

## Editorial

# Latin American Art, Visual and Material Culture in the Long Eighteenth Century: An Introduction

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The temporal frame of this Special Issue of *Arts*—the long eighteenth century—comprises a complex period of development in the Spanish colonies of Latin America that reverberates throughout the region's visual culture. Stretching from approximately 1660, the year in which the last Spanish Hapsburg king was born, to 1826, the year in which nearly all of Spain's colonies had won their independence, the essays in this thematic issue analyze visual culture during the period within which Spain's demise as an empire was realized. During this period, many countries formerly colonized by the British, Dutch, French, and Portuguese similarly sought and obtained independence. By reaching beyond the meaningless confines of the eighteenth century itself (1700–1799), this temporal frame importantly allows us to engage with colonization, racialization buffeted by the Enlightenment, and resistance on the part of marginalized groups in Latin America, in light of a flourishing visual culture that usually presents as white and masculine. As the edited collection, *Envisioning Others: Race, Color, and the Visual in Iberia and Latin America*, points out, the period's visual culture significantly shaped how marginalized groups were, and continue to be, depicted, which dovetailed with the perception that predominantly white men held positions of power in politics, the economy, and science, while others—including women, people of color, and Indigenous people—are still perceived as lacking both power and agency (Patton 2015). The essays contained in this Special Issue push back against that perception by meditating on the contributions of marginalized groups to the shaping of visual culture in the long eighteenth century.

By reframing the century, we can focus more explicitly on the collision of specific circumstances that have manifested themselves within visual culture. Scholars in other disciplines have taken this approach of customizing what in particular comprises the eighteenth century in order to perform similar analysis, albeit not in an Hispanic context, focusing instead on the colonial long eighteenth centuries of other European powers (see, for instance, Craciun and Terrall 2019; Capdeville and Kerhervé 2019; Drew 2021; Livesay 2018). In so doing, in this issue we underline the complexity of the period's visual culture from the perspective of identity as it is inherited within the period's events, innovations, and failures in the region known today as Latin America.

While pointing to some important elements that characterize the long eighteenth century in the Spanish Americas, this introduction briefly contextualizes three cross-cutting themes that readers will encounter throughout the essays contained in this issue, namely, marginalized identities asserting a presence for themselves, distinctly Latin-American making practices and tendencies, and intermediality as a means of empowering Latin-American artists and technicians. The essays contained in this thematic issue treat these themes in ways that reflect deeply ingrained issues that characterize the long eighteenth century, its challenges, and its accomplishments through various mediums that span religious and secular painting, architecture, retables, and engraving, as well as the materials and skill sets that create them.

By the late seventeenth century, Spain as a colonial superpower had diminished, and the childless demise of its final Hapsburg ruler, Carlos II (1661–1770), provoked concern about the succession of the Spanish throne throughout Europe and the transatlantic world. The War of Spanish Succession concluded years later with the Treaty of Utrecht (1713–1715), which resulted in Spain ceding Gibraltar to Britain—one of the earliest indications that its empire was crumbling. Felipe IV (1683–1746) ascended the throne from the French Bourbon line and revolutionized transatlantic governance and economic development, prioritizing resource extraction and creating companies to further these ends, fruit that ripened in the latter half of the eighteenth century. As a result, a rising settled merchant class, some of whom received noble titles, established itself in Spain's colonies where they operated haciendas and companies that extracted resources, such as silver. Immigration to the Spanish Americas, incentivized by the potential for prosperity and social mobility, increased in the 1700s. This was enabled by changes to taxation, as well as improved navigational techniques, making the voyage both more comfortable and safer. In parallel, the European slave trade expanded throughout the Spanish Americas, placing forced labor where it could best support Spain's economic ambitions. The populations of major port cities, such as Buenos Aires and Lima, and important urban centers, such as Caracas and Mexico City, exploded as loci whose foundation was informed by a robust interculturality that saw both Africans and Europeans of varying backgrounds living or working near to Indigenous peoples, in addition to varying mixtures of all of them.

Social hierarchies that, since the Spanish Middle Ages, had ordered Spanish society along the lines of blood purity and lineage—giving rise to *nuevo* and *viejo* cristianos, conversos and, in Latin America, *indios* and *mestizos*—had grown more complex with the fusion of ethnicity with the invention of race as a modern tool for ordering society around the eminence of heteronormative whiteness. These categories of identity emerged while notions of collective and national identity were forged and embraced following the period's movement toward independence from colonial oversight. For Greer et al. (2007, p. 23), racialization normalized whiteness and marginalized everybody else through a “discursive classification of the chain of human beings”. A popular genre in Latin American visual culture, *casta* painting, demonstrates how these typologies for racializing people along hierarchical lines powerfully deepened ingrained social inequalities that remain visible to this day. In Spanish America, these developments led to labels that became associated with the color of one's skin or of one's lineage and status: *mulatos*, *criollos*, *indianos*, *castizos*, *lobos*, *chinos*, and so on, which make their appearance within *casta* paintings, intended to also visualize the people they denominated. These categories significantly departed from practices traditionally used in Spain, those being ones that historically made it difficult for scholars to see the people who produce and influence visual culture due to assumptions about the producers themselves within the paradigm of white masculinity, a demographic category that has influenced national identity in many Latin American countries (see Foster 2011).

After centuries of interaction among people of varying ancestry in Latin America, by the eighteenth century in an attempt to prevent further genetic co-mingling, rigid rules emerged that governed coupling practices. However, in the balance, the reality was that people of mixed backgrounds had, by then, become the majority, making painters, trades people, clergy, missionaries, and most government functionaries neither Spanish nor *castizo*, and not born in Spain (for a more fulsome discussion, see Patton (2015); also worthwhile is the critique of *mestizo* and other racial categories offered in Rappaport (2014)). As a result, the manufacture of goods such as paint, or the erection of a *façade* or *retable*, involved the hands of people possessing multiple and sometimes intersecting identities who were more often than not part of a marginalized majority.

This hierarchy for identity was enabled by the Enlightenment, the effects of which cascaded throughout all tiers of society, giving rise to broader access to education for most groups. The desire for knowledge reflected artistic attempts to represent or account for the surrounding world, making the experiences of the majority more available and visible. Dissent from majority groups, particularly the white *criollo* classes and the *mestizaje*, mark

the eighteenth century as a period of great unrest fueled by inequalities and a minority ruling elite born in Spain who had grown increasingly distant from the quotidian challenges and experiences of everybody else. The Tupac Amaru II Rebellion of 1781 exemplifies the power that the marginalized majority sought to claim from an elite minority, including the Bourbon and Spanish beneficiaries making decisions that affected their lives from across the Atlantic, who were increasingly disconnected from the lives and conditions under which Indigenous, mixed-blood, and criollo people labored. Values had shifted, moreover, thanks to Enlightenment thought from the likes of Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) and John Locke (1632–1704), whose works influenced people around the world, despite linguistic and geographic divides, giving rise to the valuation of individual freedom and the human condition regardless of one's race, gender, or ethnicity. Independence movements sparked by that unrest continued into the nineteenth century, fueled by the American and French Revolutions in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Beginning with Saint-Domingue (Haiti) in 1791, former colonies of Spain, and, in Haiti's case, also of France, sought independence from their European metropolises. By 1826, only Cuba, Equatorial New Guinea, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico remained under Spanish control.

At the same time, Indigenous and mixed-background cults and followings emerged, exemplified by the Virgin de Guadalupe, to which vast populations subscribed. Although her cult is believed to have emerged early in the sixteenth century, it grew in popularity during the eighteenth century and is increasingly viewed as informing creole patriotism and, thus, national identity in places such as Mexico ([Conover \(2011\)](#)); Cults and spiritual syncretism between Catholic and Indigenous or African beliefs and worldviews has been the subject of much debate and scholarship. See [Gruzinski \(1989\)](#) and [MacCormack \(1991\)](#)). The visual culture associated with that virgin demonstrates the impact and power of the gaze, in this case of primarily Indigenous and mixed-background groups, who saw themselves embodied in her ([Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 2007](#)). Her visual culture makes manifest the gazers who possess agency; it also undermines the white normativity of the visualization of the biblical paradigm in ways that empower, in this case, a woman of color whose intersectional identity typically is dismissed by scholars as impotent in the context of hegemonic patriarchy. Furthermore, scholars are also increasingly placing non-Spanish art and forms of visual culture on equal footing with Indigenous and mixed-blood creations, exemplified by the likes of Claudia Brosseder in *The Power of Huacas: Change and Resistance in the Andean World of Colonial Peru* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014). Works such as this one take approaches also modeled by several authors included in the present thematic issue, which will in time further complicate the long eighteenth century in the context of Latin American visual culture, perhaps leading to its destabilization from a chronotype anchored to the Euro-settler experience of history, to one that is also informed by the experiences of the marginalized majority.

At the collision of imperial collapse and the Enlightenment, America's visual culture exhibits symptoms of the social and cultural unrest of the period, often expressed in Ibero-American baroque style that invited into the composition the different, the quotidian, and the personal. Mirrored in paintings, for example, vibrant pigments and techniques for their creation that are Indigenous to New Spain remind the viewer that non-white hands intervened in important ways into works of art and architecture. Influences from other regions of the Spanish empire, particularly from Flemish sources, crossed continents to impact works created in Latin America. While entire buildings and large paintings, or retables, rarely undertook the transatlantic voyage from Spain to Latin America—and most people born in the New World did not travel to Europe—print media had grown sophisticated by the eighteenth century and allowed, in the case of artists such as Flemish-born Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), for engraved and mezzotint copies to circulate in mass-produced form well after he had become established as a master in his craft (See [Ojeda's \(2009\)](#) web-based project devoted to engraved sources for painting launched; also see [Hyman \(2021\)](#)). The church of Nossa Senhora da Conceição da Praia in Salvador, then the viceregal capital of Brazil, is probably the most famous example of a building for which

all the stone was cut in Europe, then shipped to be assembled in America, “almost ready made from Lisbon”, as noted in [Smith \(1956\)](#).

These intermedial connections forge a Latin American visual culture in ways that also include Indigenous, Asian, and African influences drawn from their cultural practices, distinct visual cultures, and also the landscapes with which they were familiar, with biblical narratives increasingly being visualized against an American, and not Middle Eastern, landscape. These sorts of miscegenated landscapes allowed the people of the Spanish Americas to lay a claim to European origin narratives and their visualization. Put another way, intermediality allowed more than Spaniards, who had viewed or been educated in Europe, to have access to techniques and influences, which inspired non-Spanish artists and technicians in the Americas, giving them access that would otherwise not be broadly available to them. In this way, intermediality helped to provide marginalized groups with the opportunity to experiment with, and master, the European baroque and other forms that so influence the region’s visual culture.

Centers of Ibero-American baroque activity flourished in urban centers and smaller cities, and, by the eighteenth century, their focus expanded beyond religious painting to include, in some cases, casta paintings, as well as paintings featuring non-religious narratives, such as viceregal processions, portraits, works featuring mythological topics, and local architecture and landscapes. In these locations, the identities of art producers speak as a collective in ways that influence and characterize these regions’ distinctive art practices. The rich array of works analyzed in the following essays testify to the complexity of the period’s visual culture from both a front- (completed work of art, sculpture, engraving, or architectural piece) and back-end (production, materials, and labor invested into the work) perspective.

There is not a single way to approach the articles that are part of this Special Issue of *Arts*, “Latin American Art, Visual and Material Culture in the Long Eighteenth Century”. You can browse and read at your convenience. Nonetheless, many of the contributions offer some common interests that should be highlighted.

Printmaking and prints are an artistic process that was fundamental to the New World. Not only did they transmit ideas coming from Europe, prints were also crafted in the Americas, produced either in their own context or in Europe, in an attempt to illustrate the Americas. Bart Pushaw, in “Picturing the River’s Racial Ecologies in Colonial Panamá”, focuses on one single print produced in Spain, illustrating enslaved, Afro-descendant boatmen charting a wooden vessel up the Chagres River across the Isthmus of Panamá. Fashioned for a 1748 travelogue by the Spanish scientists Antonio de Ulloa and Jorge Juan, the image reflects a preoccupation with tropical ecologies, where enslaved persons are incidental. This article explores local histories and ecological knowledge, drawing from recent scholarship by Marixa Lasso, Tiffany Lethabo King, Katherine McKittrick, and Kevin Dawson. Pushaw argues that the image makes visible how enslaved and free Afro-descendant people developed a distinct cosmopolitan culture connected to intimate ecological knowledge of the river. By focusing critical attention away from the print’s Spanish manufacture to the racial ecologies of the Chagres, he contributes to restoring art historical visibility to eighteenth-century Panamá and Central America, a region routinely excised from studies of colonial Latin American art. His article also participates in the debate on Black agency during the colonial era. Pushaw’s text also contributes to the discourse of representing the Latin American landscape, a common topic that is to be encountered in many other contributions of this Special Issue.

Kelly Donahue-Wallace, in “Lady of the House: Augustina Meza (ca. 1758–1819), Print Publishing, and the Women of Mexican Late Colonial Art”, explores, through archival records and the material analysis of different prints, the life and work of the only known woman printmaker in viceregal New Spain, María Augustina Meza. Throughout her 50-year career, Meza was the owner of an independent print publishing shop in Mexico City. The paper places Meza’s print publishing business, and its practices, within the context of artists’ shops run by women in the mid- to late-eighteenth century, a little-known

area of study for early-modern Latin America. The article simultaneously recognizes the role of women in printing and broadens our understanding of women within the business of both printmaking and painting in late colonial Mexico City. It, furthermore, contributes to existing scholarship through new empirical research revealing that the lived realities of women in viceregal New Spain were more complex than traditionally held and stereotypical visions of women's lives have previously allowed. This article is an important contribution to female agency in colonial Latin American art. The archival records used by Donahue-Wallace were, until now, scarcely accessed by art historians and comprise an avenue that should be explored further.

Colonial Latin American landscape painting and the transatlantic relations to European prints, mainly Flemish, are the common themes of two other contributions to this Special Issue. Catherine Burdick, "Served on a Plate: Engraved Sources of San Diego de Alcalá's 'Miraculous Meal' for the Franciscans of Santiago, Chile", addresses these issues by focusing on a partial canvas at the Pinacoteca Universidad de Concepción, Chile, which features an episode contained in a series on the life of Diego de Alcalá in Santiago, Chile. Commissioned from Cusco by the Franciscans of Santiago, the hagiographic cycle is the most extensive ever produced about this missionary saint, which implies that a multiplicity of sources was necessary for its creation. By identifying two engravings that served as models, this study uncovers the underlying subject of this painting, a miracle that sustained Diego during an arduous journey. As a detective, Burdick reinforces the centrality of Flemish print sources to confirm the attribution of a partially destroyed painting. Landscape, thus, becomes an important aspect of her argument. This article also contributes to the study of local art markets during the period and the dispersion of an important series of canvases in more contemporary times.

Peruvian religious painting and landscape are also the main topics pursued in Sebastian Ferrero's contribution, "Materializing the Invisible: Landscape Painting in Viceregal Peru as Visionary Painting". The author claims that Andean viceregal painters adopted Flemish landscape, which became a distinctive feature of Peruvian painting in the second half of the seventeenth century. Due to a change in the artistic tastes of viceregal society, the landscape was perceived by many scholars as a secondary element of the composition. In his article, Ferrero analyzes the inclusion of the Flemish landscape in Andean religious painting, while drawing into his analysis the different spiritual processes that colonial religiosity underwent. He argues how the influence of Franciscan and Jesuit mysticism created a fertile ground where landscape painting could develop in Peru. Andean viceregal painters found in the landscape an effective way to visualize suprasensible spiritual experiences, as well as an important device for the development of a painting in Peru with visionary characteristics.

Connecting religious images and landscape, Carmen Fernández-Salvador takes the reader to a different area of viceregal South America in "Images and Landscape: The (Dis)ordering of Colonial Territory (Quito in the Eighteenth Century)". This article explores, using both firsthand documents and a close analysis of Marian images, Indigenous agency and the role played by cult images of the Virgin Mary in the ordering of space during the colonial period. Fernández-Salvador argues that the disruption of such order was a gesture of resistance by subordinate groups. In the Real Audiencia de Quito of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, civil and religious authorities used miraculous images of the Virgin Mary as aids in the founding of reducciones, which assured the imposition of Christian civility upon the Native population. Legal records suggest that, in the second half of the eighteenth century, Indigenous communities deployed similar strategies as a means of asserting their own concerns, creating a Christian geography. Native actors physically manipulated Marian images in times of conflict, moving them around or appropriating them, either to legitimize their desertion of colonial settlements, or to resist forced relocation. In both the early colonial period and in the eighteenth century, the key strategy of shaping sacred landscapes was implemented in both Andean and Christian traditions.

Jennifer Baez returns to Black agency in “Modeling Black Piety and Community Membership in the Virgin of Altagracia Medallions”, by looking at a Marian shrine in the Caribbean. In the third quarter of the eighteenth century, Santo Domingo archbishop Isidoro Rodríguez Lorenzo issued a decree formalizing the feast day to be celebrated by the cult of the Virgin of Altagracia, meaning all races (free and enslaved) were allowed to join the celebrations in church. Unrelated to issuing this decree, and during this time (c. 1760–1778), a series of painted panels depicting miracles performed by the Virgin of Altagracia was produced for her sanctuary. Painted in the coarse style of popular votive panels, they gave the cult a unifying core foundation of miracles. This essay discusses the significance of the Black bodies pictured in four of the panels within the project’s implicit effort to institutionalize the regional cult and vis-à-vis the archbishop’s encouragement of non-segregated celebrations for her feast day. As January 21 was associated with a renowned Spanish creole battle against the French, this essay locates these Black bodies within the cult’s newfound patriotic charisma. Baez examines the process by which people of color were incorporated into this community of faith as part of a two-step ritual that involved seeing images while performing difference. Through analysis of the archbishop’s decree, she argues that the images helped model Black piety and community membership within a hierarchical socioracial order. Her article prompts the need for further investigation in the Caribbean area during the viceregal period, relative to the discourse around Marian images and cultural agency within minority communities.

Further research needs to be done in certain areas of visual and material culture in Latin American art of the long eighteenth century and we are pleased our Special Issue somehow contributes to these lesser-known areas. As we mentioned already, Panama (Pushaw) and the Caribbean (Baez) are areas within Latin American art that urgently call for scholarly additional scrutiny. Colonial Yucatán is another cultural zone that invites further reflection. “The Retablos of Teabo and Mani: The Evolution of Renaissance Altars in Colonial Yucatán” by C. Cody Barteet focuses on three retablos (altarpieces) created in Yucatán, from the turn of the seventeenth through to the early eighteenth century, that relied on a similar Renaissance design. The retablos, located in the ex-convents of Mani and Teabo, all adopt the Spanish sixteenth-century Renaissance style of the Plateresque, establishing a transatlantic relationship. The retablos are connected by the inclusion of caryatid framing devices that establish a strong affinity among the works. This article explores the relationships among the retablos by considering their iconography and their styles to address the retablos’ dates and their current locations. While offering insights about these retablos, this contribution also provides a rich discussion of the thriving artistic industry that was present in colonial Yucatán.

Material studies is another field that furthers our knowledge about Viceregal artworks. “At the Core of the Workshop: Novel Aspects of the Use of Blue Smalt in Two Paintings by Cristóbal de Villalpando”, by Mirta Insaurralde Caballero and María Castañeda-Delgado, is such a contribution. During the seventeenth century, the use of smalt and indigo became increasingly common among painters’ workshops in New Spain. The unprecedented importance of these two blue pigments in oil painting may be explained by artistic and geopolitical circumstances. This article expands on the use of blue smalt—a by-product of glass production and a material that lacks in-depth study in viceregal painting—by focusing on the technical analysis of *El Triunfo de la Eucaristía* and *La Asunción* painted by Cristóbal de Villalpando, the leading painter in Mexico City at the time, which are part of the collection of the Museo Regional de Guadalajara (Mexico). The technological and material study of both paintings, situated within the trade and circulation of painting materials at the turn of the eighteenth century, shows how the painter deployed techniques rooted in his predecessors, while incorporating particular technical adaptations. Using different methodologies, the authors examine cross-section samples of Villalpando’s paintings and identify different qualities of smalt, as well as suggest a possible provenance. Their analyses make manifest novel aspects in the painting tradition of workshops in New Spain



that, ultimately, reverberated in practices of the long eighteenth century, including the pigment trade.

Throughout these articles, we detect a shift in focus from the transatlantic relationship uniting the Americas and Europe through people, artifact, and ideas, to a more local perspective through regional cults, exported works, materials, and influences, which make their presence known in localized ways, and landscape. There is also an agency that has become undercurrent through art, whether through the role of women, or Black or Indigenous communities. Religion is an underlying topic in many of the articles in this Special Issue, one to be expected as the evangelization of the Native populations was a fundamental objective of the post-conquest era and remains an essential issue of the viceregal era due to the overarching influence of the Council of Trent and Counter-Reformation ideologies. This issue's contributions bring forth, however, an unexpected relationship with the American landscape and emphasize different types of agencies. The acceptance of Christianity, therefore, was not a passive decision, but rather a clearly and properly activated one on the part of local populations.

While all the contributions of this Special Issue focus on areas under Spanish authority, colonial Latin America was much more complex as a political and geographical area, with colonies under British, Dutch, French, and Portuguese rule. There is much need to open a discussion with those neighboring colonies from a visual culture perspective.

The call for papers for this Special Issue came soon after the COVID-19 situation arose globally. We wish to extend our most sincere appreciation to our authors and peer reviewers, all of whom worked in a new and complicated research environment. We also wish to extend our thanks to the librarians who went beyond the call of duty to accommodate researchers and ensure that they could obtain material when international travels were complicated, and at times, almost impossible. Our appreciation also includes the staff at the journal who kept us on track with this Special Issue. ¡Muchas gracias! ¡Enhorabuena!

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