

FOR  
VANITY'S SAKE



CURATED BY GABI SHAE ZOLLINGER

To Stuart  
Bradley Gibbons

□

For teaching me  
my love for art

The contents of this document are exclusively for educational purposes.

The images incorporated are used according to free use policies, disclosed under section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976. Exclusive rights belong to the owners of the properties displayed herein.

No profit was accrued from this educational endeavor.

The Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art granted reproduction of works within the NEHMA collection.

I would like to acknowledge  
and thank NEHMA as an  
institution for the  
opportunity and allowance  
of this exhibition. I do not  
claim any ownership over  
the works of art shown.



# For Vanity's Sake

The female form in Latin  
American art through the ages

Virtual Exhibition

Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art

Curated by Gabi Shae Zollinger



Gabi Shae Zollinger is a student in the art history program at Utah State University.

After falling in love with art history by taking the same humanities class not just once, but twice during high school, she knew art history was something she wanted to pursue. Zollinger's inspiration stems from a desire to explore and focus on the progression of depictions of women, clothed and nude, through the art world, specifically focusing on the scheme of Latin American art for this exhibition.

# For Vanity's Sake

For Vanity's Sake will focus on the aesthetic progression of both the varying nude and clothed depictions of the female body within Latin American art. In regards to one's vanity, women have been described as vain, self-centered creatures since the inception of Adam and Eve. Eve's actions plummet all of humanity into hardship as the result of her eating the forbidden fruit within the Garden of Eden. This theme of vanity within women continues throughout history as a stereotypical characteristic of women.

There is a proponent, male-headed argument within the art history world that delegates whether or not representation of women's bodies or self-representation of women's bodies is necessary, and if self-representation can be seen as empowering or selfish. While women were not disallowed to be artists beginning as far back as antiquity to the modern age, it was much more widely seen and embraced for men to have their artwork accepted and popularized. Male artists would popularly depict female figures, both allegorical and interpretational, with angelic faces, pale skin, small and perky breasts, and never with body/pubic hair until the emergence of the avant-garde scene. These depictions were made with male consumption in mind. When female artists would depict themselves or other female figures in a non-idealized way that featured realistic bodies and details, including large breasts, large nipples, and most importantly pubic hair, their art was met with outrage and incredible backlash. The female-made depictions that could be seen as self-empowering were deemed inappropriate, overtly sexual, distasteful, and all-in-all selfish.

The sexualizing and idealizing lenses that view the female body created by men for men can be seen as the "male gaze." The "female gaze" acts as a complete opposite, the purpose to negate these stereotypical depictions that have been popularized by male artists to depict themselves and other women in an accurate and empowering way. Thus, it must be analyzed how the concept of "vanity" is gendered effeminately, and how for the "sake" of women, the negative stereotype of female self-adoration must be removed.

The exhibition will include depictions of the female body dating from pre-Columbian times to the Colonial invasion and formation of modern Latin America. From there to the contemporary world, radicalized imagery of the female form challenges conservative Latin American gender stereotypes of how women should be presented through art. The analysis of culture and aesthetic will focus heavily beginning with the Olmecs, Teotihuacano, and the Aztecs. Some influential artists and figures that can be traced back to will be Tarsila do Amaral, Frida Kahlo, and Daniela Rossell. These examples are key to understanding how vanity can be seen through self-representation of the female body.

Through the exploration of this exhibition, the necessary representation of the female body, both being done by the other and the self, should be seen as recurring ideals vital to history and culture itself. As the world villainizes the concept of art made by women for women as a target audience, the word "vanity" is not a Biblical evil, nor is it a sin for women to want to be able to artistically depicts themselves out of a misogynistic, idealized sense, but the desire of intimacy of having the idea of the female body as openly embraced as the male body is, regardless of being created by a man or a woman.



Unknown, "Great Goddess,"  
basalt, Teotihuacan

As one of the oldest art pieces found from the pre-Columbian era, the "Great Goddess" was created by the people of Teotihuacan. Found within the Pyramid of the Moon, the basalt depiction of a goddess is assumed to be the great goddess of Teotihuacan herself, a goddess of the earth, fertility, and of life itself. Culturally, she is responsible for the uniting of Teotihuacan as a prospering city. The "Great Goddess" sculpture stood at the foot of the Pyramid of the Moon. The Great Goddess is often depicted with an avian headdress with vegetal motifs and a nose pendant. This representation of the Great Goddess has her mouth agape. She clenches her fists in front of her chest. The balled fists are likely a stance of protection/prowess.

Just as her fists cover her exposed breasts, she also wears a loincloth/skirt that covers the rest of her body. There is a lack of western/European puritanical dress and notions of censorship. Predating the Colonial era, there is no hint of puritanical shame to afflict on this representation of the Great Goddess as it served as a proxy figure to represent the powerful form of a goddess. By European standards, this depiction could be considered promiscuous and/or vain to depict a nude women's body, yet it preceded the concept of European shame correlated with covering up one's exposed extremities.



Anonymous, "Coatlicue,"  
basalt, Aztec

Coatlicue is the divine matriarch of the Aztecs. She is believed to be the mother of all gods and seen as the goddess of fertility, representing life and death and rebirth within the Aztec religion. Coatlicue is often depicted with the head of two snakes smashing together, wearing a necklace of dismembered hands, skulls, and human hearts. Coatlicue also wears a skirt of snakes, as her name literally translates to "she who wears a skirt of snakes." Her basalt statue, which was originally presented in the city of Tenochtitlan, was found in modern day Mexico City. The statue depicts Coatlicue exposing her breasts. Her large breasts, specifically, show that Coatlicue herself had given birth. There are details around her neck alluding to the fact that she was decapitated before the snakes emerged from her neck. According to myth, Coatlicue had a virginal birth. When her daughter, Coyolxauhqui, had found out, she attacked her mother with hundreds of her brothers. As the myth continues, Coatlicue is decapitated, and instantaneously two snakes sprout from her neck, possibly representing blood squirting from her neck. Her pendulous breasts show no notion of censorship, similar to the Great Goddess, other than her necklace hanging down in front of her chest. In the pre-Columbian world, there was no apparent need to censor the breasts of a woman, as there were no European standards of censorship prevalent. There is no existence of vain sexualization in her body, as there was objectively no need for her depiction to be sexualized to any degree, Coatlicue's state serves as a representation figure for her onlookers to perceive and revere her existence as a powerful woman.



Juan Correa, "Immaculate Conception", 1701, oil on canvas

Juan Correa illustrates the notion of the Virgin Mary's immaculate conception, instantly being free of sin since the moment of her creation. In a Baroque-esque usage of colors and style, Correa was an extremely famous painter of his time for embracing the aesthetic of the Baroque from the Old World. This allowed for the popularization of the Spanish Baroque style in the New World of Latin America. Mary is dressed in a full length white dress with a dark blue shawl on top, a color commonly attributed with the Virgin Mary.

Her clothing is very modest, and arguably conservative. There is a blue haze behind her head that creates the illusion of a halo. With hands clasped, she looks down below her. The viewers are presumed to be sinners not exempt from judgment and damnation. The Virgin Mary was, and still is, one of the most mainstream depictions of a woman in art. As Mary was so popularly depicted for so long, other female figures in art others could be seen as selfish and vain, conservative individuals within the Church claiming it to be unnecessary to illustrate anyone but the Virgin Mary. However, the purpose of the Virgin Mary's illustrations being so widespread does the opposite to allow for women to also be seen in the sphere of the art world.



Miguel Cabrera, "Portrait of Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz", 1750, oil on canvas

Miguel Cabrera's Portrait of Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz depicts the famous nun in a posthumous portrait. As the world's first documented feminist, as collected from sent and received letters by Juana Inés de la Cruz as well as her interactions with many intellectuals, Cabrera paints the nun in an empowering way. As she is depicted seated at a desk with an open text and surrounded by books, what is seen at face value is not the only way Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz is revered by Cabrera's rendition. De la Cruz is presented as an aristocratic, regal figure for Christ. She is not seen as a proxy figure, but an individual that is respected as an aristocrat by her onlookers.

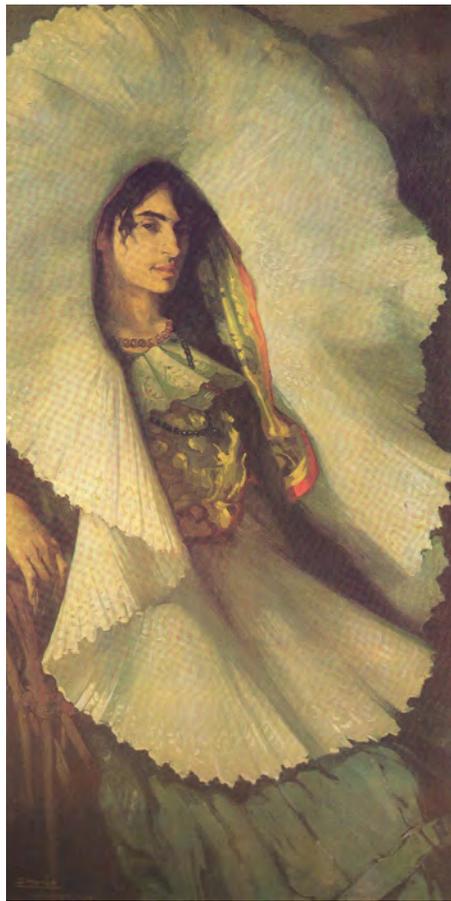
Cabrera's portrait brings up the discussion of blurring the lines between portraiture of mere mortals versus the devotional depictions of figures within the traditional Catholic Church. At the beginning of Colonial rule, only depictions of the Virgin Mary were allowed. As De la Cruz is depicted in such a respectful way with nonexistent sexual themes, there were no grounds for art critics and figures within the Church to see the late nun's portrait be done in vain. The subject matter is still tied to the Church, but shows a step of progress to include more women in art without shaming the subject.



Cristobal Lozano,  
"Portrait of Countess  
Maria Salazar Gabino",  
late 18th c., oil on canvas

As a tribute to his career as a famous court painter, Cristobal Lozano's portrait of Countess Maria Salazar Gabino pays homage to himself and his expertise as a painter. Lozano's style embraces the adoption of the French Baroque aesthetic within the New World. However, the countess' appearance would say otherwise. Her powdered wig and over-the-top, extravagant pink gown are trends traceable to the Old World residing in Europe. Lozano's portrait reflects the political atmosphere surrounding women's rights during the late 18th century in what is now modern-day Peru.

Countess Gabino's appearance is extremely done up, with extravagance in both her makeup, hair, and dress. While this was expected of her to present herself in a way that would be appropriate for her social standing, the levels of lavishness in her appearance can stereotypically chalked up to the idea of women only caring about their appearance in a self-centered nature. Yet, despite the countess being herself a woman of the upper-class, as she was able to afford to have Lozano paint her portrait, she was still subject to fashion sanctions during the time. These fashion sanctions were only applicable to women and dictated how much a woman could wear, what items and colors they could wear, and even how much they could accessorize. These same types of sanctions did not exist for men. Thus, Countess Gabino's appearance in her portrait was a direct product of her times. In order to fit in with her social status, it is necessary for the countess to be depicted to a certain degree of exuberance, not just to be seen as a symptom of vanity as ideas of feminism from the New World clashed with Old World norms and standards that introduced shame and embarrassment for women and archetypes of their behavior and outward appearance.



Saturnino Herrán,  
"Tehuana", 1914, oil on  
canvas

As a Mexican painter, Saturnino Herrán was a pioneer of the Mexican modernism movement, expressing Latin American/Mexican culture through art within the late 19th and early 20th century. Much of Herrán's work centers around the representation of Latin natives in everyday life through portraiture. His paintings were able to give a sense of identity and dignity through depicting indigenous Mexican civilians. These depictions were usually never idealized and captured a sense of nationality for lower class Mexican natives. Herrán's wife posed as the model in Tehuana. In a traditional Tehuana, referring to the women of Tehuantepec, dress, the model wears a large veil-like headpiece called a resplandor. The model can be seen with a smirk on her face— an alluring and inviting gaze towards whoever is to act as her onlooker. The model in Tehuana could have her appearance easily overlooked as extravagant considering her traditional dress and oversized headpiece due to the European-centric notion that villainized women for doing up their appearances. For an artist such as Herrán, his depiction of a Tehuana woman is unprecedented for prior examples of preceding art. Herrán pushes the boundaries of how vanity can be seen in portraiture. Portraits for women were reserved for high-status, wealthy, and stereotypically vain women. Tehuana takes a progressive step by introducing portraiture for everyday women, opening the door for women to be dressed up nicely, casually, fully clothed, or even somewhat nude to have their portrait be taken in a non-condescending and non-sexual way.



Pedro Patino Ixtolinque,  
"America", 1830, marble

America is a large marble statue of a woman commissioned by Melchor Múzquiz, the governor of the State of Mexico at the time. It surrounded the entrance of the tomb for José María Morelos, a Mexican national hero, in the city of Cuautla. While the tomb itself was never fully finished, Pedro Patino Ixtolinque created a second statue, Liberty, to accompany America. Both statues are colossal in size with non-human proportions. The statue America adheres to European canon of mathematical proportions, as applied to a woman's body. The depiction of America also adheres to the European academic canon through the woman's headdress. Standing in contrapposto, the body of the sculpture follows a line of action that creates movement in both the fabric and physical figure despite the restricting, heavy medium that is marble.

The fabric-like texture carved on the woman's body is sheer enough to make out the appearance of nipples through bas-relief chiseling. Due to the depth of the fabric, the navel can also be seen. The length of the fabric draped over the woman's body is much shorter than what most women depicted in Colonial art would wear. However, America is supposed to act as an allegorical piece of art, it stands to represent something deeper. The stylization of the woman, specifically being an indigenous woman, shows both the influence of European sexualization and fetishization of native people. As America is supposed to be an indigenous woman, it makes no sense for her clothing to be so thin and short. For both their society being influenced by Spanish religion and the environment of where they live, America's dress is blatant fetishization of the native female body. This fetishization is a result of the chronic "male gaze" that dictates most depictions of female sexualization in the art world. These types of examples do play a part in negatively creating a generalization of women's bodies and how exposing them can be considered vain. Yet, in this example, it must be remembered that this was crafted by a man's hand, and not a woman's, and is not representative of the mindset a woman might actually go through to depict themselves.



Tarsila do Amaral,  
"Anthropophagy", 1929,  
oil on canvas

Tarsila do Amaral was a prominent member of the Brazilian modernism movement. Her style is highly memorable with bright colors and stylized, almost non-figural, subject matter. Her painting *Anthropophagy* depicts two naked figures, their skin a bright orange with undefinable faces. An androgynous figure sits on the right, facing a possible female figure, presumably speaking from the large breast that droops over the second figure's leg. Both figures have a lack of body hair, leaving discretion up to the viewer. Additionally, the naked body is not idealized, contrary to countering pieces conceived by male artists within the same time period. The visible breast has a dramatized weight and is exaggerated by being pulled down by gravity.

Do Amaral paints *Anthropophagy* in a sexual, nudist way, but not in an exploitive way taken to the "male gaze." Do Amaral emphasizes the necessary representation of depicting the nude female body in a non-sexualizing light. Catered for the "female gaze," the lack of sexualization of the vague figures could be seen as vain when main consumers of the art world were men and not women that could find the non-sexual representation as empowering.



Frida Kahlo, "The Two Fridas", 1939, oil on canvas

Frida Kahlo's *The Two Fridas* is a self-portrait where she depicts herself in two forms. The representation of her two selves can be seen as the Frida on the left experiencing the heartbreak of divorcing Diego Rivera is shown in a European style dress; the Frida on the right essentially "healed" from her heartbreak and is seen in a traditional Mexican dress. The Kahlo on the left experiencing heartbreak in the piece is visibly seen bleeding from her heart and into her lap. She is injured to represent the ache and pain the separation had caused her. While the Kahlo on the left is bleeding, the two are connected via a red string through their hearts and along their arms and both the Kahlos holding each other's hand. The Kahlo on the right alludes to her being "fully" healed but moved on from the strife and turmoil the heartbreak had caused her. As Kahlo is almost always the subject matter in her own works, it could be argued that Kahlo herself is self-centered.

In this example, and in all of her self-portraits, Kahlo does not change her appearance or remove her facial hair, including her unibrow and hair around her upper lip, in an effort to not adhere to European beauty standards. Almost all of Kahlo's art are exclusively self-portraits, as well. Kahlo portraying her appearance in a way that doesn't adhere to stereotypical European beauty standards brings up the idea of self-representation and the subsequent self-adoration as a product that should not be seen negatively or selfishly.



Daniela Rossell,  
Untitled, 1997-2002  
From *Ricas y famosas*  
series, photograph

In a photographic series, Daniela Rossell's *Untitled* depicts members of the Mexican upper class and the displaying of their wealth. The present model is Rossell's stepsister, a recurring figure in Rossell's *Ricas y famosas* series. The model is posed on an expensive, plush couch surrounded by fancy dolls and Rococo-era portraits. From the pillows on the couch to the frames of each painting, the lamps, and even the decorative pattern of the wallpaper, the model is encapsulated by ornate decorations that would fit the lifestyle of one within the Mexican upper class. However, the subject matter sits in an unmannerly position that would be inappropriate for her status. Her dress has high slits on both legs and she looks slightly past the camera. The model's behavior can be seen as indifference to her wealth, spoiled, and even an act of defiance for not embracing her high status, almost as if wanting to refute her wealth. Vanity and wealth are sometimes presumed as synonymous, but Rossell's depiction of a rebellious female socialite refuting her status and wearing a distressed garment show a new distinction that separates a predisposition concerning vanity and wealth. It is important that Rossell chose to show a female, rich socialite instead of a male socialite as vanity is never associated with rich men, but only with rich women. This work directly goes against Euro-centric norms of how women are supposed to look and behave that would consider them "vain."

# For Vanity's Sake



For Vanity's Sake details the aesthetic progression of both the varying nude and clothed depictions of the female body within Latin American art. In the sphere of the art world, the concept of the "male gaze" and "female gaze" exists as it does in other walks of life. The idea of women being vain and self-centered towards their outward appearances did not come into existence until it stemmed from male-headed ideations of men projecting their views on women, perpetuating the idea of a "male gaze." For Vanity's Sake is meant to spark conversation and discussion on how it is necessary to see representation and depictions of the nude female form by both female artists as much as male artists. It is vital to realize that women artists will be at a disadvantage with self-adorational and nude art pieces as they are brushed off as vain, no longer trying to appeal to the "male gaze" that so many male artists apply to their works and instead turn to a "female gaze" of depicting women.