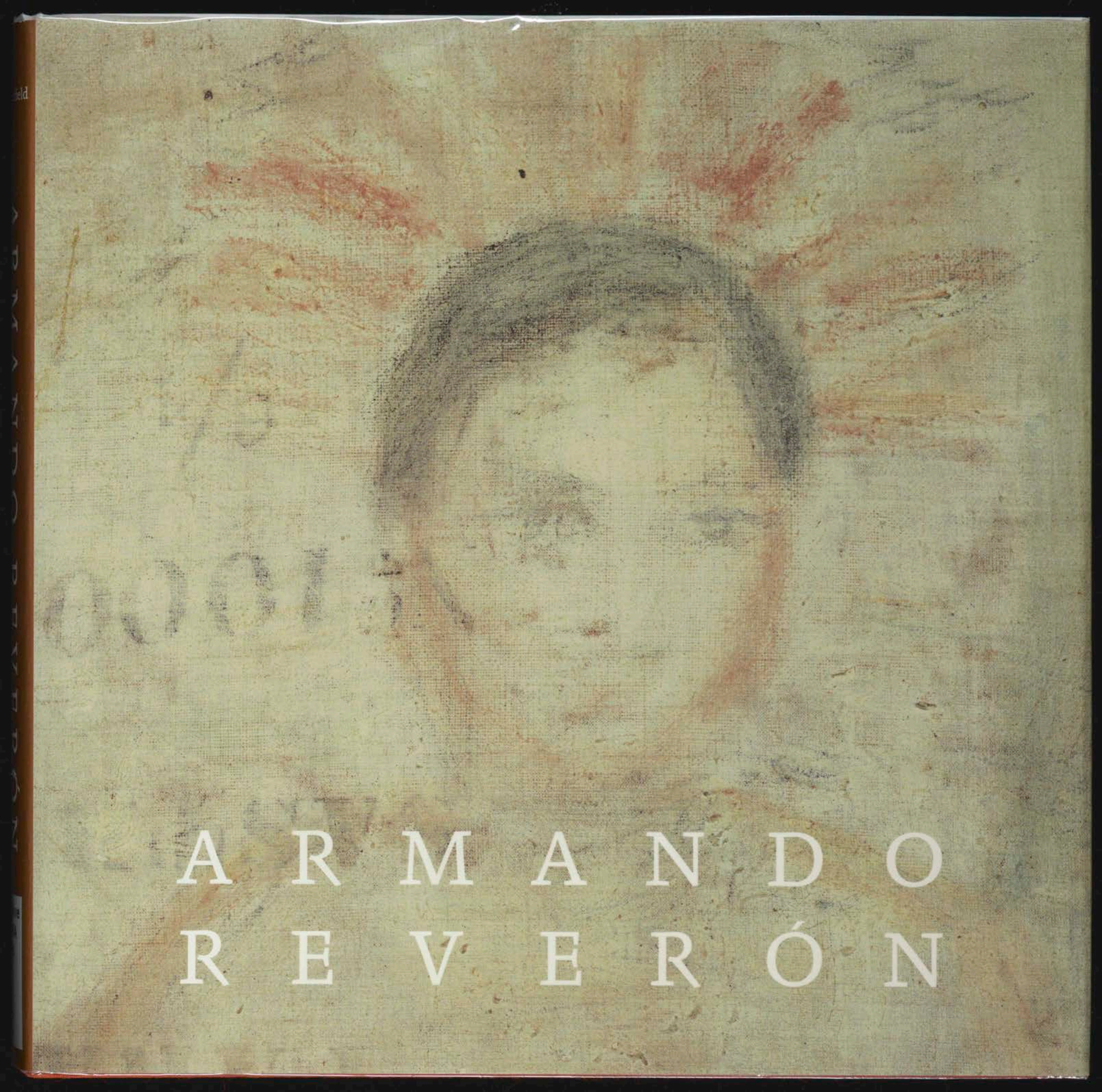
ARMANDO
REVERÓN

ARMANDO REVERÓN

By John Elderfield, with an essay by Luis Pérez-Oramas and catalogue texts by Nora Lawrence

This volume celebrates the work of the Venezuelan artist Armando Reverón (1889–1954). Highly regarded in his native country, but still little known outside Latin America, Reverón is perhaps the last—and, certainly, one of the most elusive—of the great early modernists to be presented to international audiences.

Reverón studied art in his native Venezuela and then in Spain, where he discovered the work of Francisco Goya and one of his instructors was José Ruiz Blasco, the father of Pablo Picasso. Back in Caracas, he participated in the Círculo de Bellas Artes, a group of young artists seeking to develop a specifically national modernism, only to move in 1921 to the coastal town of Macuto, where, over a number of years, he built a complex called El Castillete (The Little Castle). By the mid-1920s he had fused Post-Impressionist idioms with an extremely tactile surface and a bleached, almost monochromatic palette, creating his most widely celebrated, radical paintings. In the 1930s he turned to making mysterious sepia-toned figure compositions, initially of supposedly indigenous subjects, but by the end of that decade he was using as models the uncanny life-size dolls that he made with his companion, Juanita Ríos, along with a wide variety of imitation household objects. After a return to landscape painting in the early 1940s, which produced Venezuela's first depictions of the industrial landscape, Reverón concentrated again on figural works and, finally, on a series of extraordinary self-portraits surrounded by dolls. Reverón spent the later years of his life in the seclusion of El Castillete, yet as his fame grew he was increasingly visited by the photographers and filmmakers who shaped his image as a new Robinson Crusoe in the Caribbean.

This very first publication on Reverón in English accompanies an exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art in early 2007. John Elderfield gives a newly comprehensive account of the artist's development in the context of modern art, while Luis Pérez-Oramas places Reverón in relation to Latin American art. More than 100 works—paintings, drawings, and objects—are illustrated in the catalogue, which includes introductory texts by Nora Lawrence. An autobiographical statement by Reverón and an interview with him, a bibliographical note, and an index conclude the publication.

240 pages; 164 color and 41 black and white illustrations

ARMANDO REVERÓN

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John Elderfield

Luis Pérez-Oramas
Nora Lawrence

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

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This exhibition is organized by The Museum of Modern Art in cooperation with the Fundación Museos Nacionales of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and the Proyecto Armando Reverón, Caracas.

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Front cover: Armando Reverón. *Daughter of the Sun* (detail). [1939]. Oil on burlap, 21 $^{1}/_{16}$ × 19 $^{13}/_{16}$" (53.5 × 50.3 cm). Mercantil Collection
Frontispiece and back cover: Armando Reverón with dolls, photographed by Victoriano de los Ríos. c. 1949–54

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Foreword

Armando Reverón (1889–1954) was an extraordinary artist, who is revered in his native Venezuela, but little known outside Latin America. The Museum of Modern Art is honored to organize the first full retrospective exhibition of his work in the United States, accompanied by the first publication on him in the English language. The Museum's commitment to art from Latin America can be traced back to the years following its foundation in 1929. It is now pleased to build on that commitment in the twenty-first century, bringing Reverón to the attention of the international audience that his art so richly deserves.

The exhibition has been organized by John Elderfield, the Museum's Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis Chief Curator of Painting and Sculpture, who proposed this project in 1999, after first visiting Venezuela with the aid of a research grant from Trustee Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, whose continuing encouragement of this initiative is but part of her larger commitment to the integration of art from Latin America in our programs. The realization of the project was made possible by John's determination to see an important early modernist artist from Latin America afforded the same serious attention at the Museum that he had previously devoted to European artists from Kurt Schwitters to Henri Matisse. However, it also required the steadfast practical support, over the past seven years, of the Proyecto Armando Reverón, a Caracas group dedicated to the dissemination of knowledge on the artist's work. To all its members, especially its President and its Vice-President, Juan Ignacio Parra Schlageter and Rafael Romero D., respectively, go our deepest thanks. More recently, we were fortunate to secure the support of the Fundación Museos Nacionales of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and its President, Teresa Zottola, without which the loans of works from national collections would not have been possible. It is our good fortune that this exhibition is organized in explicit collaboration with both of these organizations, private and public, in Venezuela. Additionally, it has depended upon the generosity of public collections outside Venezuela and of many private collectors, both there and elsewhere; to all of them go our deepest thanks.

I also join John Elderfield in thanking his two collaborators. Luis Pérez-Oramas was a member of the Proyecto Armando Reverón, and has written extensively on the artist's work. He was recently named The Estrellita Brodsky Curator of Latin American Art at the Museum. Nora Lawrence, in the Department of Painting and Sculpture, has advanced the art-historical understanding of Reverón even as she administered an extremely complex exhibition.

And finally, I wish to thank the Fundación Mercantil, Venezuela, for its support of the exhibition and this publication, and an anonymous donor, The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art, and the Dale S. and Norman Mills Leff Publication Fund, which provided additional funding.

Glenn D. Lowry
Director, The Museum of Modern Art

Introduction

In the first, November 1941 issue of the *College Art Journal* published by the College Art Association of America, the opening article contained an impassioned plea for the art-historical study of modern art by Alfred H. Barr, Jr., founding Director of The Museum of Modern Art. Following it was an article, by Elizabeth Wilder, which made a "call for pioneers" to devote the same serious attention, based upon documentary historical evidence, to the study of Latin American art. A decade earlier than this, the Museum had devoted only its second one-person exhibition to the Mexican Diego Rivera, and began programs to exhibit and acquire art from Latin America, programs that grew in importance in the 1940s thanks to the support of Nelson A. Rockefeller, Museum President from 1939 to 1941. And in 1940, a year before these articles appeared, the Museum had presented another solo exhibition devoted to an artist from Latin America, on the Brazilian Cândido Portinari. However, these initiatives diminished in the postwar years, and it was not until 1967 that the next such exhibition of a painter or sculptor was devoted to the Chilean expatriate Roberto Sebastían Matta. Now, after an even longer delay, we are presenting an exhibition that this publication accompanies, devoted to the Venezuelan Armando Reverón.

Despite the call for pioneers, then, the Museum's engagement with Latin American art had become, after a strong start, sporadic and unsystematic. Many important works were acquired, but there were hardly more than a dozen exhibitions of painting and sculpture on the subject. However, compared to the record of other modern museums, this Museum was very much a pioneer, and no other institution firmly picked up the threads as they slackened here in the years after World War II.

Among the reasons for this was the rise to prominence of Abstract Expressionism and its derivatives, in the 1950s, which subordinated the various forms of realism and geometric abstraction that has flourished before the war. Since modern art in Latin America was often seen as revealing a bare contrast between these tendencies, it, too, suffered. Those nongestural versions of abstraction that were gaining ground in Latin America most especially suffered, unsurprisingly, since they could be confused with prewar geometric abstraction that no longer seemed to be avant-garde, especially in the United States. This was less the case in Europe, where practitioners of new forms of such abstraction found common ground with new Latin American artists. Nonetheless, it is broadly true that modern art from Latin America became more marginal to international attention, and the interest that it did attract was mainly for its realist, and most especially its fantastic, folkloric, or Surrealist forms. This was particularly true in the United States, not only owing to a lessening of interest in geometric abstraction in the 1950s, but also because of its geographical proximity to and historical associations with Mexico, a principal font of fantastic and folkloric realism. The results, long visible in exhibitions and auction houses, have now extended to popular, international audiences, with the result that—albeit for feminist as much as fantasist reasons—Frida Kahlo now counts among the most famous, widely shown modern artists.

Of course, the 1960s had seen a rekindling of interest in geometric abstraction in the United States, as elsewhere, with the emergence of post-painterly abstraction, Op art, and Minimalism, and the revival of curiosity about the art of Constructivism and the Bauhaus. It would be from these roots that new awareness grew of abstract art from Latin America. Witness the solo exhibition devoted to the Uruguayan Joaquín Torres-García at New York's The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in 1970, and the recent explosion of interest in this area, producing both extensive surveys and solo exhibitions devoted to major second- and third-generation artists such as the Venezuelan Gego and the Brazilian Hélio Oiticica. However, it is worth noting that, apart from Torres-García, the only other indubitably major, first-generation modernist painters or sculptors who practiced in Latin America ever to have been accorded a solo exhibition in a major, international center outside Latin America and the Iberian Peninsula were those devoted to the Mexicans Rivera, by this Museum in 1931, and Kahlo (who was, of course, married to Rivera), by the Tate in London in 2005.

This history is worth telling not only to stress the necessity of the present exhibition, only the fourth such show, now devoted to the Venezuelan Reverón, but also to point out how the previous exhibitions mark what have been taken to be the defining opposite poles of Latin American art: the cerebrally abstract and the fantastically or folklorically realist. I leave aside whether it is accurate, in fact, to thus set Torres-García against Kahlo and Rivera. One thing is certain; such a structure is utterly inadequate in seeking to come to terms with Reverón's work.

This exhibition and publication, then, aim not only to reveal to international audiences a great early modernist from Latin America; they also aim to demonstrate how this artist, at least, challenges the essential reduction of the art of a subcontinent in so simplistic a manner. In saying this, I anticipate the conclusion of my extended, chronological account of Reverón's art that follows. However, the exhibition and publication have two other, polemical aims, which are unmentioned there, although, I trust, implicit in what Luis Pérez-Oramas and Nora Lawrence, as well as I, have written; indeed, in the project as a whole. First: to signal that the Museum will again offer what has been called its ultimate accolade, of organizing major solo exhibitions for important artists, to painters and sculptors from Latin America. And second: to announce that the Museum will devote to these exhibitions, and their accompanying publications, the same serious art-historical and critical attention that it has applied to similar projects on painting and sculpture from other regions.

In its early years, the Museum was celebrated not only for having pioneered the exhibition of modern art but also for having led the way in its critical and scholarly understanding. In doing so, its first emphasis was on Europe and its second on the United States, with Latin America coming a distant third. This was also true for the majority of curators and scholars in other institutions who followed the direction that the Museum set. Added to this, while the United States, like England, saw a transformation in the study of art, in the 1930s, from criticism and connoisseurship to a true art-historical discipline, that did not happen for modern art in Latin America, although it

happened for archeology and colonial art. (Hence, Elizabeth Wilder's call for pioneers to make it possible.) Even now, despite many important advances, a great deal remains to be done, especially when it comes to artists for whom the surviving documentary evidence is sparse, as is certainly the case with Armando Reverón.

When, having seen Reverón's work in some depth for the first time in 1998 and 1999, I determined to present an exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art, I had not worked in the field of Latin American art. Beginning to learn about him from the secondary literature, rich in reminiscences and acute critical accounts, and from conversations with those who knew him or his work, I was reminded of my initial study of the late work of Kurt Schwitters, with not dissimilar sources, when I was an undergraduate in the mid-1960s. But, in that case, documentary historical studies soon started to appear, based on archival material, much by the artist himself, which had to be revisited, while other material was there to be discovered. In the case of Reverón, what Wilder calls "the bedrock of documentary evidence" is sparse.

We have added to the literature in the development of this project, but, in summary, there seem to be but two autograph documents, reprinted here in translation on pages 221–27, and only a scattering of lifetime, published references to him, dating mainly from the 1940s, for there was no art world to speak of in Caracas until then. There is somewhat more photographic and filmic evidence of Reverón, also from his later years, much also published, and a few unpublished accounts of those who knew him. In addition, there are the checklists of late exhibitions and, most importantly, of a huge, immediately posthumous one of 1955, plus an indispensable but incomplete illustrated survey of his work. There is also some brilliant critical writing, most in Spanish, only a small part of which, however, seeks to place the artist in his art-historical context. (See Bibliographical Note, pages 229–31.) And, of course, there are Reverón's works themselves, of which I was privileged to be able to see around one-half of his entire oeuvre. Additionally, I was fortunate to be one of the last to see El Castillete, the artist's extraordinary studio compound at Macuto on the Caribbean coast (see pages 210–19), before its destruction in the tragic mudslides that devastated that region in December of 1999. And I was particularly fortunate to gain the support, advice, and encouragement of those who had long admired and studied this artist, of whom more in a moment.

The results of this are twofold. The exhibition seeks to provide a balanced, but critical survey of Reverón's art that focuses on the periods of his greatest achievements. This catalogue offers an art-historical survey of Reverón's art as a whole (in my own essay, pages 14–87) and of its relationship to Latin American art (in the essay by Luis Pérez-Oramas, pages 88–115), as well as records the exhibition itself (arranged in sections and introduced by Nora Lawrence, pages 116–219). We are very much aware of having sought to offer accounts of this elusive artist that are plausible to the conditions under which he worked, and against which he achieved something utterly exceptional—and of hoping that what we think of as a new, more systematic map of Reverónia will not only offer a guide

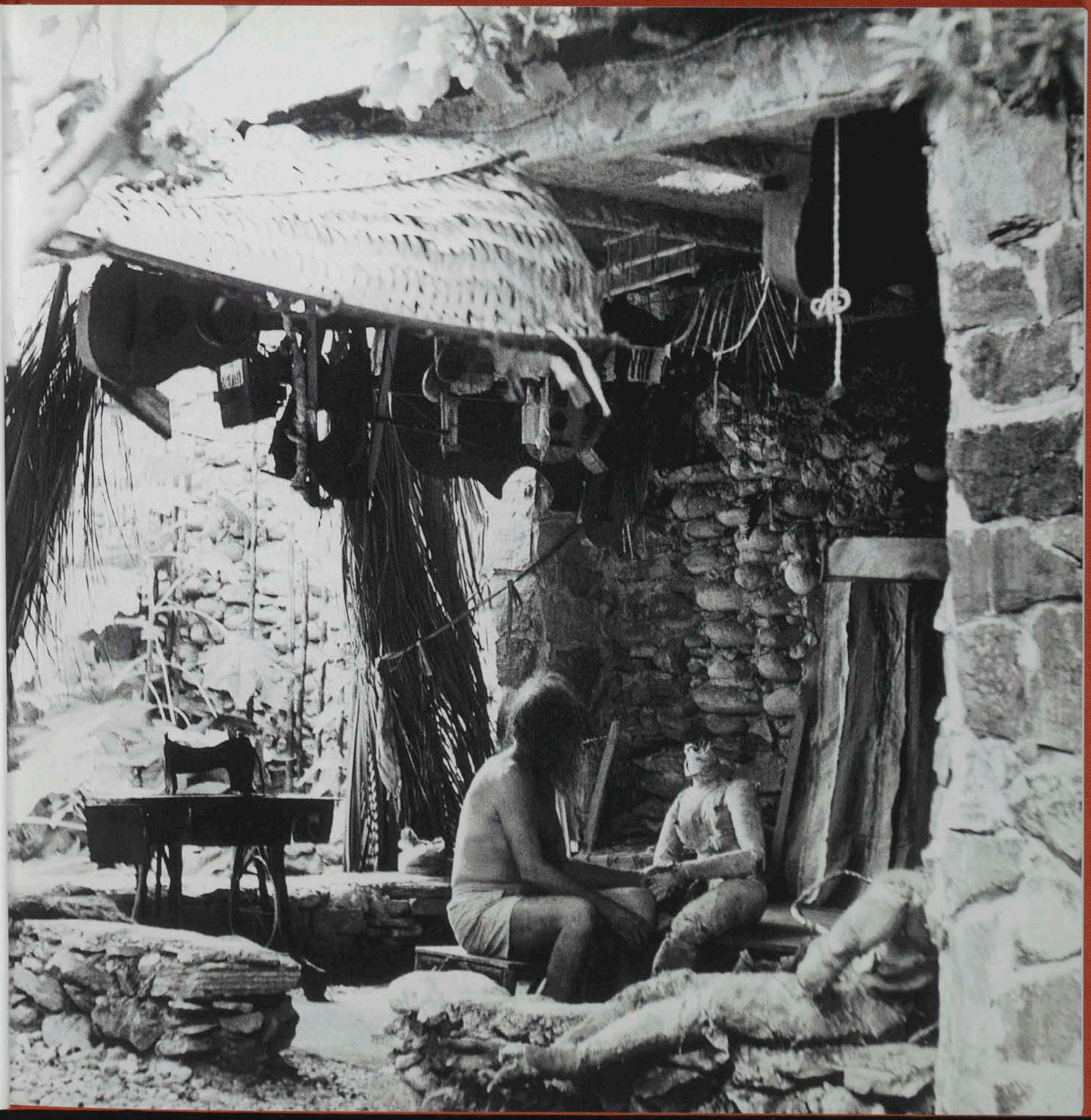
for visitors to a lesser-known territory but also encourage some of them to amplify its details, correct our mistakes, and, perhaps, draw further maps that look at the territory from different viewpoints.

When I embarked upon this project, I was deeply mindful of how irritating it might seem for those who have long tended this field to have a neophyte, however devoted, trampling through it in what I feared was bound to seem an extremely ignorant way. To the contrary, I met nothing but a delighted encouragement, for which I am extremely grateful. The names and contributions of those who afforded that support are given in the Acknowledgments on pages 233–36. However, I must mention here those now close friends in Caracas who, from the very beginning, adopted and guided me, while insisting, as the project developed, that it must reflect my own understanding, and selection of the work of the artist that they so esteemed. Chief among these are Luis Pérez-Oramas and his fellow members of the Proyecto Armando Reverón, especially Juan Ignacio Parra Schlageter and Rafael Romero D., and Maitena de Elguezabal, María Elena Huizi, Rafael Santana, and Clementina Vaamonde. And, in New York as well as Caracas, I owe no less to the friendship and encouragement of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, to whom The Museum of Modern Art also owes a great debt of gratitude for all that she has done to further the cause of art from Latin America, not least of which, for donating the first painting by Reverón to enter the collection of the Museum.

Curators are doubly privileged, as compared to academic scholars, in being entrusted with the display as well as the study of the work of great artists; and their consciousness of that privilege should be the greater to the extent that the work displayed and studied is new to them, especially when it comes from an unfamiliar place. I am deeply conscious of the trust placed in me, and therefore in The Museum of Modern Art, by these and others whose commitment to the work of Armando Reverón is of far greater duration than mine. My deepest hope is not simply that they will be satisfied that their trust has been well-placed, but that they especially will look at this artist again through new eyes.

John Elderfield
The Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis
Chief Curator of Painting and Sculpture
The Museum of Modern Art

Armando Reverón at El Castillete, photographed by Ricardo Razetti. 1953



The Natural History of Armando Reverón

JOHN ELDERFIELD

Shape without form, shade without colour,
Paralysed force, gesture without motion . . .

—T. S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men" (1925)[1]

In the mid-1920s, Armando Reverón (1889–1954) began to make the so-called white landscapes that would establish his reputation as Venezuela's most radical early modern artist. He painted these after having moved from Caracas to the relative isolation of Macuto, a village on the Caribbean coast. In the 1930s, however, he gradually abandoned landscape to concentrate on figure painting, which led to the creation of mysterious, large compositions in the last years of that decade. Of these works, the most ambitious has the added mystery of having been painted not entirely from live models but also from life-size dolls, or *muñecas,* as I shall refer to them, to distinguish them from children's dolls.

This essay comprises two sections, the first of which carries the story of Reverón and his art to this critical moment. Already, he had created for himself a walled compound at Macuto, which he called El Castillete (The Little Castle), and had gained the reputation of a hermit—even of a crazy and somewhat sinister Sandman, for he had begun to show signs of mental disturbance—although he was not, in fact, cut off from the society of Caracas.

The second section traces the changed character of the artist's life and work in his final fifteen years. During that period, he became more withdrawn, despite, or, perhaps, because of, the emergence of a Venezuelan exhibition culture that made his art increasingly well known. He returned to landscape in the early 1940s, only, surprisingly, to paint mainly urban subjects; after mid-decade, he concentrated on studio scenes with models and, increasingly, *muñecas*; then, finally, in his last series of works, he painted self-portraits with *muñecas.* Reverón made it clearly understood that a *muñeca* not only represented a person but also should be treated as a person,[2] not as a work of art. These life-size dolls never left El Castellete. Indeed, on one of the few occasions that they were filmed—the artist's reputation now attracting this sort of attention—Reverón implied that the *muñecas* would need to be forgiven for having been seen in public.[3] How *muñecas* and other strange, fabricated objects functioned in Reverón's practice is a principal subject in the final part of the essay.

1. The Sandman

Reverón was born in Caracas, Venezuela, on May 10, 1889, the only child of a frivolous mother and a drug-addicted father, both from distinguished Creole families—that is to say, families of Spanish

Opposite: Armando Reverón. *Mirror (Espejo).* 1940s. Bamboo, paper, aluminum foil, and wire, 43 3/4 × 24 7/8" (111.2 × 62 cm). Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

extraction born in the Americas.[4] Although the very different forms of their self-absorption kept the two of them apart, it did create an agreement between them that a child was a nuisance to have around. It was not so unusual, in any case, for young children of wealthy families to be sent away to school or be brought up outside the parental home. In consequence, after the young Armando had attended primary school in Caracas for a while, he was dispatched to nearby Valencia to be reared by the Rodríguez Zocca family, where he developed a very deep affection for the daughter of the family, Josefina.

On Armando's tenth birthday, in 1899, Venezuela was convulsed by the last of the nineteenth-century social upheavals that had shaken the country since the Federal Republic of Greater Colombia had declared its independence from Spain in 1811, and a separated Venezuela had finally won its independence in 1821. This was the so-called Revolución Liberal Restauradora (Restorative Liberal Revolution) of Cipriano Castro, which is to say, a military coup that was speedily transformed, with the support of the United States, into an extremely corrupt and unpleasant dictatorship. However, it is unlikely that the boy in Valencia was much aware of these events, for he was, by all accounts, a sickly child, who, at the age of twelve, almost died of typhoid fever. When he recovered, his biographers tell us, he became a very withdrawn child who enjoyed the solitude of drawing and the sole company of Josefina. He also seemed to regress for a while to an infantile state, and enjoyed playing with dolls—making dolls, some say[5]—which he would dress and paint with makeup. And whenever his mother went to Valencia, or brought him back to Caracas for visits, he apparently would withdraw to her room, fascinated by her own ritual cosmetic transformations.

Therefore, it may be surmised that when Reverón finally turned his attention to art, he did so with a prior experience of the old Platonic association of the application of paint with false, cosmetic beauty—and, therefore, of any colorfully pleasurable art with femininity,[6] not to mention of imparting affection precisely where it could not be reciprocated, as Rainer Marie Rilke famously wrote of playing with dolls.[7] In any event, the death of his father and his return to Caracas in 1904 placed him in the care of both his mother and his paternal grandmother, who is said to have encouraged his artistic interests. That year saw the opening of a newly renovated building for the Academia de Bellas Artes in the center of the city, the result of new governmental interest in the fine arts;[8] it would have been clear that there was a way for the young Reverón to follow this vocation.

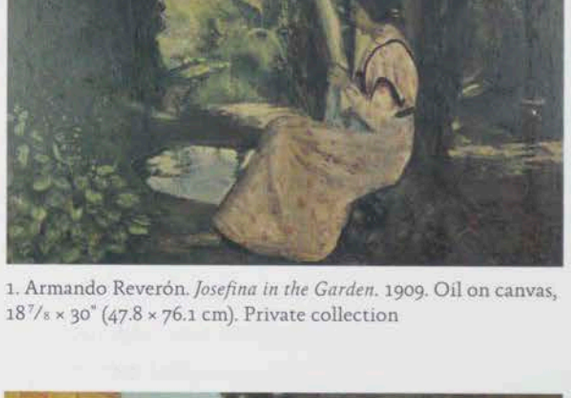
Emulation and Invention: 1908–24

Reverón reached the artistic maturity of a distinctive and original style in his mid-thirties, a few years after he had moved away from Caracas in 1921 to live in Macuto, which is a few miles east of La Guaira, Venezuela's principal port on the Caribbean. Of his earlier work, some seventy paintings have survived. These readily divide into three categories: works of his student years, 1908 through 1914; works painted between 1915 and 1919, when Reverón had entered the orbit of the liberal Círculo de

Bellas Artes; and the more mature compositions of the so-called blue period, 1920–24, which, while not yet entirely original, nonetheless include some striking and beautiful paintings. This journey of emulation and invention is worth following in outline here for the signposts to the future that Reverón erected on the way.

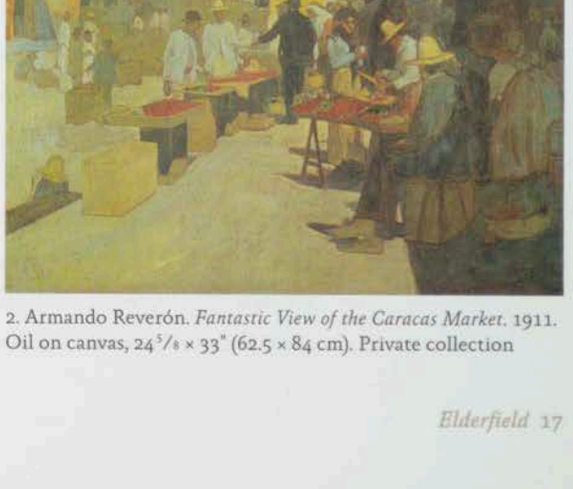
Reverón, the student: Caracas, Barcelona, Madrid, and Paris, 1908–14

In 1908, the nineteen-year-old Reverón became a student at the Academia de Bellas Artes in Caracas. No sooner had he arrived than, in December of that year, Venezuela was unsettled by another change in government, when a medical emergency suffered by Castro allowed his vice-president, General Juan Vicente Gómez, to maneuver himself into office. Although, or perhaps because, Gómez was an almost illiterate ex-farmer, he initially courted the nation's intellectual and cultural communities, allowing hope to develop that the new regime would be a liberal one. Hence, when the students at the Academia went on strike in 1909 to protest its conservative instruction, there were no repercussions; but neither were there any improvements, and the strike fizzled out. It is hard to be certain, but a painting by Reverón of Josefina seated alone in a garden (fig. 1) may have been made in 1909, when Reverón returned to Valencia during the strike.[9] If so, it is his first painting to reveal, albeit tentatively, the influence of French plein-air painting that was becoming known in Caracas, as well as being his first personal painting, having something of the discomforting frankness of Paul Cézanne's paintings made when he was a young, greatly perplexed, and perplexing artist.[10] It is reasonable to infer that confused feelings for the subject had a lot to do with the affecting oddness of this work. There are, in any case, few works to compare it to among the small number of student paintings that survive, which are, in the main, traditional religious paintings, academic still lifes, and the occasional landscape in emulation of nineteenth-century Venezuelan artists.[11]



1. Armando Reverón. *Josefina in the Garden*. 1909. Oil on canvas, 18 7/8 × 30" (47.8 × 76.1 cm). Private collection

A more accomplished but far less personal *Fantastic View of the Caracas Market* of 1911 (fig. 2), whose title tells us it is an imaginative interpretation of the subject, won the twenty-two-year-old Reverón recognition as an outstanding student when he graduated from the Academia. His fascination with the colorful, brightly illuminated scene of native vendors is as much that of a cultivated outsider to indigenous culture as that shown in Camille Pissarro's scenes of Caracas of the early 1850s.[12] It is worth remarking, therefore, that it



2. Armando Reverón. *Fantastic View of the Caracas Market*. 1911. Oil on canvas, 24 5/8 × 33" (62.5 × 84 cm). Private collection

was painted on the centenary of Greater Colombia's proclamation of independence from Spain in the original Bolívarian revolution, a centenary that, coming so close on the heels of a new regime, indubitably helped to focus debate on the nation's identity. This debate was made possible by the Gómez regime, still in its libertarian phase, having reinstated the freedom of the press and of public debate. Moreover, Gómez himself had gone into temporary retirement, leaving the government under the control of Victor Márquez Bustillos, who would become the great uncle of Armando Reverón.[13]

This debate on the nation's artistic identity took two opposite, but complementary directions: an official embrace of academic painting, for its link to Venezuela's past; and a liberal attempt to create an art that was modern and also Venezuelan. The first direction would eventually be accompanied by a broader and harsher intellectual conservatism, of which signs began to appear as early as 1912, when Gómez, beginning to reengage with public affairs, ordered the closure of the Universidad Central de Venezuela in Caracas. (It remained closed for a decade.) The second direction led, also in 1912, to the formation of the Círculo de Bellas Artes, of which Reverón became a member.

In 1912, however, Reverón was in Spain, at the Academia de La Lontja in Barcelona on a scholarship that he had won upon graduating from the Academia in Caracas. For more than thirty years, Venezuelan artists had been going to Europe for study and inspiration, but Paris had almost always been the magnet. Reverón's European travels would eventually take him to Paris; nonetheless, his attraction to Spain is telling. As we shall see, it speaks of a new, generational interest in Venezuela in things Hispanic, and it very definitely influenced the development of his own painting, indeed, his cultural outlook. Hence, in Barcelona, he both developed a taste for popular theater and bullfighting and continued to paint expressive compositions of colorful, picturesque subjects, being encouraged in this direction by his new experience of Spanish art. That experience encompassed both historical Spanish painting, notably Francisco Goya's, and contemporary art.

The severance of the final remnant of the once vast Spanish empire, with the end of the Cuban War in 1898, had prompted a compensatory call in Spain for distinctively national achievements in painting, as in literature; and by the time Reverón arrived in the country, the call had been answered in a variety of ways. Two of them are of particular relevance to him. One of these, the fashionably Hispanic paintings of Ignacio Zuloaga (see page 120),[14] he would have already known of, since the official painter of Venezuela in the early years of the twentieth century, Tito Salas, was strongly influenced by Zuloaga's work. The second, however, probably would have been a surprise, when he saw it in Barcelona. This was the attempt, by a group of that city's painters, for example, Modest Urgell Inglada (see page 91), to create an art expressive not of broadly Hispanic, but of Catalan, and, it was argued, therefore broadly Mediterranean values. In practice, however, this usually meant a pallid form of neoclassicism that drew on such conservative French models as the figure compositions of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes and Maurice Denis.[15] It is worth noting that another future pioneer of modernism in Latin America was in Barcelona at that time, practicing a timid version

of this Mediterranean classicism. This was the fifteen-year-older Uruguayan, Joaquín Torres-García (see pages 92–94). There is no record of the two having met.[16] We do know that José Ruiz Blasco, Pablo Picasso's father, was one of Reverón's teachers at the school. Was the prodigy in Paris spoken of?[17] We do not know.

After a short visit to Caracas, Reverón crossed the Atlantic again to study in Madrid, where the Spanish paintings at the Prado, by artists from El Greco to Diego Velázquez, and especially Goya, made a profound impression upon him. (In 1913, while he was in Madrid, he began his exhibiting career in Caracas when some of his paintings, including works made in Spain, were included in the first show organized by the Círculo des Bellas Artes.) Then, in 1914, he traveled from Madrid to Paris, where he stayed until the outbreak of World War I that summer. What purports to be an autobiographical document states that, in Paris, he went to the Louvre and Luxembourg museums and, at the latter, admired Impressionist paintings by Cézanne, Edgar Degas, Alfred Sisley, and others.[18] However, in a 1953 interview, which is admittedly very late in his life, he said that the museums were closed because of the war, and that he always regretted that he did not see French Impressionist painting at first hand.[19] We have no idea whether he saw French contemporary art. The little that remains of his immediately subsequent production suggests that he did not.

3. Armando Reverón. *El Calvario*. 1915. Oil on canvas, 10 1/4 × 12 5/8" (26 × 32 cm). Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

In the Círculo de Bellas Artes: Caracas, 1915–19

The paintings that Reverón made after he finally returned to Venezuela in 1915, after another short visit to Barcelona, are, in the main, more loosely, heavily painted versions—generally influenced by Impressionist idioms—of the same sort of colorful subjects that had expanded his imagination but confined his progress since he had been a student. Not all of them, however. A 1915 work entitled *El Calvario* (fig. 3) has a plain, matter-of-factness that opens, in the time of our viewing, to a mysteriousness discovered in the sensations of light and shade. Like the earlier painting of Josefina, it tells us that Reverón had glimpsed how a closely observed and recorded landscape could serve both reportorial and imaginative practice. However, its modesty could hardly have been satisfying to an artist searching for something more experimentally personal, and who did not yet realize that painterly ostentation could be less expressive than restraint.

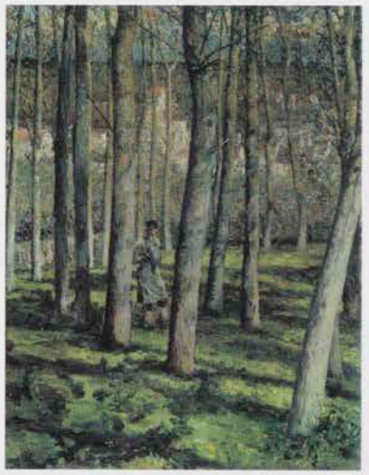
When Reverón returned to Caracas, the activities of the Círculo de Bellas Artes were in full swing.[20] Its original motivator had been an art critic, Leo Martínez, who had called for the revival of Venezuelan art through work that was modern but not merely derivative of European modern art, either in style or subject matter. This meant eschewing modes that were either radically modernist

4. Samys Mützner. *Carúpano.* 1918. Oil on canvas, 10 3/8 × 12 3/8" (26.5 × 31.5 cm). Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

in style or that addressed the subject of modernity; hence, Futurism (which suffered on both counts) was cited as an alien practice to avoid. Therefore, while explicitly opposed to the academic art that had gained official recognition, the Círculo could, and did, claim that its aims were consonant with national purposes. These purposes could be served by figure painting—and the Círculo braved conservative opinion by using live models—but it more commonly meant painting outdoors using Impressionist techniques that would record, on the one hand, the distinctiveness of Caribbean as opposed to European light and, on the other, recognizably Venezuelan landscape features, like the great Ávila Mountain that rises between Caracas and the sea, or the coastal beaches with their palm and olive trees, or the tropical gardens, bustling markets, and long, low, tile-roofed buildings of Caracas and La Guaira. The first of these options would produce an art—notably in Reverón's pioneering landscapes—that enlarged the modernist practice from which it derived with a novel sense of blinding light. As for the second, it too often tended, mainly in the work of other Círculo members but sometimes in Reverón's, to be merely an embellishment of an outmoded Impressionism with picturesque subjects and what looked like painterly freedom.

This is, in part, to say the obvious: the introduction only of modern techniques does not make for a modern art. It is also to say, more particularly, that those who introduced these techniques to Venezuela introduced examples not only to emulate but also to overcome. The most influential examples, certainly insofar as Reverón was concerned, were those provided by three painters. The Romanian artist Samys Mützner (fig. 4), who arrived in Caracas in 1916, offered corroboration for the kind of picturesque Impressionism that Reverón was beginning to practice. More helpfully, the Russian, Nicolás Ferdinandov (fig. 5), who began to visit Venezuela in 1916 and settled in the country three years later, would introduce Reverón to his version of blue-toned, nocturnal Symbolism. And the Venezuelan Emilio Boggio (fig. 6), who returned from France in 1919, practiced an expressive version of Impressionism with a densely clotted surface that Reverón also adopted.

By 1919, however, Reverón's life was in transition. His increased experimentation in 1916 had been accompanied by a physical restlessness that took him frequently to La Guaira and also back to Valencia. There, in 1917, Josefina died, causing a nervous breakdown in the already high-strung artist. The country itself was in a nervous, transitional state, Gómez having reassumed full control of the government and turned it into a dictatorship. The same year, his military police raided the Círculo's quarters, closing them down, after protests about the use of female models. Reverón moved to La Guaira, where he supported himself by giving drawing lessons to the children of wealthy families who had vaca-



5. Nicolás Ferdinandov. *Cypresses in the Cemetery of the Children of God—Nocturne*. 1919. Gouache on board, 21 1/2 × 21 1/2" (54.5 × 54.5 cm). Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

6. Emilio Boggio. *The Forest*. c. 1918. Oil on canvas, 45 3/4 × 35 1/4" (116 × 89.3 cm). Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

had vacation homes in the area. There, in 1918, he met a young *mestiza* country girl (that is, of mixed Indian and white, and possibly African, ancestry) called Juanita Ríos, or Juanita Mota,[21] who would become his model, then lifelong companion. It may have been Ferdinandov, an advocate of artists living in places away from normal social pressures, who encouraged Reverón to do just that; and the Russian painter lived with Reverón and Juanita for a short while in 1919 in Punta de Mulatos, a small fishing village near La Guaira.[22] However, when Reverón contracted a virulent fever that swept through Caracas, he and Juanita went together to his mother's home in the area of El Valle, a suburb of the capital, to recover.

It may well have been there that he made the curious painting of 1919 known as *The Family* (fig. 7), which was based on a photograph of the Rodríguez Zocca family. All five figures, silhouetted against an oddly constructed screen, stare at us with the intensity of the five wolves in a famous dream recorded by Sigmund Freud.[23] The young Reverón, who seems to be in his early to mid-teens, is uniquely framed in his own angled section of the screen, with Josefina at his right.[24] The thirty-year-old Reverón, it may be imagined, has made this area of the painting resemble a mirror, in which he sees himself as a boy. Perhaps the photograph he copied commemorated the specific moment in 1904, when, at fourteen or fifteen, he left Josefina and her family to return to Caracas. In any event, it recorded a loss, which the painting commemorated.

If this painting—created after sickness, likely in his mother's home, and in the company of a new, young female object of affection—is to be thought a "sublimated" representation of a similar, childhood situation, then its function was to open the way to at least partial fulfillment of the hitherto

7. Armando Reverón. *The Family*. 1919. Oil on canvas, 35 3/8 × 27 1/2" (90 × 70 cm). Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

8. Armando Reverón. *The Manguita Woods*. 1919. Oil on canvas, 21 1/2 × 26" (54.5 × 66 cm). Private collection

9. Armando Reverón. *Juanita*. 1919. Oil on canvas, 38 5/8 × 63 3/4" (98 × 162 cm). Private collection

repressed wish to recover what had been lost.[25] It is not unusual for an artistic vocation to be discovered in childhood loneliness or convalescence—Henri Matisse's was, too—and to produce, at once, a validation of the freedom to fantasize and an encouragement to representation of states rather than actions, notably atavistic states of undisturbed pleasure. What is different about Reverón is that, having practiced art for more than a decade, he rediscovered his vocation in a replay of such circumstances. In 1919, immediately after recovering from illness, his art reached a new level of artistic maturity, and productiveness,[26] in its secure embrace of mysteriously pleasurable representation.

Ferdinandov's example aided this process, and after Reverón's recovery in 1919, the Russian may have stayed with him and Juanita in El Valle, and that year the two artists showed their work, together with that of Reverón's student friend Rafael Monasterios, in a well-received three-artist exhibition at the Academia de Bellas Artes. But, as *The Manguita Woods* (fig. 8), painted that year, demonstrates, Reverón was combining the lessons of Ferdinandov with the exuberant materiality of his own earlier works, and tempering the mixture with the more compacted, modular impastos of Boggio. A synthesis was being formed, but it was one that, while gaining expertise from its components, seems more rudimentary than any of them—not as basic as *The Family* but, in its own way, as childlike, having the quality of a primal forest in illustrations of fairy tales. More grown up, but still immature in its own way, is a painting of Juanita (fig. 9) in which he carried to an excess the element of picturesque in his work, thereby finding ample expression, with Goya's help this time, for his early attachment to cosmetic beauty.[27]

Symbolist blue: from Caracas to Macuto, 1920–24

In 1920, Reverón divided his time between El Valle and La Guaira. It was in his mother's home at El Valle, he recalled, that he painted *The Cave* (page 122);[28] the *Portrait of Casilda* (page 122) is close in spirit to it. Both of these works also fall, again with Goya's assistance, into the arms of Hispanic painted femininity, only to a more deeply mysterious and utterly unrealistic effect. The separate touches of pigment that simultaneously shape and dissolve the appearance of Casilda are like raindrops on a window. The blurry blue paint glazed over *The Cave* invokes a mist of perfumed smoke that, in a nicely irreverent touch, just clears enough for us to notice the crucifix on the necklace of one of the temptresses in their subterranean venue.

In 1921, Reverón joined Ferdinandov, Monasterios, and two others in another well-received exhibition, this one held in the empty halls of the closed Universidad Central de Venezuela.[29] But this period of collegiality and public display, and of such sociable paintings, was about to end. Reverón found a hut in Macuto in an area named after a bar called Las Quince Letras, and moved there with Juanita. The following year, they settled definitively in Macuto and began the slow process of building what would become El Castillete. Reverón would not exhibit his work again for a dozen years.

We would be correct, I think, to associate this move to the relative isolation of Macuto with the search for a state of undisturbed freedom that Reverón now seems to be dreaming about in his paintings. In these works, he associates this freedom with a past, feminized Hispanicism. It is as if he now wished to take a further step, and realize such a dream by creating the undisturbed environment for it at Macuto. This is reminiscent, for example, of Matisse's move from Paris to Nice a few years earlier, just as World War I was ending, a move that belongs to a broader retreat from the modernity that may have been thought to have caused the war.[30] And, while Macuto, as presented in Reverón's paintings and in photographs of him there, seems remote and uncivilized, it was, in many respects, closer in spirit to Nice than to a hermit's refuge.[31] Since the late nineteenth century, a train had brought the elite of Caracas to that area of the coast for vacations, and grand villas had been built there. It seems to have been similar to a present-day Caribbean island like Anguilla, with affluent resorts, areas of wilderness shunned by the tourists, and decrepit housing in which lived an indigenous population who found employment in the resorts—and Reverón.

Even if the artist's move to Macuto was an extension of the dream of freedom of his paintings, the form that it took cannot have been entirely chosen at will, but must have depended upon some sort of social preselection. And, just as the relatively recent example of tourism provided him with the venue, so a relatively recent Hispanicism provided him with the pictorial means. While it is now customary to think of the art of Venezuela, and other Latin American countries, as Hispanic, we need to remember that the republican governments of South America had been founded in the second decade of the nineteenth century not only from a sincere belief in democratic ideals, but also from very deep hatred of Spaniards. Certainly, in what became Venezuela, the extraordinary harshness and cruelty of the Spanish opposition to independence only increased the hatred.[32] Spain and the Spanish would slowly have come to seem more attractive during the continuing chaos into which Venezuela had fallen after independence (there were more than fifty armed uprisings between 1830 and 1900),[33] and during the vicious dictatorships of Castro and especially Gómez. Therefore, Reverón's attraction to Spain should be thought to belong to a rediscovery of the Hispanic in Venezuela rather than as a natural extension of it.

It would be too strong to claim that the flourishing of Hispanicism in Reverón's art in the years around 1920, and the artist's retreat from Caracas to Macuto, which followed, should simply be thought of as an imaginative and then a literal escape from the Goméz regime. Nonetheless, it was

precisely at this time that the regime became even more ruthless than the one that it had replaced. Then, the nasty realities of unfreedom increasingly became apparent, among them the police spies and the dungeons with meat hooks to string up liberal opponents. Many decent Venezuelans would escape, if they could, from the country and its unpleasantness; Reverón took that therapy of distance in his own way.[34]

The situation is complicated, however, by the fact that Reverón's practice of art depended upon the patronage of the moneyed Caraqueños who remained. They looked away from the unpleasantness, taking increasing pleasure in resorts like Macuto as well as in the escapist vision that Reverón's work provided. This would remain as true of his landscapes as it was of his Hispanic paintings, for they could continue to be thought distinctively Venezuelan, after the Círculo model. Images accepted as having a distinctively national character tend to be those that allow interpretation as looking away from harsh present realities to comfortable old symbols.[35] Both a Venezuelan landscape painting and Hispanicism could be embraced as escapist symbols of nationality, whatever they meant to the artists. However, the Hispanic had the additional, dignifying advantage of its aristocratic associations, and the Gómez government embraced it to validate its new regime. Gómez himself was a great admirer of Spanish culture; his government would employ an Andalusian style for the modern building projects made possible by the exploitation of oil after World War I;[36] and, by 1928, Venezuela was so fully open to things Hispanic as to be deeply influenced by the Universal Exhibition in Sevilla. As Bertolt Brecht was to write of Europe on the eve of the next such war: "So the Old strode in disguised as the New, but it brought the New with it in its triumphal procession and presented it as the Old."[37] (Looking forward: That same year, 1939, Reverón would title one of his modern-archaic, reclining nudes with the personification, *Venezuela*; see fig. 21.)

Thus, Hispanicism opened onto an atavism that had two faces. One face turned to the social world, to the new, old repressive regime that welcomed a new national art with comforting, aristocratic associations. The other face turned—but very tentatively—toward that aspect of the cosmopolitanism of modern art that admitted what previously had seemed merely folkloric, fantasist, or primitive.

Tension between the cosmopolitan, but nonetheless Western, urban basis of modern art and the search for a local, national identity within it affected artists in all Latin American countries. This is true of artists in Venezuela, whose Hispanicism, attraction to Symbolism, and incipient interest in indigenous figuration all speak of their negotiation of international modernist and local nationalist concerns. However, the Venezuelan situation was unique in its primary focus on landscape. Therefore, modernism's respect for various forms of vernacular, tribal, and what seemed to be exotic art, which offered ready access to a modernist practice in Mexico and Brazil, for example, could only inform Venezuelan modernism through the Hispanic in an exotic interpretation. Certainly, neither the decorative flamboyance nor the ethnic mysteriousness of anything outside the traditional canon was of help to the Venezuelan landscape painters. Indeed, anything close to these qualities was likely

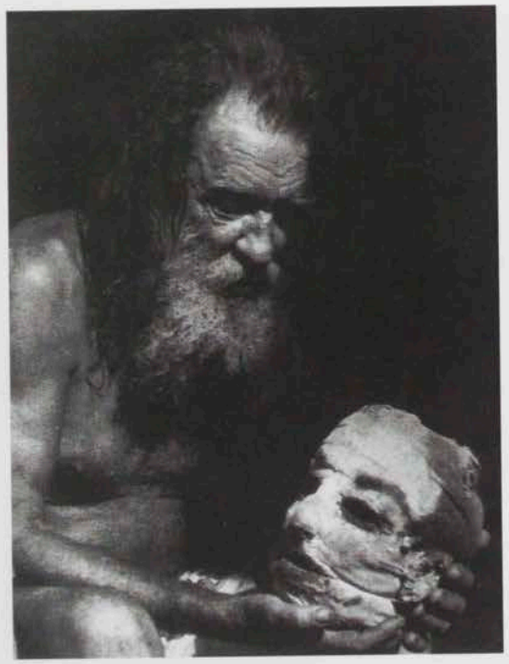
to be a hindrance within a genre that had blossomed in the strict and scrupulous record of the immediate, factual sensation. We see Reverón struggling with this fact in his landscapes of 1919 through the early 1920s, some of which fall into a sort of bejeweled topographical picturesque, while others, rebelling from this quality, are so soberly recorded as to seem flat-footed or naïve. There are some great exceptions, among them a palpably smoky blue *Landscape* of 1922 (page 123), composed with an exhilaratingly varied range of painted marks, and a vibrantly active *Fiesta in Carabellada* of around 1924 (page 123), in which the different kinds of marks are arranged in parallel bands. Both works have mystery in their coloration and their out-of-focus blur, yet the coloration and the blur offer themselves as convincing descriptive facts and not as effects installed in these paintings.

Those artists from Latin America who had founded their practice, with a modernist permit, on the folkloric or fantastic for their quotient of the mysterious had sooner or later to face up to a problem: this permit to be mysterious did not exempt them from seeking the intense literalness that sustained the modernism that they sought to emulate. Reverón did face up to this. The development of his early landscapes show him increasingly shrugging off the effects of mystery in order to directly describe phenomena that may be thought to be mysterious, or may not be, and thus he became a positivist in his painting even as he began, at Macuto, to act like a metaphysician.

Light and Substance: 1925–32

In Venezuelan society of the 1920s, painting was not an acceptable profession for the son of a good family; neither, certainly, was living with a native girl in a hut on the beach. Reverón had stepped out of his social place among his patrons, and reduced his dependence upon them to a minimum when he adopted a simple, frugal life in Macuto, borrowing money from his mother to survive. In the early 1920s, it would have been possible to conclude that, although he was now in his thirties, he was enjoying a youthful bohemian adventure, for he continued to travel frequently to Caracas to visit his friends from the former Círculo as well as to sell his work. However, it soon became clear that Reverón had more definitively changed, had passed an invisible barrier, leaving a world of highly explicit structures for a liminal state of unsettled boundaries, and of not always controlled release of delightful, spontaneous, and perilous behavior.[38]

Thus, El Castillete began truly to look like a little castle; his painting practice became very sporadic and, at times, as incomprehensible in its results as in its methods; and he began to behave in such a way as to seem not merely a bohemian but, some would say, a sort of Robinson Crusoe figure and, others would even say, eventually, a madman. It is true that he suffered nervous breakdowns, of which more later. Yet one is reminded of the ruses of Hamlet to preserve his life and integrity in a dangerous world (fig. 10).[39] Moreover, in painting his first distinct body of work in Macuto, the landscapes of the mid-1920s through the early 1930s, Reverón created the greatest historical style of



10. Remembrance of Hamlet, photographed by Ricardo Razetti. 1953. Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

modern Venezuelan art; deeply influential upon later artists in that country, his highly original modern art exhibited a style of such control and refinement that it can hardly have been made by an amateur, an outsider, or an incompetent. Ironically, though, as the style became famous, it became just as typecast as its artist.

Light, whiteness, and the Caribbean landscape

Light Behind My Arbor of 1926 (page 128) recalls the screen of *The Family*, with its pleats of shimmering fabric; only the weave of the fabric is looser and comprises the very surface of the canvas as well as representing the vertical striations of a translucent wall.[40] The visible presence of the canvas, in the linear apertures of a field of dappled white to blue-gray pigment, allows the connotation that the artist has exposed—or, rather, re-exposed—the vertical weft of the canvas, while the larger areas of erasure of pigment reveal the presence of its horizontal warp. Furthermore, the contrast of vertical and horizontal marks of pigment, and their interweaving across the center of the canvas, reinforces the sense that acts of painterly composition responded to the literal composition of the painting support. While most of these marks follow one or other of the axes of the support, few of them do so strictly. Many bend against that geometry, and some pull further away from it, in their description of the organic composition of the depicted structure and the landscape outside, and the organic composition of the support itself. For we see the irregular pull of the canvas's warp and weft threads in the depiction, as well as the depiction in them.[41] This is to say that the painting reveals itself frankly as a handmade craft object, and additionally that its painterly crafting retains—which is to say, recovers—a very strong sense of the handmade object that received the paint. In this instance, the identification of the artist's canvas and the screen of a hut he built in El Castillete reinforces their shared quality of being nonoccluding surfaces, marking divisions that are physically impenetrable, yet open to the illuminated landscape outside.

Light Behind My Arbor is one of the more legible of the extraordinary, virtually irreproducible works of the mid-1920s through early 1930s that continue to be described as white paintings, following the three-part chronological division of Reverón's oeuvre into blue, white, and sepia periods, first proposed in 1947 by the painter Pascual Navarro, that was taken up in the 1950s by his most important early critical supporter, Alfredo Boulton.[42]

Unquestionably, Boulton must have been thinking of the coloristic periodization of Picasso's early work in establishing this framework, and Reverón's early works that are dominated by blue (*The Cave*, for example) do gain in appreciation from their association with another somewhat

immature form of Hispanic Symbolism. Unfortunately, there are not enough of them to constitute a period. Neither are there so many subsequent landscapes that are dominated by white. Boulton's avant-garde valorization of these landscapes led him to imagine not only a period of paintings as white as Kazimir Malevich's *White on White*—none are—but also that the color white is the definitive aspect of those paintings that do contain a lot of it. In fact, as the preceding description of *Light Behind My Arbor* suggests, that is simply not the case. While the painting is, indeed, articulated by dabs and drifts of dry, white, milky pigment,[43] the very removal of white pigment, to expose the underlying, sepia-colored canvas, matters just as much. Moreover, the majority of the landscapes of this period are as much, if not more, sepia than white. To acknowledge this is to reattach them to the later landscapes of what Boulton described as the sepia period.

The earlier landscapes have been seen as comprising a unique, late development of classical modernist perceptual painting in which representation of the breakup of form in intensely bright, Caribbean light led to an allover optical dissolve, and hence to a new stress on the overall material unity of the marked canvas. They have, therefore, also been seen as a very early development of *post*-classical modernist emphases on the objective surface of painting and its intrinsic optical liveliness, quite irrespective of representation. No wonder that their whiteness has been emphasized, for it is this very element of bleached monochrome that allows their interpretation as late modernist perceptual paintings that are anticipatory of postmodernist materialist paintings. But is the perceptual record of a landscape under blinding light actually monochromatic?

"Painting is the truth," Reverón is reported to have said, "but light is blinding; it maddens and torments, for light cannot be seen."[44] And light, he said, "dissolves colors and . . . all colors, after all, become white."[45] Earlier, the Neo-Impressionist painter Paul Signac wrote: "Under the pretext that they are in the South, people expect to see reds, blues, greens, and yellows. While it is on the contrary the North—Holland for example—that is 'colored' (local colors), the South being luminous."[46] Paul Cézanne, basically agreeing, added that Provence was "glaring yellow, flashy like confetti that confuses all these observers who see nothing. Yes, the sun here is always bright, there's a harshness that reflects light and that makes you blink, but feel how nuanced and mellow it always is."[47] Provence is about forty-three degrees north of the Equator, which is about two degrees further north than New York, but it seems brighter because it faces south and the Mediterranean works like a reflecting bowl bouncing light over Provence. Macuto, however, is about ten degrees north, also faces onto water, albeit to the north to the Caribbean, and the light is, therefore, much brighter still. To what effect? Let us consider this account of the effect of bright light at about twenty-one degrees north from a traveler entering the Red Sea port of Jedda in October 1916: "When at last we anchored in the outer harbour, off the white town hung between the blazing sky and its reflection in the mirage which swept and rolled over the wide lagoon, then the heat of Arabia came out like a drawn sword and struck us speechless. . . . The noon sun in the East, like moonlight, put to sleep

11. Henri Matisse. *The Moroccans*. Late 1915 and fall 1916. Oil on canvas, 71 3/8" × 9'2" (181.3 × 279.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel A. Marx, 1955

the colors. There were only lights and shadow, the white houses and black gaps of streets."[48]

This stirring prose is from T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. Those who know Matisse's work cannot but be reminded of the painted remembrance of Tangier, thirty-six degrees north, called *The Moroccans* (fig. 11), which this artist completed that very same month. Obviously, Lawrence's account and Matisse's painting describe the vivid contrasts of an architectural scene, and such contrasts are reduced in open vistas without built structures, notably in views onto desert or water. Still, it seems fair to say that, while the bright light under which Reverón worked may be thought to have put to sleep the colors in his paintings, it does not entirely explain their elimination of tonal contrasts and tendency to monochrome. Or, to put it another way, while their monochrome may be thought to convey, in some cases, a realistic perceptual record of bright light on a scene, it cannot in all cases. Indeed, to consider those paintings of scenes that we can reasonably assume did present a bleached appearance is to see that, even in these cases, Reverón is not to be thought to be concerned, or solely concerned, with providing an accurate perceptual record. He was not a late Impressionist.

Versions of the Caribbean landscape

In the years from 1926 through 1932, Reverón painted only some seventy-five works, not a very high rate of production, of which nearly all are landscapes. Among these landscapes, the four main types of compositions are these. First, there are close-up and more distant views of *ranchos* (huts or cabins), among trees, presumably of those inside El Castillete. These paintings range from relatively "white" landscapes, like *Light Behind My Arbor* of 1926 (page 128) and *Rancho in Macuto* of 1927 (page 130) to the expectedly darker interior, *Rancho (Interior)* of 1931 (page 129), to a light-and-dark, almost macabre exterior, *Landscape* of 1932 (page 130), sewn together from four separate pieces of canvas. These radically transformed versions of Impressionist perceptual painting draw upon Reverón's preceding Symbolist work, as is the case with the contemporaneous work of Pierre Bonnard, of which Reverón presumably was ignorant.[49] Both artists had made Symbolist works that allow us to represent to ourselves the efforts of perception in obscure circumstances, where we are accustomed to find things slowly emerging before our eyes. Then they discovered how bright sunlight, just as much as shadow, requires a similar perceptual adjustment after creating a similar initial confusion as to what we are actually looking at. Thus, with the help of Impressionism, they learned how to represent mysteries in bright daylight.[50]

A second group of landscapes makes this very evident; paintings of densely foliated trees, within some of which, including *Sea Grape Trees* of 1927 (page 131), figures may or may not be depicted. Although these works are more sepia than white in coloration, and therefore cannot be taken to represent the direct effects of bright light, neither can they be said to be paintings of shadowy scenes. Indeed, these views into foliage reveal an allover, optical vibration that seems as if reflected there from sparkling, wind-ruffled surfaces of water. Such broken surfaces of water scatter light to produce glittering, so-called caustic networks on adjacent surfaces.[51] Thus Reverón may be thought to provide an accurate perceptual record. If so, he is nonetheless interested in how the flickering intermittencies of the glitter attract but refuse focalization, allowing him to suggest uncertain presences within the trees, rather like children's puzzles that slowly reveal incongruous, hidden images within what at first look like ordinary landscapes.[52]

A third group of landscapes seem, at first, to be more straightforward. These are paintings of exposed coastlines with ocean vistas, of which many are, in fact, somewhat sentimental evocations of the beauties of the Caribbean shore. Among those made prior to the mid-1930s, however, are some works that conflate the perceptual record and evocation of the mysterious by decelerating our experience of them in a manner different from that discussed above. These are the very pale paintings, like *El Playón* of 1929 (page 132), with washed-out blues and whites hardly covering the sepia canvas. They allow us to make inferences about what Reverón was observing. For example, seeing that he has accurately described the greater brightness that sky reveals at the horizon, we assume that the denser areas of blue describe deeper water. However, verisimilitude will disappear in extended viewing of these works. They describe journeys into pictorial space that go nowhere, but disappear into the blur of thin pigment and evaporate on the barely stained canvas.

The presence of the support, always an important factor in Reverón's finest landscapes, is never more evident than in these melancholy, scarcely formed compositions, which we will study in vain, close-up and afar, for descriptions announced but not delivered. Some may have lost pigment over time. Had they not been signed, we could be forgiven for thinking them unfinished, but their lack of finish is not that of incompletion. Neither is it, like the unfinish of some of Cézanne's compositions, built just to the point when the magnetic attraction of their units holds them together. It is closer to what will be found in certain of Mark Rothko's paintings that, accepting the risk of formlessness, provide a condition of uncertainty as to whether a particular dispersion of pigments is sufficient to comprise what we understand a painting to be. Reverón does not take it that far, but the pictorial narrative these paintings provide does point in that direction.

A final group of landscapes, mainly of isolated trees, is more specific in their descriptions, only the descriptions are either so rudimentary, as in *White Landscape* of 1934 (page 134), or are fragments, as in *The Tree* of 1931 (page 135), that, trying to decode them, we see that their narrative of representation is constantly interrupted by the means of the representation, and vice versa. Knowing

that these are landscape paintings, we assume that all marks are intended to be representational of an external subject as well as of the artist's fabrication, but we just cannot tell. And it is not simply that the paint interrupts the representation, and vice versa; also, what seems unequivocal at one moment will not seem so at another. These are paintings of and in flux. As David Sylvester said of a much later artist's work, the surface "composes an objective correlative for change."[53]

Again, we are shown the presence of the canvas, but also—more specifically than in the works considered thus far—that between the canvas and the specific elements of representation is a mediating, only loosely representational underlayer of washes of pigment. This tells us that Reverón's method is a version of the traditional way of building a painting from back to front, in halftones, as transmitted into the twentieth century by artists like Bonnard and Edouard Vuillard, whom he resembles at times in the dryness and matteness of his compositions.[54] But, whereas those artists tended to use repetitively molecular brushstrokes, Reverón's are of an exuberant variety. We saw that he marked *Light Behind My Arbor* horizontally and vertically, expressing the warp and weft of the canvas. Nearly all of these landscapes reveal these emphases, while adding to them diagonal movements and flurries of improvisatory marking that express, instead, the presence of the painter in front of his painting.

Accounts of Reverón at work speak of his highly performative method, a kind of action painting, and there are some photographs that record a work being created in this way (see figs. 14, 15). While these photographs illustrate, and most probably these accounts refer to, a more expressionistic kind of painting that began in the mid-1930s, it may safely be said of the earlier landscapes that they offer a vivid sense of the artist's marking hand and, by extension or metonymy, of the artist's entire body before the canvas. I said, of *Light Behind My Arbor,* that the process of its painterly crafting recovers a very strong sense of the handmade object that received the paint. To this should be added that in the process of recovering their objective materiality, paintings of this sort acquire a materiality that is personalized by the hand that made them.

It is this quality of personalized and objective materiality, independent of representation, that has allowed these paintings to be spoken of as being among the first postclassical modernist paintings of the independently thematized surface. However, this plainly anachronistic, intended valorization leads to their actually being subordinated, in value and understanding, to the later abstract paintings that they are said to anticipate.[55] In fact, the materiality of these works is inseparable from their perceptual basis, to which it responds; and if the materiality opposes the opticality, it does so not to make an autonomous, minimal statement but in substitution for the depicted corporeality of Reverón's earlier art and its attachment to an old, aristocratic age. This perhaps accounts for the melancholy quality of the luminance, even at its most blinding, that the weighty surface provides. Light reflects back, tinted by what is usually a battered barrier of sacking, old not because dignified but because a castoff from the commercial world of the port and the plantation, mundane and forlorn.

The surface, this is to say, does not merely represent light; it is a sort of mirror that returns light, transformed by the surface. The broken, occluded image that is returned is somewhat like that of the very dysfunctional, homemade mirror that the artist fabricated from silver paper in the early 1940s (page 14). And the old sacking that reflects the glare, aided by blurry pale washes that pulsate in the picture plane, produces a dry, bleached, granular, objective correlative of the bright surface of sand. I have spoken of these pictures as making our perceptual adjusting a theme, even a comprehensive theme, within them.[56] If, taking this a step further, we are prepared to think of the most atomized and undecipherable of them as evocative of almost blinding light, what calls up this anxious association is not simply the representation of luminance, or the reflected luminance; it is also the reflective surface itself, for triggering the atavistic association of sand in one's eyes as thwarting or damaging sight.

Figure and Fantasy: 1932–40

In 1929, Venezuela's perhaps most honored writer, Rómulo Gallegos, published in exile his most famous novel, *Doña Bárbara*, which told of a Caracas-educated hero, Santos Luzardo, returning to his decrepit country estate determined to bring law to the barbaric interior, whose forces of darkness are represented by the eponymous Doña Bárbara. He was eventually victorious over her, not by force but by pacific means, and finally married her illegitimate daughter, marking the triumph of civilization over barbarism by an idealistic process of persuasion and assimilation.[57] This wishful, picaresque story does not offer a direct parallel with that of Reverón leaving Gómez's capital to paint the true light of Venezuela; nonetheless, both journeys speak in their own ways of shaping an idealistic, national image on the model of a personal vision.

It hardly needs saying that Reverón's art is not political in the sense of being polemical, yet it speaks eloquently of the early modern theme of conflict between man and the corruptions of urban life, offering an imaginative image of space outside the city as a healing Arcadia of gardens and waters. In that respect, it is as primitivist, in its own way, as the Latin American art that described such outside spaces by means of atavistic imagery based on the folkloric or fantastic—or as Doña Bárbara in the barbaric hinterland, but only in its own, more softly primitivist way.

Atavistic imagery opened more extreme options: a vocabulary of expression that was intended or received as untutored; and the articulation of sentiments that could seem to be sexually or psychologically liberating, perhaps because associated with the representation of types outside the experience of the cultural group for whom the imagery was intended. While landscape painting could, with difficulty, tap into the first option, it could only with very great difficulty tap into the second. Reverón obviously discovered this when he abandoned the soft, aristocratic form of atavistic description of his Hispanic figure paintings for the soft primitivism of his landscapes. And when, in the 1930s, he reengaged with figure painting, he discovered that he could reengage with atavistic description as well. In

doing so, he reopened his art to the possibility of representing the sexually or psychological liberating, as he had done in his Hispanic paintings. Only now, after having worked with very mundane materials, he turned from aristocratic to humble subjects, to local peasants and Indians, or rather, to models who dressed up as Indians. And he again found that the more picturesque forms of such representation were just what his audience wanted.

Looking ahead: After the death of Gómez in 1935, Venezuela finally breathed the air of freedom, and various attempts at creating a fully democratic government laid the groundwork for the country's first honest election, which led to the aforementioned Gallegos becoming president in 1947. Unfortunately, less than a year after he was sworn in, he was deposed by a military coup, replaced by a junta, and, by 1950, the country was again sliding into political darkness. This led, in 1952, to the presidency of Pérez Jiménez, another Gómez, only worse, who was still in office when Reverón died in 1954, turning Caracas into a modern city by exploiting its old, colonial economy and expanding its new oil economy. From the mid-1930s onward, therefore, the second phase of Reverón's mature art, with its Arcadia of imaginary Indians, was practiced against the backdrop of newly libertarian, social and political expectations, albeit very fragile ones. So, when Reverón went to Caracas, and residents of Caracas went to El Castillete, what came together was Reverón's dream of a primitive retreat and his patrons' admiration of, or amusement in,[58] its ingenuousness. Both required a position of suspended disbelief in that dream and, therefore, in the no more credibly long-lasting freedom that accompanied it. Clearly, that was achieved, for in the mid-1930s Reverón began to receive notice and success; his work started to become fashionable.[59]

Reverón (and society) in Macuto

The early to mid-1930s was a period of transition for Reverón, both in his life and his art. After years of very sporadic painting, he finally settled into a regular, far more productive pictorial practice. That decade would be, quantitatively, the most prolific decade of his entire career.[60]

Because of this increased production, Reverón became a more widely known artist, and it is from this decade that we begin to have a few written and pictorial accounts of visitors to El Castillete. The compound itself (see pages 210–19), with some trees and a small pond, had grown to comprise a studio, a small chapel, and various living quarters, set within a tall boundary wall of stone with a large wooden door. (A more detailed account appears on pages 211–13.) Prominent in some of the photographs are young society men and women, and there is a day-camp atmosphere about several of them, especially those with fashionably dressed women surrounding the grinning artist (fig. 12). On the other hand, there are photographs that show what also look like such men and women, only now dressed as Indians, with Reverón in a loincloth and Juanita wearing feathers (fig. 13). These two kinds of images represent, respectively, Caracas visiting the primitive retreat and Caracas pretending to inhabit the primitivist fantasy.

Clockwise from upper left:

12. Reverón with young women at the sea, photographed by Alfredo Boulton. 1929. Archivo Boulton, Alberto Vollmer Foundation, Inc.

13. Reverón and guests dressed as Indians, photographed by Alfredo Boulton. n.d. Archivo Boulton, Alberto Vollmer Foundation, Inc.

14, 15. Reverón painting Luisa Phelps, photographed by Alfredo Boulton. 1934. Archivo Boulton, Alberto Vollmer Foundation, Inc.

Well-known among the former kind of photograph is a set, taken by Alfredo Boulton in 1934 (figs. 14, 15), that shows Reverón painting a portrait of Luisa Phelps, who was Boulton's sister-in-law. Through him, she was tied into that part of Caracas society that supported new Venezuelan art. The year the photographs were taken, Reverón had a solo exhibition at the Galerie Katia Granoff in Paris, which Phelps is said to have either curated or mediated.[61] At the end of that year, Boulton presented a similar exhibition at the Ateneo de Caracas, a private cultural center in the capital.[62] Self-evidently, Reverón was beginning to attract critical and financial support. Also from this period are photographs of the artist with his paintings on portable easels in the gardens of potential clients (see fig. 30),[63] which is how he now sold his work, as well as having his clients come to El Castillete.

Increasingly, it became easier for him to receive visitors. In Boulton's photographs, Mrs. Phelps is wearing a very snappy scarf decorated with anchors that speaks of

16. Hotel Miramar, Macuto. Late 1920s. Archivo Audiovisual de Venezuela, Instituto Autonomo Biblioteca Nacional

the yacht club: this reminds us that, only one and a half miles up the coast from El Castillete, the grand Hotel Miramar (fig. 16) had opened in 1928, expanding the accessibility of the area, as the country's mineral wealth increased, to the middle classes as well as to foreign visitors.[64] As this happened, the walls rose around El Castillete and within it was Reverón's private world. Yet, not far outside, sand would be brought in to enlarge the beach for the tourists; ocean liners would come to La Guaira; and arrangements could be made to visit an eccentric, but (for the moment) affable artist nearby.

The Boulton photographs show a bare-chested Reverón, wearing pants tightly cinched at the waist and with plugs of some kind in his ears, refreshing himself from a vacuum flask as he prepares his colors. He then makes runs at, and darting attacks on, his pictorial surface, which is of paper fastened to a board. He is using what look like homemade painting implements, taken from a tray on the ground next to the rudimentary easel. It is from the early 1930s that we first find accounts of this strange method of painting. For example, an account of a visit to El Castillete, published by Julian Padrón in 1932,[65] speaks of the waist cinching, the plugging of the ears, the homemade or modified painting instruments, and the sudden attacks on the picture. It additionally describes how the artist, preparing himself in the aforementioned way, would lie on the floor to focus his interior attention and invoke the spirits of inspiration before beginning to work, and how he would surround himself by small pieces of variously textured cloth that he would touch from time to time while working.

Boulton, writing much later, added how Reverón disliked the touch of metal, inorganic, and newly manufactured materials, wishing to be isolated from anything that, seeming alien, would interfere with the process of painting. This would explain his antipathy to conventional brushes, because of their metal ferrules; but his vacuum flask belied this distain for metal objects. Boulton also offered that the cinching of the waist, dividing Reverón's body into two zones, was a form of emasculation or de-eroticization which, together with the silencing of his ears and his avoidance of the touch of unnatural things, isolated him from the base, material world.[66] I hardly need say that this ritual, both with and without this interpretation, has generated much speculative commentary on the subjects of magic, transcendentalism, sexual repression, and split personality. We do not know whether Reverón worked like this without an audience, which must cause us to wonder whether the ritual was a way of avoiding the distractions of having an audience, or was a way of acting the part of an eccentric for an audience who expected or enjoyed strange behavior from artists.

In Reverón's case, there would be a reason to expect strange behavior. In 1933, he suffered another nervous breakdown, and was diagnosed as a schizophrenic.[67] Because this is a phasic illness, it

exhibits its delusionary and hallucinatory symptoms in a sequence of episodes with often-long periods of normality between them—or relative normality, for its emotional impoverishment persists and builds. His ritual of working may be thought to be reminiscent of a schizophrenic listening to directing voices—and he is said to have suffered from this delusion at times—or having difficulty in experiencing his will as under his own control. Yet, he did work. And whereas his eccentricity and isolation, which increased, may well confirm his diagnosis, these were not immediately accompanied by the expected diminishment of vivacity and drive.[68]

Unexpectedly, perhaps, acknowledgment of Reverón's diagnosis as a schizophrenic has occasioned the Laingean interpretation that he was not, in fact, suffering from an illness, but that society was, and this was his only rational way of coming to terms with an insane world.[69] Unquestionably, that diagnosis has been used on occasion by society as a convenient label for troublesome deviants, which Reverón did become. Nonetheless, since the society that came to visit him at El Castillete could not have read R. D. Laing's *The Divided Self* and, therefore, did not think itself to be insane, it was prepared to think that Reverón was, at least, some of the time. Indeed, by as early as November of 1931, he must have gained a reputation for his personal as well as artistic unexpectedness sufficient for a Caracas magazine to describe him as "the painter of white, of silence, and of solitude. The mad Armando Reverón."[70] Some of the visitors to El Castillete came for the comic spectacle;[71] tourists would be directed there; and a sad routine developed that eventually led, at worst, to children throwing stones at the crazy artist (as also had happened to the aged Cézanne), and, more routinely, to his being treated almost as a kind of anthropological spectacle or ethnographic curiosity, a sort of "White Indian" to go and see at Macuto.

Landscapes and figure paintings of the early to mid-1930s

After Reverón's 1933 breakdown, his paintings suggest, he returned to work with extraordinary energy. The landscapes, many of them views of coconut trees by the ocean (fig. 17), have a summary, gestural aspect indicative of their having been painted very quickly. Their Crayola coloration, which reinforces this aspect, also gives to them a naïve quality that may be thought to be refreshingly candid or unduly rudimentary. Most of these are painted on canvas. But, simultaneously, Reverón gave at least equal attention to figural painting, which he had all but abandoned in the 1920s, and for these works he mainly used gouache or some other form of tempera on paper, enjoying the slick surface for its encouragement of quick working (fig. 18). Neither of these groups of works is among his most felicitous, for he was far more successful as a careful, deliberative artist than as one of expressed spontaneity.

Since the Realism of the mid-nineteenth century, the production and reception of a modernist art had been wary of intrinsically beautiful subjects. We know far too little about Reverón's market for his work, but its own evidence suggests that he often seemed to be comfortable, especially in this period, in producing hastily made, picturesque scenes of the Caribbean coast that have

17. Armando Reverón. *El Playón*. 1933. Oil on canvas, 27 5/8 × 32" (70 × 81 cm). Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

18. Armando Reverón. *Nude in a Landscape*. 1933. Tempera on paper on board, 30 × 41" (76 × 104 cm). Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

now, at least, the connotation of a tourist art. What matters, of course, and what we want to see, are the heights to which an artist rises. However, the lesser works are instructive in showing us that an element of the picturesque, which earlier was manifested in a colorfully pleasurable art—be it of indigenous scenes, Hispanic subjects, or Symbolist effects—was transferable to his mature practice, to appear in emphasis on the spectacular beauty and distinctive light of the Caribbean landscape. Indeed, the more prolific Reverón became as a landscape painter, as he did in this period, the more this emphasis became evident. But it also continued to show in his figural works on paper of this period. These paintings of nudes, society figures, *campesinos* (peasants), women with Hispanic mantillas, *Cruz de Mayo* scenes, guitar-playing *mestizas,* the occasional portrait of Juanita, and self-portraits, are almost all similarly picturesque creations. Occasionally, though, something darker and far more interesting shows through. The human figure that had all but disappeared from Reverón's art more than a decade earlier, before the move to Macuto, had often been a colorful, picturesque figure, drawn with impastoed paint, and richly volumetric, surrounded by an almost eroding atmosphere. The figure that has returned is not too dissimilar, only now the volumes are often bloated, overripe, even to bursting, which is what the slathered gouache evokes (see fig. 18). Just how grotesque is this realism is disguised by the picturesque, as if by cosmetics, but grotesque realism it is.[72] The failure of many of these paintings is matched by the failure of the bodies in them; that is to say, by their sense of having lost substance and collapsed.

Some of the works on canvas of this period have a similar quality, for example, *The Hammock* of 1933 (page 93), but the materiality of their support, and the artist's experience of eliciting luminos-

ity from it, give to others a very different, etherealized disembodiment. Two mysterious, almost invisible, small paintings of sleeping figures (one done in 1932 [page 142]; one thought to date from five years earlier [page 142]) allow us to believe that it is these figures' unconsciousness that withdraws them from our sight. A small 1932 painting (page 140), which has been alternatively described as a woman's portrait and a self-portrait—it is impossible to tell which—is an occluded Veronica's veil that defies focalization. *Daughter of the Sun* (page 140), another small portrait made in the following year and showing an almost as faded image of a native girl dressed up with feathers, gains a presumably unintended Cubist quality from the show-through stencil lettering on the flour sack on which it is painted.

There are other small paintings of native girls of this same period, which have also accrued titles (some may be the artist's) describing them as Indians or daughters of the sun.[73] Boulton noted that these paintings could be called Reverón's "indigenous series."[74] There was, in fact, no longer an indigenous Indian population in northern Venezuela, it having been decimated by the Spanish conquistadores and their successors, even into the early twentieth century, and the remainder having assimilated. Effectively, Reverón, who had earlier painted imaginary Hispanic fantasies, now turned in the 1930s to imagination of the pre-Hispanic. Boulton said that, in this period, Reverón can be considered a "primitive,"[75] which should prompt us to consider such works in the broad context of primitivist New World mythology, including, for example, the proliferation of replications of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in Latin American and Caribbean literature.[76] And, seeing Reverón's make-believe Indians, whether in paintings or in photographs of his models, makes one realize that El Castillete was an inversion of a Robinsonian settlement: still a securely enclosed colonialist space, but designed not to keep the natives out; rather, to bring them imaginatively inside.

Earlier, I used the term "White Indian" to characterize Reverón himself at El Castillete. I did so because in 1934, the very year of the Boulton photographs that invoke his adoption by Caracas society, a book on this subject was published in New York that helps us to understand those other photographs that show Caracas society dressing up as Indians at El Castillete. R. O. Marsh's *White Indians of Darien* describes this anthropological explorer's Smithsonian-funded search for White Indians in a Panamanian island a decade earlier, a successful search that ended with Marsh fighting for their independence from Panama, dressed as a White Indian himself. The frontispiece of Marsh's book (fig. 19) is reminiscent of photographs of Juanita and others in the small tribe of Reverón's models in supposedly Indian dress. While it is difficult to believe that cosmopolitan Venezuelans, and U.S. visitors, would not have heard of these sensational events off the coast of nearby Panama, they are not mentioned here to suggest some causal relationship between them and Reverón's practice; rather, because both speak of a late colonialist context of primitivist mimicry played out in rituals on the uncertain boundaries between the civilized and the savage. More particular, they seek to separate a good from a bad savage, searching for or imagining the former as "a representative," in Michael

19. Mimi, White Indian Girl, from Richard Oglesby Marsh, *The White Indians of Darien*, 1934

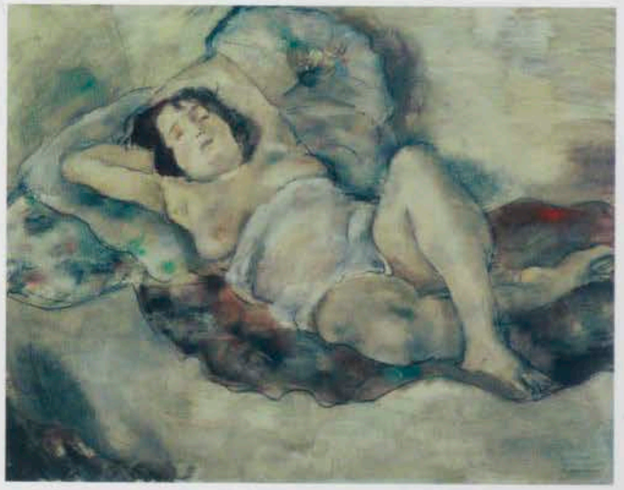
Taussig's words, "of unsullied Origin, a sort of Eden before the Fall when harmony prevailed, while the bad savage is the sign of the permanent wound inflicted by history, the sign of waste, degeneracy, and thwarted narrative."[77] In effect, the White Indian, as a good savage, nostalgically pretends that civilization's wounding never happened.

In 1935, Reverón's "indigenous" project, devoted to this theme, produced a canvas called both *Two Female Figures* and *Daughters of the Sun* (page 141), which reprises the two-temptress theme of his early figurative masterpiece, *The Cave*, but in a taller, almost four-feet-high, format, which makes it his largest painting to date. Coming out of nowhere, this sandy, white-to-sepia painting is a grand attempt to make a primitivized figurative composition using the highly individualized perceptual vision of the world of the most radical, disembodied landscapes of the mid-1920s. Bringing these themes together evokes a sense of escape not from, but within, the here-and-now into a kind of Arcadia.

It must be conceded that the inscribed figuration of *Two Female Figures*, which gives it the quality of an archaic tablet, is allied to a rudimentary spatial description that seems at odds with the surface emphasis. Coincidentally, I presume, Georges Rouault, among others, was struggling with a similar problem in France,[78] a post-Cézannian one that is seen in a number of early modernist figure compositions by lesser Cubists and Expressionists. This particular version of it, the inscribed tablet, awaited Jean Dubuffet for its solution a decade later. We know that Reverón, when he visited artists in Caracas, discussed with them the problems of creating a viable figurative art after the anatomical dislocations of early-twentieth-century modernism, but we do not know which artists they knew of to emulate.[79] One name, however, has been mentioned—the now almost-forgotten one of Jules Pascin (1885–1930), a School of Paris painter of Reverón's generation who was well known in the 1920s for his tonal compositions of young women, often startlingly young girls, in sprawling, eroticized poses that look back ultimately to French artists of the eighteenth century (fig. 20). In 1937, Reverón was awarded a medal for his work at the Venezuelan pavilion in that year's Exposition Internationale in Paris; perhaps that prompted an awareness of School of Paris painting. In any event, it cannot be discounted that, when Reverón abandoned the inscribed method of figuration of *Two Female Figures*, it could well have been through the unlikely catalyst of the prurient blur of Pascin's paintings. If so, he discovered a form of figuration there that sat well in his coarse canvases not only because of the refinement of its ultimate derivation but also despite it. This is to say, the cultivated Rococo eroticism of the posing comes as a pleasurable shock in a primitivism that is announced by material, surface means as well as by spatial setting. The intimations of Reverón's great figure compositions of the late 1930s are many, complicated, and hard to pin down, but they do include the surprise of François Boucher in the barn, not the boudoir.

The large figure compositions of the late 1930s

These paintings, made in 1938 and 1939, are large; two of them—*The Creole "Maja"* (page 145), at almost six feet wide, and *Five Figures* (page 149), at seven-and-a half feet wide—are even larger than the 1935 *Two Female Figures*. Most of them, however, return to a size closer to that of the early, five-feet-wide *The Cave,* or smaller, which seemed to be a more comfortable area of canvas for Reverón to work on. Nearly all show nudes in interiors, but there are at least two paintings, *Nude* and *The Woman of the River* (pages 146, 147), that place a single nude within a landscape setting, thereby urging the interpretation that they are personifications of, respectively, a faun or a wood sprite and a water spirit, an interpretation assisted by their seeming to merge into their settings. These beautifully arcane works are, effectively, reconceived enlargements, refined and mythicized, of figural details hidden within some of the early landscapes, for example, the hardly visible seated figure in *Sea Grape Trees* of 1927 (page 131). In their enlargement, the weave of the burlap, running through the figuration, is the epidermis of the skin and the painting simultaneously. Within the bodily shape, small details set upon the canvas make it clear that these figures are not ordinary mortals; around them, patches of paint hint at landscapes of woods, rocks, and water.



20. Jules Pascin. *Reclining Model.* c. 1925. Oil on canvas, 28 3/4 × 36 1/4" (73 × 92.1 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of A. Conger Goodyear

In 1939, Reverón also painted a picture entitled *Venezuela* (fig. 21), referred to previously. This shows a woman asleep on a *butaca*, a traditional Venezuelan chair, and therefore recalls early images of the discovery of America in which the continent is personified by an Indian woman, discovered sleeping in a hammock and awakened by her explorer (fig. 22).[80] As Luis Pérez-Oramas has observed, there is a lot of sleeping and dozing in these figure compositions of the late 1930s.[81] Remarking that they were made when Reverón had finally completed El Castillete, he views them as elegiac images of eternal sleep as if within a tomb and, therefore, as consonant with the Arcadian mythos of Reverón's art, and images that invoke the possibility of, or desire for, their resurrection. One thing he says is certain, that a sleeping figure cannot return desire.[82] Indeed, a sleeping figure cannot know of being in the presence of desire; America had to be awakened to know that. However, such a figure can know of its desirability. This is, of course, why sleeping, self-absorbed, or otherwise preoccupied figures that are accessibly exposed to desire, yet unconscious of it, have long been a staple of amorous or erotic imagery, which has tended to exaggerate the exposure and, therefore, the accessibility.

Reverón's images do nothing of the sort. Furthermore, insofar as they do not thus privilege the outward display of the body, they necessarily call our attention to its opposite, inward-looking, absorptive aspects. And yet, our attention is unrewarded. Reverón made little attempt to represent

21. Armando Reverón. *Venezuela*. 1939. Oil on canvas, 42 1/4 × 60 5/8" (107.5 × 153.8 cm). Collection Banco Central de Venezuela

22. Giovanni Stradano. *Vespucci Discovering America*. 1589. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

these figures as if suffused with a consciousness that has been merely suspended in sleep or otherwise turned inward; they do not present themselves as desirable individuals either because of, or in spite of, their unconsciousness. And if they are to be thought, possibly by the artist, to be desirable, it is as figures whose empirical individuality has been destroyed in their desiring representation. We might wish to remember Rilke's famous comment about the inability of dolls to reciprocate, mentioned in discussion of the artist's childhood, and notice a quality not merely of muteness but also of hollowness in these beautiful but lumpen, nude ghosts.

Of the interiors, it is, of course, the single-figure compositions that especially raise the question of desirability because of thus addressing the individual viewer. In the case of *Nude* (page 144), a large, dark foreground shape resembles a winged presence entering the pictorial space: a distant memory of a famous print by Goya? The dappled patches that fall upon the woman's back recall a shower of gold that falls on Danaë in a painting at the Prado. Between these soft areas of sfumato, the long diagonal stretch of a female nude is a daringly abstract embrace of the pictorial surface that makes one look ahead, anachronistically, to large paintings on bare canvas made by North American artists in the 1950s and 1960s. And it is a familiarly seductive pose that makes one look back as far as Venetian sixteenth-century painting and as near as the Symbolist art on which Reverón's earlier figural art had drawn. While sharing the eroticism of both of these sources, however, it is neither courtly, like the former, nor has it the cold cerebral lechery of the latter. How can it, for this is not a representation of an empirical individual but of the disembodied ghost of one whose boundaries blur. As with the figures depicted in landscapes, the bodily shape is given by barely inflected canvas, the physical and tactile reality of which substitutes for the body's. And it is in the space around this depictive vacancy that the patches and smears of pigment denied to the figure are dispersed.

Four years earlier, in 1935, the Surrealist journal *Minotaure* had published an extraordinary essay on mimesis by Roger Callois, which associated mimics in nature and schizophrenics as both being tempted by space to the point that their self loses its boundedness. "To these dispossessed souls," he wrote, "space seems to be a devouring force. Space pursues them, encircles them, digests them. . . . It ends by replacing them."[83] Something of this sort of spatial encircling and bodily surrender is represented in Reverón's *Nude*. In Callois's scenario, the mimic or the schizophrenic "breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses. . . . He feels himself becoming space, *dark space where things cannot be put.*" The pale body that blurs into the surrounding shadow of Reverón's painting carries the additional connotations of the bright whiteness of Caribbean light fading within the soon-to-be-invisible space of the interior, and of the skin of a White Indian, resembling that of a Caucasian, about to become as dark as the space into which this figure will merge.

Very similar in technique to this work is the so-called *The Creole "Maja"* (*La maja criolla* in Spanish; page 145), whose very title informs us that a cross-cultural narrative has become attached to it. The term *maja* (*majo*, in the masculine), familiar to us from Goya's paintings of the Duchess of Alba, originally was used in Spain in the sixteenth century for members of the lower class who adopted the elegance and carefree style of the nobility. As for *criolla* (*criollo,* in the masculine), while it originally indicated someone of Spanish extraction born in the Americas (like Reverón's parents), it came to mean simply some person or thing indigenous and national rather than foreign. Therefore, in this case, we presumably are asked to imagine the woman in the foreground as a young, native girl who is reminiscent of a Hispanic *maja*. I said earlier that Reverón's figure paintings of the 1930s reprised the sexually or psychologically liberating aspects of his early Hispanic paintings, only now in representations not of aristocratic but humble subjects, including native women and models dressed up as Indians. The acceptance of the title of this painting, which may well not be the artist's, as well as its fame, tells us that this transference was not merely his own invention.

Yet, the title and the fame may both respond to the unusual narrative puzzle that this picture presents, which joins it to the long tradition of narrative figure compositions with subjects that are obscure either because they were meant to be or because their significance has been forgotten. Here, the puzzle is shaped in the shadows around the *maja criolla*, by the figure lying next to her, with a feather headdress and what may be flowers over the belly and groin; by the seated woman at the right; and by what may or may not be a fourth figure between that figure and the window.[84] Since compositions of nude figures with unspecified subjects predictably attract sexual explanations, it is unsurprising that this one has. It has commonly been interpreted as showing a scene prior to or after a sexual act between the young woman and the figure behind her, who, if intended as a man, could be understood to be a surrogate for the artist,[85] or another male viewer. However, this figure could be intended as a woman, for Reverón made other all-female figure compositions; lesbian interpretations of these works are almost nonexistent.[86] Boulton speculates that the seated woman is an older priestess who is

supervising a ceremony of deflowering of the *maja criolla*,[87] which is regrettably too specific for what this patently ambiguous painting allows. Yet, it is indeed this seated woman who calls for an explanation other and more explicit than that merely of sexual languor that the picture as a whole provides.

Two other paintings (pages 143, 148), showing pairs of reclining figures, do not contain, or prompt, such advocates of explanation, being content to show us scenes that we intuit lie outside knowledge, yet that come to our attention not as obscurities, which require clarification, but as mysteries that will not be reduced to puzzling detail.[88] Indeed, they offer experiences in which a narrative content—certainly one that wants named characters—becomes progressively less pronounced as the differentiation of figures and setting ebbs and flows in our viewing, settles into a reciprocation, and thereby internalizes the mysterious sexuality of these works. The slightly smaller painting (page 143) is warmly somnolent and dangerously claustrophobic, its shallowly tipped space seemingly filled with heavy limbs, some of them unattributable. In contrast, the larger painting (page 148), said to be of two Indians, is cool, melancholy, and almost aqueous in its limpid paleness and hard-to-focus patches of milky pigments and touches of pale green. Reverón apparently said, of Goya, that "something is left floating in the retina."[89] The same may be said of the perceptual suspensefulness induced by this painting, in which the immobility of the two women, and the contained wholeness of each, will slowly give way, reform, and continue to be traced and erased. I said, of an earlier painting, that its eroticism is not attached to an empirical individual. Reverón may be imagined even to replicate the destruction of the empirical individual in sexual desire.[90] "It is, then," wrote Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, "the sexualizing effect of self-absorption which makes impossible the self-containment necessary for that absorption."[91] The continuing erasing and retracing of boundaries may be thought, in such an interpretation, to represent a continuing incitement and stilling of desire.

The largest composition of the series, *Five Figures* (page 149), presents itself as somewhere between the generalized figuration of the majority of the interiors and the more explicit narrativity of *The Creole "Maja."* Some critics, we learned, have asserted that one of the reclining figures in the latter painting may be thought of as a representation of the artist, but not, of course, as a self-portrait made by looking in a mirror. In the case of *Five Figures*, it seems obvious to identify the standing artist in the background as a representation of Reverón in a similar way—except that Reverón was left-handed and this artist is represented as right-handed. So, is this a self-portrait of Reverón seen in a mirror at the back of the composition? In fact, this painting, which should really be called *Six Figures*, may, in fact, contain another personification of the artist in the surrogate form of a sixth figure, with a neoclassical profile,[92] who peers into the scene from the extreme right edge. (We shall see him again.) In any event, the narrative that this painting calls forth is neither of generalized nor of specifically indigenous sexuality; it is of the studio, specifically of the theme of artist and model.

If we look closely, we see that this is an unusual version of the theme, for the model at back center seems not to be standing but hanging there. She, certainly, and probably the model to her

23. Doll. Surinam (?). n.d. Corn husk, ink, and metal pins, 9 × 2 5/8 × 2" (22.5 × 6.5 × 5.3 cm). Schomburg Center, The New York Public Library

24. *Santos*. Venezuelan. Nineteenth century. Painted wood. Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

right, and possibly one or both of the others, were painted not from live models but from the *muñecas* that Reverón or Juanita, or both of them, made,[93] and that soon multiplied in number to become very familiar, named residents of El Castillete (see pages 208, 209). Graciela, Guajíra, Niza, Serafina, and their companions looked somewhat like grown-up versions of indigenous, stuffed children's dolls (fig. 23) but were treated more like secular versions of the *santos*, the effigies of saints, in Catholic churches (fig. 24), each of whom "not only represented a person but also was treated like a person," to borrow Hans Belting's characterization of images created before what he calls the era of art.[94]

The *muñecas*, when they were not posing as nude models in *Five Figures* and subsequent paintings, wore clothes and various accessories to lounge around in at El Castillete. These clothes and accessories were made by Reverón or Juanita, as were a whole range of fabricated objects, presumably for the dolls' enjoyment, ranging from a guitar and an accordion, to a telephone and a birdcage, to a bottle, a chalice, and a mirror; none of these actually functioned (see pages 14, 50, 52, 196, 198 and 199). El Castillete thus became an uncanny environment of the imagination. Reverón continued to use live models, and may well have begun ambitious compositions with live models only to complete them using *muñecas*. Nonetheless, in the 1940s, the *muñecas* would effectively replace—that is to say, substitute for—the tribe of imaginary Indians in his art of the 1930s. Thus, the primitivist Arcadia, having been moved out of nature into the enclosure of El Castillete, finally reached the confines of the artist's studio.

Olympia and the Sandman

In Western art, the artist's studio as a subject is inseparable from the theme of the artist and model, if only because it began with representations of St. Luke portraying the Virgin.[95] The subject is also inseparable from the modalities of perceptual representation, because it gained in prominence only

25. Hans Bellmer. Untitled, plate from *Les Jeux de la poupée*. 1935 (printed 1949). Handcolored vintage gelatin silver print, 5 1/2 × 5 1/2" (14 × 14 cm). Ubu Gallery, New York, and Galerie Berinson, Berlin

in the seventeenth century, when the association of studio and scientific workshop attached to the theme: the artist involved in an investigation, seeking knowledge through perceptual metaphors.[96] This tells us already that the two, seemingly contradictory sides of Reverón's art—representation of the model and representation of the perceptual effects of landscape—are culturally related.

Such an analogy between perceptual knowledge of the model and of the land had come to reinforce an immobile image of the New World as open to exploration.[97] Of course, the theme of the artist and model had long been associated with the myth of Pygmalion, the king of Cyprus, who carved the image of his ideal woman, which was then brought to life by Aphrodite. But the trope of immobility gained a special force in the modern culture of colonialism. Reverón's *muñecas* belong to a rich, early modernist set of images of artists with mannequins, which are at their most evocative when confusion exists regarding whether or not the mannequin is humanly alive, and at their most disturbing when it is clear that it is not. In this context, the *muñecas* belong in the latter category, with, for example, those of Hans Bellmer (fig. 25), but his *representations* of *muñecas* belong in the former category, with, for example, those of Degas (fig. 26), Auguste Renoir, James Ensor, and Oskar Kokoschka, among others.[98] One of the reasons that the subject of the artist's studio gained in importance is that it shows the principal place where the world gets transformed into art. Therefore, images that reveal moments of confused transition between nature and artifice have a special value there. Within early modernism, the resonance of the image of the artist with a mannequin extended to revealing odd relationships between the natural and mechanical worlds, to reassociate immobility with modernism, as materialism's uncanny.[99]

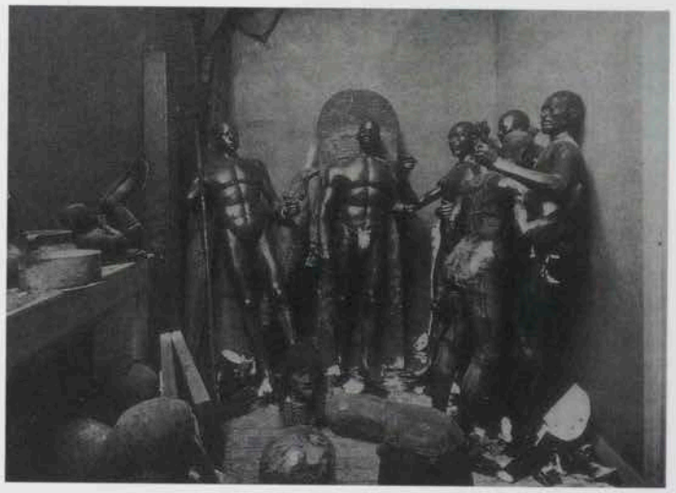
26. Edgar Degas. *Portrait of Henri Michel-Lévy*. 1878. Oil on canvas, 15 3/4 × 11" (40 × 28 cm). Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon

The urtext, in this context, is E. T. A. Hoffmann's grotesque story "The Sandman" of 1816. This story is chiefly famous for the doll Olympia, who later appeared in Jacques Offenbach's opera *Tales of Hoffmann*, and who gave her name to the most celebrated modern painting of a model of doll-like impassivity;[100] and for having been discussed in Freud's essay, "The Uncanny," written in 1919, when Reverón was thirty years of age.[101]

Hoffmann's story has two related themes. The first concerns the Sandman, who throws sand into children's eyes, blinding them. As a child, Nathaniel spied on the Sandman (under the name of Coppelius), when he visited his father,

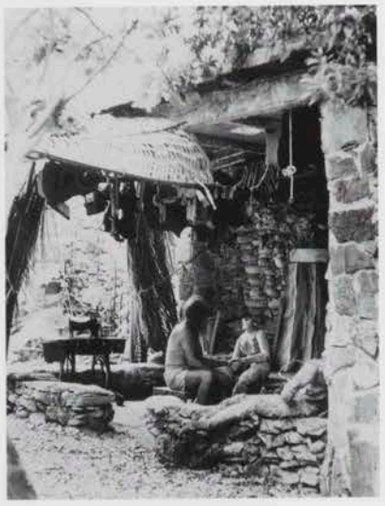
and he held him somehow responsible for his father's death. The second theme concerns Olympia, the beautiful daughter of Nathaniel's substitute father, with whom Nathaniel falls in love, only to discover that she is a doll, an automaton, whose eyes have been supplied by the optician Coppola, namely, the Sandman.

Freud quotes Friedrich Schelling to the effect that "*Unheimlich* (uncanny) is the name for everything that ought to have remained . . . secret and hidden but has come to light."[102] In his own interpretation of the first theme, the substitutive relation between the eye and the male organ, hence between blinding and castration, means that Nathaniel's fatal association of the Sandman and his father is his fearful representation of the latter, who is always the true castrating agent in Freud's accounts, and of his own wishful revenge against him.[103] For Freud, the second theme of the story elaborates the implications of Nathaniel's imagination of attack on the wholeness of his body, an imagination of separation of a critical part of the self that leads him into the narcissistic object choice of the doll Olympia. The creation of a substitute father and substitute Sandman, she is, symbolically, Nathaniel's sister and a materialization of childhood femininity that confronts him as a person after childhood. He is enslaved to her because she is confusable with, but not, a woman, being a model of the subject's own self, a potentially dismembered automaton.

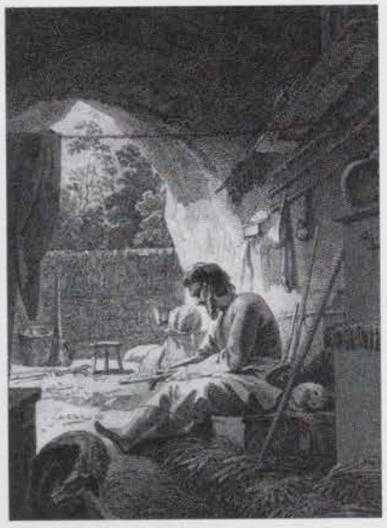


27. Georges Bataille. "Attics: Mannequins, Debris, and Dust," from *Documents*, October 1929

It is tempting to associate this scenario of narcissism with Reverón's troubled childhood, but whether or not one wishes to take that path, Freud's association of the blindingly optical and the uncanny automaton offers another association between the two sides of Reverón's practice, the Sandman's white paintings and the Olympian *muñecas*. Moreover, these themes also come together in other modern accounts of the resurfacing of the atavistic within modernity, two of the most celebrated being by Reverón's contemporaries. One is Walter Benjamin's version of modernity as a sudden rejuxtaposition of the very old and very new, made possible by everyday dislocations and by revelation of the optical unconscious through photograph and film.[104] Even more pertinent is Georges Bataille's understanding of modern art as deriving from destructive, sadistic impulses, which led him to identify its twin currents of formal decomposition and visual glare.[105] For Bataille, both currents sought destruction, the former through a bodily alteration akin to that of a decomposing corpse, the latter through a blinding brilliance akin to that of some sacred ghost. And the two came together in the phenomenon of dust, the dust associable with decay, and the dust that, in the eyes, will thwart sight. Hence, the illustrations for the October 1929 entry on Dust in Bataille's "Critical Dictionary," bearing the title "Attics: Mannequins, Debris, and Dust," are truly Reverónian (fig. 27).[106]



28. Armando Reverón at El Castillete, photographed by Ricardo Razetti. 1953



29. Thomas Medland after Thomas Stothard. *Robinson Crusoe at Work in His Cave,* from Daniel Defoe, *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner.* London, 1790

2. *The Unforgiven*

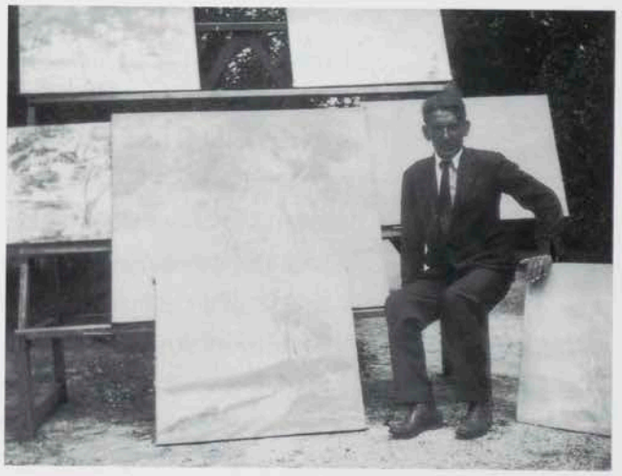
In 1939, a group of Reverón's paintings represented Venezuela at the World's Fair in New York.[1] That same year, the most important critical appraisal of his work thus far, by Mariano Pícón-Salas, compared the artist to Robinson Crusoe, Daniel Defoe's fictional Yorkshireman marooned on an island off the coast of Venezuela.[2]

El Castillete, we have learned, was not the isolated place that it seems in photographs; Pícón-Salas's comparison was misleading. Although the number of society visitors appears to have declined as the thirties advanced—perhaps the novelty had worn off—the artist remained a fairly sociable figure, not a recluse but involved in community affairs. However, after another episode of mental illness in 1940, Reverón began to withdraw, and, when he returned to work, he set aside his figure compositions for something very unexpected. He began to paint industrial and urban scenes around the port of La Guaira, and far fewer pictures of unpopulated nature. The death of his mother in 1942 was deeply affecting to him, and by 1945 his mental condition had become so precarious that he agreed to be institutionalized for three months. He made a good recovery, but, after his return to El Castillete, he abruptly abandoned painting outside its walls, to work inside on figural imagery. It was also in 1945 that Roberto Lucca came to film, saw the artist with the *muñecas,* and anticipated the rediscovery of Reverón as indeed a Robinsonian figure, adrift in a world apart from civilized society.[3] This was a fiction, because Reverón's increasing reputation as such a figure meant that he was again besieged with visitors in his later years. But it was a convenient and compelling fiction, and was firmly established by the time of his death, as is evidenced by a late photograph of the artist by Ricardo Razetti that very vividly recalls, whether consciously or not, an early illustration of Defoe's book (figs. 28, 29).

Private and Public

As Razetti's photograph demonstrates, the Robinsonian comparison was largely based on Reverón's appearance and environment. It was a comparison that the artist implicitly encouraged in the roles that he assumed in late self-portraits, as well as by agreeing to pose for photographers. Therefore, it was a comparison that became a part of his own artistic iconography. Likewise, the *muñecas,* appearing in drawings and in photographic and filmic images, and the other objects that Reverón made, appearing less frequently, served to reinforce the Robinsonian image of a self-created world. These other objects included clothes and accoutrements for the *muñecas*; other surrogate figural representations, namely, skeletons and masks; padded

sticks, used as painting instruments; and numerous nonfunctioning replicas of objects, among them musical instruments, a pair of bat wings, a telephone, rifle, mirror, birdcage, chalice, and bottle (see figs. 32, 34, and pages 14, 196–99).[4] These, however, invoke the Robinsonian comparison more in their actuality than as elements of a depicted iconography; specifically, they recall a famous commentary by Karl Marx on the means of production of the objects that Robinson made, a commentary apparently unknown to the artist and his critics.



30. Reverón with paintings; photograph attributed to Heinz Heinrich Franzius. Early 1930s

The worth of objects and the value of paintings

In his commentary, Marx says of Robinson, "Everything produced by him was exclusively the result of his own personal labor, and therefore simply an object of use for himself."[5] The *muñecas,* produced by Reverón, may similarly be said to be personal to him, and therefore for his use alone. As for the nonfunctioning replicas of objects, they were certainly of no use to anyone else but Reverón, who could imagine them working, or those replicas of human objects, the *muñecas*, for whom they may well have been made.

In contrast to this, Reverón's paintings may be said to be akin to what Marx describes as the products of work undertaken in a community of individuals. "All the characteristics of Robinson's labor are here repeated, but with this difference, that they are social, instead of individual." In these terms, Reverón's objects solely had "use value" to him (and none for anybody else), whereas because his paintings were exchanged for money or goods in the marketplace, their use value was transformed into "exchange value." Alternatively, and more precisely, his objects can be thought to have had *worth* to him and his paintings, in addition, *value*. It is customary to use the words "worth" and "value" interchangeably. However, Marx properly insists that value accrues to objects not according to their intrinsic worth, as products of a (private) human activity, but according to the esteem of the public realm. Nobody, he properly insists, seen "in his isolation produces values."

Commenting on this statement, Hannah Arendt observes that when the *homo faber*, including the artist, "comes out of his isolation, he appears as a merchant and trader and establishes the exchange market in this capacity."[6] This is precisely what Reverón did when he put on a suit and went to Caracas to sell paintings (fig. 30). But it is important to note that, in doing so, he was not carrying his paintings into the world to be seen without his presence, like manufactured goods. Rather, they were personally delivered, like the products of a preindustrial craftsman, or like souvenirs—in either case, with a remembrance of their origins, including the performative rituals of their creation, and as the result of individual treaty, not impersonal sale.

Such a remembrance of origins is critical to what Walter Benjamin famously called the "aura" of the object.[7] For Benjamin, "the unique value of the 'authentic' work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value."[8] In an age of mechanical reproduction (his familiar argument goes), an object will readily become detached from its original context, thereby compromising its historical testimony, which in turn jeopardizes its authority, or aura. Sometimes less noticed, however, is that Benjamin at times literally associates aura with authority, viewing it as something oppressive, in contrast to the democracy conferred by reproduction and, by extension, by public exhibition.[9] Effectively, he speaks of a change of aspect,[10] of something altering in an object: the new, democratic, artistic function and exhibition value becoming more visible as the old, authoritative, ritual function and use value become less visible. Under this interpretation, the artistic function and exhibition value of Reverón's *muñecas* and objects were not directly visible until the objects were posthumously shown. (These qualities were indirectly visible, of course, in the representations of the *muñecas* and objects in drawings and photographic and filmic images.) However, unlike ritual or use objects that are communally shared, the ritual function and use value of Reverón's *muñecas* and objects were also invisible, except to the artist,[11] even before the objects were exhibited or reproduced. And their origins and purposes remain mysteries, accessible only through hearsay, speculation, and inference.[12]

But how do Reverón's mature paintings and drawings fare under this interpretation? The answer, I think, is that their artistic function and exhibition value were always evident, and that an understanding of their origins and purposes was always much clearer than that of the *muñecas* and objects; but not entirely clear. Growing emphasis on the artistic function and exhibition value of the paintings and drawings caused their origins and purposes to become less clear. This brought the paintings and drawings closer to the *muñecas* and objects, except that the former can and do subsist without curiosity about their origins and purposes, whereas the latter endure in our interest precisely by sustaining that curiosity, because their artistic function is far more rudimentary. It can hardly be coincidental, then, that the *muñecas* and objects were the creation of the 1940s, the very decade that saw the establishment of a thriving exhibition culture in Caracas. Indeed, it may reasonably be proposed that, as this culture began to detach Reverón's paintings and drawings from their origins and purposes, the *muñecas* and objects appeared in his practice as products that resisted their detachment from the rituals of El Castillete.

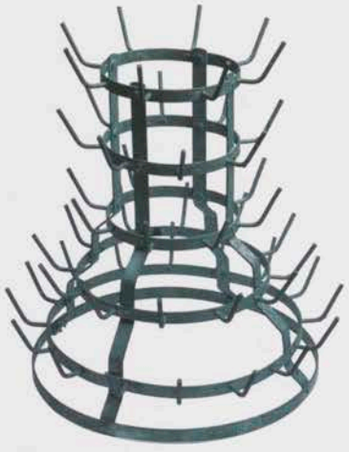
Reverón's private and public life in the 1940s

In 1940, Reverón was awarded the second prize in the first Salón Oficial Anual de Arte Venezolano in Caracas,[13] and he would be represented in every succeeding annual Salón until the end of his life, except that of 1950, when his production dropped sharply, and of 1952, when he was painting very little due to poor health. Interestingly, though, almost all of the works that he exhibited in these Salóns were landscapes, notably views of La Guaira; even after 1945, when he had stopped making

landscapes, he showed the works he had done earlier. And, in 1947, when the painter Pascual Navarro published his important article on "El solitario de Macuto"—his aim, however, not being to reinforce the myth of the hermit, but to provide an analysis of Reverón's artistic achievement—it, too, was largely a study of his landscapes, and their transcendence of Impressionism.[14] But it was then two decades since Reverón had surpassed Impressionism, and a decade since he had shaped a figurative alternative in his practice, an alternative to which he had just returned. However, neither the earlier nor the new figure compositions seem to have yet attracted critical attention, for they would have been all but unknown to visitors to the Salóns; and so would the objects and *muñecas*.

As we heard earlier, El Castillete began to attract photographers in the mid-1930s. No known photographs taken in that decade show *muñecas*, while the first film footage of the artist at work, in Edgar Anzola's film *Armando Reverón* of 1934, show only baby *muñecas*, confusable with children's dolls. Whether their parents were in hiding, or these babies had yet to grow into adults, we cannot say; however, the critical articles that began to appear in the early to mid-1930s do not yet mention full-size *muñecas*. Although we now can infer that *Five Figures* of 1939 (page 149) was painted from *muñecas*, that is because we know of their existence, but they were not recorded at El Castillete until 1945, when Roberto Lucca filmed them there.[15] However, his film was not completed until 1949, which was also when an article by Joaquín Tiberio Galvis spoke of them,[16] and when Victoriano de los Ríos began to photograph them with Reverón (see page 166).[17] It may, indeed, have been until as late as 1949 that the *muñecas* remained unknown to those who had not visited El Castillete, or who had not seen a recent drawing in which *muñecas* unequivocally appear. Such compositions may have been too recent for inclusion in the 1949 exhibition of twenty-five works from all periods, organized by the painter Alejandro Otero at the Taller Libre de Arte in Caracas.[18] If so, these drawings would not have been seen publicly until 1951, when the first, widely acclaimed retrospective of Reverón's art, comprising fifty-five works dating from 1911 through 1950, was presented at Caracas's Centro Venezolano-Americano.[19] One thing is certain: in none of these lifetime exhibitions did Reverón show *muñecas* or any other kind of object.[20] (It would not be until 1963 that the exhibition *El Taller de Reverón* finally revealed to Caracas the surprises that were in the artist's studio at the time of his death.[21]) This is worth following in detail so as to reiterate the fact that Reverón did not think of the *muñecas* and other objects as "sculptures" or "works of art."

Neither did Reverón's critical supporters, if they saw them, think of them in this way; therefore, they had great difficulty assimilating them into their understanding of his artistic practice.[22] The *muñecas* seemed to be infantile toys, or objects and instruments of the artist's erotic interests,[23] or both. As for the other objects, their actual appearance seems to have escaped notice. They, too, seemed uncanny and incomprehensible; at best, marginal and, at worst, an embarrassment to admirers of the modernist painter. Stating it this way, I allude to a famous historical prototype for a divided production, described in an earlier text by Freud on narcissism than "The Uncanny," namely, "Leonardo da Vinci



31. Marcel Duchamp. *Bottlerack*. 1961 (replica of 1914 original). Galvanized iron, height 19 5/8" (49.8 cm); diameter 16 1/8" (41 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art. Gift of Jacqueline, Paul, and Peter Matisse in memory of their mother Alexina Duchamp, 1998

32. Armando Reverón. *Bottle* (*Botella*). 1940s. Wood, 9 7/16 × 1 15/16 × 2 3/16" (24 × 5 × 5.5 cm). Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

and a Memory of His Childhood," written in 1910, when Reverón was twenty-one. In it, Freud muses on Leonardo's playfulness:

> Indeed, the great Leonardo remained like a child for the whole of his life in more than one way; it is said that all great men are bound to retain some infantile part. Even as an adult he continued to play, and this was another reason why he often appeared uncanny and incomprehensible to his contemporaries. It is only we who are unsatisfied that he should have constructed the most elaborate mechanical toys for court festivities and ceremonial receptions, for we are reluctant to see the artist turning his power to such trifles. He himself seems to have shown no unwillingness to spend his time thus.[24]

Boulton, who, more than any other observer, shaped Reverón's critical identity, apparently urged the artist not to turn his power to such trifles.[25] However, there was a vast difference between how Leonardo and Reverón used their objects: Leonardo found a social place for his, at court; Reverón's objects remained within the privacy of El Castillete.[26] It was the artist himself, not his critics, who created the traditional, categorical division in his practice when he exhibited and sold his paintings but not his objects.

Bottle and bottlerack; chalice and teacup

If Reverón's *muñecas* and other objects endure in our interest by sustaining curiosity about their origins and purposes, and if it is plausible to suggest that their appearance in the 1940s responded to an emerging exhibition culture that allowed paintings and drawings to subsist without that curiosity, a conclusion suggests itself. The *muñecas* and other objects may be thought to have required, and therefore somehow to speak of, the exhibition culture against which they react. If they do, this understanding of especially the objects may be thought to bear comparison with a common understanding of Marcel Duchamp's readymades, as drawing attention to how exhibition culture automatically attributes artistic value to works in museums and galleries.[27]

Duchamp did so, this argument would go, by exhibiting mass-produced, commercial objects, such as a bottlerack (fig. 31); Reverón by not exhibiting handmade replicas of commercial objects, such as a bottle (fig. 32). Duchamp's practice thus avoided the act of representation, and therefore the manual skill that is a traditional component of artistic value. Reverón's practice was representational, but his objects also lack traditional artistic value, being highly deficient in manual skill. Since Reverón's objects were not seen in an artistic context during his lifetime, such arcane

polemical points could hardly register, except to the artist. Nonetheless, the bottle is like the bottlerack in that neither object was conceived as a sculpture, that is, an object meant to be seen in terms of its image, proportion, structure, and use of materials; and in that both objects sustain curiosity about their origins and purposes because we do not know how they were conceived.

Perhaps for this reason, both objects have, in fact, been treated as sculptures;[28] and it must be acknowledged that neither artist could prevent the form of his chosen or fabricated object being influenced by, and therefore received in terms of, the transpersonal artistic language of its time, especially since neither artist left instructions as to how they should be received. Still, whether treated as sculptures or not, these especially call for explanation of their origins and purposes because they belong to the very period when it became understood that a work of art that looks like a mere object could reveal what its genesis might be.[29]

This long-familiar understanding of nonart objects, ranging from relics to souvenirs, would not have been accepted by the audience for avant-garde sculpture before the 1920s, until the critical assimilation of works by Hans Arp, Constantin Brancusi, Duchamp, and some other artists that resembled (or actually were) ordinary use objects. But, once that notion was accepted, the way was opened for the creation of objects in which, as one art historian puts it, "The subconscious of the artist . . . [seeks] to make contact with others' private subconscious."[30] Duchamp, recognizing how abstract sculptures were thus becoming vehicles of subjective projection, seems to have selected his bottlerack precisely for its ability to resist the creation of such expressive meaning. However, he could not prevent even an industrial object from provoking affective associations; in this case, from restaurants to dungeons.[31]

I said that Duchamp's readymades are understood to have avoided the act of representation. Strictly speaking, they did not, for they were, in fact, representations of events, of the moments of their choosing. However, if they came to accrue affective associations, they become representations of existents rather than events, of the spatiality rather than the temporality of their choosing.[32] An object that calls forth such associations does so by invoking a sense of place to which the object seems to belong and to which the viewer imaginatively travels.[33] All objects have the potential of functioning in this way. Duchamp would seem to have wished to constrain that potential. Reverón self-evidently did not constrain it. Therefore, his practice seems to fall somewhere between Duchamp's and that of the Surrealists, who sought to release that potential by transforming and subverting utility objects precisely in order to encourage subjective associations.

Surrealist objects—from Hans Bellmer's dolls (see fig. 25) and Meret Oppenheim's *Object* (fig. 33) to the objects photographed or illustrated by Bataille (see fig. 27) and others—were preeminently the creation of the 1930s, and therefore just prior to Reverón's *muñecas* and objects. We cannot help but want to compare them, even to look for avenues through which they could have influenced him; wondering, for example, whether copies of the Surrealist journal *Documents* could

33. Meret Oppenheim. *Object*. 1936. Fur-covered cup, saucer, and spoon: cup, 4 3/8" (10.9 cm) in diameter; saucer, 9 3/8" (23.7 cm) in diameter; spoon, 8" (20.2 cm) long, overall height 2 7/8" (7.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase

34. Armando Reverón. *Chalice* (*Cáliz*). 1940s. Paper, textile, and pigments, 9 5/8 × 6 1/8 × 6 1/8" (24.5 × 15.5 × 15.5 cm). Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

have reached Caracas.[34] No evidence of this has yet appeared. In continuing to look, however, it is important to keep in mind not only that the Surrealists' objects, like the Dadaists', belonged to the public world, but also that they were manipulated—and known to be manipulated—in such a way as to layer subversive association and artistic shape over and above the objects' utilitarian functions. Oppenheim's teacup is exemplary of this. Perhaps it will remind us of the often-repeated story of its inspiration by Picasso's remark, admiring the artist's fur-trimmed bracelets, that one could cover just about anything with fur, to which she responded, "Even this cup and saucer."[35] But, even if it does not, its alternative title, *Le Déjeuner en fourrure* (*Lunch in Fur*), and its fetishistic appearance tell us that the place it was intended to invoke is the female body, while its appearance additionally suggests that its artistic function is the slyly subversive one of mocking the hard substances and vertical orientation of sculptures made by men.

By contrast, Reverón's *Chalice* (fig. 34) refuses to reveal anything about its origins or purposes. His telephone (page 199) seems anthropomorphic, as does his wicker mannequin (page 204), which is technically an assisted readymade; these bear comparison to Surrealist objects like Oppenheim's in their transformation of utility objects to redirect their spatial references from the home to the body. Virtually all other objects by Reverón also make bodily reference. They do so metonymically, because their purported functions place them adjacent to the body; to be worn, played, listened to, drunk from, and so on. And they do so metaphorically, through their shapes (the bottle and the chalice), their substantiality (the bundles) or their being containers, like a body (the birdcage and the box of dominoes; pages 196, 199). Yet, except for the telephone and the wicker mannequin (and, of course, the *muñecas* and associated figural works), none of the objects truly resembles a body. In appearance, the utilitarian aspects of the objects are unaltered—except by their looking like representations; consequently, their primary spatial reference remains unaltered: El Castillete.

The Realm of the Hidden

Both Dada and Surrealist objects have been said to simultaneously symbolize and undermine the creation of what Marx called "commodity fetishism," namely, the tendency of a consumer society to generate false needs by seductively ascribing quasi-human properties and desires to ordinary objects of capitalist commodity production.[36] Remembering Marx's discussion of Robinson Crusoe, we might say that Reverón takes such objects out of consumer society, strips them of value, and carries them from the social world to his own individual one, where they speak no more of the world of commoditization than they do of the exhibition culture that forms part of that world; that is to say, only by their exclusion from it. Mainly, they tell of El Castillete and their functions there.

At El Castillete, the objects that were representations of objects were there to be seen—even to be touched and moved—but they were useless except to the *muñecas,* who were themselves representations. However, it did not matter to the *muñecas* that they could not pour from a bottle, drink from a chalice, play a musical instrument, or fire a rifle. And it did not matter to them that the flowers had no smell, the telephone would never ring, the wings would not enable flight, and the caged birds would always be silent. The objects, being deficient except as representations, tell of a world that is muted and motionless. Insofar as objects call forth affective associations by evoking a sense of place, objects that evoke a sense of place call forth affective associations. Reverón's objects literally cannot call forth, yet they are eloquent in their silence and their immobility.

They are, in one sense, no more than crude toys to go with dolls, yet, we intuit that they are deeply atavistic; see that they resemble the village objects of African cultures, which, we know, once had a presence on the Caribbean coast of Venezuela;[37] and, therefore, perhaps, associate them with ritual objects that possess but withhold meaning, except to the community to which they belong. Within the context of an artistic practice, and conscious of their bodily references, we may infer that, perhaps, they express private thoughts and emotions—mental images, bodily sensations, fantasies, and desires—that were difficult for the artist to voice, that resist translation into language; that were, perhaps, meant to be hidden from public attention. But, looking at these mute objects, are there any observations available to tell us that this is actually the case, and what these meanings, thoughts, and emotions might be?

Well, for a start, their muteness and resistance may be thought to tell of the unavailability of the artist's private thinking to the context of public communication, as that context increasingly pressed around him in the 1940s. If Reverón can be said to have made public paintings and private objects, can he, therefore, be said to have been making objects that could actually represent his unavailability to communicate what was private? Or do we need to think of him as suspending in himself what he was representing, namely, the inexpressiveness of private thinking, in order to release himself onto the path of symbolization?[38] Or is it, in fact, we, the beholders who are thus to be released? We are inclined to pass into empathy before all images,[39] and the more inscrutable the

image, the deeper the potential empathy, because the experience is further outside cognitive apprehension. Such a feeling of empathy inevitably draws upon remembered or (more usually) forgotten experiences, thus affectively evokes the past, and for that reason feels uncanny. Reverón's objects sponsor this sort of empathy, the sudden onrush of an existential memory of what is at once strange and familiar. If so, they also sponsor our own reconciliation with the sudden enclosure of the self by another presence, which had been invisibly hidden and thought lost.[40] If this possibility is to be entertained, then our induction into the place of the objects is—surprisingly and ironically—to a place indifferent to objects except for the experiences that they deliver. As the Enlightenment philosopher Simon-Théodore Jouffroy wrote in his *Cours d'esthétique*, "We are only moved by that which is invisible."[41]

Throughout this section of the essay, I have spoken of a contrast of public and private in Reverón's life and art. It is a convenience of discourse to do so, and, as we have seen, Reverón himself seemed to maintain that antithesis. It speaks even to the extremely erratic nature of his production, which we have noticed on several occasions thus far. This may be thought to indicate a discomfort with representation itself, an apathetic disinclination to engage in symbolization within the terms of the pictorial tradition in which he found himself; specifically, in terms of its call for a rational subjectivism to order the incomprehensibility of the external world.[42] For Reverón seems to have been lodged in a passive, nonrational subjectivism: not just as an individual, but also in an artistic practice that grasped at the world's continuing opaqueness to comprehension, struggling to reveal that through the unsuitable means that he had inherited: whether by almost invisible representations of the external world; by a wraithlike figuration of bodies in an impersonal, supernormal state of dream;[43] or by puzzling, transformational objects that disappear in their delivery of preobjective experiences. An opposition of public comprehensibility and private abdication from it seems to have been a condition of his existence.

We should be aware, however, that Arendt and others have described how the early stages of the modern age saw the growth of a contradiction between the public and the private spheres, then the utter extinction of their differences as both became submerged in the sphere of the social.[44] This seemed to promise the extension of self-expression as well as self-interest into the new conglomerate sphere of the social. In practice, the submerging of the private in the social removed that very barrier, privacy, which had sheltered and protected the subjectivity of the individual from the public world.[45] Privacy might remain desirable, but it no longer guaranteed shelter and protection. Hence, the discovery of intimacy, more private than the most private place could be. And intimacy, as Arendt points out, has long had a very particular interpretation: "Only the modern age, in its rebellion against society, has discovered how rich and manifold the realm of the hidden can be under the conditions of intimacy; but it is striking that from the beginning of history to our own time it has always been the bodily part of human existence that needed to be hidden in privacy."[46]

Animate and Inanimate

If, for the moment, we are prepared to set aside a contrast of public and private, we will also have to set aside a contrast of public paintings and private objects, to think of Reverón as a sponsor of intimacy, in both, against the pressures of the social world. This will complicate an obvious interpretation of the artist in the 1940s, his final decade of consistent and important work (the years 1950 through 1954 were rarely productive). The obvious interpretation is that this decade saw both a replay of the 1930s—namely, a shift from painting landscapes in the public world to making figural works within the private walls of El Castillete—and an exacerbation of that shift from public to private—more public, because urban, landscapes, and more private, because more introspective, figural works. Additionally, the artistic shift in this decade, and the ensuing contrast, seem greater than in the 1930s insofar as the change to what offer themselves as private works coincided with, and may even have been Reverón's reaction to (that is to say, against), his increasing public reputation. However, if we are prepared temporarily to set aside a contrast of public and private, a more nuanced view of Reverón in the 1940s presents itself; for certain, it aids appreciation of his unexpected landscapes of La Guaira, works in which privatization—internalization and self-isolation—is already evident.

35. Armando Reverón. *Coconut Trees by the Sea*. c. 1939. Charcoal and tempera on burlap, 22 7/8 × 31" (58 × 78.5 cm). Private collection

The final landscapes, 1940–45

Some of the late landscapes, like the so-called *White Landscape* of 1940 (page 154), are even sparer reprises of the pioneering landscapes, the production of which had more-or-less petered out by the mid-1930s. There had been late 1930s landscapes with a similar silvery tonality and spareness to that of some large figure compositions; for example, *Coconut Trees by the Sea* of around 1939 (fig. 35). And, in a few others, Reverón had compacted the over-febrile, crayonlike markings of routine mid-thirties landscapes into hatched zones, while maintaining an effect of lightness by keeping their coloration close in value to that of the canvas; *Daybreak at Pozo Ramiro* of around 1938 (fig. 36) is a good example of this. *White Landscape* follows the latter model, only using the broad, slathered strokes of mid-1930s gouaches instead. It is, of course, inaccurate to say that this is a "white" landscape if that is meant to associate it with the

36. Armando Reverón. *Daybreak at Pozo Ramiro*. c. 1938. Oil on canvas, 35 13/16 × 44 1/8" (91 × 112 cm). Collection Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, Caracas

earlier paintings. Not only is it more sepia than white, it also replaces the delicate handling of most of those landscapes with something more obdurate. Closest perhaps to the earlier, pale ocean vistas, only without their washed-out quality, this painting surrenders depiction of the perceptual record to a melancholy sense of isolation. I observed of the earlier ocean vistas that they come close to accepting the risk of formlessness. *White Landscape* pushes the point further, to a point beyond which Reverón would not go.

The La Guaira paintings may be thought of as imaginations of a return from the isolated landscape to the bustling activity of the port and its workshops, as well as to the sometimes quieter streets of the town; that is to say, from Arcadia to modernity. And it is indeed true that, in the early 1940s, Reverón painted the first industrial subjects in Venezuelan art, only he painted them, literally and figuratively, from the isolation of distance. He painted the port from a dinghy far out in the harbor; in *The Port of La Guaira* (page 160) small boats point to the shore only to make it recede. In *The Crane* (page 158), an ocean liner, connotative of distant travel, is occluded behind a crane being serviced by tiny, antlike figures, which causes the pictorial space to seem impossibly far away. In the case of *Workshop at the Port of La Guaira* (page 159), the activity taking place is indecipherable, and Reverón cuts off the view to it by a vertical post and a broad plank of wood, and puts one of his rough wooden frames next to the painted plank to reinforce its exclusionary message and to remind us of his own, clumsy artisanal workshop inside El Castillete. There is a different surprise behind another ship, beyond the pier in unnaturally extended perspective in *View of La Guaira* (page 157): a slope that indicates the mountain range that includes the Ávila Mountain dividing Caracas from the Caribbean. The Ávila was a favorite, almost emblematically national subject of Venezuelan landscape painting. It, too, is made unapproachable.

This mountain range also appears in the background of two extremely mysterious views of the town of La Guaira. In another *View of La Guaira,* of around 1941 (page 156), it weighs on the fragile buildings and streets that come between it and the viewer. In *Street of La Guaira* of around 1942 (page 156), the mountain falls back beyond a hallucinatory rush of perspective, mediated by the fan-shaped form of a tree that resembles the actual fans that Reverón (or Juanita) made and, additionally, the pubic hair that they would cover in some later charcoal drawings (see pages 174, 175). This may be too literal an association, yet there is a sense of corporealization in all of these paintings, which has two aspects. First, as in earlier landscapes, the expressed canvas surface runs through their compositions, to give to them an epidermic quality. Only here, that association is increased by Reverón having frequently agitated the surface in such a way as to mobilize, and disperse over it, small clusters of fibers like tufts of hair, sometimes mixing a softer fluff into the paint to give it greater substantiality. Second, this equation of pictorial and bodily surface is complemented by the pictorial space, distanced, offering the sense of being a container, like a body, with discrete parts and linked sequences of parts within it, like organs within a body.[47] And, far from invoking the bustle of a modern commer-

cial town, these paintings show something either stopped or in labored, slow motion, attributes which also accrue to the quality of their corporealization, suggesting oldness.

The pure landscapes of the early 1940s afford similar associations, only in the context of the greater generality that painting from the natural world allowed. Apparently, the clotted, sepia coloration of such works gave rise to rumors that the crazy artist was now painting with excrement.[48] There is a long tradition of such comments, going back to Gerard de Lairesse's famous remark that Rembrandt "painted with dung." They tell us, in their crudeness, that more than these paintings' bodily associations are being acknowledged, of that broader, humbling correspondence encompassed by the Patristic saying, *Inter urinas et faeces nascimur.* And it is true that Reverón, as he aged, makes us more and more aware of the inescapability of the human body, and its more primitive functioning.[49] (The late photographs of the artist reinforce this image.[50]) Fastidious viewers, however, may prefer to think of the melancholy of old, faded photographs and mid-nineteenth-century *études*, especially the landscape studies in a brownish *essence* by artists of the Barbizon School such as Théodore Rousseau (fig. 37).

37. Théodore Rousseau. *Cottages among Trees.* 1842–45. Oil on sized paper mounted on canvas, 6' 2 7/8" × 7' 10 1/2" (190 × 240 cm). Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, New York

Although almost as large as some of Reverón's grand figure compositions, the dramatic *El Playón* of 1942 (page 155) affords that association with nineteenth-century works that would have been considered merely provisional when they were made. It reveals a similarly distanced space as the urban paintings, as well as surface flotsam, also abrasion, bruising, and scratching; if the epidermic analogy is to be maintained, this gives to this work a quality of damage that makes its faded beauty all the more poignant. In contrast, *Landscape with Sea Grape Trees* of the same year (page 162) and *Seascape* of around 1944 (page 163) are marked in such as way as to evoke, in their very liquid settings, the spotting of rain, as well as calling up the dappled appearance of certain birds or small animals. The later work, however, is the much less detached of the two, the landscape seemingly brought closer and the marking broader.

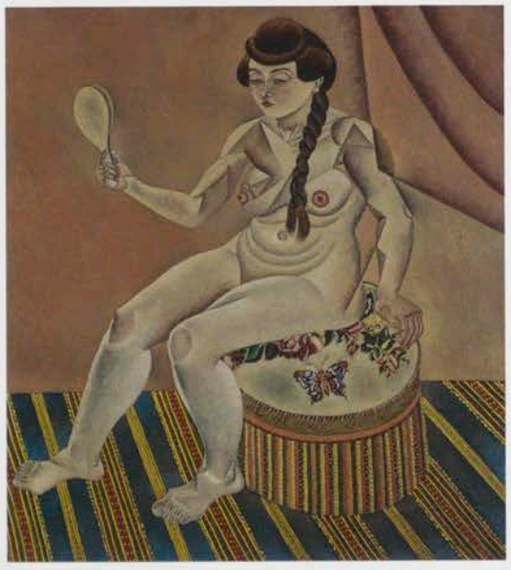
Another pair of landscapes reinforces the distinction between a 1942 and 1944 approach. *Strangler Fig Tree* of 1942 (page 162) appears to be all surface, but, stretching across it, the tree shapes a bodily resemblance as it reaches to the upper corners, even as it opens transparently to an interior of reiterative, organic movement. Reverón's images of coconut trees (page 163) have been celebrated for their abstraction.[51] But, if it is, indeed, not to be thought to describe a tree, it may be imagined as a human figure decomposed into spiny and liquid substances arranged orthogonally: the vertical spine set in parallel to an imperfection in the canvas; the horizontal smears marking the presence of

the artist before the canvas. By 1944, Reverón sought no longer to distance himself, and us, from the surface. The next year, he abandoned the practice of landscape painting for good.[52]

Drawings of models and *muñecas* in the late 1940s

In 1946, the year after Reverón abandoned landscape painting, he probably made only some half dozen works. In 1947, however, he reemerged as a highly productive, figural artist. Henceforward, he would work almost entirely on paper rather than canvas, thus reprising the shift of medium that had accompanied the shift from landscape to figuration in the early 1930s. This time, however, he rarely painted on paper; rather, he made ambitious drawings, initially charcoal drawings but, increasingly, works with complex mixtures of charcoal, chalk, crayon, and pastel, some of them of a considerable size.

Even with recent research on the dates of exhibition of some of these works, the familiar problem of establishing a precise chronology remains. For example, we will properly infer, from the record of a *Nudes* at the Salon of 1945,[53] that Reverón had, for the first time, chosen to exhibit a figural work there. But, because we cannot securely identify this work, we cannot say for sure that it was recently made. Conversely, an undated *Seated Woman* (page 168), traditionally ascribed to 1945, may not, in fact, adumbrate, but belong to the new approach of the later 1940s. It has some of the sfumato of late 1930s figural works and, therefore, their mysteriousness, only it returns us, in its rich coloration, to the source of that mysteriousness in Reverón's early Symbolist works. Hence, we might imagine this slumping painted nude to be a relative, an errant daughter perhaps, gone native (for it also recalls the 1930s Indian paintings), of one of the elegant *majas* in *The Cave* (page 122), a quarter of a century before. Or even gone religious, for there is a hint of the ecclesiastical in the hat that this figure wears, which resembles those in some strange drawings of, we hope, imaginary baptismal ceremonies that Reverón made in this period.[54] But the stiff, hieratic quality of the representation of the pose, which serves to primitivize it, also bears a resemblance to the treatment of *The Three Graces* (page 169), presumably the work of this title that was exhibited at the 1948 Salón.[55] Only that aspect is carried further in *The Three Graces*, which is flattened and formalized in an almost geometric manner that is unusual for Reverón.



38. Joan Miró. *Nude with Mirror*. 1919. Oil on canvas, 44 1/2 × 40 1/8" (113 × 102 cm). Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf

It is reported that "on one occasion he explained in greatest detail a work by Miró."[56] *Nude with Mirror* of 1919 (fig. 38) is an example of the sort of work by Joan Miró that could have influenced this particular Reverón, as well as a subject that would have brought back old associations.[57] The stylized upper right corners of the two works are especially suggestive. But we do not know whether Reverón could have seen, for example, the illustration of *The Mirror* in Clement Greenberg's book on Miró, published in

New York the year that *The Three Graces* was painted.[58] Reverón's work does not require this, or similar, sources,[59] but the possibility of a flirtation with European modernism at one of its great decorative moments is very intriguing.

If this path was indeed glimpsed, it was not chosen. *The Three Graces* is no less eloquent in its own rhyming, yet it conveys ineloquence in seeming, even when compared to the stiffly stylized Miró, an utterly muted composition, effectively a decomposition of its frozen, abutted components. *Seated Woman* shows us what could well be one of these Graces, and, while its means are softer and more suggestive, it too is a composition that stills the figure to the point of paralysis. Reverón named one of the *muñecas* Graciela (little Grace), and it is fair to assume that the figures in these two paintings were all made from *muñecas*. He said in 1953, in his only interview, that he liked "the world of the fantastic, of dolls that are like living characters but do not speak. They only look." He added: "It is I who speak. They look at me and listen to me."[60] That is somewhat how the *muñecas* present themselves in these paintings; returning the viewer's looking, even their looking is incommunicative. Susan Stewart has compared their nonfunctioning, inanimate existence with what the psalmist said of idols: "The work of men's hands, They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not." And so it continues: "They have ears, but they hear not: noses they have, but they smell not; They have hands, but they handle not; feet they have, but they walk not."[61] However, while Reverón claimed to be the speaking partner—effectively, the Sandman who created Olympia—the psalmist's conclusion disputes that easy assumption of power, saying: "They that make them are like unto them." Insofar as the viewer is complicit in making them visible, that very uncomfortable likeness can begin to take over.

Reverón is recorded as having painted from dolls while a student in Spain,[62] and it seems fair to assume that he had begun to use *muñecas* at the end of the 1930s for multiple figure compositions because to do so was easier than finding a group of models. It also avoided questions of propriety, and Reverón seemed eventually to have become almost as uncomfortable as Cézanne did painting directly from a naked woman.[63] It would be ingenuous to believe that there was no more to it than that; clearly there was, but quite what, we do not know. There are stories from critics and other artists who knew him that tell of jokes about sex toys, but whether this was anything more than male banter is impossible to tell.[64] In any event, the pictorial evidence suggests that the *muñecas* were created, in the first place, for their usefulness to a process of imaginative, pictorial representation of the female figure before accruing intrinsic value as representations themselves. That is to say, they stood in for live models. However, Juanita said that Reverón, while working from *muñecas*, would sometimes try to represent the appearance of her skin.[65] So, we cannot entirely be sure which works were done from live models and which from *muñecas*. This is especially true of some drawings of the 1940s, in which identity confusion is their very theme.

Not all of these drawings appear to show *muñecas*, but when, or if, they do not, they appear to show models as immobile as dolls, standing amidst *muñecas*, or behaving like frantic automata.

In the three-feet-tall *Female Figure with a Fan,* probably of 1945 (page 172),[66] it must be a live model, covering her sex with a fan that resembles a tree in a painting of La Guaira; nonetheless she is of doll stiffness. The contemporaneous, even larger *The Three Models* (page 173) is eerily lit from below, as if these are women warming themselves in front of a fire. But are they all women? Probably the two at the right are, but perhaps not that on the left. And is that not another figure, probably not a woman but a *muñeca,* behind the two at the right? Confusion between the animate and inanimate is, precisely, what is uncanny. This representation of probably two animate figures with probably two inanimate figures that are themselves representations of animate figures is a double thematization of uncanny doublings. A traditional use of the expressiveness of facial features to suggest inner life allows, to varying degrees, all four figures to seem to smirk in pretense of animation, misleading in two of the four cases. And the traditionally twin form of expressing animation, through the movements of the body, is invoked only to be negated when we see that it is a shocking deceit. For the most animated body is that of the unnaturally twisted left-hand figure, her left leg not seeming to touch the ground, which suggests that she must be a suspended *muñeca,* rotating as she hangs.

Another pair of drawings, of 1948 (pages 174, 175), comes at the same question from a different angle. These are said to be drawings of female dancers, and it is reported that Reverón attended a ballet at Caracas's Teatro Municipal that had a great impact upon him, but when this was is uncertain.[67] Regardless, it would be preposterous to suggest that they record a public performance, for ballerinas would hardly have been dancing almost naked in overt display of pubic hair. Reverón is said to have been proud of the fact that his *muñecas* were realistic in that particular respect.[68] It hardly matters whether these were posed *muñecas* or ballerinas remembered through the medium of *muñecas.* What matters is that the confusion is firmly lodged in these drawings in a lewdness allied to chilly automatism, both attributes disguised in, and unfolded from, the coloristic virtuosity and rhythmic cadencies of these, therefore, disturbingly beautiful works.

A final group of three drawings, of 1949, may be arranged so as to form a narrative sequence on the theme of the uncanny.[69] In the first (page 170), a model parts a long, white veil to expose her body, but, ominously, for the sides of the veil may seem to be drawn tighter than the pull of her arms allow, and its apex extends out of sight above her head. In the second (page 170), the model is naked and alone, but seems even stiffer than in the preceding work. Then, in the final drawing (page 171, left), the same naked model—clearly not a *muñeca* but a model; we were misled by the rigidity of the poses in the previous examples—is seen between two clothed *muñecas.* At least the one drawn on the right must be a *muñeca* because, with only her toes on the ground, she has to be suspended from above. But is not this *muñeca* dressed just as the model (or perhaps a *muñeca* after all) was in the first drawing, with her veil pulled tight from above? The question lingers. Yet, as viewing extends, we notice the tiny, agitated marks of pastel, partly reminiscent of the flotsam on the surfaces of the late landscapes and partly reminiscent of sutures that either have split open or, more ominously, hold these bodies stitched together.

Drawings in which the artist appears with the *muñecas* propose additional changes on these confusing themes. Before turning to these, however, we need to think further about the *muñecas* themselves. Having seen that the question of what is and is not real is integral to their representation, we now need to ask ourselves what realism can be said to mean, exactly, in a practice where the very means of representation, while unquestionably sophisticated, nonetheless present themselves as akin to those of mere illustrations. The quality is hard to pin down. It is neither academic nor untrained, but it is confusable with one or the other. And, if a work seems to be somewhat naïve—and naïveté is certainly there—it is not the installed naïveté that we have, unfortunately, come to associate with much modern art from Latin America. It is something more powerful, an unaffectedness that speaks of the instinctive knowledge that such a poverty of means—coarse canvas, brown paper, and the frankest execution—would suffice for the very ambitious tasks that Reverón set for himself. This same, seeming naïveté also shaped the *muñecas*.

The Place of the Muñecas

An attraction in the appreciation, but impediment to the understanding, of Reverón's *muñecas* is the ubiquity of dolls, large and small, in contemporary art.[70] Unquestionably, the *muñecas* gain in interest when seen in the context of recent practices that use dolls to focus attention on issues ranging from fetishism to fashion, from childhood experience to adult role-playing, and from pornography to religious rituals. Unquestionably, it is anachronistic to view them in this context. As for parallels among artists closer to Reverón's own time, from Degas to Bellmer, the modern as well as the contemporary associations are with artistic practices of an urbanity that seems alien to Reverón, and hardly open to us the broad culture in which it was possible for him to create the *muñecas* or the specific culture in which they existed with the artist at El Castillete.

Some entry into these cultures is provided by the following two stories, the second of which directly pertains to the *muñecas*. The first, which illuminates the second, tells of a much earlier moment in Venezuelan culture, beginning as it does in Caracas on Christmas morning of 1825, not long after the young nation had won independence from Spain, when old habits still remained.

The Angel and the Unforgiven

On that Christmas morning, the new British consul to Venezuela recorded in his diary his dismay at seeing a dead infant on the steps of the principal church.[71] It had been placed there, under cover of darkness, so that it might be buried at the expense of the parish. Three months later, the consul, Sir Robert Ker Porter, saw another, extraordinary sight, which caused him to complain again of the failure of most people of the city to take proper care of their offspring when dead. "The richer," he wrote, "do quite the contrary. General Mariño's child, a thing of about 17 months, died. It was carried

to the church on a sort of [litter], being fastened to a pole, having wings stuck to its little shoulders and its hands stretched forth. The infant was also painted and decorated with flowers and ribbons on its head (thus displayed), as about to take flight to heaven—and so borne to the church in procession, with priestly prayers, and chant, and candles, and sacred banners."[72]

The ceremony must have been an amazing sight for a newly arrived British Protestant;[73] a sense of what it did look like is provided by a Mexican portrait commemorating such an *angelito* who had died in 1805 (fig. 39).[74] But the astonishment of this remarkable passage—the dead child transformed into an anticipatory representation of an angel—gains added force from the surprise of its juxtaposition to an already highly affecting account of another dead child abandoned at night without ceremony. This allows Ker Porter to make his polemical point about the contrast of poverty and wealth mirroring that of abandonment and solicitude. However, these self-evident contrasts open onto a larger set of analogous oppositions that regulate our visual imagining of his account. Most noticeably, he follows the example of the parents of these children in denying descriptive visibility to the abandoned infant at the church door while allowing to shine from the pages of his diary a dazzling account of the spectacle of General Mariño's angelic child. Yet, what was visible in light was, self-evidently, a representation, compared to the reality of what was obscured in darkness on the church steps; not simply because this infant now resembled an angel, but also because that resemblance signified, everybody understood, that the infant had changed, or was about to change, its state thanks to the Savior who permanently banished death, by taking away the sins of the world. Thus, the materiality of the child's body was being replaced by the immateriality of an angelic image. What was shown to be seen was not what was real, and the common association of visibility and actuality was refuted.

39. Unknown artist. *The Child José Manuel de Cervantes y Velasco*. 1805. Oil on canvas, $22^{5}/_{8} \times 36"$ (57.5 × 91.5 cm). Private collection, Mexico, D.F.

Religious belief controls this particular transformation. However, as we have seen from Reverón's late figure drawings, awareness of an unsettled relationship between what is visible and what is actual will inform the reception of any kind of human replication. Nonetheless, the context of its presentation will affect how that relationship is understood. Thus, an even earlier, this time secular image of a figural replication—a Dutch, late-seventeenth-century drawing by Leonaert Bramer of a woman holding up a tiny glove puppet—has a unreality comparable to that of General Mariño's child, elevated by human agency into a transforming, theatrical, or ceremonial space (fig. 40).[75] Akin to it is an early painting of Simón Bolívar, the "Liberator" of Venezuela from Spain, next to an image of an indigenous Indian, conceived as an allegory of America and elevated as if a doll (fig. 41), which also reminds us of the continuity of "Indians" and *muñecas* for Reverón. Conversely, a 1945 still from Roberto Lucca's film on the artist shows *muñecas* in the grounded, nontheatrical space of the child—

40. Leonaert Bramer. *A Woman Holding a Doll*. Late 1600s. Drawing, 5 1/2 × 4 7/16" (14 × 11.2 cm). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

41. Pedro José Figueroa. *Bolívar and the Allegory of America*. 1819. Oil on canvas, 49 1/4 × 38 1/4" (125 × 97 cm). Collection Casa Museo Quinta de Bolívar, Ministry of Culture, Bogota, Colombia

42. Girl surrounded by dolls at El Castillete, from the film by Roberto Lucca, *Armando Reverón*, 1945–49

or, more precisely, a child having entered the place of the *muñecas*, and looking extremely and troublingly vulnerable for that reason (fig. 42).[76] But how are we to characterize the place of the *muñecas* if it is neither a theatrical nor a grounded, earthly space?[77] Does it, perhaps, remind us of the dark church steps in Ker Porter's account? Possibly, for insofar as the *muñecas* seem to belong, broadly speaking, to the category of grotesque realism, they belong with the abandoned rather than the heavenly child. And, yet, they must have drawn on memories of *santos* (fig. 24), as well as of indigenous dolls (fig. 23), and they were not neglected but nurtured under conditions of intimacy, and celebrated in Reverón's art. They slip and slide across the nineteenth-century oppositions, refusing easy categorization.

However, the religious transubstantiation in the story of General Mariño's child would appear to have a bearing on Reverón's understanding of his *muñecas*, judging at least by our second, strange story, told by another filmmaker who had gone to El Castillete. This story tells how, in 1951, the deeply, but eccentrically, religious Reverón agreed to the *muñecas* being filmed on one condition: that the filmmaker, Margot Benacerraf, add a scene in which she would dress as an archbishop and forgive them for their sins.[78] This was necessary, he told Benacerraf, "because these women are some devils," and she alone could forgive them. Reverón, we have learned, had made drawings of models (or *muñecas*) dressed in what look like homemade ecclesiastical costumes, including some in baptismal ceremonies. Still, a demand for an actual rite to be enacted is quite another thing. And why did the *muñecas* require forgiveness? Perhaps Reverón felt, on their behalf, some relationship between sin (or their unforgiven devilishness) and their being seen publicly, and believed that they needed to be forgiven, either to allow them to be seen or because they had already been seen

by the camera. As it turned out, the *muñecas* remained publicly unforgiven because Benacerraf only pretended to do what Reverón asked, and, when the film was previewed, the footage that he expected to see was not in it. Unsurprisingly, he felt betrayed, and complained: "What are the *muñecas* going to do for the rest of their lives without forgiveness?"

Boundaries and bundles

The representations of *muñecas* in Reverón's paintings and drawings are sometimes confusable with humans; the *muñecas* themselves never are. But there is another important difference between them and their representations. In the paintings and drawings, they compose and invoke narratives, and while, as we have heard, these narratives may be difficult to decipher from their facial expressions, postures, and gestures, the same is true of immobile humans. By contrast, the *muñecas* themselves have fixed facial expressions but not fixed postures or gestures, comprising, as they do, floppy, stuffed, ambiguous bundles—with a secure boundary, of course, but without definitive shape, bearing, or deportment. Therefore, only with respect to their facial expressions do they speak as the depicted *muñecas*, and humans, do. While three-dimensional and tangible like humans, they cannot be read, as humans can, for signs of action or intention, by posture and gesture as well as by appearance. This is why inert, passive, or mute humans are described, unkindly, as dummies, and, more generously, as narcissistic or self-absorbed.

Of idols, the psalmist had written: "They that make them are like unto them." Freud's "Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood," to which I referred earlier, speaks of the projective identification that comes with narcissism; how a part of the self is split off and projected into an object, where it is attributed to the object, and the fact that it belongs to the self is denied. The resultant object relationship is not with a person truly seen as separate, but with the self projected into another person and related to it as if it were someone else. Thus, Leonardo projected his infantile self into his apprentices and looked after them in the way that he wished his mother had looked after him, just as Nathaniel fell in love with the automaton Olympia, and just as the mythical Narcissus fell in love with a strange youth, who was actually his own reflection, but whom he did not consciously connect with himself.[79]

We might want to consider, for the purpose of argument, that Reverón's *muñecas* were vehicles of projective identification. This is worth considering, neither to offer a diagnosis of Reverón as an individual nor to explore what "love" might be thought to mean for Reverón as an individual in this context. Rather, this model of the contrast of external and internal can begin the process of bringing together the various oppositions that have accumulated in this essay: public and private, paintings and objects, social and intimate, animate and inanimate, visible and invisible. We may wish to think of these, and other oppositions that Reverón's art and life suggest, not merely as social, geographical, personal, or artistic alternatives, but as demarcations across which Reverón oscillates in his

practice, alternatively open and closed, receptive and resistant, to whatever is perceived to be external to, or other than, himself. This, in turn, invites us to think of Reverón as a maker, struggling against a need for the other, or external; then struggling against a need for not wanting that; and conceiving of each need as a tyranny. And it invites us to think of a maker who did not merely work within or across boundaries, but with boundaries; and who did not merely mark boundaries, but who traced, then erased, and then reshaped them, refusing permanently to describe limits.[80] To consider Reverón's practice in these terms is to see unity in it, although unity not built from a unifying principle, but rather, from the very oppositional forces that work to divide it. For the present, however, we need to learn how, literally, boundaries were defined with respect to the *muñecas*.

The English word "doll" is a diminutive of Dorothy, and the French word "marionette" is a diminutive of Marie, while "mannequin" (originally the Dutch *manikin*; a little man) became Gallicized and feminized together. In Spanish, there are a number of words that mean "doll," but the one commonly used is the word *muñeca*. The earliest use of the word *muñeca* was as the word to describe the limits on a field; it originally meant "boundary."[81]

Consequently, *muñeca* came to mean "landmark" and "milestone." By metonymic connection it came to mean, first, a bundle of hair, feathers, or ribbons; and, second, a stump or protuberance of the arm. (Reverón made a number of such bundles [pages 200, 201], and a group of paintings and drawings that thematize a protuberant arm.[82]) From that second, protuberant meaning came one of the present meanings of *muñeca*, the wrist, the protuberance that articulates the meeting of the hand and arm. (In *Niza* [page 209], attention is drawn to the wrist by cutting through the hanging arm to remove it from view.) And from the first and the second meaning together came another of its present meanings: a rounded cloth bundle, whether a polishing bag or a pad for applying varnish or paint. (Reverón made objects of this sort in lieu of brushes; see pages 200, 201.) Hence, by association both of form and of gender of usage, the meaning of *muñeca* emerged as a rag doll, then as any kind of fabricated, small, then possibly large, usually female figure used as a plaything.

In summary, *muñeca* began by meaning a boundary, marked by a protuberant feature; came to mean such a feature, shaped only by the cloth boundary that bundles its contents; and finally came to mean such a bundle, shaped by its boundary into a female shape. In Spanish as well as English, boundary (a limit), binding (both tying and imposing limits), and bundle (something tied together with binding) are etymologically adjacent. They are also in Reverón's practice.

Not only does the gathering of external substances into bounded bundles of varied sorts connect many objects and the dolls; it also reminds us that Reverón, we have heard, would bind himself tightly around the waist before painting, and that this was intended as a temporary form of emasculation. However, a pioneering, late-nineteenth-century study of dolls tells us that one of the favorite methods of creating a substitute doll was for a child to tie string around the middle of a pillow.[83] In either interpretation, the artist makes himself like unto the *muñecas*. But binding is also a liturgical

term that refers to the rule of divine authority, both in the imposition of a ban and in judgment upon an impenitent sinner; while its opposite, loosening, refers both to the removal of a ban and to the divine power to forgive sins.[84] In this interpretation, the boundaries created by binding are signs of a still-impenitent sinfulness that they confine. It may be thought to be a plausible interpretation for Reverón's binding of himself to separate the physical from the spiritual parts of his body. But what of the *muñecas,* who required forgiveness, Reverón believed, because they had been, or would be, seen in public? Was he saying that, in the meantime, they were confined under a sort of ecclesiastical house arrest? And, if so, would the loosening of forgiveness actually mean freedom, or only parole? Or was he speaking, like a ventriloquist, through the *muñecas*? Did he imagine himself, in his objective correlatives, confined by the impropriety of having allowed the bodily in human existence to emerge from the privacy in which it was hidden?

Reverón may well have known what he meant only a little more than we do. What matters is not finding logic where logic does not exist—not for this artist, certainly—but acknowledging that his practice, even when it seems illogical or absurd, draws upon cultural and ethical precepts that intersect with the personal, psychological frameworks and transpersonal artistic structures on which it was built. Together, they release a sense of fixation upon, and discomfort with, the bodily aspects of existence; an intimation of the fluid interchanges of a preobjective world, even across normally separated objects; and an intuition that awareness of the external world and its objects is an awareness through and thus in the altered, discomforted body.

The truth of the inside

We will remember that the grand figure compositions of the late 1930s, in which *muñecas* probably first appear, were preceded by figural paintings on paper, showing bloated, even bursting volumes (fig. 18). I said that the failure of such paintings was matched by the failure of the bodies in them, that is to say, by their grotesque sense of having lost substance and collapsed. An obvious conclusion is that one of the functions of the *muñecas* was to recapture and bundle up this bodily substance into coherent human shape. In this interpretation, the wraithlike figures in the compositions that followed look enervated because substance had drained out of them; therefore, a need for, and fear of, substantiality remained. It seemed to have seeped out of Reverón's next works, the landscapes of the early 1940s, to clot on their surfaces, while their corporealized interiors, lightened of weight like the bodies in the figure compositions, eventually expanded, as if filled with air, to press up against the viewer's space.

This pulmonary connotation of the late landscapes, when matched with marked surfaces that continued to refer to the presence of the artist before them, produce a sense of the surface as a plenum that both separates and connects an internal bodily space and the space of the artist's body, now of the viewer's body, before the canvas. Since the literal surface retreats behind its marking,

that marking floats forward in the advancing, enveloping picture plane. We should probably now be thinking of Callois again, of the individual breaking the boundary of his skin and occupying the other side: "He is similar, not similar to something, but just *similar.* And he invents space of which he is the convulsive possession."[85] It was into the context of this imagined, paroxysmal mobility of disruption and possession that the *muñecas* were born.

Just as transgression requires obedience, boundaries were required as they were dissolved. Roland Barthes famously observed that "the statue invites visitation, exploration, penetration: it implies ideally the plenitude and truth of the *inside*," whereas "the painting, by contrast, may have a back, but it has no inside: it cannot provoke that *indiscreet* act by which one might to try to find out what there is *behind* the canvas."[86] Reverón's landscapes, increasingly causing us to imagine a bodily emptiness inside, but blocking our vision of it, may be said to have required the *muñecas*. It is not simply that the paintings and *muñecas* are made from the same sort of rough canvas, causing the back of the paintings—and the stitched-together front of one of them—to resemble the outside surface of the *muñecas* (figs. 43, 44).[87] The *muñecas* actually seem to be a consequence of the paintings—their melancholy and the poverty of their means; their struggle to corporealize; their encouragement to misrecognition and erasure of identity; their thematization of the perceptual, but blocking of vision

43. The reverse side of one of Reverón's paintings

44. Armando Reverón. Back of *muñeca*. c. 1940. Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

by materiality, of sight by surface. And they prolong the silence and muteness of the paintings, and of the objects that surrounded them, in what now seems to be a deeply troubling form.

However, the *muñecas* could hardly have originally been the macabre mummies that they now are. Especially when dressed in their new clothes, having tea together, or lounging at *il bar de las muñecas,* constructed especially for them (see page 212), they may have seemed rather like overgrown, endearing children. Indeed, to have met them, been introduced to them by their pet names, with their toys around them, would surely have been to experience them as products of a charmingly naïve,

hypocoristic practice. Yet, even at their most cheerfully childish, an intimation of mortality must have hung around them, anticipating the ghoulish presences that they now are. (That comes through very clearly in Benacerraf's film.[88]) And, despite the fact that they are weighty objects, they must have always been experienced, because they refuse all reciprocation, as somehow hollow: figures of "shape without form, shade without colour, paralysed force, gesture without motion."[89]

The Artist in the Studio, 1948–51

In 1950, the distinguished French critic Gaston Diehl wrote an essay on Reverón that compared him to Paul Gauguin. To those familiar with European Post-Impressionism, Reveron's move to Macuto and life there may well seem to be a story akin to Gauguin's, even a story of a Gauguin becoming a van Gogh—another artist to whom he would be compared, and less for his painting of light than for his "madness," the bare title of a provocative article that appeared in *Newsweek* two years after his death.[90] Discussion of the artist's mental problems became very public when, after a year of deteriorating health in 1952, he was persuaded to enter a clinic again, after which he alternated between episodes of clarity and, increasingly, of debilitating schizophrenia. But, when he died of an embolism on September 18, 1954, his reputation as the premier Venezuelan artist of his generation was secure. The critical articles had increased in number and admiration, and while they often continued to rehearse the old themes of Hispanic painting and Impressionism, the late figurative work, and the environment in which it was created, also gained in attention. Reverón had been awarded the 1953 Premio Nacional de Pintura for a figurative work of 1947; yet more photographers and filmmakers had descended upon El Castillete; and only two months before Reverón's death, the architect Gio Ponti had published in Milan a serious, almost anthropological documentation of the artist's studio and its surroundings. In fact, Reverón had already documented himself in his studio in two extraordinary series of self-portrait drawings that are his final works.[91]

Disguises: the first late series of self-portraits, 1948–49

In the first series of drawings, the artist imagines his possible identities. We see him in his most familiar role as the artist-hermit of the Caribbean, with bare chest and a straw hat worn like a halo (page 184). We see him with a top hat (page 184), looking partly like someone just returned from a formal event in Caracas and partly like an African tribal chief wearing a European status symbol. And we see him as a surly desperado (page 185), with the added connotation of the *corrida,* for there is an audience beyond the barrier behind him. In the first two drawings, especially, the side of Reverón's face expands to an unnaturally large ear, and he glances in that direction, even while looking ahead to draw his reflection in a mirror. The second drawing shows us that he is noticing a female figure who is reflected behind that side of his head. Unquestionably, this is a *muñeca,* and, in both these draw-

ings, there is another at the opposite side. In the third drawing, what may be confused with another style of hat is, in fact, a pair of raised arms with a head beyond it; therefore, two figures, the head of the nearer being obscured by the artist's head. A further drawing (page 185) shows us these figures; we see that they are dancers, and presume that they are *muñecas,* too.

Surprising in this final drawing is the strangely feminized image of the artist. It reminds us that the desperado image had a feminine counterpart in a portrait of Juanita wearing an Indian headdress (fig. 45). So, in the final drawing, did Reverón imagine himself as Juanita in front of the *muñecas*? In Juanita's portrait, however, the *muñecas* look like children. So, do dancers and children offer two interpretations of the *muñecas*? Possibly, yet possibly not, for what we see in the background of Juanita's portrait is, in fact, part of the scenario of another work that offers another image of Reverón.

This three-feet-tall painting, *Old Man, Three Women, and a Child* (page 177) shows an old man surrounded by three *muñecas* and the child *muñeco* that we saw in *Five Figures*. The old man may reasonably be associated with the artist, who, Pérez-Oramas has observed, must be comparing himself, by reference to a famous Titian, to Christ scorned.[92] Reverón could have seen the Titian in reproduction, but we cannot say for certain that he was not thinking of other narratives, the drunkenness of Noah, or Lear and his daughters, for instance. Whatever the intended story, if this is the artist, we must imagine that this work was made as if from the point of view of a *second* Reverón, who is outside the picture.[93] (We met a similar situation with *The Creole "Maja"* and *Five Figures*.) This is to say, the putative artist internal to this scene is *not* represented as having been drawn by the same artist external to the scene. Reverón divides himself into an external, invisible artist and an internal artist who is a representation, like the *muñecas*. In fact, we do know that he did just that, painting this imagined self-portrait from an elderly male *muñeco* posed among young female companions at El Castillete (fig. 46).

45. Armando Reverón. *Juanita*. 1948. Charcoal, chalk, and pastel on board, $27^{7}/_{8} \times 23^{3}/_{4}$" (70.5 × 59 cm). Private collection

46. Dolls and objects in El Castillete, 1948–49

While the self-portraits discussed previously are obviously staged works, they nonetheless convey a strong sense of actuality, largely because we recognize them as mirrored images. In contrast, although we know that *Old Man, Three Women, and a Child* was similarly painted from observation, it looks both staged and unreal, perhaps because the implication that it provides of depicting a fictional narrative overrides its sense of actuality. The existence of companion works to this one, made from the same or a slightly modified scenario, reinforces the sense that Reverón, on occasion, did indeed induce such narratives by setting up

setting up *muñecas* in *tableaux* to be recorded. However, as was the case with his large figure compositions of the late 1930s, these narratives are rarely translatable into actual stories, but mainly comprise enigmatic scenes, composed of figures temporally suspended in spatial relationships whose significance will be forever obscure. For example, among the some half-dozen works in which this particular grouping of *muñecas* appears,[94] one of them (page 179) transforms the old man into a woman, a primped doll, to produce an extraordinary, more than three-feet-tall drawing of a dolls' Christmas. But, if we accept that the old man had been intended as a representation of the artist, or the artist-as-Christ, it is difficult to know whether, and if so for what reason, we should think that he has now transformed himself into a female *muñeca*. And what are we to make of another large work in this series (page 178), in which Reverón has placed what must surely be a live model in front of the seated *muñeca*, almost obscuring the Christmas subject? A representation of reality displaces a representation of a representation; but to what narrative purpose is difficult to understand. Perhaps we should not be attempting to read narratives in these changing scenarios, but, rather, noticing how these works call for narrative explanation, only to refuse it, no matter how much the relationships of their human surrogates are shuffled and rearranged. If we do notice that, we may wish to see them as representing a constant, futile search for meaning in such relationships. Such an interpretation would accord with the melancholy that they possess and induce.

Assimilation: the second late series of self-portraits, 1948–49

This brings us to what are surely the finest of Reverón's self-portrait drawings, which address the subject of interpersonal relationships in a more radical manner. In what is probably the first of a pair of drawings (page 187), Reverón faces the male artist and female *muñecas* in opposite directions and places them in separate spatial zones. In doing so, he appeals to the modalities of classical pictorial representation, which sets figures and objects against backgrounds so that we may see them clearly, and thereby read the stories that they tell. Here, a story is told of the artist's proximity to, and priority for, the observer—and his own priority over, and control of, his models. But this story is contravened by the visual abstraction that joins artist and models on one plane, for Reverón fuses as well as separates. The sides of the artist's shirt align with, and extend into, the arms of the two models, to make a sort of collar surrounding his face and head, which, therefore, begins to fuse with their faces and heads, as all three figures compose one surface pattern.

Because Reverón's figurative works of the 1930s and 1940s call upon the modalities of classical pictorial representation, they have been thought to be more conservative than his pioneering landscapes. It is indeed true, and a matter of some importance, that with these late works Reverón reattached himself to the history of art. He did so, however, not for reasons of sentiment or nostalgia, but because his art required that attachment. Previously, he had shown the external world as a primal, preobjective, continuous field; then, as a place in which the identities of separate objects were con-

fused. Now, he used the rational norms of classical pictorial representation to show separated, identifiable objects, set against backgrounds, only to invite an experience of them collapsing and merging into a preobjective field. He did so, in these last self-portraits, by creating what looks like a highly narrativized art; diverting attention from the represented incident; and thereby allowing escape from the clarity of response that it seems at first to solicit into a less clearly articulated narrative that the viewer must perform in the viewing.[95]

In the companion drawing (page 186), the *muñecas* turn slightly toward the observer. Their turn helps to bring the artist and his models more onto a single plane than in the first drawing. But there is another reason for their position in the shaping and dissolution of common contours. Self-evidently, the representation of the artist in this second drawing overlaps that of his models, but because the three faces are depicted almost in plane, the three images can be pictured as abutting, as comprising tangential, *not* overlapping forms. This sanctions the use of common contours, that is to say, those that belong equally to the two areas that they bound. Common contours most conspicuously appear around the artist's head, especially at the left side. There, the roughly parallel lines that stand for the side of the artist's head and the arm of the adjacent *muñeca* are, obviously, signs for occluding edges. But these lines read as much as signs of a textured surface as do the parallel lines at the bottom of the drawing that mark the artist's shirt. The eye will, therefore, travel over them easily. But, doing so, it will hesitate, momentarily puzzled: to which of the two tangential forms does each line belong?

With tangential forms, any centered focus of attention is also the margin of, or peripheral to, an adjacent focus of attention. This keeps the attention moving, but also causes it to pause at perceptually dense areas, even if they are epistemologically barren, such as the area of the artist's hair that blends with the face of the *muñeca* behind, and the odd arching shape that joins the two figures beneath his ear. There will be confusion between occluding edges and shadows, between shadows and body color, between body color and surface discontinuities, between surface discontinuities and occluding edges. Perceptual wandering across forms and momentary epistemological uncertainty about their identity are mutually reinforcing.

Reverón also detracts attention from the bounding function of contours by creating large linear motifs to join forms that are spatially and representationally distinct. Most important is the large U-shape, the uprights of which terminate with the dolls' noses, and arches under the artist's chin. Additionally, though, the enclosure of contour lines is countered by the fact that all lines are the creation of clusters of the small, hatched marks that scatter over the entire composition. These marks maintain in miniature the agitated shuffling of opposing forces that characterize the larger, contoured forms. They are, at once, agents of the creation of volume and materiality, and of their optical dematerialization. The vibrating, nervously fluttering quality of these clusters of marks, and their all-overness, associates these drawings with Reverón's earlier paintings, as well as with Abstract Expressionist art that he could not possibly have known. But their technique also affords a very

different association, being a variant of the *trois-crayons* technique of black, white, and sanguine chalks, used in small hatched marks, that is virtually synonymous with the name of Antoine Watteau. The association adds a surprising Rococo elegance to these drawings.

Another drawing in this series of the artist with two *muñecas*, from 1949 (page 190), showing Reverón in a top hat, is of a particular interest because Victoriano de los Rios photographed the artist beside the just-completed work (page 217). All these drawings announce that they are perceptual drawings that thematize acts of perception. And one way that they do so is revealed by their spatial compression and by the close-up view on, and cropping of, the figures. These things tell us that we are expected to read each drawing as a whole as a representation of a planar mirror.[96] The photographs not only reveal that they actually record a horizontal section of a planar mirror, but also that Reverón disregarded the optical diminution of a specular image by drawing himself and the *muñecas* at virtually life-size.[97] In fact, this second, critical revelation of the photographs should have been apparent to us all along. It tells us that, while these drawings thematize acts of perception, they are not themselves veridical representations of what Reverón saw. This is to say, they are representations of substance masquerading as representations of the perception of substance.[98] They claim—which is not to say, gain—direct, proximate access to the materiality of the world viewed.

In this drawing, the tangentiality of forms is taken to a new level of sophistication in a surface composed from a sequence of upright, abutted channels, representing solids and voids. The most startling effect, perhaps, is how the channel of space between the artist and the *muñeca* at the left leads one to expect a similar arrangement at the right. The *muñeca* at the right thus takes on the appearance of a void, except for her hair, which, to her right, becomes a solid, beyond which the surface buckles. And yet, the *muñecas* have at least equal visible presence to the artist, for the drawing invites us to alternate in our looking between the artist and, beyond the artist, his models, and it allows us to imagine the artist, models, and ambient space all becoming liquid and almost fusing. Space clings to the specular (mirrored) image, Maurice Merleau-Ponty said; everything clings to everything else, here, in a spatiality of adherence.[99]

A second pair of drawings in this sequence, from 1949 and 1950 (pages 188, 189), shows the same two *muñecas* now frontally behind the almost frontal artist. This affords the illusion (somewhat exaggerated in illustrations) of a furrowed and chiseled sculptural relief, or of crumpled paper, as if these drawings are representations of crumpled versions of themselves. In either association, their materiality is strengthened. Space is solidified, and everything is a ridge or a groove, an arris or a gutter, a crease or a fold, a lump or a hollow. Space, that is to say, is full—in the same sort of way that a body is full—and the dark, near monochrome of the drawings enhances this effect, because darkness will seem fuller than light and will unify, while light disperses.[100] Thus, artist and *muñecas* are shown to be substantially identical, of the same material, and, therefore, of the same existential status, together on the other side of the surface. "The world of objects is always a kind of 'dead among us,'"

writes Stewart; therefore, the toy ensures the continuation, in miniature, of the world of life "on the other side."[101] The artist in these drawings is as objectified and inanimate as the *muñecas*, and in the smaller of the two drawings (page 188), one of the *muñecas,* astonishingly, looks back at the artist; if anything, it is more animate than he is.

Around this time, Reverón made some crumpled paper masks, including at least three that might be thought self-portraits (page 202).[102] A final self-portrait in the series is like a mask (page 191). Reverón does not address anyone in his looking. The extraordinary intimacy of this work is in accepting the consequences of placing the observer in the position of the artist. Self-portraiture, that is to say, is now like soliloquy.[103] But, peering into the mirror to make even so self-absorbed a drawing as this one, he is not alone. The great head, now very familiar, swells in our perception to solely claim our attention. Yet, if we follow the way in which the contours slacken and multiply, and the artist's face thus assimilates into his surroundings, sooner or later our mobilized vision will detect that our intimacy with the artist is being spied upon by his models. But, now, where the representation called Reverón ends and that called Serafina or Josefina begins is impossible to tell; "the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses."[104]

The Natural History of Armando Reverón

Since David Hume's *The Natural History of Religion* of 1757, a two-tier model, whereby a rational, cultivated few are subjected to the continuous upward pressure of the instinctive, vulgar many, has proven to be remarkably long-lasting in the study of history.[105] Within art history, its influence may be found in the contrast of "Cubism and Abstract Art" and "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism" as organizing polarities of modern art.[106] But much, much earlier—since 1492 in fact—what became Latin America had been thought to epitomize the instinctive in contrast to the rational, which is why the art of Latin America could be seen as an *Art of the Fantastic*, to use the title of an 1987 exhibition.[107] Reverón said that he liked the world of the fantastic.[108] Given his eccentric reputation, it is unsurprising that he himself has been placed in that world.

But his art is another matter. Since imaginative curiosity about practices that were quite properly understood to be special, that is to say "different," will struggle against a benevolence that translates "different" as wondrously strange, it is unsurprising that a critic like Boulton, defending Reverón against that benevolence, preferred the "white" landscapes over the "sepia" figure paintings, and had no time for the *muñecas* and objects. The landscapes were perceptual and abstract while the figure paintings were psychological and fantastic, as certainly were the *muñecas* and objects. The landscapes, in Boulton's interpretation, therefore served not only to valorize Reverón as a modernist but also, as others enlarged that interpretation, to establish a paternity for young Venezuelan artists of perceptual abstraction in the 1950s and 1960s, such as Alejandro Otero and Jésus Rafael Soto, who may or

may not have drawn inspiration from Reverón's work.[109] Back-projected onto Reverón, this has shaped his image as the pioneering modernist of Venezuelan art, and, while that image has been qualified in recent years by acknowledgment of his atavism, it is for his modernity that he remains prized.

This may be thought to be only right and proper, yet, in seeking to rescue Reverón, we must not enmesh him in the very chains of genealogy, influence, and style of which his production is largely oblivious. Not entirely oblivious, as we have seen; yet it remains true that it was because he was largely working outside these categories that he does not easily fit into our customary modern histories. And he did not fit in because, as we have also heard, there wasn't an art world, as we know it, to tell him what did and did not fit—and as one began to emerge, he retreated from it. Still, even with that considerable advantage, his reception reveals the difficulty, not despite but because of avant-gardeism, in valuing true nonconformism, and the ease of assimilating artists (or artists assimilating themselves) by compromising what they have to say.

This is to insist that we must not seek to split off Reverón's atavism from his modernity; since it is integral to modernity, it is reasonable to assume it is integral to his version of it. Of course, we must respect his own understanding of the objects and *muñecas* as separate from and different to the works of art he produced. But we need to acknowledge that his practice included making both what look like perceptual images that are secular and modern and symbolic images that look cultist and nonmodern. Indeed, we need to acknowledge that the latter, which followed the former in his practice, may deserve to be thought a consequence, outcome, or fulfillment of the former.

Some of the paintings were the product of performances, and may, perhaps, be thought to be relics of performances, like later Latin American works by such artists as Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica, or like transient works created in ritual ceremonies, from sand paintings to the blackboards of Joseph Beuys. (In this interpretation, it would be because the paintings had served their purpose that they could be dispensed with and sold.) Yet, this interpretation is as troublingly prospective as that which makes Reverón a monochrome painter in advance of his time. More promising, perhaps, is to think of the material poverty and erasure of identities in the early landscapes as comparable to that of certain early sacred images. Belting tells us that even the emptiness of a wall could be taken to be visible proof of the absence of the divine image, therefore, of its invisible presence.[110] It would be quite wrong, I am convinced, to suggest that Reverón saw himself making anything like sacred imagery. However, his pictorial practice admits an affinity with what may be inferred from Paul Klee's famous statement that "art does not reproduce the visible but makes visible."[111] This suggestion that art makes the invisible visible admits the interpretation that art may make visible both something commonly not seen and something that can *never* be seen—more precisely, something that is permanently impossible to see directly, but may only gain a visible existence when manifested in an object or action. It may be in this sense that we can view Reverón's most modernist paintings as his most cultist, also having the capacity that seems to belong to his objects, of manifesting invisible

intangibles, like images from before the era of art.[112] Insofar as they express the world's perceptual incomprehensibility, returning us to a presymbolic world in flux, they may be said to do just that. If so, they are also associable with that continuing, atavistic retreat from, and within, modernity that saw Reverón imagining his companionship with ancient Hispanic *majas*, then with nonexistent indigenous Indians, and finally, through the medium of the *muñecas*, with figures, simultaneously children and the uncanny, that his mind would seem to have found in memories of his own early self, not yet separately differentiated in the world.

This retreat was along the path of the inanimate, which resembled the animate. Because what is experienced as animate is also experienced as having the potential of animation, the muteness and immobility of Reverón's frozen world can come to seem restrictions chosen for it that may be lifted. The fantasy remains—for paintings as well as *muñecas*—that the automaton will move, and our experience of what he made is of an imagined, but perhaps feared mobility of something stalled in an archaic, inaccessible place. Perhaps it is a feared mobility, because the experience of such archaic aesthetic moments as Reverón offers is in no sense social; neither is it rational or moral. It is curiously impersonal, even ruthless and unforgiving in sponsoring transformation at the expense of gratification.[113] Indeed, the existential memory that he invites us to open contains the terrifying archaism of the *muñeca* Niza as well as the peacefulness of a primal landscape from which defining features have been erased. And who, the imaginative literature on automata warns us, will monitor the restrictions of muteness and immobility when lifted? The imaginative literature also tells us that the care and attention of another who is unafraid of the uncanny is the best person for the job, and that negotiation of the limits of a blocked reciprocity can be extremely rewarding.

I take this to be a recommendation for becoming comfortable with the unfamiliar, and familiar with the uncomfortable, even to be an endorsement of the philosopher Stanley Cavell's suggestion that the acknowledgment of otherness demands a willingness for the jolting experience of the uncanny.[114] In 1942, in a note preserved in the Archives of The Museum of Modern Art, the art historian George Kubler observed that, because the art of Latin America was created under different-to-usual circumstances, it allows for different-to-usual insight into the nature and function of artistic activity—not only in Latin America—and of art-historical activity, too.[115] Perhaps a jolting experience, like that provided by the art of Armando Reverón, was what he had in mind.

Notes

The Natural History of Armando Reverón

1. The Sandman, pages 14–45.

Abbreviated references to Calzadilla refer to the publication by Juan Calzadilla, *Armando Reverón* (Caracas: Ernesto Armitano Editor, 1979). Pending the publication of a catalogue raisonné by the Proyecto Armando Reverón, announced for 2010, this is by far the most fully illustrated survey.

1. T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909 –1962* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970), 79 (poem 79–82).
2. Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), xxi, and below, page 59.
3. See below, page 63.
4. For Reverón's own description of his parents and childhood, see "Through His Own Eyes," page 226.
5. José Balza, *Análogo, simultáneo* (Caracas: Galería de Arte Nacional, 1983), 15.
6. See Jacqueline Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color: Rhetoric and Painting in the French Classical Age*, trans. Emily McVarish (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 37–54. This association was first advanced in John Elderfield, "El espejo," in *Armando Reverón: El lugar de los objetos,* exh. cat. (Caracas: Galería de Arte Nacional, 2001), 91; translated in revised form as "The Self-Portrait Drawings of Armando Reverón," *Master Drawings* 40, no.1 (spring 2002): 25.
7. See "Einiges Über Puppen," in *Rainer Maria Rilke: Ausgewählte Werke* (Leipzig: Erschienen im Insel-Verlag, 1951), 274–83; Eng. trans. as "Some Reflections on Dolls," in *Rainer Maria Rilke: Selected Works* (London: Hogarth Press, 1954), 43–50.
8. For more information, see Juan Carlos Palenzuela, *Arte en Venezuela 1838–1958* (Caracas: Fundación Banco Industrial, 2001), 117–21.
9. Suggested in *Armando Reverón: Luz y cálida sombra del Caribe* (Caracas: Fundación Museo Armando Reverón, 1996), 132.
10. Lawrence Gowing thus characterized the young Cézanne in *Cézanne: The Early Years, 1859–1872*, exh. cat. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1988), 172.
11. See Calzadilla, nos. 1–10, for examples of Reverón's student work.
12. See *Camille Pissarro en Caracas 1852/1854* (Caracas: Museo de Bellas Artes, 1980). Also see Joachim Pissarro and Claire Durand-Ruel Snollaerts, *Pissarro: Critical Catalogue of Paintings,* trans. Mark Hutchinson and Michael Taylor (New York: Rizzoli, 2005), 41–53.
13. Victor Márquez Bustillos was the father of Victorino Marques Iragorry, who married a sister of Reverón's father, thereby making the president, on the occasion of that marriage, Reverón's great uncle. I thank Juan Ignacio Parra for this information.
14. For more information on Zuloaga, see *Sorolla, Zuloaga: Dos visiones para un cambio de siglo* (Madrid: Fundación Cultural MAPFRE VIDA, 1998).
15. Maria-Josep Balsach, ed., *Modernismo e avanguardia: Picasso, Miró, Dalí e la pittura catalana* (Milan: Skira, 2003).
16. For more information on Joaquín Torres-García, see Daniel Robbins, *Joaquín Torres-García* (Providence: Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 1970), and Emmanuel Guidon, *Torres-García* (Barcelona: Instituto de Cultura, 2003). See also Pérez-Oramas, below pages 92–94, who argues convincingly that Reverón would have known of Torres-García's work in Barcelona.
17. In April and May 1912 there had been a Cubist exhibition (Robbins, *Joaquín Torres-García,* 14). By all accounts Reverón went first to Barcelona after arriving in Spain. According to Miliani he returned to Venezuela for a short time and then was definitely back in Madrid by the beginning of September 1912. Antonio Salcedo Miliani, *Armando Reverón y su época* (Caracas: Universidad de los Andes, 2000), 73.
18. See "Autobiographical Statement by Armando Reverón," page 223.
19. In March of 1913, the Fine Arts Commission in Paris voted to move the Luxembourg Museum from its "outgrown quarters" to the site of the former Seminary of San Sulpice, a move that was estimated to take two years. See "New Home for Luxembourg," *The New York Times,* March 30, 1913. After the Battle of Charleroi in August 1914, seven hundred paintings from the Louvre were taken to Toulouse, France, for safekeeping. According to an article published in *The New York Times* on February 19, 1916, the paintings "are safer there than they would be in the Louvre, where there is always danger of damage through a Zeppelin raid." For Reverón's account of this, see "Through His Own Eyes," pages 226–27.
20. For information about the Círculo de Bellas Artes, see Luis Alfredo López Méndez, *El Círculo de Bellas Artes* (Caracas: Instituto Nacional de Cultura y Bellas Artes, 1969), and Miliani, *Armando Reverón y su época,* 29–64.
21. Reverón, in "Through His Own Eyes," page 226, and in "Autobiographical Statement by Armando Reverón" (page 224), refers to Juanita as Juanita Mota. According to an interview with Juanita, her father's name was Luis Mota; assumedly her mother, who is referred to only as "Eugenia" in this article, was Eugenia Ríos. See "Juanita Ríos: la modelo de Reverón que se olvido de vivir," *El Nacional,* July 27,1955, 44. On occasion, Juanita has been referred to as Juanita Mora; presumably, this is a mistake.

22. See Konstantin N. Zapozhnikov, *Nikolas Ferdinandov: El hombre del país de las nieves azules* (Caracas: Agencia de Prensa Nóvosti, 1986), 100.
23. See Sigmund Freud, "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis," in James Strachey, ed., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 17 (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74), 3–24. This discussion of *The Family* draws on the more extended discussion in Elderfield, "El espejo," 91–92.
24. It is notable that Reverón cannot be seen except in that area, not even below it, where the lower part of his body should be. This separation of the upper from the lower parts of his body would be dramatized in his later painting practice, as discussed below, pages 65–66.
25. Freud called an indefinitely, permanently delayed wish a "repression," and a wish that has been represented, in order to escape repression, a "sublimation," which meant that the delay in its passage toward at least its partial fulfillment was coming to an end. See J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis,* trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York and London: Norton, 1973), 390–94, 431–43.
26. Judging from the listings in Calzadilla, Reverón painted eleven works in 1919, and nineteen in 1920, these thirty comparing to the only thirty-six works that appear to have survived from all the years since 1908. Although Calzadilla's catalogue is incomplete, the true figures are unlikely to alter the point made here.
27. The derivation from Goya of this image is frequently noted (e.g., Juan Liscano, *El erotismo creador de Armando Reverón* [Caracas: Galería de Arte Nacional, 1994], 34).
28. See "Through His Own Eyes," pages 226–27.
29. In the winter of 1919–20, Ferdinandov organized an exhibition of the work of Rafael Monasterios and Armando Reverón at the Escuela de Música de la Academia de Bellas Artes. (See Enrique Planchart, "Exposición de pinturas de Rafael Monasterios y Armando Reverón," *El Nuevo Diario,* January 7, 1920, reproduced in *Fuentes documentales y críticas de las artes plásticas venezolanas: Siglos XIX y XX,* vol. 1 [Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 2001], 733–35.) Immediately thereafter, Ferdinandov organized another exhibition of the work of Edmundo Monsanto, Federico Brandt, Reverón, and himself in the spring of 1920 in the halls of the closed Universidad Central. See *Nicolas Ferdinandov* (Caracas: Galería de Arte Nacional, 1980), 18–19.
30. Gowing has written of how "Matisse was assuring himself of the real existence of the conditions on which his dream depended," and how he "sat himself down among the florid apparatus of self-indulgence to examine it all with an industry and a frankness that were deeply complacent and quite unashamed." See Lawrence Gowing, *Matisse* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), 143; also, on the work of this period, on Matisse, see Jack Cowart and Dominique Fourcade, *Henri Matisse: Matisse in Nice 1916–1930* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1986).
31. See, for instance, Juan Pedro Posani, *Temperar en Macuto* (Macuto: Fundación Museo Armando Reverón, 1999); Gina Alessandra Saraceni, "Buscar La Guaira en la memoria," *Revista Bigott* 54–55 (July–December 2000): 12–19.
32. For more on Venezuelan colonial history, see John D. Lombardi, *Venezuela: The Search for Order, The Dream of Progress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), chap. 3, 93–157; also John A. Crow, *The Epic of Latin America,* 4th ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), especially chaps. 32, pp. 428–52, and 46, pp. 608–22.
33. Crow, *The Epic of Latin America,* 610.
34. See below, page 98, for Pérez-Oramas's intriguing suggestion that it was precisely the increasing repression in 1919 that prompted Reverón's move to Macuto, as well as how this instinct for self-preservation may have prompted his later dedicating a painting to Goméz himself.
35. Exceptions to this are Reverón's late, industrial paintings of the port of La Guaira; these could well have been viewed, however, as symbolic of the new Venezuela, although they probably did not have that connotation for the artist. See below, page 56.
36. See Judith Ewald, "Oil and the Fever of Political Freedom, 1923–1945," in *Venezuela: A Century of Change* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1984), chap. 3, particularly 61–69.
37. This is the first of Brecht's *Five Visions* of 1938, called "Parade of the Old New." Reproduced in *Bertolt Brecht: Poems 1913–1956* (London: Methuen, 1987), 323.
38. I am paraphrasing from Peter Brown's discussion of the custom of fourth-century Roman pilgrims leaving the city to visit shrines: "Christians who trooped out . . . experienced in a mercifully untaxing form the thrill of passing an invisible frontier: they left a world of higly explicit structures for a 'liminal' state." *The Cult of the Saints* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 42.
39. This 1953 "Hamlet" photograph of Reverón by Ricardo Razetti belongs to a sequence of images that mythologize the artist through personification—whether with or without his complicity, we do not know—which also includes a "Robinson Crusoe" photograph (fig. 28).
40. The relationship of this work to *The Family* was pointed out in Luis Pérez-Oramas, "La isla enunciativa, isla reveriana," in his *La cocina de Jurassic Park y otros ensayos visuales* (Caracas: Fundación Polar, 1998), 216–17.
41. These qualities are, of course, less evident in paintings that have been relined and put onto new, strictly rectilinear stretchers.

42. Alfredo Boulton first categorized these periods in his 1955 introduction to the exhibition catalogue, *Exposición retrospectiva de Armando Reverón* (Caracas: Museo de Bellas Artes, 1955), 7–14. According to his schematic, Reverón experienced a blue period (1919–24), a white period (1925–37), and a sepia period (1937–46). Pascual Navarro had already written of Reverón's "white period" in 1947. See "Más lejos que Monet, que Sisley, que Renoir," reprinted in *Armando Reverón: Esta luz como para magos* (Caracas: Fundación Museo Armando Reverón, 1992), 25–56.

43. On Reverón's medium, see Alfredo Boulton, *La obra de Armando Reverón* (Caracas: Fundación Neumann, 1966), 76. See also below, page 194. A 1933 photograph taken by Alfredo Boulton shows painting instruments and manufactured tube paints laid out on a table in El Castillete (Boulton, *Reverón* [Caracas: Ediciones Macanao, 1979], 170). However, Reverón eventually repudiated manufactured pigments (and painting implements) in favor of dry organic pigments of his own making. Some of these materials are preserved in the collection of the Fundación Museos Nacionales, Venezuela. Jim Coddington, Chief Conservator at The Museum of Modern Art, has postulated that some of Reverón's white pigments may have been based in powdered milk. Miliani states that artists in the Círculo de Bellas Artes disseminated materials on how to make one's own paint, as painting materials in Venezuela were prohibitively expensive for some artists. See Miliani, *Armando Reverón y su época,* 60.

44. Quoted in Rafael Arráiz Lucca, "Armando Reverón: la luz, la nada," (1953) in Katherine Chacón et al., *Armandó Reveron: Luz y cálida sombra del Caribe* (Chacao: Fundación Museo Armando Reverón, 1996), 30; trans. as "Armando Reverón: Light, Nothingness," idem, 100. Cf. Paul Cézanne in 1906, as reported by Maurice Denis: "He points to a rivulet in sunlight. 'How do you make light? Reflections? What contrasts can you use? You have to find the gray. Light isn't a thing that can be reproduced. It has to be represented by something else, by colors. I was very pleased with myself when I discovered that.'" See Michael Doran, ed., *Conversations with Cézanne* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 93.

45. "Through His Own Eyes," page 227.

46. Marina Ferretti-Bocquillon et al., *Signac 1863–1935* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001), 142.

47. Doran, ed., *Conversations with Cézanne*, 118.

48. T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (Garden City, N.Y.: Garden City Publishing, 1938), 65.

49. However, Reverón could have seen a work by Bonnard, *Soleil couchant*, which was included in an exhibition from March 1 to April 30, 1914, in Paris, as part of the exhibition *Artistes Indépendants* at the Champs de Mars. See Donald E. Gordon, *Modern Art Exhibitions 1900–1916* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1974), 797.

50. On Bonnard, see John Elderfield and Sarah Whitfield, *Bonnard* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998).

51. See David K. Lynch and William Livingstone, *Color and Light in Nature* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 93.

52. Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), 93, text figs. 75 and 76.

53. David Sylvester (on Jasper Johns), "Shots at a Moving Target," *Art in America* 85, no. 4 (April 1997): 92.

54. See Gloria Gloom, *Beyond the Easel: Decorative Paintings by Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis, and Roussel, 1890–1930* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2001), 35.

55. See below, pages 73–74.

56. Cf. Michael Podro, "Depiction and the Golden Calf," in Norman Bryson et al., ed., *Visual Theory: Painting and Interpretation* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), 175, 188.

57. Crow, *The Epic of Latin America*, 792, discusses this novel as a parable for Venezuela after Gómez.

58. Alfredo Boulton says that people visited as though he were a comic spectacle; Boulton, *Reverón* (1979), 9.

59. On Reverón selling works in the 1930s, see Balza, *Análogo, simultáneo,* 38; Miliani, *Armando Reverón y su época,* 193, and Augusto Márquez Cañizales, "Recuerdo emocionado de Reverón," *El Nacional,* September 24, 1954, reprinted in Juan Calzadilla and Wuilly Aranguren, eds., *Armando Reverón: 18 testimonios* (Caracas: Lagoven, 1979), 23–24. María Elena Huizi, in her essay "Armando Reverón y la belleza sublevada," recounts having heard a rumor that Reverón would trade his paintings for rum. See *Armando Reverón: El lugar de los objetos* (Caracas: Galería de Arte Nacional, 2001), 58.

60. His output of around forty paintings in the years 1931 and 1932 more than equaled that of the preceding six years. Moreover, while his almost sixty paintings in 1933 and about forty-five in 1935 would not be bettered in number during the remainder of the decade (never, with the single exception of some fifty works in 1948), the some 250 works that he created in the 1930s made it the quantitatively most productive decade of his entire career.

61. The chronology in the catalogue *Armando Reverón: Luz y cálida sombra del Caribe* says "mediated"; Miliani says "organized" (*Armando Reverón y su época,* 134). This presumably means that it was made possible by her patronage. The exhibition was titled *Reverón, le peintre des tropiques* and was held during the weeks of October 5 and October 12, 1934. See exhibition listings in *Beaux Arts* in each of these weeks. A short review is published as "À Paris: Reverón," *Beaux Arts* (October 5, 1934): 6.

62. For more information on the Ateneo de Caracas, see Palenzuela, *Arte en Venezuela 1838–1958,* 125.

63. A makeshift private exhibition would appear to be what is recorded in fig. 30, here, and in similar photographs. Figure 30 is described in Boulton, *Reverón* (1979), 167, as showing Reverón in the garden of Oscar Schnell in La Quebradita, a suburb of Caracas. No date is given, but Boulton (58) dates a related photograph to 1930. However, the painting *The Tree* (page 135), thought to be painted in 1931, appears in these photographs; thus, we should consider the dating of this photograph, and of this painting, to be approximate.
64. For example, this is how paintings by Reverón ended up in the collection formed by John de Menil, who was in the oil business, and his wife Dominique. The collection is now at The Menil Foundation in Houston, Texas. Today it includes three works by Reverón: *Chaparros by the Sea*, 1944; *La Guaira Harbor*, 1944; and *Macuto*, 1943.
65. Julián Padrón, "Armando Reverón," *Élite* 370 (October 15, 1932), reprinted in Roldán Esteva-Grillet, ed., *Fuentes documentales y críticas de las artes plásticas venezolanas: Siglos XIX y XX*, vol. 1 (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 2001), 819–22.
66. Boulton, *Reverón* (1979), 100, 117.
67. For a discussion of Reverón's mental health by the psychiatrist who treated him, see the interview with Dr. J. M. Báez Finol in *Castillete Museo Armando Reverón* (Macuto: Instituto Nacional de Cultura y Bellas Artes, 1974). Dr. Moisés Feldman did not directly treat Reverón, but did analyze his condition: see Moisés Feldman, "Aspectos Psicopathológicos de Reverón," in *Armando Reverón: 10 ensayos* (Caracas: Concejo Municipal del Distrito Federal, 1975).
68. To the contrary, in fact, for we have heard that he was extremely productive in 1933, the year of his breakdown, and in the years around that date whereas it was in the mid-1920s that he seemed to lack drive. Although all of his commentators describe the breakdown of 1933 as his first serious one, it is worth remembering that he was far more isolated in the previous decade and that his sporadic production could have been the result of a disability that was only noticed later. In any event, his breakdown in 1933 cannot have been a long one, for the record of his production tells us that he returned to work with extraordinary energy.
69. Calzadilla, for example, stated that "We owe our judgment to Reverón's honest doctor, a man in love with his profession and well-versed in psychoanalysis, whose empirical studies concluded exactly the opposite of what he was trying to determine. That is, that Reverón was not only not ill, but that which society called madness was merely the way in which the painter legitimately accomplished his integral artistic identity. Of course Báez Finol did not express this directly, but from his experience with Reverón we can deduce that if a person suffering from schizophrenia can recover after a series of therapeutic communication sessions, then what is wrong or twisted in a certain way is not the individual but society as a whole. The ghost of insanity could disappear by simply taking the therapeutic model put into practice at the clinic to the artist's home. In other words, Reverón's sickness resided in others." Calzadilla, quoted in Lucca, "Armando Reverón: la luz, la nada," 107–08. And R. D. Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (London: Routledge, 1999; first published 1959), 27–28: "When I certify someone insane, I am not equivocating when I write that he is of unsound mind, may be dangerous to himself and others, and requires care and attention in a mental hospital. However, at the same time, I am also aware that, in my opinion, there are other people who are regarded as sane, whose minds are as radically unsound, who may be equally or more dangerous to themselves and others, and whom society does not regard as psychotic and fit persons to be in a madhouse."
70. Raúl Carrasquel y Valverde, "El pintor del blanco, del silencio, y de la soledad: El loco Armando Reverón," *Billiken* 13, no. 626 (November 14, 1931). Reprinted in Esteva-Grillet, ed., *Fuentes documentales*, 801–02.
71. Boulton, *Reverón* (1979), 99.
72. On grotesque realism, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1968), 317; also Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 104–11.
73. Boulton, *Reverón* (1979), 98.
74. Ibid., 55.
75. "Armando Reverón o la voluptuosidad de la pintura," in *Exposición retrospectiva de Armando Reverón*, exh. cat. (Caracas: Museo de Bellas Artes, 1955), 10.
76. Summarized in Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 212–14.
77. Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 142.
78. For example, see a Georges Rouault work in The Museum of Modern Art collection: *Christ Mocked by Soldiers*, 1932, accession number 414.1941.This is illustrated in Bernard Dorival, *Rouault: L'Oeuvre peint* (Monte Carlo: Éditions André Sauret, 1988), vol. 2, 81, as *Christ aux Outrages*.
79. Augusto Márquez Cañizales later wrote of Reverón's discussions with other Caracas artists at the house of Federico Brandt, and among other things, "would discuss the precursory influence of Cézanne, Gauguin and Van Gogh in the course of modern painting." See "Recuerdo emocionado de Reverón," *El Nacional*, September 24,1954, reprinted in *Armando Reverón: 18 testimonios*, 24. Boulton mentions that Reverón much admired Degas, Henri Martin, Sisley, and Cézanne. Alfredo Boulton, "Carta de Alfredo Boulton a A.R.G."

published in *Castillete Museo Armando Reverón* (Macuto: Instituto Nacional de Cultura y Bellas Artes, 1974), n.p. Mariano Picón-Salas mentions the similarity between Pascin and Reverón; see "Armando Reverón," *Revista Nacional de Cultura* 13 (November 1939): 63–80; reproduced widely in *Esta luz como para magos* (Caracas: Fundación Museo Armando Reverón, 1992), 13–24 (reference to Pascin, 22); *Armando Reverón: 10 ensayos*, 42–50; and *Fuentes documentales y críticas de las artes plásticas venezolanas: Siglos XIX y XX*, vol. 1, 897–906. In 2000, the Venezuelan critic, Perán Erminy, who had known Reverón, spoke to the author of how Pascin's art was viewed by younger artists, like Otero, as akin to Reverón's and coming from Picasso's neoclassicism, and therefore of interest as both modern and traditional.

80. Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 177–80.
81. Luis Pérez-Oramas, "Armando Reverón: el lugar autobiográfico," *Primer simposio internacional Armando Reverón: Ponencias* (Caracas: Proyecto Armando Reverón, 2001), specifically 148–60.
82. Ibid., 154.
83. Roger Caillois, "Mimétisme et psychasthénie légendaire," *Minotaure*, no. 7 (June 1935); trans. John Shepley as "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," *October*, no. 31 (winter 1984): 17–32, quote on 30.
84. A painting that appears to be a preparatory sketch for *The Creole "Maja"* seems to show this; see *The Maja*, c. 218, in Calzadilla.
85. The first to offer this interpretation was Boulton (*Reverón*, 1979, 132).
86. Liscano recounts that Boulton wrote him a letter that noted, "In one particular painting the positioning of the two women undoubtedly makes one think of a lesbian situation." Liscano, *El erotismo creador de Armando Reverón*, 35.
87. Boulton, *Reverón* (1979), 149.
88. I follow here the general argument of Denis Donoghue, *The Arts without Mystery* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown, 1983), 14.
89. Quoted in *Armando Reverón: Luz y cálida sombra del Caribe*, 20; Eng. trans., 105.
90. John Elderfield, *The Language of the Body: Drawings by Pierre-Paul Prud'hon* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), 76.
91. Leo Bersani and Ulysee Dutoit, *Arts of Impoverishment* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1993), 138–40.
92. This figure with a neoclassical profile may be a child *muñeco*. Such figures are known to have been in existence by at least 1934, for they appear in Edgar Anzola's film *Armando Reverón* of that date (see page 49). This particular one seems to resemble the child *muñeco* in Reverón's *Old Man, Three Women, and a Child* of almost a decade later, 1948 (page 177). See page 69 and note 92 to part two for a discussion of that painting and its possible relationship to Poussin.
93. Boulton stated that Ríos, not Reverón, made these dolls (Boulton, *Reverón*, 1979, 150); In a 1953 interview (see page 227), Reverón also states that the dolls were Juanita's creation. Liscano, in *El erotismo creador de Armando Reverón* (18) states that Reverón created the dolls, and many other accounts simply take for granted that Reverón was their creator.
94. Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, xxi.
95. See Fred Licht, "The Artist in the Studio," in *Pablo Picasso: L'Atelier* (Venice: Peggy Guggenheim Collection, 1996), 57–58.
96. See Svetlana Alpers, "The Studio, the Laboratory, and the Vexations of Art," in Caroline Jones and Peter Galison, eds., *Picturing Science: Producing Art* (New York and London: Routledge, 1998), 401–17.
97. Piero Camporessi, *Le Officine dei Sensi* (Milan, 1991), 111, quoted in Martin Kemp and Marina Wallace, *Specular Bodies: The Art and Science of the Human Body from Leonardo to Now*, exh. cat. (London: Hayward Gallery, 2000), 164.
98. For more on dolls in modern art, see Pia Müller-Tamm and Katharina Sykora, *Puppen Körper Automaten: Phantasmen der Moderne* (Düsseldorf: Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, 1999).
99. See T. J. Clark, "Freud's Cézanne," in *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 167.
100. For Edouard Manet's *Olympia*, see, for example, *Manet, 1832–1883*, exh. cat. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983), 181.
101. Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" in *Art and Literature*, Penguin Freud Library, vol. 14 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1990), 336–76, being a corrected reprint of the *Standard Edition* translation by Alix Strachey of "Das Unheimliche" of 1919. (I am reminded by Pérez-Oramas that 1919 is also the date of Reverón's painting, *The Family*, an uncanny coincidence.) Here, I draw upon my discussions of this subject in "El espejo," 87–115, and "Las irredentas," in *Primer simposio internacional Armando Reverón: Ponencias* (Caracas: Proyecto Armando Reverón, 2001), 29–41.
102. Freud, "The Uncanny," 345. Freud's simplest statement of his conclusion is: "An uncanny experience occurs either when infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed" (372).
103. For those willing to consider Reverón's psychology in this context, this experience may be thought to be reenacted in his habit of sitting in the pit that he had excavated in his studio in order, he told Juan Liscano, to look up through its (imaginary) glass ceiling to "see the 'little hair' of the girls (i.e., the *muñecas*) in the room upstairs, whose undergarments had been removed. He spoke with great conviction, and I came to believe that he did indeed see those secrets, that imaginary scene, as if it were real" (Liscano, *El erotismo creador de Armando*

Reverón, 24–25). Liscano's short book is a highly sympathetic account of the benign creativity afforded by "what is called in our day a sexual problem" (ibid., 26). This delicate subject is of obvious relevance to the present essay, and I will refer to it again.

104. Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity,* 20, and passim.
105. See the chapter, "*Poussière/Peinture:* Bataille on Painting," in Briony Fer, *On Abstract Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 77–91.
106. "Grenier: Mannequins, debris et poussières," *Documents*, no. 5 (October 1929), illus. for page 278. The Bataille photographs of African statues ask for comparison to the dolls that are closely connected with childhood life, to what Alfredo Boulton called Reverón's "primitivism." See page 37, above.

2. "The Unforgiven" pages 46–75.

1. Venezuela participated in the 1939 World's Fair in New York (with a pavilion whose main attractions seem to have been orchids and food), but, while it has long been stated that Reverón's paintings were also represented there (e.g., *Armando Reverón: Luz y cálida sombra del Caribe,* 135), no documentation of his participation has yet been found. However, Nora Lawrence has discovered that Reverón did exhibit two oil paintings, both called *Composition*, in the *Latin American Exhibition of Fine Arts,* which was sponsored by the United States New York World's Fair Commission and held at the Riverside Museum, 310 Riverside Drive, New York, from July 23 to October 20, 1940 (Reverón's *Compositions* were cats. 204 and 205). *The New York Times* mentioned "soft tapestry-like figure pieces in monotone by Armando Reverón" in its review of the Riverside Museum exhibition (H. D., "A Latin-American Show," *The New York Times*, July 28, 1940). The catalogue of this Riverside Museum exhibition (which shares the exhibition's title) lists an exhibition history for Reverón's work that includes participation in the 1939 World's Fair.
2. Picón-Salas speaks of Reverón's "*personalidad robinsónica*," in "Armando Reverón," *Revista Nacional de Cultura* 13 (November 1939): 63–80, reprinted in *Armando Reverón: 10 ensayos,* 43–50, quote on 44.
3. Although Roberto Lucca's film presents a Robinsonian artist, he also shows him as someone who receives visitors. More than this, as Pérez-Oramas has suggested (in conversation with the author), the filmic narrative, such as it is, tells of sane members of Caracas society coming to visit the crazy artist in his secluded, upside-down world; but it is clear that this is just theater, a sort of theater of the absurd or, even, a slapstick comedy. The painter paints like a monkey; he hangs out with his wife, parrot, and *muñecas*; he throws away his art and leaves; the monkey replaces him as a painter. Lucca was a close friend of the artist, who presumably was complicit in this treatment of him, which thereby comprises a farcical, fictional version of the relationship of Reverón to his Caracas patrons that was established in the 1930s (see above, page 32). Lucca's film, while completed in 1949, was never publicly released. (It would later be released as part of the compilation *Armando Reverón, Cuatro testimonios* [Caracas: Cinemateca Nacional, 1996].) The more mythic Robinsonian image of Reverón appears not to have been firmly in place until after the release of Margot Benacerraf's film of 1952 (see note 78, below) and the circulation of late photographs of the artist. This subject awaits study; however, Pérez-Oramas also suggests that this image of the artist was the creation of 1950s intellectuals associated with the groups Sardio and, later, Techo de la Ballena, among them Benacerraf and two of Reverón's early authors, Juan Calzadilla and Carlos Contramaestre.
4. A further selection of objects is reproduced in *Armando Reverón: El lugar de los objetos.*
5. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (New York: Modern Library, 1906), 90. For further consideration of the economic aspects of *Robinson Crusoe*, see Stephen Herbert Hymer, "Robinson Crusoe and the Secret of Primitive Accumulation," in *The Multinational Corporation: A Radical Approach. Papers by Stephen Herbert Hymer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 103–21, and 303, n. 3 for reference to studies of Defoe dealing with economic aspects.
6. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 163. I have discussed this issue with reference to the "privacy" of drawing in "Works on Paper," in *Celebrating Modern Art: The Anderson Collection,* exh. cat. (San Francisco: The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2000), 294.
7. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 221. This discussion of Benjamin's text is indebted to that in David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 232–35.
8. Benjamin, 224.
9. Benjamin associates mechanical reproduction and exhibition, saying: "By the absolute emphasis on its exhibition value the work of art becomes a creation with entirely new functions, among which the one we are conscious of, the artistic function, later may be recognized as incidental" (ibid., 225). This is stating an extreme case, although perhaps a now too familiar one. It might be better not to speak of *absolute* emphasis on exhibition value; therefore, not of a work of art gaining *entirely* new functions.
10. Compare Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1958), 195–98.

11. It is, of course, possible that Juanita, or others, learned of their function, but we have no record of this.
12. Attempts to provide answers to these mysteries include the essays "Armando Reverón: La gruta de los objetos y la escena satírica," in *Armando Reverón: El lugar de los objetos,* by Luis Pérez-Oramas (11–51), and "Armando Reverón y la belleza sublevada," by María Elena Huizi (53–85).
13. The first prize in painting was awarded to Marcus Castillo; the first prize in sculpture to Francisco Narváez. (See Palenzuela, *Arte en Venezuela 1838–1958,* 170.)
14. Pascual Navarro, "El solitario de Macuto: Más lejos que Monet, que Sisley, que Renoir," *El Nacional,* January 26, 1947, reprinted in *Armando Reverón: 10 ensayos,* 125–36, and *Armando Reverón: Esta luz como para magos* (Caracas: Fundación Museo Armando Reverón, 1992), 25–41.
15. See note 3, above.
16. Joaquín Tiberio Galvis, "Armando Reverón," in *Reverón a la luz del periodismo: testimonios* (Caracas: Fundación Museo Armando Reverón, 1993), 33–40.
17. For reproductions of many Ríos photographs, see *Armando Reverón a la luz de Victoriano de los Ríos* (Caracas: Galería de Arte Nacional, 1989) and *Presencia y luz de Armando Reverón* (Caracas: Galería de Arte Nacional, 1991). Additionally, the negatives of the de los Ríos photographs are in the archives of the Galería de Arte Nacional, Caracas.
18. This exhibition was called *De Reverón a nuestros días,* and was held in the spring of 1949.
19. Arm*ando Reverón: Pinturas,* held from November 23 to December 10, 1951.
20. None were shown in the next retrospective exhibition, which he began planning in 1954 and that would become the first posthumous exhibition, an enormous affair of 339 paintings—more than three-quarters of his oeuvre—organized by Boulton. See catalogue, Alfredo Boulton, *Exposición retrospectiva de Armando Reverón* (1955).
21. This exhibition was organized by the artist Alirio Oramas and was held in the Salón de los espejos del Consejo Municipal, Caracas.
22. From around 1950, critics would seem to have been noticing that certain figure drawings were made from *muñecas,* not live models; for example, see the discussion in "Extraño pintor," *Visión* (May 29, 1951): 24–25. However, it was not until much later that the *muñecas* and other objects were explicitly addressed as of more than instrumental importance in Reverón's practice.
23. Liscano, *El erotismo creador de Armando Reverón,* 24. Boulton discusses this in a letter to Liscano reproduced in the same volume as appendix II.
24. Sigmund Freud, "Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood," in James Strachey, ed., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* vol. 11 (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74), 127. I was fortunate enough to see El Castillete before its destruction in the terrible December days of 1999. Although I knew that much of it had been rebuilt since Reverón lived there, and that the *muñecas* and other objects displayed there were reproductions, even so, it was impossible not to be moved by this place where all of Reverón in his various identities and roles could be imagined to be present. In fact, the aura of the *muñecas* and other objects seemed to have survived their reproduction quite well. As for El Castillete, perhaps I had foolishly expected actually to see a small castle. Instead I saw a sort of playroom of the imagination, and thus, I found myself thinking of famous playroom *in* the imagination described by Freud.
25. Perán Erminy in conversation with the author, 2000.
26. The objects and *muñecas* were not hidden away and unseen, since Reverón received visitors at El Castillete, and even engaged them in rituals involving the objects and *muñecas.* But, this is to say, they were neither shown to visitors as art objects, or as objects of potential use outside El Castillete, nor made available for sale or exchange. In these respects, they may be compared to religious or cult objects.
27. See Dieter Daniels, *Duchamp und die anderen der Modellfall einer kunstlerischen Wirkungsgeschichte in der Moderne* (Cologne: DuMont, 1992), 166–202. Daniels documents that Duchamp's original, 1913–19 readymades were rarely exhibited until the 1930s, which was when they began to be written about as interrogative of the exhibition context. Nevertheless, they presumed such an art context, including the presumption that they would be viewed. See the excellent discussion of the readymades in Dawn Ades et al., *Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), chap. 7: "The Readymades and 'Life on Credit,'" 146–71.
28. With respect to Duchamp, a critic who is also an artist, William Tucker, wrote that he was enormously affected by the *Bottlerack* as a *sculpture*: not as an incongruous, merely evocative object, but as a sculpture, seen in terms of its image, proportion, structure, and use of materials. But Tucker found other readymades by Duchamp to be contrived, over-elaborate, clever, whimsical, and boring. William Tucker, *The Language of Sculpture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), 119–20. With respect to Reverón, his objects and *muñecas* are said to be artworks in *Armando Reverón: El lugar de los objetos,* 9.
29. See the useful, short discussion of this subject in Penelope Curtis, *Sculpture 1099–1945: After Rodin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 141–78.
30. Ibid.,154.
31. Originally known as *Égouttoir,* it connotes not only restaurants and cleanliness but also,

more specifically, bottles and the rack, therefore sustenance and pain, and also, more generally, drains, sewers, even taste. See Curtis, *Sculpture 1099–1945,* 144, for some of these associations. Also, Ades et al., *Marcel Duchamp*, 156, observes that its spikes give it a sadistic aspect, which relates it to Surrealist objects.

32. Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1978), 21. I discuss the implications of this distinction for another early modernist artist in *Manet and the Execution of Maximilian* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2006), 89–93.
33. Christopher Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unknown Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 30–40.
34. In 1936, the *Exposition Surréaliste d'Objets* was held at the Galerie Ratton in Paris; objects were reproduced in the journal *Minotaure* 8 (1936); see also the earlier reproductions of objects in *Documents*, October 1929 (see fig. 27).
35. See Bice Curiger, *Meret Oppenheim: Defiance in the Face of Freedom* (Zurich, Frankfurt, New York: PARKETT Publishers, 1989), 39.
36. See Ades et al., *Marcel Duchamp,* 161–62, for a discussion of Duchamp's readymades in this context.
37. In the seventeenth century, a high volume of slaves was brought to the Caracas region of Venezuela to work on cacao plantations. By the end of that century, a large number of blacks were living in the coastal area north of Caracas. By the nineteenth century, many free blacks in Venezuela lived in coastal areas and worked as fishermen. For a historical consideration of race in Venezuela, see Winthrop R. Wright, *Café con Leche: Race, Class and National Image in Venezuela* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990).
38. I draw here on a discussion of public and private in my *The Language of the Body,* 51.
39. Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 245.
40. Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object*, 16, 37–38.
41. "Il n'y a que l'invisible qui nous emeuve." Simon-Théodore Jouffroy, *Cours d'esthetique*, 29e leçon, Paris, 1843, quoted in Alberto Manguel, *Reading Pictures* (New York: Random House, 2000), 198. I thank Joy de Menil and Alberto Manguel for providing me with the source of the quotation. The place of the objects is finally a place of a non-objectivity, which is, of course, also the place of the mature landscape paintings. It is, therefore, interesting that the one object made by Reverón that obviously relates to his paintings is a mirror that does not reflect and in which, therefore, the viewer is invisible. For discussion of this work, see my "El espejo," 110–11, where it is likened to, among other things, the pieces of silver paper that Bonnard attached to his studio wall so that he had "sparkles" to paint from, which relates it to the iridescent *papillotage* of Bonnard's paintings and to the boundary dissolutions that Callois speaks of in schizophrenia, and which run through Reverón's work. Furthermore, I am informed by Pérez-Oramas that a visitor to El Castillete remembers that the mirror was originally set into a similarly silvered setting behind a bar (presumably the "il bar de las *muñecas*" identified in a plan of El Castillete; see page 212), which means that it, as an object, would have become de-objectified, dissolving into its setting.
42. A relationship between an apathetic practice and a deobjectified form of representation, achieved by allover marking, may also be observed in artists of such different backgrounds as Pierre-Paul Prud'hon and Pierre Bonnard. On the former, in this respect, see Elderfield, *The Language of the Body,* 51, and passim, and on the latter, Yve-Alain Bois, "Bonnard's 'Passivity,'" in *Pierre Bonnard: The Work of Art, Suspending Time* (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2006), 51–63, especially 62–63. Bois, 53, n. 4, draws attention to the "unsolved mystery" of the uneven quality of Bonnard's output; such an unevenness is shared by Prud'hon and certainly by Reverón, suggesting that the solution to the mystery may be that the acceptance of passivity, which allowed these artists to disregard the mind's process of identifying objects, also meant disregarding the mind's editorial processes to an extent unusual even for the most adventurous artists.
43. Julius Meier-Graefe (on Prud'hon), *Modern Art,* vol. 2 (New York: Arno, 1968), 130, quoted in Elderfield, *The Language of the Body,* 37.
44. Arendt, *Human Condition,* 68–73.
45. Arendt speaks of how "a life spent entirely in public, in the presence of others, becomes, as we would say, shallow. While it retains its visibility, it loses the quality of rising into sight from some darker ground which must remain hidden if it is not to lose its depth in a very real, non-subjective sense" (ibid., 71).
46. Ibid., 72.
47. See Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), in particular chap. six: "Painting, Metaphor, and the Body: Titian, Bellini, de Kooning, etc.," 305–56.
48. Perán Erminy in conversation with the author, 2000.
49. Richard Wollheim, "The Sheep and the Ceremony," in *The Mind and Its Depths* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 19, from which I quote the Patristic saying.
50. For many of these reproductions, as well as the first essay devoted to photographic imagery of Reverón, see *La construcción de un personaje* (Caracas: Proyecto Armando Reverón, 2004) and the introductory essay, "Las quimeras de la imagen," by Luis Pérez-Oramas.
51. Navarro, "El solitario de Macuto: Más lejos que Monet, que Sisley, que Renoir," in *Armando Reverón: Esta luz como para magos*, 36.

52. There is at least one later landscape (Calzadilla c. 497) and there may be more; however, landscape painting as a consistent practice ends in 1945.
53. Noted in *Presencia y luz de Armando Reverón* (Caracas: Galería de Arte Nacional, 1991), 61.
54. Some baptismal scenes are reproduced in Calzadilla, see c. 408 and c. 409. In addition, Martín de Ugalde's "Reverón quiere curarse y volver a pintar," reproduced in *Armando Reverón: 18 testimonios,* 18–22, discusses a baptismal ceremony that Reverón acted out with his dolls. Perhaps these ceremonies were not so imaginary. Pérez-Oramas informs me of the existence of a letter, in the Boulton archives, sent from Gabriel del Mazo to Raul Nass in March 1965, recalling Reverón making a drawing in February 1948 that seems as if it may have been a baptismal scene.
55. See Enrique Planchart, *Tres siglos de pintura venezolana* (Caracas: Museo de Bellas Artes, 1948).
56. Liscano, *El erotismo creador de Armando Reveron*, 24.
57. Presumably, it would have brought back memories of his mother; what is impossible to know is whether he knew that a woman looking into a mirror was a conventional allegory of the art of painting: see Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color,* 40, where she illustrates Simon Vouet, *The Toilet of Venus* (1616), Carnegie Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Horace Binney Hare.
58. Clement Greenberg, *Joan Miró* (New York: Quadrangle Press, 1948). *Nude with Mirror* is reproduced as plate 5.
59. Nonetheless, it is intriguing to consider whether he could have seen an illustration of, say, Henri Matisse's *Music* of 1939 (shown at the New York World's Fair in which he may also have been represented; see note 1, above), from which his own outlined figures set against tilted rectangles may also be thought to derive. Matisse's painting and eight in-process images of it were published in *Cahiers d'Art* in 1939. See my discussion of this work in *Matisse Picasso* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2002), 283.
60. See "Through His Own Eyes," page 226.
61. Susan Stewart, "Armando Reverón: Paintings and Objects," in *The Open Studio: Essays on Art and Aesthetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 70.
62. Perán Erminy in conversation with the author, 2000.
63. Juan Liscano suggests that Reverón worked from dolls in order to avoid the problems or fears that might be encountered while working directly from the female body. See Liscano, *El erotismo creador de Armando Reverón,* 32.
64. Perán Erminy recounts a story of Reverón having been impressed by Otero telling him of having seen sex dolls in Paris, some with heating elements to warm the skin, and having asked him to get him one. (Conversation with the author, 2000.) However, as with the story reported by Liscano of looking under the skirts of the *muñecas* from the basement (see note 68, below), it is important to remember that Reverón did seem to enjoy playing, or pretending to play, the role that others had cast for him: so, if a social deviant why not a sexual one? And while we now may find the stories, not to mention the suggested practices, offensive, we need to be wary of making anachronistic judgments about what purportedly took place at Macuto around 1950. In any event, insofar as Reverón's morality is inseparable from his art, we must take it as we find it, as an operation on the boundaries between instinct and the ordering of life, between nature and culture, that makes its most vivid appearance in the body and its representation. (Highly relevant, philosophical remarks on this general subject may be found in Wollheim, "The Sheep and the Ceremony," 1–21.)
65. Juan Liscano, "Tras la experencia de Armando Reverón," reprinted in *Armando Reverón: 10 ensayos*, 95. Also see page 166 of this volume.
66. The work is undated, but it is stylistically close to Calzadilla c. 375 and 386, both of which are dated 1947.
67. The chronology in *Armando Reverón: Luz y cálida sombra del Caribe,* 136, says this occurred in 1950, i.e., two years after these drawings were made. However, Reverón had a lifelong interest in dance; these drawings did not require the motivation of a contemporaneous performance.
68. Liscano recounts a time when Reverón showed him his *muñecas,* saying, "Look, they have skin and pubic hair like women" (*El erotismo creador de Armando Reverón*, 24).
69. This narrative is not intended to suggest that the drawings necessarily were made in this sequence or intended to be read in this or any other sequence.
70. The literature on this subject is correspondingly large. Typical are Curtis L. Carter, *Dolls in Contemporary Art: A Metaphor of Personal Identity,* exh. cat. (Milwaukee, Wis.: The Patrick and Beatrice Haggerty Museum of Art Marquette University, 1993), and Marion Forek-Schmahl, *Kunstobjekt Puppe* (Weingarten: Kunstverlag Weingarten, 1990).
71. Walter Dupouy, ed., *Sir Robert Ker Porter's Caracas Diary, 1825–1842: A British Diplomat in a Newborn Nation* (Caracas: Editorial Arte, 1966), 44. This and the next two parts of the present essay are extensively revised from my "Las irredentas."
72. Dupouy, 72–73 (Diary entry for March 14,1826).
73. See "Introduction," in ibid., LVII–LXI, on Ker Porter's religious attitudes.
74. See the discussion of this painting in *Retratos: 2,000 Years of Latin American Portraits* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 139, where it is noted that "In the Catholic tradition, deceased baptized children are assumed to go directly to paradise and are consequently called *angelitos,* or 'little angels.'"

75. This drawing is reproduced after Carter, *Dolls in Contemporary Art*, 13, where, however, it is not specifically discussed.
76. This image is a still from Roberto J. Lucca's film, *Reverón,* of 1949, an amateur film made on the basis of footage shot in 1945 (see note 3, above). However, this image itself is reproduced in Boulton, *Reverón* (1979), 176–77, acknowledging the Lucca source, but with the puzzling date of 1937–44. It is accompanied by two additional stills from Lucca's film, showing Reverón painting this girl (one of them is reproduced here on page 217), but the drawing cannot be identified with certainty.
77. Philip Fisher contrasts an elevated, ceremonial space with the grounded space of carnival, in his unpublished "The Construction of the Body," cited in Susan Stewart, *On Longing,* 107, and Luis Pérez-Oramas has discussed the space of El Castillete as carnivalesque, in his "Armando Reverón: La gruta de los objetos y la escena satírica," 11–51.
78. Margot Benacerraf, unpublished interview conducted by Joaquín González, Caracas, date unknown. Transcript, Collection Centro de Información y Documentación de las Artes Plásticas (CINAP), Galería de Arte Nacional, Caracas. The relevant passage is quoted in its original Spanish in my "Las irredentas," 45, n. 7. Pérez-Oramas ("La gruta de los objetos y la escena satírica," 36–38) discusses this incident, but with a different emphasis to mine. The film in question is Benacerraf's *Reverón,* 1951–52, produced by Caroní Films, Caracas. It is available in video form: *Armando Reverón: Cuatro testimonios.*
79. See Freud, "Leonardo da Vinci" (see note 24, above), and the discussion of this text by Adam Phillips, "Narcissism, For and Against," in his *Promises, Promises: Essays on Psychoanalysis and Literature* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 200–225, which draws on John Steiner, *Psychic Retreats* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).
80. See Phillips, "Narcissism, For and Against," for a related, highly relevant discussion of narcissism, on which I draw.
81. Joan Corominas with José A. Pascual, *Diccionário Critico Etimológico castellano e hispánico* (Madrid: Gredos, c. 1987–91), 188–90, and for the related words: *maniquí*, 815; *hito,* 371; *boniga,* 621–22; and *mono*, 133–34. This brief account of *muñeca* cannot, for reasons of space and context, address its relationship to the closely related *maniquí,* since this would open onto at least French and English as well as Spanish usages.
82. See, for example, Calzadilla, c. 334, 377, 437. In addition, on page 178 [*Woman with Dolls,* 1949] a protuberant *leg* of a seated *muñeca* extends out from behind the body of the central figure (see discussion page 167).
83. G. Stanley Hall and A. Caswell Ellis, *A Study of Dolls* (New York and Chicago: Kellogg, 1987), 8.
84. See "Sin" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton, 1912), vol. 14, 4–11; "Forgiveness" in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 315–19; and "Sacrament of Reconciliation" in Wolfgang Beinert and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, eds, *Handbook of Catholic Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 621–25.
85. Callois, "Mimétisme et psychasthénie legendaire," 30.
86. Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay,* trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 208.
87. Freedberg (*The Power of Images*, 245) properly observes that almost every image provides its beholders with clues to the organic presences registered upon it. He adds that when those clues are so abundant and exact that they combine to form what is regarded as an unusually lifelike image, then, responses to it are predicated on a sense of its living reality. But when the clues are less exact and less abundant, we still seek to reconstitute the reality of the signified in the sign. Only sign fuses with signified to become the only present reality, and the smallest number of clues suffices to precipitate the search for more. Response to all images, and not only ones perceived as being more or less realistic, is predicated on the progressive reconstitution of material object as living. In the context of Reverón's art, this is a useful reminder of how the sharing of materials between the paintings and dolls shares significance, so that figure, landscape, the materials of figure and landscape, and the rough canvas itself, and its own independent connotations, interweave in our perceptual reconstitution of the image.
88. This aspect is especially apparent in a section of the film in which the *muñecas* are animated in a highly theatrical manner, gliding in and out of visibility in an uncanny, shadowy world, fetishized in their animation but also mechanized by it, like mannequins with the hurdy-gurdy playing. Luis Britos's recent photographs of the dolls, in *Armando Reverón: El lugar de los objetos*, 221–37, also dramatize their ghoulishness. Both presentations are misleading, for, as Stewart observes of the *muñecas* ("Armando Reverón: Paintings and Objects," 70): "Although they feature such conventionally fetishistic accoutrements as feathers and hair, they seem to prohibit touch: the fetishist lives in a fevered dream of animation, but this stillness of Reverón's objects is a tremendous impediment to such animation." To this, it might be added that their nonfetishistic status separates them from comparable Surrealist works, and most of their contemporary successors, which do tend to provoke fetishistically —and, to the extent that they do, they also tend to stylishness, the very thing that Reverón's art is not. The surface prevents it. It may be assumed, I think, that it was the theatricalization and fetishization of the *muñecas* that caused them to require forgiveness.

89. Eliot, *Collected Poems,* 79.
90. "Madness," *Newsweek* (January 23,1956): 37–38.
91. The discussion of Reverón's self-portrait drawings that follows is an extensively revised, but also condensed version of my "El espejo" and its shortened translation as "The Self-Portrait Drawings of Armando Reverón." Readers interested in more extended discussion and details of these and related works should turn to these sources.
92. Luis Pérez-Oramas, "Reverón: el anciano y el escarnio," in *Adquisición recentente: "Anciano, tres mujeres y niño," 1948*, exh. cat. (Macuto: Fundación Museo Armando Reverón, 1995), 8–13 (accompanying other useful short essays on this work) reprinted in his *Mirar furtivo* (Caracas: Consejo Nacional de la Cultura, 1997), 110–15. If Reverón did literally base this work on (a reproduction of) Titian's *Ecco homo* of 1575 (St. Louis Art Museum), then the child doll derives from the youth at the right of that painting. But it does seem more neoclassical. Pérez-Oramas has pointed out (in conversation) the similarity to the figure in the left background of Poussin's 1650 *Self-Portrait* in the Louvre. However, it may be that the source is a neoclassical engraving; for example, adolescents by Pierre-Paul Prud'hon are of the same type.
93. For the most famous instance of this phenomenon: John Searle, "*Las Meninas* and the Paradoxes of Pictorial Representation," in W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *The Language of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 253–57.
94. See, in addition to the works illustrated here, Caladilla c. 425. Another work in this series, not included in Calzadilla nor in the present exhibition, is in a private collection in the United States and seems never to have been reproduced.
95. This sentence paraphrases one in Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *The Forms of Violence: Narrative in Assyrian Art and Modern Culture* (New York: Shocken, 1985), 9, to which the discussion of tangential forms that follows is also indebted.
96. Gregory Galligan has argued that, in all pictures made on the mirror principle, everything shares an equivalent visual weight ("The Self Pictured: Manet, the Mirror, and the Occupation of Realist Painting," *Art Bulletin* 80, no. 1 [March 1998]: 150). Reverón's self-portraits may be said to hypostatize the mirror principle as a compositional mode. Moreover, since the mirror makes possible objectification of the artist's own body, the mirror principle means for Reverón that his image has equal visual weight with that of the *muñecas*, psychologically as well as formally.
97. The term "specular image" derives from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relation with Others," trans. William Cobb, in *The Primacy of Perception*, ed. James M. Edie (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 125–41. Merleau-Ponty's text elaborates on that of two texts of 1949, therefore contemporaneous with the self-portraits by Reverón discussed here: Henri Wallon's book, *Les Origines du charactère chez l'enfant*, and Jacques Lacan's famous article, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as revealed in Psychoanalytical Experience" (originally published in *Revue française de psychanalyse* 4 [October–December 1949]: 449–55), in *Écrits. A Selection*, trans. A. Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), 1–7. I briefly discuss this subject in the context of Matisse's art in *Henri Matisse. A Retrospective*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1992), 36.
98. For the distinction between the two, in a discussion of the work of Chardin, see Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 81. For a discussion of the distinction in the work of Bonnard, see my "Seeing Bonnard," in Elderfield and Whitfield, *Bonnard*, 33–52, where I place Bonnard as a painter who represents the perception of substance—as, finally, is Reverón, despite the occasional claim to be otherwise.
99. See note 97, above.
100. On the fullness of space in schizophrenia, see Callois, "Mimétisme et psychasthénie légendaire." On the anthropomorphization of space so that it suggests a single internal space, see Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism, or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).
101. Stewart, *On Longing,* 57.
102. The association of the masks and self-portrait drawings was made by Rafael Romero,"Autorretatos 1944," in *Armando Reverón: Exposición Iconográfica y Documental en el Centenario su Nacimiento*, exh. cat. (Caracas: Galería de Arte Nacional, 1989), 92–93. For Reverón's self-portraits in their national context, see Romero's "El autorretrato en la pintura venezolano," *Laberintos de la Identitad: Autorretatos 1820–1989*, exh. cat. (Caracas: Galería de Arte Nacional, 1990), 33–37.
103. Michael Podro, *Depiction* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 103, on Rembrandt's late self-portraits.
104. Callois, "Mimétisme et psychasthénie légendaire," 30.
105. David Hume, *The Natural History of Religion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957). The influence of Hume's book is discussed in Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 11–13. The argument that follows was rehearsed, in more general terms, in the latter part of my "The Adventures of the Optic Nerve," in John Morrill, ed., *The Promotion of Knowledge: Lectures to Mark the Centenary of the British Academy, 1902–2002*, Proceedings of the British Academy, 122 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 53–85.

106. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., *Cubism and Abstract Art,* exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1936); idem, *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism,* exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1936).

107. See Holliday T. Day, *Art of the Fantastic: Latin America, 1920–1987,* exh. cat. (Indianapolis, Ind.: Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1987).

108. See "Through His Own Eyes," page 226.

109. See, notably, Mari Carmen-Ramirez, "Reflexión Heterotópica: las obras," in *Heterotopias: Medio Siglo Sin-Lugar, 1918–1968,* exh. cat. (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2000), 39–41, 331–45. This publication demonstrates how, with a judicious selection of works, it was possible to create an optic-haptic genealogy of style that connected Reverón to Brazilian and Argentinean abstract painters like Mira Schendel and Lucio Fontano and, implicitly, to North American Minimalists like Robert Ryman. However, Pérez-Oramas informs me that even Soto told him that he never thought of Reverón as an inspiration, although he admired his luminism and understood why critics associated his art with Reverón's.

110. See Belting, *Likeness and Presence,* 157–69, 481, 458.

111. Paul Klee, *The Thinking Eye: The Notebooks of Paul Klee,* ed. Jörg Spiller, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Wittenborn, 1961), 76.

112. Klee's statement does not require that we attribute to art the capacity of manifesting invisible intangibles, but it does allow that possibility. In this respect, it links his statement to an understanding of the capacity of images that preexist the era of art. For example, the extraordinary appendix of texts on the history and use of images and relics that concludes Belting's *Likeness and Presence* includes an eleventh-century report of how a curtain before an icon of the Virgin would suddenly move, as if buoyed by a breath of wind. "When this event is happening, the appearance of the heavenly image changes, and it receives, I believe, the Virgin's living visit, making what otherwise remained invisible, visible." See "The Miracle of the Curtain at Blachernae," Michael Psellus, address (1075), in Belting, *Likeness and Presence,* 511.

113. Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object,* 29.

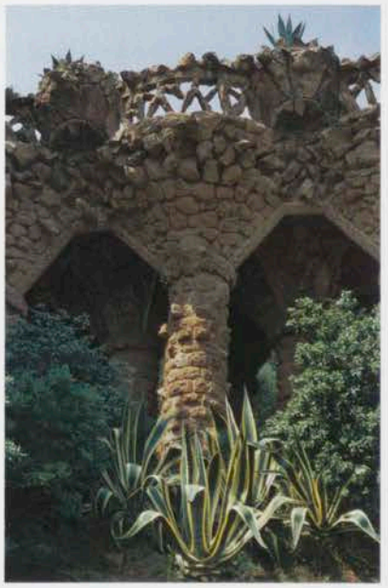
114. Stanley Cavell, " The Uncanniness of the Ordinary," in *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 153–78, at 158. He actually says horror (we think of Niza), but in the context of a discussion of the uncanny.

115. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York: Early Modern History, 18.A. (George Kubler).

Armando Reverón and Modern Art in Latin America

Luis Pérez-Oramas

Armando Reverón is known for his early nocturnal scenes, the most popular of which shows two Francisco Goya-like *majas* whose poses evoke the famous model in both her clothed and naked versions, by the painter from Fuendetodos. More than just vesperal, the *majas* in this work exist in oneiric confinement, and their eyes are covered by the same blue, turquoise, and aquamarine veil that prevails throughout the scene, in which the contours of figures dissolve like aquatic ghosts. Water and cavernous seclusion are resonant themes in this painting of 1920, which is titled *The Cave* (page 122).[1] It is curious that the so-called painter of the Caribbean's light began his career with the nocturnal opacity of these paintings. Also notable is the fact that some time after finishing *The Cave* and until his death in 1954, Reverón decided to settle near the sea—one of his great themes—in an enclosure of sorts clearly reminiscent of a grotto. His workshop, El Castillete (fig. 1), now destroyed, encapsules the artist's primitive impulse and the memory of the distant Catalan modernism that Reverón probably became acquainted with during his stay in Barcelona in 1912 (fig. 2).



1. El Castillete, photographed by Ricardo Razetti. 1953. Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

2. Antonio Gaudí. Parc Güell, Barcelona

Opposite: Armando Reverón. *Two Indians* (detail). 1939. See page 148 for full image

From Noucentism to modernity

The Catalan architect Antonio Gaudí said that the light of the Mediterranean is an ideal coordinate for painting: "On its shores, with its medium light at forty-five degrees, which is the light that best defines solids and reveals their form . . . neither excessive nor insufficient, as both of those extremes are blinding and the blind do not see."[2] Reverón was always outside that middle ground, that is, in the coordinates of blindness: not only was his life eccentric, but the same may be said of his painting. In this sense, Reverón would be the *anti-Mediterranean* painter par excellence: beyond the center, in a margin marked by both the absence and the excess of light, where bodies lose definition and become confused with the form of things around them.

Scenes like the one in *The Cave* would recur many times throughout his work, particularly during the second half of the 1930s, but with radically different tonalities: the bare canvas took on gray and sepia sfumatos next to violent dabs of white oil paint in scenes that evoke sleep more than night, the heaviness of desire more than insomnia's wakefulness. We do not know if the characters in these paintings look at us or if we merely see them in their dreams. We do not know if they are imagined or carnal women, or perhaps rag dolls prettified for the painting. But the scene is the same, and in both cases—in the romantic nights of Reverón's first works and in his paintings of the exhausting light of the shore where his sleepers and bathers rest, or perhaps only the sea rests with the mountains' shadows and the calcined trees—the artist confronts us with the limits of seeing and of what is seen: of seeing what is not seen; of seeing where nothing can be seen; of seeing what we see. Bodies and things are in a state of confusion, in a state of *fusion* with the shadows.

Perhaps this is where Reverón's eccentricity begins, by perpetually avoiding a clear and well-defined vision of things. His compositions are always on the margins of day: at dawn, vesperal or nocturnal, when things lose their edge. Even situated at the center of light, his paintings mirror the violent tropical brightness of the sun that is so intense it cannot be looked at. In this sense, a structural bond unites the three periods of the artist's work: blue, white, and sepia.[3] In all of them, a dominant monochrome envelops the figures with its thick veil, sometimes, as in *The Cave*, like a fog of color before the figures in the back. In other compositions, the monochrome is embodied in the bare sepia canvas itself, from which the figures and their formless white patches emerge. It is as if Reverón had never ceased to delve through his work, above and beyond all his themes, into the difficulty of seeing, into the adversity of the visible.

Without a doubt, this makes him a modern artist, but it also distances him from many of his Latin American contemporaries for whom art—buttressed by manifestoes and an array of avant-garde approaches, ranging from Mexican muralism to the Constructivism practiced by the Escuela del Sur (School of the South) and by the various reactions to it,[4] from the myriad versions of Expressionism and Surrealism sympathetic to the Brazilian notion of anthropophagy to the different social, national, and indigenist realisms—always maintained the certainty of its visions, never

questioned the clarity of its forms on a structural level, never felt their resistance to our sight, or their troubling perceptive uncertainty.[5]

A few years before his death, around 1950, Reverón apparently dictated an account of his life.[6] According to a few uncertain testimonies, this happened during one of his frequent visits to the Escuela de Artes (formerly the Academia de Bellas Artes) in Caracas, where he had studied in 1908. In the surviving transcript of that "autobiography," belatedly published by Alfredo Boulton,[7] Reverón names the ancient and modern masters whom he remembered as reference points at the end of his life: "Degas, Martin, Sisley, Cézanne," whom he admired, "Greco, Velázquez, Zurbarán, Goya, Murillo, Ribera, Palma the elder and Palma the younger, Anglada, Zuloaga, Sorolla, Romero de Torres, Mezquita, Rusiñol, Urgiel, Zubiaurre," whose works in the collection of the Count of Romanones made an impact on him.[8]

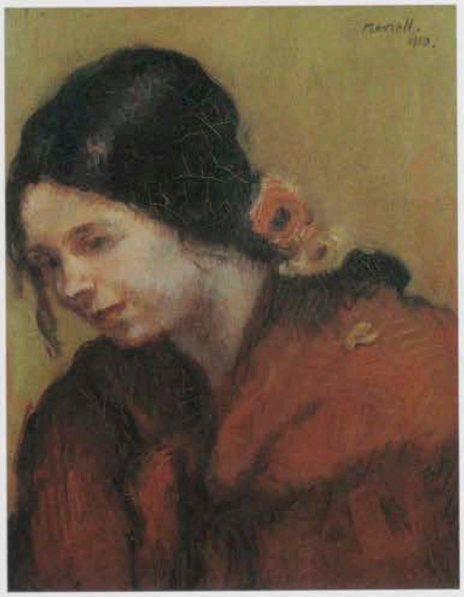
Reverón's many references to Diego Velázquez and Goya have been the subject of study and commentary by art historians.[9] For example, in one of the earliest and most complete texts about the artist's work, the writer Mariano Picón-Salas describes the moment when Reverón, accompanied by the poet Salustio González-Rincones—another eccentric who composed sonnets in invented, indigenous languages during the Dadaist years in Paris—discovered Goya in Madrid.[10] It is striking, though, that alongside painters from Venice and Spain, next to Degas and Cézanne, Reverón, at the end of his life, also remembered the dominant figures in Spanish art circles during his sojourn in Barcelona and Madrid in the teens. Among them he included three key figures of Catalan modernism: Modest Urgell Inglada, Santiago Rusiñol, and Hermenegild Anglada Camarasa.[11]

The influence of Catalan modernism on Reverón, like many other aspects of his work, awaits investigation as a fruitful subject for art history and criticism. No matter how inconsistent the effect of this modernism was on his work, its influence has great implications, not only for the modality of the modern that can be attributed to his painting, that is, the kind of eccentric "modernity" that Reverón came to embody, but also for the placement of his work within contemporary Latin American art.

Reverón lived in Spain, with some interruptions, between 1911 and 1915. He was enrolled in Barcelona's Academia de La Lontja during those years and could not have been indifferent to the events surrounding the local artistic milieu, where Catalan modernism was forged. The influence of Urgell Inglada's work, which Reverón remembered even in 1950, is evident in his *Landscape* (page 130), one of the Venezuelan artist's early pieces, which Venezuelan scholarship has associated with French Impressionism. Yet everything in that painting is reminiscent of Urgell Inglada and his belated assimilation of Camille Corot: the composition in three planes; the use of trees as framing figures; the mysterious treatment given to light; and the scene's atmospheric ambiguity (fig. 3).[12]

This, and in particular Reveron's fidelity to a certain way of imagining Arcadia, would, in the long term, have repercussions on his life's work, which was created in solitude and indifference

3. Modest Urgell Inglada. *Landscape with Figure.* n.d. Oil on canvas, 14 1/4 × 22" (36 × 55.7 cm). Museu d'Art de Girona



4. Isidro Nonell. *Portrait of a Gypsy.* 1910. Oil on canvas, 22 5/8 × 17 7/8" (57.5 × 45 cm). Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona

toward the art world. Confronted with the shadowless world of high noon in the tropics, would not Reverón have remembered the whitewashed works produced by Santiago Rusiñol in Sitges, whose luminism was to have a lasting influence on Catalan painting?[13] Despite the fact that Reverón does not mention Isidro Nonell in his brief autobiography, the latter's painting also left a mark on his early work (fig. 4 and page 122), just as it did on Pablo Picasso during his blue period. All of these influences constituted the crucible of a modernity, alongside peripheral art movements, that had a profound influence on Reverón but are to this day incompletely studied or forgotten by canonical scholarship on modernism. In addition to the Spanish artistic milieu that he witnessed in his youth while he was a student at La Lontja and the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, Reverón was later influenced by other equally eccentric local figures like Samys Mützner and Nicolás Ferdinandov (see page 20), two painters from Eastern Europe exiled in distant Venezuela whose artistic legacy can be linked to the Viennese Secession and the melancholic fantasy of Russian modernism, with its romantic search for exoticism.[14]

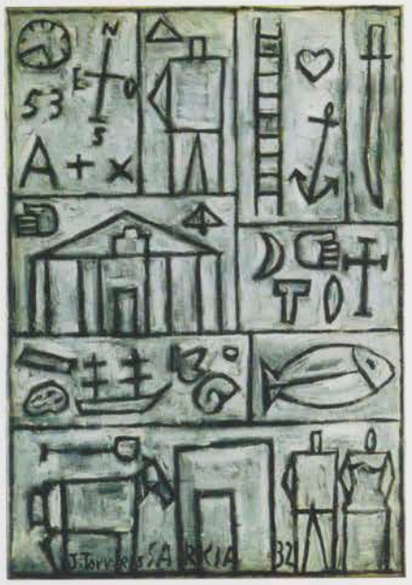
But above all, while living in Barcelona, Reverón must have heard of one of the greatest "Catalan" painters of the time—the Uruguayan Joaquín Torres-García.[15] Both artists, living in the same city, shared intellectual sources and aesthetic influences, despite their age difference. *Noucentism*—as Catalan early modernism is known—produced an iconography of Arcadia that had a profound effect on Torres-García's Catalan works, which would be ruthlessly demystified by Reverón later on. What persists in Reverón's later work is not the paradisiacal imagination of *Noucentism*, with its allegation of a superiority of Mediterranean culture, which, in the hands of the philosopher Eugenio d'Ors, resulted in sustaining the cultural fictions of the more conservative part of Spain. What remains of this imagination in Reverón's work is the depleted field, emptied of figures, of the Caribbean scenes of the sea structurally defined by their premise as pictorial deserts, represented in a synthetic rather than an analytic manner, without impostures of light or iconography and thus even more genuine than the neo-Hellenic Arcadia imagined by Torres-García and the Catalan painters: a true Arcadia poetically depicted as a desert—a barren geography and a place of origin, a vast field in which everything is always about to begin (figs. 5, 6).

5. Joaquín Torres-García. *Maternity*. 1905. Study for the mural in the house of the Baron of Rialp. Oil on canvas, 40 1/4 × 51 1/4" (102 × 130 cm). Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid

6. Armando Reverón. *The Hammock*. 1933. Tempera on canvas, 46 1/2 × 57 5/8" (118.2 × 146.2 cm). Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

The presence of Reverón and Torres-García in the *noucentista* Barcelona of 1913, considered the year of the Catalan modernist movement's "great formal consolidation,"[16] allows us to pit these two artists against each other as emblematic figures of Latin American art during the first half of the twentieth century.[17] Despite their shared sources, everything seems to separate them from the geographic extremes they came from—one from the far, almost polar, south of America, and the other from the solar excess of the tropics—to the ways in which they conceived an artwork and its destiny. Torres-García never abandoned his predilection for manifestoes, his intention of creating a school, whereas Reverón sought, in solitude, a singular experience, bereft of theory, or at least of a theory articulated in the artist's authorized words.

Everything in Torres-García's conception of painting is regulated by the use of signs (fig. 7), whereas in Reverón everything begins and ends with a language of formless marks (page 135). In the former's works, the visible is deliberately inscribed. In the latter's painting, the visible emerges, almost unintentionally. Torres-García, still a humanist, wants to equate painting with an idea and, as a description projected on a plane, with a concept. Reverón's representations cling to the materiality of the pictorial field as if impregnated by it; his art proceeds from sensation and emerges like a trace. The result is like an excrescence of painting's materiality (and practice), manifested in its rawness and body. In Torres-García's art, signs and graphic structures multiply in a labyrinth of grids in which painting continually establishes connections to and tensions with writing. In Reverón's paintings, there always seems to be a link to the experience of an aphasia of vision, to the *fascinating* condition of



7. Joaquín Torres-García. *Composition*. 1932. Oil on canvas, 28 1/4 × 19 3/4" (71.8 × 50.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Dr. Román Fresnedo Siri

a silent gaze for which the world is an object of desire—unattainable or overflowing—capable of feeding the power of representation and exacerbating the cognitive impotence of melancholy.

On the one hand, then, there is Torres-García, citizen of the world, who treats his painting like a field of signs and aspires to "geometric" thinking, which "should dominate our art and our life."[18] On the other hand, there is Reverón, whose life can be compared to that of an anchorite. Faced with the equatorial light of the Caribbean, he forgets his academic training and produces a literal painting full of formless, raw elements, a painting in which the visible appears as embedded in the very materiality of its medium. His work thus blatantly ignores the logocentric distinction between *background* and *graphic line*.[19]

These two seemingly opposing painters have not been linked by anyone; nor does it seem that there is much to connect them. Torres-García never abandoned the thick, dark palette of the turn-of-the-century studio artist, and Reverón came close to working achromatically. Yet it is the final, late work by Torres-García, which the Uruguayan painter undertook after leaving Barcelona, after living in New York during the 1920s, after his friend Rafael Barradas's influence in promoting Futurism and his encounters with Piet Mondrian and Theo van Doesburg in the Parisian Cercle et Carré group, that has relevance for Reverón's work. These two Latin American painters produced work in the late 1920s and early 1930s that was perfectly contemporary in spite of their age difference.

The Reverón of the white and blue, green and gray gestural marks applied on the canvas with a total economy of means, the Reverón who predicated his work on subtle, obsessive variations, on an iconography of maritime vistas and landscapes—coasts with coconut palms, beaches with sea grapes, or views from the *rancho*—reached stylistic maturity after leaving Barcelona. Then, around 1925–26, Reverón was already set in Macuto, a place diametrically opposed to the cosmopolitan Paris that Torres-García definitively abandoned in 1932. There, in Macuto, in a place near the shore called The Fifteen Letters,[20] Reveron built his "fisherman's house," his "Adamic" room, which perhaps recalls the grottolike details in Gaudí's Parc Güell (fig. 2) or La Pedrera, which the Venezuelan painter undoubtedly saw in his *noucentista* youth.[21]

This leads us to an epochal coincidence between the great Latin American figures and the artistic movements in which modernity seems to have burst forth, with few exceptions, during the 1920s. Not only is this true of these two antithetical artists, Reverón and Torres-García, but it also applies to the two great seminal moments of modernism in Latin American visual arts: the Mexican muralist movement, which received official impetus from José Vasconcelos in 1923 and was henceforth backed by the Mexican government well into the 1950s; and the various movements and

8. Joaquín Torres-García. *Eternal Catalonia*. 1912. Gouache on paper, 59 3/8 × 37 7/8" (151 × 96 cm). Collection of the Department of Culture of the Generalitat de Catalunya

artists who gravitated around the "Week of Modern Art" in São Paulo and the anthropophagic Brazilian manifesto between 1922 and 1928. To these two modern movements—muralism and anthropophagy—we should add the social iconography of *indigenismo*, which also emerged, during the 1920s, with palpable force in various Latin American countries: Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Venezuela. Thus, along with Reverón and Torres-García, there were a series of names in the panoply of artists that constitute the continent's first artistic modernism: Vicente do Rego Monteiro and Anita Malfatti in Brazil; Emilio Pettorutti, Juan del Prete, and Rafael Barradas in Argentina and Uruguay; José Sabogal and Eduardo Kingman in Peru and Ecuador; Francisco Narváez in Venezuela; and Roberto Montenegro, Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Frida Kahlo, and José Clemente Orozco in Mexico.

Between 1911 and 1912 Torres-García worked on the most important public commission of his Catalan period: the murals for the San Jorge room in Barcelona's Palacio de la Generalitat. Did the young Reverón hear about them? Did he ever see an image of the work? The fact is that Torres-García, a splendid easel painter by the time he left Barcelona, was also a muralist, and his murals for the Palacio de la Generalitat bear witness to the enormous impact of allegorical symbolism, which would always be present in his work and in the work of most other modern Latin American artists. There are inevitable stylistic coincidences between Torres-García's sketches of his work for the Generalitat—*Eternal Catalonia*, for example (fig. 8)—and the surviving images of Roberto Montenegro's murals, commissioned by José Vasconcelos for the Colegio Máximo de San Pedro y San Pablo in Mexico—in particular the mural *The Fiesta of Santa Cruz* (fig. 9). Before setting out on different artistic paths, the first Constructivist artist from South America and the first Mexican muralist were both imbued with the powerful currents of symbolism and allegory.

9. Roberto Montenegro. *The Fiesta of Santa Cruz* (detail). 1923–24. Fresco. Colegio Máximo de San Pedro y San Pablo, Mexico

Yet it is the radical absence of a muralist tradition in Venezuela, the almost complete concealment of Symbolist strategies and their ambiguity that differentiate the work of Reverón from that of his contemporaries in Latin America. How can

10. Jesús Soto. *Rubber Dots*. 1961. Wood, metal, canvas, plaster, and glue, 28 3/8 × 28 3/8" (72 × 72 cm). Collection Juan Ignacio Parra, Caracas

there be traces of Symbolism in a painting in which the world becomes liquid and unthinkable? What brings Reverón closer to his contemporaries is the moment of his emergence as a modern artist around 1925 when, already in his house in Macuto, he began to produce the radical white works that give rise to an unexpected form of modernity.

In them, the Caribbean's brutal sunshine sunders the legacy of Impressionism. This rupture translates into an absurd suspension of objects, which are divested of earthly reference, root, and sustenance in Reverón's works from the 1920s. But the spectral presence of objects in his paintings—which will be a recurrent obsession in his work to the very end—translates into an absolute materialization of painting. The factuality of painting thus appears in tatters, dismembered, so that the totality of the image, which is always striking in Reverón, is in permanent tension with the manifest disjunction of its figurative elements—branches, house, stem, clouds, door, coast, coconut palm—and its formal ones—canvas, seam, marks, brushstrokes, oil paints, tempera, frame. The transparency of the image is thus taken to its phantasmagoric extremes, but the opacity of painting also manifests itself as never before in the art of that place and time. Even without intending to, this makes Reveron's painting modern. His are images in a state of crisis in which we see both a whole image, likely mimetic, and the deconstructed field of its materiality, a testimony to the adversity of what is visible, captured in the eccentricity of the day, the time, the place.[22]

This modernity—this painting never before seen in those latitudes—is precisely contemporary with the main artistic movements that embodied early modernity in Latin America. What dissolves in it, though, is the symbolic *basso continuo* that is invariably present in the harshness of images of its contemporaries: in the certainty of the outlines in the murals; in the promise of constructive structures; in the clarity with which poverty is represented by realist and indigenist painters; in the Brazilian modernists' resolute aspiration to a radical expressiveness. For Reverón, though, painting is an open and unresolved canopy through which light filters like an oil-paint wound, and the image, like an intangible and uncertain entity, dissolves in the very moment of its constitution and escapes—unfettered—within the trap that holds it.

This intangibility has no relation to the aspiration to immateriality that, many years later (thirty-five to be exact), would characterize the optic and kinetic artworks of another Venezuelan artist, Jesús Soto, during his "informal" or "baroque" period. On a purely formal, not to say formalist, level, it is tempting to associate works like *Light Behind My Arbor* (1926; page 128) or *Sea Grape Trees* (1927; page 131) with Soto's *Rubber Dots* (fig. 10), produced in Paris during the early 1960s, a period marked by the influence of New Realism. In Reverón's case, the materiality of painting, the corporeal opacity of its operative presence appears insofar as the image disappears—that is, involuntarily,

because Reverón's intention, as far as one can judge from his work of the 1920s, is to construct an image in the adverse and eccentric circumstances of the tropical midday, beyond or before clarity, in the blindness caused by an excess of visibility, an excess of light. Between this Reverón and the "informalist" Soto, one could evoke the figure of Jean Fautrier, his French contemporary, though in his case—as would happen later in some of the works of Robert Ryman, another artist who enables us to understand what Reverón's work anticipates—the materiality of painting appears deliberately, as tends to happen whenever a painter returns to his studio and cuts himself off from the world, the image, regulations, or atmospheric representation.

In the case of Soto, whose *Rubber Dots* from the early 1960s can certainly be linked to Fautrier but not to Reverón, his predecessor and fellow Venezuelan, the materiality of painting appears deliberately as part of a skirmish to make it vanish in a prodigious and fictitious mirage. It is reminiscent of an enormous mass—a box—that the magician needs in order to simulate the disappearance of the body it contains. Yet I maintain that the materiality of painting *subsists* in Soto's *Rubber Dots*, for no kinetic mechanism was truly able to dematerialize anything or to make matter disappear except locally, fragmentarily, furtively, deceptively, so that what attracts us today about these works is precisely their texture and not—or not only—the illusion of dematerialization produced in them by our moving around them. What we are attracted to in these works is the unresolved and disproportionate dialectic of which they are constituted, between an excess of matter or texture and the subtle coordinates of disappearance.

Comparing Reverón's works from the 1920s with Soto's kinetic *Rubber Dots* of the 1960s can only be an anachronistic task, namely, an art-historical "tour de force," and is neither advisable nor pertinent, no matter how interesting the comparison. Rather, it further prevents us from placing Reverón in the context of those years during which modernity was forged in Latin America.[23]

Solitude and fog against the grain of history

The early 1920s were revolutionary years everywhere. In Mexico there were revolts by Catholic militants, called Cristeros, amid the violent dictatorships of Adolfo de la Huerta, Venustiano Carranza, and Plutarco Elías Calles, which laid the foundation for the institutionalization of revolutions, that constant in Latin American political thought to this day. But they were also revolutionary times in Argentina, which had its "Tragic Week" in 1919. Revolutions were unsuccessful in Venezuela, where Reverón was living, sharing a room in Caracas with his friend, the painter César Prieto, aide-de-camp at the time to Juan Vicente Gómez, one of the continent's legendary tyrants, who assumed the presidency in 1908 and wielded absolute power until his death in 1935.[24]

These political events remind us that between 1925 and 1935, precisely when Reverón produced his most luminous repertoire—that is, his white portraits and paintings—Venezuela was going through its darkest political and collective experience. This is not the place to offer a portrait of the

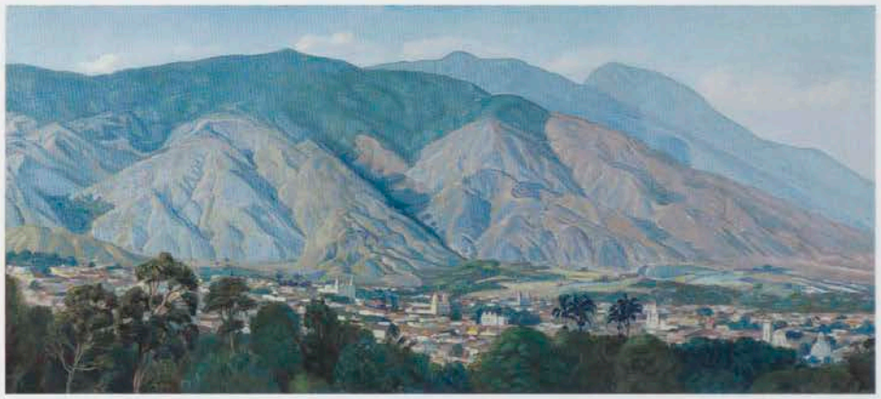
primitive tyrant, Gómez. Venezuelans living in the late twentieth century, in whose families there are no longer traces of the tortures, disappearances, and exiles that marked Gómez's rule—even though this was not the case during most of the twentieth century—have constructed a fantastic and jolly image of one of the most bloodthirsty liberal tyrants in American history.[25] The only proof of ties between Gómez and Reverón is a handwritten dedication by the artist on one of his white paintings. But one cannot jump to conclusions based on this; the painter, far from the sepulchral peace of that regime, could have sold a work to one of the dictator's innumerable children, who might have in turn given it to his father, or to one of the tyrant's countless adulators. In Venezuela, it was best not to show signs of resistance to Gómez if one wanted to preserve one's life and liberty.

In 1919, the country was decimated by hunger, insalubrity, and the devastating effects of the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic (which had taken the life of colonel Alí Gómez, first-born son of the dictator and the regime's heir). There was an attempt at revolt that year, which ended in the summary execution of its leaders and the indefinite imprisonment of some of the most highly respected civic leaders in Venezuela at the time. Could there be a link between Reverón's seclusion, between the artist's decision to leave Caracas and settle beneath the canopy of his hut in Macuto, on the beach of The Fifteen Letters, and the dismal collective life of the country that was subjected to a terrible regime? Might Reverón have been sensitive to the difference between the jovial liberty enjoyed in Barcelona and Madrid and the life of whispers that fear imposed on 1920s Venezuela? Accounts of the time tell of citizens locked up in large houses, or in the prison of nostalgia for colonial splendor, or in internal exile. Those years, the most dismal in the history of Venezuela, were precisely ones during which Reverón, forgetting the world, going against the grain of history and of his own country, produced paintings of enormous freedom, of infinite, luminous expanses, resplendent to the point of blindness. Paintings that, for these very reasons, were tactile, but they were also paintings of solitudes (see page 128).

Such is Reverón's "white" painting, so strange and extraordinary as to make it peerless in the repertoire of Latin American art of his time. In these paintings, structures dissolve, while in the work of other Latin American artists, the focus is on reinforcing structures. Stressing the inner structures of art took on a symbolic function in countries where the artists who did so experienced a lack of social structures in society. This "symbolic value" of structure—be it constructivist or realist and mimetic—translates through all of Latin America into an emphatic art that manifests itself in abstract or social realist and muralist megalographies.

As I see it, there are two fundamental aspects of Latin American art that still need to be explored: the persistence of *symbolism* in early artistic modernities, which influenced even those forms least suited to it, like Constructivism and later on Conceptual art; and the promise of modernity, in its various utopian versions, which has been supplanted by the production of effective modern artistic forms whose anthropological function was precisely to sublimate the failure of modernity as a historic project. In other words, modernity was not possible there, at least not without dramatic

ideological deviations, but what was—and is—possible is the production of modern works of art that must be read against the background of modernity's failed projects: a background or a shadow that heightens the resplendence of those forms.

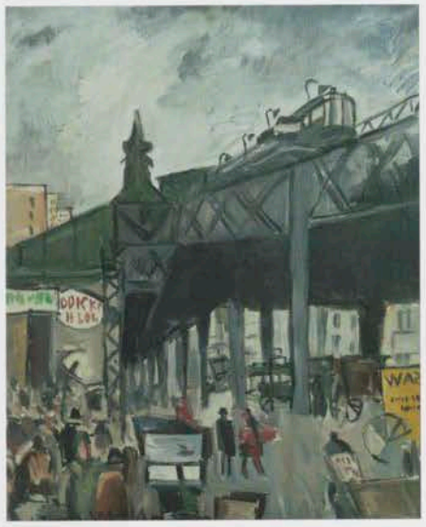


11. Manuel Cabré. *View of the Caracas Valley from El Calvario Hill*. c. 1927. Oil on canvas, 25 3/16 × 56 5/16" (64 × 143 cm). Collection Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, Caracas

Wherever modernity fails as a historic *project*, artworks emerge as an elegiac or abortive modern *ornament*. Both aspects are vehemently nuanced in Reverón's case: as forms dissolve in his work, so does their symbolic force, while the matter of art is revealed as a tactile power. This "dilution" of forms is particularly evident in Reverón's white paintings, his most moving luminic expression, but it is not limited to this period of his artistic production. There is also great variation in the "dilution" of forms in his work, ranging from disappearance—the veil of white light, but also the *majas'* green and sepia sfumato or the schematic and spectral uncertainty of the industrial landscapes of the port of La Guaira—to deformation—the formless, gestural intensity of the 1930s gouaches, the graphic saturation of the 1940s drawings, and the unsettling, cartoonish monstrosity of his objects and dolls.

But the coincidence of two aspects of the predominantly white works of the 1920s, which have been the object of much commentary—namely, the double emergence of the canvas and the light as veils, and the parallel functions of what is represented (an eccentric moment of blind light) and of the supporting surface as material glazes—grants these paintings of tropical sunlight the appearance of nebulous images, of hazy vistas. Unexpectedly, the painting of the tropics becomes visible as a wintry landscape, and the violence of the sun is confused with the opacity of fog.

Such are the works that Reverón was painting when Venezuela was experiencing the dark night of its political history. That historic night proved precisely that modernity was impossible in the country. The year 1936 is generally accepted as the beginning of the twentieth century in Venezuela, more specifically the fourteenth of February, the day of the first political demonstration in defense of democracy, two months after Gómez's death. Reveron's white forms, those landscapes veiled by a light that acts as a cloud of mist, were the first modern works produced by an artist in Venezuela. Yet they did not respond to a project of modernity: they emerged, intermingling with their material place, like marks on a painting of formless marks set against the formal precision that characterized the work of Reverón's contemporaries, most of them landscape painters fascinated with the natural environs of the Caracas valley and with the immensity of the Ávila Mountain that towers over it (fig. 11).



12. Joaquín Torres-García. *Street Scene*. n.d. Oil on canvas, 39 1/8 × 32" (99.4 × 81.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Morton G. Neumann

The argument is improbable, but not unreasonable: Reverón set out in search of a home when the nation was choked by tyranny and in isolation found a liberty that the rest of the country lacked. He produced a painting without human events, deserted, in which bodies mingle with the branches that support them or appear asleep, absent. The only event in these works is climatic and contributes to the confusion of earth and sky, coast and sea, absolute sunlight and the fog that clouds vision and represents, in painting, the blinding effect of the sun on the artist's eyes.

Claude Lévi-Strauss has studied the recurrence of the motif of fog in various myths from American indigenous communities. In both ends of the continent, North and South America, there seems to be a link between the origin of fog, its clouding effect, and the myths of duality or twins that explain the birth of the community. The meteorological fog in the myths of the north has its counterpart in the "artificial fog" of some South American myths. Fog prevents members of a community from recognizing one another, which can have a number of providential or catastrophic consequences, including incest. In some of these myths, the origin of fog may be associated with the presence of a diseased skin whose cure through fire produces mist. By confusing earth and sky, fog can help one escape one's enemies; in its domestic version, in the "key of fire," it could "save man from the *world of rottenness* in which he would find himself if the sun really disappeared."[26]

Reverón's eccentric seclusion in his Adamic workshop and the obsessive attempts to paint in the impossible visual conditions imposed by the light of the tropics, which resulted in that fogged, white painting, were no doubt strategies to eliminate history's *world of rottenness* from his work. This would explain the significance of those white and luminous paintings in that dark and dismal time. In stark contrast to his American contemporaries, including Torres-García, who was at the time representing the worldly chaos of New York (fig. 12), these works impose the tone of a painting that will produce with light, and then shadows, the prodigious effect of a mute on the horn of history. It is as if the fog of light in Reverón's works prevented the viewer from seeing not only the outlines of things, but the sharp profile of days as well (page 130).

The melancholy of bodies

Reverón's fogged, white painting peters out around 1934. However, he does not stop making "white" paintings after this date, nor are his paintings no longer influenced by the presence of light. A climatic painting shaped by the meteorology of the present is translated into an instant of light as ephemeral as the permanence of beings in our field of vision. Reverón's painting always intercepts both in its mutual incandescence and disappearance. Toward 1940, for example, he signed and dated *White Landscape* (page 154), in which the silhouette of the mountains appears emphatically drawn by a froth

of light while everything else remains as shadow, specter, dream. Certainly, there has never been a Latin American painting produced in those years that can compare to this one, in which the figurative apparatus of painting dissolves materially in the liquidity of its pigments. If one had to come up with an example it would be Siqueiros's *Collective Suicide* (fig. 13), in which the technical audacity that heralds abstraction is, nevertheless, still in the service of allegory and narrative painting.

13. David Alfaro Siqueiros. *Collective Suicide*. 1936. Enamel on wood with applied sections, 49" × 6' (124.5 × 182.9 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Dr. Gregory Zilboorg

Undoubtedly, there has not been an artist in all of Latin American art who is, at the same time, as spectral and retinal as, paradoxically, Reverón. He painted what he saw in a ghostly register, in both meanings of the word: what is left of the world as a specter before the potency of light or the uncertainty of shadows, and what is left of desire faced with the instability of its objects—concrete and carnal bodies, beautiful or wrinkled, raw more than nude, confined in seclusion, sleep, or distance. One could even argue that his repertoire of objects replicates utilitarian or symbolic things from the real world just as specters replicate bodies, just as ghosts replicate real beings (pages 14, 207).[27] The coarseness of these objects, which sometimes reaches the limits of caricature, does not mitigate their ghostly status: they are the ghosts of chalices, crowns, faces; they are the masks of things. As in a nightmare or a dream, their borders enlarge the contours of the real beings they represent. They are thus broader, thicker, more wrinkled than real things: they are the deformation of things. In contrast to most of the luminist tradition in the West, the light that blurs history in Reverón's work—the same one that veils the rottenness of the world—also leads painting to its body, its matter, its thickness.

The coincidence is, thus, significant: the year that Gómez died—1935—was at the very end of Reverón's white period. Another world begins, closer to the weave of the canvas, closer to its nakedness, to its rawness. After a brief period devoted to the production of wash drawings on paper made with very quick strokes, Reverón, between 1936 and 1940, tackled a series devoted to a repertoire of naked women, in groups or alone, *mestizas* (mixed races) or with indigenous features, some of them even *indiatids*, many of them expectant when not drowsing.

In one of these works, *Five Figures* (1939; page 149), Reverón constructs an almost frontal scene in which all the characters appear rapt in their lifeless gazes—perhaps dolls in the place of women—and in the background one can see a male presence, almost a specter, that evokes the figure of a painter in the act of producing his work. These women's emblems point to Reverón's obsession with feathers and

14. Juanita Ríos with Indian headdress. Archivo Boulton, Alberto Vollmer Foundation, Inc.

indigenous ornaments, as can be seen in some of the photographs taken in his studio of real models posing for him (fig. 14). However, the scene in *Five Figures* is, like all of Reverón's works, at once transparent and opaque: it is clear in its references and emblems but ambiguous in its sense. If we are correct in seeing a painter in the specter of the male figure, then one can argue that this is a scene of generation, genesic. This would be the only painting by Reverón in which the very act of painting is represented: a picture about the picture, a painting about painting. The models' emblems are strategically located over their genitals; feathers on the head of one woman, which resemble brushes, cover the other one's genitals; a standing figure holds a container with something like a stump in it in front of her genitals; and one of the reclining *majas* has hers covered by flowers of various colors in what looks like a palette. A mysterious angular face in profile, done entirely in grisaille, at the top right edge of the canvas, marks the painting's central axis, which coincides with the reclining *majas'* breasts. This stand-in for the viewer in the painting, pointing at the *majas'* breasts with his eyes, and the painter's implements over the models' genitals both support the hypothesis that this is a scene in which the production of painting acquires sexual, matrocentric, matricial connotations. It is women who here give birth to painting and, with their real bodies and symbolic emblems, stand in for the very light—object of Reverón's obsession—that makes the visible possible.

There are few works produced in Latin America during the first half of the twentieth century as clearly self-referential as *Five Figures*. What we have called the persistence of symbolic strategies in the various abstract and figurative mural images, as well as in the numerous realist, social, or indigenist movements, is proportionate to the primacy of contents and meanings that prevailed in Latin American art during the first half of the twentieth century. These contents and messages are what Reverón's work suspends: they are veiled by the fog of his hazy paintings from the 1920s and are later mitigated in something of a threshold between the opacity and the transparency of his facture, between landscapes and figures confused with each other, between the figures and indiscernible objects with their strange and unsettling juxtapositions in Reverón's later work.

Iconographically, Reverón's *majas* from the 1930s respond to the canon of indigenism and the representation of *mestizaje* so characteristic of Latin American art of that time.[28] *The Woman of the River* (page 147) and *The Maja* (fig. 15), for example, share an iconographic repertoire with works like Francisco Narváez's *Surima* (fig. 16) and exhibit great similarities with elements present in early Mexican muralism—for example, in the work of artists like Roberto Montenegro, among others (fig. 17). From the point of view of facture, however, Reverón tones down emblems, confuses signs, allows the ambiguity of shadows to fall on his figures, shrouding them in mystery. It is as if the models' nakedness also had an effect on the themes: a stripped-down indigenism, without emphasis,

top, left and right:

15. Armando Reverón. *The Maja*. c. 1939. Oil on canvas, 41 5/8 × 55 5/8" (105.7 × 141.2 cm). Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

16. Francisco Narváez. *Surima*. 1948. Stone from Cumarebo, 26 9/16 × 52 3/4 × 21 1/4" (67.5 × 134 × 54 cm). Collection Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, Caracas

bottom, left and right:

17. Roberto Montenegro. *The Fiesta of Santa Cruz* (detail). 1923–24. Fresco. Colegio Máximo de San Pedro y San Pablo, Mexico

18. José Sabogal. *Young Girl from Ayacucho*. 1937. Oil on wood, 30 × 30" (76.2 × 76.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Inter-American Fund

imprecise. The fact that these Indian women or *majas* are represented in the intimacy of their rooms or in front of an indefinable landscape—not, as in the paintings of Eduardo Kingman or José Sabogal, in light of the confident decorum of their sociohistorical identity (fig. 18) and without the imposing stony and hieratic consistency of Vicente do Rego Monteiro's figures—contributes to this stripped-down effect, this suspension of meaning.

The culminating work of this period is probably the painting entitled *The Creole "Maja"* (1939; page 145), which shows three characters and might be one of the rare scenes in the series of *maja* paintings—perhaps the only one, together with *Five Figures*—with a male figure. It is, however, difficult to assert anything about these characters with certainty. An authorized version—by Alfredo Boulton—maintains that one of the two reclining figures is the artist himself, dressed like an Indian, with feathers and flower arrangements on his head and genitals, sleeping next to the *maja* who has her back turned to him.[29] If this interpretation is correct, it might then be possible to link this work to two great themes in Western painting, which would make it an extraordinarily rare example in modern Latin American

art: the representation of the sleeping or pensive artist in his imaginary, personal Arcadia that suggests a tropical version of *Et in Arcadia Ego*, in which sleep would be a portent of death;[30] and the Christic theme of the sepulcher and the women at its edge who guard it or discover it as the place of a monumental absence, as the *locus* of an indecipherable message.[31]

I think one can confidently make the argument that Reverón identifies himself iconographically with the figure of Christ in some of his works. The bearded figure in the painting entitled *Old Man, Three Women, and a Child* (1948; page 177)[32]—a male doll whose appearance suggests that this is a kind of veiled self-portrait—is a clear variation on the Catholic iconography of the suffering Christ, common in churches and chapels throughout Latin America.[33] Whatever the case, in *The Creole "Maja,"* an indigenous Lazarus wrapped in his blanket of shadows and another *maja* with her head adorned with feathers seem to be part of a composition that represents the three races. The figure at the right edge, sitting on a stool—perhaps a drum—would be the black woman, keeping vigil; the cautionary *maja* who reveals her full naked body and looks at us with her face surrounded with the useless extremities of a caryatid, or *indiatid*, is the white or *mestiza*; and the Indian—the cacique in the background with his genitals covered with blooming shadows—is Reverón himself or, failing that, the other *maja*, the Indian, Creole *maja*. [34]

If *Five Figures* is a work about the genesis of painting, *The Creole "Maja"* is one about the genesis of community, about the confused silence of skins, genders, races. Fog turns into shadow in Reverón's painting to subtly reveal his white mass hidden beneath its glare: namely, that we were two, reclining one before the other, without seeing one another, and that we were thus already everyone, subject to the same regime of shadows—and lights—that resist the visible, that erect it as a density whose full transparency is impossible to attain. This density of desire or dreams is, after all, that of melancholy.

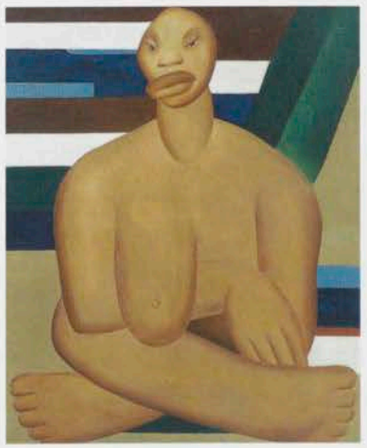
In the 1930s Reverón painted his Arcadias. In them, the models' bodies have already devoured the landscape. They are women who wait, alone in spite of their company. Both themes, waiting and solitude, are linked to the representation of melancholy so common in European painting between the wars. According to Jean Clair, "It always involves a still and pensive female figure, lost in thought apparently without object."[35] Themes and memories of incommensurable antiquity survive in these works by Reverón; they become living memory in the heart of the present, "very ancient psychic times" of a fundamentally climatic painting.[36] Thus, what infuses life into this reappearance is not nostalgia, and what grants it visibility is not the mere will to remember but, strictly speaking, the effort expended by the appearance of forms, lured in like figures of desire and substantiated in painting with all their power to seduce or dazzle—that is, in their excess and overflow—merging into the single warm mass of a living being, and disturbing the distinctions of reason, experience, memory. These forms fuse into each other, like monsters in which opposites coexist, confusing borders, skins, genders, races into a single sleeping, mindful presence.

The iconography of dreams

The theme of the three races is emblematic of Latin American art from the first half of the twentieth century: from Rivera to Sabogal, from Emilio di Cavalcanti and Tarsila do Amaral to Francisco Narváez, from Lasar Segall to Pedro Centeno Vallenilla, a great number of artists have been drawn to the representation of the races associated with American *mestizaje*, to the figures of the Indian and the black (figs. 19–21). It is, however, significant that in addition to the sfumato and the shadows that envelop them, the profiles of these figures merge in Reverón's work. The retinal dissolution of forms in his white paintings, though still present in his work from the 1930s, furthermore assumes an involuntary ideological dimension. In those works, the nakedness of the pose, the expressionless absorption of certain faces, the hieratic anticipation of some bodies, the contrast between the carnal distention of the pose and the schematic representation of the gaze in this stripped-down indigenism all prevail over the race represented, over the emblems of the Indian woman or the cacique. Reclining or recumbent figures and scenes in which figures are sleeping or drowsing abound (pages 142, 148).

One could argue that after the *inscription* of the fog that marked Reverón's works from the 1920s, he produced an iconography of dreams, of sleep. As in the famous "little scarp of a thing they call *El sueño* [*The Dream*]" written by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz in seventeenth-century Mexico, in Reverón's paintings of the 1930s "the diurnal animals flee and give way to shadows and nyctalopes, initiating the secret, belabored processes of dreams," to borrow José Lezama Lima's description of Sor Juana's *First Dream*.[37]

Reverón painted both things: the abrupt fall of nature into day in the form of a sleepless sunlight and "nature's first withdrawal into night," which is dreaming or melancholy somnolence. It is true that in many of his landscapes a violent figure, a tail of light, a whiplash emerging from the shadows of dawn or dusk amid the confusion of darkness and sfumatos will sometimes



19. Lasar Segall. *Black Mother*. 1930. Oil on canvas, 28 7/8 × 23 5/8" (73 × 60 cm). Private collection

20. Tarsila do Amaral. *A Negra*. 1923. Oil on canvas, 39 3/8 × 31 1/2" (100 × 80 cm). Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil

21. Francisco Narváez. *Cacao*. 1938. Mahogony, 7' 3 3/8" × 31 1/2" × 31 1/2" (222 × 80 × 80 cm). Collection Liceo Fermin Toro, Caracas

stand out, but for the most part all of his landscapes, especially those from the 1930s and 1940s, are nebulous, unfocused vistas that seem to emerge in the threshold that separates vigil from sleep and its stupor.

Reverón's painting seems executed by half-open eyes, clouded by sleep. However, sfumatos and shadows have a materializing function. What becomes evident in those knots of confusion, in those black or greenish clouds that constitute the body of the trees and the spine of the mountains is, once again, the thickness of painting, its earthly elements. *El Playón* from 1942 (page 155) is a prime example: the vegetation—sea grapes and coconut palms—is figured by tornados, by small pigmentary storms. The canvas seems to have been torn and perhaps repaired by the artist before beginning his painting: a knot, a thick seam that can be seen in the back of the painting protrudes to the surface. On this bulge in the painting, on this rough seam, Reverón represents the landscape's most luminous point, the sun. This results in a paradoxical lucidity: the artist has depicted the most distant natural object in the landscape on the protuberance that constitutes the closest point in the painting to our eye. The light and the landscape's remoteness, which are here, as in most of Reverón's work, perfectly concentrated in a violent instant, are meant to bring us closer to the materiality of painting, to reveal the closeness of its making to an object, its most intimate texture.

This materialization of painting is not opposed to the melancholy nature of these works. The views of the harbor, the beaches, even the scenes of industrial mills contain glimpses of a gaze engrossed in the immensity of nature, in the elusiveness of bodies, in the corroboration of a world inhabited by shadows, as if these were the internalized images of a dream. In this sense, they parallel the systematic protagonism of sleeping figures in Reverón's work of the 1930s, which in 1939 Mariano Picón-Salas had already identified with the generic name *Sleeping Venuses*.[38]

Perhaps, then, Reverón's painting is closer to a certain poetic impulse than to the work of his contemporaries producing art in Latin America. There are, in Reverón's work, distant, eloquent, and memorable echoes of an old, Hispanic tradition that sees the world as a kind of dream, which in America made its first and most brilliant appearance in Sor Juana's well-known poem. During the 1930s and 1940s, a general impulse was driving Latin American poetry toward undertakings similar to the ones Reverón had embarked on: a reencounter with the memory of the past embodied in verses and figures; a rereading of the traditions of the Spanish Golden Age; a renaissance of the theme of the melancholy Eros; and the resurgence of figures such as Francisco de Quevedo y Villegas and Luis de Góngora y Argote.[39]

Reverón's work might have more in common with the Venezuelan poets in the group *Viernes*, with the Mexican poets in the group *Contemporáneos*, with the Cuban poets in the group *Orígenes*, and in particular with José Lezama Lima than with his contemporary painters and sculptors. The trajectory from the 1920s nocturnes to the saturated and phantasmagoric scenes of the 1940s in Reverón's painting is almost perfectly described by Vicente Gerbasi's well-known verse: "We come

from night and toward night we go."[40] I cannot find anything in Latin American art of his time that comes closer to Reverón's painting, from his white blindness to the yearning melancholy of his final work, than these four verses by the Mexican poet José Gorostiza: "You are contained, oh Form, in the sumptuous/ wall of foam incarnate that you raise against/ both fog's dark hunger and the touch/ that erects you, luminous."[41]

The blinding effect of Reverónian light and the figures of dreams are both related to the famous myth of Phaeton, who was cast down by the sun and whose presence is key in Sor Juana's text, which inaugurates the tradition of the dream in Latin America: a solar holocaust of knowledge leads to melancholy and translates into absorption, into silences and distances. Reverón's images are thus distant not only because they tackle oceanic vastness or towering, mountainous volumes of shadows but because—with the exception of his later works, drawings laden with figures of desire and with his own face—they relinquish all desire to possess, to encompass. They are the ghosts that surround us, which we can seize by viewing them against the light—the trick of their shadows—in the ephemeral moment they present themselves.

That was also the time of a real holocaust. In his Macuto refuge, with the walls of El Castillete made higher every day, after a major psychological crisis sparked in 1942 by the death of his mother, Reverón could not have been indifferent to war, to Europe's struggle, to the hell that covered the planet with its frenzy for death. The dolls must have been produced during these troubled times in which the world's anxiety arrived like a weak and distant voice through the radio waves that reached Reverón's house. In contrast to Orozco, who explicitly painted war like a crushing and deafening machine, Reverón sunk into the melancholy of his inanimate rag dolls, into the coarse silence of his objects. The echo of destruction translates, once again, into figures of melancholy and, whenever Reverón represented his dolls as *majas*, into the uncertainty produced by the inability to determine whether a being is living or inanimate, a friend or a stranger.[42]

Perhaps the same year that Orozco was painting *Dive Bomber and Tank* for The Museum of Modern Art (fig. 22), Reverón had begun tackling a major project together with his partner Juanita Ríos, sewing an object at once domestic and enigmatic: *The Mantilla* (fig. 23). This was a typically Spanish, Goyaesque piece of clothing to which Reverón must have felt close because of his obvious interest in Spanish painting and his passion for bullfights, for which women dress up in mantillas and embroidered silk shawls to celebrate the bullfighters. Crudely woven, *The Mantilla* depicts the Bolívar plaza in Caracas, with its trees and the cathedral's clock tower marking ten minutes after the hour of the Angelus. In the midst of this vernacular scene, animated by peaceful activities, one can see the enormous airplanes, the paratroopers, the bombs falling like the specters of a war at once close and distant. Reverón might have heard the mournful account of the invasion of Holland or the brutal destruction of London. Absolute exteriority—war—presents itself in the central coordinates of the vernacular, the main plaza of an innocent and pastoral city, Caracas. Absolute exteriority—the

22. José Clemente Orozco. *Dive Bomber and Tank*. 1940. Fresco, six panels, each 9' × 36" (275 × 91.4 cm); overall 9 × 18' (275 × 550 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Commissioned through the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Fund

light of history, as blinding as Caribbean light but in another sense—is engraved on a black object that serves simultaneously as a veil and as a shelter.

It is this transformation of what is exterior and past into an intimate and immediate body that defines the entirety of Reverón's work. This effort to represent his own Arcadia is what distinguishes his work from other art of his time, which had become an echo of history's worldly chaos. Reverón countered this in his works with impotence, or the arsenal of melancholy, the refuge of sleep, and the certainty that the world is one of its most persistent specters. One could say that, besieged by the clamor of the news and the uncontrollable rumbling of his ill mind, Reverón was again witnessing the attacks of the world's rottenness. This time he would not counter it with a veil of white fog, but with the inwardness manifest in his obsessive self-portraits with dolls. Against the world's destruction, he set a constructed image of himself, the trace of his reflection on the mirror of his inner world, of his ghosts. Against a crumbling planet, submerged in the shipwreck of its *concoctions*, he set a *raw* art of primordial, elemental, grotesque objects—a world of masks to cover one's face and to hide one's body in simulacra.

The signs and symptoms of melancholy in Reverón's visual repertoire from the 1930s to his death still need to be studied. These include the recurring figure of a reclining, pensive woman with her hand on her cheek. In contrast to one of the *majas* in *Two Indians* (1939; page 148), which clearly responds to this contemplative iconography, *Nude* (1939; page 144) seems more relaxed, distended. The head, nevertheless, rests on the left hand in a clear variation of melancholy iconography. John Elderfield has pointed to the similarities between the figure created by the shadow of the cot in *Nude* and the *Bat Wings*, which Reverón held among his most precious objects (page 197). There are no instruments of the active life in this painting. In contrast to Albrecht Dürer's famous image of melancholy (*Melencolia I*), Reverón's melancholy is naked and alone. However, if its shadow coincides with the form of *Bat Wings*, Reverón's *Nude* would include one of the ancient emblems of melancholy: an "immobile winged figure intent on its own phantasms." Like a "meditating angel," *Nude*, which is similar to

23. Armando Reverón. *The Mantilla* (*Plaza Bolívar*). n.d. Cellophane paper, kraft paper, adhesive tape, and embroidery. 56 1/2" × 6' 11" (143.5 × 210.5 cm). Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

other melancholy figures and landscapes by Reverón, corresponds to the emblem of an artist consumed by a contemplative impulse transformed into violent sexual desire in the "attempt, at the limit of an essential psychic risk, to give body to his own fantasies and to master in an artistic practice what would otherwise be impossible to be seized or known," constituting an "epiphany of the unattainable" through his rigorous melancholy semblance.[43]

24. Joaquín Torres-García. *Universal Construction/Form 140*. 1929. Oil and tempera paint on assembled wood, $11\,^{3}/_{8} \times 18\,^{7}/_{8} \times 3\,^{7}/_{8}$" (28.7 × 47.5 × 9.3 cm). Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid

The madman and the modern legacy

Hounded by melancholy and by schizophrenia, Reverón was already known as "Macuto's madman" by 1945. The photographic documents of the time—eloquent in this respect—reveal his troubled state. His work attests to a strange form of lucidity and seems to have been his last defense against the shipwreck of reason. Not without sarcasm, Reverón assumed the role of the madman, and produced the figures and forms that have since ancient times symbolized madness in the West. While still a refuge, El Castillete, with its panoply of ironic and silent objects, is also in many respects an inverted image of the world. Among the inhabitants of that compound, Reverón seems to have lavished special attention on his monkeys, for whom he created costumes inspired in his two favorite Goyaesque figures: the painter and the matador. Of his many objects and masks there still exists a *Head of Monkey* (page 203), in which Reverón mysteriously inserted a heavy stone. This enigmatic and monstrous figure calls up paintings by Hieronymous Bosch that depict the extraction of the stone of madness.

Other Latin American artists also produced objects that, like Reverón's, have a certain rustic quality. Among them, one can again mention Torres-García, whose Constructivism was at its most original in the rustic assemblages of wood clearly related to his toys and furniture (fig. 24). Xul Solar also produced cryptic objects in which a playful intelligence is juxtaposed with the formal enigmas that so fascinated Jorges Luis Borges (fig. 25). However, I do not see the primal and sarcastic power, the inverted and perturbed reason that Reverónian objects exude, in any of them.[44]

In 1945 Alejandro Otero—the most talented of the young Venezuelan artists at the time, whose ambition to achieve an art that aimed for universality led him to disregard local traditions—decided to spend his last hours in Venezuela visiting Reverón's El Castillete before embarking on the boat that

25. Xul Solar. *Pan Juego y Marioneta I Ching*. c. 1950. Wood and painted metal. Dimensions variable. Collection Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, Caracas

would take him to Paris.[45] There they met, two individuals who knew and appreciated each other but whom not only age separated: Otero had adopted the French artist Paul Cézanne as a model and would soon create the first nonobjective works of Venezuelan art, whereas Reverón was completely indifferent to the sirens of modernity. Since 1926 he had, paradoxically, produced the first manifestation of a structurally modern painting in Venezuela. Macuto's El Castillete thus became the meeting ground for the young, voracious, and deliberately modern artist and the hermit of Venezuelan painting, the brilliant and sarcastic madman, who, from the most unexpected and local coordinates, has, perhaps involuntarily, come to embody modernity in his land. The drive toward a universal manifesto and a rejection of the vernacular meets, face to face, with the intuition of an artist whose local decisions, in something of an amnesia of the world, have succeeded in materializing an undecipherable form of modernity in the tropics.

The years from 1945 to 1951, in Argentina and Uruguay, in Brazil and Venezuela, in Mexico and Cuba, witnessed the emergence of a constellation of artists and movements that echoed nonobjective forms produced in the early twentieth century by the European avant-gardes, thus granting them continuity and ushering in a powerful reemergence of Concrete and Constructive art in Latin America. To this end, they all violently rejected figuration and landscape and categorically rejected local artistic precedents. While Tomás Maldonado stigmatized Torres-García in the magazine *Arturo*, accusing him of still being a nineteenth-century artist, the young Otero, already in Paris at that point, was writing against his predecessors' legacy of landscape painting in the first issue of the magazine *Los Disidentes*: "We do not believe in that tradition. And if it exists, it is so full of vices, so compromised if seen with rigorous eyes, that we find all attempts at praise wrong and counterproductive. Even if we take the best of cases, Reverón, his is an impressionist painting and thus offers us no more than a visual aesthetic that is today sixty-seven years behind the times."[46]

In 1952, in Paris, Otero was producing his white monochromatic paintings entitled *Colored Lines on White Ground*, which, despite his statements, take up Reverón's lesson by investigating, by different means, how the disaggregation of the visible underscores the flat materiality of painting (fig. 26). That same year, also in Paris, Soto was studying the principles of Concrete music and produced the best and most radical nonobjective works ever created by a Latin American artist, on a par with the explorations of his friends, the musician Pierre Boulez and the sculptor Jean Tinguely (fig. 27). Neither Soto nor Otero identified with the precedent set by Reverón. In the letters that Boulton and Otero exchanged during those years, both expressed reservations about the work that Reverón was producing at the time. It was difficult for them to distinguish a cipher of modernity in the self-portraits with dolls, in the grotesque effigy of *Niza* (1940s; page 209), in the almost *costumbrista* depiction of *Christmas Scene with Dolls* (1949; page 179). What we have called the Reverónian problem of modernity in Venezuela lies in this failure to recognize the modern as it arose in Reverón's unexpected forms and figures.

All the protagonists of abstraction in Venezuela were disciples of the landscape painters who shared the Escuela de Arte's classrooms with Reverón in the early twentieth century. These masters—Manuel Cabré, Antonio Edmundo Monsanto, Rafael Monasterios, and Pedro Angel González—always recognized the superiority and the invaluable strangeness of Reverón's work. They were the ones who visited Reverón frequently and invited him to Caracas to present his work to young students. Imbued with the language of Concrete art, the young men who gathered in the Taller Libre de Arte, where the works of Madí and Arte Concreto Invención were shown—among them Otero, Carlos Cruz-Diez, Omar Carreño, Alirio Oramas, and Pascual Navarro—always maintained an admiring and reverent attitude toward the eccentric figure of Reverón.[47] But, at the time, very few understood that, much before their manifestoes and abstractions were created, modernity had found an organic niche in the works of Reverón—both in their pictorial nature and in their quality as objects, as well as in the objecthood of his art practice.

One would have to oppose a deliberate modernity, the decision to be modern at all costs that can be read in Concrete and Neoconcrete manifestoes, in the magazines *Los Disidentes* and *Revisto Arturo* and in Madí's texts, with an involuntary, residual modernity, which Reverón embodied in an exemplary fashion. His amnesia of the world did not encompass the past, judging from the antique and archaic motifs in his works, nor was his an amnesia of the demanding historical circumstances in which he decided to produce his work. One cannot read the will to produce a modern manifesto in any of his factual artistic decisions, but they all—and this is what gives rise to the unprecedented form of his works—coalesced into an unmistakably modern painting. One could say that modernity in Reverón has been the residue of these decisions: something of an added value that was not intentionally sought by the artist, but whose effects—iconographic disaggregation, the ostentation of flat surfaces and textures, the materialization of pictorial devices—are unmistakably modern. In the context of Venezuelan art during the first half of the twentieth century, and in the context of modernity in Latin America, Reverón's work functions, then, like an irrefutably modern invention.

Perhaps those who judged Reverón from the standpoint of a modern artistic ideology and resisted incorporating him or showing his works together with the corpus of modern art of his time did not see his work in the same light. In this respect, Fredric Jameson established a useful distinction

26. Alejandro Otero. *Colored Lines on White Ground*. 1950. Oil on canvas, 51 1/4 × 38 1/4" (130.2 × 97.2 cm). Collection Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, Caracas

27. Jesús Soto. *Rotation*. 1952. Oil on plywood, 39 5/8 × 39 5/8 × 3" (100.5 × 100.5 × 7.5 cm). Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

between the ideology of the modern, brought to consciousness by the artists of late modernity, and classical modernity, to which Reverón undoubtedly belongs and which is still a collective and even unconscious task. "What we are now calling the ideology of modernism must be thought of as an ideological project, on which any number of individuals have labored collectively, without necessarily being aware of the historic task in which they are severally involved. More than that, it must be seen as a project that re-emerges over and over again with the various national situations as a specific and unique national-literary task or imperative, whose cross-cultural kinship with its neighbors is not always evident (either at home or abroad)."[48]

Reverón produced a modern corpus, like all other artists of classical modernity, through what Jameson calls an "untheorized and nameless practice" and not through an infatuation with "the status of the artist as modernist," which "involves a constant and self-conscious return to art about art, and art about the creation of art."[49] In this sense, he is no different from his modern counterparts, except for the fact that in his work there is no trace of the will to power that accompanied the great manifestoes of modernity in Latin America, no trace of a messianic figure, no prophetic gesture, no judgment. Secluded within the thick foliage of El Castillete's walls, protected from the Caribbean light by the shadows of the canopy he never stopped painting, building fortresses out of erotic and Arcadian dreams to defend himself from the noise of history, Reverón opted for *poiesis*, not for *praxis*, in the Ancient Greek meaning of the terms. His was not an art of action, the "manifestation of a will that produces a concrete effect," but an art of production in the presence of something that "passed from nonbeing to being, from concealment into the full light of the work."[50]

Notes

I wish to thank Catalina Ocampo for her sensitive translation of this text from the Spanish.

1. Also known as *Women in the Cave*. See Juan Calzadilla, *Armando Reverón* (Caracas: Ernesto Armitano Editor, 1979), 36, 286.
2. Joan Bergós, *Gaudí: The Man and His Work*, trans. Gerardo Denis (Boston: Bulfinch Press, 1999), 35. Quoted in Narcís Comadira, "Torres-García en la configuración del Noucentisme" in *Joaquín Torres-García 1874–1949* (Barcelona: Museu Picasso, Institut de Cultura de Barcelona, 2003), 48.
3. These three periods were identified and described by scholar and historian Alfredo Boulton. Reverón was a fundamentally achromatic painter whose palette was extremely limited during long periods of time, and it seems paradoxical to describe his production in chromatic terms, which no doubt underestimates more fundamental structural and compositional as well as anthropological aspects. Before Boulton, Mariano Picón-Salas touched on some of these aspects. The simplicity of Boulton's categorization does, however, have a practical advantage when establishing chronological limits on the artist's production. Juan Calzadilla, Juan Liscano, Miguel Arroyo, José Balza, and the author of this essay, among others, have all proposed approaches that complement Boulton's periodizations. See Alfredo Boulton, "Armando Reverón o la voluptuosidad de la pintura," in *Exposición retrospectiva de Armando Reverón* (Caracas: Museo de Bellas Artes, 1955), 7–14, and Alfredo Boulton, *Reverón* (Caracas: Ediciones Macanao, 1979), 120–49; Mariano Picón-Salas, "Armando Reverón," in *Obras selectas* (Caracas: Edime, 1962), 329–38; Calzadilla, *Armando Reverón*, 37; Juan Calzadilla, "Reverón: Su universo como idioma," in *Armando Reverón: Luz y cálida sombra del Caribe*. (Caracas: Fundación Museo Armando Reverón, 1996), 61; Juan Liscano, *El erotismo creador de Armando Reverón* (Caracas: Galería de Arte Nacional, 1994); Miguel Arroyo, "El puro mirar de Reverón," in *Armando Reverón (1889–1954): Exposición Antológica* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 1992), 177; José Balza, *Análogo, simultáneo* (Caracas: Galería de Arte Nacional, 1983), 11–53; and Luis Pérez-Oramas, *La cocina de Jurassic Park y otros ensayos visuales* (Caracas: Fundación Polar, 1998), 143–224.
4. In 1934, Joaquín Torres-García returned to Uruguay after having spent more than forty years in Europe. (He was born in Uruguay in 1874.) Surrounded by followers and art students attending his studio (El Taller Torres-García), the Uruguayan master saw his influence spread from his native country to Argentina, constituting the seminal core of constructive tendencies that followed the model set by his art and writings, known today under the general denomination, Escuela del Sur. By 1944, however, some of the young nonobjective artists in Montevideo and Buenos Aires began to react against Torres-García, considering his art still framed in a nineteenth-century pictorial and symbolist-driven aesthetics. Most of their criticism was grounded in his refusal to recognize absolute nonobjective forms and his determination to maintain iconic elements in his version of Constructivism. Groups such as Madí, whose creation was announced in the first issue of *Revista Arturo* (*Arturo Magazine*) in 1944, and Arte Concreto Invención followed a more radical approach to abstraction, being the first to practice an absolute nonobjective abstraction in the Americas.
5. Regarding the uncertainty of things in his perception within the context of modern painting, see Joachim Gasquet, *Cézanne* (Paris: Bernheim Jeune, 1921), 93.
6. See Luis Pérez-Oramas, "Armando Reverón: El lugar autobiográfico," in *Primer simposio internacional Armando Reverón: Ponencias* (Caracas: Proyecto Armando Reverón, 2001), 135–68.
7. See Boulton, *Reverón* (1979), 187–90.
8. Ibid., 189.
9. Ibid., 91-92; Calzadilla, *Armando Reverón*, 24.
10. See Picón-Salas, "Armando Reverón," 335.
11. See Boulton, *Reverón* (1979), 90.
12. See Maria-Joseph Balsach, *Modernismo e Avanguardia: Picasso, Miró, Dalí e la pittura catalana* (Milan: Skira, 2003), 90.
13. Ibid., 104.
14. See Boulton, *Reverón* (1979), 94–95, and this volume, pages 119–21.
15. See M. Luïsa Faxedas, "Dementi, belle di notte e paesaggio catalano: pittori di fine secolo tra modernismo e noucentisme," in Balsach, *Modernismo e Avanguardia*, 58: "Il noucentisme sarà predominante in Catalogna fino al 1923, anche se il momento di massima forza si conclude, probabilmente, nel 1917. Così come ha in d'Ors il suo principale teorico, ha anche i suoi pittore di riferimento, in particolare Joaquim Sunyer e Joaquin Torres-García." ["*Noucentisme* was prevalent in Catalonia until 1923, although its heyday probably came to an end in 1917. Just as it had a principal theorist in d'Ors, so did it have its set of key artists—Joaquim Sunyer and Joaquín Torres-García in particular."]
16. Comadira, "Torres-García en la configuración del Noucentisme," 53.
17. See Luis Pérez-Oramas, "The Cisneros Collection: From Landscape to Location," in Yve-Alain Bois et al., *Geometric Abstraction: Latin American Art from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection* (Cambridge: Harvard University Art Museums, 2001), 47–50.
18. Joaquín Torres-García, "El nuevo arte de América," in *La Escuela del Sur: El Taller Torres-García y su legado* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 1991), 57.
19. See Walter Benjamin, "Painting, or Signs and Marks" (1917), in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 83–86.
20. The place was so called because of the presence of a humble "*pulpería*," or convenience store

that supplied Reverón with the food and household goods to meet his daily needs. This cryptic denomination had given rise to countless interpretations. *Las Quince Letras* means The Fifteen Letters. In Spanish, the nominal phrase *"Las Quince Letras"* happens to have fifteen letters. *Tu Bishat* is the fifteenth of the month *Shebat*, the end of the Hebrew winter, celebrated as the New Year of the Tree, which promises abundance of fruits during the coming summer. The Cabalistic value of *Tu Bishat* is known to be fifteen letters. If the modest food store near El Castillete was owned by a Jewish merchant, which was very common at that time, its name could have been a cryptic figure of this Hebrew tradition. By naming his *pulpería* Las Quince Letras, he might have intended to make it a permanent evocation of the New Year of the Tree.

21. On the "Adamic" dimension of Reverón's workshop, see Luis Pérez-Oramas, "Armando Reverón: La gruta de los objetos y la escena satírica," in *Armando Reverón: El lugar de los objetos* (Caracas: Galería de Arte Nacional, 2001), 13–43, and Joseph Rykwert, *La casa de Adán en el Paraíso* (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1974).
22. For a discussion of Reverón's "white paintings" in light of his structural achromatism and its modern effects, see John Elderfield, "The Self-Portrait Drawings of Armando Reverón," *Master Drawings* 40, no. 1 (spring 2002): 25–26, and "El espejo," in *Armando Reverón: El lugar de los objetos* (Caracas: Galería de Arte Nacional, 2001), 93–94.
23. This formalist approach was embodied in *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde in Latin America*, curated by Mari Carmen Ramírez and Héctor Olea at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, in 2004. Unfortunately devoid of any critical apparatus that discusses it in the exhibition catalogue, this approach can only be judged as a visual essay in the iconography of said catalogue. See Ramírez and Olea, *Inverted Utopias*, 265.
24. For facts on Reverón's life, see Boulton, *Reverón* (1979), 188.
25. See Manuel Caballero, *Gómez, el tirano liberal: Anatomía del poder* (Caracas: Alfadil Editores, 2003). The term "liberal," in this case, does not have the progressive connotations it tends to carry in the United States. Juan Vicente Gómez seized power by authoritarian means, and embodied an unyielding pursuit of order associated with a certain idea of material "progress" during the nineteenth century. Gómez defeated the last "revolutionaries" of the nineteenth century militarily, and centralized power in his own person with the aid of a generation of intellectuals who had ties to literary "modernism" and to nineteenth-century liberal "progressiveness." Eurocentric, vehemently against Spain, and strongly sympathetic to France, these individuals were opposed to the legacy left by the heirs of the old "conservative" party and were known as liberals.
26. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Story of Lynx*, trans. Catherine Tihanyi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 8, 76. I owe this association of Reverón's white works with the myths of fog and mist, as well as the reference to Lévi-Strauss, to an observation by Paulo Mendes da Rocha, who was in charge of museography for the XXIV São Paulo Biennial, for which I organized an exhibition of Armando Reverón's work.
27. For an instrumental and symbolic classification of Reverón's objects in the context of modern art, see Elderfield, "El espejo," 110, and Elderfield, "Las irredentas," in *Primer simposio internacional Armando Reverón: Ponencias* (Caracas: Proyecto Armando Reverón, 2001), 13–50.
28. See Carlos Silva, "A la luz de la verdad," in *Salón Nacional de Pintura: Homenaje al centenario del natalicio de Armando Reverón* (Caracas: Fundarte and Museo de Arte La Rinconada, 1989), 19–21.
29. See Boulton, *Reverón* (1979), 132. I owe the association between this male figure and the artist to Alfredo Boulton, who suggested it in the late 1980s while we were both looking at the piece in his private collection.
30. See Luis Pérez-Oramas, "Armando Reverón y el arte moderno," in *Armando Reverón (1889–1954): Exposición Antológica* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 1992), 65–66.
31. See Pérez-Oramas, "Armando Reverón: La gruta de los objetos," 34–38.
32. This work, acquired in 1994 by the Museo Armando Reverón, dates to 1948. A very similar work, which shows a rigorous *iteration* of its theme, was recently discovered in a private collection in the United States. For the links between Reverón's objects—his dolls in particular—and the tradition of ritual and processional figures harking back to colonial times, see Elderfield, "The Self-Portrait Drawings," 13–18.
33. See Luis Pérez-Oramas, "El anciano y el escarnio," in *Adquisición reciente: Anciano, tres mujeres y niño, 1948* (Caracas: Fundación Museo Armando Reverón, 1995), 8–13.
34. I owe this allegorical reading of race in *The Creole "Maja,"* as well as important insights into Reverón's works, to my friend, the architect and anthropologist Carlos Peña Plaza. The Venezuelans, artist Angel Hurtado and critic Perán Erminy, both of whom were close to Reverón, have confirmed on various occasions that the artist himself referred to *The Creole "Maja"*—a title assigned by Alfredo Boulton—as *The Three Races*.
35. Jean Clair, *Malinconia: Motifs saturniens dans l'art de l'entre-deux-guerres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 80.
36. Ibid., 78.
37. The full phrase by Sor Juana in her "Response to the Very Illustrious 'Sor Philotea'" (1690) reads: "I cannot recall having written anything for my own pleasure except a little scarp of a thing they call *El sueño* [The dream]." Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *Selected Writings*, trans. Pamela Kirk Rappaport (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 286; José Lezama Lima, *La expresión americana* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2005), 107–08; quote translated by Catalina Ocampo.

38. See Picón-Salas, "Armando Reverón," 336.
39. "Because Reverón's works made after the white landscapes call upon the modalities of classical pictorial representation, they have been thought to be more conservative. It would be better to say that they are more traditional, for it is indeed true, and a matter of some importance, that with these late works Reverón reattached himself to the history of art. He did so, however, not for reasons of sentiment or nostalgia, but because his art required that attachment—because classical pictorial representation brought a needed amplitude and complexity to his modernism." Elderfield, "The Self-Portrait Drawings," 33–34.
40. Vicente Gerbasi, *Mi padre el inmigrante* (Caracas: Litografía Vargas, 1945); verse translated by Catalina Ocampo.
41. The original reads: "Te contienes, oh Forma, en el suntuoso/muro que opones de encarnada espuma/al oscuro apetito de la bruma/y al tacto que te erige luminoso." José Gorostiza, "Presencia y Fuga," *Muerte sin Fin y otros poemas* (Mexico City: Seix Barral, 2002), 102; verses translated by Catalina Ocampo.
42. See Clair, *Malinconia*, 64–79, and Elderfield, "El espejo," 101–03, and "The Self-Portrait Drawings," 30–31.
43. Giorgio Agamben, "The Phantasms of Eros," in *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, trans. Ronald L. Martinez (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 26.
44. For an analysis of Armando Reverón's objects in the context of modern art, see Elderfield, "Las irredentas," 18–44.
45. See Alejandro Otero, "Una visita a Armando Reverón," in *Reverón a la luz del periodismo* (Caracas: Fundación Museo Armando Reverón, 1993), 69.
46. Alejandro Otero, "Gaston Diehl promulga y espera una resurrección del espíritu impresionista en Venezuela?" in *Los Disidentes* 1 (March 1950): 5; translated by Catalina Ocampo.
47. In 1949, Otero organized the first retrospective of Reverón's work in the Taller Libre de Arte. See Boulton, *Reverón*, 150.
48. Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: An Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (New York: Verso, 2002), 180.
49. Ibid., 198.
50. Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, trans. Georgia Albert (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 68–69.

Note to the Reader

Reverón did not systematically title or date his works, and, therefore, it is difficult to provide totally accurate documentation. Sales of his works during his lifetime were often casual exchanges within El Castillete or in outdoor marketplaces; there are no extant loan receipts or official documents that provide original titles for these paintings. When Reverón did sign and date his works, he wrote his name in capital letters, sometimes indicating the date with plus signs and the last one or two digits of the year. A typical date might read "++40 AREVERON." While he accurately dated many works, he also sometimes signed and dated pictures only upon their sale, rather than upon their completion.

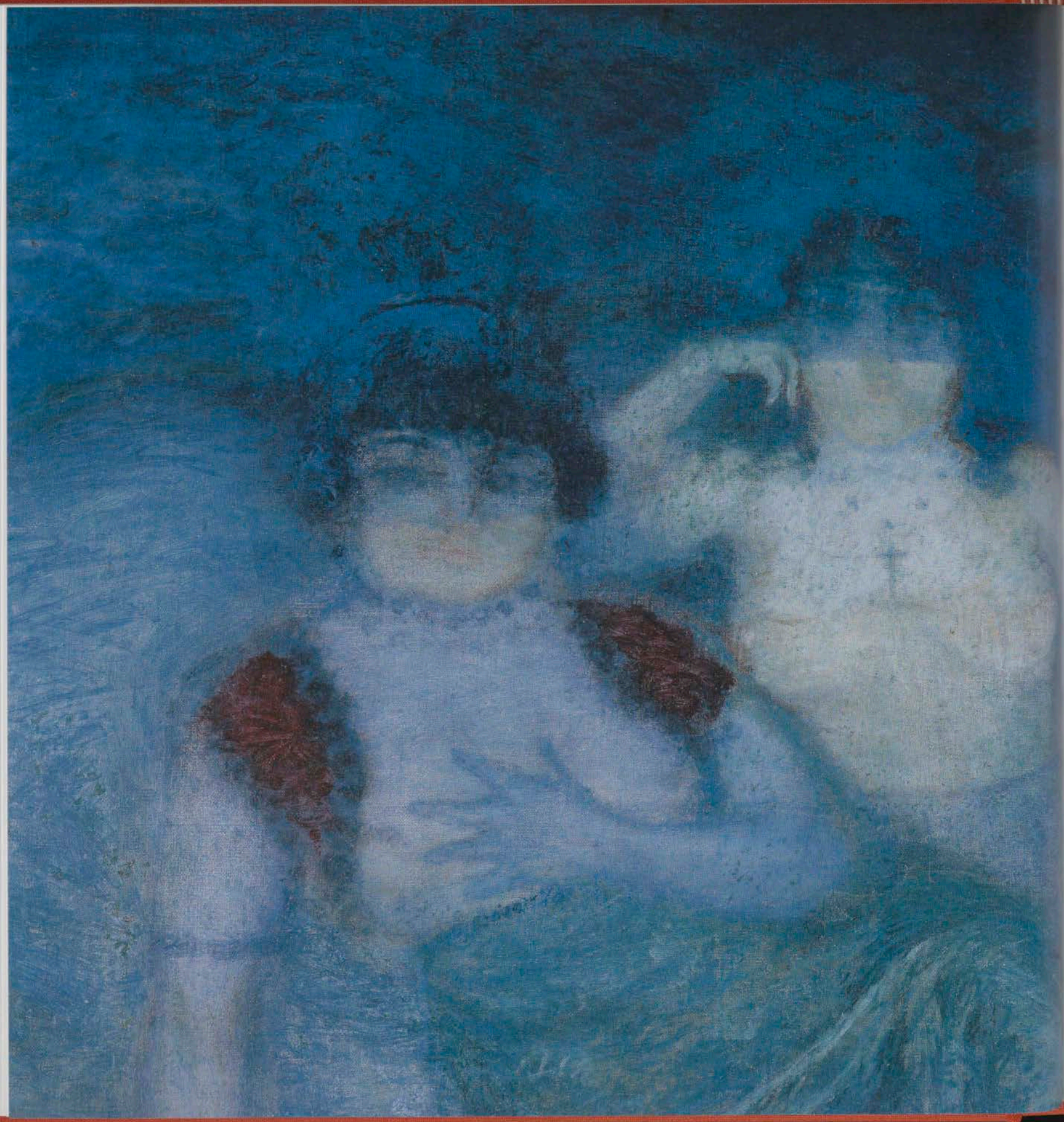
In this catalogue, dates inscribed on the works are listed without brackets. Approximate dates for paintings and drawings that Reverón did not date are given in brackets. In a few instances, two dates appear in brackets. The first is the probable date of the work, based on the best available evidence, while the second is that inscribed by the artist. The objects are believed to have been created in the early 1940s.

Spanish titles are those in common use today, and generally follow the 1955 exhibition catalogue *Exposición retrospectiva de Armando Reverón.* This exhibition, held at the Museo de Bellas Artes, Caracas, commemorated Reverón's death one year earlier, and included nearly four hundred of his works, and most of the drawings and paintings in the present exhibition. When a title here differs from the 1955 catalogue, that title is listed in brackets. A few works have been given English titles by The Museum of Modern Art, in consultation with the Proyecto Armando Reverón in Caracas. Not all English titles are meant to serve as exact translations from the Spanish, but rather as descriptive titles.

The mediums and dimensions for each work have, for the most part, been supplied by the lenders. When this was not possible, the mediums generally correspond with those listed in the most recent exhibition catalogue in which each work has appeared. Reverón painted on burlap coffee sacks as well as on artists' canvas; he used home-mixed paints and commercially available oil and tempera paint. Thus the listings of his materials are not definitive, although they follow the best available information.

NORA LAWRENCE

CATALOGUE



Early Works

About five years after his permanent return from Europe, Reverón painted *The Cave* (page 122), one of his most widely exhibited and well-known works. One of the two models for this painting was Juanita Ríos, a woman some twenty years his junior who would become his lifelong partner and most frequent model. Art historian Alfredo Boulton called *The Cave* Reverón's first portrait of Ríos, and saw it as a major example of what he termed Reverón's "blue period," which he dated from 1919 to 1924.[1] In a 1953 interview (page 227), the artist disclosed that the other model was a woman named Teresa, who has cloths draped over her body because she was not comfortable posing nude. Of this painting, Ríos later said, "In *The Little Cave*, there are two women. I am the one on the bottom, the one who has the red jacket and the half-skirt, as if of satin, and the jacket is a jacket that he made for me himself."[2] Some scholars have noted that this mystical scene also seems to include the trace of a third figure to the right of the figures, ensconced in a blue shadow.[3]

The overall blue tones and mysterious setting of *The Cave* are in part the product of Reverón's conversations with the Russian painter Nicolás Ferdinandov (1886–1925), who moved definitively to Venezuela in 1919. Reverón and Ríos lived briefly with Ferdinandov in Punta de Mulatos, a small coastal fishing village, just before Reverón contracted the Spanish flu,[4] and then again for a few months in El Valle, after. Ferdinandov executed paintings and drawings in a flat, decorative style similar to that of Art Nouveau, often with a blue palette that lent to his paintings a feeling of mystery (see page 21).

Reverón stated that he created *The Cave* while he was recovering from the flu, a period that he and Ríos spent at the house of Reverón's mother in El Valle. Other of Reverón's paintings from around this time, such as *Procession of the Virgin in El Valle* (fig. 1), share with *The Cave* the deep palette of a nocturne. *Portrait of Casilda* (page 122), a small work thickly painted with areas of sharply contrasting colors, also shares the overall blue mood of *The Cave*. Critic Miguel Arroyo spoke of *Portrait of Casilda* as an exemplar of Reverón's beautiful work with color and texture.[5] In its application of paint in small, thick swaths, *Portrait of Casilda* shows the influence that the Venezuelan artist Emilio Boggio (1857–1920) had on Reverón's production. Boggio had worked as a painter in Paris since 1877. He returned to Caracas for a time in 1919 and exhibited fifty-three of his paintings at the Academia de Bellas Artes (see page 21).[6]

1. Armando Reverón. *Procession of the Virgin in El Valle*. 1920. Oil on canvas, 24 3/4 × 27 1/4" (62.7 × 69.3 cm). Private collection

Opposite: Armando Reverón. *The Cave* (detail). [1920]. See page 122 for full image

2. Ignacio Zuloaga. *Portrait of the Countess of Noailles*. 1913. Oil on canvas, 59 3/4 × 77" (152 × 195.5 cm). Museo de Bellas Artes, Bilbao, Spain

The Cave also bears a mark of influence from Reverón's years of artistic instruction in Spain. "In the atmosphere of this painting," remarked Juan Calzadilla, "one can enjoy the distant resonance of Goya, and some of the environments in which breathed certain of the female figures of Ignacio Zuloaga" (1870–1945), in whose Madrid studio Reverón studied (fig. 2).[7] In his autobiographical statement, Reverón mentioned having seen Goya's *Nude Maja* at the Prado Museum in Madrid (see page 223), and in features like the reclining pose, splayed breasts, and direct stare of the figures of *The Cave*, an association with *Nude Maja* can be seen.

Ferdinandov organized an exhibition of works by Reverón and his art school classmate, Rafael Monasterios, in the winter of 1919–20 at the Escuela de Música at the Academia de Bellas Artes in Caracas. Art critic Enrique Planchart, who was a major figure in the creation of the anti-academic Círculo de Bellas Artes in the teens, gave Reverón's work a mixed review in *El Nuevo Diario* on January 7, 1920: "Each work gives a sense of being sure and sharpened. We all agreed that the artist must be a sensitive and receptive being; then why does he always concentrate on the same emotions and always express them in the same way?"[8]

In June of 1920, Ferdinandov organized another exhibition, this one with works by Reverón, Monasterios, himself, and Federico Brandt, another former member of the Círculo, in the galleries of the closed Universidad Central de Venezuela.[9] This exhibition received much acclaim. The critic Salvador Carvallo Arvelo commented on a Reverón portrait of a reclining woman, *Juanita* (see page 22): "The lifted face has an expression of distant life . . . with faraway dreams in its eyes. It is encircled with the vapor of the unknowable."[10] In this canvas, Arvelo continued, Reverón found "his own original, singular manner."[11]

Landscape, of 1922 (page 123), was created shortly after Reverón and Ríos settled in the coastal town of Macuto, where they would build their residence on a plot of land near the Caribbean that Reverón's mother purchased for them. *Landscape* relates to the work of Ferdinandov in its decorative and elegant handling, as well as in the element of mystery that pervades the scene. *Landscape* has been widely exhibited, and like many of Reverón's works, has been assigned different descriptive titles. The painting was called *Harmony in Blue* in the 1942 exhibition of Venezuelan landscape painting at the Museo de Bellas Artes;[12] at the 1951 Reverón exhibition at the Centro Venezolano-Americano in Caracas, it was exhibited as *Enchanted Garden*, a name which underscores the quality of the fantastic in this image.

Reverón's handling of sunlight in the 1924 *Fiesta in Caraballeda* (page 123) betrays the influence that Romanian artist Samys Mützner (1869–1958) had on Reverón (see page 20). Mützner came to Venezuela after living in several European countries in order to escape from the destruction of World War I. He was thought to be the painter who best succeeded in rendering the light of the Venezuelan coast in paint, and was also thought to imbue his colors with an emotional content.[13] His training in Impressionist techniques made him a figure of particular influence for Venezuelan artists, and he helped promote landscape painting as a national art. *Fiesta in Caraballeda* depicts multiple figures outside a church in Caraballeda, close to Macuto. Reverón's slightly earlier composition, *Procession of the Virgin in El Valle,* shares with *Fiesta in Caraballeda* the theme of outdoor, communal religious activity. After his move to Macuto, Reverón began to take his immediate surroundings as the primary subjects for his artistic production.

Notes

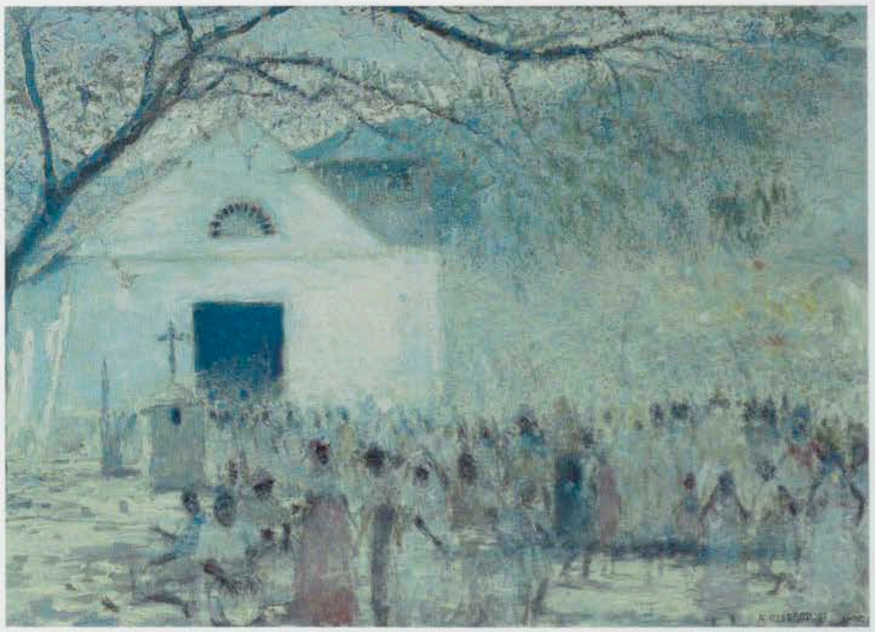
1. Alfredo Boulton, *Exposición retrospectiva de Armando Reverón* (Caracas: Museo de Bellas Artes, 1955), 14.
2. Juanita Ríos, as quoted in Itamar Martínez, "La mujer de Reverón," *El Farol* 210 (January–March 1972), and reprinted in Juan Calzadilla, *Voces y demonios de Armando Reverón* (Caracas: Colección Orinoco, Alfadil Ediciones, 1990), 82.
3. The presence of a third figure in this composition was noted during Reverón's lifetime in the film *Reverón*, directed by Margot Benacerraf (1951–52).
4. Juan Calzadilla, *Pintores Venezolanos: Armando Reverón* 10 (1968): 265.
5. Miguel Arroyo, "El puro mirar de Reverón," *Armando Reverón: Luz y cálida sombra del Caribe* (Macuto: Fundación Museo Armando Reverón, 1996), 127.
6. Juan Calzadilla, *Pintores Venezolanos: Emilio Boggio* 5 (1968): 140.
7. Juan Calzadilla, *Presencia y luz de Armando Reverón: Exposición itinerante* (Caracas: Galería de Arte Nacional, 1991), 13.
8. Enrique Planchart, "Exposición de pinturas de Rafael Monasterios y Armando Reverón," *El Nuevo Diario* (January 7, 1920), reproduced in *Fuentes documentales y críticas de las artes plásticas venezolanas: Siglos XIX y XX,* vol. 1 (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 2001), 733–35.
9. Emilio Santana, *Armando Reverón* (Caracas: Instituto Nacional de Cultura y Bellas Artes, 1967), 73.
10. Antonio Salcedo Miliani notes that this painting was *Juanita*, but it is also evident from Arvelo's description that he was speaking of *Juanita*, although he does not explicitly mention its title. Miliani, *Armando Reverón y su época* (Caracas: Universidad de los Andes, 2000), 99.
11. Salvador Carvallo Arvelo, *Impresiones de Arte* (Valencia, 1920), as quoted in Santana, *Armando Reverón*, 75.
12. Mentioned in Enrique Planchart, "Exposición del paisaje Venezolano," *El Universal* (August 1942), in three installments, reproduced in Planchart, *La pintura en Venezuela* (Caracas: Equinoccio, 1979), 191–213.
13. See Planchart, *La pintura en Venezuela,* 211.

Portrait of Casilda
Retrato de Casilda [1920]
Oil on canvas, 11 5/8 × 11 5/8" (29.5 × 29.5 cm)
Collection Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, Caracas

The Cave
La cueva [1920]
Oil on canvas, 40 × 61 1/8" (101.6 × 155.3 cm)
Private collection

Landscape
Paisaje [1922]
Oil on canvas, 35 1/16 × 38 3/16" (89 × 97 cm)
Private collection

Fiesta in Caraballeda
Fiesta en Caraballeda [1924; inscribed 1927]
Oil on canvas, 26 3/8 × 37 5/8" (67 × 95.5 cm)
Private collection



Early Landscapes

The landscapes that Reveron created in Macuto between 1926 and 1934 are arguably the paintings that have brought him the greatest recognition. Reverón concentrated on a few subjects that he began to radically reduce to monochromatic, textured paintings that bordered on abstraction. These paintings were composed at his residence at El Castillete (The Little Castle), in the seaside town of Macuto, which, on the route that existed during Reverón's lifetime, was some sixty miles outside of Caracas (fig. 1).

1. Map showing the railroad from Caracas to Macuto. The Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

The changed character of Reverón's painting was known to the Caracas art world by 1931, when Raúl Carrasquel y Valverde published his article "The Painter of White, of Silence, and of Solitude: The Mad Armando Reverón." According to the author, "Reverón used to paint normally, with all available colors," but, a short time after he returned from Europe, he "began the complete and surprising renovation of his pictorial style, of which today he is the only master and disciple." Reverón "disdains absolutely 'simple,' 'brilliant' colors of immediate 'effectiveness,' and paints only in white, with whites, on white canvases that he prepares himself, with only faint recurring 'touches' of pale blue for shadows, highlights, and 'grand effects.' The 'mad' Reverón is, to my understanding and to that of many others, an extraordinary artist with the brush, a great and strange painter, powerful, vigorous in conception and masterly in the execution of his already famous paintings."[1]

Alfredo Boulton singled out *Light Behind My Arbor* (1926; page 128) as the first painting in what he termed Reverón's "white period," so named for paintings from the 1920s and 1930s in which the artist reduced his chromatic scale to only whites and pale colors. The *rancho*, or hut, at El Castillete from which Reverón composed this painting had curtains of translucent fabric hung in front of cane beams (page 210). In this image, one can both see these curtains and see through them, to a landscape that includes only hazy details, such as a large tree trunk to the right of the door. Novelist José Balza reported specifically on what Reverón called his "arbor": "Bits of tulle hung from the beams and light penetrated through the crevices that he called 'the arbor.' . . . The light entered through a circular hole that separated the roof from the partition wall; the hole was covered with mesh from a fisherman's hammock."[2]

By the 1920s, Reverón had devised a method of painting that involved the use of "paintbrushes" composed of bamboo twigs or pencils covered with a nub of burlap, which he made himself

Opposite: Armando Reverón. *Rancho in Macuto* (detail). 1927. See page 130 for full image

(see pages 200 and 201). While he would continue to paint on standard, if open-weave, artists' canvas, such as the one in *Light Behind My Arbor*, he also began to paint on canvases crafted of burlap sacks. These burlap paintings differed from paintings on ordinary canvas in the regularity of the industrial weave as opposed to the irregular pattern of fibers in the artists' canvases.[3]

2. *Rancho* in Puntas Brisas. Photographic archive of Margot Benacerraf

Reverón depicted several other views of *ranchos* in the 1920s and 1930s. *Rancho (Interior)* (1931; page 129), which was on the cover of the Caracas-based *Élite* magazine on June 6, 1931, also shows a scene looking out from the inside of El Castillete; the outline of a nearby *rancho* can be seen beyond its open door. The artist also repeatedly painted the exterior of El Castillete in such works as *Landscape* (1932; page 130), which has, at its center, a single, small structure with a roof of palm fronds. The view depicted in another work, *Rancho in Macuto* (1927; page 130), quite closely resembles that of an existing photograph of the house in which Reverón lived in 1920 in Puntas Brisas, before moving to El Castillete (fig. 2). Both *Rancho in Macuto* and *Rancho (Interior)* have very similar elements: the same curved, elegantly thin tree trunk, and the barely perceptible hut delineated with monochromatic and sparse swaths of paint, which convey physical elements of the scene and also a sense of atmosphere.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Reverón frequently visited beaches and painted the local features of the Macuto landscape. In such paintings as *Sea Grape Trees* and *Coastal Seascape* (both 1927; page 131), he depicted the sea grape tree—in Spanish, *uvero*—that grows close to the water on some Venezuelan beaches.[4] Many of these paintings take the same format, with a sea grape tree extending out from one side of the canvas, its branches overtaking the top of the picture plane. The ocean appears as a discrete strip of blue under the extended reach of the tree's leaves. *El Playón* (page 132), which depicts the ocean in a similar manner, is a generic name for a shore, a beach sometimes topographically linked to the coast through an abrupt ravine.

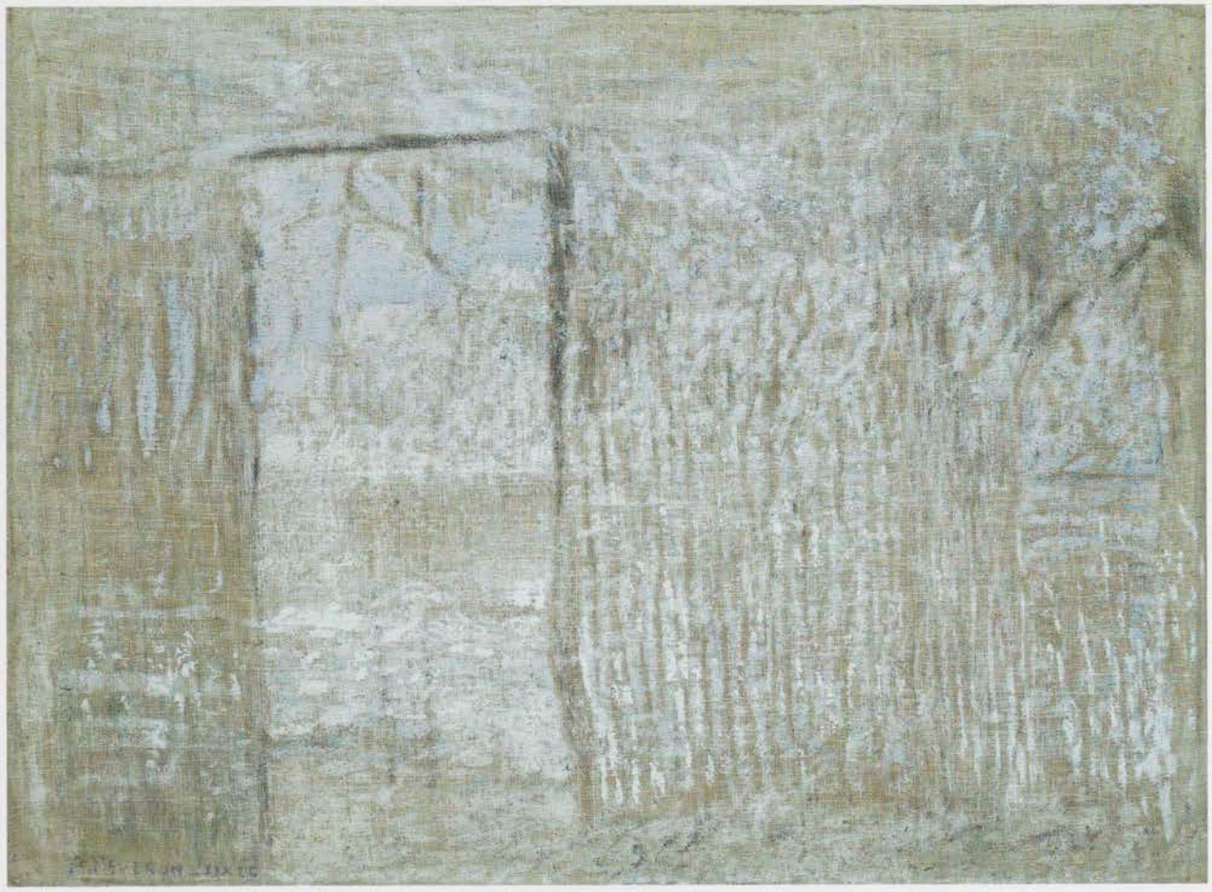
From this period, Reverón began to leave exposed segments of blank canvas, the texture and color of which served a representational function. In *Coastal Seascape*, he composed an image in reverse, painting blank space while leaving matter unpainted. Marks of white and blue paint represent the water toward the bottom of the painting, while toward the top light streams through the branches of the tree. The blue paint of the sky and the sea in *El Playón* completely delineates the forms, while the shoreline and trees of Macuto are simply represented in the natural color of the bare canvas.

Reverón most severely restricted his use of color and paint in *Coconut Trees* (1931), *The Tree* (1931), and *White Landscape* (1934; see pages 133–35). In these three landscapes, form is represented through a controlled use of light-colored and white paint, the color of which only slightly differs from the base. These paintings have been widely considered to be visual representations of the experience of being blinded by bright sunlight. While almost all figuration has been expunged from them, they are still representational, and to some degree conform to the types of beach landscapes that were made in the late 1920s. Behind the tree trunks in *Coconut Trees* can be seen a thin plane of light blue paint, more thickly applied than the paint over the rest of the canvas. Reverón uses this blue paint to indicate the ocean in the same manner as he did in *El Playón*. The sky in *White Landscape* shares the same hazy, allover quality and sharp horizon line as the sky in *El Playón*. And to the left of *The Tree* can still be seen a curved shoreline reminiscent of that present under the sea grape tree in *Coastal Seascape*.

Some of the paintings from this period, such as *Sea Grape Trees*, are dated in the customary method that Reverón developed in the 1920s for dating his works. Paintings were signed in capital letters, and, as seen in this work, sometimes the date was indicated next to the signature, using a plus sign and then the last one or two digits of the year. Perhaps the inclusion of dates at this point in his practice was due to his increased participation in the art market. An article in *Élite* in 1928 indicates that Reverón had already cultivated this market in Caracas by the late 1920s: "He comes to the capital, with his rich production from various weeks, and here he places his works in just a few days. Reverón sells quickly and well; he is one of very few local artists who has a secure market."[5] While Reverón accurately dated many works, he also sometimes signed and dated pictures only upon their sale, rather than upon their completion. Thus, even with works created early in his career, assigning definitive dates is impossible.

Notes

1. Raúl Carrasquel y Valverde, "El pintor del blanco, del silencio, y de la soledad: El loco Armando Reverón," *Billiken* 13, no. 626 (November 14, 1931), reprinted in Roldán Esteva-Grillet, ed., *Fuentes documentales* (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 2001), 801–02.
2. José Balza, *Análogo, simultáneo* (Caracas: Galeria de Arte Nacional, 1983), 23.
3. Jim Coddington, Chief Conservator at The Museum of Modern Art, has worked with Reverón paintings and helped with this definition of burlap. Alfredo Boulton reported that he sent Reverón burlap coffee sacks from Caracas on which to paint. Boulton said that around 1937, he sent the artist large coffee sacks from Caracas, and Reverón, intrigued by the possibility of integrating a characteristic texture into his paintings, used the sepia-toned burlap sacks as canvases. However, it is clear from an analysis of some works of the 1920s that Reverón, in fact, started painting on burlap before 1937. See Alfredo Boulton, *Reverón en cien años de pintura en Venezuela* (Caracas: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Caracas, 1989), 28.
4. Thanks to Fabian Michelangeli, George Shakespear, Jim Luteyn, and Karl Lauby at The New York Botanical Garden for their help with identifications and translations of botanical names into English.
5. "'La Tebaida' del 'loco' Reverón en Macuto," *Élite* 3, no.141 (May 26, 1928): n.p.



Light Behind My Arbor
Luz tras mi enramada 1926
Oil on canvas, 18 7/8 × 25 1/2" (48 × 64.7 cm)
Collection Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, Caracas

Rancho (Interior) [1931]
Oil and tempera on canvas,
21 1/16 × 25 3/16" (53.5 × 64 cm)
Private collection

Rancho in Macuto
Rancho en Macuto 1927
Oil and tempera on burlap,
$22\,^{13}/_{16} \times 27\,^{9}/_{16}$" (58 × 70 cm)
Private collection

Landscape
Paisaje [1932]
Oil and tempera on canvas,
$26\,^{9}/_{16} \times 29\,^{3}/_{4}$" (67.5 × 75.5 cm)
Private collection

Sea Grape Trees
Uveros 1927
Oil and tempera on burlap,
$25\,^{3}/_{16} \times 27\,^{15}/_{16}$" (64 × 71 cm)
Private collection

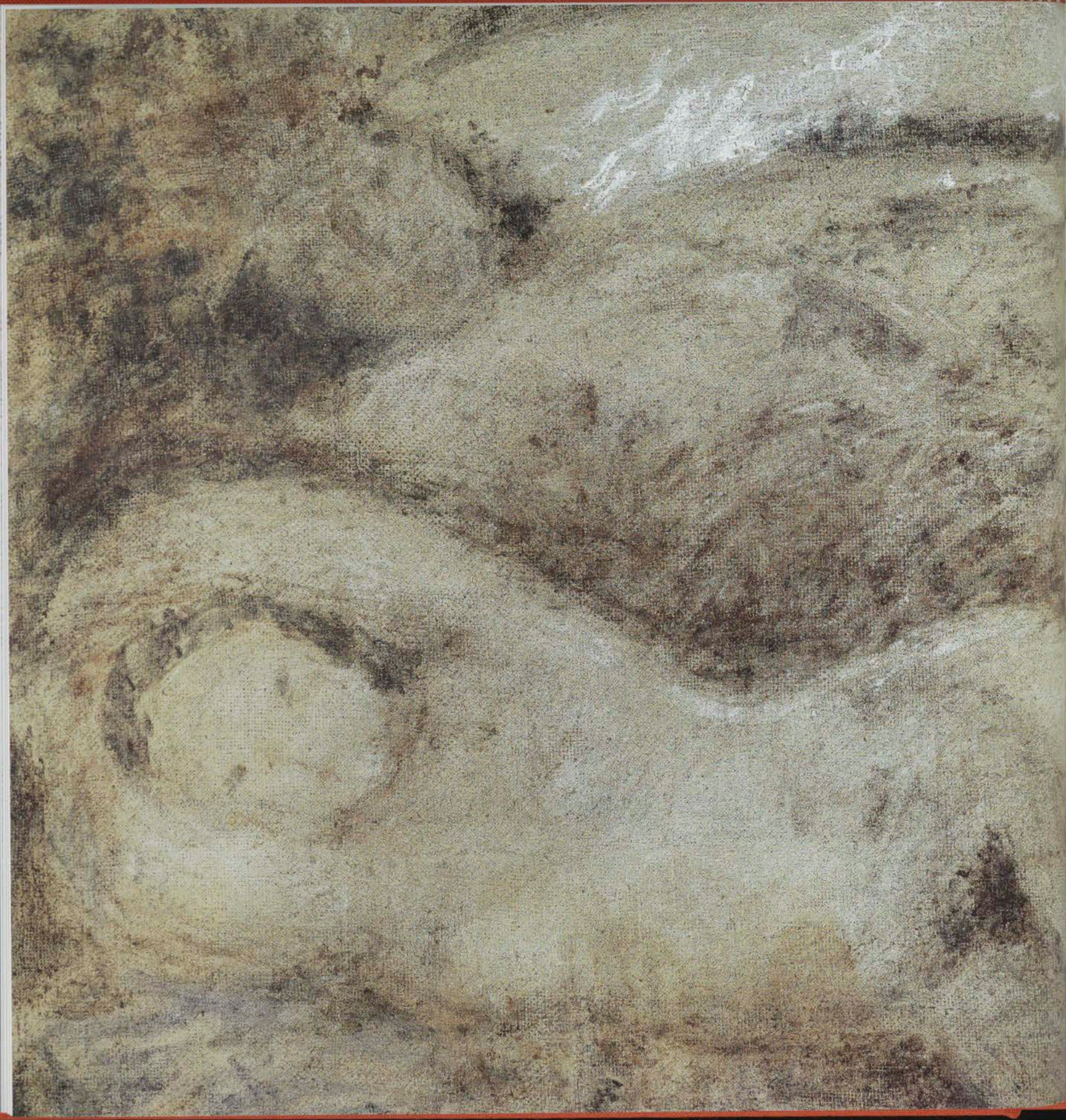
Coastal Seascape
Marina [*Paisaje*] [1927]
Oil and tempera on burlap,
$17\,^{15}/_{16} \times 21\,^{1}/_{16}$" (45.5 × 53.5 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos
Nacionales, Caracas

El Playón
[*Playa*] 1929
Oil on canvas, 24 5/8 × 31 1/2"
(62.5 × 80 cm)
Collection Diane and Bruce Halle

Coconut Trees
Cocoteros [*Bosque*] 1931
Oil and tempera on canvas,
23 5/16 × 30 1/4" (59.2 × 76.9 cm)
Private collection

White Landscape
Paisaje blanco 1934
Oil on canvas, $24\,^{7}/_{16} \times 31\,^{1}/_{2}$" (62 × 80 cm)
Private collection

The Tree
El árbol 1931
Oil on canvas, $25\,^{3}/_{8} \times 31\,^{3}/_{4}$" (64.5 × 80.6 cm)
Collection Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, Caracas



Portraits of the 1930s

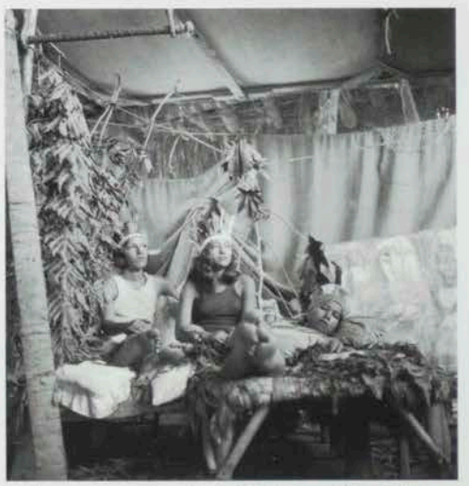
Reverón's production of figurative works increased dramatically in the early 1930s. In the 1920s, he had painted about three times more landscapes than figural works; by 1933 he was painting far more portraits than works in any other genre. The first of these were small-scale portraits, with only one or two female characters. At this point in his practice, Reverón took both Juanita Ríos and local women as the subjects of his paintings. In 1953, he stated: "I have made no more than ten portraits of men. All are women or else portraits of myself."[1] Reverón's *The White Face* (1932; page 140) has been alternately considered a portrait of a woman and a self-portrait. The ambiguous features of the face, combined with the allover, thick application of paint through which the face only partially appears, have led scholars to speak of this portrait as masklike.[2]

Daughter of the Sun and *Two Female Figures* (pages 140, 141) are two of several works that Reverón created between 1927 and 1935 in what came to be called his "indigenist series."[3] He adorned models with feathers to resemble his idea of indigenous life in Venezuela (fig. 1). Mariano Picón-Salas, writing in 1939, said that Reverón's "Daughters of the Sun" paintings were "treated with the technique of a Byzantine mosaic, submerged in a mysterious, luminous background." He continued, "Reverón has achieved somewhat magical figures and portraits, like those of the fourth century in the chapel in Ravenna."[4]

Two small figural works, *Juanita* (1927; page 142) and *Reclining Nude* (1932; page 142), anticipate in theme and style the languorous, intimate figure paintings that Reverón would complete inside El Castillete after 1935. Like these later paintings, *Juanita* takes its color primarily from the rough canvas on which Reverón painted. Julián Padrón, in 1932, commented on a contemporaneous portrait of Ríos and another female model: "The pale color continues out from the feverish paintbrushes with such harmony and such force of expression that it is difficult to achieve anything more with this one color. The feminine forms catch fire on the canvas like will-o'-the-wisps, but keep their sensuousness."[5]

Reclining Nude, with its multicolor background and the pronounced contour lines that demarcate the body, also anticipates the corpus of gestural, quickly crafted figure paintings that Reverón executed in water-based paint on paper mainly in 1933 and 1934. These were purportedly the artistic result of a depressive episode that Reverón endured in 1933.[6]

Some of the subjects for these works on paper were Caracas residents on vacation at Macuto. Luxurious bathhouses opened there in 1877, and trains began to transport vacationers from Caracas to Macuto in 1883.[7] In 1928, Macuto became accessible to an even wider group of vacationing middle to upper class



1. Young women posing as Indians at El Castillete, photographed by Alfredo Boulton. 1934. Archivo Boulton, Alberto Vollmer Foundation, Inc.

Opposite: Armando Reverón. *The Creole "Maja"* (detail). 1939. See page 145 for full image

Caraqueños when El Miramar, the area's first luxury hotel, was built on the town's waterfront (see page 34).[8] Several articles in the early 1930s brought increased attention to Reverón, and El Castillete became a diverting attraction. Picón-Salas wrote in 1939, "Reverón has made himself—with more propriety than the pigeons and the sea grape trees of the spa—into the first tourist attraction in Macuto. Some parents bring their children there in order to show them an example of how an artist is a naturally crazy being; female readers of novels observe how the fantastic beings from their novels live in real life."[9] For several years, Reverón tolerated, and reportedly also entertained, guests to El Castillete.

One of these guests was Luisa Phelps, who visited Reverón with Alfredo Boulton in 1934. On this occasion, Boulton, who owned a house in Macuto, photographed Reverón as he painted Phelps's portrait (see page 33) and described Reverón's eccentric and ritualistic process: "The artist would isolate himself from all exterior contact: he would not touch metal; he would plug his ears with large wads of cotton or balls of yarn; and he would divide his body into two zones, cruelly tightening his belt [between them]. Later, in the middle of a ritual full of gestures and of noises, as if entering into a trance before the canvas, he would half-close his eyes, snort, and simulate the gestures of painting until the rhythm of the body and the gesticulations had acquired sufficient impetus and velocity. Then, as though in spasms, he would attack the canvas as if he were an animal ripping up the red cape of the bullfighter. Sometimes, in these attacks, he would go so far as to tear the canvas."[10] Boulton and Phelps's trip proved helpful for Reverón's career: in October of 1934, Phelps facilitated a Reverón exhibition at the Galerie Katia Granoff in Paris.[11] In December of 1934, Boulton curated another monographic exhibition of Reverón's work at the Ateneo de Caracas.[12]

From 1935 on, Reverón began to isolate himself in El Castillete, concentrating on large canvases of multiple female figures, in which he sometimes would include a male figure. These acquiescent, lounging nudes—such as *Nudes* (1938; page 143) and *Nude* (1939; page 144)—comprised a "series of the *Majas*,"[13] in a reference to Francisco de Goya's *Nude Maja* and *Clothed Maja* (1797–98). These paintings begin Reverón's "sepia period," the third and final of Boulton's coloristic divisions, in which the artist's works took their sepia-colored canvases as their predominant color.

In Reverón's landscapes of the late 1920s and early 1930s, it is the blinding, equatorial sunlight that controls what is seen of the Macuto seaside; in his indoor portraiture, conversely, it is the midday shadow cast by light streaming into El Castillete that circumscribes visual access to his models. Many of these women lie in ambiguous interior settings; white light peeks through the suggestion of a square window behind the figures in *The Creole "Maja"* (1939; page 145), *Nude* (1939; page 144) and *Nudes* (1938; page 143), and marks the time as midday. In *Two Indians* (1939; page 148) the feathers that adorn the head of the upper figure heighten an idea of these portraits as exotic fantasies. Other images, such as *Nude* and *The Woman of the River* (both 1939; pages 146, 147) are in settings that are not definitively interior or exterior. These figures have been thought to represent female nymphs in natural settings; *Nude* has also been called *Woman-Tree* (*Mujer-Árbol*).

The interiority and quietness of these images take on a more mysterious meaning in *The Creole "Maja"* and *Five Figures* (1939; page 149) into which Reverón has integrated spectral images of a male figure.[14] Behind the reclining nude female in the former, just barely visible at her side, lies a male figure with a crown of feathers.[15] Luis Pérez-Oramas, among others, has likened it to a Reverónian self-portrait.[16] Boulton, however, has viewed this as a fantastic scene: an image of the deflowering of the young Creole woman who is lying down, with the seated woman to the right supervising.[17] *Five Figures* is an image of four women in Reverón's studio with the artist standing at an easel at the top right corner of the composition, painting them. These women could, in fact, be Reverón's *muñecas,* as their faces lack emotion and their bodies seem overly round, stuffed, and inflexible.[18] *Five Figures* also seems to include a stoic gray profile of a male face to the far right of the canvas.

Notes

1. See "Through His Own Eyes," page 227.
2. Susan Stewart, "Armando Reverón," in *The Open Studio* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 66–72; Luis Pérez-Oramas, *La cocina de Jurassic Park y otros ensayos visuales* (Caracas: Fundación Polar, 1998), 196.
3. Alfredo Boulton, *Reverón* (Caracas: Ediciones Macanao, 1979), 55. The title *Daughter of the Sun* was given to this painting in later exhibitions. The catalogue of Boulton's 1934 exhibition includes only simple titles for contemporaneous works, such as *The Sisters* and *Portrait*.
4. Mariano Picón-Salas, "Armando Reverón," *Revista nacional de cultura* 13 (1939), reprinted in *Esta luz como para magos* (Caracas: Fundación Museo Armando Reverón, 1992), 18.
5. Julián Padrón, "Armando Reverón," *Élite* 370 (October 15, 1932), republished in *Fuentes documentales y críticas de las artes plásticas venezolanas: Siglos XIX y XX,* vol. 2 (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 2001), 209–19.
6. Throughout his life, Reverón would suffer from several incidents involving his mental health that have been called "depressions" or "mental crises" by different authors. His psychiatrist in later life, J. M. Báez Finol, called his illness a "very slow schizophrenia" that arose in cycles. Báez Finol, interview in *Castillete Museo Armando Reverón* (Macuto: Instituto Nacional de Cultura y Bellas Artes, 1974), n.p.
7. Mónica Silva Contreras, *Temperar en Macuto* (Caracas: Fundación Museo Armando Reverón, 1999), n. p.
8. Amador Clark, *La Guaira: Tiempo de Gómez* (Caracas: Ediciones de la Presidencia de la Republica, 1994), 91.
9. Picón-Salas, "Armando Reverón," *Esta luz como para magos* (Caracas: Fundación Museo Armando Reverón, 1992), 14.
10. Boulton (1979), 100, 117.
11. See "À Paris: Reverón," *Beaux Arts* (October 5, 1934), 6.
12. Juan Calzadilla, *Armando Reverón* (Caracas: Ernesto Armitano, 1979), 34.
13. Juan Calzadilla, *Presencia y luz de Armando Reverón: Exposición itinerante* (Caracas: Galería de Arte Nacional, 1991), 22-23. While Reverón speaks in his autobiographical statement of the influence of Goya on his art, it is also relevant that Goya's *maja* images were published in Venezuela in *Élite* magazine on May 19, 1928, one issue before an article about Reverón also appeared in the pages of *Élite*.
14. For more information, see Luis Pérez-Oramas, "Armando Reverón: el lugar autobiográfico," *Primer simposio internacional Armando Reverón* (Caracas: Proyecto Armando Reverón, 2001), 136–68.
15. See Juan Liscano, *El erotismo creador de Armando Reverón* (Caracas: Ediciones GAN, 1994), 32.
16. See Luis Pérez-Oramas, "Armando Reverón: el lugar autobiográfico," 136–68.
17. *Armando Reverón: Luz y cálida sombra del Caribe* (Macuto: Fundación Museo Armando Reverón, 1996), 58. *The Creole "Maja"* was named by Boulton, not Reverón; it is known that later scholars called this series the "*Maja*" works, but not if Reverón also did.
18. See, for example, Juan Manuel Bonet, "Reverón en su luz," *Armando Reverón: Exposición antológica* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 1992), 42.

The White Face
Rostro blanco **[***Rostro de mujer***]** [1932]
Oil on burlap, 18 11/16 × 14 3/4" (47.5 × 37.5 cm)
Collection Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, Caracas

Daughter of the Sun
Hija del sol **[***India***]** [1933]
Oil on burlap, 21 1/16 × 19 13/16" (53.5 × 50.3 cm)
Mercantil Collection

Two Female Figures
Dos figuras [1935]
Oil, tempera, and charcoal on canvas,
46 7/16 × 63" (118 × 160 cm)
Private collection

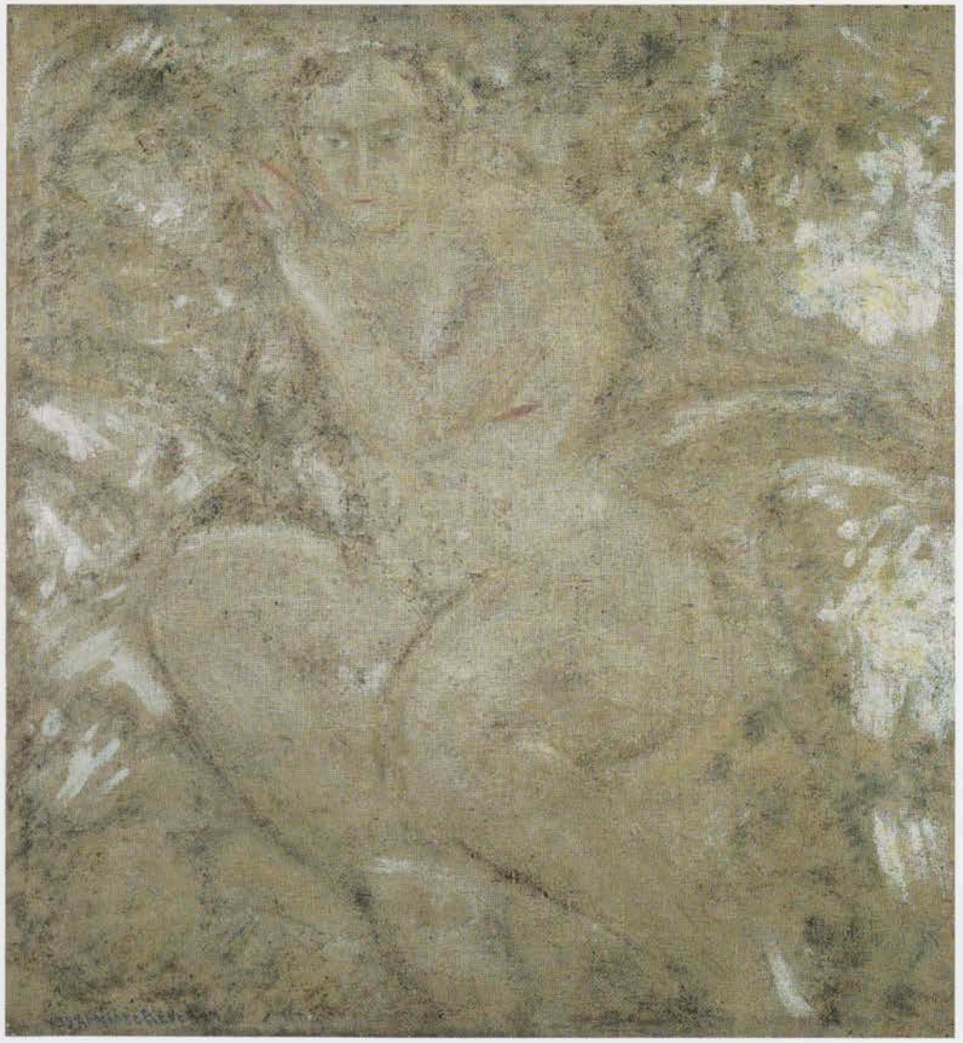
Juanita 1927
Oil and tempera on canvas,
$16\,^{9}/_{16} \times 19\,^{11}/_{16}$" (42 × 50 cm)
Private collection

Reclining Nude
Desnudo acostado [1932]
Oil and tempera on burlap,
$21\,^{5}/_{8} \times 27\,^{3}/_{8}$" (55 × 69.5 cm)
Private collection

Nudes
***Desnudos* [*Desnudo*]** 1938
Oil and tempera on canvas,
$40^{15}/_{16} \times 55^{7}/_{8}$" (104 × 142 cm)
Private collection

Nude
Desnudo [1939]
Oil, tempera, and charcoal on canvas,
40 3/4 × 52 1/8" (103.5 × 132.4 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

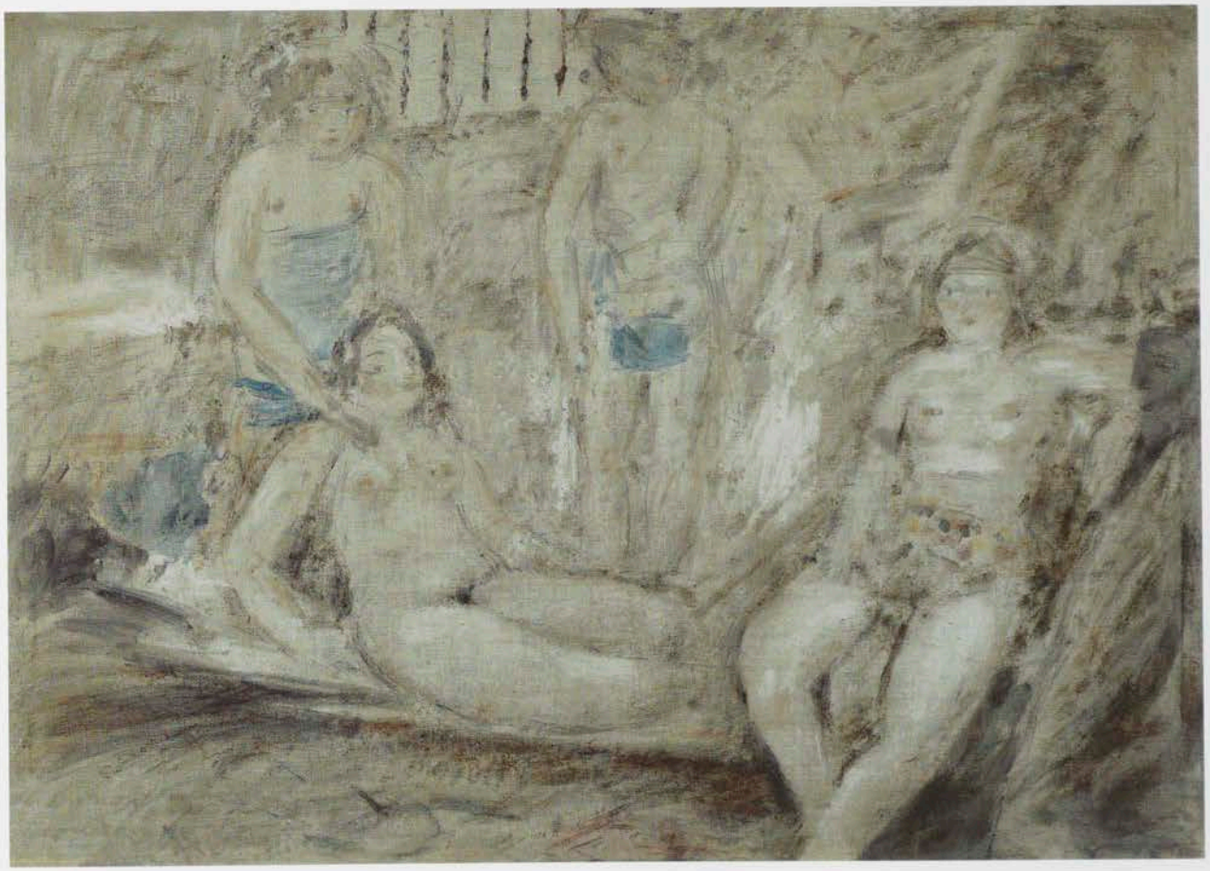
The Creole "Maja"
La maja criolla 1939
Oil and tempera on burlap,
52 9/16 × 69 1/8" (133.5 × 175.5 cm)
Private collection



Nude
Desnudo [1939]
Oil and tempera on burlap,
41 1/4 × 38 7/16" (104.8 × 97.6 cm)
Collection Ceil Pulitzer

The Woman of the River
La mujer del río 1939
Oil on canvas, 52 × 56 7/8" (132.1 × 144.5 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Fractional and promised gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros
in honor of John Elderfield

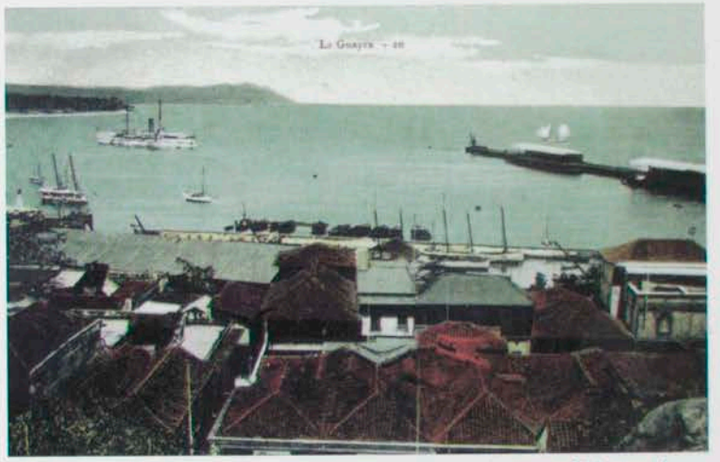
Two Indians
Dos indias 1939
Oil and tempera on burlap,
44 1/2 × 64 3/16" (113 × 163 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas



Five Figures
Cinco figuras
[*Modelos (Composición)*] [1939]
Oil and tempera on canvas,
64 1/8 × 7'5 9/16" (162.8 × 227.5 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

Landscapes of the 1940s

In the first half of the 1940s, Reverón, as he had done before, ventured outside of El Castillete to Macuto's beaches and to the nearby port of La Guaira for what would be his last major effort in landscape production (fig. 1).[1] These paintings had changed dramatically from Reverón's earlier landscapes of the 1920s and 1930s in subject, style, and mood. He continued to paint images of the local sea grape trees (page 162) and of the Venezuelan coastline (pages 163), but many of his landscapes now also depict the industrial activity of the port. While some of these landscapes demonstrate a similar concentration on surface and lack of depth to that in his earlier paintings, others show Reverón employing a modified one-point perspective.



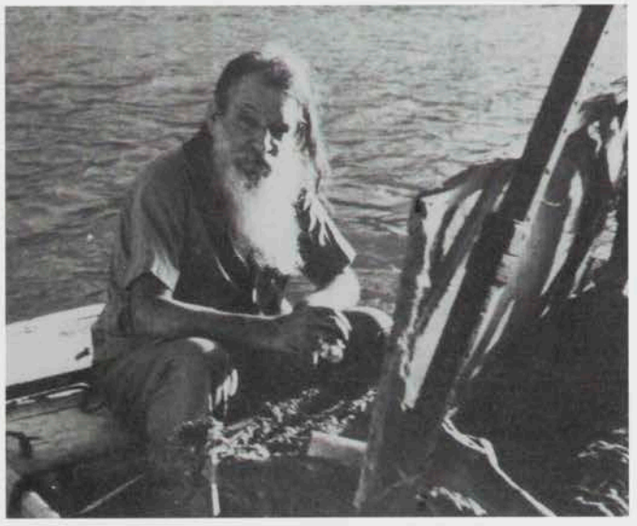
1. Panoramic scene of the Port of La Guaira. c. 1930. Collection of Maps and Graphic Works, Archivo Audiovisual de Venezuela

Reverón's *White Landscape* of 1940 (page 154) seems in many ways to be a transitional image between his early and late landscape production. While in this painting Reverón continues his exploration of hazy skies and dissolving, imprecise contours, the seaside is here depicted in the shadowed, sepia tone common to later landscapes. It is highly abstracted, and shares compositional features with such 1940s natural seascapes as *El Playón* (1942), *Seascape* (1944), and the much simplified painting *Coconut Tree* (1944; see pages 155, 163). A horizontal band of white paint curves upward on the right side of each of these canvases, and in *El Playón* and *Seascape* it is clear that this band of white is meant to indicate clouds lying just above the mountains that separate the Caribbean coastline from Caracas.

Reverón's depictions of La Guaira are remarkable for being the first known artistic depictions of Venezuela's burgeoning industrial activity. La Guaira was and is Venezuela's primary port; while it was leased to a foreign company in 1874 because Venezuela could not support it economically, control of the port was nationalized in 1936.[2] Reverón's depictions of La Guaira took many forms: he painted the town itself, in such works as *Street of La Guaira* (page 156); the town's railroad; La Guaira's vagrant residents; and images—both industrial and picturesque—of the port (pages 156–61). In the 1941 *View of La Guaira* (page 156), Reverón stains the canvas with a thin layer of color, rather than painting it. The color of the earth is mainly provided by the dark canvas foundation of the painting. Miguel Otero Silva suggested in 1955 that this was due to an inextricable connection in Reverón's mind between the sepia color of the canvas and the earth of Venezuela.[3]

Opposite: Armando Reverón. *The Port of La Guaira* (detail). [1941]. See page 160 for full image

Many of the landscapes that Reverón created in La Guaira exhibit a graphic and perspectival precision absent from his earlier works. Juan Calzadilla pointed out that Reverón's later paintings have the presence of drawings: "Reverón is essentially a draughtsman . . . for Reverón, the limits between painting and drawing disappear; it is difficult to know whether we are before a drawing or a painting."[4] The artist's use of precise, straight, dark lines often highlights or complements the industrial structures that he has introduced as subject matter, such as *The Crane* (page 158), which he depicted in other paintings from this period as well. The artist has also introduced a degree of perspectival exactitude into these works—among them *The Crane* but also *Street of La Guaira* and *View of La Guaira*—that underscores the mechanized nature of industry in the port city. Miniature figures of workers appear in the foregrounds of *Street of La Guaira, View of La Guaira* (1941; page 157), *The Crane,* and *Landscape of La Guaira.*



2. Armando Reverón painting in a boat near the Port of La Guaira, from the film *Armando Reverón* by Margot Benacerraf, 1951–52

The major industrial area of the port of La Guaira is depicted in several works. *View of La Guaira* shows an industrial dock with a large boat floating in the water beyond it. The headquarters of the Corporation of the Port of La Guaira, the company that controlled the port and its docks, is shown in several picturesque views from across the water from the port. Margot Benacerraf's 1951–52 documentary film shows Reverón sitting in a boat in front of a canvas (fig. 2), and records Reverón's creation of these scenes. Pascual Navarro noted in his 1947 article "The Solitary Man of Macuto" that these scenes closely resemble the sublime nineteenth-century seascapes of J.M.W. Turner (1775–1851).[5] The interior of a workshop, which is shown in *Workshop at the Port of La Guaira* (page 159), also appears repeatedly in works by Reverón at this time. While the purpose of this particular workshop is not clear, other contemporaneous images of workshops with similar architectural elements—exposed wooden rafters and centrally located beams—are known to be of a blacksmith's forge, and of the manufacturing areas of the Corporation of the Port of La Guaira, which constructed new docks for the port in addition to maintaining it administratively.[6]

By 1940, Reverón was exhibiting his works more regularly, but he was also increasingly experiencing problems with his mental health. In the 1920s and 1930s, there were long gaps between his exhibitions; from 1940 until 1953, his works were included nearly every year in the Salón Oficial Anual de Arte Venezolano.[7] Enrique Planchart, in his review of the 1942 *Exhibition of Venezuelan Landscape Painting,* commented that in one of Reverón's port scenes, "His vision and execution have arrived at an extreme and balanced refinement."[8] Reveron was also exhibiting internationally: in 1939 his works were shown in Paris, and in 1940 he exhibited two works in the *Latin American Exhibition*

of Fine Arts at the Riverside Museum, New York. In 1941 he was included in an exhibition in Chile.[9] However, according to Boulton, the year 1940 was when Reverón suffered another bout of depression. Two years later, his mother died, which took a great emotional toll on him. Reverón would continue painting the Port of La Guaira until 1945, and would not have another major period of landscape production after this one. Instead he concentrated on composing figural works inside El Castillete and on the creation of the dolls and objects with which he shared his home.

Notes

1. *Armando Reverón: Luz y cálida sombra del Caribe* (Macuto: Fundación Museo Armando Reverón, 1996), 87.
2. See Luis Enrique González F., *La Guayra: dos siglos de historia* (Caracas: Ediciones del Concejo Municipal del Distrito Federal, 1983), 255–56.
3. Miguel Otero Silva, "Reverón," reprinted in *Armando Reverón: 10 ensayos* (Caracas: Concejo Municipal del Distrito Federal, 1975), 75.
4. Interview in *Castillete Museo Armando Reverón* (Macuto: Instituto Nacional de Cultura y Bellas Artes, 1974), n.p.
5. See Pascual Navarro, "El solitario de Macuto," reprinted in *Esta luz como para magos* (Caracas: Fundación Museo Armando Reverón, 1992).
6. See *La Guayra, dos siglos de historia*, 253–59.
7. The year 1951 was the only exception. *Armando Reverón: La magia solar, Venezuela en México* (Mexico City: Museo Rufino Tamayo, 1989), 69.
8. Enrique Planchart, "Exposición de paisaje venezolano," in *La pintura en Venezuela* (Caracas: Equinoccio U.S.B., 1979), 208.
9. See Juan Calzadilla, *Armando Reverón* (Caracas: Ediciones Corpoven, 1979), 37; *Presencia y luz de Armando Reverón* (Caracas: Galería de Arte Nacional, 1991), 60.

White Landscape
***Paisaje blanco* [*Paisaje*]** 1940
Oil on canvas, 25 13/16 × 34 5/8" (65.5 × 88 cm)
Collection Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, Caracas

El Playón
[*Paisaje del litoral*] [1942]
Oil and gouache on canvas, 37 × 53 1/8" (94 × 135 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

View of La Guaira
Paisaje de La Guaira
[*Paisaje del litoral*] [1941]
Oil on canvas, 27 5/8 × 32 3/4" (70.2 × 83.2 cm)
Collection Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, Caracas

Street of La Guaira
Calle de La Guaira
[*Paisaje de La Guaira*] [1942]
Oil, tempera, and charcoal on burlap,
25 3/16 × 31 5/16" (64 × 79.5 cm)
Private collection, Caracas

View of La Guaira
Paisaje de La Guaira 1941
Oil and tempera on burlap,
$21\,^{7}/_{16} \times 27$" (54.4 × 68.6 cm)
Private collection

The Crane
La grúa [1942]
Oil on canvas, $36^{7}/_{16} \times 42^{15}/_{16}$" (92.5 × 109 cm)
Collection Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, Caracas

Workshop at the Port of La Guaira
Taller del servicio portuario [1944]
Tempera on canvas, 30 11/16 × 41 3/4" (78 × 106 cm)
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

The Port of La Guaira
El Puerto de La Guaira
[*La Guaira*] [1941]
Oil and tempera on canvas,
$29\,1/2 \times 37\,13/16"$ (75 × 96 cm)
Private collection

The Port of La Guaira
El Puerto de La Guaira [1941]
Oil and tempera on canvas,
$25^{9}/_{16} \times 31^{7}/_{8}$" (65 × 81 cm)
Private collection

Strangler Fig Tree
Matapalo [1942]
Oil on canvas, 22 15/16 × 19 11/16" (58.2 × 50 cm)
Private collection

Landscape with Sea Grape Trees
Paisaje con uveros **[*Arboleda*]** [1942]
Oil on canvas, 34 × 37 7/8" (86.3 × 96.2 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

Seascape
Marina **[*Paisaje*]** [1944]
Oil and tempera on canvas, $38\,^{9}/_{16} \times 47\,^{1}/_{4}$" (98 × 120 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

Coconut Tree
Cocotero **[*Playa*]** [1944]
Oil on canvas, $19\,^{13}/_{16} \times 22\,^{15}/_{16}$" (50.3 × 58.3 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

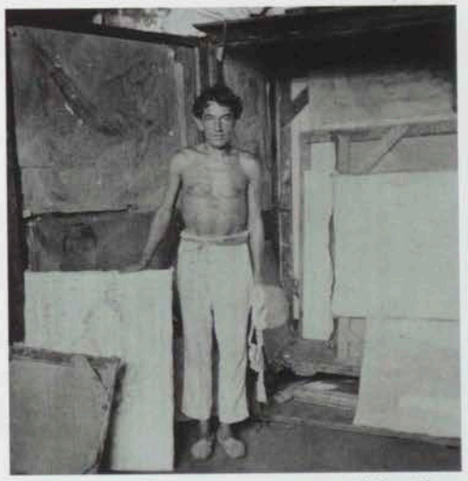
Figural Works of the 1940s

In 1945, Reverón traveled to Caracas to sell his art, and saw friends and fellow artists Manuel Cabré and Antonio Edmundo Monsanto at the art school. The two artists found that Reverón's mental health had deteriorated, and they brought him to the San Jorge Sanitorium in an effort to help him.[1] He was treated there by Doctor J. M. Báez Finol, who would ultimately diagnose him with schizophrenia.[2] After three months at the sanitorium, during which time Reverón's health apparently improved, he returned to El Castillete and began to draw, primarily with chalks, charcoal, and water-based paints on paper or board. He left landscape behind, and by 1948 he was creating figural works to the almost complete exclusion of other genres.

In *Seated Woman* (page 168), an early work from this period, the figure wears a headdress that bears a resemblance to those found in some 1930s compositions such as *Two Indians* (see page 148). In fact, *Seated Woman* has been exhibited under the title *Indian Queen*. The wooden chair on which this figure sits matches chairs that appear in photographs of El Castillete, and locates this composition within one of Reverón's *ranchos*. Markers of location are even more definitive in *The Three Graces* (page 169). Photographs of El Castillete in the 1930s and 1940s show stretched canvases hung in the air or propped up on walls (fig. 1); the three models in this work stand in front of some of these canvases.

In the lifelessness and angularity of its figures, *The Three Graces* seems to be a depiction not of real female models, but of the life-size dolls that Reverón and Ríos made (see pages 192, 208–09).[3] Reverón equipped his dolls with a universe of functionless objects for their amusement (see pages 198, 199), and some of these objects appear in *The Three Graces*. The figure furthest to the right seems to be covering her shoulders with a handmade mantilla (see page 108). The central figure stands before an imitation drum. *The Three Graces* was among works that Reverón exhibited in *Three Centuries of Venezuelan Painting*, a 1948 exhibition at the Museo de Bellas Artes in Caracas.

Guillermo Meneses believes that a specific "period" in which Reverón utilized these doll-models cannot be delineated,[4] but it is sometimes possible to ascertain which figures in Reverón's portraits are based on dolls. A woman in the background of *Female Figures* (page 171)—who wears a mantilla over her head—has feet that are not firmly planted on the floor. As can be seen in fig. 2,[5] Reverón would sometimes hang his dolls in position by tying wire, extending up from their heads, to the rafters of his *ranchos*. While they hung, Reverón would compose several drawings of them. The figure with the mantilla is again represented—but now as the focus of the composition—in *Nude* (page 170). These images demonstrate that Reverón did not depict the bodies of his dolls in



1. Reverón standing among canvases at El Castillete, photographed by Alfredo Boulton. 1930. Archivo Boulton, Alberto Vollmer Foundation, Inc.

Opposite: Armando Reverón. *Woman with Dolls* (detail). [1949]. See page 178 for full image

2. Reverón with a doll at El Castillete, photographed by Victoriano de los Ríos. 1949–54

a manner that differed from his representations of real women. The figure in *Nude* is lifelike, and is only exposed as a doll in juxtaposition to the background figure of *Female Figures*, which shares its pose and mantilla. Two paintings of nudes (page 170) are both cropped in a manner that barely includes the top of their subjects' heads; Reverón may have done this to preclude depictions of the wire from which these dolls hang. *Niza* (page 176) has the same name as one of Reverón's dolls, and the close similarities between this figure and the doll in *Female Figure* (page 171) strongly suggest that the woman in the latter work is meant to be Niza as well. In *Female Figure*, Niza stands in front of a couch made of coconut logs, on which Reverón would habitually seat his dolls.

Other works from this period, such as *Female Figure with a Fan* (page 172) or *The Three Models* (page 173), depict fully rounded, voluptuous female bodies, but may still have been depictions of Reverón's dolls. Art historian Juan Liscano recounts an interview with Juanita Ríos in which she told him that the artist used dolls because of a lack of available models. Liscano also recalled that Ríos said, "'I would pose nude for him, and after he would paint the dolls with the qualities of my skin.'"[6]

Reverón was always interested in performance and dance, and in the 1940s he depicted some figures that were explicitly performing, like the high-kicking models in two drawings titled *Female Dancers* (pages 174 and 175). One of these images of dancers (page 174) was shown at the 1954 Biennale in Venice, in a gallery devoted to Reverón that included fifteen of his works.[7] Meneses has spoken of Reverón's depictions of dolls as being far more sexually explicit than his depictions of live models. It was to works like these, the models of which are fully exposed underneath their lifted skirts, that Meneses was referring in 1966 when he wrote: "With the dolls, there begins another form of expression . . . scenes of the cabaret in which appear forms of lust, of scandal. Many times these are works of charcoal and colored pencils on board. And they have in them red lips, brilliant looks, spots that join together in sequins. Everything is contrary to the virginal melancholy of before. It is certain that this change corresponds to the crisis Reverón suffered around 1945."[8]

Reverón positioned groupings of dolls to stage theatrical scenes, and would sometimes create several compositions from the same figural arrangement. *Old Man, Three Women, and a Child* (page 177), *Woman with Dolls* (page 178), and *Christmas Scene with Dolls* (page 179) form part of a series of related works. The first has, as the central figure, a man with a long beard and a staff. A female figure faces him on his left, and a young boy stands, perhaps on top of a chair, to his right. Because this is one of very few depictions of men in Reverón's work, some scholars have postulated that this man might be an alter ego for the artist, while the child may be a representation of Reverón as a boy.[9] A photograph documents this work as being drawn from an arrangement of dolls (see page 69). While this photograph presents the scene without the compressed space of Reverón's drawing, the setup is identical. The male doll can

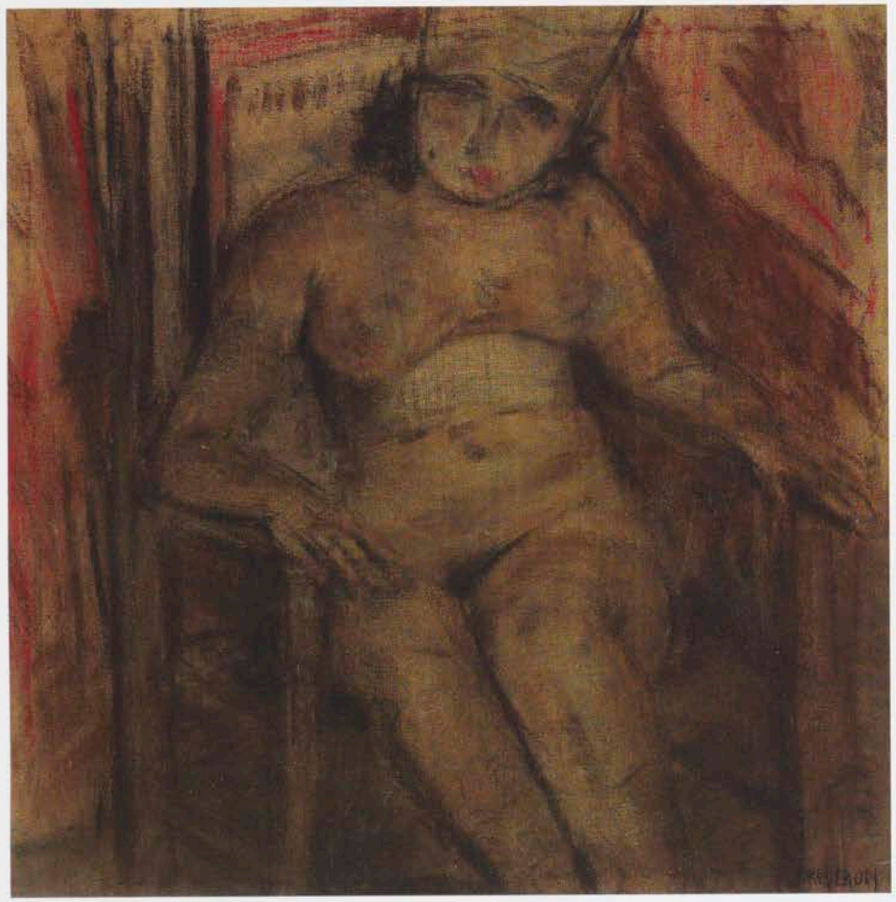
be seen, flanked by the woman and the child, to the far right in the photograph, while the other two female dolls are to the left. One of them clearly hangs from wires attached to her head.

Christmas Scene with Dolls and *Woman with Dolls* are nearly identical in composition to *Old Man, Three Women and a Child*, but the central figure of each of them has changed. In *Christmas Scene with Dolls*, Reverón has replaced the central male figure with a female doll. In *Woman with Dolls*, a woman stands directly in front of the central seated figure from *Christmas Scene with Dolls* without otherwise changing the image. The leg of the seated doll can be seen emerging from behind the standing woman on the right, and the shadows cast over this leg are identical to those of the doll's leg in *Christmas Scene with Dolls*. The doll's skirt also appears on the left side of *Nude Figures*. This female figure seems to be the first in the three compositions to be based on a live model; she stands with her weight on one leg in a relaxed and naturalistic pose, and her facial features are distinct and realistic.

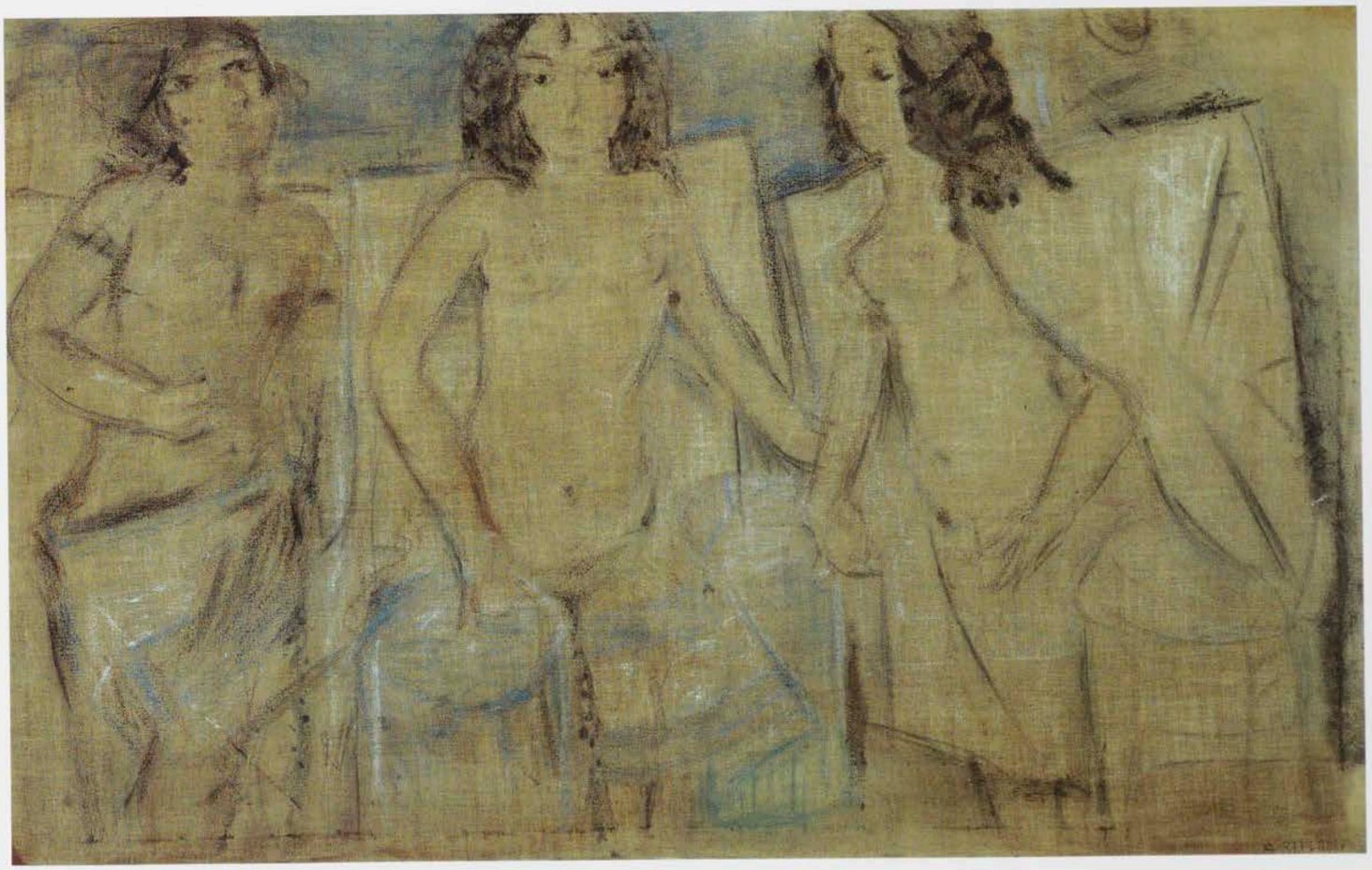
Reverón exhibited his works steadily during the late 1940s, participating annually in the Salón Oficial Anual de Arte Venezolano. However, he did not show these late figural works there until 1948, the same year that he was awarded the John Boulton Prize.[10] Only one, or possibly two, of these late 1940s figural works was exhibited at the 1951 exhibition *Armando Reverón: Pinturas* in the Centro Venezolano-Americano in Caracas, although Reverón exhibited nine landscapes made between 1940 and 1945, and five late self-portraits, dated 1948 to 1950.[11]

Notes:

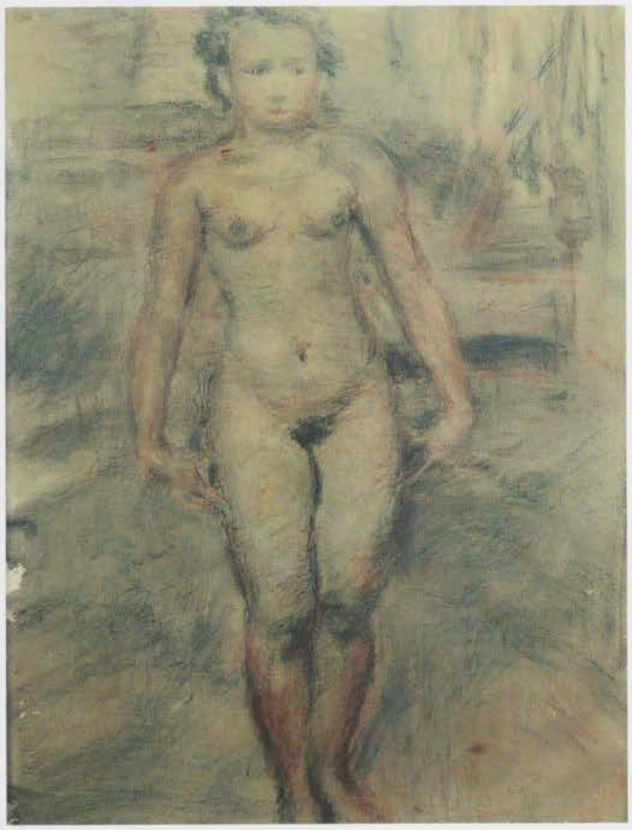
1. Juan Calzadilla, *Armando Reverón* (Caracas: Ernesto Armitano, 1979), 40. Reverón's mother died on February 2, 1942, and, perhaps as a result, Reverón's mental health deteriorated for years afterward.
2. Finol's psychological analyses of Reveron were published in Venezuelan newspapers after Reveron's death in 1954, adding to the ongoing dialogue regarding Reveron's mental health. Finol validated the popular idea that, as he said in a 1974 interview, "Reverón always painted in his moments of lucidity . . . To explain his body of work as a product of a schizophrenic hallucination does not translate with exactitude the creative reality of Armando Reverón." J. M. Báez Finol, interview in *Castillete Museo Armando Reverón* (Macuto: Instituto Nacional de Cultura y Bellas Artes, 1974), n.p.
3. Reverón refers in "Through His Own Eyes" to "all the dolls Juanita has made" (page 226); however, it is a common belief in Reverón scholarship that Reverón also played a large role in the creation of these dolls. For more on these dolls, see pages 193–95.
4. Guillermo Meneses, prologue to Alfredo Boulton, *Reverón* (Caracas: Ediciones Macanao, 1979), 57.
5. Juan Calzadilla, *Presencia y luz de Armando Reverón: Exposición itinerante* (Caracas: Galería de Arte Nacional, 1991), 102.
6. Juan Liscano, "Tras la experiencia de Armando Reverón," reprinted in *Armando Reverón: 10 ensayos* (Caracas: Concejo Municipal del Distrito Federal, 1975), 95.
7. "44 cuadros y 14 esculturas de artistas Venezolanos salen hoy para la Bienal de Venecia," *El Nacional*, May 22,1954, 32.
8. Guillermo Meneses, "El Castillete de Reverón," *El Universal*, June 16,1966, reprinted in *Armando Reverón: 18 testimonios* (Caracas: Lagoven, 1979), 62–63.
9. See essays by Ana Gradowska and Luis Pérez-Oramas in *Adquisición Reciente: "Anciano, tres mujeres y niño"* (Macuto: Fundación Museo Armando Reverón, 1995).
10. Reverón exhibited one work in 1948, *Nude* (*Desnudo*), that is now in the Collection of the Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas. This work is not included in the present catalogue. Calzadilla, *Presencia y luz*, 62.
11. The only work included from between 1945 and 1950 that depicted females was a work called *Baptism* (*Bautizo*) from 1948.



Seated Woman
***Mujer sentada* [*Reina india*]** [1945]
Oil, charcoal, and chalk on canvas,
34 1/2 × 34 1/2" (87.6 × 87.6 cm)
Private collection

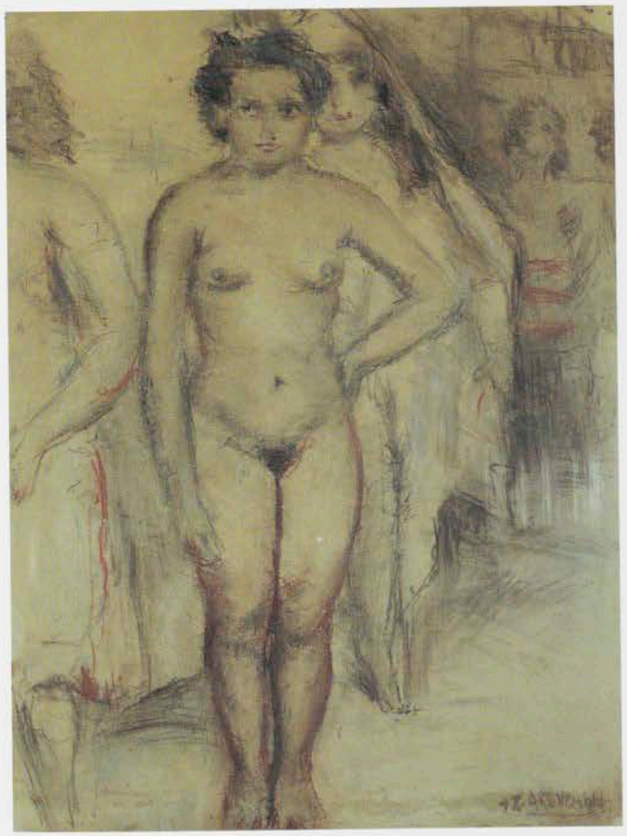


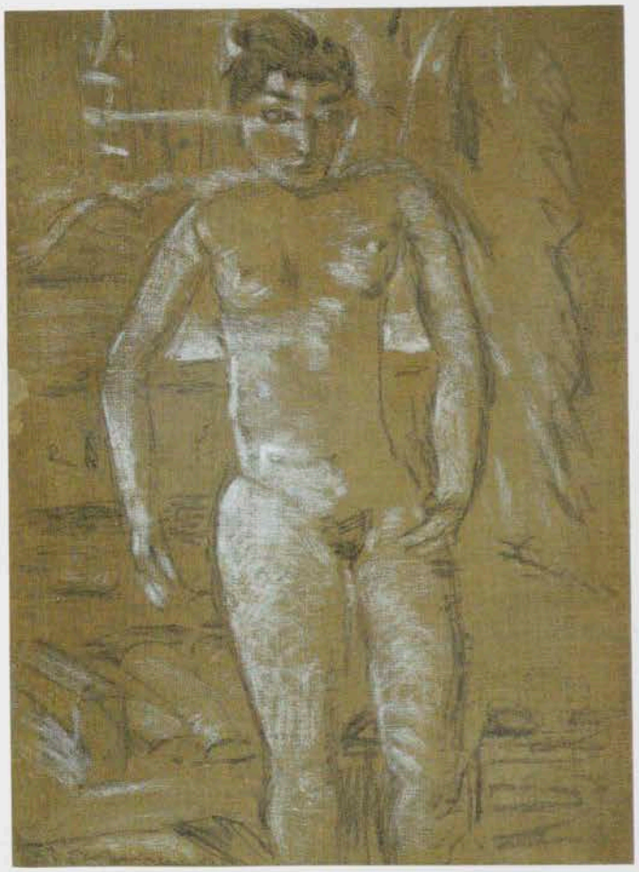
The Three Graces
Las tres gracias [1945]
Charcoal, tempera, chalk, and pastel on canvas,
42 1/16 × 66 3/4" (106.8 × 169.6 cm)
Sucesión Margot Arismendi de Villanueva



Nude
***Desnudo* [*Modelo desnudo*]** 1948
Charcoal and colored chalk on paper,
$25^{9}/_{16} \times 19^{1}/_{2}$" (65 × 49.5 cm)
Private collection, Curaçao,
Netherlands Antilles

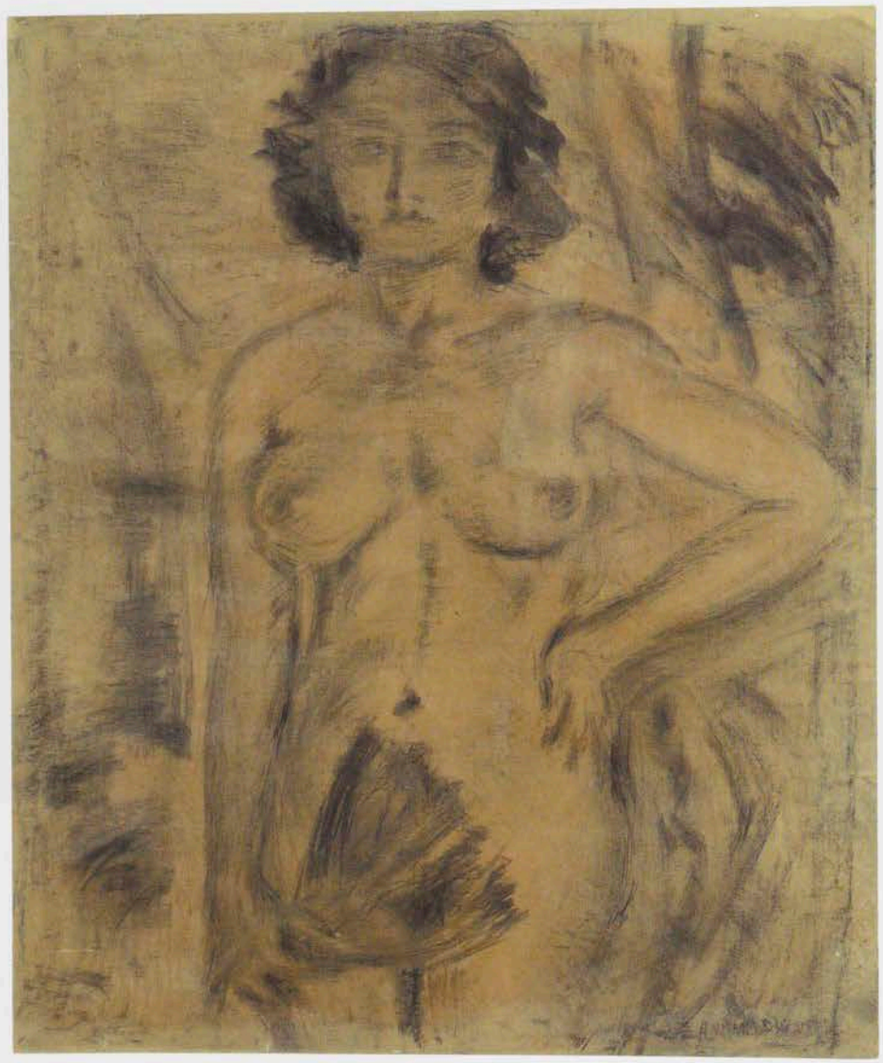
Nude
Desnudo 1949
Pencil, charcoal, chalk, and pastel
on paper, $17^{15}/_{16} \times 12^{3}/_{8}$"
(45.5 × 31.5 cm)
Collection Coronil Imber



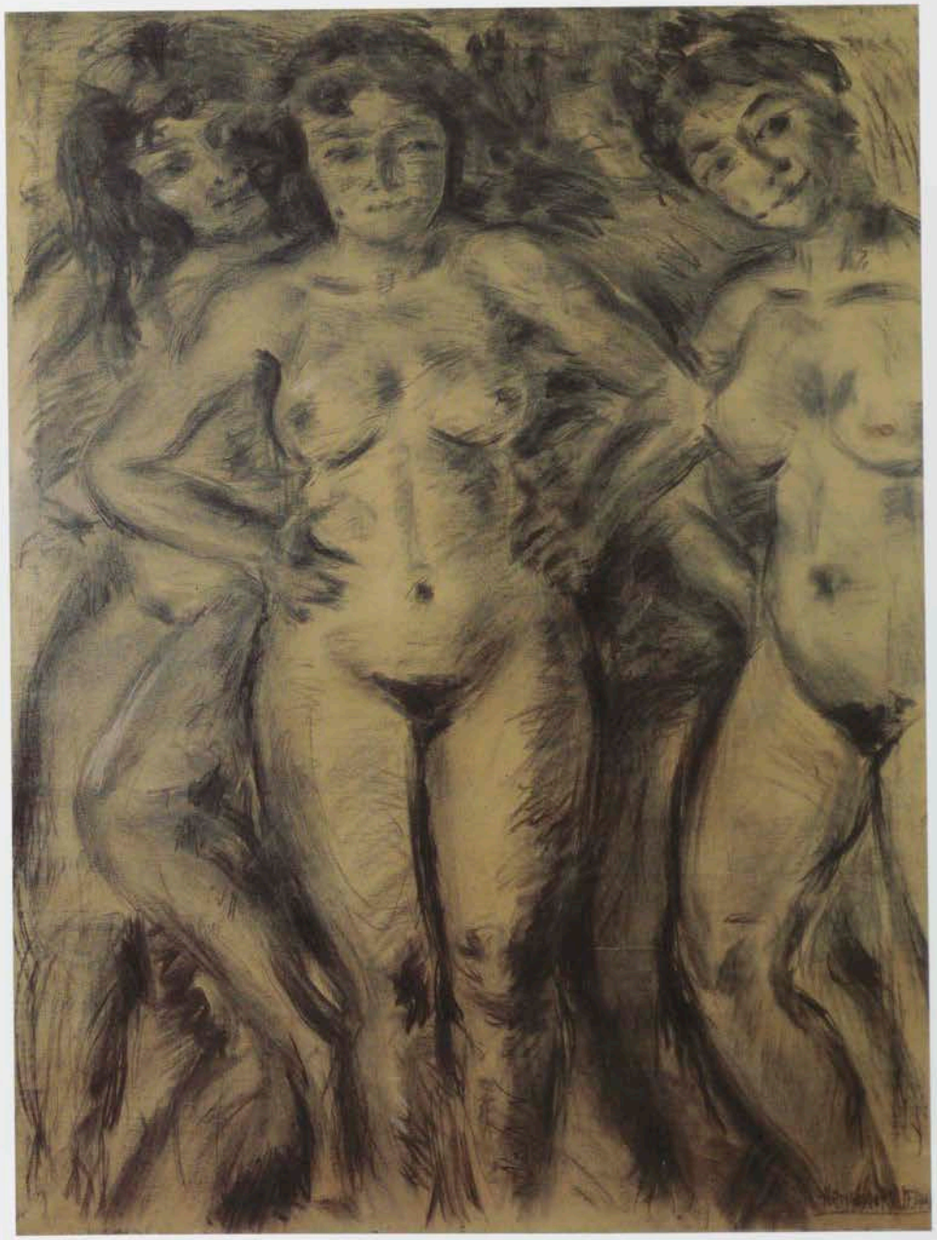


left: **Female Figures**
Figuras 1948
Pastel and charcoal on paper on board,
26 × 20 1/16" (66 × 51 cm)
Collection Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, Caracas

above: **Female Figure**
Figura [1949]
Charcoal and chalk on canvas,
31 1/2 × 24 13/16" (80 × 63 cm)
Daniela Chappard Foundation



Female Figure with a Fan
***Figura con abanico* [*Desnudo*]** [1945]
Charcoal on paper on board,
$38^{7}/_{16} \times 31^{15}/_{16}$" (97.7 × 81.2 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas



The Three Models
Las tres modelos [1947]
Charcoal and pastel on paper on board,
52 3/4 × 40 3/16" (134 × 102 cm)
Private collection

Female Dancers
Bailarinas 1948
Charcoal, chalk, and pastel on paper,
$24\,^{3}/_{16} \times 37$" (61.5 × 94 cm)
Private collection

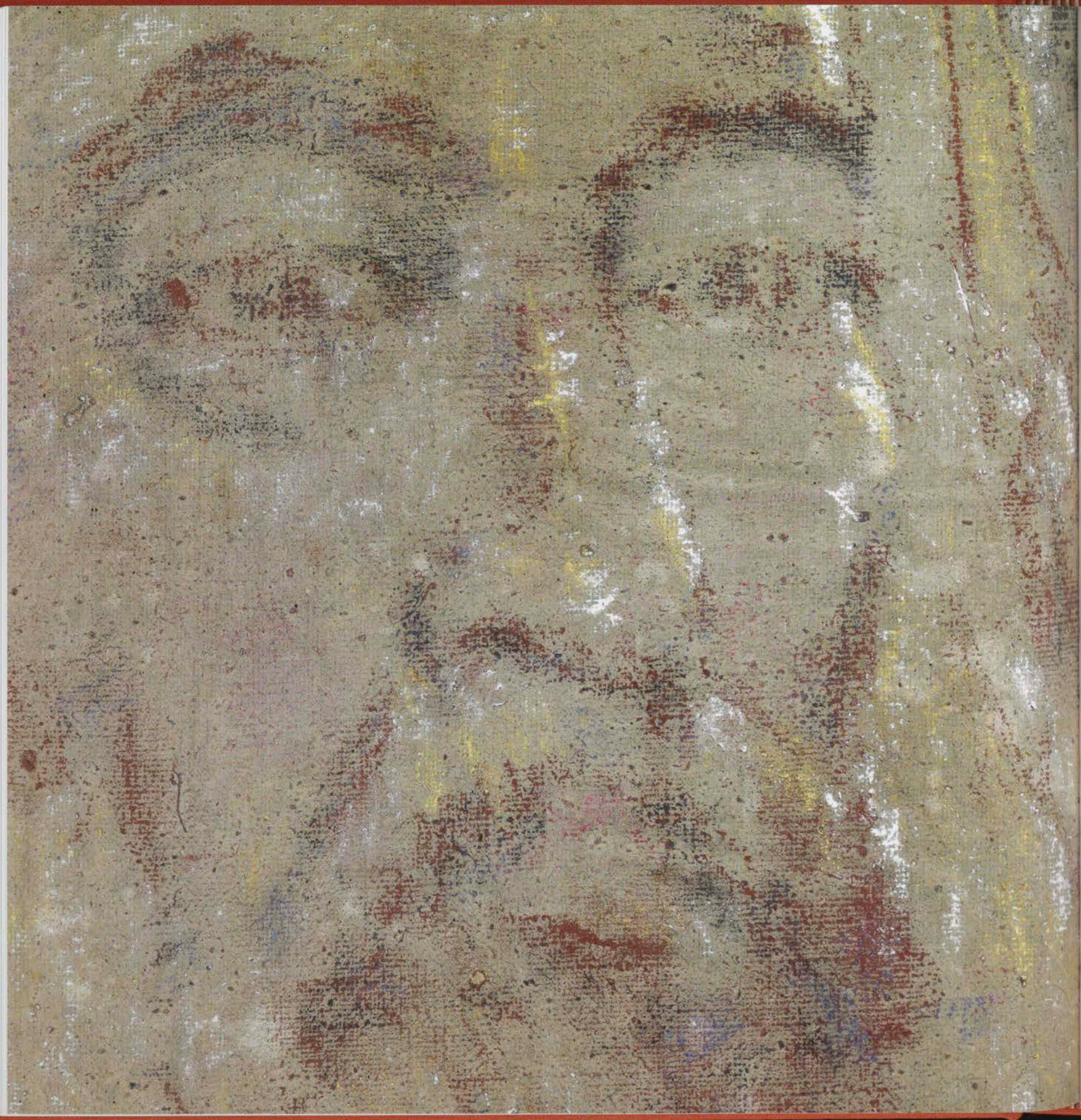
Female Dancers
Bailarinas [1948]
Charcoal, tempera, and chalk on paper,
25 3/8 × 35 7/16" (64.4 × 90 cm)
Private collection

Niza
[*Desnudo*] [1949; inscribed 1952]
Charcoal, chalk, and pastel on canvas,
45 1/16 × 28 11/16" (114.5 × 72.8 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

Old Man, Three Women, and a Child
Anciano, tres mujeres y niño [*Figuras*] 1948
Tempera and charcoal on canvas,
37 5/8 × 32 1/16" (95.5 × 81.5 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

Woman with Dolls
Mujer con muñecas [1949]
Charcoal and colored chalk on paper,
34 × 25 3/8" (86.4 × 64.5 cm)
Private collection

Christmas Scene with Dolls
Navidad de muñecas 1949
Charcoal, chalk, pastel, crayon, and oil
on paper, 45 × 34 1/4" (114.3 × 87 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas



Self-Portraits

Reverón turned to self-portraiture several times in his career, but never as consistently as he did from 1947 to 1951, years during which he created seventeen of these images. He painted an early depiction of himself in the group portrait *The Family* (1919; page 21), in which he showed himself as an obedient and controlled son. Reverón painted this image when he was thirty, using as his source a photograph of himself with the Rodríguez Zocca family, with whom he lived in his youth in Valencia (see page 16).

Reverón then abandoned self-portraiture until the 1930s, when he produced five known self-portraits (see fig. 1). These portraits are very similar in composition, and all have the quality of quick sketches. Reverón of the 1930s looks at the viewer with a steady smile, his bare chest lending credence to popular reports that he painted shirtless, with his pants belted tightly around his waist (see page 217). All of these self-portraits show what appears to be his right arm outstretched toward a canvas. In his hand he holds a brush and paints. Sometimes there is also the corner of an easel in a lower corner of the composition. His nonpainting arm is always bent. Reverón was, in fact, left-handed; what we thus see is his left arm reflected in the mirror that he looked in to paint himself.[1]

1. Armando Reverón. *Self-Portrait*. 1936. Tempera on board, 36 × 24" (91.5 × 61 cm). Private collection

The artist would not return to self-portraiture until about fifteen years later, in a series of renderings that were somber as well as formally and psychologically complicated. He made one self-portrait in 1947, nine in 1948, and seven more between 1949 and 1951. This self-portrait production coincided with a time of increased production of figural works at El Castillete (see pages 165–67). Juan Calzadilla viewed these self-portraits, nearly all of which depict Reverón from very close to the same vantage point, as Reverón's attempt to "return to the academicism of his adolescence" for their ambition and gravity.[2]

For these late self-portraits, Reverón generally drew with charcoal and chalks. Almost exclusively, he is seen from a three-quarter view of his left side. Documentary photographs taken by Victoriano de los Ríos (see page 217) show that Reverón would paint himself while looking in a mirror placed to his right. That he strained to see his image in the mirror while facing forward, toward the canvas, helps to explain the off-center angle. These portraits were made inside El Castillete, and in the background, as in the backgrounds of such late figural drawings as *Woman with Dolls* (page 178), are Reverón's dolls. As he looked in the mirror, the dolls, hung over his left shoulder, would appear behind him. Several of these portraits show the same configuration of dolls. He also repeated backgrounds very similar to those in some of his figural compositions.

Opposite: Armando Reverón. *Self-Portrait* (detail). 1951. See page 191 for full image

His *Self-Portrait with Dolls* (page 185) includes in its background the same dancing dolls of which he crafted portraits in 1948 (see pages 174, 175). Reverón's hair and facial hair change from picture to picture, indicating the passing of time between some works in which he is clean-shaven and those in which he dons a significant curly beard.

In a self-portrait from 1951 (page 191), the dolls have disappeared from the background, and Reverón sits alone. This work was composed during the filming of Margot Benacerraf's 1951–52 film *Reverón*, which won several filmmaking prizes across South America (fig. 2). A notice at the beginning of the film thanks Reverón for kindly agreeing to return to painting so that the film could include footage of him at work; perhaps this is why this painting has a quite different feel.

2. Reverón painting *Self-Portrait* (1951), from the film *Armando Reverón* by Margot Benacerraf

By the late 1940s, Reverón was receiving steady, positive response to his work. In 1949, the artist Alejandro Otero curated an exhibition of twenty-five of Reverón's paintings at the Taller Libre de Arte, Caracas, and de los Ríos exhibited his photographs of Reverón at the Centro Venezolano-Americano.[3] A 1951 article in the journal *Visión* spoke of a strong market for Reverón works, as well as a continued popular and international interest in his way of life at El Castillete: "The Caraqueños—although Reverón almost never visits the capital—are now competing to acquire his works. Among North Americans, he has few but very faithful friends, like Nelson Rockefeller, who, when he steps onto Venezuelan soil, habitually makes his first visit to the strange workshop of Reverón, and, like a religious rite, drinks the coffee in conchs and in gourds that Juanita, as the woman of the house, offers him."[4]

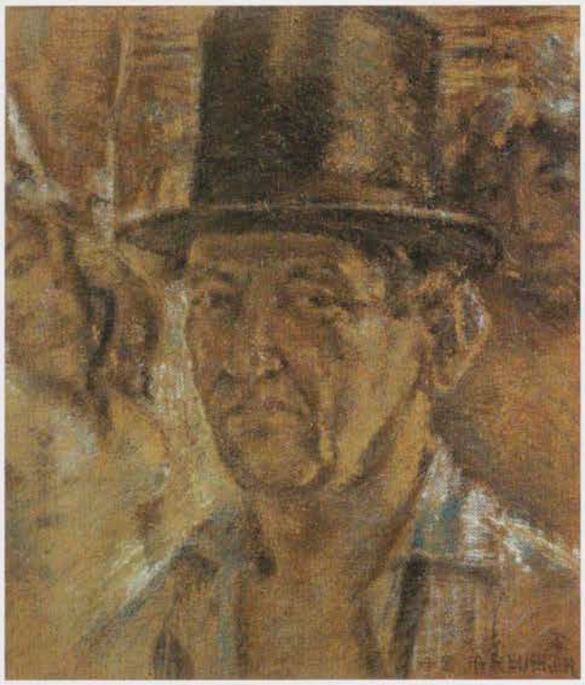
In 1951, Reverón was given a major retrospective exhibition, consisting of fifty-five works and held at the Centro Venezolano-Americano from November 23 to December 10. (Five late self-portraits were included in the exhibition.) The exhibition was organized by the noted Venezuelan critic Enrique Planchart and was warmly received in the press. Reverón also won the Antonio Esteban Frias Prize that year for his entry into the 1951 Salón Oficial Anual de Arte Venezolano. But Reverón's health was deteriorating. An article in *El Nacional* that previewed the 1951 exhibition at the Centro Venezolano-Americano stated at the end of its laudatory prose, "The presence of Armando Reverón in Caracas at the hour of the inauguration of his exhibition, however, is not certain because of the state of his health right now."[5] Despite his success in 1951, he is quoted as having said that year: "I ignore everything about the awards; they don't interest me. I am only interested in my little castle and in my

paintings. I am preparing some, and I want them to be extraordinary."[6] From 1952, his artistic production diminished, and he began to create paintings and drawings that would remain unfinished. His health showed moments of recovery in 1953, the year that Martín de Ugalde wrote an article in the newspaper *El Nacional* entitled, "Reverón Wants to Recover and Return to Painting."[7] Reverón also won prizes for his four entries in the 1953 Salón. However, in October of that year, as Reverón's mental health continued to deteriorate, Manuel Cabré and Armando Planchart pursuaded him to reenter the San Jorge Sanitorium.

On September 12, 1954, while at the sanitorium, Reverón met with Carlos Otero, the director of the Museo de Bellas Artes in Caracas, to discuss a retrospective exhibition of the artist's work that Otero was organizing for the winter. Six days after meeting with Otero, Reverón died of a cerebral embolism. His retrospective ultimately opened in the summer of 1955 with nearly four hundred works. Fifty-five of these works then traveled to Boston, Washington, D.C., New Orleans, Houston, and San Francisco in 1956.[8]

Notes

1. John Elderfield makes note of this in "The Self-Portrait Drawings of Armando Reverón," *Master Drawings* 40, no.1 (spring 2002): 27.
2. Juan Calzadilla, *Armando Reverón* (Caracas: Ernesto Armitano, 1979), preamble, n.p.
3. The invitation for this exhibition is reprinted in Juan Calzadilla, *Presencia y luz de Armando Reverón: Exposición itinerante* (Caracas: Galería de Arte Nacional, 1991), 62. While Otero held Reverón in very high regard, he later said that he felt the artist's late self-portraits were "almost disconnected, without a profound relation with the artist." Alejandro Otero, "Notas sobre la pintura de Reverón," *El Universal* (September 16, 1979), reprinted in *Armando Reverón: 18 testimonios* (Caracas: Lagoven, 1979), 71–72.
4. "Extraño Pintor," *Visión* (May 29,1951): 24–25. Rockefeller is recorded in Calzadilla 1979 as owning one Reverón self-portrait.
5. "Exposición completa de Reverón," *El Nacional,* November 1, 1951.
6. As quoted in *Los oficios de la luz* (Caracas: Fondo Editorial, 1998), 211.
7. Martín de Ugalde, "Reverón quiere curarse y volver a pintar," reprinted in *Armando Reverón: 18 testimonios*, 18.
8. The exhibition catalogue for the Caracas show, by Alfredo Boulton, is *Exposición retrospectiva de Armando Reverón* (Caracas: Museo de Bellas Artes, 1955). The exhibition traveled to the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; The Isaac Delgado Museum of Art, New Orleans; the Houston Museum of Fine Arts; and the San Francisco Museum of Art. See *Reverón* (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1956).



Self-Portrait
Autorretrato
[*Autorretrato con "pumpá"*] 1948
Charcoal and chalk on board, 24 × 20 1/16" (61 × 51 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

Self-Portrait with Straw Hat
Autorretrato con sombrero de cogollo 1948
Pencil, charcoal, and chalk on board,
30 1/4 × 25 13/16" (76.8 × 65.5 cm)
Private collection

Self-Portrait
Autorretrato 1948
Charcoal, pastel, and colored pencil
on board, 25 3/8 × 21 7/8" (64.5 × 55.5 cm)
Private collection

Self-Portrait with Dolls
Autorretrato con muñecas [1948]
Pencil, charcoal, and colored chalk on paper,
24 13/16 × 28 3/4" (63 × 73 cm)
Private collection

Self-Portrait with Dolls
Autorretrato con muñecas
[*Autorretrato con figuras*] 1949
Pastel, charcoal, and chalk on paper on board,
$25\,^{3}/_{8} \times 32\,^{7}/_{8}$" (64.5 × 83.5 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

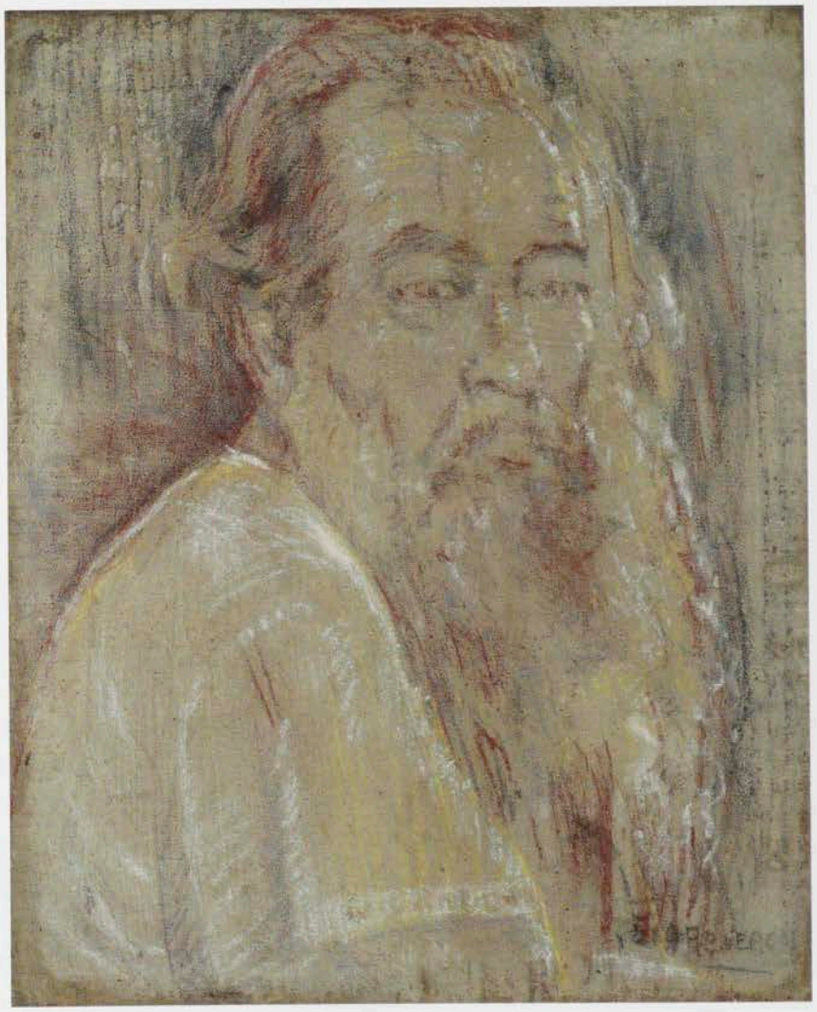
Self-Portrait with Dolls
Autorretrato con muñecas 1948
Charcoal, chalk, pastel, and colored chalk
on paper on board, 23 5/8 × 36 1/4" (60 × 92 cm)
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Asdrúbal Fuenmayor R.

Self-Portrait with Dolls
Autorretrato con muñecas
[*Autorretrato*] 1950
Charcoal, chalk, and pastel on paper,
25 1/2 × 28 9/16" (64.7 × 72.5 cm)
Private collection, Caracas

Self-Portrait with Dolls
Autorretrato con muñecas
[*Autorretrato con figuras***]** 1949
Pencil, charcoal, chalk, and pastel on paper
on board, 25 1/2 × 33" (64.7 × 83.8 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

Self-Portrait with Dolls
Autorretrato con muñecas 1949
Pencil, charcoal, pastel, chalk, and colored chalk on card stock, $18\,^{1}/_{8} \times 18\,^{5}/_{16}$" (46 × 46.5 cm)
Private collection

Self-Portrait with Top Hat and Dolls
Autorretrato con muñecas y pumpá
[*Autorretrato con "pumpá"*] 1949
Pencil, charcoal, chalk, and pastel on board, $25\,^{3}/_{8} \times 34\,^{9}/_{16}$" (64.4 × 87.8 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas



Self-Portrait
Autorretrato 1951
Charcoal and chalk on canvas,
27 3/8 × 22 1/16" (69.5 × 56 cm)
Private collection

Dolls and Objects

In a 1953 interview, Reverón stated that the importance of dolls in his life began after an extended childhood illness: "Since then I have liked the world of the fantastic, of dolls that are like living characters but do not speak. They only look. It is I who speak. They look at me and listen to me. I tell them many things about Pancho [a monkey], about Juanita Mota, about Madrid and Barcelona, and they hear me."[1] Many accounts, like that of the novelist José Balza, claim that Reverón's creation of dolls late in his life was indeed a return to an earlier practice of his youth: "Reverón, as a young boy, constructed some of his toys: not only the routine forms that are attractive to little children, but also dolls."[2] Nicolás Ferdinandov, a great inspiration on Reverón's earlier work (see pages 21 and 119–20), has also been credited with having inspired Reverón to create this universe of dolls and objects.[3]

The artist's major period of doll production is widely considered to have begun in or just before 1940, because of the introduction at this time of lifeless, stuffed women into his portraits such as *Five Figures* (see page 149). It is not definitively known why Reverón made and used these dolls in the 1940s, but it is apparent that they played a large role both in his art and in his daily life. A 1951 article in the periodical *Visión* described an encounter with Reverón's dolls: "Where does Reverón get the enigmatic models for his works that give to Venezuelan painting unmistakable archetypes of beauty and feminine mystery? In a large shed that he made himself, the artist shows what one could call the palace of an imaginary 'Bluebeard': The models are enormous dolls, also made with his own hands, nude or clothed with the most unexpected clothing. He has given them their own names . . . they are, precisely, Juanita's only rivals. Among these dolls, which recline or stand up . . . one recognizes the protagonists of many of his famous works."[4]

Reverón and Ríos made these dolls from the same burlap sacking onto which Reverón increasingly painted from the late 1920s on. The dolls, wearing outfits, jewelry, and custom-designed wigs, lived alongside Reverón and Ríos. The rudimentary construction of the dolls has been commented on widely by Reverón scholars, often in a far from complimentary manner. Alfredo Boulton, for example, called them "enormous and horrendous."[5] The bundled cloth that forms their skin is wrapped around wire skeletons for stability and is rutted and uneven (see page 67). In places, it is punctured, the internal fabric of these corpses left exposed.

Reverón also made other objects that imitated living beings, as well as costumes that were meant to be worn either by himself or by his dolls. He constructed life-size human skeletons out of wire, one of which he topped with a coconut shell as its head (pages 206, 207). Several masks of male faces and a series of crowns and hats were thought to have been used in imaginative religious rituals (page 202). A pair of bat wings made of paper and textile are large enough for a human to wear (page 197), and photographic documentation shows the two wings, which are now connected in one piece,

Opposite: Armando Reverón. Doll (*Muñeca*). 1940s. Synthetic fiber, textile, wire, cotton fiber, printed paper, jute, and pigment, 62 5/8 × 19 11/16" (159 × 50 cm). Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

hanging separately on the wall of El Castillete, as though ready to be harnessed over each shoulder and worn.[6] According to one story, Reverón would attempt to coax boys who visited El Castillete to put on the wings and jump off his roof.

Reverón's world of the imaginary was immense, and he crafted many other objects at El Castillete. His dolls were well provided for, with couches made of wooden beams, a paper telephone, and a set of dominoes (see page 199). They could entertain themselves with nonfunctioning instruments such as a guitar, a tambourine, or an accordion (page 198). Other objects included: a wooden bottle and a chalice (pages 50, 52); a flattened birdcage complete with paper birds (page 196); and a mirror of unreflective aluminum foil (page 14). By the 1930s, Reverón was also making his own painting tools, layering fabric over one end of cow ribs, pencils, or sticks to create his "paintbrushes" (see pages 200, 201). He also created a carrier in which he could transport his tools. Reverón made wooden easels and also umbrellas, under which he painted while outdoors.

According to the accounts of several visitors, the artist, at least outwardly, treated his imaginary universe quite seriously. Journalist Martín de Ugalde wrote about his encounter with Reverón's dolls on a trip to El Castillete: "On a small central table there is a radio switched on. Three life-sized, cloth dolls are formally seated in chairs, listening quietly, as though human, to a crazy rhythm of trumpets. Reverón only introduced us to Teresa. He twisted the unruly doll to attention. Her two cloth companions were not honored with an introduction."[7]

A helpful source of information regarding Reverón's objects and dolls is two documentary films about the artist late in his life: the first by Roberto Lucca in 1945 (edited in 1949), and the second by Margot Benacerraf (1951–52). Lucca's film includes footage of a 1945 visit that a group of tourists to Macuto made to El Castillete. Reverón is shown dancing with one of his dolls in an outdoor area and then throwing the doll carelessly in a heap on the ground. Benacerraf's black-and-white film in part depicts a *rancho* at the compound as an eerie, dark lair in which Reverón has hung his masks (page 202) on rope extending between parallel walls. His dolls are at uneven heights around the room (fig. 1).

1. Dolls hanging in El Castillete, from the film *Armando Reverón* by Margot Benacerraf, 1951–52

Toward the end of his life, Reverón spoke of his feeling that theatrics and reality were one: "Life is a great theater. We, you, journalists, and photographers, we are the characters whom we represent in the scene of life."[8] There are reports of Reverón staging plays and concerts in which his dolls made use of their objects, such as one from Eyidio Moscoso, who lived near El Castillete as a child and

recalled first meeting Reverón's dolls in 1942, when he was ten years old. In 1994, Moscoso recounted that one afternoon, "Reverón had everything prepared to direct what might have been one of his best concerts. In their seats of honor were the Princess India, on the piano; the India Guajira, on the harp; Asia, the Countess, on the guitar; Proserpina, on the bass. . . . At the end of the concert, the applause became a standing ovation. . . . Reverón, who was pleased, stood his dolls up so that they could give their thanks for the great applause." And then: "The imaginary public left El Castillete, retaining their habitual silence. Reverón gathered the instruments, all made by his hands, and went around hanging each doll in its usual place."[9]

Notes

1. See "Through His Own Eyes," page 226. Reverón also states in this interview that the dolls were the creation of Juanita Ríos (Mota). In 1966, Boulton also stated that Ríos, not Reverón, made these dolls, but later scholars believe that Reverón played a large role in their fabrication. Alfredo Boulton, *La obra de Armando Reverón* (Caracas: Ediciones de la Fundación Neumann, 1966), 90.
2. José Balza, *Análogo, simultáneo* (Caracas: Ediciones GAN, 1983), 15.
3. Konstantín N. Zapozhnikov, *El hombre del país de las nieves azules: Nikolas Ferdinandov* (Caracas: Cromotip, 1983), 102.
4. "Extraño Pintor," *Visión* (May 29, 1951): 24–25.
5. Alfredo Boulton, *Mirar a Reverón* (Caracas: Macanao Ediciones, 1990), 18.
6. Reproduced in Gio Ponti, "Reverón, o la vita allo stato di sogno," *Domus* 296 (July 1954): 38.
7. Martín de Ugalde, "Reverón quiere curarse y volver a pintar," reprinted in *Armando Reverón: 18 testimonios* (Caracas: Lagoven, 1979), 18.
8. "Armando Reverón recuperado de su enfermedad." *El Nacional,* May 7, 1954.
9. Eyidio Moscoso, *Reverón: amigo de un niño* (Caracas: Ediciones Fundación Museo Armando Reverón, 1994), 97–98.

Birdcage
Pajarera 1940s
Bamboo, wire, adhesive, paper,
thread, board, metal, and pigments,
$33\,^{7}/_{16} \times 41\,^{15}/_{16} \times 1\,^{7}/_{16}$" (85 × 106.5 × 3.6 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

Bat Wings
Alas de murciélago 1940s
Paper, reed, pigment, thread, and textile,
41 5/16 × 42 1/2" (105 × 108 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

Mandolin
Mandolina 1940s
Wood, board, wire, and pigment,
$39\,^{3}/_{16} \times 14\,^{5}/_{8} \times 2\,^{1}/_{2}$" (99.5 × 37.1 × 6.4 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

Accordion
Acordeón 1940s
Wood, kraft paper, nails, and pigment,
$10\,^{13}/_{16} \times 4\,^{3}/_{4} \times 7\,^{11}/_{16}$" (27.5 × 12 × 19.5 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

Telephone
Teléfono 1940s
Brass, wood, aluminum foil, pigment, and string,
$8\,1/2 \times 11\,13/16 \times 5\,7/8$" (21.6 × 30 × 15 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

Box of Dominoes
Juego de domino 1940s
Dyed board, textile, and paper,
$6\,7/16 \times 7\,11/16 \times 1\,3/4$" (16.4 × 19.5 × 4.5 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

above: **Painting Stump**
Esfumino 1940s
Bone, textile, and cotton fiber,
$7\,^{7}/_{8} \times 1\,^{9}/_{16} \times 1\,^{9}/_{16}$" (20 × 4 × 4 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

above, right: **Bundle of feathers with blue and green binding**
Manojo de plumas con amarre azul y verde 1940s
Feathers, wood, and textile,
$14 \times 5\,^{1}/_{2} \times 2\,^{3}/_{4}$" (35.5 × 14 × 7 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

Brush carrier, with brushes and painting stumps
Portapinceles, con pinceles y esfuminos 1940s
Textile, string, wood, paper, vegetable fibers, cotton fibers, pigments, and jute, $19\,^{11}/_{16} \times 28\,^{3}/_{8} \times 1\,^{7}/_{8}$" (50 × 72 × 4.7 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

opposite and right: **Painting Stumps**
Esfuminos 1940s
Wood, textile, paper, vegetable fibers, jute, string, cotton fiber, and pigments, various dimensions
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

opposite, clockwise from upper left:
Mask
Máscara 1940s
Textile, paper, thread, and pigment,
$8\,1/4 \times 8\,1/4 \times 1\,3/16$" (21 × 21 × 3 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

Mask of Satyr
Máscara—sátiro 1940s
Textile, paper, adhesive, and pigment,
$16\,13/16 \times 11\,1/4$" (42.7 × 28.5 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

Mask with Bowtie
Máscara con pajarita 1940s
Paper, pigment, and adhesive,
$12\,5/8 \times 7\,7/8$" (32 × 20 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

Mask
Máscara 1940s
Textile, paper, and pigment,
$10\,15/16 \times 8\,1/4 \times 1$" (27.8 × 21 × 2.5 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

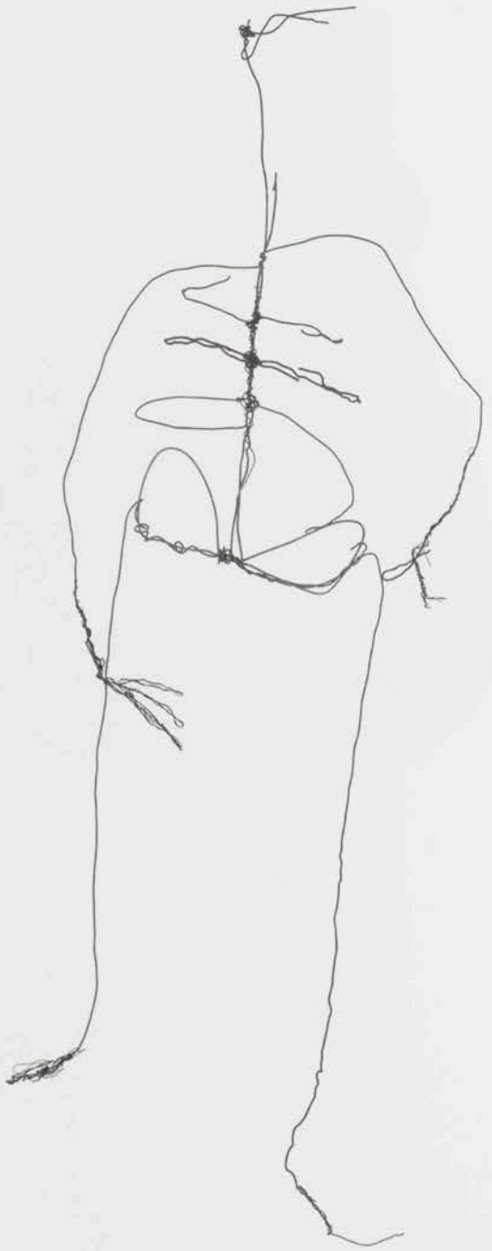
right: **Head of Monkey**
Cabeza de mono 1940s
Wire, textile, hair, stone, string, and paper,
$3\,15/16 \times 5\,7/8 \times 5\,7/8$" (10 × 15 × 15 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

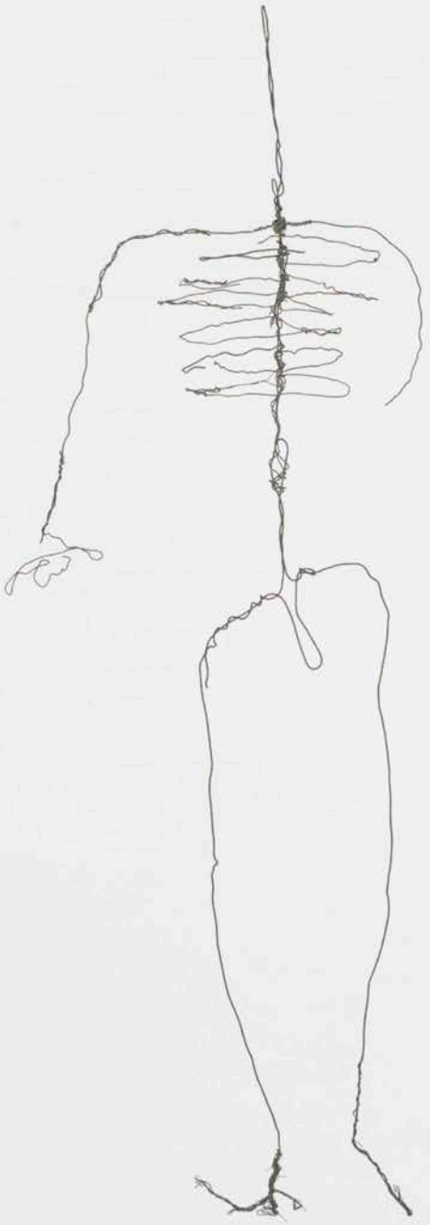
left: **Wicker Mannequin**
Cesta maniquí 1940s
Wicker weaving and coconut shells,
51 3/16 × 18 1/2 × 18 1/2" (130 × 47 × 47 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

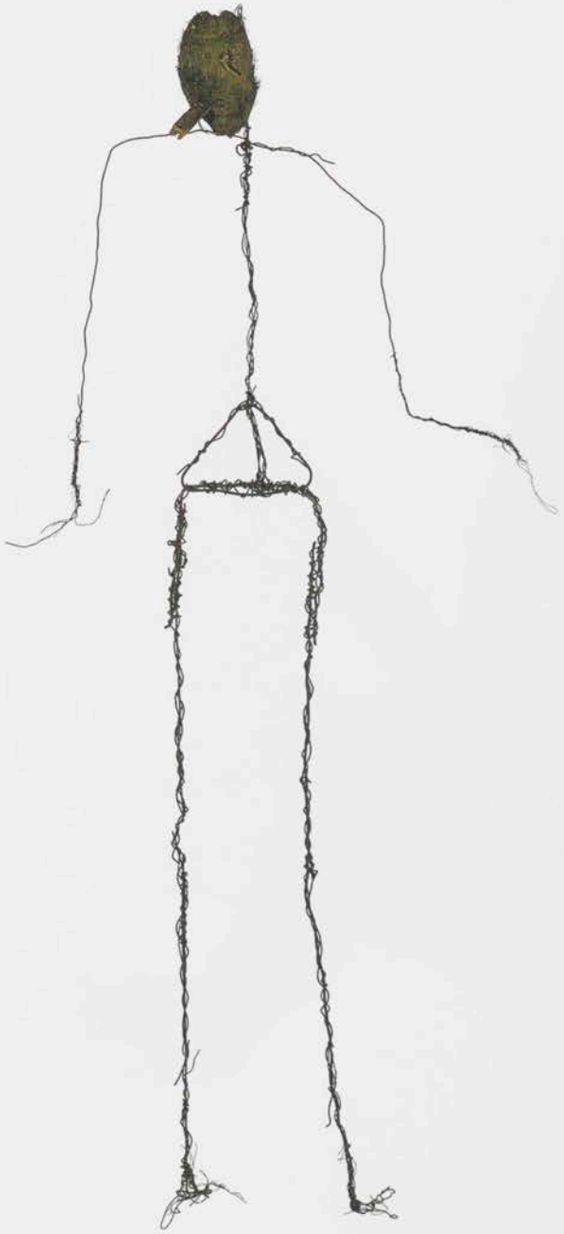
opposite, clockwise:
Crown
Corona 1940s
Brass, wire, and pigment,
2 9/16 × 6 15/16 × 6 15/16" (6.5 × 17.6 × 17.6 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

Tin Crown
Corona de hojalata 1940s
Brass, wire, printed paper, and colored glass,
4 5/16 × 4 3/4 × 4 3/4" (10.9 × 12 × 12 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

Priest's Hat
Birrete sacerdotal 1940s
Paper, thread, and textile,
5 1/8 × 6 7/8 × 6 7/8" (13 × 17.5 × 17.5 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas







opposite:
Skeleton
Esqueleto 1940s
Wire, 54 1/2 × 23 1/16 × 7 1/2" (138.5 × 58.5 × 19 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

Skeleton
Esqueleto 1940s
Wire, 59 13/16 × 19 1/2 × 6 5/16" (152 × 49.5 × 16 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

left: **Skeleton**
Esqueleto 1940s
Wire, wood, and coconut shell,
59 1/16 × 28 1/8 × 6 5/16" (150 × 71.5 × 16 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

Serafina 1940s
Textile, wire, cotton fiber, printed paper,
jute, and pigment, $63\,3/8 \times 28\,3/8 \times 9\,5/8$"
(161 × 72 × 24.5 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

Niza 1940s
Textile, wire, cotton fiber, printed paper, and pigment, 59 1/16 × 22 1/16 × 7 7/8" (150 × 56 × 20 cm)
Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

El Castillete

Reverón began building El Castillete in 1921, when his mother bought him what Alfredo Boulton describes as "a parcel of 27 meters by 27 meters, situated above the small *rancho* in which Reverón lived since 1920, facing a wine shop called 'Las Quince Letras' ('The Fifteen Letters')." Boulton writes, "It was a plot strewn with large rocks, where thorny mimosas, coconut trees, orange trees, and bread fruit trees grew. There were also papaya trees, lemon trees, and jasmine shrubs. It looked like the dry bed of an ancient stream. . . . There, the painter constructed two *ranchos*."[1] In his autobiographical statement, Reverón painstakingly lists the materials with which he built El Castillete and the price of these materials. He also recounts the construction process, the names of people who helped him, and the types of food he served at a Sunday afternoon feast in honor of the setting of the first stone, as well as at feasts on subsequent weekends. (See pages 224–25).

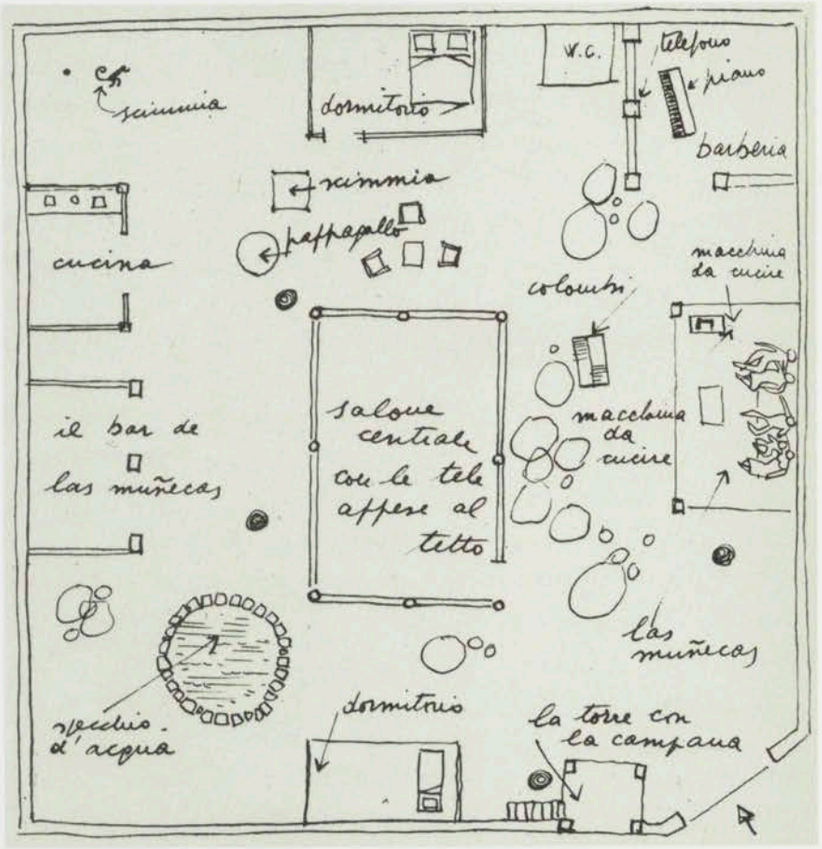
Novelist Julián Padrón reported in a 1932 article that El Castillete had expanded to include one more *rancho*. Of the three, one served as a warehouse for Reverón's paintings as well as the place where he and Ríos slept. Another was the kitchen, and the third was Reverón's studio (fig. 1).[2] Padrón's description of El Castillete continues:

> The pillars were stalks of palms screwed onto wooden crossbeams. The roof was palm. At the top was a loft with a ladder. Near the ceiling, there was string netting from which Reverón hung his canvases to dry after preparing them. The floor is yellowish-red dirt with some stones showing through the dirt. In the air were two hammocks made of *moriche* palm, and also a trapeze. At one end of the room was a case of boxes to hold the large canvases. At the front were two easels—one big and the other smaller—that he made himself from coconut stalks. On top of them, a sun umbrella regulated the light. On one side was a platform made of coconut boards, on which to pose models. And for the walls of the *rancho*, large curtains of canvas ran across the same type of rope that anchored the boats in the harbor.[3]

The *rancho* that Padrón describes was supported by large wooden tree trunks, still covered in bark, across which Reverón had strung translucent fabric (see opposite). Another *rancho* was constructed with walls of woven palm fronds. The third had a facade of laid stone, with stone columns in front that supported a porch. All of them had palm roofs. While there were other *ranchos* in and around Macuto during Reverón's life that were constructed in similarly simplistic fashion, Macuto was a relatively cosmopolitan town, and many buildings there at this time were crafted in a Spanish colonial style, either of masonry or wood.[4]

As is documented in the 1945–49 film by Roberto Lucca, Reverón received both uninvited guests and friends from Caracas artistic circles at El Castillete into the 1940s; he painted portraits of former Círculo member Antonio Edmundo Monsanto and of the artist Angel Hurtado in 1947 and 1948.

Opposite: Exterior of El Castillete, photographed by Graziano Gasparini. Originally published in *Domus*, 1954



1. Architectural plan of El Castillete, first published in *Domus*, 1954

barberia=barber
colombi=doves
cucina=kitchen
dormitorio=bedroom
il bar de las muñecas=the dolls' bar
la torre con la campana=belltower
las muñecas=dolls
macchina da cucina=stove
occhio d'acqua=pond
pappagallo=parrot
piano=piano
salone centrale con le tele appese al tetto=central parlor with curtains hanging from the roof
scimmia=monkey
telefono=telephone

Accounts recall that Reverón was hospitable to tourists because he considered them potential customers. The artist Mateo Manaure recounted a trip to visit Reverón at El Castillete, when Reverón excused himself from their conversation to entertain tourists with the madcap activities expected of him for about an hour, and then returned to Manaure, saying, "Mateo, pardon me for making you wait so long, but these are the pains that I have to go to to sell two little paintings."[5]

Documents from the 1950s record additional small structures in the space encircled by El Castillete's high stone wall, as can be seen in the floor plan of El Castillete published in a 1954 article by the Italian architect Gio Ponti.[6] Ponti spoke of El Castillete as a dreamlike, fantastic residence. He compared it to the work of the Catalan architect Antonio Gaudí, as well as to Noah's Ark, and he likened Reverón to Vincent van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, and Robinson Crusoe. Ponti was impressed by the accommodations that Reverón had built for his nonhuman companions, including a café for his dolls and a little house for his monkey, his parrot, and his doves. Ponti's article was accompanied by photographs by the Italian architect and painter Graziano Gasparini. Ponti and Gasparini were later instrumental in

the inclusion of Reverón's paintings in the 1956 Venice Biennale.

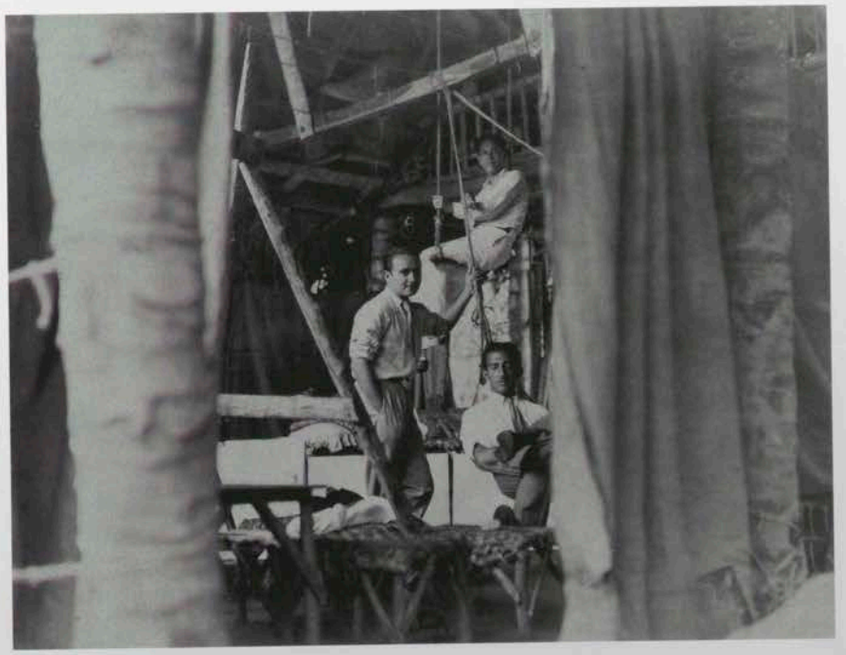
Ríos continued to live in El Castillete after Reverón's death, and rented out space in it as a guest house in order to support herself. She preserved El Castillete in much the same way as it had been during Reverón's life, with painting stretchers still hanging from the rafters, and the dolls, which suffered damage due to moth infestations, sitting quietly in the interiors (fig. 2).[7] In June of 1974, El Castillete was converted into the Museo Armando Reverón, and for more than twenty years Reverón's *ranchos* were preserved as they had been during his life. However, for reasons of conservation, the dolls and the objects were brought to the Galería de Arte Nacional, Caracas, and replaced with replicas. In December of 1999, the Museo Armando Reverón at El Castillete was destroyed during severe mudslides caused by the torrential rain in coastal Venezuela.

2. *Wicker Mannequin* and a chair made by Reverón placed in a window at El Castillete, from *Armando Reverón: 18 testimonios* (1979)

Notes

1. Alfredo Boulton, *La obra de Armando Reverón* (Caracas: Fundación Neumann, 1966), 52. I thank Jaime Tello for the translation of this segment.
2. Julián Padrón, "Armando Reverón," *Élite* 370 (October 15, 1932), republished in *Fuentes documentales y críticas de las artes plásticas venezolanas: siglos XIX y XX* (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 2001), 820.
3. Padrón, *Fuentes documentales*, 820.
4. Mónica Silva Contreras, *Temperar en Macuto* (Caracas: Fundación Museo Armando Reverón, 1999), n.p.
5. *Los objetos de Reverón* (Caracas: Fundación Museo Armando Reverón, 1993), 17.
6. Gio Ponti, "Reverón, o la vita allo stato di sogno," *Domus* 296 (July 1954): 33–39.
7. See, for example, Lorenzo Batallán, "La arquitectura vegetal del Castillete," *El Nacional*, June 19, 1966, C1.

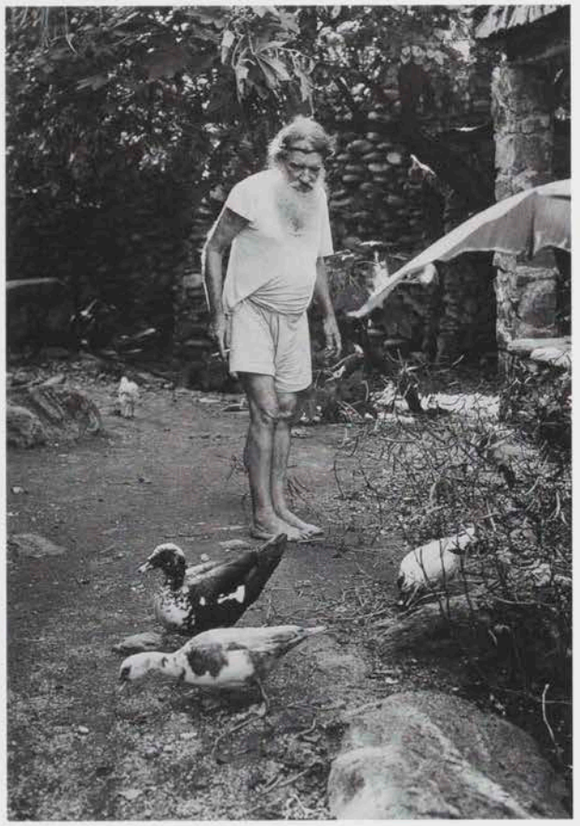

AVISO OFICIAL
Aspirantes a la Escuela
de Grumetes



opposite: *Muñecas* on a platform at El Castillete, photographed by Graziano Gasparini. Originally published in *Domus*, 1954

above: Alfredo Boulton, Francisco Narváez, Julián Padrón, and Manuel Salvatierra at El Castillete in 1933

right: Interior view of El Castillete



Reverón at El Castillete, photographed by Victoriano de los Ríos. c. 1949–54

Reverón in the attic of a *rancho*, photographed by Victoriano de los Ríos. c. 1949–54

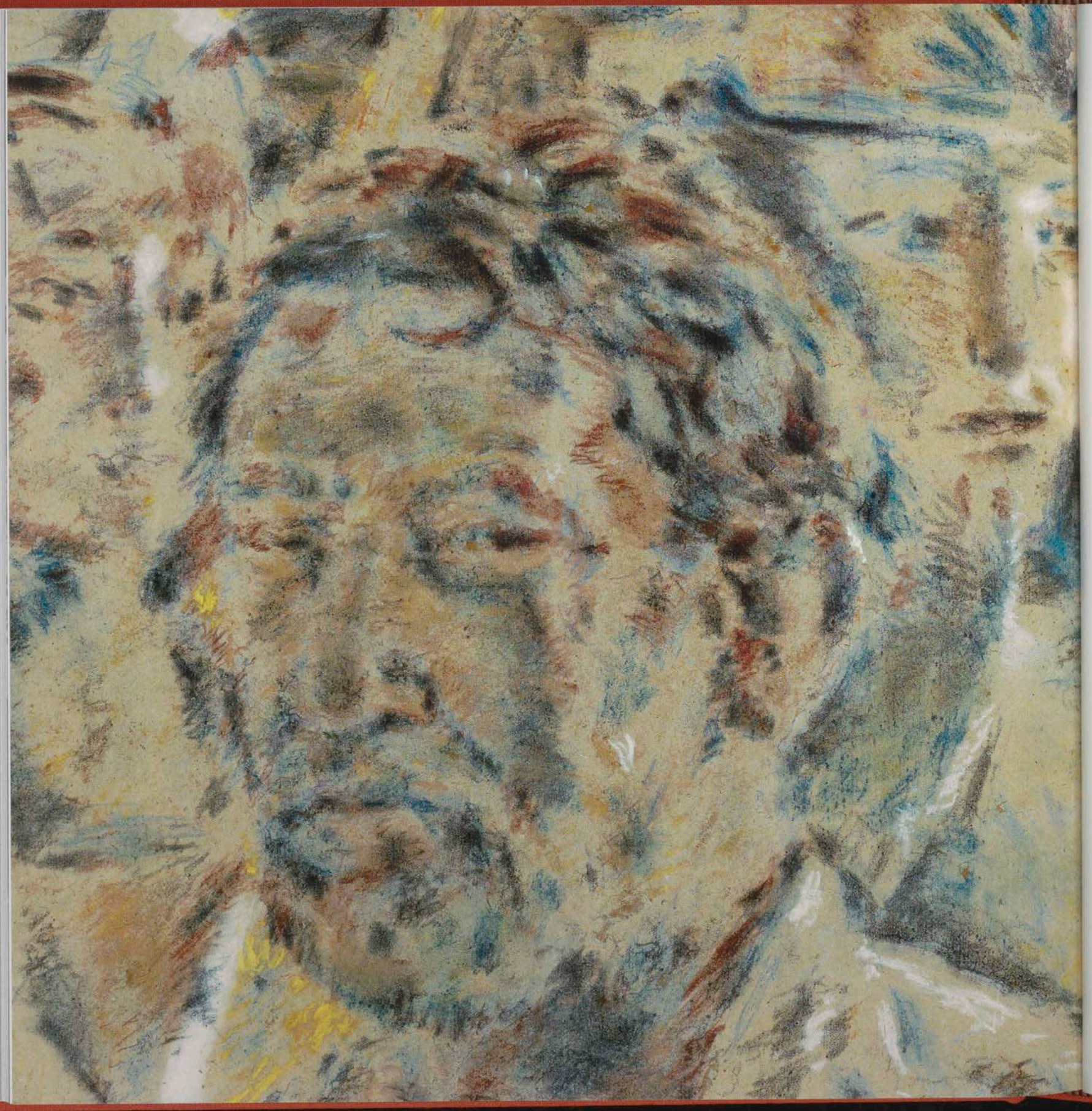
Reverón seated with *Self-Portrait with Top Hat and Dolls* (page 190) and mirror, photographed by Victoriano de los Ríos. c. 1949–54

Reverón painting outside El Castillete, from the film *Reverón* by Roberto Lucca. 1945–49

Reverón outside El Castillete with his painting *The Creole "Maja"* (page 145), from the film *Reverón* by Roberto Lucca. 1945–49

View of the interior patio at El Castillete

Reverón in the entrance of
El Castillete, photographed by
Victoriano de los Ríos. c. 1949–54



Autobiographical Statement by Armando Reverón, c. 1949

Born in 1890, in Caracas. Baptized in Santa Rosalía. Parents: Julio Reverón and Dolores Travieso de Reverón. Only child. Primary school in Caracas; teachers: M.M. Villalobos, Miguel Ángel Granados, Salesian fathers.

Around the age of eight he went to Valencia, where he entered the Cajigal school, directed by Dr. Alejo Zuloaga. He began to paint in Valencia when he was about seven or eight years old. His grandmother, Mrs. Abigail Travieso de Jesús, who became a nun after she was widowed, was quite fond of the boy and admired his childlike drawings of little houses, little boats, and river scenes, executed in graphite or color pencils, and also in watercolor. Don Ricardo Montilla had just arrived from New York after studying commerce, and at the same time, had some knowledge of drawing and painting, which he had been able to study and practice in the New York academies.

Don Ricardo had cultivated the study of living languages. A nephew of the same Abigail, he took an interest in the boy and brought him to the house of Don Antonio Michelena, father of Arturo Michelena, where he saw both painters' works: those of the son, who had already died, and those of the father.

One of the earliest memories in Reverón's life is the following: one night his parents, as was their custom, took their son for a ride in the car, by El Calvario; he still remembers hearing them say that Arturo Michelena was dying.

It was Don Ricardo who initiated his cousin Armando Reverón's artistic instruction, introducing him to works of various famous painters, both past and contemporary, drawing his attention, through his explanations, to the most noteworthy features of those works. He always invited Armando to accompany him whenever he went to draw or paint, which turned out to be quite fruitful for Armando.

When the Reverón family returned to Caracas because of Armando's sickness—typhoid fever—his long convalescence allowed him to stay at home and dedicate himself to painting as a form of entertainment. But from a mere distraction this activity turned into an obsession that occupied all hours of the day and all of the boy's spiritual and material activities.

During this period, he made, without a teacher, oil paintings of various genres such as fruits, flowers, still lifes, portraits, self-portraits, and a copy of an old Spanish work painted on the occasion of a great battle, commissioned by Don Lorenzo Ochoa, a merchant from Valencia. Ochoa frequently commissioned copies of works by great painters of the past, for example, *The Hunting of Lions by African Lancers*. By that time, Reverón was around ten or twelve years old.

Another person who had an influence on Reverón's artistic formation was the Venezuelan art enthusiast Don Federico Ponce, who took Reverón to paint El Calvario, served as his model, and

Armando Reverón. *Self-Portrait with Dolls* (detail). 1949. See page 186 for full image

commissioned paintings from him. He introduced Reverón to people with a love for painting, among them Ignacia Sanabria and Arturo Uslar, who introduced Reverón to Antonio Herrera Toro, director of the Academia de Bellas Artes. Toro later admitted him to the academy, where he continued to study until he was approximately twenty years old. Reverón lived in front of the Capitol, in the top floor of a hotel next to "Cubría and Cía," where César Augusto Prieto, painter and assistant to the president, also lived.

He was later sent to Europe to perfect his studies at the Academia de la Lontja [in Barcelona], which was at the time directed by the painter Borrás Avella, who worked with a group of instructors that included Climent, instructor of life drawing, and other well-known Spanish painters.

Spurred on by Borrás, Reverón moved to Madrid and entered the workshop of Antonio Muñoz Degrain, director of the Academia de San Fernando, to whom he had brought a letter from Borrás recommending him as a good student. He was twenty-two years old. Rafael Monasterios, painter, and Sebastián Rangel and Salustio González Rincones, writers, were living in Barcelona at the time of Reverón's arrival.

Because the Academia de San Fernando's building was being restored, Muñoz Degrain notified Reverón that classes would be held in the rooms of the library at the Universidad de Madrid.

He began his studies at the Academia, and his work was well received by instructors Garnelo, teacher of drawing; José Parada y Santí, anatomy and painting; Manuel Marín, perspective and painting; Manuel Soler, history of ancient art; and Ángel Domenech, art criticism.

Domenech put Reverón through visualization tests in order to evaluate his abilities or deficiencies. Together with students Moreno, Ramón Cuesta, and Requejo, Reverón went to Segovia on the advice of Juan José Parada; they met the master Zuloaga and frequented his workshop. Reverón practiced in the presence of the master, and the black and white paintings as well as others in color made in order to study chiaroscuro date from this time; among these one can cite *La Segoviana*, whose model was the daughter of a Segovian man who posed for the master Zuloaga.

Upon returning to Madrid, the students again attended the academy and listened to the master Muñoz Degrain's comments on the work that each one was undertaking. To one of the very vain students he said, "I think you should spend a few months in the Puerta del Sol cleaning boats in order to develop your abilities." He addressed Reverón in the following way: "You can make a giant the size of a fingernail, but you need to keep the proportions." Another day he said to him: "I am not telling you that what you did last week is bad, but paint as everyone else paints, because if you do not, you will later find yourself in trouble." Another day, while painting in the workshop, the students were chanting the Rosary in chorus, and Reverón, who could not paint amid such racket, went out into the hallway to wait for the instructor to impose some order. When he arrived, Reverón said to him, "Master, it's chaos in there," and the teacher, entering the room with Reverón, said to him, "Don't be the archbishop. Let's get to work." He was twenty-four or twenty-five years old.

Some time later, Reverón and other students from the academy were serving as assistants for the workshop of the master, Muñoz Degrain. That was where Reverón met Fournier, who offered him his workshop in Chantilly. Shortly afterward, Reverón went to Paris and lived on the rue Vendôme, where he met Otero, Tito Salas, and a group of American students. He drew in the parks, applied stains of color in the Tuilleries, made pencil portraits of tourists, and survived on commissioned work; after six months he made his way to Fournier's workshop and there painted a portrait of Mrs. Clotilde Pietri de Fournier, the painter's wife. Executed by a series of oil paint glazes in different colors applied until the figure's relief emerges, it is a work with a somber effect. Fournier found it very interesting that the only white Reverón used to create the chiaroscuro was that of the canvas and that he finished the composition through an impasto of those parts of the painting that constitute a reflection among the shadows. He also painted outdoors, very interesting corners of Chantilly, *La Bajada del Pueblo*, and colorful details of his surroundings.

He also painted flowers, fruits, and still lifes. A few months later he returned to Paris, where Rangel Drudis, a Catalan painter, Otero, and Tito Salas were living.

Reverón very much admired the painters Degas, Martín, Sisley, Cézanne, etc.; he would spend long hours studying the masterworks in the Louvre and Luxembourg museums, which was highly productive for his artistic development.

He visited [public] exhibitions, galleries, private exhibitions, collections of ancient and modern paintings.

Reverón returned to his country at the age of twenty-nine after having visited museums and collections in Spain; the collection of the Count of Romanones, which contains great works of Spanish painting: El Greco, Velázquez, Zurbarán, Goya, Murillo, Ribera, Palma the Younger and Palma the Elder, Anglada, Zuloaga, Sorolla, Romero de Torres, Mezquita, Rusiñol, Urgel, Zubiaurre.

The Prado Museum, which houses Goya's *The Second of May*, Velázquez's *Don Luis Avellaneda*, Goya's *The Nude Maja*, *Las Meninas*, and the painting *Las Lanzas de Velázquez*.

The museums of ancient and modern art in Barcelona, numerous exhibitions, and painting galleries.

The museum of modern art in Madrid, which contains works by Zuloaga, Muñoz, Degrain, etc.

In France: exhibitions, galleries, the Louvre and Luxembourg museums.

In Caracas he encountered an artistic institution that had much influence on his pictorial evolution: the Círculo de Bellas Artes, created by the former students of the Academia de Bellas Artes, had all the characteristics of a concerted reaction against academism. Reverón painted and competed in the Círculo's annual exhibitions. He set up residence in the Punta de Mulatos, in La Guaira, with Juanita Mota.

The Romanian painter Samys Mützner, with whom Reverón came into contact, had a great influence on Reverón; Mützner exhibited that part of his work made in Venezuela in the exhibition rooms of the Club de Venezuela, particularly the landscapes of Margarita and Caracas, La Guaira, and its surrounding areas, which came to about two hundred works and some portraits.

Another painter who greatly influenced Reverón was the Venezuelan painter Boggio, who traveled to Caracas and exhibited works made in Europe and Venezuela at the Academia de Bellas Artes.

The Russian painter Nicolás Ferdinandov arrived in Caracas later on; decorator, goldsmith, music aficionado, and erudite, he banded together with Rafael Monasterios, Reverón, and Rafael Ramón González, who established themselves in El Valle parish outside Caracas for some time, and later in Caracas in a room facing the one occupied by César Prieto in the Plaza López, in the colonial house that today houses the Colegio Sucre, on Cují a Marrón.

Ferdinandov organized an exhibition of paintings by Monasterios and Reverón in the halls of the Academia de Artes Plásticas, nearly ninety paintings of still lifes, landscapes, figures, animals, etc. This exhibition had little success in terms of sales, but was interesting as an example of artistic activity from that time.

Another exhibition of paintings by Ferdinandov and Reverón took place in the halls of the Universidad Central de Venezuela. This one enjoyed great economic success—all the works were sold at prices that went from 800 to 200 bolívares. The university was officially closed at this time.

[There was] another exhibition of works by Reverón and Ferdinandov in the colonial house of the Colegio Sucre, located on Cují a Marrón, in Calle Real, Caracas.

Another exhibition took place in the house where Ferdinandov was living in the Plaza López.

Reverón later settled in El Playón (Macuto) and set up his studio together with Juanita Mota (his muse), the monkeys Pancho and Chiquito, and a dog named Mirador; at first he set up house in a hut close to the beach, but from there he moved closer to the Cerro del Cojo, where he lives today, some fifty meters inland.

Living conditions have always been the same in Punta de Mulatos and in El Playón, and cannot be changed; selling paintings, domestic expenses, and the cost of painting materials and models; construction work on the residence and on the workshop, special installations in the architecture to exhibit works of art, to entertain visitors and greet tourists and neighbors.

Notes on the construction of the property

Acquisition of land in two lots of 675 and 380 square meters at the price of one bolivar per meter.

Lawsuits related to the plot's delimitation and its final demarcation.

Drawings and blueprints of the first story and the front and lateral facades, which comprise the initial studies for the final construction of the gazebo.

Purchase of the necessary materials for construction:

Wood from Carenero, transported economically with the help of the captain of the steamship "Maracaibo"; cement and stones and other materials transported from the beach, from La Guaira and El Cojo River carried by men, women, and children on their shoulders, other times with the help of mules and donkeys, or in carts and wheelbarrows, at ten cents per large rock and five cents per small rock, which turned out to be very expensive.

Rails, dowels, wires, screws, and nuts to build the basement destined for the sealed water closet, the subterranean baths, and other crypts.

Renting tools and implements used in construction: a saw, a clamp, a sledge hammer, axes, rammers, rakes, trowels, planes, a machete, tongs, hammers, screwdrivers, pliers, etc.

Contracting the personnel: the engineer Mr. Keller, bricklayers, carpenters, blacksmiths, laborers, etc.

Leveling the ground. Purchasing pipes for the water and oil to protect the construction.

Celebration for setting the first stone

Sunday. Invited guests: friends, relatives, and neighbors, the constructor Mr. Keller and his workers. Holes a meter and a half deep to place the rustic columns of araguaney and vera. Construction to drive the columns into the ground and affix them with cement and stones. At 3:00 p.m., a large lunch with the following menu: fish soup, tamales, black beans, fried beef, indigenous guacamole, fried plantains, fried fish, white rice, maize cakes, stuffed potatoes, anise bread, ice creams, brandy, wines, rum, rum milkshake, *aguardiente*, coffee, and chocolates.

Other celebrations on subsequent Sundays

Fastening lights, housing frames, joists, ridge boards, braces, plinths, water pipes, tar, filling, wooden frameworks, scaffolding. Construction of the outer wall, parapets for the gazebo and the hut for paintings, etc. A large lunch at 3:00 p.m., with fireworks and music at night, ending with a moonlight stroll.

Artists in the Reverón family

Besides the Montillas, there were two other painters in the family: Federico Chartier, married to Mrs. Soledad Reverón, sister of Julio Reverón, father of Armando Reverón; Federico Chartier had a brother who also painted. Paintings by both can probably be found in the house of Mrs. Pepita de Reverón.

Recollection of Reverón

Reverón remembers meeting César Prieto and another painter, Jesús Izquierdo, both students in the Academia de Bellas Artes. When Prieto graduated as a painter while still the president's assistant,

he lived in the same hotel as Reverón, and was dedicated to painting portraits of generals, whereas Reverón painted bootblacks, nude from the navel up.

Izquierdo and Prieto often discussed technical and artistic matters with Reverón, and Reverón, full of trust and admiration, obviously listened to them. One day when discussing one of his works, which showed a figure composed of different blues, they noted that it was different from ordinary painting because of a very interesting naïveté in the use of colors and considered it executed in a modern style that was not being taught at the academy.

Mr. Lira: These are the notes that Reverón left for you.

The original Spanish document of this text is preserved in the Archivo Boulton, in the custody of the Alberto Vollmer Foundation, Inc., Caracas.

Through His Own Eyes

"Through His Own Eyes," interview conducted with Armando Reverón at the San Jorge Sanatorium by Dr. J. M. Báez Finol and recorded by Carlos Morantes. Published in *El Nacional,* March 16, 1953, as "Visto por sí mismo."

I was born in Caracas on May 10, 1889, in the Santa Rosalía parish. My father's name was Julio Reverón Garmendia and my mother was Dolores Travieso Montilla, from Valencia. As a boy, I was often ill, and at twelve I had typhoid fever. People say that this affected my character. I don't know, but since then I have liked the world of the fantastic, of dolls that are like living characters but do not speak. They only look. It is I who speak. They look at me and listen to me. I tell them many things about Pancho [a monkey], about Juanita Mota, about Madrid and Barcelona, and they hear me. Imagine, Carlos, that at Barcelona's La Lontja, in 1912, the artistic drawing instructor was José Ruiz Blasco, Picasso's father. He was thin and blond. I had the best teachers, and for the exam at San Fernando, when I studied in Madrid, I was awarded second place. I learned to draw very well there, and I studied Velázquez, Goya, El Greco. I was crazy about Velázquez's silvery grays and golds. Titian, Dürer, and Bosch—how great they were. I was in Paris, for a few months, during World War I, and all the museums were closed, which is why I wasn't able to go to the Luxembourg, where the masters of French Impressionism were. I've always regretted that.

I came back to Venezuela in 1915 and ran into Manuel (Cabré), Rafael (Monasterios), and César (Prieto) once again. Later, I met Ferdinandov and Solita and a bit later Juanita Mota. In 1917, I

came to the seaside and returned in 1919 to the Caracas valley, where I painted some nocturnal scenes like *The Procession of the Virgin in El Valle, Nocturne with Moon*, and *The Cave*. I like that painting very much. I painted it in my mother's house, where I was living with Juanita. The other woman who is in it was called Teresa, and she didn't like to pose nude. That's why I put those cloths on her. In another painting in which Juanita appears reclining, I painted her on a pink bedspread with flowers in her hair and in her hands. Enrique Sanchez has that painting now, which is well and good. At that time and since then I have been searching for beauty beyond the simple image that represents the human figure, as in [Velázquez's] *Las Meninas*, which are magical figures beyond what they are in reality. For me reality should be a constant creation of light and colors. It is like José Antonio (Calcaño) said to me: for the painter, the reality he sees every day is enough. This was why I left Caracas and came to live in Macuto, in a world of light, of incredible vegetation, sea, where no one annoys me asking: "Armando, why do you paint like that?" You realize, if I were to ask them: "And why are you the way you are?" These are people who never have seen the beauty of a palm tree, or listened to the sound of the sea, and much less know that light dissolves colors and that all colors, after all, become white. This is why I came to live in Macuto in order to know less about nothing and to be left in peace. This is the reason why I have been raising the walls of the *rancho* little by little. I don't want them to call me Macuto's madman anymore. Let them go to hell.

Well, yes, Carlos, the Brewers, Ms. Mary, Mrs. Luisa Margarita, Solita, all are friends of my mother. I have always had many women with me. Notice that all the dolls Juanita has made are female. I have made no more than ten portraits of men. All are women or else portraits of myself. I don't like to paint animals or objects, what they called "still lifes."

Think about it, if it's a still life it's not living, it's not nature. Movement is what represents life, and when I paint I am painting the life of nature. This is why I should make my entire body move, isolate certain parts of it, not listen to noise and be left alone with my eyes in order to find in myself what only I know I am looking for. It is like a dream in which you don't know why things are happening the way they are. Painting is the same. It is different every day. Dreams are also like that. And Juanita's and Pancho's dreams. Especially Pancho's.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Bibliographical Note

This catalogue does not include a full bibliography on Armando Reverón, since an extensive and updated bibliographical text, *Armando Reverón: Guía de estudio*, was published in 2005 by the Caracas-based group Proyecto Armando Reverón. The listings in that volume are exhaustive, and it is to it that all Spanish speakers interested in conducting scholarly research on Reverón should turn. Beyond its comprehensive and annotated listing of Reverón texts, this book includes an extremely helpful historiography of the study of Reverón's art written by María Elena Huizi. In lieu of a bibliography, then, we will herein list a selection of important works on Reverón, and provide advice for further reading. English studies of Reverón's work are scarce, but books and articles do exist that either were written in English or have been translated into English; these are herein marked with an asterisk. Publications available in The Museum of Modern Art Library are listed with a bullet.

Full-length publications on Reverón did not appear until after his death in 1954. In 1955, Alfredo Boulton wrote the catalogue essay for a retrospective exhibition of Reverón's work (*Exposición retrospectiva de Armando Reverón* [Caracas: Museo de Bellas Artes, 1955]•), in which he brought the discussion of Reverón's art to a scholarly level with the designation of three, widely adopted coloristic periods—blue, white, and sepia—for Reverón's art.[1] These periods take as their basis Reverón's landscape production. Boulton also published the first monograph of Reverón's work (*La obra de Armando Reverón* [Caracas: Fundación Neumann, 1966]•); reprinted and revised as *Reverón* (Caracas: Ediciones Macanao, 1979•).[2] Boulton first met Reverón in 1920,[3] and these volumes include photographs of the artist at work as well as important firsthand information about Reverón's life and practice in El Castillete. Boulton then wrote a catalogue essay for the exhibition marking the centennial of Reverón's birth: *Reverón en cien años de pintura en Venezuela* (Caracas: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Caracas, 1989).*

Almost all of the texts written about Reverón during his lifetime—and many after—were published as newspaper and magazine articles. Many of the most important articles have been compiled in such anthologies as *Armando Reverón: 10 ensayos* (Caracas: Consejo Municipal del Distrito Federal, 1975); *Armando Reverón: 18 testimonios* (Caracas: Lagoven, 1979•); and *Armando Reverón: Esta luz como para magos* (Caracas: Fundación Museo Armando Reverón, 1992•). Two of these publications, *10 ensayos* and *Esta luz como para magos*, generally reprint long articles such as the 1939 "Armando Reverón" by Mariano Picón-Salas, which is thought to have been the first article to critically introduce Reverón to an expansive Venezuelan audience. Both of these compilations also reproduce a 1964 article by Juan Liscano, "Tras la experiencia de Armando Reverón," that includes a firsthand account of Reverón's life at El Castillete. *Armando Reverón: 18 testimonios* generally includes shorter articles, many of which are rich in anecdotal but important information. Among them are Martín de Ugalde's 1953 "Reverón quiere curarse y volver a pintar," which includes descriptions of visits to El Castillete, and a consideration of Reverón written by the artist Alejandro Otero in 1979.

opposite:
Music Books (Libros de música), 1940s

Dyed kraft paper, paper, music score, and paint, $12\frac{5}{8} \times 9\frac{7}{16}$" (32 × 24 cm)

Dyed kraft paper, paper, music score, and paint, $13\frac{3}{8} \times 9\frac{7}{16}$" (34 × 24 cm)

Dyed kraft paper, illustrated with pigment, $13\frac{1}{4} \times 9\frac{15}{16}$" (33.7 × 25.3 cm)

Dyed kraft paper and paper, $13 \times 9\frac{3}{4}$" (33 × 24.8 cm)

Collection Fundación Museos Nacionales, Caracas

While a catalogue raisonné of Reverón's artistic production has not yet been published, Juan Calzadilla's 1979 *Armando Reverón* (Caracas: Ernesto Armitano Editor•) reproduces well more than five hundred of the paintings, drawings, and objects that Reverón produced throughout his life, and is extremely helpful for any efforts at reconstructing a pictorial chronology of Reverón's production.[4] Calzadilla also wrote in-depth accounts of Reverón's art in his publication "Armando Reverón," *Pintores Venezolanos* 10 (1968) and in later essays such as "Reverón: Su universo como idioma," in the exhibition catalogue *Presencia y luz de Armando Reverón* (Caracas: Galería de Arte Nacional, 1991•). Calzadilla added to Boulton's periodization, naming a "series of *majas*" between the white and the sepia periods, and an "expressionist period" between 1945 and 1953.

Acclaimed Venezuelan novelist José Balza comments specifically on many of Reverón's paintings and objects in his *Análogo, simultáneo* (Caracas: Galeria de Arte Nacional, 1983). In his discussion, he takes into account biographical facts from Reverón's life and the socioeconomic atmosphere of Venezuela during the time of Reverón's production. In *Reverón: De los prodigios de la luz a los trabajos del arte* (Caracas: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Caracas Sofía Imber, 1989), Luis Pérez-Oramas discusses how Reverón's paintings exemplify a state of "objecthood" that puts them in conversation with modernism, despite their production in a place far removed—physically and philosophically—from the nexus of modernist theory.

Armando Reverón (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 1992•), which includes useful essays by Juan Manuel Bonet, Alfredo Boulton, Luis Pérez-Oramas, and Antonio Saura, beautifully reproduces many of Reverón's paintings and drawings. Katherine E. Manthorne's article "Armando Reverón" is an introduction to the span of Reverón's painting and drawing, and is included in *Latin American Art* 4, no.1 (spring 1992): 33–35.* In *El erotismo creador de Armando Reverón* (Caracas: Galería de Arte Nacional, 1994•),* Juan Liscano considers the sexual dynamics within Reverón's painting and objects. The catalogue of the exhibition *Armando Reverón: Luz y cálida sombra del Caribe* (Caracas: Fundación Museo Armando Reverón, 1996•),* curated by Katherine Chacón, includes articles by several Reverón scholars, as well as the text of a lecture delivered by Miguel Arroyo in 1979. The cover of the catalogue reproduces one of Reverón's masks, thus indicating Chacón's agreement that Reverón's objects should be considered part of his oeuvre. In 1998, Luis Pérez-Oramas published "Armando Reverón: Antropophagy of Light and Melancholy of Landscape,"* in the catalogue of the *XXIV Bienal de São Paulo*, and a collection of art criticism, *La cocina de Jurassic Park y otros ensayos visuales* (Caracas: Fundación Polar, 1998•), that takes Reverón's work as a focus.

Antonio Salcedo Miliani's *Armando Reverón y su época* (Caracas: Universidad de los Andes, 2000•) is a recent study of Reverón's production as well as of artistic activity in Venezuela and Latin America during Reverón's formative years. Miliani's thoroughly documented and contextualized history of Reverón's life is an asset for further study.

Essays by John Elderfield, María Elena Huizi, and Luis Pérez-Oramas, in the exhibition

catalogue for *Armando Reverón: El lugar de los objetos* (Caracas: Galería de Arte Nacional, 2001•), aim to reconsider Reverón's production of objects within El Castillete as an integral and complementary facet of his artistic work. Papers given at a symposium in conjunction with this exhibition are transcribed in *Primer simposio internacional Armando Reverón: Ponencias* (Caracas: Proyecto Armando Reverón, 2001).

Photographic and filmic documentation of Reverón's life is crucial to an understanding of his practice. Victoriano de los Ríos photographed Reverón between the years 1949 and 1954; many of his photographs are reproduced in *Armando Reverón a la luz de Victoriano de los Ríos* (Caracas: Galería de Arte Nacional, 1989•) and *Presencia y luz de Armando Reverón*. Ricardo Razetti photographed Reverón at El Castillete in 1953. These photographs are reproduced in *Imágenes solares. Ricardo Razetti: una mirada sobre Reverón* (Macuto, Venezuela: Fundación Museo Armando Reverón, 1993). A recent publication, *La construcción de un personaje: imágenes de Armando Reverón* (Caracas: Proyecto Armando Reverón, 2004), also reproduces images of Reverón at El Castillete. Three documentary films include footage of Reverón during his life. These are by Edgar Anzola (1934), Roberto Lucca (1945–49), and Margot Benacerraf (1951–52) and are included on the VHS compilation, *Armando Reverón, cuatro testimonios* (Caracas: Colección videos, Cinemateca Nacional, 1996).

Notes

1. A brief English-language catalogue for the 1955–56 commemorative exhibition that traveled to Boston after Reverón's 1954 death also exists: *Armando Reverón* (Boston: The Institute of Contemporary Art, 1956).
2. A manuscript version of an English translation of Boulton's 1966 text is in The Museum of Modern Art Library.
3. *Armando Reverón (1889–1954): Exposición antológica* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 1992), 84.
4. A catalogue raisonné is forthcoming from the Caracas-based group Proyecto Armando Reverón.

Acknowledgments

In 1998, I first saw a significant group of works by Armando Reverón, beautifully curated by Luis Pérez-Oramas, at that year's São Paulo Biennal. Although neither of us imagined this at the time, Luis would become my cicerone through Reverónia, first as a member of the future Proyecto Armando Reverón (PAR) and, later, as an Adjunct Curator and now The Estrellita Brodsky Curator of Latin American Art at The Museum of Modern Art. Although I alone am responsible for the selection of works in the exhibition, I have benefited immeasurably from his long understanding of the artist's work, and his important critical and art-historical writings on it, the most significant in recent years. His advice on the selection of works in the exhibition and his comments on my catalogue essay have been indispensable. As the project advanced, I was privileged to see more than half of Reverón's total oeuvre in some twenty visits to Venezuela as well as elsewhere. It was a great education to see many of these works in Luis's company, and many in the company of other members of the Proyecto Armando Reverón.

Without the support of PAR, formed in Caracas in 1999 to encourage study of the artist's work, including the preparation of this exhibition, this project would never have been fulfilled. Juan Ignacio Parra Schlageter and Rafael Romero D. shared with me their work on their planned catalogue raisonné of Reveron's work, scheduled to appear around 2010, and their consequent knowledge of the locations as well as relative importance of works. María Elena Huizi brought her own expertise into the activities of PAR, not least in leading the editorial process that produced its indispensable 2005 publication of *Armando Reverón: Guía de estudio.* Rafael Santana and Clementina Vaamonde have been constant participants in all of the PAR activities, and Maitena de Elguezabal has made an extraordinarily important contribution to this exhibition, having arranged for visits to collections in Venezuela and the collection of materials for this catalogue. And, as this project advanced, there developed not only deep indebtedness but also deeper friendship that has made it all, although not easy at times, a great adventure.

In 1999, I first visited Venezuela, in the company of my two principal collaborators on the exhibition Modern*Starts*, Peter Reed, then a curator in the Museum's Department of Architecture and Design, and Maria del Carmen González, then in the Museum's Department of Education. Maria, an admirer of Reverón's work, suggested that, given the unusual form of Modern*Starts,* we three go to discuss our work with curators, critics, and educators in Caracas. There, she arranged for me to see some of the paintings and objects in the Venezuelan national collections, and, thanks to Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, I met the future members of PAR. I am, therefore, deeply grateful to Maria's initiative. Neither of us imagined at the time where it would lead.

The development of the project went through two stages. The first of these was predicated on the hope that it could be realized in 2004, the fiftieth anniversary of the artist's death. Maria José Montalva joined the project in this stage, as its Curatorial Assistant at the Museum, and made

important contributions to its realization through 2002. Also at the Museum, Jim Coddington, Roger Griffith, and Karl Buchberg, in the Department of Conservation, studied the artist's materials, and Peter Perez found ways of framing Reverón's works in a manner that was consistent with the artist's practice. In Caracas, in this same period, we were fortunate in securing the research assistance of Eugenia Villanueva and Carolina Arnal. In New York, we were helped by Carlos Fernando Pérez and Eva Celin. And throughout the project, we have benefited from access to the research facilities of the Fundación Alberto Vollmer, for which we thank Sofia Vollmer de Maduro and Ada Romero.

In 2001, Luis Pérez-Oramas, with María Elena Huizi, curated the exhibition *Armando Reverón: El lugar de los objetos*, at the Galería de Arte Nacional, Caracas, which added inestimably to an understanding of the place in the artist's practice of the dolls, or *muñecas*, and other objects that he made. Luis was generous enough to ask me to contribute to the catalogue of that exhibition; my essay, "El espejo," mainly devoted to Reverón's self-portrait drawings, formed the basis for my discussion of these works in the present catalogue. Likewise, the invitation of the Proyecto Armando Reverón to contribute to a symposium on the artist that September produced what became the essay, "Las irredentas," in the first publication issued by PAR, *Primer simposio internacional Armando Reverón*, an essay from which the discussion of the *muñecas* in the present catalogue ultimately derives. Both these essays were precised by the editorial work of Juan Luis Delmont; nonetheless, it was clear to me that they were only beginnings.

I was, therefore, fortunate in being able to continue my work on Reverón under the auspices of a fellowship at The Getty Research Institute in the autumn of 2001. There, I benefited not only from the extraordinary facilities of that Institute but also from discussions with Tom Crow, its Director, and other fellows, among them, John Hyman, Jacqueline Lichtenstein, and Charles Harrison. That fall, I also found the opportunity to re-present some of the work, owing to an invitation from the Clark Art Institute to deliver that year's lectures in honor of George Heard Hamilton. I am grateful to Charles W. Haxthausen for his invitation and for those, notably Samuel Edgerton, who offered perceptive responses to what I had to say. Then, in 2002, an invitation from the British Academy to deliver a lecture, on the occasion of its centenary, on the current state of the discipline of art history offered a welcome opportunity to step back and consider the methodological differences in the study of art history on the basis of art seen in London, New York, and Caracas. I am grateful to John Morill for organizing the series of lectures of which mine was one, and Dawn Ades and Michael Podro, of the University of Essex, which sponsored it, for their most useful comments on my lecture, "The Adventures of the Optic Nerve," which was published in the *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 122, as *The Promotion of Knowledge*, in 2004. My approach to Reverón was aided by this exercise and the concluding pages of my essay explicitly derive from it.

Before this publication appeared, it had become apparent that it would be unrealistic to hope to present a Reverón exhibition in New York in 2004, owing both to the exigencies of the

completion and the installation of the new building for The Museum of Modern Art and of the changing social and political landscape of Venezuela. However, the exhibition was soon rescheduled: Luis Pérez-Oramas had joined the Museum, and Nora Lawrence became the new Curatorial Assistant for the project, not only administering this complex project in New York in the most unflappable manner but also making vital contributions to the research and scholarship on the artist. Her introductions to the plate selections of the Catalogue are evidence of this. In Caracas, the contributions of Juan Ignacio Parra and Maitena de Elguezabal at PAR became even more critical than before. We are delighted to acknowledge that this exhibition is organized in explicit collaboration with this great private organization, which has additionally sponsored a two-part symposium, in New York and Caracas, to reflect on what we have learned from this exercise.

We are also delighted that this exhibition is organized in collaboration and with the support of the Fundación Museos Nacionales of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. To its President, Teresa Zottola, goes our deepest thanks for making possible the loan of indispensable works from Venezuelan national collections, without which the exhibition would simply not have been possible. We also wish to thank Armando Gagliardi and Vivian Rivas for their support. We are also most grateful to Irarkil Rangel, coordinating registrar and Head Registrar at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Caracas, who facilitated the organization of these loans, and to Luis Angel Duque there. At the Galería de Arte Nacional, the custodian of most of Reverón's works in the national collections, we have benefited from the support of its former President, Francisco Da Antonio, who also shared his own expertise on Reverón, as well as of its current President, Elida Salazar; Chief Registrar, Leonor Solá; Registrar, Bélen Lopez Sanchez; Conservator, Dinorha Rojas; and of Mary Omaña, of the Centro de Información y Documentación Nacional de las Artes Plasticas at that same institution. We also thank Katherine Chacón, formerly director of the no longer existant Museo Armando Reverón and now director of the Museo Alejandro Otero, together with Yelitza Gil of the Biblioteca Nacional. All have helped us enormously to realize this complex project.

The exhibition has also depended upon the generosity of public collections outside Venezuela and of many private collections, both there and elsewhere; to all of them goes our very deepest thanks. I am especially grateful to all those who allowed me to visit their homes during the lengthy period of research on the exhibition; to those from whom I did not need to ask for loans as well as those from whom I asked. It is evidence of the enthusiasm for this project that only two collectors declined lending individual paintings. For advice on or the facilitation of loans, or for assistance on research questions and obtaining illustrations, we are indebted to Guillermo Ovalle, Registrar of the Fundación Cisneros in New York; Cecilia Pacheco Romo of the Museo Internacional de Arte Contemporaneo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City; Axel Stein of Sotheby's; and Hetty Wessels of the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. And for sharing their insights on Reverón with me, as well as agreeing to contribute to the symposium accompanying the exhibition, I want to thank Susan Stewart and Dawn Ades.

At The Museum of Modern Art, I am deeply grateful to Director Glenn Lowry, for his continuing support of this sometimes beleaguered project; to Jennifer Russell, Senior Deputy Director for Exhibitions, Collections, and Programs, for her own unabated enthusiasm and commitment over these seven years; to Peter Reed, now Senior Deputy Director for Curatorial Affairs, who did not know he was at the birth of this project; and to my fellow Chief Curators for having supported my desire to present an exhibition of art they did not know, reproductions of which they could hardly make out. Many of the Museum's Departments have made their customary, highly professional contributions to the project. In addition to those I have already mentioned, I wish to thank: in the Department of External Affairs, Michael Margitich and Mary Hannah; in the General Counsel's office, Patty Lipshutz, Stephen Clark, and Nancy Adelson; in the Department of Education, David Little, Laura Beiles, and Sara Bodinson; in the Office of the Registrar, Ramona Bannayan, Jennifer Wolfe, and Allison Needle; in the Department of Exhibition Production and Design, Jerome Neuner, Betty Fisher, and Michele Arms; in the Department of Art Handling and Preparation, Pete Omlor; in the Department of Imaging Services, Roberto Rivera and Robert Kastler; in the International Program, Jay Levenson; and in the Department of Marketing and Communications, Meg Blackburn and Kim Mitchell.

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Finally, I want to record my deep indebtedness to Patricia Cisneros. If Museum of Modern Art catalogues carried dedications, this one would certainly be dedicated to her: for her commitment to the Museum's programs in Latin American art; for her, and her husband Gustavo's, encouragement of my own personal discovery of Reverón, which led to this exhibition and publication; and for her international role in advancing the serious study of art from Latin America.

John Elderfield
December 2006

Works by Reverón in this Catalogue

A "C" number in brackets following a title refers to the number under which the work is listed in Juan Calzadilla's nearly comprehensive 1979 catalogue, *Armando Reverón*. Reverón's objects are not listed with Calzadilla numbers in this publication.

Both English and Spanish titles are included in the captions for those works in the present exhibition. Works not in the exhibition are identified by their English titles only and are indicated by an asterisk.*

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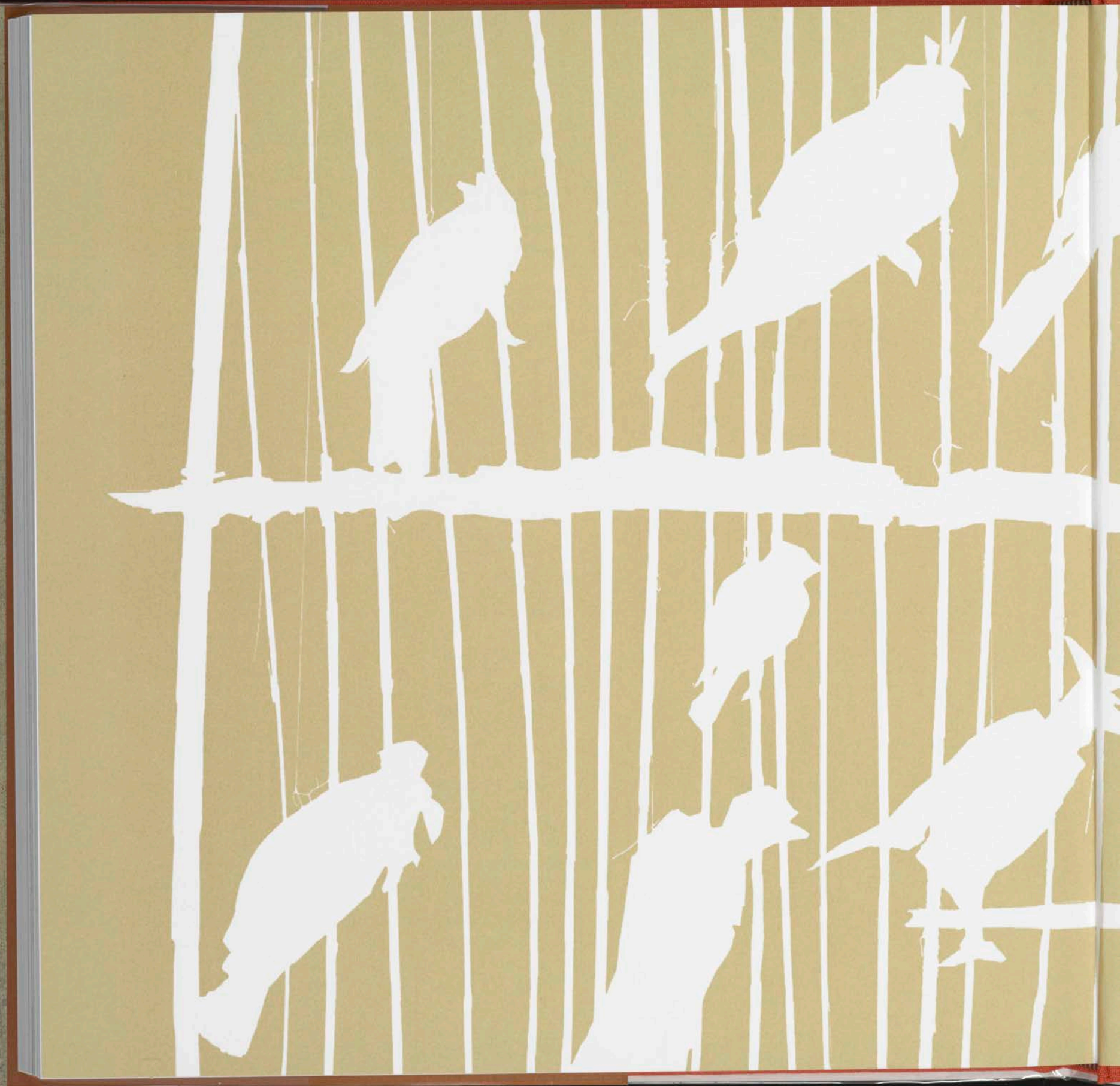

John Elderfield, The Marie-Josée and [illegible] Kravis Chief Curator of Painting and Sculpture at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, is the author of numerous catalogues and essays. He recently organized the exhibition *Manet and the Execution of Maximilian* (2006) at the Museum and wrote the catalogue that accompanied it. He has organized or co-organized many other exhibitions, including *Matisse Picasso* (2003), Modern*Starts* (2000), *Bonnard* (1998), and *Piet Mondrian 1872–1944* (1995–96). He also organized the celebrated *Henri Matisse: A Retrospective* (1992).

Luis Pérez-Oramas, recently named The Estrellita Brodsky Curator of Latin American Art at The Museum of Modern Art, has been a member of the Proyecto Armando Reverón in Caracas. Besides writing widely on the work of Reverón, he co-curated the 2001 exhibition *Armando Reverón: El lugar de los objetos* at the Galería de Arte Nacional, Caracas.

Nora Lawrence is a Curatorial Assistant in the Department of Painting and Sculpture at The Museum of Modern Art.

Front cover: Armando Reverón. *Daughter of the Sun* (detail). [1933]. Oil on burlap, $21\,{}^{1}/_{16} \times 19\,{}^{13}/_{16}$" (53.5 × 50.3 cm). Mercantil Collection

Back cover: Armando Reverón with dolls, photographed by Victoriano de los Ríos. c 1949–54

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