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# Three Case Studies of National Narratives in Central American Art

Gustavo Larach

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**THREE CASE STUDIES OF NATIONAL NARRATIVES IN  
CENTRAL AMERICAN ART**

**BY**

**GUSTAVO LARACH**

**BACHELOR OF FINE ARTS  
ART HISTORY  
MASSACHUSETTS COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN, 2000**

**THESIS**

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Arts  
Art History**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**August, 2010**

## ***DEDICACIÓN***

A Domingo y Vilma, mis padres, quienes siempre me procuraron la mejor educación posible.

A los pueblos de la América Central, por su espíritu de lucha.

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**By**

**Gustavo Larach**

**B.F.A., Art History, Massachusetts College of Art and Design, 2000  
M.A., Art History, University of New Mexico, 2010**

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis explores the ways in which two Central American artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century conceived of their own emerging nations through works of art that present national narratives. The first artist discussed is the Nicaraguan Armando Morales (b. 1927). This discussion centers on Morales's lithographic portfolio of seven images titled *La saga de Sandino*, which recounts the rebellion led by Augusto César Sandino (1895-1934) between 1926 and 1933. The second artist discussed is the Honduran Arturo López Rodezno (1908-75), who set out to produce, between the 1940's and 1960's, murals that focused on the figures of ancient Maya rulers and courtiers. The main question I am addressing is the type of nationalism that these contrasting artistic projects entailed. The evidence presented in this thesis shows Morales's project *La saga de Sandino* to be inscribed by a popular form nationalism, while López Rodezno's artistic practice is inscribed by an official nationalism. The contrasting visions and discourses implemented through the artistic projects studied in this thesis demonstrate that opposing conceptions of the nation can be located within the art of 20<sup>th</sup> century Central America.

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## ***INTRODUCTION***

The purpose of this project is to explore the ways in which two Central American artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century conceived of their own emerging nations through works of art that present national narratives. The first of these two artists is the Nicaraguan Armando Morales (b. 1927). For the purpose of this thesis, my discussion of his work will center on a lithographic portfolio of seven images he developed between July and October of 1993 in Mexico City. The portfolio, titled *La saga de Sandino*, was exhibited in the Mexican capital that same year at the Museo Rufino Tamayo and the next year in Managua, at Galería Códice. Through its seven images, *La saga de Sandino* recounts the rebellion led by Augusto César Sandino (1895-1934) between 1926 and 1933, which constituted not only a historical process central to understanding modern Nicaraguan history, but also, as we will see in Chapters One and Two, the cardinal force within a trajectory from which a sense of the Nicaraguan nation arose.

The second artist I will discuss is the Honduran Arturo López Rodezno (1908-75). While Morales revisited the modern history of his nation to evoke aspects of it, departing from events that occurred some six decades before he set out to reconstruct them in *La saga de Sandino*, López Rodezno relied on the ancient Maya culture that had its southeastern limits in what today is only the western-most portion of the Honduran territory. The most important Maya site in this area is the ancient city of Copán, located in the Honduran department of the same name, and from which López Rodezno came. Obtaining his visual sources from Maya works of art produced in Copán and elsewhere in the Maya area at least a millennium before he could ever see them, López Rodezno set

out to produce, between the 1940's and 1960's, murals that focused on the figures of ancient rulers and courtiers. How he evoked the Honduran nation, as it came to be imagined through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is a problem I will address in Chapter Three.

The main question I am addressing is the type of nationalism that these contrasting artistic projects entailed. As Benedict Anderson has written, “communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but *by the style in which they are imagined*” [my italics] (Anderson, 6). A conception of the nation precedes both of the projects studied in this thesis and I seek to clarify what those conceptions are and what devices the artists used to evoke them. I will argue that while *La saga de Sandino* asserts a *popular* brand of nationalism, the visual works by López Rodezno discussed in Chapter Three fit into the plot of an *official* form of nationalism. To sort out the conceptions that lie underneath the art works discussed in this thesis, I have divided my work into three case studies. The first two case studies, Chapters One and Two, focus on different aspects of *La saga de Sandino*. The third case study, Chapter Three, centers on the works of Arturo López Rodezno which attempt to reclaim a distant and idealized Maya past.

Chapter One, titled “Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas in Nicaragua: The Outset of an Epic,” centers on the first print in the sequence of seven that make up the portfolio titled *La saga de Sandino*. It traces the formal investigations carried out by Morales since the 1960's to see how he arrived at the particular pictorial language deployed in the prints. A detailed formal analysis of this initial lithograph, titled *Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas*, is performed in order to elucidate the poetics of the image. The forms of *Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas* evoke natural space only to disrupt it and create a disquieting spatial

configuration, which provides the discursive qualities peculiar to the print. Structuralist theory is used to inform this analysis, which points out the visual qualities of the lithograph that guide the viewer across the surface of the print, thus tracing the values that triggered the process narrated by Morales in *La saga de Sandino*.

Chapter Two, titled “Armando Morales’s Visual Narrative of Nicaragua’s Sandino,” examines *La saga de Sandino* through the lens of Walter Benjamin’s essay *The Story-Teller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov*. In drawing on Benjamin, this study seeks to inquire into Morales’s dynamics of narration and his motivation for telling the story of Sandino during the 1990’s. I have relied on the ideas of Edward Said and Andreas Huyssen, as well as those of Benjamin, to incorporate into my discussion the issue of memory centered on the problem of the temporality created by the narration and how that temporality might be perceived to extend itself into an unforeseen future. Heinrich Wölfflin’s concept of *open form* in pictorial images allowed me to explore the evocative qualities of the prints. This chapter includes an extensive formal analysis of the second print in the sequence, *Sandino en la montaña*, as I seek to show how its forms allow content to overflow their own visual field.

Lastly, Chapter Three, “Maya Motifs in the Art Work by Arturo López Rodezno of Honduras,” constitutes a reaction to the popular nationalism evoked by *La saga de Sandino*. This third case study shows how the art work of López Rodezno, as well as the agenda he set as founder and first director of the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes, contributed to the elaboration and dissemination of a discourse of official Honduran nationalism, as it was consolidated by conservative governments in Honduras during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Key to my analysis is the work of historian Darío Euraque,

who has elaborated the ideological context for that historical process in his book *Conversaciones históricas con el mestizaje y su identidad nacional en Honduras*. Formal analysis is used to implement a study of the process by which López Rodezno narrowly extracted elements of ancient Maya works to reconfigure them in his own reductive compositions. This subjective process involving the dislocation and re-contextualization of Maya imagery is what allowed López Rodezno to advance exclusionary presumptions about the indigenous origins of the Honduran nation through his visual works.

The work of Armando Morales has been discussed by several authors, including Dore Ashton, David Craven, Damián Bayón, Lily Kassner, Teresa del Conde, Raquel Tibol, Maria Dolores Torres and Maricela Kauffmann. My understanding of Morales's work was enriched by the different discussions found in the writings of these authors. In 1997, Nicaraguan art historian Maricela Kauffmann finished her M.A. Thesis at the University of Texas at Austin, *Armando Morales's Paintings of the Nicaraguan Uprisings: Visual History and Memory of the Forging of a National Identity*. In that text, she set up a very productive dialogue between *La saga de Sandino* and Ernesto Cardenal's poem *La hora cero*. Through a very rich and informative discussion, Kaufmann has elaborated upon the import of Morales's portfolio for Nicaraguan national identity (Kauffmann, 28-29). My study of *La saga de Sandino* differs in that it centers on the inherent poetic and narrative mechanisms of the portfolio, which evokes a temporality in which we can sense Sandino's project on behalf of an indigenous, rural based, autonomous Nicaraguan nation. I emphasize the fact that *La saga de Sandino* is configured in a way that demands the subjective participation of the viewer in the construction of historical narrative.

The work of Arturo López Rodezno has been discussed in the writings of Honduran authors Evaristo López, Longino Becerra and Leticia de Oyuela. Close attention to his peculiar method for appropriating Maya imagery was needed, as was a more thorough attempt to situate that practice within the historical context of official national ideology. Through the three case studies presented in this thesis, I hope to contribute to the discussion of how the nation in Central America was constructed in diverse ways through art.

Important sources for this project include the works of art themselves, both by Armando Morales and Arturo López Rodezno, as well as the writings about these artists mentioned above, and the texts by various authors who discuss the historical processes which constitute the context for the works of art: David Craven, Darío Euraque, Donald Hodges, Sergio Ramírez, Gregorio Selser and Thomas W. Walker.

In this thesis I will demonstrate that opposing conceptions of the nation can be located within the art of 20<sup>th</sup> century Central America, so that we must write of competing conceptions of the nation state in each case. In this sense, the history of Central America can still evolve in various directions whose coordinates remain to be determined.

## ***CHAPTER ONE: Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas in Nicaragua: The Outset of an Epic***

*Indudablemente toda la obra de Morales es poética,  
pero en las obras del 68 la poesía crece de modo manifiesto.*  
--Marta Traba, 'Hombre americano a todo color'

It takes a great artist to rescue a hero from the specters of memory, to restructure our perception of a story rendered invisible through familiarity. Indeed, according to most experts in the field (from Marta Traba to Dore Ashton), Armando Morales is one of the most outstanding artists from Central America. He has practiced oil painting since the 1940's and printmaking, mainly lithography, since the 1960's. Art historian David Craven points out two phases in his mature career. He went from producing abstract expressionist works during the late 1950's and early 1960's, to implementing a figurative style of "Magical Realism" during the 1970's (Craven, "Armando Morales," 46). His work often presents subjects that deal with the convulsive history of his native country, Nicaragua. Such is the case with a print titled *Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas* (1993), which represents an event that is at the genesis of the insurrection movement started by Augusto César Sandino during the 1920's.

In the pages that follow, I will center my discussion on this image, to show how the pictorial language implemented in it by Morales profits from the artistic practices that he has developed and refined since the 1960's. These practices allow Morales to seek both a partisan and a poetic image of events that are at the heart of modern Nicaraguan history. Morales's pictorial language, which has benefited from the intense formal

explorations he has carried out throughout his whole artistic career, allows him to construct an image whose depiction of things mimics the appearances of the natural world, yet is configured in a way that alters reality in unexpected ways to achieve an uncanny construction of his subject. This practice corresponds in several senses to the mode of artistic creation known as “Magic Realism.”

Before discussing the work, let us consider some ideas that will help us identify what is poetic in *Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas*. The Argentinean art critic Marta Traba saw in Armando Morales an artist who believed in art as a system of signs, as a combinatory order that has the power to represent. She described the space in his work as one that acquired value through its relationship to the forms it contained, which configures a pictorial work into a structure, a system of relationships. For Traba, poetry is engrained in the work of Morales through the lyricism of the associations that link the objects incorporated in his images, associations which produce a “metaphorical verticality”:

Morales declara, por entonces [late 1960’s], que lo inducen “la intención y el sentimiento” y que pinta mediante metáforas “desarmando la figura en la mente y reconstruyéndola metafóricamente”... Las figuras que Morales pinta en este lapso no son sino imágenes equivalentes, presencias humanas distantes, reducidas a la inacción y a la evocación (Traba, 41).

The equivalences that Traba finds in the images of Morales actually coincide with a concept the formalist linguist Roman Jakobson used to characterize metaphor and metonymy, the two basic rhetorical figures. Theorist of literature Terence Hawkes explains that, for Jakobson, “both are figures of ‘equivalence’ in that they

characteristically propose a different entity as having ‘equivalent’ status to the one that forms the main subject of the figure” (Hawkes, 59). Traba perceives a tension between the resolute arrangement of pictorial elements in the compositions of Morales and the metaphoric aspects that arise from those elements. This tension reflects the binary opposition in which Jakobson places metaphor and metonymy, metaphor constituting a vertical or selective dimension, and metonymy constituting a horizontal or combinative one. He also described the vertical dimension as an associative one, and the horizontal as syntagmatic. The structuring of one of these axes in relation to the other in an enunciation is, according to Jakobson, what makes such utterance a poetic one: “The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination” (Jakobson, 358).

As we will see, the signifying units that Morales chooses to include in his composition come together in an unexpected, unnatural arrangement. The strangeness thus created has in itself a poetic value, that of making strange objects that in another context would appear so natural they would even escape our attention. This defamiliarization is, according to the Russian linguist Viktor Shklovsky, an essential function of poetic art, which might counteract the habitual modes of sense perception we develop from the routine activities of every day life. Terence Hawkes elucidates this idea:

We very readily cease to ‘see’ the world we live in, and become anaesthetized to its distinctive features. The aim of poetry is to reverse that process, to defamiliarize that which with we are overly familiar, to



‘creatively deform’ the usual, the normal, and so to inculcate a new, childlike, non-jaded vision in us (Hawkes, 47).

There are many reasons why the author of *Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas* would want, in 1993, to prompt his audience to reimagine the events remembered in his print. But before we can contemplate those reasons, we need to realize what is being reconstructed in it. Let me start by introducing some developments of Morales’s pictorial language.

During the 1960’s, Armando Morales produced abstract compositions. In many of them, he pasted cut pieces of painted canvas onto a large format composition. This allowed him great freedom in his intense exploration of pictorial space, as the movable pieces of canvas literally allowed him to move around, within the pictorial plane, the units that would come together in his composition. In that way he explored the spatial formations that would be generated by different placements and juxtapositions of his compositional elements. Moreover, by defining form, and relationships among forms, through cutting, painting and juxtaposing pieces of canvas, which had a variety of shapes, he engaged in an intense study of formal relationships, a survey of pictorial space he carried out with great precision and subtlety.

By working with a few large shapes in his compositions, Morales set out to survey the possibilities offered by the more general and abstract properties of pictorial language, and by this process he became acquainted with the aspects of pictorial construction that he would continue to use in his more figurative work. He developed a great sense for carefully choosing and defining the large shapes that, as pieces of fabric, went into his compositions to create a compelling sense of space, a space that, at the same

time that was flat, presented interstices, figure/ground relationships and many tensions and ambiguities between its elements.

Those large shapes that Morales experimented with eventually became the constructive units for the large, nude female figures that began populating his pictures. In an article of 1974, Damián Bayón described Morales's transition into the figurative. Bayón had found in the early Morales a great sense of pictorial matter: what Morales had to say was expressed through the 'skin' of each of his paintings, large scale collages in which everything was conveyed through large geometric planes, value and the intensely expressive textures into which he translates both space and the pulse of life (Bayón, 9). Bayón described Morales's early figures as disquieting, as foretelling the phantasmagorical presence of something other; he found in those first figurative images reticence and a metaphysical air (Bayón, 11-12). Indeed, these first figures presented overtly the sophisticated formal construction that produced them, their additive planes emerging from different angles of observation and showing the painterly surfaces of the earlier, more abstract canvases. It was as though the figures were deconstructed into the mechanical aspects of the painting they inhabited.

Towards the 1980's, the flat painterly planes started becoming more volumetric. The construction and placement of figures remained a careful, reflective exercise of pictorial construction, yet the figures were fully modeled to very rounded, sensual forms. The construction of the figures and the way they came together with other figures or other elements in the composition changed: sometimes the joints were overt, sometimes they were obscured; scissions appeared within or on a figure, sometimes bluntly dividing it, sometimes rendering a figure, or the space it occupies, ambiguous and inscrutable.

Often the figures in Morales's figurative works are condensed with a different object into enigmatic visual metaphors, which contributes to the surreal, evocative air of the images. Disjunctive elements, which were material necessities of Morales's early approach to painting, like the seams where pieces of canvas come together, became integral aspects of Morales's pictorial poetics. Furthermore, his way of applying paint changed altogether: Through the exhaustive process of repeatedly applying and removing material, layer after layer, his painting became an inextricable fabric of minute and endless marks going in every direction, one color always overlaying, or being overlaid, by other colors.

Morales's journey through pictorial poetics allowed for the emergence, in his work, of a world fraught with oneiric, and often erotic, meaning. His pictorial space acquired the sensation of a space of revelation; one can sense many tales lurking underneath the skin of his pictures. One narrative that Morales made explicit, its characters appearing as ghosts in bright daylight, is the story of Nicaragua's national hero, Augusto César Sandino. He created in 1993 a set of seven lithographs that encapsulate Sandino's story. The portfolio, titled *La saga de Sandino*, narrates crucial events of Nicaraguan history. I would like to center the following discussion in the first image from the portfolio, the print titled *Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas* (Figure 1), to show how Morales's way of constructing narrative in his images follows the mode of artistic creation known as "magic realism," but also to probe Morales's structural construction of his subject, where elements that contain metaphorical values are put into play among each other through their syntagmatic arrangement.

*Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas* is a very low key image. On the upper left of the picture plane, the tall pipes of a steamboat can barely be made out, not only because of

the thick surrounding darkness, but also because they appear indeed to be at great distance. They look like very high cylinders, catching very little light amidst the dense obscurity of a tropical night. The metal lining of the boat runs perpendicular to these murky cylinders, and is only slightly brighter than them. Some small portions of it, however, are brightly lit, but the source of this light is not evident. Mysterious are also the planes and lines made visible by the light beam projecting from this boat: it is difficult to tell if those lines and planes describe elements of the same boat, of the boat next to it, or something altogether different.

In fact, the space where this steamboat is seems disjointed from the space right next to it, which is occupied by another boat. This second boat appears to be much closer to the viewer than the first. In the upper section of this image, continuity is created by the soft diagonals that give perspective to both ships and by the pervading darkness that engulfs them. Discontinuity is created by the subtle vertical lines that, to either side, frame the ship that appears closer to our eyes: a realistic, continuous space seems severed, so that the boat to the right can come further towards our eyes and play background to the women in the foreground. The way light occurs on either ship is also discontinuous: cool and fragmented to the left; very warm, focused and more modeling to the right.

These patterns of continuity and discontinuity are developed further in the group of female figures in the foreground: the figures are unified by the colors that tone their skin, by the simplified forms that construct their bodies, by the repeated gesture of bending their bodies to reach underwater with their hands. If we look at them individually, however, they are all different. Consider, for example, the first figure from

the right. She appears not only as the most completely rendered, but also as the one with most realistic anatomy. The curving forms of her body push and redefine the vertical line that separates the dark zone where the women act from the subtly lighter vertical band that we see at the right extreme of the composition. Compare this figure to the one left and in front of it: her forms are flatter and less defined, her figure presents less modeling and her head is very difficult to make out.

Generally speaking, we see heterogeneous elements that as a whole do comprise a group of female figures, whose activity is, nonetheless, seemingly clear to read: as in a cubist painting, subject matter has been broken up into many views and facets, and yet this views and facets are arranged so that an identity still comes across. Morales's image is also very different than a cubist painting in that his shapes are very broad, and his spatial arrangements do echo sensible space to a greater extent. What has been avoided is a space that would assume itself in complete consistence with nature. Rather, while the pictorial language of this image borrows vocabulary from nature, many things happen in it that indeed disrupt realistic space. Again, consider the first female figure from the right: she holds a lamp up with her left arm. The lamp gives off more light to the large boat behind and away from the women, than to the women themselves, who magically remain in a relative obscurity, and would certainly be invisible from a distance. The head of the figure that holds the lamp remains in total darkness, yet the light cast by the lamp over the boat is very intense and warm, and reflects more on the water surface right next to boat than on the waters that surround the women. Moreover, if a yellow dim light radiates soft and warm over the figures on the right side of the group and the water

around them, as we move our glance to the left of the group we see how the soft light becomes cooler, whiter and picks up shades of blue.

Morales dealt with the subject of *Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas* a few times in painting before he treated it in lithography in 1993. A painting from 1986 (Figure 2) is indeed very close in appearance and over all composition to the 1993 print. The way space is compartmentalized is practically the same in both images, showing subtle differences. The painting, in general terms, has a lighter tonality than the print, which results perhaps from the fact that is easier to add or remove light in painting, where material can be applied or removed directly from the surface of the work, than in a color lithography, where several layers of ink, at least six in the case of *Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas*, are applied to the paper one over the other, each new layer of fresh ink mixing with the previous to produce new colors. If in the painting Morales could add and remove paint directly from the canvas to create his thick, rich mesh of marks and colors, for the lithograph he had to make greasy marks and scratch away from them in the different stones used, one stone for every color. The result he achieved is surprisingly very close to the effects he achieves in painting.

The painting is significantly larger than the print (185 x 240 cm for the painting, 52.5 x 70 cm for the lithographic image), which allows for a more precise treatment of form and texture, and more nuance throughout. It also reveals the montage like process through which Morales constructed the work: visually strong seams cut across the picture plane to outline large elements of the composition, like the line that from the lower edge on the painting, left of center, runs up diagonally towards the upper edge to define the pier we see to the left of the women. Other lines, mainly vertical ones, divide other

sections of the painting. Sometimes these lines frame a part of a figure, as is the case in the second figure from right to left, whose arm is circumscribed by lines to either side of it. In this way, her arm is contained in what appears as a small, discrete section of the painting, differentiated from what surrounds it by the more intense oranges we see inside it, be it the arm that extends downward or the water the hand goes into. Sometimes the seams define the edge of a figure, as it does for the left side of the right-most figure in the composition. Sometimes the vertical lines run over a figure or other figurative elements of the image, overlaying the constructive elements of the picture over the representational ones. These lines or seams are at the same time a visual motif and a compositional strategy: while the visual motif brings rhythm and unity to the composition, the lines also define the arrangement on the pictorial surface of the narrative units of the image.

This severing of pictorial forms, this discontinuity of the pictorial surface, of the plane where a narrative is being constructed or deployed, is very important for Morales, for, if in the painting that cutting off of things into sections has to do with Morales's long standing method for building images, in the lithograph, where such a sense of discrete spatial units has also been laid down, it does not come naturally, for it is not natural that the surface of a lithographer's stone to have cuts or seams; in lithography the image is developed over the continuous surface of the stone. Morales had to replicate, through drawing in the stone, and perhaps in several of the different stones that came together to produce the image, the splits that we see also in the print. I think these breaks are important because they allow the artist to manipulate pictorial space in order to deploy in it, or construct through it, the narrative he wishes to deliver. What we might incautiously perceive as lines allow different elements of the painting to be singled out as discrete

units, while the relationships between them remains in place in the image by virtue of their proximity, even when the continuity of a naturalistic space has been disrupted.

Line in the painting of Morales performs a pictorial game: it may hide as a very soft transition or it may create a very distinct break; it may induce our eyes to travel quickly through the pictorial surface or it might isolate an aspect of the painting, inducing our eyes to acknowledge and examine that section of the image and to search for the contribution towards the overall meaning of the image made by that particular, singled out section or unit. In Morales, line separates and unites; it articulates elements together while it also allows them to project their own peculiar qualities. Line is, in that way, a central aspect of Morales's pictorial syntax.

Light is also used strategically by Morales. It is a device central to the oneirism of his pictures. "His reveries emerge as though they were behind a scrim," wrote Dore Ashton in 1987 (Ashton, 9). In his work, light can be very enigmatic, sometimes unexpectedly lacking, sometimes appearing too bright. For instance, right in the center of the painting I have been discussing, we have one of the brightest lights in the composition, actually emphasized by the dark figures that confine its area. In relation to the female figures, it acts as a negative space: how strange it is for one of the brightest spots in a picture, a spot placed right in its center, to be a negative space. The mere idea seems to subvert convention. The brightness of this negative, inexplicably lit area might only be challenged by that other brightness which glimmers on the objects that rest over the pier to the left, or by the warm orange light rose up by the woman on the far right against the prevailing darkness, as if in search for something. In fact, the three lights I just pointed out form a diagonal that goes from the upper right of the composition to the



lower left. They are thus structured into a sequence, and each carries a distinct component of the story told in the image.

The mass of light that appears right in the center of the painting is cut by the silhouettes of the figures with crisp lines. When it extends upwards to the continuing body of water, the edges of that luminous region are smoothed out, yet it remains a distinctly luminous area where light concentrates even while there is no acknowledge source. The effect is much more dramatic in the print: the contrast between the lit area and its surroundings is almost a contrast of white against black. The upper edges of this white, now flat area have not been softened, which makes it difficult to read the light as sitting on the surface of the body of water. It is as though light issued magically out of darkness to reveal what one of the women holds with her hands. That inexplicable brightness disrupts the logic of realistic space to breach into what elucidates the whole picture; it is the spot where we find a clue that will allow us to make sense of the image: a long pointed form is silhouetted inside it, which explains what the women are doing in the water. What is that object that seems to extend from the arm of one of the figures?

To understand the action revealed in the center of the composition we need to look back into history. As early as 1852, US marines disembarked in Nicaraguan soil to “protect” US interests in the country. During the Gold Rush, Nicaragua was a place through which Americans could cross from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean, and then head north to California. Its tropical lands were also exploited for timber and agricultural products. In 1849, Cornelius Vanderbilt, whose Accessory Transit Company carried thousands of people from the Caribbean to the Pacific side of Nicaragua each month, had attained a concession from the Nicaraguan government to construct an inter-oceanic

canal. The US did not intervene in Nicaragua without violence. In 1854, for example, a disagreement between Americans and Nicaraguans over control of transit routes culminated in the destruction of the whole port city of San Juan del Norte by the USS Cyane. These events were the onset of a long history of military occupations and interventions by which the US inhibited the economic and social development of Nicaragua.

US marines occupied Managua, Nicaragua's capital, and León in 1867; in 1894 Bluefields was occupied as the nationalistic politics of liberal president José Santos Zelaya, elected the year before, resisted US interests to favor those of Nicaragua. Intervention continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, during which there was an extended US occupation of Nicaragua from 1912 to 1925, and again from 1926 to 1933. During this period, a liberal leader rose up who thought it necessary to expel US forces from Nicaragua. His name was Augusto Sandino. He gained massive popular support, but the ruling elite of his country preferred, for their own benefit, to bargain with the US and so he had no support from them.

It happened around 1927 that the US military was hiding a load of armament from the Nicaraguan authorities.<sup>1</sup> A US military man had given the order of throwing the weapons under water at Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua's main Caribbean port, so they could not be seized by Nicaraguans. Sandino had become part of the Nicaraguan army and was willing to work with it to stop the intervention, but most Nicaraguan military officers did

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<sup>1</sup> In the context of the Nicaraguan Constitutional War of 1926, the US Marine Force had declared Puerto Cabezas a neutral zone, and in December of 1926 disarmed the Sacasa government, which had reassembled itself in the Caribbean port, and threw their weapons to the water. See (Sandino and Ramírez 45).

not want to cooperate with him, as their own personal interests were better satisfied by teaming up with the Americans (Selser, 118-119). In Sandino's own words:

Yo salí con seis ayudantes y conmigo iba un grupo de muchachas, ayudándonos a sacar rifles y parque, en número de treinta fusiles y seis mil cartuchos. La flojera de los políticos llegó hasta el ridículo y fue entonces cuando comprendí que los hijos del pueblo estábamos sin directores y que hacían falta hombres nuevos (Sandino, quoted in Selser, 119).

With these weapons, recovered from underwater, Sandino armed his first contingent and started an opposition that would have a great impact in the course of Nicaraguan history. Gregorio Selser, Sandino's biographer, tells us these women were prostitutes, which shows how the most dispossessed groups in Nicaragua chose to support Sandino as a leader who would pursue the interests of the Nicaraguan popular classes. These prostitutes are the women we see in *Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas*, leaning over to reach under water and fetch the weapons with which they hope their leader would recover control of their country, and give Nicaragua a direction that would actually benefit Nicaraguans.

The three lights that in the print form a diagonal sequence signify three crucial moments of the narrative contained in *Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas*, and each moment, or discrete image, is charged with equivalences as those proposed by Marta Traba. One, the warm, far reaching light risen up by the figure in the far right denotes search, a very resolute one as connoted by the steadiness with which the light is held. The broader context of the story would allow a viewer to find connotations of stronger import in this searchlight, namely the quest to free oneself from externally imposed restraints. The

second light, the one in the middle, reveals (metonymically, as one person stands for a whole people) the course of action taken up by Nicaraguans: they will take up arms in order to free themselves from those externally imposed restraints. The arm we see inside that central patch of light holding a rifle belongs to a woman. This figure is placed just a bit right of center in the composition. Where we would see her head we perceive a concave form. In the interior of that cavity we see a very bright, prismatic gleam, a light almost as bright as the white aura that engulfs the arm of the figure and the rifle she has pulled out of the water. Here, again, the realistic depiction of things is completely given up to pursue an artistic construction of meaning. Hollow objects, metallic vessels for instance, have the tendency to repeatedly reflect sounds. A polished metal would also reflect light vividly. Perhaps the reflective opening that we see symbolically placed where we would find the head of this figure is there to poetically suggest the receptiveness of the women of Puerto Cabezas to the leadership of Sandino. Or is that dark opening a symbol which stands for the head, and the light reflected in it the revolutionary calling that resonates in the very seat of reason? The trope seems to lose power when elucidated; it is stronger when it remains a silent and mysterious transgression of pictorial logic, one that brings great intensity to the image. It sustains the mystery that pervades the whole image, its uncanny junction of elements.

Tzvetan Todorov, following Freud, links the sentiment of the uncanny to more or less ancient taboos: “If we grant that primal experience is constituted by transgression, we can accept Freud’s theory as to the origin of the uncanny” (Todorov, The Fantastic, 48). It is social custom or emotional aversion which provokes inhibition in a taboo. In the short stories Todorov discusses to elaborate on the uncanny, Poe’s “The Fall of the

House of Usher” for instance, the uncanny is present precisely because both social customs and the sacred nature of things are transgressed. The sensation of the uncanny persists in the narrative until an explanation is suggested, but never fully accomplished, by the author. While the uncanny is present, however, we are considering a world prior to the institution of morals, and we surely are drawn to it. The world has been defamiliarized and we look at it anew.

The prismatic gleam in unearthly junction with the female figure that holds a rifle at the center of *Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas* appears in fact in dialog with the third light in the diagonal sequence we have been considering. That third light gleams inside a conical, metallic object: the horn of a gramophone, a recurring trope in Morales’s iconography, which can suggest old times, perhaps the familiar times of the Nicaragua in which Morales grew up in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the days indeed of Sandino. Right next to the reflection that gleams inside the gramophone horn, we see a hand reaching for the arms that have been placed on the pier. We see also, in spite of the darkness that envelops it, a tall felt hat, which, during the 1960’s, became a widespread sign referring metonymically to Sandino, when it was frequently inscribed in the walls of Nicaragua by partisans of the recently formed Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN), in which Morales would eventually play part (Kauffmann, 31).<sup>2</sup>

That a small group of prostitutes would play the main part in arming the first contingent of such a far reaching insurrection is very much in the spirit of magical realism. It is not unusual to discuss visual arts in terms of magical realism. In fact, the first writer to use the term was the German art critic Franz Roh, who in the preface to his

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<sup>2</sup> The FSLN was founded in 1961. It succeeded in 1979 in overthrowing the Somoza dictatorship, which came in place soon after the execution of Sandino in 1933 by Anastasio Somoza García.

1925 book *Magical Realism: Post-Expressionism*, where he elucidated the artistic developments he was witnessing in Germany after Expressionism, explained his use of the word “magic” as follows: “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” (Roh, 16).

The Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier is one the foremost theorists of magical realism in Latin America and his novels, particularly *El reino de este mundo*, are quintessential examples of magic realist literature in Latin America. He explains that “what he [Franz Roh] called magical realism was simply painting where real forms are combined in a way that does not conform to daily reality” (Carpentier, “The Baroque and the Marvelous Real,” 102). Carpentier has his own terms for discussing magical realism: he speaks of “lo real maravilloso” (the marvelous real), and explains that “everything strange, everything amazing, everything that eludes established norms is marvelous” (Carpentier, “The Baroque and the Marvelous Real,” 101). For the Cuban writer, there is in the “marvelous real” an exalted form of perception: “The marvelous begins to be unmistakably marvelous when it arises from an unexpected alteration of reality (the miracle) ... perceived with particular intensity by virtue of an exaltation of the spirit that leads into a kind of extreme state” (Carpentier, “On the Marvelous Real in America,” 85-86).

The contents Morales pursued in *Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas* govern the selection of the signifying units he included in the image and the order he created with them in his composition. Morales was linked to the revolutionary government constituted in 1979 by the FSLN, after decades of struggle against the US backed Somoza regime, the dictatorial

government that came in place soon after Sandino's execution in 1933. The revolutionary project was somewhat frustrated in 1990, when the FSLN was defeated in a rigged election by a right wing party. A couple of years after, Morales set out to accomplish a project he had been maturing since the mid 1980's, when he worked in the painting *Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas*. This project is the narrative cycle *La saga de Sandino*, the series of seven lithographs of which *Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas* is the first image. In it, Morales inaugurates his rendering of the one epic story he would like to persist in the consciousness of Nicaraguans, whose enduring pursue of self-determination is poetically constructed in the image.

## ***CHAPTER TWO: Armando Morales's Visual Narrative of Nicaragua's Sandino***

Does a story end with the last enunciation of the story teller, or does it continue to evolve in the mind of the subject even after that last enunciation? A story that acquires its content from actual experience, like the story told by Armando Morales in the seven prints that make up *La saga de Sandino*, will evoke particular aspects of an experience that was lived, received through oral accounts, written texts and images. Concrete images or episodes will have to be extracted from the continuum of experience, and arranged into a design that will evoke but never exhaust history. This process of selection and structuring is indeed interpretative, and, in the case at hand, we could even say that it is politically motivated. Nonetheless, the characters and historical moments reconstructed in *La saga de Sandino* work as nodes that connect not only to other scenes visually elaborated in the portfolio, but to the broader historical process they correspond to: the process of Nicaraguan self-determination, which goes back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and continues to be at stake up to this day. Thus, *La saga de Sandino* goes beyond an evocation of the revolutionary process of the 1920's and 30's, to opening up a subjective space in which the contemporary viewer can revisit the past and participate actively in its reconstruction, by making connections to the knowledge he or she carries. By assimilating the experiences presented in the prints to his or her own contemporary experience, a movement towards the present is made by the viewer, and so the question is



posed in the contemporary mind: Where has history taken us? Where are we in the process of our self-determination? What do we need to do in the future? In *La saga the Sandino*, Armando Morales opens a discursive space in which the viewer can navigate Nicaraguan history upstream, and then move downstream to think history retrospectively and challenge the reactionary inhibition of the Sandinista project.

This double movement is one of the strengths of Morales's portfolio, since counsel, understood as that deliberation process unleashed in the mind of a subject as a result of following a narrative, can only be realized after the story has been told. Counsel is never a straightforward suggestion, but something that provides direction when we are seeking a course of action. In his essay *The Story-Teller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov*, Walter Benjamin wrote "counsel is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is just unfolding" (Benjamin, "The Story-Teller," 83). If we close our eyes to the past, then we will not realize that the story of Nicaraguan self-determination can reach more promising stages. In the quote above, Benjamin's choice of the verb "to unfold" is very significant, for the different implications it has: "to open," "to make visible," "to extend to greater length." From the explicit and inexplicit contents of the portfolio, the viewer can not only retrace the course Nicaraguan history up to his or her own time, but arrive at imagining the continuation of the story: the story is open and the contemporary viewing subject becomes an agent in weaving it further.

This open design can be seen in Morales decision of breaking up a historical process of several years into seven images, each one constituting a gesture of social and historical import. This imposes a set of demands on the viewer: to learn about the

specific facts of Sandino's insurrection and, with the assistance of that knowledge, connect psychologically the different gestures or events reconstructed in the prints. This implies not only connecting one image to the other, but mentally assembling the portfolio as a narrative for the sake of its discursive values, and developing associations with events and processes beyond the time span reconstructed in it. Viewing the portfolio will activate a cognitive process that will continue to unfold in the subject long after experiencing the images. In this way the narrative achieves the amplitude necessary for the viewer's subjectivity to explore the values of the images well beyond their own frames, and to see how the concerns presented in them exceed the days of Sandino.

Openness, or open form as Heinrich Wölfflin called it, is indeed a pictorial strategy used by Morales in the images of the portfolio. The second image, titled *Sandino en la montaña* (Figure 3), is a great example of how content can overflow the space of pictorial representation. How does it happen pictorially? In this lithograph, light is broken into myriad patches of varying forms, hues and values. Only seldom bound by lines, these patches freely add up to create large masses of dark, as they do in the background to suggest a thick, impenetrable forest; or they loosely come together as lights, their edges always irregular, their hues and values always shifting and interrupted by shadows, as those that play up the figures who ride their horses in the foreground. Painterly rather than linear, this image replicates in its interplay of form, value and hue the seemingly casual movement of the riders we see in it. It suffices to look at the great variety of shapes, patterns and values that represent the soil the horses step on to get a sense of the dynamics employed by the artist as his pictorial strategy, which actually pervades the whole surface of the print.

This fragmented illumination is an effect of the space in which the riders move: they are shrouded by the dense and extensive plant mass that masks their mysterious movement; leaves, branches and twigs cast shadows of unexpected shapes on them, creating a subdued illumination that passes over our whole field of vision, uniting through its motion riders, horses, soil and the lush vegetation itself. This movement is suggested by the tonal variety that spreads through the whole picture plane, with darks predominating in this rather low key image. As this illumination passes over the riders, it unveils them only partially; their figures project from the dark but never fully. While they move, they remain a few steps from total invisibility.

The placement of the figures adds to the dynamics of the image. To the left, two riders are loosely grouped together. To the right, four of them are grouped close to each other without forming a row. A seventh figure is placed more or less between these two groups and closer to the viewer, the feet of his horse falling just above the lower edge of the picture plane. The spatial relations between the figures do not invite the eye to move forward and backward in directions perpendicular to the picture plane: it takes an oblique movement of our sight within the depth of the image to go from one figure group to the other, or even from one rider to the other. Movement projects in several directions and at differing angles.

Even though many vertical elements oppose the horizontal band that represents the soil in this image, its composition is not organized by strong vertical or horizontal axes. Instead of being deployed in accordance to any structuring axes, the figures are placed in a rather irregular pattern that not only creates ambiguities in the space they occupy, but also disturbs the whole balance of the image. Avoiding the structural guides

provided by the vertical and horizontal edges that frame it, this image appears rather as a random fragment of the world upon which our eyes fall almost by accident. Instead of being contained its forms disregard the edges that frame it, and its movement and appearance evoke the much wider world that surrounds the riders, beyond the plane of our perception.

While the free disposition of the figures throughout the picture plane does not offer a structuring order for this image, its unity is to be found in the very flow that constitutes its motive. Nothing in the image is absolutely discrete. Rather, the minutest elements in the picture, independently of what they depict, contribute with its lighting and painterly forms to the rendition of the image's main motive: movement and action become the very scheme that structures and unifies the world apprehended.

Nothing is absolutely clear in this lithograph. Rather, as in the case of *Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas*, the forms of *Sandino en la Montaña* draw us in to a world that exceeds the frame of its representation. Conceptually, this world, and the meaning constructed through it, extends to the greater portion of the Nicaraguan territory, as did the Sandinista troops at the time evoked by the image. That is why the image emphasizes movement and action in several directions and its composition is designed to imply a much larger space than the one it actually includes within its frame. What in a text would need to be explained with words, Morales achieves by the very pictorial design of this print.

As the title tells us, this is an image of Sandino in the mountains. From the extensive sylvan regions of Nicaragua, known best to peasants, Sandino, out of visibility, organized and led an army that went from less than a hundred men in 1927 to several thousands in 1933. At that time, the Defending Army of Nicaragua's National

Sovereignty, into which Sandino organized his forces in May of 1927, controlled almost two thirds of Nicaragua's national territory (Sandino and Ramírez , 113, Vol. 1). The most important fields of action of this army were the jungles and mountains that spread all over Nicaragua, the sphere of peasants and workers who decidedly joined Sandino in his pledge.

In *Sandino en la Montaña* we only get a glimpse of seven men who range an unspecified portion of territory. The shadows casted by the dense shrubbery of the forest naturally camouflage them. Their tall hats sink their heads in deep shadows, so that no single feature of any of them can be seen. The obscurity of their heads contrasts with the bright patches of light over their clothing and the reflective metal blades that issue from their waists. Thus, it is difficult to determine with precision the subject of this image. Because of the few people in it, one might think it refers to the very early stages of Sandino's struggle. It may also refer to the harsh isolation characteristic of guerrilla war. One might think the figure closest to the viewer is Sandino, since it is somehow separate from the rest. This figure, however, might just be the leader of this particular column—he holds the ammunitions that cross his body. Ultimately, the features of all these men are obscured, making it difficult to identify pictorially any one figure as a particular individual.<sup>3</sup> The veiling of the faces removes specificity from the figures, and so it opens the field of who they might represent: Sandino or one of his generals, lookout men or an expeditionary column, or just any of the thousands of Nicaraguans who joined Sandino's cause.

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<sup>3</sup> While the print has been titled *Sandino en la montaña*, in a videotaped interview Morales describes the subject matter as a “columna sandinista en la selva, en la montaña” (Bosio and Vernassa).

The multiple values granted to these figures by their indeterminacy allow the image to yield a broader idea, to construct a larger signified. The movement and action of the figures deliberately unveil a plot, a plot that is, in turn, the articulation of an ideal. It is an instance of what Roland Barthes sorts out as a Brechtian social *gestus*: “it is a gesture, or a set of gestures . . . , in which can be read a whole social situation” (Barthes, “Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein,” 93). Morales chose carefully the moment he reconstructed through this print. In it, we see a physical motion that arises from a shift in consciousness, a mobilization sparked by a new perception, which evokes not only the historical process that led to it, but also the historical process that followed it: the whole modern history of Nicaragua is permeated by a dialectic that has Sandino’s fight and ideals as the main opposing force, and that goes back to the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the American filibuster William Walker made himself, through military action, the ruler of Nicaragua and legalized slavery in the Central American nation.

This social gesture finds clear articulation in the words of Nicaraguan novelist Sergio Ramirez:

La lucha de seis años del General Sandino en las montañas nicaragüenses a la cabeza de un puñado de campesinos y obreros, debe verse como resultado histórico de siglos de dominación extranjera en su patria y de la constante entrega de los grupos dominantes a esos mismos poderes externos. Aquellos hombres peleando a brazo partido con sus machetes de trabajo y sus viejos rifles, fabricando bombas en latas vacías de conservas y rellenándolas de piedra y fragmentos de hierro, derribando aviones enemigos casi a pedradas, manteniendo siempre una alta moral de lucha

frente a un ejército cien veces más poderoso, probaron algo que hasta antes de la aparición de ese ejército del pueblo, había quedado escondido en los vericuetos de la historia latinoamericana: la hermosa posibilidad de que unos campesinos, con sus líderes propios, con sus tácticas forjadas al golpe de la marcha, con su doctrina surgida del proceso mismo de la lucha, organizaran una resistencia exitosa por la autonomía nacional (Sandino and Ramírez, 63).

As Ramírez points out, Sandino's fight sought to liberate Nicaragua from U.S. control and transform it into an autonomous nation-state. He also stresses the significant ethnic and social base of Sandino's Defending Army of National Sovereignty. Peasants and workers were not only the base of this army but they also played a crucial leadership. A prominent example is General Pedro Altamirano, also called Pedrón. In the Defending Army of National Sovereignty, Pedrón held the rank of general and was second only to Sandino, who came from an indigenous mother himself. Pedrón was chief to the army's first expeditionary column, and when Sandino traveled to Mexico seeking support from President Portes Gil, he kept the whole army active during Sandino's absence of months.

The third print of *La saga de Sandino* shows precisely, as the title indicates, *General Pedro (Pedrón) Altamirano* (Figure 4). He and members of his staff appear set against a background of buildings of simplified forms, rendered through shades and tints of orange and blue. These buildings appear massive, however distanced they are from the figures they foreground. The large scale of these constructions is accentuated by the horse that stands next to a door exceedingly taller than it. The architecture is conveyed through a much subtler chiaroscuro than that seen in the figures: the deep contrast with

which the figures are conveyed wraps them in an unreal air, an inexplicable light by which they remain half absorbed in shadows. They feel more like portentous statues strongly cast forth by their strong, differing contrast, their presence framed by the planes of comparable size that in the background come together to represent the architecture.

This tribute to the most enduring of Sandino's generals is the brightest image of the portfolio. In bright daylight we see Pedrón's long sword and the machine gun with ammunition box behind which poses one of his men. The men's faces are hardened, wrapped by deep shadows. Of four of them, we can only see the eyes of one, but barely. However strong their presence is, they remain distant, absorbed by silence. The shadows cast by their hats take away the possibility of a returned gaze. We are left with their rough features, their impassive bearing, their physical strength and the signs of the Sandinista army: tall, tightly tied boots, their straps and weapons, felt hats and the red handkerchiefs around their necks. Shadows preclude an emotional apprehension of Pedrón and his people and rather accentuate a sense of confrontation. Nonetheless, the fact that this is the brightest image in the portfolio stresses the central protagonism of the native people of Nicaragua in Sandino's revolution. Armando Morales has said that the image of Pedrón "representa mucho la quintaesencia del campesino nicaragüense del interior... [que es] donde ocurrían estas cosas" (Bosio and Vernassa).

The struggle led by these men not only represents an effort to free themselves from externally imposed restraints, but it also is the inception of a decades long revolutionary process that would eventually allow and enrich the great cultural production yielded by Nicaragua during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and still to this day. Indeed, for Frantz Fanon, both processes, liberation struggle and national culture, are not



disconnected: “The nation is not only a precondition for culture, its ebullition, its perpetual renewal and maturation. It is a necessity. First of all it is the struggle for nationhood that unlocks culture and opens the doors of creation” (Fanon, 177).

It is natural that an artist and intellectual like Morales, who during the 1980’s was a delegate of the Sandinista government before UNESCO in Paris, would constantly look back at the long historical process of Nicaragua’s struggle for liberation and represent it pictorially<sup>4</sup>. The narrative Morales constructs through the seven prints of *La saga de Sandino* directly evoke people and events that are crucial for developing a sense of the Nicaraguan nation. Edward Said points out that intellectuals who choose to think the stability of the victors and rulers “as a state of emergency threatening the less fortunate with danger of complete extinction” take into account “the memory of forgotten voices and persons” (Said, 35). In the 1990’s, when the Sandinista project was interrupted by a defeat in a rigged election and the neoliberal wave came to Nicaragua only to revert all the social conquests achieved through decades of Sandinista struggle, Morales chose to retell the story of Sandino.

Sandino’s insurrection of the 1920’s and 30’s is in fact part of Morales’ own memories, as are certainly the decades of the FSLN struggle starting in the early 1960’s, when Morales was a young blooming artist in New York and painted his *Guerrillero Muerto* series. The image of the portfolio which involves Morales own memory more directly is *Adiós a Sandino* (Figure 5). In this print, heavy, foreboding shadows flow over the image of Sandino. Indeed, the whole image is structured by strong shadows.

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<sup>4</sup> *La saga de Sandino* is only one instance. Morales had dealt in his work with aspects of liberation struggle since the 1960’s, the time when the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) was formed and he was painting his famous *Guerrillero Muerto* series. See (Craven, “A Legacy for the Latin American Left: Abstract Expressionism as Anti-Imperialist Art,” 76-79) and (Kauffmann, 39-42).

However, an iridescent light, constantly shifting between warm and cool, streams over the figures to let us glimpse them, without ever revealing them completely, even while the scene takes place on a sidewalk drenched with sunlight.

The heavy shadows that structure this image represent mainly the architecture that surrounds the figure group at the center. These dark, architectural masses exceed the frame of the composition to suggest the extension of the building beyond our field of vision. The brightest zones of the composition are to either side of this building, in the openings of the architecture, and below, in the contracted sidewalk where the figures stand. The opening at the left lets us expand our sight into the adjacent street, where a cart pulled by horses advances under the taxing sun. A tall building rises behind it, so that we only get to see a very small fragment of the sky. The opening at the right is cut off by the edge of the picture plane. Through it, we see a portion of the street behind, so bathed in light that colors and shadows are washed away, erasing major descriptive aspects. The counterpart of this street of stark light is the dark hall that allows our sight to it: immersed in shadows, barely visible, a dog has come down this hallway, seemingly drawn by something going on in front of the building.

The most dynamic patterns of light occur on the figures who pose in front of the building. Light is broken up by the folds of their clothing, by the bandoliers that wrap their bodies, by the coarse forms of their boots, by the differing shapes and positions of their hats. Their feet shift in angles and position, and their legs cast a rhythm of shadows on the side walk. Like all these visual aspects do, the red handkerchiefs around the necks of the figures also unite the group of men, despite the contrasting patterns we see in each. If in the architecture masses of light and dark are deployed in large, more homogeneously

lit areas, in the figures light and dark break into many small heterogeneous pieces that correspond to their detailed rendering and physical disposition.

Three figures stand in front of other three, without necessarily blocking the ones behind. Of these first three out front, the two on the extremes grasp strongly with their hands the bandoliers at their waist. The figure between those two pulls his hands behind his back. This gesture, as well as the flexed, forward leg, can be seen in actual historical photographs of Augusto César Sandino (Figures 6 and 7). Even while it is possible that Morales referred back to such photographs to develop this image, its conception, as he argues, springs from his memory of actually seeing Sandino in 1934.

Morales, at the time an eight year old, recalls the big commotion caused inside his father's hardware store when someone suddenly announced "¡los bandoleros!" His father took him out to look across the street where Sandino and his generals were posing for a photograph. "Look! The third from the right, that is Sandino," his father pointed out. Morales says the image was impressed upon him forever, and points out that that day Sandino was to have dinner with president Sacasa. In his way home from that dinner Sandino was captured by the National Guard and executed. "Thus, when I made this picture of Sandino I titled it *Adiós a Sandino*, because I saw him for the first time and the last" (Bosio and Vernassa).

Sergio Ramírez describes the figurative works of Morales as wrapped in dreams and the aura of childhood, filled with the devices of memory: "Esos cuadros figurativos... me han fascinado siempre por su poder evocativo y por su nostalgia plasmada siempre en las figuras misteriosas, en el color y en la luz que sólo puede provenir de los cielos nicaragüenses" (Ramírez, "Armando Morales, el clásico," 5-6).

Aspects of Sandino recurrently arise in the work of Morales like vital streams of Nicaraguan history. It is interesting to notice the particular moment when Morales executes *La saga de Sandino*. After Nicaragua and the FSLN had withstood the illegal contra-revolutionary war sponsored in the 1980's by the Reagan administration, which is ultimately what led to the electoral defeat of the FSLN, both the nation and the Sandinistas were living a process of transformation and the imposition of a foreign economic model: Neoliberalism.

At this juncture, Ramírez emphasized that the sense of the Nicaraguan nation was forged by the defense its own people had to carry out for their own *raison d'être*, a struggle Nicaraguans have been forced to continue all throughout their nation's history (Ramírez, "Nicaragua: identidad y transformación," 345). At this historical juncture, when it was necessary to reconstruct the economy destroyed by war and to consolidate the democratic system, Ramírez warned of the danger of depriving Nicaraguans of their independent nation, of their right to democracy, of all they had won through their long and arduous struggle. It is at this precise juncture that Morales remembers Sandino and sets out to tell his story through the seven prints discussed in this thesis. As French philosopher Henry Bergson believed, of all the memories latent in the unconscious, the ones that actually arise in the conscious mind are those that can concur with present events (Bergson, 61).

For Argentinean psychoanalyst Néstor A. Braunstein, memory is not a matter of looking back: it is rather a movement forward, it seeks to advance in time; and the narration by which memory is reconstructed is woven from the standpoint of its foreseen end (Braunstein, 69). The prints of *La saga de Sandino* create an atmosphere where

memories can live. By activating memory, these images allow Nicaraguans to employ their own subjectivity in setting up a vision of their own past, of recuperating the sense of their nation. The narrative prompts them to envision a Nicaragua of their own: moving across their history has the fundamental purpose of anchoring the nation. A memory cannot be verified, Braunstein explains, it simply lives in the subject that embodies it, a subject that in turn has the capacity of forgetting and repressing. A memory, however, can be authenticated by the recipients of the narration into which the memory has been woven: In 1994, gallery owner and curator Juanita Bermúdez brought *La saga the Sandino* to Galería Códice, in Managua. Her account of its reception is very telling:

Fue un impacto, llegó muchísima gente a verla. Yo tenía la galería en el Centro Cultural Managua en esa época, y pasaba cantidad de gente que iba los domingos al Malecón, y como abríamos los domingos por la tarde, por esa razón precisamente, ¡eran desfiles de personas sencillas las que entraban a ver a Sandino! (Bermúdez, personal communication, 17 September 2009).

Confirmed by reception, the narrative in the prints proves to be central to the consciousness Nicaraguans have of their own nation, it proves that it lives in memory, which Walter Benjamin describes as the epic faculty: “Memory amalgamates the chain of tradition which passes on a happening from generation to generation... It supplies the net which all stories together form in the end” (Benjamin, “The Story-Teller,” 92). While Morales does refer back to history in his narrative, he does not exhaust it, he merely opens it to sight by presenting to the viewer a few glimpses of the past to stimulate him or her to weave a sense of the historical evolution of the Nicaraguan nation. When the

viewer seeks the way in which these events are embedded in the course of history, he or she engages in a process of interpretation in which the axis of contestation is the nation itself.

The last three prints of the portfolio absorb the passion of Christ into Sandino's own saga. The fifth print, *La última cena del general Sandino* (Figure 8), points explicitly to the Last Supper. The sixth one, *Prendimiento del general Sandino Frente al "Hormiguero"* (Figure 9) parallels Christ's arrest in the Olive Garden. The last print, *Asesinato del general Sandino detrás del viejo campo de aviación* (Figure 10), echoes the Crucifixion. This conflation strongly contests the sense of the actions that led to Sandino's execution: at the time when Sandinismo was already constructing a new sense for the Nicaraguan nation, a sense that pursued its own *raison d'être*, Anastasio Somoza betrays, captures and executes an unarmed Sandino as part of his agenda of allowing US intervention in Nicaragua. Somoza and the course taken by history are thus rendered absurd.

Morales has said that he modeled this last portion of the portfolio upon the passion of Christ for the sake of parody (Bosio and Vernassa). The effect of the parallel is that it decomposes the end of the story into the irrational elements that brought about Sandino's death. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, parody literally means a period of time or the termination of such a period; the end of life, death. The death of the hero is, for Walter Benjamin, precisely what authorizes the story:

Just as a sequence of images is set in motion inside a man as his life unfolds—consisting of the views of himself under which he has encountered himself without being aware of it—suddenly in his

expressions and looks the unforgettable comes out and imparts to everything that concerned him that authority which even the poorest wretch in dying possesses for the living around him. This authority is at the very source of the story (Benjamin, "The Story-Teller," 89).

These last three images of the portfolio not only sanction the story, but they also empower the viewer for questioning the course taken by history, the actions of Nicaragua's reactionary leaders and the intervention of the United States. Following after the print right in the middle of the sequence, that brightest print of the portfolio showing Pedrón, these last three images return to the pervasive darkness of the first three prints, only that in these last three shadows seem to acquire a fateful tone.

In *La última cena del general Sandino*, the surface of the table around which the figures gather is the brightest portion of the composition. Placed in a slight diagonal, the table has Sandino at the top with President Sacasa next to him. Other figures surround the table and interact in different directions. This was indeed Sandino's last supper, as he was soon to be executed by order from Anastasio Somoza García, the first Nicaraguan leader of the National Guard, a new constabulary created by the US military and lead until then exclusively by US officials. Conversely, one of Sandino's generals had been appointed by the recently elected Sacasa as military command in the region known as Las Segovias, where Sandino's main operations had centered in the North of Nicaragua. Sandino submitted a peace protocol to the president the day after the US marines left Nicaragua,<sup>5</sup> but Somoza was suspicious of the friendly rapport between Sacasa and Sandino. In the lithograph, above Sandino's head hangs a picture, the image of an

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<sup>5</sup> An extended US occupation of Nicaragua was in place since 1926. That occupation followed a previous one, which lasted from 1912 to 1925. Sandino had assured president Sacasa that he would give up arms as soon as the US Marines abandoned the country. See (Sandino and Ramírez, 37 and passim).

execution with a line of firing soldiers to the left. This is the second brightest portion of the image.

The image titled *Prendimiento del general Sandino frente al “Hormiguero”* represents an incredibly adept play of contrasts of light and dark, some of them very strong, some of them very subtle. Violets, blues, greens, oranges and yellows help to map the space and the forms it contains in this audaciously constructed image, which takes us to witness what follows after the dinner with Sacasa the night of February 21, 1934. Sandino is returning from the dinner with the president in the same car with his father, two of his generals, Estrada and Umanzor, and Minister of Agriculture Sofonías Salvatierra, who sympathized with the Sandinistas and was supporting the dialogue between Sandino and the government. The car is stopped by soldiers of the National Guard. Don Gregorio, Sandino’s father, and the minister are arrested and taken to prison. In their cell, they hear distant shots: they come from minister’s own house, where Sandino’s people concentrate and now defend from the assault by National Guard. Socrates, Sandino’s young brother, dies in this combat. Anastasio Somoza García, director of the National Guard, saw in Sacasa and his grouping with Sandino a threat to his aspirations to power and, with the consent of the US ambassador to Nicaragua, Arthur Bliss Lane, was clearing his own way to usurping the presidency.

Sandino’s execution, along two of his men, Estrada and Umanzor, one to each side of him, is reconstructed in *Asesinato del general Sandino detrás del Viejo campo de aviación*. As the title indicates, it took place near an old aviation camp, where a deep trench had been excavated. They were murdered through the fire of machine guns, their bodies stripped of all their belongings and thrown into the trench. The National Guard



men that killed them were assassinated as well, so there remained no evidence of what had happened. In Las Segovias, where Sandino wished to retire and the agricultural cooperatives formed by the natives of the region under his auspices were blossoming, there was bloodshed too. Three hundred peasants died in the assault of the National Guard on Las Segovias. The last person to resist was Pedrón Altamirano, who was killed a year later and his head brought to Managua. Somoza would not only eventually admit that he killed Sandino, “for Nicaragua’s own good” as he argued, but in 1936 ousted his own uncle, president Sacasa, with the support of the US, and made himself president. The Somoza dictatorship begins. He would not only stay in power for 20 years, but his family would rule Nicaragua until 1979, when Anastasio Somoza Debayle was forced out of office by the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional.

Such an awareness of history allows a subject to question present state of affairs, since they hold continuity with the very historical process evoked. According to cultural critic Andreas Huyssen, to live in extended structures of temporality is a basic human need, and such structures, especially in a narrative such as Morales’s, contemplate a future: “History as a narrative of emancipation and liberation always points to some future” (Huyssen, 87). The story told by Morales shows the inception of a national project that sprung from the rural and indigenous populations of Nicaragua. This project, the first one ever to envision the incorporation of these populations into the politics and economics of the nation, was abruptly thwarted by reactionary forces. The narrative in Morales’s prints shows a historical condition that those reactionary forces seek to perpetuate. Such dialectic permeates the modern history of Nicaragua. The portfolio reconstructs the historical foundation for a desired restitution, which the viewer, receiver

of the story and agent of history, might locate in the future. *La saga de Sandino* incites the viewer to develop a perception of the past, a perception necessary to ground and construct an image of the future.

## ***CHAPTER THREE: Maya Motifs in the Art Work by Arturo López Rodezno of Honduras***

It is difficult to assess the foundations for a Honduran artistic tradition of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. An art academy or school did not crystallize there until 1940. Its first director, Arturo López Rodezno, sought to infuse his work and that produced at the school with elements of Maya art. One would think it very logical to use indigenous forms to render an artistic practice local. Close attention to the works he produced within the particular Honduran context, however, show how deceptive his practice actually was. By the way he focused on specific Maya forms he appropriated and reconfigured, López Rodezno alienated his art from the very nation he assumed to evoke.

This paper will consider previous discussions of the artist's work and role in the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes (ENBA). Close attention will be paid to López Rodezno's working method and technique, through a stringent formal analysis of key works. The broad context of 20<sup>th</sup> century artists recruiting Pre-Columbian artistic traditions for the production of modern works will be briefly considered, to then step into the specific context of conceptions of the indigenous during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Honduras. The artist's work and his role at the ENBA will be critically evaluated within that context. For the purpose of this paper, I will focus on those works and projects of López Rodezno that deal with Maya themes.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> His murals of themes from rural life, like those in the San Pedro Sula City Hall and at the Duncan Maya building in Tegucigalpa, deserve to be the subject of a different study.

### ***Arturo López Rodezno and the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes***

In 1990, the Spanish Embassy in Tegucigalpa, with the collaboration of local institutions, sponsored the first of a series of yearly exhibits of Honduran contemporary art. Since then, a survey of contemporary art continues to be presented to the public in Tegucigalpa with the name of *Antología de las Artes Plásticas de Honduras*. While every year the Anthology has reunited recently produced work, it has also commemorated an important Honduran artist of the past, including Pablo Zelaya Sierra, Confucio Montes de Oca and José Antonio Velásquez. The catalog for the first anthology remarks upon the lack of museums in Honduras, without which the Honduran public has no possibility of viewing to the work of its artists. The great loss here is access to Honduran art by the Honduran public: “La plástica hondureña va a parar, casi en su totalidad, a manos particulares y el gran público sigue ajeno a esta producción que, precisamente en Honduras, pretende y logra aprehender los más hondo del ser hondureño” (Embajada de España, 3).

Consistent with its vision of showing, cataloguing, and memorializing this new institution, the Anthology was founded “bajo la égida del gran pintor hondureño Arturo López Rodezno, fundador de la Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes, que hoy, año de 1990, conmemora sus 50 años de existencia” (Embajada de España, 4). The catalog goes on to compare López Rodezno to important Honduran historical figures like José Cecilio del Valle, who in 1824 was elected the first president of the Federation of Central America, or to the Honduran historian, journalist and diplomat Rafael Heliodoro Valle (1892-1959). The catalog closes its introduction by calling on the Honduran public to

acknowledge López Rodezno's valuable presence through his compelling artistic heritage.

Arturo López Rodezno was born in 1908 in Santa Rosa, department of Copán, the most important area in Honduras for Maya archeology. He completed elementary, middle and high school in Santa Rosa, but moved to La Habana, Cuba, in 1920 for higher education. In 1930, he obtained an engineering degree with a focus on sugar agronomy from the Universidad de la Habana. Between 1930 and 1933, he also studied painting in Habana's Academia San Alejandro, under Armando Menocal. Between 1938 and 1939 he studied fresco painting at the Académie Julian, the alternative Parisian art school that saw the formation of the Nabis group, which included Pierre Bonnard and Eduard Vuillard, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. He resided in Rome from 1952 to 1956, where he engaged with yet more painting techniques, including the enamel on copper process he would use to develop many of his Maya motifs. The pictorial practices learned by López Rodezno thus include several media: oil, fresco, mosaics, enamel and ceramics.

In their book *Honduras: Visión panorámica de su pintura*, Evaristo López and Longino Becerra single out López Rodezno as the most outstanding Honduran artist of the generation of 1930, in which they also include artists like Teresa Fortín and José Antonio Velásquez. They describe López Rodezno's work as a neo-figurative style of broad planes and emphasize the Honduran themes in it: "En Rodezno predominó siempre una temática hondureña, en la que los motivos mayas tuvieron una presencia destacada, por lo que... es el primer artista nacional que elabora un discurso plástico a partir de elementos extraídos de aquella gran cultura" (López and Becerra, 42).

These two authors also underline López Rodezno's agency in founding the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes (ENBA) in Tegucigalpa, which they report to have started without much material support from the government, then under the dictatorial rule of General Tiburcio Carías Andino. The school opened its doors on February 1 of 1940. López Rodezno directed the school from 1940 to 1953, consolidating the institution upon the model of the academies he had seen in our continent as well as in Europe. Despite the little material support offered by the government to the ENBA, López and Becerra (157) observe that Tiburcio Carías Andino, who governed Honduras from 1933 to 1949, officially endorsed his support for the ENBA mainly through his personal secretary, the poet Carlos Izaguirre, whose support to López Rodezno was instrumental for implementing the school. Honduran historian Leticia de Oyuela notes that Izaguirre himself, commenting in writing in 1948 on the first years of the ENBA, said the school was the outcome of coupling two enthusiastic wills: those of Carías and López Rodezno (Oyuela, 89). By that time the school had a building (Figure 11).

Oyuela remarks that the ENBA started to function without the foundation of any legal agreement or budget, and thus understands its creation as part of a centralizing and authoritarian program, as opposed to an academic plan responding to the necessities of artistic production in Honduras. This situation, she argues, corresponds to the way the state was led and managed under the Carías regime, which consolidated itself through the 1930's, at the time of the re-stabilization of world economy after the 1929 depression. For Oyuela, Carías's centralizing vision, modeled after the 19<sup>th</sup> century oligarchic republic, led to a conception of art as prophetic and preordained, where the artist is seen

as an isolated visionary and by that very conception distanced from actual society (Oyuela, 90).

Oyuela acknowledges various influences that impacted the school: Mexican muralism, which implied participating in a visual language that had developed in Latin America; indigenism, a set of artistic practices that cast their influence on the Central American isthmus from both Mexico and South America; the synthesis of European languages with Caribbean themes that was best exemplified by the work of Wifredo Lam; and finally, Lopez Rodezno's own work, which she considers not only inspired by Mexican muralism but also by Maya painting itself.<sup>7</sup>

At the ENBA, López Rodezno was not only director and professor, but he also set out to paint frescoes on the walls of the institution with the help of students, whom he sought to train in the technique. He also painted murals at the newly constructed City Hall in San Pedro Sula and other locations in Tegucigalpa. The forms and content of these eclectic murals follow the aesthetics of both social realism and indigenism. The murals López Rodezno executed on the walls of the ENBA during the 1940's included pictorial elements, like Maya figures, implements and glyphs, which can be traced back to original works of Maya art. He would also incorporate these elements in his painted enamels starting in the late 1950's, upon the artist's return from Italy. According to López and Becerra, the incorporation of Maya culture as content for artistic projects was something López Rodezno had promoted at the ENBA since its earliest years, and the workshops of carving and sculpture at the school developed Maya motifs on doors, chests

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<sup>7</sup> In the words of Oyuela: "López Rodezno es el autor intelectual de la Escuela de Bellas Artes y propicia la pintura mural... no solo inspirado por el muralismo mexicano sino por la gran pintura Maya de Bonampak: espacios enormes que rellenar, en los que se permite mucho que decir y la construcción de una pintura evocadora y mitificadora de una realidad pasada" (Oyuela, 91).

and panels, which implies these motifs were also pre-worked on drawings and perhaps other two dimensional forms (López and Becerra, 157).

Oyuela considered that Lopez Rodezno's strong drawing abilities were decisive in allowing him to work with different pictorial languages, but specifically important for the development of his painted enamels. For her, it was through this medium that he best developed a pictorial art evocative of the past, an Amerindian past that he rendered mythic. In her book *La batalla pictórica*, Oyuela refers briefly to what seems to be López Rodezno's generic conception of an indigenous American continent.<sup>8</sup> She recalls reading López Rodezno's own comments in a newspaper where he spoke with great enthusiasm about *Indoamérica*; it was for him the concretion of colors and rural and pre-Columbian themes, which should be the centerpiece of artistic production in Honduras (Oyuela, 92).

### ***Painted Enamels***

The word enamel refers to a vitreous paste used to decorate metal or ceramics. Enameling is a process of fusion, where the vitreous substance is fused with a metal surface through temperatures as high as 850° C, to achieve hard, transparent surfaces. Lower temperatures of around 300° C are used to develop softer, opaque enamels, which seems to be the case with those produced by López Rodezno. Heat bonds the vitreous substance to metal. This combination of metal and molten glass, both components fused through heat, is referred to as enamel. López Rodezno's are painted enamels, which are

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<sup>8</sup> Her brief discussion reads: "En una entrevista que en esa fecha [1960] concede a Diario el Día nos habla con gran entusiasmo de Indoamérica como la concreción de la vía del color y de la temática tanto rural como precolombina, como punto central de la obra que se debe desarrollar en Honduras" (Oyuela, 92) The occasion of the interview seems to be López Rodezno's completion of the 'Maya Mural' at Banco Atlántida (Figure 17), where Oyuela perceived the realization of this aesthetic.



developed on a copper plate. In this technique, the first step is to set over the plate a layer of white, opaque enamel by firing it. Color enamels are then applied gradually, requiring different firings. López Rodezno's enamels, however, seem to have often begun from a dark first coat. A wet enamel layer can be scratched with a needle to create delineations or to achieve texture. Also, translucent enamel layers can be accumulated over darker grounds to create relief effects.

López Rodezno became familiar with this enamel technique while he was a diplomat in Rome during the 1950's. While several of his enamels lack precise dating, we can logically place their production between that time and the time of his death in 1975. Indeed, Oyuela dates the so called "mural maya" in the lobby of Banco Atlántida (Plaza Morazán, Tegucigalpa), made of dozens of enameled copper plates, to 1960. Another mural was installed in a meeting room at the main building of the Banco de Guatemala (Guatemala City) and titled *Integración Económica de Centro América*, dates to 1965 (Lanuza, 23). Thus, we can reasonably locate López Rodezno's production of painted enamels mainly during the 1960's.

### ***Maya Motifs***

While these mural commissions are made of multiple plates worked separately and then installed together on a wall, 240 plates in the case of the work at Banco de Guatemala, single plates measuring roughly 30 by 20 centimeters were also developed by the artist as individual works. These single plate works, many of them part of the collection at the Banco Atlántida in Tegucigalpa, are referred to as "motivos mayas," Spanish for Maya Motifs. They usually show one single figure that may be accompanied by varying objects, implements like an incense bag or a spear. One plate shows a snake

winding up vertically behind a dancing figure. In another plate, a figure sits on a stone altar as he raises his arm; vegetable forms come down from his hand. In yet another plate, a woman sits in lotus position while she carries a baby on her back. Different sorts of headdresses crown these figures and jades decorate their chests, ears and wrists.

The woman and the baby are both depicted in profile over a field of blue (Figure 12), a tone that seems to quote the so called Maya blue used as background in large areas of the murals at Bonampak. Texture has been developed on this field of blue, apparently by manipulating the wet layer of glaze, creating an irregular and scratchy surface that contains darker regions as well as areas of brighter, more intense cerulean. Dotty marks are also applied for further texture and atmosphere. The white areas that represent the figures are also textured, showing differing types of marks. This white layer does not seem the first one to be applied: it was applied over a black layer, as were all the other colors used to render the figures. Black areas remain visible, depicting the hair of the woman or outlining the figures with calligraphic marks that recall the fluid lines of ancient Maya vase painting.

The colors fired over the black area achieve a more saturated quality. The red of the woman's loincloth, for instance, feels very dense by virtue of the black that surrounds it or shows through it. Something like that happens with the child's hair. Greens to either side of the woman's wrist or around her neck feel very deep: the same strategy seems to be used with them. This multiple layering of glazes is also used to create modeling and a rich interplay of color. Orange is laid on black, and then yellow on orange. We see that in the woman's diadem, in the elongated forms that flow from the crown of her head, in the bag that goes around her torso to hold the child and in the

child's loincloth. In the jades that deck her body, a celadon green overlays a darker green; the celadon seems to have cracked in the firing and so the darker green shows through, modeling the wrist band.

This laying down of bright color areas divides the picture plane into intensely contrasting hues and temperatures. These rich, saturated colors create a strong sensation, a playful and dynamic interaction of color that can engross the viewer with the forms there presented. This compelling play of color counterpoints the rather schematic distribution of forms López Rodezno implements in these Maya motifs. I find that this schematic quality is partially a necessity of his technique, that of defining rather homogeneous areas of color to deploy on the copper plate. The other factor at play in the schematic configuration of his compositions is the fact that he extracts visual elements, mainly figures, from actual works of Maya art to incorporate them into his painted enamels, thus isolating those figures from the other forms that went in conjunction with them in the original work. This process implies rearranging the extracted forms to fit a new format, the rectangular copper plate he was seeking to develop.

This is indeed a process of ahistorical abstraction, where the artist pulls out a figural unit from a Maya codex, a sculpted relief, a stairway, a mural or a vase, and frames it within his rectangular picture plane. Not only is the visual concept lost by depriving the figure of its original physical form, but, by separating a single component from a much larger artistic program, the abstracted figure is devoid of the meaning that was given to it by the context that enfolded it. Isolated from its context and constituted as a new signifier in the enameled plate, the figure cannot anymore refer to the concrete historical or mythological narration it was part of, and so can only refer to a very general

signified, perhaps that of Maya culture per se or, at best, to general categories for thinking that culture, like “ruler,” “warrior” or “hunter.” Through this procedure of abstraction López Rodezno sought to incorporate an “essential” Maya value into his work. He pursued an art supposedly proper to Honduras, and his strategy for it was to imbue his work with “timeless” aspects of Maya art. These aspects, however, were not only fragmented, their artistic nature was also altered. Lopez Rodezno’s mode of appropriating and re-contextualizing Maya imagery entails an emphasis on the figure of a mighty, glorified ruler.

As an example of López Rodezno’s practice of separating a visual element from the total configuration it was a part of, we can look at a painted enamel plate that was presented in a publication that commemorates the 50 years of existence of the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes, under the title of “Sculpture Fragment” (Figure 13). The figure in this enameled plate comes from a ball court marker unearthed at Copan and now part of the collection at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology in Boston (Figure 14). In the round, sculpted volcanic tufa marker, two figures confront each other. The one to the left was chosen by López Rodezno to include in his composition, but the other is excluded and so the sense of dire confrontation that animates the Mesoamerican ball game is lost. In the enameled plate, at bottom right, we see an animal head that has been rendered as a kind creature, while in the original work it is a rather terrifying sight. Thus, López Rodezno was also sanitizing his work from the more monstrous aspects of Maya art. Many other elements are excluded in López Rodezno’s composition. The forms of the figure have been simplified as well, and his facial gesture has been completely softened. In the marker, all the glyphic and pictorial contents are framed by a

quatrefoil border that indicates that the scene occurs in a space that borders the underworld. Moreover, the marker is a component of a larger whole, the ball court, a space of synapse where sculptural and architectural forms come together to support the production of a congruous space charged with social meaning.

Although a few other figures from López Rodezno's Maya motifs could be traced back to the sculpture at Copán, it is interesting to note that most of the Maya "characters" in his enamels come from sites beyond Honduras. One plate shows the figure of Pakal, Lord of Palenque (Figure 15). The figure was extracted from Pakal's sculpted stone sarcophagus lid (Figure 16), where the figure appears inserted within a complex mesh of Maya iconographic elements. The huge sarcophagus is part of the very elaborate sculptural and architectural program surrounding Pakal's burial at the Temple of the Inscriptions. Many other motifs come from sources in the Petén area and the Dresden Codex. The mural at Banco Atlántida (Figure 17), made of some one hundred and fifty enameled copper plates, shows a court scene drawn from the middle register of the north wall in room 2 at Bonampak (Figure 18).

If his images derive from such a variety of sources, it is plausible that López Rodezno was looking at different books to obtain material for his art work. It is reported that he frequently spent time at Copán (López Villamil, 5) and corresponded with Dr. Adán Cueva during the early 1970's, who was a crucial figure in reactivating research and conservation at Copán (The Getty Conservation Institute and Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia, 156). His Maya motifs, however, incorporate figures from a variety of sites in Guatemala and México, which López Rodezno could have readily seen in contemporary publications. Books that could have been accessible to López Rodezno

include Herbert Joseph Spinden's *A Study of Maya Art* and Sylvanus Morley's *The Ancient Maya*. In 1955, the Carnegie Institution of Washington published a volume titled *Bonampak, Chiapas, México*, which featured copies of the mural paintings by Antonio Tejeda and text by Karl Ruppert, Eric Thompson and Tatiana Proskouriakoff. This book may very well be the source for the Banco Atlántida mural.<sup>9</sup>

If López Rodezno was seeking to develop an art proper to Honduras, why include motifs that come, in their majority, from different sites in Guatemala and also from as far as México? What rationale allowed him to bypass this problem? Furthermore, removing the motifs from the artistic programs they belong to erases their historical specificity. What was he seeking in these motifs? What ideas did they entail for him? The use of motifs extracted from sites well beyond his contemporary Honduras represents a significant inconsistency in López Rodezno's project of developing an art proper to his nation.

The dislocation of López Rodezno's Maya motifs, their separation from the specific historical narrative they belong to and his idiosyncratic individuation of the figures, situate them in the sphere of the stereotype. The rarefied and exalted air of these images make of Maya culture something essential, and the figures become general, free-floating signifiers for a culture already idealized through the work of scholars like Morley and Thompson as the highest culture from the Pre-Columbian world. In her book *Pre-Columbian Art and the Post-Columbian World*, Barbara Braun explains that, even after 20<sup>th</sup> century anthropology started to produce specific cultural and developmental

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<sup>9</sup> Other possible sources include the color reproductions of Agustín Villagra Calletí and Román Piña Chan's book *Bonampak*, of 1961 (Lorenzo Bautista, José Luis, Raúl Pavón Abreu, and Román Piña Chán. 1961. *Bonampak*. México, D. F.: Inst. Nacional de Antropología e Historia).

paradigms to understand Pre-Columbian cultures, fanciful interpretations of the Pre-Columbian world continued to be favored by many (Braun, 35).

It is instructive to look at the more displaced elements in the painted enamels of López Rodezno, of which there are multiple examples. One such work (Figure 19) seems to be organized like a color field painting, with the picture plane broken up into chromatic areas of shifting sizes and shapes, their placement seeking rhythm and color interaction. Pre-Columbian forms appear embedded in this rich composition, sometimes overtly as in the case of a green mask in the upper left quadrant of the image, sometimes less obvious, as the red shape in the lower left, which evokes a head in profile with the line of the nose extending into the forehead. The “T” shaped, multicolor element that lies horizontally on the upper right quadrant may be read as an implement, while the smaller swatches throughout the composition might be read as jade beads, the more directly Maya references in the composition informing this reading.

Compositions like this one show how López Rodezno was reconfiguring the Maya elements he appropriated into his work through sensuous forms and colors. Abstract art of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century very often evoked more figural forms in its otherwise non-objective compositions. In the case at hand, López Rodezno seems to insert his appropriated elements of Maya art into the garb of contemporary aesthetic trends. I argue that his generic treatment of Maya art sought to avoid the elaboration of a more congruous rationale for appropriating it. If for López Rodezno *Indoamérica* allowed the concretion of colors and pre-Columbian themes, it is not logical, from any stand point, to think Maya art as particular to Honduras, a later nation-state unknown to the pre-colonial world. Concomitantly, a plastic discourse centering on Maya visual

forms cannot be considered something particularly Honduran either, much less characteristic of Honduras as such. With his eclectic reconfigurations of Maya works, López Rodezno participated, unwittingly or not, in the official discourse about indigenous peoples consolidated in Honduras during the Carías dictatorship.

### ***Maya Culture and Statehood***

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Pre-Columbian artifacts served artists and collectors as the source for a “primitive” aesthetic, one that supposedly came from an unspoiled culture, from people living in a state of nature, whose authenticity of thought and feeling could revitalize modern life. Indeed, one of the strategies used by European artists to modernize their work was to emulate aspects of the art of distant cultures, like those of Africa and Japan. One artist that set out to recover “the instinct of the primal artisan” was Paul Gauguin, who worked not only in painting but produced an array of objects in wood and clay, carving and painting the walls and furniture that surrounded him wherever he went. Andean ceramics influenced not only Gauguin’s own ceramics but also his paintings. Gauguin’s retrospective exhibition in 1908 in Paris prompted many other artists to look at “primitive” art objects to inform their art. “Like Gauguin, they appropriated primitive art with the intention of subverting the established aesthetic order, while at the same time conceiving of themselves as creative geniuses expressing the highest aspirations of their culture” (Braun, 38).

López Rodezno, educating himself in centers like Paris and Rome and working in London as chief of the Honduran diplomatic mission, seems to have fallen under the spell of such a paradoxical logic. While the incorporation of formal elements from Pre-Columbian art into modern works of art goes back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century,



López Rodezno's production of Maya motifs in frescoes and enameled copper plates took place much later, between the 1940's and the 1960's. It could be argued that the Honduran artist was concerned with authenticity, and sought to give life to the artistic production of his country. López Rodezno's quest for a modern Honduran art relied on supplying his production and teaching with the art of a culture indigenous to his country. He was indeed from Copán, and that by itself entails a predisposition to extend the Maya realm nationwide. We must examine the nature of his appropriation of Maya art.

In Honduras, during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more than subverting a specific aesthetic, artists were attempting to construct a local one, an art proper to their nation.<sup>10</sup> Artists invested in that effort include Pablo Zelaya Sierra (1896-1933), especially through his paintings of the late 1920's and early 1930's, and López Rodezno, who would have been aware of the work of Mexican artists like Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros. The quest for a new Mexican art undertaken by these artists was rooted in a revivification of some indigenous forms. "After the revolution, the Mexican Renaissance flesh out a mythic past that would inspire the Mexican masses in the creation of a new nation. Indigenist ideology venerated the Aztecs ... as the great ethnic group from which all Mexicans descended" (Braun, 39).

Braun describes Rivera's appropriation of Pre-Columbian sources as twofold. He used these sources to both promote an artistic revival and to engage in a popular nationalism often at odds with official nationalism. For Rivera, working in Mexico during the years that followed the armed interval of the revolution, this appropriation was

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<sup>10</sup> Still at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, artistic production in Honduras centered in portraiture and religious art (these would be part of the production at the ENBA during the 1940s as well). Efforts towards a modern pictorial aesthetic start only in the 1920's with the work of artists like Pablo Zelaya Sierra and Confucio Montes de Oca. No academy really exists until 1940, when the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes is founded. See Oyuela and López and Becerra.

An explicit sign of political affiliation to promote explicitly revolutionary purposes... He used it to construct a mythic past whose effectiveness could be experienced in the present... Rivera considered himself rooted in the ancient indigenous culture, and he was intent on using Pre-Columbian art as the basis of an autonomous and identifiably American aesthetic, independent of that of Europe (Braun, 186).

Mexican muralism emphasized either continuity between indigenous cultures and the modern Mexican state or a link to popular nationalism more broadly. Pre-Columbian culture was associated by some artists with statehood not only by virtue of its complex writing and calendric systems, but also on the basis of the monumental architecture and sculpture produced by large and stratified societies like those of Teotihuacán and the Maya city-states. In the larger context of Latin American culture, receptiveness to Pre-Columbian culture was not exclusive to revolutionary artists like Rivera. Conservatives also engaged with it for their own purposes.

Honduran historian Darío Euraque notes that during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Honduran state, one far more conservative than that in Mexico, sought to construct an official national identity. In this context, the ruins left by indigenous civilizations were seen as the ancestral legacy of a nationality yet to be built. This mentality eventually fixed eyes on the archeological ruins at Copán, the main Maya site in Honduras situated 12 kilometers from the Honduras-Guatemala border. The ancient city of Copán was abandoned by its Maya inhabitants as early as the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> century CE and repopulated only until the 1860's by non-Maya inhabitants. Euraque argues that, centering on the ancient Maya through attention to the ruins left by them, the

development of statist discourse overlooked almost completely the achievements of the indigenous populations still living in Honduras at the time, like the Lenca, Pech and others. Historically, only a small portion of Honduras was Maya, while the rest registered a heterogeneous, ethnic indigenous population (Euraque, 44-45).<sup>11</sup>

The Papal Nuncio in Honduras between 1939 and 1948, Federico Lunardi, studied the country's archaeology and ethnography. During those years, he promoted the idea that the indigenous Honduran population that survived during the colonial period and beyond was directly descendent from the Maya. Lunardi even perceived of a Maya populated Comayagua Valley, which we now know to be a primarily Lenca area (Dixon, 261, 267). Darío Euraque explains that Maya culture came to be considered as the one indigenous heritage within official discourse in Honduras, which was detrimental for the other indigenous groups that still populated the country and continued to be marginalized, if not oppressed,<sup>12</sup> by the very state that commissioned replicas of Mayan temples, staircases and motifs from Chichen Itza, Palenque and Copán. If Lunardi was instrumental in this process, late 19<sup>th</sup> century American archaeology also played an important role in it:

Paradójicamente, el esfuerzo mayanizador de Lunardi por medio de una arqueología y antropología improvisadas reapareció como subdiscurso del

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<sup>11</sup> Archeological evidence for this situation can be found in the work of different archeologists. Archeologists Robert Sharer and Loa Traxler describe the geographical limits of the Maya civilization in their book *The Ancient Maya*: "Within Mexico, the Maya area includes all of the Yucatán Peninsula, and within upper Central America it includes the nations of Guatemala and Belize and the western parts of Honduras and El Salvador" (Sharer and Traxler, 26). Rosemary Joyce examined the interaction between Classic Maya sites like Copán and the southeastern periphery of the Maya area in the Ulúa Valley. She posits that if there was exchange and integration between these two regions during the Classic Period, during the Terminal Classic these areas diverged and became separate during the Early Post-Classic (Joyce, 326 and passim).

<sup>12</sup> Euraque reports that during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the Honduran state was still seeking ways of repressing what would be the last indigenous revolt in the country. He situates this process during the 1920's in the Lenca area (Euraque, 47-48).

estado en sí. ¿Cómo? La pobreza hondureña de la época y los impulsos imperialistas y “civilizadores” de la arqueología norteamericana de finales del siglo XIX se convirtieron en ejes fundamentales para hacer de lo Maya (mediante las ruinas de Copán) en la herencia indígena oficial (Euraque, 47).

Euraque situates the process that constructed Honduras as indigenously Maya between the 1890’s and the 1940’s. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Alfred Maudsley developed a large corpus of photographs, drawings and casts from the sculpture and architecture at Copán. The publication of all this material was a significant advance in the study of ancient Maya art. Maudsley also participated in one the expeditions to Copán made by the Peabody Museum of Harvard University. The excavations carried out by the Peabody shaped much of the archeological work to be done at Copán in the following decades.

During the 1930’s and 40’s, the work of the Carnegie Institution of Washington at Copán established research patterns as well as attitudes and priorities that prevail up to this day in the archaeology of Honduras. Archeologists William Fash and Ricardo Agurcia Fasquelle note that during this period “conservation became a major focus of the efforts, not only to save the monuments for the future but to create a stronger sense of national identity” (Fash and Agurcia Fasquelle, 10). The infrastructure to make Copán accesible to tourists was also built during this period. Archeological interest in Honduras would center almost exclusively on Copán throughout the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century.

While most archeological work in Honduras centers in Copán and the western-most portion of the Honduran territory, which was part of the Maya area in Classic times,

Doris Stone, a famed archeologist of the time who trained at Harvard, carried researched in other areas of the country: its southwest, central Honduras, the north coast and eastern Honduras. In her 1957 paper *The Archaeology of Central and Southern Honduras*, published by the Peabody Museum, she speaks of several indigenous groups, which she situates geographically in distinct regions. The publication shows extensive examples of the carved and painted ceramics produced by these indigenous groups, as well as figurines, sculpture and implements found in those regions.

Darío Euraque posits that when Stone started digging in lands granted in concession to the banana company run by her father, Samuel Zemurray, the discourse of *mestizaje* was already in place. This *mestizaje*, or racial mix of European and indigenous ancestries, was a homogenized one, in the sense that its indigenous component, seen as exclusively Maya, denied racial heterogeneity. Stone, he argues, followed the parameters already established by foreign archeology in Honduras, particularly through the work of Sylvanus G. Morley, who knew and accepted a Mexican version of *mestizaje* as put forward by his collaborator Manuel Gamio in a 1916 book titled *Forjando Patria* (Euraque, 53-55).<sup>13</sup>

Gamio, who held several official posts in Mexico during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, conformed to the liberal agenda of “civilizing” indigenous peoples, whose culture, language and religion had to be changed so that they could be integrated into the wider nation. This homogenizing process, leading to a unified *mestizo* Mexico in some circles, was for Gamio a necessity for achieving economic prosperity. According to him, the only thing that should be preserved from Mexico’s indigenous populations was their

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<sup>13</sup> Euraque notes that, if Stone’s field research extended well beyond the Mesoamerican area, her work was probably not under the attention of Honduran intellectuals or, very likely, her publications simply did not circulate in Honduras.

material culture: their architecture, sculpture and crafts (Martinez-Rivera). As Darío Euraque points out, Gamio's indigenism was present in the Honduran cultural atmosphere of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

En Honduras, el indigenismo de Gamio tuvo presencia no sólo por medio de Morley sino también por medio de intelectuales locales que durante la década de 1920 y después fijaron sus ojos en el México revolucionario y ocuparon el imaginario racial proyectado desde ese país, y que penetraba el ambiente intelectual aún en los 1940 (Euraque, 56).

These intellectuals included Eliseo Pérez Cadalso, who attended the 1946 archeological conference hosted by General Carías in Tegucigalpa (the conference featured Monsignor Federico Lunardi), and Rafael Eliodoro Valle, both of whom highly valued Gamio's brand of indigenism. Other intellectuals, the historian Medardo Mejía for instance, favored the more right wing ideas of José Vasconcelos, who in his book *La raza cósmica* implies that *mestizaje* would in the end better indigenous peoples. Euraque concludes that “el indigenismo hondureño nunca se vinculó con esfuerzos concretos por rescatar a los pueblos Lenca u otros, sino que exaltaba también la mayanización de Honduras” (Euraque, 57). Once galvanized, the tradition of idealizing Maya culture and perceiving the indigenous roots of Honduras as solely Maya continued into the 1960's and beyond.

In 1935, public spaces in Tegucigalpa began showing the incorporation of Maya motifs. The architecture and sculpture of important public spaces, such as Parque La Concordia (Figure 20) and El Picacho (Figure 21), present forms taken directly from different sites in the Maya area. This was the work of Mexican architect Augusto

Morales y Sánchez, and corresponds to the official agenda of conceptually and visually constructing Honduras as nation of indigenous Maya roots. Morales y Sánchez's task of filling the public spaces of the Honduran capital with Maya forms continued into the 1940's, the time when the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes (ENBA) was opened under the direction of Arturo López Rodezno.

A book from 1948, titled *Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1940-1948*, promulgates the achievements of the institution in its first eight years of existence. In the prologue, Carlos Izaguirre, Tiburcio Carías's personal secretary, exalts the related wills of both the dictator and López Rodezno. Composed mainly of photographs, the book shows the area of the school decorated with murals filled with Maya forms, a space called the *Corredor Maya* (Figure 22), painted by Arturo López Rodezno during the 1940's. Maya glyphs and sculptural forms are depicted around an arched opening, along with macaws and tropical vegetation. This is reminiscent of Frederick Catherwood's exoticized renderings of Maya ruins from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Beyond the arched opening we see a wall of simulated ashlar that frame the image of a seated Maya ruler surrounded by his paraphernalia. The image is taken from one of the seated rulers sculpted on the Hieroglyphic Stairway at Copán, which tells the story of the dynasty that ruled the ancient Maya city from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE. The caption lauds the piece as the first fresco mural ever to be painted in Honduras. In another photograph, taken during one of the many visits the dictator paid to the school, Tiburcio Carías and his wife Elena pose in front of the mural (Figure 23); continuity between the living ruler of Honduras and a glorified ancient one seems to be the subtext of the picture.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> This Maya framing of modern rulers has seen a revival in recent years. The inauguration of President Ricardo Maduro (2002-2006) took place in the archeological site itself at night time, which

Maya art is an art of the court, exalting rulers and nobles in architectural and monumental freestanding sculpture, vases, mural paintings and other forms. From the extensive catalog of Maya forms he could draw on, López Rodezno chose as the centerpiece of the *Corredor Maya* at the ENBA a dynastic ruler from the Hieroglyphic Stairway at Copán, with all his sumptuous attire. For the mural at Banco Atlántida, he chose the court scene from the north wall of Room 2 at Bonampak, editing out the scenes of fierce war and chaos that fill the other three walls in the room, with the ruler as the main protagonist. While in the court scene reproduced he still incorporated two captives (of the ten or so that in the original mural appear bleeding or passing out under the ruler), he centered his attention on the victorious ruler at the center, and the lavish pageant of warriors, nobles and musicians that surround him.

In his public works containing Maya imagery, López Rodezno uses the aristocratic idea of a powerful, sacralized ruler. Metonymically, this artistic program corresponds perfectly to the agenda of a dictator who endorsed the construction of Honduras as indigenously Maya, while repressing or ignoring the rural popular classes coming from a variety of ethnic groups.

## ***Conclusion***

Oyuela's assertion that López Rodezno rendered the Amerindian past mythic holds true, if we consider myth as something opposed to history or to actuality. The artist did indeed confect a beautiful mixture of Pre-Columbian and modern forms as well as techniques, but the historical reality of contemporary indigenous peoples of Honduras is

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allowed for a very theatrical mise en scene, with the actors wrapped by the Maya forms of the set and the actual, dramatically lit monuments. During the inauguration, a ball game performance was done by a Mexican company, using fire lights.



ignored in his construction of Maya themes. Rather, his Maya motifs exalt something distant in time and space, something foreign to 20<sup>th</sup> century Honduras for most people, when these images are not glorifying the idea of power concentrated in one individual. The mythic air and aesthetic veil of the images obscure this fact, but the presence and configuration of the Maya attired figures substantiate this point.

If various types of indigenism were widespread practices in Latin America during the 1920s and 30s, López Rodezno's Maya motifs are a very late instance of that practice. The lack of museums in Honduras, as noted in the catalog to the first *Antología de las Artes Plásticas de Honduras* in 1990, would account for unfamiliarity with artistic languages among the Honduran public. Importing trends and content seems to have been a strategy of López Rodezno not only in his own work, but also in the agenda he set at the ENBA. I suggest that, given the unawareness of contemporary artistic trends, the Honduran public could not have been critical of the anachronism to which he returned. Nonetheless, his work fit the official ideological agenda of the nation state very well.

Created through Carías's own will and without any legal instrument, the ENBA appeared as a device of the state, one well suited for the elaboration and communication of a discourse of official nationalism. Working closely with the Carías regime, López Rodezno directed the school during the 1940s along those lines. There he practiced and emphasized the development of Maya themes. He approached fragmented Maya motifs with much fantasy, which in the end alienated him and his artistic practice from the actual context of contemporary Honduras, especially its popular classes.

## ***CONCLUSION***

The works by Armando Morales and Arturo López Rodezno discussed in this thesis correspond to the way in which large parts of the population of their respective countries imagine their own nation, however different in medium and format these works are. Sandino's revolution and ideals constitute up to this day a central aspect of a discourse by which many Nicaraguans envisage their nation. Through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Sandinismo* dispersed itself beyond the Nicaraguan borders, and Sandino is an important referent even for those Hondurans who continue to resist the policies of conservative and reactionary governments their nation has seen for over a century. During the first stages of Sandino's revolution, it was indeed the Honduran poet Froylán Turcios who represented Sandino before the international community. Today, the Honduran ruling class fails to understand or respond adequately to the modern history of the country, and prefers to locate the origin of the nation in a fictive Maya past they imagine at will.

The differing modes by which *La saga de Sandino* and López Rodezno's Maya motifs imagine the nation can be inferred through the divergent formal nature of the works. López Rodezno's symmetric designs for his murals at ENBA and Banco Atlántida constitute static, self-contained images, which always refer back solely to the ruler situated at their center. At best, the attention of the viewer will shift from one ruler to another or from one aspect of Maya courtly life to another. In this way, his work maintains a contrived vision predicated upon a single all-powerful ruler. It fixates upon a

supposedly ideal and unretrievable ancient past, and by the same token inhibits the viewer from thinking about and reconceiving a Honduran nation inclusive of its popular classes.

Morales's use of open form in *La saga de Sandino* allows the viewer to imagine aspects of the narrative evoked by the prints that go well beyond their frames. Instead of creating a static, always present image of an idealized past, the images of Morales's portfolio create a poetic and narrative dynamic that sets the viewer in a position to retrieve actual history and experience. These images provide a temporality in which the viewer can reconstruct the events of the past and perceive their continuity with the present, and they invite the viewer to participate in the process of imagining the nation.

It is clear that López Rodezno's pictorial strategy for envisioning the nation is exclusive, whereas Morales's is inclusive. The crowds of people that came to see *La saga de Sandino* when it was exhibited in Managua in 1994 legitimize the narrative the portfolio contains: an episode of Nicaraguan history that arose through popular support, and one which propels Nicaraguan history up to this day. The exalted and abstract "Mayaness" of Honduras, which López Rodezno helped to construct, continues to be used as legitimizing frame when inaugurating the presidency of a member of Carías's conservative political party, while also being a branding device for an unwieldy array of enterprises. Forever excluded by the lens of this deceptive rhetorical device are the nation's popular classes.

In chapter 5 of his book *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson elaborates on what can be described as a popular type of nationalism. The evidence presented in this thesis shows Morales's project *La saga de Sandino* to be inscribed by this form of

nationalism. Chapter 6 of Anderson's book, titled "Official Nationalism and Imperialism," elaborates the type of nationalism that arises in reaction to popular nationalism. López Rodezno's artistic practice is inscribed by an official nationalism. The contrasting visions and discourses implemented through the artistic projects studied in this thesis demonstrate that opposing conceptions of the nation can be located within the art of 20<sup>th</sup> century Central America. Thus, in the study of the art of the Central American Isthmus, we must seek to locate competing conceptions of the nation state for each case.

**FIGURES**



Figure 1: Armando Morales, *Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas*, color lithograph, 1993.  
Image: 52.5 x 70 cm; paper: 56 x 76 cm



Figure 2: Armando Morales, *Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas*, oil on canvas, 1986.  
185 x 240 cm



Figure 3: Armando Morales, *Sandino en la montaña*, color lithograph, 1993.  
Image: 52 x 72 cm; paper: 56 x 76 cm

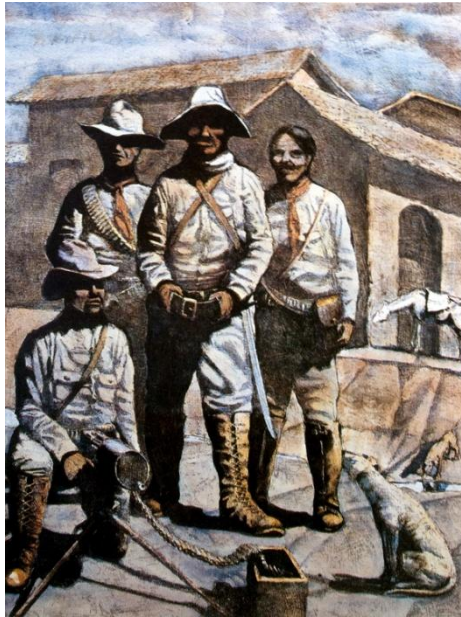


Figure 4: Armando Morales, *General Pedro (Pedrón) Altamirano*, color lithograph, 1993. Image: 52.5 x 70 cm; paper: 56 x 76 cm



Figure 5: Armando Morales, *Adiós a Sandino*, color lithograph, 1993. Image: 53 x 70.5 cm; paper: 56 x 76 cm

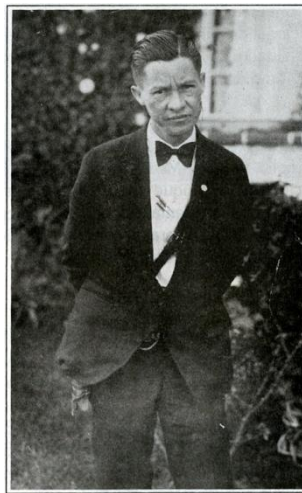


Figure 6: Anonymous photographer, Augusto César Sandino



Figure 7: Anonymous photographer, Augusto César Sandino



Figure 8: Armando Morales, *La última cena del General Sandino*, color lithograph, 1993. Image: 51.5 x 69 cm; paper: 56 x 76 cm





Figure 9: Armando Morales, *Prendimiento del General Sandino frente al "Hormiguero"*, color lithograph, 1993. Image: 52.5 x 69 cm; paper: 56 x 76 cm

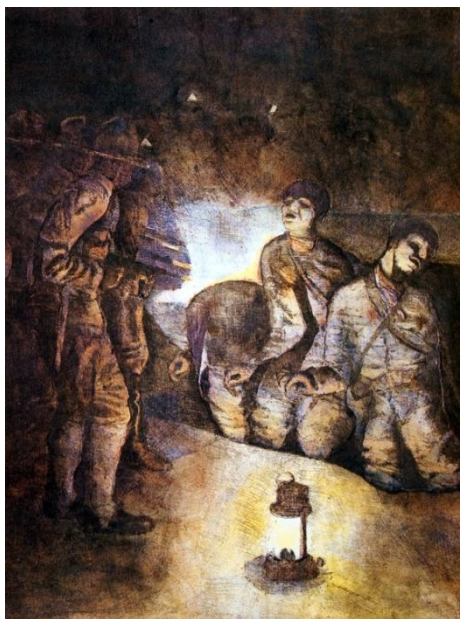


Figure 10: Armando Morales, *Asesinato del general Sandino detrás del viejo campo de aviación*, color lithograph, 1993. Image: 52 x 70 cm; paper: 56 x 76 cm



Figure 11: Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes, Honduras, 1940s

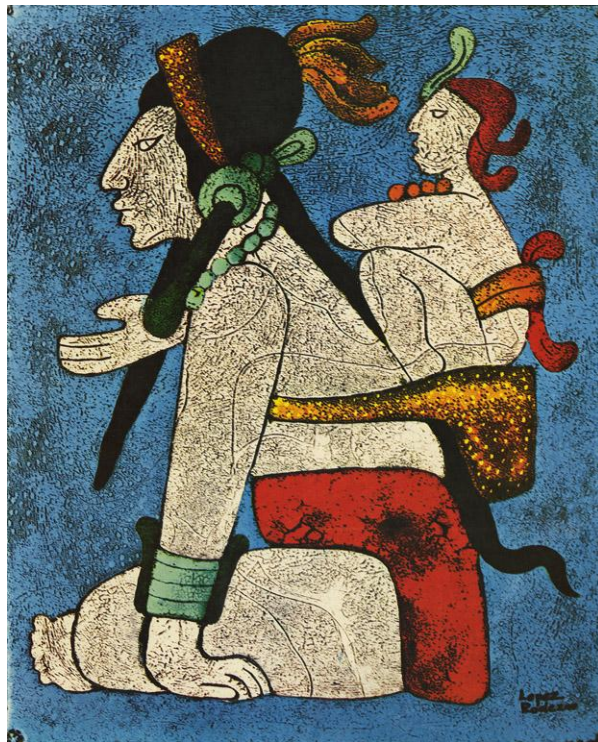


Figure 12: Arturo López Rodezno, *Mujer y niño*, enamel on copper, c. 1960s



Figure 13: Arturo López Rodezno, *Fragmento de escultura*, enamel on copper, c. 1960s



Figure 14: Center secondary marker, after removal. Ball Court IIb; Center, Copán, Honduras



Figure15: Arturo López Rodezno, *Personaje Maya*, enamel on copper, c. 1960s

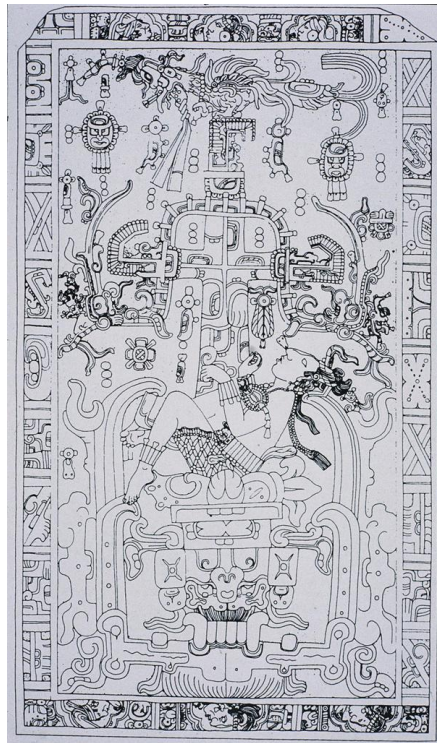


Figure 16: Palenque, Temple of Inscriptions, sarcophagus lid: drawing of relief.  
Late 7<sup>th</sup> century CE



Figure 17: Detail of “Maya Mural” at Banco Atlántida, enamel on copper.  
Complete mural: 90x1200 cm

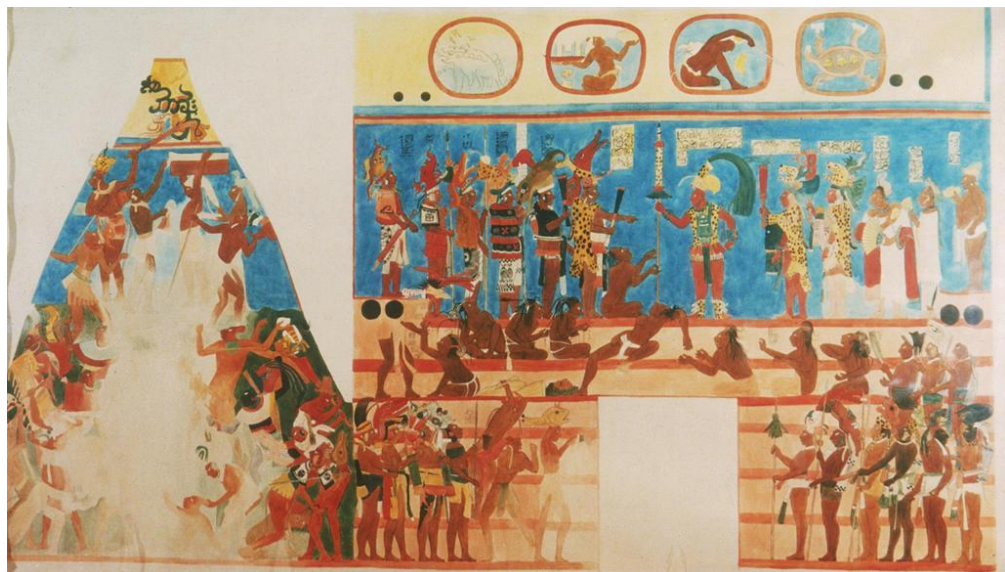


Figure 18: Temple of Frescoes: Bonampak, Room 2, North wall. Detail: Warriors surrounding captives on a terraced platform. Copy by Antonio Tejada. Original mural from c. 800 CE

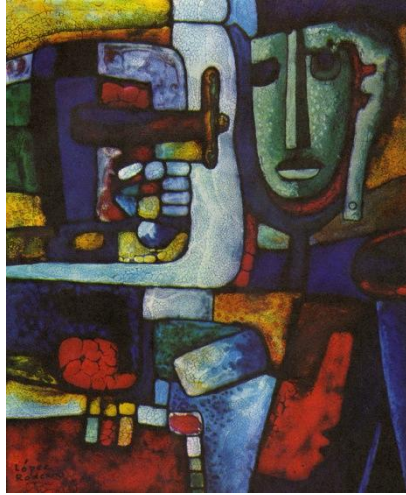


Figure 19: *Untitled*, Arturo López Rodezno, enamel on copper, c. 1960s



Figure 20: Aspect of *Parque La Concordia*, Tegucigalpa. Augusto Morales y Sánchez, architect. 1935

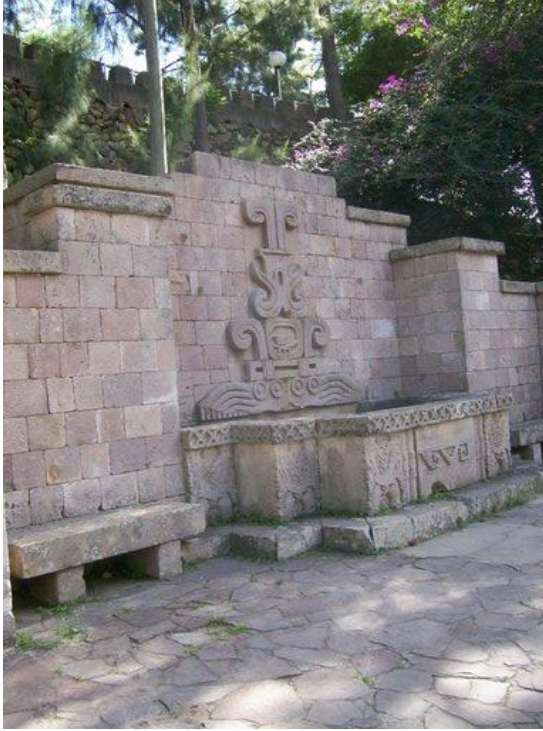


Figure 21: Aspect of *Parque El Picacho*, Tegucigalpa



Figure 22: *Corredor Maya*, ENBA, 1940s. Frescoes by López Rodezno



Figure 23: Tiburcio Carías Andino in one of his many visits to the ENBA during the 1940s



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