

3 *Los Pintores Íntegros*

A primitivist rationale for Iberian and transatlantic modernisms

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This chapter discusses the *Los Pintores Íntegros* exhibition curated by Ramón Gómez de la Serna (1888–1963) in Madrid in 1915.¹ While analysing the exhibition’s significance to the introduction of Cubism in the Spanish capital, this article also discusses how Gómez de la Serna’s rationale contributes in asserting a primitivist bedrock for the show—a topic that has yet to be addressed in the literature. Bearing in mind Patricia Leighton’s insights into how an “anticolonial crisis” can be associated with the praise of African art, and the concurrent pluralisation of the political, historical and aesthetic implications in modernist uses of primitivism arising from this paradigm,² I will consider Gómez de la Serna’s thought along with some of the artworks shown in the 1915 exhibition. I will particularly address works exhibited by Diego Rivera (1886–1957) on that occasion. As I hope to demonstrate, the primitivist background of *Los Pintores Íntegros* paved the way for intertwining the local and the cosmopolitan (1) by calling for the Europeanising of Spain via the presentation of Cubism and the inscription of Madrid in the geography of international avant-garde exhibitions; and (2) by making the values of local folk art and popular culture interchangeable under the umbrella of Cubism, a process that, I will claim, encompassed the Spanishisation of the Cubist repertoire presented by the “íntegros” painters just before Diego Rivera fabricated an alternative primitivist myth of origins, grounded in Mexican ethnicity and culture.

A “rotative” portrait by Diego Rivera

I will begin by looking at the famous Gómez de la Serna portrait by Rivera, presented at the gallery window in the immediate aftermath of the “íntegros” exhibition.³ In his memoirs, the artist highlights this portrait among his Cubist experiments.⁴ Earlier in Majorca, Rivera writes, he had tried “new textures and tactile effects by mixing substances such as sand and sawdust in oils”, composing what he believed were “interesting landscapes”. Once in Madrid, he experimented with other genres, painting at least two important portraits: that of Gómez de la Serna (Figure 3.1) and Jesús T. Acevedo (Figure 3.4), a Mexican friend, architect and art critic “whom a turn of Mexican politics forced to remain in Madrid”.⁵

Rivera described his Gómez de la Serna portrait as depicting:

The head of a decapitated woman and a sword with a woman’s hair on its point, plainly the weapon which had beheaded the woman. In the foreground was an automatic pistol. Beside it and in the centre of the canvas was a man holding a pipe in one hand, in the other a pen with which he was writing a novel. He had the appearance of an anarchistic demon, inciting crime and the general overthrow of order. In this Satanic figure everyone recognised the



Figure 3.1 Diego Rivera, Retrato de Ramón Gómez de la Serna, 1915. Oil on canvas, 109.6 × 90.2 cm. Colección Malba, Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires. Photograph by Gustavo Sosa Pinilla. © 2023 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, México, D. F./ARS, New York/SPA, Lisboa.

features of Serna, notorious for his opposition to every conventional, religious, moral, and political principle.⁶

The reception of this portrait in 1915 is a kind of saga in its own right, significantly escalating the disruption prompted by the *Los Pintores Íntegros* exhibition. Before discussing it, I want to highlight the fact that Gómez de la Serna's figure, the "anarchistic demon" writing and smoking a pipe surrounded by some of his latest and most prominent authored books, such as *Greguerías* and *El Rastro*, is portrayed by Diego Rivera as a dual character. Half of the figure stands in the light that pours from the smoking pipe. The corresponding part of the face is washed in bright yellow and the hair is red. The light reaches the writing hand, that is also coloured yellow. The other half of the figure is represented in nocturnal tones, with a violet apparel, green complexion and blue hair. The fact that the centre of Gómez de la Serna's face, resulting from the two inward-looking profiles is united by Rivera in an imperfect white triangular surface, does not diminish the startling difference in his depiction of the eyes (one is opened in a sun-shaped form, the other one is closed), nor the line dividing neck-tie and shirt into two completely different halves. Also doubled, and represented in different colours, are the triangular ink pots resting on the writing table. There is a black ink pot and a reddish ink pot, the latter clearly associated via its colour tones with the cover of the book *El Rastro*.⁷

Gómez de la Serna chose this portrait for the cover of his *Ismos* book, published a few years later in 1931. *Ismos* brings together several texts written from the 1910s onward, and had a first partial appearance in 1921, under the title *El cubismo y todos los ismos*.⁸ The book asserts the author's devotion to modernist ideology and the corresponding triumph of the new. With few exceptions—namely a chapter on African sculpture—individual protagonists in literature and the visual arts are celebrated throughout the book.⁹ Diego Rivera is entitled to a chapter, which gives Gómez de la Serna the opportunity to write about Rivera's "rotative" portrait of him.¹⁰ Taking the painting by Rivera as a perfect example of Cubist portraits' potential, where, to the benefit of representation, allegory superseded likeness,¹¹ Gómez de la Serna also highlights the different colours separating the two halves of the depicted figure: "The heaviness of one part of my body needed a darker colour and with a certain thickness, just as the levitation of the other part is blurring and vivid colour, more vivid than it appears to be".¹²

A strange melting pot?

As in the case of the Delaunays and so many other fellow artists living in Paris, the war led Diego Rivera and his partner, the Russian painter Angelina Beloff (1879–1969), to stay in neutral Spain. After brief sojourns in Majorca and Barcelona, the couple arrived in Madrid, where they reencountered an avant-garde clique with which they were already familiar.¹³ Their long-time friend María Blanchard (1881–1932) took part in this clique, as much as Gómez de la Serna, who by that time had already risen to prominence as a prolific avant-garde author, long-time editor and journalist, and who would soon be the head of the new Pombo café *tertulia* where they all met once a week from 1915 on.

In March 1915, right at the moment of Pombo's "sacred crypt" inauguration, the Madrilenian writer put together *Los Pintores Íntegros*. The exhibition held at the *Salón de Arte Moderno* (formerly the *Salon Kühn*) from 5 to 15 March 1915 displayed eleven paintings by Diego Rivera, seven paintings by María Blanchard,¹⁴ eleven artworks by the caricaturist and painter Lluís Bagaría (1882–1940) and ten sculptures by Agustín-Choco (?-?). Thus, Gómez de la Serna's exhibition showcased the work of a relatively unknown Mexican painter in conjunction with that of a likewise relatively unknown Spanish woman painter, both with Parisian avant-garde backgrounds and a sophisticated knowledge of the Cubist idiom. These artists, whose works guaranteed the overall reception of the exhibition as a Cubist show, were in turn shown alongside a well-known, Madrid-based Catalan caricaturist and illustrator who also painted. Lastly, there was an unknown sculptor in the group, referred to by Gómez de la Serna in the catalogue text as "the savage".

Was there a rationale behind the organisation of an exhibition that brought together two Parisian Cubists with two other completely different artists, be it in terms of the media they used, their artistic languages and backgrounds? Or is the art historian Jaime Brihuega right to consider this "strange melting pot" the simple result of Gómez de la Serna's arbitrary choices, and to (dis)qualify it as lacking any programmatic purpose?¹⁵

Alberto Nulman Magidin and Ana Luisa Montes de Oca Vega, in a recent article that stands out as the most in-depth study of this exhibition written to date, have rightly pointed out that for Gómez de la Serna, the show was a kind of precursor of the Pombo café group he was about to launch. In his contribution to the catalogue, read out loud at the exhibition opening, the writer referred to "nosotros" (we), meaning not only those directly involved in the show but also the wider group he was about to bring together at the Pombo café's weekly encounters.¹⁶ In addition, the authors highlight how in *La Proclama del Pombo* (The Pombo Proclamation), a loose sheet appearing a few months later, Gómez de la Serna reused the expression "íntegros" to refer to the political resistance and the heroic ethics of a group of nineteenth-century Spaniards fighting against absolutism, whose

honourable behaviour was associated with the Pombo clique: “Our attitude is as lonely and as final as that of those men full of integrity [íntegros] in the unforgettable painting by (Antonio) Gisbert, *The execution of Torrijos and his companions (on the beaches at Malaga)*.”¹⁷

Together with the act of resistance represented in Gisbert’s painting, Rivera’s assertion that Gómez de la Serna “dubbed our group *Los Íntegros*, because of our wish to express ourselves with complete integrity”¹⁸ helps us to further clarify how notions of honesty, sincerity and virtue go with the notion of integrity that defines the association of the four artists participating in the 1915 exhibition. Moreover, Gómez de la Serna retained the word “íntegros” from a chapter of his earlier book *El Rastro*, where he wrote about the young visitors to the flea market, acclaiming the “personal reality, the last and the first conquest of man, [that] lives in these young people full of true frankness with themselves”.¹⁹ So, apart from a possible pun involving the ultra-conservative Spanish Catholic party known as Partido Integrista,²⁰ Gómez de la Serna’s idea of integrity has its lineage in the “concept of the artist as a ‘primitive’—anti-rational, spontaneous, and above all ‘authentic’” that, according to Patricia Leighton and Mark Antliff, “informed the entire Cubist movement throughout the pre-World War I period”, and took as its exemplars artists as disparate as Paul Cézanne and the Douanier Rousseau.²¹

A Cubist show with a primitivist bedrock

It is my contention that there is a rationale behind the 1915 Madrid exhibition grounded on its primitivist bedrock. Highlighting the “primitivist” underpinnings of *Los Pintores Íntegros* does not belittle its Cubist affiliation, but it definitely emphasises the need for “a reconfiguration of our understanding of Cubism within politicised concepts of the ‘primitive’”, highlighted by Patricia Leighton in her study on modernism and anarchism in avant-guerre Paris.²²

Indeed, the fact that Gómez de la Serna entitled the exhibition *Los Pintores Íntegros* did not alter its immediate reception as a Cubist show.²³ The newspaper *ABC* quickly clarified that “these young people of ‘arbitrary and abstruse inspiration’ presented nothing but ‘a new modality of Cubism’”.²⁴ A few days later, the *Nuevo Mundo* made a small note on the exhibition also suggesting that the public attention it had been raising was probably due to its “displaced” Cubist affiliation.²⁵ In the same vein, José Francés’s negative criticism suggests that “íntegros” was nothing but a euphemism for Cubism in his piece for *Mundo Gráfico* (Figure 3.2).²⁶ In *La Ilustración Española y Americana*, the art critic Manuel Abril, a modern art sympathiser and a



Figure 3.2 Fresno, La Srta. Gutierrez Cueto e el Sr. Ribera, pintores íntegros, que han celebrado una Exposición de obras cubistas en el salón “Arte Moderno”, *El Mundo Gráfico*, 17 March 1915.

founding member of the Pombo café *tertulia*, also addressed the need to explain Cubism to its audience directly responding to the exhibition.²⁷

Gómez de la Serna openly discussed Cubism in the catalogue's text, bringing to the fore the question of representation in painting. He argues that the expression "pintores íntegros" emphasises that the "Cubist formula evolved in these artists" so that, in Favela's synthesis, they could "find their own integrity and autonomous (arbitrary) identity which they also applied to the nature of their subjects and the way they depicted them".²⁸ But the idea that Cubism constituted the basis on which artists such as Diego Rivera and María Blanchard renewed their approach to representation and expanded the material possibilities of painting during the war years is key and quite accurately expressed in the catalogue.²⁹

In addition, Gómez de la Serna discusses the difference inscribed by Lluís Bagaría's work in this regard, highlighting the fact that his association with Rivera and Blanchard depends on his caricatures rather than his paintings. Indeed, as Patricia Leighton argues in her study about modernist caricature, the "expressive freedom, bold simplifications, violent deformations, and strikingly abstract compositions" we find in cartoons by modernist artists "suggest a stronger formal relationship to the development of modernist painting than has been supposed".³⁰ Precisely, Gómez de la Serna maintains that Bagaría "has been one of the forerunners of this new art", adding that he is, "perhaps, one of the primitives in this bold and revealing way", that "dispensing with all disturbing elements and all vile debris, (...) shows the electrical and essential line with an instant assurance that I have not seen in any other".³¹ In other words, Bagaría's integrity manifests itself in the elemental qualities of his drawing in terms that allowed the curator to champion him as a "primitive" of the new art, despite the difference between his work and Rivera's and Blanchard's sophisticated Cubist experiments.³²

Lluís Bagaría is not the only artist adding an extra primitivist layer to the Cubist exhibition. The fourth participant in this collective show is a sculptor about whom we know almost nothing: Agustín Mediavilla, known as "El Choco", who worked at the Madrilenian atelier of the Catalan sculptor Julio Antonio (1889–1919).³³ Despite the academic foundation of his work, Julio Antonio was a regular Pombo *tertulia* attendant and a personal friend of Rivera, Bagaría and Gómez de la Serna.³⁴ Conversely, Agustín Choco reportedly equalled his exhibition partners by virtue of the "daring and laconic eloquence" of his sculptures.³⁵ Gómez de la Serna furthermore introduced him as

the savage, the man without any prejudice and without ideals, the Manchego who works the fields, the rustic man who has only been to the Museum once, who does not know how to read or write, who has not learned from anyone, who allows himself to be naively deceived (...). He doesn't know how to explain things about himself, although he is prudent and eclectic enough to admit all explanations.³⁶

El Choco is at once the naïve, candid, innocent, folk, non-educated artist producing "human and touching" pieces carved in stone. The sculptures shown at the exhibition are mainly heads, with few statuettes and reliefs, identified with plain titles such as "the monster", "the warrior", "the sorcerer", "the mute", "Adam and Eve", etc. In front of these sculptures, Gómez de la Serna writes, "a dark revelation pierces our hearts like a well-aimed arrow thrown at us by the clairvoyant and mysterious savage".³⁷

The "primitivist" credentials that Agustín "El Choco" reportedly brought to the exhibition were also singled out by an author (known only as S.A.) in the pages of the *Heraldo de Madrid*—who referred to Mediavilla as an "artist of primitive ingenuities" (*artista de candideces primitivas*)³⁸—and by Manuel Abril's comparable characterisation of "El Choco" in the already mentioned article. The latter makes clear that Cubists "highly praise the art of children, of primitive man, and of those who do not have any formal education whatsoever" because they

believe that their productions are ingenuous and free of academic prejudices. Abril agrees that “El Choco” is a perfect example of such belief, since “by intuition, by impulse, he was able to shape a couple of heads full of character in their ingenuity that merit attention and study”.³⁹

We can only regret that Agustín Choco’s sculptures are apparently lost, but my point here is Gómez de la Serna’s rationale. It seems like the 1915 exhibition is not meant to stress Cubism’s Parisian roots, or the fundamental role of its main avant-garde protagonists (either Picasso and Braque, or the Salon Cubists) as had happened in Barcelona in 1912.⁴⁰ To substantiate my argument, it is important to recall that artists such as the Delaunays, Lipchitz and Marie Laurencin were living in Madrid at that time and that they could have easily been invited to join the exhibition.⁴¹ By contrast, following the catalogue layout, where “El Choco” pieces are numbered 1–10, it is inferable that the exhibition displayed a visual sequence connecting Cubism with the putatively universal languages of “primitive” arts. And despite the fact that Gómez de la Serna was clearly familiar with the association of the movement with the “African arts”—in *El Rastro* he writes about how he lost two “black idols”,⁴² an episode that he later recalls (with a twist) in the pages of *Ismos*—the interesting nuance here is his focus on local folk contributions. That is, rather than presenting Cubism as a completely foreign modern art movement, Gómez de la Serna’s rationale associates it with Spanish (in fact, Castilian) folk art. The exhibition showcases a curatorial narrative that adds rural La Mancha (the very home of Dom Quixote) to the international constellation of “primitivisms” affiliated with modern art, and Cubism in particular. By assimilating an ultra-peripheral reference (La Mancha), and Madrid itself, into the cosmopolitan transnational world of modern art, the exhibition *Los Pintores Íntegros* brings to the fore three complementary arguments: (1) that manifestations of the “primitive” in Spanish folk art should be taken into account when evaluating Cubism and its developments; (2) that this expression of first-hand “primitive” art is simultaneously local and global, and therefore both represents and transcends national or regional boundaries; and finally (3) that Madrid can no longer be considered a cultural backwater, since it is now being inscribed into the circuits of modern art (and literature) via Gómez de la Serna’s initiatives. Finally, I contend that the politicised concept of the “primitive” supporting the exhibition allowed Gómez de la Serna to go against the isolationist thesis on Spanish cultural identity endorsed by the Generation of 1898.⁴³ By the same token, the *Los Pintores Íntegros*’ rationale was meant to reinforce the Europeanising of Spain as it was put forward in the early 1910s by the philosopher José Ortega y Gasset.

Local and cosmopolitan

As the historian Renée M. Silverman has shown, José Ortega y Gasset’s *perspectivism* responded to the isolationist ideals prevalent in the Generation of 1898, including the subjectivist perspective of *casticismo* constructed by Miguel de Unamuno in the 1910s.⁴⁴ To re-orient Spain politically and geographically towards Europe, the philosopher rejects both inward-looking nationalism he associates with subjectivism, and the rationalist objectivism that would go against it, since it would not produce any particular perspective upon which a positive conceptualisation of national identity could be built. Ortega finds that a balance between these two attitudes is needed “for reconciling self and other, both within and among nations” via an intersubjective space of encounter, of exchangeable reciprocal perspectives.⁴⁵

Associating Ortega’s thought and efforts with the interchangeable open spaces of *Ultraist* poetry, Renée Silverman furthermore writes:

The discursive strategies formulated by Ortega and [Guillermo] de Torre re-map Spain’s borders according to a revised vision of nationhood which recognises the particular conditions of post-World War I and post-imperial Europe. It is also (...) the starting point of

a much needed exploration of the relationship of subjectivity to the imagined spaces of the nation, for this same link should also be examined in terms of the intersubjective. The Europeanising geography of Ortega's *Perspectivism* and de Torre's *Ultraísmo* generates the productive exchange of subject positions and identities across borders because each distinct viewpoint is at once firmly rooted in the soil of cultural identity, yet permitted to shift with the terrain of an adjustable perception.⁴⁶

Ortega y Gasset's first journalistic project, the *España* magazine (published from January 1915 onwards), is a good example of that kind of intersubjective space for, as discussed by Ascunce Arenas, the contents of *España* implied that the future of the country depended both on its regions working together and the Europeanisation of Spain.⁴⁷ The will to renew the lost faith in Spain is stated on the cover of the first issue, and to do so, the weekly publication tackled a vast array of cultural topics, combining them with a liberal political focus. Different perspectives converged in its discussions of "national life", including Spain's colonial war in Morocco and the "Catalan problem", while it endorsed the general stance of supporting the Allies in the ongoing war. Bagaría had a major role in the publication, being "crucial in communicating an anti-German sentiment through his caricatures".⁴⁸ *España* also reinforced the construction of cultural identity by publishing a regular section documenting different types and customs of Spanish people in the twentieth century—"Los españoles pintados por sí mismos"—that updated the *costumbrista* tradition.⁴⁹

Renée Silverman also argues that "the turn towards the perceptual in the aesthetics of the first Spanish avant-garde" doubles the quest for the intersubjective space and international relations that was being theorised by Ortega y Gasset from the 1910s onward.⁵⁰ Indeed, the paradigm of those intersubjective and international relations is the optical synthesis of different perspectives that are taken to be the very basis of Cubism by, for instance, Manuel Abril. As pointed out earlier, the art critic addressed the need to explain Cubism to the *Los Pintores Íntegros*' audience, and while so doing he keenly pointed out:

When a mountain is contemplated from whichever angle—the Cubists come to say—we lost the thousands of visions of that mountain made possible by a change of viewpoint (...). (...) Copying it from any of these observing points, ignoring the others, is equivalent to wasting ninety-nine percent of the eloquent manifestations that each thing contains.

Hence the first Cubist principle: one must copy the object by moving around it in order to discover all its aspects and to know it in its entirety, not in the very partial and absurd façade which it presents to an immobile spectator.⁵¹

Some points of convergence connecting Ortega y Gasset's philosophy, Gómez de la Serna's thought and Cubism's modes of perception and representation have been recently explored by Ricardo Fernández Romero, who argues that this is evidence of shared phenomenological orientation that first emerged in the early 1910s.⁵² However, I would argue that an additional and perhaps more historically grounded explanation for this convergence can be found in the primitivist rationale informing the 1915 show and the inversion of the isolationist thesis on Spanish cultural identity it initiated, through its display of the ultra-localised "primitive" art pieces by "El Choco" alongside Rivera's and Blanchard's Cubist paintings.

The balance between the local and the cosmopolitan we find there points to the kind of intersubjective space of encounter that Ortega y Gasset would identify with the Europeanising of Spain. While inscribing Madrid in the geography of the international avant-garde, Gómez de la Serna is also stressing the specificity of folk references and local contributions in an attitude frequently read as a "renovated costumbrismo".⁵³ Further, the "primitivist" bedrock of the exhibition adds a political dimension to this cultural project. Retrieving a perspective that puts

forward “primitivism” as essential for understanding what’s at stake in modern art, Gómez de la Serna manages to bridge the gap between local references and folk art, and international avant-garde contexts without jeopardising Cubism’s revolutionary and cosmopolitan dimensions.

Both María Blanchard’s and Diego Rivera’s paintings exhibited in 1915 are suffused with local references. Two photographs published in the press of the day, together with the reproductions of the displayed paintings featured in Manuel Abril’s article, help us to accurately identify at least two paintings by Blanchard and several others by Rivera.⁵⁴ Corresponding to numbers 25 and 28 in the catalogue we find “Figure in motion” (*figura en movimiento*) and “Madrid” among Blanchard’s selection. The former most probably designates one of the versions of her well-known *Woman with a fan*,⁵⁵ in which the fragmented volumes and space seem to reproduce the movements of the woman dressed in a vivid red gown. As Magidin and Vega have rightly demonstrated, the canvas entitled “Madrid” must correspond to the triptych appearing on the left side of the two existing photographs. Its analysis requires some archaeology, since the central part of the canvas representing a feminine nude later appears in an autonomous form, isolated from the two side urban landscapes that originally completed the composition and are now lost.⁵⁶ Blanchard’s painting was considered “disgusting” (*repugnante*) by the art critic José Francés in 1915.⁵⁷ Thirty years later this same work was nicknamed “The Venus of Madrid” by Gómez de la Serna, who declared the painting to be remarkable,

[...] a find because she [Blanchard] had superimposed a naked woman—in a teratological but attractive nude—on the façade of the most characteristic Madrid rococo house, because the architect had coupled large mirror balls, purple, silver, blue, gold, among the match of bricks, the original house shining with joyful melancholy under the sun of the days under the moon of the nights.⁵⁸

The city of Madrid was also the *leitmotiv* of one of the canvases probably presented by Rivera at the exhibition. Although paintings do not have recognisable titles in the catalogue, it is commonly accepted that his 1915 *Plaza de Toros* was included in the show. Favela defines it as an “epic Cubist landscape” that “dramatically combines exhilaratingly tilted simultaneous views of the height and depth of the famous bullring” recently built on the outskirts of the city where Rivera lived.⁵⁹

Towards the Mexicanisation of Cubism

Perhaps even more interesting from the perspective of Rivera’s fusion of local and popular references with his high cosmopolitan Cubist compositions is *Spanish Still Life* (also known as *Still Life with Demijohn*) (Figure 3.3) clearly discernible in the two aforementioned photographs. The painting testifies to Rivera’s continuing exploration of textural elements, as evidenced by the variety of tactile effects found in the work (widely used in his earlier Majorcan landscapes) and his combination of such elements with the fragmentation and intersection of planes. Rivera superimposed different planes of representation: for instance the structure and the top of the table with its *trompe l’oeil* wood grain covering overlaps with the chequerboard tile floor. A large earthenware jug rests on the table projecting a blue-green shadow. Around it, we find what appears to be a sugar bowl, plus a bottle and other objects all shown from different viewpoints with a multiplicity of cast shadows. On the left, the painter included a *molinillo*, a small wooden whisk used to make the traditional chocolate drink of Mexican origin, which was subsequently adopted in Spain as a national beverage as a result of colonisation.⁶⁰

The kind of ambivalence introduced by the complete absorption into Spanish popular culture of the Mexican *molinillo* for making chocolate, will be key in reinforcing the turn towards



Figure 3.3 Diego Rivera, *Nature Morte Espagnole*, 1915. Oil on canvas, 110.5 × 90.5 cm. Gift of Katherine Graham, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. © 2023 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, México, D. F./ARS, New York/SPA, Lisboa.



Figure 3.4 Diego Rivera, *El Arquitecto*, 1915–1916, oil on canvas, 144 × 113.5 cm. Acervo Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil, Mexico City/INBAL/Secretaría de Cultura. Reproducción autorizada por el Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura, 2023. © 2023 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, México, D. F./ARS, New York/SPA, Lisboa.

an “Anáhuac Cubism”, a formulation put forward on the account of the New York exhibition curated by the Mexican caricaturist Marius de Zayas (1880–1961) a year later, in October 1916.⁶¹ Indeed, Laura Moure Cecchini has shown that Rivera’s *Spanish Still Life* was recast in this exhibition through de Zayas’ pairing of his work with Aztec objects, in his quest to develop a new primitivist paradigm.⁶²

The Mexicanisation of Cubism by Rivera is also associated with another painting shown at *Los Pintores Íntegros*—i.e. *The Architect*, also known as the portrait of Jesús T. Acevedo (1882–1918), a childhood friend, architect and art critic, exiled in Madrid for his revolutionary activities in Mexico in 1914 (Figure 3.4). As in Gómez de la Serna’s portrait, Rivera painted Acevedo seated at a desk, depicting him both frontally and in profile, amidst a combination of geometric planes. The superimposed planes forming the head are more complex in Acevedo’s portrait; the central triangular face surface brightly coloured in orange, yellow and brown. Yet, the startling effect of dissimilar eyes is repeated. Only this time, we find a “half-moon eye replacing the burning illuminating sun of Ramón [Gómez de la Serna]’s signic eye”.⁶³ The other eye and moustache, as well as the configuration of the forehead, are more naturalistically rendered. In addition to the chequerboard tile floor (also present in the *Spanish Still Life*) and the many textures produced by “modulated impastoed brush techniques” highlighted by Favela,⁶⁴ the figure’s red apparel right at the centre of the composition and its combination with a green shadowy tone on one side and a more airy white reflection on the other deserves our attention.

For Sylvia Navarrete, the most striking attribute of this portrait is precisely Rivera’s palette of “luminous expression and intensity”, where she signals the “reappearance of green, red and white (the colours of the Mexican flag), along with black, brown, and several shades of blue—an indication of the greater chromatic range in many of Rivera’s paintings that year”.⁶⁵

The idea that *The Architect* adds a step towards Rivera’s Mexicanisation of Cubism is reinforced not only by Acevedo’s nationality and the predominant colours constructing the portrayed figure but also by the well-known fact that from 1915 onward, the painter would systematically include references of Mexican folk and indigenous art in his Cubist compositions, constructing a persona that emphasises his Mexican identity. Two other 1915 paintings are fundamental to this process: the *Portrait of Martín Luis Guzmán*, and the *Zapatista landscape*. As Patricia Leighton has indicated, the conspicuous coloured Mexican serape in both paintings is “no mere nationalistic reference”, for it “evokes Mexican folk culture, both a symbol of the peasant uprising and a primitivist manoeuvre on Rivera’s part, laying claim to his own creative authenticity and *mexicanidad*”.⁶⁶

We may point out with Laura Moure Cecchini that “Rivera retrospectively conceived his appropriation of Mexican folklore as a way of producing an art that would be authentic as well as universal, and make him stand out among the other modernists”.⁶⁷ This is perhaps why the dualism of Gómez de la Serna’s portrait and the hybridisation introduced by *The Spanish Still Life*’s *molinillo* is soon to be replaced by the centred compositions and unambiguous national iconography of his two key “Anáhuac Cubism” canvases: *Portrait of Martín Luis Guzmán* and the *Zapatista landscape*. Indeed, the level of complexity brought about by these two Rivera’s works of 1915 incorporates new challenges, clearly evidenced in their different use of primitivism, associated with different, perhaps even contradictory, cultural and identitarian politics. Eventually, what must be also pointed out in Rivera’s Mexicanisation of Cubism, is the fact that it completely disrupted the established (hierarchical) order of the cultural exchanges between European countries and their former transatlantic possessions. For Rivera it was not only a matter of primitivising colonial references but also of bringing a core European avant-garde to the heart of anti-colonial resistance and revolutionary Mexican culture of that time. Be as it may, complex forms of Cubist primitivism were here at play, but the cultural politics informing that paradigm were in constant flux, as the interrelation of avant-gardism to changing conceptions of national and transnational identity evolved into a global phenomenon.

Notes

- 1 Ramón Gómez de la Serna is a major protagonist in Spanish literary avant-garde and his close connection to the European and Transatlantic artistic and literary cosmopolitan milieus in the 1910s and 1920s is well known. An overview of Gómez de la Serna's contributions can be found in the catalogue *Los ismos de Ramón Gómez de la Serna y un apéndice circense*. Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2002. See also Nigel Dennis (ed.), *Studies on Ramón Gómez de la Serna*. Ottawa: Dovehouse Editions, 1988.
- 2 Patricia Leighton, *The Liberation of Painting: Modernism and Anarchism in Avant-Guerre Paris*. Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago, 2013 (particularly Chapter 2).
- 3 Diego Rivera, *My Art, My Life: An Autobiography* (with Gladys March). New York: The Citadel Press, 1960, 64.
- 4 Quotations are taken from Rivera, op.cit., 64–66.
- 5 In Madrid, Rivera encounters several Mexican friends, arriving from Mexico, or Paris, including Jesús T. Acevedo and Martín Luis Guzmán. Rivera also paints the portrait of the latter, “a colonel under the Mexican Revolutionary forces of Pancho Villa” in 1915. Guzmán's portrait stands out as one of Rivera's first paintings with Mexican motifs; see Ramón Favela, *Diego Rivera: The Cubist Years*. Phoenix: Phoenix Art Museum, 1984, 90, 99.
- 6 Rivera, op.cit., 65.
- 7 *El Rastro* is a miscellaneous book about Madrid's flea market; see Ramón Gómez de la Serna, *El Rastro*. Valencia: Editorial Prometeo, 1914. Rivera painted a small canvas paying homage to Gómez de la Serna's *El Rastro*. As Ramón Favela puts it: “Gómez de la Serna was an avid frequenter of Madrid's famous flea market, *El Rastro* which he described with proto-Surrealist lucid fantasy in one of his earliest published books by the same name. *El Rastro* was also the title and subject of a small painting Rivera executed in Madrid which incorporates some passages from Ramón's book in its iconography.”; Favela, op.cit., 96.
- 8 Published in Madrid by Biblioteca Nueva. Also, in 1929 and 1930, Gómez de la Serna publishes several essays in the Madrilenian *Revista Occidente* that will soon appear as chapters in the *Ismos* volume; see, for instance “Completa y verídica historia de Picasso y el Cubismo” (*Revista Occidente*. Ns.73 and 74, July and August 1929). As Ioana Zlotescu asserts, the “writing dates of the various chapters are often uncertain. The author collects scattered fragments of articles or texts slightly changed, cut, lengthened, rewritten.” (“Las fechas de escritura de los distintos capítulos son a menudo inciertas. El autor recoge, de acá y de allá, fragmentos de artículos o textos ligeramente cambiados, recortados, alargados, reescritos.”); see Ioana Zlotescu, “Preámbulo”, *Ramón Gómez de la Serna. Obras Completas XVI: Ensayos, Retratos y Biografías*. Barcelona: Círculo de Lectores, Galaxia Gutenberg, 2005, 19.
- 9 A general discussion of the *Ismos* book can be found in the 2002 MNCARS catalogue *Los ismos de Ramón Gómez de la Serna*.
- 10 He singles out the portrait as “rotative” and states: “Everything is correct in this portrait, even the position of the hand that has the pipe when smoking in its three moments: first, that of bringing the pipe to the mouth; second, that of having it in the mouth, and third, that of resting the pipe in the bowl of the hands (...)”; Ramón Gómez de la Serna, *Ismos*. Madrid: Ediciones Guadamara, 1975 [1931], 334, 341.
- 11 Idem, 338.
- 12 Ibidem, 341.
- 13 Rivera, op.cit., 64.
- 14 In 1915, Blanchard was still known by her maiden name: Maria Gutierrez; Ramón Gómez de la Serna, *Los Pintores Íntegros: catalogo-invitación*. Madrid: s.n., 1915 (exhibition catalogue).
- 15 Jaime Brihuega, *Las vanguardias artísticas en España, 1909–1936*. Madrid: Istmo, 1981, 183. Brihuega's view is often repeated by subsequent art historians.
- 16 Alberto Nulman Magidin and Ana Luisa Oca Vega, “Pero Madrid no quiso recibir la comunión de la locura: Los Pintores Íntegros y los inicios de la vanguardia en Hispanoamérica”, *De la modernidad ilustrada a la ilustración modernista: homenaje a Fausto Ramírez* (Jaime Cuadriello, María José Esparza Liberal, and Angélica Velázquez Guadarrama, eds.). México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2021, 373–426. Magidin and Vega state that “(...) in March 1915 the writer's main project was the construction of a nosotros: the Pombo tertulia (...). (...) One doesn't have to go too far to find correspondences between the Exposición de los Pintores Íntegros and the artists and

- writers that attended the café on Carretas street (...) every Saturday night” (378). Also, for Magidin and Vega, the term “íntegro” helped Gómez de la Serna to “associate the group of exhibitors to the same code of values that animated his tertulia”, but that doesn’t mean that these artists represented the tertulia.
- 17 Apud Magidin and Vega, *idem*, 379. Any doubt about the importance of the historical reference in Gisbert’s painting as a paradigm of integrity is washed off by its image put right at the center of the *Proclamation*.
 - 18 Rivera, *op.cit.*, 64.
 - 19 Gómez de la Serna, *El Rastro*, 192 (“La realidad personal, la última y la primera conquista del hombre, vive en estos jóvenes llenos de verdadera franqueza consigo mismos”).
 - 20 See, for instance, Ignacio Fernández Sarasola, *Los partidos políticos en el pensamiento español*. Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2009, 152.
 - 21 Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, *Cubism and Culture*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2001, 61. The art historians furthermore explain: “Modernist primitivism as an act of self-authentication — whether modelled on the art of children, the folk, or ‘savages’ — locates the source of creativity within the artist, in a romantic merger with the elemental that serves to liberate the self. The idea of the unique perspective of the individual in turn justifies the sorts of ‘naïve’ distortions and extreme simplifications that emulate ‘primitive’ art and intimately connect with the first steps towards what would become Cubism. In this light, the appeal of the work of Henri ‘Le Douanier’ Rousseau and Paul Cézanne in this same period is no contradiction” (49).
 - 22 Leighton, *The Liberation of Painting*, 85.
 - 23 See for instance Andrew A. Anderson, *La recepción de las vanguardas extranjeras en España: Cubismo, Futurismo, Dada*. Sevilla: Editorial Renacimiento, 2018, 36 e ss.
 - 24 “Los Pintores Íntegros”, *ABC*, 7 March 1915; quoted by Magidin and Vega, *op.cit.*, 374.
 - 25 “lo dislocado del género cubista que allí se exhibe”; see “Varias notas de actualidad”. *Nuevo Mundo*, 13 March 1915, 18.
 - 26 “Si yo creyera que la señorita Gutiérrez Cuelo y el señor Ribera, los dos pintores más caracterizadamente “íntegros” (antes cubistas) de esta Exposición se habían refugiado en ese modo de manchar lienzos más ó menos geométricamente, porque no sabían hacer otra cosa ó porque eso les iba á producir el dinero que aqui no le produce la pintura á nuestros grandes artistas contemporáneos, hubiese guardado el más absoluto de los silencios.”; José Francés, “Los pintores ‘íntegros’”, *Mundo Gráfico*, 17 March 1915, 6.
 - 27 Manuel Abril, “El Cubismo”. *La Ilustración Española y Americana*, 8 March 1915, 146–147.
 - 28 Favela, *op.cit.*, 92.
 - 29 See Gómez de la Serna, *Los Pintores Íntegros*, 3–4. I therefore disagree with Magidin and Vega’s argument on how the exhibition was not meant to be understood as a cubist show.
 - 30 Leighton, *The Liberation of Painting*, 31. The author shows that not only the reading of caricature as primitivist prevails, but also Cubist works are frequently read as crude and “elemental” in a manner that imitated the techniques of the caricaturist.
 - 31 “Bagaría es, por la caricatura más que por la pintura, el hermano carnal de Rivera y de María Gutiérrez, aunque en la pintura sea integro de otro modo, en una combinación distinta, pero viéndose el ojo central y distribuidor en sus lienzos. Bagaría ha sido uno de los precursores de este arte nuevo. Es, quizá, uno de los primitivos de esta manera audaz y reveladora. La cifra, el logaritmo de cada carácter le ha preocupado siempre, y, prescindiendo de todo elemento perturbador y de todo ripio vil, con un valor inusitado y gallardo, muestra la línea eléctrica y esencial con una expedita seguridad que no he visto en ningún otro.”; Gómez de la Serna, *Los Pintores Íntegros*, 6.
 - 32 Although recently arrived from Barcelona, by 1915 Lluís Bagaría was quite well known in Madrid for his collaboration, as a caricaturist and illustrator, in key journals, such as the *España* magazine edited by José Ortega y Gasset, in which pages his drawings famously took a political position expressing a clear anti-German sentiment. Bagaría was also a regular attendant of the Pombo tertulia. In August 1915 in *España* a famous caricature of the writer Azorín, whose primitivism is proclaimed by Ortega y Gasset in 1916, as discussed by Alejandro Mejías-López in this book (Chapter 1). On Bagaría see Aranzázu Asuncion Arenas, *Barcelona and Madrid: Social Networks of the Avant-Garde*. Lanham, MD: Bucknell University Press, 2012, 141. See also Manuel Menéndez Alzamora, “Trazos políticos: sobre los usos políticos de la palabra escrita y el retrato dibujado en el contexto del 98”, *Los Retratos de Azorín. VII Coloquio Internacional* (Pascal Peyraga, ed.). Pau: Instituto Alicante de Cultura Juan Gil-Albert, 2007, 155–170.

- 33 Gómez de la Serna writes about Júlio António as early as 1910 in the pages of the *Europa* magazine (n. 7, 104–105); see Ricardo Fernández Romero, “Meditaciones de Ramón: La práctica y las ideas estéticas de Ramón Gómez de la Serna y José Ortega y Gasset en paralelo (1910–14)”, *Hispanic Research Journal*, 20, 6, 2019, footnote 4. The non-signed on-line article “Julio Antonio. Escultor” published by *MAMT QR*, publishes a photograph of Julio Antonio’s atelier showing Agustín Mediavilla among other collaborators, <https://www.dipta.cat/mamtqr/en/content/julio-antonio-escultor>; downloaded in 30 May 2022.
- 34 Magidin and Vega, op.cit., 393–394.
- 35 Gómez de la Serna, *Los Pintores Íntegros*, 7.
- 36 “Agustín ‘el choco’, como le llamamos en confianza sus íntimos, es coincidiendo en atrevimiento y lacónica elocuencia con sus compañeros de exposición, el salvaje, el hombre sin prejuicio ninguno y sin ideal, el manchego que labora el campo, el hombre rústico que sólo ha estado una vez en el Museo, que no sabe leer ni escribir, que no ha aprendido de nadie, que se deja engañar ingenuamente y un día cree que un gigante que quiere ver sus cosas, al no poder entrar en el cuarto en que trabaja, asomara un ojo tremendo por la ventana; otro día cree de verdad que sus cosas valen un millón, y espera al multimillonario que le anuncian, que ha anunciado su llegada desde Chicago. El no sabe explicar sus cosas, aunque es lo bastante prudente y ecléctico para admitir todas las explicaciones. Y aun siendo así, nada más lleno de sonrisas ingenuas y relampagueantes, nada más ágil e intencionado, nada que sea más de piedra, por su candidez valiente, ni nada más humano y conmovedor que todo esto del ‘choco’. Ante estas esculturas, una revelación obscura traspasa nuestro corazón como una flecha certera que nos arroja el salvaje clarividente y misterioso.”; idem.
- 37 Ibidem.
- 38 S.A., “Arte y artistas: Salon Kuhn”. *Heraldo de Madrid* (night edition), 8 March 1915, 1.
- 39 Abril, op.cit., 146–147.
- 40 See Mercè Vidal, 1912: *L’Exposició d’Art Cubista de les Galeries Dalmau*. Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 1996.
- 41 Even if the Delaunays were not yet as familiar with Gómez de la Serna as they would be in the 1920s, they were reachable via, for instance, Diego Rivera, whom the Delaunays entertained in Madrid as shown by the letter of excuse addressed to Robert Delaunay by Rivera in 12 May 1915 saying: “Je vous demande mil fois pardon d’avoir manqué à notre rendez-vous d’aujourd’hui, il m’était entièrement impossible d’être à votre atelier à l’heure — à cause de me trouver ce matin en train d’arranger une affaire très urgent qui m’a pris trop de temps. Si notre départ pour Paris ne se précipite pas je viendrai, si vous le permettez, après demain mercredi entre 11 heures et midi.”; BNF — *Fonds Sonia et Robert Delaunay. III Lettres et manuscrits reçus par Robert et Sonia Delaunay*, f. 168 (NAF 25654).
- 42 “two black idols that were no longer there when I returned that afternoon!... What a mark they left on me, what figuration, what emptiness, what a longing shadow!... They were grotesque, but they revealed a concept of man and of the woman less confused than that of the other sculptures, more alive, more sensual, more approachable, more anarchic...”; Gómez de la Serna, *El Rastro*, 216.
- 43 In Renée Silverman’s words, the Generation of 1898 responds to “Spain’s *fin de siècle* crisis — its psychic transition from the imperial to the post-colonial following the loss of Cuba to the United States in 1898. (...) As early as 1913, principal philosopher of the (...) inward-looking Generation of 1898 Miguel de Unamuno launched his famous diatribe against Europeanization. (...) Effectively closing all borders against the importation of all influences not indigenous to Spanish soil, the cordon separating Spain from Europe becomes the limit of Unamuno’s map. The roots of subjectivity—Spanish cultural identity—are thus circumscribed by national boundaries”; Renée Silverman, “A Europeanizing geography. The First Spanish Avant-Garde’s Re-Mapping of Castile (1914–1925)”, *The Invention of Politics in the European Avant-Garde (1906–1940)* (Sascha Bru and Gunther Martens, eds.). Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006, 218.
- 44 “In ‘Social Pedagogy as Political Programme’ (1910), one of Ortega’s earliest texts on the subject of national identity, he proclaims Spain’s non-existence as a nation; his hyperbole effectively exposes Unamuno’s metaphysical Castile as a phantasm of the political imagination.”; Silverman, op.cit., 221.
- 45 Idem, 219.
- 46 Ibidem, 219–220.
- 47 Arenas, op.cit., 331–332.
- 48 Idem, 141.
- 49 See María Ascensión Fernández Pozuelo, *Ramón Gómez de la Serna y el costumbrismo*. Zaragoza: Universidad de Zaragoza, 2016, 25–26.

- 50 “The viewing ‘I’/eye calibrated by abstraction then makes ‘an effort similar to that which this ocular adjustment makes unavoidable in order to contemplate life’, by which Ortega refers to the establishment of a certain comfort level with the defamiliarization of perception. The perfect observer comes to perceive the fragmented spaces of abstract art, such as in the Cubist still-lives of Picasso and Braque, with the same ease as when encountering a mimetically represented object.”; Silverman, op.cit., 221–222.
- 51 “Cuando se contempla una montaña desde un punto cualquiera — vienen á decir los cubistas — se pierden las mil y una visiones que puedan tenerse de esa montaña si se cambia de punto de vista (...). (...) Copiarla, pues, desde cualquiera de estos puntos observadores, desdeñando los otros, equivale a desperdiciar el noventa y nueve por ciento de las manifestaciones elocuentes que cada cosa encierra.
- De aquí el primer principio cubista: se debe copiar moviéndose en torno del objeto para descubrir todos sus aspectos y conocerlo en su integridad, no en la parcialísima y absurda fachada, que presente á un espectador inmóvil.”; Abril, op.cit., 146.
- 52 Following Ana Martínez Collado’s studies, Fernández Romero looked at the “barely studied early literary production of Gómez de la Serna as the source of a fragmentary yet original philosophical and aesthetic thinking developed in synchrony not only with the first theoretical works of the French cubist painters, in 1910–1911, but also with the phenomenological turn in the philosophy and aesthetics of Ortega himself.”; Romero, op.cit., 583.
- 53 See Pozuelo, op.cit.
- 54 See *Nuevo Mundo*, 13 March 1915; S.A., op.cit.; Abril, op.cit.
- 55 There are two versions of this painting. One belongs to the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, and the other to a private collection. They are both identified as having been painted in 1916, but at least one must be antedated from 1915 since it is reproduced in Manuel Abril’s article “El Cubismo”, op.cit., 146. See also Magidin and Vega, op.cit., 403–404.
- 56 Magidin and Vega, op.cit., 400–402.
- 57 Francés, op.cit., 6.
- 58 Apud Magidin and Vega, op.cit., 402.
- 59 Favela, op.cit., 92.
- 60 Antonio Flores’ “Cuadros sociales” published in Barcelona in 1893 add a “Tea or chocolate” debate, presenting chocolate as a traditional drink that represents Spanish culture against English preference for tea. See Pozuelo, op.cit., 21.
- 61 “By 1915, Rivera had developed what Mexican historian Justino Fernández called “El Cubismo de Anáhuac,” a form of cubism that emphasized Rivera’s national origin by including fake collages of Mexican fabrics and crafts associated with *arte popular*”; Laura Moure Cecchini, “Aztec Cubists between Paris and New York: Diego Rivera, Marius de Zayas, and the Reception of Mexican Antiquities in the 1910s”. *Modernism/modernity*, 28, 2, April 2021, 273.
- 62 Idem.
- 63 Favela, op.cit., 98.
- 64 Idem.
- 65 Sylvia Navarrete, “Diego Rivera, cubist: chronicle of an interlude”, *Diego Rivera: The Cubist Portraits 1913–1917* (Sylvia Navarrete, Serge Fauchereau, Anna Indych-López, and Joanne Klaar Walker, eds.). Dallas, TX: Meadows Museum, SMU, Phillipe Wilson Publishers, 2009, 66.
- 66 Patricia Leighton, “Embattled Cubism: Picasso, Rivera and World War I”, *Picasso and Rivera: Conversations across time* (Michael Govan and Diana Magaloni, eds.). Los Angeles, CA: LACMA, Del Monico Books/Prestel, 2016, 143.
- 67 Cecchini, op.cit., 277.

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