

The light of the suzerain and the shadow of the colony -- another kind of harmony of light and shadow

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Abstract: Julio Visquerra, a national treasure artist from Honduras, uses a unique and diverse painting language to construct a Baroque magical realism that combines lyricism, irony and criticism. Many of his works “inlay” the magnificent portraits of European aristocrats into the rich resources and landforms of Latin America, creating harmonious and integrated visual pleasure with bright and rich colors. In fact, he is presenting an ambiguous directionality and a vague symbolism in an implicit and obscure way. His works represent a certain aspect of the development of Latin American art, which is to enrich Latin America’s colonial history, collective memory, and its complex political situation and ideology in an attractive yet confusing way of expression, while at the same time quietly dissolving them in a carnivalesque way.

Key Words: Julio Visquerra, Latin America, Tropics, Mask, Conquest, Colony, Suzerain

1.Introduction

As a Honduran artist renowned in the contemporary art world, Julio Visquerra’s growth journey represents the experience of a considerable number of Latin American artists. In his early years, he was immersed in the natural and cultural environment of Latin America, and the original “artistic gene” grew in his body; in his youth, he roamed around Europe and learned various artistic expression techniques; in middle age, he returned to his homeland and “buried” the experimental forms of European art in the cultural soil of Latin America, allowing them to take root, sprout, bloom and bear fruit. Julio Visquerra’s paintings are also representative, combining a variety of elements, some of which reflect inclusiveness of identity and others reveal a gentle irony. Unfortunately, there are currently only some emotional descriptions of his life experience and artistic creation in the style of art criticism. As the author of this article, I attempt to conduct a comprehensive academic analysis, induction and conclusion.

2. Literature Review

Although Julio Visquerra is famous in both America and Europe, there is currently a lack of detailed, in-depth and thorough academic analysis of his works and his complete artistic landscape. Most art critics only describe the viewer’s immediate psychological feelings in an emotional and lyrical way, or only capture certain distinctive features and elements in his works for comment. These critical expressions lack unique theoretical perspectives and academic interventions. Juan Carlos Flores Zúñiga is a rare scholar who has made academic interpretations of Julio Visquerra’s works. He analyzed several of Julio Visquerra’s works from the perspective of the duality of globalization and localization, and came up with the concept of “glocalism”, which combines the above two tendencies. However, he only selected Julio Visquerra’s political satire works as cases for analysis. Feeling that there are many deficiencies and unexplored areas in the research in this field, I tried to conduct a holistic exploration and in-depth revelation of Julio Visquerra’s artistic creation.

3. Research Methods

This study is a qualitative research, which adopts field investigation method, interview survey and iconology. I lived and worked in Latin America from the end of 2019 to the beginning of 2024, and had the opportunity to visit Julio Visquerra’s exhibition and interview him. After sorting out and integrating a large amount of information, I will use colonialism and postcolonialism theories and reception aesthetics as the research perspective and theoretical basis to analyze the implicit political connotations and historical memories in Julio Visquerra’s paintings, and analyzes their open structure.

4. Analysis Process

4.1 A brief outline of Julio Visquerria' s creation experience

Julio Visquerria was born an artist, a complete artist, he came into the world as an artist and he will die as an artist. Today, his name has crossed the world's geography, his work has gained international recognition, there is no Honduran who does not know him, and he has been immortalized in the history of Central American art.



Figure 1. The photo of Julio Visquerria with his work at the “ Spring Time ” solo exhibition held in March 2020. Image source: <https://www.latribuna.hn/2020/03/17/tiempos-de-primavera-de-julio-visquerria-en-exposicion/>

Julio Visquerria was born in 1945[1] in San Isidro, a small town in southern Honduras. When he was a young child, his family moved to La Ceiba, a city on the Caribbean coast in the north. At the age of twelve, he fell in love with oil painting. In 1961, his oil paintings were first exhibited in the city hall of Puerto Cortés, the largest port city in Honduras. In the same year, he entered the National Academy of Fine Arts (La Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes de Comayagüela) in Comayagüela with a government scholarship. During his time at school, in addition to studying plastic arts, out of his love for drama, he also studied a series of courses such as acting, stage setting, and drama history under the tutelage of Francisco Cerrato, and joined the National Chorus Choir. He then traveled to the United States, where he received an honor that almost all artists dream of -- permanent exhibitor status at the Harvard University Museum.

In September 1966, he left for Spain. In 1970, his exhibition at the Barcelona Museum of Modern Art was a great success, and he was later awarded the status of a permanent exhibitor, a special treatment granted to him by the Museo de Antequera. In the late 1970s, he focused on the theater work that he had always loved but had little opportunity to do, and married Austrian woman Claudia Bischof, moving to Vienna with his wife. After that, he created works of art while exhibiting in various European countries and the United States. It can be said that the mid-to-late 1980s was the stage when he established his world reputation and international fame.

In 1990, he returned to his homeland, Honduras, with his wife. He could not forget the drama art that he deeply loved. Two years after his return, when Giuseppe Verdi's opera “La Traviata” was performed at the Grand Theater in Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras, he not only designed the stage scenery, but also played a small role in the play. Of course, his main focus was on painting. In the 1990s, his works “traveled” all over Latin America and became popular, from the Classic Art Collection Center in Costa Rica to the 21st Century Gallery in El Salvador, from the International Art Exhibition Center in Panama to the Paiz Biennial in Guatemala. Wherever he went, he was worshiped and adored.

His popularity in the United States and Europe has continued to grow: in 1991, some of his paintings were included in the permanent collection of the Museum of the Americas in Washington; in 1993, one of his allegorical paintings about Mayan culture became part of the collection of the King of Spain; in 1994, Italian actress Ginna Lollobrigida invited him to paint her portrait... In 2000, the Honduran government

held a retrospective exhibition for him at the National Gallery to celebrate his 40 years of artistic career. His work “El Encuentro” (The Conference) was chosen by the Honduran President and his wife as a special gift to Prince Felipe de Borbón and Letizia Ortiz on their wedding.

4.2 The gift of light and evolution of Julio Visquerria’ s painting style

Bold and almost extravagant colors, meticulous depiction of every detail, sensitive capture of light and unsparing use of it, the confluence of artistic styles since the Renaissance and the surrealist art trend -- all of this makes Julio Visquerria’s paintings a coronation of matter. When hyperrealism and transcendentalism collide in a seamless way, a feast of light, color and imagination is served.

Filadelfo Suazo, a Honduran writer, once commented: “The prosperous colors in Julio Visquerria’s paintings are dazzling and fascinating. His works always invite people to read the details in detail. Those fruits, dogs, fish, bright silk, faces of people... are all spiritual forces that transform matter, and are a magical maze!”[2] Salvadoran artist César Menéndez complimented: “Julio Visquerria’s work is easy to understand. Although mysterious characters and the mixture and intersection of multiple elements fill the canvas, his painting language is still direct and recognizable. His lyrical life experiences are revealed in his works, and he also echoes the style of Eduardo Galeano. His paintings are rich in color, and the paint and the sense of the picture seem to suddenly attack you. You will feel that your retina is suddenly distorted, and the whole person is touched and affected! Yes, his paintings successfully stimulate people’s instincts!”[3]

Almost every Latin American painter is obsessed with light, because this continent is definitely favored by the sun god, and the sun’s eyes always gaze at this vast land passionately and for a long time. Julio Visquerria’s painting habits are therefore quite representative: “For me, the studio is like a sanctuary, but painting replaces prayer. I finish my work in the daylight, not because I don’t want to continue working at night, but because my creative process only exists in the morning and daytime sunlight; besides, I don’t like the lights at night. When the sun sets, the day is over.” The typical and original Latin Americans have a special feeling for light, just like Julio Visquerria. There is no frost or snow in Julio Visquerria’s paintings, and the bright and enviable sunshine has become the background of most of his paintings.

Like all artists, Julio Visquerria’s style evolved. Initially, he painted within a very clear expressionist tendency; then, his style showed recognizable cubist tendencies; then, until 1976, he struggled to find his own way of expression. To do this, he studied the works of art from the Italian Renaissance and the Spanish Baroque, such as Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Caravaggio, Zurbarán and Goya; at the same time, he analyzed surrealist works of art, such as Salvador Dalí, René Magritte and Max Ernst. Finally, he constructed his own artistic language: a baroque magic realism that coexists with lyricism, irony and critical content.

Julio Visquerria’s extraordinary vision extracted rationality from the delightful nature. When we look at his paintings, we seem to see the works of Raphael, but it is a modified Raphael. In addition, the magnificent and overlapping colors and lines in his paintings imply complicated historical and political elements.

His works represent a certain aspect of the development of Latin American art, which is to enrich Latin America’s colonial history, collective memory, and its complex political situation and ideology in an attractive yet confusing way of expression, while at the same time quietly dissolving them in a carnivalesque way.

His works are a phantasmagoric whole that is the result of the integration of art and life. For him, art is inseparable from life, and life is inseparable from art. Therefore, when we appreciate his works, we should not ignore his living space and lifestyle.

4.3 The relationship between fruits and people: the hidden symbolic meaning of fruits in Julio Visquerria’ s paintings

In Julio Visquerra's paintings, mountains, oceans, the always clear and dry sky, and those mouth-watering tropical fruits are depicted tirelessly, because when God placed him where he came, those unique scenery and resources became a "birthmark" he was born with, accompanying his every cry and laugh.

As the saying goes, "the land and water nurture the people (i.e. each place nurtures its own inhabitants)", he himself once said: "As a painter, if you are born in the tropics, it is like gaining a privilege, because the power of nature will permeate the soul, and this power will eventually speak loudly through colors. I was born in the mountains and grew up by the sea. What else can I ask for? I believe that the surrounding environment always affects the formation of a painter and inevitably marks his growth trajectory. I regard myself as a person who was born for painting and lives for art, because I admire beauty." The scenes and objects he repeatedly depicted can resonate with all Latin Americans. From a geographical point of view, Latin America is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the east, the Pacific Ocean to the west, the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea to the north, and the plateau area in the middle section of the Andes Mountains is the birthplace of ancient civilizations in southern Latin America.

Latin America is characterized by its natural climate, with mountains and the sea, warm weather all year round, and bright sunshine for most days of the year. Latin America is rich in fruits, and there are many varieties, including mango, passion fruit, mami, cactus fruit, pineapple, banana, guava, red grape, crystal grape, cantaloupe, and so on. In Julio Visquerra's paintings, mountains, oceans and skies are the background, but fruits are not. They are either held on the characters' heads, or become part of hat decorations, or float above the characters, or naturally hang beside the characters' ears, or piled on the characters' chests, or roll off the tablecloth. In short, they are not embellishments but an important part of the characters' images and the overall configuration. They bring the viewer a drooling edible aesthetic experience in a mature, plump, tempting, surprising yet unobtrusive posture.

Longino Becerra Alvarado once analyzed: "The basic element of Julio Visquerra's paintings is the delicately rendered fruit, which shows the naturalistic details. We can't help but ask: what role does the element of fruit play in the physical structure built by the artist? There is no doubt that fruits represent life, hope and movement in Julio Visquerra's paintings. They are often in a state of falling, rather than in a state of complete inertness. The intention is clear: if there is alienation in a deformed environment, then there is also the possibility of reconquest in the same environment, provided that there is a rebellious and creative drive in the face of things." [4] Fietta Jarque Krebs wrote in the art review section of the Spanish newspaper *El País* on April 14, 1986: "Julio Visquerra escapes the constraints of the frame and his florid still life paintings throw apples, pears and other fruits out of the paintings!" [5]

It is worth noting that the protagonists of many of Julio Visquerra's paintings all carry fruits on their heads. This behavior is actually very common in Latin American countries. Whether on the white sand beaches in Cancun, beside the stone walls of San Jose Church, in the bustling markets of Bogota, or in the alleys of Rio de Janeiro, vendors selling fruits and snacks will put the things they want to sell into the big baskets on their heads and shout as they walk. However, what Julio Visquerra shows in his paintings is definitely not this lifestyle or custom. It should be noted that in the real Latin American world, walking vendors are poor people with no other survival skills, and Latin American society is still class-based. These walking vendors are almost all indigenous people and people of color, and few white people are engaged in this profession. In Julio Visquerra's paintings, the protagonists with fruits on their heads are elegant, hedonistic, delicate, rosy, and European aristocratic. They are definitely not walking vendors. To them, the fruits on their heads have become another kind of decoration like the feathers on the brim of their hats, symbolizing wealth.

4.4 Drama and Masks: Theatricality in Julio Visquerra's Paintings

Masks, jewelry, peacock feathers, and gorgeous theatrical costumes are other important elements in Julio Visquerra's paintings. A painter who loves theatrical art would naturally combine the two, so each of his paintings creates a theatrical scene that is both real and unreal, like a dream, and arouses people's imagination. Juan Carlos Flores Zúñiga once analyzed: "Julio Visquerra's deep love for theater permeates his paintings. Theater gives him inspiration, and painting presents the dramatic effects he loves. The two

are accompanied and organically integrated. His paintings are a door to his personality. Through painting, he can express himself with wisdom and sensibility.”[6]

In Europe, Julio Visquerra fell in love with the romantic city of drama--Venice. Many of his works use the azure lagoon as the background, with several gondolas slowly sailing on the lake, and churches, castles and royal palaces vaguely visible in the distance. The deep and cool color like diamonds covers the entire canvas. The protagonist is often a mysterious woman, holding an exquisite silk fan, wearing gorgeous jewelry around her neck, and wearing gracious European court costumes, with her slender white arms gracefully extending from the wide sleeves like pumpkin lanterns. Sometimes, jewelry boxes, perfume bottles, combs and small incense burners are scattered around; sometimes, apricot or ivory stone. Are they princesses, noble ladies or opera singers? We have no idea, but we know that half of their faces are always covered by masks. They always wear exaggerated hats filled with various tropical fruits and decorated with precious peacock feathers. Under the masks, their eyes are either arrogant, distant or thoughtful, and a cold and teasing feeling tugs at people's thoughts. Is the lower body of the person in the painting submerged in the water, leaning on the bow, or sitting in the courtyard? Classical instruments such as lutes, baroque guitars and cellos occasionally appear on Julio Visquerra's canvases. Perhaps, everything is just like the singing of the somnambulist in Bellini's play, and the crazy ravings of daydreamers.

The bizarre lines from Federico García Lorca's *Somnambule Ballad* (“The fig tree rubs its wind with the sandpaper of its branches. She is still on her balcony green flesh, her hair green, dreaming in the bitter sea”) fit perfectly with Julio Visquerra's painting “*Violonchelista*” (Female Cellist, 2003). Juan Carlos Flores Zúñiga further concluded: “All of Julio Visquerra's works constitute a magical reality in which humans have learned how to shape and adapt artistic feelings. The world he created has both dramatic and pictorial passions, and expresses his subjective interpretation of social history, surrounding environment and characters in a fiery and gorgeous way, so the viewer will draw more sensory experience and enjoyment from it.”[7]

“Julio Visquerra uses his knowledge and deep understanding of art history to express his passion for beautiful things, creating images full of visual tension. At the same time, he is attracted by masks, an artificiality that distorts our lives.”[8] When Claudia Rosseau, professor of art history at Montgomery College, pointed out this contradiction, the viewers might have been wondering why. Argentine art critic Hilda Breitenbach revealed the reason: “To say that Julio Visquerra is American is to mortgage his sensitive geopolitical consciousness, because his paintings transcend national boundaries, embrace and universalize us. At the same time, his paintings imply historical memory, however he is not a resentful person, but a silent bystander, watching a scene that is ignored or numbly accepted due to repetition -- the strong devouring the weak. Obviously, Julio has studied different faces that are enough to cover up power struggles or powerful bullying. In Oscar Wilde's ‘The Portrait of Dorian Gray’, those faces are hypocritical, greedy and ambitious, and Julio hides these faces behind rigid masks. These masks do not make concessions in expression, but are more eloquent in expressing the truth.”[9]

Beneath those bright colors is the colonists' satisfaction and complacency. Therefore, those wearing jewels and fruits on their heads are the people who once conquered this land and adorned themselves with all the spoils -- gold, silver, jewelry and tropical fruits rarely seen in Eurasia. The wealth of the colonized feeds the colonizers, while the colonizers' unparalleled arrogance and sense of superiority are hidden beneath the mask. This is why Julio Visquerra was so careful to depict the eyes behind the mask. He once explained: “Only the eyes can reflect the truth. I want the eyes to have their own language. If the viewer casts their gaze on the eyes behind the mask, they will find that the eyes are conveying the inner truth, which is the truth created by the artist through the painting. Every painting has its own story, and everyone sees the story they want to see in the painting.”

4.5 National Memory, Historical Presence and Postcolonial Echoes: The Calling Structure of Julio Visquerra's Paintings

In 2009, with the support of the Honduran Cultural Bureau, Julio Visquerra published a personal painting album. He divided his paintings into three parts: Tropics, Masks and Conquest, but in fact these three themes are intertwined. Regarding the last theme -- Conquest, Julio Visquerra himself explained: "I have lived in Europe for 23 years. After so many years of growth and shaping, I returned to my homeland. At this moment, I found that we actually have all the elements. The source of work and inspiration lies in our roots, our culture, nature and colonial heritage. I have always been interested in the theme of 'Conquest' because those armors and helmets are like the skin of the characters in my paintings. Everyone's world is hidden here. We all carefully guard our fears, suspicions, secrets and certain complexes." But he did not directly lay out the brutal history of colonialism and plunder on the canvas. His paintings, as always, are like gorgeous stage sets, conforming to the public's aesthetic views and understanding of beauty.

The famous work "Hacia la Batalla" (Heading for Battle) included in the "Conquest" section is quite interesting: fully armed soldiers holding long spears and riding horses in the tropical jungle. But even though this painting expresses the theme of war, it deliberately avoids the cruel atmosphere of fighting and conquering cities.

Bloody scenes never appear in Julio Visquerra's paintings, and this work is no exception. Instead, the dancing butterflies in the paintings are impressive, from the migratory monarch butterfly to the mysterious and noble blue morpho, from the red-rumped swallowtail that only flies when the sun is sufficient to the seemingly delicate and fragile but actually strong transparent wings. These rare butterfly species that almost only live in Latin America are in full bloom on the canvas. Some of them shuttle among the gray-brown weapons, curiously looking at the necks of the war horses, and some land on the edge of the stand-up collar of the Spanish armor worn by the soldiers. They symbolize the brightness, beauty and rare treasures of Latin America, until one day, their peaceful life is broken.

Another interesting thing about this painting is that the huge helmet with teeth on the top and the shape of ship wings on both sides covers the eyes of all the soldiers, but this does not mean that the painter has gone against his usual practice and abandoned his careful observation and depiction of the eyes of the characters. If you look at the piercing eyes of the war horses, you will understand the deep significance. They may not be Ferghana horses, but each of them is wearing embroidered jade belts, jadeite and agate, and their eyes are full of firmness, determination, murderous aura, thirst for wealth and indifference to life. Even the war horses are like this, let alone the invaders.

It is worth mentioning that the butterfly as a symbol has a special meaning in the modern history of Latin America: the Mirabal sisters, political activists in the Dominican Republic, were well-known for their active participation in social affairs and opposition to the dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina (1930-1961). They became spiritual leaders of the people and people affectionately called them the "Butterfly Sisters". On November 25, 1960, Trujillo sent his men to track down and kill the Mirabal sisters. Afterwards, the murderer faked the crime scene to look like a car accident. Naturally, the official newspaper also cooperated with the government to claim that the Mirabal sisters died in a traffic accident and eventually fell into the sea. Trujillo went to the fake accident scene afterwards and said an infamous statement that was later recorded in history: "The Mirabal sisters died here! What good women they are, but they are so vulnerable!" However, it turned out that the dictator himself was vulnerable. Just half a year after he made his outrageous statement, his opponents successfully assassinated him. The Trujillo dictatorship officially collapsed, and the white terror that had burned the Dominican Republic in the flames of hell for 30 years finally came to an end.[10]

In 2001, Spanish director Mariano Barroso made a movie about the lives of the Mirabal sisters, "In the Time of the Butterflies", starring Salma Hayek. The most classic scene of the movie is the last one: the sticks of the thugs fell like raindrops, and the Mirabal sisters tried their best to dodge. Their figures became more and more blurred. Suddenly, a group of colorful butterflies flew on the screen, and the movie ended in the sad atmosphere of the fluttering wings of butterflies. This ending implies that the souls of the Mirabal sisters turned into butterflies, which is similar to the ending of the legendary Chinese love story "Butterfly Lovers". In the hearts of the Latin American people, butterflies symbolize the courage to fight and resist without fear of any tyranny and power. To this day, many Latin American

countries still call November 25, the day when the Mirabal sisters were killed, “Butterfly Memorial Day”, i.e. the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.[11]

Back to the painting “Hacia la Batalla” (Heading for Battle), colorful butterflies fluttered wherever the invaders’ hooves went. Perhaps Julio Visquerra wanted to convey similar meanings and historical facts through this aesthetic method: From the late 18th century to the early and mid-19th century, the awakened Latin American colonists rose up and began to bravely resist the cruel exploitation and rule of the European colonial powers (mainly Spain and Portugal). In October 1790, in order to fight for equal civil rights, Vincent Ogé, the mixed-race leader of Saint-Domingue, led more than 700 Haitian mixed-race people and free blacks to launch an armed uprising, which marked the beginning of the Latin American independence movement. As the saying goes: Where there is injustice, there will be an outcry; A spark can start a prairie fire. The wave of colonized people seeking liberation and independence swept across Latin America, affecting 20 million people and eventually destroying the colonial rule of in Latin America, all Spanish Americas except Cuba gained independence.

According to the opinion of Spanish art critic José María Amado: “To understand Julio Visquerra’s artistic creation, I think it is necessary to start from the geographical environment. He was born on the umbilical cord connecting the North and South Americas, which is the tongue of land between the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. From the originally powerful and rich America to the later conquered colonies deeply marked by Spanish culture, Spanish-speaking Americans live in painful invasions and their spirits are endlessly oppressed. This is the key to understanding García Márquez, Julio Cortázar and Vargas Llosa. Sometimes, when people look at the black horizon, they know that there is no other way except death or escape.”[12] However, only those who are familiar with Latin American history can read the pain that is about to be forgotten from Julio Visquerra’s paintings, because all the colonial pain is hidden in beautiful, bright and pleasing colors. His paintings are undoubtedly implicit, restrained, introverted and obscure in their expression of the theme of conquest and colonization. But at the same time, as long as his paintings are read and studied in an intertextual comparison with the history of Latin America, the scars that cannot be erased by the long years are ready to emerge from his works.

For example, the banana that appears repeatedly in Julio Visquerra’s paintings may be a metaphor for the original sin of the banana in Latin America. Long and plump, golden yellow, ready to eat when peeled, seedless, sweet and soft, dense in texture, loved by even children - these words can be used to describe the tropical fruit, which is a blessing or a curse, depending on who you are talking to. In the Qur’an, the banana tree is a tree of heaven, but if you ask the slaves who have worked in the “Banana Republic”[13], they will say that it is clearly a tree of hell.

“In Europe and the United States, people began to eat bananas, so they leveled the forests of Central America and planted bananas instead. Railways were built to transport bananas, and the number of white fleets heading north, loaded with bananas, increased year by year. This is the history of the American Empire in the Caribbean, the history of the Panama Canal, the history of the canal to be built in Nicaragua, and the history of marines, armored ships, and bayonets.”[14] When John Dos Passos narrated the changes in the history of Central and South America in a calm tone, readers of later generations probably found it difficult to imagine what kind of cruel times the people who actually lived in history experienced. From the late 19th century to the early 20th century, the United Fruit Company of the United States occupied large tracts of land in Panama, Colombia, Honduras, Guatemala, Ecuador and other countries by means of “trading railways for land”. The locals became banana machines for planting, mining and harvesting bananas, that is, a labor force that was so cheap that it was almost free, was infinitely exploited, no one cared about their life or death, and spent their lives in pain and despair. Their lives passed away in a slow and miserable way in endless labor.

“Each Indian had to carry a small book with the number of days worked recorded on it: if the authorities deemed that the number of days worked was insufficient, the person would be imprisoned to pay off his debts or work in the fields for six months without pay. On the Pacific coast, workers worked in knee-deep mud in extremely unsanitary conditions for only 30 cents a day, while the United Fruit Company slyly argued that it was under pressure from dictator Jorge Ubico to reduce wages.”[15] This is the historical

fact revealed by Uruguayan journalist Eduardo Hughes Galeano in his book *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*. Peeling off the banana skin and the outer layer of history, what people see is the greed of the colonizers and the ugly faces of the collusion between the rulers and the colonizers. These faces are presented in Julio Visquerra's oil paintings in a distorted, obscure, ironic and strange way.

Take the painting "Disertación de los poetas en la mesa" (Poets' dissertation at the table) as an example: This painting presents the two elements of skin color and class to the viewer in an ironic way. From Julio Visquerra's creative perspective, poets, as the most romantic group of intellectuals, are also white. They live a life of luxury, enjoying delicious food while casually talking about learning. For them, the exchange of knowledge occurs at the same time as the enjoyment of life. Undoubtedly, they are guests from the upper class. This group of people has lost their human facial features. Men and women are dressed in banquet gowns, toasting each other, but their faces are replaced by bird heads or become a blank piece (like a light bulb or a duck egg). A "gentleman" in a tuxedo even has an orange-red tail. The necklaces on the necks of the three female guests complement the fine wine in front of them, reflecting their affluent lives. Of course, there are all kinds of fruits on the table, such as watermelon, mango, etc., including a large bunch of bananas. Behind the guests are splendor clouds and dark blue sea, and tropical fish swim between the guests' legs. The gray cat stretched its head to catch the fruit rolling on the table, leaving behind a playful and elegant back view. The white guests are slender and light in terms of their physical features, but why did the painter erase their faces as human beings? The two guests, a man and a woman, in the foreground of the painting seem to be dancing some kind of now-lost dance. What are they trying to express with this strange body language? Obviously, there is tension between them because they are arguing, but are they showing the conflict itself in a way that glorifies war? While the pampered poets were consuming sumptuous food, they were also exporting knowledge and opinions. Their essays were "written" on the dining table. This kind of visual language is very interesting, as it juxtaposes two seemingly unrelated behaviors, thus producing rich connotations.



Figure 2. Julio Visquerra's painting "Disertación de los poetas en la mesa" (Poets' dissertation at the table). Image source: <https://www.meer.com/es/54139-el-realismo-fantastico-de-julio-visquerra>

This is the style of Julio Visquerria. The politician he painted has a monkey face with an exaggerated expression. When the viewer sees such a face, adjectives such as eager for quick success, complacency, greed and vanity will jump out of their minds. But Julio Visquerria never mentions the specific names, and the characters in his paintings have no prototypes. Only people who are familiar with Latin American history will flow smile tears when viewing them. His art works always bring some questions to the viewers, who try to solve the mystery by following the images and clues in his paintings, but ultimately their thoughts will diverge to nowhere and end in vain, without finding a foothold.

It can be said that Julio Visquerria's paintings have a "calling structure". The so-called "calling structure" refers to the blank points and undetermined points in literary and artistic works that make the entire text present an open structure. This structure itself is always calling on the active participation of the recipient, enriching and concretizing it through re-creation. This theory was proposed by Wolfgang Iser, a representative of German reception aesthetics. He believed that the uncertainty of text meaning gives readers/viewers the right to participate in the construction of meaning. A literary or artistic work that highlights the "calling structure" will inspire readers/viewers to associate and imagine, and realize the potential aesthetic value of the work in a personalized way. The "calling structure" generates motivation, which drives readers/viewers to actively participate in the construction and divergence of meaning. In the view of Wolfgang Iser, on the premise of providing sufficient information for understanding, the more uncertain factors and "blanks" that the creator deliberately leaves in an artwork, the deeper its meaning will be and the higher the artistic quality will be. Otherwise, it cannot be called an amazing work of art.[16] It can be seen that whether we explore the colors, lines, light and shadow in Julio Visquerria's paintings from the perspective of art history, or explore the "temptation" of his paintings to viewers from the perspective of reception aesthetics, Julio Visquerria's paintings can be regarded as excellent works.

His painting "Tierra" (Earth) has a relatively clear theme. The protagonists of the painting are still monsters with monkey faces and human bodies. They are surrounded by medals, military uniforms, and battle robes. In the center of the painting is a globe, and some areas on the globe are measured by some kind of instrument. Various fruits are stacked at the bottom of the picture, and naturally there are bunches of bananas. Black birds are locked in cages, and the banknotes only occupy a small corner of the picture, but they are very conspicuous. The monsters are holding mobile phones to make calls or send text messages, and the planes in the sky are leaning over and flying towards the mountains... This painting includes topics such as colonialism, capitalism, and globalization, and the painter's critical spirit is ready to emerge.

Like most Latin American people, the locals always hate Europe's territorial colonization and the United States' economic colonization. On the other hand, corrupt politics and backward economy make the locals discouraged and even desperate. They try their best to migrate to Europe or the United States legally or even illegally -- even though the people in those places have hurt them before.

Julio Visquerria also has this contradictory personality to a greater or lesser extent. He is undoubtedly fascinated by the European landscape, mood, temperament and demeanor of European women. The Europe and European women he painted about are also naturally intoxicating, but the beauty of Europe also hurts him. When he talked about his motherland and his homeland to Europeans, he must have encountered the same situation that almost all Hondurans would fall into.

Honduras, a country famous for the Copán ruins and the Great Blue Hole, has aroused the interest of white people in Mayan civilization. When white people talk with interest about other landscapes on this land, such as the rainforest, *Dianthus caryophyllus* and Patuca River, they inevitably talk about the frequent coups, poor social security, rampant AIDS, filthy slums, stagnant industry and the notorious "wife swapping" custom.

At this time, as a famous painter, what kind of response could Julio Visquerria make? He could popularize the cruel colonial history of the Spanish Kingdom. However, the custom of "wife swapping" is a Mayan legacy. People would say that if there were no Spanish missionaries, such barbaric customs would probably still prevail in the world. He could tell people how Honduras' rich mineral resources were plundered by white people from Europe and the United States, and how Honduras gradually became a member of the "Banana Republic". However, Chile and Panama have experienced similar history. Now,

they have become the most economically developed regions in Latin America, attracting foreign businessmen and investment from all over the world every year, while Honduras seems to have been forgotten by God and abandoned itself. The most ironic thing is that to this day, the banana industry is still the mainstay of Honduras' economy.

5. Conclusion

In terms of the evolution of sovereignty, many countries and regions in the world have broken away from the rule of the colonists. However, whether it is when the former colonies are constructing their own subjectivity in the process of breaking away from the rule of the colonial powers, or when the former colonial powers are gazing at the former colonies with a sense of superiority, the delay and stagnation of the colonial gaze is always happening. The eye of power is always staring at the former colonized, and the colonized also "inherited" the thinking, vision and voice of the colonizers when they gained independence. This is what Homi Kharshedji Bhabha calls ambivalence. Homi Bhabha believes that the identity of the colonized is split into a binary yet unified state, and the original local cultural identity of the colonized and the cultural identity of the colonizer constitute a hybrid. He then developed the concept of hybridity. In his view, colonialism is not a thing of the past, nor has it disappeared. Colonial history and culture are continuously invading the present.[17]

Most of Julio Visquerra's paintings present ambiguous directions and implicit symbols in a euphemistic way, "venting" this ambivalence until it begins to produce a visually aesthetically pleasing effect, until the colonists in the paintings, the rich products in the colonies, and the continent where the mother country is located all coexist harmoniously in a rounded and harmonious manner and attitude.

According to William Rowe and Vivian Schelling in *Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America*, hybridity is when old cultural forms are separated from their original context or mode of expression and then reborn in a new context or combined with new cultural forms to generate new meanings or new modes of expression. [18] In the book *The Location of Culture*, Homi Kharshedji Bhabha argues that culture must be understood as a complex intersection of geographical diversity, historical temporality, and differences in subject positions. In this space of cultural hybridity, differences emerge as an in-betweenness. The cultural identities of the original colonizers and colonized are no longer important, and the cultural identities of the current residents living in the former colonies are inevitably mixed.[19]

When a person develops attachments to different ethnic groups or language communities, or loses his or her attachment to any specific group, a hybridity of cultural identities is generated. The historical identity inherent in culture no longer exists. Culture is not a homogeneous, unified force, nor is it an entity with authentic origins and passed down from generation to generation in national traditions. Therefore, cultural identity must be negotiated on the basis of subverting and reorganizing the power relationship between colonizers and colonized, so that controversial cultural meanings are constantly challenged, reread, appropriated, and reorganized. In a sense, Julio Visquerra's paintings are also a cross-cultural "third space". This space is vague and fluid, and it intentionally or unintentionally promotes the dynamic process of "interculturality" and calls for the viewer's interpretation.

[1] Although some websites list his birth year as 1943, he himself confirmed that it should be 1945.

[2] *El Heraldo* (2018, May 19). "Julio Visquerra o el maravilloso desconcierto de la belleza" (Julio Visquerra or the wonderful bewilderment of beauty), from <https://www.elheraldo.hn/entretenimiento/julio-visquerra-o-el-maravilloso-desconcierto-de-la-belleza-ACEH1179393#image-1>

[3] [8] [9] [12] Visquerra, J. (2009). *Exuberancia tropical*. Tegulcigalpa, M.D.C., Honduras, C. A: Secretaría de Cultura, Artes y Deportes.

[4] Alvarado, L. (1998, February 4). "Elementos en las pinturas de Julio Visquerra" (Elements in Julio Visquerra's paintings), from *Libertad de Expresión*.

[5] Krebs, F. (1986, April 14). “Reseña de la exposición de pintura de Julio Visquerra” (Review of Julio Visquerra’s Exhibition), from El País.

[6] [7] Zúñiga, J. (2008). “Julio Visquerra: Glocalismo Fantastico” (Julio Visquerra: Fantastic Glocalism), from Ars Kriterion E-Zine.

[10] Calderón, R. (2022). *The Mirabal Sisters, From Caterpillars to Butterflies*. Cayena Press, Inc.

[11] Roorda, E. (2019, June 25). The Murder of the Mirabal Sisters in the Dominican Republic. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Social Work. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.013.487>

[13] When someone mentions a “banana republic,” they’re referring to a small, poor, politically unstable country that is weak because of an excessive reliance on one crop and foreign funding. The term originated as a way to describe the experiences of many countries in Central America, whose economies and politics were dominated by U.S.-based banana exporters at the turn of the 20th century. See Wilson, M. (2022, August 12). “What’s a banana republic? A political scientist explains”, The Conversation, from <https://theconversation.com/whats-a-banana-republic-a-political-scientist-explains-188573>

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[17] [19] Bhabha, H. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. Routledge.

[18] Rowe, W. & Schelling V. (1991). *Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America*. Verso Books.