

ARTICLE

## Modern Art, National Culture, and Hispanophilia in *Revista de Avance*

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### Abstract

This article explores how the editors and contributors of *Revista de Avance* formulated an idiosyncratic version of visual modern art and how that discernment shaped their idea of a nationalist and regional culture. Their artistic disquisitions were influenced by complicated political agendas and funding. After the collapse of the Cuban economy in the early 1920s, the magazine's editors, who held socialist and anti-American imperialist beliefs, looked to Spain as a cultural model. In its pages, the magazine privileged Spanish civilization and conflated it with both European modernist culture and Cuban art and literature. At the same time, *Revista de Avance* voiced the ideas of the Institución Hispano-Cubana de Cultura, led by Fernando Ortiz.

**Keywords:** Cuban modern art; Hispanism; hispanophilia; Fernando Ortiz; Institución Hispano-Cubana de Cultura; pan-Latinism

### Resumen

Este ensayo analiza cómo los editores y colaboradores de la *Revista de Avance* formularon una versión singular del arte moderno, y cómo sus reflexiones contribuyeron a conceptualizar una cultura nacional y regional. Sus disquisiciones artísticas estuvieron influidas por agendas políticas problemáticas, así como por financiamientos cuestionables. Tras el colapso de la economía cubana a inicios de la década del 20, los editores de la revista, quienes profesaban ideas socialistas y anti-imperialistas, buscaron en España su modelo cultural. De este modo, los textos de la *Revista de Avance* fusionaron la civilización española con la cultura modernista europea y con la literatura y el arte cubanos. Al mismo tiempo, la publicación promovió las ideas de la Institución Hispano-Cubana de Cultura, liderada por Fernando Ortiz.

**Palabras clave:** arte moderno cubano; hispanismo; hispanofilia; Fernando Ortíz; Institución Hispano-Cubana de Cultura; panlatinismo

The first two decades of the twentieth century dampened the enthusiasm that Latin Americans felt after attaining independence from Spain. In 1928, the Peruvian thinker and journalist José Carlos Mariátegui (1928, 2) wrote in his journal *Amauta* (1926–1930) that it had become clear that Latin American countries had arrived late to the race of capitalist competition. They were destined to function as mere colonies in a new world order ruled by the power of monopolies.

This reality was nowhere more evident than in Cuba. After winning the war against Spain in 1898 with the aid of the United States, most Cubans did not anticipate the high cost that they would be forced to pay in return. Once the war ended, the United States occupied the island for seven years. In 1909, President Theodore Roosevelt ordered the final withdrawal of US military troops only after confining the country in the straitjacket of the Cuban-American Treaty of Relations (1903), whose stipulations, including the right to lease land surrounding Guantánamo Bay, inaugurated an era of economic and political dependence on its powerful neighbor. Cuban leaders, many of whom had fought in the Wars of Independence, were complicit in this new form of subjugation, now known as neocolonialism. After the establishment of the Republic in 1902, they sold vast swaths of land to American companies, increasing their personal wealth in the process. By 1920, after six years of a sugar bonanza due to World War I, Cuba's financial system collapsed, triggering an economic crisis that continued until the late 1930s. In those years, many Cubans felt that the culture was antiquated, the political establishment corrupt, and national sovereignty held captive.

In this dire environment, pervaded by disillusionment and deep resentment toward US interference, in 1927 a group of young upper- and middle-class intellectuals launched the magazine *Revista de Avance*.<sup>1</sup> Having led the revolts of the early 1920s against the corruption of Alfredo Zayas's government (1921–1925), they shared a strong anti-US imperialist sentiment and leftist views, a high regard for the works of the mythic Cuban writer José Martí, an aspiration to forge a nationalist culture, and a deep desire to catch up with the European avant-garde movements, thus the magazine's name, meaning “forward.”

In the historiography of Latin American modernism, *Revista de Avance* is repeatedly credited with providing a critical, theoretical, and internationalist platform for the *vanguardia* movement (Martínez 1994, 6). Francine Masiello (1993) argued that the magazine offered a new vision for Latin American intellectuals as leaders of political activity and guides to alternative aesthetics. This dual role enabled them to formulate a strategy of opposition to neocolonialism. Celina Manzoni (2001) analyzed how *Revista de Avance* reflected the political and historical specificities of the Caribbean milieu while joining the continental debates around language, Americanism, indigenism, popular culture, and *negritismo*. She concluded that, with the tension between nationalism and the avant-garde in literary works, the magazine fostered the autonomy of Latin American literature vis-à-vis Spanish, European, and American literature. In a later text, Manzoni examined *Revista de Avance*'s issue on Mariátegui (published on June 15, 1930) to claim how the Cuban writers acknowledged the novelty and power of the Peruvian writer's essayistic style, deeming it one of the most daring gestures of the avant-garde in Latin America. Manuel Ramírez Chicharro (2014) pointed out that by emphasizing Cuba's ethnic diversity, specifically Afro-Cuban influence in visual arts, literature, and music, *Revista de Avance* succeeded in formulating a national identity.

The magazine's promotion of modernist visual trends has also interested scholars. Ingrid Robyn (2016) argued that by reproducing images of local and international avant-garde in its pages, *Revista de Avance* created a physical and imaginary space for the presence of an international avant-garde at the margins of the modern world. She rightly clarifies that the magazine favored the “return to order”—a European interwar movement that encouraged the adoption of classical elements—over more radical and experimental practices. The desire to invent an international avant-garde actualized less than two decades later in 1942, when some of the former collaborators of the magazine—Alejo Carpentier, Juan Marinello, and Jorge Mañach—organized two exhibitions at the Lyceum

<sup>1</sup> The magazine began on March 15, 1927, and ended on September 15, 1930, producing fifty issues. First a bimonthly publication, it was released monthly after January 1928.

of Havana. One showcased Picasso's works, his first presence in Latin America, and the other European painters, including Joan Miró and Henri Toulouse-Lautrec. For Robyn, *Revista de Avance* paved the way for the 1942 exhibitions and for the groundbreaking Cuban show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York two years later.

Harper Montgomery expanded Masiello's earlier argument that the editors of both *Revista de Avance* and *Amauta* valued the importance of modernist art for anticolonial purposes. Given the peripatetic life of the Latin American intelligentsia, sometimes due to intellectual curiosity, at other times to forced exile, the Cubans and Peruvians also realized that by borrowing modernist movements, Latin American artists could express their international experiences, which Montgomery (2017, 10–11) calls a "mobile reality." Lori Cole (2018, 11) similarly contends that magazines like *Revista de Avance* served as transatlantic channels to exchange text and ideas within the conventions of the international avant-garde.

This article pursues two main ideas. First, it aims to deepen and widen Robyn's analysis of how the editors and contributors of *Revista de Avance* understood modern visual art and how that discernment shaped their vision of a nationalist and regional culture. Contrary to the established narrative that the magazine championed international trends without reservation, it is more accurate to say that its editors judged the European avant-garde harshly and perceived it with great suspicion. That "dehumanized" art, as the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset had defined it because of its absence of human forms, suffered from a spiritual void, argued the Cubans. To fill that void, they combined Mariátegui's Marxist ideas on art with the spiritualism contained in "Ariel," the 1900 essay by the Uruguayan José Enrique Rodó that had become very influential among the Latin American intelligentsia.<sup>2</sup>

However, the Havana-based group misunderstood the processes involved in creating European avant-garde works, from cubism to surrealism. They viewed them as a stock of formal recipes that could be used at will as long as the content was local, or, as they called it, "Latin American." They believed that the mere introduction of motifs or ideas linked to native cultures into this "ready-to-wear" collection would prevent artists from servile imitation of Europe. At the same time, and contradictorily, *Revista de Avance's* pages introduced two Europeans, Picasso and the Belgian Pierre-Louis Flouquet, as the most exemplary artists worthy of imitation. Alongside the Mexican Diego Rivera, they were transforming or humanizing modern art. Picasso had revolutionized forms, and Flouquet was infusing Cubism with emotion.

In short, they formulated an idiosyncratic version of modernism in which content was more important than form. But given the lack of indigenous populations on the island, the editors recommended Afro-Cuban themes as suitable content for national art. This recommendation ran parallel with their increasing irritation at Rivera for his tyrannical prescriptions of what Latin American art should be. Finding Afro-Cuban motifs for the new art, however, did not translate into a commitment to the social rights of the Afro-Cuban population. On the contrary, the editors never intended to disrupt the country's ethnic hierarchy. They firmly believed that Cuba needed more Spanish immigrants and that Cuban culture should be rooted in Spanish civilization, which would provide values and ideas to achieve social and racial cohesion. This leads to the second idea discussed in this article.

The editors' artistic disquisitions were interwoven with complicated cultural and political agendas and funding. Powerful Spanish businesses and individuals operating in Cuba financed *Revista de Avance*, which helps explain why the magazine maintained an unequivocal pro-Spain stance during its short circulation. Notes and essays showed how

<sup>2</sup> Two months after Mariátegui's death, *Revista de Avance* published a special issue devoted to him (no. 47, June 15, 1930), and the articles demonstrate the deep knowledge that Cuban intellectuals had about Mariátegui's work.

the magazine's gatekeepers adhered to Pan-Hispanism or Hispanism, the nineteenth-century movement formed in Spain by liberal and conservative elites after the Latin American Wars of Independence. Its professed aim was to form a cultural alliance with Spain's former colonies.

In that vein, *Revista de Avance* advocated solidarity among Hispanic American nations and the creation of an autochthonous art while heavily promoting Spanish culture and interests on the island, going so far as to analyze national themes through the lens of the Spanish intelligentsia. Such was the extent of this editorial policy that other Cuban and Latin American intellectuals admonished *Revista de Avance* for its relentless endorsement of the former empire's culture and values. It could not be otherwise given that the lawyer, criminologist, and anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, president of the Institución Hispano-Cubana de Cultura and the most powerful cultural figure on the island at the time, was a patron of the magazine and the intellectual mentor of its editors.<sup>3</sup>

However dominant, Hispanism was not the only intellectual trend that nurtured discussions in *Revista de Avance*. Editors and collaborators also subscribed to ideas drawn from Pan-Latinism and Indo-Americanism, movements that strongly resisted American values and US imperialist encroachment on the continent. Pan-Latinism, a doctrine born in Parisian circles in the mid-nineteenth century through the writings of the French economist Michel Chevalier, claimed that France ought to lead the fate of the Latin peoples, including those living in the "New World." Such leadership would counteract Anglo-Saxon geopolitical supremacy. In the second half of the nineteenth century, a great champion of Pan-Latinism in the region was the Chilean writer Francisco Bilbao, who began to add the word *Latin* to America in his writings and speeches to differentiate it from its northern neighbor, but, profoundly disappointed with the French invasion of Mexico in 1861, he almost abandoned the practice. At the turn of the twentieth century, Rodó and the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío continued the Pan-Latinist legacy (Altamirano 2021, 28–29).

Rodó's "Ariel," inspired by the characters of Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, contrasted a moral, caring, and spiritual Latin America to a greedy, individualistic, and utilitarian Anglo-Saxon one. For Rodó (1988, 31), Greek civilization represented the perfect combination of the ideal with the real, the body and the spirit, the "springtime of the human spirit, a smile of history" (31). Rodó's Latin American followers, both liberals and conservatives, were called Arielistas. In 1924, Mariátegui defined Latin America as an "Indo-Spanish" community (Altamirano 2021, 48–49). Four years later, he opposed Rodó's division of Latin and Anglo-Saxon America and asserted that only a socialist Indo-America could antagonize an imperialist American one (Mariátegui 1928, 2).

Similarly, in 1930, the Peruvian politician and writer Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre claimed that the Pan-Latinist and Pan-Hispanist movements failed to reveal the ethnic fabric of the continent. He then popularized the term *Indo-Americanism* to signify that the Amerindians were the ethnic cornerstone of Latin American countries (Altamirano 2021, 49). In the responses offered to the magazine's questionnaire "What Latin American Art Should Be?" Latin American and Cuban intellectuals adopted a mixture of these ideas in their quest for a regional and national identity. In the same breath, they all rejected Pan-Americanism, a US movement that, under the guise of commercial, economic, military, and political cooperation among the Americas, sought to exert US control over the continent.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> I am aware of Ortiz's influence on literary and cultural studies, particularly the adaptation of his notion of "transculturation" by the canonical Uruguayan literary critic Ángel Rama, which is the subject of a vast amount of scholarship. I do not discuss this topic in tracing Ortiz's early and specifically Cuban concerns. Above all, see the works by Argentinian cultural critic Claudia Gilman.

<sup>4</sup> James G. Blaine, US secretary of state from 1889 to 1892, developed a foreign policy toward Latin America through the creation of the Pan-American Union and the celebration of Pan-American Conferences, the first of which took place in Washington in 1890. *Revista de Avance's* editors lambasted these conferences for their openly interventionist ideology (Los Cinco 1928e, 3–4).

There were thus tensions and contradictions at the heart of *Revista de Avance*. The editors (Martín Casanovas, Francisco Ichaso, Jorge Mañach, Juan Marinello, Félix Lizaso, and José Zacarías Tallet) promoted Afro-Cuban themes in works of art while encouraging Spanish immigration.<sup>5</sup> They would state their Hispanophilia even as they advocated anti-imperialist and pro-Soviet Marxist ideas. They also participated in demonstrations against President Gerardo Machado (1925–1933) but without ever mentioning his name or directly attacking his government in their articles, a fact that did not go unnoticed by the readership. Prominent members of the Machado government blatantly publicized their businesses in *Revista de Avance*. The conflicting positions are partly explained by *Revista de Avance*'s bringing together of Cuban socialist youth and Spanish businessmen, opposite factions who, despite their divergent interests, were united by an open hostility toward the United States. Perhaps the most surprising conclusion is that the magazine can be seen as the propaganda organ of the Institución Hispano-Cubana de Cultura.

### What was modern art for *Revista de Avance*?

In his first article, “Vanguardism,” Mañach wonders whether the avant-garde means absolute or relative novelty and about the meaning of novelty. He answers indirectly by quoting Ortega y Gasset from the Spanish modernist journal *La Gaceta Literaria*. The philosopher stated that Latin America's youth would provide vitality for an exhausted Europe and that the time had come for artists to shed their provincialism so they could create for the world, not only for their small village (Mañach 1927a, 3).<sup>6</sup> In the second essay, Mañach (1927c, 18–19) argues that every historical period always has a style, a predominant rhythm that influences all forms. And in his last installment, he contends that artists should reflect the time in which they live, and they can do so by expressing the maximum amount of reality in the least amount of language (Mañach 1927b, 44). It does not matter, he continues, if that language is descriptive or abstract; what really matters is its eloquence. For example, a monstrous leg by Picasso best expresses our chaotic times. Interestingly, the few works by Picasso chosen to illustrate future articles, found in no. 5 (May 15, 1927, 107) and no. 12 (September 30, 1927, 307), were never cubist, but rather images of women in a figurative style that corresponded to his neoclassical phase, the “return to order” of the interwar years, as Robyn (2016, 140, 142) pointed out in her essay.

Mañach's ideas, helped by Ortega's dictum of a creatively drained Europe, would establish guidelines for modern art, not only for Cubans but also for other intellectuals on the continent. Another popular credo, suggested by Mariátegui in his *Amauta* editorials and later echoed by Mañach, was that artists' works should engage with political realities. This belief set the stage for conceptualizing the most important visual arts event in the history of the magazine, the exhibition *Arte Nuevo* (New Art), held at the Asociación de Pintores y Escultores, May 7–30, 1927.

<sup>5</sup> The five original editors, “Los Cinco,” were Casanovas, Ichaso, Mañach, Marinello, and Tallet (the latter replaced Alejo Carpentier from the second issue). By September 1927, Lizaso had taken over from Casanovas, who went into exile in Mexico after being charged with communist activities. A year later, in September 1928, Tallet also left, leaving Ichaso, Mañach, Lizaso, and Marinello as the four final editors of *Revista de Avance*, “Los Cuatro.” Carpentier, Marinello, Casanovas, and Tallet were consummate Marxist-Leninists; Ichaso, Mañach, and Lizaso shared more centrist views.

<sup>6</sup> The idea of the decline of Europe was a fashionable narrative in the European intellectual circles of the interwar years. In “El mundo que nace [de] El conde de Keyserling,” the Cuban educator Medardo Vitier mentioned the huge popularity among Cuban intellectuals of Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (1918–1922) and Hermann Keyserling's *The World in the Making* (1926), *Revista de Avance*, no. 19 (February 15, 1928): 57–58. Both books, written by German philosophers, spoke about the exhaustion of Western civilization. Incidentally, Ortega y Gasset's *Revista de Occidente* published excerpts from the Spanish translations of Spengler's and Keyserling's books.

### A new art show

Organized by the editors of *Revista de Avance*, the exhibition opened a new chapter in the history of Cuban art, launching the careers of the country's most acclaimed modernist painters. In his review of the show, "Nuevos rumbos: La exposición de '1927,'" and the lecture he delivered on its closing day, Casanovas championed these artists under Mañach's triad of eloquence, actuality, and political commitment. He added a fourth term to his analysis, *emotion*, which he considered the essential component lacking in European modernist works. *Emotion* became a loaded word in *Revista de Avance's* concept of modern art, and Casanovas proposed it through the combination of two sources: Rodó's spiritualism and Mariátegui's refutation of Ortega y Gasset's claims in the 1925 "The Dehumanization of Art."

In his famous essay, the Spanish philosopher argued that modern art and literature emerged in response to one of art's objectives: the quest for purity. This is an "artistic" art that the masses fail to understand because it no longer offers those realist scenes and situations (provided by the nineteenth-century movements of Romanticism and naturalism) through which the general public can emote; it paints ideas, not things. In modern art, reality is distorted; the human image is broken or abandoned altogether (thus, the word *dehumanized*); and the ties with the actual world severed—all of which elicit an aesthetic pleasure, an intelligent one. That is the ultimate goal of true art, says Ortega y Gasset. He emphasizes that thankfully, modern art has broken the political illusion that everybody should be equal (Ortega y Gasset 1925, 60–61, 69, 73–74, 53–55).

Casanovas disagrees with Ortega y Gasset's argument that modern art was born of art's internal logic and historical evolution. Instead, he affirms that this "dehumanized" art is the undisputed product of a materialistic society that scorns moral values and favors efficiency and utilitarianism, the outcome of greedy Yankee capitalism, echoing Rodó. Devoid of human emotions, contemporary art—which he says began with nineteenth-century impressionism—transformed itself into an industry, a factory of professional virtuosity in the hands of the capitalist bourgeoisie (Casanovas 1927b, 99).

Casanovas (1927b, 99) judges this new art sharply: "Our condemnation, our categorical rejection of [nineteenth-century impressionist] art, servile instrument of the capitalist bourgeoisie . . . Our generation loathes it because this disastrous and inescapable heritage is our largest obstacle . . . The urgent call of modern art is for the return to the description of everyday human emotions in a simple language." In a clear refutation of Ortega y Gasset's essay, Casanovas concludes that, after that return, the final step is to free this art from the mantle of obfuscation that a capitalist minority has imposed on it and make it intelligible for the masses (100).

Mariátegui's ideas in "Art, Revolution, and Decadence," published in *Amauta* in 1926, informed Casanovas's belief. Mariátegui blamed Ortega y Gasset for misinforming the Hispanic world about the nature of modern art, given the philosopher's alleged inability to distinguish revolutionary from decadent elements contained in that art. To correct what he perceives as Ortega y Gasset's error of judgment, Mariátegui (1926, 317) responded: "The decadence of capitalist civilization is reflected in the atomization and dissolute nature of its art. In this crisis, art has above all lost its essential unity . . . Secession is the most natural conclusion. Schools proliferate *ad infinitum* because no centrifugal forces exist . . . The contemporary artist's soul is, in the majority of cases, empty." In other words, capitalism has bred this succession of empty isms. More importantly, truly revolutionary art consisted not in the creation of a new technique or in the destruction of the old but "in the rejection, dismissal and ridicule of the bourgeois absolute" (Mariátegui 1926, 317). Casanovas agrees. Modern art cannot be meaningful as long as the soul of the artist remains devoid of emotions. What, then, is emotion for Casanovas?

Without providing a definition, he asserts that art is fulfilling this goal through the works of Eduardo Abela, Rafael Blanco, Carlos Enríquez, Antonio Gattorno, Víctor Manuel García, Ramón Loy, Marcelo Pogolotti, Lorenzo Romero Arciaga, José Hurtado de Mendoza, the Venezuelan Luis López Méndez, and the Spaniard José Segura, among other exhibitors.<sup>7</sup> Their art represents a disavowal of the past, a liberation from the materialism and servile professionalism that the bourgeoisie imposed on artists. A perfect example of this new art can also be found in Rivera's humanist frescoes. Casanovas (1927c, 100) proclaims that this is a time of active and aggressive militancy, in which all members of society must engage in the political struggle.

Some of the works from the exhibition were reproduced in the middle section of the issue, accompanied by a brief note declaring that after this event, it was possible to speak of a "militant" and "new" Cuban art in accord with artistic vanguards (Figure 1). Yet the landscape by López Méndez (*Tierra cálida*), the architectonic views by Pogolotti (*Río San Juan*) and Romero Arciaga (*Paisaje*), the religious allegory by Gattorno (*Camino de Jerusalén*), and the two risqué nudes by Enríquez do not align with Rivera's militant art or Picasso's novel forms that *Revista de Avance* set as examples. In fact, these six figurative paintings bear strong marks of postimpressionist styles. The figures in López Méndez and Gattorno resemble those found in Matisse and Gauguin; the city views in Pogolotti and Romero Arciaga evoke Maurice Utrillo's French vistas; and the female nudes in Enríquez recall the watercolor effect, fluid lines, and provocative women's poses of Jules Pascin.

In *Latin American Vanguards: The Art of Contentious Encounters*, Vicky Unruh (1994, 26) views Casanovas's response as part of the larger strategy of the Latin American intelligentsia to "rehumanize" art by connecting art with a life experience.<sup>8</sup> However, when one reexamines Casanovas's and Mañach's short essays, one cannot help noticing that their suggestion to "rehumanize" art translated into two simple solutions: to never dispense with the human figure, which should now be drawn with modernist techniques (e.g., cubist) and to add political content to the work. Overall, Casanovas's and Mañach's art reviews showed a lack of knowledge of the chronological evolution of the European avant-garde and the rationale of its creative processes. They despised impressionism (the "1800s" art) and the art that followed for being "bourgeois," yet the artists they sponsored in the *Arte Nuevo* exhibition were employing those very styles. Hurtado de Mendoza experimented with pointillism, both Loy and Segura painted in an academic style, and the rest appropriated postimpressionist trends. Casanovas and Mañach claimed that these Cuban artists had infused their work with spiritual emotion without ever explaining how that intangible quality manifested in their paintings and drawings.

Casanovas's and Mañach's indictment of the apolitical nature of the European avant-garde equally revealed their mistaken notions. All avant-garde manifestos proclaimed loudly and clearly that theirs was not only an artistic and cultural revolution but also social and, in most cases, political. Nearly all the protagonists of the avant-garde saga, except for the Italian futurists, held strong leftist views. These editors completely ignored or seemed unaware of the antiwar Dadaist performances or the anticapitalist standpoint of the German expressionists and the French surrealists, to name a few. Even more puzzling

<sup>7</sup> The other artists were Alberto Sabas, Rebeca Peink de Rosado Avila, the American Alice Neel (Enríquez's wife at the time), and the Russian American Adja Yunkers.

<sup>8</sup> To demonstrate her argument, Unruh first equates Ortega's term *dehumanization* to *ostranenie*, a concept coined by the Russian formalist linguist Victor Shklovsky that alludes to changes in perception, an effect of distancing or defamiliarization. The avant-garde calls attention to itself, to its own process of production. Next, Unruh borrows Peter Bürger's idea from his *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974) in which he claimed that European avant-garde movements, besides their self-critical pursuit, sought to merge art with life. After blending her interpretation of Ortega's and Bürger's ideas, Unruh (1994, 23–26) argues that Latin American avant-garde literature of the 1920s and 1930s rehumanized art by incorporating a lived experience into manifestos, poetry, prose fiction, and plays.



"1927"  
EXPOSICION DE ARTE NUEVO

LA EXPOSICION DE ARTE NUEVO, organizada por "1927", es, indudablemente, la exhibición de carácter colectivo más interesante de las que se han celebrado en Cuba siendo al par la primera que recoge, estéticamente, las manifestaciones artísticas de vanguardia. Con esta exposición se han revelado nuevos nombres, comprendiendo la incorporación de otros a las filas de avanzada artística. Después de esta exposición de "1927", puede hablarse ya, como de algo existente y militante, de arte



RIO SAN JUAN  
por Manuel  
Pogolati

PAISAJE  
por  
L. Romero Arriaga

CAMINO  
DE JERUSALEN  
por  
Antonio Gallardo



TIERRA CALIDA  
por  
León López Méndez

"1927"

nuevo y de vanguardias artísticas en Cuba. Se ha dado ya el aseo y se ha, y está en marcha la nueva falange. Cohesionada la masa, este esfuerzo perseverará, marcando nuevas jefaturas y conquistando nuevas posiciones; lo que hasta hoy era un presentimiento y una rebelión, es una realidad que se afirma y camina ya, victoriosamente, a paso de carga.

Los cuatro grabados de estas páginas, reproducen cuatro de los obras que integran esta primera exposición cubana de arte nuevo.



"1927"

Figure 1. "Arte Nuevo," Revista de Avance. May 15, 1927. no. 5.



was their unfamiliarity with the radical experiments of the socialist-driven Russian constructivists, given that their fellow editors Marinello and Tallet were members of the Anti-Imperialist League of the Americas.

Last, the Cubans' emphasis on feelings ran counter to one of the chief decrees of the European avant-garde: the erasure of emotions from the work of art. One should not confuse emotions with lived experiences. For cubist and abstract artists, emotion equaled sentimentality, that "plague" from Romanticism that they urged artists to avoid at all costs. As Ortega y Gasset had correctly defined it, this new art was cerebral and should stir both the mind and the senses, not the heart.

To sum up, concerning the European avant-garde, *Revista de Avance's* editors perceived decline in lieu of a new visual system built according to its own set of rules and meant to conjure social utopias. They spotted indulgence where there was only an extreme reduction of forms and fusion of the pictorial elements with the picture plane itself. They missed the idea that, in many cases, this fusion alluded to the dissolution of social hierarchies. Their vision of a true avant-garde centered on making social and political references explicit in the work of art to elicit an emotional response in the spectator. In short, a revolution in content rather than in form.

### Three artists to follow: Rivera, Flouquet, and Picasso

Because Rivera, for the Cubans, had single-handedly given birth to Latin American modernist art, *Revista de Avance* sponsored an exhibition of his work and of a young Belgian cubist named Pierre-Louis Flouquet at the Asociación de Pintores y Escultores in May 1927. Casanovas points out that Flouquet's work bears analogies with the "cerebral" Picasso of the cubist period, as both emphasize volumes through pure form. However, the Belgian's works surpassed Picasso's in sheer emotion, vital impulse, and esoteric palpitation. Consequently, Flouquet saved his art from the excessive individualism and insensitive nature of cubism (Casanovas 1927c). Even though Casanovas ranked Flouquet above Picasso, the editors shared the opinion that the work of the Spaniard was the undisputed paradigm of European art.

In the following issue, the editors again promoted Flouquet's exhibition, stating that he was the representative of "la plastique sentimentale" (sentimental visual art), a new aesthetic opposed to "la plastique pure" (pure visual art), with German origins (Los Cinco 1927c, 155). The reproduced paintings and drawings reveal a blend of figurative and abstract forms. Flouquet's humanoid figures, with their oval heads and tubular limbs, evoke the early Cubist paintings by Fernand Léger (e.g., *The Staircase*, 1913). At other times, the projecting planes and the angular and curved shapes of Flouquet's sitters echo Albert Gleizes's figures of his 1913–1918 period (*Woman at the Piano*, 1914, comes to mind). It is likely that the humanistic dimension and the "sentimental visuality" with which the editors described these works stemmed from Flouquet's preservation of some recognizable human form. (Figure 2)

The review of Rivera was assigned to Carpentier. Their political kinship is unmistakable. First, Carpentier, who had been imprisoned in 1927 for his communist activities, claims that there is no honorable life outside of the extreme left. Second, he recounts how Rivera returned to Mexico after feeling inspired by Picasso's leftist militancy and pictorial brilliance and then channeled his tenderness and piety for the suffering Amerindian into political activism. Rivera's frescoes perform a social role; they are destined for the masses, not for the art dealer or private buyer (Carpentier 1927, 232–34). In the view of Carpentier and the editorial board, the work of Rivera is exemplary because it maintains the human form; thus, it is humanistic and also responds to Mariátegui's precepts of what the new art should be: didactic in its political messages, militant in its antibourgeois stance and, above



Fátiga.



Materialidad.

"1927"

su lenguaje de clase, subvertido, para dar a comprender la existencia y presencia de un determinado impulso sentimental, y sugerirlo por medio de una retórica cerebral, voluntariamente expresa, en el ánimo del espectador.

El futurismo pretende pues representar no, como los simbolistas, estados emocionales, calificados para ellos de signos gráficos concretos, pero de una efímera y débil certeza, sino corrientes sentimentales, representadas como formas, como tendencias, es decir, en su fase negativa e imponderable.

Flouquet, cuya exposición abrió el por "1927" se abre el 20 en la A. de P. y E. tiene, aparentemente, ciertos puntos de contacto y analogía con Picasso, el Picasso (indefiniblemente cerebral de la época cubista); pero en realidad, su arte es algo aparte, no esencial ni inicial. Picasso expulsa del cubismo y en todas sus épocas, esencialmente, realista, y a su historia sólo hay plasticidad, materia, forma y color. Nada se quita más allá de lo que devuelve la retina ni más allá de la recepción material de los sentidos. Flouquet, por el contrario, concreta y recoge en sus líneas, en casi todas de ellas sino en todas, un ímpetu y una palpación sentimental, aculta, castrina.

¿Entonces, cabe afiliar a técnicas futuristas? O, ¿es qué la diferencia de éste? En que el Flouquet prescinde de los valores plásticos de la línea y del color, por concentrar en éstos un interés y una intención descriptivamente psicológica; en que en él cada línea y cada color tienen un valor y una significación cifrada, un interés concreto. Pierre Flouquet cubista, pretende con la línea, describir plásticamente algo imperceptible como lo es el impulso dinámico y motor de nuestros sentimientos; pero lo hace sin olvidar ni despreciar jamás el imperativo de plasticidad. Así ocurre muchas veces, que no acertamos a comprender y a desentrañar el simbolismo sentimental y el contenido psicológico de las arbitrarias creaciones de Pierre Flouquet; no sólo cuando esto ocurre, su plasticidad y su valor estético es sólo ellas, clara y evidente.

El arte arbitrario de Pierre Flouquet, de una agudeza sensible y castrina, y a la vez, de una plástica refinada y segura, encierra en su intención y por sus propios una contradicción flagrante.



El beso.



1666.

"1927"

Figure 2. "Pierre Flouquet," Revista de Avance. May 30, 1927, no. 6, 154.

all, connected to the masses. Curiously, the article did not reproduce a single work by the Mexican.

Even though Rivera remained an artistic prototype for the readership of *Revista de Avance*, by August 1929, Eduardo Abela was instructing Cuban artists to stop blindly imitating Rivera and Mexican art, for Mexico has “an opposite psychology to ours and we are taking the risk of seeing our efforts nullified, transforming ourselves into another [art] factory . . . We do know to what extent the Yankee dollar chokes us but perhaps we ignore to what extent the spiritual force of Mexican art can overshadow us” (225). Abela’s message appeared among the varied responses that intellectuals and artists from Cuba and the region submitted to *Revista de Avance*’s 1928 questionnaire (1928d).

### What should Latin American art be?

The editors’ concern about finding ways to create nationalist art and culture, and furthermore, a brand of regional art that was no longer subservient to Mexican muralism, prompted them to issue a survey called “What Should Latin American Art Be?” containing the following questions: “(1) Do you think that the work of a Latin American artist should reveal a preoccupation with Latin American themes? (2) Do you think that Latin Americanness is a matter of optics, content, or vehicle? (3) Do you think that there are traits common to every Latin American country’s art? (4) How should Latin American artists respond to European art?” (Los Cinco 1928e, 235).

To the first question, Abela responds that the spiritual forces of Europe were exhausted, and only the virgin and human roots of Latin America could save the old continent (Abela 1928, 361). The Cuban poet Regino Boti agrees that art should reveal a preoccupation with Latin American themes, provided that such art be infused with humanism (Boti 1929, 24), an opinion shared by Chilean writer Carlos Préndez-Saldías (1929, 85). However, the Nicaraguan poet and essayist Avilés-Ramírez argues that Latin American artists should extoll the classical forms of indigenous art as a means to break free from the vile servitude to Europe, an idea that reiterated Mariátegui’s Indo-Americanism. It was time to face the dilemma: “either copying Europe in their works, like an unconscious ape in a frock coat, or liberate themselves from it” (Avilés-Ramírez 1929, 55).

To the second query, responses were rather vague. The more coherent ones said that “Latin Americanness” should encompass the three (optics, content, and vehicle). Avilés-Ramírez notes that native work “must catch the eye, move the heart, and serve as propaganda” (Avilés-Ramírez 1929, 55), while the Cuban lawyer and essayist Raúl Roa pointed out that art should be a vehicle, never an end in itself. The content determines the essential qualities of the work of art. Latin Americanness, he adds, is a political reality based upon a solid economic foundation (Roa 1929, 242). In other words, echoing Avilés-Ramírez, Roa concurs that art should serve as a vehicle for political propaganda.

Asked about finding common traits in the art of the region, Cuban essayist Enrique José Varona answers that except for humanist content, no other commonalities could he find given the differences in ideologies, institutions, and traditions among Latin American countries (Varona 1928, 285). The response of Mexican politician and writer Jaime Torres-Bodet matches Varona’s, although the former thinks that the search for Latin Americanness should not be a priority, especially at that moment when the world was experiencing a period of “extreme universality,” by which phrase he may have been referring to pervasive cosmopolitan attitudes (Torres-Bodet 1928, 315). Abela is confident that Mexico, Peru, and Cuba will stand out in the future since few countries in the continent have shown such a high level of originality. However, he bemoans the lack of indigenous populations in Cuba and thinks that Cuban art will compensate with its spiritual strength (Abela 1928, 361). Boti clearly states that the social and political

problems of each country generate singular art practices, although the roots [the Latin American environment] remain the same (Boti 1929, 24).

The fourth question generated the most interesting responses. Regarding artists' attitude toward European art, Torres-Bodet thinks that it should neither display a thoughtless submission to nor a systematic negation of it, but preferably something in between. For Abela, Latin American artists should benefit from what Europeans had done in the past. Boti shares Abela's thought, adding that artists should take the vital energy from European art to nourish their work so they can produce an art that is both autochthonous and universal. Avilés-Ramírez uses similar terms. This new Latin American art would be achieved through a process of appropriation, even resorting to the incorporation of cubism, surrealism, expressionism—all isms, if necessary. The Cuban writer Luis Felipe Rodríguez reminds readers that even though they have been born in Latin America, they all owe a debt to Europe, the root of their culture. He calls for the embrace of European art as a proven discipline to strengthen what is native to Latin America (Rodríguez 1929, 118). Roa seems resolute in his political views: Artists should adopt a preeminently critical attitude; otherwise, they would be destined to become an intellectual colony of Europe in the same manner that they already were an economic colony of the United States. Furthermore, they should distrust Europe, especially Rome and Paris.

Mañach submitted his own response in “Vértice del buen gusto” (Apex of good taste), a lengthy essay that reveals his own struggle to conceptualize the tenets of Cuban modern art. He finds that the dichotomies framing modern art—humanistic versus dehumanized, pure versus descriptive, social versus individualistic, Latin American versus universal—stifle creativity. For Mexico and Peru, rich in indigenous traditions, it is easy to produce a social art with marked national traits. But what should the Hispanic Caribbean countries without indigenous majorities and subject to cosmopolitan influences do? He understands that Cuban artists are under pressure to create nationalist art to confront US economic dominance but advises that they not yield to such pressure, especially from Rivera, who by then was postulating that all art that was not proletarian was by default bourgeois and therefore false and reprehensible (Mañach 1929, 131, 133).

Mañach warns that Rivera's theory is an intrusion of social, political, or historical agendas into the realm of aesthetics. In other words, rigid notions of artistic nationalism tend to transform art into collectivism and propaganda. It is dangerous, he insists, to make any specific kind of art dogmatic. Rivera's art in Mexico is as valuable as that of Picasso and Juan Gris in Spain. One is figurative, has humanist concerns, and expresses the country's traditions, while the other is abstract and deploys the universal language of forms. However, it is essential for artists to exercise freedom of choice, selecting whatever styles suit their own culture (Mañach 1929, 134, 137). Mañach's words attest to the growing exasperation that some Cuban artists were feeling in the face of Rivera's artistic tyranny.

Finally, Francisco Ichaso delivers the survey's conclusions, restating some of the responses, and combining them with his own. Slavish imitation of Europe is unacceptable. For example, he says that Latin American literature is currently composed of more or less elegant pastiches that appropriate the European models learned at the academy or in books. Poets speak of a French rose or a Spanish carnation while the royal poinciana tree languishes unappreciated in their lands. If the region aspires to contribute to the world, it is imperative that all efforts be directed toward the creation of a national character, but that task will not be accomplished as long as words and art copy European states of mind, lifestyles, and ethical, political, or social notions alien to Latin American realities. Europe will never respect their efforts until they stop living spiritually under its tutelage (Ichaso 1929, 260–262).

To the second question, “What is Latin Americanness?” Ichaso responds that it is content, but not the picturesque or *criollismo* genres cultivated across the continent.

Instead, Latin Americanness should lie in the universal humanism of art's message. He infers that humanism resides in the common characteristics, destinies, emotions, and aspirations among Latin American nations. Ichaso condenses those commonalities into two distinctive patterns: resistance against the common enemy of Yankee imperialism and *mestizaje*, derived from the interracial unions of the Amerindian and the African with the Spaniard, the Italian, and the Chinese (Ichaso 1929, 264–265).

For Cole, this questionnaire helped *Revista de Avance* establish a category of Latin American art vis-à-vis Europe. She positions the magazine within a larger network of periodicals, such as the American *transition* and the Paris-based Latin American *Imán*, which equally issued surveys that interrogated intellectuals about possible avenues to create what they called “Latin American art.” In a fruitful exchange, the three publications shared contributors and editors, built national canons, and formed outlets for literary and artistic expressions from the Americas (Cole 2018, 69–70).

Based on Mañach's and Ichaso's reflections on the survey responses, one can list with precision the writers' guidelines to produce Cuban and Latin American art: First, the European avant-garde is like a warehouse from which artists can pick garments to present their local realities, cultural, political, or social. Whether using figuration or abstraction, the work should always communicate a humanistic message, namely political resistance against the United States and representation of the country's ethnic fabric. Second, art should reflect the world of the common people. Third, the renewal of Latin America art lies in the combination of national or regional content, humanistic messages, and avant-garde forms. Fourth, and most important, this formula is set to guarantee the fusion of the local (content) with the universal (avant-garde forms and ecumenical humanism), thereby alleviating the anxiety that such polarities have so far triggered among artists. Both Mañach and Ichaso championed freedom of choice for the artists to undermine the suffocating rule with which Mexican muralism was governing artistic endeavors in the region. They had concocted a successful recipe, or so they thought, but the remaining question about content puzzled these writers. If the island lacked an Amerindian population, what would the subject matter be?

### Afro-Cubanism

Around the same time as the publication of Mañach's “Vértice del buen gusto,” and not by coincidence, articles in *Revista de Avance* began to discuss themes related to the culture of the African diaspora on the island. The first, “De la Sique Africana” (On African psyche) by Tomás Castañeda-Ledón, declared that since jazz was ruling American nightlife and transforming music worldwide in the same manner that cubism had done in painting, it was only natural that Cuba would contribute to this Africanist momentum and growing thirst for “African things.” It was necessary to incorporate the knowledge of current black culture into the work of art (Castañeda-Ledón 1929, 110–11).

A note on the subject, “Moda y Modo Negros” (Black fashion and customs), written by Pedro Marco, mentioned that the Afro-Cuban musical tradition had produced extraordinary genres, such as rumba and son, while literature lagged behind. Writers ought to include the emotions of the black youth—love, hatred, indifference, brief joys, and long and profound sadness—in their novels and poems (Marco 1929, 81). In another issue, Marinello wrote that “black themes” in Cuba bore special significance because this group participated in the Wars of Independence and because their dances, charmingly primitive and wicked, would constitute an exemplary motif in painting (Marinello 1930, 53).

The articles reveal the writers' cursory engagement with African culture. In the same manner that they conceived the avant-garde as an assortment of styles to choose from,



**Figure 3.** Jaime Valls, *Revista de Avance*. September 15, 1928, no. 26, 241.

they perceived Afro-Cuban culture as a purveyor of tropes to nationalist representations. Even more significant is the fact that they turned their attention to this resource only after Europeans and Americans had “rediscovered” and further exploited it. Accordingly, *Revista de Avance* reproduced works of Cuban artists who exoticized Afro-Cuban themes, such as Enric Casanovas’s curvaceous nudes of young black females, Jaime Valls’s sketchy portraits of elder African women drawn with flattened noses and aggrandized lips, or Abela’s xylographs of Afro-Cubans dancing and playing music (Figure 3).

Ramírez Chicharro groups these representations into five themes: rural, urban, erotic, religious, and festive. For example, muscular black men often appeared in rural environments, either plowing the field, cutting sugar cane, or carrying water. The city provided a backdrop for the peanut seller or the bourgeois dressed in a white suit. Women were depicted either naked or wearing the white garments characteristic of Santería or Regla de Osha, the most commonly practiced Afro-Cuban religion. In the first category, artists highlighted the models’ women’s sensuality and sexual inhibition; in the second, they portrayed *santeras* conversing with men or doing domestic chores. In the last group, women dance while men play music in a festive atmosphere. Ramírez Chicharro suggests that *Revista de Avance* was the first Cuban publication to value the Afro-Cuban legacies as

essential to the formation of a national culture (Ramírez-Chicharro 2014, 5–9, 14). In that regard, there is no denying the importance of poetry.

Since the early 1960s, literary scholars such as Carlos Ripoll and Rosario Rexach have stressed the role of *Revista de Avance* in promoting *negrismo* or the Afro-Cuban poetry written by Carpentier, Tallet, Emilio Ballagas, and Ramón Guirao (see Ripoll 1964; Rexach 1963). More recently, Carlos Granés has argued that the lascivious nature of Nicolás Guillén's verses in *Motivos de Son* (published in 1930) and in *Sóngoro cosongo* (from 1931), with its brazen descriptions of breasts, hips, and derrieres of black and mulatto women, served to counteract the effects of American puritanism; it helped differentiate between a sensual Latin America and a dull Anglo-Saxon one (Granés 2022, 161–162). Granés brings up an interesting point. There is an indisputable equivalence between the lustful spirit of *poesía negrista* and the sensual portrayal of Afro-Cuban women in the magazine.

Today, some could perceive the visual representations of Afro-Cubans by Abela, Valls, and Casanovas, together with the hypersexualized depiction of women in the poems of Tallet and Guillén, as stereotyped forms. However, paintings with Afro-Cuban themes hang on prominent walls in the National Museum of Fine Arts in Havana; Cuban art historians lavish praise on those works; and literary scholars on the island and abroad extoll the linguistic inventions of *negrista* poets in their use of onomatopoeia, alliteration, parallelism, and repetition of words to achieve a rhythmic effect, in imitation of the sound of percussion instruments in Afro-Cuban music. Thus, a considerable number of Latin Americanists consider *negrismo* an artistic triumph that resignified visual arts, literature, and music within the framework of Cuban culture.

When one recalls the deep concern of *Revista de Avance*'s editors with the formulation of a nationalist culture, it is easy to understand the appeal of Afro-Cuban themes to their modernist endeavors. They had found the content that would invigorate and give purpose to those alleged feeble and nihilistic European avant-garde styles. In the visual arts, Afro-Cubanism matched Rivera's *indigenismo*. *Poesía negrista* coincided with *indigenista* Andean poetry, specifically the avant-garde literary experiments of Alejandro Peralta, Emilio Vázquez, and Francisco Chukiwanka, all members of Orkopata, the Peruvian avant-garde group based in Puno who published the *indigenista* journal *Boletín Titikaka* (1926–1930).

Notwithstanding the laudable efforts of *Revista de Avance*'s editors in advocating *negrismo* in art and literature, it is important to point out that this art failed to connect with the masses in the political sense that said editors had urged in their articles. In fact, images of seductive black and mulatto women, some of them drawn by Valls himself, began to populate the covers of *Bohemia* and *Carteles*, the country's most popular illustrated magazines. Afro-Cuban tropes, such as rumba dancers, Abakuá *iremes* or “diablitos,” peanut and fruit sellers, and curvaceous women of color, became an essential component of brochures, postcards, and guidebooks used to promote tourism in Cuba, an industry that began to grow in the mid-1920s as a result of American Prohibition. In other words, from the early 1930s to the late 1950s, advertisers and illustrators turned Afro-Cubanism into a touristic brand of Cuba that sold leisure time, dissoluteness, and friendliness. Interestingly, these images were often drawn using modernist techniques—elongation, simplification, and geometrization of the figure.

Delving into analysis of how the Afro-Cuban debates in *Revista de Avance* impacted the creation of Cuban modernist works of art and of visual representations of the tourism industry in the 1920s and later, how the magazine contributed to a wider conceptualization of racial issues on the island, and how the editors created an interesting tension between Afro-Cubanism and Hispanophilia requires a different essay. In staying within the scope and context of this article, my greater interest is to show the ways through which the writers of *Revista de Avance* adopted Ortiz's idea that culture needed to replace the old-fashioned category of race, with Spain at the center of that project.

### Hispanism or Hispanophilia?

In January 1929, Ortiz gave a lecture in Madrid called “Race and Culture” in which he defined culture as a spiritual community with common beliefs and attitudes to life. Latin American countries needed to erect a new nationalist culture built upon the foundations of Hispanic culture and Spanish language, their common origins (Los Cuatro 1929a, 3–4). *Revista de Avance’s* editors fully endorsed this idea. They said that a black Cuban elite was already devising a plan for the “spiritual” improvement of the black population based on the principles of racial self-assurance and the harmonization of their aspirations with those of the whites. Through such coordination, a unique nationalist ideal could be crafted (Los Cuatro 1929a, 5–6).

Ortiz’s theory of replacing race with culture was borrowed from Hispanism, an early nineteenth-century movement that believed in the existence of a transatlantic Hispanic family, community, or *raza* (race). (Van Aken 1959, vii).<sup>9</sup> After the Spanish-American War, Hispanism gained many adepts in Spain and in the New World. In 1898, the Spanish politician Joaquín Sánchez de Toca wrote that the common trait of Spaniards (*peninsulares*) and Spanish Americans was their concern with spiritual values. That idea became a recurrent theme among Hispano-Americanists, who argued that *peninsulares* and Spanish Americans belonged to the same race, defined not by blood or physical traits but by a common culture, language, Catholic ideals, historical experiences, and above all a spiritual ethos. However, this was not an equal partnership. In response to those Latin American intellectual elites who in the postindependence period promoted American and French cultures (Pan-Americanists and Pan-Latinists), *peninsulares* proclaimed their need to wield spiritual hegemony over Spain’s former colonies. They maintained that Spanish Americans would resist American interventionist policy only by joining together under the leadership of Spain, which would plead their cause in Europe (Pike 1971, 1–2, 134, 144).

The leading institution tasked with restoring a cultural dialogue between Spain and Hispanic America was the Centro de Estudios Históricos, a research institute under the aegis of the Junta para la Ampliación de Estudios e Investigaciones Científicas (JAE), founded in Madrid in 1907 with the twin goals of modernizing Spain and strengthening academic relations with Spanish American countries. For the first goal, the Junta established student exchange programs between Spain and the most technologically advanced European countries. For the second, it secured for Spanish American students a number of places in Spain’s centers of higher education, provided fellowships for Spaniards to study in Latin America, and facilitated exchange of academics and scholarly publications (Pike 1971, 155).

The Centro de Estudios Históricos encouraged the study of popular traditions on both sides of the Atlantic to jointly discuss the common history of Spain and the Americas. The initiative resulted in the creation of Hispanic societies and philological schools in the region (including one in New York) in conjunction with the academic training of philologists, historians, and scholars of folklore in Spanish universities. As the president of the Society of Folklore, Ortiz was the representative of that project in Cuba. The Centro also incentivized the revival of the Spanish intellectual heritage in the Americas (Naranjo Orovio 2021, 54, 59–60). To that end, in 1926, Ortiz founded the Institución Hispano-Cubana de Cultura, the well of ideas for *Revista de Avance*. The magazine’s editors and many of the Cuban collaborators joined the Institución, which by December 1927, after only one year of existence, had reached two thousand members. Ortiz also opened branches across the

<sup>9</sup> The American historian Van Aken dates the origins of Hispanism around 1834 when Spain began a diplomatic strategy to recognize the new Latin American republics or Spain’s “daughter nations.” He also argues that in its broad scope the movement originally included Portugal, Brazil, and the Philippines, but in a narrow sense it is limited to Spain and Spanish America (Van Aken 1959, vii).



island: in Matanzas, Santa Clara, Sagua la Grande, Cienfuegos, Camagüey, Manzanillo, and Santiago de Cuba.

There is a clever sleight of hand here. Ortiz was president of the Academy of Cuban History, responsible for compiling the country's folklore, and at the same time chief promoter of the cultural legacy of the former empire. For Ortiz, the creation of a national culture meant the Hispanicization of the Afro-Cuban population on the principles of a common language and traditions, as expressed by the editors in the January 1929 editorial, in which they claimed that the Cuban black elite was already thinking of coordinating and harmonizing their aspirations with those of whites. Perhaps they hoped that the Cuban population would eventually whiten via more Spanish immigration and interracial couplings, as had occurred after the establishment in Cuba of the Comisión Permanente de Población Blanca in 1842.<sup>10</sup> The Africanist Karen Y. Morrison (2010, 32) has demonstrated the rapid miscegenation taking place in Cuba within a century, specifically the consensual or forced mating of white men with black and mulatto women.

Ortiz moved with such ease in exclusive Spanish intellectual circles that he was appointed the Cuban representative of several Spanish Royal Academies: of Language, of Civic and Political Sciences, of History, and of Jurisprudence and Legislation (Naranjo Orovio and Puig-Samper 2000, 480–81). Moreover, through the Institución, he made powerful connections and sent many Cuban students and artists to Spain as part of the JAE's educational exchange program that included travel and study grants. Naranjo Orovio and Puig-Samper chronicle the evolution of Ortiz's sentiments toward Spain. During the 1910s, he rejected the Hispanist and retrograde imperialist discourse of Spanish traditionalists—such as historian and jurist Rafael Altamira—who had not resigned themselves to the collapse of the empire. Ortiz had faith that the United States would bring the desired modernization to Cuba. However, around 1925, he turned his gaze to Spain, then immersed in modernizing efforts, specifically through the scientific and intellectual activities of the JAE, and through a new intelligentsia, many of them socialists who had overcome the traditional, superstitious, and expansionist ideals of the old Spain (Naranjo Orovio and Puig-Samper 2000, 482, 484).

Thus, guided by Ortiz's Institución Hispano-Cubana de Cultura, *Revista de Avance* heavily promoted Spanish culture through the organization of lectures, publication of poems and short novels, and invitations to collaborate. The magazine reproduced works by Picasso, Salvador Dalí, José Moreno Villa, and Francisco Pérez-Mateo. It published literary works by Góngora, Miguel de Unamuno, Ramón del Valle Inclán, Ramón Gómez de la Serna, Juan Ramón Jiménez, and Antonio Machado, as well as by the modernist writers of the Generation of 27: among them, Federico García Lorca, Pedro Salinas, Luis Cernuda, and Dámaso Alonso. Essays by Santiago Ramón y Cajal, Ramón Menéndez- Pidal, Ramiro de Maetzu, and Ortega y Gasset conveyed to the readers new philosophical, cultural, and scientific trends from Spain and Europe.

What events made Ortiz change his early hopes about the Americanization of Cuba? After American troops left in 1909, the conditions imposed by the Cuban-American Treaty of Relations alienated many Cubans. However, World War I changed their attitude. Cuba enjoyed unprecedented prosperity (known as the period of the “fat cows” or “the dance of the millions”) when it became the top supplier of sugar worldwide. In 1919, of the island's 209 sugar mills, 71 were Cuban-owned, 68 were American, 41 were Spanish, 13 were Cuban-Spanish, 5 were French, and 4 were English, among a few others. The American-owned

<sup>10</sup> In the nineteenth century, Cuban agrarian reformists (like José Antonio Saco) and the Spanish Crown agreed to implement a system for Spanish immigrants to settle in Cuba to own and cultivate land. The Royal Decrees of 1838 and 1844 made this new project of white colonization in Cuba official, and in 1842, the Crown established in Cuba the Comisión Permanente de Población Blanca (Permanent Committee for the White Population) to oversee the process.

ones produced more than 51 percent of the total sugar output. With the prospect of a steady bonanza, American capital flooded Cuba to buy more land and build larger sugar mills. Banking regulations were ignored, and large loans went unsecured. Speculation and frantic spending ensued (Pino Santos 1984, 384, 430–31).

After the war ended and Europe's production of beet sugar resumed, the United States did not purchase the entire Cuban harvest as it had done during the war. By December 1920, the price of sugar had dramatically dropped from almost twelve cents per pound to three cents, creating a domino effect. Mill owners, sugar speculators, and homesteaders who had borrowed on the sale of the next harvest were unable to pay their debts; terrified people rushed to the banks to withdraw their savings. By the following March, many banks had declared bankruptcy, and a month later, most Cuban-Spanish banks had closed. The disastrous situation provoked a wave of suicides across the island, the most sensational that of Galician José Luis López-Rodríguez, the owner of Banco Nacional. This debacle, known as the years of the "skinny cows," worsened during the stock market crash of 1929, and its effects rippled throughout the following decade. It plunged the Cuban economy into a deep economic crisis; unemployment and poverty reached levels never experienced, except perhaps for the 1898 war; and criminal activities, notably robberies and homicides, skyrocketed (Le Riverend 1965; Ibarra Cuesta 1998).

Spanish clubs or cultural centers (Centro Gallego, Centro Asturiano, and Centro Andaluz) in Havana either arranged for the departure of thousands of Spaniards who had lost their jobs or provided shelter and food for those who decided to stay. These fateful years, from 1920 to 1929, coincided with the governments of Zayas and Machado and with the launch of *Revista de Avance*. The effects of the 1921 cataclysm remained fresh in everybody's memories, mostly in the minds of well-off Spanish-Cubans and Cubans of Spanish descent, among them Ortiz himself (his maternal family was from Menorca) and the very editors of the magazine: Casanovas was Catalanian; Marinello's father, Catalanian; Ichaso's mother, Canarian, his father, Basque; and Mañach's father, Galician and one of the presidents of the Centro Gallego in Havana. The editors endeavored to craft a Cuban culture, but love for Spain ran deep in their veins, as did their bitterness toward the United States, which was forever blamed for the hardships and suffering of Cubans and for the losses endured by the Spaniards and their ongoing exodus.

It is likely that in an effort to stop that flight, powerful Spanish businesses and social clubs financed *Revista de Avance* and the Institución. Among them were Crusellas; Bacardí rum; Real Sidra Asturiana CIMA; Pons, Cobo y Cía; Trianon jewelry store; Fin de Siglo department store; Café La Isla; Casino Español; Casa Editora Cultural; Bach Music Conservatory; and the Asturian, Galician, and Andalusian centers. Naranjo Orovio and Puig-Samper (2000, 488) mention that Compañía Trasatlántica Española offered a 40 percent discount on round-trip tickets of Spanish scholars invited to lecture at the Institución. Even in its first issue, *Revista de Avance* published an article signed by the Spanish socialist politician and writer Luis Araquistáin calling Spaniards in Cuba to invest heavily on the island so as to avoid borrowing money from the United States (Araquistáin 1927, 5).

The evidence suggests that *Revista de Avance* became a propaganda front at the service of the Institución Hispano-Cubana de Cultura. In several instances the editors defended themselves against similar recriminations. When an unnamed person complained about the magazine's sponsorship of Goya's exhibition, the editors responded that celebrating Goya and Góngora did not imply they were unconditional servants of Spanish culture. If that were the case, what better source to draw from than Spain, the pillar of Cuban culture? (Los Cinco 1928b, 108). Even *Amauta* published a note scolding the editors for still paying tribute to the old metropolis. The editorial board retorted that their selection of artists and writers was based exclusively on aesthetic criteria, adding that their promotion of American writers did not equal admiration for Yankee imperialism (Los Cinco 1928c,

204).<sup>11</sup> Ramón Rubiera, a journalist from *Bohemia*, accused *Revista de Avance* of being ancient and colonial. The editors riposted that the magazine had published the best of Cuban and foreign cultures, and their regard for the Spaniards Ramón Gómez de la Serna and Federico García Lorca sprang from the modernity of their works, not their place of birth (Los Cinco 1928a, 267–268).

The editors had to defend themselves against another accusation: their reluctance to openly criticize Machado's government despite having led the political demonstrations of the early 1920s against the corruption of former President Zayas. When in 1927 readers asked why *Revista de Avance* had remained silent about Machado's recent repression of students' protests, the editors replied that the magazine was strictly cultural even though culture included "ideological concerns" (Los Cinco 1927a, 41).

The pressure on the editors to issue political statements must have intensified because almost a year later, Marinello (1928, 7) reiterated that the magazine was an exclusively aesthetic publication and those who expected loud attacks against specific people (likely a reference to Machado) would be very disappointed. One can only speculate that the conspicuous omission was probably due to the close links of lawyers Vázquez-Bello and Rivas-Vázquez to Machado: One partner led Machado's senate, and another was a legal adviser to the president. They prominently advertised their law firm in the magazine and helped fund it. Ramiro Guerra, the authority on historical matters in *Revista de Avance*, would become secretary of Machado's presidency in 1932. Machado himself showed an increasing Hispanophilia during his tenure.<sup>12</sup> When in 1930 the university student Rafael Trejo was shot by Machado's police and Marinello was arrested and sent to prison, the editors decided to preemptively close the magazine to avoid the impending government's press censorship.

In the mid-1940s, the Moscow Politburo, through its Soviet embassy in Havana, appointed Ortiz president of the Instituto de Intercambio Cultural Cubano-Soviético (1945–1955), a front that spread communist ideas on the island and counterbalanced the political messages of the newly founded Instituto Cultural Cubano-Norteamericano (1943).<sup>13</sup> In the same style that he had championed Spanish culture in the 1920s and 1930s, Ortiz began to endorse Soviet culture and sciences through the organization of lectures, exhibitions, music concerts, and film presentations. The Instituto published *Cuba y la URSS*, a journal that praised Joseph Stalin's leadership and channeled Soviet propaganda for its Cuban readership. When Spain came under the rule of General Francisco Franco, many Spanish republicans found refuge in Cuba and formed an antifascist movement. In light of these political developments, in 1947 the Institución Hispano-Cubana (Ortiz's former domain) closed its doors.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> This response is interesting: After 1928, the editors included more American writers. One surmises that this editorial policy aimed to shield them against the Hispanophilia criticism.

<sup>12</sup> In 1927, the same year of the launch of *Revista de Avance*, Machado began to court the Spaniards living on the island. In July, he signed a commercial treaty with Spain, and during his presidential campaign a month later, he toured the Spanish centers across the island and visited the tombs of the Spanish soldiers killed in 1898. In 1928, Machado tasked his ambassador in Madrid, Mario García Kohly, with communicating to the then prime minister of Spain, General Primo de Rivera, his desire to erect a monument to Spanish soldiers in Cuba and build a park in Havana devoted to Spain (Macías Martín, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> In 1943, the then President Fulgencio Batista established diplomatic relations between Cuba and the Soviet Union. Joseph Stalin appointed Maxim Litvinoff, the Soviet ambassador in Washington, to be his representative in Havana as well. Shortly after, Andrei Gromyko replaced Litvinoff as ambassador to both countries. There is scant information on the Instituto's origins. The Cuban historian Katia Figueredo Cabrera (2018, 456) mentions that the Soviet embassy was key in its formation.

<sup>14</sup> The Instituto was organized into several sections: social and economic, visual arts, dramatic arts and motion pictures, music and dance, medicine, physical and mathematical sciences, history, urbanism, education, literature, press and publicity. Among other activities, it sponsored an exhibition of Soviet photographs in Havana and

Ortiz—probably the most influential figure in pre-1959 Cuban culture—shifted allegiances when he recognized the Soviet Union as an emergent power that could help Cuba combat US dominance. One can trace a clear line of continuity from the leftist, anti-imperialist, and Hispanophile generation of *Revista de Avance* to Fidel Castro. By helping the Soviets establish a cultural foothold on the island, Ortiz prepared the ground for the advent of the 1959 revolution, led by that young law student, son of a wealthy Galician father, and avowed anti-Yankee. After denouncing the ills of the latifundio (the plantation economy) that Americans had imported from the US South to the island and promising to “return Cuba to Cubans,” Castro successfully overthrew Fulgencio Batista’s regime. However, soon enough, he suppressed elections, declared his revolution socialist, implemented a dictatorship that continues to this day, ruthlessly repressed and executed political dissidents, and opened the country’s doors to the Soviet Union, the third empire to cast its shadow over the small island. Many felt this was an unforgivable betrayal of his pledge to liberate Cuba from tyranny and foreign influence. Significantly, members of *Revista de Avance*’s circle, Ortiz, Carpentier, Marinello, Roa, and Tallet, would all make important contributions to Castro’s Soviet-era cultural policies.

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