

**The Reinvention of Bestiaries, Floras, and Herbaria: Alternative
Decolonial Modernities in Contemporary Latin American Art**

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Since Columbus famously spied mermaids near the coast of Hispaniola on 8 January 1493, European descriptions of the flora and fauna of the New World have been spiced with marvels and misconceptions of all kinds. Reports on colonial expeditions portrayed a fabulously prodigious nature; amid their many errors, however, these accounts significantly expanded what was known in Europe about the animals, plants, and minerals of the Americas. Colonial administrations made use of this knowledge in extensive mining, engineering, and agricultural operations that would extract American riches for European benefit. The many atlases, albums, bestiaries, floras, chronicles, encyclopaedias, and expedition reports compiled by scientists can also be read as sites of encounter at which European and indigenous cosmologies and systems of knowledge came into contact, leading in some cases to fruitful exchanges and in others to epistemic violence.

Artists often worked intensively alongside naturalists in the many scientific expeditions to the Americas funded by European states during the colonial era and beyond; the importance of their role in producing knowledge has been recognized in a raft of fascinating studies (see, for example, Bleichmar 2012; Nieto Olarte 2006; Marcaida and Pimentel 2014). More recently, several Latin American artists have created new bestiaries and floras, revising these genres in order to reconnect them with the (neo)colonial histories that were often erased from their pages and to contest the Eurocentric narratives of modernity they encode. Claudio Romo (Chile)

resurrects the fabulous beasts and exotic plants described by pre-Enlightenment writers and explorers, adding new varieties of his own, to reflect on the exclusions on which European conceptions of modernity and civilization are founded. Works by Walmor Corrêa (Brazil) undermine European conceptions of scientific progress and modernity as linear and teleological. His anatomically precise depictions of hybrid figures from Brazilian folklore reinsert the mysterious and the supernatural into the visual language of modern Western science. Alberto Baraya (Colombia) reworks eighteenth-century conventions of botanical illustration, celebrating the anomalies and aberrations that were smoothed out in the European quest for a universal system of classification and exposing the relationship between modern science and the dynamics of economic and cultural dispossession.

Through their recreations of bestiaries, herbaria, and floras, all three artists construct alternative histories of modernity that are multitemporal as well as ontologically and epistemologically plural. These projects can be read alongside those of Latin American decolonial thinkers such as Enrique Dussel, Aníbal Quijano, and Walter D. Mignolo, who have emphasized that modernity is not invented in Europe and rolled out to backward colonies but the product of that colonial encounter itself, such that “coloniality is constitutive of modernity” and indeed that “there is no modernity without coloniality” (Mignolo 2010, 330). Works by Romo, Corrêa, and Baraya produce clear critiques of Eurocentric conceptions of modernity within a decolonial framework; they also compose alternative discourses of modernity that are less exclusionary, while nevertheless forged in close dialogue with European scientific, literary and visual traditions. They do so by returning to baroque imaginaries, to invoke the baroque’s historical co-option in Latin America as an instrument for anticolonial and anti-institutional expression but also to redeploy its excess, heterogeneity, and performativity for the creation of post-anthropocentric perspectives on science and nature.

A significant body of scholarship has traced indigenous and creole counter-appropriations of the baroque in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Latin American art and architecture. Many writers and researchers have attempted to locate a nascent American cultural identity in such subversions. In an influential essay published in 1957, José Lezama Lima identified the baroque as “an art of counterconquest” in the New World, as the cultural hybridization evident in the work of sculptors such as Aleijadinho and El Indio Kondori disrupts the imposition of colonial authority (2010, 213). Over-simplistic accounts that pit a hybrid baroque against a conservative one have been usefully nuanced in more recent years (see, for example, Gruzinski 2012, 198; Cacho Casal 2012, 1–5). Meanwhile, the critical

and creative potential of the historical baroque has expanded far beyond its original moment, as its “wayward, rich afterlife” has inspired many “neobaroques” (Kaup 2012, 2). Drawing on seminal essays by Lezama Lima (1957), Severo Sarduy (1972), and Alejo Carpentier (1976), critics have identified traits of the “neobaroque” in the fictional texts of many twentieth-century Latin American writers that bridge elite and popular cultures, modernity and the non-rational (see, for example, Arriarán 2007). Redefining the baroque too broadly may lessen its analytical value, however, by stripping it of its historicity and its capacity for social and cultural critique. Mabel Moraña objects to the dehistoricized version of the baroque offered by Omar Calabrese, arguing that his readings rest on a series of abstract, universalized features that he considers to be inherent in baroque culture everywhere (2010, 64; see Calabrese 1992). Likewise, she proposes that the postmodern pluralities and polyphonies of Sarduy’s baroque “existen fuera de la historia y más allá de la especificidad de la cultura, es decir, más allá de toda referencialidad y de todo proyecto social organizado” (77).

The baroque has thus variously referred to a specific historical period, a movement in the history of art and architecture, an expression of anticolonial resistance, and a postmodern poetic strategy. I wish to recuperate the term here in a way that connects all of these, but focuses principally on its critique of Enlightenment philosophy and European (and Eurocentric) modernity. In using the term “neobaroque” to describe works by Romo, Corrêa, and Baraya, I draw attention to the specific continuities they suggest with the historical baroque, namely, the rearticulation of aesthetic strategies that subvert and pluralize European narratives of modernity. But the term also marks their conscious distance in time from the original baroque as well as the subsequent rise and consolidation of scientific disciplines such as natural history and zoology that were to follow it. My discussion of these twenty-first-century works will also drive a wedge between a “postmodern” neobaroque, which—in literary criticism, at least, which does not always attend to the complexities of the literary text—celebrates excess and performance in order to subvert authority, linear histories, and essentialized identities, and a “decolonial” neobaroque, which in the work of these artists involves acts of historical reembedding as much as ones of disembedding. In the work of Romo, Corrêa, and Baraya, the excesses and the hybridizing effects of the neobaroque become important means of rehistoricization, as they return to specific moments in the history of art and scientific illustration, both pre- and post-Enlightenment, in order to expose and overturn the hierarchies and exclusions that have shaped modern Western knowledge. My readings build on the approach

suggested by Irleamar Chiampi, who argues that the baroque reappears in the twentieth century in Latin America “to bear witness to the crisis or end of modernity and to the very condition of a continent that could not be assimilated by the project of the Enlightenment” (2010, 508). In this way, the neobaroque becomes “an archaeology of the modern” that reveals something of the character of Latin America’s ‘dissonant modernity’ (508). The works I explore here clearly demonstrate that the contemporary power of the baroque lies, as Bolívar Echeverría (2000, 15) affirms, in the force with which it poses “la posibilidad y la urgencia de una modernidad alternativa” (the possibility and the urgency of an alternative modernity). In the context of the twenty-first century, as I will show, these alternative modernities are shaped by an increasing awareness of a history of ecological destruction as well as one of human exploitation, and draw on the philosophical and aesthetic potential of posthumanist thought.

A key purpose of this essay is to strengthen the connection between the neobaroque and decolonial thought in the Latin American context, which is briefly proposed but not fully developed in recent scholarship. Both Quijano (1999, 142) and Mignolo (2005, 61–62) return to the scene of the historical baroque in America to give instances of the kind of critical appropriation and resignification of European culture that would provide the foundation for a new Latin American cultural identity born out of colonial difference. Neither considers, however, how the particular aesthetic and conceptual modes of the baroque might be carried forward to create opportunities for a critical revision of European modernity in our own time. This perspective is pursued by Kaup (2012, 21), who grasps the potential of the neobaroque for the construction of “a new kind of temporality” and “an alternative modernity.” Like Moraña, Kaup opposes a “reductive equation of the neobaroque with postmodernism,” arguing that although the neobaroque is often parodic and self-reflexive in its recyclings, these features do not signify a crisis in representation or the exhaustion of a style (18-19). The works by Romo, Corrêa, and Baraya discussed below extend our understanding of how such techniques may be placed at the service of a critical, decolonial revision of Eurocentric narratives of modernity.

Claudio Romo: Baroque Cabinets of Curiosities and the Great Divide of Modernity

Claudio Romo’s illustrated texts evoke the myriad books and collections through which human civilizations have attempted, since antiquity, to understand and contain the natural world. *El álbum de la flora imprudente* (2007) mimics the form of a nineteenth-century naturalist’s album, with pseudo-scientific texts interspersed

with lavish colour illustrations. The fictional botanist, Lázaro de Sahagún, relates the discoveries he makes on an expedition in 1868 that lands him unexpectedly on the remote *Isla Especular* (Mirror Island), located somewhere between Tierra del Fuego and Antarctica. He has travelled there on the *Gabinete Verde* (Green Cabinet), a steam-powered ocean liner with two tall funnels and an enormous glasshouse of the kind commonly built for nineteenth-century botanical gardens. Romo's album refuses to remain with the confines of that century, however, drawing on classical, medieval, early modern, and baroque models to construct a Borgesian labyrinth of texts and images that can also be read from a contemporary, post-anthropocentric perspective.

Like a baroque cabinet of curiosities, *El álbum de la flora imprudente* assembles the exotic, the anomalous, and the ambiguous to create a phantasmagorical world. We are introduced to creatures that defy classification, continually change shape, and challenge our sense of scale. The *Cayetana* shrub reinvents itself infinitely, “como un inagotable calidoscopio vegetal”, and now takes on 240 different forms during a single day (2007, 22). The large *Bárbara megafitopolis* tree contains several citadels within it, peopled with tiny humanoids who have descended from Portuguese merchants shipwrecked there long ago. Trees and plants are depicted as marvellous and infinitely creative, able to acquire new forms of agency to outwit their predators. The *Casiopea colosal*, a red cactus, has the capacity to throw its long spines like javelins, while over time the ingenious *Aloisia peregrina* tree has developed legs to run away from those who would steal its delicious fruit.

European Wunderkammer of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries contained many objects that were similarly hybrid and ambiguous in appearance. There was a marked preference in such collections for the paradoxical, the improbable, and the indeterminate: for objects whose status was uncertain, such as stones that looked like plants, plants that looked like animals, stuffed animals that might be dead or alive, or curious items that might be the work of nature or of an artist (Pimentel 2003, 160–61). These transgressions and confusions are everywhere to be found in Romo's work. The illustrations he created for Juan Nicolás Padrón's *Bestiario: Animales reales fantásticos* (2008) highlight the ontological ambiguities to which the text alerts us. The Gigantic Sloth climbs a tree so slowly that its fur has fused with the bark and tendrils (see Fig. 1), while morphological resemblances are drawn out between human reproductive organs and the mandrake root, an item commonly found in cabinets of curiosities as it seemed to transgress the boundary between plant and human (Mason 2009, 84).



Fig. 1. Claudio Romo, Gigantic Sloth, from Juan Nicolás Padrón and Claudio Romo, *Bestiario: Animales reales fantásticos*, p. 48 (detail)

Romo himself identifies his portrayal of nature as “baroque” in its excess and exuberance: he represents the natural world “como un carnaval en permanente despliegue” (Fariás 2008, 23). The baroque repetitions and reinventions that are also evident in Romo’s mythologies allow a decolonial perspective to emerge. *Bestiario* constructs a kind of global history of legendary beasts and monsters in a way that does not lend priority to those of European antiquity. American creatures (real and imagined) such as the glyptodon, the megatherium, the axolotl, and the plumed serpent Quetzalcoatl are slipped in alongside sirens and satyrs, much in the way that Amerindian legends were worked into Baroque friezes in the New World. Another work authored and illustrated by Romo, *Bestiario mexicano*, draws out the similarities between paganism and Mesoamerican mythology: both are built on the “fusion” of the human world with the animal kingdom that is rejected in the more hierarchical conception of the cosmos inherent in Jewish and Christian traditions (Cenzi 2018, 4). Romo describes as “foundational” the myth of the “wild man,” known in the Yucatán as the *sinsimito* (or the *sisimito* or the *sisimite*). This is because it represents “the perfect summary of the animality that we wanted to leave behind”: the barbarism that we rejected “once we had crossed the frontier between the state of nature and that of culture, once we had built the walls of the City” (2018, 8, 10).¹ It is a myth that represents the dark side of modernity: the scapegoats that are repressed and excised in order to erect a divide between nature and society, allowing

¹ The translations from the original Italian are mine.

some groups to project a view of themselves as more rational, scientific, and civilized.

Quijano identifies the opposition between the state of nature and the state of civilization as the founding myth upon which Eurocentric narratives of modernity have been built. This myth gives rise to a belief in the unilinear nature of change and progress across human history, and enables Europeans to position themselves at the apex of civilization and to reorganize time, to such an extent that “todo lo no-europeo es percibido como pasado” (everything non-European is perceived as the past) (2000, 220, 222). It is this conception of time that allows some societies to be depicted as “backward,” with their beliefs dismissed as irrational and irrelevant to the modern world. In contrast, myths and local beliefs in Romo’s work are not relegated to a past that has been superseded by modernity, but coexist with modernity, albeit often in a contestatory relationship. In *Bestiario mexicano*, the text describing the *aluxe* notes the importance of these impish demons in Mayan culture, which was only strengthened with the arrival of the monotheistic Spanish. But it also tracks much more recent claims of their continued activity. In 2010, when the pop star Elton John was to perform at the ancient Mayan site of Chichén Itzá, part of the stage collapsed the day before the concert, injuring three technicians. Romo observes that the organizers had failed to ingratiate themselves with the *aluxe*. This was, in fact, the explanation given at the time by local Mayan leaders who considered the concert to be an irreverent and inappropriate use of sacred ruins for private profit, with ticket prices aimed at global elites (Gordon 2010). Here the recourse to myth draws attention to cultural (mis)appropriation and structural inequality, helping to define the cultural and social injustices that have been exacerbated by contemporary forms of globalization.

Romo’s text calls attention to the complexity of Mesoamerican mythology, particularly in its subtle understanding of the fluidity of relations between humans and nature, and between the natural and the supernatural, terms held rigidly apart in modern European thought since the Enlightenment. This is most clearly evident in the concept of the co-essence, which, Romo explains, is an animal or a celestial phenomenon (such as rain, lightning or wind) that shares the consciousness of its owner (2018, 45). Such myths bear witness to “the inherent complexity of the Mesoamerican vision of the world, of the innumerable presences that inhabit it, of man himself understood as an integral part of this crowded natural and supernatural space” (45).

This vision of a world in which humans are fully woven into a plural reality, integrated with the natural and supernatural rather than separated from them, is also expressed in the modes of illustration employed by Romo, which find multiple ways of crossing divides between nature and art, nature and technology, myth and modernity. In *Bestiario mexicano*, highly textured, precise line-drawings of each mythical animal use techniques of hatching and cross-hatching that were common in early forms of printmaking (in etchings and engravings) and in some scientific illustrations (see Fig. 2). These techniques contrast with others that might be found in fantasy graphic novels, children’s literature, and other forms of popular art, with rich colours and simple, whimsical designs. The depictions of the creatures switch easily between the natural, the cultural, and the mechanical: the *waay pop*, a man who is able to transform himself into a bird, is shown first as a man with wings clearly strapped onto his back and a beak-shaped helmet (see Fig. 3); then as the static, stylized representation of a mythical figure, as a being that genuinely seems to combine characteristics of a man and a bird, and finally fully transformed into a bird. The illustrations thus encode the ontological ambiguity of the *waay pop* and other co-essences: are these full metamorphoses in which one being is transformed into another, the acquisition of certain characteristics, or simply the donning of a disguise? Nature and culture are also confounded in depictions of the hairy *sinsimito* as well groomed, adorned with the “sumptuous and elaborate hairstyles” mentioned in Romo’s description (6), which had once been adopted by ancient inhabitants of the region, together with the stone jewels worn by its victims (see Fig. 4).



Fig. 2. Claudio Andrés Salvador Francisco Romo Torres, “Waay Pop”,
from *Bestiario mexicano*, p. 37



Fig. 3. Claudio Andrés Salvador Francisco Romo Torres, 'Waay Pop',
from *Bestiario mexicano*, p. 38



Fig. 4. Claudio Andrés Salvador Francisco Romo Torres, 'Sinsimito',
from *Bestiario mexicano*, p. 9

Romo's commitment to reenchanted the natural world also harks back to medieval and Renaissance perceptions of the correspondences that connected everything in the cosmos, and responds to a need in our own time to reject modernity's utilitarian exploitation of nature. He suggests that the marvellous in his

work proposes “una relación más emotiva con el entorno y no sólo como una bodega de recursos” (Fariás 2008, 23). The plants and animals Romo describes and draws live in a world of hyperbolic affects and affinities. The *squonk* (*Bestiario*) weeps constantly and inconsolably, as if it were ashamed of its ugliness, while the *Pandora angustiosa* (*El álbum de la flora imprudente*) causes such great melancholy in those near it that the ship’s crew members have to use full-body diving suits to extract a sample (see Fig. 5).

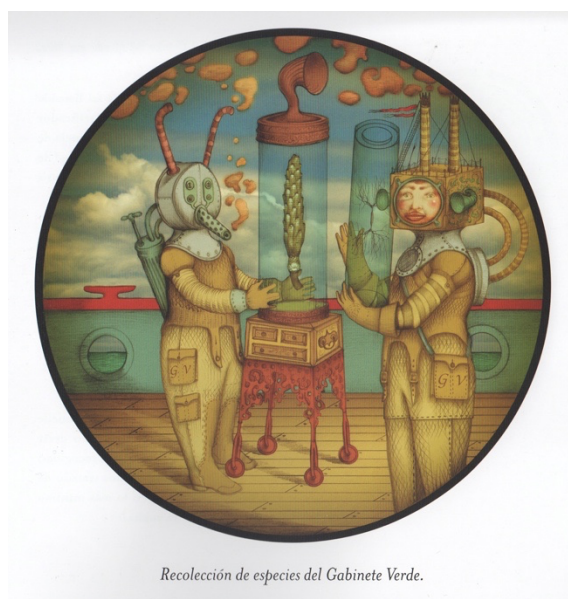


Fig. 5. Claudio Romo, *El álbum de la flora imprudente*, p. 45.

The importance accorded to pre-Hispanic myths in Romo’s floras and bestiaries recalls a similar emphasis on indigenous myth in the foundational narratives composed by Latin American Boom novels, which also sought to relativize Western knowledge by valuing other kinds of knowledge and experience, including the supernatural. At times, they also risk echoing the Boom’s exoticizing accounts of Latin American difference or its subsumption of history into myth. But in the context of a twenty-first-century consciousness of the scale and speed of biodiversity loss across the planet, Romo’s quest to resuscitate myths and monsters of the past and to produce new hybrids takes on a very different set of connotations.

The epigraph to *El álbum de la flora imprudente* affirms that “La naturaleza nunca cesa en su invención; su imaginación es infinita, siendo en la variedad y la diferencia donde ella se recrea y fortalece” (5). If the notion of the artistry and variety of nature was central to the baroque, it also serves a post-anthropocentric, posthumanist, and ecological agenda in Romo’s work. His texts and illustrations celebrate the agency of an endlessly diverse natural world that is constantly reinventing itself. We are reminded in *Bestiario mexicano* that monsters were invented to “reflect the unpredictability of nature” and to lend humanity the perception of

greater control over it (18). It is precisely the unbounded creativity and mutability of nature that must now save the world, however, given our reduction of its biodiversity. The fictional Sahagún reflects in an epilogue that if our planet is a living, conscious organism, as he believes, then the *Isla Especular* and places like it are reservoirs in which the Earth holds its creations safe, to guarantee the perpetuation of life in times of planetary decline (49).

Romo's protagonist shares a surname with the Franciscan missionary Bernardino de Sahagún, a pioneering ethnographer who compiled the extraordinary *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España* (1540-1590). Sahagún's manuscript is unparalleled in the early colonial period, both for the scope and depth of its engagement with indigenous cultures and the collaborative nature of its composition: Sahagún spent decades interviewing town elders and many sections were written or compiled by Nahuatl students. Romo's fictional Sahagún therefore revives an approach to studying the New World that was much more pluralistic than many of the Enlightenment treatises that were to follow. He is a kind of historical castaway, hailing from an earlier period before eighteenth-century naturalists and atlas makers sought to smooth out the "untamed variability" of nature, "reacting against" the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century fascination with the strange, the monstrous, the excessive, and the deviant (Daston and Galison 2010, 67). His monsters recapture the "pluri-perspectivism" that characterizes scientific discourse in the seventeenth century, with its fascination for that which escaped or exceeded order or taxonomy (Del Río Parra 2003, 16, 44). In this way, Romo's work returns to a historical juncture in order to point to an alternative path that European science could have taken: one that might not have led to a disenchanted modernity and the imposition of a single system of knowledge with universalizing pretensions.

Walmor Corrêa: Premodern and Popular Imaginaries in the Visual Language of Science

Like those of Romo, many of Corrêa's projects disrupt linear, Eurocentric conceptions of history in which the modern supplants the traditional, and myth and enchantment disappear in the correcting prism of scientific reason. The errors and eccentricities Corrêa finds in historical scientific texts written by European travellers to Brazil deflate their authority, while his reinsertion of Brazilian popular and indigenous imaginaries within modern scientific modes of illustration mischievously elevates the folkloric, which has been systematically excluded from the canons of modern European knowledge.

For his *Biblioteca dos enganos* (*Library of Mistakes*, 2009), Corrêa created a series of illustrations to accompany handwritten excerpts from works by the renowned German-Brazilian zoologist Hermann Von Ihering, who spent four decades in Brazil between 1880 and 1920. Von Ihering's painstaking studies of birds and mammals are collated in monumental catalogues. His understanding of the work of science as dialectical and cumulative, working in a linear way toward ever-greater accuracy, is evident from his constant citation and correction of the work of other naturalists. Concise entries for each species begin with cross-references to their appearance in publications by former zoologists; Von Ihering's texts then confirm, qualify or reject their conclusions on the basis of his own observations. Corrêa chose a selection of these entries, in which Von Ihering either disproved previous errors or introduced obvious mistakes of his own. He reconstructed these misconceptions in illustrations that gave life to the false assumptions created or corrected by Von Ihering's texts. The pages he composed were then exhibited as open books in a display case modelled on the kind made for the iconic natural history museum in La Plata, Argentina, where Von Ihering was well known.

In his book *Os mamíferos do Rio Grande do Sul* (*Mammals of the Rio Grande do Sul*), Von Ihering notes that the armadillo is common in the southern sierras of Brazil (1894, section 24: *Praopus novecinctus* L.). He then wastes no time in exposing the errors of two zoologists who had claimed to have observed a new species with a shorter appendage, asserting that they must simply have seen an abnormal specimen with a mutilated tail. He is equally dismissive of a claim that this alleged new species has a small fifth toe on the forefeet, as neither he nor a fellow zoologist have been able to confirm this observation. The fictional species features among the precise illustrations created for one of Corrêa's books in the *Biblioteca dos enganos*, which include a naturalistic depiction of an armadillo with a stubby behind and an anatomical sketch of a five-toed forelimb. Von Ihering is not immune to committing his own errors, however. For another book in the collection, Corrêa transcribes the zoologist's musings on the behaviour of certain species of swallow that disappears entirely during winter; while he admits that little is known about the migratory habits of swallows, he claims that some of them are certainly "residents," hibernating during the winter. In this (mistaken) belief, he joins a long line of scholars from Aristotle and Pliny to Linnaeus. Despite the development of modern empirical methods in zoology, natural historians of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century still returned to Pliny and other classical authors in their interpretations of America (Valenzuela Matus 2018). Registering

the enduring nature of this error, one of Corrêa's illustrations shows a swallow on the threshold of a little hollow, ready to nestle into hibernation (see Fig. 6).

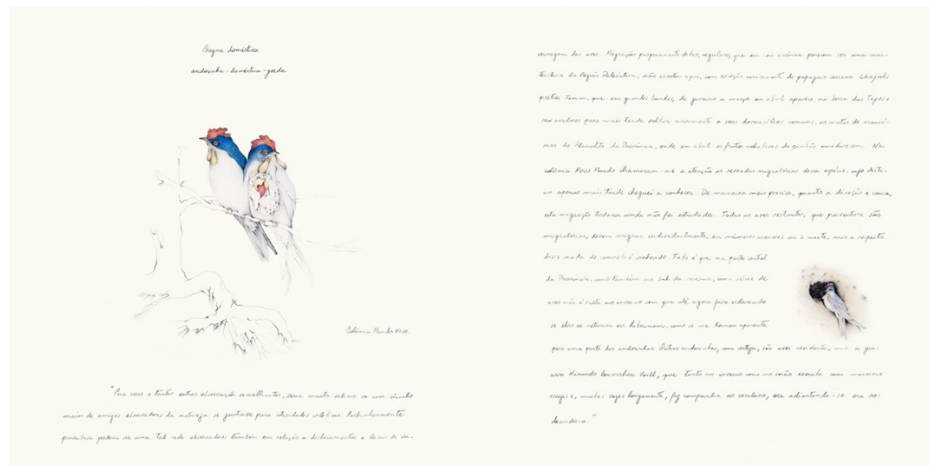


Fig. 6. Walmor Corrêa, 'Progne doméstica. Andorinha – doméstica – gorda', from *Biblioteca dos enganos* (2009)

Corrêa's emphasis on the overlooked, the confused, and the misclassified pokes a hole in the scientific plausibility of the accounts of Von Ihering and his naturalist peers and predecessors. But the aim is not to discredit these findings as less scientifically accurate and based more on speculation and supposition than those of our own era; such a position would only confirm a linear model of scientific discovery, progressing from lesser to greater knowledge. Instead, it is to cast a critical eye on a branch of knowledge that is often absurdly universalist in its approach to the natural world. The project of establishing a single classification system for all species is a naïve one: as we understand from the Von Ihering texts that Corrêa transcribes, such systems inevitably rest on decisions that are arguable and arbitrary, given the huge variations between individual members of what have come to be regarded as separate species, and the essentially cultural nature of taxonomies.

At the same time, Corrêa's *Biblioteca* portrays science as an activity that is suffused with mystery and imagination, bearing the imprint of human subjectivity, cultural perspectives, and historical contingencies. In his search for a science that does not relegate those realms to the "pre-modern," Corrêa reaches back to a pre-Enlightenment period. He has been particularly inspired by the letters and chronicles of Padre José de Anchieta, a Jesuit missionary who spent several decades evangelizing the Indian population of Brazil in the second half of the sixteenth century. Anchieta is credited with being one of the founders of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro; he was also a pioneering linguist, ethnographer and naturalist. In the Jesuit tradition of report-writing, he sent exhaustively detailed letters to his

superiors on the customs of indigenous communities and the flora and fauna of Brazil. Corrêa cites one such epistle, the *Carta de São Vicente* (1560) as the motivation for many of his artistic works.

Anchieta's account in this letter of a journey into the Mata Atlântica, the forest that extends along Brazil's Atlantic coast, is a pre-Enlightenment medley of methodical observations and fabulous tales. Surviving the adversities of a stormy sea passage and evading the attention of diverse and deadly snakes, Anchieta musters a range of superlatives to account for the new and wondrous animals he encounters, which boast the sharpest nails or teeth, the stoutest legs, or the tastiest flesh. Unlike his eighteenth-century successors, who would catalogue species according to European classification systems, Anchieta prefers to use local Indian names. While accounts of scientific expeditions in the later colonial period extracted species from their natural, social, and cultural environments, focusing primarily on their commercial potential for Europe, Anchieta describes the uses the Indians found for each animal: often to eat, but also to make belts or shields, or to incite sexual pleasure. He displays an evident admiration for indigenous medicine and hunting and fishing techniques.

Recognizing that some of the extraordinary phenomena he relates may stretch his readers' belief, Anchieta insists at several points that he and his Jesuit brothers have witnessed them at first hand. An Indian cure for ulcers has been "provado com experiência" ("demonstrated by experience"); likewise, a snake so huge that it may easily swallow a deer is "observado por todos" ("observed by all") (1997, 19, 17). The same claims are made about phenomena that stray into the realm of the supernatural. Although Anchieta and his Jesuit brothers attempt to convert the Indians they meet to the Christian faith, they give at least partial credence to local beliefs concerning "demons," or strange beasts that threaten them. "E cousa sabida e pela boca corre" ("it is a well-known fact and on everyone's lips") that the Indians are whipped and beaten to death by *corupiras*, and Anchieta affirms that his brothers can testify to this, having seen several Indians killed by them in this way (34). Equally murderous are the water-dwelling *igpupiára*, who drowned many members of an Indian community before Christians moved in to the area. Indeed, Anchieta understands these monsters to be nothing less than incarnations of the Devil, who oppresses those who do not know God with "cruel tyranny" of this kind (35).

The physical features of the dreaded *igpupiára* and *corupira* (or *curupira*, as it is more commonly known) are not described by Anchieta. Both creatures are minutely portrayed, however, in Corrêa's series *Unheimlich, imaginário popular brasileiro*

(2005), alongside other monsters and hybrids that live on in Brazilian folklore and popular culture. In creating these works, Corrêa also turned to another important intertext, Luís da Câmara Cascudo's *Geografia dos mitos brasileiros* (*Geography of Brazilian Myths*, 1947). He represents the *curupira* in one of the regional versions detailed by da Câmara Cascudo (2012, 180–82), with its feet facing backwards, one eye and no anus (see Fig. 7); in his description of the amphibian *ipupiara* (2012, 254–84), Corrêa notes the flexible skeleton but adds coyly that details of the articulation of the flipper will be better understood when it has been properly dissected.

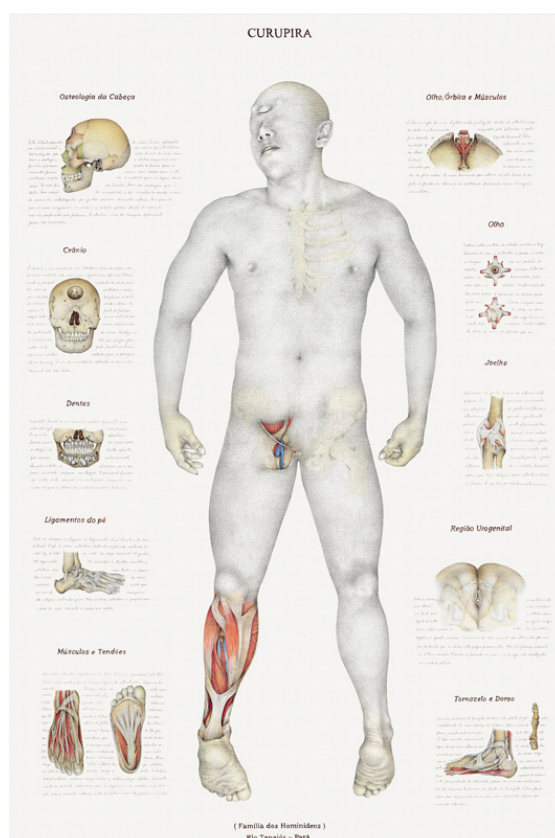


Fig. 7. Walmor Corrêa, 'Curupira' from *Unheimlich: Imaginário popular brasileiro* (2005). Acrylic and graphite on canvas.

The figures are depicted as they might be presented in an anatomy textbook. A large frontal view dominates against a plain white background, with part of the torso pulled back to show the inner organs. This central figure is flanked by smaller illustrations in multiple projections, showing details of joints, muscles or skeleton structure, each labelled in meticulous handwriting. In this way, Corrêa treats his chimerical creatures with the gravity of a scientific treatise, lending them veracity through anatomical precision. The *capelobo* is given a human frame, with the long snout of the anteater and the rounded feet that it acquires in some regions of Brazil, according to da Câmara Cascudo (2012, 404). Noting some of the

anatomical features that the specimen shares with humans, the written descriptions also point to the limited rotation of the head on the neck, given the form of the *capelobo*'s elongated cranium, and explains how the jaw moves to accommodate food when eating. In developing his depiction of the *ondina* (siren), Corrêa consulted medical specialists to explore the possible anatomy of a mermaid.² How would its body be able to withstand the higher pressures of deep water? What would its foetus look like? He adds gills behind the ears, near the carotid arteries, to allow the hyperoxygenation of blood flowing to the brain while the siren is below water, and adapts the eye for lower levels of light, removing tear glands as the cornea would be continually washed with water.

Corrêa's *Unheimlich* series therefore takes to an extreme the transcultural and transdisciplinary elements of Anchieta's text, finding room within a Western scientific idiom for the popular, the alien, and the supernatural: locating strangeness in the familiar, much like Freud's theory of the *unheimlich* (the uncanny). A number of early colonial chronicles did assimilate indigenous legends and taxonomies in this way. The work of Francisco Hernández (1514-1587), the only scientist to have written a natural history of the New World in the sixteenth century, is a synthesis of European classificatory systems and indigenous nomenclature, often relying on local Indian knowledge of new animals and plants (De Asúa and French 2016, 101). Its incorporation of Aztec legends relating to the hidden powers of animals presented no difficulty to his readers, as "[t]he Renaissance image of nature, with its insistence on its plastic power, its 'secrets' and the possibility of its control through natural magic, could accommodate part of the native lore with which many of the conceptual and literary representations of New World animals were invested" (De Asúa and French 2016, 234). Corrêa's own hybridizing work therefore stretches back to a moment of greater fluidity and exchange, before such beliefs, along with local names and cultural uses, were erased in the Enlightenment bid for objectivity and a universal nomenclature.

Corrêa had already developed his work on animal hybrids in *Natureza perversa* (*Perverse Nature*, 2003), which adopts the conventions of zoological illustration to explore the possible anatomies of invented species such as the *pinguisch* (which combines the head of a fish with the lower body of a penguin; see Fig. 8) and the *schnabelaffe* (a beaked monkey), and to speculate on their bizarre mating habits. Corrêa's techniques of grafting and cross-fertilizing are recognizably baroque in their recourse to multiple intertexts and traditions. Rekindling a pre-Enlightenment fascination with the monstrous, these inventions also speak more

² Conversation with the author, 28 April 2019.

specifically to an early colonial imaginary in which composites and mixtures were rife, arising from encounters with otherness. To depict such riotously fantastic hybrids under the distanced, dissecting eye of the nineteenth-century naturalist is both to accentuate the divide between the pre-modern and modern, and to find creative ways of weaving them together again.

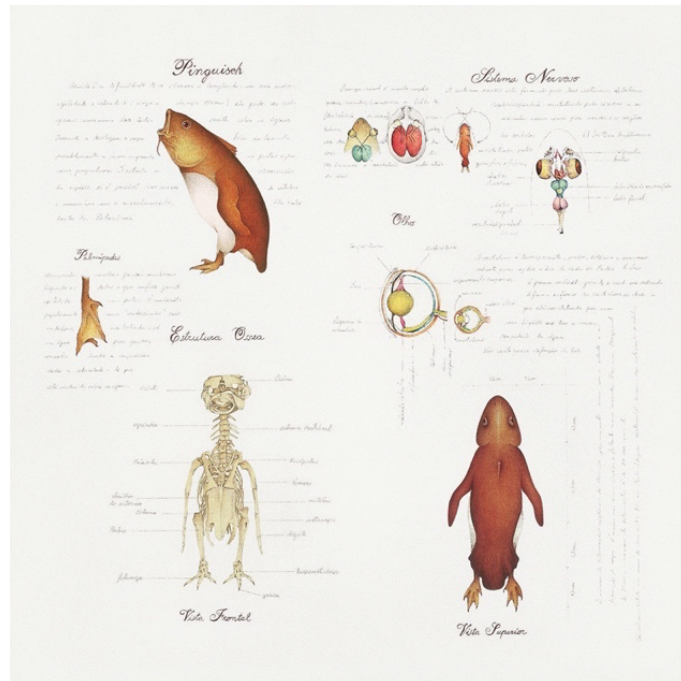


Fig. 8. Walmor Corrêa, 'Pinguish' from *Natureza perversa* (2003)

Kaup proposes that we understand the baroque as an “alternative modernity” that rejects the Enlightenment’s rupture with the past and with non-rationalist thought, affirming instead “the impure, hybrid coexistence of the disjunctive (modern and premodern, global and local, faith and reason, science and wonder)” (2012, 6). It becomes in this way a powerful expression of the temporal heterogeneity that characterizes Latin American modernity, and a tool with which to critique the exclusion of indigenous and creole cultures from the single, universal modernity championed by Enlightenment ideology and in European thought more generally (6). The return to the baroque may be a search for a Latin American aesthetic in “the recovery of that which appeared farthest from the modern” (González Echevarría 1993, 5). It is not a rejection of modernity, however, so much as a rewriting of Eurocentric narratives of modernity. In its reinsertion of the fantastic and the folkloric in scientific modes of representation, Corrêa’s neobaroque becomes not only a form of cultural “counter-conquest” but also the construction of an alternative, less exclusionary, history of modernity.

There is a risk, of course, that Corrêa's spirited celebration of all things hybrid may create a utopian vision of cultural mixture that skips too quickly over the violence of colonial relations. In 2013, he created another hybrid in the style of the *Unheimlich* series, a woman-lizard entitled *Salamanca do Jarau*, in reference to a legend of some importance in the south of Brazil. According to the story, a Moorish princess with magical gifts (also called the Teiniaguá) arrives from Spain and is turned into a lizard by indigenous people to demonstrate their superior power; she continues to grant the wishes of those who visit her cave. In developing the work, Corrêa conducted research alongside doctors and a community association based in Barcelona on the health issues experienced by Latin American women immigrants. Common problems included alcoholism, chronic back pain, infertility, and the deformation of hands through too much manual labour. These were shown in red in the relevant place on the figure of the *Salamanca do Jarau*, in a testament to the suffering of current-day migrants for whom the hoped-for fulfilment of their desires has turned into something more monstrous, born of the poverty, inequality, and discrimination that mark reverse migrations from Latin America to Spain within the enduring legacy of coloniality. Once common currency in colonial accounts of the New World, marking out the frontiers of modern civilization, the monstrous is reclaimed in Corrêa's work for decolonial purposes: to reweave histories of knowledge that have been torn apart in the imposition of a dominant, secular, Enlightenment science, to recreate the natural world as a site of excess, entanglement, and enchantment that confounds our attempts to tame it, and also to testify to the human suffering that continues to result from the forms of displacement and dispossession produced by global capitalism.



Fig. 9. Walmor Corrêa, 'Teiniaguá, vista dorsal', from *Salamanca do Jarau* (2013)

Alberto Baraya: Botanical Illustration and the Natural History of Capitalism

Alberto Baraya consciously inserts his work into a tradition of botanical illustration in Colombia that dates from the Royal Botanical Expedition to New Granada (1783-1816), led by José Celestino Mutis, a Spanish mathematician, botanist, and physician.³ The expedition, which employed dozens of scientists and artists, investigated aspects of natural history, geography, zoology, astronomy, and mining. Although incomplete, the exquisite illustrations that catalogued the region's flora stretched to almost 6000 folio drawings. In many ways, these adhered to the norms of botanical illustration in the eighteenth century in Europe. The figure at the centre of a typical plate demonstrated the "habit" of the plant (its general appearance and architecture), with details and transverse sections of the calyx, petals, and fruit arranged at the foot, allowing the plant to be successfully identified according to the Linnaean system.

This format is employed for many of the plates designed for Baraya's *Herbario de plantas artificiales* (2002-), with the rather significant difference that the

³ The *Expedición Botánica al Virreinato de Nueva Granada* covered an area that now comprises Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, parts of northern Peru and northern Brazil, and other smaller states.

specimens shown are not of native flora but artificial flowers, the great majority made in China, from plastic, fabric and wire. Baraya collects his samples from the environments in which they are often to be found: cafés, offices, hotel bathrooms, churches, airports, and shop windows. The flowers dominate the plate, with dissections arrayed below; a handwritten label details the origin of the plant and the materials used for its petioles, stamens, and other parts.

Despite these similarities in form, important differences emerge in Baraya's reworking of the eighteenth-century norms of botanical illustration. The quest for a universal taxonomy of plants led to an approach that was zealously exact in its depiction of the essence of each plant but disregarded the imperfections of a particular specimen or any characteristics that were not considered common to the species. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, an allegiance to what might be called "truth-to-nature" obliged the naturalist to be "steeped in but not enslaved to nature as it appeared" (Daston and Galison 2010, 59). Drawings undertaken for expeditions such as the one conducted in New Granada were not typically drawn from real plants: they were composite images that smoothed out the accidental and the anomalous to create a single, idealized version of the plant (Bleichmar 2012, 67). In contrast, Baraya's plates celebrate the local, the contingent, and the subjective. Several of the *Herbario* plates include a photographed "comparative study" in which a plastic fruit—designed to represent the recognizable essence of a coconut or a cacao pod—is held next to a real one, showing the deviations in colour, form or texture of the genuine article in comparison with its idealized reproduction. Photographs tie specimens to specific places or people that Baraya meets on his travels, bearing witness to the way in which his artworks arise from chance connections and discoveries. In *Taxones Tabatinga* (2014),⁴ for example, Baraya catalogues the different kinds of artificial plants and flowers he finds in a decorative display in a hairdressing salon owned by Nicolasa, who appears in a photograph placed next to the species identified, brandishing her bouquet with a coquettish smile (see Fig. 10).

In a similar way, the *Herbario* plates often contain photographs showing the shop windows or market stalls where plants were found or the cultural uses to which the flowers are put. Such references to specific natural or human environments are entirely absent from the illustrations commissioned by Mutis and other leaders of New World expeditions. Indigenous taxonomies, which generally categorized plants according to their culinary, medicinal, or religious uses, were

⁴ Tabatinga is a frontier city in the Brazilian Amazon, located on the border with Colombia.

eliminated by such naturalists in favour of “standard” European classification systems (Nieto Olarte 2006, 112). As Mary Louise Pratt affirms, the European exercise of natural history “elaborated a rationalizing, extractive, dissociative understanding which overlaid functional, experiential relations among people, plants, and animals” (2008, 37).

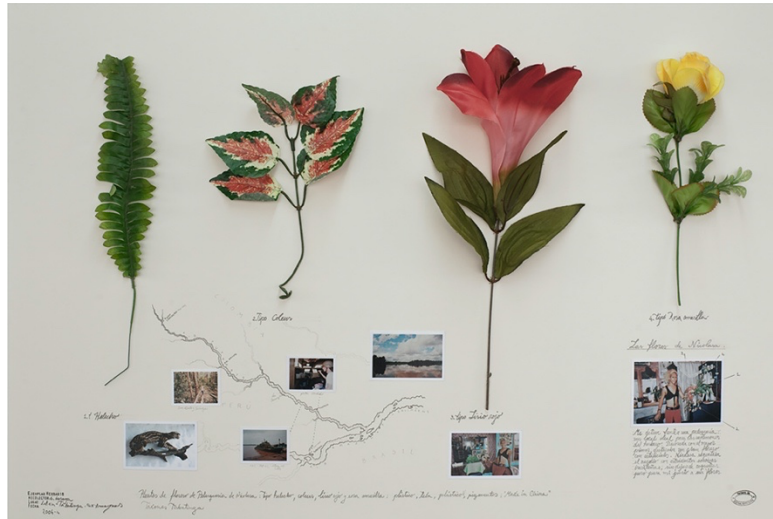


Fig. 10. Alberto Baraya, *Taxones Tabatinga* (2014) from the *Herbario de plantas artificiales*. Found object “Made in China,” drawing and photography on cardboard

In an operation that was deeply appropriative at heart, life forms across the planet “were to be drawn out of the tangled threads of their life surroundings and rewoven into European-based patterns of global unity and order” (31).

While this process is erased in the handsome compositions of the New Granada plates, Baraya traces very plainly how his own specimens are caught up in patterns of global trade and consumption. Next to the dense green foliage and sepi petals of the *Orquídea viajera* (2013) we find a map of its “commercial and cultural routes,” linking the artificial flowers market in Yiwu, China, to retail outlets from Madrid to Miami; a further series of connecting lines trace the flowers’ artistic reinsertion into landscapes during Baraya’s journeys to New Zealand, Machu Picchu, and elsewhere. His plates reconnect the natural and cultural histories that are torn apart in eighteenth-century abstractions. In a plate dedicated to an artificial reproduction of a *Brugmansia* or *Datura* species (*Borrachero Doble; Double Devil’s Trumpet*, 2014), he includes photographs of the natural environments in which the real plants, which contain toxic hallucinogens, are typically found, as well as notes on their use in Europe and America by magicians and shamans for the healing of wounds or the divination of a patient’s illnesses (see Fig. 11). By contrast, the elegant *Datura* illustration produced for Mutis (see Fig. 12) is full of botanical

information that would aid identification, folding flowers and spiny fruit into its design, but it reveals nothing beyond the plant's morphology, which is set against a plain white background.⁵



Fig. 11. Alberto Baraya, *Borrachero doble* (*Double Devil's Trumpet*, 2014) from the *Herbario de plantas artificiales*. Found object 'Made in China', drawing and photography on cardboard



Fig. 12. Juan Francisco Mancera, 'Giganton. Datura' from the *Drawings of the Royal Botanical Expedition to the New Kingdom of Granada*, led by José Celestino Mutis

As well as simplifying nature, making it more legible and fit to enter a pre-established system of classification, the illustrations made for expeditions to the

⁵ See <http://www.rjb.csic.es/icones/mutis/paginas/laminadibujo.php?lamina=2875>.

Americas allowed specimens to transcend time and space, protecting them against the decay they would otherwise suffer on the long sea journey back. Through the creation of permanent inscriptions on paper, the immense variety of nature could be condensed, flattened, and shipped back to Europe, to be measured, compared, ordered, and assigned values. As Mutis famously claimed, his illustrations characterized each plant so fully and accurately that no one viewing them would actually need to travel to search for them in their native environment (Uribe Uribe 1954, 102). For Latour, these and other “immutable mobiles” played a vital role in the rise of capitalism and the European domination of other cultures (1986, 12). As such inscriptions are “superimposed, reshuffled, recombined, and summarized” in Europe’s “centers of calculation,” merchants, engineers, cartographers, and others draw benefit from the new ideas and phenomena that emerge, which remain “hidden from the other people from whom all these inscriptions have been exacted” (30).

The economic exploitation of America that was the ultimate aim of the New World expeditions may have been suppressed in the illustrations produced for Mutis, but it was a prominent reference in correspondence about the project. The huge expense of such expeditions was primarily justified by the financial gains that an increased knowledge of its colonies’ natural resources was likely to secure for Spain. Writing to his King in 1763, Mutis reaffirms the profit and the glory that would surely derive from his expedition. Following some complaints about the discomforts of the “verdaderamente austera y desabrida” life of the naturalist, he lists the many riches that the land of America offers the Spanish crown, from gold and precious stones to wood and plants of many kinds: all produced “para la utilidad y el comercio” and “para el bien del genero [sic] humano” (Mendoza 1909, 80, 77).

The decolonial thrust of Baraya’s work emerges most powerfully in a series that attends to this relationship between natural history and commerce, together with the racial politics of (neo)colonialism. As part of an expedition to Tumaco, a city in the Pacific lowlands of Colombia, Baraya produced a series of plates on cacao, one of the main crops grown in the region. *Cacao, beso de cacao* (2018) features the longitudinal cross-section of a cacao pod made—as the description below tells us—of thermoformed plastic with a heart of polystyrene foam (see Fig. 13). Where we would normally expect to see smaller images of the plant’s characteristic features, Baraya inserts wrappers for a chocolate-covered candy manufactured by

Nestlé called “Beso de negra”.⁶ The bold red packaging is adorned with images of voluptuous lips and an alluring black woman in a shoulderless dress. As Baraya notes in a label below, the sensual experience offered by the combination of cacao and sugar is promoted via an exoticizing depiction of racial difference.



Fig. 13. Alberto Baraya, *Cacao, beso de cacao* (2018) from the Tumaco Expedition, *Herbario de plantas artificiales*. Found object, drawing and photography on cardboard

In another plate in the series, *Cacao, conguito* (2018), the artificial red fruit of a cacao tree is accompanied by a small reproduction mounted on cardboard of a black, round-bellied cartoon character. The image forms part of the branding for a range of products marketed in Spain under the name of Conguitos by Chocolates Lacasa, a Spanish confectionery company. The name *conguitos* is the diminutive version of a Latin American Spanish term for a black person (which derives from the country name Congo). The caricatured black character has full red lips and is carrying, as Baraya observes, “una lanza tipo tribal”. This jaunty, exotic figure is used to promote the brand in Spain in a way that implicitly celebrates the racial dynamics of cacao production, as cacao growers tend to be black; many African slaves were brought to work on plantations in Colombia and other countries in Latin America, while today’s cacao farm labourers in former colonies in West Africa

⁶ In the wake of the protests that followed George Floyd’s death, Nestlé announced that it plans to rename the sweets as part of a broader review of racialized product names. See <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-06-22/nestle-pulls-beso-de-negra-candy-reviews-portfolio-for-racism>.

also work in conditions that approach those of slavery. Baraya's plate exposes the operation of structural racism in global agricultural production, in both colonial and contemporary eras.

The close relationship between racism and the emergence of the modern world-system is clearly outlined in the work of Quijano. Ethnic categorizations were "the inevitable cultural consequence of coloniality" and were used to justify different kinds of labour control, including slavery and other forms of coerced labour (Quijano and Wallerstein 1992, 550–51). Quijano argues that modernity itself only emerges in Europe as a result of its imperial ventures in America: its constitution as a modern power rests historically on the wealth extracted from the region—gold, silver, potatoes, tomatoes, tobacco—with the free labour of Indians, *mestizos*, and African slaves (2000, 221). In this sense, "The Americas were not incorporated into an already existing capitalist world-economy. There could not have been a capitalist world-economy without the Americas" (Quijano and Wallerstein 1992, 549). By the eighteenth century, however, Europeans had not only persuaded themselves that they had independently forged their own civilization, but that they were naturally and racially superior to other civilizations, as evidenced by their imperial domination over them (Quijano 2000, 221).

It is this story—of the basis of modern capitalist European society in colonialism and racism—that is laid bare in Baraya's works. But many of them also move beyond the unveiling of acts of dispossession and exploitation to compose gestures of symbolic reversal and reparation. In one series of plates created for the *Herbario de plantas artificiales*, Baraya adds photographs showing the use of anthropometric calipers, often used in nineteenth-century race studies to measure head and body size in colonized subjects. Leading to dubious "scientific" conclusions, the measurements obtained by such instruments were often used to affirm the superiority of Europeans over other races and to justify the exercise of power. Reversing this objectifying procedure, Baraya asks local people he meets on his expeditions to measure his own head. In *Orquídea Vanda y 4 antropometrías artificiales* (2013), photographs taken during an expedition to Peru show the artist's head being measured by indigenous women and another tourist in the ancient Incan sites of Ollantaytambo, Cusco, and Machu Picchu (see Fig. 14).



Fig. 14. Alberto Baraya, *Orquídea Vanda y 4 antropometrías artificiales* (2013) from the *Herbario de plantas artificiales*. Wire, plastic, pigments, drawing and photography on cardboard

As José Roca points out, Baraya's purloined plants—stolen from hotel receptions, restaurants, and shops—rehearse the thefts of colonial scientists engaged in acts of “collecting.” As well as bearing witness to a history of dispossession, however, these expeditions also perform acts of restitution. For his *Proyecto árbol de caucho* (2006), Baraya travelled to the Acre region of Brazil, the scene of intensive rubber production and the expansion of European colonization in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He worked with local rubber tappers to cover the surface of a thirty-metre rubber tree with liquid latex that had been extracted from other rubber trees, and then peeled off the cast. Exhibited at the São Paulo Biennial, the empty, flaccid rubber skin spoke to the boom and bust cycles of rubber production and their enormous and lasting social and environmental impact on the region. The *antropometrías* plates and the rubber tree project bring us closer to “a new global vision of modernity” that, as Enrique Dussel affirms, “shows not only its emancipatory but also its destructive and genocidal side” (1993, 75).

Baraya's absurd quest to collect and identify every type of artificial plant in the world mimics the overweening ambition of Enlightenment natural histories, but replaces their austere language with baroque proliferation and theatricality. For Severo Sarduy, the “obsessive repetition of a useless thing [...] determines the

Baroque as *play*, in contrast to the determination of the classical work as a labor” (2010, 288). Other elements of Baraya’s plates also bear affinities with the (neo)baroque. While they are relatively simple in design, they employ the quintessential baroque technique of *trompe l’oeil* in their presentation of artificial plants that often trick the viewer into believing that they are real. They also create folds in matter in ways observed by Gilles Deleuze (1993) as they recycle and rework themes and forms from the past, trouble the division between the artist as subject and object, entangle the spiritual and the cultural with the material and commercial, and interweave the artificial and the organic, artistic convention and its critique.

Kaup finds the decolonial potential of the baroque to lie in its dedication to “overwriting the alien, colonial text” (Farago et al. 2015, 58). This potential is extended in the performative, palimpsestic nature of the journeys Baraya undertakes to collect artificial plants and to reinsert them in different natural, artistic, and architectural landscapes. These journeys reconstruct some of the trajectories followed by humans and plants within the Spanish empire and beyond, while exposing and subverting the objectives of those colonial expeditions or historicizing them as part of a continuing process of globalization. Armed with Wade Davis’s account of his recreation in 1974-75 of the Amazonian journey undertaken by the botanist Richard Evans Schultes in 1941, Baraya retraced those retracings in his 2004 expedition along the Putumayo River (see Davis 1997; 2004). He is conscious that Schultes’s journey is also a textual one, mediated by the adventures of a chain of other travellers and botanists stretching back to Mutis and Humboldt (Baraya 2005). In his own parodic addition to the saga, Baraya searches the cafés, altars, and doorways of the Amazon for plastic flowers made in China, “como muestras fehacientes de la expansión infinita de esa extraña vegetación china por los confines del mundo” (2005).

If the scientific expeditions of the New World forged an intimate connection between journeys, progress, and knowledge, Baraya defends the practice of art as a form of knowledge production in our own time. It is not to be compared with scientific knowledge, however, as it represents “otra manera de adentrarse al conocimiento”.⁷ Following John Law, we might identify this kind of knowledge as baroque, in the way that it makes space for otherness, knows in “materially heterogeneous ways,” understands itself to be performative, multiplies viewpoints, and allows us to reflect on emotional and embodied modes of knowing. Law finds in the baroque “a possible *resource* for creating ways of knowing

⁷ Conversation with the author, 12 February 2019.

differently, a storehouse of possible alternative techniques” (2016, 23, 28, 36). The kind of knowledge generated by Baraya’s journeys is one that does not settle into stable perspectives but yields the “awareness of otherness in the self” that Roberto González Echevarría finds to be characteristic of the baroque. As a phenomenon that “questions all received knowledge,” the baroque in Latin America expresses “the plurality of New World culture, its being-in-the-making as something not quite achieved, of something heterogeneous and incomplete” (1993, 198–99).

The Decolonial Potential of the Neobaroque

César Augusto Salgado suspects that the deep interest in the baroque in Latin American cultural theory “may have no equivalent in current postcolonial thinking” (1999, 317). Bhabha, Spivak, and other postcolonial theorists who speak from other regions of the colonized world are of course centrally concerned with the contradictions that are inherent to colonial projects; for Bhabha, cultural hybridity marks out the “ambivalent space” of colonial power, where “other ‘denied’ knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority” (1994, 114, 112). But as the European colonization of the Americas *predates* the Enlightenment, its contestation also implies, as Salgado argues, “a response to the failure of enlightened ideals to transform and modernize Latin American society and culture” (1999, 326n4)—or, I would add—a response to the epistemic and ecological violence involved in that project of transformation and modernization.

These works amply demonstrate how the neobaroque may serve a decolonial critique of modernity in the Latin American context. Romo, Corrêa, and Baraya do not invoke the baroque as an inherent and ahistorical trait, as Alejo Carpentier risks doing when he claims that Latin America is baroque because of “the unruly complexities of its nature and its vegetation [...] our nature is untamed, as is our history” (1995, 105). Instead, they develop a specific critique of the colonial imposition of Enlightenment thought, which has become synonymous with the emergence of modernity and scientific rationalism in the European context. As a response to the abstractions and extractions of Enlightenment and colonial science, their work comprises a series of symbolic acts of *reinsertion* and *reconnection*. This approach, I would argue, is very much at the heart of the decolonial politics of the neobaroque. Their embrace of baroque concerns and aesthetics is therefore not primarily a postmodern, dehistoricizing bid to unseat the discourses of the metropolitan centre, but a decolonial, *re*historicizing venture that seeks to rebuild Latin American modernity in a way that excludes neither its pre-Enlightenment past

nor the centuries of cross-fertilization between indigenous and European imaginaries.

Although they are often irreverent in their articulation, these works also represent more serious endeavours to recover a cultural history that has often been supplanted or sidelined. When artists and sculptors from Mexico or Brazil inserted Amerindian or African deities among the Western gods and goddesses that were a mainstay of baroque art, Serge Gruzinski observes, they opened the way for “the recomposition and rescue” of non-European pasts (2009, 120). The work of Romo and Corrêa in particular reinscribe popular and indigenous myths into cultural histories from which they have often been erased. Their palimpsestic, transhistorical techniques unfold alternative temporalities that yield us a glimpse of “a modernity without an irreversible break with the past” (Kaup 2012, 22). Using visual idioms that are associated with different historical moments in the history of scientific illustration allows these artists to incorporate a critique of modernity within some of its most paradigmatic genres. This approach again aligns them with a decolonial project that, for Dussel, does not share postmodernism’s critique of reason *per se*, but certainly concurs with its critique of the “violent, coercive, genocidal reason” (1993, 75) that is generated by the Eurocentric myth of modernity.

An aesthetics of reconnection and recomposition also allows these artists to explore how art expands our knowledge of the world, both for and beyond the purposes of modern science. While they emphasize the importance of botanical and zoological illustration in capturing, ordering, and commodifying nature within a (neo)colonial global economy, all three artists demonstrate the capacity of art to assemble and create plural epistemologies, in which modern Western science represents only one possible approach to understanding the natural world. If baroque art was a response to “the gathering regimentation of knowledge” in the Renaissance (Greene 2009, 150), then the neobaroque art of Romo, Corrêa, and Baraya exposes, from the perspective of the other “end of modernity,” the gross insufficiency of Enlightenment systems of knowledge in the face of environmental crisis and the many forms of cultural and economic dispossession that have resulted from the historical collusion between European colonialism, capitalism, and modern science. Not content merely to show where Western science has fallen short, these works also demonstrate the potential in art to promote the kind of interaction between scientific and other forms of knowledge and practice that is essential to the decolonial project.

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