“A Desperate Pioneerism:” Laura Márquez’s Art and Social Engagement in 1960s Paraguay

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“A Desperate Pioneerism:”
Laura Márquez’s Art and Social Engagement in 1960s Paraguay

by
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments........................................................................................................................................................... ii

List of Illustrations................................................................................................................................................................ iv

Introduction............................................................................................................................................................................. 1

Chapter 1: Becoming a South American Artist in Argentina and Paraguay................................................. 11

Chapter 2: Negotiating Local and International: Márquez’s Ñandutí Works........................................ 28

Chapter 3: Picturing Dictatorship......................................................................................................................... 43

Chapter 4: Innovation and Chance at the 1967 São Paulo Biennial...................................................... 58

Conclusion.......................................................................................................................................................................... 75

Bibliography...................................................................................................................................................................... 79

Illustrations......................................................................................................................................................................... 82
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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1: Laura Márquez, *Untitled* from the series *Musical* (Musical), 1958, gouache and watercolor on paper, 33cm x 65cm. Private collection

Fig. 2: Laura Márquez, *Untitled*, c.1960, ink on paper (monotype), 9.5cm x 13.8cm. Private collection

Fig. 3: Laura Márquez, *Untitled*, c. 1960, ink on paper (monotype), 9.5cm x 13.8cm. Private collection

Fig. 4: Laura Márquez, *Untitled* from the series *Los Soles* (the Suns), c. 1960, oil on canvas

Fig. 5: Laura Márquez, *Untitled* from the series *Los Soles* (the Suns), c. 1960

Fig. 6: Laura Márquez, *Untitled* from the series *Cardumenes* (Shoal), 1963, oil on wood, 159cm x 159cm. Private collection

Fig. 7: Laura Márquez, *Untitled*, 1963, ink on paper. Collection of Jorge Gross Brown

Fig. 8: Marciana Rojas, *Trompetista* (Trumpeter), c. 1960, clay. Photo courtesy of Centro de Artes Visuales/Museo del Barro

Fig. 9: Marino Marini, *Pomona seduta* (Seated Pomona), 1946, bronze. Photo courtesy of Artstor.

Fig. 10: Laura Márquez, *Untitled*, 1966/2006, oil on canvas, 192cm x 201cm. Private Collection

Fig. 11: Laura Márquez, *Untitled*, 1966, oil on canvas, 66cm x 40cm. Collection of Jorge Gross Brown

Fig. 12: Laura Márquez, *Untitled*, 1966, linocut, 15cm x 15cm. Private Collection

Fig. 13: Laura Márquez, *Untitled*, c.1966, linocut, 20cm x 38cm. Collection of Daniel Nasta

Fig. 14: Laura Márquez, *Ñandutí de la Victoria* (Ñanduti of Victory), 1965, mixed media, 149.9cm x 149.9cm

Fig. 15: Laura Márquez, *Seis meses de silencio* (Six Months of Silence), 1967, synthetic paint on canvas, 160cm x 165cm. Collection Centro de Artes Visuales / Museo del Barro

Fig. 16: Robert Rauschenberg, *White Painting* [three panel], 1951. Collection San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
Fig. 17: Laura Márquez, *Seis meses de silencio*, verso

Fig. 18: Laura Márquez, *Seis meses de silencio*, detail

Fig. 19: Laura Márquez, *Presión/Represión* (Pressure/Repression), c. 1960, aquatint and embossing on paper, 47cm x 35.5cm. Private collection

Fig. 20: Laura Márquez, *Homenaje a Inés* (Homage to Inés), 1971-1981. Exaedro

Fig. 21: Laura Márquez, *Untitled*, 1993. Exaedro

Fig. 22: Laura Márquez, *Untitled*, 1973

Fig. 23: Laura Márquez, *Untitled*, n.d., embossing on paper, 47cm x 35.5cm. Private collection

Fig. 24: Photograph of Laura Márquez with *Puertas Inútiles* (Useless Doors) at the São Paulo Biennial, 1967

Fig. 25: Drawing created by Javier Rodríguez Alcalá after his involvement with an attempted reinstallation of *Puertas Inútiles* in Paraguay in 2006

Fig. 26: Drawing created by Javier Rodríguez Alcalá after his involvement with an attempted reinstallation of *Puertas Inútiles* in Paraguay in 2006

Fig. 27: Drawing created by Javier Rodríguez Alcalá after his involvement with an attempted reinstallation of *Puertas Inútiles* in Paraguay in 2006

Fig. 28: Drawing created by Ricardo Migliorisi of the São Paulo iteration of *Puertas Inútiles*. Published in Ticio Escobar’s *Una interpretación de las artes visuales en el Paraguay* (2007)

Fig. 29: Carlos Colombino, *La Chismosa* (The Gossip), 1969, mixed media. Photograph courtesy of Lia Colombino
Introduction

In a paragraph toward the end of her 1972 publication *Arte latinoamericano actual*, critic Marta Traba makes a brief albeit resolute nod to the artists whose work – due to political, economic, or geographic circumstances – has been unfairly overlooked both regionally and internationally. According to Traba, “[in] some extreme cases of underdevelopment and isolation, as in the countries of Central America, or Bolivia, or Paraguay, the art world’s will to understand what is happening is so dense, that it clouds any intent to find out what occurs in the particular [artistic] sphere of a country or continent.”¹ Here, Traba implies that a prevalent disinterest in or preconceived notions of artistic production from certain Latin American regions obstructs earnest attempts to acknowledge the valuable contributions of artists working in those locations. Even within *Arte latinoamericano actual* – a book explicitly focused on Latin America, conscious of recognition gaps, and critical of artistic hegemonies – Central Americans and Bolivians rarely (and Paraguayans never) enter into Traba’s extensive discussions of 1960s artists and their precursors. After citing these omissions from the art historical canon, the author proceeds to mention the name of one artist – one person in a noted country of neglect, fighting relentlessly to break through the barriers of regional isolation and international ignorance to engage with the avant-garde production of her field: Laura Márquez.² In the paragraph’s closing

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¹ Marta Traba, *Arte latinoamericano actual* (Caracas: Ediciones de la Biblioteca de la Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1972), 111.


Martra Traba seems to have left a great impact on Márquez, as well. In her autobiographical text “Memoria de infancias” – where the artist mentions only the most lasting impressions made over a span of more than seventy years – she recalls meeting Traba at a conference in 1964 at the Museo de Arte Moderno in Buenos Aires.
sentence Traba writes, “works like that of the Paraguayan artist Laura Márquez show the characteristics of a desperate pioneerism; and it is fair to credit her with that achievement of struggle.”

Traba is not alone in underscoring Márquez’s significant contributions among the many Latin American artists – both within and outside of Paraguay – working against trying economic, political, and social conditions during the 1960s. In Ticio Escobar’s seminal work on Paraguayan art history, *Una interpretación de las artes visuales en el Paraguay* (first published in 1982), Márquez appears in a chapter titled “La apertura” or “the opening” – a period of roughly ten years beginning around 1960 in which the author identifies a newfound receptivity in Paraguay to then-current European, North American, and South American artistic tendencies. Escobar pinpoints the arrival of Márquez, who returned to Paraguay in 1960 after studying art for ten years in Buenos Aires, as having “helped to stir the atmosphere…bringing [from Buenos Aires] a [solid academic] formation, a restless temperament, and a contagious enthusiasm.” Escobar adds that, throughout the decade, the artist “[moved] in two directions; growing and adjusting her [own] work…as much as constantly opening herself to avant-garde influences of which she [also] acted as a transmitter.”

Beyond Traba and Escobar’s identification of Márquez’s international connections and desire for innovation, contemporary Paraguayan artists – especially women – also recognize

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3 Traba, *Arte latinoamericano actual*, 111.
   Original Spanish: “En tales situaciones, obras como la de la paraguaya Laura Márquez revisten las características de un pionerismo desesperado; y es justo abonarle ese mérito de ariete.”

   Original Spanish: “La llegada de Laura Márquez ayudó a remover el ambiente; luego de varios anos volvía de Buenos Aires trayendo una buena formación, un temperamento inquieto y un entusiasmo contagioso.”

5 Ibid., 442.
   Original Spanish: “se mueve en una doble dirección; tanto crece y ajusta su obra…como se abre constantemente a
Márquez’s persistent legacy within the local artistic milieu. During interviews conducted with female Paraguayan artists throughout 2012, roughly half of the women interviewed referenced Márquez as a crucial Paraguayan precursor – a “pillar of modernity” with “exquisite work.”

Many of these artists have collected Márquez’s paintings and sculptures, remember her brilliant, passionate disputes with other members of the art community, and admire her persistence within an environment that was utterly unequipped to support artistic production.

Despite the recognition and praise (however limited) that Márquez has received for her tireless artistic activity and progressive contributions, her signature appropriation of and transmission of international artistic tendencies subjected her to the same criticism accorded many Latin American artists driven by “opening” impulses in the 1960s. Traba, for example, was a harsh critic of artists who “succumbed” to hegemonic cultural influences. Writing on Latin American artists’ adoption of tendencies developed in the United States, Traba identifies three “endemic defects” that these artists’ work can potentially suffer:

1) They derive too obviously from foreign models without managing to recreate them according to their own style; 2) They move cautiously and with a lack of resources in trembling areas where they feel insecure and, in these cases adopt the easiest signs, least prohibitive [in regards to general] appropriation; for example, range of colors, clear design, flatness; 3) This same insecurity propels them to change their form of expression constantly, thereby making it impossible to follow their dramatic transformations, in which they are seen to operate much more as artisans with a certain trade than as inventors of languages.


7 Traba, *Arte latinoamericano actual*, 111.
Original Spanish: “Fuera de esta lista tentativa de ejemplos de acatamiento no-incondicional de la invasión americana, los inventarios de artistas, país por país, padecen tres defectos endémicos de la década: 1) Derivan demasiado obviamente de modelos extranjeros, sin lograr recrearlos según un estilo propio; 2) Se mueven con timidez y con pobreza de recursos dentro de zonas tembladeras en las cuales se sienten inseguros y, en estos casos adoptan los signos más fáciles, menos dispensiosos de la invasión; por ejemplo, gama de colores, diseño neto, planos; 3) Su misma inseguridad los impulsa a cambiar constantemente de forma expresiva, de tal modo que es imposible seguir sus vertiginosas transformaciones, en las cuales se los ve operar mucho más en función de...
In Traba’s opinion, the Latin American’s mindless embrace of artistic forms and concepts generated by highly modernized (industrialized, commercialized) nations inevitably resulted in lackluster, superficial work. These artists, aware of their works’ unstable formal and conceptual basis, became nomads – wandering cross-tendency without purpose or the ability to innovate.

While Traba’s positive mention of Márquez in her book indicates that – from her perspective – the artist’s work did not suffer these “defects,” Escobar makes the opposite determination. In reference to Paraguay, Escobar characterizes the 1960s as a decade of frantic local efforts to match North and South (Argentina and Brazil) American avant-gardes, both of which retained aspects of modern European art. Escobar equates this era to “a marathon [that] managed to place art produced in Paraguay on the same level as that of the great metropolises.”

While the author cites a handful of situations in which Paraguayans produced “original interpretations of cosmopolitan tendencies,” he echoes Traba’s aforementioned critiques when assessing Márquez’s oeuvre. According to Escobar, the majority of Márquez’s works from this decade possess a cursory or transitory character, with the artist succumbing to the widespread problem of a rushed and acritical incorporation of foreign models. Escobar describes Márquez’s Paraguayan artistic production as an “incessant search for distinct experiences that rarely had

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8 Escobar, Une interpretación, 452.
Original Spanish: “Una carrera maratónica había logrado nivelar el arte producido en el Paraguay con el de las grandes metrópolis...[un] desesperado gesto de actualización que quemó etapas y saltó por encima de sus propias condiciones.”

9 Ibid., 435.
Original Spanish: “Durante la década del ’60, el proceso se propone profundizar el movimiento de la década anterior y actualizarlo rápidamente poniéndolo en horario internacional. Por primera vez se logra producir ciertas interpretaciones originales de tendencias cosmopolitas (como la neofiguración y determinadas formas de abstracción) y algunos resultados consistentes. Pero la apresurada incorporación de modelos ajenos promueve muchas veces imágenes superficiales y pasajeras.”
time to solidify into definitive forms.” Thus, in his opinion, the artist’s production throughout the 1960s demonstrates the era’s lean toward superficial appropriation.

Bookended by Márquez’s studies in Buenos Aires and by her move to New York City in 1970, the 1960s—a rare, extended period during which the artist resided in her country of birth—hold special significance in her memory; yet, from Márquez’s perspective, the “incessant search” that Escobar critiques as her weakness was instead the central force fueling her artistic production. In a short essay by Dina Burstyn published in a catalog accompanying Laura Márquez: Gráficos 1965-73, a 1980 exhibition of Márquez’s prints held at Galería Arte/Sanos in Asunción, the author cites a poignant reflection that emerged in conversation with Márquez. Living in New York City at the time of their discussion, the artist remembers her decade in Paraguay as follows:

I lived very far from here, inventing inventions without stopping, but the world didn’t know them, because it [was] always [too] late [for] me. I always arrived late, to pick up forms, to conferences for inventors, to birthdays, to send cards. Mondays were like Sundays that had gotten late, and [my] Mondays were [actually] Tuesdays [that had almost ended]. But when I invented it was always early, even many years early. This quotation communicates a great deal about Márquez’s artistic drive, and also about the difficult aspects of her character. What Escobar deems cursory explorations of multiple formal and conceptual concerns are for Márquez significant innovations, driven by a profound restlessness. That is, her primary concern was not to create complete or “definitive” works, but rather to respond through constant experimentation to the agitated and unsure aspects of her lived

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10 Ibid., 445-446.
Original Spanish: “tenía una actitud…desarrollada fundamentalmente a través de la incesante búsqueda de experiencias siempre distintas que pocas veces tuvieron tiempo de cuajar en formas definitivas.”

Original Spanish: “yo vivía muy lejos de aquí, inventando inventos sin parar, pero el mundo no los conocía, porque siempre se me hacia tarde. Llegaba siempre tarde, a retirar formularios, a los congresos de inventores, a los cumpleaños, a despachar cartas. Los lunes eran como domingos, que se habían hecho tarde, y los lunes eran
experience. Her statement also indicates that, beyond the inhibitive economic, political, and social environment within which the artist resided, she also struggled against her own disadvantageous personality traits – in particular, an inability to complete certain tasks that may have helped propel her career forward.

In this thesis, I examine the challenging economic, political, and social contexts that Márquez encountered in 1960s Paraguay – both the ones she was able to navigate with wit and ingenuity, and the ones that eventually led her to abandon Paraguay for New York City. I also conduct in-depth analyses of series and individual works that stand out among Márquez’s oeuvre. In the specific works analyzed here, Márquez engaged with what was perhaps the most pervasive question plaguing Paraguayan artists throughout the decade: to what extent, if at all, could they incorporate international artistic tendencies into their artworks without negating the regional particularities inherent in the art historical trajectory of their country? Overall, I consider Márquez an invaluable “transmitter” – both carrying international forms and concepts into Paraguay, and diffusing her experience of local reality. In the end, I demonstrate that Márquez identified numerous, compelling justifications for her adoption of “foreign” artistic tendencies, which include but are not limited to her education in Buenos Aires; her ability to recognize visual and conceptual characteristics of these tendencies within local tradition; and her belief that the fundamental visual languages of these tendencies could effectively communicate both her personal struggles and the broader political hardships present in Paraguayan daily life.

Chapter 1 begins by addressing Márquez’s self-proclaimed identity as a “South American,” rather than Paraguayan, artist. I briefly review her upbringing in Asunción, the capital city of Paraguay, and examine the ten years she spent as an art student and activist in
Buenos Aires (from 1950-1960). I then discuss how, upon her return to Paraguay, Márquez entered life under the dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner (1954-1989), which shaped her intercultural experience by way of its historically-driven, internationally-focused economic and political goals. With a focus on the Stroessner regime’s waning relationship with Argentina and growing ties with Brazil and the United States, I emphasize how these shifting influences in turn affected the Paraguayan art scene’s reception to particular international tendencies. I close with an exploration of three series of paintings from the late 1950s and early 1960s that convey Márquez’s awareness of and interest in European and North American formal concerns.

I open Chapter 2 with an analysis of the contentious debates in Latin American around local adoption of tendencies formed and developed in highly modernized nations. I locate the ideals and artworks of Márquez at a floating point between the “pro-universal” and “pro-regional” poles by making the case that the imagery included in her body of work together with her social involvement throughout the 1960s advocate a locally-oriented exploration of international artistic tendencies. To support my argument, I analyze a group of paintings and prints in which Márquez utilized imagery related to ñandutí – a type of lace widely identified as distinctly Paraguayan. Through her discerning depictions of this traditional art form, Márquez exposed its historical as well as contemporary visual and conceptual complexities, thereby creating a channel through which she linked ñandutí with optical, kinetic, and pop art. Ultimately, I suggest, Márquez posited these ñandutí works as physical justifications for a strategic intermingling of traditional, regional art and international artistic tendencies while simultaneously acknowledging the complexity of allowing celebrated craft and contemporary art to spar openly within the same picture plane.
Having addressed how Márquez used local imagery as a means for exploring formal and conceptual questions associated with optical, kinetic, and pop art, Chapter 3 investigates the artist’s use of a geometric, abstract formal language as a means for conveying local psychology. During the 1960s, this local psychology was darkened by the violence and oppression of Alfredo Stroessner’s dictatorship. I take as my primary case study a painting titled Seis meses de silencio (Six Months of Silence) – first freeing it from the highly specific and thus confining art-historical categorizations of various scholars, and then recontextualizing the painting’s formal and thematic content in accordance with the specific sociopolitical environment inhabited and ostensibly absorbed by Márquez: 1960s Paraguay under brutal dictatorship. As a secondary point, I examine Márquez’s frequent revisitation of the forms and themes that appear in Seis meses de silencio by turning, near the end of the chapter, to an intaglio series titled Presión/Represión (Pressure/Repression), as well as to an untitled print that is closely related to the series through form and process. Despite slight formal variations and differences in medium, the paintings and prints demonstrate the artist’s profound interest in geometry and the potential of withholding color. My analysis centers on her use of poetic tiles to underscore the formal and conceptual aspects of works, and also the possibility of ascribing these works themes such as injustice, violence, and oppression.

Finally, Chapter 4 examines the 1967 São Paulo Biennial as a moment of coalescence in Márquez’s formal and conceptual explorations, as well as a turning point in her career. I explain the significance that this Biennial held for the artists of Paraguay, allowing them the rare possibility to exhibit their work internationally and to seek acknowledgement beyond the region. I then focus my discussion upon the single, large work Márquez displayed at the 1967 Biennial – a modular installation of metal frames and canvas “doors” titled Puertas Inútiles (Useless...
Doors). Through analysis of the work’s structure as well as the environmental and sensorial experiences it produced, I demonstrate that both innovation and chance were key characteristics of its production and internal workings. Furthermore, I identify these same, key characteristics in Paraguay’s newly restructured São Paulo Biennial participant selection process – a process that enabled Márquez to exhibit work in the 1967 Biennial, and ultimately drove her creation of *Puertas Inútiles*. A close examination of articles published in the local Paraguayan newspaper *La Tribuna* around the Biennial reveals the reasons for restructuring the selection process, the specific changes that were made, and the reactions of artists to the new system both immediately before and after the Biennial opened. In the end, I return to *Puertas Inútiles*, suggesting that it can be read as an expression of the artist’s hope for innovation; of her faith in chance as a process with the potential to eliminate human bias; and as an inquiry into whether or not the adjustments made to a broken system truly represent progress and justice.

Within this thesis my desire is to proffer careful, historically-grounded interpretations that further research can build upon or, just as importantly, argue against. One of the major difficulties I faced throughout this process was an utter absence of scholarly work (published or not) focused exclusively on Márquez’s artistic production and social involvement. The limited commentaries that have emerged over time around particular works within Márquez’s oeuvre have sought to classify them as outward-looking, superficial, concrete, minimal, or purely formal – classifications that impede in-depth examination of their complexity. This lack of holistic scholarly writing on Márquez’s work was exacerbated by the fact that there is no extant archive dedicated to the artist from which to draw primary materials. Thus, it became my task to amass – with the generous assistance of Gabriela Zuccolillo – a preliminary digital archive pertaining to Márquez.
The digital archive I built to facilitate the writing of this thesis consists primarily of recently photographed (either by myself or by Zuccolillo) artwork, exhibition catalogs, articles from *La Tribuna*, socio-political and economic publications addressing 1960s Paraguay (of which there are few), interviews I conducted over the course of five years with artists and historians who know Márquez, and interviews that Zuccolillo conducted with Márquez. These materials, along with Ticio Escobar’s ambitious book *Una interpretación de las artes visuales en el Paraguay*, form the basis of my holistic approach to researching and writing about Márquez’s work. Based upon the aforementioned materials I gathered, I then proceeded to interweave formal analysis, biography, historical narrative, and extant art criticism – all the while attending not only to Márquez’s artistic production but also to her actions outside the studio, which I believe were mutually enriching. In the end, I hope to direct my reader toward the wider field of action that colored Márquez’s life in 1960s Paraguay and to suggest that her restless, broad-reaching contributions deserve the careful attention of art publics both within her country of birth and far beyond.
Chapter 1

Becoming a South American Artist in Argentina and Paraguay

Appearing in the first line of the catalog essay authored by Márquez that accompanied her 2006 Asunción retrospective is the self-defining declaration: “Laura Márquez is a South American artist.” While very recently, then, Márquez identified more strongly with an entire continent than with her country of birth, this statement finds its origins in the 1950s and 1960s – two decades during which Márquez resided in South America and was directly influenced by the artistic milieus of three South American countries: Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil. In this chapter, I trace the artist’s personal ties with these nations, as well as the broader economic and political situations that helped shape her intercultural experience. I begin by providing general information regarding Márquez’s middle-class upbringing in Asunción, and regarding her formative years as an art student at the Academia de Bellas Artes de Buenos Aires (Academy of Fine Arts of Buenos Aires). I then move to an in-depth discussion of the economic and political policies under Alfredo Stroessner, whose dictatorship began effecting drastic change on both domestic and international levels in 1954. These economic and political changes in turn produced cultural shifts, which Márquez experienced upon returning to Paraguay in 1960. I close with an exploration of three series of abstract paintings from the late 50s and early 60s in which Márquez’s interest in European and North American tendencies becomes evident. Overall, I


13 While Márquez did move to New York City in 1970 (after having visited the United States once in 1966), and also visited Paris in 1966, I will accept Escobar’s argument that the artistic tendencies of Europe and New York City had thoroughly infiltrated the art scenes of Argentina and Brazil by the 1960s, and therefore Laura learned of these tendencies after they had been filtered through the sub-metropolis.
hope to set the stage for the artist’s open and thoughtful uptake of various international formal and conceptual concerns through the 1960s as a strategy to convey her complex local reality.

Márquez, born in Asunción in 1929 to Paraguayan mother Catalina Moscarda and Argentine father Angel Márquez, grew up in a comfortable middle-class home. Moscarda managed the household while Angel Márquez sold liquor produced at a family-owned factory based in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Márquez lived in Asunción until, at eighteen years of age, she moved to Buenos Aires with her parents and younger brother. It was there that Márquez, encouraged by an aunt who believed she had artistic potential, began studying art.

In 1950 Márquez entered the Academia de Bellas Artes de Buenos Aires, where she spent the next ten years as a student and passionate participant in academic affairs. She first completed the Manuel Belgrano cycle of pre-university studies, followed by the Prilidiano Pueyrredón cycle of undergraduate studies, and finally she completed graduate studies through the Academia’s Ernesto de la Cárcova program. In 1955, along with fellow colleagues including Julio Le Parc, Horacio J. Safons, Juan Carrera Buján, and María Vaner, Márquez took part in a student-led rebellion calling for pedagogical reformation at the Academia de Bellas Artes. During this rebellion students occupied the Academia – making demands for new courses and forcing numerous professors to resign. Márquez emerged as a leader, representing the student body as a

14 Gabriela Zuccolillo, e-mail message to author, July 21, 2017.
17 Le Parc and Márquez met at the Academia de Bellas Artes, and have remained close friends throughout their careers.
19 J.A. García Martínez, Arte y enseñanza artística en la Argentina (Buenos Aires: Fundación Bando de Boston, 1985), 133.
member of the Consejo Directivo de las Escuelas de Bellas Artes (Advisory Council of the Schools of Fine Arts) from 1955-1957, and also serving as Vice President of the Centro de Estudiantes de Artes Plásticas (CEAP – Center for Plastic Arts Students) from 1955-1960.\(^\text{20}\) In 1958, students’ efforts and demands culminated in the instatement of a new Plan de Estudios (Plan of Studies) at the Academia. This Plan de Estudios included a new set of classes on composition, as well as changes to the pedagogical structuring of art history, anatomy, and perspective courses.\(^\text{21}\) According to historian J.A. García Martínez, perspective courses in particular underwent significant (European-oriented) modernization, with perspective “treated more openly on the basis of descriptive geometry and visual perception derived from Bauhaus, New Design, [and] Gestalt.”\(^\text{22}\) Besides these modern pedagogical shifts, long-standing hierarchical structures eroded – with young artists who prioritized the individuality and freedom of students taking positions previously occupied by traditionally-trained professors.\(^\text{23}\) As I demonstrate in the final chapter of this thesis, Márquez’s investment in the empowerment of artists via systemic reformation extended well into the 1960s at least (little is known regarding the artist’s sociopolitical involvement in the 1970s), and became particularly evident in her activities around Paraguay’s 1967 São Paulo Biennial participant selection process.

As Escobar suggests in his first mention of Márquez in \textit{Una interpretación de las artes visuales en el Paraguay}, the artist’s extensive academic formation in an international art center


\(^{21}\) García Martínez, \textit{Arte y enseñanza}, 131.

\(^{22}\) Ibid.

Original Spanish: “La perspectiva se trato con mas amplitud de base por la geometría descriptiva y el perceptismo visual derivado de la Bauhaus, el New Design, la Gestalt y la visión encarada como tema visual.”

\(^{23}\) Ibid, 157.
set her apart from many locally-educated colleagues in Paraguay. Indeed, Paraguay’s first official academic program in fine arts did not emerge until 1957, with the creation of the Escuela de Bellas Artes de la Universidad Nacional (School of Fine Arts of the National University, hereafter EBA). According to Escobar, however, the EBA “[filled] more of a regressive role; [it relayed] retrograde teachings…incapable of providing adequate formations to meet the severe demands for natural representation, [and] did not even provide [students with] rudimentary techniques.” 24

Due to this acute lack in local academic arts education programs, many Paraguayans studying art in the 1950s and 1960s were either self-taught or received their formations at artist-run centers and studios in Asunción. Noteworthy among the capital’s art educators during this time period were Brazilian-born artists João Rossi (1923-2000) and Livio Abramo (1903-1993), and Paraguayan-born artists Olga Blinder (1921-2008) and Cira Moscarda (1934-1984). Rossi, a self-taught painter who arrived in Asunción by way of Montevideo in 1950, was originally contracted by the Asociación Cristiana de Jóvenes (Christian Youth Association) to teach physical education.25 Eventually, Rossi also gave art-related lectures and taught art courses at the Asociación, the Casa Argentina (Argentina House), and the Centro Cultural Paraguayo Americano (Paraguayan American Cultural Center).26 These conferences and courses, however, focused upon theoretical art appreciation rather than active art-making.27 Abramo, also self-

24 Escobar, Una interpretación, 417. Original Spanish: “cumple más bien una función retardataria; desenvuelve una enseñanza retrograde…incapaz de proporcionar una formación adecuada a las severas exigencias de la representación naturalista, ni siquiera aporta rudimentos técnicos”

25 Ibid., 385.

26 Ibid., 387.

27 Javier Rodríguez Alcalá, e-mail message to author, September 5, 2017.
taught, introduced a modern “syntactic/systematic” pedagogy to the Asunción art world through the courses he gave at the Misión Cultural Brasileña (Brazilian Cultural Mission, hereafter MCB), which included art history, Line and Color, and printmaking.  

In order to attend these classes, students paid a low monthly fee, although in some cases Abramo himself paid for the education of students without financial resources. Abramo also taught classes independently of the MCB. Olga Blinder, who studied with both Rossi and Abramo, co-founded the Escolinha de Arte (Little Art School) in 1959, as well as the Cursos de Arte de la Misión Cultural Brasileña (Art Courses of the MCB) in 1962, and served as director of both until 1976. Finally, Moscarda gave free, informal workshops in which she encouraged students to eschew convention through spontaneous and often irreverent cross-media explorations. These workshops took place at her private studio, which also served as a place of encounter for many young artists.

Despite Márquez’s official academic formation, which contrasted with that of her peers, Escobar and other historians emphasize that she also possessed a deeply nonconformist, anti-academic attitude. Escobar attributes this nonconformism to Márquez’s contact with the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella (Torcuato Di Tella Institute), an experimental art center and exhibition space in Buenos Aires. Indeed, although the artist never exhibited her own work at Di Tella, she was certainly aware of and affected by the avant-garde currents flowing through the Instituto. In an interview with artist and anthropologist Gabriela Zucolillo, Márquez recalled that it was thanks to Jorge Romero Brest’s quest to bring the “latest shout of Europe” to Di Tella’s Centro de

28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Escobar, Una interpretación, 433.
Artes Visuales (Center of Visual Arts) that she became acquainted with the work of Victor Vasarely and Arman. On the occasion of her encounter with Arman’s work, Márquez remembered being particularly struck by one of his accumulations. She described the piece as a large tray filled with used cigarette cases fixed together with a varnish-like substance that gave the overall object a glassy quality.\(^{32}\) Furthermore, Márquez recalled a phrase written by Arman that appeared in the exhibition catalog, which – both when she first read it and at the time of the interview – held great significance for her: “I have not invented accumulation; it is the result of time.”\(^{33}\) The significance of Márquez’s fixation on Arman’s accumulative processes becomes evident as I discuss her closely related interest in the repetition of form, which appears throughout her work but particularly in early series such as Los Soles and Cardumenes (c. 1960 and 1963, discussed later in this chapter); within her ñandutí prints and paintings (discussed in the second chapter); and in works such as Puertas Inútiles (1967, discussed in the final chapter).

In 1960, after Márquez married artist Juan Carrera Buján (with whom she studied in Buenos Aires), the couple moved to an Asunción that was markedly different from the one she had left in 1950 – primarily due to the dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner. Despite its oppressive methods, Stroessner’s regime was a modernizing force that brought unprecedented stability and international exchange to the country. His regime focused on building international relations and fortifying them via infrastructural projects that – beyond marking modernizing processes within

\(^{32}\) The artist’s memory serves her. In 1964 Arman presented the work 1 kilo de humo (1 kilo of smoke, 1962) at the Di Tella Institute’s International Prize contest. Julio Le Parc, Márquez’s close friend, also exhibited his work at this contest, which likely served as the impetus for her visit to Di Tella.

\(^{33}\) Premio Nacional e Internacional Instituto Torcuato Di Tella 1964 (Buenos Aires: Centro de Artes Visuales Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, 1964), 44.

The artist’s actual quote from the exhibition catalogue reads as follows: “No he inventado la acumulación, esta pertenece a la naturaleza y a la totalidad de los gestos cotidianos, pero esta apropiación es sistemáticamente elevada a la altura de una proposición artística.”
Paraguay’s borders – ensured its physical connection to other countries. Thus, a nation that had long suffered both physical and political isolation, and that historian Bernardo Neri Farina characterizes as “poverty-stricken, lacking infrastructure, without sources of sustainable production, [and] dependent on an agrarian economy” pre-Stroessner, underwent significant political, economic, and social change shortly after the dictatorship began.34

Having launched a successful military coup against President Federico Chávez in 1954, Stroessner inherited a nation mired in the aftermath of grave tragedies suffered from the moment of its independence (1811). Paraguay’s landlocked position (meaning that it has no Atlantic or Pacific coastline) served as a great disadvantage, and placed the country at the mercy of its powerful neighbors – Argentina and Brazil – for access to external markets. This geographic reality was exacerbated by an unfortunate paucity of valuable (extractable and exportable) natural resources, which forced Paraguay to survive on a marginally profitable agrarian economy. Paraguay’s already weak economy was additionally inhibited by a string of devastating wars – the War of the Triple Alliance (1864-1870, in which Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay fought against Paraguay), the Chaco War (1932-1935, fought between Paraguay and Bolivia), and the Paraguayan Civil War of 1947 – all of which depleted financial and human resources as well as geographic territory.35 Paraguay’s longstanding fear of absorption or exploitation by its neighbors, aggravated in particular by the War of the Triple Alliance, led the


35 Carlos R. Miranda, The Stroessner Era: Authoritarian Rule in Paraguay (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), 103. “For example, the 1930s territorial dispute with Bolivia over the Chaco, although ending in victory, dissipated more of Paraguay’s meager resources. With roughly 36,000 dead and more that $125 million spent, Paraguay was gain in shambles…The civil war of 1947…caused further instability and curtailed possibilities for additional growth.”
country’s leaders to establish and maintain isolationist policies over the course of roughly one hundred and forty years. These policies hindered the country’s engagement in international trade beyond its aforementioned dependence on Argentine and Brazilian ports.\(^{36}\)

According to Neri Farina, one of the Stroessner regime’s most significant actions during its first years in power was to overcome the hegemony exercised by Argentina over the Paraguayan economy.\(^{37}\) This hegemony, strong enough for Neri Farina to declare Argentina “the only lung by which our country breathed,“\(^{38}\) began around 1860\(^{39}\) and lasted into the mid-1950s. The bind reached an official breaking point when, after the fall of Juan Domingo Perón in 1955, Stroessner defended and provided refuge for the former Argentine President, thereby producing irreparable rift between the Paraguayan regime and Argentine Revolución Libertadora government.\(^{40}\)

At the same time that Stroessner cut ties with Argentina, he also sought to fortify preexisting and develop new links with major global powers – often for economic purposes. Immediately after assuming his role as president, Stroessner signed an agreement with the International Monetary Fund and instituted a plan to stabilize Paraguay by bringing down inflation, attracting foreign investment, and increasing the volume and diversity of exports.\(^{41}\) He

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\(^{36}\) It is crucial to note that these isolationist policies also went hand-in-hand with dictatorships that plagued Paraguay for the majority of its existence.


\(^{38}\) Ibid.

Original Spanish: “Argentina era el único pulmón por el cual respiraba nuestro país.”


\(^{41}\) Miranda, *The Stroessner Era*, 104.
then turned to develop a stronger political alliance with the neighboring country of Brazil, setting in motion what historians refer to as the Brazilianization of Paraguay. This shift toward Brazil perhaps has roots in Stroessner’s personal ties with the country (a part of his military training occurred in Rio de Janeiro and he was decorated by the country for several achievements). Regardless of the weight accorded to these personal ties, the seeds of exchange between Paraguay and Brazil grew with the alliance forged between Stroessner and Brazilian President Juscelino Kubitschek. This alliance sparked an initiative that became known as the *Marcha al Este* (March toward the East) in Paraguay. With funds from Kubitschek’s government, the Stroessner regime began constructing a paved route linking the cities of Coronel Oviedo, a midway point between the western city of Asunción and the eastern edge of the country, and Puerto President Franco on the Paraguay-Brazil border (now Ciudad del Este). By 1958 the route had been completed, and the two presidents proceeded to sign an agreement to build the Puente de la Amistad (International Friendship Bridge), which spanned the Paraná River to connect Puerto Presidente Franco with Foz do Iguaçu (Brazil). In 1965 the Puente was unveiled, and Paraguay


   The two presidents had various meetings – Stroessner was the first president to visit Brasilia in 1958.

44 Ibid., 29.
   Interestingly, these funds were actually made available through a loan to Brazil by the United States.

   This was particularly significant as in 1954, only 87 kilometers of the 1,215 kilometers of roads in Paraguay were paved – part of a larger issue with the transit of people and also locally produced goods to markets both within the country and internationally. At the time, ninety percent of the transport of product both nationally and internationally occurred by river (either the Paraguay or Parana River).

finally had a second major international outlet besides Asunción on the Argentine border through which to conduct external commerce.

In creating new links with global forces, Stroessner had his sights set specifically on the United States. Upon assuming power, Stroessner immediately sought to engage Dwight D. Eisenhower, then President of the United States. After numerous appeals, a meeting between Stroessner and Eisenhower finally occurred on July 23, 1956 – marking the beginning of a period of smooth relations between Paraguay and the U.S., which facilitated the consolidation and continuity of Stroessner’s power as well as the stabilization of Paraguay’s economy. Neri Farina argues that the U.S. was only interested in Paraguay due to its strategic location between Brazil and Argentina, and utilized the territory as a stronghold from which to prevent the spread of communism in South America. Stroessner was ostensibly aware both of the United States’ fear and of Paraguay’s role in assuaging it, and thus launched a decidedly anticommunist discourse within the country. Consequently, Paraguay received approximately thirty million dollars from the United States between 1954 and 1960. Finally, in support of Paraguay’s growing international relations, the country’s first national airlines, Lineas Aéreas Paraguayas (LAP), was created in March of 1963. LAP transported passengers, cargo, and mail – thereby facilitating direct bi-directional exchange between Asunción and capital cities across the United States, Latin America, and Europe.

As a result of the above-mentioned political and economic shifts, a cultural revolution occurred in Paraguay that involved both Argentina and Brazil. According to Escobar (and in

48 Ibid., 31-32.
49 Ibid., 38.
alignment with Thomas Whigham’s timeline for Argentina’s economic hegemony), from the end of the War of the Triple Alliance up until the 1950s, the predominant cultural influence exerted on Paraguay was Argentine. It was through Argentina, whose artists traveled to or studied in Europe far more frequently than those of its neighbor, that Paraguay received European artistic tendencies once-removed.\textsuperscript{50} Consequently, Escobar remarks that “at the beginning of the [20th] century, our visual arts were sustained neither by local tradition nor by common histories and not even by an effective cultural colonization that would bring [Paraguay] up-to-date with European styles.”\textsuperscript{51} It is possible that this “ineffective” cultural dominance fueled Márquez’s negative reception by various Paraguayan colleagues (addressed in Chapter 2) when she returned after ten years of study in Buenos Aires. In the mid 50s, however, the cultural hegemony of Argentina dwindled as Brazil – with its rapidly opening museums in principal cities, a significant new biennial, international exhibitions of Brazilian art and architecture, and a movement to teach South Americans Brazilian Portuguese\textsuperscript{52} – began to rise as the continent’s new modern art center.

Significantly, Escobar sustains that the year in which the Stroessner regime began also marks the birth of modern art in Paraguay. According to Escobar, this new era was initiated by the \textit{Grupo Arte Nuevo}’s first exhibition in 1954.\textsuperscript{53} The group’s show, titled \textit{Primera Semana de}

\textsuperscript{50} Escobar, \textit{Una interpretación}, 307.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 314.

Original Spanish: “a comienzos de siglo [XX], nuestras artes visuales no estaban sostenidas ni por una tradición propia ni por historias comunes y ni siquiera por una colonización cultural efectiva que le pusiera ‘al día’ con los estilos europeos.”

\textsuperscript{52} García, “Hegemonies,” 30.

\textsuperscript{53} For a compelling historical analyses that consider other factors/timelines in the modernization of Paraguayan art see Javier Rodríguez Alcalá’s essay “Modernidad y vanguardias en las artes plásticas Paraguayas: el Grupo Arte Nuevo o la reinvención del j(f)uego.”
Arte Moderno Paraguayo (First Week of Modern Paraguayan Art, evoking Brazil’s 1922 Semana de Arte Moderna), signaled a transformative moment in which participating artists questioned and transgressed traditional modes of art-making, proposing a new artistic language characterized by both formal and conceptual renovation. Escobar refers to the period initiated by this exhibition, which roughly extended from 1954-1960, as La Ruptura (the Rupture). Working in a distinct manner from their precursors, the Ruptura artists began opening themselves toward and drawing imagery from their contemporary, local surroundings while also attempting to express their personal experiences of a wider world. While Escobar considers the resulting works from this period to be “provisional and precarious,” he also underscores the significance of the newfound artistic preoccupation, in particular, with issues of form including rhythm, composition, line, and color.

In light of Paraguay’s rapidly internationalizing policies in the 1950s, it is not surprising that historians have worked to attribute the country’s cultural renovation to external influences. María Amalia García, for example, makes a compelling argument for viewing Paraguay’s “new art” as primarily linked to Brazil’s growing cultural presence in Asunción. She points to the noteworthy presence of Brazilian artists such as Rossi and Abramo (mentioned above, who arrived in Paraguay in 1950 and 1956 respectively), as well as the efforts of the Instituto Cultural Paraguay Brasil (Paraguay-Brazil Cultural Institute, founded in 1943, which later became the Misión Cultural Brasileña) in Asunción. Escobar, on the other hand, ascribes particular developments within the Paraguayan cultural renovation to diverse global powers. For example,

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54 Escobar, Una interpretación, 396.
55 Ibid., 383.
the author states that Asunción learned of cubism and constructivism through Buenos Aires, and mentions the strong influence that Di Tella’s activities had on Paraguayan art in the mid-1960s. He also argues that two different cities influenced Paraguay’s two distinct approaches to addressing its primary cultural struggle of the era: whether or not it could utilize languages passed on by the sub-metropolis for its own self-expression. In this struggle between local and global, Escobar determines that the country developed its appreciation for internationalism through Buenos Aires, and that São Paulo encouraged its origin-related searches.  

In regard to North American cultural influence, Escobar contends that Paraguay caught wind of New York’s growing dominance and particular tendencies (abstract expressionism, pop art, happenings) through its sub-metropolis neighbors prior to receiving funds from the United States.

Before turning to a discussion of Márquez’s early explorations of international artistic tendencies, it is crucial to distinguish between the employment of these tendencies by a Paraguayan artist and their employment by artists from the United States, São Paulo, or Buenos Aires. In the last three locations, local artists were responding to new industrial processes and technologies existing within their immediate environments. In addition, many of these artists’ works were funded by the same corporations involved in domestic industrialization. In Paraguay, however, the case was different; beyond the uneven levels of modernization, Paraguay at the time was without an art market or corporate backing for artistic production. Thus, the majority of artworks created by Paraguayan artists as well as the spaces where they displayed them, although influenced by the aforementioned industrialized nations, were financed by the artists.

57 Escobar, Una interpretación, 408.
58 Ibid., 437.
themselves.\textsuperscript{59} These highly contrasting situations generated much of the 1960s debate around Paraguayan and other Latin American artists’ uptake of formal qualities – deemed incapable of signifying the region’s underdeveloped status – that emerged from extensively modernized societies.

Despite the opposing stances of many colleagues, Márquez willingly embraced the influences of international artistic currents in her practice. The artworks she created and exhibited around the turn of the decade reflect her open mentality toward and growing interest in various tendencies stemming from the United States and Europe, likely filtered through Buenos Aires. In 1959, the year before she relocated to Paraguay, Márquez had her first Paraguayan solo exhibition at the Bar y Café Capri in Asunción.\textsuperscript{60} Included in this exhibition were paintings from her \textit{Musical} series (1958), which were comprised of interwoven abstract and geometric forms, rendered in gouache and watercolor. The only known extant painting from this series (fig. 1) is visually (and due to the series’ title) reminiscent of Kandinsky’s early abstract watercolors with its thin, carefully painted black lines juxtaposed with smooth, sweeping brushstrokes in various tones of gray, black, and delicate yellow-green. Here, Márquez uses the medium to explore opacity and transparency in a manner that seems more playful than scientific; yet her subdued palette also lends an air of seriousness to the broad, curving, painterly strokes. Checkered areas of black and gray – evoking notes on a musical staff – give weight and balance to a composition that otherwise could appear loose or ephemeral. Márquez’s second solo exhibition in Paraguay,

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\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 452.
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\textsuperscript{60} “Próxima Muestra de Arte,” \textit{La Tribuna} (Asunción, Paraguay), January 25, 1959. Original Spanish: “En la sede del Café Capri, en el transcurso de la presente semana, nuestra compatriota la pintora Laura Márquez Moscarda que se halla radicada en Buenos Aires, presentará una muestra de sus interesantes trabajos, que ha de llamar la atención del público capitalino, por la calidad de los mismos. Esta inteligente y culta artista ha concurrido con sus obras a numerosas muestras colectivas en Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Mar de la Plata y otras ciudades argentinas.”
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which took place in 1962 at the Unión Club in Asunción, consisted of oil paintings that the artist characterizes as being of “a cubist nature.”

By 1963, Márquez had turned away from delicate non-figurative mark-making toward a more figurative, expressive type of abstraction that Escobar refers to as “la abstracción ‘calida.’” This “warm abstraction” is characterized by bold color palettes and immediate, evident mark-making, and can be seen within Márquez’s series *Los Soles* (Suns, c.1960) and *Cardumenes* (Shoal, 1963). Márquez began *Los Soles* as a series of postcard-sized monotypes (figs. 2-3) that she made in Argentina and distributed upon her arrival in Paraguay as gifts. These lively prints, which balance vibrantly-colored geometric or lyrical forms with transparent layers of shadow, became larger, denser and yet equally expressionistic suns when painted in oil on canvas (figs. 4-5). In these paintings, Márquez pushes color to its maximum vibrancy, and then juxtaposes these bold colors with quietly nuanced ones. Large areas of vermillion and neon lime seem to glow, springing forth from dark navy and black backgrounds. In one painting, she places thick, sweeping strokes of green and blue underneath a large, red orb – suggesting waves gently rippling below a fiery setting sun. In another *Sol*, a jumble of loosely-rendered orange circles seems to rise up toward a large green orb, which casts a light of the same hue underneath (or in front of) the orange circles. While less obviously a sun and more spontaneous in nature


63 Gabriela Zuccolillo, in discussion with the author, June 2017.
than the orb in the aforementioned painting, this shape nonetheless provides the focal point for a scene that resembles an enigmatic, astronomical event.

Some of the same forms and palettes that Márquez used in *Los Soles* (particularly in fig. 3) reemerge in her 1963 *Cardumenes* series. In the same way that the title *Los Soles* directs the viewer to identify specific imagery within a seemingly abstract composition, *Cardumenes* (fig. 6) prompts the connection of the repeated marquise-like forms entering the canvas from the right side of the composition with two schools of fish.\(^{64}\) While the placement of forms is carefully considered, the artist’s partially transparent, smooth, sweeping brushstrokes add a sense of celerity to the composition (much like in fig. 5) and evoke abstract expressionism or informalism, which Márquez likely encountered during her studies in Buenos Aires in the 1950s.

Looking carefully at the *Musical, Los Soles, and Cardumenes* series reveals the significance that rhythmic repetition has in Márquez’s work, where forms like the circle and marquise appear again and again. Her interests in geometric abstraction, cubism, and abstract expressionism or informalism can be traced back to the time she spent as a student in Buenos Aires, as well as to the rapidly changing international relations of Paraguay. These three series could even be read as declarations, made upon the artist’s return to Paraguay, of her modern international stance. In coming chapters, we see Márquez continue to adopt openly and investigate the formal and conceptual aspects of various international artistic tendencies while also questioning and reshaping these tendencies in accordance with her Paraguayan reality. We will also witness a marked shift from natural references, such as suns and fish, to increasingly

\(^{64}\) It is interesting to note that, at the same time she created this series of paintings, she worked with the same formal subject matter in different mediums, such as printmaking (see fig. 7).
domestic and political ones – another sign that Márquez was responding to the modernization occurring within Paraguay and also within the borders of allied nations.
Chapter 2
Negotiating Local and International: Márquez’s Ñandutí Works

In *Arte latinoamericano actual* Marta Traba claims that, by the 1960s, artists from “open” Latin American countries were capable of producing works indistinguishable from those made by artists in New York City. An observation that initially reads as praise for North and South American artistic equality, however, reveals itself instead as a sharp critique of the Latin American “receptor’s” eagerness to adopt tendencies from a society that is incomprehensibly modern. According to Traba, “modern North American art has accepted its position, without a doubt, as a region of technology.” Thus, by virtue of originating from regions that lack technology, works produced by Latin American artists that share North American “solutions…formulas of expression and even materials” are not conceptually viable in her view.

The broad issue that Traba proceeds to investigate – the individual artist’s desire to create works addressing “universalist” ambitions versus his or her regional reality – was also of great concern to Paraguayan artists throughout the 1960s. If asked on which side of the debate one might find the artworks of Laura Márquez, various art historians as well as the artist herself would likely concur “pro-universal.” Her position, however, was more complex. Indeed, both Márquez’s body of work and social involvement throughout the 1960s demonstrates that she was

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66 Ibid., 12.  
Original Spanish: “El arte moderno norteamericano ha aceptado ser, sin duda alguna, una región de la tecnología.”

67 Ibid., 14.  
Original Spanish: “soluciones…fórmulas de expresión y hasta sus materiales.”
exploring international artistic tendencies from a deliberate, locally-oriented point of view.

According to Márquez, one group of works in particular – paintings and prints within which she depicts and utilizes actual ñandutí (lace) – stem directly from the local debate around whether or not Paraguayan artists could rightfully adopt geometric, optical, and kinetic art. Ñandutí, a traditional and ostensibly Paraguayan type of lace, had been produced within the country for over one hundred years by the time Márquez created these works. Thus, in her writings, Márquez’s emphatic argumentation for adoption of international tendencies is as follows: “Yes!! Paraguay [already] has elements in its tradition that are geometric and optic and/or kinetic.”\textsuperscript{68}

Beyond deliberately adopting local imagery as a tactic to combat accusations of her extrajerizante approach to art-making in Paraguay, I suggest (in agreement with Márquez) that the ñandutí works respond to and expand upon the aforementioned idea, seeking to justify a strategic intermingling of traditional, regional art and contemporary international artistic tendencies (op, kinetic, and pop art). Ultimately, Márquez underscores both the compelling possibilities and complexities of this intermingling through her election of a historically convoluted subject matter; through her keen awareness of the ways in which various publics experience “folk” and “fine” art; and through her strategic use of color and material.

Ticio Escobar suggests that Paraguayan artists could understand and utilize 1960s international tendencies despite the stark differences between their social, political, and economic realities and those of the United States or even neighboring Argentina. Highlighting abstraction and neofiguration, Escobar writes in 1984 that “[the concepts], generically, [had] the same universal significance; our visual thought [had] already been so [shaped] by common

\textsuperscript{68} Márquez, “Memoria,” 4.
Original Spanish: “Si!! Paraguay tiene elementos en su tradición que son geométricos y ópticos y/o cinéticos.”

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experiences (or ideological manipulations) that we [had] developed a perceptive structure that [permitted] us to share universal codes (to organize or not our own histories).”

Paraguayan artists, then, were equipped with the tools – both intuitive and learned – to adopt tendencies from other regions, and could freely choose whether or not to employ them. While Escobar reached this confident conclusion twenty years later, the topic of nationally-focused versus globally-minded creation was highly contentious in 1960s Asunción.

Escobar suggests that the debate around whether or not Paraguayans could employ forms and concepts derived from foreign sources stemmed from problematic false alternatives posited by the so-called “new art” that Latin Americans were making during the 60s. The false alternatives – nationalism versus internationalism and the maintenance of tradition versus the embrace of contemporaneity – sprang from dueling fears around the disadvantages of cultural dependence (in Paraguay’s case on Argentina, Brazil, and the United States) and of falling further behind. These binaries eventually created two opposing groups of Paraguayan artists. According to Escobar, the first group reacted to a fear of cultural dependence and “proposed as [their] principal task a deepening of the conquests begun in the previous decade, in the sense of the elaboration of [their] own signs in order to express the unique contents of the national situation;” and the second group, concerned with falling behind, “considered to be primordial the necessity of opening and updating” Working against such false alternatives, artists from both

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Original Spanish: “Cuando en la década del ’60, por ejemplo, hablamos de abstracción y neofiguración o en la del ’70, de arte conceptual, nos estamos ya refiriendo a conceptos que, genéricamente, tienen el mismo significado universal; nuestro pensamiento visual ya ha sido tan mediatisado por experiencias comunes (o manipulaciones ideológicas) que hemos gestados una estructura perceptivo que nos permite compartir los códigos universales (para organizar o no nuestras propias historias).”

70 Ibid., 454.

71 Ibid., 455.
groups were led astray. Whether they negated the artistic trajectory of their milieu or veered
toward nationalism and tradition, they entered dangerous territory. As Escobar writes,
“pretending to construct a culture without assuming its continuity and concrete conditions is not
less ahistorical than remaining prisoner to an objectified tradition.”

Buenos Aires-educated Márquez – accused by Paraguayan colleagues of being extranjizante (tending towards foreign ideas) – could easily be associated with the “opening and updating” group. A close examination of her ñandutí works suggests that the artist forged a balanced albeit complicated course that
rejected ahistoricism by melding international tendencies with local artistic traditions.

Before turning to a discussion of Márquez’s works, it is worth mentioning discrete
situations in which she demonstrated a deep appreciation for traditional, regional art; an excited awareness of coexisting national/international and traditional/contemporary binaries; and also denounced the possibility of staying a purely “localist” course. First, in 1964, Márquez applied for and received a grant from Argentina’s Fondo Nacional de las Artes (National Art Fund) to study folk art in Paraguay. Eventually, she focused her research on the traditional ceramic art of Marciana Rojas (b. 1930), the wooden sculptures of an artist known as Melagrejo, and traditional, painted wooden saints created by the Paéz family. In her essay “Memoria de infancias” Márquez pauses to remember, in particular, the strikingly modern quality of Rojas’s work (fig. 8): “an extraordinary sculptress-ceramicist…Was Laura Márquez in front of works by Marino Marini? A distant artist on a far-away continent?...Marciana Rojas, her horsemen or

Original Spanish: “algunos artistas proponen como tarea principal la profundización de las conquistas comenzadas en la década anterior, en el sentido de la elaboración de signos propios para expresar los contenidos peculiares de la situación nacional; y otros, plantean como primordial la necesidad de apertura y actualización.”

72 Ibid.
Original Spanish: “no es menos ahistorico pretender construir una cultura sin asumir su continuidad y sus condiciones concretas que quedar prisionero de una tradición cosificada.”
Amazons, or her equestrian figure, alone, an abstraction of form, totally sculptural.” Here, Márquez expresses astonishment at the similarities between the sculptures of a world-renowned modern Italian artist (fig. 9), and a rural Paraguayan ceramicist who – while recognized as an innovator in the realm of Paraguayan folk artists – upholds traditional indigenous techniques. From Márquez’s perspective, Rojas’s clay figures embody the same reductive (modernist) qualities as Marini’s bronzes. Thus, at the same time that Márquez expressed a deep fascination with Paraguayan folk art, she was apparently inclined to connect its formal qualities with those of international modern art.

As the decade progressed, Márquez eschewed the idea of “purely Paraguayan” art, and displayed a keen interest in contemporary international tendencies. At a lecture given by the artist before her peers in Asunción in 1965, she vehemently argued in favor of pop art’s viability within Paraguay. This conference was the impetus for a historic dispute between Márquez and her neofigurist colleague Carlos Colombino (1937-2013) – an artist with whom she would exhibit many times throughout her career, both in Paraguay and abroad. As opposed to Márquez, Colombino rejected pop entirely – asserting that Paraguayan artists could only employ the art form in a superficial manner. In 1969, Márquez reinforced her pro-international stance by participating in the impromptu exhibition Buscando la raíz (Looking for the Root), which took place at Galería Atlántica in Asunción. The show, which included Márquez along with Paraguayan artists Ricardo Migliorisi (b. 1948) and Bernardo Krasniansky (b. 1951) among

Original Spanish: “una extraordinaria escultora-ceramista…Estaba Laura Márquez frente a obras de Marino Marini? Artista distante en lejano Continente?…Marciana Rojas, sus jinetes o amazonas, o la figura ecuestre, sola, una abstracción de la forma, totalmente escultórica.”

74 Escobar, Una interpretación, 456.

75 Both of these young, rebellious artists attended workshops with Cira Moscarda in the 1960s.
others, was organized in defiant response to the insistent words of Josefina Plá (b. 1903, Spain, d.1999, Paraguay). Plá, a prominent critic in Asunción who had dedicated much of her life to the study of Paraguayan folk art, encouraged local artists to “look to the [Paraguayan] origin!” in the face of a rapidly changing artistic scene.  

The exhibition, as indicated by its title, satirized what Escobar calls “the ‘localist’ position.” Participating artists submitted works that ridiculed the search for – or perhaps asserted the inherent complications in seeking to identify – a national essence by joining international avant-garde thought and technique with Paraguayan fauna, folklore, and tradition. Krasniasky displayed a sculpture in the form of a tuber (likely referencing manioc, which is widely consumed in Paraguay both on its own and as the flour base of numerous traditional recipes) with stripes and buttons. While this sculpture no longer exists, descriptions of it imply that Krasniasky sought to convey the absurdity of exhibiting an actual root widely-grown in Paraguay. By “dressing” this root in pop attire, however, the artist created an object that was at once ridiculous and meaningful, asking questions about updating and commodifying tradition. Utilizing a visual vocabulary similar to Krasniasky’s, Migliorisi contributed a soft sculpture in the form of a chicken, hand painted in vibrant colors and titled Gallina buscando la raíz (Chicken looking for the root, 1969). The name of this sculpture recalls the way in which chickens, often kept in rural or agricultural settings, peck at the ground in search of nutrients. Thus, Migliorisi’s work shows that the native earth on its own is barren and thereby renders the isolated hunt for artistic nourishment futile. While no record remains of the work contributed by

76 Ricardo Migliorisi, e-mail message to author, August 23, 2017. Original Spanish: "Hay que buscar la raíz!"

77 Escobar, Una interpretación, 456.
Márquez, the fact of her participation suggests an awareness of the dangers inherent in exclusive use of traditionally Paraguayan symbols and techniques. These dangers include the tricky and sometimes fictional nature of the “single origin” – a concept exemplified by ñandutí, whose easily overlooked multi-cultural makeup provided Márquez with a powerful tool for exploring the complications of 1960s local versus international debates.

The history of ñandutí sheds light on the significance of an imagery used repeatedly by Márquez to draw connections between local and international artistic tendencies. In Guaraní, an official language of Paraguay along with Spanish, the word ñandutí translates roughly to “white of spider,” or spider web. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, this word was also used to refer to a delicate lace – historically made from cotton or silk thread – produced within Paraguay. Ñandutí lace articles (these could be table cloths or runners, shawls or small motifs incorporated into clothing, etc.), traditionally white or ochre in color, are often comprised of adjoining circular or semi-circular roundels. Each individual roundel is about two inches in diameter and begins with a radiating warp, hence the resemblance to a spider’s web.

While ñanduti has and continues to be thought of as a uniquely Paraguayan artistic tradition, it owes its existence to processes of acculturation. Indeed, lacework incorporating multiple radiating-warp motifs and thus compared with wheels or suns (e.g. “suns of Salamanca,” “suns of Casar,” or “Catalonian wheels”) was immensely popular in Spain from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. Historians agree that immigrants from the Canary

78 Ricardo Migliorisi, e-mail message to author, August 23, 2017.
   Historian Gustavo Gonzalez states that the first mention of ñanduí by its Guaraní name in writing was in an 1838 letter.
Islands – in particular from Tenerife – brought this type of lace to Paraguay during the first decades of the nineteenth century. Shortly thereafter, Paraguayan women living in rural villages such as Itaguá, Guarambaré, Carapeguá, and Pirayú began producing a similar albeit not identical lace. The idea of a spider’s web quickly replaced the Spanish concepts of “sun” and “wheel,” and the lace makers’ patterns grew to incorporate a profusion of locally-spawned individual motifs. These new motifs included stylized versions of flora (corn flower, coconut flower, jasmine, guava flower), fauna (birds, butterflies, bats, scorpions, ticks), heavenly bodies (suns and stars), and symbols from domestic life (altars, crucifixes, baskets, fans).

Once in great demand by bourgeois Paraguayan families and international travelers, the market for ñandutí has declined over time. Nonetheless, artisans continue making lace in the same villages from which it originated, and visitors to Paraguay often purchase it. In accordance with tourist preference (historian Annick Sanjurjo argues that locals mostly prefer the lace in white or ochre), vibrant, multicolored articles of ñanduti have, over time, become predominant both in rural displays and in city shops.

Imagery derived from the brilliantly-colored lace that appealed to the international eye punctuated Márquez’s body of work throughout the 1960s, appearing as the central form in pieces of varying sizes and mediums. In a large, untitled painting from 1966/2006 (fig. 10), the artist uses line and an adept handling of paint to demonstrate her knowledge of the behavior of hand-made lace articles. Within this work, a painted ñandutí article comprised of circular motifs

81 González, Ñanduti, 33.
82 Ibid., 47-50.
83 Sanjurjo, Ñanduti, 68.
84 The white-tape grid that covers this painting was added by the artist in 2006, and therefore will not be discussed in this thesis.
in golden yellow, emerald, periwinkle, pink, red, and dark navy bursts forth from a lush scarlet background. At the article’s center is a roundel consisting of yellow, white, and light blue thread set against a deep orange background. Six slightly smaller roundels that overlay a wide ring of blue violet background encircle this central form. Here, evident hue variations in the orange and blue violet seem both a result of the artist applying multiple pigments to the canvas, as well the effect of optical mixing between the background colors and overlaying threads. Returning to the central roundel, Márquez depicts lace made on a reticulated warp with darning and knot stitches – the overall effect of which is a grid punctuated by small circles and crosses. This commonly-used pattern, known as arasa poty sencillo (simple guava flower – there also exists a “real,” more complex version), is vertically oriented so that the guava flowers and buds are separated into stacks. A simple decorative petal-like stitch known as ysypo (liana) borders this roundel. Of the six surrounding and adjoining motifs, every other one (three of the circles are decorated with a single ysypo stitch, and three with a double stitch) is nearly identical – a distinction of great importance. Indeed, Márquez depicts an article of ñandutí that is obviously not an object of mechanical perfection; rather, the threads radiating from each roundel’s center vary in the consistency of their width, in their closeness to one another, and in the gentle bending of their lines. While the first aspect of imperfection may refer to thread that is hand-spun, the second and third aspects have to do with the physical tensions inherent in ñandutí – where a delicately knotted weft pulls the radial warp ever so slightly to and fro. Additionally, upon close examination of the circles and semi-circles repeated within each roundel, we recognize slight variations in size and symmetry. Here, the artist – who uses visible brushstrokes to mark the presence of her own hand – is clearly interested in demonstrating how an intricate piece of lace, constructed by humans, acts when it is removed from its support.
A physically smaller and visually quieter untitled painting from the same year (fig. 11) asks the viewer to focus upon geometric repetition and color pairings by way of its simplified forms and more limited palette. This painting contains a single roundel similar to the one at center of the large painting. Here, however, Márquez has rotated the *arasapoty sencillo* pattern, comprised of orange, yellow, green, and pink threads, so that the buds and flowers form diagonal rather than vertical stacks. Groupings of three radial threads that extend from and then double back toward the roundel act as its border. Each grouping is bound together by a knot that forms part of an orange weft resembling a continuum of figure eights with a line cutting through their centers. This circular pattern is known as the *cadena*, or chain. Overall, by placing a single, comparatively simple roundel against a matte black background, the artist creates a meditative visual experience – allowing for calm enjoyment of rhythmically repeated geometries and a careful balancing of warm and cool neon colors.

While employing similar neon and black palettes, Márquez creates a more complex experience of visual layering in two small prints that challenge the viewer’s perception of foreground and background. The first work (fig. 12, 1966), a linocut containing a single neon-magenta roundel surrounded by black ink, depicts a radial warp motif intersected by a stitch known as *arapaho jovai* (a Guaraní word pairing meaning cookies with their mirror image). This popular motif simplifies the form of a sweet Paraguayan cookie baked underground and made of manioc flour and sugar cane syrup. Here, the leaf-shaped cookies lean inward toward each other to create triangular points. Interestingly, this stitch also appears in traditional lace from Tenerife, although with a different name and significance. 85 The second print (also a linocut) (fig. 13, c.1966) contains a neon-orange roundel also surrounded by black ink, and depicts a radial warp

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85 Sanjurjo, Ñandutí, 109.
motif intersected at two points by what seems to be a technique known as karê’I (broken line) – a zig-zagging stitch. In both prints, Márquez plays with the optical perception of color. The vibrant magenta and orange ñandutí roundels appear to spring forth from black backgrounds; yet, unlike the smaller painting in which neon colors are laid on top of a black background, here the artist applies black ink to brightly-colored paper – thereby reversing the viewer’s expectation regarding which layer is above, and which is beneath. A sliver of gray Chine Collé in the orange print takes this idea one step further, as we perceive the top-most layer of the image – physically in the foreground – to be an erased, ghostly image revealed beneath both the black ink and the orange paper.

Finally, in a mixed-media piece titled Ñandutí de la victoria (Ñandutí of Victory, 1965, fig. 14) Márquez again explores geometry and physical construction by juxtaposing bold colors and distinct materials. In this piece, the artist applies one, actual large article of traditional thread-based ñandutí lace to a painted surface. Set against a bright orange or red square rotated forty-five degrees with a yellow circle at its center and horizontally-oriented blue or green rectangles around its edge, the threads and motifs are barely visible, and seem to recede within the canvas. This effect is enhanced by a bordering ring of vertically-oriented cobalt rectangles, divided by yellow brush strokes and surrounded by a mostly even layer of vermillion. While the artist’s overwhelming use of bold geometry and primary colors subdues (or, on occasion, even subverts) the colorful quality and delicate physical structure of the lace itself, the same formal qualities also call upon the viewer to imagine the primary colors and basic geometric structures inherent in ñandutí. Noticeably distinct from the aforementioned works, here the artist does not reproduce ñandutí motifs with her own hands; however, her relaxed application of paint below and around the lace serves as a reminder that the imagery we observe, whether fiber-based or
pigment, reached a state of completion by way of the human hand. Yet the artist also underscores the difference between lace and paint; the brushy, perforated black strokes encircling the blue rectangles, in particular, add a sense of celerity to the work – standing in contrast to the painstakingly (slowly) constructed and visually intricate fiber article found at its center. Overall and based upon the above discussions of structure, color, and medium, it becomes apparent that Márquez used her ñandutí works to explore the complexity of visual and tactile perception.

In her own writing and speech, Márquez expands upon the significance of integrating ñandutí into her oeuvre – explaining her strategic use of the regional artistic tradition for self preservation, and also underscoring the optical and mechanical qualities that align ñandutí lace with kinetic art. In an unpublished conversation from 2013, the artist reiterates her reasons, mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, for incorporating ñandutí into her work: “my ñandutís [were] born from a dispute. They always claimed that I was ‘foreignizing’ the country, and that kinetic art makes no sense here.”86 First, Márquez deliberately adopted ñandutí imagery in order to quell critiques of her international artistic interests. Second, the artist emphasizes ñandutí’s oft unseen contemporary qualities to show that Paraguayan art already included some of these seemingly nonnative forms and concepts. According to Márquez, whether or not kinetic art “makes sense” in a particular location depends on the viewer’s ability (or willingness) to identify kinetic qualities within an object or immediate environment. While the artist cites both geometries and structures inherent in ñandutí that align it with kinetic art, she focuses her argument on popular display of the lace.87 The condition noted by Márquez (which remains true

86 Laura Márquez, interview by unknown person published on flyer, 2013.
   Original Spanish: “mis ñandutíes nacen de una discusión. Siempre me atribuían a que yo estaba extranjerizando el país y que acá no tiene sentido el arte cinético.”

87 Ibid.
   Original Spanish: “…yo traje como ejemplo que el arte cinético no se lo ve, pero existe. No se lo ve porque la
to this day) is the following: in the villages where artisans make and sell ñanduti, lace articles are hung vertically, either on stretchers or from wires, along major roadways. Remembering her own experience driving by a ñandutí display, Márquez remarks “in passing along the route in a car, you see an intrinsic thing of colors, some of which intermingle with others, which is the base of kinetic [art].”

This physical movement of the human body past a work of multicolored ñandutí is the first aspect necessary for a kinetic appreciation of the lace. The second aspect has to do with the partial transparency of the lace. As noted by Márquez, “lines of thread [play] with the space and color that accidentally occur ‘behind’ the strings, creating an optical illusion of virtual movement.”

Here, Márquez’s understanding of ñandutí’s kinetic quality emerges as two-fold – both mechanical and optical – and in this way represents (or combines) the two schools of kinetic art designated by art history; a common experience of ñandutí on display involves physical (mechanical) movement, and its colorful yet transparent nature can create the illusion of movement including a push-pull effect between background and foreground. Overall, if we discard Márquez’s theory and analyze the ñandutí works on their own, we might compare them
to Victor Vasarely’s paintings which suggest movement through stimulating the human eye, as opposed to creating movement by employing mechanical structures.\(^9\)

While there are undeniable commonalities between Márquez’s ñandutí works and kinetic art, I believe it is also essential to view them through the lens of pop art. The artist certainly drew from Paraguayan popular culture when she chose to work with ñandutí – an art form that had been practiced for over one hundred years. During this time span, ñandutí gained fame both nationally and internationally (becoming a Paraguayan cultural icon, one might say). Márquez’s decisions to employ a bold palette, coupled with references to domesticity (an art form that draws symbols from everyday life and is created by women in their homes) and fashion (ñandutí is often integrated into clothing), also align these works with pop characteristics and concerns.

Within Márquez’s works, however, she elevated an emblem of Paraguayan everyday life that is distinctly unrelated to modern technologies or mass media; rather, by way of her elected imagery, the artist represents a society that largely continued adhering to tradition over modernization; a society where hand-made crafts were still highly valued; and where rural living was significantly more common than city or suburban dwelling, all characteristics evident in Paraguay’s socioeconomic situation at the time. Even the name of the art form Márquez depicts – ñanduti, a word in an Amerindian language spoken by the majority of Paraguayans – at once grants the local audience a more immediate understanding of her work and acknowledges that the preservation of language and artistic tradition has in part happened due to the nation’s geographic and political isolation. Yet it would be wrong to assume that, in her work with ñanduti, Márquez points to “roots” that are exclusively Paraguayan. On the contrary, she presents

\(^9\) As previously mentioned Márquez has referred to Vasarely in conversation and saw his work at the Di Tella Institute.
a practice whose history is far more complicated – one where European and indigenous as well as rural and cosmopolitan influences become deeply intertwined – and allows this history to dialogue freely with the most recent concerns in other, highly modernized countries.

Having examined works in which Márquez used both “local” ñandutí imagery and then-current international artistic tendencies, her argument for an admittedly complex yet compelling integration of foreign formal and conceptual themes into the Asunción art scene becomes apparent. Here, we can return to the metaphor of a spider’s web; in much the same way that a spider spins a web in order to nurture itself, Márquez composes works of art that reveal the many sources from which Paraguayan artists can draw to enrich their production. During a decade of overwhelmingly rapid change, Márquez – herself embedded in conflict – posits the possibility of referencing national tradition while also thoughtfully incorporating aspects of optical, kinetic, and pop art into one’s practice. Equipped with a nuanced understanding of how these international tendencies might be “seen” within the Paraguayan context and with a finely-honed comprehension of color and material, Márquez created artworks that skillfully navigate the troubled waters of overt nationalism and alienating subject matter.92 While she may not have found the perfect equilibrium between the problematic binaries plaguing Latin American artists in the 1960s, her acknowledgement of these binaries along with her multidimensional artistic approach made a significant contribution to the conversation.

92 Artistic issues cited as widespread during the 1960s by Escobar, Una interpretación, 455.
Chapter 3

Picturing Dictatorship

Having explored how Laura Márquez used local imagery – derived from physical ñandutí lace – as a means for exploring questions associated with pop, optical, and kinetic art, I now investigate how she used geometric, abstract formal languages as a means for conveying the local psychological conditions produced by Alfredo Stroessner’s dictatorship. I take as my primary case study a painting titled *Seis meses de silencio* (Six Months of Silence, 1967, fig. 15), whose striking formal qualities, including a large protrusion on a shining surface, have compelled scholars to declare it demonstrative of particular 1960s artistic tendencies. Due to the painting’s monochromatic palette, bold geometry, and its apparent denial of figuration, it seems natural to read the work as an indication of Márquez’s continued engagement with the broadly defined pictorial language of geometric abstraction. Scholars have ventured, however, to categorize the work with even more specificity, deeming it a “concrete” work, discussing it as a minimalist “painting-object,” and linking it with Márquez’s earlier geometric (albeit expressionistic) series. Rather than seeking to locate *Seis meses de silencio* within a particular artistic tendency, I allow the work its formal and conceptual entanglement with various tendencies, and instead focus on contextualizing its psychological themes within the specific sociopolitical environment inhabited and ostensibly absorbed by Márquez: 1960s Paraguay under brutal dictatorship.93 I argue that, despite the painting’s austere and apparently abstract formal qualities, it does not necessarily negate representation. Through in-depth visual and verbal analysis, I show that the artist’s

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93 While neither Márquez nor her immediately family had any particular political alliances to speak of, I believe that – having lived under Alfredo Stroessner’s regime for seven years at the time of this painting’s creation – the artist was acutely aware of the darkness and danger that permeated everyday life within Paraguay.
reflective work is loaded with deeply psychological personal and public content that is fraught with dark trials and suffering. As a secondary point, I examine Márquez’s frequent revisitation of the forms and themes that appear in *Seis meses de silencio* by turning – near the end of this chapter – to discuss an intaglio series titled *Presión/Represión*, as well as an untitled print that is closely related to the series via form and process. The readings I conduct of both the painting and prints underscore the artist’s interest in geometry and the potential of withholding color; her use of poetic language as a tool for emphasizing formal and conceptual content via the titling of works; and the possibility of ascribing these works themes such as injustice, violence, and oppression.

While art historians Ticio Escobar and Carlos Sosa, and critic Javier Rodríguez Alcalá all concur that *Seis meses de silencio* – sometimes shortened here to *Seis meses*) is one of Márquez’s most important works to date, they each present a distinct interpretation of the painting’s art-historical classification. Escobar proclaims that *Seis meses* “is definitively concrete and [possesses the] ‘cold’ values and the visual economy of hard edge and cool art.” Here, Escobar categorizes the painting with assurance, and – while he abstains from conducting a visual analysis (ostensibly because the formal links are so obvious) – declares its compositional elements demonstrative of three international artistic tendencies. However, Escobar’s use of the term “desenvolverse” (to disentangle – above I translate the word as “possesses” in order to facilitate linguistic flow) in discussing how the painting reveals itself formally, indicates that the work is somehow particularly complex or tangled despite its seemingly simple geometries and restrained palette.

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94 Escobar, *Una interpretación*, 466. Original Spanish: “es definitivamente concreta y se desenvuelve con los valores ‘frios’ y la economía visual del hard edge y cool art.”
Rather than classify *Seis meses de silencio* as concrete art outright, Sosa suggests that the work “takes abstraction to the border of the concrete,” thereby echoing Escobar’s acknowledgment of the painting’s complexity. Sosa describes the liminal territory *Seis meses* approaches as a “dimension” in which the work “resigns all artistic identity and becomes invested in an ambiguous objectuality that is quasi-functional.” That is, the painting seems to shed its identity as a work of art (or metaphor) in order to assume a (literal) role that lies somewhere between the ambivalent occupation of and determined action within space. The “quasi-functional” quality Sosa attributes to the painting can be interpreted in two ways: either the painting is operating physically in space due to its framelessness and rupture of the two-dimensional picture plane – two qualities which encourage the viewer to move at a certain radius around the painting’s surface rather than approach it directly; or it is operating in a psychological sense – invading the viewer’s otherwise tranquil emotional space with its imposing size, austere palette, and bold geometry. Sosa’s insistence upon the painting’s transitional objecthood evinces his desire to link the work’s physical operation with North American minimalist sculpture. Indeed, the historian writes that *Seis meses* harks back to “the sixties discussion of North American object aesthetics.” Reminiscent of the ways in which art historians have described minimalist works, Sosa refers to *Seis meses* as an “object-painting” that is “hermetic” in its round

95 Carlos Sosa, “Arte en el Paraguay del sesenta,” *Serie cuadernos de Arte*, no. 3 (2011): 5. Interestingly, Sosa traces the paintings’s lineage back to suprematism: “[Laura] concibe la obra próxima a los principios del *Suprematismo*.”

96 Ibid.

97 Ibid. Original Spanish: “resigna toda identidad artística y acaba investido de una ambigua objetualidad cuasi funcional.”

98 Ibid. Original Spanish: “la discusión sesentista de la estética objetual norteamericana.”
rejection of figuration. Here, Sosa seemingly refers to the way in which a minimalist sculpture, when placed strategically within an environment, physically confronts the viewer with its weighty albeit mute presence. He also posits that Márquez “locates [the work] in quotidian reality” where it complements rather than reproduces “the real.”

It would seem, then, that Sosa himself is caught in a liminal space – wrestling with describing a painting in which he senses both a denial of and certain receptiveness or relation to the “real world” it physically occupies.

Finally, instead of locating Seis meses de silencio within an international tendency, Javier Rodríguez Alcalá seeks to contextualize the work within Márquez’s oeuvre. He asks if the painting could be a “sol negro” – a different iteration of the shimmering orbs contained within the earlier Los Soles series discussed in Chapter 1.

The critic makes a valid point since, as I will emphasize near the end of this chapter, Márquez returned to the same formal and conceptual content throughout her career. Implicit in Rodríguez Alcalá’s question is an acknowledgement that both Seis meses and Los Soles take as their central form a large, bold circle. While Los Soles are aglow with vivid color and are markedly expressionistic due to Márquez’s visible brushstrokes, Seis meses is characterized by a dark monochromatic palette and the elimination of the artist’s hand by way of her smooth, even pigment application. Thus, Seis meses more closely resembles an eclipse of the sun, or the solar body in absence. Overall, Rodríguez Alcalá stresses that the painting’s significance lies in its position as one of the early forays into abstract

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99 Ibid., 4.
99 Original Spanish: “la artista se empecina en negarlo [el ilusionismo] con el negro sucedáneo y ubicar en la realidad cotidiana el cuadro-objeto como artificio plástico que complementa lo real, antes que reproducirlo en la ya anodina superficie del “cuadro.”
100 Javier Rodríguez Alcalá, e-mail message to author, September 8, 2017.
101 While I will not expound upon this possibility in my on writing, it is work mentioning that – in a 2013 conversation between Gabriela Zucolillo and Laura Márquez – Márquez showed Zucolillo an image she had saved of a solar eclipse. However, she never overtly stated that Seis meses de silencio was based on the image
“experience” (again, moving beyond two-dimensional painting) in Asunción, and also in the syntax and semantics contained within the work itself. In the ensuing discussion of *Seis meses de silencio*, I will follow Rodríguez Alcalá’s suggested approach, looking first within the work to explore syntax and semantics. I will then look without to investigate how these elements might relate to or interact with the artist’s immediate (local) surroundings.

At 160 centimeters by 165 centimeters, *Seis meses de silencio* is an imposing work in size and also in its formal content, which is at once severely reserved, highly receptive, and markedly violent. The reticent nature we initially perceive in the painting is inextricably linked to the geometries it employs and to its restrained palette. Despite slight differences between width and height, the frameless canvas appears to be a perfect square. This square is uniformly painted in a matte, slate-gray. Centered within the square is a large circle (potentially an oval) whose pristine edges fall roughly ten centimeters short of each of the square’s four sides. The circle is also uniformly painted but with a rich, shiny black pigment. If it were not for this large, lustrous area, the painting could easily pass as a resolutely nonrepresentational work of geometric abstraction.

The surface of the circle, however, defies the classification of *Seis meses de silencio* as nonrepresentational. Indeed, the black pigment is so reflective that any lights surrounding it or objects placed before it will inevitably appear, albeit distorted, within the circle. Here, Robert Rauschenberg’s *White Painting* (1951, fig. 16) comes to mind in that it pretends to negate color and figuration, yet is in fact a highly receptive surface that respond continuously to the world around it by registering the shadowy movements of all who pass by. It is also true of *Seis meses* that who or whatever moves in front the painting will become part of its content, if only for a second. For this reason, it is impossible to every truly “capture” *Seis meses* alone in a of a solar eclipse.
photograph, as documentation of its physical presence is equally representative of the environment in which it exists. This issue of receptivity could very well serve as the source of conflict (that the painting somehow registers but does not reproduce reality) found within Sosa’s commentary.

Beyond the responsive nature I have identified in *Seis meses de silencio*’s material surface, the piece’s violent structural break with the two-dimensional picture plane also challenges its supposedly ambivalent character. Between the painting’s wooden support and the canvas lies a rectangular strip of wood, about 90 centimeters long, that crosses directly through the circle’s center at 45 degrees (fig. 17). The canvas is stretched so tightly across this underlying framework that the rectangular protrusion has compromised both the pigment applied to and the fibers comprising the canvas; small areas of crackling paint expose extremely tense and sometimes broken white threads which together reveal the outline of the wooden strip (fig. 18). In taking a step back from the painting, the protrusion has the appearance of a suture – as if the circle had been slashed open through its center and then sewn shut again. Thus, even if an act of violence was not actually part of the painting’s creation, the overall visual effect suggests an intense, scarring event.

Having demonstrated that *Seis meses de silencio* is not, in fact, a neutral, nonrepresentational work of concrete or minimalist art, I now embark upon an investigation of the conceptual meaning we might assign the painting. This investigation necessarily begins with a careful analysis of the syntax of the work’s title. Indeed, for an artist who rarely bestowed poetic titles upon individual works let alone signed or dated them, the weight of *Seis meses de silencio* must be addressed. I will start by exploring the various significations of *Seis meses*, the

102 Javier Rodríguez Alcalá, e-mail message to author, September 8, 2017.
temporal measurement that Márquez assigns to silencio. Six months, as a demarcated period of time, is equivalent to half of one year. Thus, six months has the potential to evoke a more substantial temporal measurement (if we are willing, for a moment, to look beyond the modifier “half of”): one year. The year derives its considerable import from signifying a sizeable unit of measure (365 days, 8,760 hours) that additionally recalls the human life span: we measure the length of our own lives in years. Yet, while I have demonstrated that the artist’s word choice brings to mind the concept of a year and equates to half a year, she elects the words “six months.” The difference between saying “six months” or “half a year” has to do with a slowed perception of time. While “half a year” seemingly glazes over what is indeed a significant period (again, due its actual length and to its relationship with human life), “six months” indicates a dissection of time into smaller units. That is, when we choose to measure time in months we imply a heightened awareness of the passing of time and of our personal experiences as temporally situated. This heightened awareness can be felt positively if the temporal units are characterized by happiness or growth, and can be felt negatively if the units are filled with pain or oppression. The idea of connotation brings me to a discussion of that which Márquez measures in months: silence.

I will now explore the idea of silencio with a focus on how its significance can change depending upon the way in which it is humanly experienced. Generally, we understand the word “silence” to mean the complete absence of noise. Its implications, however, can shift entirely first, when it is considered in relation human perception (much like “months” or “years”) and second, when one investigates the situation in which a human might encounter silence. Whether deliberately sought or found by chance in nature or at home, silence can bring peace by assisting in a person’s capacity to meditate or relax. When silence is enforced upon a person, it can be
oppressive. The command “silence!” comes to mind as particular usage of the word that, when emphasized with a severe tone, often seeks to eliminate the human voice. Rather than creating tranquil space for contemplation, this type of silence produces an uncomfortable or even terrifying void.

Taking into account the formal qualities that converge within Seis meses de silencio – hard-edged geometry, dark pigments, and a brutal underlying structure – it would seem that both the silence and the passage of time referenced in Márquez’s poetic title hold negative rather than positive connotations. Here one might ask: what particular circumstances could have propelled the artist’s creation of such an ominous work, and why did she choose to underscore the work’s formal qualities with a menacing title? I contend that the deeply significant title, in conjunction with the painting’s intentional and inevitable interactions with its surroundings, relate to the threatening political climate in which Márquez made Seis meses. Considering what it felt like to live and work under Stroessner adds profound layers of significance to the formal and literary analyses I conducted above, as well as to the primarily formalist readings of the work by previous scholars.

In the long history of Paraguayan dictators, Stroessner claimed the longest authoritarian rule, from 1954-1989. The absolute control he maintained for thirty-five years can be attributed to his conquest of the Colorado party, to his close cooperation with the armed forces and – of principle interest here – to key modifications made to the nation’s Constitution under his rule. For example, the administration successfully merged the duties and jurisdictions of the judicial, legislative, and executive branches despite the government’s formal representative and federal structure. In this restructuring, the executive branch came to hold absolute power over the other two. In addition, the Constitution did not put any systems in place to judge or penalize the
executive branch – thereby allowing the president to dissolve legislature at any time he felt it necessary. As such, and according to historian Carlos Miranda, “although [the government] furnished a façade of organizational purity, [it] was the underpinning of authoritarianism under Stroessner.” In 1967, having consolidated and legitimized his power as well as Paraguay’s unlawful political system, Stroessner further ensured a long-lasting reign by creating Article 173, which allowed the president to be reelected for a third (as opposed to only a second) five-year term.

As the threat of an enduring dictatorship grew, so too did the level of violence experienced by the Paraguayan population. According to the final report issued by Paraguay’s Comisión de Verdad y Justicia (Commission of Truth and Justice, hereafter CVJ) on human rights violations during and immediately after Stroessner’s reign, 19,862 people were illegally detained, 18,772 were tortured, 59 were assassinated, 3,470 were exiled, and 336 disappeared. Beyond these registered cases, the CVJ recognized in particular an “enormous” quantity of exiles and rape victims that were not accounted for by their study. Overall, the CVJ estimates that one in every 124 people living in Paraguay suffered, either directly or indirectly, human rights violations under the Stroessner regime.

The regime’s tactics of oppression effectively paralyzed the Paraguayan population’s ability to act out or speak up against rampant violence and political injustice. Article 79, an

103 Miranda, The Stroessner Era, 60.
104 Ibid., 58-59.
105 Ibid., 96. In 1977, the Constitution would be modified again to allow for indefinite reelection.
106 Neri Farina and Boccia Paz, El Paraguay, 77.
107 Ibid., 78.
additional modification made to the Constitution in 1967, “established the state of siege as a means of protecting the Constitution and the authorities invested in it…and was clearly designed to dampen and /or deter internal unrest. The article also placed limitations on the right to meet,” historian Miranda explains.\(^{108}\) Beyond new, repressive laws, Stroessner made his ominous presence felt by way of constant public appearances. According to Miranda, “he could be seen presiding at ribbon-cutting ceremonies, distributing graduation diplomas, and inaugurating private and public buildings around the country… [and] the activities of the presidency received daily coverage on evening television and the radio networks.”\(^{109}\) Undoubtedly, the regime’s relentless insistence on its omnipresence loomed over the citizens of Paraguay as a dark force – capable of squelching any demands for sociopolitical change and affecting the tone of daily life.

The oppression exerted by Stroessner and his government at large had an indirect yet undeniable effect on artistic production within Paraguay. Escobar states that, while the Dictator’s “effective system of repression and control [limited]…expressive possibilities,” artistic creation was mostly constrained by self-censorship.\(^{110}\) Escobar defines self-censorship as a process in which artists recognize “‘the limits’ and decide to respect them preventatively and that, from fear of transgressing them, sometimes hold back more than necessary.”\(^{111}\) Yet, as indicated above, their rights to meet and discuss protest through artistic action were also limited. As noted by Escobar in his 1995 publication *Sobre Cultura y Mercosur*, during Stroessner’s dictatorship

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109 Ibid., 67.


Original Spanish: “efectivo sistema de represión y control [limitaba]…las posibilidades expresivas.”

111 Ibid.

Original Spanish: “conoce ‘los limites’ y decide respetarlos preventivamente y que, desde el temor a transgredirlos, a veces se retrae mas de lo necesario.”
“those known as ‘the cultured ones’... got together to discuss, in low voices and at midnight, the possibility of creating opposition through the dynamics of their figures and discourses themselves. Prudence, necessary to survive, demanded separate actions and silent maneuvers.”

This vision of Paraguay’s cultural intelligentsia meeting secretly and under the cover of darkness leads directly into my proposed reading of *Seis meses de silencio* as a work that addressed rather than rejected the environment in which Márquez created it.

If we reexamine the painting and its title with the full knowledge of Paraguay’s terrifying sociopolitical climate during the 1960s, we can conduct a deeper reading of the artist’s syntax, and can expound upon visual manifestations of themes such as oppression and violence. In regard to the painting’s formal qualities, Márquez’s austere black and gray canvas can be understood as evoking both the physical and emotional repression endured by Paraguayans under dictatorship. The painting’s large, reflective circle can be thought of as a mirror, registering the comings and goings of citizens – in particular of “the cultured ones,” who would have spent the most time in its vicinity. In this reflective surface these citizens are implicated and watched through a darkened lens. The wooden strip that nearly breaks through the canvas echoes the regime’s use of violent force, as well as the public’s desire to be liberated – to escape from a confined area where justice and livelihood are constantly threatened.

The work’s title can be understood as referencing a period of time whose passing is clearly demarcated by the Stroessner regime’s strategic political actions; and also as a period endured both painfully and silently due to violent acts committed against Paraguayan citizens combined with tactics of repression. In equating six months to half a year (as I suggest above)

the title can also be read as a metaphor for Márquez’s own existence between two countries – Paraguay and Argentina – between 1960 and 1970. That is, during this period of ten years in which Márquez lived primarily in Asunción, she also spent a significant amount of time visiting Buenos Aires, a place that for many years served as her home. She went back to visit family members who continued living there, to visit friends, and also to attend exhibitions and conferences related to art. Thus, Márquez must have perceived shocking differences as she moved between the “closed,” (to borrow Traba’s classification) darkness of Paraguay under dictatorship and the more liberal, “open” Argentina, which, at the time, was undergoing a period of socio-political unrest, and also had an infrastructure to support its vibrant artistic community. Just as Márquez certainly suffered the effects of repressive force in her country of birth, she must have relished in the considerable freedoms she experienced while in Argentina.

Before closing this chapter, I must turn briefly to a series of prints that can also be read within the context of Stroessner’s dictatorship due to its date, to the many formal elements it shares with *Seis meses de silencio*, and also to the series’ equally poetic and ominous title: *Presión/Represión* (Pressure/Repression, fig. 19). While many of these prints are neither signed nor dated, Márquez – having moved back to Asunción, Paraguay in 2013 after a forty-year stint in New York City – signed one of the works and noted the series’ title along with when and where she created the prints (1960, Buenos Aires), thereby placing them within the scope of my investigation. Due to their medium – aquatints with embossing, which involves techniques and materials that I do not believe Márquez accessed or experimented with during the 60s – I suspect that the prints were made in New York City in the 70s. The formal and conceptual similarities between the prints and *Seis meses de silencio*, however, cannot be denied. These prints also stand sobrevivir, exigía haceres separados y maniobras silenciosas.”
as a testament to the artist’s penchant for revisiting and reworking the same formal elements over the course of decades, in particular the circle, as we have seen in *Los Soles*, her ñandutí works, and *Seis meses* (along with numerous other works pictured but not analyzed in this text).\(^{113}\)

Much like *Seis meses*, the *Presión/Represión* series takes as its primary form a black circle, although this circle is offset toward the left edge of the print. Around the circle is a thin ring of exposed, un-inked white paper. Also surrounding this black circle is a second ring – thick and white – which touches and seemingly blends with the circle’s white edge at the upper-left corner of the composition and then cracks open at the lower-right corner to form a gap. The black circle with white edge and the outermost white ring are both embossed, rising noticeably above the even gray field against which they are set. Of course, the forms included in this print are confined by a plate mark, and take the piece of paper as their field rather than the broader environment that forms the field for *Seis meses*. These prints could also similarly be read as conveying the threatening, oppressive environment in which Márquez primarily lived during the 1960s. In such a reading, the thick, white ring takes on the character of a cuff which is about to close in on an area characterized by darkness. In this way, the print diagrams an oppressive movement rather than registering repressed movement like *Seis meses*.

The loaded pairing of words *Presión/Represión* could refer both to Paraguay’s political climate under Stroessner, and – in a clever way – to the artist’s printmaking techniques. We can understand the word “pressure” as the force exerted by a relentless authoritarian government to maintain sociopolitical order. Similarly, the word “repression” can be understood as the constant state experienced by the majority of the Paraguayan population between 1954 and 1989. The title

\(^{113}\) Series such as *Homenaje a Inés* (fig. 20 – the first work with this title and imagery was created in 1960) and among other untitled works (figs. 21-22).
can also be read as wordplay cluing the viewer into Márquez’s artistic process. Indeed, it is likely that the artist produced and aligned two separate plates to create this series – one with an aquatint to lay ink on the paper, and one with a raised surface to emboss the paper. Thus, the artist would press and then re-press each sheet of paper with the plates in order to arrive at the completed state. Márquez’s powerful use of medium and process which in this case creates a subtly protruding surface, evokes a muted form of violence: censorship, perhaps.

Finally, an untitled, undated print (fig. 23) elevates the symbolic forms of *Presión/Represión* to an even more nuanced level of significance. Márquez likely produced this print with one of the same plates used to create *Presión/Represión*, yet she only embossed the paper, leaving color out entirely. Here, I believe the work merits the same sociopolitical reading that runs throughout this chapter; the artist can be understood as emphasizing the link between pressure/repression and absence (this absence, induced by oppression, could be physical or psychological), ultimately arriving at the question of what (if anything) voids and silence actually contain. This reading aside, the print is an object of great delicacy and formal beauty – a minimal synthesis, one might say, of *Presión/Represión* and even *Seis meses de silencio*, as well as further evidence of Márquez’s desire to conduct a thorough exploration of each form or concept that appears in her artwork.

In sum, despite the art historical desire to classify works as “belonging to” a single, definable tendency, neither *Seis meses de silencio* nor *Presión/Represión* can be adequately contained or explained by the categories of concrete, hard edge, or minimal art. Rather, elaborating on Javier Rodríguez Alcalá’s suggestion, I look within Márquez oeuvre, and pay

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114 As was shrewdly noted by the print’s owner, the only other marking on this paper besides Márquez’s signature is the abbreviation “a/p” (artist’s proof) in lieu of “p/a” (prueba de artista). This might serve as an indication that the print was created while Márquez was living in the English-speaking United States (1970-2013), rather
particular attention to these works’ syntax and semantics. In doing so, I conduct visual and verbal analyses that tie the painting and prints to the artist’s local sociopolitical environment, thereby endowing them with possibilities to signify rich and powerful associative meanings that extend beyond a purely visual experience. At the same time, and as I have done in previous chapters, I show that Márquez borrowed from the formal languages of 1960s international artistic tendencies with the effect of confounding art historians and enriching her personal practice.
Chapter 4

Innovation and Chance at the 1967 São Paulo Biennial

Despite the difficult economic, political, and social circumstances under which Laura Márquez lived throughout the 1960s, she was able to exhibit internationally with relative frequency.\textsuperscript{115} Of all the opportunities available to Paraguayans for international exhibition of their works, the most coveted was the São Paulo Biennial. In a 1964 interview appearing in the Paraguayan newspaper \textit{La Tribuna}, a journalist asks artist Carlos Colombino if the art of Paraguay is known in Europe, to which the artist responds “Our art is unknown not just in Europe, but also in America. The São Paulo Biennial is the only [exhibition] that allows us to [to access the international public] in a consistent manner.”\textsuperscript{116} Márquez, then, was very fortunate to participate in three different iterations of the Biennial during the 1960s – the 6\textsuperscript{th} (1961), 8\textsuperscript{th} (1965), and 9\textsuperscript{th} (1967). In both 1961 and 1965 the artist exhibited four oil paintings; and in 1967 she exhibited one, large work – a modular installation of metal frames and canvas “doors” titled \textit{Puertas Inútiles} (Useless Doors, 1967, Fig. 24) – which she created specifically for the Biennial. The year 1967, then, represented a significant shift in Márquez’s artistic medium and in her consideration of how her works operated in space – a veritable leap beyond the artist’s break with the two-dimensional picture plane in the “painting-object” \textit{Seis meses de silencio} created the same year. \textit{Puertas Inútiles} was not only conceived of in three dimensions, it was also a physically engaging work (an


\textsuperscript{116} “Carlos Colombino y la Pintura Moderna en el Paraguay,” \textit{La Tribuna} (Asunción, Paraguay), March 6, 1964. Original Spanish: “Nuestro arte no solo es desconocido en Europa sino también en América. La Bienal de São Paulo es la única que nos hace salir hacia afuera de una manera constante.”
environment, it could be said), activated by the public’s multi-sensorial participation. Through extensive analysis of the work’s structure and the environmental and sensorial experiences it generated, I demonstrate that innovation and chance were key characteristics both of its production and internal workings. Furthermore, I identify these same characteristics in Paraguay’s newly instated São Paulo Biennial participant selection processes, by which Márquez was chosen to exhibit work in the 1967 Biennial (in turn prompting her to create Puertas Inútiles). Through a close examination of articles published in La Tribuna, I explore the artistic discontent that initiated the Biennial’s changes to its acceptance process, the act of restructuring the process itself, and the reactions of artists to the new system both immediately before and after the Biennial opened. In the end, I show that Puertas Inútiles can be viewed as an expression of the artist’s hope for innovation; of her faith in chance as a process capable of eliminating human bias; and ultimately as a work that questions whether or not adjustments made within a “useless” or broken system can truly represent progress or – for Márquez in particular – justice.

After displaying Puertas Inútiles at the São Paulo Biennial, Márquez installed distinct iterations of the work two more times in the 1960s: once in 1968, and once in 1969. In 1968 the artist displayed a smaller version of the work in Materiales, Nuevas Tecnicas, Nuevas Expresiones at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (National Museum of Art) in Buenos Aires, Argentina. In 1969, she showed the work in Ocho Escultores Internaciones – an exhibition organized by the Museo de Arte Contemporaneo de Montevideo (Museum of Contemporary Art of Montevideo) in Uruguay. In this third installation, the artist did not use canvas, but constructed the doors entirely of metal in order to allow for their material stability in the Parque Roosevelt of the Aeropuerto de Carrasco, Montevideo – an outdoor exhibition site.
No known original floor plans exist for the initial São Paulo display of *Puertas Inútiles*, and the few photographs of Márquez’s installations provide only partial views of the work. Thus, in order to explain the physical structure of *Puertas Inútiles*, I will rely upon a series of drawings (figs. 25-27) created by Javier Rodríguez Alcalá after his involvement with a reinstallation of the work in Paraguay in 2006. Rodríguez Alcalá demonstrates how the overall installation is comprised of individual modules, each one consisting of three distinct components (fig. 25). The first component is a rectangular metal frame – roughly 3 meters tall by 1.8 meters wide – which Márquez painted white. Set into the frame are three aligning pairs of metal pivots, with three pivots along the top inside edge and three along the bottom inside edge. Mounted on each set of pivots is one “door” – the second component of *Puertas Inútiles*. Each door is a rectangular structure a bit less than 3 meters tall by 65 centimeters wide, which is essentially a thin rectangular metal frame covered in white canvas. We can think of the doors in “closed” position as perfectly parallel to the metal frame; however, due to the pivots that hold the doors in place (at the centers of the top and bottom edge of each door), they are free to rotate both to the left and to the right. The third and final component of the individual module are two identical metal supports, which are also painted white and measure roughly 3 meters tall by 70 centimeters wide. These supports would be attached perpendicularly to either end of the larger metal frame in order to produce a stable, vertically-standing structure (fig. 26). Hypothetically, any quantity of individual modules could then be arranged to form a labyrinthine environment through which people move – either by walking around the individual modules, or by rotating the doors and stepping over the metal frames to pass through the modules. The complexity of this environment would be subject to change depending upon the number of modules used as well as their overall configuration.
Based upon a drawing created by artist Ricardo Migliorisi of the São Paulo iteration of *Puertas Inútiles* (fig. 28), it would seem that Márquez’s original installation consisted of four large structures, with each structure comprised of five rectangular, door-holding frames. In Migliorisi’s drawing, the frames are adjoining (perhaps hinged together?), creating the overall effect of four five-paneled screens or room dividers zigzagging through space. In “Memoria de infancias,” Márquez mentions that the São Paulo installation of *Puertas Inútiles* included fifty doors. In this case, and if Migliorisi’s estimate of five frames per structure is correct, then each frame held two or three doors (all frames could not have held three – in this case the total number of doors would be sixty). Missing entirely from Migliorisi’s drawing are the supports mentioned by Rodríguez Alcalá. It remains unclear if and how these supports may have been included in Márquez’s São Paulo installation of *Puertas Inútiles*.

We can understand *Puertas Inútiles* both as synthesis of and distinct progression beyond many of the tendencies and concerns heretofore discussed in series such as *Los Soles* and *Cardumenes*; in Márquez’s ñanduti works; and in *Seis meses de silencio*. Canvas remains one of the artist’s primary materials in *Puertas Inútiles*, and she continues to employ a monochromatic palette (in this case white on white versus the black on dark gray of *Seis meses de silencio*). We can also identify her persisting interests in both geometric abstraction and the rhythmic repetition of forms. Additionally, *Puertas Inútiles* exists within the realm of kinetic art; however, Márquez’s interests have shifted from producing the optical illusion of or evoking movement (vibrating juxtapositions of color or the remembrance of driving by ñandutí on display) to creating art activated by physical motion. Finally, we perceive the artist’s continued engagement with aspects of minimalism via *Puertas Inútiles’* modular structure, broad spatial engagement, and performative nature. While I will again refrain from classifying Márquez’s work as
representative of one particular tendency, it is interesting to note that in 1967, the artist herself
“located [Puertas Inútiles] in the newest artistic current: that of cool art.”117 Although Márquez’s
(along with the broader art historical) definition of “cool art” remains elusive, this statement
conveys the artist’s wish to characterize the work both as cutting-edge and as part of a larger,
global movement toward innovation.

Perhaps the most dramatic shift to occur within Puertas Inútiles in relation to works
discussed in previous chapters is Márquez’s decisive and historically significant move away
from painting toward interactive sculptural installation.118 Indeed, Javier Rodríguez Alcalá
affirms that, by fully embracing sculpture, “[Puertas Inútiles] avoids (or distances itself from)
the ‘format’ of most works made up until that point in Paraguay. [Here,] I refer to the
work/painting made on an easel.”119 In addition to broadening the local scope of artistic
mediums, Márquez took her personal interest in public engagement to a new level with Puertas
Inútiles – transforming the traditional viewer into a bodily participant who navigates and touches
art objects. In fact, and in accordance with the artist’s intention, the work requires touch –
something prohibited in painting – for a complete activation of its functions. By activating
Puertas Inútiles through touch, the participant’s perception of tendencies and concerns
previously considered by Márquez in two dimensions (geometric abstraction, repetition) is no
longer purely visual. Taking into account the historical significance conferred upon Puertas

Original Spanish: “Ahora resulta de que pronto mi obra se ubica en la corriente artística mas nueva: la del arte
frio.”

118 This shift toward sculptural installation could be viewed as part and parcel of her expanded explorations of
kinetic and minimalist art.

119 Javier Rodríguez Alcalá, e-mail message to author, September 8, 2017.
Original Spanish: “en ese sentido casi como que evita (o se desmarca del todo) del ‘formato’ de obra realizada
hasta entonces mas usualmente en PY. me refiero al ‘cuadro/pintura de caballete.’”
Inútiles by Rodríguez Alcalá, Márquez’s expanded and newly developed structural and sensorial interests, and her desire to classify the work as cool art, it becomes apparent that Puertas Inútiles marked a turning point – both within the local art scene and within the artist’s oeuvre.

Here, it is worth pausing to note that Puertas Inútiles was not the only Paraguayan work in the 1967 São Paulo Biennial to involve a mechanical structure requiring activation by way of visitors’ physical interaction. In fact, Colombino (who, as previously noted, was Márquez’s close colleague and rival) exhibited a sculpture involving a hand crank that visitors were invited to turn. The work, titled La Chismosa (The Gossip, 1967, fig. 29), is primarily comprised of three rectangular blocks of wood. Carved in relief and painted on the two largest (vertically oriented) surfaces of the central block (opposite from one another) are two distinct faces with large eyes and slightly parted lips. Sprouting from the plane facing the ceiling (at the crown of the two-faced “head”) are thick spikes of wood resembling hair. A thin metal pole pierces the central block, connecting it with two much larger rectangular slabs of wood. These slabs, each with human ears carved and painted on their largest vertically-oriented opposite-facing surfaces, stand directly on the ground – their imagery oriented perpendicularly to that on the central block. The pole connecting the central block to the outer blocks extends through one outer block and terminates in a hand crank. By turning the crank, visitors also turned the central block – thereby changing the orientation of the two faces and wooden spikes.

An article written by Márquez and published in La Tribuna sheds light on her personal opinion regarding the artistic value of La Chismosa. Although Colombino contributed nine works in total to the 1967 Biennial, Márquez dismisses the majority of them due to their “habitual expressionist content,”¹²⁰ and to the artist’s insistence on wood as his primary material

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(Colombino is known for and has produced a great quantity of xilopinturas throughout his career, which are engraved paintings on two-dimensional slabs of wood). Nonetheless, she commends Colombino for “[delivering] novelty” by exhibiting objects in addition to his more typical two-dimensional works. In her writing, Márquez focuses on La Chismosa as representative of such objects; she explains that it “enjoys great affection from the public, as this object [embodies a primary characteristic] of modern art: becoming a toy for adults. The public constantly plays and entertains itself with the invention of this piece, which consists of turning the great central square…the squeaking of the wood becomes an almost musical sound.”

Márquez’s commentary on La Chismosa, communicates valuable information that pertains to Puertas Inútiles as well to her overall body of work. First, at the time, Márquez conceived of “modern” (or what we would call contemporary) artworks as objects whose kinetic qualities were directly and playfully activated by the public. Second, multi-sensorial experiences had become increasingly important to the artist; an artwork was more compelling if it engaged touch or hearing in addition to sight. Finally, Márquez’s critique of Colombino’s preference for one material indicates that she felt a need to challenge her own artistic practice by continuously exploring new mediums and structures. Thus, what could be interpreted as a rushed or noncommittal traipse across tendencies was actually a deliberate commitment to innovation – a task Márquez identified as the artist’s duty, and thought of as crucial to contemporary artistic relevancy.

Original Spanish: “Colombino presenta… un conjunto de obras dentro de su habitual contenido expresionista…siempre en el material de su predilección, la madera.”

Ibid.
Original Spanish: “‘La Chismosa’ goza de gran simpatía del público, ya que este objeto reúne las características propias del arte moderno: convertirse en un juguete para mayores. Constantemente el público juega y se entretiene con el invento de esta pieza, que consiste en hacer girar la gran masa cuadrada central que la compone y al realizarse ante movimiento, el chirriar de la madera se convierte en sonido casi musical.”
Examining the significant role that experimenting with structure and mechanization played in Márquez’s conception and creation of *Puertas Inútiles* enhances our understanding of the sensory experience it produced for Biennial-goers. There are no records of how many people were allowed to move within the installation at once; however, we can assume that multiple, simultaneous participants would ensure encounters between strangers, as well as disappearances when people created new or stepped through previously existing openings. This continuously changing environment would be driven by physical action involving participants’ hands and feet. Visitors would use their hands to push canvas doors open, and would use their feet to navigate the surface on which *Puertas Inútiles* was installed – stepping gingerly over the metal framework while passing through doors, and walking at a more assured clip when moving around modules.

While an active experience of the work (involving opening doors and stepping over frameworks) was perhaps the most common, visitors also may have opted for a more passive experience, in which they could simply stand between the modules of *Puertas Inútiles*. In this case, the participant would still undergo multi-sensorial engagement due to the physical and visual components of the work itself, and also to the actions of other visitors inside the installation.

We can imagine that, with moving parts and moving people, the installation might at times be hazardous. Due the height of the doors and to their potential for parallel positioning in relation to the framework, *Puertas Inútiles* ostensibly had the effect of blocking visitors from perceiving one another’s presence. Then, if a visitor rotated a door from parallel to perpendicular position, an unassuming person on the other side of the door might suffer a surprising knock. Additionally, if a visitor forgot to lift his or her feet while stepping over the frame structure and through a door, he or she might trip. A heightened bodily awareness, then, would be an important component of experiencing *Puertas Inútiles* in a safe manner.
Beyond the physical structure of *Puertas Inútiles*, the monochromatic palette chosen by Márquez also undoubtedly necessitated a heightened sensorial awareness – particularly when the work was displayed within a traditional gallery setting. Indeed, having entered within *Puertas Inútiles*, visitors would have found the labyrinthine nature of their environment further complicated by all-encompassing fields of white-on-white with subtle geometric outlines. The white canvas doors, white metal frames, and white gallery walls would force the public to adapt their vision and to rely more heavily on other senses (such as hearing and touch) to avoid further disorientation. Yet visitors navigating within the installation would also experience surprising pops of color as they caught sight of one another’s clothing, faces, or hair.

Overall, the structure, palette, and participatory nature of *Puertas Inútiles* would have resulted in a unique experience for each individual who entered it. Due to the continuously changing positions of doors and unexpected encounters with a varying number of other visitors inside the installation, it would be nearly impossible to recreate an initial experience. Beyond individual experiences, the installation itself – activated by the entry, navigation, and exit of participants – also underwent constant metamorphosis. In sum, *Puertas Inútiles* – both in terms of the participant’s experience and in terms of the installation’s internal structure and its workings – was defined as much by the public’s will as it was by coincidence and chance.

Innovation and chance – two significant components embedded within *Puertas Inútiles* – also led to Márquez’s participation in the 1967 São Paulo Biennial (and consequently prompted the work’s creation). The 1967 edition of the Biennial holds particular importance in Paraguayan art history because it occasioned a reevaluation and restructuring of participant selection processes. Following this restructuring, representative artists were chosen by lottery rather than being selected by a jury of specialists. The decision to change the process was a response to the
discontentment many Paraguayan artists felt for a system that they perceived as exclusive and biased. In “Memoria de infancias,” Márquez expresses her own dissatisfaction as follows:

From the very beginning, it could be said…the artist remembers the existence of an exclusionist group, that [had] the power to decide who did and did not participate in national and international art events. In 1966…looking to break the “rough streak” of not being included, Laura Márquez worked toward the approval of a project: That the artists interested in ‘participating’ be selected by Chance.  

It is unclear whether or not Márquez was the primary actor in framing, presenting, and passing a new set of regulations around Paraguay’s participant selection process for the São Paulo Biennial. Within the first few days of the year 1967, however, the new regulations had been approved and the process was put into practice.

A comprehensive article published in *La Tribuna* on January 3rd explains the new regulations, and provides an official account of the 1967 selection event. Under the newly instated system, any artist with a minimum of three years of “recognized activity” in the visual arts wishing to exhibit in the Biennial would be able to participate in a lottery. These “qualified” artists would be assigned numbers, and all numbers would be entered into a raffle box. The first ten numbers (artists) selected would automatically be considered exhibitors in the upcoming Biennial. By confirming their participation, these ten artists also agreed to refrain from participating in the next (1969) lottery/Biennial. Finally, any artist whose number was not drawn was ensured exhibition of their work in the next Biennial. An official document outlining these

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Original Spanish: “Desde siempre, podría decirse…está en la memoria de la artista la existencia de un grupo exclusionista, que tiene el poder de decir quien participa y quien no en eventos de Arte nacionales e internacionales. En 1966 o 67, buscando romper la ‘mala racha’ de no ser incluida, Laura Márquez intenta la aprobación de un proyecto: Que los artistas interesados de ‘participar’ sean seleccionados por el Azar.”

123 Ibid.
regulations was signed on January 3rd, 1967 by seventeen artists (not including Márquez), the Director of the Department of Higher Learning and Cultural Diffusion, and a notary public.124

Twenty artists participated in Paraguay’s 1967 São Paulo Biennial lottery, which took place at the Centro Cultural Paraguayo Americano in Asunción. Márquez’s number was the first to be drawn. Besides the nine subsequent artists chosen by lottery, the Director of the Department of Higher Learning and Cultural Diffusion selected two additional artists for inclusion in the Biennial: Federico Ketterer (1910-1977) and Carlos Colombino.125 It would seem that, at some point following this official selection process, three artists dropped out of the Biennial and two new artists joined the group of exhibitors. The artists who ultimately displayed work at the 1967 São Paulo Biennial on behalf of Paraguay are as follows: José Laterza Parodi (who had a solo show in the Special Room), Olga Blinder, Michael Burt, Enrique Careaga, Colombino, Edith Jiménez, Federico Ketterer, Pedro di Lascio, Márquez, Jenaro Pindú, and Leonardo Torfs (who together showed works in the General Room).

In an interview with La Tribuna one month after the lottery took place, Márquez vehemently defends the new selection process – determining that it resolves a host of issues stemming from (as reiterated in “Memoria de infancias”) local power dynamics. According to Márquez,

we [as] artists understand that no one has the right to decide the publication or not of our work [– a] power that we erroneously conferred upon certain people, in the false idea that they represented the Criticism of Art. Soon, we visual artists understood this grave error, which was the cause of profound divides between colleagues, judges, and authorities…we decided on the lottery as a form that could save the quality and contemporaneity necessary in artworks for them to be presented abroad…Chance, that


125 It is unclear whether or not the Director’s guaranteed selection of two additional participants was included in the official, signed document delineating the new selection process for Biennial participation.
marvelous factor on which man has depended since the world has existed, will decide. And the work of the artist leaves the country without having suffered the harm of absurd personal opinions that profoundly and humanly affect the freedom of creation.126

Here, Márquez attributes inequities in the local art scene to a small group of people whose judgments negatively affected interpersonal relations as well as the autonomy of art itself. Chance, then – in rendering personal judgments powerless – allows for an unmediated dialogue between artwork and audience, thereby imbuing the final artistic creation with greater conceptual value and relevance. In Márquez’s opinion, only when a work of art possesses these qualities can it finally compete on an international level. Furthermore, Márquez views the newly instated lottery system not only as a significant local innovation, but also as a historic occasion in which Paraguay stands out as a leader within a global context. She ends the article with the following, proud statement: “I think that Paraguay is the first country to contribute this highly democratic solution to the brief pages of the History of Contemporary Art.”127

In an interview that took place in September of 1967 (after the Biennial’s installation but before its opening) exhibiting artists Michael Burt (1931-2017) and Colombino – along with Márquez – discuss their opinions regarding Paraguayan representation at the São Paulo Biennial based upon the group of works ultimately displayed. Unsurprisingly, Márquez insists that Paraguay is on “the same level as many nations,” and affirms that progress had been made by

126 “Arte y azar: Una opinión,” La Tribuna (Asunción, Paraguay), February 28, 1967. Original Spanish: “los artistas comprendimos que nadie tiene derecho a decidir la publicación o no de nuestra obra. Atribución que erróneamente conferíamos a algunos señores, en la falsa idea de que ellos representaban la Crítica de Arte. Los artistas plásticos comprendimos de pronto ese grave error que fue causa de profundas divergencias entre colegas, jueces y autoridades. Fue entonces cuando nos decidimos por el sorteo como forma que pudiera salvar la calidad y actualidad necesarias de la obras como para ser presentadas en el exterior…El azar, ese maravilloso factor con el que cuenta el hombre desde que el mundo existe es quien decide. Y la obra del artista sale del país sin haber sufrido el menoscabo de absurdas opiniones personales que afectan profunda y humanamente la libertad de creación.”

127 Ibid. Original Spanish: “Creo que el Paraguay es el primer país que aporta esta solución de alta democracia para las breves paginas de la Historia del Arte Contemporáneo.”
selecting artists rather than individual artworks. Colombino, on the other hand, believes that there is a “noticeable range in quality” within the pool of works – that “the lottery made it possible for works of unequal status to appear [together]. It is not the most perfect system.” Implicit in Colombino’s comment is the idea that his works were held in high regard, and that the presence of “lesser” Paraguayan works was artistically (personally) damaging by association. For Colombino, then, it is preferable that artworks be selected by a jury who can ensure the uniform caliber of the overall national display. Finally Burt, who lands somewhere in between Márquez and Colombino, suggests that Paraguayans had “attained a higher level [of quality] than in [previous biennials], save for a few exceptions.” Although “quality” is a value to which artists both for and against the new selection process appealed, the criteria they were using to determine it remains unclear in the article.

Mediated by an unknown journalist, the September 1967 article is rife with documentation of heated arguments that erupted between Márquez and Colombino throughout the dialogue. These arguments serve as an indication that – even with the new lottery system in place – tensions surrounding Paraguay’s representation (and reputation) at the São Paulo Biennial continued to run high. The fact that Márquez became a participant via the lottery and that Colombino was chosen with particular works in mind by the Director of the Department of Higher Learning and Cultural Diffusion, for example, causes the artists to quarrel at length over

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128 “Tres artistas paraguayos discuten del arte,” La Tribuna (Asunción, Paraguay), September 7, 1967. Original Spanish: “En cuanto a la totalidad de la representación nacional en dicho evento Laura Márquez afirma ‘Yo creo que estamos el mismo nivel de muchas naciones…se debería en general seleccionar nombres y no obras.’”

129 Ibid. Original Spanish: “Hay algunas obras que no están a la altura de las otras. Se nota un desnivel de calidad…El sorteo dio la oportunidad de que aparecieran obras de desigual categoría. No es el sistema más perfecto.”

130 Ibid.
artist selection versus the selection of individual works. Márquez and Colombino also enter into serious disagreements surrounding the overall duties of and significance attributed to art critics. Márquez maintains both that there are no art critics in Paraguay, and that art critics in general are wrongly assigned the role of “creator,” thereby diminishing the role of the artist. Colombino defends the art critic as “a special part of the public, who has the power to transmit something that the work of art has [given] him,” and also reveals that art criticism helped orient his early work. At the end of the article, the writer insinuates that Colombino asks Márquez if she thinks herself a genius (ostensibly because she did not require any feedback from art critics), to which she retorts: “Yes, I think myself equal to a Beethoven or a Bach, I don’t know why I should feel inferior.” It would seem, then, that polemical questions surrounding who or what in the local art world could legitimize artistic value (the critic? oneself?) and consequently determine the artist’s ability to exhibit internationally, were ultimately avoided and remained unanswered. These questions continued to plague Márquez, in particular, who obviously had a keen awareness of injustice and the impact it could have on her career.

Despite Márquez’s personal success at the 1967 São Paulo Biennial (Puertas Inútiles was nominated for a prize) as well as her involvement in restructuring the participant selection process, the artist’s discontentment with Paraguay’s lack of representation at the Biennial coupled with the jury’s national biases persisted. In October of 1967, Márquez’s writing

Original Spanish: “llevamos un nivel más alta que en las anteriores, salva en algunas excepciones.”

Ibid. Original Spanish: “el crítico es una parte especial del público, que tiene el poder de transmitir algo que le ha dado la obra de arte.”

Ibid. Original Spanish: “Si, yo me creo igual que un Beethoven o un Bach, no se porque deba sentirme inferior.”

According to Márquez, Puertas Inútiles did not obtain sufficient votes to win a prize. Which prize the work
appeared yet again in *La Tribuna* – this time exposing the disadvantages of artists who did not have a jury member from their respective country present at the 1967 Biennial.\(^{134}\) In the article, Márquez explains that the Biennial Foundation chose nine jury members representing nine different countries: Germany, Argentina, Belgium, the United States, Great Britain, Japan, Mexico, Poland, and Brazil. She then makes the point that artists from seven of the nine countries with jury representation obtained prizes for their work. Furthermore, she argues that the only reason a Belgian artist did not win a prize was because the jury member, due to health problems, missed the deliberations. The jury member from Mexico, in Márquez’s opinion, was the only person who “at every moment [showed] a total freedom of judgment and support for the artworks rather than the countries.”\(^{135}\) Qualms aside, Márquez admits that “man is linked with his [own] concerns and it is natural that in the case of making judgments, his feelings be a part of the judgment. The sufficient freedom needed to make a pure judgment has not yet arrived.”\(^{136}\) Márquez’s disillusionment with critical systems infiltrated by human bias, however, does not deter her from proposing yet another solution: “the countries that would be represented on the jury” Márquez suggests, “should refrain from sending artists to the same competition.”\(^{137}\) Yet the artist maintains awareness of her lofty demands, closing this suggestion with the following

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135 Ibid.  
Original Spanish: “la jurado por México, en todo momento muestra una total libertad de juicio y su adhesión es a las obras y no a los países.”

136 Ibid.  
Original Spanish: “El hombre está ligado a sus afectos y es natural que en el caso de tener que emitir juicio, sus sentimientos sean parte de ese juicio. No llego aun a la suficiente liberación como para emitir un juicio puro.”

137 Ibid.  
Original Spanish: “la solución más llana sería elegir: p jurados o países. Vale decir, los países que estuvieran representados en jurado deberían inhibirse de enviar artistas en el mismo certamen.”
disclaimer: “of course these imaginings are very idealist, and I understand that there are many compromises in connection with these large art competitions, and to attend only to the ethical part of the problem is a bit uncommon.” It would seem that the artist cannot help but seek reform and progress within the biased or unjust framework she inhabits, even if that progress occurs only in her imagination.

It is conceivable that, provided the opportunity to receive international recognition at the São Paulo Biennial, Márquez used Puertas Inútiles to make a statement regarding her situation as a Paraguayan artist. Referring to the work in “Memoria de infancias,” she departs from her paragraphs of prose to write a poetic couplet:

The sculpture is mobile, but not by an electrical system.

The Doors move by the will of the people.

Márquez, like those who chose to enter Puertas Inútiles, navigated within a functioning albeit disorienting, treacherous system. Presented with numerous opportunities and fueled by the self-determination to explore, blockages could suddenly become passageways – with new methods and routes revealing themselves. But what lies on the other side of an opened door? For the Biennial-goers who visited Puertas Inútiles and ultimately for Márquez, passing through one door only revealed new challenges. There was no arrival and no relief – just a continuum of motion theoretically proffered by the system, but more often driven by the volition of the actor. Regardless of the end results, Márquez stands out as a figure who persevered in the face of trial,

138 Ibid.
Original Spanish: “Por supuesto que estos son elucubraciones bastante idealistas, y entiendo que muchos son los compromisos que están ligados a estos grandes certámenes de arte, y observar solamente la parte ética del problema es estar un poco fuera de lo común.”

Original Spanish: “La escultura es móvil, pero no de sistema eléctrico. Las Puertas se mueven a voluntad de las personas.”
working relentlessly through issues of progress and critical judgement in written and three-dimensional form.
Conclusion

Returning once more to the lofty expectations of Marta Traba, it becomes apparent why she recognized Laura Márquez, in particular, as a Latin American artist deserving of international recognition. Indeed, Traba contends that,

Although [many artists] work in solitude, as much within their respective countries as within the continental panorama, they have a point in common and that is their relationship with reality. If their relationship with reality is not lost, they are capable of understanding the peculiarity of their coordinates of movement and time; and they can color [these coordinates]…to avoid two [mistakes], equally aberrant, of nativism or the socializing lecture.140

It can certainly be said that Márquez worked in solitude due to Paraguay’s geography, its lack of resources, Alfredo Stroessner’s oppressive dictatorship, and even the disagreements she had with influential artists and critics. As I have made clear through in-depth investigations of Márquez’s artistic production and social engagement between 1960 and 1970, however, she always remained connected to her immediate experiences of regional realities. As I have argued, the artist responded to the formal and conceptual values she encountered during her extensive academic formation in Buenos Aires, and during subsequent trips to that city; she celebrated local craft and found ways to link it with then-current international artistic concerns; she appropriated global artistic languages to express local socio-political struggles; and even worked to shift local policies that she felt were biased or unfair, not just for personal gain but also on behalf of her colleagues. All the while, Márquez walked a path that avoided adhesion to the fatal

140 Traba, Arte latinoamericano actual, 37.

Original Spanish: “pese a la soledad en que trabajan unos y otros, tanto en sus respectivos países, como dentro del panorama continental, tienen un punto en común y es su relación con la realidad. Al no perder esa relación con la realidad, son capaces de comprender la peculiaridad de sus coordenadas de movimiento y tiempo; y pueden teñirlas de ese trasfondo mítico o mágico para evitar las dos caídas, igualmente aberrantes, del nativismo o la parrafada socializante.
 binaries – myopic “localist” versus regional history-negating internationalist – outlined by Traba and Escobar.

It would seem that, through a decade of artistic and socio-cultural activities in Paraguay, Márquez came to understand the peculiar coordinates of her own practice. Márquez’s conviction – as is made evident by interviews with the artist throughout the 1960s, especially those around the 1967 São Paulo Biennial – was that art made in Paraguay achieved the same degrees of quality and creativity as widely-acknowledged, highly-praised work produced in more developed and better represented nations. After returning from travels abroad (initiated by the artist’s participation in the 1966 exhibition “Contemporary Art of Paraguay” at the Pan-American Union in Washington D.C.), Márquez was quoted in *La Tribuna* in response to a journalist’s question regarding Paraguay’s artistic reputation abroad: “The general opinion is that Paraguay is impressive due to its contemporaneity. And speaking of Paraguayan art, in relation to all that I have seen, I consider it to be rich in ideas and lacking in stimuli. The contemporary art of our country is at an international level in terms of its creations.”

Here, beyond answering the journalist’s inquiry with statements affirming Paraguay’s admirable artistic production, positive reception, and international equality, Márquez inserts a brief albeit significant insight: that Paraguayan artists, for all their creativity, lack incentives in comparison with artists from other nations. We can imagine the conditions that spawned this paucity of incentives; for example the aforementioned lack of representation at international art

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Original Spanish: “La opinión general es que el Paraguay impresiona por su actualidad. Y hablando de plástica paraguaya, en relación con todo lo que he visto, considero que esta rica en ideas y huérfana de estímulos. La plástica contemporánea de nuestro país está a nivel internacional en cuanto a sus creaciones.”

competitions, the broken or inequitable systems responsible for sending artists abroad, the absence of an art market, and the threat of violence under Stroessner.

In the interview he gave with La Tribuna in 1964, Carlos Colombino presents an even darker view of what it meant to be an artist in Paraguay during this period. Colombino, who was also a formally trained architect, had – at the time of the interview – renounced art-making for architecture. The reason he gives for doing so is the following:

architecture is something related to my artistic activities that gives me the possibility to influence people’s taste [– people] for whom it is easier to accept a practical object with modern lines than a painting created under the same postulates…in our country the artist must prostitute his work in order to live from it…you can prostitute [your work] or rebel. And you have to choose, and it isn’t easy…For this situation to change different economic and cultural conditions are necessary. Meanwhile, we must settle in with the artists in marble towers, failed artists, misunderstood artists, and artists that emigrate.142

While she may never have used Colombino’s strong language, the dire conditions around art-making in Paraguay were the same for Márquez as they were for her colleague. Márquez shared Colombino’s professed ethics and was wholly unwilling to “prostitute” her artwork. Thus, the anxiety-inducing choice Colombino describes – prostitution versus rebellion – was one that Márquez would eventually be called upon to make, too.

Implicit in Márquez’s heightened awareness of national limitations, including the dysfunctional systems governing international prize distribution (which ultimately prohibited certain levels of recognition by the international art community), is an ambition that far surpassed the simple desire to exhibit work. What Márquez sought was to be at the forefront of

142 “Carlos Colombino y la Pintura Moderna en el Paraguay,” La Tribuna (Asunción, Paraguay), March 6, 1964. Original Spanish: “La arquitectura es algo a fin con mis actividades artísticas y que me da posibilidades de influir en el gusto de la gente, a quien le es más fácil aceptar un objeto practico de líneas modernas que un cuadro elaborado bajo los mismos postulados……en nuestro país el artista para vivir de su arte tiene que prostituirlo…Ante esta situación al artista no le queda otros caminos: o prostituirse o rebelarse. Y hay que elegir, y no es fácil…Para que esta situación cambie son necesarias condiciones económicas y culturales diferentes. Mientras tanto tenemos que conformarnos con artistas en torre de marfil, artistas fracasados, artistas incomprendidos, y artistas que emigran.”
artistic innovation, and to have the worth of her artistic contributions confirmed by internationally renowned voices, capable of launching her career beyond the borders of Paraguay. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that after ten years of noteworthy (even innovative) production and professional frustration, Márquez left her home in Asunción to begin a new life in what was then the center of the art world, a place with comparatively infinite incentives and opportunities: New York City.

What follows is a period of over forty years in which Márquez lived primarily in a TriBeCa loft – all the while traveling back and forth between the United States, Paraguay, and Argentina. Little is known about the breadth of Márquez’s production and social involvement during this time period. “Memoria de infancias” does provide some insight into her continued activities. For example, in 1971 along with artists such as Fernando Botero, Luis Camnitzer, and Liliana Porter, Márquez founded the Museum of Latin American Art of New York. While specifics are yet unknown, Márquez has also professed her participation in exhibitions and happenings at New York galleries and museums, as well as at other institutions across the United States. In 2013, after great difficulties and suffering in a rapidly gentrifying New York City, Márquez returned to Asunción, Paraguay, where she currently resides.
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ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1: Laura Márquez, *Untitled* from the series *Musical* (Musical), 1958, gouache and watercolor on paper, 33cm x 65cm. Private collection
Fig. 2: Laura Márquez, *Untitled*, c.1960, ink on paper (monotype), 9.5cm x 13.8cm. Private collection

Fig. 3: Laura Márquez, *Untitled*, c.1960, ink on paper (monotype), 9.5cm x 13.8cm. Private collection
Fig. 4: Laura Márquez, *Untitled* from the series *Los Soles* (the Suns), c. 1960, oil on canvas
Fig. 5: Laura Márquez, *Untitled* from the series *Los Soles* (the Suns), c. 1960
Fig. 6: Laura Márquez, *Untitled* from the series *Cardumenes* (Shoal), 1963, oil on wood, 159cm x 159cm. Private collection
Fig. 7: Laura Márquez, *Untitled*, 1963, ink on paper. Collection of Jorge Gross Brown
Fig. 8: Marciana Rojas, *Trompetista*, c. 1960, clay. Photo courtesy of Centro de Artes Visuales/Museo del Barro
Fig. 9: Marino Marini, *Pomona seduta* (Seated Pomona), 1946, bronze. Photo courtesy of Artstor.
Fig. 10: Laura Márquez, *Untitled*, 1966/2006, oil on canvas, 192cm x 201cm. Private Collection
Fig. 11: Laura Márquez, *Untitled*, 1966, oil on canvas, 66cm x 40cm. Collection of Jorge Gross Brown
Fig. 12: Laura Márquez, *Untitled*, 1966, linocut, 15cm x 15cm. Private Collection
Fig. 13: Laura Márquez, *Untitled*, c.1966, linocut, 20cm x 38cm. Collection of Daniel Nasta
Fig. 14: Laura Márquez, Ñanduti de la Victoria (Ñanduti of Victory), 1965, mixed media, 149.9cm x 149.9cm
Fig. 15: Laura Márquez, *Seis meses de silencio* (Six Months of Silence), 1967, synthetic paint on canvas, 160cm x 165cm. Collection Centro de Artes Visuales / Museo del
Fig. 16: Robert Rauschenberg, *White Painting* [three panel], 1951. Collection San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
Fig. 17: Laura Márquez, *Seis meses de silencio*, verso

Fig. 18: Laura Márquez, *Seis meses de silencio*, detail
Fig. 19: Laura Márquez, *Presión/Represión* (Pressure/Repression), c. 1960, aquatint and embossing on paper, 47cm x 35.5cm. Private collection
Fig. 20: Laura Márquez, *Homenaje a Inés* (Homage to Inés), 1971-1981. Exaedro
Fig. 21: Laura Márquez, *Untitled*, 1993. Exaedro
Fig. 22: Laura Márquez, *Untitled*, 1973
Fig. 23: Laura Márquez, *Untitled*, n.d., embossing on paper, 47cm x 35.5cm. Private collection
Fig. 24: Photograph of Laura Márquez with *Puertas Inútiles* (Useless Doors) at the São Paulo Biennial, 1967
Fig. 25: Drawing created by Javier Rodríguez Alcalá after his involvement with an attempted reinstallation of *Puertas Inútiles* in Paraguay in 2006.
Fig. 26: Drawing created by Javier Rodríguez Alcalá after his involvement with an attempted reinstallation of *Puertas Inútiles* in Paraguay in 2006.

Fig. 27: Drawing created by Javier Rodríguez Alcalá after his involvement with an attempted reinstallation of *Puertas Inútiles* in Paraguay in 2006.
Fig. 28: Drawing created by Ricardo Migliorisi of the São Paulo iteration of *Puertas Inútiles*. Published in Ticio Escobar’s *Una interpretación de las artes visuales en el Paraguay* (2007)
Fig. 29: Carlos Colombino, *La Chismosa* (The Gossip), 1969, mixed media. Photograph courtesy of Lia Colombino.