated at an early age. Mendive grew up in a Havana slum in a Santería-practicing family, Cogollo in the multiracial port city of Cartagena. Galloza grew up close to some of the conventillos of Montevideo, where Afro-Uruguayan culture thrived. Rego is white but is a priest in the Afro-Brazilian religion of Umbanda. Páez Vilaró was also white, but he worked from a conventillo and traveled extensively in Africa. For these artists, connections to Africa were personal, intense, and intimate, part of living, contemporary cultures that functioned as reservoirs against racism and prejudice. By the time black mobilization exploded in Latin America in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, visual artists were already well positioned to play leading roles in the formulation of new demands for inclusion and justice.

THE ART OF BLACK MOBILIZATION

The Primer Congreso de la Cultura Negra de las Americas that Afro-Colombian writer and activist Manuel Zapata Olivella organized in 1977 was not an isolated event. It was in fact one of the initial salvos in what would soon become a continental, transnational wave of black mobilization demanding equal access to material resources and to power. One of the central goals of the Congress was to affirm black culture in the Americas, but this agenda was linked to a more general discussion concerning racism and discrimination in the region. Intellectuals and artists such as Nascimento attended, while one of the sections was devoted to artistic creativity and headed by artist and folklorist Delia Zapata Olivella. Clearly, the organizers saw art and culture as platforms for demands and activism. Subsequent congresses were organized in Panama (1980) and Brazil (1982). By 1978 a national

black political movement, the *Movimento Negro Unificado*, had been created in Brazil (see Chapter 7).

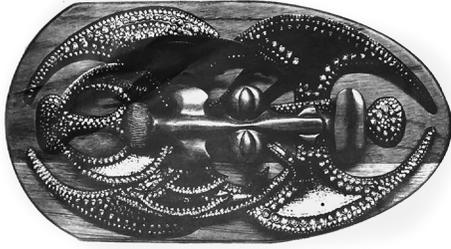
In part because many of the activists were themselves artists or intellectuals, or due to the fact that many civil rights organizations began as study groups and cultural initiatives, art and culture were always conceived as part of the movement. In some countries, such as Peru, Costa Rica, and Paraguay, activists demanded the designation of specific days for Afro-Peruvian, Afro-Costa Rican, and Afro-Paraguayan Culture. In countries with larger populations of African descent, such as Brazil and Cuba, artists-activists used cultural projects to denounce the persistence of racism, to revisit the memories of slavery and emancipation, and to highlight the shortcomings of *mestizaje* and racial democracy.

An early example of visual artists' involvement in debates about race and justice is that of *Grupo Antillano* (1978–83) in Cuba (see Figure 10.9). Founded by sculptor and engraver Rafael Queneditt, the Group came into existence after the so-called *Quinquenio Gris*, a “grey” period of neo-Stalinist censorship during the 1970s characterized by a dogmatic approach to culture in general and to Afro-Cuban religiosity in particular. The Group's foundational manifesto stated clearly that their *raison d'être* was to search for the Caribbean and African roots of an authentic Cuban culture. In this search, they claimed to build on a generation of previous artists, among them Wifredo Lam (who became honorary president of the Group and exhibited with them) and Afro-Cuban artist Roberto Diago (1920–55).

Grupo Antillano placed *Santería* and other African religious and cultural practices at the very center of Cuba's national formation, a position that openly contested official characterizations of such practices as primitive obstacles in the construction of a modern socialist society. Furthermore, the Group engaged the sympathy and support of a large group of collaborators. Among these were not only key figures in Cuban visual arts, but also writers, musicians, historians, and art critics who shared their views and concerns about the African and Caribbean roots of Cuban culture. Prominent among these collaborators were some of the best-known Afro-Cuban intellectuals of the period: historians José Luciano Franco and Pedro Deschamps Chapeaux; ethnographers and ethnomusicologists Rogelio Martínez Furé and Odilio Urfé; musicians such as Martha Jean Claude, Mercedita Valdés, and pianist Rosario Franco; playwright Eugenio Hernández Espinosa; and Afrocubanista poetry performer Luis Carbonell. The Group built a true Afro-Cuban cultural movement and their exhibits became cultural and social events that transcended the visual arts. Their exhibits were also a searing critique of Cuban art academies,

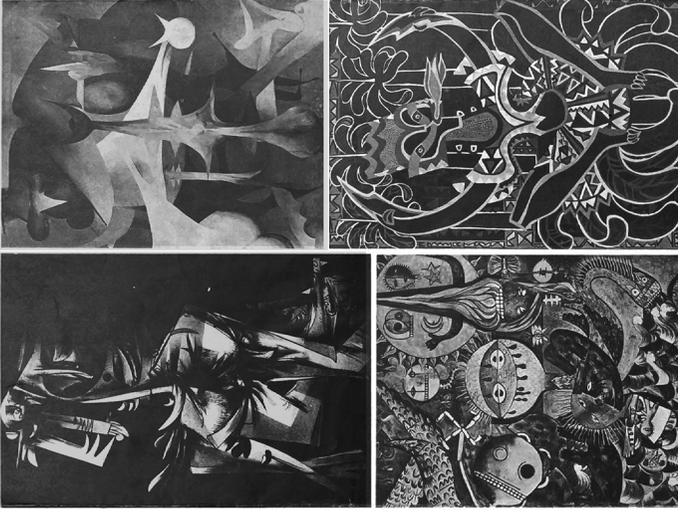
**CASA
DE LA CULTURA
CUBANA/PRAGA
FONDO CUBANO
DE BIENES
CULTURALES**

**Exposición
Grupo Antillano
Enero 1980**



Grupo

**1980
"Antiska Skupina"
Místersvo Kultura / Kuba
Kubánský Fond Kulturech Statku
Kubánský Dům Kulture / Praha**



Antillano



FONDO CUBANO DE BIENES CULTURALES MINISTERIO DE CULTURA

FIGURE 10.9 Exhibition poster, Grupo Antillano (Havana, 1980). From Alejandro de la Fuente, ed. *Grupo Antillano: The Art of Afro-Cuba*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013.

where new trends in Western art found a privileged space, and of a cultural bureaucracy that insisted on relegating black culture to the spaces of folklore (de la Fuente 2013; Ramos Cruz 2013; Bettelheim 2013).

Grupo Antillano took advantage of a propitious moment, as in the late 1970s the Cuban government became embroiled in the African civil wars and built new alliances in the Caribbean, especially with the New Jewel Movement in Grenada. Brazilian artists followed a similar strategy when, in 1988, they used the centennial of the abolition of slavery to highlight the persistence of racism and discrimination in their country. It was in this context that Araujo organized the exhibit *A Mão Afro-Brasileira*, mentioned at the outset of this chapter, which was accompanied by a profusely illustrated volume that highlighted the key contributions of Afrodescendants to Brazilian culture. The exhibit and the volume openly called for a new, Afrocentric and revolutionary art history of Brazil (Araujo 2014). Presented at the Museum of Modern Art in São Paulo, *A Mão Afro-Brasileira* offered the first comprehensive assessment of the artistic production of people of African descent in the country, from colonial times to contemporary art. Araujo would go on to organize other important exhibits of Afro-Brazilian art in the 1990s and 2000s (Cleveland 2013), and he would organize a new version of his own pathbreaking exhibit, *A Nova Mão Afro-Brasileira*, in 2014. In contrast to the original exhibit, *A Nova Mão Afro-Brasileira* highlights the work of a selected group of contemporary artists, including highly acclaimed artists such as Rosana Paulino (b. 1967) and photographer Eustáquio Neves (b. 1955) (Araujo 2014). Paulino's work was also featured, along with the work of Ronaldo Rêgo, Rubem Valentim, Niobe Xandó, Mestre Didi, Araujo, and others, in the "Arte Afro-Brasileira" section of the important *Mostra do Redescobrimento* exhibited at the São Paulo Biennale in 2000 (Salum 2000; Aguilar 2000).

Two additional curatorial projects are also connected to broader patterns of black mobilization: *Viaje sin Mapa* (2006) in Colombia and *Queloides* (1997–2012) in Cuba. Curated by Mercedes Angola and Raúl Cristancho Álvarez, two faculty members at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, *Viaje sin Mapa* sought to offer the first comprehensive survey of "afro representations in Colombian contemporary art." Probably not coincidentally, the exhibit took place at a time when debates concerning how to count people of African descent in the Colombian national census were raging (Angola and Cristancho Álvarez 2006; Paschel 2013). *Viaje sin Mapa* was presented at the Luis Angel Arango Library in Bogotá and its main goal was to neutralize the invisibility that has traditionally

affected black artists in Colombia. Cristancho went on to organize, along with Luz Adriana Maya Restrepo, *¡Mandinga Sea! África en Antioquia* (2013–14), an ambitious exhibition that sought to trace the impact of West African cultures in Antioquia and that looked at representations of blackness from the colonial period to the present (Maya Restrepo and Cristancho Álvarez 2015).

In Cuba, *Queloides* represented the angst of a group of young, mostly black artists as they experienced the collapse of the Cuban socialist welfare state in the 1990s (de la Fuente 2008a). “*Queloides*” are raised, pathological scars, a title that makes reference both to the traumatic effects of racism and to the widespread belief that the black skin is especially susceptible to developing these scars. The first exhibit, *Queloides I Parte*, was presented alongside an anthropology conference in 1997, organized by artist Alexis Esquivel and by art critic Omar Pascual Castillo (see Figure 10.10). A second, larger edition took place at the Centro de Desarrollo de Artes Visuales in Havana in 1999, thanks to the curatorial intervention of Afro-Cuban writer and art critic Ariel Ribeaux Diago (1969–2005). These exhibits received very limited state support and were ignored by the Cuban media, despite being unprecedented events in Cuban art. Because of this, in 2010 Afro-Cuban artist Elio Rodríguez (b. 1966) and the author of this chapter organized a new edition of the exhibit under the title *Queloides: Raza y Racismo en el Arte Cubano Contemporáneo*. It was the first and only time that the terms “race” and “racism” appeared in an art exhibit in Cuba (de la Fuente 2010; Casamayor 2011; Martín-Sevillano 2011). The artists participating in each of these exhibits have varied, but five of them – Manuel Arenas (b. 1964), Alexis Esquivel (b. 1968), Douglas Pérez (b. 1972), René Peña (b. 1957), and Elio Rodríguez – have participated in all of them.

Collectively, these curatorial projects have achieved at least two important goals. First, they have created opportunities for artists interested in issues of race and identity, including a growing group of Afro-descendant artists, to share and disseminate their work, in Latin America and beyond. Notably, this includes the work of a small but growing number of female Afrodescendant artists, who have traditionally been grossly underrepresented in the region’s art scene. Second, the artists participating in these exhibits have articulated potent critiques of Latin American societies and contributed to make racism and discrimination socially visible. Their work can be located in, and be understood as, contributions to current debates concerning race, gender, and justice in the region.

PROLEGOMENO No. 1

El proceso de inter-acción cultural África-Europa en el contexto latinoamericano, y más específicamente, en el caribeño, o sea, el nuestro, como es sabido, estuvo condicionado por relaciones socio-económicas violentas (esclavistas), las cuales dotaron al propio proceso de integración cultural de una compleja especificidad de carácter traumático, que aun en nuestros días no deja de problematizarnos constantemente, pues dicho proceso es en la actualidad la imagen de un cuerpo con borrosas céntricas y notables QUELOIDES, que precisan de una fina y sofisticada cirugía, que junto a los métodos más contemporáneos de lectura de los fenómenos culturales sea capaz de "esbozar" (finalmente) una "nueva" re-lectura de esta FRANKSTEIN (sincrética) que es nuestra cultura.

El MODELO multicultural es una tendencia que parece rimar con el desarrollo de los medios de homogenización macro-cultural, a la vez, que parece ser contrarrestada por ellos mismos esta ambigüedad le da una complejidad inusitada al fenómeno en sí, de ahí que sea tan importante desarrollar una comprensión actualizada de los MODELOS de HETEROOXIA cultural en sus sentidos más específicos, para luego contar con herramientas eficaces para el desarrollo ulterior de cualquier programa de emancipación o democratización cultural a escala global.

Es ya tradicional en el campo de las Artes Visuales en Cuba una preocupación de los artistas por acercarse a los procesos de integración (hibridación, o sincrétismo) cultural desde un punto de vista etnológico, etnográfico y en el peor de los casos folklóricos (y/o folklorizantes); dar una visión "otra" desde un punto de vista sociológico es la preocupación fundamental de los artistas jóvenes aquí reunidos, para intentar manifestar una artista poco reflexada (explícitamente) por el Arte, pero que no por ello resulta menos sintomática a la hora de penetrar en el análisis de estos tópicos, y que por demás permite una postura de distancia crítica que posibilitan figurarse el problema como proceso continuo y presente. No como preférito investigable.

Alexis Esquivel. Enero/1997

QUELOIDES I PARTE

Alvaro Almaguer

Manuel Arenas

Roberto Diago

Aléxis Esquivel

Omar-Pascual C.

René Peña

Douglas Pérez

Gertrudis Rivalta

Elio Rodríguez

José Angel Vincench

PROYECTO Y CURADURIA

Alexis Esquivel Bermudez
Omar Pascual Castrillo

DISEÑO DE CATALOGO

Oriando Silvio Silvera Hdez

QUELOIDES I PARTE, es una muestra que se integra de manera modesta al ENCUENTRO DE ANTROPOLOGIA DE LA TRANSCULTURACION, efectuado en el mes de Enero de 1997, en La Habana, CUBA.

CASA DE AFRICA

Enero 1997

FIGURE 10.10 Exhibition brochure, Queloides I Parte (Havana, 1997). From Alejandro de la Fuente, ed. *Queloides: Race and Racism in Cuban Contemporary Art*. Pittsburgh: Mattress Factory Museum, 2010.

FUTURE AGENDA

Art has frequently been a force for social change, a space where new futures and agendas for racial justice become possible. That is why, in their *Éloge de la Creolité*, Bernabé, Chamoiseau, Confiant and Khyar (1990) argue that art is the key to “the indeterminacy of the new” and “the richness of the unknown.” Afro-Latin American art has played a major role in the construction of new imaginaries of race and nation and made key contributions to Latin American culture.

This field is still in its infancy, however, and truly basic research questions and areas of study remain unexplored (Munanga 2000). First and foremost, a better knowledge of the artistic production of Afrodescendants in the region since colonial times is badly needed. Such knowledge would radically alter – Araujo (2010) is correct – how we study art history in Latin America. Neglected by scholars, museums, art collectors, curators, and art critics, the very existence and production of numerous artists of African descent are barely known, or simply unknown. With the partial (and admittedly crucial) exception of Brazil, this is still virgin territory. Yet both in terms of locus of production and subject formation, Afrodescendant artists represent a distinct voice in continental debates on race, difference, nation, and representation. Many of these artists have not only experienced and have been forced to contend with racial barriers of various sorts, but have lived in communities constituted around African-based cultural practices. Writing in 1943 about his piece *Negra Vieja*, which had been acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, MoMA, Afro-Cuban sculptor Teodoro Ramos Blanco reflected about the importance of this distinction:

Black form has been interpreted, or to be precise has been dealt with by great artists, but they have only achieved the exterior part, without content. They have given us the vessel, but visibly empty; they have lacked emotion and when they have tried to feel it, it has looked fake to us, as something neither felt nor experienced. Let us say that it was a matter of fashion or ‘snobbism’ . . . How different is the effect when the form is interpreted – and now the expression is valid – by a sincere artist who is proud of his inspiration . . . The touch is not about making a white or yellow form painted of black; you must feel it, model its expression, its rhythm, its beauty, its interior. And even if it is made of white marble, the form will be black because its essence is black.⁴

⁴ Teodoro Ramos Blanco, “Comentario a propósito de mi ‘Negra Vieja,’” Havana, March 1943, reel 2169, Giulio V. Blanc Papers, Archives of American Art. I am grateful to Cary García Yero for sharing this document with me.

In addition to research centered on issues of authorship, many concrete questions remain. The important subject of how African aesthetic sensibilities may have shaped the production of religious and secular artifacts during the colonial period needs serious and detailed attention. Archaeologists have done valuable research on how slaves reproduced African aesthetic traditions in the production of work tools and in pottery and pipe decorations. That these aesthetic interventions fall outside the canon of art is, of course, a matter of definitions. A dialogue between archaeologists, historians, and art historians around these interventions would open new and exciting opportunities for further research into slaves' contributions to Afro-Latin American art.

Further research is also needed on the question of black representations in the patriotic art of the nineteenth century, a theme that has not been properly and systematically surveyed, despite its obvious importance. A related question concerns the transformation of art from a colonial mechanical trade to a cultured form of knowledge and its impact on black artistic communities in the region. Several authors note the relative absence of Afrodescendant artists, indeed of black subjects in general, in the art of the late nineteenth century and the turn of the twentieth century. Recent research in Brazil suggests, however, that this may be a function of our own lack of knowledge rather than a reflection of reality (Marques 2010; Teixeira Leite 2010b; Cardoso 2015).

Given how much remains to be done at the national level, where the work of many Afrodescendant artists is still barely known, the dearth of comparative studies is perhaps understandable. Even the well-known modernist and avant-garde movements, which share so much in common concerning their views of race and nation, as well as their cross-fertilization in transnational nodes such as Paris or New York, have not been seriously studied from a regional point of view. How did these artists contribute to the consolidation of racial democracy and populist regimes in the region? Did they open up spaces for new ideas and formulations? The contributions that visual artists have made to the contemporary Afrodescendant movement – another promising area of comparative research – have deep roots that we need to understand better.

As we reflect on the contributions of Afro-Latin American art, it is worth considering how visual representations articulate ideas about race, class, gender, nation, and belonging that are otherwise difficult to convey in the public sphere. Through the creative recombination and synthesis of a variety of discourses, the visual arts are able to produce and disseminate

new contents even in environments in which the explicit discussion of such contents is not welcome. The important work done by several Argentine historians about stereotypical representations of blacks illustrates how the popular media articulates racist meanings without an explicit or “verbal” discussion of blackness (Frigerio 2011; Adamovsky 2016b; Alberto 2016; Ghidoli 2016b, 2016c; Lamborghini and Geler 2016). Similar research could be fruitfully done across the region, particularly, but not exclusively, in countries where the black population supposedly disappeared and where Afrodescendants are poorly represented in more-conventional sources (for postrevolutionary Cuba, see Benson 2016).

Art, however, can also operate in the opposite direction. As Adamovsky (2016b, 158) has argued, “visual culture is one of the fundamental resources for hegemony-building, but it is also a fertile ground for counter hegemonic exercises.” For instance, art played a prominent role in rupturing the thick nationalist silence frequently associated with state ideologies of racial democracy. To mention one example, when the celebrations of the fourth centennial of the foundation of the city of São Paulo failed to make any reference to slavery, to Africa, or to blacks, what the members of a local Afro-Brazilian club demanded was, of all things, an artistic intervention: a sculpture of Mãe Preta, a project that was implemented despite the objections of the city’s white major (Alberto 2011). When open debates about race, racism, and the vitality of African religious practices were officially proscribed in Cuba during the 1970s, the visual arts became a privileged space to raise issues and to insinuate views that were otherwise unspeakable, as exemplified by the work of Grupo Antillano (de la Fuente 2013). A somewhat different but related example is that of Peronist Argentina. While the Peronista leadership rejected any open discussion of race, the regime’s visual imagery celebrated a racially mixed population, an unstated but potent recognition of the political importance and might of the lower-class “cabecitas negras,” migrant workers from the interior (Lamborghini and Geler 2016; Adamovsky 2016b). As I have argued elsewhere, “things that are not speakable in other realms become possible in the realm of art” (Gates, Rodríguez Valdés, and de la Fuente 2012, 35).

In the articulation of this research agenda, it is important to note the creation of the Afro-Brazil Museum in São Paulo in 2004 (see Figures 10.11 and 10.12), an institution that not only provides a much-needed sense of historical tradition to the Afrodescendant population in



FIGURE 10.11 Museu Afro Brasil (1). Photo, Nelson Kon. Courtesy of Museu Afro Brasil.



FIGURE 10.12 Museu Afro Brasil (2). Photo, Nelson Kon. Courtesy of Museu Afro Brasil.

Brazil (Cleveland 2015), but also provides a specialized space for the study of Afro-Latin American art. The field now has an institutional home, one that is properly located in the region. One museum is certainly not enough to capture the rich history of this artistic production, but it is a start.

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