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Facing Independence: Portraiture and the Figuring of Nationalism
in the Work of José Gil de Castro

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Theresa Marie Knopp

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Thesis Committee:

Dr. Alexandra LeBlanc, Chairperson

Dr. Jason Weems

Dr. Malcolm Baker

The Thesis of Theresa Marie Knopp is approved:

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

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Introduction: The Patriot Painter

During the transition from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century in South America, the cultural backdrop of the period was one in which established artistic styles and preferences of the viceregal period began to yield to new concerns. As Spanish dominion over the Americas waned and geo-political boundaries were in a constant state of flux (see Figures 1.1 and 1.2), a shifting set of political circumstances spawned changes in the function and subject matter of images. Portraits of head political figures became increasingly imbued with the ideals of the new Republicanism, enlisted to aid in the spread of its basic principles and beliefs. As a new class of creole revolutionaries reached the highest levels of political power, they needed to legitimize themselves in the eyes of the public and convey the ideological basis of their new governments. While images continued to play a vital role in the espousal of official values, new ideas also necessitated innovative approaches to visual expression.

The artist who arguably best encapsulates the artistic and historical complexity of this moment is José Gil de Castro y Morales (1785-c. 1841).¹ He became the most prolific portraitist amongst his contemporaries and the artist most favored by the new republican elite. He was also the only portrait painter to earn commissions by each of the three most famous South American liberators: Simón Bolívar of Venezuela, José de San Martín of Argentina, and Bernardo O'Higgins of Chile, a prestigious clientele that earned

¹ While different authors provide slightly variant dates for Gil de Castro's birth and death, these represent the largest consensus of scholarship consulted.

him recognition as “painter of the liberators.”² An examination of his work provides exclusive insight into a cohesive artistic program aligned with the immediate representational concerns of the foremost leaders of the independence period. Due to their basically political nature, these portraits blur the boundaries between private images and public art, obliging the viewer to consider them extensions of the political objectives of the sitters. Insofar as his subjects acted as proxies of the nascent national governments, their portraits likewise exhibit the emerging political paradigms on which these early governments were formed. Therefore by analyzing these images with attention to their implicit and explicit content, one views the ways in which they served not only as vehicles for the delivery of information but importantly, as political expedients. Whereas much art throughout history has acted as political commentary, this project aims to establish the ways in which Gil de Castro’s work functioned as political accessory.

Following a model of political accessory, Gil de Castro’s images did not simply provide illustration or documentation of external political phenomena. Rather, his works played a tangible and indeed necessary role in the reification of abstract concepts. In the earliest years of the first South American nations, these visual materials actively aided in facilitating the transmission and concrete manifestation of Republican ideals. In the artist’s pictorial expression of patriotism, the very definition of this term and the basis on which national devotion would be constructed was espoused, effectively made real. His works provided edification to their audiences in the most literal sense, building and

² Elizabeth P. Benson, et al, *Retratos: 2,000 Years of Latin American Portraits* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 156.

transmitting appropriate models of power, leadership, and citizenship in the post-
viceregal moment. The continued functioning and creative appropriation of his works
since their inception fortifies their active role.

In order to develop this broader argument, it is necessary first to briefly describe
Gil de Castro's biography and an overview of his body of work. He was born in 1785 in
Lima, the colonial city founded by Francisco Pizarro in 1535 as the center of Spanish
power on the South American continent. Yet while it was established as the "City of
Kings" (*Ciudad de los Reyes*), Lima became a very different kind of city during the
artist's life: the capital of a new Republic, the nation of Peru.³ At a young age Gil de
Castro entered the local militia where he gained basic skills in map-making, engineering,
drawing, and painting. It is believed that around the age of fifteen he entered the *limeño*
workshop of Pedro Díaz (active 1770-1815) where he trained largely in the painting of
religious images.⁴ His first documented commission came in 1807, a series of sixteen
miracles of the Virgin of the Rosary of Chiquinquirá for the Chapel of the Virgin, a
project he worked on with his master and which is no longer extant. Gil de Castro would
continue creating religious works on commission throughout his life, though they would
never comprise the bulk of his production. These works betray the colonial convention of

³ The Viceroyalty of Peru had consisted of all of Spain's South American holdings until 1739, when the
Viceroyalty of New Granada was created out of the area roughly corresponding to today's Colombia,
Ecuador, Panama, and Venezuela. Its capital was located at Santa Fe de Bogotá. In 1776 the Viceroyalty of
Río de la Plata was created out of modern-day Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay, with its capital
located in Buenos Aires.

⁴ This aspect of the artist's early formation was concluded by the MALI study and is summarized in Natalia
Majluf, ed., *Más allá de la imagen. Los estudios técnicos en el Proyecto José Gil de Castro* (Lima:
Asociación Museo de Arte de Lima, 2012).

stereotyped likenesses, prioritizing the depiction of saintly attributes which were their defining features.⁵

The *limeño* artist established his own shop in the capital prior to moving to Santiago de Chile sometime around 1813.⁶ There he marketed himself as a portrait artist and worked for the large number of wealthy aristocrats who resided in the region. While Lima had already developed a substantial base of painters formed in the workshops of the capital, Santiago lagged somewhat behind, providing an opportunity for the Peruvian painter to enter a market in need of *retratistas*.⁷ His portraits of this period demonstrate the fashioning of his personal artistic style, one which resembled in many ways the work of his master while still indicating the development of his own unique vision. This example of a portrait of Francisco Manuel de la Sotta y Manso may serve as a representative image of his portraits of prominent civilians (Figure 1.3). The sitter is depicted in three-quarter length, a common format for civilian portraiture. The man stands centered in the composition appearing relaxed, dressed in his finest clothing and holding in his hand a letter addressed to him in Santiago de Chile. While the letter serves to identify the sitter by name within the field of the image, the coat of arms hovering in the top right corner speaks to his ancestral line. The flowing red curtain draped behind

⁵ Hernan Maino, ed., *Pintura Chilena del Siglo XIX: José Gil de Castro: El Retratista de la Independencia* (Santiago de Chile: Origo Ediciones, 2008), 30.

⁶ I have based my dating on the information provided in the MALI publication, *Más allá de la imagen*, given that this has been the most thorough study of Gil de Castro's life and work to date, linking lengthy art historical research with technical analysis and allowing many of the previously unsettled details of his biography to be more firmly placed. Where the MALI study has not commented, I have incorporated the consensus views of other scholarship.

⁷ Maino, *Pintura Chilena*, 15-16.

him had been a standard convention of such portraits dating to the earliest years of the colony, an artistic trope with its origins in Baroque Europe. Images such as these would usually hang in a prominent place in the sitter's own home, or would be a gift for one of the sitter's friends or relatives. Providing a likeness of the individual for posterity, such portraits also acted as physical markers of status, providing a flattering likeness for the sitter, friends, and relatives to view and admire.

As Gil de Castro built a reputation in Santiago, he was able to attract not only the attention of the Chilean elite, but also members of the Army.⁸ Though he had many royalists as clients during the period of the late colony, at the outbreak of the independence wars he apparently “joined the struggle enthusiastically,” entering the ranks himself.⁹ Though he would never actually see battle, the painter contributed what were his own best skills: he designed the army's uniforms and created portraits of the entire military staff. While many artists at the time earned commissions from members of the powerful military elite—Simón Bolívar for one had his portrait painted by at least four other prominent artists of the period¹⁰—Gil de Castro was able to rise above the rest, establishing himself as the most sought-after portraitist by the leaders of independence. To suggest that this was due solely to the artist's shrewd professional connections or to his own superior artistic abilities are likely too simple of explanations. A probable

⁸ Ibid., 17-18.

⁹ Dawn Ades, *Art in Latin America: The Modern Era, 1820-1980* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989), 17.

¹⁰ These include Juan Lovera (1778-1841), Pedro José Figueroa (1780-1838), José María Espinosa (1796-1883), and Pablo Rojas (1780-1840).

scenario would combine elements of both: certainly through the strength of his strategic professional connections he was able to attain important artistic credentials which could burnish his reputation.¹¹ However he was also able to obtain the more intangible benefit of being in the personal favor of such influential figures. His skills as an artist as well as his knowledge of engineering, map-making, and uniform design may have further bolstered his resume and widened his appeal. Indeed, evidence of his professional acclaim is demonstrated by his admittance into the Legion of Merit of Chile as well as a host of official titles including “Primer Pintor del Gobierno del Perú” (Principal Painter of the Peruvian Government) and “Second Cosmographer” to the first Supreme Director of Chile, Bernardo O’Higgins.¹²

During the years of the independence struggles (c. 1808-1830) Gil de Castro was tasked with the representation of individuals who stood for radical and revolutionary ideas. Yet naturally, despite these new artistic demands, he was not compelled to totally abandon the iconographic traditions and techniques with which he had always worked. Certain conventions still held significant weight and were thoroughly ingrained not only in his own artistic repertoire but generally within the visual culture of the period. Thus the Peruvian painter’s portraits of the foremost heroes and icons of independence follow in a general way a basic model of official portraiture carried over from the viceregal period. Yet one must not conclude that these images merely function in the same way as

¹¹ It is known that Gil de Castro created a painting which he gave to José de San Martín in August of 1817, the *Asceta o Anciano Español*, which the MALI researchers suggest was the first act of what would be a prolific professional relationship between the artist and the general. See *Más allá de la imagen*, 54.

¹² Benson, et al., *Retratos*, 155.

their historical predecessors, for to assume this would be to elide their particular intent and complexity. Gil de Castro's images in fact present a plethora of competing dimensions. They offered new ways of shaping the sitter's role in history, and helped envision that which had not yet been tested in terms of the moment's most novel philosophical and political innovations. His work simultaneously demonstrates the profound strength of convention as well as the drive to reimagine its possibilities.

Demonstrating an active process of renewal and adaptation, however subtle or obvious, given its implications for art history his work must be treated with the thoroughness and specificity it justly deserves. So often images which appear to be mere adherents to preexisting artistic formulas are discounted as passive recipients, not at all innovative, when in fact their anticipation of future artistic concerns and refiguring of tradition provide a direct view into the most complex moments in history. The fruitfulness of considering the agency of this artist in his various decisions, whether prototypical or pioneering, is abundant, and to overlook the basis of such phenomena would be an egregious blunder. In fact this would run counter to the basic aim of our discipline: to probe and understand history on its own terms. Thus it is important to place Gil de Castro's work into its proper historical context, and to consider the extent to which it has been discounted or misjudged up to this point in scholarship.

The period in question encompassed the South American Wars of Independence, erupting at the close of the first decade of the nineteenth century. A century of economic and political tightening of control over the Spanish-American colonies had precipitated strong feelings of resentment among creoles (American-born Spaniards) regarding their

second-class status.¹³ They were frustrated by the barriers that prevented them from attaining higher positions in the colonial administration, posts which were virtually all held by *peninsulares* (European-born Spaniards). Creoles felt entitled to self-government based on the fact of their domestic birth and quickly made this the rallying cry for their right to political autonomy. After the chaos of the French Revolution and Napoleon Bonaparte's subsequent ousting of King Ferdinand VII of Spain in 1808, the ensuing instability in Spain triggered preliminary actions toward national independence movements in South America. By 1830 independence from Spain had been achieved by each of the nations which had fought assiduously toward this goal.¹⁴ In Chile, the country in which Gil de Castro first developed his skills as a painter for independence, a National Junta was formed in 1810 which, while nominally in support of Ferdinand, desired to make itself an autonomous republic. As the dominant political postures radicalized, full independence for a nation of Chile quickly became the explicit goal.

Spanish forces were swiftly sent in to quash the insurgency in Chile, and the patriot military efforts needed to be strengthened. Bernardo O'Higgins (1778-1842), a creole patriot of Spanish and Irish descent, was appointed as commander-in-chief of the Chilean liberation forces in 1813, but was not able to fend off a series Spanish of

¹³ After the death of Charles II, the last Habsburg Emperor of Spain, in 1700, control of the American dominions went to the Bourbons in France. Beginning in 1700 the Bourbons initiated a century long period of political and economic restructuring known as the Bourbon Reforms.

¹⁴ These include Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Paraguay, Argentina, Chile, Peru, and Bolivia. 1830 represents a rough outer limit of the phase during which the current geo-political boundaries of these nations were being solidified.

attacks.¹⁵ A devastating loss at the Battle of Rancagua in October of 1814 launched a three-year period known as the Spanish *Reconquista* in which the royalists aimed to end any hope of national autonomy. However their efforts would have the reverse effect, “[serving] the cause of independence by widening the gulf between patriots and royalists.”¹⁶ As O’Higgins continued to look for ways to reinvigorate the patriot cause in Chile, a regional independence movement was fully underway.

In Argentina, another important military commander was organizing an extraordinarily ambitious campaign to liberate Chile and Peru. The creole General José de San Martín (c. 1778-1850) from the United Provinces of Rio de la Plata (modern-day Argentina) assembled his famed Army of the Andes in his headquarters in Mendoza, where he was joined in command by O’Higgins. San Martín’s decision to cross the Andes with his troops in January of 1817 was based on the inaccessibility of a northern route to Peru as well as the knowledge that Chile would have to be liberated first.¹⁷ The Army’s successful traversing of the treacherous mountains was a monumental achievement, “unsurpassed not only for its courage and endurance but also for its superb timing which brought each section of the army to its right place at the appointed time.”¹⁸ After their crossing the Army went on to earn an important victory at the Battle of Chacabuco in February 1817. The official Proclamation of Chilean Independence was

¹⁵ John Lynch, *The South American Revolutions 1808-1826*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986), 136.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 138-9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 141.

given on January 1, 1818, while the document was signed the following month by none other than the new Supreme Director, Bernardo O'Higgins.¹⁹

While the Spaniards' efforts to try to regain control would nonetheless continue for years, the struggle to liberate Peru from royalist domination was no less prolonged and fraught with unique challenges. Though the Peruvian Independence Wars had begun in 1811, up until the final patriot victory, Lima remained a stronghold of royalist sentiment and sustained more moderate ideas about the requirements of nationhood. Many believed it was "compatible with the ideal of imperial unity," given that "this union was regarded as the safest guarantee against anarchy."²⁰ However when Ferdinand was restored to the throne in 1814 and it became clear he would do nothing to initiate the reforms creoles desired, many were quickly radicalized and rebellions ensued. In 1820 San Martín was continuing his plan to liberate Peru, working to weaken Spanish control through a variety of courses.²¹ Yet as John Lynch recounts in his book on the Spanish-American Revolutions, in Peru San Martín did not want to unleash outright violence. He preferred a peaceful strategic campaign, which Lynch explains was a result of his own "long record of monarchist sentiment" and his belief in America's "proneness to factionalism and violence unless restrained by strong government."²² In these words we

¹⁹ *Memoria Chilena*, Biblioteca Nacional de Chile (DIBAM), 2014, <http://www.memoriachilena.cl/602/w3-article-562.html#presentacion>, 21 April 2015.

²⁰ Lynch, *South American Revolutions*, 160.

²¹ One arm of San Martín's plan was to create a navy with the help of the United States, Britain, and Chile, which defended the surrounding waters of Lima and damaged Spanish trade by sea. See Lynch, *South American Revolutions*, 172-3.

²² *Ibid.*, 175.

can locate one of the essential points of criticism of the Spanish-American independence wars, namely that the leaders of these movements aimed to establish the same kind of authoritarian control and exclusionary governmental apparatus which had provided cause for revolution in the first place. Yet while they aimed to centralize control over their territories in a manner arguably akin to the Spanish monarchs, they envisioned themselves as fundamentally different from their dynastic predecessors. In their view, staunch totalitarian leadership was the only way to ensure the preservation of the radical political transformation for which they fought.

The opinion that strong central governments needed to be established immediately following independence was shared by the most famous South American Liberator himself, Simón Bolívar (1783-1830). It is known he supported a life-term presidency and the right to select his successor.²³ He also believed that while federalism was the most ideal governmental system, in the nascent Republics it was untenable. Describing it as “the most perfect and the most capable of providing for human happiness in society,” he also said that “nevertheless, [it is] the most contrary to the interests of our infant state.”²⁴ He argued the young nations lacked both the stability and maturity required for the success of a federalist system, and that the necessary values of republicanism had not yet

²³ David Bushnell, ed., *The Liberator, Simón Bolívar: Man and Image*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), *xvi*.

²⁴ Simón Bolívar, “The Cartagena Manifesto,” 15 December 1812; rpt. in *The Liberator*, ed. David Bushnell, 7.

sunken into the American psyche. While he proudly worked to liberate the South American nations, he often infantilized them in relation to their European counterparts.²⁵

Needless to say, this period was exceedingly complex given its countless turns, dramatic successes, intermittent setbacks, and apparent contradictions. Only a very minimal overview of these events and problems has been provided here for the sake of contextualization. While an enormous cast of characters were involved, O'Higgins, San Martín, and Bolívar emerge in the historical accounts as three significant actors. While they have often been treated with great adoration,²⁶ their actions and ambitions have also been met with ample criticism. Many have viewed them as aspiring despots, aiming to insert themselves where the viceroys once stood and initiate their own reigns of quasi-monarchical rule. Despite their moves to end slavery and some of the systemic abuses of the indigenous population, it is true that the status quo remained largely intact following independence, as wealthy land owners returned to their haciendas and continued to exploit the lower classes.²⁷ The intricacy of this period also manifested in art, as preexisting models of power and authority continued to hold significant weight over the way in which new ideas were presented. This can perhaps be most directly observed in portraiture, a genre which had always contributed to the self-fashioning of rule and visualized hierarchies of power. While more will be said on the particular ways in which

²⁵ In his famous "Jamaica Letter" of 1815, Bolívar infantilizes the South American nations as he elaborates on their complex relationship with Europe. See Bushnell, ed., *The Liberator*, 11-21.

²⁶ Bolívar, for example, has been widely considered the preeminent founding father of South America, some even going as far as to honor him as a god. See Bushnell, *The Liberator*, 128.

²⁷ Lynch, *South American Revolutions*, 277-9.

the portrait enacted this process, it is necessary to first turn our attention to the ways in which a study of Gil de Castro's work and its historical context falls within discourses of nationalism and the realm of National Art.

Toward a Criteria for National Art

By its very definition, National Art must pertain in a very direct way to the nation in question. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the designation of national can indicate a variety of types of relationships between the nation and the object to which the term is applied. It may indicate that the object is merely maintained by the nation in question, distributed or known within its boundaries and thus identifiable chiefly to a particular nation's populace. Alternatively, an object, including a work of art, can be national insofar as it is "expressive of the culture or tradition of a particular nation."²⁸ It may additionally refer to an object's espousal of nationalistic or patriotic sentiment. Finally, the national object is often "officially recognized or sanctioned by the government of a nation; controlled or endorsed by the state."²⁹ The work of Gil de Castro remarkably fits each one of these criteria, allowing it most certainly to fall within the limits of national discourse.

However there are certainly aspects of his work and legacy which do not fit exclusively within the category of National Art, and which necessitate additional descriptors to account for their broader applicability. One must recall for example that Gil de Castro's works were created during a period in which national boundaries had not

²⁸ Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University Press, 2015, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/125287?redirectedFrom=national#eid>, 21 April, 2015.

²⁹ Ibid.

been fully solidified. Independence required a large supra-regional effort with individuals from different parts of the region fighting together toward a mutually beneficial outcome.³⁰ Gil de Castro's work thus leads to questions of pan-national or regional identities, especially given that the notion of Americanism, rather than national identification, acted as the explicit unifying platform espoused by figures like Bolívar.³¹ Indeed Gil de Castro has been described as one of the first "international artists,"³² making him a useful reference point for these kinds of theoretical inquiries.

As they fought across the region, members of the military staff tended to send their portraits back to relatives at home. As a result today Gil de Castro's work is dispersed throughout Chile, Peru, Argentina, Venezuela, and Bolivia. However the native land of the sitter did not always determine where his portrait would end up. For instance, in the case of the artist's various portraits of Bolívar these currently reside in multiple countries. Thus while his images do meet the criteria of National Art, as described above, the objects must also be viewed as national and international, or perhaps, as encompassing a larger regional territory that crossed national boundaries.

This study contends that these categories are not mutually exclusive. While Gil de Castro can certainly be used fruitfully to examine a moment in which internationalism

³⁰ One might recall for example San Martín's Army of the Andes, which was comprised of soldiers from across the Río de la Plata as well as the Captaincy General of Chile.

³¹ In his various letters and public addresses Bolívar commonly referred to those born in the Americas as "Americans", often using this term in lieu of national or other kinds of regional signifiers. See for example his famous "Jamaica Letter" of September 1815, reprinted in Bushnell, ed., *The Liberator*, 11-21.

³² Katie Underwood, "Gil de Castro, Painter of Latin American Independence Movement, Gets a Fresh Look in New Getty-Supported Publication," *The Getty iris*, The J. Paul Getty Trust, 7 December 2012, <http://blogs.getty.edu/iris/gil-de-castro-painter-of-latin-american-independence-movement-gets-a-fresh-look-in-new-getty-supported-publication/>, 21 April 2015.

may have been born, the fact remains that the ability for his works to transcend national limits still implies that such limits existed, or were in the process of being made. The content and meaning of his portraits of the leaders of independence also apply directly to many of the important issues and theoretical models of nationalism and nation-building considered in modern scholarship. Thus while I have aimed to focus chiefly on this dimension of Gil de Castro's work, it is without blindness to the other discourses or interpretive frameworks in which he can be examined. Indeed it is part of the aim of this study to encourage a broadening of the discursive scope in which Gil de Castro has been considered.

I have already argued that the nationalistic aims of the artist's work are both visible and purposeful, intimately tied to the works' production and connected to the ways in which they are considered in different geographic contexts. To further establish this as a basis of my larger argument, I will next provide a brief overview of the objects' current locations and states of preservation, and how these connect with their status as national images. Then, by introducing some of the preeminent theories and models of nationalism which have been influential in modern scholarship, I establish those which are most relevant to Gil de Castro's body of work. Finally, I examine how his work has been considered in the field of art history up to the present day, in order to foreground and introduce the specific ways in which my project aims to enrich and contribute to the current body of knowledge.

In Peru, approximately 37 works by Gil de Castro are held in Lima alone. The large number can be related to the fact that the artist maintains a notable place in the

cultural heritage of the country. According to a recent study of the artist's work, "for the historiography of Peruvian art Gil de Castro appears as an important reference, as 'painter of the liberators' and precursor of the art of the independent period."³³ Chile conserves an even larger proportion of his oeuvre, with 80 works spread across various private collections and institutions. Likewise in this country Gil de Castro "is considered the first artist of the republican period, and a pioneer of national art."³⁴ Many of his works are known by the public in these countries, and the objects themselves are well-preserved in their respective collections. Ongoing institutional and academic interest in both Peru and Chile is evidenced by exhibitions featuring his work over the last couple of decades, including a retrospective exhibition at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Chile in 1994 as well as a recent large scale project undertaken by the Museo de Arte de Lima, more on which will be discussed shortly.

Ironically, the country that maintains the largest collection of the artist's work is not the one which most closely identifies him as part of its own national cultural heritage. In general, the state of Gil de Castro's works in Argentina is found to be much worse than those conserved in Peru and Chile. Works at the Historico Nacional in Buenos Aires have sustained significant physical damage including folds, rips, tears, holes, and have undergone numerous re-paintings intended to "improve" upon the images, rather than to preserve their original states.³⁵ While some of the damage was likely due to

³³ Majluf, ed., *Más allá de la imagen*, 115.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

circumstances of transport during and immediately after the war,³⁶ their poor state has also been considered to be the result of a general lack of respect for and interest in the works themselves as art. In the context of the historical museum, they were treated rather as “‘documents’, and treated in a utilitarian mode.”³⁷ While there are surely a variety of causes for the state of these objects, it has been suggested that the fact that Gil de Castro himself never lived in Argentina was likely a contributing factor in their critical evaluation and thus ultimately, their state of preservation.³⁸

Indeed, in Argentina Gil de Castro is described as “a perfect stranger,” while in Chile and Peru he is recognized as an important figure in these countries’ own national cultural imaginaries.³⁹ It is a point which cannot be easily divorced from the fact this is the only country of the three in which the artist never made his career: Gil de Castro had a significant professional presence in both Lima and Santiago. There is even a square named after him in the latter city (*Plaza Mulatto Gil de Castro*), marking the place where he established his workshop and portrayed so many members of the Chilean aristocracy before becoming the favorite artist of the new national governments.⁴⁰ Given his physical presence in these capital cities and his direct contribution to the local cultures, it is

³⁶ Some instances of damage were also determined to be the result of deliberate vandalism due to feelings of opposition to the figure represented, such as the case of a particular portrait of San Martín which is believed to have been slashed by a supporter of Carrera in Chile. See *Más allá de la imagen*, 117.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 117.

³⁸ The project researchers of the MALI study referred to this phenomenon as the works’ “material critical fortune,” a concept which links the works’ state of preservation and the degree of their cultural entrenchment to their critical evaluation in these different countries. See *Más allá de la imagen*, 114-119.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

reasonable that this played a role in his later adoption as an artist considered one of Peru's and Chile's own.

This process of inducting an individual into the cultural heritage of a country, or alternatively, of negating one's national association, provides a point of entry into a scholarly discourse on the nature of nationalism. By exploring some of its essential contours, we can establish a basis on which to evaluate Gil de Castro's work as nationally significant. While the work and biography of Gil de Castro indeed lay claim to models of inter- or pan-nationalism, his clients had explicitly nationalistic aims in mind. In their portraits one finds they ascertained the value of constructing national origin stories, and aimed to shape themselves as the generative national figureheads. They perceived a need to foster patriotism as the preservation of the nation, once established, would continue to demand the active participation and cooperation of its citizens. These facts necessitate a basic understanding of some of the central concerns and perspectives on nationalism and the way it has come to function in human societies. Yet first, it is necessary to briefly acknowledge the difficulty presented by some of the terms that are germane to this project.

It is important to recognize that many of the terms which occur in this study are inevitably fraught, often with complex or contingent meanings and even controversial connotations. A complete history of the linguistic and academic usage of historical, regional, and ambiguously geographic signifiers like Latin America, Spanish-America, and America is far beyond the scope of the current project, however I attempt to explain or contextualize them when appropriate. The word "America," for example, while

contested today in its usage as a pseudonym for the United States, is accurate for the period as a unifying term. Employed frequently by figures like Simón Bolívar, it was used to promote the idea of a hemispheric identity unique from Europe and the rest of the world.

Another term which has already appeared warrants an explanation. Patriot (in Spanish, *patriota*), was employed in the period in question and was actually included in many of the portraits of independence leaders and heroes made by Gil de Castro. As defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, a patriot is “a person who loves his her country, especially one who is ready to support its freedoms and rights and to defend it against enemies or detractors.”⁴¹ However while the term is certainly tied to one’s support and active defense of one’s own nation, I also assert that it can have a broader meaning when considered in the context of this period. The idea of patriotism was one promoted throughout the former Spanish-American territories in a way that was arguably as much irrespective of national boundaries as it was an advocate for their formation. By this I mean that the principle was compelling as a general ideal: those who fought for their own nation also intrinsically fought for patriotism as a new moral code, as an alternative to a prior long-standing and widespread form of political subjecthood. It is noteworthy in this regard that another entry is provided in the same dictionary definition referenced above. It reads, “In extended use: a lover, devotee, or supporter of a particular place, cause, ideal, etc.: a champion.”⁴² The lack of specificity of these terms—place,

⁴¹ Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University Press, 2015, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/138899?redirectedFrom=patriot#eid>, 21 May, 2015.

⁴² Ibid.

cause, ideal—serves well to reinforce the possibility that a broader notion of patriotism indeed emerged in this period.

Thus I argue that Gil de Castro himself, perhaps the region's first "international artist," should also be viewed as one of the first patriot painters. Using paint and brush as his weapons of ideology, he supported a broader platform of patriotism that did not necessarily limit his own national identification. While it is impossible to know the way in which the artist perceived his own national membership, his involvement in the larger campaigns for political independence render him at least a supporter of its basic principles. Viewed this way, it is not necessary to know his own feelings of national affiliation in order to characterize him as a patriot. Rather, it is my view that the term should rightly retain its multivalence and certainly, its ambiguity, as it pertains to Gil de Castro and to this study broadly. Thus like this example, I encourage the reader to consider the untidy and problematic nature of terms used here, as this is both far more intellectually honest and academically productive than ignoring their complexity.

Bearing these issues in mind, I turn now to describing some important work done on the national phenomenon. One of the most commonly cited texts is Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. It was first published in 1983 by Verso in London, and laid out the author's ideas regarding how nationalism emerged in the wake of revolutionary struggles in the Americas, Europe, and Asia. With special attention to the ways in which nationalism emerged differently in different places, and the potential reasons for these differences, Anderson bases his idea of nationalism on the concept of imagined communities.

Emerging due in part to the rise of print culture and the changing epistemic framework of the Early Modern period, imagined communities created a way of conceptualizing one's own membership in particular groups, a phenomenon which Anderson argues presaged the rise of national consciousness and eventually, the creation of national identities.

Focusing initially on Europe, Anderson turns to the Western hemisphere, which had its own important conditions for the emergence of nationalism. Anderson argues that in South America a combination of the spread of liberalizing ideas of the Enlightenment, a tightening of control on the part of the colonial-imperial state, and a fear of revolts of the lower classes helped create the backdrop for national independence movements to arise. But, the leaders of such movements—Anderson's "creole pioneers"—were the main actors who facilitated the creation of the kind of imagined community necessary for the emergence of a national consciousness. Finally the author addresses the question of why nationalism became so powerful, inspiring acts of great sacrifice on behalf of an entity that was ostensibly novel and relatively untested. To this he attributes a sense of moral grandeur associated with revolution, and the primordialness of language which helped fashion strong feelings of one's belonging in the imagined community.

It is this role of language which one can see patently working through Gil de Castro's portraits, as terms like *nación* (nation) and *patria* (homeland) gained almost immediate currency with the advent of independence. This helped to congeal abstract concepts in linguistic form, articulating them through a visual mode and making them comprehensible to contemporary viewers. Yet, as previously raised, there is also something to be said for the powerful ambiguity of language: like images, it is often their

very inexactness and multiplicity of meaning which affords them their potency, making them effective agents in the spread of ideas without attaching to them explicit promises. As Jeanette Favrot Peterson wrote, “The terms *patria* and *nación* in creole rhetoric cannot be identified with modern concepts of nationhood in which the rights of all are respected, nor were they consistent with the realities of colonial society.”⁴³ Language can be a powerful tool and certainly played an important role in the dissemination of ideas in the work of Gil de Castro.

Another relevant model, which Anderson’s book provides, is introduced in a section entitled “The Biography of Nations,” in which the life of a nation is compared to the life of a person. Like human lives, the memories of one’s own infancy cannot be directly remembered, and rather must be “narrated” or told from the point of view of someone else in a better position of remembering.⁴⁴ As a result of this “estrangement comes a conception of personhood, identity,” which we adopt as part of the basic narrative of our own lives.⁴⁵ Though the memories are not our own, we rely on them and on the proximity and accepted authority of the individuals who provide them to us. So it is with nations, Anderson argues, as nations similarly construct their own biographies based on information (“memories”) provided by or constructed by those who were present at their formation. Works of art are often taken as providing such memories of the past, and thus involve a process of strategic remembering and forgetting of significant

⁴³ “The Virgin of Guadalupe: Symbol of Conquest or Liberation?” *Art Journal* 51, no. 4 (1992): 43.

⁴⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 204.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

people, places, and events. This notion becomes important in considering which events and persons are “remembered” in Gil de Castro’s portraits, and how their authenticity as historical memories also hinges upon the acceptance of the authority of the individuals or institutions which commissioned and display(ed) them.

In her review of three texts on nationalism, Yael Tamir responds to many of Anderson’s ideas while aiming to amend their focus. She asserts that “the paramount common denominator of all nations is a national consciousness fostering feelings of belongingness and national fraternity.”⁴⁶ For her, the defining aspect of nations is based on the existence of national consciousness, regardless of the particular ways in which it is brought about. This model is valuable for the present study as it depends less on theorizing the exact process by which nationalism emerges; rather it directs attention to the establishment of a national consciousness. This leads one to consider how this concept might be supported and fortified in a given society, as well as the role of hierarchies of power and authority which often lie behind its creation.

Of course the degree to which individuals perceive their own national membership and are compelled by national imagery is likely the most difficult to find and evaluate. As E.J. Hobsbawm notes, “to insist on consciousness or choice as the criterion of nationhood is insensibly to subordinate the complex and multiple ways in which human beings define and redefine themselves as members of groups, to a single option:

⁴⁶ Yael Tamir, “The Enigma of Nationalism: Imagined Communities by Benedict Anderson; Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity by Liah Greenfeld; National Identity by Anthony D. Smith.” *World Politics* 47, no. 3 (1995): 424.

the choice of belonging to a ‘nation’ or ‘nationality’.”⁴⁷ It is important to remember that beginning in this period of national independence, and in many places today, citizens are provided official nationalities by their respective governments, a phenomenon which Anderson has equated with religious conversion.⁴⁸ One likewise cannot assume these identities were unilaterally or willingly accepted, particularly given the fact that many—particularly members of the indigenous population and those of African or Asian descent—were compelled to fight for independence by force or coercion. However, the aim of the present study is not to theorize or demonstrate that a devout nationalism was generally accepted, but rather that the espousal and tangible presentation of these values can be observed in the imagistic program of Gil de Castro and his patrons. In establishing nations and nationalistic concepts, art, and in particular portraiture, was viewed as serving a vital purpose.

Tamir highlights the notion of national consciousness to foreground her ideas regarding what many scholars have aimed to understand, namely the power of nationalism. She attributes this to nationalism’s significant role in the formation of individual identities. She cites the work of Anthony D. Smith who notes that nations provide ““a powerful means of defining and locating individual selves in the world through the prism of the collective personality and its distinctive culture.””⁴⁹

⁴⁷ E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 8.

⁴⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 145.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Tamir, “The Enigma of Nationalism,” 430.

Furthermore, not only does nationalism help an individual position himself in the world, but also within his own past and future. Nationalism becomes powerful for its presumed stability and permanence: it is believed one's actions performed on behalf of the nation will be remembered forever, providing the kind of moral grandeur Anderson identifies as necessary for one's willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice in its name. Anderson also indicates that it is the degree to which the cause of this sacrifice "is felt to be something fundamentally pure" which adds to the power of these feelings.⁵⁰ Thus a strong belief in the greater meaning and moral soundness of one's cause, as well as a certain promise of immortality together create the foundation on which such sacrifices are made. Given that portraits have the capacity to provide tangible evidence of this promise of immortality by carrying one's memory into the indeterminate future, they become exemplary materials for an examination of nationalism's power.

While Gil de Castro's own practice of national image-making is thus ripe for the development and application of these and other models, curators and art historians working outside of the countries in which he worked have largely ignored its discursive possibilities. His work has featured into exhibitions of Latin American art staged in Europe and the United States oriented toward the presentation of a broad-sweeping, nominally Latin American, art history. Such projects position him as a touchstone of a kind of historical moment in-between: depicting the foremost heroes of independence in a style often characterized as naïve, rigid, and static, exemplary of a vestigial colonial

⁵⁰ *Imagined Communities*, 144.

portrait format brought up to date through the adoption of a neo-classical model.⁵¹ In contrast his oeuvre has received much closer attention in the countries in which he resided, Peru and Chile, owing naturally in part to the increased accessibility to the objects themselves, but also due to the fact that his images have directly contributed to the national cultural identities of those countries.

As his work appeared in English-language texts and international exhibits of the twentieth century, his presence contributed to foreign notions of a Latin American cultural identity. The works included in such caches were virtually always limited to his portraits of Simón Bolívar and José Olaya Balandra, the former the preeminent Latin American liberator and the latter a popular icon of Peruvian independence. The portrait of Olaya, created in 1828, is particularly well-traveled (Figure 1.4). It was featured in the 1966 exhibition of Latin American art organized by the Yale University Art Gallery and the University of Texas Art Museum, which visited cities across the United States as well as the Palace of Fine Arts in Mexico City.⁵² The show aimed to present a panoramic view of “Latin American artistic and cultural evolution during the century and a half since Independence,” according to the catalog authored by Stanton Loomis Catlin and Terrence Greider.⁵³ Covering chronologically the period of 1800-1965, Olaya was included in the exhibit as a marker of “the first consistent art style of Latin American republican

⁵¹ See for example Stanton Loomis Catlin and Terence Greider, *Art of Latin America Since Independence*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 14; and Ades, *Art in Latin America*, 17-18, 341.

⁵² According to “Major Art Exhibits: Yale-Texas Exhibition of Latin American Art Goes to Mexico,” *Latin American Research Review* 2, no. 2 (1967): 221.

⁵³ *Art of Latin America since Independence*, ix.

idealism,” though according to a reviewer, the work was overshadowed by “a host of more technically accomplished Europeanized and indeed European artists, lacking for the most part his assertiveness.”⁵⁴

The show indeed appears to have been received and measured in a comparative light with coeval trends in Europe, though the catalog focuses more on the relationship between Latin American artists and their “cognates” in the United States: “the Venezuelan Juan Lovera may remind us of his contemporary, Trumbull; Blanes may be compared to Homer and Sívori to Eakins.”⁵⁵ Searching to forge an “American” sense of hemispheric unity, the authors introduce the catalog by establishing this comparison as an overarching theme. Olaya then, notwithstanding the critique that his role was effectively minimized in the show as a whole, seems to exist demonstratively as a relic of a bygone and incipient era of a nominally Latin American history, distant yet accessible to a North American audience acquainting themselves with the vast cultural production of their southern neighbors.

The portrait of Olaya appeared again in another international context as part of the traveling exhibition *Art in Latin America: The Modern Era, 1820-1980*, which opened at the Hayward Gallery in London in May 1989 and ran until August of that year before moving onto Stockholm and Madrid. The exhibition was headed by Dawn Ades of the University of Essex, who also authored the catalog along with Guy Brett, Stanton Loomis Catlin, and Rosemary O’Neill. Though according to Ades the show’s aim was “to create

⁵⁴ Richard P. Schaedel, “Paintings at an Exhibition: 1966 The Yale-Texas Exhibition of Latin American Art 1800-1965,” *Latin American Research Review* 1, no. 3 (1966), 92.

⁵⁵ Catlin and Greider, *Art of Latin America*, 1.

not a survey but rather a temporary museum of Latin American art,”⁵⁶ the catalog states that the exhibition “explores thematically and historically the emergence of what may be called a Latin America aesthetic [*sic*] and the questions of national and cultural identity associated with it.”⁵⁷ Thus despite the alleged intent to move away from totalizing rhetoric, like the Yale-Texas show its chronological breadth and geographic scope resulted in a narrative which charted the critical moments of an inclusive Latin American art across more than a century and a half. As Gil de Castro’s portrait featured prominently in a section featuring independence heroes, it spoke less to a distinctly Peruvian reality and national history than to an essential part of a collective “Latin American” experience. Chosen also to adorn the catalog’s cover (Figure 1.5), Olaya becomes the spokesman for a region unified by a shared colonial past, an aspect which has contributed perhaps more than any other to the false homogenization of its history and culture.

The dissemination of Gil de Castro’s portrait of Olaya abroad in the context of what can be termed “identity exhibitions,”⁵⁸ in which it is given the role of a kind of historical and cultural ambassador to its place of origin, thus opens up questions regarding the ability for those outside of national boundaries to help construct notions of national or pan-national identity in the global arena. Taking a heading of “Latin American” as an organizing principle, what is an exceedingly complex field of cultural

⁵⁶ David Thomas, “Art in Latin America,” *RSA Journal* 137, no. 5397 (1989): 588.

⁵⁷ Ades, *Art in Latin America*, 1.

⁵⁸ This notion of constructing Latin American identity through art exhibits and displaying it for North American or European audiences has been discussed at length by various scholars. See for instance Mari Carmen Ramírez, “Beyond ‘The Fantastic’: Framing Identity in U.S. Exhibitions of Latin American Art,” *Art Journal* 51, no. 4 (1992): 60-68.

production is falsely congealed under an ambiguous historical, geographic, and cultural signifier. The term Latin America itself has been widely deconstructed and problematized, for numerous reasons, but importantly for its origins in and inherent support of a pervasive and hegemonic “logic of coloniality,” as described by Walter Mignolo in his 2005 book *The Idea of Latin America*.⁵⁹ As he recounts, the notion of *Latinidad* was introduced by the French intellectual Michel Chevalier in the nineteenth century as a way of designating and locating certain inherent differences—racial, cultural, and imperial—believed to exist between the descendants of the Roman and Germanic cultures.⁶⁰ Thus Latin America became an organizing principle for world culture, an idea built fundamentally on differentials of power, racist ideology, and the modern ethos of coloniality.

Thus it is significant that Latin American is one of the categories which has been used as an intellectual expedient in various didactic contexts, including art exhibitions, survey publications, and introductory art history courses. Within these it is admittedly difficult to avoid Gil de Castro’s work becoming fixed within a conveniently tidy narrative. Yet as the portrait of Olaya, as our current example, becomes interchangeable with Peruvian and Latin American independence in the context of international art shows, the details of his biography may become lost or minimized as his synonymy with nationalistic values and patriotism assume the central focus. While the image necessarily remains a signifier of localized history and culture, one must recognize that the

⁵⁹ *The Idea of Latin America* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 10.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 77-80.

parameters of this narrative will fluctuate depending on the way in which it is presented, and the underlying perspectives shaping its production. Given these issues, it is important at least to acknowledge what is at stake in Gil de Castro's inclusion in a Latin American framework, irrespective of whether one ultimately decides to reject or accept such a classification.

To turn to monographic studies of the artist, these have virtually all been published in Spanish. One important example is Ricardo Mariátegui Oliva's *Jose Gil de Castro ("El Mulato Gil"): vida y obra del gran pintor peruano de los libertadores: Obras existentes en Argentina y Chile*, published in 1981. The same author also published a two-volume text in 1983 dealing with the artist's portraits of various wealthy and socially prominent figures in Lima. His texts provide lengthy descriptions and historical background of more than 100 works by Gil de Castro, impressive but not nearly exhaustive of the artist's vast body of work.⁶¹ It is clear that Mariátegui Oliva oriented his research to the artist's works which were best known up to that point and where the sitters were of the highest social prominence. Still, up until recently his texts remained the most extensive studies of Gil de Castro's work, and many holes continued to exist in the artist's biography.

The fact that profound gaps in the knowledge of this artist remained for so long, however, does not indicate a lack of interest in his works, nor a lack of art historical value. It likely rather reflects another, more complex phenomenon. First there is the issue

⁶¹ It is currently estimated that Gil de Castro authored more than 200 paintings in his lifetime. See *Más allá de la imagen*, 70.

of language, as most studies of Gil de Castro have only been published in Spanish, limiting their accessibility. Also, the works are scattered throughout private and public collections across South America, making it difficult for researchers outside of the continent to gain access and obtain the necessary permissions to work with objects deemed part of the national patrimony. This creates a unique situation for researchers wanting to examine these objects, and for institutions outside of South America to borrow them for exhibitions, particularly given that works of the national patrimony have extremely strict policies regarding their international movements.⁶²

But thirdly, the lack of attention Gil de Castro has received abroad can be traced to his long-standing reputation as a naïve painter. While we know this is far from the truth, as recent findings indicate he was trained within the workshop of an important master and had thorough knowledge of contemporary artistic trends and techniques, the fact that he had sufficient skill to reach the highest level of professional prestige was apparently overlooked. Commonly described as a “popular” or folk artist, this characterization seems to have been based totally on the critical reception of his work, which itself does not fit neatly within a hegemonic paradigm of artistic development privileging realism, consistent modelling, and “correct” perspective.⁶³ It is imperative to recognize that these criteria did not hold weight over the artist as they did elsewhere in the world, and by holding it to a foreign standard, Gil de Castro’s work has not been

⁶² For more information regarding the definition and rationale of the national patrimony, see John O’Hagan and Clare McAndrew, “‘Protecting’ the National Artistic Patrimony; An Economics Perspective,” *Trinity Economic Paper Series*, no. 7 (Dublin: Trinity College, 2000).

⁶³ Benson, et al., *Retratos*, 24, 33.

considered on its own terms. It is for the sake of the integrity of the discipline to correct this art historical miscalculation. Luckily, very recently an unprecedented study of the artist concluded, yielding significant findings which help to ameliorate exactly this error.

The multi-year and multi-national study entitled *José Gil de Castro, Cultura visual a representacion, del antiguo regimen a las republicas sudamericanas* was launched by the Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI) in April of 2008 with the support of the Getty Foundation in Los Angeles. The project was headed by Roberto Amigo, Nestor Barrio, Natalia Majluf, Laura Malosetti, and Luis Eduardo Wuffarden, a team of researchers of whom many had already published extensively on Gil de Castro. The team comprised individuals from the MALI and from institutions in Chile and Argentina in order to orchestrate the international collaboration necessary for the study of Gil de Castro's massive oeuvre, which is widely dispersed across the continent.⁶⁴ Bringing together in-depth technical analysis with art historical research, the project was able to settle some issues of attribution, conclude with more certainty details of his biography, and gain a better understanding of how the artist actually worked. The project, which concluded in the fall of 2014, resulted in a publication summarizing its results entitled *Más allá de la imagen. Los estudios técnicos en el proyecto José Gil de Castro (Beyond the Image: Technical Studies in the José Gil de Castro Project)*, as well as an international exhibition and Gil de Castro's first complete catalog raisonné.

⁶⁴ The project forged a collaboration between the Centro Nacional de Conservación y Restauración, Dirección de Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos of Chile (CNCR-DIBAM), the Instituto de Investigaciones sobre Patrimonio Cultural, Universidad Nacional de San Martín of Buenos Aires, Argentina (IIPC-UNSAM), and the Museo de Arte de Lima of Peru (MALI).

However, while the products of this study are exceptional, it is not clear they will necessarily lead to increased visibility of Gil de Castro on the global stage. These publications are still as yet only published in Spanish, and although the exhibition was a great success in bringing together works formerly bound to their home countries through the terms of the national patrimony, the show only traveled to the countries that cooperated in the project. For any student or scholar seriously interested in this artist, these materials will be of basic necessity to consult. However his work needs to be brought into broader contexts and fields of inquiry if it is to have any significant impact on the discipline. The present study aims to do precisely this, as it brings to light the connections between Gil de Castro's body of work and the broader field of national visual culture studies. A thorough consideration not only reveals important illustrative examples of the various machinations of nationalism, but also productively serves to problematize and elucidate those aspects considered within the context of the Spanish-American wars of independence.

The Cultural Dimension of Nation-Building

The above issues and concepts provide the basis of entry into the manner in which images actively construct and proliferate patriotic ideas, acting as digestible models and tangible symbols of a powerful state-ordained nationalism. While nation-building is comprised of a variety of armatures including the technological, social, political, and economic, this study draws attention specifically to its cultural dimension. As it investigates the role of one uniquely important body of work within the framework of incipient national identities, it locates an active re-vision of prior notions of power and

authority in the early Republican period. Tracking the process of building and disseminating a nationalist project, this study follows the view of E.J. Hobsbawm who wrote: “Nations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way round.”⁶⁵ Indeed Gil de Castro’s works were commissioned by those who had an enormous stake in creating messages of national unity, instilling the values of patriotism, and arguing for the righteous authority and competence of the new leadership. The following pages describe this process by attending to three images which help explicate important aspects of these phenomena.

First, I present the example of Gil de Castro’s 1825 *Portrait of Simón Bolívar in Lima*. The work depicts the Liberator at a high point in his career after he had earned a number of significant victories across the continent. While the image broadly follows the expected requirements of portraiture for the time, it also demonstrates that the artist was aware of changes he could make to the basic format. Remarkably pared down compared to other examples, I argue this may be explained by looking to the kind of self-representation Bolívar wanted to fashion at this point in his career. I also consider the implications of these kinds of images, which forge a visual link between military might and the success of the nation. A final important aspect is the imagining of Bolívar as a unifying figure in the multi-national fight for independence; despite later siting of the work as a thoroughly national image, within the work itself Bolívar is not tied to any nation in particular, aiding in his eventual adoption as a figure of continental solidarity.

⁶⁵ *Nations and Nationalism*, 10.

Next, I examine the case of the artist's 1820 *Portrait of Bernardo O'Higgins*. Like the portrait of Bolívar, this image offers the dignified display of a confident military general. However the figure also espouses the new terms of national leadership, a system purportedly based on one's personal merits as a leader rather than one's *de facto* status as ruler. The theme of personal merit indeed permeates the meaning of the image, as O'Higgins is laden with signifiers of his various accomplishments. Acting as a promise for the future of national leadership, the work also effectively serves as a legitimization of the sitter's own rise to power. I also discuss the distinct features of the landscape depicted in the background, one which bears witness to the creation of a national narrative and the basic components of a Chilean national identity. Thus overall, this chapter permits the reader to view the ways in which images directly contributed to the fashioning of a particular national consciousness.

The final example discussed here is Gil de Castro's *Portrait of José Olaya Balandra* of 1828, a work completely unique in the artist's oeuvre both for its subject and the nature of the representation. After the death of the Peruvian martyr for independence, José Olaya, a portrait was ordered to be made in his honor. Yet given his status as a commoner and his mixed racial background, his glorified likeness had no clear prototype in the context of the late colonial period. Through the artist's creative imagining of his subject, one observes an active re-envisioning of convention, effectively remaking the genre of portraiture as a result. Drawing on religious iconography and imagining his subject as a saint, Gil de Castro found a way to shape his subject in a manner deemed best suited to his background and biography. This demonstrates the way in which

contemporary circumstances forced artists to contend with new subject matter, opening up the possibility for unique representational solutions. Thus the portrait of Olaya provides a view onto an important moment of artistic transformation and regeneration.

After examining these three images, I close with a discussion of the way in which images of eminent historical figures become synonymous with entire regions and histories through a process of iconization, and the different ways in which their likenesses circulate in a manner that helps entrench notions of national identity. Akin to other kinds of national emblems, portraits of celebrated founding fathers and humble patriots serve a vital and distinct purpose in creating a national visual canon. With attention to the power structures that facilitate such circulations of images, one can better delineate the forces that converge to create fundamental narratives and cultural identities of nations.

Finally, I conclude that an examination of Gil de Castro's body of work during the nominally transformative period of independence reveals the ways in which this era was not a decisive overturning of prior convention. Rather while the status quo in many ways was upheld following independence, many of the artistic traditions of the colonial era were similarly retained. What the period provided was an incentive to reconsider colonial convention, allowing us to see what was viewed as useful and what could be reinvented. What the reader will find is that this historical period was neither wholly transformative nor fundamentally stable, but rather involved an exceedingly complex process of grappling with artistic norms and expectations. Gil de Castro emerges as the preeminent figure who exemplifies this phenomenon in a particular time and place, one who exercises not passivity but agency in the ways in which he reimagined a visual

language in the service of new ideas. Ultimately this examination yields insight into a period that has been critically under-explored, while providing a compelling framework from which to enrich the field of national visual culture studies and discourses concerned with the national phenomenon. It is the larger aim of this study, then, to demonstrate this artist's broad applicability, in order to encourage more work to be done on this multi-faceted, numerous, yet globally little-recognized, body of work.

Figures



Figure 1.1 Map of Colonial South America, c. 1790. Pictured in Leopoldo Castedo, *A History of Latin American Art and Architecture* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1969), 314.



Figure 1.2. Map of South America, 1800-1830. Pictured in John Lynch, *The South American Revolutions 1808-1826*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1986), 6.



Figure 1.3. José Gil de Castro, *Francisco Manuel de la Sotta y Manso*, date unknown. Oil on canvas. 42.1 x 31.9 in (107 x 81 cm). Private collection. Pictured in Hernán Maino, *Pintura Chilena del Siglo XIX: José Gil de Castro: El Retratista de la Independencia* (Santiago de Chile: Origo Ediciones, 2008), 49.



Figure 1.4. José Gil de Castro, *José Olaya Balandra*, 1828. Oil on canvas. 6.7 x 4.4 ft (204 x 134 cm). Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Antropología e Historia del Peru. Pueblo Libre, Lima, Peru. Photo by the author.



Figure 1.5. Cover of *Art in Latin America: The Modern Era, 1820-1980* by Dawn Ades, et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), featuring portrait of *José Olaya Balandra* by José Gil de Castro, 1828.

Chapter 1: Simón Bolívar and the Crafting of Image

José Gil de Castro produced multiple portraits of Simón Bolívar throughout his career. An example from 1825 provides valuable insight into the fashioning of the Liberator's imagistic persona at arguably the highest point of his career. It was a moment of great military achievement for Bolívar, yet also one in which the weight of continuing obligations was certainly of present mind. By looking to the ways in which this portrait differed from others of its kind, we can see how it conveyed a sense of leadership that distinguished itself from tradition and recent historical experience by modifying artistic convention. By altering the typical portrait format and through his rendering of the figure's features, Gil de Castro succeeded in crafting an image that provided the impression of unencumbered leadership. The work also simultaneously heightened Bolívar's role as a formidable military commander, creating a linkage between the necessity of militarism and the continued preservation of national sovereignty. Finally, lacking in specific material which would link the subject to any nation in particular, the portrait also helps shape Bolívar as a unifying figure whose reach, and thus significance, is international. Together these aspects actively helped revise existing notions of political efficacy, indicating the emergence of a new historical epoch while promoting nationalist ideology and regional solidarity.

The four-by-seven-foot *Portrait of Simón Bolívar in Lima* of 1825 features the titular figure standing erect in full-length view (Figure 2.1). His tall and slender body creates a vertical axis perpendicular to the horizontal field of the tile floor. Emphasizing this verticality, Bolívar's right foot points forward bearing the weight of his body, while

his left leg relaxes, turning slightly outward to the right. The small bend resulting in his left leg thus counters the fixed linearity of the right. The compositional balance of his position is heightened by a bend in his right arm, created as the sitter situates his right hand in the opening of his waistcoat.⁶⁶ His left hand, in contrast, grasps a long, gold-sheathed saber, lifting it slightly outward and away from his body. The line of the left arm is thus visually extended through the line of the sword, creating a continuous diagonal axis moving downward and to the right, disrupted only by the limit of the pictorial field. Through this harmony of bent and straight lines the artist's careful positioning of the figure amounts to the neoclassical *contrapposto*, in which the body is placed in a comfortable position of balanced weight distribution, yielding a visual harmony of parts based on the principle of opposition. This pose would have been of standard stock for portraiture at the time, given the Neo-Classical interest that had begun to flourish in the previous century, and the general character of full-length portraits which often featured some variation of this model.

The static nature of Bolívar's highly composed form contrasts with the animated qualities of his face. Framed by his distinctive sideburns and slightly tousled black hair, the lustrous pallor of his flesh yields a healthful and vibrant appearance as if he was lit

⁶⁶ The hand-in-waistcoat gesture became a stock pose of eighteenth century portraiture particularly in England, and had its origins in classical statuary. It was also a pose which aristocratic men would often adopt in real life. As a result the pose was associated with a sense of dignified personal decorum. After Jacques-Louis David made the gesture most associated with Napoleon in his portrait of the French Emperor in 1812, it had even more specific connotations. While many have compared Bolívar with Napoleon since the eighteenth century, his adoption of the pose does not necessarily indicate he meant to emulate his French counterpart. On the contrary the Liberator apparently detested the comparison. See Arline Meyer, "Re-dressing Classical Statuary: The Eighteenth-Century 'Hand-in-Waistcoat' Portrait," *The Art Bulletin* 77, no. 1 (1995): 45-63; and, on Bolívar's feelings regarding the comparison with Napoleon, see Dawn Ades, *Art in Latin America*, 12.

from within. A light source seems to come from the left, evidenced by a shadow to the right of Bolívar's feet, though the background rather displays an indeterminate distribution of light. Bolívar's characteristic long, straight nose is in full view due to the three-quarter turn of the head, a staple of Gil de Castro's repertoire. Bolívar's expression is equally noteworthy: his eyes appear widened as if he was laboring to maintain a lively appearance—facial lines near the right temple reveal this act of raising the eyebrows. The effect approximates the common expression of a “deer-in-headlights.” This apparent muscular effort in the upper part of the face is echoed by the subtle smirk of the mouth, turned up at the corner just enough to amplify this sense of contrived alertness. Yet despite the impression of forced energy, the face as a whole conveys an attempt to project confidence. The understated smile aids in the transmission of this air of self-satisfaction.

Between the animated character of the sitter's face and the rigidity of his form, a first set of many tensions within the work is introduced. A second lies in the way in which the artist conveys volume, as the visibly flat fields of color that make up the figure's body seem incompatible with the lustrous and more three-dimensional qualities of the face. In addition, the floor seems unnaturally tilted up, visually dividing the figure at the level of his knees and making it appear as though he was not anchored firmly to the floor. Aspects such as these have led to a variety of evaluations regarding the artist's skill, particularly by those who are familiar with and rather prefer the highly modeled and “finished” paintings of the contemporary era in Western Europe. However researchers at the MALI have defended and helped explain Gil de Castro's style for those who have found it somewhat mystifying, arguing that one must consider it a function of the

physical manner in which he worked as well as the basic paradigms which guided his approach.

The MALI study draws attention to way in which Gil de Castro composed his paintings and how he conceived of individual details and objects. They discovered in the course of their project that Gil de Castro employed the technique of tracing as means of expediting the creative process, while also painting objects as close as possible to their true dimensions. In *Más allá de la imagen*, Natalia Majluf and Carolina Ossa write of Gil de Castro's "pictorial logic" that,

"The method of tracing also reminds us of a particular form of conceiving of a painting, one which is guided by relations of proximity, contiguity, and touch. It is then tempting in this context to remind us of the famous opposition of the optic and the tactile (or haptic) of Alois Riegl, to understand a work which seems to be determined by the desire to capture 'the individual unity of things.' Each object and each detail is treated as an individual and isolated piece that does not seem to require nor depend on the other elements represented in the painting."⁶⁷

In addition the authors describe the artist's interest in "constructing the visual illusion based on proximity more than distance, on the tactile more than the optical."⁶⁸ As the figure is visually brought to the surface, he not only becomes the decisive focal point of the image, but begins to exist, in a certain sense, with a greater feeling of physical presence than works which tout their own immaculate representation of depth and dimension. Majluf and Ossa encourage the viewer to consider the appearance of Gil de Castro's works then through this lens of artistic intention and a multiplicity of equally

⁶⁷ Natalia Majluf, ed., *Más allá de la imagen*, 94.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 95.

valid compositional choices, ridding it of the critical judgments that often enter into the minds of those searching for “perfect” perspective or consistent modeling and materiality.

This approach of prioritizing the feeling of presence of the figure, rather than paining to articulate a mathematically true space, thus substantiates the artist’s ambiguous rendering of the background. Behind Bolívar is a plain backdrop with a darkened hue, a field which collides abruptly with the orange and grey tiled floor. At the bottom is a border which one perceives to be the edge of the floor plane, or perhaps a platform on which the figure stands. Thus while the artist has provided the indication of an actual, interior space, one has no sense of what kind of space the figure inhabits. It contains no furnishings, no supplemental objects, and no indication of identifiable architecture which one might expect to find in such examples of state portraiture popular throughout the colonial era. The pared-down environment is indeed distinct from representations of the Liberator done by other artists of the period, as well as other portraits done by Gil de Castro at earlier and later dates. Here the artist’s clear compositional prioritizing of the figure, heightened by the careful balance of the figure’s form and strong visual tensions, further distinguish this work from other examples. To expound on these differences, an overview of the most common features of colonial state portraiture is first useful, prior to a discussion of two important contemporary works of Bolivarian portraiture which will serve as direct comparisons.

Portraits became increasingly popular toward the end of the colonial period among affluent civilians, fashionable for their ability to capture and preserve the likenesses of elite individuals who wanted the memory of their important status to carry

on long after their death. One author also notes that portraits were especially popular among wealthy creoles as they became ever more aware of their second-class status, aiming to convey their distinction from *peninsulares*.⁶⁹ However portraits had been chiefly noteworthy during the colonial era for the depiction of the Spanish kings and his emissaries in the Americas, the viceroys, as well as other kinds of high-ranking individuals like prominent clergymen, for example. Up until the eighteenth century, when French tastes became popular throughout the Spanish Empire as a result of the Bourbons' succession to power in Europe, the portraits of such figures subscribed to a very particular and largely fixed set of compositional criteria. First, the sitter would be posed in a limited array of rigid positions, either sitting or standing, and depicted either in bust, half-length, three-quarter, or full-length format. As more of the figure was portrayed, the dimensions of the work also tended to increase, and due to this larger, full-length portraits were the most expensive to commission and conveyed the clearest message of personal wealth and status.

However there were other mechanisms communicating the social importance of the sitter. A variety of symbolic objects and attributes offered evidence of the sitter's life and character, such as his professional duties, notable accomplishments, or religious devotion. Coats of arms were also useful for demonstrating a person's prestigious family lineage. Backgrounds usually featured some kind of elaborate interior space, replete with lush draperies, bookshelves, or writing desks, indicating a particular space, for instance,

⁶⁹ Maino, *Pintura Chilena*, 16.

the inside of a church or palace. The way in which an individual comported himself in the portrait was also carefully circumscribed, and his gesture and position had to accord to basic standards of personal decorum.⁷⁰ Thus the range of body positions an individual could adopt was quite narrow. That, coupled with standardized backgrounds and props, have made these portraits seem repetitive, even formulaic in appearance. This model, which changed little during the period, had its origins in Europe, where Baroque conventions were essentially imported wholesale to the Americas along with the arrival of the Spanish in the sixteenth century.

However there was one clear American innovation to these kinds of images. Text panels hovered artificially on the picture plane, inserted as a superficial means of permitting more information to enter into the image with the advantage of articulating any additional aspects of the sitter's identity which visual symbols could not directly signify. These could include the sitter's often long official name and titles, details of his biography, or a description of his most impressive personal accolades. These text elements along with the stiffly posed figure and carefully crafted environment affirm portraiture itself as a highly composed genre, reflecting a person not "as he was," as if conveying an objective snapshot of the person's everyday life or activities, for example, but rather presented the sitter in the most idealized manner, as he would want to be seen and remembered by himself and others.

⁷⁰ For more on the significance of particular poses and body positions, and specifically the infamous "hand-in-waistcoat" gesture, see Meyer, "Re-dressing Classical Statuary," 45-63.

One image may serve as an example of this standard portrait model (Figure 2.2). The 1752 portrait by Mexican artist Miguel Cabrera, one of the most prominent artists of the eighteenth century, depicts the Sixth Count of Santiago de Calimaya, also the Seventh Marquis of Salinas de Rio Pisuerga, known by the ostentatious Christian name of Juan Xavier Joaquín Gutiérrez Altamirano Velasco y Castilla Albornos, López Legaspi Ortiz de Oraa Gorraez Beaumont, y Navarra. His wealth and status are clearly symbolized by his extravagant clothing, voluminous and extensively patterned with intricate designs. As noted by Gauvin Alexander Bailey, the Asiatic decorations on the garments indicates the sitter's relation to the conquistador of the Philippines.⁷¹ The compass in his right hand may also reference the "exotic lands that the sitter only ruled in name," symbolic of a trans-Pacific connection forged only through the unique circumstances of colonial occupation.⁷² Don Juan's styling in the French mode, including the powdered wig and high-heeled shoes, further indicates his cosmopolitanism and great financial means. The portrait is framed on the left side by the sitter's familial coat of arms and a text cartouche which recounts his absurdly long official name and titles, a linguistic and visual device which itself attests to his lofty status.

Thus the image described above serves to translate the most important aspects of the sitter's identity through the integration of a variety of visual and linguistic motifs. One can learn a great deal about the sitter's background, social standing, access to various goods, and knowledge of contemporary fashion. However there is also a more

⁷¹ *Art of Colonial Latin America* (London: Phaidon Press, 2005), 166.

⁷² *Ibid.*

general argument which the image makes about Don Juan's status, which is based on the viewer's recognition of the use of an iconographic model reserved over the course of many generations for the depiction of the richest and most powerful members of society. The strength of the message then is supported by its repetition, as a visual canon of powerful figures is constructed with each successive portrait adopting this representational formula. Yet the authority of the image is also controlled by its necessary exclusivity, by the fact that only the most powerful, wealthy, or socially prominent can afford to be depicted in this way.

These characteristics formed the basic tenets of official portraiture which guided the practice generally throughout the colonial period and into the period of independence. They provided a set of expectations held by the sitters as they commissioned a portrait, as well as a powerful visual model which they would have every incentive to emulate. In Gil de Castro's portraits of independence leaders, this basic process of artistic continuity must be understood as linked fundamentally to the deep level of cultural entrenchment of this particular iconographic model, rather than a conscious desire of the sitters to visually resemble the Spanish viceroys. Their explicit desire to differentiate themselves from these same individuals and to revise existing rhetorics of power and authority was expressed both in their own words and through their visual representations. While the visualizing of these figures through an established aesthetic mode helped legitimize them as worthy agents of political power, one must also recognize their conscious intent to espouse novel ideas and reformulate existing ideology.

To explore more specifically the artistic precedents and corollaries to Gil de Castro's 1825 work, a portrait by Pedro José Figueroa (1780-1838) done in 1819, entitled *Simon Bolívar, Liberator and Father of the Nation*, provides a useful example. The work integrates the standing figure of Bolívar with a seated female allegory of America (Figure 2.3). With his arm around the figure, the arrangement reinforces the paternalistic language employed in the title. Bolívar is shown in a three-quarter format, short of the full-length presentation found in so many of his portraits. Yet while the entirety of his form is not represented, the Liberator is depicted at a much larger scale than his female counterpart. By enlarging his size relative to the seated figure, the artist has offset any minimizing implications regarding the importance of the central figure coming from the reduced format. Bolívar still dominates the composition by nature of his being comparatively much larger than the seated figure. The personification of America wears a feathered headdress of the type commonly used to connote American indigeneity, though her skin appears lighter even than Bolívar's himself, with features and attributes conforming more to that of a European, or perhaps *mestizo* (mixed-race) individual.⁷³ Reflecting the colonial situation of interracial and cross-cultural encounter, America is imagined as a hybrid product, finally brought under the proper submission of a native-born yet Europeanized leader. Through Figueroa's juxtaposition of real and fictitious figures, the image merges reality with fantasy in the service of a symbolic message.

Figueroa chose to employ a staple of colonial iconography, the personification of America, in order to provide a comprehensible visual stand-in for the concept of

⁷³ Ades, *Art of Latin America*, 17.

Bolívar's patronage of American freedom.⁷⁴ The portrait was made to commemorate the Liberator's victory in August of 1819 at the Battle of Boyacá, which clinched the independence of Gran Colombia. Employing artistic allegory, the portrait unites its two principal figures in an imaginary space; the scene depicted is not meant to be taken literally. Rather the image speaks a symbolic artistic language, placing its figures in such a way as to stand in for broader concepts. Bolívar is effectively converted into a symbol himself: a stoic military leader who stands steadfast alongside his majestic continent, protecting and defending her from any and all aggressors. Therefore through the particular fashioning of the image, Bolívar is not simply "Bolívar: the man," but the "Bolívar: Father of the Nation," a figure who has achieved historic status and is envisioned as the embodiment of larger ideals. Figueroa's portrait shows the potential of such images to transcend their role as straightforward representations of individuals, rather using a sitter's likeness as a vehicle to creatively express and advocate for a particular understanding of a person's rightful place in history.

A second example comes from the oeuvre of Pablo Rojas (1780-1840) (Figure 2.). Like Gil de Castro's his portrait of *Simon Bolívar* was created in 1825. Here the sitter is again shown frontally, standing and depicted in full-length, posing in his military uniform. His body appears to be in a more tense state than in Gil de Castro's image, indicated by the gesture of Bolívar's hands and his more stiffened, even guarded, stance. To the lower right of the figure stands a small cherub, looking up in admiration of the eminent figure standing before him, and holding a white cloth on which is inscribed the

⁷⁴ Ibid., 16-17.

following: “To Simon Bolivar, Liberator of Colombia and Peru. The Municipality of Lima.” The figures are set in an elaborate interior space of the kind much more popular for portraits of the period than Gil de Castro’s reductive example. The room features a desk with various writing implements, a column illuminated on the right side, and an arched doorway on the left which reveals a violent scene of action ensuing just outside. A heavy curtain is draped behind the figure in the conventional manner. Thus in its overall composition, the portrait adheres closely to conventions of portraiture which were popular for the depiction of kings, viceroys, and other eminent figures of the colonial period. This includes the combination of text and image which is used in order to convey both a general message of power and authority, as well as the specific terms of the sitter’s artistic commemoration.

Like Figueroa’s image, the fantastic qualities of Rojas’s portrait are readily apparent. By fantastic, I solely mean those visual creations which do not re-present reality: those which are a product of imagination, artistic invention, or pictorial expediency—those of fantasy, in the literal sense. The figure holding the celebratory cloth at the bottom right corner resembles the allegorical figures and *putti* of Italian Renaissance art, acting as a personification of infancy who reveres the Liberator and looks to him for guidance and protection, analogous in this way to Figueroa’s personification of America. The young figure can be imagined as standing in for the likewise adolescent nations of the South American continent, particularly the two referenced in the text. Furthermore, the exterior scene of battle illustrating a military charge is implausibly depicted as taking place at the same time that its leader is having

his portrait painted in some lavish interior space nearby. Thus one is again presented with an image which was not intended to be taken as a snapshot of real life: its allegorical and symbolic structure takes precedence over any claim to being documentary. The work does not contend to translate the actual, observable terms of the encounter between the artist and sitter. On the contrary, the artist has made use of artificial artistic devices in the form of symbolic and linguistic elements, viewed as pictorially advantageous for the way they could explicitly denote complementary ideas simultaneously. By drawing on the conventional iconography of secular portraiture in the type of setting used, the narrative elements, and the addition of text, Rojas's portrait falls in line with the kinds of images readable to an audience steeped in a long-standing visual code.

Compared to these two well-known portraits of the Liberator done roughly contemporaneously to Gil de Castro's, the latter emerges as markedly different in several ways. First, it bears repeating that Gil de Castro's composition is notably pared down, distinct for its lack of an elaborated interior setting, textual intrusions into pictorial space, or any kind of supplementary or allegorical material. One might wonder if this simplicity was the result of the intended destination for this portrait. Bolívar gave the portrait as a gift to his sister, Doña María Antonia Bolívar de Clemente, in Caracas, shortly after its making.⁷⁵ Certainly in the absence of text or other explanatory elements, this particular viewer would already have the knowledge to identify the sitter. Taking this notion further, if this work was in fact made with this audience in mind, it may not have found it

⁷⁵ Ricardo Mariátegui Oliva, *Colección Lienzos José Gil de Castro en Lima*, (Lima, Peru: [s.n.], 1983), 2: 5.

necessary to include such material in the composition. However, it is not evident that mere identification was ever the sole purpose for such devices. Rather such additions added to the overall glory of the image, providing for the viewer an elaborated representation which would be seen to fit the eminence of the esteemed subject. Text panels, in particular, not only served to provide essential information about the sitter, but themselves acted as iconographic markers of status: an ornately framed panel bearing multiple lines of elegant writing would impress upon the viewer—literate or not—the great social standing of the sitter, whose life and deeds were distinguished enough to merit the incorporation of this iconographic device reserved for figures of high standing. The viewer’s action of reading and re-reading this text would also amount to a re-enactment of the act of commemoration the portrait embodied. Thus text acted as an important accessory to the “performance [of] the act of portrayal” conducted by the sitter and the artist in their respective roles in shaping the representation.⁷⁶

One thus is left with the notion that the intentional simplicity of this portrayal may hide an inner complexity. Given the almost painstakingly harmonious composition of the figure’s form, measured against the conspicuous plainness of the surrounding environment, the clearly deliberate nature of these choices comes into relief. Doubtless not a careless or unpremeditated arrangement, the starkness of the image serves to direct the viewer’s eye directly to the figure itself, and to ensure that it remained there. Studying the various features of the figure’s elegant military costume, the dignified comportment

⁷⁶ Harry Berger, Jr., “Fictions of the Pose: Facing the Gaze of Early Modern Portraiture,” *Representations*, no. 46 (1994): 89.

of his body, and the arresting expression of the face, one indeed feels obliged to do so. Everything the viewer needs to know about the figure and about his representation is thus encompassed squarely within this figure itself. It is as if all of the symbolism and allegory of other kinds of depictions has been condensed and packaged within the uniformed body of the great *Libertador*. In this way, each aspect of his form becomes that much more significant, carrying proportionately more weight as it occupies more space in the image as a whole.

This portrait indeed appears to contend matter-of-factly that its subject, costumed as he is in his military uniform and bearing his battle weapon, can literally stand alone. Through the tightly balanced positioning of his body and the simplicity of the setting, an impression of unencumbered leadership is achieved which dominates one's perception of the image. Having nothing to draw the eye away from the figure itself, one is compelled to extend this sense of careful composure and directness found in the composition to the character of Bolívar himself. Appearing confident, even pleased, in his role as the lone subject and happily returning the viewer's gaze, Bolívar exudes an air of self-assuredness in the way that he contentedly monopolizes pictorial space. One can recall that given its dimensions the image of the figure would tower over the viewer standing before it: one is physically confronted by the life-size representation. Unobstructed by superficial details like desks and bookshelves, allegorical figures or narrative tableau, one can imagine Bolívar as occupying real, physical space in a way that is distinct from both Figueroa's and Rojas's portrayals. This sense of corporeality of the figure thus projects a notion of his ability to similarly take up space in the world. This may refer to his various military

and political successes which were becoming physically observable to contemporary viewers, causing the viewer to accept Bolívar's affirmative presence in a revised physical and ideological landscape.

A Centering of Militarism and Regionalism

The circumstances surrounding the artist's portrayal of Bolívar in Lima in 1825 certainly would have justified a resolute confidence on the part of the sitter. The period of the 1810s and 1820s was one of great triumph for the Liberator and for the various nations he helped liberate. Christened *El Libertador* in 1813 for his efforts to bring independence to the northern part of South America, he had prevailed in numerous battles against the Spanish forces which resulted in the independence of Gran Colombia in 1821.⁷⁷ After the Guayaquil Conference of 1822, in which he met with San Martín to discuss the final liberation of Peru, Bolívar took over the project and was named the nation's dictator in 1824. Finally in 1825, after his long-time commander Antonio José de Sucre (1795-1830) succeeded in his task to liberate Upper Peru, Bolívar became the namesake of the nation of Bolivia.⁷⁸ Thus it is little surprise that virtually every example of Bolivarian portraiture exhibits the Liberator in his military garb, as it exemplified his role as a famed commander. However, by altering the standard portrait formula, drastically paring down its conventional appearance, Gil de Castro's portrait does this in

⁷⁷ Gran Colombia encompassed modern-day Colombia, Panama, Venezuela, Ecuador, northern Peru, and area northwest of Brazil. See Introduction, Figure 2.

⁷⁸ General Sucre issued a decree on February 9, 1825 which proclaimed the independence of Upper Peru. The region would initially take the name of Bolívar in August of that year, later changed to Bolivia. See Lynch, *The South American Revolutions*, 283-4.

a way which is markedly different from other examples.⁷⁹As a result of this approach, the work both heightens the subject's role as an effective general and envisions him as a supra-regional leader, one whose relevance and importance to the South American context can be suited to various audiences.

Throughout the years of fighting Bolívar was plagued by feelings of anxiety over the ability of the South American continent to sustain the liberation for which he so diligently fought. According to John Lynch, “in the last years of his life [up until 1830] Bolívar was haunted by America's need for strong government,” with the fear that “if the principles of liberty are too rapidly introduced anarchy and the destruction of the white inhabitants will be the inevitable consequences.”⁸⁰ He believed himself to be the only one capable of sustaining control over the infant states. Thus Bolívar had a vested interest in creating a strong public persona, one which would support his reputation as an efficacious military leader and shrewd politician. Through his various martial endeavors, strategic alliances, proclamations, speeches, and diplomatic missions, he could influence the way he was perceived by members of the public. However Bolívar also clearly saw value in providing a physical image of himself for public consumption. In 1823, for instance, Bolívar commissioned Gil de Castro to create at least ten copies of a bust portrait to be hung in “all the public, official places,” presumably including major

⁷⁹ There is another portrait done by Gil de Castro which is similar to the 1825 example. It is pictured and described in Mariátegui Oliva's *Colección Lienzos* (“Lamina III”). It was apparently based on the 1825 portrait but was created later in 1826. While the figure is nearly identical, the pose is slightly varied and the background is more elaborated than the 1825 example, as it includes the indication of an interior architectural space. According to Mariátegui Oliva the work is not signed by Gil de Castro but bears “evidence of the notable *limeño* painter.” See Mariátegui Oliva, *Colección Lienzos*, 5.

⁸⁰ Lynch, *The South American Revolutions*, 285.

governmental buildings and palaces throughout the region.⁸¹ Thus one can conclude that in his portraits Bolívar innately surmised their potential to transmit messages about his role and competence as a leader and protector.

In the 1825 portrait, Bolívar again dons the elaborate military costume which was a staple of his portrayals. He wears white pants, a black waistcoat decorated with lavish gold embroidery, and tall black riding boots with delicate gold spurs. Across his waist is a thick red belt featuring a buckle on which are inscribed his initials “SB,” also a standard feature of his portraits. Though there are some variations on this costume, both Figueroa and Rojas also depict the Liberator fully uniformed. Yet rather than obligatory subject matter, Gil de Castro’s portrait capitalizes even more on the general’s uniform as a container of important symbolism. Aided by a dearth of various other kinds of objects or symbols, the military costume occupies a privileged position in the portrait. Seemingly delighting in the depiction of its various details, the work accords to the artist’s general penchant for military attire. Yet while Gil de Castro may have enjoyed what the uniform provided aesthetically, it is also clear that the elaborate costume and its display in the otherwise reduced setting added important content to the meaning of the image.

A military costume broadly functions in a similar manner to a clergyman’s robes. It marks one’s membership within a certain branch of society and symbolizes the wearer’s devotion to a meaningful cause. It also contains unique internal signifiers of its own, differentiating one member of an organization from others, based on the overall

⁸¹ This characterization came from an interview with the Curator of Colonial Painting at the MALI, Ricardo Kusunoki, whom I met with in September of 2014. Copies of this portrait are now held in Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, and Venezuela.

quality of the garment as well as the specific markers of his appointment and status. In Bolívar's garment, aspects like lavish embroidery, the ostentatious belt buckle, and intricately sheathed saber convey that he is a superior member of the military, indicating his supreme status within its ranks. In addition, the fact that the image does not contain any other identifying elements insists upon Bolívar's primary occupation as a military general. It is as if his own body and individual identity become synonymous with this role, as his physical form becomes both visually and conceptually connected with the costume and the value it represents.

Herry Berger, Jr. writes of this effect of portraits, explaining that such images “commemorate the individual as the model, the embodiment, of the status, values, norms, and authenticity of a particular class, lineage, institution or profession.”⁸² Thus through the portrait's compositional heightening of its subject matter, Bolívar is transformed into a living symbol of his military successes. The uniform becomes an index of the various battles in which he has fought, functioning to provide the audience with the root cause of his artistic commemoration. As Bolívar stands proudly displaying this uniform, a system of value is forged which honors and respects this military might and connects it to the celebratory act of portraiture.

Thus to depict his subject in a way that focuses and virtually limits one's attention to the uniformed figure presents a compelling argument about the role of militarism. Given the key part which physical combat had played, and continued to play, in securing independence, this image reminds the viewer of the need for continued militaristic

⁸² Berger, “Fictions of the Pose,” 94.

strength and competent leadership. The work also avoids the abstraction of its message by taking on a more documentary quality than other works through its rejection of superfluous or fantastical detail. While the physical space in which the encounter occurred is indeed ambiguous, it more plausibly presents the terms of an actual encounter than either Figueroa's or Rojas's image. This causes the work's message to likewise seem more authentic, even more tangible than comparable images, despite the "fictiveness of the representation" which is a defining characteristic of portraits generally.⁸³

Finally, as the image follows in a basic way the iconographic model provided by a tradition of official portraits, it can be assured that the aim of celebrating Bolívar's role as a military general will be properly received by the audience. According to Richard Brilliant, this is achieved through the portrait's designation of "the established repertoires of artistic representation out of which the portrait, as a work of art, is made."⁸⁴ While the portrait strays from this same model by eliminating unnecessary visual symbolism, it retains enough of a coherence to the established repertoire to ensure the work will be perceived as demanding admiration. The figure is still posed formally in space exhibiting dignified comportment, in a full-length format which announces the sitter's importance. Rather than an elaborate text panel or various symbolic objects and scenery, the viewer would be directed to venerate the figure solely on the basis of his role as military leader and famed status. Thus the pared down portrait not only succeeds in differentiating itself from expected iconography as a means of putting forth a new kind of leader, it also

⁸³ Ibid., 98.

⁸⁴ Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (London: Reaktion Books, 1991), 46.

introduces, through an implicit mechanism, a basic national value of the importance of strong military leadership.

In contrast to other Bolivarian images, including those described above by Figueroa and Rojas, Gil de Castro's portrait does not link its subject explicitly to any particular nation or nations. Rather than providing text which acknowledges the sitter's role in liberating certain particular, the only marker of place lies in the artist's signature which reads, "En Lima, Por Gil" (In Lima, By Gil). While this refers to the city in which the artist and the Liberator's encounter took place, it does not limit his likeness and thus, his significance, solely to that city. It rather functions as a permanent record of the place in which the work happened to be created. As Bolívar is imagined through the work's reductive framework, he is free to be associated with a multiplicity of geographic contexts and political circumstances; his likeness can easily pertain to those nations which he has already helped to liberate, as well as those for which he continues to fight. Thus by allowing his representation to live up to his claim as the supra-regional *Libertador*, his image can come to stand in for a similarly generalized sense of continental solidarity. This operates in tandem with Bolívar's significance today—his name is often considered synonymous with pan-Latin American associations.

In this way, Gil de Castro's portrait operates in a manner that is more analogous to Figueroa's portrait of 1819, rather than Rojas's of 1825. In Gil de Castro's portrait Bolívar could just as easily be viewed as the ubiquitous "Father of America," defender of liberty and architect of national campaigns. Here the viewer is permitted to fill in the gaps not explicitly provided in the image; he or she can decide the particular narrative in

which the figure is situated. To this end he or she can recall those battles or local histories which are felt to most intimately and directly apply to one's own experience and perceived connection to the figure. Thus through the clever plainness of the image, the artist has fashioned a representation that allows the viewer to effectively finish the work, in a way which can vary based on the perspective of the individual. What remains is the essential message of the importance of military leadership for the survival of the national unit, irrespective of its geographic limits. Thus this notion fits with Bolívar's own feelings about strong and forceful leadership in the Americas, which he believed was the only way to secure a future of national sovereignty. Therefore this portrait of Bolívar can be viewed as aligning with the kind of self-image the sitter aimed to project.

The Limits of Experimentation

It is said that Bolívar appreciated this image for its "relative simplicity and directness."⁸⁵ Given his positive evaluation, we can speak of it as properly satisfying a particular desire on the part of the sitter to present himself through portraiture in a way that accorded with the way he wanted to be seen. This must be considered in light of the socio-historical context of the period, given that "Portraits exist at the interface between art and social life . . . because both the artist and the subject are enmeshed in the value system of their society."⁸⁶ For the sitter to favor an image of himself which appears more simple and direct in contrast to contemporary examples, including those commissioned by Bolívar at other points in his career, indicates that these qualities were perceived to be

⁸⁵ Ades, *Art in Latin America*, 18.

⁸⁶ Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 11.

valuable at the present moment. As Bolívar had thoroughly established himself as the preeminent *Libertador* of the former Spanish colonies in South America, as well as the namesake of a nation, in this portrait it appears that he indeed intended to stake his claim as the singular leader of the region. Depicted in a setting which is greatly reduced and visibly distinct from other examples, the image thus draws the viewer's attention to Bolívar's unique and broad-sweeping status.

However the portrait also reveals deeper mechanisms at work which are outwardly elided by the portrait's plainer format. This is namely the image's promotion of the notion of military might and its necessary correlation to the continuation of national independence. As the portrait lends credence to this idea through its official sanction by Bolívar himself, it can thus be viewed as marking one of the many origin points at which the existence and ultimate survival of the nation was ideologically linked to a strong military, a theme which continues to pervade many notions of nationalism today. Finally given the work's denial of Bolívar's sole relationship to any one nation, the work presents a vision of a supra-regional leader whose reach can be extended to any and all members who consider themselves Americans.

By following the basic criteria of official portraits established throughout the colonial era, Gil de Castro's portrait can enjoy the iconographic authority provided by those sources. However by altering its format, reducing its features only to the bare minimum which is required—the lone, carefully composed, lavishly bedecked figure—he can at the same time set his image apart from those very same sources. Thus at least in part, the meaning of the work is constructed through recognition of what it is not,

illustrated by the discussion of colonial state portraiture generally and the examples by Figueroa and Rojas. The simpler composition and its feeling of directness conveys an attempt to present a leader who seems more accessible to his audience, perhaps even more present and aware of the plights facing the region. This would have been compelling and well-suited to the rhetorical aims of the elite creole liberators, as they aimed to distinguish themselves from the Spanish, while at the same time profiting from the iconographic models of power, authority, and legitimacy established under their auspices. The artist could only revise this model so far before it would have detracted from the intended message; Bolívar still had to fit into the basic accepted modes of conveying the right to rule. Thus in total, Gil de Castro's 1825 portrait of Simón Bolívar can be seen as experimenting with the limits of representation. The work bears witness to this active creative process, indicating complexities and contingencies in the cultural realm akin to the various challenges facing emerging nations on the political front. As portraiture remained a necessary means of conveying ideals of leadership, a new succession of powerful individuals required creative solutions. While their likenesses continued to be vehicles of ideology, they would also increasingly become agents of national identity.

Figures

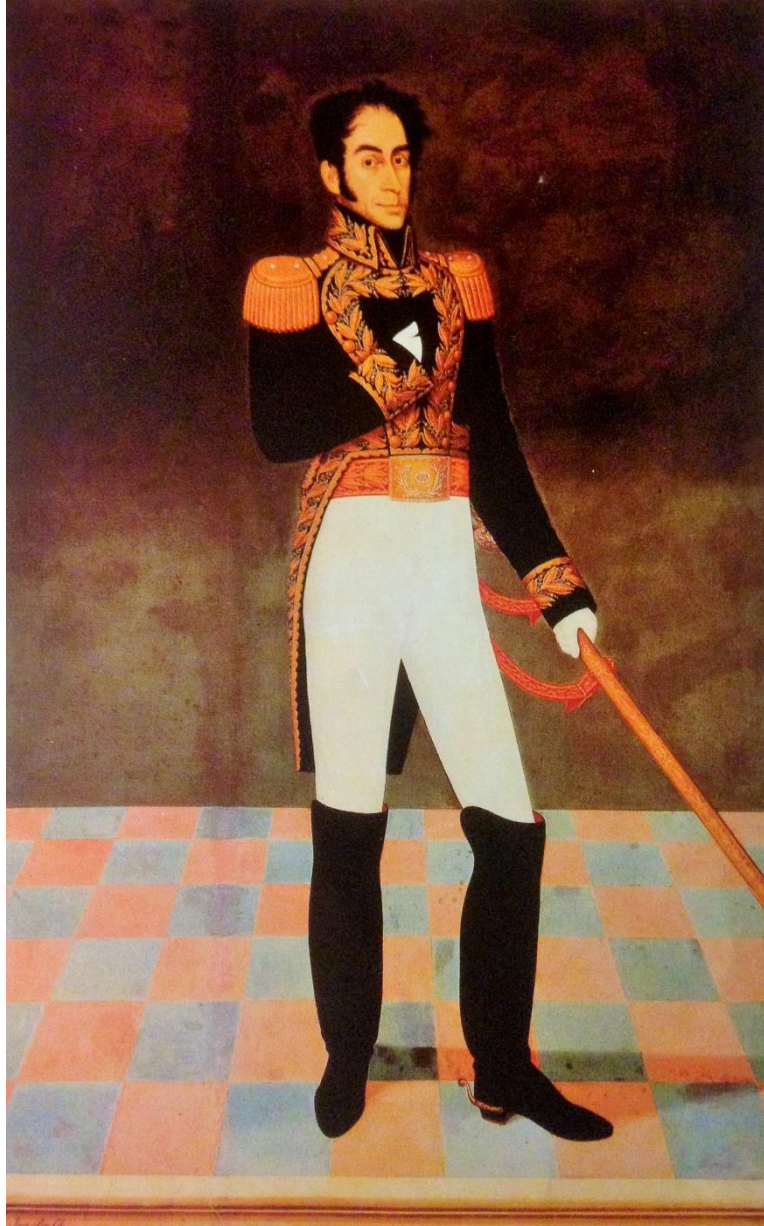


Figure 2.1. José Gil de Castro, *Portrait of Simon Bolívar in Lima*, 1825. Oil on canvas. 6.9 x 4.3 ft (210 x 130 cm). Salon Eliptico del Congreso Nacional, Ministerio de Relaciones Interiores, Venezuela. Pictured in Dawn Ades, *Art in Latin America* (New Haven: Yale, 1989), 20.



Figure 2.2. Miguel Cabrera, *The Sixth Count of Santiago de Calimaya*, 1752. Oil on canvas. 81.3 x 53 in (206.4 x 134.6 cm). Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York. Photo by the Brooklyn Museum, 2014, <http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/>, 5 June 2015.

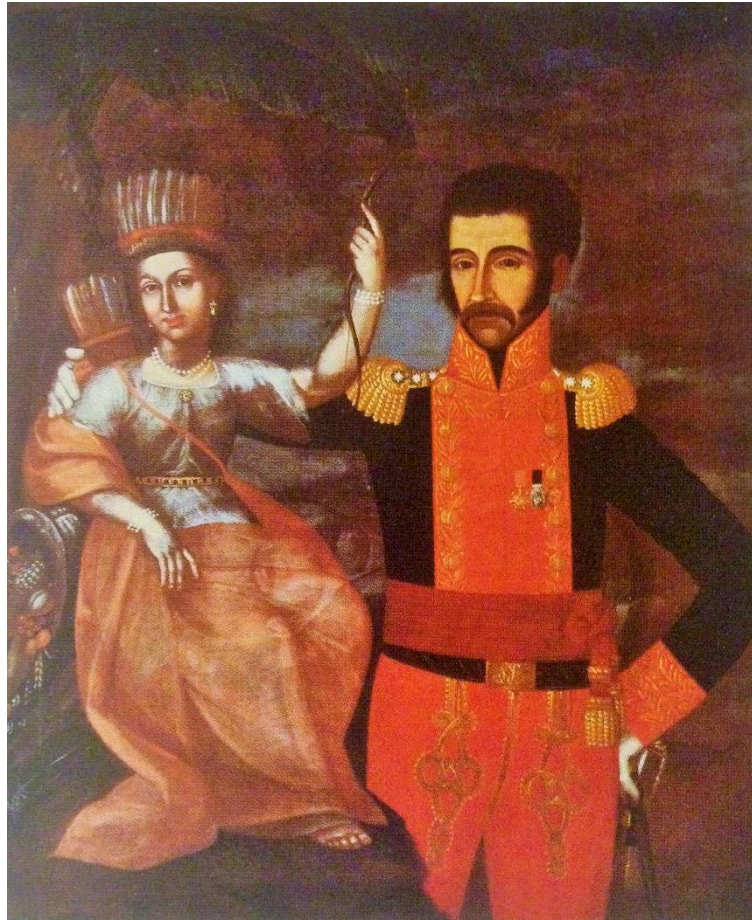


Figure 2.3. Pedro José Figueroa, *Simón Bolívar, Liberator and Father of the Nation*, 1819. Oil on canvas. Dimensions unknown. Quinta de Bolívar, Colombia. Pictured in Dawn Ades, *Art in Latin America* (New Haven: Yale, 1989), 17.



Figure 2.4. Pablo Rojas, *Simón Bolívar*, 1825. Oil on canvas. Dimensions unknown. Museo Nacional de Antropología, Arqueología e Historia del Perú. Pictured in Majluf, Natalia, ed. *Más allá de la imagen. Los estudios técnicos en el proyecto José Gil de Castro* (Lima, Peru: Asociación Museo de Arte de Lima, 2012), 31.

Chapter 2: Picturing a National Hero: Bernardo O'Higgins

Bernardo O'Higgins Riquelme (1778-1842) is considered one of the founding fathers and heroes of the modern nation of Chile. He was the first Supreme Director of the new Republic and one of the co-commanders of José de San Martín's Army of the Andes. A thickset man of Spanish and Irish descent, O'Higgins was commemorated in a massive portrait by Gil de Castro roughly seven by four feet in dimension. He is glorified for his role in helping achieve the independence of his country, exalted for his various military successes and considerable personal accolades. His image operates through a visual language of Republican idealism built on the actions of exemplary individuals. However the image does much more than celebrate the successes of a single person. By referencing an exceedingly challenging collective struggle which succeeded in the creation of a nation and the formation of national emblems, the work operates on different levels to argue for the enormity of these recent triumphs. Through the extensive symbolism of the figure as well as the features of the background, the image involves a complex web of signification that appeals chiefly to the greatness of the challenges faced and surmounted by the patriot forces. The work also expresses an interest in the shaping of a national identity for Chile, one which settles on formative events of an historic narrative and the defining features of the local environment. This latter element would in fact anticipate artistic concerns of the nineteenth century, in which works of art produced in many South American nations sought to provide a sense of national character through attention to the defining attributes of a country's landscape, people, and history.

The basic structure of the portrait of O'Higgins follows the same general schema as his other depictions of the military leadership of the independence wars (Figure 3.1). The work features a full-length view of the stocky figure occupying the center of the field, posed in a comfortable yet compositionally formal *contrapposto* stance yielding a three-quarter view of the face and body. One should recall that this format was reserved only for those of the "highest political authority" as the careful restriction of this format was essential to maintaining the "exclusive nature" of these types of works.⁸⁷ Of the over 200 paintings estimated to have been created by the artist over the course of his career, only about a dozen depict a figure in full-length.⁸⁸ Thus the iconographic weight of this format hinges upon the fact that only a select number of individuals could be considered worthy of being depicted in this way, and that they must all share a common set of characteristics in order to preserve the artistic standard. Certainly O'Higgins' official ranking within San Martín's Army and his role as part of its key leadership, coupled with the fact that he was selected as the nation's first leader, would warrant such an honorific presentation, but it is the way in which these aspects are communicated in the portrait which transform the work into a patent symbol of personal and collective achievement.

⁸⁷ Patricia Mondoñedo Murillo, *El retrato de José Olaya: La obra disímil de José Gil de Castro* (Lima: Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, 2002), 64.

⁸⁸ The total number of Gil de Castro's body of work was estimated by the researchers of the MALI study and is summarized on page 70 of Majluf, ed., *Más allá de la imagen*; it is an estimation which includes both extant and non-extant works. The authors also remark that this is the highest output known for an artist of the region during this period, indeed making Gil de Castro's achievement extraordinary. Mondoñedo Murillo's text states that only eleven of Gil de Castro's works feature a figure depicted in a full-length format. See *El retrato de José Olaya*, 64, fn 96.

Like Gil de Castro's 1825 portrait of Bolivar, O'Higgins proudly displays his military uniform which is itself an important signifier. Yet in this case, the uniform is built on an even more intricate system. The blue sash crossing O'Higgins' chest symbolizes his membership in the Legion of Merit of Chile.⁸⁹ On his chest are displayed medals won from the battles of Chacabuco and Maipú, both significant victories for the patriot army and instrumental in the final liberation of Chile from Spain in 1818.⁹⁰ The uniform features a repetition of light blue, white, and red, the colors of the Chilean flag which waves valiantly in the background. Around O'Higgins' waist is a tricolor band, the ends of which hang down by the figure's left thigh and terminate with large gold tassels. Wrapped around this band is a thin gold belt with elaborate links and buckles featuring images of lions' heads. As was common in the depictions of head military figures there is an overall abundance of gold decoration throughout the garment and its accessories, from the intricate embroidery to the ornate sheathed saber crossing behind the figure. As if this opulence were not enough, O'Higgins holds under his left arm a flamboyant bicorn hat sprouting large, fluffy feathers in the same red, white, and blue hues of the Chilean flag.

Comparing this image with the *Portrait of Bolivar in Lima*, both feature their subjects costumed in such a way as to highlight and glorify their roles as military leaders.

⁸⁹ Incidentally this an accolade the artist himself also shared. At the outbreak of the independence wars Gil de Castro became a fierce advocate for liberation, joining the ranks of San Martín's Army of the Andes and accompanying the General on his military campaigns. He developed a close professional relationship, some say even a friendship, with Bernardo O'Higgins, and was honored with a number of official titles, some of which he incorporated into his signature. These included his role as "second cosmographer" to O'Higgins and "*Miembro de la Mesa Topográfica del Estado.*" He was awarded entrance into the prestigious Legion of Merit of Chile in 1817. See Maino ed., *Pintura Chilena*, 21; and Benson, et al., *Retratos*, 155.

⁹⁰ The Battle of Chacabuco took place near Santiago, Chile on February 12, 1817 while the Battle of Maipú occurred on the Maipú plains, also near Santiago, on April 5, 1818.

However, the portrait of O'Higgins emerges as even more highly ornamented and exemplary of his military successes. With the proliferation of colors keyed back to the Chilean flag and the addition of decorations on the General's uniform that refer to specific victories of the Chilean independence war, the image of O'Higgins becomes directly associated with the successful liberation of a single country. In contrast, Bolívar's portrait is much less precise in the sense that it does not favor Bolívar's role in the successful liberation of one nation over others. Where the great *Libertador* may be envisioned as a representative of pan-Latin American independence, O'Higgins stands as the leading representative of a glorified campaign for the independence of Chile.

By pointing to his significant achievements, the basic subject matter of the image is O'Higgins as a successful liberator. The inscription along the lower horizontal axis lists O'Higgins' official titles, enunciating among these his role as "Supreme Director of the Chilean Republic" and "Chairman of the Legion of Merit." Yet the two lines of text were apparently insufficient to list the General's various accolades, as they are abbreviated at the end by a double ampersand ("&&"), as if to say "and then there is even more..." By indicating the abundance of his titles through this strategic use of abbreviation, the artist masterfully inflates the perception of the sitter's status and political relevance while economizing available space on the canvas. In this way it effectively matters less what these additional titles actually were; rather the fact that more titles are indicated serves to exaggerate his importance and the impression of O'Higgins as an ultimate figure of merit.

It is useful to note that O'Higgins himself originated the "Legion of Merit"—and made himself Chairman—as part of his campaign to openly dismantle the colonial system

which had so long favored an ancestral succession to power. As an essential part of the official rhetoric of this gesture, O'Higgins wanted to forcefully inspire a sea change in which actions alone would merit one's advancement to a position of power. As further evidence of this revolutionary notion, during his tenure as Supreme Director O'Higgins also abolished primogeniture, titles of the nobility, and the display of coats of arms. While his later dealings with European royalty would ultimately undermine the ideological purism behind these actions, they speak to the fact that from the beginning there was a clear effort on the part of the new government to make a strong public statement that significant societal and political change was taking place in the transition to autonomous government.⁹¹ By emphasizing this in the portrait, through the blue sash symbolizing his role in the Legion and the textual reminder in the inscription, the notion of O'Higgins as a figure of personal excellence is supported and fortified by the pictorial allusions to his role as a successful arbiter of independence.

Through the clever linguistic and pictorial expounding of O'Higgins' official titles and achievements, coupled with the repetition of colors newly endowed with national symbolism, the viewer is provided a legible image of patriotic allegiance and exaltation. The inclusion of the flag in the background can be readily observed by the viewer as the origin of the palette adorning the figure, illustrating the birth of a nation that has quickly begun to articulate and entrench an identity through a visual vocabulary of signs. Furthermore, through the work's imposing scale and adoption of a full-length

⁹¹ *Memoria Chilena*, Biblioteca Nacional de Chile (DIBAM), 2014, <http://www.memoriachilena.cl/602/w3-article-562.html#presentacion>, 21 April 2015.

format, the portrait falls in line within a tradition of images that acted as physical embodiments of power and authority throughout the colonial period. By adjusting the content of such images to suit their contemporary context, a revised system of value is fashioned which recognizes and rewards significant achievements made on behalf of the nation. Rather than simply operating within the closed field of the image, this value system transcends pictorial boundaries as it actively works to alter existing paradigms about the basis on which one earns the right to achieve political power. The image thus acts as material evidence of this transformation, attesting to the new thematic by adopting the highest form of artistic praise for an individual, the official state portrait.

A Symbolic Landscape

While the notion of patriotic achievement can be gleaned through the figure and the inscription, it is vastly heightened by the nature of the background. The figure of O'Higgins is set within a mountainous landscape underneath a dramatic sky in which a scene of battle unfolds. The setting can be viewed as operating on different levels. First, it helps create a national origin story for the nation of Chile, one based on particular historic battles and the actions of the nation's first Supreme Director as he bravely led his troops to victory. Second, the background also helps shape a general notion of Chile's emerging national identity, rooted in the features of its vernacular landscape. Representing this identity through the inclusion of the majestic Andes Mountains, Gil de Castro also anticipates later concerns of the nineteenth century as artists sought to articulate a sense

of national identity of the new American nations.⁹² Thus the background as a whole helps place the work within the broader art historical framework of the period, as the artist re-imagined the potential of a typically formulaic aspect of official portraiture, all in the service of constructing a national narrative.

It bears mention that this type of background is extremely rare in the oeuvre of Gil de Castro—typically backgrounds featuring landscapes are found only in his religious works.⁹³ Scholars have sometimes mentioned that the authorship of the background is questionable, a view that stems in part from the 1981 study of Gil de Castro’s work by Ricardo Mariátegui Oliva, in which the author writes that the background “is not original to the Peruvian painter; executed much later during the work of restoration, in which [it was] repainted.”⁹⁴ However the author does not appear to claim that the existing composition was not original to the work’s design, rather that it was “*repintado*” (repainted). Thus the possibility that it simply improved upon or that later interventions aimed to recover the state of the existing design remains. Others have commented that the background merely “may have been embellished” at a later date.⁹⁵ The MALI researchers

⁹² This is exemplified by the work of the costumbrista artists, both local and traveling artists from Europe who aimed to document and depict the vernacular practices and customs of ordinary people in the Americas as well as the landscape and indigenous flora and fauna. The *costumbrismo* genre flourished from about 1830-1850.

⁹³ While this portrait does not imagine its sitter as a religious figure, focusing rather on O’Higgins’ worldly accomplishments and continuing role as a celebrated figure on earth, in the discussion of the portrait of Olaya in Chapter 3 this comparison will be explicitly made and elaborated upon as it is important to that work’s meaning.

⁹⁴ Ricardo Mariátegui Oliva, *Jose Gil de Castro (“el mulato Gil”) vida y obra del gran pintor peruano de los libertadores: obras existentes en Argentina y Chile*. (Lima, Peru: [s.n.], 1981): 198.

⁹⁵ Kelly Donahue-Wallace, *Art and Architecture of Viceregal Latin America, 1521-1821* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008): 237.

in particular have espoused that one only need to look to the exquisite rendering of this background in particular, as well that of the Olaya portrait, to become acquainted with the great skill Gil de Castro possessed.⁹⁶

To the left of the figure a fierce scene of battle erupts in a conspicuously clear area amongst the otherwise impenetrable landscape. A group of soldiers to the right and closer to the foreground mobilize a cannon under the guidance of a general who holds out his sword toward the men in a gesture of command. The Chilean flag waves proudly above the grouping, while to the left the rest of the episode transpires. Soldiers on horseback charge in from the left heading for the heart of the action, of which little can be made out amid billowing clouds of smoke emerging from the rampant gunfire. Though rather obscured, the scene exudes a vigorous energy. Between the charging men on horseback, hazy clouds of smoke, and soldiers hastily preparing for cannon fire the viewer takes in a climactic moment of tremendous conflict. Yet, seemingly in spite of this violence, the flag appears to foreshadow a Chilean victory as it waves triumphantly in a position somewhat removed from the nexus of danger.

According to Mariátegui Oliva, the battle depicted in the O'Higgins portrait is indeed one in which the liberating forces were victorious.⁹⁷ An important battle between the liberating army and the Spanish forces took place on February 12, 1817 on the plains

⁹⁶ Majluf, ed., *Más allá de la imagen*, 95. The fact that the MALI team does not contest the attribution of the background of this work in their publication and rather celebrates it as demonstrating the immense skill of Gil de Castro is telling. Given the heavy technical focus of their study, it seems fair that if the attribution of the background was in question, it would have been mentioned even if direct examination of the work was not possible.

⁹⁷ Mariátegui Oliva, *José Gil de Castro ("el mulato Gil")*, 197.

of Chacabuco, just north of Santiago. Led by José de San Martín, the Army of the Andes had successfully completed its extraordinary journey across the treacherous mountains, characterized by John Lynch as the Army's "first enemy...a monstrous barrier separating the plains of Argentina from the valleys of central Chile, crossed by only a few precipitous passes at heights between nine and twelve thousand feet, and never before traversed by a force of this size."⁹⁸ After this momentous feat, San Martín's men quickly prepared for battle against the Spanish forces located at Chacabuco. O'Higgins commanded one of the flanks in what would be an important victory for the liberating cause; along with the Battle of Maipú the following spring, the two battles formed the ultimate turning point of the Chilean War of Independence.⁹⁹

If the scene depicted in Gil de Castro's portrait in fact accords to Mariátegui Oliva's claim, this would certainly be appropriate in the context of an image that celebrates the efforts of one of the battle's head captains. It is even possible the artist may have included an image of O'Higgins in the scene itself as a means of re-telling the story through the use of simultaneous narrative. As a first potential candidate, the figure commanding his men near the cannon on the right is clearly in a position of leadership, signaled by both his gesture and attire. However it is not clear that this man is unquestionably the protagonist of the portrait himself. There were three chief leaders during this battle which included San Martín, O'Higgins, and Miguel Estanislao Soler (1783-1849), another Argentine general like San Martín. This figure could plausibly be

⁹⁸ *The Spanish American Revolutions*, 141.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

any one of the three, though it is perhaps significant that he is dressed differently than O'Higgins in the center of the portrait.

There is a second possibility that O'Higgins could be found amongst the various figures on horseback. At least one comparable image presents what could be reasonable support for the suggestion that O'Higgins is the rider of the lone white horse galloping in full view at the far left. Giulio Nanetti's *Battala de Rancagua* was created in approximately the same year as Gil de Castro's portrait of O'Higgins, and presents a scene from another significant battle in which O'Higgins was a key player (Figure 3.2). Though the Battle of Rancagua (October 1-2, 1814) resulted in a major defeat of the revolutionary forces, the image depicts a lively ground battle in which many Spaniards, uniformed in red, lie slain across the foreground. Here the Chilean flag projects defiantly out of a church window in spite of the many Spanish soldiers who have assembled in an advantageous position atop the buildings in the background. At the left of the composition, Bernardo O'Higgins rides on a white horse, raising his sword to the air and attempting to inspire his men with a display of confidence, despite what would be their ultimate defeat (Figure 3.3). Though neither the flag nor O'Higgins are centered in the composition, in their respective positions they punctuate the points at which the image can be divided into thirds, acting as optical resting points but also creating an important compositional counterbalance between the two. If O'Higgins' valiant likeness atop the white horse represents active leadership and bravery in the thick of the fight, the flag acts as a symbol of this patriotic devotion and an assurance that despite the present outcome, his effort will not be made in vain.

One interesting aspect of both images is that the current Chilean flag is seen waving amidst each scene of battle, although the design of this flag would not be made official until October of 1817—three years after the Battle of Rancagua had concluded and eight months after the Battle of Chacabuco. This anachronistic design thus enters into each composition as a retroactive symbol of national pride and victory, done with the knowledge of a favorable conclusion to what was a bloody and at times uncertain campaign for freedom. Though there was a different outcome in each of these battles, the flag remains in both works as a sign that Chile in the end won the war, allowing each painting to speak to a final patriotic triumph.

Nanetti's O'Higgins wears a uniform that is very similar to that depicted in Gil de Castro's portrait of the independence fighter, complete with his tricolored feathered hat. Riding atop the sole white horse in the image, this visual trope may have been repeated in both images as a means of drawing attention to the works' protagonist. Of course equestrian portraits were nothing novel at the time these works were made, having arisen out of the neoclassical interest of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Yet the imagery of a glorious figure riding atop a white horse has more specific parallels. In particular one recalls the widely-known portrait by Jacques-Louis David of *Napoleon Crossing the Alps*, of which five versions were made between 1801 and 1805 (Figure 3.4). The image is a dramatic fantasy of Napoleon's crossing, a dynamically idealized image imbued with a heroic spirit.¹⁰⁰ Napoleon's white horse rears as its rider easily

¹⁰⁰ Dawn Ades also mentions the use of David's portrait as an explicit iconographic reference in the context of South American liberation, placing the origins of this comparison to just around the time Gil de Castro's and Nanetti's works were made. See *Art in Latin America*, 12.

holds on, pointing the way forward seemingly unafraid of what perils lie ahead. The French Emperor's majestic crossing of the Alps is of course analogous to the feat accomplished by O'Higgins and the rest of the Army of the Andes, an episode of great physical triumph from which the artist can draw in order to shape a similarly glorious image.

It is fair then to suggest that the figure on the white horse in Gil de Castro's portrait may indeed have been intended to be the sitter himself. As the subject of the work this would not at all be inappropriate. While this further highlights O'Higgins' individual deeds, the image also draws attention to the fact that his success would not have been possible without the support of his Army and co-commanders, who bravely charged into battle alongside him. The inclusion of the anachronistic Chilean flag heightens this sense of patriotic victory, sealing the interpretation of the image as a celebratory look back on the nation's immediate past. As a final punctuation of this feat, the paper O'Higgins holds in his right hand has been conjectured to be none other than Chile's Act of Independence, a document he signed in 1817.¹⁰¹ While this narrative tableau serves to affirm the portrait's status as a work whose meaning extends beyond the level of the individual, the background also helps provide the essential contours of a national, and thus communal, legend.

The greater landscape beyond the figure and the scene of battle is comprised by the treacherous and majestic Andes. Serving as a visual reminder of the obstacles faced by the Army as it courageously traveled from Mendoza to Santiago in January 1817, the

¹⁰¹ Donahue-Wallace, *Art and Architecture*, 237.

setting reminds the viewer of the stakes of this journey. Although the Battle of Chacabuco did not take place in the mountains and rather on the plains that lay beyond them, the image condenses the setting of both events in order to present them within the same landscape. Integrating these two elements together in this way, the artist has likewise combined a message of struggle and achievement, fusing two key pieces of the historical sequence of events. Similarly, the portrait depicts one of the battle's commanders, O'Higgins, posing triumphantly for his portrait, with his hat under his arm and the Act of Independence in hand, clearly having come out victorious from the events taking place behind him. Thus through the pictorial composite of the Andean setting, active scene of battle, and the ultimately victorious General, the images brings together three significant episodes in a single tableau, the time before, during, and after an important event, forming a neatly summarized "moment" of independence.

It is a particular capacity of the genre of portraiture to permit such a composition to take shape, one which seamlessly blends disparate chronological moments in a way that seems natural. Following the general schema of the colonial portrait, the figure predominates the picture plane while the surrounding elements denote particular aspects of his character or biography. In this case, these aspects of the sitter's biography also point to a period of larger historical significance, placing the work squarely between an individual and collective orientation. In this respect, the portrait shares with its predecessors the ability to address the achievements of a single individual in light of his larger social consequence, though in this instance it is in a national, rather than colonial, context.

Evidence of the history of this particular kind of artistic device can be found in an image depicting José Antonio de Manso Velasco, First Count of Superunda and 30th Viceroy of Peru (Figure 3.5). In the equestrian portrait, a relatively rare format for official viceregal portraiture, the Viceroy is depicted riding atop a horse outside the city of Lima. Behind him is an idealized vision of the capital, highlighting Velasco's role in rebuilding the city after the devastation of the great earthquake and tsunami of 1746.¹⁰² In the eighteenth century, portraits began to experiment more with novel backgrounds such as these, yielding a richer and more detailed image which could illustrate the sitter's accomplishments through more elaborate means.

In the case of Lozano's portrait the work highlights the fact that the Count's actions had a tangible impact on the physical landscape and lives of the inhabitants of his city. Likewise, the portrait of O'Higgins makes full use of the symbolic and narrative potential of the portrait genre, effectively overlapping it with landscape and history painting as a means of extending the paradigmatic reach of the image. With its emphasis on patriotic symbolism and interest in re-telling a significant chapter of a national historic narrative, the work transcends its own supposed limitations as a portrait meant to glorify a single individual, stepping firmly into the realm of National Art. While celebrating one of Chile's foremost arbiters of independence by focusing on his various achievements and emphasizing the danger of the challenges he faced, the work also directs the viewer's attention to the larger outcome of his and his soldiers' actions, placing the individual's achievements in the context of a collective pursuit and ultimately, a national victory.

¹⁰² Benson, et al, *Retratos*, 82.

O'Higgins as National Hero

Through a kind of pictorial nationalism, the triumph of the individual and of the nation become merged as O'Higgins' own successes become inextricable with the greater cause for which he fought. The portrait succeeds in providing both a celebratory portrait of an individual as well as an idealized vision of Chilean independence. By highlighting a significant battle which led to national liberation and including the mountains San Martín's Army heroically crossed, these aspects both allude to and help shape a national narrative. These events become important moments of the nation's history, impressing them upon the viewer through the tangible and thus powerful nature of the image. In this way the image reflects one of the key processes of nation-building which Benedict Anderson describes, namely the process of recounting, or constructing a "biography" of the nation. These key events become "remembered" as they enter into posterity through the visual mode of the portrait. Not an accidental choice, this image must be considered to be a part of a process of strategic remembering of particular historical events and personages. The authority of the narrative it provides can be based on the fact that the viewer is compelled to accept the proximity of the image to the subject and to these events, thus providing a sufficiently authentic national origin story.

In addition, the image can be viewed as self-consciously asserting a palpable sense of national community. Yael Tamir writes of this phenomenon that its existence is a common and defining aspect of all nations, and is dependent on "feelings of belongingness and national fraternity."¹⁰³ In the first part of this project I directed the

¹⁰³ "The Enigma of Nationalism," 424.

reader to think about the ways in which this sense of national awareness, or consciousness, can be constructed through images. In the O'Higgins portrait this is provided for the viewer in at least a couple ways. First, the repetition of Chile's three national colors, white, red, and blue, can be sourced to the flag that is also included in the image. These colors repeat throughout the image, helping to foster visual acknowledgement of the emblem as a basic symbol of national membership. Second, the mountains that refer to San Martín's historic crossing also present a key element of the nation's topography, allowing it to become representative of not only a key event during the fight for independence, but also a general and defining characteristic of the national landscape. This notion of shaping the image of a nation through attention to its landscape, among other aspects, would become one of the central concerns of many artists during the nineteenth century in the Americas, who viewed a nation's natural environment an important part of its own unique identity.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a "hero" as "a man...distinguished by the performance of courageous or noble actions, especially in battle; a brave or illustrious warrior, soldier, etc."¹⁰⁴ Given this definition, the portrait of O'Higgins serves to shape the sitter as a national hero by presenting a celebratory likeness which draws the viewer's attention to his most noble actions done in the name of the state. This is evidenced by the scene of battle, the rendering of the fearsome mountains, and the inclusion, both visual and linguistic, of various signs of his great personal accomplishments. In doing this the

¹⁰⁴ Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University Press, 2015, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/86297?rkey=5CyxXK&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>, 21 April, 2015.

artist has created a portrait with profound national resonance, one which goes far beyond the level of the individual depicted and argues for his entry into a national canon of heroes. Within the limits of the picture plane, one is provided with everything needed to both venerate and justify the figure's entry into a Chilean national narrative, urging one to consider the General a central actor in the nation's formative history. By placing his sitter within this larger context, Gil de Castro has asserted the genre of portraiture as a powerful means of articulating national identity and activating a means of national hero worship. Through this act of merging portraiture with landscape and history painting, the artist cleverly permitted his subject to materialize both as individual and archetype.

Figures



Figure 3.1. José Gil de Castro, *Portrait of Captain General Bernardo O'Higgins Riquelme*, 1820. Oil on canvas. 6.6 x 4.3 ft (200 x 132 cm). Museo Histórico Nacional. Santiago, Chile. Pictured in Hernán Maino, *Pintura Chilena del Siglo XIX: José Gil de Castro: El Retratista de la Independencia* (Santiago de Chile: Origo Ediciones, 2008), 93.



Figure 3.2. Giulio Nanetti, *Batalla de Rancagua*, c. 1820. Oil on canvas. 2.1 x 3.3 ft (64 x 101 cm). Museo Histórico Nacional, Sala El colapso del imperio. Santiago, Chile. Photo from SURDOC, Centro de Documentación de Bienes Patrimoniales, Dirección de Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos, 2013, <http://www.surdoc.cl/>, 5 June 2015.



Figure 3.3. Detail of Bernardo O'Higgins. From Giulio Nanetti, *Batalla de Rancagua*, c. 1820. Oil on canvas, 2.1 x 3.3 ft (64 x 101 cm). Museo Histórico Nacional, Santiago, Chile. Photo from SURDOC, Centro de Documentación de Bienes Patrimoniales, Dirección de Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos, 2013, <http://www.surdoc.cl/>, 5 June 2015.



Figure 3.4. Jacques-Louis David, *Napoleon Crossing the Alps*, 1803. Oil on canvas. 8.6 x 7.3 ft (261 x 221 cm). Château de Versailles, Versailles, France. Photo by RMN-Grand Palais (Château de Versailles)/Franck Raux.



Figure 3.5. Cristóbal Lozano, *Don José Antonio Manso de Velazco, Conde de Superunda*, 1746. Oil on canvas. 9.5 x 7.8 ft (291 x 238 cm). Museo de América. Madrid, Spain. Pictured in Paul B. Niell and Stacie G. Widdifield. *Buen Gusto and Classicism in the Visual Cultures of Latin America, 1780-1910*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013), 193.

Chapter 3: The Martyr Olaya: A New Kind of Hero

One portrait in the oeuvre of José Gil de Castro clearly stands out among the rest. His commission to depict the deceased national hero and professed martyr for Peruvian independence, José Silverio Olaya Balandra (1789-1823), presented a wholly new set of circumstances and iconographic problems for the artist (Figure 4.1). The subject's own background and social status provided little of distinction for the purposes of a large-scale commemorative portrait, except for the fact of his great contribution to and sacrifice for the patriot cause. The artist thus had to be creative in the way in which he adapted his subject to the artistic demands of his task. By looking to the work's basic features one can view the way in which Gil de Castro fundamentally perceived differently the requirements of this commission compared to his other projects. Drawing from his experience with religious iconography, the artist approximated Olaya to a saint, alluding to his quasi-divine status by bestowing upon him honors which the sitter would only receive through the circumstances of his death. As a result, the image acts as a window onto another clear moment of artistic reinvention, visual evidence of an active creative process that found itself reimagining the limits of secular portraiture. It also demonstrates the important connections between religion and nationalism which have often been commented on by scholars of the social functioning of each, an aspect which helps the viewer identify and understand the power of adapting religious symbolism for the representation of a national hero.

José Olaya was an indigenous fisherman from the coastal town of Chorrillos, a suburb located just south of Lima. As part of his daily duties, Olaya sailed from

Chorrillos to the nearby island of San Lorenzo and on to the port city of Callao to sell his wares. In June 1823, the Spanish forces recaptured Lima. As a result the current president, José de la Riva Agüero, and his congress were forced to hide out in the Real Felipe Fortress in Callao.¹⁰⁵ There they came across Olaya, quickly realizing he would be the ideal candidate to aid them in carrying secret messages from Callao to the patriots remaining in Lima. While the pathways on land were closely monitored, a common fisherman would not appear to the royalists as a threat, and as he traveled it would be assumed he was simply traveling to do business in the capital. Olaya agreed to the covert task, and in doing so he directly served the independence cause, bravely taking on the immense personal risks involved.¹⁰⁶

Disastrously, the royalists caught on to Olaya's role as an intermediary during his second trip. He was captured and taken to a dungeon in the city center, where he was relentlessly tortured in an effort to force him to give up the identities of those with whom he had been in contact. Despite various horrific brutalities inflicted upon his body, Olaya revealed nothing to his captors.¹⁰⁷ According to Luis Antonio Eguiguren, ““They flattered him, they promised him great prizes and money in abundance; but everything hit against an immovable rock, as those bathed by raging seas, each time it adheres more firmly to

¹⁰⁵ Though Peruvian Independence had been declared on June 28, 1821 by José de San Martín, it was only recognized in the north and in Lima while Cuzco and the south-central mountain region remained controlled by the royalists. The effort to make Peru completely independent would continue until 1826, four years after San Martín abdicated his position as its supreme leader and only after Simón Bolívar entered the country to aid in its final liberation.

¹⁰⁶ Mondoñedo Murillo, *El retrato de José Olaya*, 60.

¹⁰⁷ Olaya was reportedly beaten, struck with various objects, and had his finger nailed removed. See Mondoñedo Murillo, *El retrato de José Olaya*, 61.

its base.”¹⁰⁸ As a result of his continued refusal to comply Olaya was taken outside on June 29, 1823 to an alley adjoining the Plaza de Armas, and executed by gunfire. Today a large monument to José Olaya featuring his likeness stands at this site.

As a result of his selfless actions and remarkable courage, Olaya is considered a martyr for Peruvian independence.¹⁰⁹ His noble actions were acknowledged as such after his death and on September 3, 1823 the Peruvian president Bernardo José Tagle issued a decree which stated: “In the Sala de la Municipalidad of the town of Chorrillos, will be placed a canvas on which will be written the following: The patriot Don José Olaya served with glory the Fatherland, and honored the place of his birth.”¹¹⁰ Thus the instructions to commemorate the deeds of the humble fisherman came from the highest register of government, the President himself, despite the fact that in his life Olaya never had a direct relationship with his government (“beyond the link that by social contract is established between the municipality and its inhabitants,”) nor any kind of societal prominence.¹¹¹ Rather, it is in spite of his background and due solely to his willingness to aid the cause of independence that a person of his meager status was able to rise to the level of a national hero.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Mondoñedo Murillo, *El retrato de José Olaya*, 61.

¹⁰⁹ Olaya is commonly referred to as a martyr by scholars, while the wall label accompanying Gil de Castro’s portrait in the Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Antropología e Historia del Peru explicitly reads “*se le considera mártir de la independencia.*”

¹¹⁰ Mondoñedo Murillo, *El retrato de José Olaya*, 67.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

It would be five years before the portrait of Olaya President Tagle ordered would finally be created. José Gil de Castro was commissioned to execute the task, presumably owing to his substantial resume and prominent role as chief portraitist of the current leadership. Yet given the fact that he had never met his subject, and that he typically made portraits of the elite, his task was novel in his career. Though he had for a long while created portraits of civilians, these were always wealthy creoles with high social status; there was much the artist could draw from in their personal or professional lives to shape an image that celebrated their wealth, status, or distinguished lineage, while this was emphatically not the case for his current commission.

Gil de Castro's life-size commemorative portrait of the Martyr Olaya was done at a comparable scale to his great images of Simón Bolívar and Bernardo O'Higgins, made respectively, three and eight years prior. Again the subject is presented in full-length, proffering him the pictorial honor of falling within a tradition of commemorative portraits depicting the most respected and powerful individuals in society. While these portraits virtually always featured *peninsulares* or *criollos*, the portrait of Olaya presents a man of indigenous descent. It is, in fact, the only example of a work by Gil de Castro which features a non-white subject.¹¹²

Olaya stands centered in the composition. His form appears column-like owing to his straightened legs which equally bear the weight of his body. Instead of adopting a *contrapposto* stance as many of his sitters did, Olaya's pose appears much more rigid and static. As his feet both turn outward to the corners of the frame, it is almost as if the

¹¹² Ibid., 68.

figure hovers above the ground rather than being firmly planted upon it. Despite the frontality asserted by the position of his legs, one can observe that his body in fact turns slightly, indicated by the exposure of his right hip and the foreshortening of the figure's torso. Thus in total the figure accords to the three-corner turn favored by the artist. This position allows the face to be seen in partial profile, permitting the angle of the nose and more of the right side of the face to be viewed. The figure's dark complexion stands in contrast to his white clothing, which one scholar has remarked serves to "throw [Olaya's] Indian features into relief."¹¹³ While one could reasonably say this, the elegant nature and color of his garments do much more than draw attention to his racial origins.

Olaya is dressed in bright white trousers and matching waistcoat. Underneath his waistcoat he wears a white shirt with intricate lace detail at the breast, secured with a small bow at the neck. Out of his right chest pocket spills an orange handkerchief itself bearing an ornate design (Figure 4.2). On his head a white skull cap is trimmed with more lace, and on his feet Olaya dons ocher-colored loafers topped off with black bows. In the crook of his left arm he holds a circular, broad-rimmed black hat, conspicuously turned outward to expose the inside. His right arm extends outward to his side, presenting the letters held out as the ultimate symbol of his mortal sacrifice. These are the letters he carried with him on his fated passages, and thus the objects that most clearly symbolize his murder at the hands of the Spanish. The top-most letter is addressed to President Tagle, the two-time Peruvian President who ordered the work in his decree of 1823

¹¹³ James Higgins, *Lima: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005): 102.

(Figure 4.3).¹¹⁴ Thus this nod to the current President honors his role in sponsoring this great work, much in the manner of the donor portraits (“*donantes*”) made in the colonial period which paid homage to their patrons by including their likeness somewhere in the image or indicating their patronage in a text panel.¹¹⁵ The destination of Callao, also written on the letter, reveals the letter’s intended target, one which it would ultimately never reach.

Olaya’s clothing is a supreme fantasy. Not only would these clothes never be practical for a fisherman, but never would have been feasible to obtain in his humble life. Thus Olaya is bestowed with the symbolic marker of a status he could only reach in death, honored with garments at a level of richness and quality accessible only to the wealthiest and most privileged members of society. Yet in addition, the hue of these clothes specifically emanates an ethereal quality. Their piercing white is highly suggestive that the figure has attained divine status, as if in death, Olaya’s martyrdom became literal, transforming him into a kind of secular saint who resides in heaven and thus imagined in appropriately pristine glory. As he visibly drew from religious iconography to construct this likeness, he imagined Olaya as fundamentally different from his powerful military clientele and thus looked to other kinds of images and genres as a more relevant model.

¹¹⁴ Bernardo José Tagle was a Grand Marshal in the Peruvian military who became provisional President in February of 1823 before being replaced by President José de la Riva Agüero. He held office again as the President from July of that year to February 1824, before Simón Bolívar took over as dictator of Peru.

¹¹⁵ So-called “donor portraits” or *donantes* featured likenesses of the patron(s) of a religious work, conferring upon these individuals the status of pious reverence for the deity depicted and ensuring their patronage would forever be acknowledged.

Religious portraits, or images of particular saints, angels, and other deities of the Christian faith had been popular in the Americas long before the era of Gil de Castro. Crucial in spreading the new faith from the earliest years of colonization, religious themes persisted and continued to make up the majority of viceregal art into the late eighteenth century.¹¹⁶ To a certain extent these kinds of images shared with secular portraiture a basic approach, namely an interest in depicting a particular religious icon and identifying him or her through the use of linguistic and visual techniques. Text panels were often included as a way to provide the biography of the saint and to expound on the definitive aspects of his or her life, while the saint's attributes stemming from Biblical tradition were depicted in order to correctly identify the figure.

These religious portraits were distinct from secular examples due to the fact that they contended to present an image of the divine. As a result, certain aspects were less important to the artist such as the individualization of facial features.¹¹⁷ An image circa 1650 of the *Virgin of the Immaculate Conception with Litanies* by Diego Quispe Tito, considered the father of the Cuzco school of painting, is illustrative (Figure 4.4). The Virgin at the center is surrounded by angels, indicating through this hierarchical structure that she is the glorified subject of the image. However the details of her face are virtually interchangeable with the angels around her. They all share the same pale flesh, rosy cheeks, delicate features, and in some cases, even the modest turn of the head found in many such Marian depictions. By imparting them all with similar features, they can be

¹¹⁶ Donahue-Wallace, *Art and Architecture*, 133.

¹¹⁷ Maino ed., *Pintura Chilena*, 30.

understood as according to the same iconic register of divine visages, sharing similar qualities of the divine such as spiritual purity, humility, and beauty.

Given that deities lack human originals on which to base their portraits, an artist's task centered on communicating abstract ideas rather than attempting to provide a human likeness.¹¹⁸ Consequently images of saints, the Virgin Mary, and Christ often became stereotyped as the artist's aim was rather to render their timeless and otherworldly qualities. Yet images of deities could still forge connections to the physical realm through other means, for instance in the case of the donor portraits referenced above. A painting on tin dated to the early nineteenth century by an unidentified artist of the Quito school features the Virgin of Cotopaxi, a local Marian figure, seated with the Christ child on her lap and Saint John the Baptist beside her (Figure 4.5). The work's patrons flank the Virgin at the bottom of the image, while the peak of the Ecuadorian mountain Cotopaxi is depicted in the background. Thus not only does the image pay homage to a celebrated local version of the Virgin and recognize the work's patrons, it also places the work in an identifiable location. Through the inclusion of the towering mountain the artist has shown an interest in depicting the characteristic elements of the vernacular landscape, emphasizing the localized significance of the Virgin and her favor of this particular region. By introducing these elements of the landscape the work is ensured a local interpretation, arguing not only for the religious devotion of the donors but also elevating

¹¹⁸ Though some depictions of saints would have in fact had a human original at one point, for instance in the case of Saint Rose of Lima, who was canonized 54 years after her death in the South American viceroyalty, there would not have been a direct source of her likeness which would have been accessible to the artist. Thus these images must also be considered ultra-constructions.

the status of the region and those who live there as they may lay claim to divine patronage.

Though he was better known as a painter of secular portraits, Gil de Castro also created religious works throughout his career. This was appropriate given that he was “heir to the colonial artistic tradition” in which religious commissions were most common.¹¹⁹ Indeed from his formative years in the *limeño* workshop of Pedro Díaz he had created images with religious subject matter. His painting of *Santo Domingo* of an unconfirmed date of 1817 provides a useful example of the artist’s saintly repertoire as well as a striking comparison to the portrait of Olaya (Figure 4.6).¹²⁰ The work’s full-length format signals the significance of Saint Dominic de Guzmán, founder of the Dominican order, although the painting itself is of modest scale. The figure is draped in white robes and wears a dark cloak overtop. His *contrapposto* stance is indicated by the folds in the garment which reveal the bent position of the saint’s right knee. Saint Dominic directs his eyes downward and tilts his head to the right, creating an elegant curve beginning at the figure’s right foot that traces up through the central axis of the body, culminating at the top of his head. A book in the saint’s right hand supports a small church at the level of his breast. In his left, a flowing standard terminates in a cross and a bundle of flowers. A golden halo signaling his immortal divinity surrounds the saint’s tonsured head while a white star punctuates the center of his forehead.

¹¹⁹ Maino, ed., *Pintura Chilena*, 30.

¹²⁰ This date is provided by Ricardo Mariátegui Oliva though it is not confirmed by other sources consulted who indicate rather that the date of the work is unknown. See *Jose Gil de Castro (“el mulato Gil”)*, 137.

Saint Dominic is set in a hilly landscape either at dusk or dawn, as indicated by the light peaking just over the horizon. Clouds accumulate in a circle around the saint's head creating a double halo effect and helping to frame the figure's face. Colonial religious art often featured the inclusion of landscapes and landscape elements, but like the image of the Virgin of Cotopaxi, this example specifically highlights the particular features of the vernacular landscape of the Andean region, and thus the saint's presence in the immediate environment. Equal to the artist's interest in characterizing the local geography is the desire to create a relationship between the figure and the landscape, permitting the work to speak to its local origins and to confer upon this locale the privilege of the attendance of the titular saint. In contrast to secular portraits, which aimed to glorify an individual's accomplishments, portraits of religious figures rather drew attention to the saint's humility, divinity, and role as a symbol of spiritual purity.

The parallels between religious portraiture and Gil de Castro's portrait are ample. First, given Olaya's rich and immaculate white clothing, his pictorial presence emanates the timeless and abstract qualities of the divine. This draws an immediate visual correspondence with portraits of saints and angels. Depicted not as a poor fisherman but as a well-appointed gentleman, he is clothed in a manner that never would have been attainable to him during life. Rather it is a status conferred upon Olaya only in death, an ironic consequence of his brave and selfless acts, which earned him a glorified status he could never personally enjoy. Moreover, the pristine presentation of the figure yields no sign of the violence inflicted upon his body. Rather than depict Olaya at the moment of his suffering, he is shown outside of time and with an idealized form arguing for an

unscathed immortality. It is a decisive fantasy, an idealization and ultimately a rejection of the final brutality of his life. While other examples of secular portraiture, including those of Bolívar and O'Higgins discussed here, are by nature guilty of exaggerating or inflating the truth, in its defiant denial of reality the Olaya portrait emerges as wholly different.

In not having access to his model, the artist had to construct what he thought would be a suitable and approximate likeness of the Peruvian martyr. He also needed to convey a properly triumphant message about his patriotism. Drawing on his work as a secular portraitist, certain conventions are retained, yet adjusted, in order to better suit what were perceived to be the unique requirements of this project. Comparing it to the portrait of O'Higgins, both figures are depicted in full-length and centered in the composition. However Olaya stands erect with both legs straightened, creating a perfect symmetry of his feet and yielding a more static composition than the formally contrived yet naturalistic *contrapposto* of O'Higgins. The effect is a more schematized body that further removes Olaya from the realm of reality and from the compositional conventions of secular portraiture. Though in both portraits the central figure has removed his hat, Olaya's is decidedly not the bountiful and flamboyant bicorn version held by the Captain General. Rather it is of a simple, round design, bearing no visible superfluous detail, a style likely viewed as better suited to his social status. It is conspicuously turned outward toward the viewer revealing its interior, as if to call attention to its emptiness (Figure 4.7). One can only wonder whether this vacancy is meant to call attention to a possible hiding place for the letters Olaya carried on his clandestine journeys, even if this is only a fiction

imagined by the artist, in which case this particular attribute would be imbued with the same poignant tone permeating the portrait as a whole.

The quasi-divine nature of Gil de Castro's Olaya has been remarked upon by scholars. Along with this comparison is the realization that a new kind of portrait has been imagined, one which combines aspects of both secular and religious imagery. Miguel A. Bretos comments on the intent of this kind of image, which is "in a sense, profoundly revolutionary." He goes on to write that "Olaya was an Indian who gave his life for his country and is represented in a setting that is saintly in all but name. He is offered up for veneration in a way that is completely unprecedented; not as a saint, of course, but as a *prócer*, a patriot, and a father of his country. No Indian, save for Inca royalty, was ever so portrayed in colonial Peru."¹²¹ Thus it is only within the context of an emergent nationalism that the conditions exist to exalt a figure like Olaya to the highest level, depicting him not only in an artistic mode formerly reserved for kings, viceroys, and high ranking members of the church, but for religious icons. In the context of the early nineteenth century, space is made available in the iconographic repertoire for those willing to risk their lives for the success of the nation. With this, a new paradigm is established in which the preservation of *la patria* becomes a sacred priority, akin even to one's devotion to God.

Religion and Nationalism

By imagining Olaya as a saint, the image cements a theoretical equivalence between the so-called "moral grandeur" of patriotic sacrifice and that of religious

¹²¹ Benson, et al., *Retratos*, 156-7.

devotion.¹²² It is a powerful rhetorical claim, particularly when geared toward a devout audience familiar with religious iconography. Many scholars have recognized and elaborated on this important connection between religion and nationalism. Benedict Anderson in particular has enumerated some of the terms of this relationship in his book *Imagined Communities*, arguing that religion acted as one of the cultural roots which primed societies for the emergence and rapid acceptance of nationalistic sentiment. While he acknowledges that nationalism did not simply replace religion, he writes that,

“The century of the Enlightenment, of rationalist secularism, brought with it its own modern darkness. With the ebbing of religious belief, the suffering which belief in part composed did not disappear. Disintegration of paradise: nothing makes fatality more arbitrary. Absurdity of salvation: nothing makes another style of continuity more necessary. What then was required was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning.”¹²³

Thus if unquestioning religious belief was at all waning at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the time was ripe and the lexicon already established to feed this inclination toward devotion with a novel, or at least supplementary, source of confidence.

The portrait of Olaya thus becomes hyperbolic testimony that in dying for one’s country, one’s memory will live on indefinitely. Through the unique imagining of the work, Olaya’s sacrifice is envisioned to be on the level of both the highest spiritual and worldly authorities. Sharing the iconographic conventions of each, patriotism is argued to be of the highest order of human conduct. The rational basis for this, as described by Anderson, is two-fold: first, like religion, the cause of nationalism that inspires such acts

¹²² Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 144.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

of devotion must be understood as “something fundamentally pure.”¹²⁴ In other words, a society that exalts patriotic achievement views it to be exemplary of utmost virtue, a powerful force of good that abides by certain immutable laws of human action. Second, fighting for the nation becomes a worthy cause due to the fact that it is also perceived to be something permanent, eternal, even destined-to-be.¹²⁵ Anderson draws attention to the tendency of nations to inevitably “loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide into a limitless future.”¹²⁶ Given this philosophical and even existential weight, those who volunteer to help the nation thrive can likewise be assured a place in history.

Anderson argues that nationalism provides hope for immortality in the same way religious belief provides solace in suffering, by guaranteeing one’s memory will survive long after his body has ceased to pump with blood. This is the basic promise made by the image of Olaya, that in spite of the obscurity in which one lives his life, the highest level of societal reverence can in fact be attained by anyone. Solely by nature of one’s actions during life, he can transcend the supposedly fixed social position in which he lives and be elevated not only to the level of the secular elite but even to a status approaching the divine. The chance for an ordinary life to gain this higher meaning, the opportunity to be remembered and revered by a nation and by history must be viewed as a ground-breaking prospect in the context of a post-colonial moment in which social standing for

¹²⁴ Ibid., 144.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 11-12.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

generations had been essentially determined at birth. The image speaks to a reevaluation of the concept of lineage as the ultimate decider of one's destiny. This is evidenced by the creative imaging of the figure, but also, importantly, by the powerful use of language.

Like the 1820 portrait of O'Higgins and countless examples from the colonial period, there are text elements in the portrait of Olaya that outline the terms of his birth, death, and honorable deeds. In the lower left corner, an oval cartouche tells of his birth in the town of Chorrillos in 1782, the circumstances of his capture in 1823, and his unwavering patriotism despite his brutal torture and eventual death at the hands of the Spanish forces. Again adhering to colonial convention, text is provided to give the viewer the specific details of his life and actions and ensure that the basis for his commemoration is established. However, in contrast to these same conventions, no information is given about his ancestry or lineage, as these were not available nor applicable in his case; this information would in fact have done little to support the celebratory intentions of the image, particularly if the work continued to operate under a colonial paradigm of class, race, and status. This is not to say that these prejudices did not still exist—to the contrary, one may argue they still exist today. Rather it is to say that in this instance a different criteria has been applied, one which has elevated an unconventional figure to noble status. The flowing red banner above his head fulfills verbatim the request made by President Tagle, stating: "The patriot Don José Olaya served with glory his fatherland and honored the place of his birth." Evidenced by the addition of the title of *Don* to his name, Olaya has literally been ennobled, despite his background, by way of his great sacrifice and service. Moreover, while the text places the image firmly in the realm of the

national given its explicit reference to the Fatherland (*la patria*), it also makes an important reference to Olaya's local identity. Citing that the patriot "honored the place of his birth," the town of Chorrillos claims Olaya as a local hero, making the image a work of both national and local significance. This dual connotation is supported by the equally significant nature of the background.

The significance of landscapes in religious portraiture was briefly outlined above. As landscapes were rare, but not uncommon, in Gil de Castro's portraits, it is significant that the artist chose to employ a landscape in his depiction of Olaya. It clearly has affinities with saintly imagery such as the artist's portrait of *Santo Domingo*. In this image the background served to localize the divine figure and assert his presence in the Andean landscape, symbolizing his divine favor over its territory. However in the context of the secular portrait, chiefly demonstrated by the *Portrait of Bernardo O'Higgins*, examined in Chapter 2, a landscape provides an opportunity to inject the image with additional symbolic content, aiding in further identifying the figure portrayed and indicating his or her significance. In the Olaya portrait the background serves both to symbolize Olaya's patriotic acts as well as indicate his relevance to both local and national contexts.

While the figure is set within a generally rocky landscape, one notices that the scene is not symmetrical. The right side features an accumulation of stones that appears to be closer to the foreground than the left, evidenced by the scale of the stone blocks in relation to the foliage growing amongst them. These rectangular blocks indicate some kind of man-made structure, placed along horizontal registers as if laid by human hands.

Though the intent is somewhat ambiguous, the rusticated blocks may be a reference to the fortifications that sheltered the patriotic forces during the brief Spanish re-occupation of the capital. In this way the stones would allude to the historical narrative out of which Olaya's own historic role emerged.

There is an obvious disjuncture between the right side of the background and the left, which presents an alternate landscape. Depicted further in the distance, a cliff juts out above a long, curved pathway traveling diagonally downward into the ocean.¹²⁷ This path can be understood as referencing Olaya's secret passages on land and sea, thus symbolizing directly this vital component of his biography. At the left edge, depicted in the background at the level just beneath Olaya's outstretched hand, is a mountain. Its position bears a striking resemblance to the peak of Cotopaxi represented in the Quito school painting. Occupying a nearly identical place in the composition, the mountain demonstrates a similar interest in providing a real geographical context to the fictional image.

In the Quito school painting, the peak acts an explicit reference to a particularly famous mountain in Ecuador. Placing its subject in a definable locale, the work gains a geographic specificity which would otherwise be imprecise. Yet in the portrait of Olaya, the particular landmass represented is more difficult to clearly identify. While the Andes Mountains are a characteristic feature of Peruvian geography, the metropolitan area of Lima itself lies on the coastline of the Pacific Ocean and is mostly flat. Another notable topographic landmark near Chorrillos, the sitter's own hometown, is the Morro Solar, a

¹²⁷ Mondoñedo Murillo, *El retrato de José Olaya*, 66.

cluster of hills rising out of the landscape in an oblong formation and ending in a steep slope terminating in the ocean. Though it is indeed an iconic feature of the region, it does not have the shape of a mountain and thus most likely not meant to be the form depicted in the image.

While there may be different candidates, it is not obvious which peak the hazy mountain silhouette is meant to identify.¹²⁸ However there is an alternate possibility: that it may not have been intended to represent a particular peak at all. Viewed this way, the mountain may stand in for the Andes broadly as a characteristic feature of the Peruvian region.¹²⁹ The mountain would then act as a generalized symbol of national topography. The cliffs, on the other hand, are believed to represent Chorrillos, the hometown of Olaya and the municipality which finally commissioned the work in 1828 based on President Tagle's decree five years prior.¹³⁰ Thus the background, taken as a whole, presents the viewer with a composite landscape. Combining features of the local and national environment with symbolic architectural elements, the background takes on a multivalence that speaks to a new geo-political landscape. In addition to its national orientation, it is also aligned with the municipality which claims José Olaya as a local hero, and which finally commissioned his commemorative portrait on the orders of the

¹²⁸ The peak represented may also be the massive Hill of San Cristóbal, the closest landmark approximating a mountain which exists within the metropolitan limits of Lima. The Hill is in the current district of Rímac, located just north of the downtown area. However this is difficult to confirm as there are a variety of significant mountain peaks scattered across the country.

¹²⁹ Not only are they an identifying feature, but also are highly symbolic during the period of independence as they were the stage for the historic crossing of the Army of the Andes. This as part of a larger campaign to liberate Chile and ultimately, Peru.

¹³⁰ Mondoñedo Murillo, *El retrato de José Olaya*, 66.

President. As a result, Olaya is simultaneously imagined as a local and national hero, a figure with the capacity to unify different regions under a collective banner of nation. Olaya's significance then is multiplied, encouraging local allegiances to exist in harmony with the larger goals and values of a Peruvian nation.

The Popular Hero as Vehicle of Nationalism

A figure such as Olaya clearly demanded a new reference point for the artist. Lacking the conventional prerequisites, the artist looked to religious models as a means of legitimizing Olaya's place within an iconographic tradition. As his background was seen to more closely approximate the humble and pure origins of a saint, these kinds of images were viewed as a closer prototype than the portrait of an individual born into the secular elite. In an emerging national context, the Olaya portrait becomes representative of a novel political paradigm which argues for the possibility for ordinary lives to be transformed, able to reach heights that would have been virtually unreachable under the viceregal system. Whether or not this claim was genuine, in the context of art one observes the ways in which this message was conveyed through the use of a potent visual language.

With its populist orientation then, it is important to recall that the portrait was in fact ordered by the State, a body "with which the fisherman did not share during his life any close relationship."¹³¹ Thus the portrait takes on an impersonal character, presenting the likeness of a figure whom the artist never met, and whose story is used to further the goals and values of the new national government. As Patricia Mondoñedo Murillo rightly

¹³¹ Ibid., 67.

points out, the Republican administration seized on the example of José Olaya not for his status as an individual, but as a convenient and profitable allegory.¹³² His image thus operated as a tool of national propaganda, despite its genuinely reverential intent and continued national significance.

Today, Olaya remains an important popular hero in Peru. Peruvians recognize and admire his sacrifice for independence and the fact that he exemplifies the patriotic devotion of the common citizen. Many are even familiar with Gil de Castro's iconic portrait. However others have expressed criticism of the work, specifically for the way it seemed to present a promise that a new, democratic society was burgeoning with independence, one which would dissolve the racial barriers and strict stratification of the colonial system in favor of a more equal society. This critique has chiefly come from contemporary artists who have appropriated Gil de Castro's image as part of a contemporary critique of Peruvian life.¹³³ Yet however probing or critical their projects, it is precisely this active engagement with the source object which retains its cultural validity. It demonstrates the degree of entrenchment of the image within Peru's national visual culture, one that is nonetheless open to reappraisal. Thus by exploring the impact of this particular image, a discussion of the power and criteria of national images can be fruitfully extended into the present moment.

¹³² Ibid., 69.

¹³³ See for example the work of Moico Yaker, a contemporary Peruvian artist who has re-appropriated Gil de Castro's Olaya numerous times for individual works as well as projects in series. See Gustavo Buntinx, *Un pasado incompleto (A Past Incomplete): Moico Yaker: Pinturas (The Paintings) 1986-1994* (Monterrey, Mexico: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey, A.C., 1996).

The portrait of Olaya has retained its basic orientation as an image of popular resonance. In this way, his image can be seen as the other side of a patriotic struggle fashioned from the top by creole elites, yet facilitated only through the efforts of vast numbers of soldiers and commoners. In his capacity as an artist Gil de Castro himself contributed to the forging of national consciousness, by providing images which creatively reimagined their subjects in the service of nationalist projects. Through this particularly creative imagining of the humble fisherman, the subject's very immortalization on canvas demonstrates the height of his achievement and his contribution to the expression of national values. By aligning his likeness with divine imagery, Olaya becomes a timeless aspirational figure who epitomizes a cause believed to be decisively pure. Uncorrupted by the prospect of wealth or political power, Olaya becomes the ultimately unattainable yet strived-for model of heroism meant to demonstrate the broadest values of the nation. Combining the power of religious imagery with a great orator's appeal to emotion, the image declares that one's own sacrifices in the name of *la patria*, however great, will likely never measure up to those of Olaya. Yet as long as the nation exists and his memory kept alive, his standard will likewise remain, setting generations off onto an eternal quest to match his example.

Figures



Figure 4.1. José Gil de Castro, *José Olaya Balandra*, 1828. Oil on canvas. 6.7 x 4.4 ft (204 x 134 cm). Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Antropología e Historia del Peru. Pueblo Libre, Lima, Peru. Photo by the author.



Figure 4.2. Detail of handkerchief, *José Olaya Balandra*, 1828. Photo by the author.



Figure 4.3. Detail of letters, *José Olaya Balandra*, 1828. Photo by the author.



Figure 4.4. Diego Quispe Tito, *Virgin of the Immaculate Conception with Litanies*, c. 1650. Oil on canvas. Dimensions unknown. Denver Art Museum. Denver, Colorado. Pictured in Kelly Donahue-Wallace, *Art and Architecture of Viceregal Latin America, 1521-1821* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), Plate 16.



Figure 4.5. Unidentified artist (Quito school), *The Virgin of Cotopaxi with Donors*, early nineteenth century. Oil on tin. 10.8 x 8.7 in (27.5 x 22 cm). Private Collection, New York. Pictured in Elizabeth P. Benson, et al. *Retratos: 2,000 Years of Latin American Portraits*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 145.



Figure 4.6. José Gil de Castro, *Santo Domingo*, 1817 (date unconfirmed). Oil on canvas. 2.4 x 1.5 ft (72 x 46 cm). Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes. Santiago, Chile. Pictured in Hernán Maino, *Pintura Chilena del Siglo XIX: José Gil de Castro: El Retratarista de la Independencia* (Santiago de Chile: Origo Ediciones, 2008), 31.



Figure 4.7. Detail of hat, *José Olaya Balandra*, 1828. Photo by the author.

Conclusion: The Afterlife of National Images

While José Gil de Castro's works emerge as national images, to better understand both the strength and evolution of their messages one must consider how they have been received or repurposed in the years following their inception. By looking at the posthumous dissemination, appropriation, and transformation of these images both within and outside their countries of origin, one can track a continuous process of renewal, revision, and re-articulation to which national visual cultures are subject. This can be fruitfully done by looking to the ways later generations of individuals and institutions have engaged and interpreted these objects. Thus, to consider the legacy of Gil de Castro's images is necessarily to locate the sites at which they have spread within different national and international communities, and the implications behind these particular modes of transport. However it is also important to examine not only how and where these works have spread, but also how they have come to mean as they have come in contact with various audiences. Here we must establish a framework for understanding how images—and specifically portraits—endure as vehicles of national or regional identity.

National entities have long developed visual syntaxes to help express and concretize abstract notions of their identities. This is achieved through the creation of flags, emblems, monuments, currencies, as well as other kinds of state-sponsored materials and ceremonial practices. According to E.J. Hobsbawm, such icons or “visible symbols...are still the most widely used methods of envisaging what cannot be envisaged,” namely, those aspects of community, collective memory, and common

history believed to unite all national members.¹³⁴ Thus images can be made to stand in for ideas, functioning through the public's recognition of the clear association between the image or object and the given idea.

These processes are very similar to the way in which religious icons operate. Religious icons have a unique ability to provide the viewer or devotee with a feeling of connection or proximity to the idea contained by the image as well as access to the power believed to reside within the icon itself. Similarly, images associated with national communities are nominally secular yet can operate in a manner that approaches their own kind of religiosity. As is the case with depictions of Jesus Christ, his apostles, or other saints and angels, depictions of national heroes or leaders also have the ability to forge a feeling of connection between the viewer and the "sacred personage" him/herself.¹³⁵ This eminent likeness can also come to embody ideas which go beyond the level of the individual portrayed, symbolizing qualities such as self-sacrifice, spiritual or moral purity, goodness, leadership, and bravery. As the image of the individual comes to be interchangeable with such ideas, it becomes keenly useful and aptly suited for physical reproduction and circulation.

As an eminent likeness circulates in a given society it can also come to represent entire histories and regions. The likeness of George Washington, for example, has become entrenched in a U.S. national visual vocabulary, connoting a history of revolutionary struggle for self-government and the desire for freedom from monarchical

¹³⁴ *Nations and Nationalism*, 50.

¹³⁵ Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University Press, 2015, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/90879?redirectedFrom=icon#eid>, 28 May, 2015.

tyranny. His image is perhaps most widely and intimately seen on United States currency, which has at least the capacity to be seen by every national member, as well as foreign visitors who engage in domestic commerce. While a handful of particular likenesses often come to dominate the public's perception of such figures, in the case of George Washington, one likeness has historically risen above the rest. Adam Greenhalgh writes in his 2007 article on Gilbert Stuart's unfinished 1796 portrait of Washington known as the *Athenaeum Portrait* (Figure 5.1), which attained devotional cult status in the United States after the 1932 bicentennial celebration of the first American President's birth. Greenhalgh argues that the portrait became "an icon in the strictest sense of the word," standing in for the actual person of Washington in the years after his death and uniting Americans through grand displays of ritualistic devotion.¹³⁶

Elaborating the link between representations and nationalism, Greenhalgh describes a kind of devotional practice which centered on the portrait and whose unique purpose was not satisfied by church or state alone. Rather the kind of community created around Washington's likeness was neither political nor religious, but something in between: part of the nation's "civil religion."¹³⁷ Approximating religious consecration, the *Athenaeum* portrait was deemed the most authoritative likeness. Reproductions were hung in virtually every place in which Americans congregated including post offices, school rooms, railroad stations, and churches, while many displayed the image inside

¹³⁶ Adam Greenhalgh, "'Not a Man but a God' The Apotheosis of Gilbert Stuart's *Athenaeum* Portrait of George Washington," *Winterthur Portfolio* 41, no. 4 (2007): 269.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 272.

their homes.¹³⁸ The image circulated widely despite the fact that more objectively accurate portraits existed, a phenomenon which Greenhalgh explains was due to the fact that the Athenaeum portrait had already long been the most ubiquitous image of the President, and was the likeness to which the public felt most closely connected.¹³⁹ Thus this particular image became imbued with national symbolism through an historical process of public familiarity and acceptance, inducted into broad-scale national ceremonial practice through its profound public support and widespread circulation.

Many other cases can be observed in which an historical figure becomes associated with local, national, or regional histories and identities. Often these images come to circulate outside of national boundaries, coming to stand in for more general ideas. This is exemplified by the way in which the image of Che Guevara has on one level, a specific meaning and relevance within the Cuban political context, but has also come to mean on a broader level worldwide, symbolizing general notions of resistance, revolution, and class consciousness. As his image comes unhinged from its geographic and historical origins, appearing on bumper stickers, T-shirts, and various avenues of social media, it models the way in which such images contain a profound malleability: as likeness becomes icon, it renders itself available to those who aim to deploy the image in the service of particular ideas, which may themselves be undergirded by the intent to rouse community sentiment or fortify collective allegiances. Gil de Castro's portraits of

¹³⁸ Ibid., 292.

¹³⁹ Greenhalgh writes that the organizing committee of the bicentennial celebration had actually chosen Houdon's sculpture of Washington as the official likeness of the event as it was felt to be the most accurate depiction of the President, but that it was almost immediately rejected by the public because it was not the image that they most associated with the President. See Greenhalgh, "Not a Man but a God," 275-77.

historic individuals have also partaken in this kind of process, as institutions and individuals have helped his images attain iconic status through various means of appropriation.

Portraits of eminent individuals enable a process of iconization as they provide vehicles for the spread of ideas. However the use of portraits that are themselves felt to be illustrious can be seen as an even better fit for public consumption. In a national context, the portrait of an important hero or political leader which was made from life can be an important part of a nation's heritage, given that the work provides a feeling of proximity to those celebrated figures or historic moments. Gil de Castro's 1825 portrait of Simón Bolívar provides such an example as it has continuously been chosen by governments for reproduction and dissemination on a national and international scale. The fact that these items are government sponsored is significant, as it demonstrates that the artist's images have been felt to facilitate the espousal of an official state narrative, one which is in agreement with the aims and ambitions of those in positions of political power and historical influence. This usage also demonstrates consistency in the work's functioning since its inception, given that it was commissioned by governmental figures to help reflect and instill patriotic sentiment. Yet while their public visibility would have been relatively limited at the time they were made, today these images exist in easily reproducible forms, able to reach exponentially larger audiences.

Gil de Castro's portrait of Bolívar has been reproduced on Venezuelan currency, itself named after the liberator.¹⁴⁰ In October of 2001, a 1,000 bolivar bill was issued

¹⁴⁰ The Bolivian monetary unit is also known as the bolivar.

featuring a version of his 1825 portrait of the Liberator in Lima (Figure 5.2). The bill was released as part of a new family of bills bearing the same pattern of design inaugurated in 1999. According to the Central Bank of Venezuela's website: "The new family of bills are characterized by incorporating graphic elements alluding to the history of the country, its natural beauty, important architectural works, as well as the national flora and fauna."¹⁴¹ Fitting this characterization, the back of the bill bears images of the national flower and the National Pantheon, formerly an eighteenth century church which now houses the remains of famous Venezuelans, including those of Bolívar. The verso also depicts the Cerro Ávila, a mountain range situated in the coastal region. The portrait of Bolívar on the bill's face appears to have been based on a printed version of Gil de Castro's portrait, as it is cropped, flipped, and enhanced through stronger definition and more dramatic shading of his features.

This deployment of Gil de Castro's image was an intentional mode of circulating an important portrait of the nation's seminal liberator. The original portrait hangs inside the National Congress building in Caracas, a setting which already endows the image with an aura of state backing. As it is reproduced on the Bs. 1,000 bill, however, it is able to transcend the physical limitations of its current display and reach a virtually unlimited number of Venezuelan citizens and foreign visitors. Thereby the image's potential audience is dramatically expanded, while the public's interactions with the work become much more direct and personal. The image has been reduced to an individual scale yet

¹⁴¹ "Conoce tus nuevos billetes de Bs. 1.000 y Bs. 2.000," Banco Central de Venezuela, 2001, <http://www.bcv.org.ve/c3/monedasbilletes/milydos/index.htm>, 21 April, 2015.

also effectively magnified through the replication of the image across the large quantity of bills put into circulation. Thus not only does the image act as an extension of the government institution that issued it, but it can also be literally possessed by those who earn and spend the bill. To the extent that the individual observes and recognizes the image, it becomes a part of his or her own national image reserve, contributing in this way to one's personal conception of national visual culture. As the individual also becomes the instrument of the bill's circulation he or she is implicated, wittingly or unwittingly, in the propagation of the historical narrative and symbolism it contains.

Another medium that has facilitated the spread of Gil de Castro's portrait of Bolívar both nationally and internationally plays a unique yet often marginalized role in the circulation of symbolic images. Pauliina Raento and Stanley D. Brunn write on the covert power of postage stamps in their 2005 article "Visualizing Finland: Postage Stamps as Political Messengers." While "the mundane character and our individual ways of looking hide the stamps' status as official visual images," the authors argue rather that postage stamps are capable of significant cultural influence as they visually "implement the state's official outlook in the everyday life of ordinary citizens."¹⁴² Thus it is by virtue of their very banality and ubiquity, along with their explicit national backing, that they are able to solidify an official view of history, while their visual format makes them ideal vehicles for the circulation and entrenchment of a national iconography. The authors also note that like other nationally sponsored paraphernalia like currency, stamps "seek to

¹⁴² Pauliina Raento and Stanley D. Brunn. "Visualizing Finland: Postage Stamps as Political Messengers," *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography* 87, no. 2 (2005): 145.

unite and foster a common heritage and ‘an imagined community’, raising heroic stories to visibility and erasing shameful ones.”¹⁴³ They become an apt means for the dissemination of sufficiently eminent national images, able to reach a vast population who may not have the opportunity to view the originals *in situ*, with the added benefit of reproducing them at personal scale. As a result, “their ceremoniality is perhaps more private, optional and thus uniquely intimate” than other types of encounters with nationally significant objects, sites, or monuments.¹⁴⁴

Gil de Castro’s portraits of Simón Bolívar have appeared on multiple stamps issued in Venezuela. One particular example (Figure 5.3) produced in 1966 by a German printing company bears solely the bust portion of the artist’s 1825 portrait. Text immediately below the cropped portrait reads “Jose Gil de Castro 1825,” while additional text surrounding the image, moving clockwise from above, reads as follows: “Liberator y Padre de la Patria [Liberator and Father of the Homeland], Simon Bolivar, 0,30 Aereo, Venezuela.” While the price of 30 céntimos indicates the value of the stamp at the time of its issue,¹⁴⁵ the term *Aereo* indicates that this was an airmail stamp. This indicates that this particular issue was intended for both intra- and extra-national viewership, making it both a foreign and domestic signifier of Venezuela’s national and political heritage. In addition, this stamp appears to have been issued as part of a series with a run of approximately 900, in which each had the same basic format but featured different

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 146.

¹⁴⁵ The Venezuelan unit of currency has been the bolivar since the 1870s.

portraits of the Liberator taken from his expansive repertoire of painted likenesses (Figure 5.4).¹⁴⁶

Another example was issued more recently, in 2008, again as part of a series of images of the Liberator. Seen here as part of a full stamp sheet (Figure 5.5), two of Gil de Castro's portraits are represented out of the twelve, one which was done posthumously in 1830 (Figure 5.6) and one of the bust portraits of which numerous copies were made circa 1823 (Figure 5.7). The portraits are done in a variety of formats and while some feature conventional interior settings, others set the Liberator against an exterior scene, while still others contain no background at all. The stamps comprise works by various artists giving the name of each on the stamp itself. Not every artist is one who was himself Venezuelan, including of course, Gil de Castro. However placed together in this context one gets a sense of the quantity and variety of Bolivarian portraiture, of which this is only a sampling. The repeated interest of the Venezuelan government in issuing stamps featuring portraits of the nation's preeminent founding father not only perpetuates and ensures an officially-sanctioned pictorial commemoration of the Liberator, but also demonstrates Bolívar's historical status as a favorite visual subject since his own era. The plurality of depictions—all which are notably distinct—magnifies the impression of cultural and historical ubiquity of the subject as he is envisioned variously through the eyes of each artist, arguing for the necessity of equivalent omnipresence in the minds of contemporary viewers. As postage stamps have been characterized as vehicles of

¹⁴⁶ This is based on internet research of the stamp series specifically looking at the information and photographs provided by collectors and private vendors who have placed these stamps up for sale in the online marketplace.

“citizenship education,” these examples indeed fit this description well, as they provide a repertoire of significant national images while also directing the viewer to honor and venerate the figure depicted.¹⁴⁷

A final example is instructive in demonstrating the way in which governments appropriate foreign images as a means of furthering their own national agenda, while in the process proliferating a visual canon that contributes to the crystallization of other national and regional identities. A stamp issued in the Soviet Union in 1983 (Figure 5.8) reproduces the same 1825 portrait of Bolívar seen in the 1966 stamp and the 2001 bill from Venezuela. Cropping the portrait to frame solely the figure’s face and upper-most portion of his waistcoat, the image is surrounded by decorative olive branches, cannons, flags, and sabers. Bolívar’s name appears at the top in Russian as well as the dates of his birth and death. Though it may seem surprising to find an image of Simón Bolívar on a stamp issued in the Soviet Union, considering the context of Russia in the early 1980s the choice becomes much less unexpected.

Perceiving the United States as an existential threat to its sovereignty in the early 1980s, the Soviet Union had an immediate interest in fostering solidarity amongst its people and aligning itself with the history of other nations which had triumphed over foreign aggressors. By adopting an image of Simón Bolívar, considered the preeminent icon of Latin American independence, Russia could equate its own political circumstances with that of South America in the early nineteenth century. As the Russians themselves had revolted against an oppressive regime at the beginning of the

¹⁴⁷ Raento and Brunn, “Visualizing Finland,” 145.

twentieth century, during the Bolshevik Revolution, in the context of the tensions of the early 1980s it seemed the Soviets again faced an equivalent challenge. Thus to disseminate this image of Bolívar to the people demonstrates an attempt to unify and inspire the same patriotism among Russian citizens which had previously led to the assurance of autonomy in Latin America. At the same time Gil de Castro's portrait of Bolívar becomes the carrier of this message, and as it is distributed internationally acts jointly as a cultural and historical ambassador of South America, as well as the kind of political messenger Raento and Brunn describe.

The Russian example provides a tangible view of the way in which historical figures can come to stand in for regional histories and general ideas. As Bolívar appears on a Soviet stamp during the tensions of the 1980s, his image becomes synonymous with a Latin American history of political struggle and ultimate triumph. Russian viewers can become inspired by his likeness as they perceive their own way of life to be similarly threatened by a formidable foreign opponent. However another consequence of this interaction is necessarily that the image becomes detached from this original context as it is deployed for a new one. It is transformed into an image representing generally the attainment of political sovereignty and liberation, making itself available to be adopted by any entity seeking to align itself with these notions. Much like nationalism itself, the icon has become modular, "capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains."¹⁴⁸ In the process, this use of the

¹⁴⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 4.

image contributes to the concretization of associations between the figure and a generalized history—one whose impact has become global.

...

In this study I have demonstrated how through his portraits, *limeño* artist José Gil de Castro y Morales not merely reflected but actively helped facilitate the political change that occurred during the transition from colonial rule to national independence in the former Spanish-American colonies. I have operated under the premise that his images of eminent national and pan-national leaders provide a window onto a complex historical moment, one typically glossed over or neatly summarized in much of the literature, leading to the false conclusion that the period provided little of real art historical import. To the contrary, I have argued that a consideration of Gil de Castro's work enriches a number of compelling fields within art history and national visual culture studies alike, certainly providing more questions than finite answers. The relatively scant number of focused studies on the artist's oeuvre—compared to the significance of his art historical contribution and common mention in survey texts—begs one to consider the basis of this oversight, and to delve deeper into the ways in which regional art histories are constructed on the global stage. While I have demonstrated there is clearly more work to be done in these areas, I have also presented my own conclusions regarding the particular ways in which images help shape national narratives and express patriotic values.

While it is difficult to convey adequately the complexity of this historical period, it is even problematic to ascribe to it decisive limits, as national independences were often announced only to be overturned by resurgences of royalist control. This created a

vast diversity of circumstances even within nominally discrete national units. Despite the great victories Simón Bolívar helped achieve, the great *Libertador* himself died under the impression that his efforts had been in vain, declaring just a short time before his death, “America is ungovernable...he who serves a revolution ploughs the sea... the only thing that can be done in America is to emigrate.”¹⁴⁹ Yet despite his own disillusionment, today one cannot ignore that the period of roughly 1808 to 1830 was one of incredible action and historic transformation, ending a 300 year expanse of Spanish colonial dominion and ushering in a new phase of challenges spawned from independence.¹⁵⁰

As creole revolutionaries came to replace Spanish viceroys, a parallel process occurred in art. Portraits had long been a tool of communicating wealth, power, and political legitimacy in the colonial era, and the endurance of conventions guiding their form well into the Republican period demonstrates the degree of their entrenchment in South American visual culture. Portraits still acted as an important and effective means of self-promotion, but were now used to construct new arguments about the basis on which political power would be earned, and the new figures who would fill these positions. As one scholar put it, “a new pantheon of heroes and heroines had to be acknowledged and promoted by the new sovereign states, and portraiture was enlisted to do the honors.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Simón Bolívar, Letter to General Juan José Flores, 9 November 1830; rpt. in David Bushnell, ed., *The Liberator, Simón Bolívar: Man and Image*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 86.

¹⁵⁰ In 1808, King Ferdinand VII of Spain was dethroned and replaced by Napoleon’s brother, an event which commenced uproar in the Spanish colonies and acted as the most direct historical impetus for the explicit campaigns for independence. In 1830, Simón Bolívar died of tuberculosis near Santa Marta in Colombia. The year of his death also marked the final independence of various South American nations he helped liberate, acting as a reasonable outside figure for the period in question.

¹⁵¹ Benson, et al, *Retratos*, 152.

Given the novelty of their new political positions, the lucid transmission of novel symbols and narratives was of direct concern to those who assumed power.

Gil de Castro's portraits, among others, enabled many of the important tacit mechanisms of an emergent nationalism. They provided citizens with tangible evidence of their belonging to the national unit, compelling them to accept their role as active participants, rather than involuntary subjects. This was aided in part through linguistic means, as terms like *patriota* and *patria* implore one to recognize a basic connection and thus duty to one's place of birth. In combination with these linguistic signifiers, Gil de Castro's images highlighted the significant events, actors, places, and symbols most preferable to the shaping of particular historical narratives.

Forging clear links between the glorified display of figures like Bolívar and O'Higgins and a powerful iconographic history, these portraits demonstrated that the cause for their artistic commemoration resided in their role as successful arbiters of independence. Through their lovingly embellished costumes and various military accolades, an ideological connection between the necessity of military prowess and the preservation of national sovereignty was simultaneously established. As a notion of personal merit was ushered in as the new standard, it set the stage for a flourishing of a republican idealism which would come to dominate the meaning of the portraits. In these ways the artist succeeded in conveying a novel vision of political leadership in the revolutionary context.

However it is clear that the context of revolution also allowed for other kinds of heroes to come to the fore. The quintessential "Everyman," José Olaya became another

important aspirational model, but one who could bring the promise of a new and fulfilling age much closer to the average citizen.¹⁵² However, for the artist, Olaya did not have the same kind of iconographic precedent as figures of heads of state. Utilizing his full repertoire of artistic tools, Gil de Castro approximated his subject to a saint, creating his own iconographic model where one did not exist. In doing this he demonstrates the creative possibilities this period presented, which compelled an artist to combine different pictorial strategies and indeed, different genres, in order to convey an intended message. As a result Gil de Castro effectively reworked the genre of portraiture, a phenomenon enabled due to the particular machinations of national development.

Each of the three cases discussed here is uniquely significant, offering a means of testing some of the foremost theoretical models of nationalism that exist today. As scholars continue to debate the essential nature of the national phenomenon, it remains important to consider individual examples based on their own particular and variant circumstances, in order to avoid broad determinations which may or may not hold up under examination. Certainly in the case of the nascent South American republics, it has been essential to stay focused as much as possible on the very localized histories from which these entities emerged. While nationalism may indeed be a movable concept, it is undoubtedly never static; rather the infinitude of dynamic circumstances worldwide and its countless manifestations are what make nations such fertile ground for academic study.

¹⁵² Benson, et al, *Retratos*, 156.

I end with a final point with regard to the seemingly endless debate on the definability of nations. In this respect I find that a statement by Walter Bagehot continues to resonate: ““We know what it is when you do not ask us, but we cannot very quickly explain or define it.””¹⁵³ The fact that we cannot seem to describe exactly what nations are can be linked to the fact that nations themselves are products of the human condition, and thus, similarly imperfect and contradictory. Nations are created out of a desire to organize populations and consolidate power within precise geographic zones, as a way to rationalize existence according to logical principles which are themselves subject to the same instability and corruptibility basic to human nature. But to try to elide that fact, to make them seem as perfectible rational systems—this is the task of national imagery. Given their lofty ambitions, nations must be visually constructed as to appear as timeless and fundamental as God himself, opposed to heresy, exempt from distrust, and demanding of one’s unquestioning allegiance, for to forsake one’s nation is considered a rejection of a basic truth of the collective human experience—that we all owe our survival to forces greater and more powerful than ourselves. Whatever form a nation takes, this description touches on the fundamental grip nations hold on individuals and societies. It is this enigmatic power one sees manifested, literally brought to the surface, in the remarkably complex portraits by the singular *limeño* painter, José Gil de Castro.

¹⁵³ Quoted in Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 1.

Figures

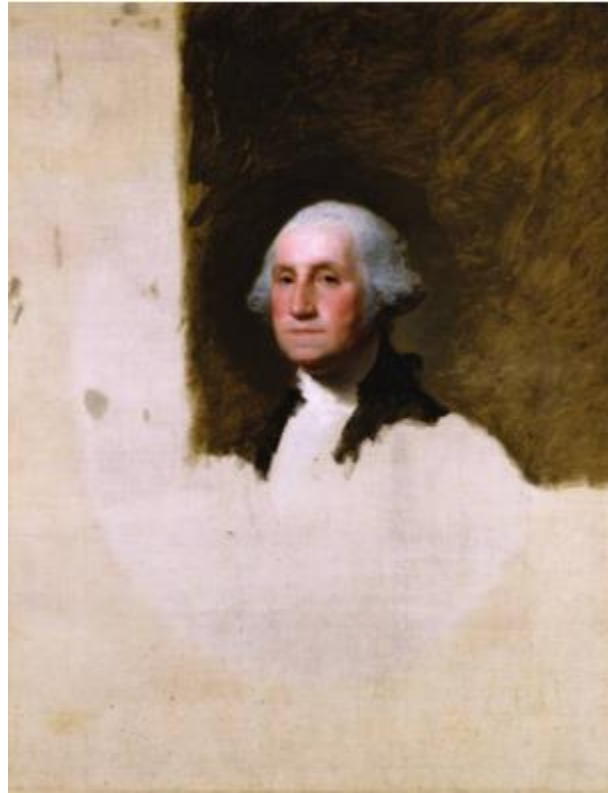


Figure 5.1. Gilbert Stuart, *George Washington* (Athenaeum Portrait), 1796. Oil on canvas. 48 x 37 in (121.9 x 94 cm). National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. Pictured in Adam Greenhalgh, “‘Not a Man but a God’ The Apotheosis of Gilbert Stuart’s Athenaeum Portrait of George Washington,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 41, no. 4 (2007): 271.



Figure 5.2. 1,000 bolivar bill bearing an image of Simón Bolívar inspired by Gil de Castro’s *Portrait of Simón Bolívar in Lima*, 1825. Issued in October 2001 by the Central Bank of Venezuela. Dimensions unknown. Banco Central de Venezuela, n.d. <http://www.bcv.org.ve/c3/monedasbilletes/milydos/index.htm>. 5 June 2015.



Figure 5.3. Airmail postage stamp with image of *Símon Bolívar* taken from the oeuvre of *José Gil de Castro*. Issued in Venezuela, printed in Germany in 1966. Dimensions unknown. Photo by Boris 15. Depositphotos, 2015. <http://depositphotos.com/12261805/stock-photo-postage-stamp-venezuela-1966-simon.html>. 5 June 2015.

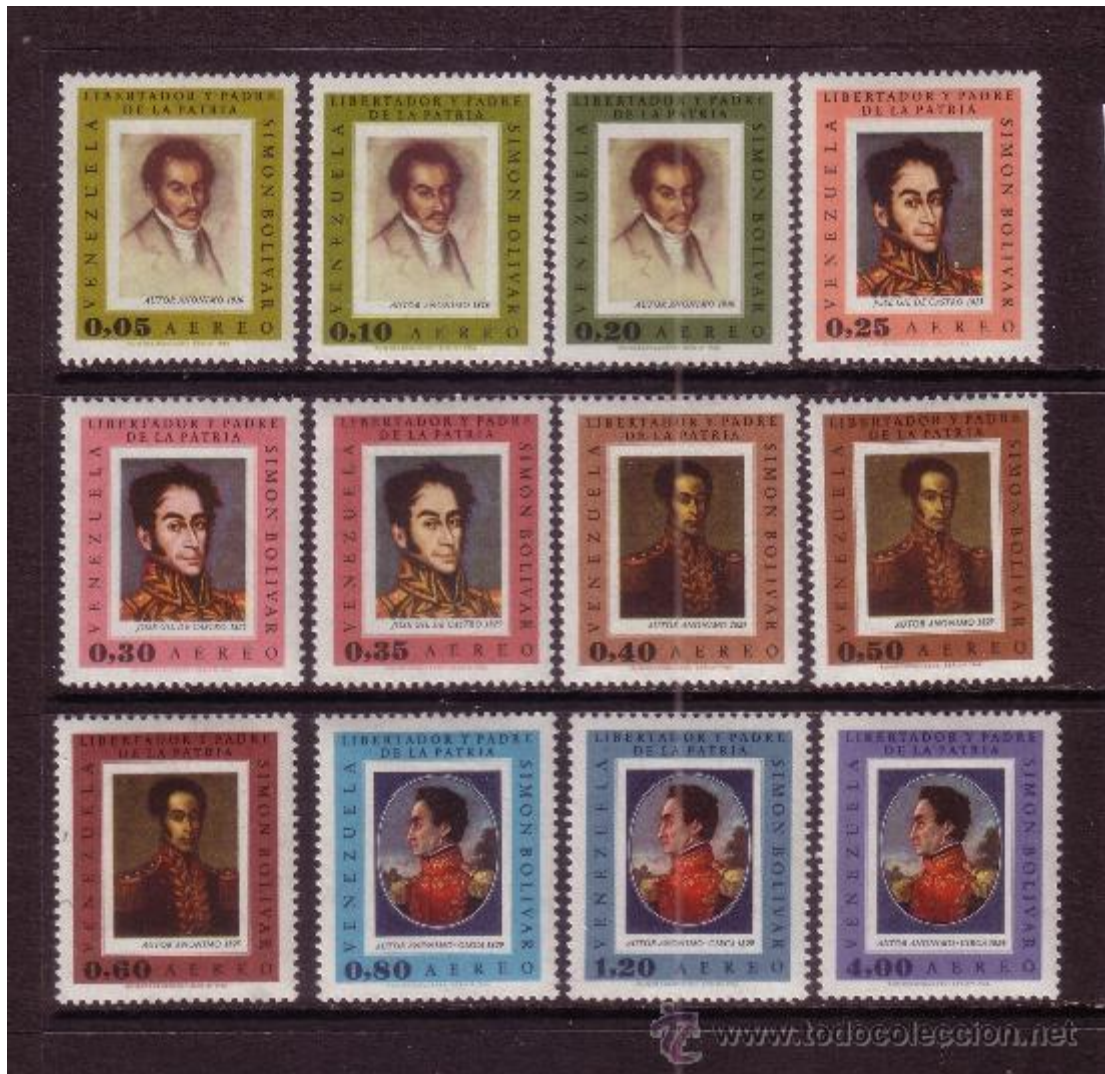


Figure 5.4. Twelve airmail stamps from 1966 issue featuring portraits of Simón Bolívar, Venezuela. Dimensions unknown. Photo by Pedro Alcaraz, Todocoleccion, Zoconet, S.L., 2015. <http://www.todocoleccion.net/sellos-venezuela/venezuela-aereo-895-906-ano-1966-simon-bolivar~x35227157#descripcion>. 5 June 2015.

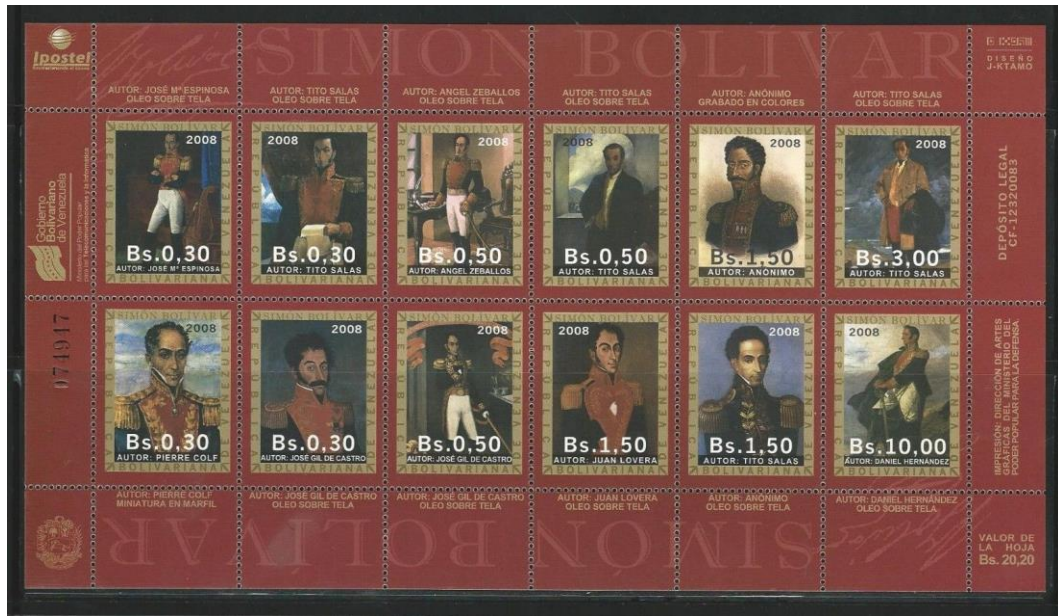


Figure 5.5. Stamp page issued 2008 by the Gobierno Bolivariana de Venezuela. Twelve stamps featuring portraits of Simon Bolivar. Dimensions unknown. Venexile Networks, n.d. <http://venexile.tumblr.com/image/35336220658>. 5 June 2015.



Figure 5.6. José Gil de Castro, *Simón Bolívar*, 1830. Oil on canvas. Approximately 93 x 66 in (237 x 167 cm). Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Antropología e Historia del Perú. Lima, Peru. Pictured in Dawn Ades, *Art in Latin America* (New Haven: Yale, 1989), 18.



Figure 5.7. José Gil de Castro, *Simón Bolívar*, c. 1823. Oil on canvas. Approximately 26 x 20 in (65.5 x 51 cm). Museo de Arte de Lima. Lima, Peru. Pictured in Natalia Majluf, ed., *Más allá de la imagen. Los estudios técnicos en el proyecto José Gil de Castro* (Lima, Peru: Asociación Museo de Arte de Lima, 2012), 90.



Figure 5.8. Postage stamp from the Soviet Union with image of Simón Bolívar by José Gil de Castro, 1983. Dimensions unknown. Image by sova, ebay.com, 28 July 2014. <http://www.ebay.com/itm/SIMON-BOLIVAR-PESIDENT-VENEZUELA-STAMP-USED-1983-RUSSIA>. 5 June 2015.

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