

*THE ONSET OF A NEW TIME THROUGH THE RECYCLING  
OF COLOMBIAN PIONEROS, VISIONARIOS AND REFERENTES<sup>1</sup>*

*El comienzo de una nueva era a partir del reciclaje  
de los pioneros, visionarios y referentes colombianos*

AERNE ANNATINA

UNIVERSITY OF SAINT GALLEN (SUIZA)

annatina.aerne@unisg.ch

**Abstract:** The paper explores a change in discourse on Colombian artists born between the 1920s and 1950s from memoria to pionero, visionario and referente. Drawing on Thompson's framework on the passage of goods through the states durable, zero and transient, I describe the discursive shift towards visionaries, pioneers and referents as a process of recycling (Thompson, 2017 [1979]). Thompson's framework also connects the rise of objects into the category of durable things to wealthy socio-economic classes' purchases. I observe a coincidence of the rise of the labels and an art boom in the years 2011–2015, also driven by international demand in the Colombian art market. The re-evaluation of pioneers, visionaries and referents is related to an international demand which has contributed to shift these artists into the spotlight.

**Keywords:** Recycling, Colombia, Contemporary Art, Memoria

**Resumen:** el presente artículo explora un cambio en el discurso de los artistas colombianos nacidos entre las décadas de 1920 y de 1950, de memoria a pionero, visionario y referente. A partir de la investigación de Thompson del pasaje de los bienes a través de los estados durable, cero y transitorio, describo el cambio discursivo hacia visionarios, pioneros y referentes como proceso de reciclaje (Thompson, 2017 [1979]). El estudio de Thompson relaciona, además, el incremento de los objetos en la categoría de bienes durables con las compras de las clases socioeconómicas más pudientes. Observo una coincidencia en el aumento de las etiquetas y del *boom* artístico durante los años 2011-2015, promovido también por la demanda internacional del mercado artístico colombiano. La reevaluación de pioneros, visionarios y referentes está relacionada con una demanda internacional que ha contribuido a que estos artistas destaquen.

**Palabras clave:** reciclaje, Colombia, arte contemporáneo, memoria

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<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful to two anonymous reviewers for their very valuable suggestions. I am also indebted to Marianne Jäggi Aerne for her critical yet sympathetic reading of this paper and for the generous feedback by Adriana López-Labourdet.

## Introduction

In the discourse of Colombian art, remembrance particularly in relation to violence has been prevalent. Recently, three new terms have however permeated the discourse of Colombian art professionals: *pionero*, *referente* and *visionario*. One example of such an artist termed pioneer is Beatriz González. The artist was born in 1938 in Bucaramanga, Colombia, and her work has been discussed extensively with respect to memorizing the violence in Colombia. Indeed, Beatriz González often takes current events that are reported in the news as a reference, and photographic images she clips from the newspapers serve as a source of inspiration. In late 2015, when I had the privilege to visit her in her studio in Bogotá, she was concerned about the refugees from Venezuela coming to Colombia. Her contribution to construct a collective memory was particularly highlighted with respect to her in situ installation *Auras anónimas* completed in 2009 (Vignolo, 2013: 136f). The work was situated in Bogotá's Central Cemetery. In this cemetery there were around 9000 abandoned niches for urns that were used as graves for the deaths caused by the civil unrest shaking the capital in 1948. As many of the niches were empty and the cemetery was used for leisure, the compound was falling apart. Beatriz González filled the niches with tombstones with imprints of people carrying dead bodies. The images resonate with a profession that was popular in 19<sup>th</sup> century Colombia and consisted in carrying travelers through narrow ravines, the difference being that the carried persons in the prints were dead (Ibarra, 2014). Vignolo describes the reception of the work as follows:

[T]he municipality commissioned the plastic artist Beatriz González to do a new artistic intervention in the columbaria, titled *Auras anónimas*. Her proposition inspired a documentary of the director Diego García-Moreno, in which the process of elaborating the art work of González turns into the common thread to tell the history of the armed conflict in Colombia.<sup>2</sup>

Her work is thus seen as a common thread that runs through Colombia's past. Beatriz González' work is situated in a tradition of artists that commemorate Colombia's history. Malagón-Kurka distinguishes three periods in the artistic production representing the Colombian conflict. Beatriz González is part of the style of *nueva indexicalidad* (Malagón-Kurka, 2010). This group, rather than showing the brutal force in detail, avoids giving in to voyeurism and presents the traces such force inflicts. In Beatriz González' work, this indexicality takes the form of using vivid colors painting flat persons and objects that create a distance to the brutality of the events.

This function to remember is also important to the artist herself, as she explained in an interview with Dominique Rodríguez (2009): "Wishing to delete it from the collective memory goes contrary to the human being which needs the preserve the memory of its deaths."

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<sup>2</sup> The quotes have been translated to English for the present article by the author.

The above contextualization of Beatriz González' work presents a sharp contrast to the entirely different discourse that I encountered when in 2015 I had the chance to visit the gallery Casas Riegner, which represents the artist. As I entered the gallery, the assistants were just rolling up one of her earlier works that had been sold to the Tate Modern in London. When I talked to the gallery assistant Felipe Villada about Beatriz González' work, he did not frame it as chronicling historical events. She was presented as a pioneer. The term caught my attention as I was expecting a discourse on how to memorize events. However, Felipe Villada explained (personal communication, February 4, 2015):

It is something very interesting, that catches the attention of many people... well, there is something like a generation of pioneer artists. Beatriz González is a great example, Antonio Caro, Miguel Ángel Rojas, Rosemberg Sandoval, are other artists that we represent, that are artists in whose work political topics are very present.

Felipe Villada did not allude to a memorizing function, but rather stressed the importance of the artist as a pioneer. In the catalogue accompanying an earlier solo show of Beatriz González in Casas Riegner in 2012, the first sentence of the text printed on the catalogue's envelope reads (Rodríguez, 2012): "A conversation between contemporary art figures from various backgrounds from the Latin-American art context and its pioneers, serves as the catalyst for the realization of the visionary exhibition *Empatía*, Beatriz Gonzalez".

Beatriz González is contextualized as a visionary, surrounded by pioneers. This discourse already hints at the fact that the term pioneer is neither restricted to Beatriz González, nor to her gallery Casas Riegner, and that visionary, and pioneer (and referent, as will be discussed later) are used interchangeably.

This poses two questions I try to answer in this article: why did the discourse on these artists change, and to what effect? I conceptualize the change in discourse as one of recycling. I thereby follow Culler, and Thompson, who characterize the process of recycling as one of "radical discontinuity". Recycled objects pass from transient through a zero category in order to become a durable good. This zero category clearly separates the present from the past. This discontinuous time frame is also instituted by the labels under discussion.

The analysis then turns to the origins of this discursive shift. An object is defined as durable not only based on the object's inherent characteristics, but also as a function of whom the object belongs to (Thompson, 2017 [1979]; Culler, 1985). Not only do wealthy select durable objects as their possession, but what they select also becomes durable. I find that the wealthy that determine the selection of the durable have changed recently, as Colombian art has received more international attention.

### **From Memoria to *Pioneros*, *Referentes* and *Visionarios***

Memory has been a pervasive concept in the discussion of Colombian contemporary art for some time. In the literature on Colombian visual art, artists and artworks are often attributed the function to commemorate certain

events (Giraldo, 2010: 78; Malagón-Kurka, 2010: 204; Merewether, 1993: 104; Vignolo, 2013).<sup>3</sup> Suárez, who analyzed the artistic production in Colombia with respect to film, visual art and music states that visual artists working on memory and violence have reached a point of exhaustion. She also notes that the market of visual art memorizing the violence has been saturated (Suárez, 2010: 197ff).

The function to memorize is attributed to community art projects and international contemporary artworks alike. I briefly explore two examples at the opposite sides of the spectrum, but there would be many more to inquire. Alcalá, analyzing a community art project in Barrio Antioquia, Medellín, emphasizes the role of art and culture in the process of remembrance and acknowledgment of the collective suffering (Alcalá, 2005: 93). The community art project turned a bus into a museum, in which citizens could exhibit the personal belongings of family members that had disappeared or died, acknowledging their loss in a public space.

On the other side of the spectrum is the work of Doris Salcedo, one of Beatriz González's disciples and also one of the most internationally recognised Colombian contemporary artists. In an interview the artist highlights the importance of memorizing with the following words<sup>4</sup> (Riaño, 2005): "For me, trying to recuperate la memoria is the most important labor of the human being. There are too many open wounds to continue forward." Bal notes that this memorizing usually comes first when Salcedo's work is analyzed (Bal, 2010).

The recent surge of the labels pioneer, visionary and referent contrasts with this discourse. By taking a closer look at the ways Colombian art professionals use the terms gives an idea as to what is meant by these labels. These artists have been working for a long period of time without gaining commercial recognition; this is the largest common denominator. Thus, the terms pioneer, visionary and referent are defined based on two criteria: on a market condition (not being commercialized internationally) and a time constraint (the artists have been active for some time). The group of artists is thus neither defined based on a set of aesthetic criteria, as is common in art history, nor chronologically.

Felipe Villada, gallery assistant of Casas Riegner, explained that it is a mission of the gallery to show pioneers that at their time did not have enough opportunities to be internationally and nationally successful (personal communication, February 4, 2015):

We are clearly interested to have Colombian art recognized because there are many wonderful artists, pioneers that have started their work years ago and that are not known on an international level. Of course, the younger generation has had the opportunity to make themselves known.

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<sup>3</sup> The ubiquitousness of memoria is thus that efforts have been undertaken to categorize different styles to depict and memorize violence in Colombian art according to the time period. The exposition *Arte y violencia en Colombia desde 1948*, curated by Álvaro Medina in 1998 at the Museo de Arte Moderno in Bogotá, suggested a periodization into three time episodes. This periodization has been adopted by Malagón-Kurka (2010) and by Ortegón (2013).

<sup>4</sup> I found the quote first in Yepes (2010: 31) who criticizes Salcedo's artistic practice.

The world has changed and they apply to things, and study abroad. They are more mobile in that sense, while there has been a generation of pioneers that has maybe gone unnoticed on the international level.

Felipe Villada remarks that this generation of pioneers was not noticed on an international level. This lack of opportunity was also described by other art professionals. Jairo Valenzuela from the gallery Valenzuela Klenner, Carlos Hurtado from the gallery Nueveochenta, and Gustavo Ortiz from the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo (MAC) equally noted the lack of international interest for these artists in earlier decades (personal communication, February 10, 2015; personal communication, February 3, 2015; personal communication, October 7, 2015). Jairo Valenzuela explained that in the 1980s artists were frustrated as they had no chance to sell their work because there had been no market at the time (personal communication, February 10, 2015). Instead, these artists earned their living in academic institutions. Similarly, Carlos Hurtado described referents as artists that did not have a market (personal communication, February 3, 2015).

Certain art professionals framed the past a bit different and suggested that these artists were left out by the market, saying that there were opportunities also in previous periods, but these artists were not included in the art circuits. Beatriz López, the director of the Instituto de Visión, explained that their program, which is titled visionarios, is political in the sense that it shows artists that have previously been marginalized by the art circuit (personal communication, February 17, 2015):

[T]he gallery has quite a strong research area, which is called visionarios. And it has a political sense. One can say so, because it tries to investigate from the market side the reasons why certain discourses remained outside of the official discourse. The market was the authority, and, in the seventies, eighties and nineties, certain propositions did not enter into the current aesthetic at that moment.

Beatriz López uses the term visionario, which resonates the name of her gallery Instituto de Visión, in order to designate the artists that have not been commercially successful in the past, but are now. Although she uses the term visionary, her definition is quite the same as the one invoked by Felipe Villada for pioneer.

While the terms pioneer, visionary and referent are used by certain gallerists, they have spread beyond isolated organizations. In 2014, the art fair in Bogotá artBo opened a curated section of labelled referentes establishing the labels outside particular galleries. Every year this section is developed in cooperation between a curator and the galleries that participate in the fair, as the curator chooses works from the galleries that are admitted to artBo's main section. Alejandra Sarría, responsible for the organization of this section explained the section referentes as follows (personal communication, October 16, 2015):

The reality is that at least the sections referentes and sitio<sup>5</sup> pertain to the commercial side of the fair, because the artworks with which they work come from the galleries that participate in the fair. Everything that is shown in the section referentes comes from the archive of the galleries that are also present in other parts of the fair. [...] These artworks are part of the galleries' offer, and often the galleries have kept these works for years in their storage. For the galleries it has become very interesting because it allows them showing the serious work they have been doing for years [...].

Alejandra Sarría explains referent in the same way as Felipe Villada and Beatriz López defined pioneer and visionary, respectively: artists that have been around for a while without having been commercialized. The interchangeable use of these terms was furthermore highlighted later in the conversation, when Alejandra Sarría referred to pioneros when she explained the selection of artists that are represented in the section referents.

It is tempting to assume that the terms define a certain artistic movement, or topic and that the artists were excluded based on this characteristic. The interviews however showed that the labels do not refer to a specific kind of style or topic, but mainly to artists that have been working for a while without having been commercialized. Nonetheless, I take a closer look at the artists in order to assure that I do not misread these labels. Examining the Colombian artists that have been present at least twice in the section referentes in artBo from 2014 to 2017 gives a better understanding as to the artists joined under these labels. While this list does not comprise all of the artists that are termed pioneers or visionaries or referents by Colombian art professionals, it comes as close as possible to a consensus as to which artists belong to this group. Looking at those artists that have been present at least twice ensures that more than one curator or one gallery have deemed the artists worthy of entering this selection. In total, 14 Colombian artists and one artist collective (Taller Rojo) have been exhibited in the section referente at least twice.

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<sup>5</sup> Sitio is a section featuring artworks that need more or a different space than the commercial booths occupied by galleries.

Artist	ArtBo	Gallery	Date of Birth	Type of Art
Adolfo Bernal	2014 2015 2017	Casas Riegner	1954– 2008	Conceptual
Alicia Barney	2015 2016 2017	Instituto de Visión	1952	
Antonio Caro	2016 2017	Casas Riegner	1950	
Jonier Marín	2014 2016 2017	Henrique Faria Fine Art	1946	
Sandra Llano-Mejía	2015 2017	Instituto de Visión	1951	
Ana Mercedes Hoyos	2014 2015 2017	Nueveochenta	1942– 2015	Figurative Painting
Beatriz González	2014 2015 2017	Casas Riegner	1938	
Luis Caballero	2014 2016 2017	Alonso Garcés	1943– 1995	
Carlos Rojas	2014 2015 2017	Casas Riegner	1933– 1997	Geometric abstraction
Eduardo Ramírez Villamizar	2014 2017	Galería El Museo	1922– 2004	
Feliza Bursztyn	2014 2015	Galería El Museo	1933– 1982	
John Castles	2014 2015	Nueveochenta	1940	
Jorge Riveros	2014 2016 2017	Alonso Garcés	1934	
Fernell Franco	2014 2017	Instituto de Visión	1942– 2006	Photography
Taller 4 Rojo	2015 2017	El Dorado		Serigraphic Work

Table 1:

List of Referentes Present in at Least Two Editions of artBo between 2014 and 2017.

Source: artBo, 2018. Own presentation.

The artists share the characteristic that they have been mostly active in the past. Half of them have already passed away, and the youngest was born in 1954. These artists differ greatly in their style. In an attempt to categorize them, I divided these artists into three groups: those whose work is predominantly figurative, those whose work is mainly geometrical abstraction and those whose abstractions follow a distinct pattern, in the table referred to as conceptual. There is one artist, and one collective which do not fit the categorization: Fernell Franco is a photographer, and the collective Taller 4 Rojo concentrated on serigraphic works. This categorization highlights rather than hides the diversity of the artists. I thus establish that referents, visionaries and pioneers are terms used to designate artists that were not commercially recognized at their time, but that differ greatly in their style. This leads to the question, what motivated the galleries to establish these new terms. In order to approach this question, I conceptualize this discursive turn as one of recycling, drawing on Thompson and Culler.

### **Radical Discontinuity in Time in Recycling and through the Labels *Pioneros, Referentes and Visionarios***

Thompson distinguishes objects as pertaining to transient, durable and zero categories (Thompson, 2017 [1979]). Durable objects live infinitely, and their value does not diminish, but increases. Established artworks, conserved in museums or collections would classify as durable. Transient objects decrease in value over time, and they eventually end in a zero category —as a piece of rubbish. Culler bases his analysis of the transition of an object from transient to durable on Thompson (Culler, 1985: 5). A transient object decreases in value until it lands in the zero category, where it has no value. Some of these objects are suddenly rediscovered and become durable. It is not a linear process, but rather one of “radical discontinuities” (Culler, 1985: 5). The example cited by Culler refers to a chair: “An old-fashioned, uncomfortable wooden monstrosity that has been gathering cobwebs in the attic” is more likely to be discovered as an antique, than a relatively new chair, which has only lost some of its value (Culler, 1985: 5).

Such a transition from zero to durable describes also the development of a particular group of Colombian artists, termed pioneers, visionaries or referents. The artworks of these artists had been stored for years in galleries’ basements, before being brought to light again. They had been created by artists that had already been active in the market in earlier periods but had not been commercially successful until recently. The artworks are thus “recycled” in quite a literal sense.



In addition, I argue that these artists share with recycled objects Culler's "radical discontinuity in time".<sup>6</sup> Recycled goods represent a past that is clearly separated from the viewers' time of a continuous presence. Recycled goods have passed through a period of worthlessness, of zero value before reaching the durable stage. Dramatically expressed, they were dead before being resuscitated again. Recycled objects come from a past which is clearly demarcated by the zero stage and represents a terminated time period. Although we as viewers share the present time with these recycled objects, we perceive these objects to come from a time prior to our presence. The chair that has gathered cobwebs in the attic embodies a time which is prior to our present. Its style and form make it impossible to equate the chair with our present time. As was shown in the paragraph before, the artists do not form a homogeneous group that informs the viewers about a previous time. Their coming from an earlier time is achieved through the discursive shift. In the following paragraphs I analyze how the connotations of these terms, visionary, pioneer, and referent, institute a "radical discontinuity" in time.

The adjective visionary is defined as describing something illusory, impossible to be realized or achieved, utopian, and existing only in imagination; unreal. Moreover, it denotes somebody who has visions, and who is disposed to reverie, or imagining; someone dreamy. It relates to someone that is characterized by visions or the power of vision, and it describes someone that has, or is marked by foresight and imagination, a visionary leader, a visionary invention (Merriam-Webster). Summarizing the entry in the dictionary, visionary has an element of uncertainty: it denotes something that may or may not become reality eventually.

The term pioneer refers to a member of a military unit, usually the construction engineer. Second, it is used to describe a person or group that opens a new line of thought or activity, or a new method or technical development, or also the first person to settle in a territory. In a biological context it can also refer to a plant or animal capable of establishing itself in an open area and initiating an ecological cycle (Merriam-Webster). According to the dictionary, pioneer alludes to innovation, or someone that suggests something new.

Both terms refer to the future, which is surprising given that they are used to emphasize that the artists and artworks tell an impressive history. Works that have been created decades ago and artists that have passed away can hardly see the next tendencies in art, or tread new ground in today's perspective. These labels have to be interpreted in the context of the time in which these works were created: the works were visionary when they were first made and these artists were pioneers at their time. This also means that we, as onlookers today, are able to assess the extent to which these visions have

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<sup>6</sup> While the interest of this article is mainly on the discontinuity in time in recycling, there are of course different conceptualizations of recycling and time. Recycled objects are seen as sources of information about a past. Goods from the past are by definition the left-overs of a specific time and thereby remember past moments. They are seen to be a storage of information (Moser, 2007; Stam, 1997). Stam holds that such goods are heterochronic insofar as they concentrate the evolution of time in a defined space. They can also be seen as an archaeological site, teaching us about the past (Stam, 1997: 283).

become reality, and the extent to which these pioneers were followed by other artists. The term visionary or pioneer in this context has therefore not the forward-looking notion of something that might be a success or not. It is a term that is used to praise artists that have been successful with their vision or the territory they covered, or at least, a term that claims that the artists have been successful with their artistic vision. Labelling a work from the past as visionary or pioneer emphasizes the works' age, as it suggests that already enough time has passed to assess the degree of realization of the artworks' visionary potential, and whether the artist really was a pioneer. It makes clear that the object has successfully transitioned into the durable category.

While the historicizing nature of the terms visionary and pioneer may not be so intuitive at first sight, it is quite obvious with the term referent. To reference is defined as the act of mentioning something in speech, or in writing; the act of referring to or consulting something or someone. It is also defined as the act of looking at or in something for information. A reference can also be consulted as a source to which a reader turns for additional information, a work containing useful facts. A person, who can be asked for information about another person's character and abilities, can serve as a reference (Merriam-Webster).

A referent accordingly is an artist that tells us about their time. They are the sources of information today, if we want to understand the past. This term also creates a time in which we, the present onlookers, are in a different time period than the artists. We obviously need sources to know what was important then, as the time of the artwork is distinct from ours. These labels therefore all have a historicizing effect. They relegate certain artists to the past and create a divide between the present and the time during which these works have been created.

Visionaries, pioneers and referents are terms that establish a sense of a clearly demarcated past in that they emphasize that these works of art have passed into the durable category. These terms resemble what Caroline Jones describes as posthumous market effects, undertaken by artists that are still alive, or by intermediaries and galleries (Jones, 2017: 142). Jones describes the role of these actors, as they frame, describe and order their work in "an air of self-authorization but also of lingering retrospect" (140). The discourse that relegates the pioneers, referents and visionaries to the past seems to aim at exactly that, to introduce a retrospective angle for these artists.

These terms also institute a different time than the previous discourse, *memoria* or remembrance which refers to the state of bearing in mind. Remembrance also means the ability to remember; the period over which one's memory extends (Merriam-Webster). Remembrance thus refers to keeping something absent or distant in the present and establishes a presence of the events one remembers. The attribution of a function to remember events to art therefore establishes continuity between the artist or artwork and the occurrence.

The shift from the concept of *memoria* to the terms pioneers, visionaries and referents implies a shift from keeping the past present to a clear differentiation between the present and the past. Thus, the terms pioneer,

referent and visionary create exactly such a time of “radical discontinuity” as is characteristic of recycling, as they separate the observer from the artists’ time.

### Changes in the Composition of Participants in the Discourse

Culler in his analysis on the passage of goods from transient to zero and finally, durable categories, also connects the categories of goods to certain socio-economic classes. Objects placed in the category of durables are more valuable, and therefore more accessible to groups with wealth and power. It is not only the case that the higher socio-economic classes collect durables (Culler, 1985: 8). The process also works in the reverse: what the powerful collect, becomes durable. This points to the fact that a shift in the perception of durables may also be connected to a reconfiguration of power in the art circuits. It is hence expected that the Colombian market has seen the arrival of new actors that generated a demand for the pioneers, visionaries and referents and therefore these specific artworks have been rediscovered.<sup>7</sup>

Describing how the art circuit had changed during the past few years, interview partners<sup>8</sup> responded that many new galleries had been established. Gallerists described the Colombian market as commercially very interesting. The director of the cultural part of the Banco de la República, Efraín Riaño Lesmes, observed the foundation of six new galleries over the course of the second half year of 2015, a development he found surprising (personal communication, October 20, 2015). This impression was confirmed by other art professionals, who had witnessed a number of new galleries being founded between 2011 and 2015 (Carlos Hurtado, personal communication, February 3, 2015; Mauricio Gómez Jaramillo, personal communication, February 9, 2015; Felipe Villada, personal communication, February 4, 2015; Efraín Riaño Lesmes, personal communication, October 20, 2015; Nicolás Gómez Echeverri, personal communication, October 20, 2015, Maria Paula Maldonado, personal communication, November 18, 2016).

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<sup>7</sup> Others may disagree and point out that there are different logics of evaluation and that the market does not necessarily determine what is perceived as valuable in the artistic circuit. A distinction drawn by Isabella Graw helps to see different logics of evaluation, as she differentiates the symbolic from the monetary value of art (Graw, 2008: 11). I would argue that this distinction is inconsistent of what can be observed in the art system today. Graw’s distinction holds at first sight, as it is usually accepted to express an artwork’s symbolic value in monetary terms, but the opposite is not accepted openly: to deduce the symbolic value from an artwork’s price. While the first does not seem to bother us (attributing monetary value to symbolic value), we are not so comfortable with the second (deducing the symbolic value of an artwork from its price). However, with the increased commercialization of art and artworks (Geers, 2014: 8; Werner, 2010: 22), such an equation can hardly be disputed: we notice and appreciate expensive artworks rather than cheap ones. If the market value increasingly comes to determine the symbolic value of an artwork, such a distinction between symbolic and economic value collapses. In the case discussed here, this becomes evident: the labels that lead to a re-evaluation of artists did originate with the galleries and hence on the commercial side of the art scene.

<sup>8</sup> The quotes and interviews in this article were collected for the authors’ PhD project. The author conducted 35 semi-structured interviews with Colombian art professionals in three rounds between February 2015 and November 2016.

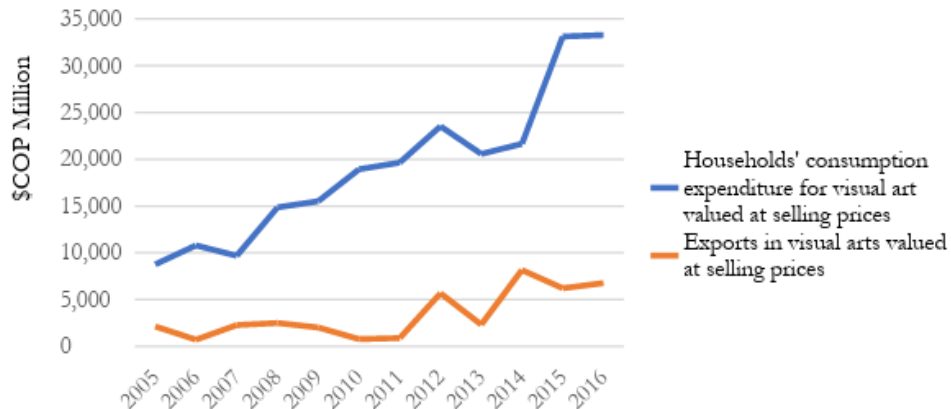
The boom was not restricted to galleries. Since 2011, there had also been a «boom» of independent art spaces – spaces that are directed by artists, rather than gallerists that may or may not sell art (Castellanos, Machicado, and Peláez, 2015: 8). Laura González, director of the fair Odeón, describes how many of her artist friends found such new spaces.

Every day there are more artist collectives that choose a space and divide it into workshops, and then it evolves into some very informal casa cultural. They organize discussions, they do stuff. You don't know how many friends I have and how many people I know that tell me on the weekend: "Oh, I have a new project!" – "What? Another one?" Another project is super, but it is crazy. I think in this sense it can be overwhelming, but it is cool, because there are more spaces every time, and more creations of a different kind.

Some of the interviewees also mentioned an increase of the number of artists in Colombia (Beatriz González, personal communication, October 6, 2015; Ricardo Perdomo, personal communication, October 25, 2016; Angelina Guerrero, personal communication, November 2, 2016). According to Beatriz González, the universities are producing artists "like a machine" (personal communication, October 6, 2015). The universities had also started to provide better infrastructure for visual arts studies, such as facilities to do serigraphic work.

Given this recent art boom, the question arises, what resources sustain the galleries, independent art spaces, and ultimately, artists. Art professionals highlighted that the art boom had been due to both, a recent rise of international demand during the past five years, as well as a steady increase in domestic demand over the past ten years. The increase of this interest in Colombian contemporary art can also be seen in data provided by the national statistics office. Domestic art consumption has steadily increased since the mid 2000s, reinforced by an increased international interest setting in in 2011.

## Visual Art Consumption in and Exports in Visual Arts from Colombia



Graphic 1

Visual Arts Consumption in and Exports in Visual Arts from Colombia. Source: Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (DANE), 2018

Regarding the shift in discourse from memory to pioneers, visionaries and referents, the increased international demand is particularly relevant. Although I was not able to trace the origin of the individual collectors that buy the pioneers, referents and visionaries, evaluating the main audience of the galleries' representing these artists suggests that these labels respond to an international, rather than an increased domestic demand.

The artists labelled as pioneers, visionaries and referents are predominantly represented by the largest galleries. These galleries (Casas Riegner, Instituto de Visión, Nueveochenta, El Dorado, El Museo) in contrast to smaller organizations, cater to an international public. Carlos Hurtado, from Nueveochenta that represents the pioneers Ana Mercedes Hoyos and John Castles estimated 75% of the gallery's collectors to come from abroad (personal communication, February 3, 2015). Interview partners from Casas Riegner that in addition to Beatriz González represent Adolfo Bernal, Antonio Caro, and Carlos Rojas in their program reported similar tendencies (Felipe Villada, personal communication, February 4, 2015). The Instituto de Visión that shows the pioneers Alicia Barney, Sandra Llano-Mejía and Fernell Franco equally highlighted the importance of foreign buyers (Beatriz López, personal communication, February 17, 2015). Valentina Gutiérrez from El Dorado, representing Taller 4 Rojo regretted not to be able to also attract a domestic public (personal communication, November 24, 2016).

The importance of international demand was also highlighted by one of the pioneers herself. Beatriz González emphasized an increased demand for Colombian art by foreign institutional buyers in recent years. The artist explained that her work and that of her friends has incited more interest recently. Internationally recognized institutions such as the Tate (London), MoMA (New York) and Reina Sofía (Madrid) as well as museums in San

Francisco, and Chicago have started to buy Colombian art (Beatriz González, personal communication, October 6, 2015).<sup>9</sup>

Summarizing these observations, I find that the shift in the perception of pioneers, visionaries and referents from a zero category to a durable good coincided with an art boom and an increased international demand for Colombian art. The new terms, pioneers, visionaries and referents responded to this international demand. However, this only brings us to the next question: why have international buyers started to collect Colombian art between 2011 and 2015?

### **Changed Conditions in Colombia Attract International Attention**

A number of factors seems to have played a role in bringing Colombian art into the focus of international demand. The improved security situation within Colombia surely helps to attract international visitors. Javier Machicado from the research corporation Lado B observed the opening of the Colombian economy after a decade of isolation caused by extreme violence and narco-trafficking (personal communication, November 25, 2016). In contemporary arts, sales without the buyer looking at the artwork itself, just taking a photograph as a reference are rare. If people are reluctant to visit Colombia, and for the galleries to participate in international art fairs is expensive, internationalization of Colombian art is difficult. Different interview partners observed that Colombia started to participate in art fairs and biennales which facilitates the exchange of information (Carlos Hurtado, personal communication, February 3, 2015, Felipe Villada, personal communication, February 4, 2015).

The foundation of artBo in 2004 has been an important step in providing a platform for contemporary art in Colombia for galleries and artists, and it also plays a role in the sector's internationalization. The fair attracts international galleries, and invites international collectors (Luis Aristizabal, personal communication, February 5, 2015). Moreover, as participation in the fair is a sign of quality for any local gallery or artist, international buyers also rely on artBo's approval of selected Colombian galleries. The presence of international galleries also confirms the status of the fair and its participating local galleries in an international context. The art fair artBo also plays an important role in supporting galleries in their effort to internationalize (Mauricio Gómez Jaramillo, personal communication, February 9, 2015). The contact with both international galleries as well as international collectors allows Colombian galleries to gain experience with an international public (Alejandra Sarria, personal communication, October 16, 2015) and also allow

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<sup>9</sup> While the Colombian art market at least in some segments increasingly serves an international public, it needs to be noted that the art market remains geographically centralized. The United States, United Kingdom, and China are the most important markets by a large margin, taking into account both secondary and primary markets (McAndrew, 2018: 34). In 2017, they accounted for 83% of the market. Olaf Velthuis observes a similar geographic concentration on the level of galleries' representation of artists. 50% of a gallery's artists are based in the same country as the gallery itself (Velthuis, 2013: 293).

Colombian galleries to take note of the offers that are in high demand (Javier Machicado, personal communication, November 25, 2016).

It is also possible that the return of internationally recognized Colombian art professionals played a role. Jairo Valenzuela mentioned that the return of José Roca, previously curator at the Tate Modern in London, to Bogotá has had an important effect on attracting international interest (personal communication, February 10, 2015). In 2013, José Roca founded an independent art space in San Felipe, one of the residential areas in Bogotá, where many new galleries opened over the past couple of years.

Contemporary art is also part of Colombia's foreign policy, and of campaigns that promote export and investment. Luis Armando Soto, head of cultural affairs of the Ministry of External Relations in Colombia explained that they have focused their cultural activities on the promotion of contemporary art in the past decade, and especially so during the years between 2011 and 2016 (personal communication, November 18, 2016). Visual art, in his view, is particularly suited to create positive associations with Colombia: "I believe that there is a great, let's say, intellectual force, that the development of the visual arts in Colombia, [...] is one of the more sophisticated artistic expressions in terms of thought, elaboration and global contact."

The global art market's need for new areas and discoveries of emerging artists promotes the integration of Colombia. From a Colombian perspective, this is described as shifts in the art market (Jairo Valenzuela, personal communication, February 10, 2015, Andrea Meridiano, personal communication, November 6, 2016). After focusing on Cuba in the eighties, on Brazil in the nineties, Mexico in 2000, it was Colombia's turn to be discovered (Jairo Valenzuela, personal communication, February 10, 2015). Moreover, the prices for art increased globally. If buyers are looking for more economic offers off the beaten path, peripheral markets may become more interesting.

Thus, a number of conditions contributed to attract international demand. Security conditions had improved and artBo provided a suitable platform that guaranteed the quality of the artistic offers. Internationally recognized local art professionals had returned to Bogotá recently, and encouraged former colleagues to visit Colombia. Moreover, the Colombian foreign policy had used visual art quite deliberately in order to promote Colombia abroad. Last, but not least, the international art market constantly seeks novel offers, and Colombia has been one of its more recent discoveries.

Connecting this shift to the rediscovery of pioneers, visionaries and referents, I can trace the process of recycling to a shift in the configuration of forces in the Colombian art market. As wealthy collectors from Europe and the US have started to buy pioneers, visionaries and referents, these artists have transited from the zero category to a durable category. As suggested by Culler and Thompson not only do the wealthy collect durable goods, but what is collected by the wealthy also becomes durable.

## Conclusion: Recycled Objects and the Onset of a New Time

The conclusion of this analysis is twofold. On a theoretical level, it is interesting to note that recycled objects establish a divide between the present and the past, and not only reflect the past. On a more specific level it is intriguing that Colombian society has put the past aside and finds itself in the onset of a new time.

The discursive shift from memory to pioneers is not based in the characteristics of the artworks. The artists that are termed pioneers, visionaries or referents work on different topics and apply different styles. This makes it difficult to claim that the shift in discourse originates in the artworks themselves. It is not a new group of artists that establishes a difference in comparison to the already recognized groups, and hence founds a new *époque* as conceptualized by Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 2014: 175). Neither does the effect come about through the artworks' potential to structure the space and time, as described by Rancière's distribution of the sensible (Rancière, 2009: 23).

Rather, the change represents a discursive move by the art professionals in Bogotá. The shift thereby resembles Osborne's description how different terms come to designate different times (Osborne, 2014). In his analysis Osborne examines how "contemporary" has displaced "postmodern" as the fundamental category of the historical presence (21). This displacement has spatial implications, as contemporary in Osborne's analysis also signifies "the unity of global modernity", a sametimeness across the world (23).<sup>10</sup> The terms analyzed here are specific to the Colombian context. However, the underlying development entails a geographic shift, as these terms for Colombian art respond to a predominantly international demand. Colombian art denoted with these terms takes part in a global contemporaneity. This development corresponds Saloni Mathur's observation that contemporary art is increasingly open to non-Western artists (Smith and Mathur, 2014: 165).

The labels can be read as a reaction to a change in demand. Linking this change in discourse to the context in which the labels for the artists emerged, highlights different factors. Most immediately, I observed an unprecedented interest in Colombian art that led to a rediscovery, or recycling of pioneers, visionaries and referents. But this international interest also reflects changes in Colombia: security conditions have in fact improved, and the establishment of artBo provides a professional platform. Moreover, internationally recognized Colombian art professionals have returned to Bogotá recently, and Colombian foreign policy has promoted visual art abroad.

The onset of a new time in Colombia is thus not only a discursive promise about Colombia's future of its art sector to international buyers, it actually reflects a development also in Colombia's wider society.

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<sup>10</sup> In Boris Groys' analysis, this movement towards the same time across the world for the Soviet Union entails a movement back in time, as modernity has been much more thoroughly imposed throughout the Soviet Union than what was experienced as modernity in the West (Groys, 2003: 329).



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