

The Politics of Taste



Beatriz González and Cold War Aesthetics **ANA MARÍA REYES**



The Politics of Taste

BUY

DUKE

**UNIVERSITY
PRESS**



DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS





The Politics of Taste

Beatriz González and Cold War Aesthetics

ANA MARÍA REYES

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Durham and London

2019

DUKE

**UNIVERSITY
PRESS**





© 2019 Duke University Press

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞

Designed by Amy Ruth Buchanan

Typeset in Merope and Alegreya Sans by Copperline Books

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Reyes, Ana María (College teacher), [date] author.

Title: The politics of taste : Beatriz González and Cold War aesthetics / Ana María Reyes.

Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2019. | Series: Art history publication initiative | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019002426 (print)

LCCN 2019012478 (ebook)

ISBN 9781478004554 (ebook)

ISBN 9781478003632 (hardcover : alk. paper)

ISBN 9781478003977 (pbk. : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: González, Beatriz, 1938—Criticism and interpretation. |

Art, Colombian—Political aspects—20th century. | Art, Colombian—20th century. | Pop art—Colombia—20th century.

Classification: LCC N6679.G656 (ebook) |

LCC N6679.G656 R494 2019 (print) | DDC 709.2—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019002426>

Cover art: Beatriz González, *Los suicidas del Sisga*, 1965.

Oil on canvas, 120 × 100 cm. Frontispiece: Beatriz González,

Vermeeriana sentada, 1964. Oil on canvas, 100 × 85 cm.



THIS BOOK WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY
A COLLABORATIVE GRANT FROM
THE ANDREW W. MELLON FOUNDATION.

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS





contents

acknowledgments vii

introduction **Dis-cursis** 1

chapter 1 **Vermeer in Bucaramanga, Beatriz in Bogotá** 33

chapter 2 **A Leap from the Domestic Sphere
into the Sisga Reservoir** 73

chapter 3 **“Cut It Out”** 113
Impropriety at the MAMBO

chapter 4 **Notes for an Exclusive History of Colombia** 153

chapter 5 **Modernist Obstruction at the Second
Medellín Biennial** 181

epilogue **Underdeveloped Art for Underdeveloped
People** 218

notes 231

bibliography 283

index 303

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS



acknowledgments

Writing a book is a laborious journey of self-growth, criticism, and surrender. While it may seem like solitary work, it is truly a collective endeavor. This book is the culmination of many years of research, writing, and revising that would not have been possible without the many people and institutions that supported me. Just as this study sets out to demonstrate that artistic meaning is a contingent, collective, and contextual cocreation, its own existence is the product of many academic exchanges, as well as nourishing relations. My mentors, colleagues, students, friends, and family members engaged me in dynamic discussions that ultimately affected this study in profound ways.

The publication of the book was funded by the Boston University Center for the Humanities, College of Arts and Sciences Humanities Research Fund, Department of the History of Art and Architecture, and Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Research and writing was supported by the Santander Fellowship at the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, Harvard University; the Boston University Center for the Humanities; and the Boston University Junior Faculty Fellowship. Funding for the early phase came from the Tinker Field Research Grant for Latin America and Iberia, the Hewlett Research Grant for Latin America, the National Hispanic Scholarship Fund, the FLAS: National Resources/Fellowship for Language and Area Studies, the University of Chicago Department of Art History Field Research Grant, the University of Chicago Center for Latin American Studies Field Research Grant, and the American Association of University Women (AAUW).

This book began as a doctoral thesis from the University of Chicago. To state that my advisers at the University of Chicago, Martha Ward, Thomas B. F. Cummins, W. J. T. Mitchell, and Darby English are present in every page of this document would be an understatement. They have consistently pushed me and believed in the importance of my work. Marty Ward inspired me to think about the discursive frameworks of exhibition sites. Her demand for excellence required that I raise the bar of expectations. Studying pre-Columbian and colonial art with Tom Cummins also gave me an understanding of the stubbornly persistent culture in Latin America and the significant role it continues to play in power relations. Tom's and Marty's unwavering support has been and continues to be central to my own persistence. I also extend my gratitude to W. J. T. Mitchell who gave me decisive encouragement. He taught me that violence could take on many, often undetectable, forms and that representations of violence could

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS





viii ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

not be reduced to gruesome imagery; rather, violence constitutes a much more complex network of actions and references. Darby English pushed me to think beyond Colombia and how Beatriz González's works paradoxically engaged the international art scene by deploying a strategic localism. A special thanks to Agnes Lugo Ortiz and Cécile Fromont for their support and insightful comments on my project. Undoubtedly, my mentors' intellectual legacy runs through the best parts of this book.

Since my arrival at Boston University, I have encountered extraordinary collegiality in the Department of the History of Art and Architecture (HAA) and the Center for Latin American Studies. I could not have juggled the demands of teaching, service, and writing without their encouragement, support, and guidance. I especially thank my mentor, Michael Zell, and our HAA chair, Alice Tseng, who went above and beyond their call of duty to ensure that I had the resources and time to develop the manuscript. I am also fortunate to count as my colleagues and friends Ross Barrett, Cynthia Becker, Emine Fetvacı, Deborah Kahn, Fred Kleiner, Becky Martin, Bruce Redford, Kim Sichel, and Greg Williams. I also counted on the support of Susan Rice and Christopher Spedaliere in securing high resolution images. At the Center for Latin American Studies at Boston University I am particularly indebted to Michael Birenbaum Quintero, Alicia Borinsky, Susan Eckstein, James Iffland, Adela Pineda, and Jeff Rubin. I give a special thanks to my Ph.D. students Julian Serna Lancheros and Constanza Robles Sepúlveda for their careful and diligent work on the manuscript and their help with securing images and authorizations. I am indebted to my graduate students, who enrich seminar discussions in ways that filtered into this manuscript.

In Bogotá I encountered unforgettable kindness and generosity on the part of scholars and institutional professionals who made my work not only efficient but also enjoyable. I owe an immense debt of gratitude to Carlos José Reyes Posada, director of the National Library, and Jorge Orlando Melo, director of the Luis Ángel Arango Library. Many thanks to Alvaro Medina, Ernesto Monsalve, Jaime Pulido, and the late Gloria Zea at the Museum of Modern Art in Bogotá, and to Nicolás Gómez Echeverri at the Museo Banco de la República. I am grateful to Daniel Castro, Elvira Pinzón Méndez, Angela Eraso, and Maria Lucia Alonso of the Museo Nacional de Colombia; Diana Tabita Serrano Campo from the Museo de la Independencia Casa del Florero; and Paola Andrea López Lara of the Museo Quinta de Bolívar. I thank Marta Combariza at the Museo de Arte de la Universidad Nacional for giving me full access to the museum's archives and for making possible the reassembly of González's furniture pieces. Special thanks go to Luisa Reyes Trujillo at the Presidencia de la República de Colombia and Luis Armando Soto at the Ministry of Culture. I am profoundly grateful to Fidel Cano Correa at *El Espectador* for taking time out of his extremely busy schedule during national elections to help me secure image rights. I also express my deep appre-

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS



ciation to the art dealers and collectors who shared information and materials and who allowed me to spend time with González's works, mainly Paula Arenas, Víctor Alfandary, Alonso Garcés, José Darío Gutiérrez, Ana María Mendieta, Francisco Reyes, and Vicky Turbay. A deep sentiment of gratitude for the artists who shared images and authorizations, including Pedro Alcántara, Alvaro Barrios, and José Carlos Ramos Gálvez. Equally I extend my appreciation to the rights holders who generously granted me authorization to reproduce works, including María Eugenia Martínez de Arango, Barbara Brizzi, María Cristina Celis Agudelo, Nicolás Consuegra, the Estrada Family, Pablo Leyva, Ernesto Monsalve Rodrigo Obregón Osorio, Marcos Roda, Pablo Roda, Pedro Roda, Juana Roda, Inés Rodríguez Berni, Rosse Mary Rojas, Margarita Salcedo, and Liliane Zafrani. My research and writing were nourished by conversations with violentologists Alejandro Reyes Posada and María Victoria Uribe, as well with the artists Antonio Caro, Juan Manuel Echavarría, Umberto Giangrandi, Oscar Muñoz, and Bernardo Salcedo, and the Nadaist poet Elmo Valencia. My work has been greatly enhanced by exchanges with the art historians María Iovino, Imelda González Ramírez, Carmen María Jaramillo, Víctor Manuel Rodríguez, and Eduardo Serrano, to whom I am also indebted for their hospitality. I fully acknowledge my admiration for Beatriz González's works. I am deeply grateful for her generosity in granting me access to her personal archive and patiently agreeing to be interviewed day after day. The information I gathered from those twelve hours of interviews, which I attempt to contextualize in the pages that follow, is a treasure in and of itself. Thanks are due to her assistant, José Ruiz Díaz, who graciously helped me access important materials.

In Medellín, Colombia, I also encountered astonishing hospitality and collegiality that proved invaluable for finishing this book. I owe special debt of gratitude to Leonel Estrada's family, especially Martin Nova, Beatriz Estrada de Nova, Maria Isabel Estrada, and Natalia Vélez for generously granting me access to the Leonel Estrada and Coltejer Biennial archives. Thanks go to Juan Camilo Castaño and Yuliana Quiceno Cardona at the Museo de Antioquia for facilitating my study of the Coltejer Biennial art collection. At the Museum of Modern Art in Medellín I would like to thank the late Alberto Sierra for spending time with me at the Beatriz González retrospective and to Ana María Cano from EAFIT for visiting the exhibition and discussing the works with me. I would also like to thank Emiliano Valdéz for kindly granting me access to the archives of the MAMM.

I am fortunate to have found rare and precious friendships among my colleagues from which I continue to grow. This book would not exist without the unwavering support and intellectual exchanges I have shared through the years with Jill Bugajski, Jack Cheng, Ingrid Elliott, Tatiana Flores, Kyle Huffman, Aleca le Blanc, Lisa Meyerowitz, Harper Montgomery, Evelyn Carmen Ramos-Alfred, Maureen Shanahan, and Gina McDaniel Tarver. Many thanks to my dear col-

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

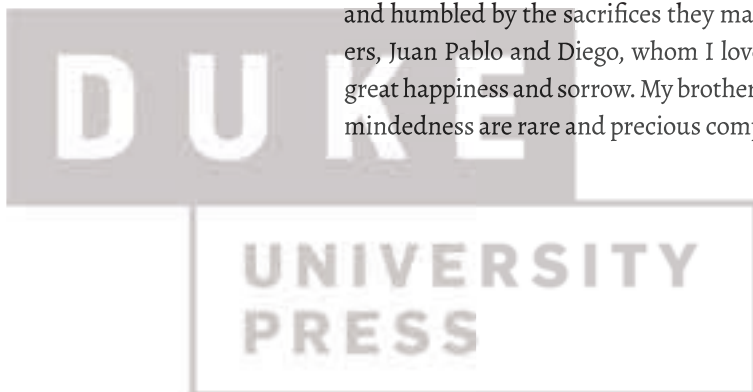


X ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

leagues from the University of Chicago, Carmen Fernández Salvador, Courtney Gilbert, Ray Hernandez Durán, Michael Schreffler, and Liz Segal. I owe a great debt to my colleagues at DRCLAS, Harvard, who challenged me to rethink key aspects of the manuscript and consider the permutations of the term *cursi* throughout the Spanish-speaking world, especially Boris Muñoz, Maritza Navarro, Katie Sampeck, and Verónica Zubillaga. At Northwestern University I was inspired by Claudia Swan and Hollis Clayson, who challenged me to think about gender, domesticity, and representation. Frank Safford shared his kindness, time, and valuable insights on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Colombian economic history. A special debt of gratitude goes to Andrea Giunta for her support and her inspiring work. I am also deeply grateful for my Symbolic Reparations Research team, Marco Abarca, Julián Bonder, José Falconi, Robin Greeley, Lisa Laplante, Michael Orwicz, Luisa Peralta, Fernando Rosenberg, Yolanda Sierra, and Doris Sommer for challenging me to think beyond deconstructing symbolic violence and thinking about constructive forms of symbolic healing.

I would like to express my profound gratitude to Gisela Fosado, editor at Duke University Press, for her enthusiasm, support, and stewardship along with her editorial assistants, Lydia Rose Rappoport-Hankins and Jenny Tan, and others from Duke University Press: Amy Buchanan, Christopher Catanese, Emily Chilton, Ellen Goldlust, Janet Martell, Bonnie Perkel, David Prout, and Chad Royal. The first revisions of the manuscript were greatly influenced by the challenging questions posed to me by Ken Wissoker at CAA. I am tremendously thankful to the readers at Duke for their careful reading and insightful feedback. No doubt their intelligent suggestions and gentle criticisms greatly improved the final manuscript. Mary Coffey's observations challenged me to revisit the history of avant-garde collage and consider how González engaged this practice in her own context. I owe a heartfelt thanks to Mary Roldán, who shared with me her impressive knowledge and helped me think about Colombia's history in more nuanced ways. Her work on the role of religion in the Cold War has been transformative for my thinking.

Embarking on an academic career has been possible because of my supportive and inspiring family. My parents, the late Pablo Reyes Posada and María Eugenia Duque, inculcated in me deep humanist values that have served as my compass and no doubt structure my scholarship. They encouraged me every day, sometimes twice, to pursue my professional dreams and intellectual passions and to contribute to future generations of Latinx scholars. I am both honored and humbled by the sacrifices they made for my benefit. I thank my two brothers, Juan Pablo and Diego, whom I love deeply and with whom I have endured great happiness and sorrow. My brother Diego taught me that humility and open-mindedness are rare and precious components of intelligence. While he is many





years my junior, he has proved to be many years wiser. His ability to rise from adversity continues to be a daily inspiration.

I am deeply grateful to my husband, Bill Gatti (my favorite B. G.), who met me at the beginning of this journey and who has lived it daily. While he probably never realized how long it would be, he has never hesitated in his support, making inconceivable sacrifices in the process. He has listened to gestating ideas, traveled back and forth to Latin America, read drafts, become an amateur art historian, and simultaneously given me the space and time to think, research, and write. I dedicate this book to him and to our three Gatti-cos, Lorenzo, Lucas, and Lina, who fill my life with unconditional love, endless joy, and unbridled imagination.

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS



introduction

Dis-cursis

The weekly Colombian television show *Correo Especial* on June 7, 1978, begins by showing a woman walking through a narrow, busy, and cluttered flea market.¹ She wears a traditional *ruana*, Colombia's peasant wool poncho, with a short skirt. Massive demographic changes in the mid-twentieth century engendered this type of hybrid fashion, an attempt to resolve the local and traditional with the modern and international. This was a time rife with cultural tensions wrought by what the modernization theorist Walt Whitman Rostow called the transitional stage of development in a society ready for "takeoff" toward modernity.² The camera suddenly shifts to a pile of furniture for sale: a wicker crib, a metal bedframe, and a collapsible cot. The reporter Gloria Valencia de Castaño, barely visible through breaks in the crowd, announces that the Pasaje Rivas, this vibrant flea market in which she is standing, has "entered into history . . . thanks to the use and misuse [of its wares] by the artist Beatriz González." As two men carrying furniture pass through the narrow market alley, we notice that the artist has been standing next to the reporter all along.

A spectator familiar with González's artistic production would immediately connect the wicker cribs to *Baby Johnson in situ* (1971; figure I.1), in which the artist assembled her painting of a Johnson and Johnson baby advertisement into a wicker carriage.³ The bedframes remind the viewer of *Camafeo* (Cameo [1971; figure I.2), in which González inserted a medallion portrait of Beethoven into a pink metal bedframe decorated with stenciled flowers that the art critic Marta Traba called "repulsive open corollas."⁴ The title *Camafeo* carries the double meaning of "cameo" and "ugly bed," connecting a musical icon of legitimate culture in no uncertain terms with bad taste. Likewise, in *Mutis por el foro* (Exit Stage Rear [1973; figure I.3) González placed her commercial enamel version of Pedro Alcántara Quijano's *El Libertador Muerto* (ca. 1930) — a "representation of a representation" — in the place of a mattress on a red metal bedframe that she purchased at the Pasaje Rivas.⁵ The modest bed reminded the artist of Bolívar's desolate passing in Santa Marta in 1830. Reflecting on *Exit Stage Rear* González dryly wondered, "Dead Bolívar, isn't it best for him to rest on a bed?"⁶ All three works reproduce immediately recognizable images taken from the mass media or, in the case of Alcántara Quijano's iconic patrimonial painting, repro-

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS





I.1 Beatriz González, *Baby Johnson in situ*, 1971, enamel on metal plate, assembled on wicker baby carriage, 45 × 30 × 70 cm.

I.2 Beatriz González, *Camaféo*, 1971, enamel on metal plate, assembled on metal bed, 125 × 100 × 75 cm.

I.3 Beatriz González, *Mutis por el foro*, 1973, enamel on metal plate assembled on metal bed, 120 × 205 × 90 cm.



DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS



duced massively on Colombia's Extra de la Independencia lottery tickets of 1972. Alongside their punning titles, these works materially, stylistically, and thematically exemplify González's critical incursions into the politics of taste, which she has provocatively displayed in art institutions. Her assaults on elites' sensibilities have elicited responses in the media that disclose the processes by which these institutions mediate social and cultural difference.

In 1978, González was already recognized as a leading artist, representing Colombia in various international exhibitions and art competitions, including the biennials held in São Paulo and Venice. Today González remains one of the most powerful cultural figures in Latin America, continuing to produce as an artist, curator, and art historian. While her artworks have consistently engaged the institutional and discursive framing of culture, as a curator of the art and history collections at the National Museum of Colombia and as a highly influential member of the acquisitions committee for the Banco de la República, the largest cultural organization in the nation, she has become a powerful agent of the institutions that legitimize cultural patrimony.⁷ Yet during the early years of her career she staged a sharp critique of those very institutions, the modernizing discourses that served as their aesthetic compass, and the exclusionary social structures they buttressed. Her artistic engagements with lowbrow subject matter and materials, saturated with local, gender, and class references, stood in stark contrast to the demands for artists to produce sophisticated, "exportable" works as evidence of Latin American modernity, best represented by the rise to prominence of geometric abstract, kinetic, and op art, along with new technological media, during the post-World War II period.

This book analyzes González's artistic practices; responses to her works, including the writings of the art critic Marta Traba, which helped to secure González's position in the Colombian art world; and the institutions where they worked and contextualizes them within the dynamic historical processes that unfolded during the coalition government of the National Front (1958–1974) and after the Cuban Revolution. Colombia was just emerging from bloody internecine war that has come to be known as La Violencia that left hundreds of thousands dead and the authoritarian dictatorship of Gustavo Rojas Pinilla (1953–1957).⁸ With the return to democracy, the nation experienced a short period of optimism about peace, expanding democracy, and improving of the standards of living for all. The failure and erasure from historical memory of this dynamic and innovative period, what the historian Robert Karl calls a "forgotten peace," reveals the limitations of democratic participation.⁹ Even the most progressive and well-intentioned reformists were unable to overcome elite distrust of the masses, described as *el pueblo*, and their fear of communism. This is a study of González's emerging career (1964–1970) during the aftermath of this democratic experimentation, a time of disillusionment with the promise of state-led modernization

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS



4 INTRODUCTION

programs and hemispheric cooperation that motivated many to take up arms through guerrilla insurgency and others to stage their critique from within democratic and cultural institutions.

The passionate and polarized responses that González's paintings generated in the press give us insight into the social anxieties and political frustrations underlying Cold War aesthetic discourses. As a student of Marta Traba at the University of Los Andes (Uniandes) and her protégé at the Bogotá Museum of Modern Art (MAMBO), González's triumphal debut materialized these institutions' desire to cast Colombian art as modern, sophisticated, and universal. However, when González's works turned to local and urban lowbrow culture, they unsettled the still pervasive binary definition of culture as eruditely universal or rural folklore propagated by the Ministry of Education for its cultural policies since the 1930s.¹⁰ Unpacking critical reviews of González's exhibitions reveals the rigid hierarchical society perpetuated by the model of elite modernization that proved to be an insurmountable obstacle for social reform. Social, economic, and political modernization programs claimed to build a more egalitarian and democratic society—a reformist alternative to a Cuban-inspired revolution. However, hemispheric elites perceived the impoverished masses as unruly and threatening, making these objectives contradictory and impossible to achieve. Both González and Traba lived through the turmoil generated by these social, economic, and political engineering programs. As modernization promises failed to deliver, the National Front started to crack down on social unrest, and as many Latin American nations began to experience military repression, including Traba's native Argentina, her critical writings increasingly characterized U.S. culture as a dangerous neoimperial instrument. In tandem, González's disavowal of a homogenized, rational, scientific, and international aesthetic resisted the underlying premises of an evolutionary or progressive modernization ideology. Instead, González's recycling aesthetic looked to the heteroglossia of urban popular culture. She joined artists through the hemisphere, such as expressive figuration artists who attacked conventions of good taste as well as Brazilian artists Hélio Oiticica, Caetano Veloso, and those associated with the Tropicália movement, in resisting the demands of local elites by unleashing flamboyant and insubordinate creativity.¹¹ Nonetheless, González's erudite art of appropriation prompted viewers to express their fears and prejudices toward urban newcomers. Critics and intellectuals rehearsed a language of class condescension that reproduced rather than challenged social hierarchies and asserted their privileged distance from the "popular."

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS



Art and Symbolic Violence

The subject of this book arose from a question: How could Colombian art critics during the 1950s and early 1960s have reduced aesthetic debates to a decontextualized formalist analysis, given that Colombia was undergoing one of the most dramatic and dynamic moments in its history? How could art critics so conspicuously evade issues of violence as the country was emerging out of La Violencia, one of its darkest historical moments, and embarking on another phase involving Cuban-inspired guerrillas and counterinsurgency initiatives? Instead of paying attention to myriad artworks that engaged social realities, critics and exhibition jurors, aspiring to an ideal of artistic autonomy, accommodated their descriptive language to formalist and internationalist art discourses. By doing so, critics disconnected artworks from their local contexts at a time when the nation was recovering from civil war and military dictatorship and attempting to transition back to democracy. I came to understand that at the center of political violence in Colombia were other forms of symbolic violence and detachment — among cosmopolitan elites, the provincial pueblo (populace), and rural-to-urban migrants; between the world of ideas and historical events; and between those who possessed aesthetic discernment, or “good taste,” and those who did not. González’s works serve as effective critical tools that interrogate the politics of taste, the boundaries of representation within cultural circuits, and art’s relation to symbolic violence.

Colombia has endured several waves of violence and many coexisting conflicts that continue to dramatically alter the social landscape today. González’s career began amid a significant shift in these internal conflicts. To stop the bloodshed of the brutal partisan war between liberals and conservatives known as La Violencia, the country’s economic and political elites sponsored a military coup by General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla in 1953. After several years of intensifying authoritarian rule, the traditional ruling parties ousted the dictator and formed the National Front (1958–1974), a power-sharing coalition government. The National Front alternated the presidency and divided power mathematically between the Liberal and Conservative Parties to end partisan resentments and, in theory, make government more pluralistic. By limiting power to the traditional liberal and conservative elites, the National Front government effectively ruled out all other political alternatives.¹² Nonetheless, while many Latin American nations were succumbing to military dictatorships, this coalition government collaborated closely with the United States to preserve a fragile and restricted democracy through intense modernization programs designed to avert revolution.¹³

The initial phase of the National Front, especially under its architect and first president, Alberto Lleras Camargo, was a time of optimism and collaborative ingenuity in which the state and communities searched for grassroots solutions to

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

violence and development. As part of this *pax criolla*, the state granted *campesino* combatants amnesty and loans to purchase and farm their land. Many other nongovernment organizations, including the Catholic Church, the Asociación Nacional de Industrialistas (National Association of Industrialists; ANDI), and the Federación Nacional de Cafeteros (National Federation of Coffee Growers; FNC) also searched for alternative ways to tackle social inequities and expand economic and political participation.¹⁴ One exceptional case was Acción Cultural Popular (Popular Cultural Action; ACPO), created by an inventive rural priest, José Joaquín Salcedo, who was able to tap into a vast international religious network to channel anticommunist anxieties and funds into an ambitious and effective rural radio literacy program.¹⁵ Unfortunately, many of these historical actors soon learned that peace and democracy building would be impossible without major structural changes. For instance, enthusiastic peasant leaders of ACPO, determined to elevate peasants' well-being and productivity through education, realized the program's impotence in the context of indentured servitude.¹⁶ Many community development programs were blocked by old partisan political resentments at the local and national levels.¹⁷

Despite the efforts of many government officials, rural folk, and even former combatants, the traditional political elites acted to preserve the traditional order and turned against the peasant guerrillas who had been fighting on their behalf in the countryside. Even Lleras Camargo, who extended amnesty to the guerrillas and worked toward their integration into rural economies, was simultaneously instrumental in the developing anticommunist policies of the Organization of American States (OAS) and of the United States in Latin America.¹⁸ Indeed, between 1958 and 1960, before the Alliance for Progress, Lleras Camargo worked with the Eisenhower administration to shift military aid programs reserved for external threats, according to the Caracas OAS declaration of 1954, into internal security programs — that is, the beginnings of counterinsurgency operations that altered the course of the Cold War in the region.¹⁹

The Cold War was a period of ideological warfare that had significant consequences for the daily lives of people worldwide, and most dramatically in the global South. The 1960s in Colombia offer a compelling chapter in this complex history, a period when international forces interacted with national transformations closely tied with U.S. policies toward Latin America. Alberto Lleras Camargo, the director of the Pan American Union (PAU) and first general-secretary of its successor, the OAS, as well as the architect and first president of the National Front, was a key figure in determining inter-American Cold War policies. He was a highly respected Liberal Party statesman, a friend of Nelson Rockefeller, and deeply respected by John F. Kennedy; his ideals of liberal democracy matched the rise of postwar liberalism in the United States.²⁰ The admiration he commanded from Kennedy and his brilliant diplomacy helped transform an ambitious plan

of hemispheric economic collaboration, drafted as Operación Pan-Americana by Brazil's President Juscelino Kubitschek, into the Alliance for Progress.²¹

The Alliance for Progress materialized Latin American governments' desires for increased U.S. economic aid and for refashioning the global role of the United States in accordance with modernization theories articulated from Ivory Tower social science departments. Modernization theories resonated with the traditional political class in Colombia, especially Lleras Camargo's Liberal Party, which had already experienced an intense period of political, economic, and cultural modernization during the Liberal Republic (1934–1946), especially during the *Revolución en Marcha* under the presidency of Alfonso López Pumarejo (1934–1938). Lleras Camargo shared Washington's fervent anticommunism and the belief that social, economic, and cultural modernization was a cure for all social ills.²² Colombia, along with Chile, thus became a “showcase” for the Alliance for Progress, a program intent on strengthening democratic institutions and alleviating the misery that jeopardized them.

The 1960s in Colombia was a decade of economic, social, and cultural reform that followed several different development theories, including the Latin American *desarrollismo* formulated by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA), U.S. modernization theories, and the many different community development theories that had circulated since the Liberal Republic, some of them tied to Catholic intellectuals.²³ Working under the assumption that modernization programs would eventually foster a more egalitarian society, the National Front promoted accelerated industrialization through import substitution programs for manufacturing and by luring foreign investments in other areas. Other programs, such as ACPO and the Peace Corps, followed theories of community development that sought to help find and implement local solutions.²⁴ As this book elaborates, none of these development programs could surmount the obstacles posed by a deeply stratified Colombian society and the Cold War agendas of both the elites and U.S. foreign policy. Indeed, the public and private alliances of national and international elites proved to be instrumental to the resilience of hierarchical structures in Colombia.

On May 18, 1964, just one month after the opening of González's first solo exhibition, curated by Marta Traba at the MAMBO, the Colombian armed forces launched an air strike against the “independent republic” of Marquetalia, a small bastion of peasant communists that had consolidated from the liberal guerrillas of La Violencia.²⁵ The attack intended to eradicate domestic communism once and for all but instead gave birth to the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia; FARC) and opened a new chapter in Cold War history that continues to unravel to this day. Realizing that party leaders were operating in defense of elite rule and catering to U.S. interests, and inspired by the success of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, peasants, along

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS



8 INTRODUCTION

with students, intellectuals, union leaders, and even radicalized priests, turned to class-based guerrilla warfare against the state.

The art world was deeply entangled in these processes. After the bitter aesthetic battles of the 1940s and 1950s between the conservatives who continued to support academic neoclassicism as a universal idiom superior to what they considered a degenerate modern language of the Americanists supported by liberals, the National Front also opened an era of updating culture through cosmopolitan modernism.²⁶ Through newly founded cultural institutions such as the MAMBO and the International Coltejer Biennial in Medellín, many modernizing agents, in both the private and public sector, sponsored a controlled form of modernism to integrate Colombia into an evolutionary narrative and redirect the gaze of intellectuals away from political opposition by promising participation in universal culture.²⁷ Many museums of modern art founded across the hemisphere during the 1950s and 1960s championed abstraction as a modern lingua franca. In Latin America, on the one hand, geometric abstraction, op art, and kinetic art provided a visual language of cultural advancement that trafficked with a faith in industrial, scientific, and technological universalism; geometric abstraction thus became the aesthetic partner of economic development, or the visualization of modernization. On the other hand, lyrical abstraction served to both foster Latin American global participation and, in its entanglement with discourses of spiritual elevation, supported a pervasive claim on Latin American spiritual authority above a materialist United States.²⁸

The scholarship on the political uses and abuses of cultural internationalism during this period is vast and convincingly demonstrates how “internationalizing” culture was a facet of Cold War ideological battles, serving as a means to redirect the attention of artists toward participating in a cosmopolitan culture, coded as universal, and away from political involvement and ongoing armed struggles taking place in the global South.²⁹ Cultural modernization proved to be an authoritative discourse that lured the support of diverse and at times antagonistic characters. In the United States, powerful institutions such as the Central Intelligence Agency, the Museum of Modern Art, the Rockefellers’ petroleum company Esso, the Center for Inter-American Relations, and the PAU sponsored abstraction as evidence of democratic freedom and capitalist free enterprise and used it as a weapon of the Cold War against dogmatic Soviet socialist realism.³⁰ In Latin America, supporters included the industrial bourgeoisie invested in participating in global capitalism and the political elite eager to stake a claim for their nations amid Cold War redefinitions of power relations. Furthermore, intellectuals who had witnessed the pathological nationalism and racism of World War II now rejected race-based indigenist and Americanist discourses that had occupied many of the Latin American avant-gardes in the first part of the twentieth century. Abstraction’s iconophobia served as an antagonist to fascism’s iconophilia —

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS



that is, the cult of leaders, as well as racialized and atavistic nationalism. Finally, the Roman Catholic Church, especially after the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), found in abstraction a means to update and modernize a Catholic or universal art that could reveal the human soul through artistic intuition.³¹

In this context, the cultural sphere served as an important space for ideological negotiations to effectively shape a dynamic public sphere that contrasted with the political limitations of the National Front. Through the lens of González's early exhibitions (1964–1970), *The Politics of Taste* looks at the role played by the arts and criticism within this restricted and precarious return to democracy, as well as at the effects of the modernization programs that were taking place within a deeply traditional and hierarchical society. In doing so, it allows us to access an important and previously neglected piece of the Cold War puzzle — that is, to understand the ways in which aesthetic discourses played out in a country considered the closest hemispheric ally of the United States during the Cold War.³² It also helps us trace how the failures of the National Front's reforms became manifest in the cultural sphere as artists and intellectuals challenged internationalism. González's ascendance to cultural prominence parallels the turn away from high modernist universalism toward resistance articulated as a form of regional, not national, authenticity, vaguely alluded to by critics as *lo nuestro* (that which is ours).

González's strategic provincialism and Traba's theory of cultural resistance to cultural imperialism must be understood alongside this sense of frustration with a limited democracy and U.S. involvement in Colombian affairs.³³ If we consider the discourse of cultural advancement as a companion to modernization theory, we could also conceive of the discourse of cultural authenticity as a companion to community development's search for local solutions. Indeed, many critics and artists throughout Latin America during this era searched for regional aesthetic solutions as alternatives to importing neocolonial art trends. In repudiating both elite cosmopolitanism and nationalist folklorism of the Liberal Republic, González's appropriation of urban popular culture, in all of its hybrid, diverse, excessive, and "fantastic irregularities," served as resistance to the perceived elitism and homogenizing effects of international modernism and the ultranationalism of the Rojas Pinilla dictatorship.³⁴ During the 1960s and early 1970s, González's works helped critics revitalize a discourse of cultural authenticity, as reformulated from the urban marginal or geographic periphery, and not an idealized academically constructed folklore designed to articulate national unity.³⁵

Precisely because González launched her career by successfully meeting the terms of cultural modernization, when she subsequently challenged and parodied those terms in explicit ways, she did so from a consecrated position. Therefore, critics could not easily dismiss her works and were obliged to react in support of or against them. González's early exhibitions serve as privileged case



studies because they managed to arouse passionate support and irritation, if not fright, from diverse historical actors. These responses demonstrate how people could express their positions on social and historical changes through the arts in ways that may not necessarily have been intelligible to themselves or socially permissible through other avenues.

The varied responses to González's aesthetic provocations on the battlefield of cultural and political realignments during the Cold War era demonstrate that her artworks challenged and aggravated many different cultural agents, including Colombian conservatives who were trying to preserve traditional patrimonial hegemony; progressive elites who enlisted culture in forging a modern nation; and European cultural agents who were competing with the United States for influence over the global South, among others. González's artistic interventions with taste engaged with institutional categories of legitimate culture that attempted to fix and stabilize social distinctions; she parodied trends in the growing international art circuits in order to resist them.

The Colombian context provides a valuable model for understanding modernism and modernity within a particular modernization process that emerged under the watchful eye of the traditional political and economic elites and in a deeply Catholic and fragmented society. Unlike many Latin American nations where liberalism had triumphed in the nineteenth century, initiating earlier processes of modernization and secularization, in Colombia the Conservative Party won the nineteenth-century civil wars and consolidated its hegemony through the Constitution of 1886, which remained firm until 1991, and its close alliance to the Vatican with the Concordat of 1887.³⁶ The role of the church in Colombian history runs deep; it has been a protagonist in the nation's modernization processes. Therefore, while the 1960s witnessed a strong push toward secularization, Catholic discourses of morality continued to play an important part in cultural debates.

Because of the *longue durée* of Conservative Party hegemony, Colombian national identity continued to be articulated primarily as Catholic and Hispanic. With limited success, intellectuals within the Liberal Republic, especially the Ministry of Education, made a concerted effort to secularize and unify Colombian identity through folklore. However, they were unable to create a cohesive narrative from the ambitious folkloric surveys of 1942.³⁷ Therefore, the Colombian case serves as a contrast to Mexico and Peru, where cultural producers drew from pre-Columbian imperial civilizations to construct a strong sense of national identity; Argentina and Brazil, where a long history of industrialization inspired a sense of full participation in a modern and universal global culture; and Venezuela, where the magic of the petro-state could create the mirage of modernity without modernization.³⁸ This inability to construct a cohesive "imagined community," as described by Benedict Anderson, in large part has been due to the absence of a strong, centralized state, a condition the National Front sought to correct.³⁹ Fur-



thermore, the difficult topography of Colombia, which is divided by the splintering of the Andes into three ranges, made for diverse regions that remained relatively isolated from one another until the beginning of air travel. Colombia is thus characterized by its biodiversity and multiculturalism, but also by its political and social fragmentation. Consequently, despite many attempts, Colombian cultural agents developed neither a strong sense of nationalism, as in Mexico, nor a sense of internationalism as a paradoxical form of nationalism, as in Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela. Instead, many artists, such as González, parodied and resisted artistic internationalism through a calculated regionalism that anticipated and influenced cultural Third Worldism and, eventually, multiculturalism.

Lo Último

Let us return to the 1978 interview in *Correo Especial* with which I opened. When González appears on camera, she is visibly more at ease than her interviewer, Gloria Valencia de Castaño, in the crowded street market. González asserts that the Pasaje Rivas is a “thermometer” that measures “the latest in artisanal crafts and decorative furniture.” The artist’s brief but revealing characterization of the informal market, so easily dismissed by Valencia in her haste to move the conversation along, was in fact carefully crafted with rich references, which I take up here as an opportunity to unpack some of the themes elaborated in this book.

In evoking the metaphor of the thermometer, González was citing Marta Traba, who had famously called the National Salon the infallible thermometer of official Colombian art.⁴⁰ We can surmise that this was no coincidence, as González cited Traba’s phrase again a decade later in the title of her essay on the salon’s history, “El termómetro infalible.”⁴¹ The relationship between González and Traba, between student and teacher and then artist and critic, was not only a close collaboration but also a key part of this era’s narrative. The Argentine-born Traba, one of the most influential art critics in Latin America, was decisive in shaping González’s career as her professor at Uniandes, curator of her exhibitions at the MAMBO, and critical defender of her work in print. González was an attentive student who learned a modernist discourse from her professor. González’s first exhibition at the MAMBO in 1964, directed by Traba herself, launched both the artist’s career and the museum’s young artists program. Throughout this study one can trace a fascinating dialogical relationship in the works of both artist and critic, each influencing the other as they shifted ideological positions from modernist autonomy toward Traba’s theory of regional resistance and González’s strategic provincialism. In her monograph *Los muebles de Beatriz González* (1977), Traba grappled with her own aesthetic and social presumptions to defend González’s furniture assemblages.⁴² Indeed, when Traba articulated a theory of resistance to cultural dependence in the 1970s, she applauded González’s *pop nacional* style

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS



as exemplary of such artistic defiance.⁴³ Ironically, Traba spent much of her critical energy in denouncing both aestheticized nationalism, which she regarded as a cancer emanating from Mexico, and U.S. cultural imperialism, which she called the “terrorism of the avant-gardes” and traced in the mimetic adoption of trends such as conceptual art, happenings, and pop art. Although Traba admired U.S. pop art, she faulted Latin American artists for adopting styles that she considered pertinent only in highly industrialized consumer societies. González’s engagement with urban popular culture and the emerging mass media in the Colombian context forced Traba to reconsider pop art’s valence in neocolonial contexts. Thus, González’s heretical turn was one of the factors that influenced Traba’s change of course. Rather than think about the González-Traba relation as an inversion of mentor-student roles, it is crucial to understand both as unfixed cultural agents who mutually informed and influenced each other.

An “infallible thermometer” seems like an odd metaphor for cultural assessment. The term presupposes a measurable outcome with a high degree of accuracy, one that involves experts that can decipher given technological data. This characterization of the National Salon seemingly contradicts Traba’s disdain for technolatriy and González’s irreverence toward official aesthetic conventions, yet it reveals the degree to which the critic and artist valued the role of experts and institutions in determining aesthetic values. Traba’s thermometer was necessarily institutional in nature and presided over by professional art critics. Nonetheless, institutions were also shifting agents, themselves embedded in a complex web of local and international power relations.

The notion of a cultural thermometer to measure *lo último* (the latest) implies not only a value judgment but also a temporal judgment — one that presupposes an evolutionary narrative of culture that depends on specialized experts who can perceive and foster this development. Paralleling Rostow’s stages of economic development, culture was presumed to be in the same need of updating as the industrial sector. Importing experts in just about any conceivable field to assess newly discovered problems in the newly conceived Third World was characteristic of the general political, economic, and cultural outlook of modernization theories.⁴⁴ Under the ideology of cultural development, art institutions invited professional experts, mostly art critics imported from the industrialized world, to judge international artistic competitions. They rewarded artists who produced works that experts deemed international and not national, global and not local, universal and not provincial, sophisticated and not *cursi* (tacky). However, institutions did not generate these expectations in a vacuum; they were responding to larger forces that directed them away from local and toward international objectives. González’s use of this metaphor, even if ironic, reveals the extent to which this discourse of advancement permeated even the ideas of those who considered themselves resistant.



Modernism in the arts became symbolic of the modernization programs of the National Front, which in large part explains why Traba secured such a prominent public role soon after she arrived in Bogotá from Europe in 1953. She introduced a rigorous modernist discourse at an opportune time to break the aesthetic impasse that dominated the National Salon debates in the two decades before her arrival. The cosmopolitan universalism of abstraction could satisfy the discursive needs of both the progressive liberals and the Catholic conservatives, putting an end to their bitter aesthetic disputes.

With the arrival of television under Rojas Pinilla in 1953, the visual arts could join other forms of cultural democratization implemented during the 1930s that sought to expand the access of culture — that is, high culture — across the country through modern technology such as radio broadcasts, educational films, village and transportable libraries, and other printed material, including reproductions of artworks.⁴⁵ Indeed, the Liberal Republic shared Walter Benjamin's enthusiasm for mechanical reproduction,⁴⁶ but rather than believing in its revolutionary potential, liberal intellectuals thought that modern media constituted a means of spiritually elevating the masses either through exposure to universal high art or the guided refinement of folklore.⁴⁷ The art critic Casimiro Eiger also had been broadcasting his art criticism over the radio since 1946.⁴⁸ With television, at least theoretically, the provinces could now visualize the artworks that were being discussed. Traba's arrival in Bogotá coincided with the first television broadcasting in the country. Alvaro Castaño Castillo immediately hired her to work alongside Eiger at the cultural radio station HJCK. Castaño Castillo was an important modernizing agent who founded the HJCK station; was one of the cofounders of Uniandes, where González studied and Traba taught; and was married to González's interviewer, Gloria Valencia. At HJCK, Traba wrote and broadcast the radio shows *Cincuenta años de progreso* (Fifty Years of Progress) and *Cómo nacen las empresas* (How Companies Are Born), both sponsored by Esso.⁴⁹ Traba would later work on a series of television shows for Radio y Televisión Interamericana (RTI). Before the 1950s were over, and at a time of limited television programming, it is remarkable that Traba broadcast several shows on art history, including *El museo imaginario* (The Imaginary Museum [c. 1955]; figure I.4), *Una visita a los museos* (A Visit to the Museums), *El ABC del arte* (The ABCs of Art), and *Curso de historia de arte* (Art History Course). The last was an extension of her lessons at the Universidad de América in Bogotá.⁵⁰ González recalled Traba opening up the conversation about art to a mass audience. "Before Marta, art critics would call each other on the phone to chat," she said. "Then she came on television for *all* Colombians to see! A priest from [the department of] Chocó would send her letters thanking her for educating through television. In these letters we find people from the provinces who could now participate in [high] culture."⁵¹ By linking new technology — radio and television — to the arts, cultural "advance-

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS



I.4 Marta Traba filming her television show *El museo imaginario* (The Imaginary Museum), c. 1955. Photograph courtesy of Nicolás Gómez Echeverri.

ment” coupled its new technical lexicon with didactic new media. González’s enthusiasm was more ideal than factual, since television remained a luxury item for many more decades.⁵²

González participated in this emerging artistic public sphere, which included the opening of several museums around Colombia — including the Museo Zea in Medellín in 1955, the Museo la Tertulia in Cali in 1956, the Colección de Arte del Banco de la República in Bogotá in 1957, the Museo de Arte Latinoamericano in Cartagena in 1959, the MAMBO in Bogotá in 1962, and the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Minuto de Dios in Bogotá in 1966 — and the establishment of several corporate sponsored art competitions, such as the Salón Intercol de Artistas Jóvenes in Bogotá in 1964, the Festival de Cultura in Cali in 1965, and the International Coltejer Biennial in Medellín in 1968.⁵³

The Salón Intercol de Artistas in Bogotá, where González exhibited *Vermeerianas* (1964), was one of the many such efforts by private industry to sponsor the arts. In fact, the role of the petroleum industry in general, and of Intercol (the International Petroleum Company, affiliated with the Rockefellers’ Esso) in particular, must be considered in analyzing how new artistic values were promoted in Colombia. In a series of articles titled “La empresa privada del petróleo y el interés público” (Petroleum’s Private Enterprise and Public Interest [1964]), published first by the magazine *Economía* and later as part of the series *Empresa Privada en Colombia* (Private Enterprise in Colombia), Intercol outlined its economic, legislative, and cultural goals.⁵⁴ Although various authors discussed separately the diverse aspects of Intercol and the petroleum industry, they all believed in global

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

capitalism as free enterprise based on open competition. They warned against the dangers of nationalizing the petroleum industry in a way that resonated with Traba's argument against the nationalist tendencies in art. Intercol translated the concept of open competition into its duty to Colombian culture.⁵⁵ Through the sponsorship of "free competition" in venues such as the Premio Nacional de la Novela Esso and the Salón Intercol de Artistas Jóvenes, the petroleum company gave itself credit for patronizing and above all exporting the best of what Colombians had to offer.⁵⁶ Following this logic, Intercol privileged the "stupendous examples" of Colombian art that "beg[a]n to appear," a reference to emergent and new rather than the traditional or to the international rather than the provincial tendencies in art that could have been considered the most efficient testimony of an advancing culture.

Intercol conceived Colombian art as playing a diplomatic role directed at North American and European audiences in the mission to attract economic investment.⁵⁷ Florencia Bazzano-Nelson demonstrates how Alberto Lleras Camargo, along with his close friend Nelson Rockefeller and Intercol, astutely conducted cultural diplomacy by sponsoring the exhibition "3,500 Years of Colombian Art" at the Lowe Art Museum operated by the University of Miami. While purportedly a comprehensive history of Colombian art, the exhibition highlighted two periods: pre-Columbian civilizations and newly emergent modern artists, selected by Traba. Both Lleras Camargo and Rockefeller understood that cultural dissemination could feasibly accomplish what politics could not — that is, to testify to the sophistication and relevance of a nation. In this way, the exhibition crafted an image of refined ancient and modern societies that would counter descriptions of a violent country, especially against Protestants, that had coursed through the *New York Times* and other prominent media sources during the previous decades. Bazzano-Nelson demonstrates the skill with which both statesmen seized the opportunity to promote their own interests — that is, to facilitate Intercol's ability to drill for oil after losing its concessions in Barrancabermeja to Ecopetrol, and for the National Front to promote its main agricultural export, coffee, after its devaluation had disastrous effects on the economy. When Lleras Camargo visited the Lowe Gallery, he was on his way back from Washington, DC, where he had discussed increased aid for Colombia's internal security with U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower. After leaving Coral Gables, the exhibition traveled to Washington, DC, curated by José Gómez Sicre, director of the PAU's Division of Visual Arts. The "3,500 Years of Colombian Art" exhibition was on view on the Washington Mall around the time U.S. officials deliberated on the fate of military aid for the National Front.⁵⁸

Intercol was an important patron of the art world that González navigated.⁵⁹ Intercol's magazine *Lámpara* published texts by critics who sympathized with abstraction, such as Casimiro Eiger and Walter Engel. In fact, Intercol's grant to the

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS



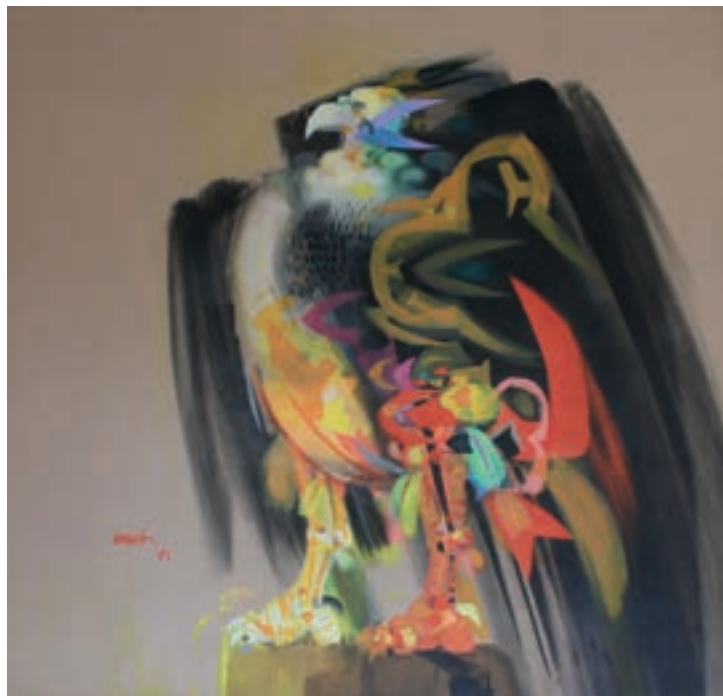
MAMBO was the decisive financial support needed to open its doors in October 1963.⁶⁰ González was present at the museum's founding in 1962 and recalls Traba rushing to liberate the patronage bonds of the MAMBO from the state, which she considered a necessary step in the emancipation of artists from the nationalist and political role they had played in earlier decades, including in the National Salon.⁶¹ Traba did not have to venture far. Her petition was met by generous and enthusiastic support from the private sector — domestic, as well as multinational, corporations.⁶² Traba also readily found corporate and multinational sponsorship for her own magazine, *Prisma*, where the Banco Cafetero advertised in its pages, “You Are in the Circuit of Progress.”⁶³

Traba invited Gómez Sicre to consult on the future MAMBO in 1961. She had worked with him earlier, in 1959, when they organized an exhibition of modern Colombian art as part of an exhibition series of new, “exportable art” from Latin America for the PAU.⁶⁴ The exhibition catalogue, *Art in Latin America Today: Colombia*, gave Traba an opportunity to define what was representative of modern Colombian art on her own terms and, hence, strengthen her version of a new canon. She concludes her essay in the catalogue by saying, “Freedom from every interest except plastic.”⁶⁵

Traba's brief in the 1950s and into the mid-1960s was for artists to be at once modern, autonomous from extra-aesthetic concerns, and highly subjective; over time, she added authentic to that list. Her champion was the Spanish émigré Alejandro Obregón, whose gestural, abstract, and expressive style she viewed as the origin for a fully realized modernism in Colombia.⁶⁶ The National Front's Presidential Collection purchased Obregón's *Cóndor* (Condor [1971]; figure I.5), a large-scale painting that hung on the walls of the Salón del Consejo de Ministros (Ministry Cabinet) in the Nariño Presidential Palace, joined later by González's painting *La Constituyente* (The Constitutional Assembly [1991]; see figure E.3). A caricature by Héctor Osuna that same year titled “The Remodeling of the Ministry Cabinet: Requirements and Specifications” (1971; figure I.6), published in the Sunday supplement of *El Espectador*, references the change of the ministry guard and parodies the government's attempts to “update” the ministry by equating its efforts with interior decoration.⁶⁷ Obregón's recently purchased *Cóndor* figures prominently at the head of the table as the pictorial equivalent to government modernization. In the caricature, one sees the Ministry Cabinet redecorated to look more like a corporate boardroom than the nineteenth-century neoclassical, Republican-style rooms typical in Colombian government buildings. Osuna weaves together allusions to modernized furnishings with the goals of the new cabinet members — for example, “The air of the ministry [is] to be appropriate and conditioned” and “The lighting should illuminate the president, but never indirectly.” The text attached to Obregón's painting reads, “Each minister should be ‘*que ni pintado*’ [as if painted] for the position.” The expression is a play on

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS



I.5 Alejandro Obregón, *Cóndor*, 1971.
Courtesy of Casa Museo Obregón.
Colección Presidencia de la República.

I.6 Héctor Osuna, "La remodelación del Consejo de Ministros: Requisitos y especificaciones," *Magazín Dominical*, *El Espectador*, June 6, 1971. Courtesy of Fidel Cano, © *El Espectador*. Image source: Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia.

DU

UNIVERSITY
PRESS





words suggesting both that the ministers should be the appropriate “fit” for their nominations and that Obregón’s *Cóndor* seems to have been painted specifically for this room and occasion. Osuna comments on the symbolic value of Obregón’s painting in representing the nation as updated and modern, yet still authentically Andean, as symbolized by the national bird. Therefore, when Obregón, arguably the most iconic exemplar of Colombian modern art, lauded González’s first solo exhibition of the *Encajeras* (Lacemakers) at the MAMBO and called her the “revelation of ’64,” he tacitly passed the baton to a new generation. His endorsement could have been the most sacrosanct at the time, even if it amounted to no more than one phrase.⁶⁸

Lo Cursi

In the *Correo Especial* interview, González called the Pasaje Rivas a thermometer of *lo último*. In doing so she was describing the flea market as the measure not of the latest artistic trends — as high culture *qua* international — but of “the latest trends in artisanal crafts and decorative furniture.” Her strategic use of *lo último* to describe lowbrow, informal commerce, crafts, and second-hand furniture at the market was both a satirical and a deliberate provocation that exposed a key theme that she explored from the beginning of her artistic career: the discursive constructs of taste and cultural legitimacy and how they function in Colombian society as forms of social exclusion and discrimination.

Twenty-seven years after that television interview, in 2005, González was again recorded at the Pasaje Rivas informal market for the art documentary series *Plástica: Arte contemporáneo en Colombia*. This time she said, “Mi trabajo es Pasaje Rivas” (My work is Pasaje Rivas [see figure 1.7]).⁶⁹ Why would González characterize her oeuvre in this way? It is clear that the cluttered, informal market had only grown in González’s esteem — or, perhaps, in its symbolic value — from *termómetro de lo último* (thermometer of the latest) to a metaphor describing her long career of accomplishments. Yet this is an unusual and provocative assertion. To begin with, only some of her works are materially resonant of this space. For instance, González painted several paintings based on popular lithographs printed by Gráficas Molinari in Cali — including the purgatorial souls (see figures 3.2 and 3.12), the mythological nymphs (see figures 3.7, 3.8, 3.13, and 3.16), and the Christ of Monserrate (see figure 5.1) — that were still being sold at the small commercial stands around the Pasaje Rivas. Other works, such as *Baby Johnson in situ*, *Cameo*, and *Exit Stage Rear* are multimedia pieces in which González attached her enamel-on-metal paintings to furniture she purchased at the Pasaje Rivas. However, the majority of her works are not so explicitly tied to this specific market, although she, along with critics, repeatedly associated her works with this space and the San Victorino shops along Tenth Street.





1.7 Pasaje Rivas, Bogotá, 2016. Image source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/yonolatengo>. CC BY 2.1.

González's description of her oeuvre as "Pasaje Rivas" from the position of a renowned artist forty years into her prolific career acts as a provocation similar to the one she put forth many decades earlier, both allying her artistic practice to cultural practices considered tasteless and even perhaps illicit — that is, *cursi*. The works studied in this book emphasize the connections between place and taste in subtle and complicated ways, conflating the world of consumerism and functional art and the critical world of high art. González drags into high-art institutions the very social terrain the market connotes. In bringing the Pasaje Rivas into the modern art museum, National Salon, and international biennials, she satirically challenged cultural modernization theory and its ideological distinctions between the global, elite, and legitimate and the provincial, illegitimate, and *cursi*, in the process puncturing this divide.

Many elite Bogotanos view the Pasaje Rivas as an excessive and unsophisticated, even a dangerous, space.⁷⁰ This disdainful attitude betrays their anxiety over the so-called invading cultures that stemmed from accelerated migration in the wake of La Violencia and the effects of industrialization, which transformed Colombia from a primarily rural society to a primarily urban society: while 70.9 percent of the population lived in rural areas in 1938, by 1973, 77.5 percent of the population lived in the cities.⁷¹ The massive migrations changed the face of cities such as Bogotá and sparked concerns about patrimonial and invading culture. As elite Bogotanos moved to the northern sectors of the city, they abandoned the historical center to the migrants and squatters. González herself migrated from



Bucaramanga to Bogotá in 1957 to study at the university, giving her a privileged perspective on these social tensions.

It is the sense of illegitimacy Pasaje Rivas possesses that makes it such an interesting referent. Like so much of the informal commerce that has emerged out of the expansive urbanization in Bogotá, especially around the old “doors to the city” in the San Victorino neighborhood, the resilient market stands as a testament to the entrepreneurial survival of urban newcomers and their creative production. The markets that developed in Pasaje Rivas and San Victorino sold the *cursilerías* that stylistically embodied Bogotá’s excessive growth. Yet the elites, nostalgic for the days that they held the city center, have mythologized these markets as places of dubious, illicit activity, in turn exposing their fear of the rural-to-urban migrants.

These tensions are rendered explicit at the Pasaje Rivas. The market is adjacent to the city’s main Plaza de Bolívar, which houses the central government, legislative, and ecclesiastical buildings of Colombia. The Pasaje Rivas is behind and metaphorically obstructed by the French-inspired architecture of City Hall (Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, figure I.8). The street vendors’ appropriation of the back alleys in the historical sector of Bogotá is an abrupt contrast to the tightly controlled official zone surrounding the government buildings (figure I.9). The seats of central power are not only visually emphasized by the vast, open square, the Plaza de Bolívar; they are also harmonized by the uniform ochre-colored limestone (known as *piedra amarilla* or *piedra bogotana*). The use of the local stone and neoclassical architectural style of the administrative buildings pay homage to the discourses of universalism and authenticity underlying national foundation. There is no doubt about the legitimacy of this space. No street vendors or solicitors are permitted in the unobstructed expanse of the central plaza. Indeed, after the Bogotazo riots of April 9, 1948, the Plaza de Bolívar was emptied of all features except the statue of Simón Bolívar to safeguard against unruly mobs. Despite warnings about petty theft in the alleys of the Pasaje Rivas, one is more likely to lose one’s camera in front of the Nariño Presidential Palace, as I discovered personally. As I was photographing the site in 2005, I was confronted by a military police officer who demanded my film and then the entire (digital) camera. It was only my academic credentials that spared my camera from becoming the property of the state; however, to keep it I had to agree to delete all images of the presidential palace. This anecdote reveals the government’s continued defensive attitude toward the public and is key to understanding the impassioned and polarized responses to González’s works during the 1960s. Members of the pueblo were conceived not as participatory agents in democratic institutions but as threats to the established order.

I locate González’s work precisely at the interstitial space between official and informal spaces that come into productive friction at the intersection between





1.8 Plaza de Bolívar: City Hall Bogotá, Ministries of Interior and Justice and the National Cathedral, Bogotá. Photograph: Ernesto Monsalve, 2017.

1.9 Plaza de Bolívar: National Capitol, City Hall Bogotá and Ministries of Interior and Justice, Bogotá. Photograph: Ernesto Monsalve, 2017.

the Pasaje Rivas and the Plaza de Bolívar, pressing up against each other on the back walls of Bogotá's City Hall. The physical proximity of these structures notwithstanding, the cultural gap is immense and provides metaphorical parameters for what the scholar Ángel Rama called the "lettered city." Rama's lettered city reveals a resilient legacy of colonialism in which the "New World's" physical and social landscapes were reconfigured to accommodate European ideals of hierarchical order while disregarding the actual topographies onto which they were mapped, omitting the violent confrontations engendered by their conquest.⁷² As a consequence, a deep breach exists between the ideal, as articulated in the delineation of the civic grid and the formality of laws, and the social realities that have served as a site for ideological battles between governing elites, who Rama calls *letrados* (erudites), and the governed pueblo.

Rama convincingly demonstrates the close relationship between the state, both colonial and republican, and the imagined ideals of social, political, and



22 INTRODUCTION

civic structure conceived by the letrados throughout Latin America. Proper spoken and written language became a marker of a letrado's proximity to central power. After independence, linguistic forms were repurposed to reposition creole letrados at the apex of society, filling the vacuum left behind after the removal of the colonial enterprise and the figure of the monarch. The urban landscape, legal code, linguistic form, and social structure accommodated not a regional reality but a utopian world constituted through cosmopolitan ideals conceived on another continent. In Colombia in the 1930s, the liberal caudillo Jorge Eliécer Gaitán called this distinction the governing *país político* (the political country) and governed *país nacional* (the national country).

Just as formal language and law served to uphold social distinctions throughout Latin America, the letrados further buttressed their importance by advancing notions of *buen gusto* (good taste). Directly tied to the foundation of art academies as a way to elevate good taste in colonial societies such as Mexico, Brazil, and Cuba, and later in the young republics, the visual arts were charged with the task of aesthetic, as well as spiritual and moral, enhancement.⁷³ This academic inculcation of a tasteful discernment echoed the civilizing missions that had justified colonial and then elite governance. The rhetoric of good taste was predicated on a presumed universality and atemporality, thus serving as a powerful and euphemistic device for social exclusion.

When the Liberal Republic sought to rival the Catholic Church's hegemony over spiritual guidance, it turned to the Ministry of Education and Division of Cultural Extension to fulfill the state's obligation of uplifting the pueblo. When officials gave assurances that their cultural policies directed at democratizing culture would go beyond educating the masses in elite culture, they envisioned the role of intellectuals in terms of refining popular culture. They clarified that their cultural policies were intent on building a "spiritual climate" that could guide popular sensibility and "ingrain in the collective soul a permanent impulse toward progress and perfectionism . . . to allow that collective soul, that lost identity, to be expressed in clear and precise form, finding within intellectual culture the proper grammar and orthography to assure its correct public manifestation."⁷⁴ Put differently, rural folk would provide raw materials that intellectuals could polish into a unifying national culture.⁷⁵

Indeed, the National Salon in Colombia was founded in 1940 under President Eduardo Santos of the Liberal Party and the Education Minister Jorge Eliécer Gaitán to further the state's cultural mandates. In fostering artistic and aesthetic elevation, the National Salon would also cultivate public spirituality and morality. Until the 1960s, debates about national artistic production centered on which aesthetic would be the most appropriate to elevate the masses: conservative, Catholic-inspired neoclassicism; Americanist indigenism; or modernist autonomy? Proponents of all three models continued to believe that the fine arts

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS



could serve as instruments for spiritual elevation, guarantors of public morality, and catalysts for national unity through cultural harmony.⁷⁶

During the postwar era, significant parallels emerged between the discourses of uplifting and updating. Modernizing agents sought to enlist the cultural sphere in the battle against the so-called backwardness of postcolonial societies, now on economic, scientific, and technical terms. Shifting away from an emphasis during the 1930s and 1940s on folklore being the “national soul,” Latin America the 1950s and 1960s would revive the age-old tension between what was considered cosmopolitan good taste and what was considered provincial bad taste. Through a system of awarding prizes and providing other forms of institutional validation, abstraction came to signify elegance and sophistication, alongside technical advancement. Furthermore, geometric and constructivist forms connoted the masculine, rational, and universal character of the lettered city, one that refuted U.S. and European stereotypes of Latin American culture as feminized, irrational, and “primitive.”⁷⁷

Despite this rapidly transforming cultural environment, “good taste” still held currency in the 1960s when González exhibited her works. As I discuss in the chapters that follow, reviewers in the salons in which González participated still considered beauty and good taste markers of artistic success and continued to remind audiences that she had demonstrated elevated discernment with her *Lace-makers* exhibition in 1964. That way, González’s incursions into lowbrow culture could be considered intellectual engagements with the cursi and not just cursi themselves. This distinction allowed critics to characterize González’s reference to the tabloid press in *Los suicidas del Sisga* (The Sisga Suicides [1965]; see figure 2.1), for example, as a heretical turn for both the artist and the National Salon. Even Gloria Valencia de Castaño affirmed in their interview that González began her career as “una niña que pintaba muy formalmente con todas las de la ley” (a girl who painted very formally with full authority).⁷⁸ Valencia emphasized that González had conquered a sanctioned cultural space before her works took an unexpected provincial and lowbrow turn. González would later reflect on her dislike at being called “refined” and her preference for being known as a provocateur. When I asked her why she stopped working with furniture, she responded, “Because people started to like it.”⁷⁹ González measured the success of her works in terms of the aggravation they provoked, not in terms of their validation of elite standards of taste. Once her furniture assemblages began to be viewed as tasteful, she moved on to another type of provocation. It was precisely because González belonged to the lettered city that her explorations beyond its borders could have a critical effect.

Robert Karl describes a third social division in the mid-twentieth century, which he terms the *país letrado*—that is, the social scientists and intellectuals who mediated between the *país político* and the *país nacional*. González inhab-



ited this país letrado, whose members did not belong to the subaltern peasants, workers, and precariat but who did level sharp critiques at the país político. Other members of the país letrado included many intellectuals, most famously National University sociologists such as the Camilo Torres (the acclaimed guerrilla priest) and Orlando Fals Borda, whose frustration led them toward radicalization.⁸⁰

Nevertheless, González's appropriations of urban popular culture revealed the class condescension of the local elites, even of progressive intellectuals, and help us understand the limitations of their challenge. When González exhibited *The Sisga Suicides* at the National Salon in 1965, it was the first time that critics, including Traba, identified the cursi as an artistic strategy. From 1967 on, González's referents to popular culture extended beyond subject matter and style to her choice of media. She began to work with industrial enamel paint on tin plates and, in 1970, to assemble these paintings onto objects purchased at popular Bogotá markets such as the Pasaje Rivas and San Victorino. Her choice of commercial materials accompanied her unequivocally urban popular, local, and even devotional subjects, including those with specifically national connotations, such as a double portrait of the Colombian founding fathers Simón Bolívar and Francisco de Paula Santander (1967; see figures 4.1 and 4.2) and the bed assemblage depicting Bogotá's most venerated icon, *Our Fallen Lord of Monserrate* (1970; see figure 5.1). This strategically local turn that played with a so-called underdeveloped sensibility elicited responses in the critical press that reveal the persistent equation of the cosmopolitan with good taste and the provincial with bad taste. That is, the cursi served as counterculture aggression against elite and internationalist aesthetic conventions and the will to modernize the arts. As this book demonstrates, the país letrado celebrated high art that referenced the cursilería of urban popular culture as resistance to cultural neocolonialism while never fully owning up to its own prejudicial coloniality.⁸¹

Cursi, like taste, is an unstable category. Despite González's reputation as a painter of the cursi, she did not embrace the term initially. Rather, she characterized her work as *desmedido* (unbridled) — capturing the temperature of Colombian culture. “Cursi” is a disdainful word used to designate certain types of behavior. If a person desired a bed made from amaranth wood, with ivory inlay — a marker of social status and thus good taste — but instead purchased a faux-wood metal radio bed (like the one González used in her assemblage *Naturaleza casi muerta* (Almost Still Life; see figure 5.1), she or he would be considered “cursi,” with the term unequivocally signifying bad aesthetic taste.

While there are certainly overlaps between the intellectual uses of the terms “kitsch,” “camp,” and “cursi,” there are also subtle yet crucial differences worth mentioning. The term “kitsch” inherits the Marxist theoretical framework associated especially with intellectuals of the Frankfurt School, who distrusted mass culture as alienated and dominated. Theodor Adorno and Clement Green-



berg, among other influential thinkers who wrestled with the popular rise of European fascism in the 1930s, lost faith in the masses as agents of progressive change and considered popular culture vulnerable to manipulation by nefarious forces intent on swaying their emotions.⁸² Traba adopted the term “kitsch” in *Los muebles de Beatriz González* (1977) to defend González’s furniture pieces as high art and as opposed to dominant popular culture. Following Adorno and Greenberg, as well as Herbert Marcuse and Henri Lefebvre, Traba was concerned with top-down cultural coercion in popular culture by a techno-dictatorship of highly industrialized consumer societies.⁸³ Even though Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht were translated and widely read during this era, Traba never found any constructive potential in mass or popular culture; nor did she ever consider alliances between intellectual elites and the popular classes. Traba paradoxically claimed that González was “Brechtian without intending it.”⁸⁴ In doing so, she unwittingly contradicted her own reading of González’s assemblages by equating them to Brecht’s engagement with the working classes, a relation that was antithetical to Traba’s own. Instead, Traba focused on the país letrado. While she was initially enthusiastic about corporate sponsorship of the arts, she later advocated for patronage by the professional middle classes as a way to liberate cultural production from the state and the dangers of populism. Nonetheless, Traba never questioned the ways in which her own definitions of taste perpetuated social hierarchies. She first used “kitsch” many years after she described González’s references to popular culture as strategizing “the cursi” in art. Thus, the term “cursi” certainly operated differently for Traba in 1965 from how she employed “kitsch” in 1977. When Traba describes *The Sisga Suicides* as introducing the theme of the cursi, she is referring to this strategy as one of biting humor. The fact that an amorous couple that committed suicide (or a homicide and suicide) could be considered comic and not tragic betrays the kind of class condescension central to understanding how González’s works functioned in the imaginary of Colombian spectators in the 1960s.

“Camp,” following Susan Sontag, has come to denote one of the many counterculture movements that emerged in New York City during the 1960s. Sontag defended camp sensibility as the emergence of an Oscar Wildean dandyism, associated with urban homosexual communities and related to the psychic and social liberation advocated by Marcuse. She wrote about popular culture from an erudite position and differentiated these sophisticated *nouveau-flâneurs* from the consuming masses as savvy discerners of camp who choose certain elements of consumer culture, perhaps even as a form of release from the rigors of intellectual life, the iconophobia of Judaism, or the Puritanism of Anglo-Protestant culture.⁸⁵ Undoubtedly, there are intersections between the lowbrow culture that Sontag considers camp and lo cursi. However, while Sontag celebrates the camp sensibility, the use of the term “cursi” in reviews of González’s work betrays a

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS



ridiculing attitude toward those who lack the proper form and good taste to appreciate and participate in high art and the lettered city.

Furthermore, “cursi” is a term that connotes both sentimentality and excess and is used disparagingly to characterize women and the lower classes as volatile and dangerous. Therefore, notions of proper and improper behavior overlap in the language of both class and gender social discrimination. “Cursi” is central to this study not only because it captures the class and gender biases that González’s works elicited in reviewers, but also because it has a connotation of material, psychological, and behavioral excess that relates to the elites’ disdainful perceptions of the masses as irrational, unruly, and threatening mobs. Dis-cursis, or the politics of taste, was one of the many weapons enlisted during the Cold War.

In the context of the Cold War, the modernizing agents conceived of themselves as masculine, rational, and measured leaders combating irrational communists.⁸⁶ *Life* magazine described Ché Guevara as an uncouth, irrational communist who helped validate U.S. Treasury Secretary C. Douglas Dillon’s speech at Punta del Este, Uruguay, when the beret-wearing Cuban “tried to stalk out. But he chose the wrong door and led his entire retinue of pistol-packing ‘secretaries’ into the ladies’ room.”⁸⁷ The term “cursi” also insinuates the gendered tone employed to ridicule Ché’s emotional outburst. In a similarly dismissing and patronizing manner, the mainstream press repeatedly attacked Jorge Eliécer Gaitán during the 1940s for his lack of decorum and penchant for whipping audiences into a frenzy during his political speeches. “Cursi,” therefore, is a word saturated not only with class condescension but also with anxiety about a threat emanating from the popular classes, revolutionary fervor, and social changes engendered by modernity.

The characterization of popular culture as “cursi” evokes the sociopolitical divide between the Pasaje Rivas and Bogotá’s City Hall. I locate González’s oeuvre, with all of its productive tensions and contradictions, at this interstitial space.⁸⁸ The perceived threat of informal commerce and “invading” newcomers implicit in the unease around the Pasaje Rivas is crucial to understanding how her works functioned in the Colombian context. The excessive character of the market — its chaotic, perhaps uncontrollable — structure, denies any type of cultural cohesion or top-down metanarrative. It metaphorically highlights the distinction between official models of culture and the diverse, hybrid, and contradictory elements that those models exclude. For an artist to characterize her entire oeuvre as “Pasaje Rivas” suggests an implicit understanding with her audience about classifications of social hierarchies and their relation to form and taste.

González’s biography provides us with valuable insights into the process of habitus inculcation. Through the concept of the habitus, or a system of enduring and transferable dispositions that a person acquires through a long process of family and institutional education, the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu describes



how human behavior contributes to reproducing social structures at conscious and unconscious levels.⁸⁹ González's upbringing in a privileged family from a provincial town in the midst of becoming a city gave her a particular vantage point on issues of class and taste. Yet her experience as a newcomer in Bogotá at a time of great concern about migration gave her exposure to the processes by which Bogotanos set out to distinguish themselves from invaders, which in turn reveals a crisis of confidence in civic categories themselves. González speaks with great self-consciousness about the aesthetic dispositions that were inculcated with rigor by her family and her education. She credits her mother's lessons on taste as having given her the capacity for critical thinking that she would maintain throughout her life, even as she later destabilized notions of good and bad taste. In doing so, she rationally uncovers what Bourdieu termed the "ideology of charisma," in which taste is viewed as a natural talent. In other words, González turns her own cultural competence on itself in a sharp exploration of the function of taste: to "the area par excellence of the denial of the social," as Bourdieu wrote — and, I add, to the political.⁹⁰

Chapter Descriptions

The genesis of González's now iconic practices, in the first six years of her long career, divulge the contested terrain over cultural distinctions that were being forged through institutions during a period of limited democracy, intense modernization programs, and Cold War tensions. Each of the exhibitions I study here explores a different dimension of these tensions. Each chapter connects González's artworks, Marta Traba's critical support, and responses by the press with the underlying anxiety about the social changes engendered by modernization programs of industrialization, urbanization, anticommunism, education reform, and population control. I trace González's exhibitions from her consecration in the Bogotá art world in 1964 through her debut in the international biennial circuit in 1970. Centering each chapter on a single exhibition of her works — at the MAMBO, the National Salon, or international biennial — helps us approximate the ways in which works of art engage in dialogue with institutional objectives.⁹¹ By examining these exhibitions, I evaluate how the artist's aesthetic choices, institutional frameworks, and spectators' responses — traceable through the critical press — together constitute a battleground for cultural signification. Through responses to González's multivalent artworks, I show how these key institutions were implicated in shaping cultural expectations and judgments, often mediating a public sphere that was struggling to establish itself internationally in an increasingly globalized art market while also contending with the threat of revolutionary fervor within a deeply Catholic and stratified society. Through González's exhibitions and Traba's writings we can approximate how



those expectations and judgments were constituted, challenged, and, in some cases, subverted.

In 1964, the recently inaugurated MAMBO hosted a solo show of González's *Lacemaker* series based on Vermeer's *The Lacemaker* (ca. 1669). The show consecrated the young González as a force to be reckoned with. As noted earlier, the painter Alejandro Obregón referred to her as the "Revelation of '64!" Chapter 1, "Vermeer in Bucaramanga, Beatriz in Bogotá," contextualizes González's success within the broader aims of the museum and its corporate sponsors. While the reviews of the exhibition focused exclusively on the *Lacemaker* series's fulfillment of the cultural expectations González learned from her professors at Uniandes, a closer look at the development of the series shows that González was already calculating ways to subvert those demands. Critics lauded the *Lacemaker* series for its erudition, sophistication, and modernity. It headed the charge for "exportable" art that would place Colombia competitively in the international cultural arena. This legitimized position gave González a privileged platform from which to launch her subsequent critique. Her later cultural critiques were possible precisely because she was already sanctioned on the terms of the art establishment. The fact that González's satirical critique in the *Lacemaker* series went unmentioned by the contemporary critical press betrays the degree to which modernization ideology served as the lens through which aesthetic judgments were made. The chapter contextualizes the *Lacemaker* series within the dominant artistic discourse in Bogotá of the late 1950s and early 1960s and illustrates why the internationalist push, within Cold War realignments of power, satisfied so many divergent agendas. As we shall see, none of those agendas could fully contain González.

Chapter 2, "A Leap from the Domestic Sphere into El Sisga Reservoir," examines González's *The Sisga Suicides*, submitted to the Seventeenth National Salon of Colombian Artists in 1965 — a watershed moment in the artist's career and in the history of Colombian art. The painting represents a press photo of a couple who purportedly committed suicide to "liberate [the woman] from sin." The motives for the suicide reveal much about the accelerating industrialization and urbanization of Colombia and how those forces conflicted with traditional notions of feminine virtue in a nation that prided itself as being the most Catholic in the Western Hemisphere.

Two weeks before the 1965 National Salon opened, former President Alberto Lleras Camargo hosted the first Pan-American Assembly on Population. In his keynote address he declared birth control as the only viable solution to Latin America's demographic explosion and, therefore, to averting a Cuban-inspired revolution. The subsequent media frenzy influenced how spectators at the National Salon saw González's painting, which sparked anxious phrases such as

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS



“crisis in the salon” and “spectacle of fraud.” The chapter analyzes how the polarized responses to *The Sisga Suicides* reveal entangled discourses of class conflict and reproductive rights. Marta Traba, by contrast, applauded González for introducing the cursi as subject matter in Colombian art. That critics were discussing a painting about a suicide pact in terms of the black humor it employed reveals the limits of decontextualizing formalist critique. Nevertheless, the painting’s subject matter, and its debased figurative style, marked a shift in direction for the National Salon, an institution that had articulated “legitimate” culture in Colombia since its inception.

González’s second exhibition of painted faux collages at the MAMBO in May–June 1967 — the subject of chapter 3, “‘Cut It Out’ Impropriety at the MAMBO” — was seen by few at the time and has been largely neglected in the literature on González since then. The museum had relocated to the campus of the National University, where radicalized activities fanned revolutionary sparks. Less than two weeks after the exhibition opened, the military invaded the “inviolable” terrain of the university.

Reviews of the exhibition consolidated González’s reputation as a painter of the cursi (tacky), the popular, and what is “ours.” Somewhere in the relationship among these concepts is embedded an understanding of a postmodernist critical discourse that was emerging alongside the student culture-turned-guerrilla insurgency of the time. Because of the location of the exhibition, attendance was low, and the critics who braved the violent confrontations between students and police tended to be those who shared the demonstrators’ politics. In fact, the language used by reviewers to describe González’s exhibition mirrored the grievances expressed by the protestors. The chapter studies how González’s works inspired by private and popular visual culture crossed wires with the political climate of the National University and positioned her amid class, gender, and generational clashes that were dramatically unfolding in 1967.

“Plagiarism!” was the charge against González splashed across the pages of the newspaper *El Siglo* in November 1967. It was an indignant response by the famed conservative journalist Arturo Abella to the prize González won at the Nineteenth National Salon of Colombian Artists for her work *Apuntes para la historia extensa I* (Notes for the Extensive History I; see figure 4.1). The image under fire consisted of an enamel-on-tin medallion of Simón Bolívar, part of a diptych that included another founding father of the nation and Bolívar’s political rival, Francisco de Paula Santander. Not only was González accused of plagiarism, but the stylistic and material depiction of these patriotic emblems also prompted newspapers to publish irate letters by anonymous writers.

Chapter 4, “Notes for an Exclusive History of Colombia,” reads between the lines of these strong reactions and relates them to broader anxieties about the

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS



changing face of the capital city after the Bogotazo riots of 1948 and the political discourses of the left. Simón Bolívar was no longer the fixed symbol of the Conservative Party of traditional Colombian historiography but a destabilized signifier. In fact, several years after the scandal over González's salon entry, the guerrilla group M-19 stormed the Quinta de Bolívar museum in Bogotá and kidnapped Bolívar's sword while claiming they were resuming the Liberator's interrupted emancipatory project. What was at stake, then, was the authenticity not of the painting but of patrimonial culture and the social hierarchies this traditional understanding of history buttressed. The chapter shows how González's *Notes for the Extensive History* struck a nervous chord with citizens who felt their status and patrimonial culture were being threatened by both rapidly changing social categories and Cold War revolutionary ideas.

In 1970, González painted *Almost Still Life*, her version of the most venerated and miraculous sculpture in Bogotá, *Our Fallen Lord of Monserrate*, and assembled it onto a bed purchased at a popular market. Chapter 5, "Modernism Obstructed at the Second Medellín Biennial," looks at her strategic provincialism in exhibiting this decisively local work, saturated with popular and devotional references, at an international competition. By inserting her paintings into elaborate furniture frames, González called into question the discursive frameworks through which art and culture were interpreted and presented. Embedded in her complex and hilarious assemblages is an interrogation of sight — proper versus improper forms of viewing — that are deeply related to both institutions of cultural circulation and Catholic modes of understanding the world.

European jurors exposed their own geopolitical biases when they dismissed González's *Almost Still Life* as a derivative and belated example of U.S. pop art while commending Latin American geometric abstraction as an organic continuation of European constructivism. Paralleling the development discourse in the economic sphere, the international biennial circuit tried to fit Colombia and Latin America into a larger global arena, with its accompanying evolutionary narrative. González confronted these hegemonic discourses with a bed saturated with local iconography that challenged the newness and radicality of new media expected from participants in the international biennials and instead parodied art trends and the jurors, who, like the clergy, tried to guide viewers in the "proper" direction.

The book concludes with an epilogue, "Underdeveloped Art for Underdeveloped People." It relates González's *cursilerías* to the articulation of Latin American cultural regionalism, theories of marginality in avant-garde practices, and dematerialized art during the Cold War. It then traces González's turn from parody to tragedy in response to Colombia's escalating violence since the mid-1980s, when narcoterrorism and paramilitarism aggravated the armed conflict. Her

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

works have become lamentations over Colombia's staggering losses and incalculable suffering. González briefly interrupted her pictorial dirges to paint the Constitutional Assembly of 1991, employing her famous vibrant colors to mark the symbolic entry of the pueblo into the lettered city and multiculturalism into the Presidential Palace. Yet the popular rejection of the peace agreement plebiscite of 2016 demonstrates that González's pictorial critique of coloniality remains relevant and urgent today.

DUKE**UNIVERSITY
PRESS**



notes

Introduction

- 1 The show was directed by Rodrigo Castaño Valencia, whose parents, Gloria Valencia and Alvaro Castaño Castillo, were key figures in the development of cultural programming in both radio (HJCK) and television (since its earliest broadcasting in Colombia): Gloria Valencia de Castaño, interview with Beatriz González Aranda, *Correo Especial*, dir. Rodrigo Castaño Valencia, June 7, 1978, accessed June 14, 2010, <http://produccionesrodaryrodar.com/products/75>.
- 2 Walt Whitman Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*, 3d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1960] 1990).
- 3 For a discussion of González's art "in situ," the furniture pieces, and the irony of placement, see Carolina Ponce de León, "Beatriz González in situ," in *Beatriz González: Una pintora de provincia*, ed. Marta Calderón (Bogotá: Carlos Valencia, 1988), 12–29.
- 4 Marta Traba, "Beatriz González: La cursilería como arte," in *São Paulo Bienal*, exhibition catalogue (Bogotá: Colcultura, 1971), n.p.
- 5 Interview with Germán Rubiano Caballero on the occasion of the Bogotá Museum of Modern Art's exhibition "Luis Caballero — Beatriz González" in February 1973, reprinted in Jaime Ardila, *Beatriz González: Apuntes para la historia extensa* (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo, 1974), 17–20. For a discussion of *Exit Stage Rear*, see Ana María Reyes, "In Bed with Dead Bolívar: Beatriz González's Case for Critical History Painting," in *Simón Bolívar: Travels and Transformations of a Cultural Icon*, ed. Ana María Reyes and Maureen G. Shanahan (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2016), 148–68.
- 6 Marta Traba, *Los muebles de Beatriz González* (Bogotá: Museo de Arte Moderno, 1977), 65.
- 7 Other important publications, including exhibition catalogues, on Beatriz González's works include: Beatriz González Aranda and Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, *Beatriz González: Colombia 1971 Bienal de São Paulo* (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1971); Museo de Arte Moderno, *Luis Caballero, Beatriz González*, exhibition catalogue (Bogotá: Museo de Arte Moderno, 1973); Museo de Arte Moderno La Tertulia, *Beatriz González*, exhibition catalogue (Cali: Museo de Arte Moderno La Tertulia, 1976); Beatriz González Aranda, Eduardo Serrano, and Museo de Arte Moderno, *Beatriz González: Colombia 1978, Biennale di Venezia* (Bogotá: Museum of Modern Art of Bogotá, 1978); Beatriz González Aranda, Eduardo Serrano, and Museo de Arte Moderno, *Beatriz González: Exposición retrospectiva, 1962–1984* (Bogotá: Museo de Arte Moderno, 1984); Marta Calderón, ed., *Beatriz González: Una pintora de provincia* (Bogotá: Carlos Valencia, 1988); Museo de Bellas Artes, Venezuela, *Beatriz González, retrospectiva*, Museo de Bellas Artes, Caracas,

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS



June 12–August 21, 1994 (Caracas: El Museo, 1994); Beatriz González Aranda, Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, and Banco de la República, *Treinta años en la obra gráfica de Beatriz González* (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1996); Carolina Ponce de León, *Beatriz González: What an Honor to Be with You at This Historic Moment — Works 1965–1997* (New York City: El Museo del Barrio, 1998); Carmen María Jaramillo, *Beatriz González: Verónica* (Bogotá: Alonso Garcés Galería, 2003); Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, República de Colombia, *Otras miradas: Débora Arango, Beatriz González, Patricia Bravo* (Bogotá: Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, República de Colombia, 2005); Benjamín Villegas Jiménez, Holland Cotter, Carmen María Jaramillo, María Margarita Malagón, and Oscar Monsalve, *Beatriz González* (Bogotá: Villegas, 2005); Mari Carmen Ramírez, Héctor Olea, and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, *Heterotopías: Medio siglo sin-lugar, 1918–1968: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 12/XII/00–27/II/01* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2000); Mari Carmen Ramírez, Héctor Olea, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde Art in Latin America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004); Malagón-Kurka, María Margarita, *Arte como presencia indécica: La obra de tres artistas colombianos en tiempos de violencia: Beatriz González, Oscar Muñoz y Doris Salcedo en la década de los noventa* (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2010); Alberto Sierra Maya, Julián Posada C., Hans Ulrich Obrist, and Beatriz González et al., *Beatriz González: La comedia y la tragedia, 1948–2010*, exhibition catalogue (Medellín: Museo de Arte Moderno de Medellín, 2011); Beatriz González, María Inés Rodríguez, *Beatriz González 1965–2017*, exhibition catalogue (Bordeaux: CAPC, 2017).

- 8 Because La Violencia was an undeclared civil war, scholars debate over its dates. The consensus marks 1946 as the beginning, with the return of Conservative Party hegemony and repression against liberals. However, neither the coup d'état by General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla nor the National Front fully contained partisan violence, which after 1964 took on a more international Cold War character. The year 1966 is the most widely accepted as the end date among scholars. For discussion of La Violencia, see Charles W. Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez G., *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective* (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1992); Mary Roldán, *Blood and Fire: La Violencia in Antioquia, Colombia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).
- 9 Robert Karl, *Forgotten Peace: Reform, Violence, and the Making of Contemporary Colombia* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017).
- 10 Ana María Ochoa Gautier, *Entre los deseos y los derechos: Un ensayo crítico sobre políticas culturales* (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia, 2003); Jorge Eliécer Ruiz and Valentina Marulanda, *Cultural Policy in Colombia* (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 1977); and Renán Silva, *República liberal, intelectuales y cultura popular* (Medellín: La Carreta, 2012).
- 11 For a discussion of urban popular culture and the Tropicália movement in Brazil, see Carlos Bassualdo, ed., *Tropicália: A Revolution in Brazilian Culture, 1967–1972* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify 2005); Christopher Dunn, *Brutality Garden: Tropicália and the Emergence of a Brazilian Counterculture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

- 12 Herbert Braun, *Our Guerrillas, Our Sidewalks: A Journey into the Violence of Colombia* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1994).
- 13 Carlos Caballero Argáez, Mónica Pachón Buitriago, Eduardo Posada Carbó, eds., *Cincuenta años de regreso a la democracia: Nuevas miradas a la relevancia histórica del Frente Nacional* (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2012).
- 14 Karl, *Forgotten Peace*.
- 15 Mary Roldán, "Popular Cultural Activism, Catholic Transnationalism, and Development in Colombia before Vatican II," in *Local Church, Global Church: Catholic Activism in Latin America from Rerum Novarum to Vatican II*, ed. Stephen Andes and Julia Young (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 245–74.
- 16 Roldán "Popular Cultural Activism, Catholic Transnationalism, and Development in Colombia before Vatican II."
- 17 An important factor in the constitution of FARC was the failure to deliver on the promises of land and loans because the conservative elites in Bogotá accused the government of favoring liberal peasants: Karl, *Forgotten Peace*.
- 18 See Bradley Lynn Coleman, "The Partnership Transformed, 1958–1960," in *Colombia and the United States: The Making of an Inter-American Alliance, 1939–1960*, New Studies in U.S. Foreign Relations (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2008), 171–98; Leopoldo Villar Borda, *Alberto Lleras: El último republicano* (Bogotá: Planeta, 1997).
- 19 Coleman, *Colombia and the United States*, 171–98; Dana Adams Schmidt, "Colombia Urges Rise in Latin Aid," *New York Times*, April 7, 1960.
- 20 Florencia Bazzano-Nelson, "Cold War Pan-American Operations: Oil, Coffee, and '3,500 Years of Colombian Art,'" *Hispanic Research Journal* 12, no. 5 (October 2011): 438–66; Claire Fox, *Making Art Panamerican: Cultural Policy and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Carlos Caballero Argáez, Patricia Pinzón de Lewin, Eduardo Escallón Largacha, and Maria Natalia Marian Suárez, *Alberto Lleras Camargo y John F. Kennedy: Amistad y política internacional: Recuento de episodios de la Guerra Fria, la Alianza para el Progreso y el problema de Cuba* (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2013).
- 21 Carlos Caballero Argáez, "La relación personal entre John F. Kennedy y Alberto Lleras Camargo," in Argáez et al., *Alberto Lleras Camargo y John F. Kennedy*, 7–18; David Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 225; Alberto Lleras Camargo, "The Alliance for Progress: Aims, Distortions, Obstacles," *Foreign Affairs* 42, no. 1 (October 1963): 25–37.
- 22 Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, [2003] 2007).
- 23 Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Raúl Prebisch, J. Samuel Valenzuela, and Arturo Valenzuela, "Modernization and Dependency: Alternative Perspectives in the Study of Latin American Underdevelopment," *Comparative Politics* 10, no. 4 (July 1978): 535–57; Daniel Immerwahr, *Thinking Small: The United*

DU

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

- States and the Lure of Community Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).
- 24 Mary Roldán, "Acción Cultural Popular, Responsible Procreation, and the Roots of Social Activism in Rural Colombia," *Latin American Research Review* 49 (2014): 27–44; Roldán, "Popular Cultural Activism, Catholic Transnationalism, and Development in Colombia before Vatican II"; Immerwahr, *Thinking Small*.
 - 25 According to Karl, the definition of "communism" implemented by Manuel Marulanda and other guerrillas who became the leaders of FARC had more to do with an understanding of communal land tenure and farming than any allegiance to the Communist International: Karl, *Forgotten Peace*.
 - 26 Álvaro Medina, *Procesos del arte en Colombia* (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1978); Carmen María Jaramillo, *Arte política y crítica: Una aproximación a la consolidación del arte moderno en Colombia* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2005); Cristina Lleras, *Arte, política y crítica: Politización de la mirada estética Colombia, 1940–1952* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia), 2005.
 - 27 For a discussion of this trend throughout Latin America, see Patrick Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).
 - 28 The tradition of characterizing Latin American spiritual superiority (as Ariel) over United States materialism (as Caliban) is broadly known as *Arielismo*, following José Enrique Rodó's interpretation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*; see José Enrique Rodó and Belén Castro, *Ariel* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2000).
 - 29 See Beverly E. Adams, "Locating the International: Art of Brazil and Argentina in the 1950s and 1960s" (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, Austin, 2000); Eva Cockcroft, "Abstract Expressionism: A Weapon of the Cold War," *Art Forum*, no. 12 (June 1974): 39–42; Andrea Giunta, *Avant-Garde, Internationalism, and Politics: Argentine Art in the Sixties* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Shifra Goldman, *Contemporary Mexican Painting in a Time of Change* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995); Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Max Kozloff, "Abstract Expressionism and the Cold War," in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, ed. Francis Francina (London: Routledge, 2000), 107–23; Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom*; Nadia Moreno Moya, *Arte y Juventud, El Salón Esso de Artistas Jóvenes en Colombia* (Bogotá: Instituto Distrital de las Artes and La Silueta, 2013); Maria Eugenia Mudrovic, *Mundo nuevo, cultura y guerra fría en la década del 60* (Rosario, Argentina: B. Viterbo, 1997); Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 2000).
 - 30 It is noteworthy that all of these institutions were related in some way to Alberto Lleras Camargo's friend Nelson Rockefeller and his family interests: see Cockcroft "Abstract Expressionism"; Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*; Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom*; Bazzano-Nelson, "Cold War Pan-American Operations"; Fox, *Making Art Panamerican*. The name "Esso" is a phonetic rendering of the letters "S" and "O," which stand for Standard Oil of New Jersey, the company founded by John D. Rockefeller in 1870.

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

- 31 Charles Murphy, "The Church and Culture since Vatican II: On the Analogy of Faith and Art," *Theological Studies* 48, no. 2 (1987): 317–31; Laura Barragán, Sergio Méndez, Nicolás Velásquez, and Ricardo Arias, *Iglesia Católica, arte y secularización en Colombia en las décadas 1960 y 1970* (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2004).
- 32 See Gina McDaniel Tarver, *The New Iconoclasts: From Art of a New Reality to Conceptual Art in Colombia, 1961–1975* (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2016). In this ambitious study, McDaniel Tarver shows how Colombian artists addressed both local issues and artistic demands, arguing that Colombian avant-gardes were resistant to internationalizing impulses. For the close relation between Colombia and the United States, see Stephen J. Randall, *Colombia and the United States: Hegemony and Interdependence* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992).
- 33 For a discussion on Traba's shift from aesthetic autonomy to cultural resistance, see Florencia Bazzano-Nelson, "Cambios de margen: Las teorías estéticas de Marta Traba," in Marta Traba, *Dos décadas vulnerables de las artes plásticas latinoamericanas, 1950–1970* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno, 2005), 9–32; Florencia Bazzano-Nelson, "Marta Traba: Internationalism or Regional Resistance?" *Art Journal* 64, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 87–89. For an analysis of the broader intellectual turn in Latin America, see Jean Franco, "From Modernization to Resistance: Latin American Literature, 1959–1976," *Latin American Perspectives* 5, no. 1 (Winter 1978): 77–97.
- 34 Traba, *Los muebles de Beatriz González*, 40.
- 35 For a thorough discussion of the intellectual construction of popular culture during the Liberal Republic as a means to unify a fragmented society whose collective identity primarily rested on its Hispanic language and Catholic religion, see Silva, *República liberal, intelectuales y cultura popular*.
- 36 Barragán et al., *Iglesia Católica, arte y secularización en Colombia en las décadas 1960 y 1970*; Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia*; Aline Helg, *La educación en Colombia, 1918–1957: Una historia social, económica y política* (Bogotá: Fondo Editorial Cerec, 1987); Frank Safford and Marco Palacios, *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- 37 Renán Silva, "Reflexiones sobre la cultura popular: A propósito de la Encuesta Folclórica Nacional de 1942," in Silva, *República liberal, intelectuales y cultura popular*, 193–226.
- 38 Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).
- 39 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991). According to Marco Palacios, the National Front further eroded the state's already weak legitimacy: Marco Palacios, *Entre la legitimidad y la violencia: Colombia 1875–1994* (Bogotá: Grupo Editorial Norma, 1995).
- 40 "Este termómetro infalible del salón nacional es la base para todas las autocríticas, y nuestras formas nacionales de expresión deben no sólo practicar, sino vivir en la autocrítica para no caer en los fáciles inflacionismos y mixtificaciones culturales": Marta Traba, "Presentación Catálogo XVII Salón Nacional de Artistas Nacionales," *El Espacio*, August 21, 1965.
- 41 Beatriz González Aranda, "El termómetro infalible," in 50 años, *Salón Nacional de*

- Artistas*, ed. Camilo Calderón Schrader (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1990), xxvii–xxxii.
- 42 Traba was an unapologetic modernist who defended the autonomy of art. In her book *Los muebles de Beatriz González* (1977), Traba enters into productive contradiction. In defense of high art, Traba grapples with González's engagements with popular visual culture by deploying an Adornian analysis, which understands popular culture as a manifestation of alienated consumers and as characteristic of manipulated and dominated masses. At the same time, Traba locates resistance and authenticity within González's appropriation practices, which are themselves reiterating popular appropriations. For Theodor Adorno's views on high culture, see Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Theodor Adorno, "Commitment," reprinted in *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. Frederic Jameson (London: Verso, 1986), 177–96; for the way in which high art operates within a logic of cultural capital with *relative* autonomy to the currency market, see Pierre Bourdieu and Randal Johnson, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).
- 43 Marta Traba, *Dos décadas vulnerables*.
- 44 See Escobar, *Encountering Development*; Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future*; Diana Marcela Rojas, "La Alianza para el Progreso en Colombia," *Análisis Político*, no. 70 (September–December 2010): 91–124.
- 45 Silva, *República liberal, intelectuales y cultura popular*; María Elena Bravo de Hermelin, "Aproximación histórica a las políticas culturales de Colombia," *Gaceta* 48 (2002): 164–232; Michael Birenbaum Quintero, "Race, Region, Representativity, and the Folklore Paradigm," in *Rites, Rights, and Rhythms: A Genealogy of Musical Meaning in Colombia's Black Pacific* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 161–211.
- 46 Karl Buchholz, who had relocated to Bogotá during World War II, opened the Buchholz bookstore. The gallery exhibited modernist art and the bookstore published Buchholz's influential magazine, *Eco: Revista de la Cultura de Occidente*, which in 1968 printed a Spanish translation of Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in two volumes.
- 47 Birenbaum Quintero, *Rites, Rights, and Rhythms*.
- 48 Casimiro Eiger and Mario Jursich Durán, *Crónicas de arte colombiano, 1946–1963* (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1995).
- 49 Victoria Verlichak, *Marta Traba: Una terquedad furibunda* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero and Fundación Proa, 2001), 128; Nicolás Gómez Echeverri, *En blanco y negro, Marta Traba en la televisión colombiana, 1954–1958* (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2008).
- 50 Gómez Echeverri, *En blanco y negro*, 128–32.
- 51 Beatriz González, discussion with the author, Bogotá, August 17, 2005.
- 52 Television sets were very expensive and restricted to the elites, as well as to members of the military who could acquire them with heavy subsidies under Rojas Pinilla's regime. Therefore, television's potential to reach the masses was more theoretical than practical. I am indebted to Mary Roldán for alerting me to this

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

documentation: United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, "Statistics on Radio and Television, 1950–1960," report, 1963, accessed May 25, 2018, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0003/000337/033739eo.pdf>.

- 53 Originally founded in 1881, the Museo Zea (now the Museo de Antioquia) opened its current modern building in 1955. Imelda Ramírez González, *Debates críticos en los umbrales del arte contemporáneo: El arte de los años sesenta y la fundación del Museo de Arte de Medellín* (Medellín: Fondo Editorial Universidad Eafit, 2012), 82–83.
- 54 Eduardo Mendoza Varela, "Intercol y la cultural nacional," in *Mesa redonda: La empresa privada del petróleo y el interés público*, Empresa Privada en Colombia, no. 2 (Bogotá: Asociación de Acción Interamericana de Colombia, 1964). The essay was originally published in *Economía* (Bogotá) 1, no. 1 (1964). See also Jorge Echeverri Herrera and Asociación de Acción Interamericana de Colombia, *La empresa privada del petróleo y el interés público* (Bogotá: Continente, 1964).
- 55 Mendoza Varela, "Intercol y la cultural nacional," 19.
- 56 The Esso prize for literature consisted of \$25,000 and publication of the manuscript. Gabriel García Márquez won the first Esso prize in 1961 with his work *La Mala Hora* (The Evil Hour). When the work was published in Spain the next year, and cleansed of its jargon, García Márquez repudiated it and entered a writing block that, thankfully, ended in 1965 when he began to write *Cien años de soledad* [One Hundred Years of Solitude] (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1967).

"This is how International Petroleum has understood [its role], and such is the admirable case of the fine arts exhibitions, stupendous traveling shows of Colombian art, that on two occasions have circulated United States and European cities, with the sole and direct sponsorship of Intercol. The visual experience of our [Colombian] cultural endeavors . . . are more valid, more persuasive as a form of dissemination, than so many enormous diplomatic missions, which at the end of the day are futile because they barely leave the trace of a feeble and unconvincing assignment": Mendoza Varela, "Intercol y la cultural nacional," 20.
- 57 Traba worked on one of these exhibitions only six months after she arrived in Colombia. She also helped with the selection of works and wrote the text for the "3,500 Years of Colombian Art" in 1960 at the Lowe Museum in Coral Gables, Florida. Bazzano-Nelson, "Cold War Pan-American Operations"; Verlichak, *Marta Traba*, 142.
- 58 Bazzano-Nelson "Cold War Pan-American Operations"; Coleman, *Colombia and the United States*.
- 59 Tropical Oil and Esso had partially financed *Revista de Indias*, the magazine of the Liberal Republic's Ministry of Education, since the 1940s. According to Roldán, there was an increase of U.S. corporate sponsorship of Colombian cultural initiatives during the presidency of Eduardo Santos (1938–1942) as a form of hemispheric collaboration against fascism led by Nelson Rockefeller and the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs: Mary Roldán, correspondence with the author, April 13, 2018.
- 60 Although the MAMBO was founded on paper in 1955, it was declared an "autonomous corporation" in 1958, and on November 20, 1962, a relaunching act was signed at the Colón Theater in Bogotá. Finally, the museum, located on the Car-

rera 7a, nos. 23–61, opened to the public on October 31, 1963, with the exhibition *Tumbas* by Antonio Roda: Verlichak *Marta Traba*, 173–74.

- 61 Beatriz González, discussion with the author, Bogotá, August 17, 2005; Florencia Bazzano-Nelson, “Theory in Context: Marta Traba’s Art-Critical Writings and Colombia, 1945–1959” (Ph.D. diss., University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, 2000), 383–84.
- 62 Among the list of early sponsors were national corporations such as Bavaria, Cementos Diamante, Colmbates, Colmotores, Coltejer, Federación Nacional de Cafeteros, Flota Mercantile Grancolombiana, RTI, Vanitex, Avianca Airlines, Zuñeta Holguín y Cía, Panauto, Petroquímica del Atlántico, Alphatex, Comapán, Arturo García Salazar e Hijos, Seguros La Libertad, y Cabarría y Cía, and multinational corporations such as Xerox, Leo-Burnett-Novas, Diners Club, BVD, Braniff Airlines, Shell, and Phillips Petroleum Company: see Eduardo Serrano and Museo de Arte Moderno, *El Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá: Recuento de un esfuerzo conjunto* (Bogotá: Museo de Arte Moderno, 1979). According to Shifra Goldman, Intercol began sponsoring the visual arts in Bogotá in 1959 as a “goodwill” gesture. She writes, “Public Relations and press coverage snowballed, and the exhibit was brought to the Pan American Union, Washington D.C. in 1960. Intercol, which had \$100 million invested in Colombia, insisted that the art shown was not tied in any way to its investment, a statement that appears less than candid. In 1963, Intercol was a major supporter, along with business interests . . . to the foundation of MAM”; furthermore, the Visual Art Unit of the Pan American Union (PAU) and, as of 1948, the Organization of American States (OAS) were also allied with Esso, a Rockefeller-dominated affiliate of Standard Oil, which organized the Esso Salon for Young Artists throughout Latin America: Goldman, *Contemporary Mexican Painting in a Time of Change*, 31, 34. For a discussion of the role of transnational corporations in reordering the international cultural and symbolic market, see Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 56–64.
- 63 Multinationals included Phillips and Shell, along with national corporations such as La Nacional de Seguros, Leda-Schreder, Panauto, Compañía Colombiana de Seguros, and the Banco Cafetero: Bazzano-Nelson, “Theory in Context,” 383–84.
- 64 Marta Traba, *Art in Latin America Today: Colombia* (Washington, DC: Pan American Union, 1959); Fox, *Making Art Panamerican*.
- 65 As of 1974, Gloria Zea acted as director of both the MAMBO and the Instituto Colombiano de Cultura (Colcultura), which was part of the Ministry of Education and the precursor to the Ministry of Culture. Zea was appointed in large part due to her experience working for the International Council for the Museum of Modern Art in New York, an organization closely related to the Rockefeller family. According to the MAMBO’s curator Eduardo Serrano, there never appeared to be a conflict of interests in Zea’s joint appointment since the institutions had similar visions. What this demonstrates is the close alignment among the activities of Washington, New York, and Bogotá institutions: Serrano and Museo de Arte Moderno, *El Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá*, 117.

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

- 66 Marta Traba, "Obregón y la pintura colombiana," *El Tiempo* (Bogotá), March 15, 1959.
- 67 Héctor Osuna, "La remodelación del Consejo de Ministros: Requisitos y especificaciones," *Magazín Dominical, El Espectador*, June 6, 1971. See also Héctor Osuna, *Osuna de frente* (Bogotá: Biblioteca de El Espectador, El Ancora, 1983).
- 68 Ardila, *Beatriz González*, 86.
- 69 Beatriz González, television interview, *Plástica arte contemporáneo en Colombia*, 2 videos, Ministerio de Cultura, Bogotá, 2005.
- 70 When asking for directions to the Pasaje Rivas, most people, astonished by my interest, immediately warned me about the potential dangers of taking anything valuable to the area.
- 71 Lars Schoultz, "Urbanization and Changing Voting Patterns: Colombia, 1946–1970," *Political Science Quarterly* 87 (March 1972): 22–45. See also Alejandro Angulo Novoa, *El movimiento de la población colombiana* (Bogotá: Centro de Investigación y Acción Social, 1969). Ann Farnsworth-Alvear describes the dramatic account of urbanization in Colombia: "In 1875, 95 percent of Colombians lived in the countryside, a percentage that dropped rapidly in the 1910s and 1920s. Between 1938 and 1985, however, the relative weights of the rural and urban populations reversed themselves: Colombia was 69 percent rural in 1938 but 69 percent urban by 1985, with the population increasingly concentrated in the largest cities": Ann Farnsworth-Alvear, *Dulcinea in the Factory: Myths, Morals, Men, and Women in Colombia's Industrial Experiment, 1905–1960* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 45. The statistics are from José Olinto Rueda, "Historia de la población de Colombia: 1880–2000," in *Nueva historia de Colombia*, vol. 5, ed. Jaime Jaramillo Uribe, Alvaro Tirado Mejía, Jorge Orlando Melo, and Jesús Antonio Bejarano (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta, 1998), 357–96.
- 72 Since the Spanish conquest of the Americas, the *traza* (design) was used in the foundation of new towns. Its grid embodied the European ideal of an ordered and hierarchical social structure, not the lived experiences of those who inhabited it: see Ángel Rama, *The Lettered City* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996); Valerie Frazer, *The Architecture of Conquest: Building in the Viceroyalty of Peru, 1535–1635* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
- 73 Paul B. Niell and Stacie G. Widdifield, eds., *Buen Gusto and Classicism in the Visual Cultures of Latin America, 1780–1910* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013); Paul Niell, "Founding the Academy of San Alejandro and the Politics of Taste in Late Colonial Havana, Cuba," *Colonial Latin American Review* 21, no. 2 (2012): 293–318.
- 74 Ministerio de Educación Nacional, *La obra educativa del gobierno*, vol. 3 (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1940), cited in Silva, *República liberal, intelectuales y cultura popular*, 242.
- 75 Birenbaum Quintero, *Rites, Rights, and Rhythms*.
- 76 Lleras, *Arte, política y crítica*, 25; Niell and Widdifield, *Buen Gusto and Classicism in the Visual Cultures of Latin America*; Barragán et al., *Iglesia Católica, arte y secularización en Colombia en las décadas 1960 y 1970*.
- 77 Ana María Reyes, "Building Abstraction in Brazil: The São Paulo Bienal of 1951," *Chicago Art Journal* 8, no. 1 (1998): 31–42.

- 78 In the statement, Valencia is using the term “formally” in the sense of “conformity to rules, propriety,” as defined in the Oxford English Dictionary, not to suggest formalism in the modernist sense.
- 79 Beatriz González, discussion with the author, Bogotá, January 10, 2010.
- 80 Karl, *Forgotten Peace*. For an interesting account of the *letrado* intellectual class, see Jean Franco, *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City: Latin America in the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).
- 81 Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, ed. Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 181–224.
- 82 Most famously, Clement Greenberg theorizes kitsch as Fascism’s dangerous seduction and manipulation of the masses. See Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” *Partisan Review* (July–August 1940): 296–310.
- 83 Traba, *Dos décadas vulnerables*.
- 84 Traba, *Los muebles de Beatriz González*, 46.
- 85 For a revalorization of camp and melodrama in cultural and political theory, see Bonnie Honig, *Antigone, Interrupted* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
- 86 Latham, *Modernization as Ideology*, 99.
- 87 “Fresh Breeze from the South” (editorial), *Life Magazine*, August 25, 1961, 46; “Yanquis Open a New World Series against the Reds,” *Life Magazine*, August 25, 1961, 40. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology*, 99.
- 88 My understanding of culture as a terrain of power negotiations and struggle is deeply influenced by the “Gramscian turn” in cultural studies, especially the work of Stuart Hall. See, e.g., Antonio Gramsci, Quintin Hoare, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York: International Publishers, 1972); Stuart Hall, “Notes on Deconstructing the ‘Popular,’” in *People’s History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 227–40; Tony Bennett, “Popular Culture and ‘The Turn to Gramsci’: The Politics of ‘Popular Culture,’” in *Popular Culture and Social Relations* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1986).
- 89 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).
- 90 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 11.
- 91 The MAMBO was inaugurated on October 31, 1963, in retail space on Seventh Avenue, the city’s main transportation artery: Serrano and Museo de Arte Moderno, *El Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá*.

Chapter 1. Vermeer in Bucaramanga, Beatriz in Bogotá

- 1 Camilo Calderón Schrader, ed., *50 Años, Salón Nacional de Artistas* (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1990), 187.
- 2 Marta Traba, “Primer Salón de Artistas Jóvenes: Un éxito,” *Revista La Nueva Prensa*, no. 122, September 1, 1964; Marta Traba, “¡Claro que hay jóvenes con talento!” *Nueva Prensa*, April 18–24, 1964.

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS