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Inhabited Landscapes: Nudes, Spirituality, and Coevality in the Landscape Paintings of Armando Morales

Regina Emmer

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**INHABITED LANDSCAPES:
NUDES, SPIRITUALITY, AND COEVALITY IN THE
LANDSCAPE PAINTINGS OF ARMANDO MORALES**

by

Regina N. Emmer

**B.A. Art History, The George Washington University, 2006
M.A. Professional Studies in Art History, Towson University, 2011
M.A. Art History, University of New Mexico, 2013**

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Arts
Art History**

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Dedication

In memory of Dr. David Craven, with whom this process began.

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ABSTRACT

The Nicaraguan artist Armando Morales (1927-2011) has received considerable attention in recent scholarship for his work as a ‘Magical Realist’ painter—a label that has drawn attention to the “dreamlike” and “mythic” qualities of Morales’ work while obscuring other qualities that are critical to understanding the artist and his oeuvre. Focusing on the landscape paintings that Armando Morales executed between 1985 and 2001, I remove Morales’ work from the framework of magical realism within which it has been situated in order to more deeply probe themes that were central to the artist but which have been largely overlooked. More specifically, my research has aimed to address the recurring presence of the female nude, the role of spirituality, and the notion of indigenous coequality—or coexistence—with the modern industrialized world, all of which are embedded in Morales’ late twentieth century depictions of the Nicaraguan topography. I draw upon twentieth century anthropological discourse in order to situate my analysis within a larger body of work concerned with the temporal and spatial construction of ‘otherness.’

I begin by deconstructing the myth of Latin American magical realism, exploring the ways in which the construct of magical realism has functioned within colonialist

imaginings of Latin America as a place concerned with ‘unreal’ time and space. By removing these works from the realm of ‘unreality,’ it becomes possible to pointedly address those elements which do not adhere to narratives of ‘otherness’ and which have, therefore, remained unaddressed in the existing scholarship. I first consider the implications of the pronounced presence and fragmentation of the nude female body throughout Morales’ landscape paintings. Approaching these compositions as open works of art, I propose multiple possible readings of Morales’ constructions of the nude, one of which is that we might read these landscapes as representing the artist’s own colonizing gaze in dialogue with Europe.

I next address the manner in which religion, spirituality, and magic were constructed in opposition to science, modernity, and progress in late nineteenth and early twentieth century anthropological discourse in order to create the inferior ‘others’ necessary for European and American colonial expansion. Drawing upon the work of anthropologists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss and Mary Douglas, I argue that Morales’ landscape paintings reveal a visual language riddled with spiritual underpinnings that challenge the modern separation between religion and science. I conclude by examining Morales’ 1992 work, *Selva tropical, decidua*, within the discourse of the modernist grid, arguing that Morales reacted against cultural binaries by gridding the landscape, not according to the Cartesian coordinate system, but rather as a rhizomatic map. With the research and analyses presented here, I hope to remove Armando Morales’ landscape paintings from the “imagined community” within which they have been situated in order to provoke new approaches to the multi-layered visual language found throughout these works.

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Introduction: The Temporal and Spatial Construction of Latin America as ‘Other’

In her 1986 essay “...y los sueños sueños son,” U.S. critic Dore Ashton describes the landscape paintings of contemporary Nicaraguan artist Armando Morales as the epitome of Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier’s notion of *el real maravilloso*, comparing an unidentified tropical forest painting with the jungle scene that Carpentier constructs with his “baroque prose” in *Los Pasos Perdidos*.¹ Of Morales’ paintings, Ashton writes:

Morales’ landscape paintings are perhaps the most commanding reminders of his return to pastness...His way back, like Alejo Carpentier’s in *Los Pasos Perdidos*, takes him from the concrete experiences of sites in a tropical city to a place that lives, still, in mythic time...The cross-hatching of his razor is always seeking a structural unity that imposes an invented, human order on the natural anarchy. A horizontal landscape with its frame of sky and water is an intricate composition in which the effect of all the small touches, equivalent to adjectives in a prose account, mount up to an apparition of some impenetrable place, infinitely remote both in time and space, and complete within itself. These are landscapes screened, abstracted and re-invented. They are the issue of an imagination warmed by physical experiences in time past, flowing into an imaginary present. The crepuscular light, even in Morales’ landscapes, serves to heighten the paradox of the single vision containing both the real and the marvelous, and Morales, like so many of the writers of Latin America, accommodates both on the same plane.²

Ashton’s analysis of Armando Morales encapsulates the general discourse that has been constructed in order to discuss the works of Central American artists from a mainstream U.S. perspective, and the above excerpt highlights the three major themes that shape my own analysis of the work of Armando Morales throughout this thesis: the theme of time and space, the theme of an imagined Latin American community, and the theme of the colonizing gaze. The theme of time and space is, in particular, one to which I will continually return, as my other thematic concerns are closely linked with the temporal and spatial construction of Latin America as ‘Other.’ Throughout the course of this thesis, I will deconstruct the way that the constructs of time and space have been deployed in discussions of Armando Morales’ work as a Nicaraguan artist. As I will demonstrate, the portrayal of the Latin American artist as concerned with “mythic” time

and “imaginary” space has been integral to the construction of a regional cultural typology that functions as part of a larger colonizing discourse and which has skewed the scholarly discourse on Armando Morales and his oeuvre. As anthropologist Johannes Fabian argues in his 1983 publication, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*, the construction of narratives that deny the coequality—the temporal and spatial coexistence—of non-industrialized people and societies has been central to the continued colonization and ‘othering’ of these people and societies. While Fabian focuses on the ways that time and space have been deployed as mechanisms for the objectification of ‘other’ societies within the practices and discourses of anthropological study, his argument applies equally to the practices and discourses governing the fields of art history and art criticism. According to Fabian:

Among the historical conditions under which our discipline emerged and which affected its growth and differentiation were the rise of capitalism and its colonialist-imperialist expansion into the very societies which became the target of our inquiries. For this to occur, the expansive, aggressive, and oppressive societies which we collectively and inaccurately call the West needed Space to occupy. More profoundly and problematically, they required Time to accommodate the schemes of a one-way history: progress, development, modernity (and their negative mirror images: stagnation, underdevelopment, tradition). In short, *geopolitics* has its ideological foundations in *chronopolitics*...Neither political Space nor political Time are natural resources. They are ideologically construed instruments of power.³

Fabian’s work presents valuable insight that speaks to the manner in which the construct of time is deployed as a mechanism for the spatial ‘othering’ of Latin America. By establishing a system of binaries in which Latin America could be deployed as embodying the negative qualities of “stagnation, underdevelopment, tradition,” political and economic elites found a temporal mechanism by which to justify and facilitate colonialist-imperialist intervention in the region.

This temporal ‘othering’ indeed goes hand in hand with spatial ‘othering,’ as the notion of a removed time presupposes a removed space in which this ‘other’ time occurs. In his 2011 publication, *How Racism Takes Place*, George Lipsitz specifically probes the ways in which *spatial* constructs themselves function to uphold racial and cultural systems of differentiation. Lipsitz primarily focuses on the ways in which these systems of differentiation maintain the unjustified privilege and power of white Americans at the expense of black Americans living in the United States, but his insights are equally telling of the way that carving out the space of the ‘other’ functions as a mechanism for wielding transnational power. Lipsitz’s analysis sheds significant light on the ways in which spatial boundaries are deliberately constructed in order to prevent non-white American populations from gaining equal access to opportunity, resources and power, as social hierarchy is indeed maintained by structures that emphasize difference and dominance.

While Lipsitz speaks to the construction of racialized space in the United States domestic context, his argument similarly applies to the spatial imagining of Latin America as primitive and, therefore subordinate, transcontinental ‘other.’ As Katherine Manthorne argues in her 1989 publication *Tropical Renaissance: New Directions in American Art*, the mainstream U.S. perception of Latin America as a “Third World” territory derives from the cultural narratives constructed by nineteenth century U.S. artists.⁴ The narratives of exoticism formulated by these artists and transmitted to the North American public via the flat space of the canvas were integral to the construction of Latin America as the space of the primitive ‘other.’ As I will demonstrate, the

discourse surrounding magical realism has similarly functioned in the creation of a space for the ‘othering’ and exploitation of Latin America’s natural and human landscapes.

The contemporary notion that space is transparent—that space is easily readable and functions according to what we see on the surface—has contributed to the invisibility of the role played by spatial constructs as mechanisms for wielding social, political and economic power. Lipsitz explains, however, that the imaginary spaces of the ‘other’ are much more deliberately constructed and deployed than many of us recognize or are able to admit. Within the imperialist consciousness, this imagining of the spatial ‘other’ directly facilitates the processes of colonial appropriation. As Lipsitz points out, “When history takes place, it does so in actual places. Among aggrieved groups, history also takes places away, leaving some people, as David Roediger reminds us, displaced, disinherited, dispossessed, and just plain dissed.”⁵ Lipsitz’s analysis is equally significant for his examination of cultural and artistic tendencies “that...work within time and space to advance new understandings of ancestry, inheritance, association, affiliation, and action.”⁶ This approach to artistic expression informs my own analyses in Chapters Three and Four, as I explore the multivalent spiritual and cultural codes embedded in the landscape paintings of Armando Morales.

The concept that has facilitated the imperialist imagining of a region whose peoples and cultures are concerned with magic, and therefore, with the irrational, primitive time and space of the pre-modern, pre-historical past is the construction and deployment of magical realism. Under the guise of being concerned with a dialectic between the magical and the real, the discourse of Latin American magical realism has functioned, somewhat paradoxically, to maintain imperialist political and economic

dominance based on a system of cultural binaries in which reality and unreality, science and magic, reason and spirituality, primitivism and civilization, and stagnation and progress are hierarchically pitted against one another. Temporal and spatial distancing allowed for the erection of this series of cultural binaries, which have formed the structural basis for the political and economic dominance of the modern industrialized nations of Europe and the United States beginning in the Middle Ages and persisting right through to the present.

Roland Barthes critiqued the very structural basis upon which modern industrial society is founded in his 1967 essay, “The Death of the Author.” Barthes points out that emphases on ‘creative genius’ and the author as individual are modern notions which “emerg[ed] from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation...”⁷ Barthes makes reference to the introduction of Early Modern philosophies of human reason, the renewed humanistic interest in individual learning, and the introduction of Reformation ideals that challenged the authority of the Catholic church and led to the separation of church and state to suggest that it was this growing interest in individualism which ultimately gave birth to bourgeois culture, imperialist competition, and modern capitalism. Embedded within the text of “The Death of the Author” is an underlying critique of the imperialist emphases on positivism, progress, and scientific rationalism which were ultimately put in place during the Enlightenment as tactics for wielding European (and, later, American) political and economic dominance. Enlightenment thinking solidified the construction of the ‘West’ as the space of progress and modernity, as the world’s cultural ‘Others’ were, conversely, constructed as spaces of stagnation and tradition. One of my objectives throughout the

course of this thesis is to deconstruct the way that discussions of time and space have been deployed in relation to the works of Armando Morales, who, as I will demonstrate, viewed his own work, not as concerned with the construction of mythic narratives, but as both progressive and modern, while also preserving tradition.

Throughout her essay, Ashton continues to compare Armando Morales' landscape painting to Alejo Carpentier's 1949 novel, which raises an important question: why is it logical to equate the work of a late twentieth century Nicaraguan painter with the work of a mid-twentieth century Cuban novelist? My second thematic concern derives from this question, as I first explore the way in which the visual and literary arts have become collapsed in discussions of Latin America and then consider how this has functioned in the imagining of a shared Latin American identity and culture.

Ashton's analysis suggests that visual language functions in a manner *equivalent* to written or spoken language, and her essay summarizes a general discourse in which Central American visual and literary arts are consistently linked with one another. While Central and Latin American artists and authors may share similar social and political experiences— and perhaps, therefore, similar expressive tendencies—the belief that the visual arts represent the same “marvelous reality” reflected in regional literature is implausible. Although it is beneficial to examine literature as a tool for more fully understanding the historical climate of cultural production in a given nation or region—as I will do in the course of this thesis—it is problematic to equate the two forms of expression. This conflation of the visual and literary arts is as problematic as the notion that all artists or authors in Latin America are united by a singular, common regional culture or expressive mode. The tendency to equate visual art and literature contributes

to an essentialist perception of all Latin Americans as trying to reconcile the experiences of modern “reality” with the “imaginary” world of dreams and myth. In both cases, individual visual languages and modes of expression are made to fit within the mold of a generalized regional narrative, resulting in a lack of critical examination of the work of art itself.

Edward Said’s 1994 publication *Culture and Imperialism* helps to summarize the role played by magical realism as a cultural construct in the process of constructing “imagined communities,” which Benedict Anderson defines as fictitious societies founded upon collective imaginings of nationhood.⁸ As Said explains:

...the international media system has in actuality done what idealistic or ideologically inspired notions of collectivity—imagined communities—aspire to do... discussions of magic realism in the Caribbean and African novel, say, may allude to or at best outline the contours of a “post-modern” or national field that unites these works, but we know that the works and their authors and readers are specific to, and articulated in, local circumstances, and these circumstances are usefully kept separate when we analyze the contrasting conditions of reception in London or New York on the one hand, the peripheries on the other.⁹

In the Latin American context, the generalized notion of magical realism has functioned in a manner similar to that which Said describes with reference to Africa and the Caribbean. That is, the construction and deployment of magical realism as an expressive mode characteristic of the entire region has facilitated the construction of an “imagined” Latin American community. As Mari Carmen Ramírez argued in her 1992 essay, “‘Beyond the Fantastic’: Framing Identity in U.S. Exhibitions of Latin American Art,” this, in turn, allows local and individual specificities to be ignored as Euro-American discourses become centered on broadly homogenized notions of the world’s cultural ‘others.’ Ramírez’s essay is highly significant for its articulation of the problem of non-specificity in the construction of exhibitions of Latin American art. Yet, Ramírez herself

engages in a reversal of the very homogenizing practices that she denounces as she collapses national, state, and local contexts, as well as the individual practices of museum administrators and curators, under the blanket term “Euro-American.” It is this lack of specificity—as it has been enacted on both sides of the coin—which I will attempt to counter.

Although there are parallels between the Cuban Revolution, which occurred during the 1950’s, and the Nicaraguan Revolution, which occurred during the 1970’s, this is not reason to assume that the works of Carpentier and Morales reflect like ideas and experiences. Carpentier openly aligned himself with the revolutionary movement and was forcibly exiled from the country, while Armando Morales moved to New York shortly after the founding of the FSLN in 1961 and had no direct contact with the revolutionary climate in Nicaragua. Because Carpentier and Morales were responding to different national and historical contexts, did not share similar experiences of direct revolutionary involvement, and employed different expressive mechanisms—that is, writing and painting—there is no basis for the assumption that they expressed a similar sort of “marvelous reality,” as Ashton proposes. In other words, there is no real basis for equating the works of these two individuals; the propensity to do so reflects an essentialist view of a shared Latin American experience and manner of cultural expression.

And yet, while there is no *real* basis for comparing Morales to Carpentier, there are benefits. By aligning Armando Morales with Alejo Carpentier, the scholarly discourse has fashioned a history of Morales and his work that has established his ‘credibility’ as a revolutionary, avant-garde artist. Despite Morales’ lack of involvement

in the 1979 Nicaraguan Revolution, the repeated suggestion that he shared a sort of artistic ‘solidarity’ with Carpentier via similar expressive modes and tendencies has contributed to the construction of a narrative that presents Morales as a nationalistic artist and supporter of the Nicaraguan Revolution. The construction of Morales as such points to a problem inherent in art history as a discipline; a problem which art historian Kirsten Buick addresses in her 2010 publication, *Child of the Fire: Mary Edmonia Lewis and the Problem of Art History’s Black and Indian Subject*. While Buick specifically addresses the “Negro Problem framework” as it relates to the subject of her study, Buick’s deconstruction of “the notion that...art represents a full and uncomplicated expression of [an artist’s] identity” is equally relevant with regard to Armando Morales.¹⁰ As Buick explains, there is a pervasive tendency to read the works of artists who do not fit the traditional mold of the white male ‘genius’ artist as reflecting their inherent racial, social and cultural “differences.”¹¹ In truth, however, the discipline of art history is founded on constructing and reinforcing narratives of difference in order to maintain the structure of imperialist political and economic dominance.¹² The writing of the history on Armando Morales and his work, therefore, has been colored by an implicit need to reinforce the constructed narrative of Latin American identity. The notion of Morales as a nationalistic and/or revolutionary artist is a notion that I will deconstruct in the chapters that follow by more deeply probing Morales’ thematic interests, visual language and self-positioning as an artist, all of which have been examined only so far as they fit the mold of Latin American artistic identity.

Toward that end, I propose an alternative to Dore Ashton’s comparison of Morales and Carpentier. Rather than examine Morales’ landscape paintings in relation to

Carpentier's canonic writings in order to establish points of similarity, we might alternatively examine them in relation to the works of one of Morales' contemporary visual artistic counterparts in order to establish points of difference. The landscape paintings of Nicaraguan artist Arnolfo Guillén (b. 1941), who was a member of Nicaragua's revolutionary Praxis Group from the time of its founding in 1963, help to illustrate the formal and thematic differences between the work of Morales and the work of his revolutionary artistic counterparts, a number of whom were jailed, tortured, or exiled for their political activism and revolutionary involvement.¹³ Morales and Guillén both studied under Rodrigo Peñalba at the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes in Managua during the 1950's, a decade of heightened oppression and tension under the Somoza dictatorship. While Guillén, along with numerous other pupils of Peñalba, went on to become founding members and participants in Nicaragua's Praxis Group, which openly opposed the dictatorship, Morales never participated in the Praxis Group Movement and never identified with the group's manifesto. Published in July 1963, the Praxis Group Manifesto openly opposed individualism and expressed the need to seek 'truth' and change through a dynamic, collective process of creation and exchange:

La verdad no se nos ha dado de antemano. La verdad la encuentra el hombre en la lucha. La verdad tampoco es patrimonio exclusivo de cada uno. La verdad es de todos. De ahí que necesitemos divulgarla, proclamarla, enfrentarla si es preciso. Ocurre entonces que la sola creencia de poseerla no basta. La verdad límpida, inmaculada, la verdad de los solitarios y los orgullosos no nos sirve. Si es cierto que queremos servir a la verdad —una verdad dinámica, viva, que cada día, cada hora, cada minuto, nos impone su exigencia— es necesario que la hagamos llegar a los demás, hombres como nosotros, y como nosotros embarcados en el mismo bote: en el de la existencia de cada día. Es preciso, pues, que exterioricemos nuestra creación en el arte y en la cultura y que la encarnemos en la vida: en hechos, en actos, en actitudes.¹⁴

While Morales has been compared to Carpentier to support the uncomplicated narrative of a shared Latin American expressive tendency centered on reconciling the marvelous

and the real, comparison with Guillén's work helps us to situate Morales within a more complex narrative that examines the ways in which his work in fact contradicted the ideals of Nicaragua's avant-garde revolutionary culture.

I will begin by comparing Guillén's *Esta tierra ni se vende ni se rinde* to Morales' *Jungla*, both landscape paintings and both executed in 1987 (Figures 1 & 2).¹⁵ Guillén's painting, the title of which translates as *This Land is Neither Sold nor Yielded*, depicts a dark, barren space that is barely recognizable as a landscape in any traditional sense. A basin rests between two abstract mountainous forms, beneath which a patch of vibrant pigment appears as a glowing light emanating from cavernous space, producing a point of stark visual contrast within an otherwise monochromatic scene of black and gray earth. The painting is composed of a combination of mixed media and oil paint on wood panel, creating a rough, rigidly tactile surface. The composition effects the sense of a landscape that has been left completely desolate and devoid of all life in the aftermath of war and destruction. The formal interplay between solids and voids and the contrast between the glowing burst of light and the empty gray space above conjure images of a mushroom cloud produced by the detonation of a nuclear weapon.

Aside from such formal allusions, the title of the work—*Esta tierra ni se vende ni se rinde* (*This Land is Neither Sold nor Yielded*)—is itself telling given that Guillén painted it in 1987, a year that marked the height of violent resistance to the Sandinista government during the U.S.-backed Contra War.¹⁶ Guillén's title clearly projects the message that, unlike the self-interested Somoza regime, no amount of money or military intervention will cause the Sandinista Revolutionaries to willingly surrender the collective space of the Nicaraguan people. This painting resists the counterrevolutionary

movement and its U.S. supporters by presenting a visual narrative that serves as a reminder that the Nicaraguan Revolution was fought by individuals who were motivated, not by self-interest, but by the desire to produce a more promising collective future.

Conversely, *Jungla*, painted the same year as Guillén's work, is markedly more ambiguous. On one hand, Morales' *Jungla*, or *Jungle*, reveals an unsettling, inherent tension not typical of landscape scenes executed as markers of nationhood. Branches bend and twist in a manner that is, at once, unsettling and calm, static and writhing. The sense of stoic dynamism that dominates the composition is heightened by Morales' use of a spectral palette and prismatic plays of light to intensify the effects of illumination and shadow in a scene that we might read as foreboding and, yet, full of hope. Yet, through the inherent tension conveyed in this unsettling landscape scene, Morales presents us with an image that also suggests uncertainty about the future, the national fate, and the artist's own place in relation to the national landscape that he represents.

While Guillén's work is charged with clear political underpinnings and a message of resistance to the U.S.-backed Contras, Morales' *Jungla* is more ambiguous in its presentation of the Nicaraguan topography. Morales does not present a perfectly imagined, mythic national narrative, but rather a highly subjective, individually mediated narrative that is riddled with contradiction and ambiguous visual language. As I will demonstrate, this in part derives from the fact that, while Guillén was in Nicaragua to experience the revolutionary climate and its aftermath, Morales was living abroad in Europe in the years leading up to, during and after the 1979 Revolution. This points to the third major theme that informs my reading of the landscape paintings of Armando Morales: the theme of the colonizing gaze. I argue that the ambiguity inherent in

Morales' landscape paintings is indexical, not simply of the fragile, 'disjunctive' state of the nation in the revolutionary climate, but rather, of Morales' own individual tendency to perceive the Nicaraguan landscape—social, political and human—through a European optic.

By removing Morales' works from the "imagined community" within which they have been situated, it becomes possible to more fully engage with and problematize the visual narratives that they construct. Exemplifying Umberto Eco's notion of the "open work," Morales' landscape paintings thrive on their ambiguity and inherent sense of mystery as they present the viewer with the opportunity to construct and re-construct meaning in ways that are often contradictory. In this way, as Eco notes in his seminal text *The Open Work*, first published in 1962, the work of art itself may embody a fixed physical form while also existing as a continual process of interpretive performance. As Eco explains:

A work of art, therefore, is a complete and closed form in its uniqueness as a balanced organic whole, while at the same time constituting an open product on account of its susceptibility to countless different interpretations which do not impinge on its unadulterable specificity. Hence, every reception of a work of art is both an interpretation and a performance of it, because in every reception the work takes on a fresh perspective for itself.¹⁷

I believe that the veil of "magical realism," as woven in the contemporary Anglicized sense, has hindered the 'openness' of Morales' works. In the following chapters, I attempt to remove this veil in order to reveal several of the contradictory interpretations embedded in Morales' landscape compositions. In Chapter One, I deconstruct the way in which time and space and the notion of magical realism have been deployed in discussions of Latin American art. As I will explain, my objective in the context of this thesis is to examine the aspects and underpinnings of Armando Morales' work that have

been veiled by the discourse of magical realism that pervades the scholarship on Latin American art. In Chapter Two, I examine Armando Morales' constructions of the feminine and fragmentation of the female body in landscape. In Chapter Three, I probe the religious underpinnings and spirituality inherent in Morales' landscape compositions. In Chapter Four, I examine the interplay between horizontal and vertical elements evident in Morales' landscape compositions and consider the ways in which these intersections speak to the artist's simultaneous identification with European and Nicaraguan culture and worldviews. I conclude my analysis by summarizing the ways in which Morales' use of ambiguous visual language allows contradictory readings and interpretations to co-exist, and I propose that there is much room for new and fresh insight to be introduced in scholarship on Central American art in general when we look beyond the dominant narratives that have been constructed in the field.

Chapter One: The Myth of Magical Realism in Latin American Art and Literature

Magical realism, as a literary and artistic genre, has become widely associated with the art and literature of Latin America since the mid-twentieth century, when the Cuban novelist, Alejo Carpentier, first introduced the notion of *lo real maravilloso*, translated as *the marvelous real*, to describe the distinctive qualities of Latin American cultural production.¹⁸ Although Carpentier's notion of *lo real maravilloso* differed from the concept of *Magischer Realismus*, translated as *magical realism*, first introduced by the German art critic Franz Roh in 1925, use of the two terms became nearly interchangeable in application to Latin American literature by the late 1960's. By the early 1980's, the term *magical realism* was increasingly being used to describe the region's visual artistic production. Moreover, while Carpentier clearly distinguished between Surrealism and *lo real maravilloso* in the literature on Latin American art, the terms Surrealism and *magical realism* seem to be used almost interchangeably throughout the latter half of the twentieth century.

In this chapter, I do three things: I trace the origin and development of the concept of magical realism as it is applied to Latin America; I explore the manner in which the terms magical realism and Surrealism have been used interchangeably with reference to the regional visual arts; and I expand upon Mari Carmen Ramírez's argument in "Beyond the Fantastic" to argue that the mythological construction of Latin American magical realism has functioned within a larger colonizing, primitivizing discourse in the writing of art history. I attempt to deconstruct the notion of magical realism by re-assessing its deployment as a colonizing mechanism in the Latin American context and by untangling the origins of the mythology of a shared Latin American identity.¹⁹

The magical realism that has come to be associated with the late twentieth and early twenty first century visual and literary culture of Latin America developed out of the concept of *lo real maravilloso* introduced by the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier in the Prologue to his 1949 novel *El reino de este mundo*, translated as *The Kingdom of this World*. The terms *magical realism* and *lo real maravilloso* gradually came to be used almost interchangeably with regard to Latin America during the second half of the twentieth century, representing not only a shift in terminology from *marvelous* to *magical*, but also a shift in meaning and understanding. In other words, the term *magical realism* is not merely a linguistic translation of Carpentier's concept of *lo real maravilloso*. When Carpentier introduced the notion of *lo real maravilloso* to describe literary trends in Latin America, the concept of *Magischer Realismus* had already been introduced by the German art critic Franz Roh over two decades earlier, in his 1925 essay "Nach-Expressionismus: Magischer Realismus," and, accordingly, was already imbued with its own set of meanings. In order to untangle the complex web of associations linked with the term *magical realism*, it is necessary to re-examine the texts of both Roh and Carpentier.

The German art critic Franz Roh first used the term *Magischer Realismus* in 1925 to describe the Post-Expressionist shift in artistic production during the Weimar era in Germany. This shift was characterized by a break with Expressionistic abstraction and a general resurgence of 'realistic' and figurative forms of representation, and Roh believed that it required a name that signified something beyond the chronologically-rooted notion of "Post-Expressionism."²⁰ As Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy Faris have noted in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, Roh's initial use of the term to describe

an aesthetic style marked by a resurgence of realism is at odds with our contemporary notion of magical realism as being marked by the incorporation of mystical or fantastic elements.²¹ Already, the relevance of time and space as cultural constructs becomes evident. As I have discussed, the notions of time and space have been deployed in the contemporary construction of Latin America as being trapped in a primitive past. Toward this end, the term “magic” has been deployed in the formulation of Latin America as concerned with the imaginary space of “pastness” rather than with the contemporary space of progress. Yet, Roh’s original notion of *Magischer Realismus* was formulated around the idea that a linear, chronological understanding of artistic production as progressing from one movement to the next was inaccurate. Roh acknowledged that, during the height of Expressionism in Germany, realism as a mode of representation was not left behind in some past time and space; rather, it continued to exist alongside and within the expressive tendencies that were developing out of the Weimar context. Similarly, Roh recognized that “magic,” or “mystery,” was not the space of pre-modern, primitive society, but rather, had continually existed as an inherent part of contemporary being.

Despite Alejo Carpentier’s claim in 1949 that “what [Franz Roh] called *magical realism* was simply painting where real forms are combined in a way that does not conform to daily reality,” a reexamination of Roh’s 1925 text reveals that Carpentier was mistaken in his understanding of Roh’s use of the term.²² In the introduction to a 1927 Spanish translation of his original essay, Roh acknowledged the limitations of assigning set terminology, such as the term “magic,” to describe a general artistic tendency informed by complex circumstances in a specific historical moment:

I attribute no special value to the title “magical realism”... With the word “magic,” as opposed to “mystic,” I wish to indicate that the mystery does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it...²³

This statement reveals that, when Roh first used the term in 1925, it was precisely reality with which he was concerned.

Roh originally coined the term *Magischer Realismus* because he believed that the work that he was describing “had to have a name that meant something.”²⁴ The term itself was, in fact, not widely used until the 1960’s, when Roh’s essay was re-introduced as part of a newly emerging mainstream interest in re-visiting the cultural production of the Weimar era.²⁵ As the excerpt above makes clear, when he first used the term, Roh did not conceive of “magic” and “reality” as separate phenomena. Rather, he saw “magic,” or “mystery,” as part of perceived “reality.” In other words, Roh was describing a new style of painting that, as he saw it, represented a synthesis between “the spiritual type of painting that seeks what is powerful,” and “the other type, which cultivates the profound meaning of the diminutive.”²⁶ We might read the two types of painting that Roh described as being concerned, on one hand, with the abstract, intangible forces of the world and, on the other hand, as being concerned with that which is tangible and physically observable. For Roh, both abstract forces and tangible objects exist as part of the individual’s perceived “reality,” and *Magischer Realismus*, then, represented a style of painting that explored this point of convergence. Yet, in the process of the term’s translation into English, its meaning was altered such that the translated term, *magical realism*, has become a linguistic signifier with a set of signified associations that are far removed from Roh’s original conception of *Magischer Realismus*.

The artists whose work Roh first set out to describe when he developed the notion of *Magischer Realismus* were associated with what has been considered a period of

heightened intellectual artistic production during the years of the Weimar Republic. These artists include figures like Georg Schrimpf, Otto Dix and George Grosz, all of whom are more commonly associated with the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, translated as *New Objectivity*, Movement that characterized the Weimar Period of cultural production.²⁷ The 1934 landscape painting *Flanders* by Otto Dix exemplifies the Weimar approach to representing the nation (Figure 3). These artists sought to represent the ‘other side’ of a national narrative, painting scenes that depicted the horrors of war and their negative impact on Germany’s human landscape. As Irene Guenther notes in her essay “magical realism, New Objectivity, and the Arts during the Weimar Republic,” Franz Roh’s conception of *Magischer Realismus* describes the same artistic tendencies that Gustav Hartlaub observed and labeled *Neue Sachlichkeit*.²⁸ Because Hartlaub’s *Neue Sachlichkeit* interpreted the arts of the Weimar Era, first and foremost, as politically driven artistic expressions, his term took hold, while Roh’s term was largely overlooked.²⁹

I argue that there are three primary reasons for which Roh’s conception of *Magischer Realismus* was pushed aside while Hartlaub’s notion of *Neue Sachlichkeit* was embraced to describe the cultural and intellectual activities of the Weimar Era. First, Hartlaub was the director of the Kuntshalle Museum in Mannheim, Germany, and he coined the term *Neue Sachlichkeit* as the title of an exhibition of Post-Expressionist art. Though Hartlaub may not have set out to describe the cultural production of an entire era when he named that exhibition, the fact that the term *Neue Sachlichkeit* was immediately and widely embraced by Weimar artists, architects and intellectuals points to the tacit cultural, social and political influence of the museum, as institution. In other words, if

not for the fact that Hartlaub was an important museum director, his term *Neue Sachlichkeit* may have gone unnoticed just as Roh's had. The second reason that Hartlaub's *Neue Sachlichkeit* was taken up over Roh's *Magischer Realismus* returns to the way in which a linear notion of time was constructed to support the narrative of European progress. The term *Neue* indicated the development of a conceptual movement that had not existed prior that point, and therefore resonated with the notion of time as constantly moving forward in linear fashion. Third, it makes sense that during the Weimar era the cultural mainstream would favor a term that emphasized *Sachlichkeit* over *Magischer* because the former emphasized a rational understanding of the world as experienced through "objectness." As Timothy Mitchell notes in his 1989 essay "Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order," the world was "reduced...to a system of objects [whose] careful organization enabled them to evoke some larger meaning, such as History or Empire or Progress."³⁰ Mitchell's essay summarizes the way in which, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the museum as influential institution developed out of the European need to rationally order cultural space and historical time in order to construct narratives of "otherness."³¹ As Mari Carmen Ramírez's 1992 essay, "Beyond the Fantastic," makes clear, the construction of narratives of "otherness" has remained central to the mission of the museum through the twentieth century and well into the twenty-first.³²

Roh and Hartlaub were essentially describing the same artistic tendencies and characteristics, but because Hartlaub's term—*Neue Sachlichkeit*—privileged the association with the tangible object, and therefore with scientific rationalism over the association with the intangible, spiritual and phenomenological aspects of everyday life

experience/qualities of culture, it was embraced. Artists such as Schrimpf, Grosz and Dix saw themselves as producing more truthful representations of society, not invented imaginings of the grotesque. *Neue Sachlichkeit* was, therefore, accepted as a more appropriate signifier to assert the sense of political agency and heightened intellectual activity that the artists of the Weimar era saw as distinguishing them from the emotive, angst-ridden tendencies of the Expressionists.

Because Roh and Hartlaub both set out to describe the intellectual and political underpinnings of Weimar artistic production, there is remarkable consistency between the characteristics that each identified in describing the art of the Weimar Era.³³ Roh acknowledged that he was describing the same basic tendencies and artistic qualities that had become associated with *Neue Sachlichkeit* and, by the time that he published *Geschichte der Deutschen Kunst von 1900 bis zur Gegenwart*, translated as *German Art in the Twentieth Century*, in 1958, he had replaced his original term, *Magischer Realismus*, with Hartlaub's term *Neue Sachlichkeit*.³⁴

Although Roh claimed to “attribute no special value” to the specific terms used, terms always matter.³⁵ It is plausible that Roh's notion of *Magischer Realismus* was not adopted in the Weimar context because the term *Magischer* carries associations with the intangible, abstract, *unreality* of experience—qualities with which Weimar artists did not want to be first and foremost associated. In fact, the qualities associated with the “magical” are qualities that have traditionally been avoided in discourses on “high” art and culture. Even the Surrealists, for example, were associated with a psychoanalytic and, therefore, with a pseudo-scientific point of view. The qualities of the “magical”

have instead been reserved for and associated with the irrational ‘other’ and the world’s so-called ‘primitive’ cultures.

In a 1955 lecture entitled “The Structural Study of Myth,” structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss noted that anthropology was increasingly moving “away from studies in the field of religion,” and replacing them with “studies in the field of mythology,” thus undermining “the prospects for the scientific study of [primitive] religion.”³⁶ In other words, as primitive religion became equated with mythology in anthropological discourse, it became removed from science and instead understood as belonging to the realm of magic and superstition. In her 1966 publication *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas expands upon Lévi-Strauss’ argument, explaining the manner in which the notion of magic has been deployed as a mechanism for the ‘othering’ of non-industrialized societies in an ongoing historical attempt to propagate the notion that these societies are irrational and incapable of self-governance.³⁷ As Douglas points out, many of the indigenous social practices that have been deployed as superstitious and concerned with the irrationality of myth and magic, were, in fact, quite rationally based on culturally unique standards of cleanliness and purity.

Douglas explains that the modern association of myth, magic and superstition with primitivism is embedded in the discipline of social anthropology, as formulated around William Robertson Smith’s late nineteenth century text *The Religion of the Semites*.³⁸ Robertson Smith’s work was founded on two primary agendas: the attempt to promote the Darwinian narrative of evolutionary progress, and the attempt to reconcile religious faith with scientific reason. Both of these agendas necessitated a re-defining of

the roles of magic and superstition in order to construct a narrative centered, not on spirituality, but on moral human progress. According to Douglas,

Robertson Smith...inherited the idea that modern civilised man represents a long process of evolution. He accepted that something of what we still do and believe is fossil; meaningless, petrified appendage to the daily business of living. But Robertson Smith was not interested in dead survivals. Customs which have not fed into the growing points of human history he dubbed irrational and primitive and implied that they were of little interest. For him the important task was to scrape away the clinging rubble and dust of contemporary savage cultures and to reveal the life-bearing channels which prove their evolutionary status by their live functions in modern society. This is precisely what *The Religion of the Semites* attempts to do. Savage superstition is there separated from the beginnings of true religion, and discarded with very little consideration.³⁹

Douglas goes on to explain the influence of Robertson Smith's work on the subsequent generation of early modern anthropologists, among them Émile Durkheim, who was pivotal to the founding of French sociology, and the Scottish social anthropologist James George Frazer. It was Frazer, Douglas explains, who

...crudely tidied up the evolutionary assumptions implicit in Robertson Smith and assigned to human culture three stages of development. Magic was the first stage, religion the second, science the third. His argument proceeds by a kind of Hegelian dialectic since magic, classed as primitive science, was defeated by its own inadequacy and supplemented by religion in the form of a priestly and political fraud. From the thesis of magic emerged the antithesis, religion, and the synthesis, modern effective science, replaced both magic and religion. This fashionable presentation was supported by no evidence whatever. Frazer's evolutionary scheme was only based on some unquestioning assumptions taken over from the common talk of his day. One was the assumption that ethical refinement is a mark of advanced civilisation. Another the assumption that magic has nothing to do with morals or religion. On this basis he constructed the image of our early ancestors, their thinking dominated by magic. For them the universe was moved by impersonal, mechanistic principles. Fumbling for the right formula for controlling it, they stumbled on some sound principles, but just as often their confused state of mind led them to think that words and signs could be used as instruments. Magic resulted from early man's inability to distinguish between his own subjective associations and external objective reality. Its origin was based on a mistake. No doubt about it, the savage was a credulous fool.⁴⁰

Rather than probe the real cultural bases for rationally derived indigenous social practices, Enlightenment thinking thus led to a tendency to essentialize cultural practices foreign to white male elite European understanding as naïve, superstitious, and concerned with the irrational realm of the magical. This 'othering' was based, in a broad sense, on

the need to construct narratives and ideologies that would allow white male elite European, and later, American, colonizers to rationalize or justify their own exploitation of foreign land and people.

It is no surprise, then, that, shortly after Franz Roh's term *Magischer Realismus* was re-discovered in the 1960's, it was transformed from its original context and meaning and taken up in use almost interchangeably with Alejo Carpentier's notion of *lo real maravilloso* to describe Latin American art and literature. While Roh believed that the term itself was arbitrary, the cultural ideas that have since become linked with it are rather deliberate, and carry real implications for how we read and interpret the work of Armando Morales and other Central American artists classified as working in a magical realist vein.

Alejo Carpentier had introduced his notion of *lo real maravilloso*, translated as *the marvelous real*, in the Prologue to his 1949 novel *El reino de este mundo*. In that essay, Carpentier identified the distinctive artistic qualities that had emerged in Latin American culture as a result of the intersections between international paradigms and local regional history and tradition. Carpentier sought to establish a Latin American cultural framework outside the confines of European Surrealism, and, throughout the 1950's, Latin American authors increasingly embraced Carpentier's concept of *lo real maravilloso*. While Carpentier had applied his discussion of *lo real maravilloso* to both the visual and literary arts, it was not until the latter part of the 1960's that manifestations of *lo real maravilloso* began to be widely identified in the region's visual artistic production. This increasing awareness of *lo real maravilloso* as present in the Latin American visual arts coincided with a renewed international interest during the late

1960's in the artistic production of the Weimar era and the re-discovery of Franz Roh's essay on *Magischer Realismus*. Simultaneously, Latin American literature began to receive international attention with Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Cien Años de Soledad*, published in 1967—just one year after Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger*. It was in this context that the term *Magischer Realismus*, as used by Roh, and Carpentier's notion of *lo real maravilloso* became conflated in application to Latin America.

Simultaneously, although Carpentier had attempted to establish *lo real maravilloso* as a cultural tendency distinct from European Surrealism, the Surrealist fascination with Latin America, and the persistent identification of the region's artists with the Surrealist movement, both voluntarily and involuntarily, further broadened the definition of *lo real maravilloso* in discourses on Latin American art.⁴¹ Gradually, then, the diffuse cultural references and aesthetic tendencies associated with both *Magischer Realismus* and *lo real maravilloso* became simplified, collapsed and “normalized” into a form that conceptually linked Latin American art with the creation of magical or fantastic visual narratives. More specifically, Latin American art in the latter part of the twentieth century became associated with the construction of visual narratives that were “dream-like” and connected with the primitive, indigenous and exotic, rather than concerned with the ‘realities’ of civilized society. As Mari Carmen Ramírez notes, these associations became most evident in the museum exhibition context of the 1980's, as curators constructed narratives centered on the “fantastic” art of Latin America.⁴²

As the terms *Magischer Realismus* and *lo real maravilloso* were Anglicized, the notion of Latin American *magical realism* became part of the construction of a larger mythology that presented Latin America as “asleep” and incapable of rational self-

governance. Even when the term *magical realism* is not overtly used in the writing of Latin American art history, this mythology has colored critical and scholarly interpretation of the regional artistic production in a general sense. More specifically, this mythology has functioned as part of a larger rhetoric that sustains the illusion of continued Latin American reliance on U.S. economic, political and military intervention. In many ways, the manner in which magical realism has been constructed and deployed with reference to Latin America functions as a contemporary myth of the sort identified by Roland Barthes—magical realism has been constructed as a “normalized” form that encapsulates and mythologizes the cultural and artistic tendencies of an entire region. As Barthes noted, “[such] ‘normalized’ forms attract little attention, by the very fact of their extension, in which their origin is easily lost.”⁴³

Even when we revisit the “origins” of its mythology, the embrace of magical realism in Latin America certainly already pre-supposed a European gaze. The term itself had been coined and first applied by Franz Roh within a European context; Carpentier’s notion of the marvelous real was based on his perception of the interactions between European models and Latin American history and culture; and the Surrealist presence in Latin America derived, from the European perspective, from an interest in Latin America’s place as “other.”⁴⁴ The manner in which Roh’s initial use of the term magical realism—to describe a break with Expressionistic abstraction and a return to more realistic forms of representation—later changed in application to Latin America sheds significant light on the ways in which the mythology of Latin American magical realism was constructed. As the term came to signify an association with the “unreal” or imagined, it became increasingly difficult to divorce the notion of magical realism from

Surrealism, despite Carpentier's clear attempt to dissociate *lo real maravilloso* from European Surrealism. As Oriana Baddeley and Valerie Fraser noted in their 1992 publication *Drawing the Line: Art and Cultural Identity in Contemporary Latin America*, it was specifically the Surrealist interest in defying rational systems of social and political governance that attracted Andre Breton and his followers to Latin America:

Surrealism defined itself as primarily preoccupied with 'otherness,' whether expressed through insanity, social deviancy or the strangeness of differing cultural norms... The perceived opposites of 'civilized' values were sought out and adopted as emblems of the Surrealist cause.⁴⁵

While the initial Surrealist interest in Latin America was precipitated by an expressed desire to invert and deconstruct social, political and cultural norms, the association of Latin America with Surrealism has served a paradoxical function: it has solidified and supported a colonizing perception of Latin America as 'backward,' 'uncivilized,' and politically and economically inept. The fact that magical realism and Surrealism remained closely linked and, at times, were even interchangeably used to describe Latin American art and artists in the late twentieth century suggests that magical realism, as constructed from the Western perspective, perpetuated the notion of a Latin America that was "asleep" and incapable of dealing with its own political, social and environmental realities.

From the general perspective of the late twentieth century Latin American artist such as Morales, there is no doubt that the desire to embrace the label of magical realism—in the English sense of the term—reflects, at least in part, a desire to gain international recognition and patronage while maintaining the ability to incorporate elements of a regionally distinctive visual language. Again, magical realism functioned in a manner similar to Surrealism by "offer[ing] the Latin American artist a place at the

high table.”⁴⁶ In other words, it was precisely the attraction of the European modernists’ gaze that many twentieth century Latin American artists came to associate with a sense of professional artistic accomplishment and, by extension, with wealthy elite patronage.

Although Baddeley and Fraser acknowledge that the European identification of Latin America with Surrealism was problematic in its perpetuation of exoticizing myths, they, too, perpetuate the colonizing gaze in their discussion of “The Surrealist Continent.”

According to Baddeley and Fraser:

In Third World countries caught in a battle for some measure of cultural independence, Surrealism offered a validation of their own internal languages of rebellion. Dreams and magic replaced reason and morality, the shaman usurped the priest. Latin American artists attempting to confront the contradictions of their heritage, to forge a cultural identity which encompassed the divergent strands of colonial history, could find within Surrealism a prioritization of their own concerns.⁴⁷

Surrealism did not so much validate Latin American artists’ “internal languages of rebellion” as it did provide a visual strategy by which those internal visual languages, whether “of rebellion” or not, could become part of an international artistic discourse. In other words, it is reductive to suggest that the visual languages emerging out of twentieth century Latin America were necessarily rebellious, simply because they were perceived as ‘different’ when examined through a European optic. Toward that end, Baddeley and Fraser’s assertion that “dreams and magic replaced reason and morality” is misleading.

In the context of the producing Latin American cultures, these elements are not diametrically opposed, but rather, coexist in much the same way that European cultural influences coexist with aspects of native culture.

Whether speaking of magical realism or of *lo real maravilloso*, at issue is the fact that these terms seem to have become almost as “hollow” as terms like “Surrealism,” “Baroque” or “classicism.”⁴⁸ In this way, the tendency of *lo real maravilloso* that Alejo

Carpentier sought to describe in order to distinguish Latin American art from association with any of these “meaningless” terms has gradually become simplified and codified into a meaningless term itself. Carpentier developed his notion of *lo real maravilloso* in 1949 in order to distinguish emerging Latin American literary trends from inclusion within the genre of Surrealist literature—a genre with which Latin American art and literature had become increasingly associated from the late 1920’s through the late 1940’s. Carpentier noted that, by the late 1940’s, the definition and deployment of the term “Surrealism” had evolved to the point that it no longer corresponded to Andre Breton’s initial definition:

Today, everybody knows what Surrealism is, everybody says after witnessing an unusual occurrence: “How surreal.” But if we go back to the basic text on Surrealism, to Andre Breton’s First Manifesto, written in 1924, we must face the fact that the definition given by the founder of this movement hardly corresponds to what happened later.⁴⁹

In much the same way, the use and meaning of the term *lo real maravilloso*, which Carpentier coined in an attempt to establish a meaningful term for describing the work of Latin American artists and authors responding to regional reality and history, has evolved in a way that “hardly corresponds” to what Carpentier originally described. When we revisit Carpentier’s original definition, we find that he distinguished *lo real maravilloso* from Surrealism because even “if Surrealism pursued the marvelous...it very rarely looked for it in reality.”⁵⁰ According to Carpentier, Surrealism was concerned with the dreamlike and with the deliberate construction of “strange” or marvelous scenes, and, therefore, was concerned with unreality. Conversely, Carpentier defines *lo real maravilloso* as the very expression of Latin America reality; a reality in which “the strange is commonplace, and always was commonplace...[in which] contemporary history presents us with strange occurrences every day.”⁵¹ Carpentier argued that, unlike the European Surrealists, the Latin American artist or author did not have to try,

deliberately, to evoke a sense of the strange or marvelous because the strange and marvelous were already inherent to daily life and reality.

Curiously, by the end of the twentieth century, the notion of *lo real maravilloso*, as described by Carpentier, had itself undergone a transformation that suggested that *lo real maravilloso* had always been defined, in part, by its association with the dreamlike, the mythic and the unreal or imagined. In her 1987 essay, "...y los sueños sueños son," Dore Ashton, for example, explains Armando Morales' work as "consistent with the notion of *el real maravilloso* discussed by the Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier."⁵² Yet, in the same breath, Ashton describes Morales' paintings as "dreamlike," "mythic" and concerned with "the imagined rather than the directly confronted; the legendary rather than the real."⁵³ If we return once more to Carpentier's original definition of *lo real maravilloso*, it becomes clear that Ashton's understanding of the term is inaccurate and misleading.

In a 1975 lecture entitled "Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso," translated as "The Baroque and the Marvelous Real," Carpentier expanded upon the definition of *lo real maravilloso* that he set forth in his 1949 Prologue to *El Reino de Este Mundo*:

Now then, I speak of the marvelous real when I refer to certain things that have occurred in America, certain characteristics of its landscape... In the prologue to the first edition of my book *The Kingdom of This World*, I define what I think the marvelous real to be. But at times people say to me, "We have something that has been called *magical realism*; what is the difference between magical realism and the marvelous real?" If we stop to take a look, what difference can there possibly be between Surrealism and the marvelous real? ...if Surrealism pursued the marvelous, one would have to say that it very rarely looked for it in reality... On the other hand, the marvelous real that I defend and that is our own marvelous real is encountered in its raw state, latent and omnipresent, in all that is Latin American. Here the strange is commonplace, and always was commonplace.⁵⁴

It is important to note that, in this 1975 lecture, Carpentier used the terms *magical realism* and Surrealism interchangeably. In so doing, Carpentier literally and

deliberately—albeit with great subtlety—critiqued the notion of *magical realism* as it was becoming increasingly associated with Latin American literature. As we have already established, Carpentier understood *lo real maravilloso* as embedded in Latin American reality, and he critiqued both *magical realism* and Surrealism for their failure to directly confront reality. Carpentier’s understanding of *lo real maravilloso* is thus fundamentally opposed to Ashton’s understanding of *el real maravilloso* as being “concerned with the imagined rather than the directly confronted.”⁵⁵

Ashton is considered among the most significant authors and critics of Latin American art and art history, and her work has, indeed, been formative to the establishment of a scholarly discourse on Latin American art in the United States. Yet, her writing on Morales, specifically, points to the conflation of art history and art criticism that has problematized scholarship on Latin American art. Prior to the late twentieth century, Latin American art received little serious scholarly attention within the discipline of art history, and the majority of writing on Latin American art was approached from the critic’s perspective. Because the analysis of Latin American art was approached, first, through the lens of art criticism and only much later approached as a subject for historical study, the practice of art criticism has not entirely been separated out from the practice of art history in the Latin American context. As a result, terms such as *lo real maravilloso* have been ‘inherited’ within the artistic discourse without rigorous scholarly examination of their origins and intended meanings. Indeed, the invisible guiding hand of anthropology—“the science of man, or of mankind, in the widest sense,” according to the Oxford English Dictionary—has further obscured these origins by providing a ‘scientific’ rationale for distinguishing societies from one another on the

basis of their governance by myth, religion or science.⁵⁶ While it is widely acknowledged that the notion of *lo real maravilloso* originated with Alejo Carpentier's 1949 essay, it seems that, much like "Surrealism," *lo real maravilloso* has come to represent something very different from what its founder set out to describe in his original texts on the subject.

Ashton's repeated use of the term *el real maravilloso* in her essay on Morales is problematic for another reason. Ashton is a U.S.-based critic who lives and works in New York, and, despite its Spanish title, "...y los sueños, sueños son" was originally published in English in the exhibition catalogue for a 1987 show entitled *Armando Morales: Recent Paintings* held at the Claude Bernard Gallery in New York. By using a Spanish title, which refers to the seventeenth century Spanish play *La vida es sueño*, written by Pedro Calderón de la Barca, Ashton immediately signals to the reader that she is writing from a space of awareness, authenticity and credibility, and suggests that she has translated the text into English for her American readers to understand. Ashton heightens the sense that this is a translated text by repeatedly invoking the term *el real maravilloso* in its Spanish sense and by constructing her English language prose in a fluid, poetic way. In this way, Ashton's place as American author is obscured, as she instead presents herself as a translator of authentic Latin American culture and of Morales' visual language. Consequently, the reader does not question Ashton's authority and becomes willing to take at face value Ashton's interpretation of Morales' works. In other words, the suggestion that she acts as translator rather than author serves to validate Ashton's claims as authentic, consequently veiling the subjectivity of her analysis.

The manner in which Ashton renders herself invisible as *author* of “...y los sueños sueños son” is akin to the manner in which Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, in his 1855 poem *The Song of Hiawatha*, rendered himself invisible as author of a mythic Native American identity. As Virginia Jackson notes in her essay “Longfellow’s Tradition; or, Picture-Writing a Nation,” Longfellow very deliberately obscured his own authorial presence in order to suggest to readers that he had merely deciphered authentic Native American pictographic signs and recorded them in a form intelligible to his white American audience. According to Jackson, Longfellow “made reading look like seeing” as “the figurative “meaning” of each symbol [was], literally, recorded, as if it illustrated the symbol itself.”⁵⁷ In this way, Longfellow obscured the subjective motives that contributed to his authoring of a mythic, universal Native American subject in the figure of Hiawatha, instead convincing readers that *The Song of Hiawatha* was written from an objective, ethnographic (and therefore accurate) standpoint.

Toward this end, as Joe Lockard explains in his essay “The Universal Hiawatha,” Longfellow’s poem functioned in the construction of a revisionist national history, in which the distorted fiction of a universal Native American identity was presented as “authentic”.⁵⁸ The sense of authenticity surrounding Longfellow’s poem both contributed to and was informed by the nineteenth century rhetoric of the “Noble Savage,” by which U.S. governmental conquest of the sentimental, primitive Native American race was justified and propagated as inevitable and manifest.⁵⁹ Accordingly, Lockard notes that *The Song of Hiawatha* became a “a hyper-reflective translation source text,” in which “translators see the visions they wish to see on the reflective surface of the text, and these visions mirror entirely contradictory narcissistic social self-images.”⁶⁰

In a similar way, by presenting herself as translator rather than author, Dore Ashton projects a mythic, romanticized, self-reflective vision of Armando Morales as Latin American artist while retaining a sense of authenticity and objective, ethnographic authority. It is significant that Ashton wrote “...y los sueños sueños son” during the height of U.S. involvement in the Contra War occurring in Nicaragua during the late 1980’s. Even if not Ashton’s intention, I believe that her essay is part of the discourse on Latin American magical realism that justified, in the U.S. national consciousness, violent intervention in Nicaraguan political affairs by contributing to the construction of a fictional, romanticized universal Latin American identity. Because this fictional Latin American identity centered on the perception of Latin Americans as concerned with dreams and magic rather than with reality, U.S. intervention in the region could be justified as necessary and inevitable. In a similar way, Wendy B. Faris, in her 2002 essay “The Question of the Other: Cultural Critiques of Magical Realism” attempts to uphold and promote the primitivizing agenda of the U.S. cultural mainstream. Faris systematically refutes critiques of the construct of magical realism in order to maintain the narratives of “otherness” so central to the agenda of magical realism. Among the many problematic points proposed by Faris is the notion that realism and the fantastic are distinct from one another and diametrically opposed. “In other words,” Faris writes, “magical realism is a combination of realism and the fantastic in which the former predominates.”⁶¹

Interestingly, however, Carpentier’s original definition of *lo real maravilloso* corresponds to a recent re-reading of magical realism proposed by Eva Aldea in her 2011 publication *Magical Realism and Deleuze: The Indiscernability of Difference in*

Postcolonial Literature. Aldea applies Deleuze's notion of ontology—which proposes that being or 'reality' can not be conceptualized as different manifestations of a singular universal being or substance, but rather that reality must itself be understood as a continual process of the negotiation of different forces—to argue that the magical, i.e., the 'virtual,' is necessarily already a part of the 'real.' As Aldea explains it:

Deleuze's ontology rests on a few simple concepts, at the heart of which lies a paradox: one Being with two distinct yet inextricable sides. To Deleuze, the real consists of the actual and the virtual. The actual is that which exists in time and space: matter and form. The virtual is an 'abstract and potential multiplicity' presupposed by space and time... The real consists of the virtual and the actual together. However, this twofold nature of reality is merely the appearance of two aspects of the same thing... univocal Being. To Deleuze, difference, rather than identity, is therefore primary to Being.

Deleuze emphasizes the role of the virtual in an understanding of reality. A view of reality that only takes the actual side into account, which allows the virtual to be 'reduced to a simple possible,' leads to error and illusion.⁶²

Aldea more directly explains the significance of applying Deleuze's ontology in reformulating our understanding of magical realism. She writes:

A reading of magical realism using Deleuze's concept of series reveals that the structure of the real and the magical corresponds to Deleuze's fundamental distinction between two sides of Being: the actual and the virtual. Indeed, the realism appears as 'real' precisely because it reflects the convergent, ordered structure of all actual things, all things in the here and now. The magic appears as different because of its divergence from such a structure... The structured order that governs meaning under [a regime of signs], and makes realism appear as a transparent representation of an external reality, is the same order that underpins the social organization of the State with its rigid segmentation of territory and people. Magic, in contrast, is not bound by this order, and thus appears as deterritorialized, able to move across the boundaries of the segments of the State as embodied by the convergent series of realism.⁶³

Because this view approaches "the virtual," or the magical, as necessarily inherent to what humans experience as reality, or being, Deleuze's view of reality is remarkably consistent with the view of reality that Carpentier explains as being intuitive in the Latin American consciousness. Aldea's application of Deleuze's philosophies is significant for transforming our understanding of magical realism, from an understanding of magical realism as the reconciliation of the real and the magical, to an understanding of the

magical as already inherent in reality. This also, then, necessitates a radical reformulation of our general understanding of what constitutes being or reality. Because the “regime of signs” that remains dominant in the elite industrialist consciousness has constructed the virtual, or the magical, as being outside of the framework of reality, rather than embedded in it, to achieve a wide-reaching transformation in our perception of reality and, therefore, of our reception of magical realism, is a difficult task. While my reading of the works of Armando Morales is informed by Deleuze’s philosophies and by Aldea’s application of them in re-defining magical realism, I have chosen to abandon the term itself, precisely because of the notions that remain tied up with the magical under a “regime of signs” that still largely privileges rationalist assumptions. In other words, I believe that labeling Armando Morales as a “magical Realist” artist inevitably calls attention to certain aspects and qualities of his works, while other qualities that do not directly pertain to the narrative, or mythology, of magical realism are repeatedly overlooked.

In the chapters that follow, I attempt to counter this tendency by analyzing several of Morales’ landscape paintings without the presupposition that these are magical realist works. More specifically, I analyze Morales’ works without pointed consideration of their “dreamlike” or imaginative qualities and without attempting to align them with the regional literary conventions surrounding the notion of *lo real maravilloso*. In so doing, I attempt, not to deconstruct or disprove the validity of the notions of magical realism or *lo real maravilloso*, but rather to contribute an alternative analysis of Morales’ landscape paintings. In examining Morales’ landscape depictions outside of the framework of magical realism, I address three main themes or issues that have not yet been rigorously

addressed in the existing scholarship pertaining to these works: Morales' constructions of the female nude, Morales' constructions of the spiritual, and Morales' suggestion that a cyclical view of time permeates the Nicaraguan consciousness. Rather than approach these works from a perspective that seeks to reconcile the magical and the real, I approach them from a perspective that presupposes a process of constant negotiation between the actual and the virtual aspects of existence.⁶⁴ Finally, I will demonstrate that, because Morales moved to Europe and openly aligned himself with a European cultural perspective, these works complicate the notion that Morales contributed to the construction of a national visual narrative with these works. While Morales' landscape paintings do convey a sense of nostalgic respect for the Nicaraguan landscape and indigenous culture, they also convey a colonizing, primitivizing gaze. In this way, an inherent tension between the sense of a Nicaraguan national identity and the discourse of primitivism underscores these works and lends to contradictory interpretations of them.

Chapter Two: Un-Earthing the Nude

Because the scholarly and critical discourse on Armando Morales' landscape paintings has centered upon their imaginative qualities and "dream like atmospheres," no analysis has directly addressed the fact that the nude female body figures prominently in Morales' landscape paintings. The tendency to subvert critical analysis of Morales' female nudes is compounded by the fact that, as Marcia Pointon argues, art historical discourse has, as a rule, avoided the nude. In her 1990 publication *Naked Authority: The Body in Western Painting 1830-1908*, Pointon explores the numerous possible "reasons for avoiding the nude as a subject," one of which is directly linked to the nude's canonic place within the discipline of art history.⁶⁵ As Pointon argues, "The nude has been (inappropriately) associated almost exclusively with high art forms and art historians seeking to challenge the direction and boundaries of the discipline have with good reason looked to objects of study outside the canonical register."⁶⁶ This point is significant in furthering our understanding of why the nude as subject has been, in particular, omitted from scholarship on Latin American art. As scholars focusing on Latin American art seek to expand the field and subvert the colonizing narratives upon which the discipline of art history was founded, there has been a tendency to avoid discussion of 'traditional' art historical categories and canons all together.

In this chapter, I propose that it is in fact necessary to confront the ways in which Armando Morales engaged the canon of the nude in his landscape paintings in order to establish himself as working within the lineage of 'high art.' I argue that Morales deliberately aligned himself with the tradition of late nineteenth and early twentieth century European artists and deployed the female nude—and more specifically, the

indigenous female nude—in painting as a form of rhetoric to assert his presence as artistic master in dialogue with Europe.

In some of the landscape paintings that Morales executed between 1985 and 2001, human figuration is open and direct—the presence of the female nude in the landscape is central to the composition in a way that is immediately overt to the viewer—while in others, female bodies and body parts are incorporated into the overall landscape composition in obscured and abstracted ways, almost always forming portions of tree trunks and limbs and adding an anthropomorphic quality to the landscape. While Oriana Baddeley and Valerie Fraser note the anthropomorphic quality of the trees in Morales' landscape paintings, they never identify the artist's tendency to cite human bodily forms in his constructions of landscape and they never directly compare the forms of and in Morales' trees with the artist's figurative paintings and sketches and, therefore, their analysis of Morales does not extend beyond the general and the speculative. In this chapter, I formally compare the elements of Morales' landscape paintings with his figurative paintings and sketches in order to demonstrate that, even when the nude female is not overtly present, Morales very directly incorporated female bodily forms into his landscape paintings.

Because Morales, like any artist, was working from a perspective informed by a complexity of ideas, beliefs and experiences, it would be implausible to read his landscape paintings as suggestive of any singular worldview or artistic tradition. Rather, these paintings are indicative of the complex and often contradictory forces that are always present in the work of any individual artist. I propose three possible readings of Morales' constructions of nude female bodies in and as landscape, and argue that his

paintings of women in landscape do not represent a singular artistic perspective, but rather, are open works of art in which many possible interpretations perform and intersect.

First, Morales' landscape paintings, with their prominent incorporation of nude female bodies and body parts, may be read as perpetuating art history's patriarchal tradition of constructing the female body as an object removed from time and space and thereby subject to colonization by the male artist.⁶⁷ I will demonstrate that, by appropriating and manipulating the female body and its forms, Morales exoticizes and colonizes the indigenous body just as he exoticizes and colonizes the Central American landscape.

Second, because Morales oscillates between and often even combines intact and fragmented bodies in his constructions of landscape throughout the time period in question, we may read his landscape paintings as exemplary of the dialectic between totalization and fragmentation that Linda Nochlin argues is metaphoric of modernity. In *The Body in Pieces: The Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity*, Nochlin analyzes examples of artistic bodily fragmentation and "re-suturing" throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to posit that "modernity may...be associated with, or suggested by, [either] a metaphoric or actual fragmentation," or "its opposite, with a will to totalization embodied in the notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the struggle to overcome the disintegrative effects—social, psychic, political—inscribed in modern, particularly modern urban, experience, by hypostatizing them within a higher unity."⁶⁸

Finally then, Morales' landscape paintings may also be read as allegories for nationhood. If we consider these images within the tradition of constructing the female

figure as national allegory, then we might read them as metaphoric of a fragmented Nicaraguan national identity and the resulting “will to totalization” that this sense of fragmentation produced in the decades following the 1979 Revolution. I further complicate this notion by proposing that the fragmented female body in landscape may be read, not just as an allegory for an abstract conception of nationhood, but also as an allegory for the *machismo* framework that continues to dominate the nation socially and politically and perpetuates injustice based on constructions of gender difference.⁶⁹

It is important to first acknowledge the ways in which Morales’ landscape paintings remain within a larger art historical framework that has governed the canonic construction of the female nude as an object for the gazing male subject and as naturally attuned to or connected with nature. According to Marcia Pointon, “The painting of the female nude in Western post-medieval culture might... be seen as one of the institutionalized forms that most effectively functions to reinforce and reproduce woman’s intermediate situation between nature and culture.”⁷⁰ As Pointon suggests, this is directly linked to the problematic manner in which the artist’s rendering of the female nude came to signify—iconically, indexically and symbolically—the male artist’s mastery over nature and creative cultivation of culture. Pointon problematizes and deconstructs the way in which the female nude has generally functioned as artistic signifier, and her formal and textual analyses throughout *Naked Authority* ultimately demonstrate that, in order to be relevant, any discourse surrounding the nude must account for the constantly shifting cultural codes and boundaries that govern the rhetorical functioning of the nude in visual representation.⁷¹ In this way, Pointon’s text provides a relevant point of departure for considering the multiple, contradictory readings

that we might attribute to Armando Morales' constructions and deployment of the female nude in landscape.

According to Pointon, the manner in which the female nude has come to signify male creativity and artistic genius in part derives from the fact that "since the Renaissance, the measure of professional attainment in artistic practice has been...the mastery of the plastic essentials of the body."⁷² Seeking to align himself with this tradition of professional artistic practice early in his career, Armando Morales began working toward the development of a distinctive approach to rendering the nude female body and, by the early 1970's, the female nude became a subject of frequent depiction for the artist. A 1973 painting entitled *Dos desnudos contra muro Amarillo* exemplifies Morales' early approach to rendering the nude female body (Figure 4). While Morales' later works never fundamentally break with the formal treatment of the body that is demonstrated here, this composition is unique in that the female nudes are the clear foci of this composition, as if insistently demonstrating the artist's "mastery of the plastic essentials of the body."⁷³ The scene depicts two female figures set side by side within a shallow, abstract space, dominating the composition as their bodies extend beyond the frame. In contrast to the otherwise flat pictorial plane, these female nudes are rendered like weighty, sculptural masses in space. Their sculptural bodies appear stagnant and immobile in a suggestion that, although they occupy space, these two figures exist outside of time.

Dos desnudos contra muro Amarillo was painted several years after Morales had discovered, in 1968 or 1969, a text by the sixteenth century Flemish physician Andreas Vesalius entitled *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*, translated as *On the Structure of the*

Human Body.⁷⁴ Vesalius' text was illustrated with detailed anatomical drawings executed by the German-Italian painter and draughtsman, Jan van Calcar, and Morales has cited this text and van Calcar's illustrations for it as one of the sources that most influenced his personal artistic development of the human figure. As Morales explained, "The profound study of human anatomy and the analysis of its mechanisms in Vesalius suggested to me a kind of formal expression which if pursued with rigor could create hitherto unexplored drama in the depiction of the nude."⁷⁵ An examination of any of van Calcar's woodcuts for that text illustrates Morales' point—these are not simply anatomical studies, but rather are anatomical studies charged with a sense of dramatic humanism (Figure 5).

Vesalius' text and van Calcar's illustrations for it certainly influenced the numerous anatomical studies that Morales completed throughout his career, but the significance of *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* is most evident in a series of paintings that Morales executed in homage to Vesalius in the 1970's (Figure 6). *Gimnasio, I: Homage to Vesalius* (1975), for example, depicts two masculine figures that confront one another in an outdoor arena reminiscent of the Roman Coliseum, their musculature and skeletal structures partially visible through translucent skin. In a manner akin to the illustrations for *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*, Morales' rendering of the human bodies creates a dramatic energy that charges the whole composition with a sense of dynamic movement and tension. The two male figures in *Gimnasio I* stand erect and engaged with muscles flexed, in stark contrast to the two voluptuous female figures that lean against a wall in *Dos desnudos*, their bodies composed of softly modeled curves.

Unlike the male nudes depicted throughout Morales' *Homage to Vesalius* series, none of the female nudes that Morales painted throughout his oeuvre, beginning with *Dos desnudos*, conveys this same sense of writhing action. Rather, Morales adheres to the art historical canon, always rendering his female subjects as passive objects rather than active agents. In this way, Morales actively performs as a masculine artist who, through the stylized representation of his male and female figures, reifies the patriarchal masculine/feminine binary by which the masculine is continually upheld as dominant.⁷⁶ As Judith Butler argues in her 1988 essay, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,"

...gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self... Just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives.⁷⁷

Thus, Morales' differing stylized treatment of male and female bodies functions on multiple levels. It first serves to affirm his own identity as a masculine artist working within the patriarchal tradition of the academy. Simultaneously, it reinforces the masculine/feminine binary by giving visual expression to the constructed notion of gender difference across both time and space. By repeatedly performing the narrative of gender difference in his paintings, Morales becomes part of the larger artistic and art historical community that has historically deployed the space of the canvas as a mechanism for perpetuating the masculine/feminine binary in the real space of society.

Morales' performance as a masculine artist is underscored by the fact that he rendered the male nude as an expression of homage to Vesalius, while his repeated

rendering of the indigenous female nude may be read as the repeated appropriation and reinvention of the female body in order to help construct his own masculine identity. As Griselda Pollock argues in her 1993 publication, *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888-1893: Gender and the Color of Art History*, the pervasive tendency among late nineteenth century European male artists was to emulate one another while distorting and re-figuring indigenous female subjects in the process.⁷⁸ Pollock argues that the history of the European avant-garde has been a history of

...reference, deference and difference...Reference ensured recognition that what you were doing was part of the avant-garde project. Deference and difference had to be finely calibrated so that the ambition and claim of your work was measured by its difference from the artist or artistic statement whose status you both acknowledged (deference) and displaced.⁷⁹

Pollock further explains that *difference*, in particular, functioned on multiple levels to direct the avant-garde project of the late nineteenth century. On one hand, European male artists working in deference to one another had to do something *different* in order to distinguish themselves from those artists to whom they paid tribute.⁸⁰ Yet, in order to do so, they also had to respond in innovative ways to a larger colonizing discourse centered on the invention of fictions that emphasized differences, not only of gender, but also between European and non-European societies, in order to maintain the status of the white male artist.⁸¹ Pollock invokes Franz Fanon's 1952 work, *Black Skins, White Masks*, to explain that:

Colonial domination is not only economic and political. It is psychological as well, forming an ambivalent field of relationships and identifications which implicate both colonizer and colonized in distorted figurations of desire in which the personality and the body of one group is literally colonized by the desires and meanings of the dominating group, turning [exotic] peoples into projections for Westerners of the 'Otherness of the Self.'⁸²

The indigenous female body became central to these inventions of difference, and the identities of indigenous female subjects were thus erased and reinvented to support the

visual narratives constructed by white male European artists. While Pollock formulates her argument by examining Paul Gauguin's *Mana'o tupapau* as a Tahitian "gambit" created in response to Edouard Manet's *Olympia*, the tendency to pay deference while inventing difference was indeed likewise deployed by Paul Cezanne and Pablo Picasso, two European modernists who are most immediately relevant to our discussion of Morales.

While the sources for and influences on Morales' depictions of the female nude are numerous, Morales cited the works of Cezanne and Picasso as influences that were formative when he was just beginning to study painting under Rodrigo Peñalba in Nicaragua during the 1960's.⁸³ *Dos desnudos contra muro Amarillo* was executed after Morales had spent several years examining van Calcar's drawings and completing hundreds of rigorously detailed anatomical nude studies from life. Yet, despite Morales' knowledge of human anatomy and musculature, the grotesque and unsettling distortion of these female bodies indeed points to the modernist European influence. The nude female bodies in *Dos desnudos* appear elongated and oddly proportioned in a manner reminiscent of the distorted female figures in Cezanne's *The Large Bathers* (1906) (Figure 7).

As Art Historian Jack Flam has noted, Cezanne's depictions of female nudes "redefined...what was permissible in the representation of the human figure," as they broke with the persistent Renaissance-derived tradition of depicting eroticized nudes set in Arcadian wilderness scenes.⁸⁴ Yet, Cezanne not only laid the groundwork for a modernist tradition in which the nude female figure would no longer be depicted in idealized, eroticized fashion; with *The Large Bathers* he also established as 'acceptable' the artist's violent distortion of the female body in painting. Cezanne was openly uneasy

about rendering the nude female body from life, and, rather than work from live models, he worked primarily from earlier sketches and studies, which he had completed during his years of formal artistic training. As Leo Steinberg and numerous other scholars have noted, Cezanne's anxiety over the nude female body is evident throughout his oeuvre—and *The Large Bathers* is particularly angst-laden.

With *The Large Bathers*, Cezanne did not simply challenge the traditions of the past, which had reduced the painted female nude to an object for the male gaze in a reductive suggestion that feminine agency existed solely in the power to sexually seduce. On one hand, Cezanne stripped his painted female subjects of all agency and identity, including sexual agency, as he appropriated bodily forms and distorted the facial features of his subjects as if in self-defense. *The Large Bathers* may then be read, at least in part, as representing Cezanne's aggressive reaction to the threat of the feminine and his attempt to reestablish a masculine control that he felt had been lost. While Neo-Classical and Renaissance-derived canons were indeed problematic in propagating the idea that the nude female body was to be rendered as an eroticized object for the pleasure of the gazing male subject, the supposition that the female body was a site of visual and sexual pleasure necessarily implied that, to a certain degree—however small—women retained an element of power. Cezanne did not deconstruct the Renaissance canon of the nude, but rather, he established a binary between, on the one hand, the female nude as a site for visual erotic pleasure, and, on the other, the female nude as threatening to masculine agency. With *The Large Bathers*, Cezanne also, then, may be seen as having established a binary between the idealized, eroticized treatment of the female body, and the violent distortion of it. But there is more to this story.

In her 1992 publication *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*, Lynda Nead cites the work of Carol Duncan to explain that, in the modernist context, the male artist's distortion of the female body transcends literal interpretation as it becomes symbolic of masculine attainment of "spiritual and artistic enlightenment":

In the broader historical context of male anxieties concerning the sexualized female body, the modernist trajectory is defined by Duncan as an attempt to transcend the earthly domain of woman/nature/ representation in order to discover the higher masculine plane of pure abstraction. The tradition of the female nude works here to identify the spiritual quest for abstraction as an exclusively male endeavour. Duncan gives as an example the placing of Willem de Kooning's *Woman I* on the threshold to the rooms containing the great Abstract Expressionist breakthroughs by Pollock, Rothko, Still and so on. The interpretation that is suggested through this installation is that the female body, woman, must be confronted and transcended on the way to spiritual and artistic enlightenment (abstraction).⁸⁵

For the modernist (male) artist seeking to reach "the higher masculine plane of pure abstraction," then, the distortion and gradual abstraction of the nude female body functions as a sort of rite of passage into the enlightened domain. Nead's discussion and synthesis of Carol Duncan's observations is significant for helping us to decode the visual language of successive generations of twentieth century modernists, for whom the distortion of the female nude functioned within this larger discourse.

In many ways, it was Cezanne's *The Large Bathers* that paved the way for Pablo Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)* (1907)—a work that fundamentally changed the course of figurative painting (Figure 8). Although Armando Morales' nudes never became quite as geometrically distorted as Picasso's nude female figures, a strong Cubist influence is evident in Morales' increasingly pronounced abstraction and fragmentation of female bodies. While Morales' female figures bear little resemblance to the female figures in Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)*, it is undeniable that Picasso's work profoundly influenced Morales' approach to figuration. *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)* was

the first major work to present the nude female body in a highly geometric, fragmented, abstracted fashion. This was pivotal for two reasons: 1) It solidified the break with traditional nude figuration that Cezanne had incited the previous year with *The Large Bathers*, and 2) it established a new tradition—a modernist tradition—of figuration, from which the post-modern generation of artists would have to break. As Morales explained in a 1990 interview with Celia S. De Birbragher, the generation of artists emerging in the late 1950's acknowledged that figures such as Cezanne, Braque and Picasso had already deconstructed the language of “open and direct figuration,” making it “necessary to look for a new and original form of [figurative] expression.”⁸⁶

For Morales, the development of this new form of figurative expression is epitomized by a painting such as *Selva tropical I (Jungla)* (1985) (Figure 9). In *Selva tropical I (Jungla)* (1985), what at first appears an elaborate labyrinth of branches and trees reveals Morales' uncanny ability to subtly incorporate numerous pictures within the same painting. A closer look reveals that eerily curvilinear trees are imbued with human anatomy and identifiable female body parts. The central tree sprouts upward from a pyramidal base and appears to transform into a pair of legs connected to the lower half of a woman's body (Figure 10). Above in the composition, seeming to form part of the upper portion of the trunk on a tree behind, a female breast is visible as if in profile (Figure 11). The composition is peppered with numerous other anatomical and facial elements, rendered in a sort of *tromp l'oeil* fashion that causes the viewer to continually question whether or not what he or she sees is actually present on the canvas.

Comparison of the bodily elements in this landscape scene with Morales' anatomical studies and figurative sketches helps to demonstrate the formal correlations

between human bodies and landscape features. The prominent pyramidal base in *Selva tropical I (Jungla)* (1985), for example, directly echoes the pyramidal base from which the central female figure in his 1984 *Sketch for Three Women* emerges (Figure 12). Similarly, when examined alongside an artist's sketch of human feet outstretched in upward motion, it becomes evident that the base of the tree in *Selva tropical II* (1987) assumes the form of a human foot (Figures 13 & 14). Finally, artist's sketches of female torsos and limbs are reflected, in elongated form, in Morales' anthropomorphic jungle trees, which are at once alluring and repulsive (Figures 15 & 16).

Rather than geometrically abstract the female body parts that are scattered throughout these scenes, Morales renders them in a formally naturalistic way, retaining a sense of the bodily curvature and musculature that we find in his anatomical studies. Because the body parts retain their naturalistic forms, they appear like fragmented cadavers, like limbs of corpses that have been chopped off and painted into the trees. Sinuous branches replace severed limbs to form reconstructed "bodies" that, despite the formal naturalism of their individual components, have been completely de-humanized.

Clearly breaking with Cubist conventions, Morales abstracts the female body, not by reducing it to a series of fragmented geometric forms, but by fragmenting its naturalistic human forms and weaving them into the landscape. Yet, while Morales clearly breaks with the formal conventions of Picasso, he adheres to his predecessor's tendency to seize and manipulate female bodies, re-purposing their individual parts as he inhabits and literally inscribes his masculine gaze into the work through a process of cross-hatching. Morales summarized this process in a 1990 interview with Celia S. de Birbragher:

I copy from a sketch my initial image with thin quick-drying colors. I let the work dry for about ten days and then there is a second image, once again copied from the sketch—carefully done with a reticle—but executed more carefully and with greater veracity than the sketch and using an unrestricted range of colors. This I also let dry for another ten days. There then follows a staining process, which is something which can be done only by the hand and with the minimum intervention of the brain...once again I let the work dry...Then I stain the canvas again with different grays, dark, leaden, bluish, gold-colored, reddish and sometimes verging on black. I take off this layer by “shaving” it before it dries; the shaving is literal because I do it with razor blades, hundreds of them, but it is all done very carefully in a certain direction, with account being taken of parallels and the crossing of angles at 6 or 8 points...Of the final gray smearing of paint there remains what one decides not to take away as well as what cannot be taken away, since the paint has lodged into the very fine nooks and crannies of the earlier coatings. In this “shaving” too I take away some of the first staining and even of the second image; what remains is an interplay of color like a geological sifting with an infinite number of points appearing in an ordered disorder which gives punctuation to the picture...Finally I varnish the picture, touching it up and correcting it with a very fine brush and a hundred thousand brush strokes where necessary. I then let it dry for a few months and then I apply a final varnish of beeswax which I polish hard with a fluff-free cloth. The picture is then ready.⁸⁷

The manner in which Morales speaks of ‘ordering’ the ‘disordered’ calls to mind Timothy Mitchell’s discussion in *Colonising Egypt*. In that text, which I will discuss in greater detail later in this chapter, Mitchell brings to light the colonial project of ordering the world’s ‘disorderly’ societies as if pictures or exhibitions.⁸⁸ In this description, Morales also presents his treatment of the canvas as a series of invasive acts; at times almost violent, but always highly calculated and executed with exacting care.

On one hand, then, we might read Morales’ constructions of the feminine in landscape as acts of colonization. That is, we might attribute to these landscapes a reading similar to one of the readings of Picasso’s constructions of the female nude that Leo Steinberg proposes in his essay, “The Algerian Women and Picasso at Large.”⁸⁹ Steinberg argues that Picasso’s rendering of the female nudes in *Femmes d’Alger* “implies neither a Cubist nor a perspective space, but a space already entered, inhabited by the eye as by a roaming caress.”⁹⁰ A pointed sense of voyeuristic inhabitation is evident in several of Morales’ depictions of female bathers in landscape. *Tres Bañistas*

en la Selva (1994) and *Cuatro bañistas* (2000) are both pointedly voyeuristic scenes in which we, as viewers, visually inhabit the spaces occupied by the female bathers as if from the artist's own perspective (Figures 17 & 18). In both of these images, the effect is that of peeking through the brush to catch a glimpse of someone who doesn't know that we are watching. The sense of voyeurism and the sense that these female nudes are passive objects rather than viewing subjects is heightened by the fact that we never clearly see the women's faces. Their gazes never meet our own, as Morales constructs them as objects for the gaze rather than as individual agents who think, see, feel and perceive in their own right.

We have thus far examined the ways in which Morales' constructions of the female nude in landscape, as exemplified by *Dos desnudos contra un muro amarillo*, *Tres Bañistas*, *Cuatro Bañistas*, and *Selvas Tropicales I & II*, on one hand exhibit acts of artistic colonization in a manner akin to the colonization of the female body that is evident throughout the oeuvre of Pablo Picasso, whose work established both a model and a point of departure for Armando Morales. Morales' masculine colonization of the feminine in these scenes in part exemplifies the traditional tendency of the male artist to assert his creative mastery through the rendering of the female nude. In this way, through his deployment of the female nude in landscape, Morales inserted himself into the discourse of celebrated European artists who similarly engaged the canon of the female nude as a form of rhetoric to assert their roles as the creators and purveyors of culture.⁹¹ Likewise, the acts of inhabitation and colonization may be seen as extending even beyond the female body and onto the land itself. All of the examples that we have examined might also be read as adhering to a narrative that presents, not only masculine

colonization of the feminine, but also the colonization of “nature” by “culture.”

Applying Lynda Nead’s discussion in *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*, it becomes clear that Morales’ treatment and framing of the nude female form is embedded within a larger historical discourse, in which the ‘unruly’ matter of the female body, conceptualized as nature, becomes the site for the assertion of masculine reason and creativity as it is ordered and framed by the male artist:

For Plato and Aristotle and throughout the Middle Ages, the natural world had been conceptualized as female, as ‘mother’. With his celebration of the scientific mind, Descartes effectively recasts knowledge and reason as masculine attributes. In the *Meditations* a series of binary oppositions runs through the argument as ‘metaphors of contrast’ that assert the primacy of the masculine over the feminine. The term ‘male’ is associated with the higher faculties of creativity and rational mental processes, while the ‘female’ is demoted to the role of passive nature and associated with the biological mechanisms of reproduction. Thus in western metaphysics, form (the male) is preferred over matter (the female); mind and spirit are privileged over body and substance and the only way to give meaning and order to the body in nature is through the imposition of technique and style – to give it a defining frame. The implications of a system of thought that defines both scientific inquiry and artistic creativity as masculine are considerable and are certainly still at work in contemporary society.⁹²

As we will see, Morales’ repeated framing and ordering of “nature,” as represented by indigenous landscape and the nude female body, marks his symbolic passage toward “spiritual and artistic enlightenment” in the manner of the European male artist.⁹³

The terms “nature” and “culture” are immensely problematic and loaded, but, temporarily setting aside the complexities inherent in these terms, we might here take “nature” to refer to that which is indigenous, and “culture” to refer to that which has been developed according to European models of civilization.⁹⁴ These concepts of “indigenous nature” and “civilized culture” function in the construction, not only of places and societies, but also of individuals themselves. Thus, Judith Butler’s notion of gender performativity and the masculine/feminine binary becomes relevant to our discussion here as well.

Nature/culture and indigeneity/civilization are binary constructs that have been socially fabricated in much the same way as the gender constructs of female and male. In the context of modernity, individuals may thus perform identity according to the category with which one chooses to self identify. As with gender performance, one's self identification with either nature or culture, and one's corresponding performance of either 'indigenous' or 'civilized' identity, will eventually become embedded in the individual's belief system, impacting one's perception of both self and others.⁹⁵ As with gender identity, repeated performance perpetuates the nature/culture and indigeneity/civilization binaries, contributing to their universal salience across time and space. These dichotomies of nature/culture and indigeneity/civilization function in the construction of narratives of difference by equating nature and indigeneity with the primitive past—a construct that stands in binary opposition to culture and civilization, which are linked with the modern present and the progress of the future.

Seeking to establish and maintain his own place within the European cultural framework, Armando Morales identified with culture and civilization, and performed his identity accordingly throughout the course of his oeuvre. In 1982, Morales had moved to Paris, where he maintained his primary residence until 1990, at which point he moved to London. Morales lived and worked in London until 1992, when he embarked upon extensive travel, moving frequently for almost a decade and taking up residence at different sites throughout Spain, Italy, and Mexico before returning to London and, finally, Paris—the European cities where he all the while maintained “permanent” homes and studios. During the early 2000's, Morales also traveled frequently to Miami and New York before establishing a new permanent residence and studio outside of

Barcelona and obtaining Spanish citizenship in 2004-2005.⁹⁶ Although he visited and traveled throughout Nicaragua during this time, Morales did not actually *live* in Nicaragua, save for short periods of time in 2001 and 2002. This means that none of the landscape paintings that Morales executed between 1982 and 2001 were actually executed in the native region that they represent.⁹⁷ This point is meant to neither validate nor invalidate the authenticity of Morales' depictions of the Nicaraguan landscape; rather, it underscores the way in which Morales was deliberately performing the role of the modernist artist. In other words, Morales was essentially engaging in the practice of the “tropical journey” that Griselda Pollock attributes to figures like Paul Gauguin in *Avant-Garde Gambits*.⁹⁸ With his female nudes, Morales paid homage to and established himself in dialogue with European modernists such as Picasso, all the while appropriating and re-imagining the Nicaraguan landscape and the indigenous female body in order to do so.

In 1982, when Morales first moved to Paris, he explained the reasoning for his move to Lizandro Chávez Alfaro, a reporter for the Nicaraguan periodical *Nuevo Amanecer*:

This is not only my wanting to increase my exhibitions quantifiably, but also qualitatively by establishing a dialogue with the ideal interlocutor, such as the more capable, more cosmopolitan Frenchman. Having a dialogue with the public is not only about selling paintings. Selling is important—we need to sell to live—but it also provides a certain freedom. We need a minimum amount of money to buy materials, and to live with ease, but not luxuriously, of having the freedom to paint whatever one wants. And when you have that freedom, you paint daily.⁹⁹

This explanation reiterates Morales' self-identification with culture and his deliberate performance as a ‘civilized’ European artist. That Morales perceived “the more capable, more cosmopolitan” models of France and Europe as being in some way superior is no surprise. As an academically trained artist, the nature/culture and indigeneity/civilization

binaries were certainly embedded in Morales' conceptual framework, and he believed that the move to France would allow him to cultivate the quality of his work and increase his marketability as an artist.

After he left for Europe, Morales never returned permanently to live in Nicaragua, and he notes that on his various trips to Central America, he went with the self-professed aim of traveling throughout the rain forests and indigenous lands of Nicaragua, Honduras and Mexico in order to gain fresh inspiration and add to the storehouse of visual memories from which he would later draw while working in his studios in Paris, London or Barcelona. Although Morales rarely identifies specific places in the titles of his landscape compositions, he has stated, for example, that his landscape scenes draw upon visual imagery observed while traveling through forests and rain forests in Leticia, Manaus, Santarem and Belem do Para, as well as on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua. Morales also stated that he never worked from photographs, explaining to Celia S. de Birbragher that:

The millions of pieces of information which I have acquired during my travels (I have an excellent visual memory) are re-arranged ad infinitum in the peace and quiet of my Paris studio. I do not use photographs, I have never had a camera and the photographs which appear in magazines have always seemed to me to be strange, in the strictest sense of the word...¹⁰⁰

A 1996 snapshot photograph of the rainforest, however, which was taken by the artist during one of his Central American trips, contradicts this claim (Figure 19). This photo is clearly not an artwork intended for display, but rather is a personal effect that records and reflects Morales' own interior vision and experience. Even if Morales did not directly paint from such photographs, it is significant to note that he maintained these visual records, which tell us that his painterly visualizations of the Nicaraguan landscape were informed, not only by images from memory, but also by the photographic images

that he framed, ordered and appropriated while performing his role as modernist artist in dialogue with Europe.

Because Morales had openly aligned himself European life and culture, working almost exclusively in his Paris and London studios when he painted his late twentieth century landscape scenes, his trips to Central America were in many ways acts of direct physical inhabitation of the ‘undeveloped’ Central American landscape. Thus, the landscape paintings that Morales executed as representations of the Nicaraguan and Central American topography are representations mediated through a European optic; representations in which indigenous “nature” has been colonized by “culture” by the very act of their conception and execution. Toward that end, these works also enter into the larger discourse of primitivism—because Morales approached the indigenous through a self-declared European optic, he may be seen as representing, not aspects of a culture to which he held some claim by virtue of his Nicaraguan nationality, but a culture that he had inhabited and appropriated according to an insider/outsider perspective. This point is further complicated by the way in which Morales represents and describes his process.

Morales’ emphatic claims that his representations of the Nicaraguan landscape represent his own visual memories, rather than images that had been mediated through the lens of a camera, make clear that he sought to present himself as an authentic translator of the landscape, in much the same way that Dore Ashton presents herself as an authentic translator of Latin American culture. Resonating with Roland Barthes’ discussion of “The Rhetoric of the Image,” Michael Baxandall, in his 1985 publication *Patterns of Intention*, provides a detailed analysis of the ways in which descriptive language functions as part of a complex dialogue that directs the viewer’s perception,

understanding and interpretation of an image. One of the many ways that Morales' description of process functions is to assert his place as "participant," rather than merely "observer," for "the participant knows and understands his culture with an immediacy and spontaneity the observer does not share."¹⁰¹ On one hand, Morales acted as an observer, engaging in the same type of primitivizing process as European modernists such as Gauguin and Picasso. Simultaneously, however, he made sure to construct his *representation* of process according to the paradigm established by figures like Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, which allowed him to uphold his image as authentic participant without sacrificing his identity as 'civilized' artist in dialogue with Europe.

Yet, for all of his effort to align himself with European culture, Morales in many ways felt suspended between the worlds of his Nicaraguan upbringing and his cosmopolitan life in Europe, as suggested by statements that he made in interviews with Celia S. de Birbragher and Jean Piaget during the 1980's.¹⁰² Returning then to Morales' *Selva Tropical I*, we might formulate an alternative reading of the scene as exemplifying the dialectic between fragmentation and totalization that Linda Nochlin argues acts a metaphor of modernity (Figure 9). On one hand, the fragmented female bodies throughout the scene may be read as markers of both the artist's own fragmented identity and sense of alienation in the context of urban European life, and of Nicaragua's fragmented national identity in the aftermath of the 1979 revolution. Following the revolution, the nation was faced with the task of formulating new social, political and economic frameworks and, accordingly, a new national identity, that deconstructed the frameworks imposed by the Somoza dictatorship and by persistent U.S. intervention in Nicaraguan affairs. This task was compounded by the ongoing presence of counter-

revolutionary groups and the eventual onset of the Contra War which lasted throughout the 1980's. Simultaneously, then, the fragmented bodies throughout *Selva Tropical I* suggest an attempt to create a unified totality by making these dismembered bodies whole again, completing them by weaving them into the gestalt of the landscape scene itself. Considered in this way, the fragments of dismembered bodies with which the scene is riddled may be read as part of a landscape scene that is paradoxically both fragmented and unified, acting as an allegorical reconstruction of Nicaragua itself.

We have thus far considered two possible ways in which we might read Morales' constructions of women in landscape: as acts of artistic colonization of both the female body and of the Nicaraguan landscape that are directly linked to Morales' adoption of a European optic; and as both metaphoric of modernity and allegorical of Nicaraguan national identity. Yet each of the first two readings that I have proposed remains, to some extent, within the realm of the abstract; a realm which, as Marcia Pointon notes, propagates the patriarchal narratives of art historical discourse by relegating the female nude as a subject that functions symbolically or allegorically, but never within the realm of the 'real.'¹⁰³ Pointon explains the manner in which "the rhetoric of the real" in visual representation has, since the mid-nineteenth century, functioned to help establish and maintain a structure of masculine dominance.¹⁰⁴ By creating an oppositional framework between 'reality' and 'unreality,' it became possible to remove the nude female subject from time and space, allowing the male artist to appropriate the nude female body and reconstruct it within the unreal realm of pictorial illusion.¹⁰⁵

In his 1988 text *Colonising Egypt*, Timothy Mitchell further examines the problematic implications of the real/unreal binary that has been constructed to serve

colonizing ends.¹⁰⁶ Mitchell explains that, in the nineteenth century, as Europe endeavored to “colonise Egypt” by ordering the country itself like an exhibition, “the West had come to live as though the world were divided...into a realm of mere representations and a realm of ‘the real.’”¹⁰⁷ The European observer, Mitchell explains, needed a system of codes or signs—a plan—by which to order the world.¹⁰⁸ By ordering and “enframing” the world as picture or exhibition, colonialism “buil[t]-in an effect of order and an effect of truth.”¹⁰⁹ In other words, colonialism turned real space—the concrete space of objects and interactions—into something that was easily readable by reorganizing society according to a systematized framework.¹¹⁰ Yet, as Mitchell goes on to argue, “a framework [also] sets up the impression of something beyond the picture-world it enframes. It promises a truth that lies outside its world of material representation.”¹¹¹

With my third and final reading, I examine Morales’ constructions of the female body in landscape in relation to the concrete facts that continue to constitute life for the women who actually do exist within the human landscape of Nicaraguan society today. In many ways, Morales’ incorporation of women into these representations of indigenous landscape speaks to an already established regional tradition of colonization and, more importantly, to a gendered reality which continues to dominate the national framework. As Margaret Randall notes in *Sandino’s Daughters Revisited: Feminism in Nicaragua*:

...it would be a mistake to assume that the original inhabitants of Central America respected women’s power or place in society any more than today’s patriarchy does. There are contrary opinions regarding exactly how women did live in ancient Mesoamerica, but it is clear that—then as now—they existed largely for the benefit of men. Reliable research indicates that the earliest societies were the most egalitarian, and that by the time of the Conquest both dominant cultures—the Nahuas (popularly known as “Aztecs”) and the Mayas—had developed thoroughly male-dominated systems. In this respect, then, the invaders found gender relations in the lands they colonized to be not so different from their own.

This European exploration, which initiated five hundred years of genocide—via invasion, occupation, exploitation, violence, profound racial stratification, and impoverishment—was carried out by men: the heralded explorers who, in the name of the Spanish Crown (or the Portugese, English, or French), are still honored in the “authoritative” texts. They claimed the land, looted precious metals and other resources, disrupted or destroyed whole social systems, and reviled spiritual traditions. And because Spanish women didn’t join them in the crossing (nor did they come in any numbers until approximately a hundred years later) these men established relations of use and domination over the indigenous women that continue to define gender and race relations today.¹¹²

On one hand, we might take Morales’ decision to obtain Spanish citizenship in 2004—and his overall preference for a “cosmopolitan” European lifestyle—as an act of self-realignment with the men who colonized Central America, and, therefore, as a symbolic act of betrayal. Yet, Randall’s account makes clear that, as gender relations are concerned, not much has fundamentally changed since the pre-conquest era. In other words, Morales’ artistic colonization of the feminine is remarkably consistent, not only with the patterns of male-domination that have always defined indigenous women’s roles and lives in the abstract realm of distant time and space, but also with the patterns of *machismo* that still define Nicaraguan society today. *Machismo*, which refers to a pervasive and often violent sense of Central American male dominance, remains prevalent throughout the nations of Central America, and continues to affect the roles and lives of both indigenous and non-indigenous women in the region, complicating the narrative that, in Nicaragua, gender equality was born out of the revolution.

The roles of women did see a dramatic shift in the years leading up to and during the 1979 Nicaraguan Revolution, as the FSLN emphasized the creation of the New Woman to complement the gendered construct of the New Man, and encouraged women’s participation in the revolutionary movement.¹¹³ As art historian David Craven has noted, the ‘women’s revolution’ in Nicaragua became integral to the nation’s larger

revolutionary process, as did the cultural revolution that emphasized the need for national literary and artistic production that challenged the dominant cultural models and tradition that had been introduced with industrialization.¹¹⁴

The compilations of revolutionary women's biographies and memoirs published by Margaret Randall in *Sandino's Daughters* and *Sandino's Daughters Revisited* both support and complicate Craven's point.¹¹⁵ On one hand, each of the revolutionary participants that Randall interviewed, among them Gioconda Bellia, Daisy Zamora and Nora Astorga, noted that the Revolution incited a fundamental shift in gender relations, as women were, for the first time, encouraged to step out of their roles as wives and mothers and assert individual agency as political activists and soldiers. Yet, while the roles of women changed with the Revolution, the process of women's liberation in Nicaragua has been much more complicated than suggested by utopian ideas and unilateral narratives linking it with the revolutionary movement.

Randall interviewed nearly two dozen women from a diversity of racial, economic and class backgrounds and recorded their accounts, which demonstrate that the experiences of women who participated in the revolution were as diverse as the individuals themselves. While these accounts demonstrate certain continuities and a shared sense of what Randall terms "solidarity" among women who participated in the Revolution, the women's individual histories make clear that there was no singular experience that defined the experience of the "New Woman," just as the process of "women's liberation" in Nicaragua was not completed with the revolution. Rather, the process of building gender equality is ongoing, and differs across racial, economic and social strata. Likewise, although women became active participants in the National

Liberation Movement, notions of the feminine place in Nicaragua's traditionally *machismo* society have remained largely unaffected, revealing an inherent contradiction embedded in the revolutionary movement itself.¹¹⁶

Although all FSLN members were to be viewed as 'gender neutral,' nearly all of the women that Randall interviewed experienced sexual discrimination as participants in a traditionally *machismo* revolutionary context.¹¹⁷ While the National Liberation Movement sought to create a more just society in which all individuals were viewed and treated as human equals, gendered constructs have inevitably persisted. The larger implication of this contradiction is that, even in a society that fought a revolution for the cause of human equality, contemporary social constructs and belief systems often allow those in positions of power to uphold the systems of differentiation that perpetuate violence and mistreatment of other human beings. With this in mind, we might, more ironically now, read Morales' landscape scenes, with their distorted, fragmented female bodies, as allegories for nationhood. Though, not as allegories for an idealized "imagined community" of Nicaraguan national identity, but rather as allegories for a nation still largely defined by *machismo* brutality, which functions as its own form of "imagined community" centered on maintaining masculine dominance.¹¹⁸

In the Nicaraguan consciousness, *machismo* functions in a manner equivalent to the type of "colonial racism" that Benedict Anderson describes in his 1991 text *Imagined Communities*.¹¹⁹ Anderson explains, "...on the whole, racism and anti-semitism manifest themselves, not across national boundaries, but within them. In other words, they justify not so much foreign wars as domestic oppression and domination."¹²⁰ Anderson goes on to define "colonial racism" as "a major element in that conception of 'Empire' which

attempted to wield dynastic legitimacy and national community...by generalizing a principle of innate, inherited superiority on which its own domestic position was (however shakily) based...¹²¹ While Morales almost certainly did not intend that we read this treatment of the female body in landscape as representative of the *machismo* framework underlying Nicaraguan society, an allegorical reading of Morales' distortion of the female body as such proves relevant in the contemporary national context.

Machismo remains a dominant force in Nicaragua, as in the Central American region at large. According to a 2009-2010 report, entitled "Opening Spaces for Citizen Security and Human Development," conducted and published by the United Nations Development Program, two-thirds of the women murdered in Central America are murdered as acts of "femicide"—that is, are murdered solely on the basis of their possessing feminine gender.¹²² Only since 2007 has *machismo* been recognized as a serious and violent threat in Nicaragua, when the Masculinity Network for Gender Equality began to implement a series of courses and programs aimed at promoting 'new masculinity' and gender equality among Nicaraguan adolescents, teenagers and adult men.¹²³ The Nicaraguan campaign for 'new masculinity' and gender equality is a first in the region, and has established a model for other Central American nations seeking to implement programs aimed at ending *machismo* ideology and violence against women.¹²⁴

While this social reality certainly runs counter to the majority of historical narratives constructed in discussions of Central American art, it adds a crucial layer to our understanding of the work of an artist like Armando Morales—even if this reality is difficult to confront. The regional, national, and individual circumstances here discussed suggest that Armando Morales' constructions of the feminine in landscape are

underwritten with acts of artistic colonization and pervasive *machismo* violence. With this analysis, I have attempted, not to establish that what I propose is the ultimate truth governing the creation of these works, but rather, to approach Morales' visual representations of the female body from an alternative perspective. My hope is that this perspective will contribute to the formation of new dialogues on the work of Armando Morales, and will propose new modes of not just looking at these images, but of seeing the multiple contradictory histories embedded in them.

Canonically, the feminine connection to nature has been symbolically and spiritually linked to childbirth, used as an allegory for nationhood, and tied to notions of the rebirth and regeneration of civilizations. Morales' constructions of women in landscape are on one hand, just as the canon itself, problematic and anti-feminist, propagating antiquated gendered ideas and inequities. Yet, Morales' landscape scenes may also be read as more than stereotypical canonic images that construct woman as an allegory for nationhood or that link femininity with nature. As we will see in the next chapter, the landscape paintings of Armando Morales lend to multiple interpretations and convey a visual language that may be decoded in different and seemingly opposed ways. These works evade binary readings and in part thrive on their problematic, multi-faceted and controversial nature, evincing the potential effectiveness of a dialogic approach to cultural production. When we remove these works—and our own thinking—from the mythologized narrative framework within which they have been placed as examples of Central American art, we, as viewers and receptors, become free to interpret the obscure visual language of Armando Morales according to what we, as individuals, see, think and feel when we look at these images.

Chapter Three: Spirituality and Progress

Despite some recent attempts to renew them, it would seem that during the past twenty years anthropology has more and more turned away from studies in the field of religion. At the same time, and precisely because professional anthropologists' interest has withdrawn from primitive religion, all kinds of amateurs who claim to belong to other disciplines have seized this opportunity to move in, thereby turning into their private playground what we had left as a wasteland. Thus, the prospects for the scientific study of religion have been undermined...

-Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," 1955

Closely linked with the lack of scholarship addressing Morales' constructions of the feminine in landscape is a skirting of the issue of spirituality as it relates to these works. Over half a century after structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss identified anthropology's increasingly problematic tendency to "turn away from studies in the field of religion," the propensity to do so remains prevalent in contemporary scholarship across disciplines. As Michael Allen Gillespie has more recently noted in his 2008 publication *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, the need to rationalize the theological and the spiritual has dominated modern and postmodern discourse, resulting in a consequent failure to address the continued presence of religious belief and spirituality in the context of modern life. Expanding upon Lévi-Strauss' 1955 argument, anthropologist Mary Douglas notes in *Purity and Danger* that the process by which magic became associated with pre-history, primitivism, and irrationality was central to the early modern project of wielding power over the masses through the constructs of organized religion and, later, through the discoveries of science.

The way in which the construct of magical realism has been deployed in discussions of modern and contemporary Latin American art has in part functioned to veil the real spirituality inherent in regional cultural production by presenting regional visual narratives as generally imaginative, dream-like and primitive. Although Armando Morales openly cited the theological influences on his work, there is almost no

scholarship that pointedly addresses the spiritual elements and influences inherent in his landscape paintings. In this chapter, I attempt to counter that tendency by arguing that, rather than read Morales' landscape scenes as "mythic" or "dream-like," we might alternatively read them as visual explorations of the mysteries inherent in the natural world; as reflections on the place of humanity within the mysterious realm of the universe. I argue that Morales' landscape paintings were informed by three intersecting spiritual belief systems which shaped his understanding of the intersections between humanity, divinity and the universe: ancient Meso-American pantheisms, Catholicism, and the theology of twentieth century French philosopher priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. I examine these belief systems as they informed Armando Morales' attempt to reconcile the intangible mysteries of the universe with the contradictory world of modernity.

Morales was born and raised in Granada, Nicaragua, and the artist has frequently cited childhood memories and experiences of Granada and Lake Nicaragua as prominent influences throughout his oeuvre. The Spanish colonial influence was, and still is, a strong presence in Granada, where, much like the rest of Nicaragua, Catholicism remains central to daily life and culture. As religion and culture, Catholicism permeated all aspects of Armando Morales' upbringing, instilling in him beliefs and traditions that remained prominent in his life and his work. Even after Morales moved away from Nicaragua, and had been living in the "secularized" world of Paris for several years, he continued to paint highly charged religious scenes, such as *Descendimiento de la Cruz*, translated as *Descent from the Cross*, which he completed in 1989 (Figure 20).

On one hand, *Descendimiento* clearly demonstrates Morales' interest in the human bodily structure. One gets the sense that each of the figures in this composition was rendered with careful attention to anatomic detail and accuracy, and it is telling that the only figure whose body is not in tact is also the only figure who can be clearly identified as female. With the head of a skeleton and the body of a statue, this figure, who appears to be not entirely human and whose right arm has been severed, forms a striking visual counterpart to the deceased Christ, whose own body remains in tact and unblemished. The implicit suggestion is that, as noted in Chapter Two, Morales is adhering to the academic canon and here equating the feminine with the primitive. Her skeleton head and cold, statue-like body suggest that she has remained trapped in the past, her inability to achieve progress marked by her inevitable dissolution and decay.

In a 1990 interview, Celia S. de Birbragher noted the recurrence of such religious themes in Morales' work, and inquired about the source of this interest in Christian imagery. Morales responded by explaining that "there is an intense and archaic drama in the morphology of religion, and I am referring almost exclusively to images of the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, which seems to lend itself more than any other image to a profound and thorough analysis of the structure of the human body, in the sense used in Vesalio's book which I mentioned earlier...similar in intensity to the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles..."¹²⁵ This statement is significant because Morales discusses religion in a secularized, pseudo-scientific way, yet remains reverent to Catholic belief, referring to the "Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ." Morales suggests that, from his perspective, religious faith and scientific faith are not diametrically opposed. This suggestion is underscored by his pointed use of the term "morphology," which, according

to the Oxford English Dictionary, most commonly refers to “The branch of biology that deals with the form of living organisms and their parts, and the relationships between their structures.”¹²⁶ It seems that Morales uses the term in a dual sense to suggest that he is interested in painting scenes that explore the anatomy of the human body as rendered in the figure of Christ, but also, less overtly, to suggest that he is interested in the changing forms and structures of religion itself.

The fact that the term “morphology” has distinct biological and scientific associations might seem coincidental, if not for the fact that, four years earlier, Morales had revealed his interest in the theology of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who proposed a re-interpretation of Christianity that merged Christian and pantheist beliefs.

In an interview conducted by Jean Paget in Paris in April 1986, Morales cited the writings of French philosopher and theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin as a prominent influence on his personal beliefs and artistic career, calling Teilhard “the pure humanist.”¹²⁷ Learned in the mystical and spiritual beliefs of the ancients and in evolutionary science, Chardin contended that religion, and Christianity in particular, needed to adopt a multi-perspectival approach, within which a variety of disparate views and interests could intersect in order to progress with society and the reality of the common people. Chardin introduced evolutionary thought to the teachings of Christianity with the belief that “sooner or later souls will end by giving themselves to the religion which activates them most as human beings.”¹²⁸ An examination of Teilhard’s writings reveals that what he proposed was, more specifically, a pantheistic re-interpretation of Christianity. Chardin stated this aim clearly in his work *Christianity and Evolution*, writing, “What I am proposing to do is to narrow that gap between pantheism

and Christianity by bringing out what one might call the Christian soul of pantheism or the pantheist aspect of Christianity.”¹²⁹

Broadly, pantheism refers to the belief that god and universe are one in the same; that divinity is collectively composed of all forms of nature and the cosmos.¹³⁰ Merging spirituality, rationality and science, pantheist belief is that elements of the natural world are continually regenerative and strive toward unity, while individual beings live only one life.¹³¹ Because pantheism and Christianity have historically been constructed as diametrically opposed to one another, the new belief system that Chardin proposed was formulated around the purported creation of a common spiritual language that would reconcile the anthropomorphic, monotheistic beliefs of Christianity with animistic, polytheistic belief systems, as well as with modern evolutionary thought and the discoveries of modern science. By extension, Chardin also endeavored to reconcile the understanding of divinity as a tangible, fixed anthropomorphic entity with an abstract understanding of divinity as composed of the intangible, incomprehensible forces driving the universe.¹³²

The influence of Chardin’s philosophy, then, contributes to our understanding of the way in which Morales merges elements of both Christian and pagan imagery, the anthropomorphic and the animistic, the tangible and the abstract in his landscape paintings. The attempt to make pantheism, religion, and evolution compatible with one another is similarly present in Morales’ landscape paintings, which are imbued with a spiritually charged visual language in which magic, religion and science coexist.

Morales’ 1992 painting *Bañista* illustrates this merging of spirituality, religion and science perhaps more clearly than any other example (Figure 21). As the bather who

dominates the right hand side of the composition engages in a self-performed cleansing ritual, this scene conjures, simultaneously, association with the Christian rite of baptism and with the pagan Birth of Venus. On the left hand side of the composition, the distinguishable form of a female body seems to fade into the form of a tree trunk, allowing the viewer to visually follow a process that may be read as a bodily decomposition, as a rebirth, or as an evolutionary transformation. Morales heightens the sense of transformation by placing the body on the left hand side in the midst of a series of clustered forms that appear to be half woman, half tree. In this composition, the viewer witnesses the gradual abstraction of the nude female body as Morales provides us with visual cues that present an alternative way to frame our reading of his other landscape scenes.

In the previous chapter, I discussed three possible ways that we might read Morales' pronounced abstractions of women in landscape: as either marking the artist's own passage into 'enlightenment,' as metaphoric of modernity, or as manifestations of the artist's colonizing gaze. Closely linked with this third reading is the discussion of science as the culmination of human moral and spiritual progress. If we re-examine *Cuatro Bañistas* (2000) from the perspective of spiritual-scientific progress, it becomes possible to understand this as more than a voyeuristic scene (Figure 18). The figures on the far right and left of the composition are so enmeshed in the surrounding landscape that they become barely visible, their bodies abstracted by the nest of densely woven foliage that surrounds them. Because these bodies are neither clearly visible nor highly eroticized, such depictions of female bathers suggest that Morales was interested in depicting the female form, not just as an object to be appropriated by the male artist, but

also as naturally embedded in the history of the Nicaraguan landscape; as an embodiment, perhaps, of the rituals, beliefs and traditions of Nicaragua's Meso-American or pre-conquest ancestry.

With its profusion of snaky, maze-like mountain jungle trees, *Cuatro Bañistas* evokes Gestalt theory of perception as the human figures and the enveloping jungle landscape merge into a unified whole, the forms so closely intertwined that each element of the tightly coherent composition relies upon the others to achieve maximum visual effect.¹³³ By depicting awesome nature and figures in relatively equal relationship to one other, and using prismatic plays of light and a spectral palette, Morales reminds us of the subjective, collective nature of spirituality.¹³⁴ Just as this painting functions as an open work, its 'meaning' collectively composed and always changing based on infinite possible individual interpretations of it, it also functions a reminder that, prior to the forced introduction of Catholicism, spirituality was a collectively authored process.

In a similar way, in *Selva Tropical I (Jungla)* (1985), rather than read landscape elements such as trees anthropomorphically—as embodying human feelings and motivations—we might instead read the human anatomy as contributing to the overall composition of the landscape (Figure 9]. In other words, in these landscape scenes, trees do not mimic human forms; rather, human forms act as small parts of a much larger whole. When read in this way, these landscape scenes function, not to anthropocentric ends, but rather to emphasize that humans are mortal, transient and individually insignificant except as bodies of particulate matter that contribute to the integral whole of the universe.

A 1975 painting entitled *Metamorphosis* clearly demonstrates Morales' interest in the transformative processes of life and suggests the artist's belief that all things are composed of a common, transmutable substance (Figure 22). The individual elements in this composition are identifiable, yet they blend into one another as the forms of a pear, female sitter and the natural and architectural landscapes are rendered as co-integrated parts of a cohesive whole. In this way, compositions such as *Metamorphosis* and *Selva Tropical I (Jungla)* (1985) act as *memento mori* images as they remind the viewer of her own inevitable mortality as part of a larger universal order. Morales' still life compositions achieve a similar *memento mori* effect, often depicting pieces of bruised, fleshy fruit strewn like corpses across a table or placed next to a sharp blade (Figure 23). Such still life images demonstrate a visual continuity between Morales' formal treatment of the female body and his rendering of the forms of pears and apples. This visual continuity functions to remind the human viewer that she, too, is an organic body that will inevitably decay and decompose.

Rápido el Peinado (2001) again reminds the human viewer that she is merely part of a much larger whole, yet Morales here creates a landscape scene in which the forest itself assumes a divine animistic presence (Figure 24). Miniscule female figures are engulfed by an overwhelming forestscape and the sense of human helplessness is heightened by their placement in the presence of a powerfully flowing rapid. While a traditional art historical analysis would situate this composition within the discourse of the sublime, to do so would be problematic, as the notion of the sublime necessarily presupposes a European optic.¹³⁵ The discourse of the sublime was established in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by the British philosopher Edmund Burke, and the

German philosophers Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer, all of whom aimed to explain humanity's place in relation to nature. Yet, to distinguish between "humanity" and "nature" in order to discuss the former's place in relation to the latter is in many ways counter-intuitive in a Central American context. Throughout Central America, "humanity" and "nature" have not traditionally been conceptualized as separate entities, but rather, have been—and still are—conceptualized as co-integrated and co-existent.¹³⁶ Rather than read *Rápido el Peinado* within the framework of German Romanticism, then, we might alternatively read this painting in relation to the ancient Meso-American pantheist belief systems that have shaped the regional spiritual consciousness. Largely owing to the Meso-American influence, even after the introduction of Catholicism, the Central American understanding of religion remains fundamentally different from the notions propagated by organized religions that were constructed to serve the interests of modern industrial capitalism.

The poses of the female bathers in *Rápido el Peinado* are direct citations of the same poses that Morales used in a monumental painting executed in 1986 entitled *Las Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas*, which depicts a group of unknown indigenous women who helped revolutionary leader Augusto Cesar Sandino retrieve arms from the waters near Nicaragua's northeast coast (Figure 25).¹³⁷ Although the identity of these women is unknown, historical accounts speculate that they were indigenous women of an Indian tribe descended from a Nahua, or Aztec, tribal lineage.¹³⁸ The women are the focal point of this composition, suggested not only by the painting's title, but also by the pointed absence of the figure of Sandino in the scene. On one hand, we might read this as a pointed act of artistic colonization, as Morales appropriates the indigenous female who

acts also as a cipher for magic, primitivism and irrationality. Yet, there is also something nostalgic about this monumental history painting that takes a group of indigenous women as its primary subject.

The poses of the women depicted in *Las Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas* formed the basis for a visual language that Morales would employ in nearly all subsequent examples of direct figuration of the female nude. After 1986, Morales repeatedly—and almost exclusively—cites these poses when rendering groupings of nude female figures in landscape. In fact, the only openly figurative examples in which Morales does not directly cite these poses are in the scenes of Bañistas that we discussed earlier in this chapter. What is significant is that Morales' repeated use of the grouping of poses employed in his history painting of *Las Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas* suggests the deliberate development of a visual language for representing the indigenous female, who would have been read as preserving the traditions of the past. While it is certainly problematic that Morales equates the female nude with the pre-modern (i.e., primitive) past, the tendency to do so was embedded in the traditions of the academy. The possibility that the women in Morales' landscapes derive from ancient Nahuan lineage necessitates a discussion of Nicaragua's pre-conquest ancestry.

Margaret Randall notes that all three of Nicaragua's still-thriving indigenous cultures, those of the Miskito, Sumu and Rama people, can be found along the Atlantic Coast and that the origins of these groups can be culturally traced to one of the two primary groups that dominated the region up until the Spanish conquest: the Nahuatl, or Aztec, and the Maya.¹³⁹ It is significant to note here that the Caribbean presence was also integral to cultural development along Nicaragua's Atlantic coast, and that, although the

discussion offered here is simplified, Nicaragua's indigenous cultures are diverse and complex. Due to the syncretic nature of pre-conquest cultural development, it is in fact somewhat problematic to discuss the indigenous groups of present-day Nicaragua according to the three classifications of Miskito, Sumu and Rama. This discussion is not meant to simplify, homogenize or essentialize linguistically and culturally diverse populations, but rather to point out that, prior to the influence of Catholicism, religious beliefs and rituals were based on pantheistic, animistic systems of worship derived from the ancient Meso-American religious beliefs and practices of the Maya and the Aztec. The account of Cándida Cardenales, a Sumu Indian woman from Nicaragua corroborates historical accounts that suggest that the women who helped Sandino retrieve arms on December 25, 1926—the women who are represented in Morales' painting of *Las Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas*—were indigenous women of Nahua lineage. Cardenales “recalls [that] she left home to work as a maid for General Augusto Sandino, who led the fight against the US Marine occupation of Nicaragua in the 1920s,” and that “many Sumus and Miskitos from her region joined Sandino's army when he traveled down the Río Coco in 1926.”¹⁴⁰

While not much is known of the pre-Colombian history and civilizations specific to Nicaragua, William Fowler has also noted that the pre-colonial/pre-Colombian tribes of Nicaragua's eastern, pacific coastal, and central highlands regions were culturally similar to and/or influenced by the Maya and the Aztec of northern Central America, as well as the tribes of the Caribbean.¹⁴¹ While specific discussion of the region's pre-Colombian history and civilizations necessitates detailed study in its own right, we do know that ancient Meso-American and Caribbean religions were, in a general sense,

pantheistic religions based upon the polytheistic worship of many gods embodying combined human, animal and environmental attributes. This all too general point is not meant to homogenize the variety of distinct cultures and civilizations in Nicaragua and the surrounding areas, nor is it meant to suggest that Nicaragua's pre-Colombian societies were "less advanced" imitations of the civilizations of the Maya and the Aztec. Rather, this point is meant to help explain why superstition and magic, originally performed as a set of rituals based on the cosmological, cyclical order of nature, would remain fundamental to Nicaraguan life. According to Mayan myth, the goddess Coatlicue is the goddess of both earth and death, representing the origin and the end of all life.¹⁴² Similarly, Chalchiuhtlicue is the Aztec goddess of rivers, lakes, springs and fertility. While Morales' depictions of women in landscape are certainly problematic, it is necessary to more deeply probe the spiritual and religious underpinnings of Morales' work in order to better understand the multiplicity of nuances inherent in his visual language.

For many Nicaraguan artists and authors in the late twentieth century, this sense of connection to the national topography was closely linked with a desire to recover the history of the pre-Colombian past, preservation of which had been neglected during the decades-long reign of the Somoza regime. Morales' training alongside many members of the Nicaraguan Praxis Group of the 1960's provides further evidence for his interest in exploring and understanding the Pre-Colombian history of the region as foundational to understanding the reality of the world as experienced in the present. An understanding of the repetitive nature of history and of the cyclical nature of life is evident throughout Morales' landscape paintings, and he painted several landscape scenes that suggest an

intimate awareness of indigenous animism, in which landscape elements were themselves regarded as the dwelling sites of spirituality and divinity. *Rápido el Peinado* is one such example, as Morales presents a landscape in which the human is an integrated part of the natural whole, which, in its totality, emanates a divine presence.

The works of two contemporary Nicaraguan literary figures, Ernesto Cardenal and Gioconda Belli, help to illustrate the way in which the pre-conquest past has remained present in the Nicaraguan consciousness. Belli and Cardenal are both well-known figures whose influence is not only national, but continental and international, and their works underscore a sense of complex spirituality in which ancient ancestral practices and rituals merge with modern Catholicism.

Although fictional, Gioconda Belli's 1988 novel *La mujer habitada* provides an ideal example of the national literary culture with which Morales would have been familiar. The story occurs in the context of the Nicaraguan revolution, but is narrated by Itza, a young Indian woman who died fighting Spanish conquistadors on the same soil that the revolutionaries are now fighting to reclaim from a corrupt dictatorship. Throughout *La mujer habitada*, Belli makes clear and specific narrative reference to Meso-American religious beliefs and deities, particularly those associated with the Nahuatl religion. Belli draws upon the legend of the Popol Vuh—the ancient text that tells the creation story of the Maya people—as she makes repeated narrative references to ancient earth gods and goddesses and the natural processes of transformation. Itza, for example, identifies herself as “Nahuatl,” and recalls that, when she was born, the midwife “prayed to Chalchiuhtlicue, mother and sister to the gods,” while she ritualistically cleansed and purified her newborn body.¹⁴³ Itza also refers to one of the novel's main

characters as a *quauhtecal*—the eagle companion of the sun—after he has been killed, and explains that he will return as a *huitzilin*—a hummingbird, which, according to ancient Mexican mythology, was the animal attribute, or nahual, of the Aztec war god Huitzilopochtli.¹⁴⁴ These symbolic references are evident throughout *La mujer habitada*, as Belli builds toward her ultimate argument: that in order for humanity to free itself of the inequities imposed by worldly concerns, it is necessary to re-adopt a pantheistic worldview similar to that which governed ancient society.

Although Belli presents her message in fictional form, this notion runs parallel to the very real type of societal reformation that Nicaraguan liberation theologian Ernesto Cardenal has proposed in his work and writings. Cardenal's poetic and philosophical writings further illustrate the extent to which a sense of spirituality and an awareness of cyclical nature derived from the pre-Colombian past have remained at the forefront of the Nicaraguan consciousness. Cardenal served as Nicaraguan Minister of Culture between 1979 and 1987, and in 1965, he established a community of "primitivist" artists and poets on the archipelago of Solentiname on Lake Nicaragua. A painting in the style promoted by Cardenal, which came to be known as *pintura primitivista*, exemplifies the formal and ideological qualities that defined the artistic and poetic praxis of the Solentiname community (Figure 26). The composition is generally defined by a non-hierarchical worldview, in which the human and vegetative landscapes co-exist as equally important elements contributing to the communal whole.¹⁴⁵

Morales very much revered Cardenal and his work, and in 1989 he painted a monumental homage to Cardenal, entitled *Oráculo Sobre Managua (Homenaje a Ernesto Cardenal)* (Figure 27). Highly significant is the fact that, in the title of this painting,

Morales makes explicit reference to two well-known literary works by Cardenal: *Oraculo Sobre Managua* and *Homenaje a los Indios Americanos*. As Mario A. Rojas of The Catholic University in Washington, D.C. has noted, and as is clear throughout these writings, Cardenal makes reference to the philosophies and teachings of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and looks to the sacred writings of the ancient Maya to propose a re-formed social structure in which humanity lives in closer communion with nature.¹⁴⁶ Throughout his works, Cardenal emphasizes that contemporary society stands to learn a great deal from the Maya, and that personal contemplation and a renewed understanding of the natural universe are necessary for the achievement of social justice and equality for all living entities. These ideas converge in Cardenal's epic poem *Cántico Cósmico*, which explores evolution as a spiritual process in which disparate elements transform and merge to create newly unified wholes. In Cantiga 12, entitled "Birth of Venus," Cardenal writes:

Strange body is this: head, trunk, limbs.
 Elongated trunk and limbs even more so,
 but not just another vertebrae or another mammal, biped with chest extremities ending in
 hands, not merely that, but rather
 a harmonious god-befitting composition.¹⁴⁷

In Cantiga 14, "The Hand," Cardenal even more directly speaks to the process of human evolution:

Our first parents in the trees
 Ate all kinds of fruit
 Including the fruit of Good and of Evil, their arms and legs
 stretched by those trees.
 Gripping onto the branches perfected the hands.
 The body became upright to better survey the surroundings,
 and judging the distance between branches
 developed binocular vision,
 and the complexity of tree-top activity
 made the brain agile...
 A prehensile hand was more useful than claws:
 To the branches we owe the thin fingers with opposable thumb.¹⁴⁸

Returning to Morales' *Bañista (Bather)* with a focus upon the central tree in the composition, we see that the trunk is formed by an elongated human body with arms outstretched, hands and fingers merging into the forms of branches (Figure 21).

Consideration of Morales' painting alongside Cardenal's poetry is not meant to suggest that we can equate visual and literary expression, but rather, demonstrates that a complex form of spirituality, in which ancient Meso-American, Catholic and scientific-evolutionary beliefs intersect, permeates the Nicaraguan consciousness.

The writings of figures like Ernesto Cardenal and Gioconda Belli are also significant because they underscore the prominent presence of spirituality within the arena of cultural production in post-revolutionary Nicaragua. That Armando Morales knew both of these figures professionally and personally is significant in deepening our understanding of his landscape paintings. While we, as viewers, must value our own interpretations and reactions to the work of art above all else, it is also necessary to understand something of the cultural and spiritual framework involved in shaping the artist's visual language.

An awareness of the broader spiritual context introduces an alternative reading of the anthropomorphic tree trunks in Morales' *Jungla*, for example, which appear to consist of human bodies with arms stretched upward as if pulling themselves up from the roots of the earth (Figure 2). While a magical realist reading of this work would propose that Morales draws upon the past to create an image of a mythic, imaginary present, the scene may just as easily be read as a reflection on the continuity between the dimensions of space and time. The "return to pastness" and suggestion of "mythic time" that Dore Ashton notes in Morales' work do not evince a concern with imagined un-reality, but

rather, speak to the notion that the past is continually present, contributing to the ever-shifting formation of the Nicaraguan consciousness and informing contemporary spirituality.

Throughout his landscape paintings, Morales reconciles the three stages of human cultural development—first magic, second religion, and third science—that the Scottish social anthropologist James George Frazer constructed in the early twentieth century in order to promote the narrative of modern human progress.¹⁴⁹ This suggests that Morales recognized the coequality of ‘primitive’ and ‘civilized’ societies in much the same way that the French structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss recognized the synchronicity, or simultaneity, of cultures existing at different points in time and space.¹⁵⁰ In essays such as “The Structural Study of Myth” (1955), Lévi-Strauss acknowledges that cultures existing independently of one another in time and space can arrive at equally viable, yet culturally appropriate, solutions to similar problems:

Prevalent attempts to explain alleged differences between the so-called "primitive" mind and scientific thought have resorted to qualitative differences between the working processes of the mind in both cases while assuming that the objects to which they were applying themselves remained very much the same. If our interpretation is correct, we are led toward a completely different view, namely, that the kind of logic which is used by mythical thought is as rigorous as that of modern science, and that the difference lies not in the quality of the intellectual process, but in the nature of the things to which it is applied.¹⁵¹

Lévi-Strauss’ work is significant because he was one of the first anthropological thinkers to challenge the notion of cultural hierarchy by which “primitive” societies were believed to be less capable than industrialized societies. Yet, as a structuralist, Lévi-Strauss remained reliant upon a dialectical mode of thinking that was rooted in a system of binaries, such as the opposition between synchronicity—simultaneity—and diachronicity—linear temporal progression. As I will demonstrate in the next chapter,

Morales suggests an awareness of temporal and spatial continuity that deconstructs the binary between 'primitive' spirituality and scientific progress that has dominated anthropological discourse since the early twentieth century.

Chapter Four: The Gridded Landscape

In Euclidean geometry, we know one space from another not primarily by the ways in which our bodies create that space but by the ways in which we inhabit or enter it. Space becomes a container for experience. By privileging inhabitation (where space always preexists experience), Euclidean geometry enables a rendering-abstract of space, abstract in the sense that it is empty before the arrival of content to fill it...It is due to this linear grammar of geometry that the colonizer is able to assert that seemingly empty space is uninhabited.

-Erin Manning, *Relationescapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*, 2009

As we have seen, Armando Morales developed a new form of visual expression that represented the intersection of myriad formal, thematic, social and personal influences. In this chapter, I address the formal interplay between verticals and horizontals evident in Morales' landscape paintings, focusing my analysis on Morales' 1992 work, *Selva tropical, decidua* in order to draw conclusions that we might then apply to works that have been examined in the previous chapters (Figure 28). I examine this work in the context of art historical discourses surrounding the modernist grid, and argue that Morales employs a compositional system based on nonlinear coordinates in order to deconstruct the notions of spatial fixity and temporal linearity. I will demonstrate that, by rejecting Euclidean geometry and the Cartesian coordinate system, Morales rejects the modern separation between spirituality and science, and also, therefore, deconstructs the modernist binary between "primitivism" and "civilization" by suggesting that disparate worldviews can and do coexist in the context of modernity.

In her 1979 article, "Grids," Rosalind Krauss argues that "although the grid is certainly not a story, it *is* a structure, and one, moreover, that allows a contradiction between the values of science and those of spiritualism to maintain themselves within the consciousness of modernism..."¹⁵² For the modern artist, the grid provides a geometrically ordered mechanism by which to spatialize—concretely—artistic practice in the present while rejecting narrative structure and, therefore, temporal fixity. Because the

gridded composition evades sequential reading, each moment that occurs in the course of a viewer's perception of the work exists simultaneously, meaning that the viewer's past, present and future experiences coexist within the two-dimensional space of the canvas. In this way, the gridded composition is one in which space and time are necessarily interdependent, as vertical and horizontal elements intersect to produce, not the illusion of fixed points in space, but rather to produce an infinite number of possible viewing experiences. As I will demonstrate as this chapter unfolds, while verticality has come to represent an emphasis on individualism, hierarchy, anthropomorphism and temporal linearity, horizontality suggests an emphasis on equality, non-anthropomorphism and a non-linear conception of time.¹⁵³ The elements that compose the vertical coordinates or axis of the gridded composition may thus be read as markers of scientific 'progress,' while the elements that compose the horizontal coordinates may be read as markers of the continued presence of pre-modern civilization and values in the present.

According to Rosalind Krauss, the prevalence of the grid in modern art derives from its "mythic power," which "makes us able to think we are dealing with materialism (or sometimes science, or logic) while at the same time it provides us with a release into belief (or illusion, or fiction)."¹⁵⁴ With its pronounced interplay between vertical and horizontal formal elements, *Selva tropical, decidua* is exemplary of the gridded composition's potential to create a space for the coexistence of these disparate worldviews. As Erin Manning argues in her 2009 publication *Relationescapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*, "to assume a regular passage from past to present to future is to be imprisoned within Cartesian coordinates."¹⁵⁵ Yet, by constructing a grid composed

of dynamic, or *topological*, sequences rather than strictly linear coordinates, it becomes possible to transcend the Cartesian structure. As Manning explains,

Topology refers to a continuity of transformation that alters the figure, bringing to the fore not the coordinates of form but the experience of it. Topologies suggest that the space of the body extends beyond Euclidean coordinates to an embodiment of folding space-times of experience: pure plastic rhythm.¹⁵⁶

Although the trunks of the individual trees in *Selva tropical, decidua* are roughly vertical in orientation, we do not read the composition just vertically or anthropomorphically due to Morales' application of dynamic, nonlinear, topological visual sequences, as well as the strong horizontal orientation of the picture itself.¹⁵⁷ As Leo Steinberg notes in *Other Criteria*, "a picture that harks back to the natural world evokes sense data which are experienced in the normal erect posture," producing "revelations to which we relate visually as from the top of a columnar body."¹⁵⁸ On one hand, the verticality of the individual trees in *Selva tropical, decidua* does allow the viewer to conceptualize them anthropomorphically, as forms that mirror the individual's own human body. Yet, by balancing vertical, anthropomorphic forms with the strong horizontality of the overall composition, Morales suggests a non-hierarchical view of nature, in which the human viewer conceptualizes herself, not as an individual, but as an integrated part of the collective natural whole. Thus, anthropomorphism here functions in a non-anthropocentric way. The individual human viewer visually connects with and enters the composition with the sense of becoming an equal part of it, rather than with the sense of being a dominant figure in relation to it.

While Steinberg relates verticality to Renaissance pictorial conventions aimed at producing an illusionistic worldspace on the flat space of the canvas, he describes its "companion," horizontality, as "the flat bedding in which we do our begetting,

conceiving and dreaming. The horizontality of the bed relates to ‘making’ as the vertical of the Renaissance picture plane related to seeing.”¹⁵⁹ It is important to note that the “making” of which Steinberg speaks refers, not just to the artist’s making of the picture, but to the collaborative process of the picture’s continual making and re-making as a site of ongoing dialogue and experiences. Although I am drawing upon Leo Steinberg’s discussion of “the flatbed picture plane,” I do not mean to suggest that *Selva tropical, decidua* meets Steinberg’s criteria for the flatbed picture, as Morales’ composition remains equally reliant on verticals and horizontals.¹⁶⁰ Rather, I am suggesting that *Selva tropical, decidua* produces an infinite series of possible experiences rather than any illusion of a fixed “worldspace.”¹⁶¹

In this way, *Selva tropical, decidua* is exemplary of Umberto Eco’s notion of “the open work.” The composition’s strong horizontal orientation and the absence of a horizon line or vanishing point rid the scene of any central point of focus, as Morales rejects the convention of fixed-point perspective that was invented during the Renaissance to hinder the viewer’s subjective experience of an artwork. Because Renaissance perspectival conventions developed out of the scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, fixed-point perspective is an integral part of the larger process that formed the basis for Enlightenment rationalism and the structures upon which modern society was founded. As Umberto Eco explains,

The scientific and practical development of the technique of perspective bears witness to the gradual maturation of this awareness of an interpretative subjectivity pitted against the work of art. Yet it is equally certain that this awareness has led to a tendency to operate against the "openness" of the work, to favor its "closing out." The various devices of perspective were just so many different concessions to the actual location of the observer in order to ensure that he looked at the figure in the only possible right way—that is, the way the author of the work had prescribed, by providing various visual devices for the observer's attention to focus on.¹⁶²

Renaissance perspective thus provided a logical scientific system by which to control individual experience. Accordingly, the rejection of fixed-point perspective is one of the most defining features of modern art, and in this way, Morales adheres to the modernist canon.

Rather than direct or fix the viewer's experience and interpretation of the artwork by providing clear visual focal points, Morales constructs *Selva Tropical, Decidua* such that there is no clear, objective, "right way" to read the scene. There is no suggestion of linear time or narrative visual structure, as we inevitably view this as a continuous scene. Rather than read this as a composition with a beginning, middle and end, all elements are co-integrated and simultaneously present in the consciousness of the viewer. In this way, Morales represents time, not according to the closed, finite, linear structure as it is conceived according to the narratives of scientific and industrial progress, but rather, as collective, continuous, and non-linear. This open, non-linear view of time speaks, not only to Morales' self identification with the tenets of European modernism, but also to a larger cultural consciousness embedded in Nicaragua's pre-modern past.

The non-linear, open temporal structure that we find in *Selva tropical, decidua* is similarly present in the works of many of Morales' regional counterparts, but particularly informative examples may be found among Morales' contemporaries in the Praxis Group, which was founded in Nicaragua in 1961.¹⁶³ A dynamic, non-linear and, specifically, cyclical view of time was of particular importance to the Praxis Group artists, who believed that they must draw upon the pre-Columbian past and the tumult of the present in order to re-shape the future. Morales had studied alongside and worked closely with a number of the Praxis Group members between 1948 and 1953, during his years of formal

training under Rodrigo Peñalba (1908-1979) at the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes in Managua. Although the artists of the Praxis Group exhibit a range of very different forms of stylistic expression, they shared a common interest in the exploration of new pictorial mediums, new expressive tendencies, and new themes that would “produce a collision that wakes [the public] from the frenzy of the inauthentic and helps them to rise above a state of alienation.”¹⁶⁴ Toward this end, the Praxis Group artists likewise shared the common goal of building a new Nicaraguan artistic identity that defied Eurocentrism while retaining international appeal and relevance. In pursuit of this goal, the artists of the Praxis Group drew upon two major, and seemingly opposed, formal traditions.¹⁶⁵ As art historian David Craven notes, the two major influences on the Praxis Group artists were “the Abstract Expressionist movements from the United States and Europe...and the artistic traditions of pre-Columbian Nicaragua that had survived only in fragments.”¹⁶⁶ In this way, the Praxis Group sought to deconstruct notions of progress and temporal linearity by producing an artistic forum in which the pre-Columbian past and the modernist present could co-exist in the creation of the Nicaraguan future.

The work of the Guatemalan-born artist César Izquierdo (b. 1937) is exemplary of these intersecting influences, and Izquierdo’s 1973 work, *Los guardianes*, clearly evinces the open, non-linear, cyclical view of temporality that permeated the diverse body of Praxis Group works executed in the 1960’s and 1970’s (Figure 29). *Los guardianes* combines oil paint with unconventional materials, such as sand, string, oxidized iron and mechanical parts, in a monochromatic, strongly horizontal landscape composition. What appears to be a “natural” landscape, with trees and a mountain, merges with elements that suggest the whirlwind of industrialization and development, deconstructing colonialist

notions of linear temporal progress. A highly textured surface and incised, swirling, circular forms indicate that a continual movement and flux is embedded within the landscape, suggesting that time and life are not static and permanent, but rather, impermanent and dynamic. As in Morales' *Selva tropical, decidua*, individual elements are diffused across the canvas in a way that prevents a linear reading of the visual narrative, instead effecting the sense that the temporal dimensions of past, present and future are simultaneously present and dynamically co-exist in shaping present reality.

The cyclical view of time and life conveyed in the works of Morales and Izquierdo is similarly present in Central American literary tradition, the most well-known example being Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, in which García Márquez tells the century-long history of the Buendía family living in the fictional town of Macondo. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the Buendía family seems to be plagued by a repetitive curse that causes greed and immorality to continually propagate in the family line until, eventually, the town of Macondo and the Buendía line self-destruct. The novel ends as Aureliano Buendía deciphers a set of parchments encoded with ancient prophecies given to him by the gypsy Melquíades, arriving at the realization that Macondo and the Buendías have faded away, returning to the space of emptiness from which they started. García Márquez's novel helps to illustrate the way in which a cyclical notion of time pervades the Central American consciousness. Just as the Popol Vuh reveals that the ancient Maya viewed death, not as finite, but rather as the foundation for new life, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* illustrates the way in which the dissolution of a society forms the basis for a fresh start. Yet, underlying the notion of cyclical regeneration is a continual awareness of the past, represented in *One Hundred Years* by

the figure of Aureliano Buendía, who has witnessed the completion of a historical cycle, yet retains awareness of all that has ensued up until that point. In other words, in the Central American consciousness, time does not stop and start over, but continually revolves such that the memories and experiences of the past are embedded in the present—and in the cycle of history itself.

As many scholars across various disciplines have noted, the Enlightenment shift toward rational modes of thinking coincided with a rejection of the spiritual, the superstitious, and any system of faith that could not be verified by empiricism and scientific logic. The Enlightenment was closely followed by the Industrial Revolution in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which, as E.P. Thompson argued in his 1967 essay, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,” fundamentally changed the place and understanding of time in the collective social consciousness, as capitalist interests introduced a new structure based on measured clock time to replace earlier temporal conventions based on natural awareness.¹⁶⁷ The shift toward industrial society, therefore, also coincided with a shift in the human relationship to and understanding of time, from the horizontal, collective construction of temporality, to a vertical temporal structure, in which the interests of capitalist entrepreneurs (and the government officials who profited in communion with them) were placed at the top of the hierarchy. This shift toward a mechanically measured conception of time was, as Thompson noted, linked with a new emphasis on measuring progress, not only of individual human workers, but also of whole societies. Out of the notion that temporal measurement could be used to measure progress developed a linear conception of time, in which time came to be viewed as constantly moving forward in a sequential order. Accordingly, the temporal

dimensions of past, present and future came to be conceptualized as separate from one another.

In the early twentieth century, drawing upon Albert Einstein's recently developed theories of relativity, Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque developed Cubism as an expressive mode by which to break with the Cartesian notion that humans perceive independent points in space and time as singular events and from a singular perspective. Instead, Picasso and Braque proposed, following from Einstein's theories, that we can and do perceive multiple points of view simultaneously, and sought to create a visual mode by which to express the fluidity of the dimensions of past, present and future in the human temporal consciousness. This specific aim of Cubism points to a fundamental reason for which the Cubist influence was so widely absorbed by Central American artists, as Cubism introduced a manner of artistic representation that reconciled European tradition with an understanding of ontology and temporality that was intuitive to the Central American consciousness. Cubism provided a model that allowed Central American artists to align themselves with European modernist tradition without compromising their own cultural conception of being. In other words, the Cubist manner of seeing and representing was in many ways congruent with the pervasive Central American manner of seeing and representing. Yet, while the Cubists broke with the Cartesian coordinate system, they remained reliant upon conventional geometric forms, as is evident in Georges Braque's 1910 painting, "Violin and Candlestick" (Figure 30). Although the Cubist influence is evident in Morales' still lifes, history paintings and strictly figurative renderings, Morales' landscape paintings are particularly unique in their rejection of conventional geometric forms.

In *Selva tropical, decidua*, Morales presents a grid composed, not of strictly linear coordinates, but rather of twisted, curvilinear coordinates that appear to be in process of mutation. In this way, Morales breaks with the conventions of the strictly linear modernist grid by creating a grid composed of visual sequences that are not just topological, but also rhizomatic. In his essay, “Rhizome versus Tree,” Gilles Deleuze describes the rhizome as a botanical system that exists in a state of continuous mutation or deformation, and enunciates several properties which distinguish the rhizome from the “structural or generative model” of the tree.”¹⁶⁸ While the tree “plots points, fixes an order, [and] hierarchizes tracings” the rhizome functions as “a map...that is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious.”¹⁶⁹ In his discussion of the rhizome’s cartographic properties, Deleuze goes on to argue that the rhizome, as a map, is not “a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions, with binary relations between the points and biunivocal relationships between the positions,” but rather “is made only of lines: lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis, changes in nature.”¹⁷⁰ Deleuze further summarizes this point, explaining that

The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots...the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits in its own lines of flight...In contrast to centered systems with hierarchical modes of communication and preestablished paths, the rhizome is an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system...defined solely by a circulation of states.¹⁷¹

While the general properties of verticality and horizontality are retained in *Selva tropical, decidua*, the strictly linear coordinates of the Cartesian grid are continually deformed and

mutated, producing a rhizomatic map in which twisting, writhing lines variously interact and intersect. The result is an open, nonhierarchical composition with no pre-determined narrative structure. By ‘mapping’ the Nicaraguan topography in this way, Morales rejects a binary structure, suggesting that there is no right or wrong way to perceive the world and deconstructing the invented opposition between reality and unreality.

Although the Cubist influence certainly contributed to Armando Morales’ individual artistic development, it is also evident throughout Morales’ landscape paintings that he retained elements or qualities that are distinct from European models, and speak to the persistence of the Nicaraguan past and regional culture and values. As I have attempted to demonstrate throughout this chapter, a vertical worldview is linked with Enlightenment rationalism and individualism and, therefore, with the imperialist-industrialist social and cultural models that developed out of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. Verticality thus implies an understanding of society governed by a hierarchical structure, in which individuals and societies are understood in terms of their place and importance in relation to one another. As proposed in Chapter 2, Morales undoubtedly had a hierarchized notion of society, evident in his suggestion that European life and artistic models were superior to and more sophisticated than those of Nicaragua and Central America. Closely linked with this hierarchical conception of society is an anthropocentric worldview, by which the world and all of the objects in it are understood as they correspond to the forms and vertical orientation of the human body. This derives from the Classical Greco-Roman worldview in which the ideal proportions of the human body formed the basis for all acts of creation and perception. A renewed emphasis on classical proportions and geometry was ushered in, first with the

Italian Renaissance, and then with the Enlightenment, as scientific rationalism became the new basis for intellectual and cultural activity in Europe and the American colonies.

Despite the high status that Morales accorded European society and culture, the strong sense of horizontality evident in *Selva tropical, decidua* evinces the persistence of a worldview that is unframed by hierarchical relationships and temporal linearity. The horizontal dispersion of compositional elements across the canvas functions to create a visual narrative in which each individual element is seen as contributing to the collective whole of the picture, rather than emphasizing a single element as the dominant focal point. Similarly, Morales rejects the use of single point perspective in his landscape compositions, suggesting that there is not only one way to perceive and understand the world, but rather, that there are multiple ways to perceive and understand the world. Rather than present a unilateral visual narrative intended to foster support for the national revolution and contribute to the formation of a new Nicaraguan national identity, Morales' depictions of the Nicaraguan landscape speak to the complex intersection of multiple contradictory narratives and of the continuity between past, present and future.

On one hand, it is not surprising that a sense of verticality permeates Morales' landscape compositions, as the earliest formal influences on Morales' career were largely European influences. European avant-garde artists working in the first half of the twentieth century were, in large part, responding to nineteenth century developments and the changing conditions of modernity. More specifically, they were responding to the formation and solidification of nation-states, rapid scientific and technological progress, and the alienation brought on by industrialization and capitalism, mass media, and the rise of consumer culture. In the climate of these changing conditions, early twentieth

century Cubists and Abstractionists recognized that written and spoken languages alone were not sufficient for dealing with and representing the new and constantly fluctuating modern realities with which they found themselves confronted. Already threatened by the fragmentation of modernity, early twentieth century European modernists sought new visual languages and expressive mechanisms for exploring the totality of existence and for reconciling science and spirituality in art and life.

Artists working in Central America and, in Morales' case, specifically, in Nicaragua in the late 1950's and early 1960's were similarly experiencing the threat of fragmentation encountered with modernization, although in a way compounded by their place as part of the "Third World." In the Central American context, the rapid emergence of industrialization and the entry of new technologies were accompanied by the entry of foreign capitalism and domestic political and economic corruption as national leaders became increasingly self-interested. In Nicaragua, Anastasio Somoza Garcia had established himself as dictator in 1936, beginning a period of corrupt family rule that lasted for over forty years. Somoza and the two sons who succeeded him personally profited by inviting the entry of foreign capitalists, who exploited Nicaragua's land and people as they set up lucrative coffee, cotton, banana and sugar plantations that allowed them to produce and export large quantities of desirable goods at grossly low costs. The plantations were primarily established and run by U.S. entrepreneurs and, as long as they profited, so did the Somoza dynasty, while the Nicaraguan people increasingly struggled for basic subsistence. Yet, the paradox lay not in the fact that Nicaraguan farmers and their families were forced to work for next to nothing while foreign entrepreneurs and local leaders grew increasingly wealthy—this is indeed expected in an imperialistic

system. Rather, the paradox lay in the fact that many Nicaraguan people welcomed the industrialization and technological progress being vertically introduced from the “First World,” as they no doubt believed that this progress would eventually bring prospects for a better and more equitable future. On one hand, there was a desire to follow European and American cultural models in order to be recognized as a modern nation, but as time passed with no improvement in the national quality of living, Nicaraguan citizens began to react against what they now saw as an inequitable system that had been founded on their land and labor.

In the late 1950's, as Armando Morales was entering the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes in Managua to begin his artistic training under Rodrigo Peñalba, who was best known for his European-inspired Expressionism, tension was beginning to mount toward revolution. At the hands of imperialism, capitalism and modernization, the Nicaraguan people had endured nearly two decades of exploit, hardship and fragmented “progress.” A major paradox inherent in Morales' career as an artist, as is true of a number of professional Central American artists, was born of the fact that he was learning to emulate European artistic predecessors while living in a national context that was growing to increasingly despise U.S. (and by extension, European) political, economic and cultural models. Unlike many members of the current generation of contemporary Central American artists, Morales never completely rejected emulation of European and American cultural models in the manner that Nicaraguan revolutionaries believed was necessary in order to establish national cultural and political autonomy. While Morales certainly established a distinctive artistic style defined, in part, by his self-identification as a Nicaraguan artist, he sought, throughout his career to achieve a level of

professional artistic accomplishment that would earn him a place of international recognition alongside his European predecessors and his European and American counterparts. Because the system of formal artistic training in Nicaragua was founded, like so many other fine arts academies throughout Central America, on the narrative of Europe as cultural and artistic paradigm, Morales and other Central American artists emerging in the 1950's and 1960's would never entirely break with the vertical notions that maintained the supremacy of European and American models.

Yet, in contrast to the vertical aspects that permeate Morales' work, the horizontal aspects evince the persistent influence of a pantheistic worldview in the Nicaraguan mind and consciousness, and speak to the value placed on social equality in a society with a long history of corrupt dictatorial rule. For Morales, it was ultimately the combination of vertical and horizontal conceptualizations of society that allowed him to embrace a variety of cultural and artistic influences simultaneously, integrating seemingly opposed European and indigenous cultural models into his individualized visual language and artistic approach. At their points of intersection, the dynamic vertical and horizontal elements to be found in *Selva tropical, decidua* produce a gridded landscape that functions both within and beyond the parameters of modernity.

Conclusion

While Dore Ashton describes Morales' work as being "mythic," suggesting the creation of imaginary worlds that exist outside of time, temporality is very much present throughout Morales' landscape paintings. In *Selva tropical, decidua*, Morales presents us with vegetation at various stages of growth, simultaneously representing a variety of different points in the cycle of natural life. While some of the trees in the composition appear to be in the process of decay, others are vibrantly blossoming, while still others are just beginning to sprout from the earth. Likewise, the blending of oil paints creates the effect of gradual transition from one color into the next, imbuing the composition with an overall effect of transformation. We can observe similar tendencies in *Selva tropical I (Jungla)* (1992), *Selva tropical, II* (1987), and *Selva tropical, por dentro* (1992), as well as in the painting of a *Bañista* discussed in Chapter Two. In these compositions, time is not mythic, but collapsed, as Morales presents the viewer with various temporal moments to be perceived simultaneously, as we witness the unfolding of processes of transformation and rebirth.

In *Selva Tropical II* (1987), a grouping of female bathers at the lower left of the composition gathers at the base of a tree trunk that anthropomorphically assumes the form of a human foot. The poses of the female bathers are, again, direct citations of the same poses that Morales used in his 1986 painting of *Las Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas*, which depicts a group of unknown indigenous women who helped revolutionary leader Augusto Cesar Sandino retrieve arms from the waters near Nicaragua's northeast coast.¹⁷² As discussed in Chapter Three, Morales also cited these same poses in later works, such as *Rápido el Peinado* (2001), and, although no specific location is identified in *Selva tropical, II*, Puerto Cabezas and el Peinado are known places that still exist—Puerto

Cabezas on the North Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, and El Peinado in the central southwestern area of El Salvador. The fact that these compositions are rooted in depictions of real places with real histories of conquest and political and social tumult deconstructs Ashton's claim that Morales is concerned with mythic, imaginary time and space. Rather, these works are concerned with representing real spaces and a non-linear conception of time, both of which, on one hand, challenge dominant European and American narratives of progress.

Yet, as we have seen, Morales also conceived these works through a European optic. His appropriation and rendering of the landscape, as well as his fragmentation and abstraction of the nude female body, evince the colonizing gaze of an artist who sought to establish his own place in the narrative of colonialist progress. Morales, then, does not, as a magical realist reading of these works would presume, simply attempt to incorporate mythic or magical elements into the realm of what we perceive as plausibly "realistic" in order to push the boundaries imposed by European tradition.¹⁷³ By virtue of their multiple, contradictory suggestions and evasion of clear, unilateral narratives, Morales' landscape paintings rupture the binaries that have often shaped scholarly discourses on Central American art.

As I have demonstrated throughout the course of this thesis, these binaries—between reality and unreality, science and magic, reason and spirituality, primitivism and civilization, stagnation and progress—have been inherited from the discipline of anthropology and applied to art history in an ongoing effort to construct a pseudo-scientific, ethnographic framework within which to situate the discipline of art history. Yet, as scholars such as Mary Douglas, Johannes Fabian, George Lipsitz, Timothy

Mitchell and Claude Lévi-Strauss have made clear, the structure of anthropology is itself inherently flawed, established on a framework of binaries invented to promote colonizing narratives of scientific rationalism and progress.

As Timothy Mitchell writes in *Colonising Egypt*, “modern progress must be understood as a movement towards increasing inequality.”¹⁷⁴ Indeed, the emergence of an elite, ruling class necessitates the presence of a subordinate ‘Other’—an ‘Other’ which has historically been constructed through inventions of biological difference, as well as through temporal and spatial distancing. The veil of magical realism has contributed to the construction of Latin America as a place that exists outside of ‘real’ time and space; a place concerned with “mythic time” and the unreality of magic. As Mary Douglas reveals in *Purity and Danger*, the history of modernity is underwritten with invented oppositions between reason and spirituality, between science and magic, between reality and unreality—inventions of difference which have justified the colonization and exploitation of foreign land and people by white European and American elites. Constructed as open works of art, Morales’ landscape paintings suggest that ‘reality’ cannot be understood as the dominant pole in a system of binaries, but rather can only be understood as a process of constant flux and contradiction, of which magic and spirituality are inherently part.

Figures

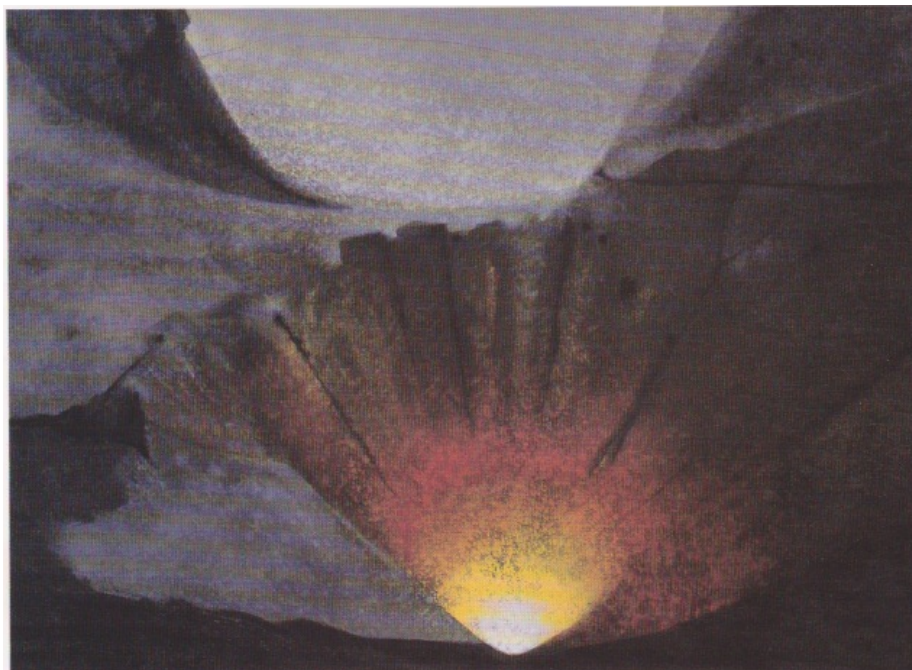


Figure 1. Arnoldo Guillén, *Esta tierra ni se vende ni se rinde*, 1987, Oil on Canvas, 122 x 166cm



Figure 2. Armando Morales, *Jungla*, 1987, Oil on Canvas, 160 x 202 cm



Figure 3. Otto Dix, *Flanders*, 1934, Oil on Canvas, 198 x 249 cm



Figure 4. Armando Morales, *Dos desnudos contra muro amarillo*, 1973, Oil on Canvas

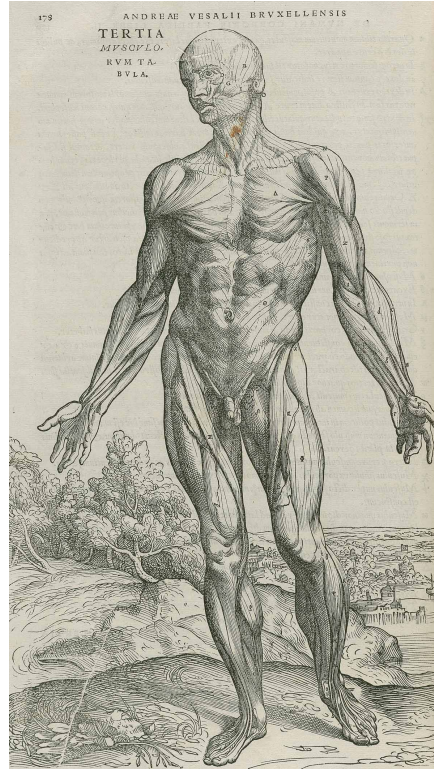


Figure 5. Jan van Calcar, illustration for *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* by Andreas Vesalius, c. 1543, Woodcut

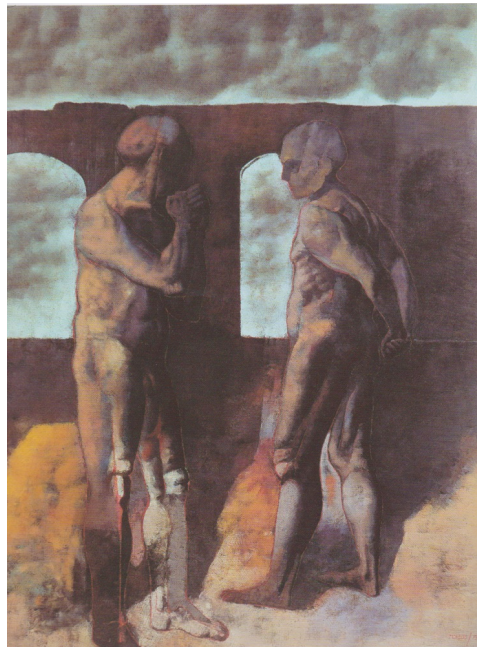


Figure 6. Armando Morales, *Gimnasio, I: Homage to Vesalius*, 1975, Oil on Canvas, 162 x 130 cm

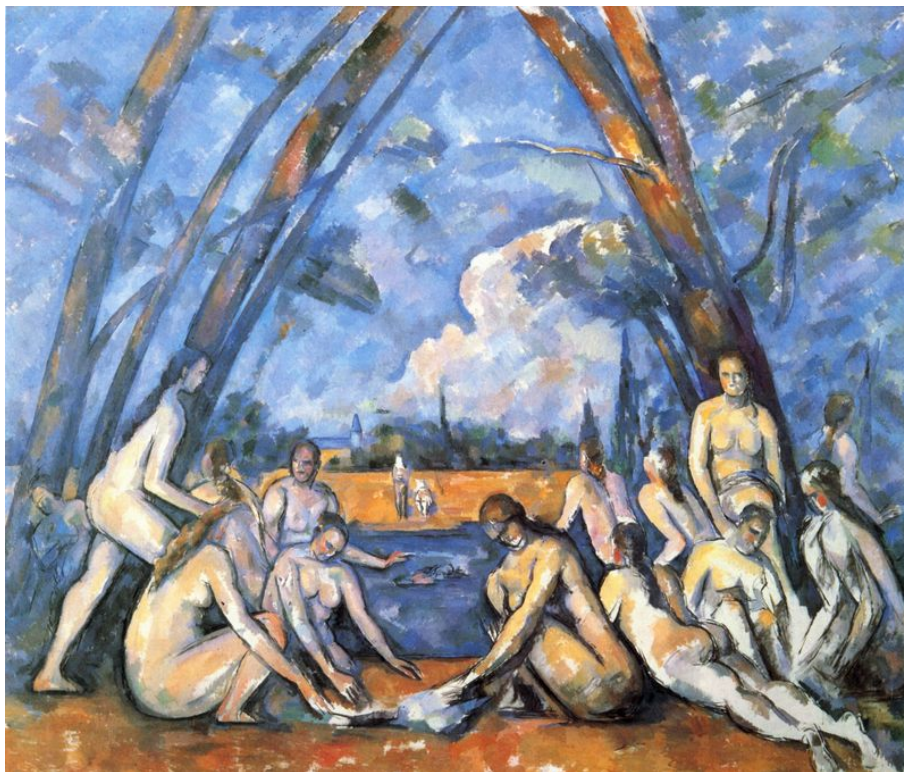


Figure 7. Paul Cézanne, *The Large Bathers*, 1906, Oil on Canvas, 210.5 x 250.8 cm



Figure 8. Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger*, 1911, Oil on Canvas, 244 x 234 cm



Figure 9. Armando Morales, *Selva Tropical I (Jungla)*, 1985,
Oil on Canvas, 162 x 130 cm



Figure 10. *Selva Tropical I (Jungla)*, detail

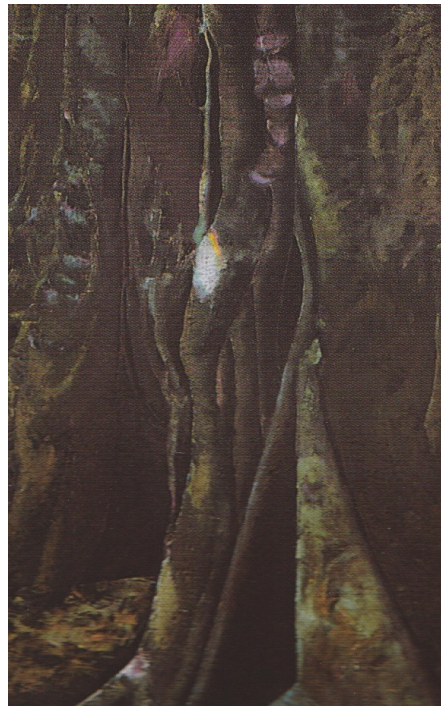


Figure 11. *Selva Tropical I (Jungla)*, detail



Figure 12. Armando Morales, *Sketch for Three Women*, 1984



Figure 13. Armando Morales, *Selva Tropical II* (detail), 1987, Oil on Canvas



Figure 14. Armando Morales, Anatomical Sketch

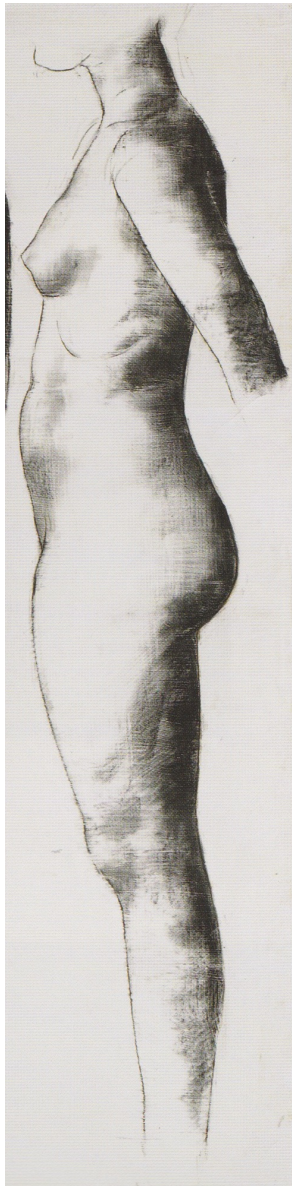


Figure 15.
Armando Morales,
Anatomical Sketch



Figure 16.
Armando Morales,
Selva tropical I, detail



Figure 17. Armando Morales, *Tres bañistas en la selva*, 1994, Oil on Canvas, 100 x 81 cm



Figure 18. Armando Morales, *Cuatro bañistas*, 2000, Oil on Canvas, 130 x 162 cm



Figure 19. The jungle, Rio San Juan, Nicaragua, 1996, Photograph by Armando Morales



Figure 20. Armando Morales, *Descendimiento de la Cruz* (*Descent from the Cross*), 1989, Oil on Canvas, 201 x 162 cm

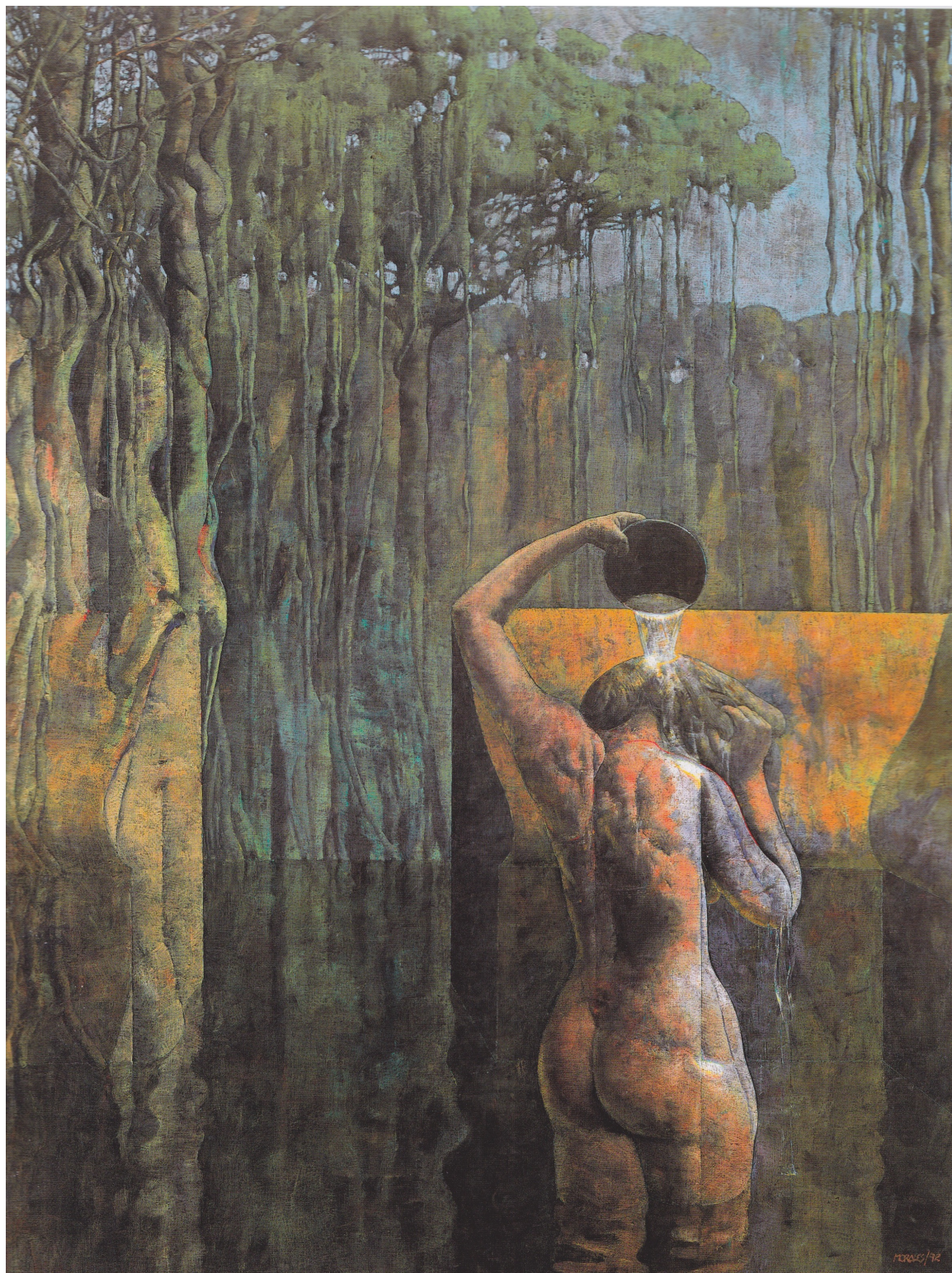


Figure 21. Armando Morales, *Bañista*, 1992, Oil on Canvas, 162 x 130 cm



Figure 22. Armando Morales, *Metamorphosis*, 1975, Oil on Canvas, 127 x 109 cm



Figure 23. Armando Morales, *Still life with three marañones and knife*, 2003, Oil on Canvas, 46 x 55 cm



Figure 24. Armando Morales, *Rápido el Peinado*, 2001, Oil on Canvas, 114 x 162 cm

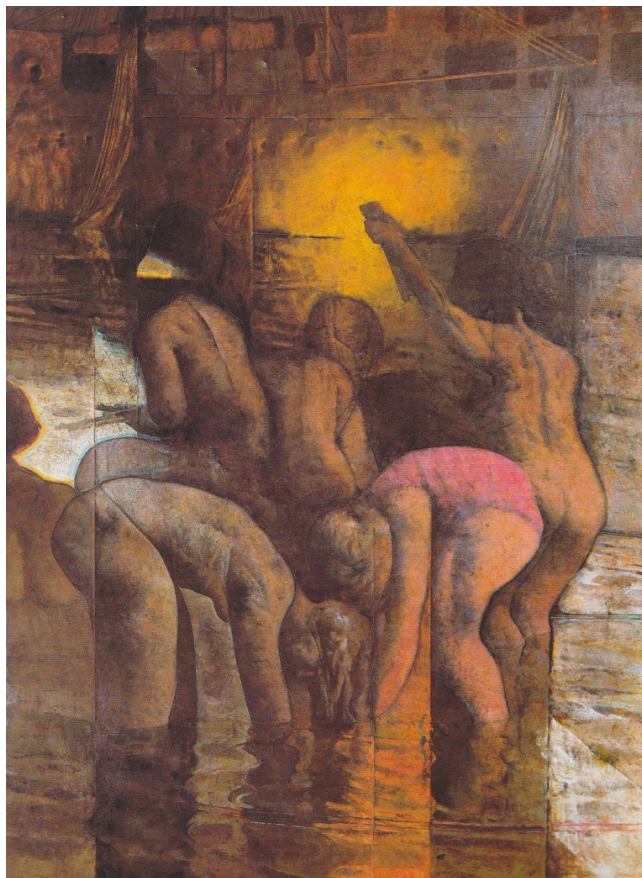


Figure 25. Armando Morales, *Mujeres de Puerto Cabzeas* (partial view), 1986, Oil on Canvas, 185 x 240 cm



Figure 26. Pablo Paisano, *Crucifixión en la montaña*, mid 20th C., Acrylic on Canvas, 183 x 112 cm



Figure 27. Armando Morales, *Oráculo sobre Managua (Homenaje a Ernesto Cardenal)*, 1989, Oil on Canvas, 162 x 201 cm



Figure 28. Armando Morales, *Selva tropical, decidua*, 1992, Oil on Canvas, 130 x 260 cm



Figure 29. César Izquierdo, *Los guardianes*, 1973,
Mixed Media on Canvas, 136 x 197 cm



Figure 30. Georges Braques, *Violin and Candlestick*, 1910, Oil on Canvas, 61 x 50 cm

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Endnotes

¹ Dore Ashton, "...y los sueños, sueños son," in *Armando Morales: Recent Paintings* (New York, NY: Claude Bernard Gallery, 1987). Note: Although Carpentier's term is *lo real maravilloso*, Ashton refers to *el real maravilloso* throughout her essay.

² *Ibid.* 4.

³ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1983), 143-144.

⁴ See Katherine Manthorne, *Tropical Renaissance: New Directions in American Art* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989).

⁵ George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2011), 20.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image, Music, Text*, translated by Stephen Heath (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1978), 142-143.

⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991). In the Introduction to his text, Anderson writes, "In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."

⁹ Edward Said, *Culture & Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 309. Also see Derek Alan Barker, "Escaping the Tyranny of Magic Realism? A Discussion of the Term in Relation to the Novels of Zakes Mda," in *Postcolonial Text*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2008) for a discussion that applies Said's insights in order to problematize the application of the term "magical realism" with reference to the work of South African novelist Zakes Mda.

¹⁰ Kirsten Buick, *Child of the Fire: Mary Edmonia Lewis and the Problem of Art History's Black and Indian Subject* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2010), 32-33.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ David Craven, *Art and Revolution in Latin America 1910-1990* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press), 131.

¹⁴ *La Prensa Literaria*, Excerpt from Praxis Group manifesto of July 1963, accessible at:

<http://archivo.laprensa.com.ni/archivo/2003/mayo/31/literaria/ensayos/ensayos-20030531-01.html> .

English Translation of Quoted Excerpt: "We have not been given the truth beforehand. The truth is the man in the fight. Nor is the truth a heritage unique to each one. The truth is all. We therefore need to disclose it, proclaim it, confront it if necessary. Belief alone does not suffice to possess it. The clear, immaculate truth, the truth of the solitary and the proud, does not serve us. If we want to serve the truth—a dynamic, living truth, which each day, each hour, each minute, imposes itself upon us—then it is necessary to reach out to others, men like us, and embark on a shared journey for the existence of each day. It is necessary, therefore, to disseminate our creation in art and culture and to become the incarnation of it in life: in facts, in acts, in attitudes."

¹⁵ While Wilfredo Lam's 1943 work, *Jungla*, would also present a compelling comparison with any number of Morales' *Jungla* or *Selva Tropical* scenes, I have chosen not to connect them in the context of this thesis. Lam's work and oeuvre are highly complex and merit detailed study in their own right, presenting an excellent opportunity for an entirely new project to be pursued in future scholarship.

¹⁶ In 1987, the counterrevolutionary *Resistencia Nicaragüense*, or *Nicaraguan Resistance*, organization was founded in opposition to the Sandinista government and sought to strengthen the resistance movement by unifying all of Nicaragua's counterrevolutionary interests under a single organization aimed at overthrowing the Sandinistas.

¹⁷ Umberto Eco, *The Open Work* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 4.

¹⁸ Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, eds., "Editor's Note" in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 75-76. It is important to note here that Jacques-Stéphen Alexis had formulated a theory of *le réalisme merveilleux* before Carpentier, earlier in the 1940's,

though he did not apply it to his own work until the 1955 publication of his novel *Compère Général Soleil* (translated into English as *General Sun, My Brother*). The concept of magic realism had also been used earlier by Arturo Uslar Pietri to discuss the Venezuelan narrative.

¹⁹ This perspective is much informed by Edward Said's text, *Culture and Imperialism*.

²⁰ Franz Roh, "Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism," pp. 15-31 in Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, eds., *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 15-16.

²¹ Ibid. (See "Editors' Note").

²² Alejo Carpentier, "The Baroque and the Marvelous Real," pp. 89-108 in Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, eds., *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 102.

²³ Roh, "Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, 15. The translation of Roh's essay was published in the *Revista de Occidente* in Madrid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Irene Guenther, "'Magical Realism, New Objectivity, and the Arts during the Weimar Republic,'" pp. 33-73 in Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, eds., *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 33-34.

²⁶ Roh, "Magical Realism: Post-Expressionism," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, 28.

²⁷ Ibid. 17.

²⁸ Guenther, "Magical Realism, New Objectivity," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, 33.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Timothy Mitchell, "Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order," in Donald Preziosi, ed., *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* (Oxford & NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 460.

³¹ Ibid. 456.

³² This contention is largely based on the fact that, more than twenty years after the publication of Ramírez's essay, not much has changed in the curatorial authoring of narratives of "otherness" and difference.

³³ Guenther, "Magical Realism, New Objectivity," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, 35.

³⁴ For specific characteristics that Roh identified, see Guenther, "Magical Realism, New Objectivity," pp. 35-36.

³⁵ Roh, "Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, 15.

³⁶ Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," in *Structural Anthropology*, translated by Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (NY, New York: Basic Books, 1963), 428.

³⁷ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (NY & London: Routledge, 2003).

³⁸ Mary Douglas, see Chapter One, "Ritual Uncleaness," in *Purity and Danger*.

³⁹ Ibid. 14.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 28.

⁴¹ "voluntarily" refers to the instances in which Latin American artists, such as Roberto Matta from Chile, openly identified themselves as Surrealists; "involuntarily" refers to an artist such as Frida Kahlo, who was in a sense "appropriated" by André Breton as a Surrealist painter, despite the fact that she never openly aligned herself with the movement.

⁴² Mari Carmen Ramírez, "Beyond the Fantastic," in *Art Journal* 51:4 (Winter, 1992).

⁴³ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, translated by Annette Lavers (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1972), 140.

⁴⁴ Oriana Baddeley & Valerie Fraser, *Drawing the Line: Art and Cultural Identity in Contemporary Latin America* (London: Verso, 1989), 102.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 102-103.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 102.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 103.

⁴⁸ Alejo Carpentier, "Baroque and the Marvelous Real," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, 91.

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- ⁴⁹ Ibid. 89.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid. 103.
- ⁵¹ Ibid. 104, 107.
- ⁵² Ashton, "y los sueños...", 3. It is important to note that, although the proper term is *lo real maravilloso*, Ashton alters the Spanish grammar in referring to *el real maravilloso*.
- ⁵³ Ibid. 3.
- ⁵⁴ Carpentier, "Baroque and the Marvelous Real," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, 102-104.
- ⁵⁵ Ashton, "y los sueños...", 3.
- ⁵⁶ Oxford English Dictionary Online, entry for "anthropology," accessible at: <http://www.oed.com.libproxy.unm.edu/view/Entry/8436?redirectedFrom=anthropology#eid>
- ⁵⁷ Virginia Jackson, "Longfellow's Tradition; or, Picture-Writing a Nation" in *Modern Language Quarterly* December 1998, 59(4), pp. 471-496 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 493.
- ⁵⁸ Joe Lockard, "The Universal Hiawatha" in *American Indian Quarterly* Winter 2000, 24(1), pp. 110-125 (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 111.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid. 112-113.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid. 117.
- ⁶¹ Wendy B. Faris, "The Question of the Other: Cultural Critiques of Magical Realism," in *Janus Head: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature, Continental Philosophy, Phenomenological Psychology, and the Arts*, pp. 101-119 (Pittsburgh, PA: Fall 2002), 102.
- ⁶² Eva Aldea, *Magical Realism & Deleuze: The Indiscernability of Difference in Postcolonial Literature* (London & New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 19.
- ⁶³ Ibid. 147.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid. Gilles Deleuze, "A Thousand Plateaus."
- ⁶⁵ Marcia Pointon, *Naked Authority: The Body in Western Painting 1830-1908* (Cambridge & NY: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 11.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid.
- ⁶⁷ Pointon, *Naked Authority*, 13.
- ⁶⁸ Linda Nochlin, *The Body in Pieces: The Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity* (New York, NY: Thames & Hudson, 1994), 53.
- ⁶⁹ *machismo*: this term refers to strong, often aggressive masculinity that has characterized male consciousness in Nicaragua & throughout Central America.
- ⁷⁰ Pointon, *Naked Authority*, 19.
- ⁷¹ Ibid. 33-34.
- ⁷² Ibid. 12.
- ⁷³ Ibid.
- ⁷⁴ Celia S. de Birbragher, "Interview with Armando Morales," in *Arte en Colombia*, No. 45. October 1990: 146-149; 146.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid.
- ⁷⁶ Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," in *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 4. pp. 519-531 (Dec., 1988).
- ⁷⁷ Ibid. 519, 526.
- ⁷⁸ Griselda Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888-1893: Gender and the Color of Art History* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1993), 42.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid. 14.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid.
- ⁸¹ Ibid. 14, 42-43.
- ⁸² Ibid. 42-43.
- ⁸³ Jean Paget, "Morales: Pintar es ver e imaginar," in *Ventana*, Saturday 5 July 1986 (Medellín, Colombia), 3.

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- ⁸⁴ Jack Flam, "Bathers But Not Beauties," in *Art News*, Accessible at: <http://www.artnews.com/2012/05/24/bathers-but-not-beauties/>
- ⁸⁵ Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity & Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992), 45.
- ⁸⁶ De Birbragher, "Interview with Armando Morales," 146.
- ⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 147-148.
- ⁸⁸ See Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley & LA: University of California Press, 1991).
- ⁸⁹ Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria*, (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 125-234.
- ⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 234.
- ⁹¹ Pointon, *Naked Authority*, 12.
- ⁹² Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude*, 23.
- ⁹³ *Ibid.* 45.
- ⁹⁴ In his text *Keywords*, Raymond Williams explains "culture" as "one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language," and "nature" as "perhaps the most complex word in the language." For detailed discussions of these terms and their inherent complexities, see entries for "culture" and "nature" in Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1985).
- ⁹⁵ Butler, "Performative Acts," 520.
- ⁹⁶ Morales still retained his Nicaraguan nationality after becoming a Spanish citizen.
- ⁹⁷ Morales was very open about this fact. See interviews by C. S. de Birbragher and Jean Paget.
- ⁹⁸ Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits*, 24-25.
- ⁹⁹ Armando Morales, as quoted in Catherine Loewer, ed., *Armando Morales: Monograph and Catalogue Raisonné—Paintings & Drawings, 1974-2004* (Three Volumes) (Manchester, Vermont: Hudson Hills, 2010), Vol. 3, 387.
- ¹⁰⁰ de Birbragher, "Interview with Armando Morales," 147.
- ¹⁰¹ Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1985/1992), 109.
- ¹⁰² See interviews by Paget & de Birbragher.
- ¹⁰³ Pointon, *Naked Authority*, 116.
- ¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 116-118.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰⁶ Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley & LA: University of California Press, 1991), 32-33.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 32, 34-35.
- ¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 32-33
- ¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 33.
- ¹¹² Margaret Randall, *Sandino's Daughters Revisited: Feminism in Nicaragua* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 7.
- ¹¹³ David Craven, *Art & Revolution in Latin America, 1910-1990* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002), 134.
- ¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁵ See Margaret Randall, *Sandino's Daughters* and *Sandino's Daughters Revisited*.
- ¹¹⁶ *machismo*: this term refers to strong, often aggressive masculinity that has characterized male consciousness in Nicaragua & throughout Central America.
- ¹¹⁷ See Margaret Randall, *Sandino's Daughters* (Rutgers, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995).
- ¹¹⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 150.
- ¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹²⁰ *Ibid.* 149-150.
- ¹²¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹²² José Adán Silva, "Nicaragua: Machismo Just Isn't Cool," published 23 October 2010 by Inter Service Press and accessible at <http://www.globalissues.org/news/2010/10/23/7361>; Also see: United Nations

Development Program Report, "Opening Spaces for Citizen Security and Human Development," PDF Accessible at: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/regional/latinamericathecaribbean/irdhc-2009-2010-summary.pdf>

¹²³ Silva, "Nicaragua: Machismo Just Isn't Cool."

¹²⁴ Men attempting to educate themselves in the thinking of 'new masculinity' have also been victims of *Machismo* violence; see Silva, "Nicaragua: Machismo Just Isn't Cool."

¹²⁵ de Birbragher, "Interview with Armando Morales," 149.

¹²⁶ OED, entry for "morphology," Accessible at:

<http://www.oed.com.libproxy.unm.edu/view/Entry/122369?redirectedFrom=morphology#eid>

¹²⁷ Paget, "Pintar es ver," 3.

¹²⁸ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity & Evolution*, translated by René Hague (NY:

Harvest Books, 1971), 228.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* 56.

¹³⁰ Lynn Gamwell, *Exploring the Invisible: Art, Science & Spirituality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 14. This definition is based upon the German Romantic conception of Pantheism, as derived from Pythagoras' contention that "man and the universe are both constructed from [one primordial] substance, [the monad]," and "that man is a microcosm of the universe and animated by a common spirit, a World Soul, which is divine and eternal."

¹³¹ Chardin, *Christianity & Evolution*, 58. Chardin develops his conception of pantheism throughout his lectures. Summarized in "How I Believe," he states: "We now see beings as like threadless fibres, woven into a universal process. Everything falls back into a past abyss, and everything rushes forward toward a future abyss. Through its history, every being is co-extensive with the whole of duration; and its ontogenesis is no more than the infinitesimal element of a cosmogenesis in which is ultimately expressed the individuality – the face, we might say – of the universe."

¹³² Paget, "Pintar es ver," 3. Also see Celia S. De Birbragher, "Interview with Armando Morales," in *Arte en Colombia*, No. 45. October 1990: 146-149.

¹³³ The notion of Gestalt Theory of psychology as applied to aesthetics and perception was first introduced at length by Rudolf Arnheim in *Art & Visual Perception* (Berkeley & LA: University of California Press, 1954). As summarized by Arnheim in a later interview by Uta Grundmann, "Gestalt psychology was basically a reaction to the traditional sciences. A scientific experiment was based primarily on breaking down its object into single parts and defining them. The sum of the definitions then corresponded to the object. By contrast, the Gestalt psychologists, referring among other things to the arts, emphasized that there are common connections in human nature, in nature generally, in which the whole is made up of an interrelationship of its parts and no sum of the parts equals the whole." See "The Intelligence of Vision: An Interview with Rudolf Arnheim," Accessible at:

<http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/2/rudolfarnheim.php>

Similarly, Chardin states that "We are unable, in reality, to understand the multiple...The intelligible world, the true world, can only be a unified whole. In consequence, the elements, the parts, the atoms, the monads, have no real and permanent value." See p. 57 in *Christianity and Evolution*.

¹³⁴ Gamwell, *Exploring the Invisible*, 24.

¹³⁵ Any "art historical" analysis does, itself, presuppose being mediated by a European optic, as the discipline in itself is founded on Eurocentric ideas and approaches. In a minor attempt to avoid some of the "Eurocentrizing" that pervades art history, I choose not to discuss Morales' landscape works as exemplary of the sublime and/or in relation to the German Romantic landscape paintings of a figure such as Caspar David Friedrich.

¹³⁶ This contention is based on a range of both fictional and documentary literary sources written by Nicaraguan authors, as well as authors from elsewhere throughout Central America and the Caribbean. This is also based, more importantly, on discussion of these ideas with Central American artists and academics, who have helped me to understand that to view "humanity" and "nature" as separate entities is necessarily a Eurocentric/U.S.-centric way of viewing the world.

¹³⁷ This painting formed the basis for the *Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas* lithograph that Morales executed as part of his 1993 *La Saga de Sandino* series. For a detailed and highly insightful analysis of the *Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas* lithograph, see, Gustavo Larach, "Chapter One: Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas in Nicaragua: The Outset of an Epic," in the thesis entitled *Three Case Studies of National Narratives in Central American Art* (Albuquerque, NM: The University of New Mexico, 2010).

¹³⁸ Margaret Randall, *Sandino's Daughters Revisited*, 7.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ "Jinotega's Miskitos and Sumus: Little Noted Victims of the Contra War," Accessible at: <http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/2706>

¹⁴¹ William Fowler, "Ethnohistoric Sources on the Pipil Nicarao: A Critical Analysis," pp. 37-62 in *Ethnohistory* (Columbus, OH: American Indian Ethnohistoric Conference), 1985.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Gioconda Belli, *The Inhabited Woman* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 8, 106.

¹⁴⁴ Lewis Spence, Chapter II in *The Myths of Mexico and Peru* (1913), online text accessible at:

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/nam/mmp/mmp05.htm>

¹⁴⁵ Craven, *Art and Revolution*, 146.

¹⁴⁶ Mario A. Rojas, Chapter VI in *Council for Washington, D.C. Research in Values & Philosophy: Vol. 2*, Section entitled "Ernesto Cardenal: Poetry, Christianity and Revolution," Accessible at:

http://www.crvp.org/book/Series05/V-2/chapter_vi.htm

¹⁴⁷ Ernesto Cardenal, *Cosmic Canticle*, Translated by John Lyons (Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1993), 102.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 113.

¹⁴⁹ See discussion of Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger* and quotation by Frazer at p. 26 of this manuscript.

¹⁵⁰ Drawing upon Lévi-Strauss' discussions in "The Structural Study of Myth" and "History and Dialectic," *synchronicity* refers to cultural simultaneity, or the notion that equivalent intellectual solutions can be formulated by cultures existing independently of one another.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," in *October*, Vol. 9 (Summer, 1979), pp. 50-64 (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1979), 55.

¹⁵³ It is also interesting to note here that, in the field of literary studies, the horizontal axis is associated with order/logic/reason through grammar and syntax, while the vertical axis is associated with the metaphorical.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 54.

¹⁵⁵ Erin Manning, *Relationescapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009), 163.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 165.

¹⁵⁷ This in part draws upon Leo Steinberg's discussion in *Other Criteria*.

¹⁵⁸ Steinberg, *Other Criteria*, 84.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. 84, 90.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. 82

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 91.

¹⁶² Eco, *The Open Work*, 5.

¹⁶³ Maria Dolores Torres, *La Modernidad en la pintura nicaragüense* (Managua: Banco Central de Nicaragua, 1995), 55.

¹⁶⁴ Antonio Tapies, as quoted in Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Craven, *Art and Revolution*, 127; also see Chapter VI in M.D. Torres *La Modernidad en la pintura nicaragüense*.

¹⁶⁶ Craven, *Art and Revolution*, 127.

¹⁶⁷ E.P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," 1967.

¹⁶⁸ Gilles Deleuze, "Rhizome versus Tree," in *The Deleuze Reader*, edited by Constantin V. Boundas (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1993), 34.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. 29, 34-35.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. 36.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. 36.

¹⁷² This painting formed the basis for the *Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas* lithograph that Morales executed as part of his 1993 La Saga de Sandino series. For a detailed and highly insightful analysis of the *Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas* lithograph, see, Gustavo Larach, "Chapter One: Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas in Nicaragua: The Outset of an Epic," in the thesis entitled *Three Case Studies of National Narratives in Central American Art* (Albuquerque, NM: The University of New Mexico, 2010).

¹⁷³ Bernard McGuirk and Richard Cardwell, eds. *Gabriel García Márquez* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 45.

¹⁷⁴ Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, 124.