

tions other scholars' works in a bibliographic essay that does little to connect his findings to any particular historiography.

*Brazil's Revolution in Commerce* has neither a conventional introduction nor conclusion, and that signals to the reader how Woodard has chosen to wall off his findings from the works of others. It is a shame he did that because he is a fine researcher, and his book is filled with important and interesting insights. Perhaps the kindest way to interpret Woodard's choices is to say he has left the analysis to his readers. I only wish he had guided them more to the rich historiography on the many topics covered in this very well researched book.

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ANA MARÍA REYES, *The Politics of Taste: Beatriz González and Cold War Aesthetics*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2019.

Ana María Reyes's book, *The Politics of Taste: Beatriz González and Cold War Aesthetics* is an interesting analysis of the visual representation of the cultural impact of industrialization, internal immigration, and discourses of democratization and development in Colombia between 1964 and the 1970s. The artistic and socio-political structure of that process, Reyes argues, can be traced in the visual work and statements of Beatriz González and in the response of her contemporary critics, all connected by a particular idea of "taste." According to Reyes, her book "looks at the role played by the arts and criticism within this restricted and precarious return to democracy [following the dictatorship of General Rojas Pinilla], as well as at the effects of the modernization programmes that were taking place within a deeply traditional and hierarchical society" (p. 9). These programmes included migration, lured by or forced into "the *ideals* of urban civility and imagined opportunity" (p. 190) and the mechanics of urban consumerism and functional art.

Reyes's study is rich in information, illustrations, and ideas. It is also clearly structured. Six main paths guide its reading: González's personal artistic process through abstract art, Pop Art, Neo-Dada, and conceptual art; the response of her critics, among them Nicolás Buenaventura, Aurita de Cali, Walter Engel, Luis Fernando Lucena, Darío Ruiz Gómez, and, above all, Marta Traba; the place of modernism within the conventional historical sequence of Western Art; the socio-political context, internal (the populism of the National Front) as well as external (the Cold War); the construction of a post-war urban popular culture marked by migration and the "civilizing" Alliance for Progress; and a series of links between educational and art institutions such as the Universidad de los

Andes, the Salón Nacional de Artistas Colombianos, the Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá, and the Coltejer and the São Paulo Biennials. These paths are interwoven throughout the five chapters that organize González's work in five stages marked by awards bestowed by art institutions or by polemics triggered during exhibitions at international events. As Reyes makes evident, González has dealt with the topic of *taste* from the beginning of her career. The author of the book argues that awards and polemics are the result of González provoking her educated viewers and reviewers by assaulting "elites' sensibilities" (p. 3) and the "language of both class and gender social discrimination" (p. 26) via her "appropriations of urban popular culture" and the latter's "bad aesthetic taste" (p. 24).

Despite the fact that Beatriz González's pictorial production between 1962 and 1964 was welcomed by contemporary critics as an "embodiment of conservative modernization in Colombia" (p. 33), those works were, Reyes argues, "representations of representations" (p. 56) that made a "biting critique of artistic autonomy" (p. 57) by attacking the uncritical cultural reproduction of the middle and upper classes' values. The first stage of González's production included abstract expressionism versions of Diego Velasquez's and Johannes Vermeer's paintings; her critics deemed these as examples of the artistic autonomy and internationalism made possible by the democratic freedom offered by artistic abstraction, in an interpretation reflected the 1950s National Front's rhetoric of progress and "good taste." But Reyes argues that, rather than aiming at an internationalization of her own "exportable" work, González, in her series *Encajeras* (1964-1967), which is part of the first stage, carried out a provincialization of Vermeer's *The Lacemaker* (69) by establishing associations with national and popular values. The evidence of these links lies in the painting *Encajera almanaque Piel Roja* (1964), which makes references to the headshots of women exhibited by illustrated calendars published and distributed as a courtesy by Coltabaco within the advertising campaign designed for its best-selling cigarettes *Piel Roja*.

This type of "rich web of references" (p. 153) articulated by González is tracked by Reyes's book as they move from universalist painting to ephemeral, mechanically reproduced images guided by the artist's attraction to "industrial material and artisanal skill" (p. 189). In the second stage, González's 1965 series *Los suicidas del Sisga*, the 1967 *Estirpe de reinas*, and the series *Foto estudios*, of the same year, are versions of family photographs typically exhibited on a mantle; the first two photographs used as a basis for the paintings were reproduced by the newspaper *El Tiempo* to, in that order, illustrate the tragic end of an urban couple and to highlight the celebrity status of a specific family, while the last series are versions of studio child photography. In the third stage, the

paintings *Ánimas benditas* and *El jardín de las Hespérides* as well as the series of *Náyades*, also from 1967, are versions of industrial decorative images of classical and religious themes taken from the catalogue of original and imported chromolithographs reproduced by the Cali printing house Gráficas Molinary. From the same year, part of the fourth stage, are *Apuntes para la historia extensa I* and *II*, two enamel paintings on metal plate that are high-contrast, colorful versions of original 1800s paintings depicting the Independence heroes Simón Bolívar and Francisco de Paula Santander. Reyes closes her quest and argument with what she calls “strategic regionalism,” represented by pieces such as González’s *mobiliarios*, multimedia assemblages produced between 1970 and 1977; these are enamel-painted tin plates assembled onto metal furniture depicting religious images based on chromolithographs: scenes of the *Via crucis* and the *Good Death* are assembled onto beds; the *Last Supper* onto a table; and a version of the *Madonna and Child* onto a wood vanity. Contemporary critics singled out González’s representations as trafficking with cultural marginality and even plagiarism. Through the intersection of recognizable representations of republican neoclassical painting, photographic reproductions in periodicals, illustrated tin advertising boards, TV programmes, and regional Pop Art, González’s work creates, according to Reyes, a place between the high and the low, the official and the informal, the spiritual and the domestic.

Reyes has found in the symbolic basis of Cold War visibility, brought to the surface by González, “the discursive constructs of taste and cultural legitimacy in Colombian society as forms of social exclusion and discrimination” (p. 18). “What González achieves in effect,” concludes Reyes in her last chapter, “is to expose the discourse as the frame through which the image is to be interpreted. This discourse penetrates the privacy of the home and the most intimate of acts: the constitution of the subject” (p. 189). Such subject is represented as the “‘invading’ newcomers” carrying with them their cultural bad taste.

Via González’s production and the discursive frame of taste, Reyes opens up a debate on the ways in which diverse rural traditions (reduced by critics and artists to “the folkloric”) were turned into a homogenised urban popular culture produced and sold to internal migrants who, subsequently, also became producers and sellers, by copying and adapting “civilizing” images and ways of life, as well as correspondent values. The result of such absorption of modernity is a “tacky” (*cursi*) aesthetics that was harshly criticised in its time as well as evaluated within a spectrum in which it was considered a matter of idiosyncrasy and also a fundamental piece of a theory of resistance to US imperial aggression. Between 1967 and 1971, notions such as “authentic art” (Lucena), “art that is *ours*” (Ruiz Gómez), and “regional culture” (Traba) showed a more

sympathetic attempt to make sense of González's visuality and its relationship with the ever-changing cultural and socio-political contexts.

This book is a very useful study for readers interested in art and cultural history. It succeeds at identifying, analyzing, and commenting on the terms of a post-war discussion, from critics to artist and vice versa. The treatment of some of these terms remains, however, imprecise. Key notions such as "what is ours" and "the popular" could have been examined in more detail, and the notion of "bad taste" more clearly distinguished from other related concepts to avoid synonymy.

What is referred to as "our own popular culture" (p. 213), for example, could be seen as ambiguous if one takes into consideration that such cultural production is made of industrial objects and European imagery (as was the case of *Gráfica Molinary*) produced and imported in the 1950s by the bourgeoisie and sold after World War II to all types of urban immigrants. Likewise, the political program of modernisation in Latin America was also made of an amalgam of symbols that came from industrial production, mass media enterprises, and political discourses of social improvement. At some point, newly arrived urban consumers, particularly those that become small industrialists or craftsmen, will also become creators of symbols following current trading trends, as happened to high-end artists. On the other hand, while the notion of good taste is clearly explained, its counterpart loses some of its shape throughout the text. Despite its initial working definition (p. 19), it then acquires multiple facets when associated with the terms tasteless, cheap, facile, untutored, unsophisticated, unmeasured, unbridled, naïve, kitsch, camp, sentimental, and excessive. Leaving aside these points, this book is authoritative, rigorous, and consistently insightful. With this study Ana María Reyes manages to successfully open a significant number of routes for further studies on the subject.

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