

Looking into the Future: Visiting Artists' Studios in 1880s Buenos Aires

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Abstract

During the 1880s, Buenos Aires witnessed a boost in the project of founding a national art scene. Interestingly, the founding of such a scene implied, in the first place, the creation of a field of art criticism. Due to the lack of official institutes and public support for the arts, the process of imagining and creating a national art took place both on paper and in the studio. As a result, one specific topos that emerges in this period is the visit to the artist's studio. This new discursive art space is at first sight small and insignificant, yet as the present study shows, its discovery in art criticism was crucial for the elaboration of a new myth, i.e., that of a national art production *to come*, observable in its actual birth place. The concept of "the visit to the great artist" had a different meaning in Buenos Aires than, for instance, in Paris. Most of the painters or sculptors were not yet viewed as "great artists". They were precursors or national masters to be. The main focus of this article addresses the question of what this means for the representation of artistic practices and what it tells us about the dynamic of the early art scene.

Contents

The studio in texts

Passing by the studio: a view from the street

Inside the studio

The perspective of a latent artistic future

The studio in texts

[1] The artist's studio is a popular topos throughout art history. It is not only the subject of many paintings but there are innumerable articles describing studio visits, many art historiographical essays, biographies, literary portraits, exhibition reviews and more general critical reflections about art and the workspace. In other words, there is a corpus of studio narratives in art criticism which consists of all kinds of texts. These include long elaborate descriptions, personal recollections, informative texts and humorous texts. Some of these include classic anecdotes, such as Vasari's account of Giotto's painting a fly on a figure's nose that looked so real his master Cimabue tried to swat it away, or Arsène

Houssaye's account about Nicolas Coustou keeping a holy-water font, sculpted by his mother, in his studio which he filled with his own tears.¹

[2] In literature, Olivier Nora considered the "visit to the great writer" a genre with its own structure and codes, which contributed to the mythification of the writer in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The texts, to which Nora refers, describe the visit as a rite of passage with the high point being the appearance of the writer himself. The house, the rooms, the interior, the objects are all part of the ritual. They confirm the writer's status as a genius: "Each object is portrayed as if it had the power to reveal the illustrious. The space seems magnetized, haunted by the writer."² The genre originated at the end of the eighteenth century and became most popular in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when the adoration of artists thrived through the production of biographies, memoirs, statues, monographic museums and so on. At the same time, towards the end of the nineteenth century, a different kind of interest in artists and public figures emerged. Some writers and magazines shifted the focus from the genius – and all the elements that confirmed that status – to the human being, the "real person" who hides behind the myth – a subject that eventually led to the flourishing of tabloids.³

[3] In general, a similar dynamic can be identified in art history. Critics used the artist's workspace to offer insight into creative processes and the life and oeuvre of artists. Elements like the building, the arrangement of the room(s), artworks in progress, artworks by other artists, curious objects and so on, are represented in such a manner that they contribute to a particular image of the artist. The same applied to habits, organized events, meetings and other incidents that took place in the space. It should, however, be noted that part of their descriptions was fiction. Critics often blended their own experiences with popular stories and myths. Moreover, the representation of the studio was also embedded in, and shaped by, the dominant discourse about art and artists. Hence, the description of the workspaces, including the activities that took place there, answered to particular idea(s) that were circulating. From this perspective, Rachel Esner, Sandra Kisters and Ann-Sophie Lehmann identified a paradigm shift in the studio's representation in the early modern period: the workspace was no longer presented/viewed as a space of *making*, of craft, but of *creation*. The space of hard work and labor became a sacred space of inspiration. Texts and images began to focus on the idea of artistic genius and all of the aspects that this

¹ Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella, Oxford and New York 1991, 35; Arsène Houssaye, *Histoire de l'art français au dix-huitième siècle*, Paris 1860, 39.

² Olivier Nora, "La visite au grand écrivain", in: *Les lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, vol. 2, Paris 1986, 563-587: 572.

³ See the chapter "Writers at Home and in the Popular Press: Truth and Fiction", in: Elizabeth Emery, *Photojournalism and the Origins of the French Writer House Museum (1881-1914). Privacy, Publicity and Personality*, London and New York 2012, 47-80.

concept implied (autonomy, talent, the union between spirit and matter), and to hide elements such as the activity of workshop assistants, routine and any artistic failure. The change in imagery responded – and contributed – to the rise of a particular image of an artist but was also a result of a new economic, social and cultural situation that forced artists to take up a more active role in the promotion of their work.⁴

[4] As the studies by Esner, Kisters and Lehmann show, studio representations in art criticism offer a unique window into the dynamics of the art scene. Based on the increasing body of scholarship about artistic practices and representations, the authors refer to the coming of a new field of research in the discipline of art history: *studio studies*.⁵ The present paper situates itself in this emerging field by analyzing the representation of the studio in the press of Buenos Aires at the end of the nineteenth century. The objective is to reveal how the studio topos adapts and transforms to a different context, more specifically to the Buenos Aires art scene of the late 1870s and 1880s. After years of civil wars and the War of the Triple Alliance, Argentina entered into a period of peace that witnessed a boost in the project of founding a national art scene.⁶ Huge waves of migration transformed the capital and the country. Between 1880 and 1914 more than 4,200,000 persons arrived in Buenos Aires, of which the majority came from Europe and more specifically Italy, Spain, France, Germany and England. The agrarian export boom and strong industrial growth had turned the country into one of the wealthiest of the world.⁷ In this environment, a group of artists and critics created in 1876 the first independent art association, the Sociedad Estímulo de Bellas Artes, that strived for the creation of official art institutes as well as for official support for artists (travel grants and commissions) and the art market. However, as this was not a priority of the government, there was no fine

⁴ Rachel Esner, Sandra Kisters and Ann-Sophie Lehmann, "Introduction", in: *Hiding Making, Showing Creation. The Studio from Turner to Tacita Dean*, eds. Rachel Esner, Sandra Kisters and Ann-Sophie Lehmann, Amsterdam 2013, 9-13; Sandra Kisters, "Introduction: Old and New Studio Topoi in the Nineteenth Century", in: *Hiding Making, Showing Creation*, eds. Esner, Kisters and Lehmann, 15-30.

⁵ Rachel Esner also explored the topic in other articles such as "Visiting Delaroche and Diaz with *L'illustration*", in: *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide 2* (2012), <http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/summer12/rachel-esner-visiting-delaroche-and-diaz-with-lillustration> (accessed August 2018); and "In the Artist's Studio with *L'illustration*", in: *RIHA Journal* 0069 (2013), <https://www.riha-journal.org/articles/2013/2013-jan-mar/esner-lillustration> (accessed August 2018).

⁶ The War of the Triple Alliance (or the Paraguayan War) was a war that took place from 1864 until 1870 between Paraguay and the Triple Alliance of Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina.

⁷ Fernando Devoto, *Historia de la inmigración en La Argentina*, Buenos Aires 2009, 13-6, 247-248.

arts museum until 1896⁸ and no official academy until 1905⁹. The main places that showed artworks in the 1880s were small commercial venues that sold all sorts of goods. The Florida street (Fig. 1) had the highest concentration of such shops.



1 Calle Florida, Buenos Aires, ca. 1889, photographer: Samuel Boote (© Wikimedia Commons)

But most objects on sale there were European artworks and artistic objects, made *pour l'exportation*, often falsifications. Only sporadically did the work of a promising national artist or a famous international artist appear.¹⁰ Interestingly, this situation led to a vital role for art criticism in the national art project, to the extent that the production of texts in fact *anticipated* the actual art production.¹¹

[5] One specific topos that emerges in this period is the visit to the artist's studio. This new discursive art space is at first sight small and insignificant, no wonder when we consider the precarious state of art criticism in Argentina. Yet, as the present study shows, its discovery in art criticism was crucial for the elaboration of a new myth, i.e., that of a national art production to come, observable in its actual birth place.¹² In other words, the concept of "the visit to the great artist" had a different meaning in Buenos Aires than, for instance, in Paris. Most of the

⁸ The Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes opened its doors in December 1895.

⁹ It was the academy founded by the Sociedad Estímulo de Bellas Artes that was nationalized in 1905. For a general introduction on the art scene in this period see: Laura Malosetti Costa, "Las artes plásticas entre el ochenta y el Centenario", in: *Nueva Historia Argentina. Arte, sociedad y política*, ed. José Emilio Burucua, Buenos Aires 2010, 161-215; Laura Malosetti Costa, *Los primeros modernos. Arte y sociedad en Buenos Aires a fines del siglo XIX*, Buenos Aires 2001.

¹⁰ For a thorough study on the art market and taste in Buenos Aires at the end of the nineteenth century, see: María Isabel Baldasarre, *Los dueños del arte: coleccionismo y consumo cultural en Buenos Aires*, Buenos Aires 2006.

painters or sculptors were not yet viewed as "great artists". They were precursors or national masters to be. The question of what this means for the representation of artistic practices, and what it tells us about the dynamics of the early art scene is the focus of the present paper.

Passing by the studio: a view from the street

[6] Almost each studio visit begins on the street. Critics briefly describe the way to the workshop or explain how they stumbled across the artist's abodes. Santos Vega (a pseudonym of a critic that wrote for the newspaper *Sud-América*) accidentally discovered the sculptor Camilo Romairone's (1850–1915) workshop in the Calle de las Artes when a simple wooden *chalet* attracted his attention. Pausing, he perceived through the windows interesting statues and busts and immediately decided to make an appointment with the artist to "satisfy our curiosity and give the readers of *Sud-América* some artistic news [...]".¹³ The aspect of discovery runs through the text that shows Buenos Aires as a young capital in transformation in which "the seed of art germinates hidden but vigorous".¹⁴ The visit of Scaramouche, another critic of the newspaper *Sud-América*, to the studio of the painters Vincenzo Caprile (1856–1936), Federico Cortese (1829–1913) and Raffaele Tafuri (1857–1929) was less random. In his view, the studio was the perfect outing for a cold humid September day, "[...] when everything is veiled in darkness, when you want nothing and everything is unbearable [...]", because the paintings of the Italian artists were filled with natural beauty. Cortese's *Salto di Tiberio* depicted a "calm sea, of a profound blue, [with] a crystal wave that gently kisses the beach". A landscape by Caprile

¹¹ Art criticism was a developing practice that adopted many different shapes and defended sometimes widely divergent interests. Yet, the foundation of a national modern art scene took place in this ensemble of texts as much as it did on canvas. It was the work of critics, such as Eduardo Schiaffino, Carlos Gutiérrez and Fernando Carvalho, but also of editors who founded magazines and newspapers and published seemingly insignificant notes, translations and anonymous reflections. For an elaborate study on the issue, see the unpublished PhD dissertation: Laurens Dhaenens, *Writing Art into Being. The Imaginary Creation of an Argentinian Art Scene in Late Nineteenth-Century Art Criticism*, PhD Diss., Katholieke Universiteit Leuven 2017.

¹² Although there was a rise in art criticism, it was still in a fragile state. Newspapers largely neglected the subject. Articles about art appeared very irregularly. There were several attempts to create an art magazine, many of which failed. The ambiguity or semi-presence of the art discourse in the local press is perhaps best expressed in numbers. *El Nacional*, e.g., one of the leading newspapers, published, in 1883, eleven articles that dealt with the topic, including translations of foreign texts. Dhaenens, *Writing Art into Being*, 26.

¹³ Santos Vega, "Arte nacional: una visita al estudio del escultor Romairone", in: *Sud-América*, 13 January 1886.

¹⁴ Vega, "Arte nacional: una visita al estudio del escultor Romairone".

of a rustic country house, a village girl and three little lambs was a "true masterpiece": it conveyed a "paradisiacal calm" and the sky was an "orgy of light, fresh air and serenity".¹⁵ By pointing out how art could brighten the darkest day, the critic evokes a contrast between the reality outside the studio, characterized by bad weather, rheumatism and a cold, and the imaginary world of painting inside the studio, which – as he remarked – was only a carriage ride away (for those who live in the city center).

[7] Critics often mentioned the address and/or briefly described the outside of the studio. Scaramouche noted down that outside the space at Calle Charcas 1191 shared by the three artists, there was "a piece of paper with the names of Caprile, Cortese and Tafuri, written in a fantastic handwriting".¹⁶ From other texts we learn that the sculptor Lucio Correa Morales' workshop was located at Calle Cangallo 1958 and Camilo Romairone's at Calle de las Artes, nearby the crossing with Calle Charcas.¹⁷ The studio of Romairone was very easy to recognize because it was the only chalet in the neighbourhood. The painter Alfonso Muzii (1856–1946) had his studio at Calle Juncal 31, and the sculptor Pasquale Fosca (1852–1929) and the painter Emile Cagniart (1851–1911) worked during their stay in Buenos Aires at Calle Centro América 961 and 1137 respectively.¹⁸ The painter José Aguyari's (1840–1885) atelier was in the city center, at the crossing of the streets Florida and Cangallo. It was the apartment with balconies, located on the first floor of the corner house.¹⁹ By providing the street names, number and/or details about the buildings, the articles featuring studios allow readers to constitute a discursive map of artistic activity in the city. The clear indications made it possible for anyone to visit the artists. However, the primary objective was not to create a new public circuit. The critics wanted to generate visibility for the artists and, indirectly, to demonstrate the coming of a national art. Moreover, this kind of textual mapping can be understood as part of the broader tendency to map Buenos Aires and the urban transformations caused by the massive European immigration and economic prosperity. Newspapers are full of articles describing the construction of streets, avenues and neighbourhoods, the opening of shops and hotels, the destruction of ancient buildings and the creation of city parks. Some of those texts are genuine travel narratives like Eduardo Schiaffino's

¹⁵ Scaramouche, "El arte en Buenos Aires", in: *Sud-América*, 26 September 1888.

¹⁶ Scaramouche, "El arte en Buenos Aires".

¹⁷ S.n., "Lucio Correa Morales", in: *La Prensa*, 5 January 1883; Vega, "Arte nacional: una visita al estudio del escultor Romairone".

¹⁸ Blanco De Plomo, "Arte: cuadros de Muzii", in: *Sud-América*, 11 October 1888; s.n., "El pintor Cagniart", in: *La Nación*, 29 June 1890.

¹⁹ S.n., "Al través del arte", in: *La crónica*, 26 August 1885.

"Alrededor de la ciudad" that he published in 1882 in *El Nacional* – before he started writing about art.²⁰

[8] Visiting studios and, more specifically the practice of describing those visits, was a new phenomenon in the 1880s in Buenos Aires. As Scaramouche concludes in his article about the three Italian artists: "We still have a lot to say, especially about the uncommon practice of visiting the studios of painters. But that is for another time", even though he never returned to the subject afterwards.²¹ Decennia of political and economic instability had obstructed the establishment of an official art circuit and had kept artists away from the public eye. Most probably, studio visits occurred informally, outside of the discursive space of the press – hence the many fleeting references. In addition, the development of art criticism was still in an incipient phase. There had been attempts to establish a specialized magazine for the arts, yet, until 1908, newspapers were the most stable medium even though many of them had only a short lifespan or did not pay much attention to the visual arts.²² This explains why Scaramouche and other critics presented themselves as art lovers, admirers of beauty, and explicitly denied being art critics, and why several critics referred to artworks that they had seen through workshop windows without actually entering the space.

[9] A review of the *Prima Esposizione Artística, Industriale e Operaia Italiana* – also known as the Italian Exhibition of 1881 –, published in *La Nación*, reads:

The Exhibition includes two paintings that we saw for the first time at least fourteen years ago in the extinguished house of Corti, Francischelli and Co., located on the corner of Florida and Cangallo [...]. Later, we saw these same works in the studio of its author, at the Calle de Piedad, near the corner of Uruguay Street. Many stopped in front of the painter's window to gaze at his

²⁰ Zigzag, "Alrededor de la ciudad", in: *El Nacional*, 1 November 1882. Zigzag was one of the pseudonyms of Eduardo Schiaffino.

²¹ Scaramouche, "El arte en Buenos Aires".

²² The most important magazine of this period, *El arte en el Plata* was founded by the Sociedad Estímulo de Bellas Artes in 1878. However, due to financial reasons only one issue appeared. Afterwards, *La Gaceta Musical* claimed to be the organ of all the fine arts. In 1881, *La Ilustración Argentina*, the product of writers and visual artists gave painting and sculpture a more prominent space for three years, although the attention for the visual arts was irregular and fragmented as well. As María Isabel Baldasarre has argued, no magazine truly continued the project of *El arte en el Plata* until 1908, when *Athinae. Revista mensual de arte. Órgano del centro de estudiantes de bellas artes* (1908-1911) emerged. Laura Malosetti Costa, *Los primeros modernos*, Buenos Aires 2001, 161-167; María Isabel Baldasarre, "El arte en el Plata, o el fugaz proyecto de una revista de artes plásticas en Buenos Aires de 1878", in: *Leer las artes*, eds. Inés Saavedra and Patricia M. Artundo, Buenos Aires 2002, 23-38; María Isabel Baldasarre, "La revista de los jóvenes: *Athinae*", in: *Arte en revistas. Publicaciones culturales en la Argentina 1900-1950*, ed. Beatriz Viterbo, Buenos Aires 2008, 25-60.

*works, taking advantage of his absences - which happened when the light reflected by the white wall in front of the studio did not allow him to work well.*²³

Briefly put, the two paintings by an unnamed painter were first exhibited, then returned to the studio where they could be seen from the street, through the window of the studio, and were now on display at the Italian Exposition.²⁴ Here the text achieves two things: on the one hand it stresses the fame of the artworks, on the other hand it demonstrates how the painter's studio was part of the city's cultural fabric. People walked by to see the artworks.

[10] In fin de siècle-Buenos Aires, to look at artworks was, in the words of a critic from the newspaper *El Censor*, part of a "flanerie artística". People strolled through the streets and let themselves be seduced by the objects on display in the store windows. If one was lucky, one could find "treasures" such as bronze statues by Auguste Moreau or studies by Albert Aublet.²⁵ Carlos Gutiérrez, who wrote most of the texts about art in *La Patria Argentina*, gave a glimpse on the particular ambiance that the shops generated on the streets, more specifically the Calle Florida:

*Yesterday we walked by the Bazar du Ménage, owned by the Bullrich señores, on the Florida street right where it crosses with Rivadavia. We noticed then a group of people standing in front of the shop windows. Inside them, as a beacon for public attention, stood an easel holding a portrait, drawn with pen, of the deceased Narciso Martínez de Hoz.*²⁶

²³ "Hay en la Exposición dos cuadros que hemos conocido, hace por lo menos catorce años, en la estinguida [sic] casa Corti, Francischelli y Ca. en la esquina de Florida y Cangallo [...]. Posteriormente hemos visto esas mismas obras en el estudio de su autor, calle de Piedad, cerca de la esquina de Uruguay; no eran pocos los que se detenían en la ventana del pintor a mirar sus obras, aprovechando sus ausencias, cuando la luz que reflejaba la pared blanca del frente no le permitía trabajar bien." S.n., "La exposición italiana (notas y comentarios): bellas artes", in: *La Nación*, 1 April 1881. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine.

²⁴ The First Italian Artistic, Industrial and Craftsmen Exposition was organized by the *Unione Operai Italiani*, an important association of the Italian community in Buenos Aires. Because there was no institutional circuit, these kind of expositions played a significant role in the creation of the art scene. The Italian Exposition was a popular event and generated unprecedented attention for the fine arts. Malosetti Costa, *Los primeros modernos*, 130-135.

²⁵ Lohengrin, "Telas, mármoles y bronces", in: *El Censor*, 17 December 1887. For a more thorough study on the *flâneur* and the rise of cultural consumption in Buenos Aires, see: María Isabel Baldassarre, *Los dueños del arte*, 34-36.

²⁶ "Ayer pasábamos por el Bazar du Menage de los señores Bullrich, Florida al llegar a Rivadavia, llamándonos la atención un grupo de gente que se había detenido en las vidrieras. En ellas, llamando la atención pública, estaba sobre un caballete un retrato hecho a pluma del malogrado Narciso Martínez de Hoz." S.n., "Arte", in: *La Patria Argentina*, 20 January 1881.

The portrait, made by A. Molet, was "an art work, as perfect as one can make them here [in Argentina]", which, according to the author, explained the crowd gazing through the shop window.²⁷

[11] Store windows were a primary space to show artworks and as a result much of the art criticism published in the 1880s deals with art that could be seen from the street. In the studio discourse, it means that some visits started and ended on the street. Yet, they are never limited to the street. There is always a broader perspective that puts the workshop in relationship with other spaces, such as exhibitions, private collections, foreign destinations and so on. For instance, "Dos acuarelas", an article published in *El Diario* in December 1882, is the first literary portrait of Eduardo Schiaffino (1858–1935), written in the context of a small exhibition of two watercolors at Casa Bossi. The critic, Filis (a pseudonym), also went to Schiaffino's studio but instead of entering the workshop, he peeped through the cracks of one of the studio doors to look at the artworks. He obviously did not know Schiaffino. The first part of the article is dedicated to the critic's endeavour to find out the identity of the young artist who, every day in the early hours, took a train from the Central Station of Buenos Aires to go to the forest of Palermo to study nature. He learned that it was Eduardo Schiaffino through a friend who had followed the painter and had talked to locals who knew the dedicated artist as "one of the most loyal visitors of the Palermo forest".²⁸

[12] "Dos acuarelas" sheds a different light on the artistic practice and the significance of the workshop. The studio bathes in an atmosphere of secrecy, most probably because of a lack of windows onto the street. What Filis saw through the door cracks remains undiscussed. He only mentioned that the sketches and drawings were promising. Because Filis depicted Schiaffino as a *pleinairiste* whose true workspace was the forest of Palermo, the workshop appears as a sealed box that contained possible masterworks of the future. When Schiaffino entered the forest, he first searched for the right spot and once he found that spot, he transformed his walking stick into a comfortable chair, folded out a small table that he carried around in his suitcase, spread out his painter's utensils and started working. It is the exhibition of the two watercolors at Casa Bossi, finally, that provided a glimpse of the result: one of the works represented the forest (Fig. 2), the other a Venetian landscape. Filis praised Schiaffino's "delicate drawing" and "vigorous and beautiful [application of] color".²⁹ The direct study of nature had not just enabled him to paint the forest but also Venice truthfully, "as if he had been there".³⁰ And yet, what is artfully implied by the discursive detour of peeping through the crevices, is that the imaginary voyage

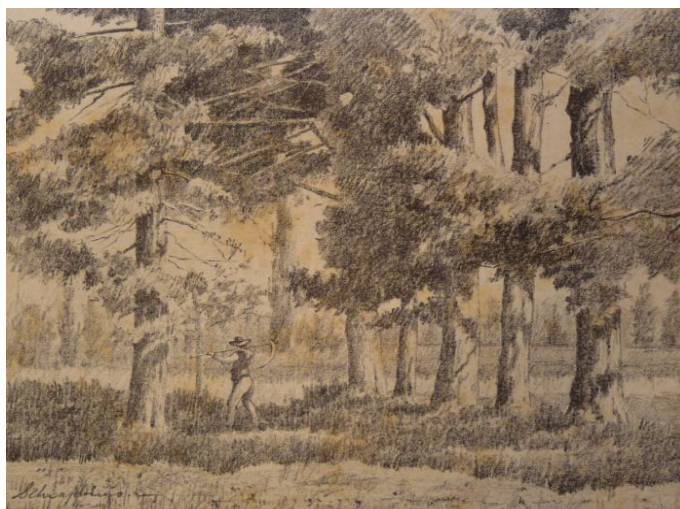
²⁷ S.n., "Arte".

²⁸ Filis, "Dos acuarelas", in: *El Diario*, 15 December 1882.

²⁹ Filis, "Dos acuarelas".

³⁰ Filis, "Dos acuarelas".

to Venice was of course first and foremost a product of the studio and of his classes with the well-known landscape artist José Aguyari – and less from painting outdoors.



2 Eduardo Schiaffino, *Los pinos de Palermo*, s.d., whereabouts unknown (drawing published in *La Ilustración Argentina* 17, 1883). Much of Schiaffino's early work is lost, including the watercolors exhibited in 1882. However, some of his early drawings were published in the magazine *La Ilustración Argentina*.

[13] Other studios were more revealing for the passer-by than Schiaffino's black box:

*Arriving at Cerrito, in the street of Charcas, there is a small villa, that one can guess is the lodging of an artist. What one can see in passing by are large cups with plants, busts of plaster or terra cotta artistically placed here and there, in perfect harmony with the facade of the building. The interior is actually the workshop of the modest artist Camilo Romaironi. Here, we find lined up in a row the great dead men, resurrected by the mysterious breath of art. [...] When looking at that picturesque dwelling, one breathes an atmosphere charged with great ideas, with something sublime and immortal.*³¹

Curiously, it is unclear whether the author, Remy, visited the studio or not. What is clear is that the author approached the space as a *flâneur*, from the outside. He found out that the chalet was the home of an artist in passing by. Although he recognized some of the statues, such as the busts of Giuseppe Garibaldi and Lisarda de la Serna, the wife of a mutual friend, he did not provide further details.

³¹ "En la calle de Charcas, al llegar a Cerrito, hay un verdadero pequeño *chalet*, que desde luego se adivina es la morada de un artista. Copas con plantas, bustos de yeso o de tierra *cotta* [sic], artísticamente colocados, y que armonizan perfectamente con la fachada del edificio, es lo que se ve al pasar. El interior es el taller del modesto artista Camilo Romaironi. Allí están formados en fila los grandes muertos, resucitados por el sople misterioso del arte. [...] Una atmosfera impregnada de grandes ideas, de algo sublime e inmortal, se respira al asomarse a aquella pintoresca morada." Remy, "Camilo Romaironi", in: *El Diario*, 16 May 1883.

He was most struck by the fact that politicians, public figures and friends become equals in the realms of commemorative art.³²

Inside the studio

[14] Within the relatively small discursive space devoted to the studio, Romairone's studio stands out as a popular subject. There are at least three articles that focus on the workspace of the Italian sculptor: "Camilo Romairone" by Remy, published in *El Diario* (1883), "La casa del artista" by Carlos Gutiérrez, published in *La Patria Argentina* (1883) and "Arte Nacional: Una visita al estudio del escultor Romairone" by Santos Vega, published in *Sud-América* (1886). The latter two give a more in-depth account of the studio experience, including a description of the interior. What is remarkable is that both critics observed a sense of distance between the workshop and society. For Santos Vega, the studio was a "nest" and a "hide-out", located faraway from "society's social agitation".³³ Gutiérrez, who evidently had a close bond with the artist, describes the chalet as a refuge and a product of hard labor.³⁴ The discursive meaning of the studio that was more revealing to the public from the outside thus transformed when viewed from the inside, when the poetics of the space is experienced. It is no longer a window displaying art but a unique space that tells us something about the artist and his work, or that was used to present a certain image of the person(s) working there.

[15] The few authors that entered the studio shed light on the significance of the workspace in very different ways. Santos Vega did not describe Romairone's workspace but let the artist speak about the artworks he was making. Gutiérrez approached the studio of the Italian artist from a different angle. He introduced the sculptor from the vantage point of the struggle that characterized his first years in Buenos Aires, and hence framed the space as a result of his hard work. Other texts, such as "El taller de un artista" or "Lucio Correa Morales" that deal with the studios of the sculptors Francisco Cafferata (1861–1890) and Correa Morales (1852–1923), are descriptive and focused on the artworks.³⁵ Pedro Bourel's visit to Juan Manuel Blanes' (1830–1901) workshop in Montevideo reads as a brief travel narrative.³⁶ This also holds true for Benigno B. Lugones' article

³² Remy, "Camilo Romairone".

³³ Vega, "Arte nacional: una visita al estudio del escultor Romairone".

³⁴ Although the text is unsigned, based on the style and the newspaper in which it was published, it can be attributed to Carlos Gutiérrez. S.n., "La casa del artista: Camilo Romairone", in: *La Patria Argentina*, 31 March 1883.

³⁵ S.n., "En el taller de un artista", in: *Sud-América*, 19 January 1889; s.n., "Lucio Correa Morales".

³⁶ Pedro Bourel, "Blanes. Recuerdos de una visita", in: *El Nacional*, 2 April 1883.

about the painter Graciano Mendilaharzu (1857–1894) that he wrote in Paris.³⁷ Of all these texts, one in particular stands out: "El taller de una artista", published in Buenos Aires in *La Prensa* in 1884. This article about the workspace of the Uruguayan painter Josefina Cibils is a literary experiment in which the author, who signed as Sansón Carrasco, did not mention the identity of the painter until the last paragraph:³⁸

*And by the way, I have not yet said who the owner is of the workshop that I am visiting, and I will not say it out of fear of being indiscreet, but the greatest challenge has been in fact that of looking at her paintings, which she hides out of modesty. It is something I have done without her knowledge. I entered the workshop as if to take it by surprise; and, what is farthest from Miss Josefina Cibils' mind is the thought that at this moment I was admiring her canvases and paying tribute to her pictorial talent [...].*³⁹

[16] In other words, Carrasco visited the studio in secret and wrote a surprise homage. He structured the text in such a way that the reader gradually receives information about the artist. The first paragraphs underline that the owner of the studio is a woman – which is already evident from the Spanish title. The space was small and disorganized but "with taste, with the coquetry typical of a woman who knows how to be gracious even in her carelessness".⁴⁰ In the second part of the text, the focus shifts to the question of whether it is possible to *learn* to paint, sing or write? As the author emphasized, Montevideo and Buenos Aires did not offer any schools or traditions in the visual arts. The Continental Exhibition had shown that there were few good artists in the country.⁴¹ Eleonora Pacheco was one of the exceptions. Her work attested that "art is not made, nor is it copied, it is felt".⁴² In the third and last part of the text, Carrasco returns to the studio and discusses sketches, studies and finished artworks, including original paintings

³⁷ Benigno B. Lugones, "Graciano Mendilaharzu", in: *La Nación*, 12 December 1882.

³⁸ I was unable to identify the dates of birth and death of Cibils. Reproductions of her works appeared in several Uruguayan magazines in the 1880s and 1890s such as *La Ilustración del Plata* and *Montevideo Cómico*.

³⁹ *Y a todo esto, no he dicho todavía quien sea la dueña del taller que visito, y no lo diría por temor de incurrir en una indiscreción, sino fuera que la mayor osadía ha sido la de revisar sus cuadros, que modestamente oculta, sin que ella misma lo sepa. He llegado al taller como tomándolo por asalto, y lo más lejano que tiene la señorita Josefina Cibils de sus pensamientos es el suponer que a estas horas admiro yo sus telas y rindo tributo a su talento pictórico [...].*

Sansón Carrasco, "El taller de una artista", in: *La Prensa*, 23 January 1884. The text first appeared in Montevideo: Sansón Carrasco, "El taller de una artista", in: *El lunes de La Razón*, vol. 25, 21 January 1884, 196-197. Sansón Carrasco was the pseudonym of Daniel Muñoz who founded the newspaper *La Razón* in 1878. His texts were frequently republished in the Argentinian press.

⁴⁰ Carrasco, "El taller de una artista".

and copies. His judgment is clear: Cibils was "one of the most distinguished *aficionadas* from and beyond the region of Rio de la Plata".⁴³

[17] The scholar Georgina Gluzman points out that in Buenos Aires in the 1880s the notion of *aficionada* received a negative connotation, and eventually became the category to describe all female artists. Women artists were not considered true artists but women who dedicated their free time to an artistic practice. Although this remained the dominant opinion, there were attempts to bring nuance to the discourse. In 1893, the intellectual Ernesto Quesada proposed a third category, the dilettante. Situated between the artist and the *aficionada*, the dilettante were artists who, like *aficionadas*, did not make art for a living but whose work was inspired by sincere passion, dedication and study. Most probably, Quesada was referring to artists like his wife, Eleonora Pacheco, who received a lot of attention at the Continental Exhibition.⁴⁴

[18] "El taller de una artista" exposes a rhetorical dynamic that is characteristic of studio narratives in general: the space becomes an active subject informing the reader about the person who lives and works there. The building, the façade, the indoor and outdoor decorations, the spatial organization of the rooms, the furniture, the artworks, studies and sketches hanging on the walls or lying around are (literary) elements which reveal several aspects of the artist's identity. In Carrasco's text, Cibils appears as a solitary figure, or at least as someone who worked in solitude. Chaotic but dedicated to her practice, she was a productive artist who failed to promote her work. Her paintings were highly personal objects, which is why the studio was a space of intimacy, open for the inner world of sentiments but closed off from the outside world. It was a small room, lit by two doors facing the terrace. In Rachel Esner's words, Cibils' studio can be considered a kind of *atelier de travail*. Esner, who studied studio representations in texts and images in the magazine *L'illustration* from the 1850s and the year 1886, discerned two main models, that of the *atelier de travail* and the *salon studio*. In the *atelier de travail*, all the elements refer to the activity of making art. It shows the artist as a dedicated laborer, someone who is continuously at work and devotes his whole life to the act of creating. Society is kept on the sidelines. The *salon studio*, by contrast, is the home of "the artist as man of the world". It is a social space, reminiscent of an exhibition or a cabinet of curiosity. Here, the work

⁴¹ The Exposición Continental Sud-Americana took place in Buenos Aires in 1882 and was the second universal exhibition organized in Argentina. The Sociedad Estímulo de Bellas Artes was in charge of the fine arts section. Malosetti Costa, *Los primeros modernos*, 138-157.

⁴² Carrasco, "El taller de una artista".

⁴³ Carrasco, "El taller de una artista".

⁴⁴ Georgina Gluzman, *Mujeres y arte en la Buenos Aires del siglo XIX: Prácticas y discursos*, PhD diss., Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2015, 113-118, 148.

and stencils of the artist appear amidst salon furniture, foreign objects, musical instruments and so on.⁴⁵

[19] Although Esner's categorization should not be considered universal, it offers an interesting perspective on the Argentinian representations, certainly when the two models are considered as two poles of a spectrum in which other identity issues were at play. For instance, the Carrasco text offers a feminized version of the *atelier de travail*. The chaos was a feminine feature, a "coquetry typical of a woman". The artist had kept all her work, even that of poor quality, like "a mother who took care of all her children". Moreover, her work was the product of "intimate sentiments" rather than study, which made her a true *aficionada* – rather than a true artist.⁴⁶ In the text about Camilo Romairone, Carlos Gutiérrez distinguished two types of artists in Buenos Aires: those who could count on the help of powerful mentors and those who had to multiply their efforts in the struggle for life. Romairone, who had to combine his artistic practice with other activities in order to survive, belonged to the second group. During his first years in Buenos Aires, his work was a subject of fierce criticism. According to Gutiérrez, the persons who could have supported his career, neglected or attacked the sculptor, pushing him into a precarious situation: "he spent more time at home than at the academy because the struggle for life absorbed his time and means".⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the artist succeeded. His studio was full of statues that demonstrated his exceptional skills and the status he enjoyed among an elite of collectors and art lovers.

[20] Gutiérrez portrayed the artists by portraying the studio, which implies a representation of the personal workspace as a space of concentration and hard work.⁴⁸ Romairone lived in a "small poetic house" that was "the result of his labor and proof of the acceptance of his artworks; the outcome of the public's applause, of his own merit". On the ground floor, organized around a small courtyard, there was a (reception) room, a depository and the atelier. Upstairs were the sculptor's living quarters. The atelier overwhelmed the critic who considered it "one of the most beautiful of its kind in Buenos Aires, having been constructed *ex profeso*". It was large, well-lit and did not have a lot of furniture except for a few armchairs and a table covered with sketches. An imposing unfinished architectural monument stood in the middle of the space, surrounded by busts of famous persons. Gutiérrez recognized the faces of the politicians

⁴⁵ Rachel Esner, "In the Artist's Studio with *L'illustration*", 21-24.

⁴⁶ Carrasco, "El taller de una artista".

⁴⁷ S.n., "La casa del artista: Camilo Romairone".

⁴⁸ S.n., "La casa del artista: Camilo Romairone". According to Adolfo Luis Ribera, Romairone became famous for his busts after 1875 when the Sociedad Científica Argentina granted him a prize for "his artistic work in sculpture". Adolfo Luis Ribera, "Escultura", in: *Historia general del arte en la Argentina*, eds. Adolfo Luis Ribera et al., vol. 4, Buenos Aires 1985, 143-184: 154.

Manuel Dorrego, Manuel Augusto Montes de Oca and José María del Carril, the historian and archivist, Manuel Ricardo Trelles and the wife of president Mitre. The statues showed "the protection" that he now enjoyed: "The young sculptor works a lot and his commissions are numerous".⁴⁹ The space was, like Cibils' studio, disorganized. Yet, tellingly, here it is described as an artistic quality, typical of a studio – and not as a marker of gender.

[21] Because of the numerous busts, Gutiérrez also described Romairone's *atelier de travail* as a "museum of contemporary history that represented all the famous figures of Argentina".⁵⁰ In the context of Buenos Aires, the reference can be read as a political remark about the institutional void in society that made the studio a possible space to see art for lack of a museum. Other critics made similar observations. In "El arte en Buenos Aires", the studios of Caprile, Cortese, Tafuri and Muzii emerge as privileged spaces to see (master) artworks in Buenos Aires.⁵¹ Carrasco named Cibils' atelier a "small temple of art".⁵² Gutiérrez made the same point in his account about José Aguyari's studio which was more a *salon studio* than an *atelier de travail*:

On the corner of Florida and Cangallo, on the second floor, as if it were searching for the clear and abundant light necessary for a workshop, there are the balconies of his dwelling, small like a birdcage, but full of the artistic chic of a painter. [...].

You do not see here the loose disorder or the indiscriminate confusion of a workshop where leaves are heaping, studies are hanging, plasters are lying in the corner, and palettes, colors and trestles, brushes, sketches and worktables remain scattered. On the contrary, everything here is in order: if you see an easel, it is made of oak, clean and worthy of the room; some easels even have the classic velvet curtain in front; [...] and in the furniture, all of which is quite expensive, you see that profusion of trinkets and art objects of an exquisite art lover.

The workshop has such an original furniture arrangement that all the talent of a painter was needed to turn it into a harmonious composition.

On the right there is a desk with a large kneehole desk; the center is the living area, with couches and a piano; a fumoir in a corner; and in the back, where the light is broadly abundant, are the easels, the work canvases and the pigments. [...].

The walls are filled with watercolors, oil paintings and sketches by different authors, all arranged in the clean order of a museum. On one of the frontal walls

⁴⁹ S.n., "La casa del artista: Camilo Romairone".

⁵⁰ S.n., "La casa del artista: Camilo Romairone".

⁵¹ Scaramouche, "El arte en Buenos Aires".

⁵² Carrasco, "El taller de una artista".

is the door that leads to the interior quarters. There, the artist works in the scarce free time left to him by his lessons.

There are few, very few finished artworks in his house because his paintings are sold soon after completing them [...]. There is also an air of exhibition gallery because different artists from Italy often send him their paintings, looking to sell them in America.

What you find there are a lot of paintings by young, local people who have gone to Europe to train themselves.

It would be strange to find among these young artists one who has not been his disciple, for the good teacher is in constant demand.⁵³

[22] Aguyari's studio was one of a kind: it was not disorganized. There were no painting tools, sketches, studies or (un)finished artworks lying around. Instead, it was tidy and well-organized. The many artworks on the walls were not by the painter himself but were gifts from Italian colleagues and Argentinian students. These works on display emphasized the successes of Aguyari as a painter and a teacher. The reason why he did not have work by himself was popularity and

⁵³ S.n., "Al través del arte".

En la esquina de Florida y Cangallo, en el segundo piso, como buscando la luz clara y profusa necesaria al taller, allí están los balcones de su morada, pequeña por cierto como la jaula del pájaro, pero llena del chic artístico de un pintor. [...]

No hay allí el suelto desorden ni la confusión despreocupada del cuarto del trabajo que amontona las hojas, cuelga los diseños, arrincona los yesos y desparrama paletas, colores y caballetes, pinceles, esbozos y mesas de trabajo. Al contrario, todo está en orden: si se trata de un caballete, es de roble, limpio y digno de una sala, algunos tienen la clásica cortina de terciopelo; [...] y en los muebles todos que son ricos, se ve esa profusión de bibelots y objetos de arte del aficionado esquisito [sic].

El taller tiene un amueblado original que ha necesitado de todo el talento de un pintor para encontrarle un conjunto que sea armonioso.

La parte de la derecha es un escritorio con una gran mesa ministro, el centro es una sala con sus divanes y su piano, fumoir en un extremo [sic], y más allá donde la luz es ampliamente profusa, están los caballetes, los lienzos de trabajo y los colores. [...]

Los muros están llenos de acuarelas, de telas al óleo y de croquis de distintos autores, todo como en el orden limpio de un museo, y en uno de los frentes abre la puerta que da a las habitaciones interiores.

Allí trabaja el artista en los pocos momentos que le dejan libre sus lecciones; poco, muy poco del concluido, tiene en su casa, pues sus cuadros se venden pronto [...]. Algo hay allí también de la sala de exposición [sic] pues varios artistas de Italia le suelen enviar sus cuadros, buscando para ellos salida en América.

Lo que allí se encuentra mucho, son las telas de los jóvenes que de aquí han ido a perfeccionarse a Europa.

Raro es el que de ellos no ha sido su discípulo, pues el buen maestro es siempre buscado [...].

fame. Moreover, the Italian paintings demonstrated a strong connection with his home country where, apparently, artists aware of his success sent him artworks in the hope of finding a new market. The paintings by young Argentinian artists expressed his strong position in the local scene. He was an important teacher, "a friend", "someone [the student artists] could trust" and as a result the primary contact for artists abroad and for anyone in Buenos Aires in need of information about the young travelling generation. Gutiérrez even invited the reader to pass by and "knock on his door".⁵⁴ It is important to bear in mind that Aguyari had an impressive life history. He was a Venetian artist who had travelled to London, Mexico and Egypt before arriving in Buenos Aires around 1869. In Argentina, he specialized in landscape painting and portraits, and made a series of watercolors representing the countryside (Fig. 3).



3 José Aguyari, *Barrancas del Paraná*, 1870–1873, watercolor on paper, 21.6 x 30.6 cm, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de Buenos Aires (© Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes)

He became a professor in drawing at the Colegio Nacional and co-founded the Sociedad Estímulo de Bellas Artes. In 1874 the president Domingo Faustino Sarmiento assigned him to go to Europe in order to prepare for the creation of a national academy. Unfortunately, when he returned, Sarmiento was no longer in office and the project was cancelled. He had important political contacts, including Bartolomé Mitre, president of Argentina from 1862 until 1868, Nicolás Avellanada, president from 1874 until 1880 and Vélez Sársfield who assumed ministerial positions in the governments of Mitre and Sarmiento.⁵⁵

[23] Eduardo Schiaffino, one of his pupils, stated in 1883 that the impact of Aguyari on the development of a national art was double: he produced a significant oeuvre and he educated artists and amateurs, introducing "taste" in

⁵⁴ S.n., "Al través del arte".

⁵⁵ Malosetti Costa, *Los primeros modernos*, 94-95. See also: José María Lozano Mouján, *Apuntes para la historia de nuestra pintura y escultura*, Buenos Aires 1922, 64-65; Eduardo Schiaffino, *La pintura y la escultura en Argentina*, Buenos Aires 1933, 220-225.

society. In order to show the significance of his master – and of his presence in Argentina –, Schiaffino narrated his biography and reflected upon his Venetian origins.⁵⁶ Gutiérrez confirms Schiaffino's vision without, however, mentioning any biographical details or artworks. From this point of view, his portrait is as exceptional as the one of Cibils. The only subject that 'speaks' is the atelier. Since Aguyari died a few months later, the text is the last portrait of the painter alive. Ironically, the painter is not present in the article, except through the objects in the space. Although the painter must have been ill the moment the article was published, there are no references to his illness. Gutiérrez presented Aguyari as an established and committed artist whose door was (still) open for the public.⁵⁷

The perspective of a latent artistic future

[24] Despite the many differences between the studios, the workspace always appears as a place that stood between the world outside and the inner world of personal creations, which turned a studio visit into an experience that offered a glimpse into the secrets of art. A critic from *Sud-América* concluded an article about his visit to the studio of Francisco Cafferata thusly:

*After a lively conversation with the artist in which we remembered the great art cities, with their great monuments, teachers who immortalized themselves on that glorious day, we left the workshop where, for a couple of hours, we experienced the true life of sentiment and art.*⁵⁸

[25] In providing the exact location of those spaces of sentiment and art, critics made artists visible and accessible in a symbolic as well as in a real sense, as is most clear in the Aguyari article. From this perspective, the discourse of the atelier offers a mise-en-abyme of the art discourse in general in its struggle with the ambiguous presence of art in society. There were artists living and working in Buenos Aires but they were semi-visible. Ateliers were discovered in passing by, or integrated in the *flanerie artística* that was generated by the commercial circuit. Critics saw it as their task to change this because these places of promise both demonstrated the production of art in the country and foretold the imminence of a national art on a larger scale. Francisco Caferatta was a sculptor

⁵⁶ Eduardo Schiaffino, "José Aguyari", in: *La Ilustración Argentina* 20 (1883), 236.

⁵⁷ The article was published 26 August 1885 in *La Crónica*, and on 16 October the same newspaper announced the artist's death. S.n., "José Agujari: Q.E.P.D.", in: *La Crónica*, 16 October 1885. Schiaffino claimed that Aguyari died of *spleen* attacks but it is also possible that he had the yellow fever. Laura Malosetti Costa, "Artistas viajeros en la Belle Époque", in: *Cuadros de viaje: artistas argentinos en Europa y Estados Unidos (1880-1910)*, ed. Laura Malosetti Costa, Buenos Aires 2008, 13-49, 94.

⁵⁸ "Después de una conversación animada con el artista y recorrer con el recuerdo las grandes ciudades del arte, sus principales monumentos y los maestros que se inmortalizaron en la gloriosa jornada, nos retiramos del taller en que durante un par de horas hicimos la verdadera vida del sentimiento y del arte." S.n., "En el taller de un artista".

who "in a couple of years will be a true national glory", and Lucio Correa Morales was "a genuine sculptor of conscience and of inspiration of tomorrow".⁵⁹ Aguyari's workspace was full of signs of the coming of a young generation of Argentinian artists. In the words of Santos Vega, the overall message was that in Buenos Aires the seed of art was finally sprouting.⁶⁰

[26] The temporality of the studio discourse is layered: different time dimensions intersect. The focus was on the present, but in that present the critics saw a glimpse of the future. The coming of a national art, however, implied a different role for the critic as well. The denial of being an art critic and the many reflections about the importance and practice of art criticism were signs of that transformation:

*The time when it was a simple thing to write artistic criticism has passed. Instead of those barely presentable artworks that Bossi exhibited from afternoon to afternoon, today we find ourselves invaded by innumerable objects of art, many of which bear good signatures. To wield weapons of good law, you have to have a very accurate eye [...].*⁶¹

In 1888 art critics in Buenos Aires had to be more skilful than before because of the omnipresence of artistic objects. The emphasis on "the eye" brings the figure of the connoisseur into the picture, which, taking the cultural situation of the capital into account, implied that anyone who wanted to write art criticism had to travel to Europe to study masterworks.

[27] A critic of *La Nación* that signed with the initials J.M.L. made the comment before elaborating on the artworks that he saw in the studio of Alphonso Muzii. Consequently, the text focusses on the pictorial surface. Even the brief observations about the workspace were about the creation of the paintings. The studio was well-lit by natural light, permitting a *pleinairismo* indoors. It was impressively decorated with carpets, *chaises longues* and, more importantly, sketches by well-known artists and by the artist himself. In Muzii's drawings, the critic saw "the slow development of each artwork" but also a passion that he did not always see in the final artworks. In general, however, J.M.L. was awestruck. The main reason was Muzii's dedication to "Argentinian subjects". The Italian artist was opening new perspectives for Argentina's cultural scene since he travelled inland and painted gauchos, rivers and riverbanks, the pampas and the mountains. *Campaña de Córdoba*, a *costumbrista* painting [Costumbrismo refers

⁵⁹ S.n., "Arte nacional. El génio de San Martín (escultura de Caferatta)", in: *La Ilustración Argentina* 15 (1882), 169; s.n., "Lucio Correa Morales".

⁶⁰ Vega, "Arte nacional: una visita al estudio del escultor Romairone".

⁶¹ "Pasó el tiempo en que era fácil cosa esto de hacer crítica artística. En vez de aquellos cuadritos apenas presentables que de tarde en tarde exhibía Bossi, nos encontramos hoy invadidos por innumerables objetos de arte, muchos de los cuales llevan buenas firmas. Para esgrimir armas de buena ley, hay que tener el ojo muy certero y el brazo firme y ágil." J.M.L., "Sobre pintura", in: *La Nación*, 1 October 1888.

to literary or pictorial depictions of local customs, especially in the Hispanic world in the 19th century] that depicts a group of gauchos around a fire, was "perhaps the first Argentinian artwork that deserve[d] to be named as such".⁶² The analysis of the artwork, however, leaves no doubt that the claim should be understood as a statement about the coming of a national art rather than an attempt to position the artwork in Argentinian art history. The critic lauded the truthful execution of the gauchos around the fire, but *una china* [a gaucho woman] and a gaucho situated left on the painting "left much to be desired" and were "a dissonant note".⁶³ That the painting was "the best that he saw in the studio" also shows the limitations of the artist's Argentinian production. In other words, the first Argentinian painting still had to be painted.

[28] The perspective of a latent artistic future did not make it easy to claim the first national artwork or the position of founder of a national art. In the first Argentinian art history text published in 1884 as part of the essay "Apuntes sobre el arte en Buenos Aires. Falta de protección para su desenvolvimiento", Eduardo Schiaffino projected it into the future on the members of the Sociedad Estímulo de Bellas Artes – but never directly onto an artist or an artwork in the present.⁶⁴ It was a historical perspective of an art history that had yet to take place in Buenos Aires, and more particularly in the workshops. Curiously, the critics observing the process of creating a national art in the workshops did not elaborate on precisely what could or should be expected of such a national art. They only suggested that Argentinian art should represent Argentinian subject matter; an opinion that went against the grain of the art market. The market was so focused on imported European artworks and artistic objects that some dealers urged European artists residing in Buenos Aires to paint European landscapes. In 1888, the critic of the newspaper *Sud-América*, who signed with the pseudonym Blanco de Plomo, complained that if Muzii had depicted "exotic colors, Neapolitan skies or Venetian waters with the eternal gondolas on the foreground" rather than "color local", all the artworks would have been sold.⁶⁵ According to Blanco, the disinterest in local imagery stood in the way of the development of a national art because painting Venice from Buenos Aires would only lead to "artworks of the imagination, fantasies, more or less conventional paintings whose primary defect would be the lack of veracity".⁶⁶

[29] In conclusion, the studio discourse of the 1870s and 1880s did not only highlight the incipient artistic production in the city – revealing the ambiguous

⁶² J.M.L., "Sobre pintura".

⁶³ J.M.L., "Sobre pintura".

⁶⁴ Zigzag, "Apuntes sobre el arte en Buenos Aires. Falta de protección para su desenvolvimiento", in: *El Diario*, 18–30 September 1883.

⁶⁵ De Plomo, "Arte: cuadros de Muzii".

⁶⁶ De Plomo, "Arte: cuadros de Muzii".

place of art and artists in society, it also expressed the tension of an art scene in transition. A national art had not yet emerged but European (inspired) artworks made in Argentina such as Cortese's *Salto di Tiberio* and Schiaffino's imaginary Venice, and Argentinian artworks such as Romairone's busts of national figures, Schiaffino's watercolor of the Palermo Forest and Muzii's *costumbrista* paintings were promising. Paradoxically, a national art could not germinate from workshops alone. As Malosetti Costa and other scholars pointed out, a national art emerged through the foundation of official art institutions, government funding for the arts, the participation of national artists at international art platforms such as the Paris Salon, and the development of the press and art criticism specifically – or, briefly put, through the creation of a modern art scene. The artists and critics were well aware of this at the time, hence the majority of (early) texts addressing subjects such as the institutionalization of art, government support and the development of public taste.⁶⁷

About the Author

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⁶⁷ Malosetti Costa, *Los primeros modernos*, 15-33.

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