

Anthropophagic and “glocal” creativity: the poetic expressions of César Martínez

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Cultural, ethnic, political, economic and religious diversity are the principal traits of the first world cities of today. This plurality has been driven, primarily, by globalization, which is defined by Nestor Garcia Canclini as the “the upper and inevitable layer” of capitalism, “the only model possible for men to interact with each other”¹ today. According to this author, some detractors see globalization as a negative, the cause of today’s societal discords (regional, national or international), as it favors standardization and also the growth of migrations, a direct consequence of increased unemployment in peripheral countries, due to the bankruptcy of many small businesses not being able to support the competitive prices of the large multinationals. However, its defenders (large corporations and politicians) interpret globalization in the positive, as the road to activating societal relations through attitudes of solidarity and cooperation, which will intensify interchanges between different communities, although these may be geographically very distant. Globalization allows markets to expand and, by consequence, the economies in the countries involved will surge, however it also leads to diluting national identities and reduces the prominence of the principal political players in these states. As Canclini writes, “it produces greater transnational interchange, shaking the certainties of belonging to a nation”.²

The idea of a fighting to defend a national identity against the global giant is echoed in the artistic arenas, through creative projects, such as the work of César Martínez Silva³ (Mexico City, 1962). With his *perforMANcenas*,

¹ Néstor García Canclini, *La globalización imaginada*, Mexico, Paidós, 2005, p. 10.

² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

³ César Martínez earned his bachelor degree in graphic communication design from the *Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana de México* and studied Fine Arts at the *Escuela Nacional de Pintura, Escultura y Grabado, La Esmeralda*. He currently combines teaching at the *Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana de México* with doctorate studies at the *Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha*, Spain. Additionally, since November 2001, Martínez has been a member of the *Sistema Nacional de*

photo montages, urban installations, sculptures, etcetera, this Mexican artist (*creActivist and Undisciplined*, as he defines himself) aims to denounce the expansionist spirit still present in most of the colonist countries of the past, like France, Spain, Portugal or Great Britain, and in the imperialist and capitalist nations that were added later, like the United States, Canada or Japan. As the artist would lead us to believe, the only thing that has changed is the strategy these countries use to project their supremacy or, if you prefer, the terminology to define their expansion processes and “cannibalism”; so that what was then known as “colonization”, then came to be “capitalist imperialism”, and today is called “globalization”.

However, Martínez is not against globalization per se, rather the impersonal and inhuman way in which it is adopted in the hands of the large transnational multinationals and the politicians of the dominant western countries, who only chase economic wealth. What globalization implies in terms of cultural and information exchange (ease of access to knowledge produced beyond the national borders and promoting indigenous affairs outside the country, mobility of persons, cultural assets and consumer goods), the artist considers to be a positive consequence and one from which he himself has benefited. Since 2003, Martínez has divided his time between Mexico and Spain, where he has been studying a doctorate degree at the *Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha*. Also, since the end of the 1990’s, his narrative and performance work has grown in international presence, contributing to promoting Mexican art beyond the country’s territorial borders and, by consequence, Martínez is contributing to the deconstruction of the false stereotypes and prejudices that developed world countries have been attaching to Latin American art, in general, for decades,⁴ which until

Creadores de Arte, recognition awarded by the *Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes* through the *Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes*.

⁴ In his article “*Pluralismo e identidad: el arte y sus fronteras*”, part of the paper *Horizontes del arte latinoamericano* (1999) and which contains the papers from the *IX Encuentros Internacionales en el Arte Contemporáneo* (Arco 97), David Pérez states that with the “triumphalist” commemoration of the *5° Centenario del Descubrimiento* in 1992, Spain is again turning its sights towards Latin America, but with the nostalgia of the colonist, not because Spain actually recognizes the place Latin America holds in the world as an independent and autonomous territory: “As *ideological compensation* for the former colonialist, we now look to the discovery of a new trend: the recovery of a Latin American culture reflected in a multicultural periphery replete with vitality and authenticity. This vision, as may be suspected, does nothing more than to repeat and/or revive the myth of the noble savage or, if you prefer, the fetish of redeeming primitivism and the fascination for this initial purity that civilization is certain to prostitute. Once again, we observe the *other* in the deforming mirror of superiority given to us from this history we have imposed, a superiority where the *other* is invented to be able to hide the fateful terror that would invoke the intuition of *one’s* own inexistence, meaning, the permanent trap on which the system of domination and consumption of the techno-democracies is built” (p. 27). This critical position finds its equivalent in art, see, for example, the traveling *performance* of Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez Peña,

quite recently⁵ have not been able to see beyond their monocentric, phallogentric, elitist and racist viewpoint (some still hold on to this thinking).

Latin American art [according to José Jiménez and Fernando Castro Flórez] is “beyond the fantastical”, the interpretive cliché coined throughout the century, particularly following the rise of surrealism. And facing common questions in art today, such as those of the post-minimalism movement, the critical resources of conceptual art or the return of abstractionism, without sacrificing references anchored in local traditions⁶ [and here where we can place the work of Cesar Martínez].

Although García Canclini supports the idea that today the central option is not to “defend identity or globalize”, rather to “understand the opportunities to explore what we can do and be with others, such as challenging diversity, difference and inequality”.⁷ In much of his work, Martínez opts to move through levels of subversion, with harsh criticism (using a language that is ironic, humoristic and ambiguous) towards global politics of an invasive and conquistador nature, while underscoring the particular characteristics of the

Undiscovered Amerindians, which from 1992 to 1995 was shown at different art museums, festivals and biennials in Madrid, London, Washington, Sydney, Chicago and New York, and which consisted of the artists being in a cage and dressed as indigenous, but surrounded by present-day objects, such as sunglasses and cell phones.

In the same paper, in his article “*Transterritorial. En torno a los espacios de la identidad y de la diáspora*”, Octavio Zaya states that although Latin American art has been relatively present in Berlin, London, Milan and New York since the 1980’s, “it had been completely left out of the artistic discourse of democratic Spain” (pp. 33-34). However, it also needs to be noted that this attitude of the Spanish state towards art from Latin America has changed substantially in recent years, increasing the number of exhibitions featuring Latino artists, such as the following exhibitions held in Madrid: *Versiones del Sur* (MNCARS, 2000), *Pintores de Aztlán* (La Casa Encendida, 2007), *Lo[s]cinético[s]* (MNCARS, 2007), *Arte, Sátira... ¡Subversión!* (Casa de América, 2007) or the Arco1997 offerings (where there was a considerably increased presence of Latin American galleries), Arco 05 (dedicated to Mexico) or 2008 (with Brazil as the invited country). As these exhibitions are held in the Spanish capital, they can be interpreted as an attempt by the local government to bring Latin American art and culture to the locals, fostering interaction and integration with immigrant Latin American communities that have settled in Madrid in recent times.

⁵ Coco Fusco, in the paper “*El performance latino: la reconquista del espacio civil*” (in José Jiménez and Fernando Castro Flórez (eds.), *Horizontes del arte latinoamericano*, Madrid, Tecnos, 1999, pp. 93-106), states that in the 80’s the international art market opened its doors to the developing world looking for a new injection of creativity and originality to lift the monotony in which the market was immersed at the time. To this end, “in the US, Canada, Australia and Great Britain first, and then in some European countries, different versions of multicultural politics came into being promoting an appreciation for ethnic diversity and sexual preferences”. However, “most of the institutions in the dominant culture use this policy to absorb elements of an ‘authentic subalternity’ with government support or to improve marketing techniques. In few cases, there has been open dialog on the drastic inequalities between and within the different groups.” (pp. 99-100)

⁶ José Jiménez and Fernando Castro, “*Introducción: El arte de las Américas*”, *Horizontes...*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁷ Néstor García Canclini, *La globalización imaginada*, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

local identity of his native Mexico. However, he understands this line of action as a first and necessary step to be able to aspire, in the future, to the ideals proposed by García Canclini, meaning, the development of a fair and balanced interchange between countries under equal conditions for everyone involved, without abuses of power, impositions or attitudes of supremacy. For today's multicultural cities to become hybrid intercultural places, spaces that foster inclusiveness, where no community loses their culture to another, and there is also no fear of opening oneself up, so that "the other" becomes "one of us",⁸ we need to blur the lines between the local and the global, seeking a middle ground that will ensure the continuity of the national identity while allowing for the advantages of cultural interchange and the international projection of the indigenous.

Throughout this paper, we analyze the expressive poetry of artist César Martínez, at both the conceptual and formal levels, and we delve into his treatment of the issues associated with the local/global dichotomy discussed above. We also discuss other questions arising from his artistic discourse, such as reflecting on the ephemeral nature of life and the open and playful attitude that Mexicans have towards death, the creative and demanding use of language and, as an imperative complement to the artist's work, technical experimentation with a variety of materials (dynamite, latex, jelly, chocolate, etc.), the relationship between art and food, and also the metaphor for cannibalism or the references to filmmaker Peter Greenaway.

⁸ Term used by Martínez in various of his *perforMANcenas*, such as *América G-Latina* (Casa de América, Madrid, 1999).