



# **Social History of Music and Plastic Arts in Guatemala 1871-1976**

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## **Introduction**

This research is a critical result of the appreciation and study of the artistic phenomenon in Guatemalan society at a time when, due to socioeconomic changes, it is constantly acquiring different forms of appreciation.

The 19th century is for the development of art (1), the period that establishes in

Guatemalan urban society, that is to say, in Guatemala City, not only the differentiation of social classes and their consolidation as such, but consequently the adoption of their tastes. This is evidenced by the organization of cultural associations (2), which are concerned with disseminating cultural-artistic ideas in the media, these are not foreign to a strong European accent. In the taste of the dominant class, there is talk of the music of an Italian musical tradition that was maintained for a long time and of the French taste that marked the "Belle Epoque", constituting expressions that were identified with a class that claimed to be the nationality itself. Taking this as a starting point, the present research, given the lack of texts that present the Guatemalan visual-musical phenomenon in the socio-political context, has delved into it in order to obtain a clearer understanding and response to the problem of artistic production in our environment.

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The teamwork carried out with Misses Anabella Castro and Walda Judith Echeverría is highly valuable. It has been achieved in this way, not only as priceless information about the mentioned phenomenon, but as an important registry of material to consult for other investigations. Also the work has had the invaluable help of the studious teacher, Celeste Placios de Anleu, who without interest helped me in the tiring labor of writing and correcting texts.

This investigation opens up various paths that will need to be explored in the near future, given the importance that artistic aspects have acquired in Guatemalan society, we cannot cover it in its entirety, nor can we consider the topic exhaustive.

There is still much to be done, since the nature of this research has been limited to a relatively small number of topics. We believe, however, that the contribution in this field so little explored, will enrich the documentation on these two aspects of Guatemalan art.

In the *Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala*, through the *Dirección General de Investigaciones* and the *CEFOL (Centro de Estudios Folkloricos)* have sponsored and supported this work, says a lot about the interest that this house if studies maintain for this area of the aesthetic and history of our country.

-Enrique Anleu Díaz

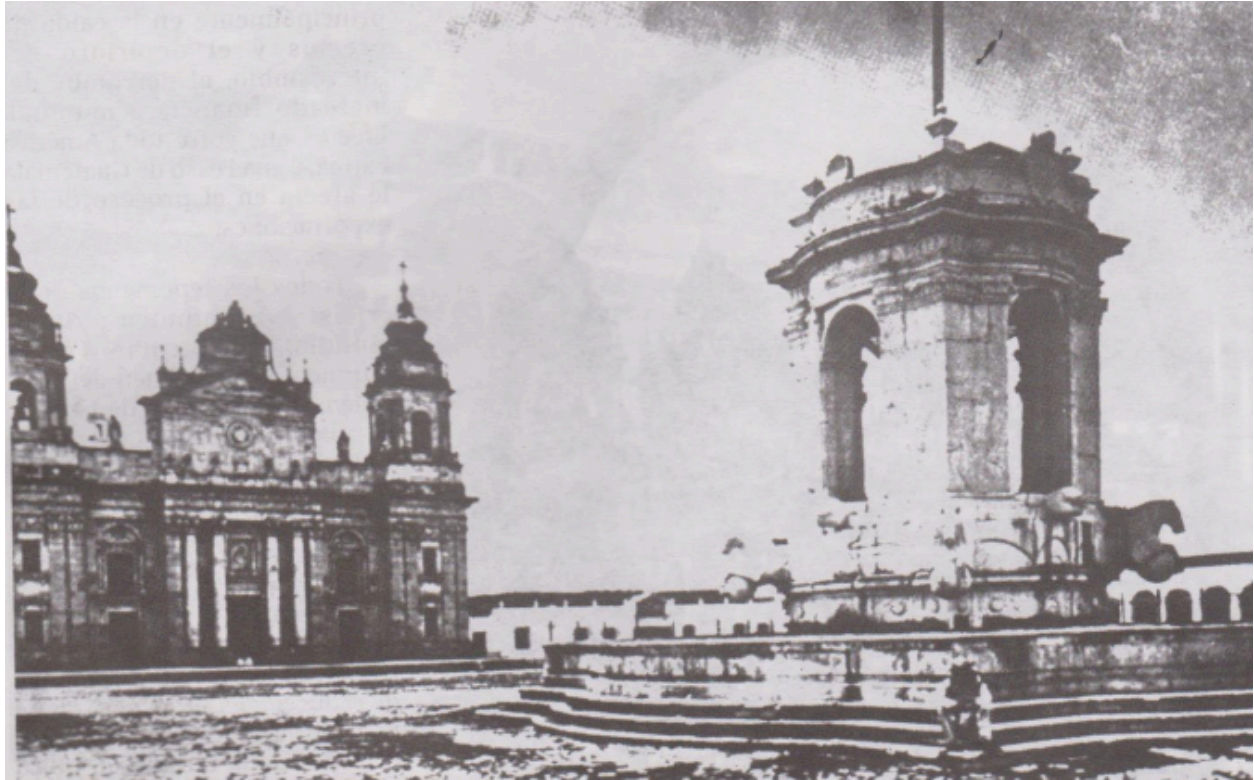


## **General Historical Reference**

### *19th Century, last decades*

In the last decades of the 19th Century, Guatemala based its economic development on coffee production and the drive for agricultural diversification. The process and development of coffee production led to the formation and growth of farms and plantations, the construction of communication routes, the establishment of monetary units, etc. The economic boom of the so-called first liberal regimes is reflected at different levels, and is evident not only in Guatemala City but also in the coffee boom areas, mainly in western Guatemala and in particular Quetzaltenango which from this time onwards became the second city of Guatemala due to its social-economic importance, to which they transferred not only productive elements necessary for cultivation, but also socio-cultural ones. European urban planning elements were brought here, as well as the activity of national and international artists.

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Church and fountain of Carlos III. Photo by Eadweard Muybridge, 1875. (General Directorate of Anthropology and History Collection).

In the last decades of the 19th Century, Neoclassical and French-style artistic movements proliferate, especially urban planning movements in Guatemala City. However, these artistic manifestations that are promoted are not an isolated product, the same economic bloom allows the importance not only of the artistic trends but the arrival of Guatemalan artists, who later settle here and promote schools and currents.

At the end of the 19th Century and early 20th Century, under the regime of Manuel Estrada Cabrera that also coincided with a political period in which changes in global structures were manifested, in Guatemala these changes were evident in the investment of “new” capital in agricultural production through transnational corporations (UFCO) that came to have a great influence on state policy; there was also capital investment in other sectors of the economy, such as transportation, the railroad company (IRCA), the electric company, telecommunication etc., which under the Estrada Cabrera regime acquired a large number of benefits (concessions) among which the following should be highlighted: cheap labor, land concessions to companies in regions of Izabal, benefited the use of beaches, among others.

The increase on the investment of Northamerican capital propitiated particular economic and social conditions, a dependency that also transforms labor relations, and gives away the existing social stratification, the bourgeoisie incorporates to different branches of investment and most of the population as direct salaried

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producers. In the midst of the social extremes, there is a middle sector of the population, small shopkeepers, some professionals, artists, etc. When Guatemala joined to global capitalism, commercial exchange phenomena occurred internally, and increased circulation, promoting a trend towards the consumption of imported industrially manufactured items, which is of course evident from the first decades of the 20th Century.

The political regimes after Estrada Cabrera's, that is, from 1921 to 1923, maintained the "neoliberal" tendency, that is to say, the consolidation of the bourgeoisie that at the beginning was only coffee-growing, but at this point it encompassed agricultural, livestock, financial and industrial sectors (the latter being less developed), meaning, it consolidated itself as an Agro-exporting Bourgeoisie, despite the fact that during this period very important economic-political conflicts manifested themselves at an extreme level, such as the case of the First World War in 1929.

The crisis has consequences, mainly in the fall of prices and the deterioration of exchange, the collapse of the global financial market. The effects suffered by all of Latin America, and in the case of Guatemala, affects the export process.

All the phenomena of the global economic-political crisis are linked to the internal regime of Jorge Ubico (14 years), one of the most particular dictatorship of the mid-century, its objective was to "save the regime of large estate and smallholding" and maintain the power of the agro-exporter bourgeoisie.

The beginnings of the Ubiquista regime were affected commercially by a high percentage of reductions in the exportations prices. To maintain the power of the bourgeoisie, Ubico stimulated the capital investment again, a reduction in the salaries, a high percentage of unemployment and promoted a series of provisions designed to force the majority of the population into forced labor through the "Vagrancy Law".

In 1944 this regime entered into crisis, amidst revolts of widespread social discontent, and the social organization of middle sectors, resulting in the final of the October 1944 movement.

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Interior of the Economic Society of Friends of the Rases building. Eaweara Muybridge, 1875. This beautiful building housed the Legislative Assembly after the Economic Society was suppressed due to a political error by the government in 1871, in its eagerness to erase all traces of the past. (Collection of the General Directorate of Anthropology and History).

The revolution of October 20th, initially under a government reunion, in its first period of government, headed by Juan José Arévalo, and in the second by Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán, promoted the abolition of forced labor, established the bases for free union organization, and structured agrarian laws until reaching an Agrarian Reform, stimulating education in different areas.

The October revolution sought to modernize and stabilize capitalism, eradicating the dominating pre-capitalism ways of Ubico's regime.

All this revolutionary period, that was no longer than ten years, created the conditions for a new surge in creativity and the participation of the cultural impulse in other sectors of the population, those who had not previously been art consumers in every sense. It allowed non-elite artists to participate, with a marked tendency toward the product of the projections of society at that time.

The revolutionary period, its objectives involved affecting the interests of the dominant bourgeoisie until then, the interests of capital investments that at the time had not received concessions favorable to their interests, especially in agricultural export activities affected by the new agrarian legislation, did not become consolidated or fully realized. Towards 1954, the two affected sectors united to promoting and supporting the counter-revolutionary project under the command of Carlos Castillo Armas and with the support of the United States, putting an end to the October 1944 project, as well as to its main reforms.

This new political period in Guatemala annuls the principal contributions of the revolutionary regime, especially with regard to agricultural legislation and it returns to the impulse for foreign investment through concessions and with a somewhat broad economic policy. From the 1960s onwards, the regimes were influenced by

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different elements, projecting from this period some mechanisms that reveal the tendencies of art, for example art galleries or expositions in whose themes elements of socio-political life and values will be reflected and the folkloric values, without unlink itself in any moment of the global artistic movements (3).

### **SITUATION OF THE ARTS AT THE END OF THE 19TH CENTURY**

When it refers to certain elements of judgment in an attempt to define a historical movement, dates were selected if there is any direct event that marks the importance of its beginning. It is reported to Licenciado [*Guatemalan University Degree*] Julian Amurrio (4) that this choice of dates in relation to social or ideological movements or economic or political crises, is more in keeping with the historical method than with history itself. This concept has an enormous validity for the realization of this work in the sense of involving artistic manifestations within certain events in the historical life of the country.

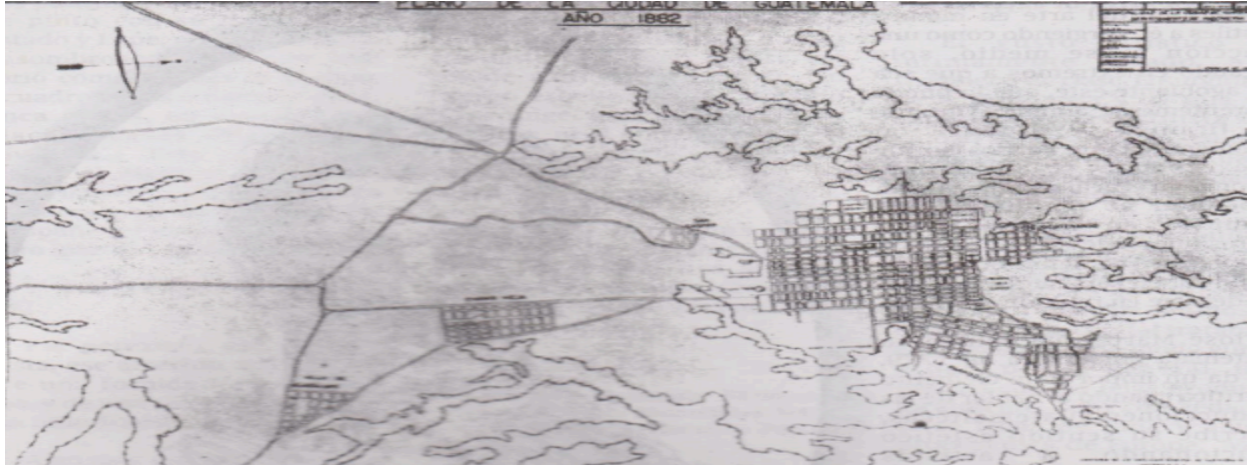
Thus, the period that goes from the liberal revolution of Garcia Granados to the fall of Estrada Cabrera, are two events that are taken as parameters to talk about a period of our history, being purely circumstantial, since before the known date, there already exist in the middle of the components that come into play for the socio-economic transformation, as they still exist after the fall of the dictator of La Palma.

All these social, political and economic forms made their appearance in relation to the country's development, in terms of a need for economic transformation that had been brewing for years.



University of San Carlos of Guatemala. Photo by Eadweard Muybridge, 1875.  
(Collection of the Directorate General of Anthropology and History)

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Map of Guatemala City, 1882. Photo by Mauro Calanchina. (Collection of the General Directorate of Anthropology and History).

In his study on positivism in Guatemala, Amurrio provides valuable documentation in which it can be appreciated the entire range encompassed by political and economic thought, the radical opportunism of the party in power and the philosophical thought of some intellectuals with evident differences from liberal politics.

The confluence of all of them at a certain moment in history are, however, elements that contributed in different ways to outline and concretize another type of thinking, artistic thinking, immersed in the tangled political instability and that in the ideological-social context requires certain conditions to be able to express its validity as such in the history of art, inseparable from socio-economic history.

### **THE HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL IDEAS OF GUATEMALA AT THE END OF THE 19TH CENTURY**

The liberal revolution and reform were a movement that, although already looming as a consequence of the socio-economic crisis caused by monoculture, was exploited to the benefit of some who saw in them the power to establish a system favorable to the interests of the landowners. Barrios, a landowner from the west, had the ambition as a landowner to get rich, as demonstrated by the possessions he had and those he acquired while in office, so by joining Garcia Granados' revolution he saw in it the possibility of achieving it.

Rufino Barrios is a coffee grower from the west who had gone bankrupt. The resentment of the coffee growers against the previous regime comes to the surface in him, combined with personal experiences with the Jesuits, which is why he displays an exacerbated anticlerical and anti-religious attitude: he is an ambitious

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military man, a rough man with coarse manners, and he possessed the necessary elements to direct his energies towards objectives that were within the framework of his interests (6).



This is evident in their actions against García Granados, an intellectual who pioneered the liberal revolution, whom Barrios skillfully exploited to seize power by framing him as a dictatorship. The liberals' interests center on partisanship, and their political leadership is geared toward the aforementioned coffee economy, quashing any opposition to the regime and the measures it adopts. In such a context, the role, function, and interest in art had no place. The Minister of Education himself, Lorenzo Montúfar (a furious anticlerical), proclaimed that "thank goodness the age of literature has passed," because in the eyes of liberals, the arts, like other activities that had no practical use, were clearly useless.

It is worth mentioning the cultural and artistic phenomenon, in Toynbee's opinion, on the thesis of the production of art in environments hostile to it, emerging as a reaction to that environment, only reaching extremes where it is so overwhelming that it can apparently annul it. During tyrannies such a phenomenon occurs and that of Barrios was no exception. The manifestations in art maintain an opposition to the regime and the examples regarding the expressions given in this case lack significance to fully identify the social role of art in relation to the environment.

Jose Marti, who was in Guatemala on 1779, gives us an important element of criticism when speaking of Guatemalan productions, he describes their aesthetic sense, mentioning artists marked in a stage evidently alien to the ideology of the moment, which can be considered as testimony of the reaction of the artists of that time to the lack of stimuli, which annulled new expressions of artistic creation.

In "Guatemala" by Jose Marti, he writes the following: "There are in Guatemala, in painting and sculpture, great names; and more than names, great aptitudes..." "Manuel Merlo is the name given by the author of correct and broad canvases that, among shadows, leap out valuable to intelligent eyes, in the picturesque chapel of Calvary. Original in his invention, daring in his composition, skillful in positioning, zooming in and out, giving perspective, dark in his color, sure in his drawing, Manuel Merlo can well be considered on a par with the gentle Pontaza, the faithful Cabrera, the mystic Rolsales, the penetrating Jalla."

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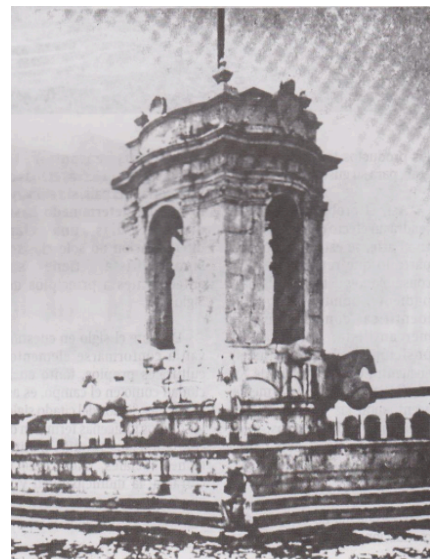
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"...Pontaza already painted the kindly physiognomy of Saint Dominic, he skillfully folded his white robe, animated his school, beautified his temptations, placed before his eyes a gracious gaze on the treatise on the sacraments." He had then, with more color and more practice, not that rough perspective, childish composition and puerile ornamentation of the painting, more famous than worthy of fame, in which he depicts the death of the loving Dominicans..."

"King Pontazak painted, and the fame of Mrs. Vasconcelos never dimmed much; strange not for her absolute merit, but because in bitter scarcity of masters and resources, in procedures and ideas she had to invent everything. The artist divined the secrets of color, those of perspective, those of the extremely difficult human flesh.

Rosales, a daring colorist, left paintings of warm intonation for Calvary; ... For Saint Francis there were, and now some passages from the life of the saint that del Tostado and Lope painted with his rapidity, the very prolific, the astonishing Villalpando have disappeared, who, like Rubens, covered Europe with paintings, more or less beautiful, never bad, in short days, palaces, manor houses and convents... This one is by Julian Perales; the Antiguan sculptor has no rival for Christs. He touches the wood and it already bleeds. In Spain and France, they don't want a Christ who isn't Perales.

- And did you see Cirilo Lara work?
- That lazy, strange artist, that daring craftsman who makes a sturdy Venus from a bean, and from an orange seed, a baby Jesus.
- Something more than that, Look at the Saint John he made for the Cathedral. With one hand he points to the land; with the other, raised, he looks to the sky. It's not yet polished and is rough stone, but the colossal folds already reveal the loving head, its position natural, its hand good, its intricate hair well-touched.
- More famous is Quirio Cataño.
- He has won it. He made the much-venerated Lord of Esquipulas, the *Cristo Negro* with his sorrowful expression, his slender torso, his studied forms... and there go the lover and the friend, saying that in 1640 the very famous Alonso de la Paz appeared in Guatemala, and carving wood, made, in addition to glorious works, a Jesus of Nazareth, a treasure of which the Church of La Merced is proud today... There is a renowned Virgin of Mercy on Calvary that incites tears: She



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too cries. This was the work of Vicente España, a disciple who could and knew more than his teacher, the good José Bolaños." "... I saw a fierce dispute in Paris over a small conception of Ramirez. The Virgin is happy; her blue robes billow gracefully; her slender body folds like an ascending archangel. And I didn't even know Ramirez's name! He, thus honored, died in his homeland, so prosperous and so grateful, in terrible poverty.

There are abundant copies of image-makers in Barcelona. The Guatemalans are neither old nor new, inferior to them: they have tamed the wood and made it man and woman." (7)

### THE ARTISTIC IDEAS



Artistic taste is closely linked to a class phenomenon. The rise of the bourgeoisie and a mercantilist capitalist class in Guatemala City, where this situation was most evident, shaped their tastes in foreign fashions.

In the "Review" of the General Situation of Guatemala, Pio Pascal points out this aspect with the formation of the bourgeoisie, referring to the fact that the ladinos who resided in the capital always tried to be in European fashion and that, in general, they did not dress in fine wool and cotton fabrics from Europe,

"since the products woven in the country were, for their taste, 'ordinary'"

Thus, the problem of social classes will have an effect as a problem in art, establishing on the one hand what represents the consumers of the same, the wealthy, dominant class, which is identified with the mercantilist bourgeois, while the position of the artists is found in the majority of cases within the middle class, accentuating the differences due to socio-political ideologies, and the artistic creeds are an internal cause in the development of art itself.

The problem is not alien to Guatemalan artistic production and we can find such separation in various stages of the country's history. However, what has determined until today a clear differentiation not only elitist, has its antecedents at the beginning of the 19th century.

During the century in question, distinct cultural elements began to take shape both in the city and in the countryside. By the mid-century, Indigenous groups had fully developed their own social institutions, such as the *cofradía* (religious brotherhood),

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the municipal council, and *compadrazgo* (ritual kinship), which acted as important social and cohesive forces.

The development of Guatemalan culture in the 19th century can be characterized by "city-states," where the city of Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción monopolized cultural elements imported from Europe and reinterpreted them using local traditions. This dynamic, in turn, allowed Indigenous groups to maintain a degree of cultural autonomy.

We can therefore affirm that, at the beginning of liberalism in Guatemala, two types of cultures were already established:

- a. An urban culture connected to hegemonic centers in Europe and, to a lesser extent, North America.
- b. A subordinate culture shaped by the country's many Indigenous and mestizo ethnic groups, who, throughout history, developed their own worldview and way of life. This culture retained elements from pre-Hispanic times, the colonial era, liberalism, and African cultural contributions.

Within this context, the notion of national consciousness in a Guatemalan society attempting to forge a nation becomes a kind of fiction, in which the NATIONAL is associated with a historical past—particularly the extinct ancient civilizations—and with the development of an urban mestizo culture aligned with Western ideals.



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Even though these differences were recognized, they did not seem sufficient to fully explain the limited artistic production that took place after 1871—unless one considers class-related factors tied to foreign tastes, which prevailed at the expense of national ones, along with the complete lack of interest from the liberal government in fostering artistic creation.

This is evident in a series of writings by Rubén Darío regarding the album *Tesoro de Bellas Artes Modernas*, which was presented as part of a press campaign in Guatemala in 1891 promoting the album of photogravures.

The album includes 56 prints, among which Darío particularly highlights the paintings *The Soldier's Dream* by Édouard Detaille, *The Childhood of Bacchus* by Édouard Ramvier, *Bullfight in a Roman Circus* by Alexandre Wagner, *Victor Hugo* by Alphonse Monchablon, and *The Last Cartridge* by Alphonse de Neuville. From this same work by Darío, one can draw conclusions about the public's preference for European art. In the same issue of the mailo, there is a news item that explicitly states that *Tesoro de Bellas Artes* is "a magnificent, luxurious work" and that "all people of good taste should have such a worthy piece in their library" (Mail, May 14, 1891).

This reference to "good taste" was also made by Francisco Monterroso, professor of linear drawing and painting at the National Institute and Central Normal School for Boys (March 12, 1891), and by Antonio Perelló. The editors, Griffin and Campbell, used their endorsements for further promotion of the book, stating: "We publish the above assessments by the distinguished artists Mr. Perelló and Mr. Monterroso regarding the merit of the *Tesoro de Bellas Artes* so that art enthusiasts may form an opinion of our work." (Mail, May 16, 1891).

Several other figures from what was considered the "high society" followed with similar praise, clearly indicating the prevailing taste of the time. Adding to this is the "considerable number of chromolithographs and statues brought from abroad," as noted by Víctor Miguel Díaz in "The Fine Arts in Guatemala" in the supplement of *Diario de Centroamérica*. From this, we can piece together a profile of the class-based dynamics that dominated the artistic field at the time.

To what has already been mentioned, we must add public opinions regarding "*plastic works*," which helped shape our understanding of the artistic landscape in Guatemala City at the end of the 19th century. An article published in *La Gaceta de Guatemala* on November 11, 1859, mentions a Mr. Chenal, author of a painting referred to as a "*vistas*"—a type of work that was undoubtedly based on photographs. The historian Francis Polo Sifontes reproduces this article in a study that highlights two paintings by Augusto de Succa (10), which we quote:

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## PAINT

"We saw in the print shop located in the arcade of the Palace a beautiful painting on display that depicts a morning view of the city from Cerro del Carmen.

We would have preferred (11) one of those evening effects, which appear so magnificent in our country; but perhaps the painter did not want to sacrifice the view of the city and its monuments to the effect of the sky, which might have made them appear somewhat dark. This painting is notable not only for the accuracy of the drawing but also for the truthfulness of the colors; and we have no doubt that it will be generally appreciated by an audience as passionate about the fine arts as ours.

It is the first time we have seen an almost complete VIEW of this beautiful capital reproduced. THIS TYPE OF PAINTING SHOULD ATTRACT THE ATTENTION OF OUR ENTHUSIASTS (12), in a country covered by a splendid sky and so full of picturesque scenes, like all of Central America.

We invite Mr. Chenal, the author of the painting, to continue PAINTING NEW VIEWS, which we believe will be well received by the refined taste of the Guatemalan people. A few painting enthusiasts"\*\*\*

In similar terms, we encounter the personality of Carlos Augusto Guido de Succa. He arrived in Guatemala from Belgium around 1843. He was a photographer as well as a painter. Referring to the research of attorney Luis Luján Muñoz, we know that among the pictorial works created by this artist are several oil landscape paintings—particularly two that were once located in the vestibule of the Carrera Theater (Colón), painted around 1870. These paintings depicted the city of Guatemala as seen "from south to north and in reverse," in the same way as an interior view of the Metropolitan Cathedral that is now in private hands.

## ART AND DICTATORSHIPS (1898–1944)

In Guatemala, dictatorships have shaped the destiny of artists' lives and works; alongside them, upper-class elites of capitalist-mercantilist background have identified with such regimes in their effort to reject any expression that might—even slightly—disturb the harmony between both.

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Tyrants feed on a vanity that becomes an Herostratus-like compulsion before history. Flattery and servility from those around them nourish them, and confusing their role before the people, they proclaim themselves the leaders and guides of false narratives, rooting themselves in dictatorship to do so.

Tyrants become blinded by their poor understanding of certain historical figures, and in attempting to imitate their deeds or achievements outside of any real historical context, they become laughable yet dangerous parodies of those models. Sustained by that same servility, flattery, and arrogance—which they call order, discipline, and development—they tolerate no criticism or opposition to their commands, nor to their despotic hold over official status, education, or the concept of national history, claiming that dissent leads away from the citizen morality they claim to embody. In such a suffocating environment, creativity cannot flourish.

After the presidency of Reyna Barrios—who, mixing personal taste with a desire to beautify Guatemala City, built the Paseo de la Reforma, for which he brought in European artists to create the statues that now adorn it and signify the arrival of new ideas in Guatemala—he was assassinated by gunfire on the night of February 8, 1898, as he returned from the theater. The presidency then passed to the first designate, Manuel Estrada Cabrera.

Estrada Cabrera's tyranny marked another terrible chapter in the country's history; its disastrous consequences left painful memories in the generation of intellectuals and artists who lived through it—memories echoed in the works of writers like Miguel Ángel Asturias and Rafael Arévalo Martínez, and in the suffering of musicians such as the unforgettable composer Luis Felipe Arias, who was killed by the dictator's henchmen, or Jesús Castillo, who had to take refuge on a farm in the Costa Cuca to escape the tyrant's wrath. According to artists of the time, art entered a phase of creative negation, replaced instead by the construction of buildings meant to glorify the tyrant's name—such as the so-called Temples of Minerva, built at the northern racetrack and in many towns across the country, along with the “Minervalias,” which served as a pretext to exalt his image.



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It is at this moment that the hegemonic groups which had come to form a considerable social stratum in Guatemala begin to experience years of economic prosperity. Coffee growers grow wealthy, affluent families travel to Europe, forging relationships and even intermarrying with their counterparts on the old continent, thus establishing class-based groups that come to be known as Guatemala's "high society."

Beginning in the final years of the previous century, during the administration of Reyna Barrios and later under the dictatorship of Estrada Cabrera (1898–1917), Guatemala experienced its own version of the Belle Époque. Reyna Barrios undertook a wide range of projects during his government, with the intention of beautifying the capital and transforming it into "a little Paris." It was during his administration that the first world exposition in Guatemala was held in 1897. Thanks to his legislative efforts, laws concerning literary, artistic, and industrial property were enacted. To enhance the capital's beauty, he brought in foreign artists—among them the sculptor Santiago González—who became a driving force behind a group of artists that, along with the teachings of the Spaniard Jaime Sabartés, would bring about a uniquely significant artistic development in Guatemala.

During the first two decades of the 20th century, new forms of expression were quietly taking shape, awaiting the right moment to emerge and crystallize into works that, through diverse artistic forms, would reflect the new ideas behind artistic development.

### **KEY FIGURES IN MUSIC AND THE VISUAL ARTS**

In the development of art, there are key figures who, with new impulses at different times, revitalize artistic expression—especially when, due to the exhaustion of formulas in a class-based society, art no longer responds to the historical moment being lived. The concept of "key figures" or "genius artists" has been challenged by some scholars within art history analysis, particularly from a social perspective, since art is considered a phenomenon that emerges from social groups and should be studied based on that collective function. However, the very nature of art also demands, for its creation, dissemination, acceptance, and understanding, certain conditions that vary depending on the angle from which it is approached (13).

This results in an expression of individuals, aimed at groups and individuals constituted as an "elite" bound to a type of knowledge that lies beyond the common sphere—while at the same time, these groups are divided as recipients of the values attributed to them by the dominant culture, thereby generating what is referred to as "cultural snobbery" (14).

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Hadjinicolaou raises several objections, seeing them as obstacles to studying this subject from the standpoint of “key artists,” whom he views as products of the ideology of hegemonic groups—an approach he rejects from the standpoint of historical materialism. On the other hand, Lucien Goldmann argues that “the true subjects of cultural creation are social groups, not isolated individuals,” while a “Marxist-influenced” variant of the environmental theory is represented by the thesis that a pictorial work is dependent on the class origin of its producer.



Nevertheless, the historical process in which individuals made decisions on behalf of groups led, inevitably, to an era where individual drive played a significant role, and society sought leadership figures in whom the ideals of the hegemonic groups could be embodied. This, in turn, responds to the demands of understanding art in the terms proposed by Hippolyte Taine, who believed that a work of art reflects the spirit and customs of its time.

Between 1900 and 1930, a new interpretation of this method emerged within the liberal German bourgeoisie. However, the difficulty of applying it across different geographic contexts lies in the often intentional omission of the role played by isolated aesthetic conceptions—viewed instead as contradictions within a generally outdated status quo.

One of the systems criticized by Hadjinicolaou—who becomes a tenacious critic of the methods applied in art history (15), is the one used, in some way, to explain phenomena in “bourgeois” societies (hegemonic societies in which the individual decidedly matters). The existence of “key figures,” while applicable to the study of certain problems under specific circumstances due to the dynamics of society itself and in affinity with the concepts of “narrative history” and “problem history,” is nonetheless practiced without hesitation by French historiography.

French historiography (1900–1940), through figures such as Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch—who revisited the critique of the traditional positivist historiography postulates outlined by Henri Ibeér—established a new current of thought grounded

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in reflection and practice. One of its principal characteristics was the recognition of history as a scientific discipline under ongoing construction, which necessitated the formulation of hypotheses (thus, "narrative history" had to give way to "problem history"). This approach aimed to achieve a historical synthesis capable of explaining the interconnection between the various articulated levels of social structure, as well as the arrhythmias, imbalances, and contradictions that might arise among them. There was also a diversification of sources—moving away from the exclusivity of written documents—along with an awareness of the plurality of temporalities, including short-term durations (events). To this, other figures and characteristics may be added, such as Paul Vidal de la Blache, Jean Jaurès, Georges Lefebvre, and Ernest Labrousse (16).

All the above serves to justify the use of diverse methodological tools applied within various socio-cultural frameworks, according to the historical context and its demands. In light of this, it seems that in Guatemala, there have been periods in which groups have emerged that define artistic movements according to the social function of art—contributions that, although coming from individuals, are shaped by a collective or group-based spirit.

Sabartés is, above all, the driving force around whom a group of artists gathers, absorbing his innovative ideas. His personality was undoubtedly magnetic, and he was also an important representative in Spain of the progressive movements. According to Dr. Luis Luján, Sabartés was "a result of the flourishing cultural moment in Barcelona, where there was not only a vigorous Catalanist movement, but modernism was its main aesthetic manifestation" (17). Sabartés had arrived in Guatemala in early 1904 by a twist of fate. A close friend of Pablo Picasso, he brought with him a "wealth of rich and valuable experiences lived in the intellectual world of Barcelona and Paris" and also brought a portrait painted by Picasso himself. It is believed that other paintings by Picasso were also brought and are in the possession of some individuals in the city of Guatemala.

Years later, Carlos Mérida would declare that thanks to Sabartés, they were able to see Cubism "up close, firsthand" as it was beginning, while the Impressionist period was coming to an end. The other significant figure who contributed enormously to the development of visual art in Guatemala during this time was the sculptor Santiago González, who had studied in France with Rodin and had a great influence on the young artists of the era, such as Agustín Iriarte, Yela Gunther, Carlos Valenti, and Carlos Mérida. Iriarte traveled to Italy and returned "influenced by Italian Impressionism" (Luján), while Valenti had affiliations with French Impressionism, which can be seen in his associations with the style of Lautrec, combined with an expressionist sense.

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Two groups emerged—one formed around 1920 by the artists Enrique Acuña and Ernesto Bravo, representing academicism, and on the other hand, the artists Agustín Iriarte, Rafael Rodríguez Padilla, Rafael Yela Gunther, Santiago González, Humberto Garavito, Carlos Mérida, Carlos Valenti, and Jaime Sabartés. In the field of music, Jesús Castillo, Fabián Rodríguez, and Julián Paniagua Martínez aligned themselves with a nationalism infused with romantic elements. It is important to note, however, that there was already awareness of French and Italian music with impressionist traits.

Within the socio-cultural framework of the early 20th century, we can identify figures who had a strong influence on the development of the arts in Guatemala and who can be situated in the first decade of the current century—in music, Luis Felipe Arias, and in the visual arts, Santiago González, Justo de Gandarias, and the previously mentioned Jaime Sabartés.

It is only natural that in an environment where the challenges of a discipline are discussed and there is a collective awareness of it through the “group instinct” (18), directions for the paths of art can emerge. Individual contributions are the achievements of a generation, and in the face of collective social change, individualism tends to play a role that leads to isolation.

From 1920 onward, artists deliberately sought to organize themselves into groups—a phenomenon that occurred in many sectors of capitalist society, and which was strengthened by the rise of the proletariat.

This, in some way, holds significance during the period when Guatemala City was undergoing major transformations as a result of the 1917 earthquake and the shift away from the dictatorial government led by Manuel Estrada Cabrera. The conjunction of these events contributed, in various ways, to new social and economic changes that also extended into the arts.

Other key figures in this context include Carlos Valenti, Carlos Mérida, and José Castañeda. It could be said that with the first two, Guatemalan visual art underwent a renewal of concepts, techniques, and creations that marked a turning point and helped bring about the changes that would follow. The same can be said in the field of contemporary music with Castañeda, who, with innovative and original ideas, invented a new system of musical notation—an achievement that placed him in music history among the intellectuals who made valuable contributions to the reexamination of traditional theories

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## References

1. Liberal dictatorships did not allow the development of art, their concerns revolved around the economic interests of coffee growers.
  2. The "Amigos del País" society is one of the institutions that were formed since the mid-18th century and its role in the history of Guatemala is of important interest.
  3. Julián Amurrio Gonzales. "El Positivismo en Guatemala". Editorial Universitaria, la Ed., Guatemala, 1970.
  4. Arnold Hausser. Historia Social de la Literatura y el Arte, Tres Tomos. Editorial Omega. Barcelona.
  5. At the time of taking power as president, the dictator Barrios refers to a phrase "I will swear not on the Bible, but as a soldier", Laguardia: El Movimiento Liberal. Barrios' oath of office upon being sworn in as President of Guatemala.
  6. Jose Marti. Guatemala. Biblioteca de Cultura Popular 20 de octubre. Vol. 36. Ministerio de Educación Pública, Guatemala, 1952.
  7. Pío Casal, cit. Dari Fuentes, en Artesanías de la Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción - Tradición Popular. Centro de Estudios Folklóricos, 1990.
  8. Evelyn Urhan de Irving, "Rubén Darío y El Tesoro de Bellas Artes Modernas". Tennessee Technological University. 1990. 1a. ed.
  9. Francis Polo Sifintes. La Ciudad de Guatemala en 1870 a través de dos pinturas de Augusto de Succa. Publicaciones del Instituto de Antropología e Historia. Guatemala, 1978.
  10. The underlining is from the author.
  11. The underlining is from the author.
  12. Enrico Fubini. "La Estética Musical del Siglo XX". When referring to the groups to whom the music is addressed, he explains that it is a small group dedicated to music that comes to know the symbols, the forms and the mechanics itself.
  13. The social groups that have made up Guatemalan society since the 19th century are nuclei where the ruling class dictates bourgeois taste; this reappears in societies from 1944 to the present day, albeit in a different connotation. Hegemonic groups always constitute the upholders and promoters of "taste," characterized by different meanings.
  14. Hadjinicolaou presents three obstacles as objections to the study of art history: 1. The history of art as the history of artists, 2. The history of art as part of the history of civilizations and, 3. The history of art as the history of works of art: in his opinion, none of these formulas used on the subject comply with the methodology to be used for analysis in the history of art, differentiating it from the aesthetic problem.
  15. Ernesto Godoy D. "El Nacimiento de la Historiografía Francesa Contemporánea". Escuela de Historia, IHAA. Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, 1992.
  16. Luis Luján Muñoz. Jaime Sabartés en Guatemala 1904-27. Dirección General de Cultura y Bellas, 1981. 1a. Edición.
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17. Jung and Adler defined and coined the concept of the group instinct, which allows for the establishment of natural norms and laws that help protect the group in the face of countless circumstances, reaffirming that human beings are, by nature, social animals. C. G. Jung, "Símbolo de Transformación", Ed. Paidós, Buenos Aires, 1962.
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