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# i. Traveller-Reporter Artists and the Empirical Tradition in Post-Independence Latin American Art

by Stanton L. Catlin

THE ART of modern Latin America, now close to two hundred years old, was born in the ferment of the European Enlightenment and out of contending, often contradictory forces within the Latin American Independence movements; it is at once a native and a Western phenomenon. Its beginnings brought separation from its Iberian colonial foster parents and from their orthodox precepts of Christian belief, and opened up wider realms of experience, in particular the then new-found commitment of Western society to the life of reason. Within a short time Latin American art became aware of the ancient sources of its Amerindian heritage as simply an extension of natural existence. When, in the first two decades of the present century, it joined forces with another phenomenon of this expanded world – the efforts of the European avant-garde precursors of International Modernism to rejuvenate Western art – it saw that movement as linked with its own indigenous elements, which it inevitably related to artistic values and form. Even now, the experience of individual artists and the physical circumstances of life on the American continents continue to set it apart, and to give Latin American art along with its particular self-contained character, a salient presence in the increasingly diverse, changing scene of world art.

The American territories under Spanish and Portuguese rule in the decades preceding Latin American Independence constituted four Spanish viceroyalties (New Spain, Nueva Granada, Peru and Rio de la Plata) and one Portuguese viceregal colony (Brazil). The art and architecture in each of the five areas reflected the dominant traditions and to some degree the trends current in the parent Peninsular metropolis. For example, French taste at the Bourbon court in Madrid was reflected in viceregal portraits done in mid-century

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Santa Fé de Bogotá (Nueva Granada); Italian neo-classical style as received by Mengs, the German court painter to Carlos III, was carried to Mexico, to the San Carlos Academy, by the Valencians, de Tolsá and Jimeno y Planes; and the strict neo-classical style of the French followers of Jacques-Louis David became the model for instruction at the Academia Imperial de Belas Artes founded in Rio de Janeiro under the Le Breton Mission by the Portuguese ruler João VI. However, the influence on the artistic climate most widespread and most profoundly felt was unquestionably direct observation, experiment and rational analysis as the new basis of reality, brought into being by the European Enlightenment which began, before the French Revolution, the overall process of secularization in art.

Long before this, over the centuries following the Iberian discovery and gradual conquest of this immense part of the New World, the role of art had been to serve the Church in its evangelization of the indigenous populations. This included not only the teaching of Catholic religious doctrine and ritual but the hierarchical organization of state and civic life, and, through architecture, the shaping of the physical environment. Whatever the medium – painting, sculpture, architecture, ornaments fashioned of gold, silver and composite materials – and whether the context was religious or secular, art's primary reason for being was devotional. As manifestations of the presence of God and of human allegiance to Him, in keeping with the faith of the reigning Peninsular powers, works of art everywhere symbolized and served as a guide to a supernatural, other-worldly view of life. Thus, while focusing thought and attention on a mystical essence of reality, art also provided future Ibero-American colonial generations with a common patrimony: artistic form in which existence found meaning as revealed through deity.

With the Council of Trent's redefinition in 1541 of art not as story-telling but as the symbolic interpretation of Catholicism, the propagation of the faith in the New World took up a new line: the nascent empiricism and individualism of the Italian High Renaissance were replaced by the universal authority and omnipotence of the Godhead as *given*. In the new lands of the Western hemisphere, 'unspoiled by civilization', this rigid doctrine for the next two-and-a-half centuries effectively channelled the creative energies of the secular community, as well as the religious orders, into supernatural frames of reference.

In Europe, however, the impetus brought by the Renaissance to the study of the tangible world, and the gradual recovery of information not as revealed but as *found* by observation and experiment, continued through the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. From the time of Galileo's celestial observations in the sixteenth century, the scientific method as a means of determining principles governing the physical universe slowly gained recognition among the secular powers of Europe. The facts it yielded about the world beyond the known European horizons gradually came to the attention of the major seafaring nations and the subsequent

quest for reliable information, as a means of possession and trading for wealth, began in earnest in the eighteenth century. Taking pragmatic advantage of the new-found opportunities, these nations sent out maritime expeditions which combined geographical exploration with carefully planned efforts by artists objectively to record unknown forms of plant, animal and human life. Among the enlightened aristocracy the interest in nature itself often amounted to a passion, while the study of land masses, glaciers, coral reefs, harbours and archipelagos, most having military as well as economic importance, promised geopolitical advantage and, inevitably, strategic control by the powers sending out the vessels.

The longest and most far-reaching, although not the first, of these maritime ventures into little-known ocean spaces of the planet were the three voyages into the Pacific made between 1768 and 1776 by Captain James Cook for the Royal Society and the British Admiralty. To record his findings Cook took with him artists who could be counted upon to render natural phenomena objectively and in accurate detail, rather than in the idealizing classical manner advocated by the Royal Academy, then newly founded.

Theoretical and applied science made slow progress on the European continent, however, and the transmission of its methods and results to Latin America was impeded by the isolationist policies of the Peninsular regimes, with their defensive military strategies, centralized mercantile systems and the religious orthodoxy enforced by the Inquisition. It was only with the discovery of the unfamiliar beyond European experience, and with the harder necessity of accepting the existence and legitimacy of that experience, that both art and science came to interest themselves in questions of identity, in nature as well as in human beings, and that the descriptive function of art, tied to science as an aid to perception of the visible world and thus also to the understanding of nature, began gradually to emerge. The split between art as ideality and art as a means of defining the particular in nature began at that point to be narrowed, and new realities that could serve as a basis for creative invention fully to be appreciated.

The American career of the great Spanish physician and horticulturalist, José Celestino Mutis, a disciple of Carolus Linnaeus and founder of the Expedición Botánica of Nueva Granada (the viceroyalty that became Gran Colombia), prefigures the change of outlook that led to Independence in the Ibero-American world. Chartered by royal decree in 1784, the Expedición produced in its 33 years of existence more than 5,300 meticulously detailed studies of previously unknown species of flora of the Colombian highlands, rendered on folio sheets with unprecedented economy, accuracy and grace, for illustrations of this kind. The original drawings were preserved, but remained little known for nearly a century and a half, the Crown-supported Expedición having been shut down in the wake of Bolívar's campaign against the Spanish forces in northern South America. Recently the drawings have begun to be





Villand.

*Passiflora mollissima* (H. B. K.) Bailey

Jard. Bot. Madrid: 2081

published through a collaboration of the Spanish and Colombian Academies of Science. Among artisans employed by the Expedición were Ecuadorean Indians trained in workshops of the Quito school of sculpture, famed for the purity of its religious sentiment. Under Mutis' direction, these recorders of living flower specimens invented new techniques for copying forms as they appeared to the eye. Materials and colours were made from local vegetables and minerals suited to the requirement for minutely detailed and accurately coloured renderings, to further the aim of truth to nature as found *in situ* [Pl. 3.2].

Because of the extraordinary range, accuracy and artistic quality of its record of newly-discovered North Andean natural phenomena, the Expedición Mutisiana (as it came to be known) helped Latin American art cross the threshold from serving ends that were exclusively other-worldly, towards a new goal, of identifying and becoming part of the world around it. It did this both through the subject matter it examined and the aesthetic example it set, and through the effect its activity had on the broader changes of the era. In that transitional period and in the same way the native sense of homeland and of individual self-awareness began to emerge and take shape as Latin American consciousness.

By the end of the eighteenth century a score of expeditions had been launched by competing European powers who, pursuing national self-interest, had begun to find in nature, directly examined, a source of reliable knowledge, and in the modernization of production and trade the surest way to material progress. This new orientation, known in Spanish history as the 'Ilustración' (and called by some in South America 'el despotismo ilustrado'), under the progress-minded Bourbon monarch, Carlos III, led to the opening of the Spanish American domains to free trade, and to other liberalizing reforms, as well as to scientific missions to New Spain, Cuba, Venezuela, Peru and Chile.<sup>1</sup>

However, it was owing primarily to Count Alexander von Humboldt, the German pioneer traveller-explorer and natural scientist, in the first post-Independence decades of the nineteenth century, that the artistic threshold marked out by Celestino Mutis became the basis for a new, modern beginning for Latin American art. Humboldt (with his colleague, the young French botanist, Aimée Bonpland) was authorized by the Spanish crown to visit Cuba, traverse the North and Central Andes and Mexico (then Spain's namesake and most favoured extension of herself), to study the physical aspect of the land – the great rivers, mountains and volcanoes, and their vegetation – to gather plant specimens, data on the atmosphere and ocean currents, and to assess the general condition of Ibero-American society [Pl. 3.3]. The comprehensive first-hand report of their five-year journey (1799–1804), published serially over three decades and following as it did in the wake of the European Enlightenment's interest in science and primitive cultures, excited the European intelligentsia almost as a second discovery of a New World whose wonders had long been hidden by Spanish pro-



3.3 Alexander von Humboldt, 'Passage dans le Cordillère des Andes', c. 1814, from *Voyage de Humboldt et de Bonpland*, Paris: Schoell, 1814–34, Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin.

3.2 Escobar y Villaroel, 'Passiflora Mollissima', watercolour, Pl. 37 from José Celestino Mutis y Bossio, *Flora de la Real Expedición Botánica del Nuevo Reyno de Granada*, Vol. 27: *Passifloraceas y Begoniaceas*.



tectionist policy. By then the French Revolution had directed minds everywhere towards social change, the stirrings of intellectual and political freedom, and the crossing of new frontiers of knowledge, adventure and – inevitably – political and private fortune.

The immediate consequence of Humboldt's mission was an urge on the part of artists to follow in his footsteps. A handful of patrons, *aficionados* such as the Russian Consul-General in Rio de Janeiro, Baron Georg Langsdorff, were followed by stalwart individuals such as the Bavarian, Johann Moritz Rugendas, who moved with great strides from region to region, travelling long distances overland, then by sea. Others, members of ships' companies, spanned shorter stretches, from port to port. Still others, illustrators or draughtsmen with official state-sponsored expeditions, posted overland or went on global voyages; among them were the Frenchman Debret, in the Le Breton Mission to Brazil, and Conrad Martens, with Darwin and Fitzroy in HMS *Beagle*. The majority travelled alone (Emeric Essex Vidal in Argentina, Claudio Gay in Chile, Edward Mark in Colombia, Daniel Egerton in Mexico [Pls

3.4 Daniel Thomas Egerton, *View of the Valley of Mexico*, 1837, oil on canvas, Ministry of Public Buildings and Works, Mexico City.







3.5 Edward Walhouse Mark, *Plaza Mayor, Bogotá*, 1846, watercolour on paper, 24.5×56.9 cm., Biblioteca Luis Angel Arango, Bogotá.

3.6 Emeric Essex Vidal, *Estancia Foreman of the Artigas Epoch*, 1811-20, watercolour, Museo Historico y Archivo Municipal, Montevideo.



3.4,5,6]), or as a patron-artist team such as Stephens and Catherwood in the Yucatán. They moved between coastland and highland or jungle seeking the unfamiliar – aboriginal stone markings, ancient ruins, the different habitats and endless variety in tribal groups and mestizo peasant types, as well as forms of natural life that would strike the cultivated European eye as novel or characteristic of the freshness and mystery of the rediscovered Ibero-American world.<sup>2</sup>

As might have been expected, from the outset the reportorial activity of these travelling artists, whose purpose was to document natural phenomena, departed both in practice and in principle from the standards prevailing in the European academies of fine art. As Bernard Smith has shown in his book *European Vision and the South Pacific 1768-1850* (1960), the European academies did not train artists to work from nature, seeking out its intrinsic characteristics, but to distill and refine its forms in search of 'ideality'. This did not suffice for Captain Cook and the Royal Society, who needed specific information on the forms of nature, whether it was the configuration of a coastline or harbour, the characteristics of an aboriginal tribe, or the flora and fauna of a tropical island. Thus a new norm for art came into being as part of the European Enlightenment's search for authenticity, or, in Professor Smith's word, 'typicality'. Its antecedents may perhaps be found in fine-art tradition, in, for example, seventeenth-century Netherlandish genre painting, as in the scenes describing peasant folkways and the lower classes called 'Bambocciate' that eventually led, in the Iberian and Latin American world, to what became known condescendingly as 'costumbrismo'.

Among the first and most methodical of the early followers of Humboldt was Prinz Maximilian Wied, of Neuwied, a minor Rhineland principality. He began in 1815 by recording the natural



phenomena of Brazil's hinterland in a series of sketchbook diaries. He then followed Lewis and Clark's itinerary across the Louisiana Territory of the United States, accompanied this time by the Swiss artist Karl Bodmer, who produced a collection of lucid illustrations of the northern continent.

Possibly the most encyclopaedic of the early nineteenth-century European recorders of new life on the South American continent was Jean-Baptiste Debret, who worked in Brazil from 1816 to 1824 [Pls 3.7,8,9]. His Parisian training both at the Ecole des Beaux Arts and as an engineering student prepared him, after Napoleon's fall, for joining the Le Breton Mission: the group of French planners, artists and architects commissioned in 1816 by the Portuguese king, João VI, to make over the city of Rio de Janeiro in French neo-classical fashion as a capital worthy of imperial status.

In Rio, Debret became court painter to the Braganza family and founder in 1826 of the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts, where he was professor of painting; he was also the official draughtsman-cataloguer of the imperial family's human subjects and its physical domain in the New World. Like a latter-day Diderot, he depicted visually the economic, architectural, ceremonial and ethnic aspects of life in the settled parts of Brazil as well as the nearer wilderness of the interior. The pre-Independence Portuguese *ancien régime* enlisted modern perspectives to promote both its own grandeur and its progressive outlook, a dichotomy which Debret better exemplifies than any of his traveller-reporter contemporaries. But his studies of the natural life of the land are more effective than his depictions of the formal grandeur of the court, done in neo-classical mode favoured for royal portraiture and ceremony and epitomized by the paintings of David.

Among the variety of subjects treated by traveller-reporter artists over their fifty years' activity, between 1810 and 1860, in all parts of Latin America from Mexico to Chile, as well as in the Caribbean, at least four principal categories can be distinguished: scientific, ecological, topological and social. (The latter, which took in an extremely wide range of customs and types of individuals observed in everyday activity, from region to region, is generally known in Spanish as *costumbres*, *usos* and *tipos*, or, again, *costumbrismo*.) Scientific subjects included newly discovered or unfamiliar phenomena in the plant and animal world; native inhabitants, coloured as well as indigenous (both exemplifying the Old World's wanted version of Rousseau's noble savage); and land forms showing the uniqueness of arboreal species as well as the prodigality of vegetation – these last almost always connected with human activities typical of place. Under 'topological' may be grouped views of cities, village squares, port scenes and sites of geographical and military importance. The most varied and inclusive category, however, was the social, covering the activities and typical dress of every sort of inhabitant, from urban upper-class society to those of the *barrios*, from marketplace, military camp, cattle ranch, portside loading

3.7 Jean-Baptiste Debret, 'Guyanese Savages', from *Voyage pittoresque et historique au Brésil*, 1834-9, Vol. 1, The British Library Board.





dock to frontier forest and jungle. Foot-soldiers and horsemen, seemingly ever-present during the wars between blockading European naval powers, ambitious generals and rival caudillos were favourite subjects in the Rio de la Plata region. This category also included informal portraiture, which in many instances bordered on formal art, more or less following European models of the time.

Johann Moritz Rugendas, whose medieval ancestors had come from Catalonia but whose family had for generations been distinguished in the arts in Augsburg, probably best exemplifies the traveller-reporter tradition in both the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking parts of Latin America during the post-Independence era. Rugendas travelled further, and over a longer period, than any of his contemporaries, and evolved the most expressively consistent style in the more than 5,000 paintings and drawings he produced between 1821 and 1847 in Mexico and South America. Sarmiento paired him with Humboldt in his often-quoted tribute: 'Humboldt with pen and Rugendas with brush are the two Europeans who have portrayed America most truthfully'.<sup>3</sup>

Rugendas first spent two years in Brazil (1821-3) depicting nature and the life of settlers and slaves in accurate and widely encompassing detail: the record of these years, published in *Voyage pittoresque dans le Brésil* (1835), is among the most sumptuous publications of the traveller-reporter era. Returning to Europe, Rugendas then spent eight years taking stock of his experience and career as an artist. He met Humboldt, who favoured him among his protégés as one who in his Brazilian work had set up models that would 'begin a new epoch in landscape painting'.<sup>4</sup> During this time Rugendas seems also to have made contact with precursors of the Barbizon school of landscape painting, and allegedly he met Eugène Delacroix, whose work, following the latter's involvement with the cause of Greek independence, he apparently saw in Rome.

In 1830 the July Revolution revived freedom of thought in



3.8 Jean-Baptiste Debret, 'The Signal for Battle', from *Voyage pittoresque et historique au Brésil*, 1834-9, Vol. 1, The British Library Board.



3.9 Jean-Baptiste Debret, *Return of the Naturalist's Slaves*, c. 1820, watercolour, Private Collection.

France, and Romanticism emerged there, as in much of the rest of Europe, as the main counter-force to the classical style in officially approved art. Within a year of the Revolution Rugendas left on his second working journey to the New World, taking with him his experience of the young Barbizon avant-garde painters as well as Humboldt's advice: 'Avoid the temperate zones, Buenos Aires and Chile. . . . Go where the palm trees are abundant, the tree ferns, the cactus, snow-covered mountains and volcanoes, to the chain mountains of the Andes . . . . A great artist such as you must search for the monumental.'<sup>5</sup>

Although he never abandoned Rugendas as a friend, Humboldt could 'not [then] have imagined how far his protégé would depart from this guidance'.<sup>6</sup> Without avoiding volcanoes or the desolate passes of the cordillera, the arid spaces of the highlands or dense vegetation of the tropics, Rugendas turned from the precise depiction of typological specimens (albeit always in their natural context) such as he had produced in Brazil, and from the grandiose and prodigal aspects of nature, to the people and customs of the human settlements, shown against more generalized backgrounds of natural grandeur in which he emphasized the human rather than the monumental scale.

His fourteen years of travel and work took him this time to seven countries, from Mexico to Chile, from coastal lands to the remote interior, where he moved among the people at all levels of post-Independence society, recording the human scene in its daily ambience and natural phenomena in their geographical setting. He singled out many types of individuals and their occupations, and was often exposed to danger when protecting friends fleeing political arrest in Mexico, or while witnessing violent events such as *el malón*, a raid in which Indians destroyed white settlements and seized captives, in Argentina. Rugendas spent ten years in Chile, travelling between the cities and the high Andean passes of Peru, Bolivia and Argentina, virtually becoming a citizen of Santiago, whose intelligentsia were then, in the late 1830s, just beginning to sense and to express the cultural qualities of their nation.

Galasz and Ivelic in their history of Chilean painting from the colonial period up to 1981, isolate three areas of activity in Rugendas' work:

as historian – a chronicler who narrates events and describes the customs of an epoch, showing illustrious persons with distinguished records in the military, politics or society; as scientists – an explorer who extracts the elements characteristic of flora or fauna; as geographer – who favours geographical space in its natural plenitude, not yet transformed by the hand of man.<sup>7</sup>

In Argentina, where he worked in and around Buenos Aires for three months immediately after leaving Chile in 1845, Rugendas' subjects may be grouped under the same three categories: As historian – types of people, their habits and customs as ranchers, peons, soldiers, gauchos; hunting ostriches with *boleadoras*; private carriages and stevedore *carretas*; the Indian raid on a white settlement –

3.10 Johann Moritz Rugendas, *Study of Palm Trees*, c. 1831–4, oil sketch, Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin.









3.11 Johann Moritz Rugendas, *View in the Environs of Lima*, 1843, oil on canvas, 34.7×45 cm.

the attack, the post in flames, demolished, the rape of a woman captive, the return of the captive. As scientist – depiction of human species such as tribal Indians (Patagonian) and of specific social types such as battalion sergeants and foot-soldiers (the dictator Rosas' ruffian *colorado* infantry). As geographer – mountain peaks, caves, hills, bridges, rocks, hovels, peninsulas, rivers, harbours, sunsets, panoramic city views.

From another angle, however, such an inventory – which could be repeated for many of the countries Rugendas visited on his second American journey – transcends its documentary function, serving as an early bridge between factual reporting and expressive art. In the first place the style does not radically change from country to country, or from one time to another – it is the manifestation of a consistent personal view, of how the artist observes his subjects, more than a literal record of what he has seen, however essential objective truth is to his scientific outlook and artistic mission. The personal quality or 'hand' in the execution of the work

becomes, in the light of Rugendas' contact in France with the work of Delacroix and the Barbizon landscapists, an extension of the Proto-Romantic ideal then just beginning to declare its independence from the late neo-classic style favoured by the waning Bourbon Restoration. In not limiting himself to landscape, or isolating the mood and circumstances of a single place, the artist was showing his belief in the universality of the Romantic ideal by rendering the life of the whole South American continent, thereby enlarging the thematic repertory of art (as Delacroix was to do in 1831 by carrying it into North Africa), but also by pushing the creative frontier beyond conventional European, as well as American, horizons.

That Rugendas had a Latin American following is hard to prove. He had no known pupils, even in Chile in the decade he spent there. But he was a presence wherever he worked, and the image of him seated before an easel or standing before a subject in the drawing room of one of his many clients, undoubtedly encouraged others to try their hand at his *métier*. Perhaps this was especially true at the popular level, where self-taught depictees of street life such as the Peruvian mulatto, Pancho Fierro, and anonymous Indian and mestizo tradesfolk, were encouraged to describe their own ambience and their occupations as matters of impulse, following an ancient artisanal tradition. From this perspective, Rugendas must be seen as having influenced native Latin American art forms simply through propinquity, through others' observation of him or their study of his published work, and through word of mouth, both in Latin America and in European circles having Latin American affiliations. His *Voyage pittoresque dans le Brésil* was almost certainly known to the authors of the *Atlas* of Venezuela, the Italian Agustin Codazzi and his Venezuelan collaborator, Carmelo Fernández. Indeed it seems that after Rugendas' return to Europe the Romantic ideal was slow to take hold in Latin American art until the twentieth century, and then was fulfilled in forms of art other than representational.

Rugendas' predecessor in America, the Frenchman Debret, may have been even more prolific than his Bavarian contemporary in his many assignments as court painter. But although Debret's mission was confined to one country (however sufficient that country's variety, scale and uniqueness to one artist's fifteen-year commitment), and his work more diversified in style – as dictated by the different nature of his many tasks – than that of Rugendas, one can only draw a parallel between these two exemplary figures in the documentation of the early life of the Latin American world and its importance to its native artistic following.

In Argentina traveller-reporter artists, or 'costumbristas', as they have been vaguely known, dominated the post-Independence scene during the decades of the Rosas dictatorship (1833–52), becoming in effect a resident community, with second- and third-generation native-born followers. Each artist had his own ways of depicting





3.12 Prilidiano Pueyrredón, *A Rest in the Country*, c. 1860, oil on canvas, 76×166.5 cm., Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires.

both the picturesque and as often not-so-picturesque *porteño* life, with its grotesquely high-wheeled *carretas*, rough gaucho and soldier types, tent bazaars, its elegant indoor social life of theatre parties, female rivalries over dress and *peineta*, its country picnics, horse races and ostrich hunts, cattle round-ups and open corral abattoirs. The output of these artists, together with portraiture, both life-size and miniature, established an essentially representational and realistic norm of artistic practice, one that emphasized the particular, the typical and the natively characteristic, including the ironic and ridiculous. This mode of perception and expression continued in Argentina into the second half of the nineteenth century, influencing the quality of observation and new-found sense of home of native-born generations. It also laid the basis for a representational, socially aware tradition in art that anticipated, as did other Latin American work of this genre, the emergence in mid- to late-nineteenth-century Europe of strongly nationalist tendencies, as seen in the work, based on typical scenes from Spanish life, of Sorolla, Zuloaga, Zubiaurre and Fortuny.

From the precedent of this early down-to-life-as-it-is work, seen largely through the eyes of those newly arrived from Europe, came the first sharply differentiated examples of Argentine national art: the sensitively painted battle scenes and portraits of Carlos Morel, the inwardly reflective portraits of García del Molino, the panoramas by Cándido López of troop formations in the Paraguayan war, and the stately portraits and pampa landscapes of Prilidiano Pueyrredón [Pl. 3.12].

It happened that the first two of these important Argentine artists, Morel and García del Molino, were pupils of a Swiss painter, Josef Guth, who settled in Buenos Aires. Guth arrived from Paris in 1817, and within a year had established a drawing

academy in Buenos Aires; he was a widely respected professor of drawing in the University of Buenos Aires from 1822 to 1828. He became an Argentine citizen, and remained in the country until his death, in Entre Rios province, at an unknown date.

According to Alfredo Boulton's meticulously researched *Historia de la Pintura en Venezuela—Epoca Nacional* (1968), the earliest visiting recorders of the Venezuelan scene following Independence were British. They were visitors to or residents of Caracas or the near-by port of La Guaira, and nearly all were painters of portraits. Sir Robert Ker Porter, British Consul-General and Chargé d'Affaires at Caracas from 1826 to 1841, had trained as a portrait painter at the Royal Academy, and made carefully observed notebook sketches of the environs of Caracas with a late-eighteenth-century verve that pinpointed details of nature. It was the velvety neo-classic style of late-Georgian portraiture that prevailed, however, and in the small coterie of prominent persons, both natives and foreigners, cultivating international taste in the arts, it set a remarkably high, if conventionally British standard of taste, for its time and place. Indeed that style soon became part of Venezuelan tradition, modifying the patrician bearing of the mid- and late century portrait subjects of Tovar y Tovar and Herrera Toro. Yet there was a dichotomy in the portraiture of post-Independence Venezuela: the genteel neo-classicist manner of the early outsiders contrasts sharply with that of the formidable native portraitist, Juan Lovera, whose images of darkly clad founding fathers and eminent republican gentry have an almost New England puritan moralistic severity.

Between 1842 and 1846, after the eastern parts of Gran Colombia had split off to form the sovereign state of Venezuela, the versatile Prussian landscapist, Ferdinand Bellermann, toured that country as its first major traveller-reporter artist. Accompanied by his countryman, the naturalist Karl Moritz, Bellermann went from east to west painting in a vigorous style with rich impasto and spirited light and colour.<sup>8</sup> Although his method of building compositions from dark to light to highlight, using an overall greenish-brown palette, places Bellermann's work in the late continental baroque tradition, as Boulton says, this artist captured for the first time the individuality of the Venezuelan landscape, opening native eyes, used to pastoral tranquillity, to its dynamic aspects [Pl. 3.13].

Within six years there arrived in Venezuela two artists from the island of St. Thomas, the Danish marine and landscape painter, Fritz Georg Melbye, and the twenty-two-year-old Camille Pissarro, whom Melbye found sketching in Charlotte Amalie and persuaded to leave home and his future in the family import-export business.

Together the two men spent two years drawing and painting the coastal and interior landscapes of Venezuela [Pl. 3.14]. Pissarro determined to become a full-time artist, and soon after his return to St. Thomas in 1854 he left permanently for France, later to become the 'patriarch of Impressionism'. Cézanne's comment, that Pissarro had the advantage over his fellow Impressionists through having



3.13 Ferdinand Bellermann, *View of La Guaria*, 1842-6, Collection Alfredo Boulton, Caracas.

J.M.W. Turner, *View of La Guaria*, 1851, watercolour on paper, Private Collection.



Agustín Codazzi, frontispiece for Agustín Codazzi, *Atlas Físico y Político de la República de Venezuela*, Caracas, 1841, 27×32 cm., Map Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.



learned to draw directly from nature, rather than having to unlearn the lessons of the academy, sums up the effect of his travelling with Melbye the towns and villages, plains and woodlands of mid-century Venezuela. It also points to the traveller-reporter tradition, in Latin America and elsewhere, as a proving ground for the empirical method as a means of activating the intuitive and expressive processes of art.

Despite Humboldt's journey and report, and his enthusiasm for the rugged montane grandeur of the North Andean region of Gran Colombia, especially that of the high equatorial stretch between Bogotá and Quito, few artists in the traveller-explorer-reporter category appeared in the region before the mid-nineteenth century. Because of Humboldt's report, however, before the end of the 1830s the vastness of the area as the unexplored part of a tripartite national domain became a challenge and a lure to naturalists and geographers as well to artists, native as well as from abroad.

With Independence, the need to know, in order to govern, as well as to comprehend objectively the newly freed native lands led to the first major Latin American initiatives in systematic geographical exploration involving artists. The Comisión Corográfica of the 1850s in its organization followed, perhaps deliberately, the eighteenth-century precedent of the Expedición Botánica of Celestino Mutis. The organizer and leading figure of the Comisión, the Italian engineer-geographer Agustín Codazzi, belongs in the category of traveller-reporter. Under the direction of Codazzi – whose dedication to the mapping of vast areas of the South American mainland had already led to his and Fernández' enormously successful *Atlas Físico y Político de la República de Venezuela* (1841) [Pl. 3.15] – the Comisión Corográfica assembled a group of painters, writers, botanists and cartographers who took ten years (1850–9) to chart the physical, political and human geography of the republic of neighbouring Nueva Granada (later the United States of Colombia)





in each of its highland, coastal and tropical provinces; they left a visual record in some 200 perceptive watercolour drawings, many of the finest by Fernández [Pls 3.16,17]. Supported by the Colombian President of the time, José Hilario López (1849-53), the undertaking was a direct descendant of Humboldt's mission for the Spanish Crown some fifty years earlier. It was also a further application of the European Enlightenment's principles of empirical investigation and knowledge-gathering, now associated with rational control of its own affairs by an autonomous state, and carried out in part by local artists to gain an understanding of their native patrimony. Its legacy to Colombian art has been a wider appreciation of the physical setting of the territories and of their diverse populations, and finally a recognition of that setting as a subject for artistic interpretation. The natural riches of the country were given vigorous treatment in the 1940s and '50s in the *mangles*, *condores*, *flores carnívoras*, *sortilegios*, and similar themes of the Colombian modernist, Alejandro Obregón.

3.16 Carmelo Fernández, *Meztizo Farmers of Anis, Ocana Province, Colombia*, 1850-9, watercolour, Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá.

3.17 Carmelo Fernández, *Notables of the Capital, Santander Province, Colombia*, 1850-9, watercolour, Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá.

With the coming to Latin America of national academies of art (see Chapter 2) on the post-Revolutionary French model, neo-classicism became the approved standard in art and for the patronage of art by the creole upper classes, as well as the basis for instruction in art throughout both American continents. In the Antilles Spain provided the model for the San Alejandro Academy in Cuba, and England's Royal Academy for Haiti's beginning of art instruction during the monarchy of Henri Christophe. The San Carlos Academy in Mexico and the Le Breton Mission in Brazil – the latter with its offspring, the Escola Nacional de Belas Artes in Rio de Janeiro – set the example that was followed, under republican rule, by the academies founded in mid-century in Chile, Colombia, and Venezuela, part of a continuing policy of state patronage of the arts following European royal tradition.

In Mexico, the forerunner of a national art was a state institution established in the late colonial period. The royal mint, La Moneda, where coins were designed and struck, soon became the Royal Academy of the Three Noble Arts of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, and was so chartered in 1785. From the beginning, the curriculum of what was later called the San Carlos Academy followed neo-classical principles: students were taught to draw, first from casts then from life, over an exacting twelve-year course, comparable perhaps to present-day medical discipline. Pedro Patiño Ixtolinque, thought to have been a full-blooded Indian yet, under the notably equitable provisions obtaining under Spanish rule, eligible as well as qualified for the directorship of the Academy, assumed that position in 1825, after Independence; he had fought – as had some members of Colombia's Expedición Mutisiana – among the *guerrilleros* of the Independence movements. The Academy, however, bereft of royal support in the aftermath of revolution, was forced temporarily to close. Patiño, a former pupil of the exacting master sculptor and architect, Manuel de Tolsá, continued from his respected position to work on monuments to the heroes of Independence, in the classical style to which he was devoted. However, he introduced themes and symbols of the new Mexican nation, in a spirit and manner of working that reflected, within the neo-classical mode, the self-consciousness of pre-Hispanic identity, thereby sowing the seeds of the indigenism that was to become the focus of renascent *Mexicanidad* towards the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Noreña's monument to Cuauhtémoc (1887) on the Paseo de la Reforma is still grandly in neo-classical guise.

Thus, following the models and the discipline of the officially sponsored San Carlos Academy, Greek and Roman art was the criterion of excellence in Mexico throughout the century; and this neo-classical standard applied as well in most other Latin American centres where state academies were established from the mid-century onwards. But the prevailing norm of style did not preclude variations in theme and expressive treatment among strong-minded students and professors whose creative impulses rebelled against the imitation of imported models. Although instruction in

the Mexican academy during the long period from its eighteenth-century inception to the end of the Díaz era kept well within the range of general academic practice, at periods of decline, as Charlot has shown, nationalistic inflections can be seen in the pose, features and mood of the prescribed antique subjects copied and in the frozen postures of live models. On the other hand, at periods when state support and outside control of curriculum and instruction (i.e., through appointment of European artists to the faculty) were at their highest, the need of artists to express values rooted in native experience built to explosive proportions. A reaction against the staffing of the original San Carlos Academy exclusively by Spanish academicians set in as early as the first decade of its founding. Then, with the present century's social revolution, came the student strike that closed the school between 1910 and 1913. It opened again when a new director general, Ramos Martínez, began out-of-door classes in the suburban surroundings of Santa Anita; there, on a wave of *plein airism*, in the lively popular surroundings glowing with colour and sunlight, the pall of gloomy neo-classical draughting rooms was lifted.

The rigour and tenacity of the Mexican academic tradition may at times have exceeded that of Brazil, Chile, Venezuela and the other countries paying homage to European artistic prototypes, after the Napoleonic era. But in all the countries where neo-classicism was instituted as an a priori means of artistic regeneration, to fill the void left by the nullification of exclusively other-worldly criteria of creativity, it was destined to confront, eventually, the consciousness of actuality in the minds of artists. Those brought up in surroundings defined empirically and, through Independence, progressively made their own, instituted a self-liberating process that continues today.

In the course of its history, as Charlot further points out, the Mexican academy acted essentially as a foil for and a charge to the impulse towards creative independence. Among the artists who were trained there, the strictures imposed, if not always the teaching that conveyed them, produced in the long run the grit and technical command needed for the success of the Mexican mural renaissance. This is affirmed by Orozco in his stout defence of his student years at the San Carlos Academy.

The effects of neo-classical discipline on nineteenth-century Latin American art in the many countries where that discipline, in the training of professional artists, including those abroad, was centred in state-supported academies have yet to be measured. One consequence may be that rationality in art was built permanently into the Latin American creative make-up. It put a brake on, if by no means a stop to, individual Romantic tendencies until the end of the century. And in the 1920s it re-emerged both in form and structure in countries as far apart as Mexico and Argentina, in movements as seemingly opposed as indigenism and constructivism.

All the same, the limitations imposed by neo-classicism on the free choice of themes and manner of treatment diverged more and



more acutely from the artists' own experience of their native environment. The traveller-reporter artists were building more autochthonous frames of reference in their recording of scientific, ecological and social reality. Their activity was especially telling in the first of these spheres, the archaeological record that was accumulating of ancient cities, monuments and artefacts, from the first amateur sketches of ancient statues in the Guatemalan and Honduran jungles to the expressively detailed lithographs by Frederick Catherwood of Maya sculpture and architecture [Pls 3.56-9] and the precision photographs of Desiré Charnay in the Yucatán. The work of these and others brought to native consciousness, through the medium of archaeological and popular publications, the millennial origins and the grand scale of native American civilizations. Thus new distinctions were drawn to counter artistic judgements that had made 'native' a synonym for inferiority and set external standards for cultural acceptance or exclusion.

The 'ecological' observations of traveller-reporters became a focus for appreciating a diversity in nature far greater than had been perceived before the Enlightenment; thus there was great interest in the sweeping panoramic landscapes of the Valley of Mexico by José María Velasco (whose first published work, in scientist-reporter style, was on the flora of Mexico City's environs); in the late-nineteenth-century intimist landscapes of the Colombian highland savannah by González Camargo (in contrast to those of others who used this idyllic natural scene to convey essentially European, late-Romantic sentiment); in the humble surroundings to which the early-twentieth-century Venezuelan landscapists, Federico Brandt and Edmundo Monsanto, and their followers turned in their discovery of native values, as did also the Chilean impressionist painter of teeming country rosebushes and farmyard scenes, Juan Francisco González.

By their wide-ranging depiction of popular life in the country and city, the continuing customs of Indians, the fashions of the upper classes and their imitation by the fledgling middle class, the reporters on the social scene opened up the greatest number of possible subjects conducive to native and thus national aspirations. Reaching into all phases of Latin American life, their work stimulated the native would-be artist to pursue the same genre and soon led to the appearance of noteworthy artists and schools: the mulatto diarist of Limenian street life, Pancho Fierro, in Peru; J. G. Tatis and Torres Méndez, with their characterizations of city and country life in Colombia; the youthful itinerant artist Juan Cordero; the rich tradition of provincial portraiture, *retablo* and *pulquería* wall painting in Mexico which anticipated Hermenegildo Bustos' striking images; the vivid social tensions and contrasts of the Porfirian world of José Guadalupe Posada.

The cumulative effect of all the categories of traveller-reporter activity on the academic neo-classical tradition was first to divert, and finally to replace it. It was primarily in landscape painting, where compositions could be based on careful study of the Mexican

natural scene, that classical themes could be bypassed while keeping within permissible restraints of perspective, balance and colour. Epitomizing this approach are the Mexican landscapes of Velasco, which can be seen as a fulfilment of both classical and Romantic ideals of the late-nineteenth-century tradition in Western landscape painting, as well as a culmination, in this genre, of the empirical legacy of the traveller-reporter in the Western hemisphere.

The broader effect of that legacy for New World artists was, of course, to replace the ideal world of the neo-classical tradition with their own natural world, in all the phases and elements available to human perception, as a subject for their ordering and re-creation. That hundred-year process was a corollary of the gradual replacement in Latin America of the old forms of outside rule with a new social, ethical and political order having self-determination as its basis, both in society and in art.

A prominent art-historical view holds that the colonial style of art in Latin America survived into the late nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> This, of course, does not preclude the theory that the intuitive and empirical processes of artistic invention which emerged at the start of the nineteenth century were brought about by Independence. The critical question, however, is what replaced the previously dominant styles, and what resources were available to later artists, especially when almost all elements of continuity had been removed by the establishment of a new philosophical attitude, comprehensively secular in its outlook. The traditional scholarly approach to such a question is to ponder the evidence of history, once a new style has emerged, and then go back to check on its evolution *ex post facto*. But for purposes of historiography an approach more in keeping with the empirical interest in process, stages of development, and based on a knowledge of sources, would be to consider stages of development as valid for artistic appraisal as the overall end result of evolution, thereby broadening the basis of critical enquiry into emergent areas of creative innovation. Indeed, if the many stages of Picasso's art had not been followed as they occurred, where, *post mortem*, would one start in reconstructing them and, indeed, what would one have if one did?

Such has been our purpose in reviewing some of the effects of the new universal attitude towards direct experience on the art of the New World: how the various models it brought were used as the basis for a new beginning over a much broader range of Western and indigenous traditions in art than had been true under colonial conditions – and how this process constitutes a clear beginning of the art of the modern world in the Latin American parts of the Western Hemisphere.