

The Foundations of the *Proyecto Bachué* Bogotá, 2013

The *PROYECTO BACHUÉ* (BACHUÉ PROJECT) is a platform for managing activities related to Colombian plastic and audio-visual arts. Its aim is to promote contemporary expressions of creation, research and curatorship based on the rescue of ancestral values and a review of modern manifestations in the arts, contributing to the consolidation of a cultural heritage which reflects on our current and local existence, useful for building a more universal reality.

The collection

The objectives of the *Proyecto Bachué* are based on assembling and conserving Colombian works of art from the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries, as well as maps, documents, primary sources and reference materials. In terms of heritage, the value of this collection lies in being a testimony to the ideas and concerns, bequeathed by artists and thinkers, around the question of defining the identity of Latin America, taking into account the knowledge of its territory, history and the characteristics of its inhabitants.

The *Proyecto Bachué* reaffirms the value of collecting as an individual or institutional practice, with an enormous potential to help establish a conceptual base and to stimulate and encourage a purposeful collecting based on coherent criteria, in accordance with the sensitivity, resources, interests and needs of the person involved.

The art collection of the *Proyecto Bachué* includes works in a variety of formats and mediums which date from the end of the 19th century to the present day. Within the collection as a whole, they are grouped in accordance with the conventional categories of the history of Colombian art:

(i) Pieces by the landscape artists who, at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, traveled through and depicted the natural setting which surrounded the main Colombian cities, with the aim of making a pictorial record of the appearance of the natural territory and the life there;

(ii) Pieces by “Americanist” artists who, in the first decades of the 20th century, inquired into the characteristic features of Colombian identity, in accordance to its roots and pre-Columbian past, creating images which

leant on visual and narrative elements from the Mexican muralist movement and its followers in the rest of the continent;

(iii) A complete display of the works of the generation of artists who emerged around the middle of the 20th century, and with the support of specialized critics, formulated individual visual languages which broke with the academic tradition and appropriated resources from the European avant-gardes, adapted to local settings and stories;

(iv) A group of works with an open political content, which, through expressionist strategies of deforming the body or through mechanisms of propaganda and the use of language, denounced the armed conflicts and widespread poverty in the countries in Colombia, and

(v) Finally, it is worth singling out the works of contemporary artists, who have developed their work in accordance with the conceptualist approaches which the collection supports.

With regard to the archive of documents, maps and books, the collection counts on manuscripts dated during the conquest and illustrated plates from books of 18th and 19th century European travelers, which respond to political and economic strategies for seizing hold of the territory and its resources. The compilation of old maps is a feature of this interest, since they clearly evidence the scientific resources which explorers, traders and politicians developed to ensure their domination over the territory. The primary and secondary bibliography is an added conceptual support for the collection and offers theoretical arguments and bases which allow a contemporary approach to the study of the historical processes which show the workings of different economic, political or aesthetic interests in defining the territory of Latin America and the identity of its inhabitants.

The conceptual foundations of the *Proyecto Bachué*

The historical precedents employed focus *Proyecto Bachué*'s interest in promoting academic and creative projects. They fall within two broad and closely interrelated questions: the appropriation and domination of the territory as a source of resources and the tensions between Euro-centrism and Americanism in the extensive historical process of defining an identity of our own. In that regard, the focus of *Proyecto Bachué*'s interest is the historical processes in Colombian territory which have determined the specificities of its intellectual and artistic production.

Nevertheless, the platform is open to proposals which offer links and relations with the agents, deeds and concerns of other Latin American countries. The *Proyecto Bachué* proposes the necessary revision of these processes of the past which have shaped different approaches to a sense of identity, with the aim of understanding the conditions of our present and knowing how to secure our future.

Invitation to Participate

Proyecto Bachué would like to invite researchers in social sciences or the humanities, artists and curators (whether independent or associated with an entity, collective or institution) to come up with thoughtful, rigorous, creative and purposeful projects related to a variety of concerns and to historical events in Latin America, from the time of the Conquest to the present day. In line with the visual resources which are the basis of the *Proyecto Bachué*, it is axiomatic that such projects study the scientific, ideological or aesthetic use of the image. For that reason, among the aspects of interest to *Proyecto Bachué*, the evidence of illustrations, plates, maps, books, objects and works of art are regarded as fundamental.

In accordance with the above, the following are the general subjects in which *Proyecto Bachué* is especially interested in:

- The political, economic and cultural processes of the late Middle Ages and the beginnings of the Enlightenment in Europe which stimulated scientific development, navigation and the exploration of American territory.
- The processes for the exploitation of mineral and plant resources by the European conquerors in American territory and their respective social and political consequences.
- The processes behind the hybridization of European, Indigenous and African elements, seen in cultural and religious expressions, emphasizing in architecture, painting and literature.
- Testimonies and visual and narrative interpretations of legends as Lake Parime and El Dorado and expeditions to Cipango, as well as the economic, political, scientific and cultural reasons behind them.
- The phenomenon of the conquest and mining of Potosí and the related political, economic and cultural scenarios.
- The geo-political tensions among European nations – mainly, Spain, England, France and the Netherlands – related to the colonial context of America.

- Scientific, visual and narrative accounts like those of La Condamine, Humboldt, Bonpland, Fidalgo and Malaspina, as well as the political and economic circumstances which prompted their respective expeditions to the territory of America.
- The scientific, visual and narrative accounts left by the Botanical Expedition to the Nuevo Reino de Granada (the Spanish Vice-Royalty roughly corresponding to present-day Colombia) and the historical framework in which it was conceived and carried out.
- The role of the scientific Enlightenment in the events culminating in the Independence of Latin America.
- The scientific, visual and narrative accounts of the “Comisión Corográfica” (a survey of the geography, natural resources and customs of Colombia), carried out in the mid-19th century by Colombian and European scientists, and the political aims and mechanisms for exploiting trade and natural resources which lay behind it.
- The cartographical work done by Agustín Codazzi and its relation to the political and economic need to explore, appropriate and control the territory of Colombia.
- The founding and consolidation of the Escuela de Bellas Artes in Bogotá (Bogotá School of Fine Arts) and its educational approach based on European cultural models.
- Hispanophilism (*españolera*) as a cultural phenomenon associated with the political context in the transition from the 19th to the 20th century.
- The renewal of the landscape painting genre as a medium for acknowledging the territory and exploring its basic pictorial features.
- The artistic output of the “Americanist” generation of the 1930’s and 1940’s; their aesthetic contributions and the ideological foundations responsible for their interest in rescuing aspects of Colombia’s cultural roots, especially pre-Columbian ones.
- The artistic output of the generation which made a sharp break with academic notions of art in the middle of the 20th century; their aesthetic contributions and the ideological foundations responsible for their interest in appropriating visual resources from the European avant-gardes in order to go more deeply into local ambits and stories.
- The artistic output of the mid-20th century which evidenced the sensations, impulses and emotions arising from the transformation of natural and urban landscapes due to modernization processes.
- The artistic output which dealt with the phenomenon known as “The Violence” between the end of the 1940’s to the beginning of the 1960’s.

- The artistic output of the 1960`s and 1970`s which seized hold of the trends of Pop, Conceptualism and Neo-Expressionism to deal with the phenomena of violence and their consequences in the countryside and the cities.
- The contemporary art movements which, since the 1980`s to the present, have diversified their mediums and resources to comment on the social and political conditions of their times, and relations with the historical scenario responsible for those conditions.
- Collecting as a practice which is valuable for producing scientific and humanistic knowledge.

Resources for associated projects

The support program for the development of academic or creative projects which provide in-depth studies of these subjects or bring up similar concerns offers the following resources:

- Access to the art collection.
- Access to the collection of documents and maps.
- Access to the bibliographic archive.
- Provision of contacts with and access to a data base of experts in the different fields of study.
- Channeling of communications with similar entities.
- Management of strategies for divulging and publicizing the proposed project.

Participation requirements

The projects must comply with the following requisites:

- Personal information of the applicant(s): name and i.d. number.
- Contac information: telephone number, address, e-mail.
- Title of the proposal.
- General description of the proposal.
- Justification of the proposal in terms of the criteria of the *Proyecto Bachué*.
- Strategies for dissemination and publicity.
- Possible allies.
- Work schedule.
- Budget.
- Curriculum Vitae of the applicant(s).
- Reference bibliography.

Optional

- Mock-up of the text to be published.
- Sketches or pictures of an artistic or curatorial project, or a project for an exhibition.

The projects should be sent to the following e-mail:

contacto@proyectobachue.org

The projects will be evaluated in accordance with their: i) conceptual solidity, ii) their relevance to the *Proyecto Bachué*, iii) contribution to the field, iv) feasibility and v) the experience of the applicant. After the project is evaluated, the applicant will receive an answer via e-mail.

An in-depth historical and conceptual view

The conceptual basis of the *Proyecto Bachué* lies in the historical processes involving the territory of Latin America as a scenario of conflict or referent for establishing the features and values of a certain continental identity. In that regard, its framework of interest dates back to the 15th century and is projected towards the present time. In this broad panorama, the tensions between local customs, imaginaries and resources, on the one hand, and colonial interests, on the other, stand out.

The narrative which the *Proyecto Bachué* would like to recreate begins with a study of Christopher Columbus's enterprise for the exploration of America, based, on Marco Polo travels. The fundamental aim of Columbus was to open trade routes to Cipango (Japan) which would allow for the shipment of spices and gold to Europe. This intention, which would bring wealth to his backers, was a decisive factor for the support of the catholic monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella.

The chimera of a city of gold – the legend of El Dorado – quickly spread through Europe and prompted continued explorations of American territory, and as a result, the processes of conquest which destroyed the millenary native cultures.

During this process, the imposition of catholic believes and traditions over local ones was definitive. In the New Kingdom of Granada, which was made up by Colombian and Venezuelan territory, religious missions like the Jesuit priests and Franciscan Friars were very influential. Their way of converting was harsh, but it was also mediated by educational and

investigative intentions. Fray Pedro Simón's work is an example of this. He was a Spanish priest who arrived to the New Kingdom of Granada in 1604 and worked as a professor for many years. His work is a complete report of colonial history in Colombia and Venezuela. In *Historical News of the Conquest of Firm Land in the Western Indies* (Noticias Historiales de las conquistas de Tierra Firme en las Indias Occidentales), better known as *Historical News*, he exposes a personal concept about the historic labor and, through four volumes, he goes deeper into anthropological aspects, and narrates social and political pre-Columbian life. It is important to highlight his interest in indigenous cosmogony, evident in the description of the myth that explains the creation of the world and man through the legend of La Bachué.

In the course of the 16th century, the Spanish empire grew stronger, because of its domination of the new lands which provided Spain with precious metals and new consumer products.

But the imperial project would not have been possible without the scientific developments behind the progress of navigation. The philosophical notions which came out of the European Renaissance regarded mankind as the center and master of the world. This transformation of Western thought gave rise to scientific and technological advances which enabled mankind to gain knowledge of and dominate the world through the use of reason, which, in turn, cast doubt on superstitious, mystical and mythological explanations of reality.

From the time of the Phoenicians, navigation had rested on astronomical observations. But on dark and stormy days, sailors got lost because they could not observe the stars. In the context of the Renaissance, the investigations of magnetism published in 1600 by the British doctor and physicist William Gilbert proved to be essential for the development of navigation, as they led to the improvement of the compass and the sextant. With those devices, it became possible to locate the cardinal points and thus draw maps with a precise scientific reference point, in accordance with the degrees of latitudinal excursion.

Up to that time, magnetism had been regarded as a form of witchcraft, since, according to the Aristotelian philosophy which then reigned, there was a fifth element made up of inexplicable magical forces. The exploration of the earth and the resources for measurement and cartography were responsible for strengthening the expeditions to America.

Another problem in this scientific field presented a big challenge to European explorers: how to determine the shape of the Earth. In 1735, the King of France, Louis XV, sponsored the scientific expedition, led by Pierre Bouguer, Jorge Juan, Antonio de Ulloa and Charles Marie de La Condamine, to measure the degree of terrestrial longitude at the equator. Once that measurement was made, along with a similar calculation done by an expedition to the Arctic Circle in Finland, it became possible to verify the geodesic shape of the Earth, which is flattened at the poles and bulges at the equator.

Other focal point for documenting and understanding the history of Latin America is the expedition of La Condamine, who withdrew from the geographical project to penetrate the Orinoco and the Amazon, where he discovered rubber (a material that would revolutionize industry) and developed the most effective way to use quina bark to cure malaria. Antonio de Ulloa, for his part, discovered the platinum, a mineral which proved highly useful for European industry.

The American cultural process largely depended on developments in scientific navigation. The dominance of navigational knowledge led to conflicts among the Spanish, French and English, because navigation and control of the seas meant access to information and resources, that is, the domination of the world. In this context, there are documented cases of the contraband use of this hitherto confidential information through the production and dissemination of maps and illustrated plates, mostly by engravers in Holland.

That was one indication that Europe's interest in America was not exclusively a matter of gold and silver but also a scientific one, due to the possibility of discovering new botanical resources. There was thus forged a close link between art, cartography, geography and politics, seen in the visual material which illustrated mythical stories about El Dorado, Lake Parime and phantasmagorical creatures which were supposed to inhabit the territory of Latin America.

A focus of special interest was the Potosí region, which lies in what is now the country of Bolivia. The Spanish came in search of golden cities, but only found artifacts made of that mineral. In 1545, however, they came across Cerro Rico, the silver mountain. The motive behind the exploitation of this mine was that the King of Spain needed to repay his debts to English bankers. Such a resort was characteristic of the colonial age, when Europe had to produce monetary surpluses to finance projects

to expand knowledge (the Enlightenment), satisfy the demands of an emerging consumer society (the Industrial Revolution) and pay for a culture of wasteful luxury and extravagance (Baroque and Rococo art).

The history of Potosí was an example of the political and social tensions which created the forced imposition of Spain on America through the violent subjugation of the indigenous peoples and the indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources, which also caused the disastrous environmental impacts associated with unregulated mining. Potosí also became the center for the forced indoctrination of the natives in the Catholic Faith which, among other consequences, was responsible for the distinctive religious art of the Spanish colonies, based on a syncretism between Catholic iconography and the indigenous cosmogony.

The silver extracted from the mines at Potosí was shipped to Havana, where, bound for Spain, the ships carrying them joined the fleets which had brought treasure from Mexico and the Philippines. That was the reason for the presence of French and English pirates, some government-licensed corsairs and others freebooters, who attacked the Spanish vessels to steal precious metals and cut supplies to the Spanish colonies. Anson's voyages to the Pacific and those in the Atlantic by the British Vice-Admiral Edward Vernon -- who attacked Cartagena in 1740 -- became popular legends. A number of Caribbean islands were seized by the English, who also took hold of the Falklands, a key to control the Pacific. In response, the ships full of precious metals began to directly cross the Atlantic from Argentina, which became known as the Silver Route.

When mineral resources began to be depleted in the 17th century, there was a wave of expeditions on the part of explorers interested in finding botanical resources. This was a new age of scientists, shaped by humanistic ideals which, with the passage of time, were followed by the Creole elites of Latin America.

From the moment he arrived at the port of Cartagena in Nueva Granada in 1760 and during his journey from there to Santa Fe de Bogotá, José Celestino Mutis, a priest and scientist from Cadiz, kept a diary of his observations of the plants, animals and minerals he found in a territory which captivated him. Over the years, he carried out programs for reforming and restructuring the educational curriculum there which promoted the study of philosophy and the exact sciences in place of the speculative Scholasticism previously in force, but his real passion was the study of the botanical resources of Nueva Granada. In 1783, the

Archbishop and Viceroy Antonio Caballero y Góngora, who was also concerned about the state of education in Nueva Granada and a follower of the Enlightenment thought favored by King Carlos III in Spain, offered his unrestricted support for the realization of what became known as the Botanical Expedition.

Based first in the town of Mariquita and eventually in Santa Fe de Bogotá, José Celestino Mutis assumed the overall direction of this scientific project, which set out to collect botanical specimens from the different thermal levels of the territory of Nueva Granada, with the aim of studying and classifying them in accordance with the taxonomical system for live species which had been established by the naturalist Carl Linnaeus on the basis of sexual characteristics.

The realization of the Botanical Expedition owed much to the contributions of herbalists who traveled through the regions around the valley of the river Magdalena and between the central and eastern cordilleras of the Andes, gathering specimens of plants for the herbarium, as well as the draftsmen who meticulously dissected the plants to paint monochrome and color illustrations, among whom stood out Salvador Rizo and Francisco Javier Matís.

A group of eminent scientific experts and humanists added their knowledge of botany, zoology, cartography and astronomy to the findings of the project, among them Juan Eloy Valenzuela, Francisco Antonio Zea, friar Diego García, Jorge Tadeo Lozano, Francisco José de Caldas and Sinforoso Mutis Consuegra. The Expedition not only consolidated a methodological system for collecting, recording and conserving rare plants, it also provided a training in the arts and sciences to the followers of the Enlightenment in Nueva Granada. Mutis died in 1808, hoping that the fruits of his investigations would remain in the Vice-Royalty for the benefit of future generations of scientists. The work of the Botanical Expedition lasted until 1816, when General Pablo Morillo, head of the Spanish army, who tried to stamp out the Independence movement, seized the herbariums, illustrative plates and manuscripts of the botanical studies and shipped them to the Royal Botanical Garden in Madrid.

At the same time that the Botanical Expedition was working in the central part of Nueva Granada, a cartographical commission was at work in its Caribbean region. It became known as the Fidalgo Expedition, from its leader, Joaquín Francisco Fidalgo, a brigadier of the Spanish navy responsible for mapping ports and bays in order to secure the empire's control over the territory and strengthen its offensive and defensive

capacity to resist attacks by England and France. The final decade of the 18th century also witnessed the Malaspina Expedition, led by an officer of the Spanish navy, Alejandro Malaspina, which mapped much of the west coast of the Americas, crossed to the Philippines and stopped off at Australia and New Zealand. Its biggest contribution was the production of nautical and hydrographical charts which helped to expand European trade to the Pacific.

In 1799, Baron Alexander von Humboldt embarked on his exploration of Spanish America to pursue his interest in the chemical composition of the atmosphere, the formation of the planet and the arrangement of geological strata, while his travel companion, Aimé Bonpland, was devoted to the study of flora and fauna. Once they were in Venezuela, they headed for the River Orinoco, to verify whether there was a connection between the Orinoco and the Amazon, as had been reported by the British corsair, Sir Walter Raleigh, two hundred years before.

In the course of the expedition they collected hundreds of botanical specimens from the jungles, one aspect, among others, of a detailed survey of a remote and inhospitable region practically unknown to science before then. They later returned to the Caribbean, aiming for Panama, but due to bad weather on the voyage from Cuba, landed in Cartagena de Indias, where they changed their itinerary and decided to travel overland to Quito and visit José Celestino Mutis in Santa Fe de Bogotá en route. Humboldt's journey through the cordilleras of the Andes led him to formulate a hypothesis about the influence of geography on plants, based on the differences between those of the Andes and the Alps, and likewise observe how plant life varied in accordance with altitudinal levels as well.

During their stay in Santa Fe, José Celestino Mutis proved a generous host. He helped Humboldt with lodgings, transport and other needs; gave him access to his notes and manuscripts; and presented him with plates from the Botanical Expedition. Humboldt resumed his journey to Quito, traveling along rough trails through the Andes and determined to climb Mount Chimborazo, the highest in Ecuador. In Quito he encountered and shared information with Francisco José de Caldas, a Creole from Nueva Granada with a broad scientific knowledge, responsible for discoveries about the morphology of the Ecuadorian stretch of the Andean chain and suitable conditions for growing a number of useful plants.

By bringing together educated Creoles interested in exchanging ideas or consulting his library of 10,000 volumes, José Celestino Mutis' enterprise

to spread the ideals of the Enlightenment which was flourishing in Europe and became the nucleus of the nascent Independent movement. In the middle of the 19th century, when the former colonies had turned into independent republics, businessmen interested in exploiting their natural resources began to arrive in Latin America.

To serve these economic aims, draftsmen were needed to illustrate and provide evidence of the wealth of those countries and the conditions in which trade would be carried out. In Colombia, Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera, president of what was then known as the Republic of New Granada between 1845 and 1849, sponsored a commission, directed by the Italian-born soldier and scientist Agustín Codazzi, charged with undertaking a complete survey of the country's resources in the form of texts, illustrations and maps.

In the same period, a number of foreign scientists, diplomats and artists visited Latin America, inspired by the experiences of Humboldt and intrigued by the mystery of exotic lands. One such was Frederic Edwin Church, a distinguished U.S. landscape painter and central member of the Hudson River School, who traveled to South America in 1853 and 1857 and made monumental paintings of the Andes. His method was to make sketches, drawings and color notes in the field, then returning to his studio to turn them into paintings of an intense luminosity, the successful sale of which financed further overseas journeys.

Another traveler was Auguste Le Moyne, a French diplomat who visited the islands of the Caribbean and Nueva Granada. He noted their natural features, studied their insects and made detailed watercolors of their landscapes.

A similar case was that of Edward Walhouse Mark, a British diplomat, who did drawings and watercolors of the scenery, personages and customs he encountered on his extensive travels through the central and Caribbean regions of Colombia, as did Henry Price, an English watercolor artist, based in Santa Fe, who recorded everyday life on the banks on the River Magdalena. Visual testimonies were likewise left by foreign visitors with scientific interests, like the chemist Jean-Baptiste Boussingault, who lived in Colombia between 1823 and 1828 and studied geological and seismological phenomena; François Désiré Roulin, a French physician who explored the Llanos Orientales; and León Gauthier, Joseph Brown and Albert Berg, among others. These people were responsible for illustrations of the natural landscape, human types and customs of New Granada which gave foreigners with political,

economic or cultural interests a clearer idea of the characteristics of the flourishing new republic, determining possible political, cultural and economic nexus.

The plates made from the ink drawings or watercolors of such travelers corresponded to the need for an accurate pictorial record to complement written accounts of the inhabitants, landscapes and customs of far-off countries. In a parallel manner, map-making, combining the graphic arts and exact sciences, served for a precise description of their geography. Nevertheless, it was not until the founding of the Bogotá School of Fine Arts in 1886 that such skills were freed from their strictly functional purpose of aiding commerce or nation-building in Colombia. For the first time, the teaching of painting and sculpture was based on granting an autonomous value to art in itself, and while the approach was academic and Eurocentric, the institution was a presage of the modernism and search for an identity of its own that would characterize Colombian art from the 1920's onwards.

In 1893, the painter Andrés de Santa María returned to Colombia after a long stay in Paris, where he had studied art and then achieved a certain degree of success. In 1894, he helped establish the Faculty of Landscape Painting at the School of Fine Arts, headed by the Spanish artist Luis de Llanos, who died not long after and was succeeded by his compatriot Enrique Recio y Gil. Thanks to this academic recognition, the genre became the centerpiece of Colombian painting in that period and led, almost accidentally, to a new look at the natural features of the country.

The interaction between the academic tradition of the Spanish maestros and the French Impressionism introduced by Santa María played a fundamental role in the resulting movement of Colombian landscape painters. Another influential figure was the Italian painter Giovanni Ferroni, who devoted himself to detailed studies of the Magdalena River and the Savannah region around Bogotá.

The work of these foreign artists strengthened the interest in the Andean landscape on the part of young painters who lived in and around Bogotá, partly from a wish to free themselves from European models and partly as a response to the growing urbanization of the country. Among the leading figures of what became known as the School of the Savannah or the School of Bogotá – the dominant trend at the dawn of the 20th century – there were Roberto Páramo, Ricardo Borrero Álvarez, Jesús María Zamora and Fídolo Alfonso González Camargo. Motivated by nationalist ideals, they sought to create an authentic Colombian art in paintings

which exalted the natural beauty of its landscape, an approach similar to the romantic nationalism of writers like Walt Whitman in the United States, Jorge Isaacs in Colombia and those responsible for the “gaucho literature” of Argentina, Uruguay and southern Brazil.

In Colombia, such ideals clashed with those of the Conservative party, which ruled the country during the first three decades of the 20th century, with the support of upper-class ideologues who looked back to the Spanish heritage as a model for society and the arts in response to the political turmoil which had climaxed in the War of a Thousand Days (1899-1902). That ideology was responsible for the founding in 1920 of the Circle of Fine Arts, a private institution which organized exhibitions which favored Colombian artists who followed the academic tradition taught in Madrid and often employed visual motifs taken from Spanish painting.

In many cases, the resulting works were an odd mixture of the imported and the homegrown. While their subject matter was Colombian – marketplaces, peasant-farmers, drovers and domestic servants -- the treatment was idyllic and said little about the reality of the country. The paintings usually had an intense coloring, with robust figures, racial types and landscapes drawn from European imaginaries. This “Neo-costumbrismo” (an updating of 19th century depictions of local customs and mannerisms) assumed a paternalistic attitude towards problems of class and race and its exponents were responding to a market made up of a landowning class, which was backward-looking and enjoyed an economic bonanza at the time.

In the 1930’s, with the election of a Liberal government, the resurgence of left-wing movements in the wake of the World Depression and the growing influence of a politicized art, especially the Mexican muralism which exalted that nation’s indigenous roots and *mestizo* and/or working class population, Colombian culture went through another shift. At this juncture, the fundamental question which disturbed artists, writers and intellectuals was how to define an authentic Colombian identity. The artists of this generation were seeking renewal through the revalidation of peasant-farmers and indigenous persons as a visual force. Among them there stood Ramón Barba and his students Josefina Albarracín and Hena Rodríguez, who turned to sculptures in wood, a material associated with vernacular values.

During the same period, Colombia felt the impact of the Mexican school of muralists headed by Rivera-Orozco-Siqueiros, which championed that

genre as the artistic medium most accessible to the public and thus the one most apt for their wish to employ history to redefine national identity through a narrative which glorified the fight for emancipation of the indigenous races, the workers and the lower classes. That movement strongly marked the painting of Pedro Nel Gómez and Ignacio Gómez, from Antioquia, and Alipio Jaramillo, from Caldas, who did a number of murals in Chile in the 1940's.

The artists who grouped themselves around these common interests were known as the Bachué Group, who took their name from the piece sculpted in granite called *Bachué, generative mother of the chibchan people*, made by the Bogotan artist Rómulo Rozo, which was displayed in the architectural complex which was de Colombian pavilion during the Iberoamerican Exposition of Seville in 1929. This piece is an allegory to the Muisca legend that explains the origin of humanity; it presents simultaneously two events separate in time: the emergence of a woman from water with a child in her arms, and their posterior return to the water as snakes after they have populated earth. In Colombian art, it stands out as an iconic piece which uses various semantic resources taken from pre-Columbian design and mythology, French, Oriental and Egyptian symbolism, and imaginary additions from the artist, turning into a pivot in the nationalist and indigenous ideas which were defended by Latin-American intellectuals during the first half of the XX century.

The Colombian artists who shared these interests formed what became known as the The Bachué Group, named after a granite sculpture, entitled *Bachué, madre generatriz del pueblo Chibcha* (Bachué, the mother goddess of the Chibcha people), done by Rómulo Rozo, an artist from Bogotá. That piece was based on an ancient legend of the Muisca indigenous culture which explains the origin of humanity. It stands as a landmark in Colombian art, for the way it combined semantic resources from pre-Columbian mythology and design with motifs from the sculptor's imagination.

The work of the artists of the Bachué generation reformulated the role of art with an ideological program focused on the historical and cultural traits which would define what being Colombian means. Even though some of those artists recurred to a certain geometrization of the figures and strong doses of fantasy, their conceptual approach gave a priority to the narrative resources afforded by their imagery, over and above the experimental techniques pertaining to the European avant-garde art of that time. That was what would finally cause Colombian and foreign critics to acknowledge the *Latin American* character of their works.

In the 1940's and early 1950's, a number of young Colombian artists traveled to remote regions of the country. Their aim was to capture, in painting, the characteristic customs and ways of life of the communities and landscapes they visited. They sought to describe and transmit the colors and shapes of the tropics and a certain mystery associated with these remote places.

Among those artists, it is worth singling out two German-born painters, who had immigrated to Colombia to escape from war-torn Europe. Their early works revealed a training influenced by the European avant-garde movements, mainly Expressionism. The first, Guillermo Wiedemann, painted the inhabitants and the scenery of the communities of people of African descent who lived on the Pacific Coast and along the length of the River Magdalena. The second, Leopoldo Richter, who was also an entomologist, depicted the indigenous people, animals and vegetation of the Amazon region.

Among the young native-born Colombian artists who were also interested in local settings there were Lucy Tejada (b. 1920), who painted the deserts, salt pans and shepherds of the Wayúu indigenous culture of La Guajira; Hernando Tejada (1924-1998), who painted the fishing villages of Tolú; and Fernando Botero (b. 1939), who painted the inhabitants, landscapes and traditions of the islands of San Bernardo, Tolú and Coveñas.

Due to the Second World War and other circumstantial factors, a number of professional art critics from Europe who were familiar with and appreciative of modern art immigrated to Colombia in the 1940's and early 1950's. At around the same time, a young generation of Colombian artists was likewise returning from art schools in cities like Paris, Barcelona, Rome and New York. This convergence led to the consolidation of the first Colombian movement of so-called modern art.

The most influential critic in that movement was Marta Traba, who, while born in Argentina, had studied in Paris, and along with others, like Casimiro Eiger, Walter Engel, Juan Friede and Clemente Airó, was responsible for critical and theoretical analyses which validated the new movement and were disseminated in mass media like the press, radio, television and specialized art reviews.

The proposal of those young artists was to adopt the pictorial resources of the European avant-gardes – mainly Cubism and Expressionism – to the

portrayal of local settings, traditions and myths. In that regard, the presence of an artist like Alejandro Obregón was definitive, since he transcended the traditional methods of representation to emphasize the gestural and symbolic aspects of Colombian identity, likewise found in his choice of subject matter – landscapes and the allegorical nature of condors, bulls and barracudas.

Fernando Botero did not exceed the limits of figurativism, working instead with distortions of bodies and objects inspired by his study of Italian Renaissance painting and the assimilation of folkloric elements drawn from religion, sports and popular culture.

Other artists, like Édgar Negret and Eduardo Ramírez Villamizar, tended to abstractionism by studying the visual structures of animals, objects or familiar scenes. For her part, Marta Traba, the most radical champion of modernism, was a relentless defender of the work of this generation, with arguments based on the autonomy of visual language, over and above the narrative or contextual aspects the works might suggest. Now that a sufficient period of time has elapsed for a more objective view of her criticism, there is a need to reevaluate the stance of Marta Traba, accepting her own invitation to others to fill the gaps in her definitive book, *Historia abierta del arte colombiano* (An open history of Colombian art).

Another major turning point in Colombian art was the civil conflict that became known as *La Violencia* (The Violence), which began around the middle of the 1940's, reached a boiling point with the assassination of the Liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in 1948, was further aggravated by the rightist governments of presidents Laureano Gómez and Gustavo Rojas Pinilla and only ended at the beginning of the 1960's.

The artists of that period felt a need to produce a visual testimony of the events, their political causes and their social consequences. Some, like Alejandro Obregón, Alipio Jaramillo, Enrique Grau, Débora Arango and Ignacio Gómez Jaramillo, resorted to allegorical images which integrated depictions of the victims with scenes of the conflict, whether in the cities (especially the riots following the murder of Gaitán, known as the *Bogotazo*) or the countryside, recording the sinister consequence of the fighting between followers of the two major parties.

Nevertheless, at the very same time, in the 1960's, when left-wing movements were strong and student protest marches frequent, that symbolic artistic strategy was being questioned by some younger artists

who shared the same political militancy. In Latin America as a whole, a conceptualist approach to political questions arose in art, which made use of texts and media images to challenge the ruling classes and the cruelties of dictatorships.

In Colombia, one of the most striking examples was the appropriation of the graphic arts as a technical medium that would allow for the cheap reproduction of images with the aim of reaching a much broader public. Nevertheless, some artists distanced themselves from the pop art formulas that were arriving from the United States, which seemed to legitimate the banality of a consumer society. Instead, they resorted to intense emotional and expressive constructions through the incursion into erotic and sordid dimensions of the human body. Artists like Luis Ángel Rengifo, Pedro Alcántara and Augusto Rendón used techniques like *agua fuerte* (nitric acid solution) and Drypoint to create monstrous images with torn bodies allusive to the barbarous dimensions of violence. In this same expressive line, it is important to highlight painters Leonel Góngora, Carlos Granada, Augusto Rivera and Luciano Jaramillo, who looked into themes like sexuality and death, as aspects associated to violent and unequal contexts. In graphic works, others like Clemencia Lucia, Sonia Gutiérrez and the members of the Taller 4 Rojo (Red Workshop 4), reworked socialist realism as a medium for slogans of protest against U.S. intervention in Colombia and the struggle of the working class and peasant-farmers.

At the same time that this *art engagé* was being produced, other artists were taking elements from U.S. pop art to work with images of mass culture, mainly urban ones. While the previous generation of artists like Marco Ospina, Ignacio Gómez Jaramillo, Alejandro Obregón and Guillermo Wiedemann based their pictorial experimentation on capturing the sensorial aspects of natural settings, the artists who consolidated their careers in the 1970's were interested in the social and cultural transformations associated with rapid urban growth, along with the visual and informational aspects of the communications media.

Artistic expressions became varied, as did the mediums for creative work. Drawing and graphics, broadly represented at the Biennials of Cali, became very strong in the hands of artists like María Paz Jaramillo, Óscar Jaramillo, Éver Astudillo and Oscar Muñoz, who, inspired by photography and the cinema, depicted the world of nighthawks, cheap rented rooms, brothels and bars which revealed the alienation of big cities marked by crime, poverty and the victims of forced displacement. In stretch relation with these artists it is important to consider the

photographic work by Fernell Franco, who developed an extended work of documentary photography and artistic experimentation, he was also interested in the marginal spaces in Cali. Simultaneous to this movement, in the seventies emerged a group of artists in Medellin who wanted to reveal the spaces and human exchanges of the hidden city.

Closely linked to those artists was the photography of Fernell Franco, whose extensive studies of life in the marginal neighborhoods of Cali combined photo-reportage with experimental techniques. For their part, artists like Álvaro Barrios and Beatriz González fixed their attention on visual elements found in mass culture, like comics; the icons of politics, sports and religion; advertising; celebrity pages and kitsch ornaments, all of which defined the visual tastes and consumer habits of urban life.

This period also witnessed the emergence of conceptualist works which placed the idea above the object, made use of texts and often had a political content. Some of the leading artists of that movement were Antonio Caro, Álvaro Barrios, Adolfo Bernal and Bernardo Salcedo, the latter of whom also stood out for his free-association assemblage of objects placed in boxes. Meanwhile, abstractionist trends continued to be strong and became increasingly polished and constructive, as in the case of the proposals of Carlos Rojas, Ana Mercedes Hoyos, Manolo Vellojín, Rafael Echeverri, Hernando (Momo) del Villar and an emerging group of sculptors from Medellín, who aimed at minimalist architectural works integrated into the public spaces of that city.

We thus see that some of the key characteristics of contemporary modes of art have been the result of a process which evolved throughout the course of the 20th century, with an evident explosion of new creative possibilities in the 1970's and 1980's, developments which also revealed changes in the definition of a work of art on the part of both the creators of art and the public.

It is evident that artists in Colombia have undertaken a revaluation of the relevance of purely technical skills and broadened the range of mediums which enable them to shape visual expressions and communicate their ideas, engaging with creative processes which require a dynamic and profound investigation of the subjects and phenomena they are interested in.

Nowadays, Colombian artists generally base themselves on what is happening around them, the physical aspect of the spaces they live in, the information which they receive from the communications media, the

visual codes transmitted by mass culture, and the uncertainties and strengths they find in the cultural, political and economic systems which rule their world and affect their own feelings.

Whether in an individual manner or as members of collectives or participatory groups, they reflect and materialize these reflections in a tangible expression of images presented through videos, photographs, paintings, drawings, corporeal gestures, installations, virtual publications or written texts.

The resulting works make use of metaphors, allegories and symbols which encourage the spectator to sharpen his or her capacity for interpretation, transcend ideas of “taste” to penetrate proposals which require the spectator to think about the conditions of his or own context or that others and on some occasions, even demand the active participation of the public as a necessary condition for understanding the meaning of art. Art historians, art critics and curators (whether independent or associated with museums or galleries) are responsible for disseminating and explaining these works through their organization of exhibitions, lectures, catalogue notes, essays or books. Their role is to act as bridge between the objects of art and the members of the public who, in one way or another, are the “consumers”.

The above helps to explain the origin of the *Proyecto Bachué*, originally defined, in part, by the need to assimilate contemporary artistic proposals and find definitive values in their characteristic heterogeneity. The leading route has been to look back in time, for the purpose of weaving together the different stages of art in Colombia in terms of its constant need to create images, taking into account how intentions have changed over time, answering to such ideals as representation, testimonial, discourse or invention.

The *Proyecto Bachué* is interested in creative proposals based on the foundational and historical considerations mentioned above, which, to a large extent, have governed the quest for an authentic Colombian identity in accordance with changing notions of the territory as the scenario of political, economic and cultural shifts. In that regard, it is worth mentioning some projects which focus on the revaluation of historical narratives, like a number of video-installations and photographs by José Alejandro Restrepo which project scientific and religious imaginaries from the colonial age onto the narratives found in contemporary media.

Since the 1990's, Nadín Ospina, for his part, has created ironical commentaries on the ancestral imaginary of our indigenous cultures through hybrid versions of pre-Columbian ceramic, stone or bronze artifacts which depict characters from television cartoons and thus make a statement about the undeniable role of the mass culture of the United States in shaping the identity of contemporary Latin America. A valuable contribution has also been made by Alberto Baraya, who produces visual archives of plastic plants which challenge the absolutist pretensions of scientific enterprises like the Botanical Expedition.

Similarly, Eduard Moreno works with the notion of archives, with a special concern for ideas about death, employing office stationery and carbon paper to create images drawn from nature and popular culture which seem to resist the passage of time. Carlos Castro, in turn, has built objects which serve as a parody of history through unlikely combinations of images and materials, ranging from views of the contemporary city done in the manner of the plates of the Comisión Corográfica (the abovementioned survey of natural resources done in the mid-19th century) to putting references from the Baroque art of Europe into depictions of *tejo*, a traditional Colombian sport roughly comparable to horseshoe-pitching, and a corn cob made of human teeth.

Such works illustrate the central concern of the *Proyecto Bachué* and the way it wants to support contemporary practices which reappraise the history of Colombian art in order to better define the role of art at the current time and times to come.

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