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The colonial archive and its fictions

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ABSTRACT

The archive has played a crucial role in art historical scholarship in helping to flesh out the identities of colonial artists, scribes, and writers. But the vagaries of history, colonialist violences, and postcolonial regimes mean that the archives undergirding such study are particularly unstable. This essay treats the role of archives (their lacunae as well as their surpluses) in shaping the historical methods and scholarly desires around these actors. Case studies are organized around objects made of ink and paper, the same materials as colonial documentation. These cases span a wide temporal range, a broad geographic frame, and a diverse set of period actors. Set out in reverse chronological order, they capture the longing and lament that colonial archives produce. The essay then turns to archival gaps that have been or might be filled, focalizing a range or methods—from historically sanctioned modes of recovery to patently fraudulent fictions—to explore generative methods of probing archival limits.

KEYWORDS

Archive; biography; fabulation; New Granada; New Spain; Gregorio Vásquez de Arce y Ceballos; Codex Cardona; Antonio Valeriano

On folio 7r of the Codex Yanhuitlán, a sixteenth-century manuscript from Oaxaca, a bishop and a Dominican friar sit face to face with quills in hand in the process of making a document (Figure 1). The composition funnels our gaze to the tabletop, this central plane tilted slightly upward to provide greater legibility of the sheet of paper upon it, as the tips of quills lay out marks on the page. Inquiry into this folio has sought to identify the two actors and, in turn, the historical moment pictured.[1] Indeed, the text they are creating seems to offer an invitation to do so by calling particular attention to identity. The two men set signatures onto the page, both finished with looping *rúbricas* that evidence polished hands and that marked distinct social identity in the sixteenth century. The bishop's signature, which may begin with a 'P,' is curiously compressed. Across from him, the Dominican retraces the second arc of an 'm,' but this signature is as bodiless as the bishop's: the terminal stroke, rather than joining up with subsequent letters, has been drawn out into a knotted descender connecting to a triangular shape with looped corners. That is, even though the composition seems to have been designed to set off the signatures at its center, these signatures are not readable. They at

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Figure 1. Unknown artist, *Codex Yanhuitlán* [MS 3], f. 7r, ca. 1545–1550, ink on paper. Biblioteca Histórica José María Lafragua. Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Puebla. Photograph: Iván Pérez.

once point to and refuse to reveal the names of the men who make them. In the very pictorial passage where we expect an anchoring name and with it the first thread of a biographic identity to be revealed, the image checks our desires.

The same refusal extends to the identity of the codex's makers, about whom little is known. One certainty, however, is that they emerged from an Indigenous ambit. Such an origin is made evident elsewhere in this codex by the confident handling of pictography and is confirmed on this page by certain stylistic features, including round jade beads —an Indigenous sign of preciousness—decorating the bishop's robes. Via composition,

the folio's creator pointed to the document being signed by these Europeans while underscoring his or her own work of ink and line via iconography. Despite this self-referentiality and decades of inquiry, no entirely satisfying identification of the men pictured has been made, nor has any archival information about the artist been unearthed. That identity refuses to coalesce around any of these figures is ironic given the subject matter of the picture. After all, the two men are engaged in document creation, a mundane and nearly ceaseless activity in Spain's empire. This production constituted a world of written paper that now fills the *expedientes*, *carpetas*, *legajos*, *salas*, *fondos*, and *archivos* across American geographies once controlled by Spain—that is, the very archives where the identities of these actors might be discovered.

That an object like the Codex Yanhuitlán might prompt a quest for identification should come as no surprise. Archival discoveries have had a long and important role in the writing of art history, and that of colonial Latin America is no exception. The avid search for a name, an identity, and then onward to a biography for an artist might seem like an outmoded art historical obsession. Yet in the art history of colonial Latin America, at least two key factors have kept biography as a goal, if sometimes an unstated one. First, there is a sense in many circles that the discipline of Latin American art history had a belated start, leaving the basic groundwork—charting artists, assembling documents, compiling corpora—still undone. This development is thus graphed or measured against a European art history in which the artist, beginning in the sixteenth century, has been a central axis—an art history in which today the authorial tradition is undeniably alive and well despite detractors and new avenues of inquiry. The allure is clear. Surfacing a creator's name offers art historians inroads into capacious interpretive fields: biography and, with it, chronology, set locales, an oeuvre of related works, and a subjectivity produced through those very processes of making.[2]

Second, newer and, on their surface, more progressive trends in the discipline—particularly in anglophone circles—still cluster around precisely those questions for which biography and, with it, the archive have been so central. They include calls to recover Indigenous agency, to elevate the lives and experiences of subaltern artistic voices, and to salvage neglected works and place them at the level of prized objects. While certain post-structural approaches might wish to move beyond or even 'kill' the author, post- and decolonial gestures cannot afford to erase already marginalized subjects. These efforts often thus rely, perhaps ironically, on fairly standard categories of the 'individual' and the 'work of art.' And these projects of recovery, urgent in their politics, have kept issues of the archive, both traditionally and more broadly conceived, firmly at the core of disciplinary discussion.

Surfacing subjectivities and, with them, models of authorship comes with a disciplinary inheritance that demands a certain density of archival documentation—be it textual or object based—to assert historical realities. Yet these norms, a *mort main* of sorts, are out of sync with the colonial archive, which despite its voluminousness—produced by the pens of Spanish bureaucrats and their armies of notaries—is replete with exclusions. No archive includes everything, but the colonial archive was created and preserved especially unevenly in relation to certain categories of colonial and postcolonial actors, among them artists. The weight of the archive thus tilts heavily in certain directions: toward a peninsular Spaniard rather than a *mulato libre*; toward an Indigenous *tlahcuiloh* in a Franciscan scriptorium as opposed to a sixteenth-century sculptor of a 'minor' miracle-working

image; or toward a productive, well-patronized eighteenth-century urban painter rather than his counterpart in a regional outpost. It also might simply be silent about individuals in any of these categories, even if they all surely played crucial roles in the production of art or literature.

This essay explores intersections of the 'archive' with the figure of the 'creator' in colonial Latin America. We address the uncomfortable reality that at this intersection the historian often finds absences: of shop inventories, of preparatory drawings, of letters to and from patrons, and so on. Such things may have existed but have left little trace. Absence has led to a host of efforts to fill gaps—efforts ranging from the fictional to the forged to the fabulated. That range is here explored not as a call to abandon the archive but to suggest the strengths or generative potentials of archival misalignments between the records about creators and the historical expectations that continue to accrete around them and their work. That is, we do not mean to suggest that scholars throw the archive aside but instead invite embracing the ways that its limitations require methods other than simply digging harder within what remains. By the same token, our description of 'creator' or 'artist' as categories should not be mistaken for an argument for their preservation but rather an acknowledgement of both their historical relevance—from the sixteenth century onward—and their continued prevalence in academic disciplines, specifically art history, despite decades of discourse challenging them.

In what follows, we frame an examination of colonial creators and the archive by focusing on works that, much like period documentation itself, are made of ink and paper: drawings, illustrations, preparatory materials, and scribal texts. Each section centers an 'archival episode.' These episodes were chosen to draw out the factors that frustrate, thwart, or enable archival work and recovery across a wide temporal frame (in reverse chronology from the late eighteenth century to the early colonial period), a broad geographic expanse (from northern New Spain to New Granada), and a range of period actors (Indigenous, Creole, and peninsular). Holistic coverage is not the aim; our hope, instead, is that the particularities of case studies will serve as prompts, prods, or foils. Our choices highlight how the work of art historians of colonial Latin America, a wide-ranging field of study, is conditioned by a gap between evidentiary expectations and what the archive reveals—largely irrespective of the background, identity, and location of their subjects of study. Together, these examples give a sense of the range of complexities scholars now face while highlighting the distinct methods that interpreters of both the past and the present have taken in approaching the archive and the materials it offers up or, more often, withholds.

Phantom presence

Sometime in the mid-eighteenth century, an artist arrived early one morning at the church of San Francisco in the small New Spanish town of El Pueblito outside Santiago de Querétaro (Unidentified author, post-1768).[3] He went at the behest of his patron, one don Joseph Aranburo. Aranburo wished to offer a gift to the Virgin of El Pueblito, a miracle-working statue whose fame was on the rise. This gift was to be a silver crescent moon, sign of the Virgin's immaculacy, to adorn her base. We know this from a drawing or design that the artist made on the occasion (Figure 2). A pair of delicate crescents arc

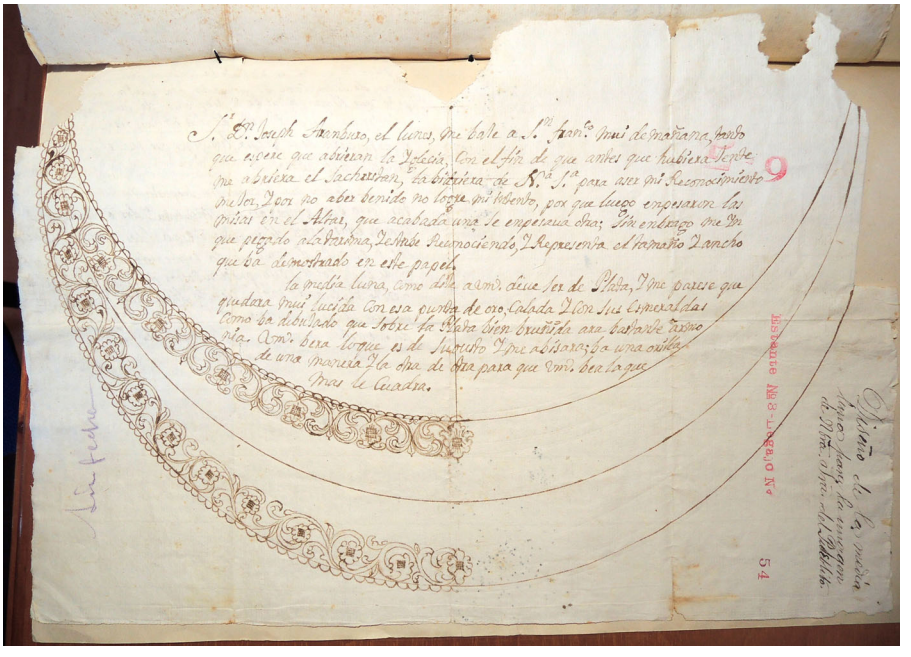

Figure 2. Unknown artist, *Design for a crescent moon for the Virgin of El Pueblito*, before 1768, ink on paper. Archivo Histórico de la Provincia Franciscana de Michoacán, Celaya, Fondo: Provincia, Conventos, El Pueblito, Caja 3, Número 54. Photograph: Aaron M. Hyman.

across the page, rendered by a compass whose fixed point is indexed by a darkened indentation where the artist secured this drafting tool. Having marked out the form, the artist then applied two slightly different ornamental patterns on the inner and outer edges of half of the crescent.[4] These offered a choice for the patron, who would select between them before the artist (presumably a silversmith) fabricated the motif with silver, gold, emeralds, and diamonds. Though little is known about Aranburo, he was clearly well-off.

Given the paucity of extant records of artistic practice, the mere survival of this drawing is remarkable. It exists as a single sheet in a folder of materials—housed in the Archivo Histórico de la Provincia Franciscana de Michoacán—with no direct correlation to the many documents surrounding it, save that all relate to the cult and sanctuary of the Virgin of El Pueblito. Yet just as notable as the survival of this modest line drawing is the textual accompaniment penned by the artist on the same sheet, which gives an unusually chatty account of his process. He writes: 'On Monday, I went down to San Francisco very early in the morning, very hopeful that they would open the church so that before there were many people the sacristan could open the glass case of Our Lady so that I could complete my examination.' A plan had clearly been agreed upon. But unfortunately for this artist—and in a familiar turn of events for any art historian—the sacristan did not come early, and the artist could not closely inspect the statue of the Virgin before masses: 'As soon as one [mass] would end, another would begin.' Nevertheless, the artist managed to position himself 'right next to the dais' and used the sheet

on which his drawing would eventually be made as an impromptu measure to approximate the size that his adornment would need to be. What we are left with in his drawing is at once the documentary record (both textual and pictorial) of his creative endeavor and the very tool of that process.[5] Through it we get a glimpse of an artist's nearly failed trip to access a statue, his frustrated maneuvering with local clergy, and his best attempt to gauge the necessary size of an object that would satisfy both the desires of his patron and its function as a decorous adornment for the Virgin of El Pueblito.

Historians of Latin American art rarely come so close to the scene of colonial artistic practice. Uncommon is the inventory of an artist's shop, nearly nonexistent the correspondence between an artist and a patron (let alone one narrating an encounter with another artwork!), and infrequent the nonformulaic document penned by an artist in the first person. These are the kinds of sources that the historian of European art might routinely turn to, even rely upon, to answer a question or 'get to know' an artist. In bringing different types of documentation together, the drawing of the crescent moon represents something of an archival ideal, surfacing as it does from a tremendous chasm where colonial artistic materials once existed. Yet even so, it remains fragmentary. The drawing itself is partial—three chunks torn out of its upper edge absent the sharp points of the crescent. But that physical degradation stands in for a larger absence. For although we can empathize with the thwarted artist's frustration as one mass spilled over into the next, keeping him from his work, a lacuna overshadows all this: we never learn his name. And thus, the document refuses to act as a starting point for seeking out a more stable identity and, in turn, building out a larger context for this particular endeavor.

The point may be a simple one with which to begin, but it bears repeating: the archive is far from the rich storehouse it is often dreamed to be (Burns 2010). To the historian, this might seem incongruous: Spanish Habsburgs and Bourbons were notorious paper producers, rivaled perhaps only by the Vatican. But when it comes to the kind of documents that have most traditionally enabled art historical research, the colonial Latin American archive is more partial than most from the early modern world and certainly more so than Europe's. This drawing, however, throws into doubt the idea that if one only looked harder, a clear picture of the sort we might hope to find would be revealed. For even in its most intimate moments, the archive rebuffs our most valiant attempts to really know creators. In this instance, it engages our empathic sensibilities while presenting only an absent specter with whom to chart proximity.

Collecting by creating

The archive evidences plenty of colonial drawings—in contracts mentioning presentation designs and wills bequeathing the tools of artists' workshops (for instance, Hernández de Alba 1938, 29, 46). But few *extant* drawings, like the one we have seen from El Pueblito, exist today. A cache of 106 drawings attributed to the New Granadan painter Gregorio Vásquez de Arce y Ceballos in Bogotá has thus been heralded as a case of singular survival, and an important one given that drawing has traditionally been seen as opening a window onto creative process and artistic subjectivity. A resplendent signature and date, 1704, on one sheet have seemingly secured authorship for the entire group, which is

Figure 3. Unknown artist (formerly attributed to Gregorio Vasquéz de Arce y Ceballos), *Angel with signature*, nineteenth or twentieth century (?), oil on paper. Museo Colonial, Bogotá. Collection of the Museo Colonial, Bogotá, photographic reproduction: © Museo Colonial / Oscar Monsalve.

characterized by exceptional stylistic unity (Figure 3). Whereas in the example of the El Pueblito artist we had no name to which we might tether other documents or objects, the example of Vásquez offers up a named artist to whom a corpus could and did become attached. As this section will make clear, however, there can be a distorting effect from such a powerful impetus to have a named historical actor paired with works capable of fulfilling the promise of that identity.

The drawings' unique survival has been stressed from their earliest publication, when they were in the possession of Carlos Pardo, a wealthy Bogotá collector (Pizano Restrepo 1926). In 1942, the city's recently formed Museo de Arte Colonial bought the drawings, promoted as 'one of the most valuable treasures of [our] collection.' Just two years later, the museum released a publication dedicated exclusively to the drawings (Giraldo Jaramillo 1944). Against an academic backdrop in which the arts of Mexico and Peru were already overshadowing the rest of what were once the Spanish Americas, Colombia housed a group of objects that set it apart and a type of object that placed it on par with Europe. The museum's 1944 text is peppered with references to European artists—from Correggio to Rubens to Manet—and a quote from Ingres serves as epigraph: 'Drawing represents the integrity of art' (idem, ix). A decade later, the museum again celebrated its acquisition with a luxury facsimile of the drawings, vaunted as 'a unicum in the history of colonial art in the Americas' (Tovar Gil 1955, n.p.). These reproductions were printed on laid paper, tinted with a colorant and torn around the edges, to capture the patina of time's passage. The museum published a second facsimile edition of loose folios 'for the pride of Bogotá

[…] and for the honor of those arts transplanted from Europe to the Hispanic Americas' (Hernández de Alba 1966, n.p.).

Notable for their clarity of line, the drawings depend solely on contours, almost all applied in thick oil with brush, to carve out characters, groupings, and scenes. Fifty-seven drawings match motifs or entire compositions in paintings signed by or attributed to Vásquez, and in several cases, drawings conform to printed models from which we know colonial artists routinely worked, such as Raphael's *Madonna della Sedia*. But technique flattens distinctions: whether copying from print, replicating painted motifs for reuse in the *taller*, or sketching figures and groupings, these drawings undercut variability with cold lines fixing forms in the center of sheets.

This kind of pictorial leveling is strange for artists' drawings, as is the pure use of contour with no cross-hatching or wash to model figures. While the drawings' singularity has been stressed in every publication, the question of their function has given rise to a discordant chorus of explanations. Perhaps they are sketches (with an odd lack of corrections), or presentation drawings for prospective patrons, or models for workshop production, or tracings of finished compositions, or even, as one commentator suggests, 'pictorial essays that should count as entirely finished works of art' (Giraldo Jaramillo 1980, 135). Each proposition falls short. These are obviously not finished works of art; that they are presentation drawings of such amazingly standard types seems dubious (as is the idea that the group would be reunited after being given to patrons); though contour lines suggest tracing, in the cases in which drawings correspond to finished paintings they do not always match in scale—and they are too uniformly sized, all around 30 × 20 cm; and in the early eighteenth century, paper (if not oiled) was not yet used to trace in such a way. Workshop stock might seem a possible explanation, but there is little evidence to suggest that the drawings were ever *used*: no splotches of pigment or oil; no greasy fingerprints; no punching, tracing, or notation.

If the function of these drawings is unclear and their survival surprising, their facture —or, more precisely, the facture of the paper itself—is disconcerting. A gaunt face, for instance, was sketched on the verso of a papal bull, a concession of Urban VIII for the salvation of those fighting for the faith in the Tierra Firme (Figure 4). While the bull's function and Urban's reign from 1623 to 1644 make it a good candidate as scrap paper for Vásquez (1638–1711), this particular example was a rerelease. Printed in Madrid at the behest of Benedict XIV (r. 1740–1758; his name appears at the top edge), the sheet could have arrived in the Americas, at the earliest, about 40 years after Vásquez's death. The drawings are unusually free of watermarks, but one example localizes the sheet's production to a paper mill in Cádiz, Spain, in the mid 1760s or Lisbon around 1780.[6] While the appearance of a signature in this grouping insists on Vásquez's authorship—and rather oddly, given how few early modern drawings are signed at all—the papers of these drawings undercut their validity.

Someone wanted these drawings to be by Vásquez. Maybe even a few of them are. But certainly not all of them—and it does seem that bad intentions were at play. It is in the drawings' almost-but-not-quite-rightness that one senses fraudulence. A papal bull matches up with the artist's life, but its rerelease does not. The drawings are on colonial-era paper, yes, but not on paper from the early eighteenth century. A signature and date insist too hard. There is a visual quality of calculated dissimulation as well. An elegantly positioned head on one sheet, for instance, produces an echo

Figure 4. Unknown artist (formerly attributed to Gregorio Vásquez de Arce y Ceballos), *Head of a monk*, nineteenth or twentieth century (?), oil on paper. Collection of the Museo Colonial, Bogotá, photographic reproduction: © Museo Colonial / Oscar Monsalve.

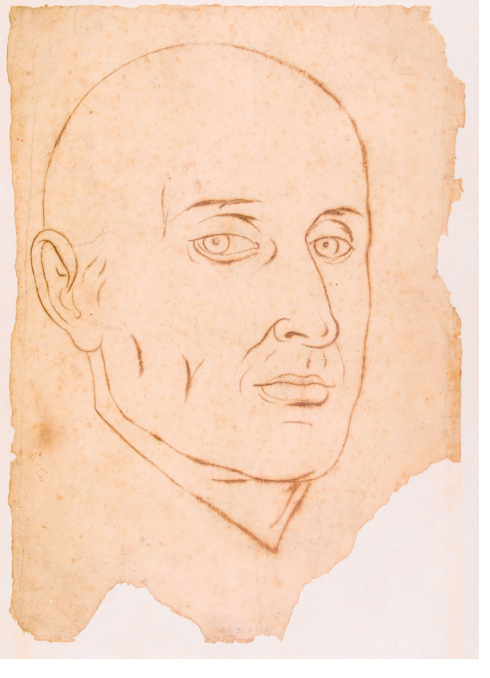

Figure 5. Unknown artist (formerly attributed to Gregorio Vásquez de Arce y Ceballos), *Head*, nineteenth or twentieth century (?), oil on paper. Collection of the Museo Colonial, Bogotá, photographic reproduction: © Museo Colonial / Oscar Monsalve.

between the strange point of the figure's neck and the ripped edge of the page itself (Figure 5).

But in whose interest was these drawings' creation or, even, forgery? Who wanted archival gaps filled in such a way? One might look to a particular group of nineteenth-century intellectuals who seem to have grasped the critical ideological role that this artist could play for Colombia and its collections. These nineteenth-century thinkers found in Vásquez not only an artist of admirable quality but also a symbol for a budding nation. For having been championed in the nineteenth century as an artist worthy of history, Vásquez, much like the drawings, occupies a singular position in the history of colonial art. He was by some 75 years the first colonial Latin American artist to receive monographic attention. In 1859, José Manuel Groot produced an account of Vásquez's life and work, opening this tale in the archive where he located a baptismal record proving that the artist was born in Bogotá (Groot 1859). Such a discovery allowed the historian to claim Vásquez as a product both of and for the nascent nation, writing that 'the memory of such an important artist should not be lost for my country' (idem, 1).

Interest in Vásquez grew quickly, culminating in 1866 at the first annual exhibition of the School of Fine Arts in Bogotá. The 60-room show featured European and American works spanning millennia—from a deep Indigenous past to a contemporary present—but only Vásquez was honored with his own room. The show positioned him as the defining figure in Colombia's artistic development, and commentary in Bogotá's *Papel Periódico Ilustrado* followed suit: 'The Exposition, the first of its kind in the country, shined a brilliant light on the name of Vásquez, extending the shadow of clouds over those others of little merit' (Girón 1887, 242–43, 257–60, 275–76). In Vásquez, a group of nationalists found a powerful tool for Colombia's particular nineteenth-century strategy of reconciling, rather than disavowing, its colonial past with its projected nationalist future. The exposition closed with an impassioned speech by director Alberto Urdaneta in which he urged the erection of a statue to the memory of 'the colossal figure of Vásquez, singular genius and honor of America, who, with his master hand, guides the path of our national art.' He continued: 'This statue will mark the first historic day of a new era […] and Colombia, like Italy of the Renaissance, will pride itself before its siblings on the continent to be able to count among its chosen children such an artist-genius' (idem, 275).

The drawings first appeared in a 1926 monograph on Vásquez that echoed these nationalist tones (Pizano Restrepo 1926). An illustrated frontispiece, at once charmingly naive and ideologically freighted, sets the stage (Figure 6). Standing before the cathedral of Bogotá, the artist and a music-playing angel experience a vision of a distinctly Vásquez-ian Virgin. The artist's attention fixed heavenward, his unattended brush seems to have miraculously rendered the city's coat of arms. If the nationalist bent were not apparent, the title page opens—with no explanation—to a facsimile of the last will and testament of Simón Bolívar, a national founder and hero with whom Vásquez was now made to rub shoulders.

The wishes of those looking to position Vásquez as an origin point for the nation bring us back to the drawings. For nearly all the Colombian intellectuals who championed Vásquez were themselves amateur artists, polymaths whose genteel formation (and sometimes professional proclivities) included the artist's tools. This was true of Vásquez's

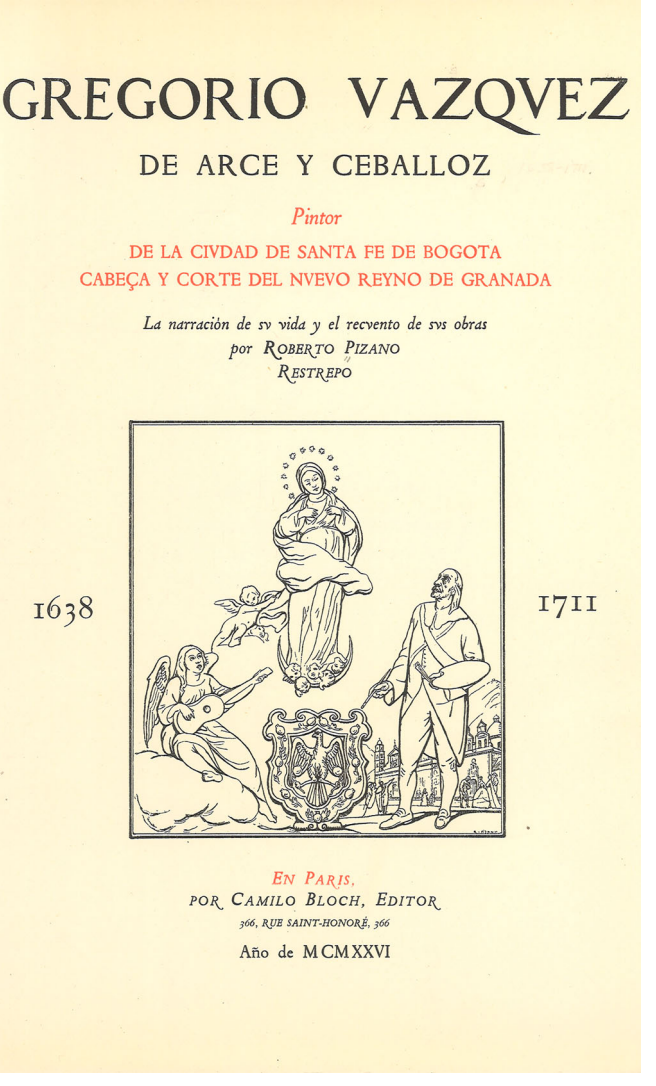

Figure 6. Title page of Robert Pizano Restrepo's 1926 monograph on Gregorio Vásquez de Arce y Ceballos (Paris: Camilo Bloch, 1926). Image in the public domain.

first monographer, Groot, who trained as a religious painter and worked as a secondary-school teacher, implementing drawing in his curriculum (Giraldo Jaramillo 1980, 44–45; González and Segura 1991, 10–36). He was a particularly capable draughtsman and also copied assiduously after Vásquez in the process of studying, documenting, and championing his corpus and life. Was Groot's desire (1859, 1) that '[Vásquez's] name be written in the annals of history' so strong that he inscribed that name upon a drawing he wished the artist had left us? Perhaps.

Yet one might instead turn to Vásquez's subsequent monographer, Roberto Pizano Restrepo, who authored the 1926 volume in which the drawings were first published. Pizano offered a provenance for the drawings he illustrated stretching back through

important colonial officials to the artist himself (Pizano Restrepo 1926, 142–47).[7] Against this backdrop, it is thus notable that Pizano's 1926 frontispiece indulges in a similar quality of contour as the drawings he would reproduce: figures rendered in outline, modeled only with single lines to suggest folds of drapery. In the lower right-hand corner, we find the signature of Pizano himself as its artist and designer. One might imagine, of course, that in crafting his frontispiece, Pizano was simply emulating the supposedly colonial drawings included in his volume. But it is also possible that he had a hand in producing some of the very drawings that he attributed to Vásquez.

Whether or not Pizano helped 'create' this corpus, it is implausibly surprising that he neither includes an illustration of the signed drawing that now anchors it nor makes any mention of a signature at all (idem, 148). The autograph seems yet another, later fabrication—meaning that these drawings most likely underwent multiple steps not only to be made but also to then be fully attached to Vásquez. Less important than finding a particular forger, then, is acknowledging the demands placed upon the archive by the writing of a certain kind of history that existing records may not be able to support. Whoever made these drawings and whoever later appended the signature both wanted things for this artist that he otherwise did not have: a material history and a sense of self-fashioning that would elevate the colonial artist to the standards of the early modern European creators with whom he was increasingly compared. Nineteenth-century accounts insisted on an equivalence of the Creole Vásquez with his better known European counterparts, but the colonial painter lacked the material corpus to robustly undergird such comparisons. Vásquez had no drawings. And so, it seems, someone made them.

Whatever the exact case, the drawings are the products of postcolonial expectations that Colombia should live up to Europe's material record. But it would seem that those same postcolonial longings have continued to shape how scholars look at (or not so fully look at) these objects. For the authenticity of these drawings has rarely been placed in doubt. This is frankly surprising. None of the features that disqualify them—a rereleased bull, bad watermarks—are particularly difficult to notice. And it is not the case that people have not looked at them. They were even conserved in the 1980s (Ortiz Robledo 2008, 67), and they feature in more than a dozen publications from 1926 to the 2010s (Rubiano Caballero 1997, 27–29; Alcalá 1999; Brown 2013).

The fact that so few have sought to explicitly question Vásquez's authorship of the drawings reveals latent, and longstanding, desires about colonial makers and their histories.[8] European collections have often set standards for evidence and preservation, creating a longing for similarly robust corpora in Latin American contexts. But European collections emerged from an almost singular instance in human history when large publics cared about artists as creators, wanted a sneak peek into their studios, and saw drawings as the critical indexes of those spaces—the gestures of authorial performance, of a hand that betrays the thinking mind. Through them, we too, as historians, get the sense of coming to know the actors of the past. But how, then, can we know colonial makers?

Discrediting these drawings comes with the unfortunate side effect of producing a colonial artist found lacking, of writing yet again of a colonial history that falls short. But perhaps we need not be quite so disappointed. If Latin Americanists often feel thwarted in efforts to know colonial artists, there may nevertheless exist a promise

amid that disappointment. A mismatch between Latin America and Europe could help make strange the normative operations of early modern art history where the artist–author is concerned. Might such disconnects push us to decenter the category of 'the artist' from his (usually his) central role in art history? And, let us be clear, this role was not just highlighted in early nationalist efforts to shape canons but continues to orient the narrations of colonial Latin American art, particularly as it is introduced to new audiences (both academic and general).[9] In addition, the collection and display of colonial art offers potent sites to rethink art history's relationship to the artist, not only as a locus of value in an absolute sense but also as a relational category for the countries and collections from which they come, and so too out of which they are created.

Florentine fabulation

The preceding examples have served to explore some absences in the colonial archive, which may offer up names without corpora or corpora without historical actors. Into these gaps, as the Vásquez drawings demonstrate, invention at times enters. Archival invention is usually thought of as a form of malpractice, but a more creative approach might frame it as a potential, if attended to carefully both historically and historiographically. This section makes a case for thinking of one of the best-known objects in the history of colonial Latin American art, the Florentine Codex (*Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*), in these terms. The Florentine Codex has been studied iconographically and materially—as a source for knowledge about pre-Conquest traditions in the Valley of Mexico and about the Conquest itself, and as an object of highly localized facture as well as exotic, transatlantic bounty. Despite the richness of the Nahuatl and Spanish texts and the accompanying images, art historians remain frustrated in trying to imagine how the unnamed artists employed by Bernardino de Sahagún, the project's Franciscan overseer, conceived of their roles in coproducing this monument of sixteenth-century proto-ethnography.

The process of creating the codex's twelve books was long and laborious, and the work evolved according to dramatically shifting conditions. None had greater impact than the epidemic of 1576, which ravaged Indigenous communities. Sahagún himself described the trauma: innumerable dead, expiring without the consolation of loved ones, friars rushing about to baptize or confess Indigenous people in a last-ditch effort to (as they would have it) save souls (Sahagún ca. 1576, Book 11, 389r–90v). He describes in harrowing terms entire households falling so ill that 'no one could even get a jug of water' to quell the thirst brought by fevers (idem, Book 11, 390r).

The reader arrives at Book 11, which narrates the plants and minerals of New Spain, only to see the illustrations' vibrant, subtly handled hues give way first to muddied greens and browns and then to gray-scale. Color drains away from one folio to the next, a shift indexing an artistic response to a new scarcity of materials and collapsing supply chains. For the historian wishing to think about artists and their self-conceptions, it is especially disquieting to find pages devoted to the natural elements used for painters' colorants devoid of actual color (Figure 7). What should be vibrant reds of cochineal—both liquid spilling forth from insect exoskeletons and the loaded brush of a painter—are rendered only as outlines. Despite the lack of pigments, the production of the Florentine Codex continued at Sahagún's behest, of course, and with the participation of Indigenous

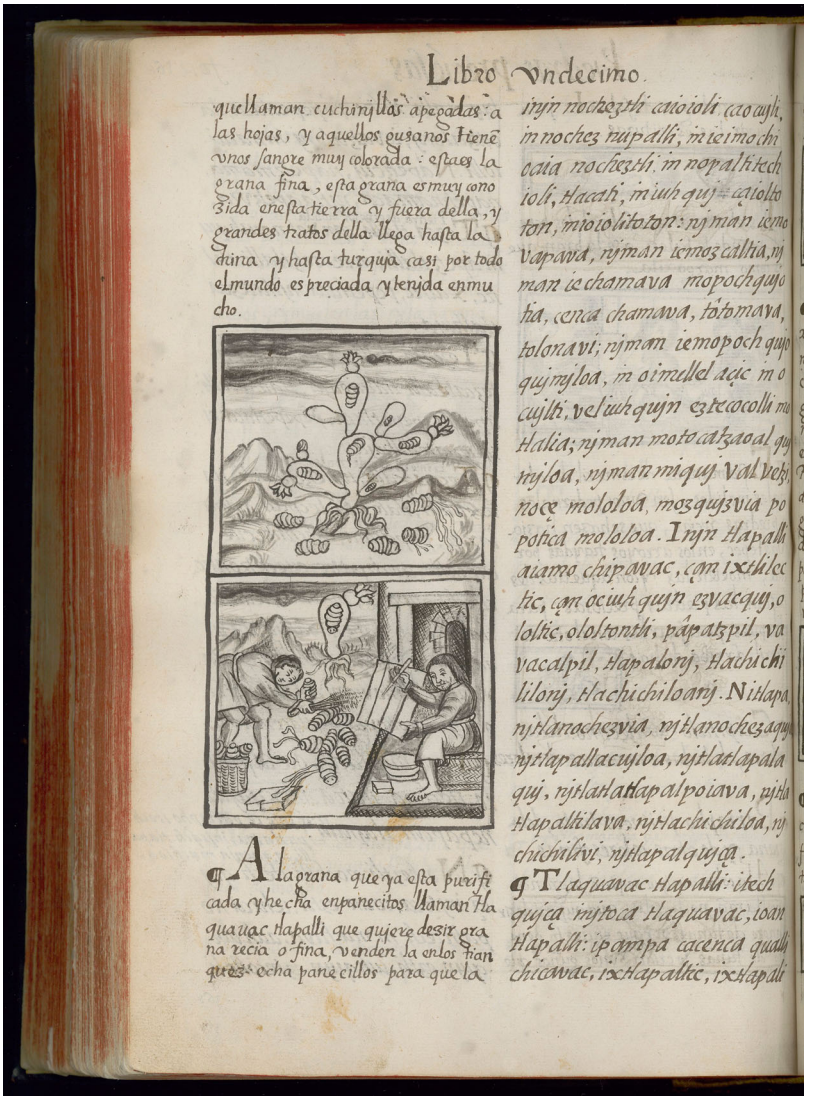

Figure 7. Unknown artists, *Florentine Codex*, Book 11, f. 216v, ca. 1575–1577, ink on paper. Ms. Med. Palat. 220. Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence. By permission of the Ministero della Cultura; any further reproduction by any means is prohibited.

artists. The scene is discomfiting to imagine, and it is one that led Diana Magaloni Kerpel (2014, 14) to 'an essential question: what did the Florentine Codex mean to the Tlatelolco team who decided to devote their lives to completing it amid a mortal battle against death itself?'

One particularity that emerges in trying to answer this question is that the identities of the artists are unknown. Four grammarians (one of them Antonio Valeriano, discussed below) and three scribes are named at the codex's outset. But no such mention is given to its painters. In her groundbreaking work, Magaloni pushes to get close to these artists. She isolates 21 hands and conjures identities to match, like 'Master of the Three-

Quarter Profiles,' 'Master of Complex Skin Coloring,' and 'Master of Both Traditions.' Offering these monikers—via a technique of connoisseurship reaching back to Giovanni Morelli—Magaloni tries to capture not only artistic predilection (toward, for instance, a particular angle of profile) but also something of the workings of the artistic mind navigating the complex currents of style and image theory (a code switcher moving between 'Both Traditions').[10] Yet this well-traveled art historical path does not lead to an answer to the 'essential' question of what making actually meant to these creators.

The archive fails us most—it would seem uncontentious to say—where Indigenous, colonized, or otherwise marginalized figures of the past are concerned. Any attempt at archival recovery thus raises the question of exactly how much one can build from shreds gleaned from the archive while still claiming adherence to rigorous scholarly interpretation. How can we write about what is not there? Perhaps no historian and critic has engaged these questions to more forceful effect in recent years than Saidiya Hartman, who in writing about the transatlantic slave trade was failed by an archive offering only glimpses of the enslaved peoples she researched (Hartman 2008). And even then, these subjects (particularly women) were spectral, refracted through documentation hinging upon their abjection. The stories this archive proffered only restaged and perpetuated violence endured. Hartman thus attempted to conceive of a way of 'writing at the limit of the unspeakable and the unknown' in order to undermine the epistemological structures of the very archive that had rendered her subjects mute (idem, 1). But this mode would need to destabilize the protocols of historical writing that had failed to represent them.

Hartman terms this mode of writing 'critical fabulation.' In her words: 'By playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story, by re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view, I have attempted to jeopardize the status of the event, to displace the received or authorized account, and to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done' (idem, 11). In her most explicit account of this method, Hartman reimagined two African girls in the hull of a ship. These two figures enter the textual record only because the ship's captain was indicted for their murder. Yet instead of allowing the archive to leave the pair as bodies broken by violence, Hartman fabulates a scene of comfort: 'Picture them: the relics of two girls, one cradling the other, plundered innocents; a sailor caught sight of them and later said they were friends. Two world-less girls found a country in each other's arms. Beside the defeat and the terror, there would be this too: the glimpse of beauty, the instant of possibility' (idem, 8). Hartman offers this account not as a feel-good moment in an otherwise grim history. Instead, she means to open the possibility of these women's subjectivities, their motivations and experiences. She thereby insists that the evidence from an archive recording property, damaged and destroyed, and legal disputes could produce other narrative threads.

This mode is, by historiographical standards, a radical proposal for working with a source base and deploying evidence. But Hartman deems it imperative for archives so fractured and distorted by colonialism's violences that certain voices—and experiences—cannot otherwise be heard. Although the brutalities of slavery and its related institutions are of course particular, Hartman's intervention nevertheless might be seen to have bearing on the circumstances faced by historians of Latin American art: rarely does an archive offer insight into the subjective experiences of colonial artists,

particularly Indigenous artists, so often ignored or intentionally disappeared. This section tests critical fabulation as a means to probe the subjectivity of the Florentine Codex's artists and to expose the limits of the archive by which we have come to only partially know them. And so we offer two fabulations about the production of the codex's final books.

We first must underscore that these stories are *not* offered as history. We are not asking that they be considered in terms of their potential for entry into the record as *any* sort of truth of fact. Indeed, and as Hartman too would have it, they are less important in their own right than they are for revealing, through the process of the difficulty of their generation, the discursive limits of the archive and the disciplinary norms that those limits have established. These continue to structure how art historians write about the codex and its artists and, more generally, about artists and authors from colonial Latin America. This is not a call to produce tomes of fabulation but rather an entreaty to take up this practice as a step in our scholarly thinking. Seeing what we can and cannot verify might begin as a process of envisioning what could have been.

That said, one version of this story might center the artists' experience of a lack of resources that gradually hampered their work. So picture them: the artists of the Florentine Codex locked in the convent complex of Santiago in Tlatelolco, racing to finish the books' illustrations amid the grave uncertainties surrounding the *cocoliztli* outbreak. Fearing the loss of his artists, Sahagún would not let them return to their homes, and so they were sequestered. The gathered creators were forced to console one another as they faced the losses of nearby but unreachable family and friends, losses known only through the hushed tones of rumor. These artists had been working on this project day in and out for years, and as they filed into the workroom, they could find comfort in their regular places at the table, a semblance of normality through daily rhythms of setting inked line to page. Against this backdrop, creation became a refuge, the image a respite. Nonetheless, the terror of sickness in the group itself grew by the day, every morning bringing a visual roll call, a quick check for pale skin or flushed foreheads. Anxiously surveyed, too, were rationed stockpiles of color. Sahagún had supplied the artists with plenty of paper but had done little to acquire enough pigment, which they understood as having the potential to give energy, life to their images. Gray-scale was good enough for the Franciscan, but for the artists, the loss of color warned of endings. Increasingly, they came to feel trapped by the frames set down on the pages to receive drawings, just as they were trapped by the walls of a room that they might not leave alive.

But another version of this story might instead center the artists' response to the violence and violation that the project had inflicted from the outset. Picture it, then, again: the artists found safe haven in the monastery at Tlatelolco. After all, this was not the first cocoliztli outbreak, and they knew well what it could bring. More to the point, they could see a promise ahead: Book 12 offered the chance to tell the story of the Conquest of Mexico-Tenochtitlan in their own words, language, and pictures. 'Beside the defeat and the terror,' to use Hartman's words, 'there would be this too,' the possibility for some sort of redemption, a chance to correct the narrative and honor ancestors who had faced debasement, embarrassment, demotion. To tell this history, as Kevin Terraciano has underscored (2019b, 45–62), these artists pictured the Nahua heroes who fought at length against their Spanish vanquishers. A flash of color in one of the

Figure 8. Unknown artists, *Florentine Codex*, Book 12, f. 34r, ca. 1575–1577, ink and natural pigments on paper. Ms. Med. Palat. 220. Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence. By permission of the Ministero della Cultura; any further reproduction by any means is prohibited.

illustrations describing the beginning of the Conquest opens this window (Figure 8). The artists, seeing resources for the project diminish as its urgency grew, squirreled away color, taking just a little pigment when they had the chance, folding it in a bit of paper and holding it for later. At the eleventh hour, they chose where it would be deployed. The hidden pigment was just enough for the quetzal plumes, a piece of a feather shield, and the flesh tones of a warrior. Here, they would finally expend their reserves to give sudden, vivid life to this charged moment of encounter. Animated, made to shimmer, this warrior—and with him the artist himself—takes some revenge.

Let us be crystal clear: we are not endorsing either of these fabulations as *true*—in the way that Pizano promoted Vásquez's drawings—and Hartman's model does not, in any case, suggest that this is the goal. Voicing histories impossible to verify is meant, instead, to point to the limits of the archives in which colonized or subjugated historical actors exist (or do not). Doing so forces the issue of what a historian would need to reputably narrate the past and asks us to reckon with the causes of archival absence that make it seem impossible to do so. In light of the two critical fabulations here offered—both of which *could* be true—we are forced to ask what would be required to rule out or verify them and, in turn, exactly why we lack such resources.

In the trial Hartman draws on, the words of the enslaved were not deemed worthy of recording. In the case of the Florentine Codex, the full scope of Indigenous artistic production was not preserved. Indeed, part of what makes getting at the self-conceptions of the Florentine Codex artists so difficult is the conspicuous absence of any draft materials for this monumental project. The codex is what we might call a 'fair copy,' twelve books of cleanly produced text and the final forms of more than 1,000 pictures, almost none of which bear any evidence of reworking and show only scant adjustments on the page; the few there are in the form of paste-overs. Yet this astonishing fact has seemed to merit little art historical discussion.

There are at least two reasons to suggest that preparatory work must have existed. First, the illustrations of the Florentine Codex are not stock pictures mechanically repeated throughout but rather distinct scenes and motifs that needed to be customized for this project and the formal constraints of the page. Second, the artists often deployed 'Western' pictorial codes: cross-hatching and washy shading for modeling, perspectival devices for space, iconographies and motifs pulled from prints. Given these artistic demands, how should a historian imagine that these artists were able to complete these pictures in the absence of preparatory work? Other related manuscripts exist—the *Primeros memoriales* among them—and certainly, their texts and some of the images served as fodder for the Florentine Codex. But the pictorial program of the *Primeros memoriales* is more restricted and distinct in both format and composition. It thus does not constitute the kind of preparatory pictorial thinking needed to undertake the later project. And yet we lack this draft material (messy sketches, notes about correction and collaboration, indications about color choices)—a 'missing artistic archive' of the codex's production.

This lack of draft material is precisely what makes coming to 'know' the codex's artists so very difficult. In this case, though, the absence is not a mere accident—a misplaced box in storage, insect infestation, a library fire—but a deliberate one. Indeed, well before the Florentine Codex was completed, officials in Spain wanted the project halted, its materials confiscated, and the general activity of collecting and recording the 'idolatrous superstitions' of Indigenous populations ceased entirely (Baudot 1995, 492–504). On 22 April 1577, no less than King Phillip II wrote that officials in New Spain were to 'proceed with much care and diligence to seize those books, without any original or copy remaining, and to send them carefully guarded at the first opportunity to our Council of the Indies, so that they may be examined' (Markey 2011, 202). Exactly what confiscations came to pass remains unclear. A new Franciscan commissary general of New Spain, Rodrigo de Sequera, arrived in Mexico City in 1575, and he was ultimately responsible

for traveling with the Florentine Codex back to Europe, where he kept it away from suspicious eyes.

Sequera seems to have rushed the writers and artists to finish the text. The final pages of Book 12, the codex's last, end abruptly—not just colors now absent but also the images themselves (Figure 9). Spaces in the last chapters were marked out for pictures to accompany text detailing the final scenes of the Conquest and the Spaniards' insatiable hunger for gold, but these pictures were never completed. Time, it seems, had run out—the book needed to be sent on the move.[11] This was for the best. The king wrote directly to Mexico City on 13 May 1577, about confiscating Sahagún's text (Baudot 1995, 500–3). And a flurry of missives came to a head in 1578 when Sahagún himself wrote to the king—either not understanding the scope of the investigation or hoping to appear cooperative—to inform the sovereign that he retained materials and would happily forward them (idem, 503n27). The Council of the Indies moved quickly to again decree that all materials be seized.

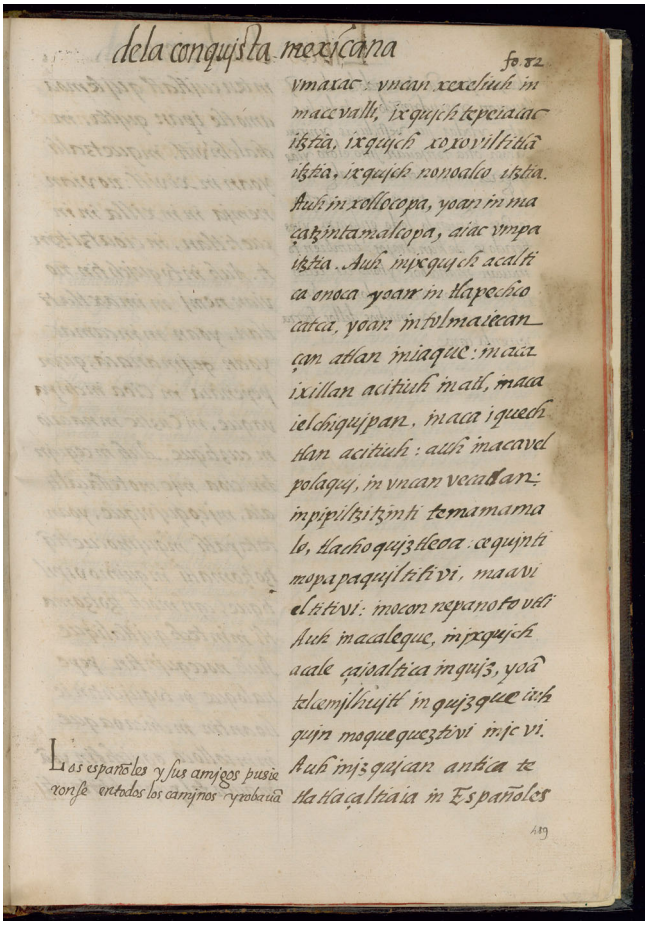

Figure 9. Unknown artists, *Florentine Codex*, Book 12, f. 82r, ca. 1575–1577, ink on paper. Ms. Med. Palat. 220. Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence. By permission of the Ministero della Cultura; any further reproduction by any means is prohibited.

If these materials were indeed taken, they do not survive. And this despite the fact that the sixteenth century was an era of collecting (at least in Europe), during which connoisseurs increasingly looked to drawings—effectively artistic drafts—for insight into artists' minds. The working materials from the artists of the Florentine Codex were apparently not worth saving, or, equally likely, needed to be destroyed. Historians are thus left with a monument of sixteenth-century thought about Indigenous beliefs, translation, and art but without the preparatory materials that might point to processes by which that monument came to be. Perhaps because of the codex's voluminous presence—twelve books in three volumes, a text of more than 1,000 pages, more than half in Nahuatl—the profound loss of draft material, both textual and pictorial, has gone largely unremarked upon. (For the colonial historian, accustomed to the morsels from the archive, it actually might seem audacious to ask for more.) Thus, the codex has had to act as both monument and archive, as if it alone could provide answers to its own riddles.

At first blush, letting imagination do the work of creating evidence hardly fits within scholarly norms. Yet it is of course already the case that some acts of imaginative narration are sanctioned within disciplinary inheritances: there seems nothing particularly controversial about attributing, based on connoisseurial assessments, certain of the codex's pages to the 'Master of the Three-Quarter Profiles' or the 'Master of Complex Skin Coloring.' These too, however, are *fabula*—ghosts conjured by the art historian, voiced and given life through words. *That* method and mode is familiar and authorized (if sometimes contested) within an art historical lineage. The 'Master of Complex Skin Coloring' is, by certain art historical standards, a documented artist, just one lacking and awaiting a proper name to be pulled from the archive.

The point of fabulation is not whether the story one tells is 'true.' Rather, fabulation reveals archival gaps where they had not necessarily been appreciated. Above, we tried, in the absence of the Florentine Codex makers' own words, to empathically describe their experiences as they struggled through the codex's production during an epidemic. This fabulation, in turn, exposed something *else* absent from the archive—draft materials gone missing, perhaps deliberately destroyed. Seeing the codex's composition in this light might provoke additional questions, particularly around the limited impact of the Florentine Codex on other Indigenous manuscript production: physical drafts, the image programs, and maybe even the artists themselves had little resonance beyond Sahagún's project. That is to say, a history of what we do not have opens productively back onto the history of what we do.

Historicizing authorship's allure

Three years before the frantic scramble by the Florentine Codex's creators to finish their work, a much more mundane document was drawn up in a nearby Mexico City neighborhood. This was a careful record of the tributes owed and paid in 1574 by Indigenous residents. The accuracy of its contents was attested to by the repeated signatures of the high-ranking *gobernador* (Figure 10). That signature, with its confident capital 'A' and decorative top loop followed by a bold 'Val,' stands for 'Antonio Valeriano.'[12] Valeriano was singled out by Sahagún as one of the principal grammarians who worked on the text of the Florentine Codex, and his broad archival presence is seen in documents like this one, which he penned in his official capacity as the head of the Indigenous government of

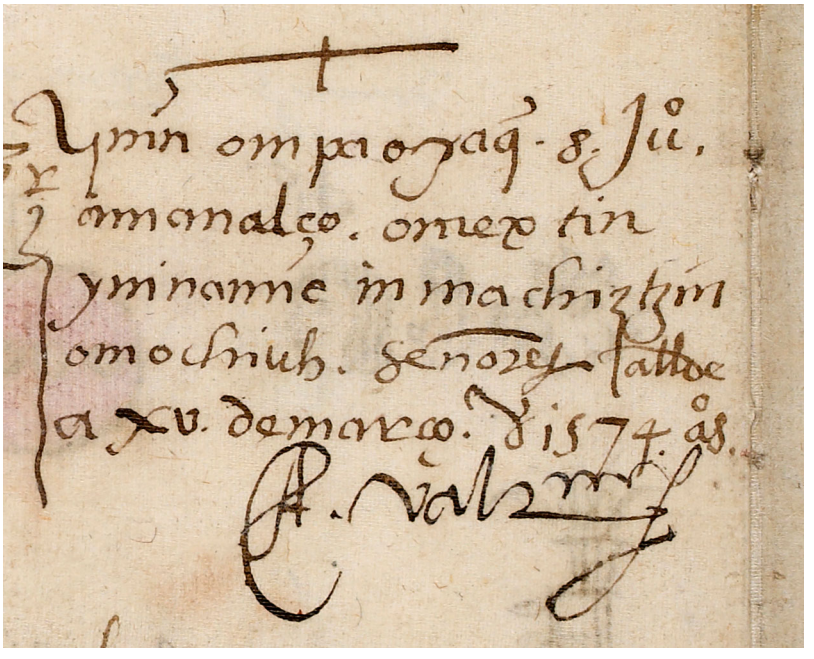

Figure 10. Unknown artists, scribes, and Antonio Valeriano, *Libro de tributos de San Pablo Teocaltitlan*, f. 14v, 1574. Ms. Mexicain 376. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

Mexico-Tenochtitlan, a post he held for 26 years. Given his connection to Sahagún's oeuvre and his own documentary production, Valeriano might seem the corrective to the unnamed painters of the Florentine Codex, a fleshed-out creator as opposed to the specters conjured above; as an Indigenous writer richly documented by the colonial archive, his textual production offers a compensatory case for the marked absences of Indigenous painters and artisans. Even better, Valeriano's own confident assertion of a particular subjectivity—literate, a master penman, a verifying authority—can be traced in the ascenders and descenders that his pen impressed upon the heavy linen paper of the tribute record.

The documents that are signed by Valeriano include this tribute list, letters to the Spanish king, and administrative records of the cabildo of Mexico-Tenochtitlan. They allow one to paint a biographic picture: a skillful administrator able to work with the viceroy and judges of the Real Audiencia; a student of Habsburg bureaucracy and notarial conventions; a subject who could manipulate the codes needed to appeal to the monarch (Connell 2011, 70–89; Mundy 2015; Karttunen 1995). These documents also reveal him to be an eager proponent of Indigenous evangelization (León-Portilla 2015). Yet the portrait they allow tells us as much about the nature of the archive as about Valeriano's subjectivity. Valeriano was an Indigenous intermediary acting to establish an enduring political order, one that afforded him opportunities to sign documents like the tribute record and thereby find preservation within the Habsburg archive.

Apart from this, during his lifetime and well after his death in 1605, Valeriano appears in the writings of men who knew him and praised his skills as a Latinist (Torquemada 1986, 1:607, 3:114–15). In a didactic Latin tract published in 1554, Francisco Cervantes

de Salazar describes him as a teacher of Latin to Indigenous pupils 'in no respect inferior to our [Spanish] grammarians' (1953, 62). In the preface to a 1606 book of Nahuatl sermons, the Franciscan Juan Bautista praised Valeriano as 'so great in Latin that he spoke *ex tempore* (even in the final years of old age) with such propriety and elegance that he seemed like Cicero or Quintilian' (Bautista 1606, [xv]).

But beyond these biographical cues, the archive fails this Indigenous creator. Little survives to actually convey his skills as a Latinist—most notably, none of his famous orations. And almost nothing capturing his relationship to literary production can be identified as coming from his own hand (Laird 2016). That is, this famed Indigenous person lacks an archival corpus, and he thus instead became a site of projection. Non-Indigenous authors of the colonial past (and, as we will see, in the twentieth century as well) have used Valeriano to limn a particularly desirable Indigenous subjectivity: that of a willing rather than resistant colonial subject. For Cervantes de Salazar, professor at the newly founded university, Valeriano was evidence of not only the intellectual capacities of Indigenous people but also the power of humanistic learning. For later Franciscans, like Juan Bautista, Valeriano offered evidence of the efficacy of their evangelization work—an Indigenous Nahua man who had embraced Christianity along with Christian letters. His skills as a Latinist were mobilized to bolster that argument: Cicero and Quintilian were pagan authors whose texts were deployed within a Christianizing context; Valeriano had similarly transcended a pagan past to aid friars in communicating 'the mysteries of the faith' (Bautista 1606, n.p.).

Valeriano's utility as a site of projection would only continue. Valeriano would come to be most celebrated for authorship of esteemed texts like the *Nican mopohua*, a Nahuatl account (published in 1649) that describes Juan Diego's vision of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Today, this is the most important account of the apparition; its language, Nahuatl, bolsters its status as a source close to Indigenous Juan Diego. Yet there is nothing in the extant archival record nor in any contemporary account that connects Valeriano to this or any other apparitional text. Instead, it was the Creole intellectual Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora who in 1680, some three generations after Valeriano's death, asserted that Valeriano had a role. He mentions a manuscript of apparitions (though he does not name it as the *Nican mopohua*) and writes that 'the original in Nahuatl [*Mexicano*] is of the hand [*letra*] of Don Antonio Valeriano *Indio*, who is its true author' (1928, 60).

Sigüenza's confident attribution—as well as his simultaneous creation of Valeriano as author of an apparition narrative—speaks to yet other desires at work and how Valeriano's robust persona but *lack* of extant works allowed him to be mobilized and attached to textual objects. By the seventeenth century, Creole intellectuals sought proof that Christian phenomena—like the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe—were rooted directly in Indigenous America. At stake was the ability to reveal a New World Christianity that existed before the arrival of evangelization. Valeriano's authorship of a text that recounted the miraculous appearance of the Virgin directly to an Indigenous man provided, in the words of Peter Villella, 'evidence of a link between heaven and the New World that did not go through Spain' (2016, xx). What is equally crucial here is Sigüenza's insistence on the Indigenous authorship of the apparition text. His belief that its author was none other than Valeriano lent authority and antiquity to a largely unverifiable and thus updateable account.

When Hartman writes of the 'Venuses' in slavery's archive, women gutted of subjectivity and turned into props of wanton, racialized sexuality, she invokes them as having 'engendered' her. We take this to mean that the contours of Black, diasporic female subjecthood that Hartman herself inhabits have been shaped by these historical ciphers. And we also take it to mean that Hartman, as a writer and intellectual, has been generated by her encounters with these archival fragments and absences. And her attempts to navigate with and describe around these erasures might offer ways to rethink *historical* events and subjectivities as well: as a spectral Indigenous subject, how has Valeriano engendered those who have narrated his story? This raises a slightly different aspect of the relationship between researcher and colonial archive. For Sigüenza, possession of Nahuatl documents, along with works of pictography, indexed an archival survival of Indigenous historical traditions from sixteenth-century New Spain. Sigüenza's encounter with 'Valeriano's' text came at an inflection point in the history of the colony. Sahagún and Juan Bautista had known Valeriano directly and had lived in a New Spain where the intellectual tradition of Indigenous thinkers was rich and immediate. Sigüenza's moment was different: demographic collapse caused by the epidemics had truncated this living tradition. The once-busy scriptorium within the monastery of Santiago at Tlatelolco was now empty. Instead, Indigenous manuscripts, many of them almost entirely pictorial, indexed a now-distant past. As a Creole aspiring to write the history of New Spain, Sigüenza needed a connection to this past. He eagerly acquired the library of don Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, a historian of Indigenous descent; this was one of the best Indigenous manuscript collections in New Spain (Brian 2016). The collection, though, was a double-edged sword. For while it contained historical truths, the frustrating opacity of its various pictographic texts offered an enduring reproach to Sigüenza's interpretive efforts. When Sigüenza identified what he believed to be Valeriano's hand in his manuscript archive, he was granting himself an inroad into, or a workaround for, the particular Indigenous history that the pictographic archive contained.

The Valeriano that Sigüenza found in his collection—literate Indigenous historian, possessor of a now-lost body of knowledge—could produce Sigüenza as a particular type of colonial subject. This is not Hartman's imagined direct descent from her historical actors; Sigüenza's fabulation is, of course, far more colonialist, opportunistic, and violent vis-à-vis its subject. But in many ways, Sigüenza needed his Indigenous counterpart to become a New Spanish historian, to have a genealogy on which his efforts could rest. Nameless creators, unreadable glyphs—these were not enough to authorize his work, his belonging, or his transformation into a person capable of writing the history of New Spain. And unlike pure fiction, Sigüenza's work was indeed 'critical'; it relied on probing an archive, its absences, and trying to work within and around them. Thinking about the capacity of (or even desire for) archival work to engender us as subjects, we might then see Sigüenza's efforts as something more akin to a historical precursor to critical fabulation than to the nineteenth-century forgery we explored above.

Sigüenza y Góngora was just the first of a long line of intellectuals for whom Valeriano has served as a site of projection. The scope of this essay prevents us from tracking all of these historiographic desires. But to offer one example, Valeriano was surmised to be the author of a set of *Cantares mexicanos*, traditional Nahuatl song-poems (Garibay Kintana 1953). This assignation of authorship can be set against a twentieth-century backdrop of nation-building through the resurrection and celebration of Indigenous intellectuals (Lee

2014a; 2014b). A full account of how Indigenous figures engendered writers grappling with the place of indigeneity in a postcolonial nation would have to parse the active debate around Valeriano's authorship of the *Nican mopohua*, whose scholarly supporters are largely members of the Mexican academy (León-Portilla 2000; Martínez Baracs 2015). Alternative scholarship, comprising a large cohort of anglophone scholars (Karttunen 1995; Sousa et al. 1998; Brading 2002; Poole 2017, 89, and passim; Laird 2016), that argues convincingly *against* his authorship of these texts would still do well to look to both past and present efforts to assign authorship not as 'right' or 'wrong' but as a pervasive and ongoing colonial problem of the archive and of authorship, one for which there may be no actual solution.

To respond to contemporary desires to discover Indigenous subjectivity in the archive is, therefore, to set out on a difficult path. Sigüenza, and other colonial-era historians, established the expectation that Indigenous historical knowledge, absent in the present, would be discovered through traces in the archive, and this expectation, in turn, has become a distinguishing feature of how colonial history is written. At the same time, the credibility of Indigenous historical knowledge in such accounts depended on having an author. Multifaceted Valeriano was often the most conveniently available. What are the dangers of this Valeriano historiographic monoculture? In coming to stand for so much Indigenous intellectual production, Valeriano threatens to overshadow other Indigenous creators (Tavárez 2013; McDonough 2014). For other Nahuatl-speaking men and women had visionary experiences and may have set them down, others wrote poetry in elaborate language, and yet others mastered Latin.

While Valeriano was not, as far as we know, an artist, he does allow us to see both the archival absences of Indigenous creators and the ways that the activities of filling in those archival gaps have enabled a host of ideological projections. Whereas before we suggested that fabulation is a useful tool for exposing the limits of the archive by maneuvering around its gaps, in this section we looked at the relationship of Valeriano and Sigüenza, an Indigenous archival figure and his Creole narrator, to position the colonial archive as something that engenders its interlocutors. What is important for us here is that fabulation and forgery exist on a spectrum. Each is a type of response to the archive's fractures. But who we become through those different acts and, in turn, the archive we leave behind are radically different. While not all might believe Sigüenza to have been a *critical* fabulator, he clearly falls elsewhere on the spectrum than the producer of Vásquez's drawings in Bogotá. And thus he, and Valeriano with him, open up a view of how to create recursive relationships between a past that is not so passive and a present that, soon enough, will be history.

The prices we pay

In this essay, we have examined some of the methods and source bases by which one comes to know colonial artists. Of course, all archives have limits. But in the case of the colonial archive, these limits are often extreme and can lead, as explored to this point, to both frustration and fiction. Above, we gestured to the display and collection of colonial art as potential sites for rethinking art history's relationship to the colonial artist. In closing, we turn to an important locus where art historical desires are gauged and actualized—that of the market. The two examples presented explore the maneuvers

that take place around authorship and the archive within different metrics of value—ones with literal, financial ramifications. These are critical to consider, we argue, as colonial Latin American art increasingly filters through the marketplace to take up a visible presence in the institutional structures of museum, university, and private collection. The twinned concepts of archive and identity always play a role, with knowledge, fabulation, and forgery potentially circling around them.

The first example underscores the consequences of attribution, a particularly art historical way of attaching works to authors, and of exhibition for the value of a colonial artist's work. Take, for instance, an oil-on-copper painting of the Virgin's Assumption signed by Nicolás Enríquez in 1744 in Mexico City (Figure 11). Enríquez's painting combines two compositions of the same subject by colonial predecessors: one by Juan Correa in the sacristy of the cathedral of Mexico City and a subsequent iteration by Juan Rodríguez Juárez completed for that church's high altar. That is, Enríquez's painting sat in

Figure 11. Nicolás Enríquez, *The Assumption of the Virgin*, 1744, oil on copper, 105 × 87 cm. © The Phoebus Foundation, Antwerp.

relationship to the highest echelons of New Spanish art—esteemed painters of Mexico City working in one of the most important ecclesiastical spaces in the Spanish Americas. What is more, all of these pictures emerged from a transatlantic relay, each painting carefully quoting the Flemish artist Peter Paul Rubens (Hyman 2017; 2021, 163–207). In short, there was much to recommend Enríquez's picture in its moment.

It is unclear what became of the painting, but by the late nineteenth century it was in a private collection in France, revealed by provenance research completed when the painting was publicly auctioned by Sotheby's in 2004. At that time, the work's estimate was set at $50,000–$70,000, a modest price given the painting's large size, the complexity of its iconography, and the fact that it is signed and dated. The painting sold but failed to draw even the estimate.[13]

Yet the fate of Enríquez's *Assumption* soon changed. The work was included in the widely celebrated exhibition *Painted in Mexico, 1700–1790: Pinxit Mexici*, with venues in Mexico City, Los Angeles, and New York (Katzew 2017). When the painting was again put up for auction at Christie's—within a year of the show's closing in 2018—expectations soared. But the picture exceeded a seller's fantasy, fetching nearly double the upper-range estimate and selling for more than half a million dollars.[14] Some inflation is a natural product of increased attention, which a show like *Painted in Mexico* can lend. Yet we would suggest that this painting's rapid accrual of value did not result merely from being exhibited but from the particular historiographic and scholarly framing that the show provided.

That framework emphasized the importance of named artists and shined a particularly bright spotlight on Enríquez. Although at each venue of *Painted in Mexico* objects were configured differently, all three exhibitions opened with a section titled 'Great Masters.' This section offered less a theme than an implicit claim: that being a named master, one whose biography and professional trajectory can be narrated, both was and still is important. By defining works of art principally in terms of their artists, then, the curators asked viewers to look most pointedly at the *who* (named artists) and the *how* (individual, masterful styles) of these paintings. Of the artists featured in this show, Enríquez emerged with particular luster. But he did so, in no small part, by riding the coattails of his more famed contemporary Juan Rodríguez Juárez. The show opened with a huge altarpiece by Rodríguez Juárez and two paintings that show, first, that picture in situ accompanied by its patron Antonio Valero and, second, the structure in which it was housed (Katzew 2017, 175–76; Hyman 2019, 413–14). While Rodríguez Juárez's altarpiece is ostentatiously signed, the pictures that were paired with it are not. They were rather assigned to Enríquez on this occasion on connoisseurial grounds. Attribution, in this particular episode, also implicitly fleshed out Enríquez's relatively scant biography. For once these paintings are taken to have been made by the artist, we can imagine Enríquez in conversation with and service to Valero, the presumed patron of all three paintings.

Art history, of course, has sanctioned storytelling of this particular sort—and perhaps rightly so—which is the byproduct of the workaday practice of stylistic attribution. But it does have consequences, both historical and material. We might scoff at the price that Enríquez's *Assumption* fetched in the wake of attribution, exhibition, and celebration. Or alternatively, we might see progress in a colonial artist (finally!) competing with his European peers on the open market. Either way, there is little doubt that art historical

practice—and particularly some of art history's entrenched priorities around biography and master-based production—plays potent roles.

As this essay has already made clear, however, motivations can be less high-minded and scholarly. In 1982, Sotheby's offered select libraries and collections something of an archival unicorn: a sixteenth-century manuscript from New Spain, richly illustrated (Figure 12; Bauer 2009). While documents from New Spain do turn up at auction, nothing of this scope had before. The asking price—about $1 million—might thus seem justified. Indeed, the Codex Cardona is a sprawling manuscript of more than 200 bifolios in five unbound volumes. Written in coarse Spanish and containing an account of towns around the Valley of Mexico, its text resembles that of a *visita*, an official account penned by a Crown administrator. Sections also echo *relaciones geográficas*, descriptions of geographic features and economic activities of cities and towns, particularly Indigenous ones. But unlike products of either genre, the Codex Cardona is abundantly illustrated with narrative figures and information about the dynamics of life, much more akin to an Indigenous manuscript. It pictures leaders with town councils and offers pictographic place-names; it even includes a large map of Mexico City with Indigenous zones cordoned off from Spanish settlement. The codex's facture suggests Indigenous authorship: unlike the European laid paper of the visita or relación, its pages are made of a coarse fiber-like native amate (fig-bark paper).

The manuscript also miraculously fills the sparse Indigenous archive of the Valley of Mexico, an area with one of the largest sixteenth-century Indigenous populations but where colonization and urbanism left far fewer sources than one would hope. One of the figures from its pages offers a bookend to the image with which this essay began. In the Codex Yanhuitlán, a bishop and a friar pick up pens to create a document, but

Figure 12. Unknown artist, *Detail of María Barthola from the Codex Cardona*, ca. twentieth century, ink on paper. Private collection. Photograph: Barbara E. Mundy.

neither they nor the codex's Indigenous maker can be named. The Codex Cardona similarly contains a seated figure, whom we catch in the act of writing, and remarkably, that figure is not only a woman but also Indigenous. Clothed in a huipil, she steadies an open volume on a lectern with one hand while holding an arrowlike pen to add text. And here a label names this figure as 'María Barthola.' In an archive where even Indigenous men are rarely named, let alone shown as creators, María Barthola is the rarest of rare birds: an Indigenous female scribe.[15]

Unfortunately, the manuscript that shows her is of dubious authenticity, and no one, therefore, snatched it up. But María Barthola was not invented out of whole cloth; rather, her presence in this forged manuscript represents a calculated extension of the historical record. One 'doña Bartola' is named by Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl—the historian whose collection Sigüenza acquired—as the daughter of the ruler of Ixtapalapa. He writes that she possessed pieces of the family archive, and he used these documents, written 'in Nahuatl [*lengua mexicana*] and Spanish about the great things that happened in this land,' in his own historical account (Alva Ixtlilxochitl 1985, 1:261–93). By the beginning of the twentieth century, Ixtlilxochitl's fragmentary mention of 'doña Bartola' was transformed into doña María Bartola, a figure taken as a singular Indigenous female historian from the early colonial period. In a history of women creators of Mexico published in 1910, for instance, Laureana Wright de Kleinhans declared doña María Bartola 'a star of national feminine literature […] the first woman historian' and lamented a supposed Spanish destruction of her oeuvre (Wright de Kleinhans 1910, 67; see also Monges Nicolau 1997). María Bartola continued to be celebrated in popular histories (Gugliotta 1989).

The Codex Cardona would then effectively and thrillingly restore this historical loss. But it seems specifically contoured for the demands of the contemporary market (Ramírez López 2021). Every year more and more evidence—art historical, historical, and technical—piles up to call the Codex Cardona's authenticity into question. When the manuscript was recently offered at an online auction, its description, normally encomiastic, included the red flag that 'some experts […] doubt its originality.'[16]

These doubts stem from more than just faulty technical features, however. María Bartola's status as a historian may have been produced by a misreading of Ixtlilxochitl's circuitous text, which seems more likely to identify her father as the creator of historical narratives and her as their custodian. Even her name seems something of a fiction. While Ixtlilxochitl identified her as the daughter of the ruler of Ixtapalapa, her father names her not as 'María' but as 'Barbara Pimentel' (Monjarás Ruiz 1980, 301). The unusual name 'Bartola' likely only emerged from a mistranscription of 'Barbara.' Among the many confections surrounding her, then, is the very name set down in the Codex Cardona.

At stake for our purposes is that this codex brings together the forged document with a figure of shaky historical authorship to begin with. Art historical paradigms built on biography and, perforce, archival discovery place a particularly insidious demand on subaltern subjects—subjects whose archival presence is definitionally limited—by asking them to overcome the conditions of their own erasure. Yet ironically, when 'María Barthola' sets her pen to the page in front of her, it is a page already filled with graphic scratches—even less expressive marks than the careful 'signatures' set down in the Codex Yanhuitlán—that do not resolve into writing, let alone a name.

In this essay, we have explored the historiographic mobilization of authors, scribes, and artists from colonial Latin America through their archival traces and imagined personae to stress just how high the stakes that attend authorship and archives really are. The market is but the most obvious place to gauge that operation and one obviously connected to scholarship and its various institutions. By extension, we have called for an extra dose of caution when the specter of authorship—which accompanies attribution or discovery—begins to emerge. There should and will be new archival exploration and revelation. But nothing will fundamentally change the nature of the archive within which historians of colonial Latin American art and literature work—and this despite both academic and adjacent institutional pressures. As this essay charts, however, lament—if one can pause and dwell upon it—can serve as a prompt to think both critically and creatively about what remains and what we make of it.

Notes

1. Jiménez Moreno and Matos Higuera (1940, 63) first identified bishop Sebastián Ramírez de Fuenleal and friar Domingo de Santa María. Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2011, 485) suggest bishop Juan López de Zárate and Domingo de Betanzos. Hermann, van Doesburg, and Oudijk (2015, 60) offer new pagination, adjust the chronology, and argue that the scene represents an ecclesiastic reunion of 1532, without offering firm identifications. Nor does Frassani (2017, 64), who suggests the scene shows a Dominican agreement to establish Yanhuitlán's monastery. Terraciano (2001, 36–38) discusses the page and Mixtec writing.
2. This essay is, in several ways, a companion piece to another essay in which these particular historiographies of authorship are more intensively treated; see Hyman and Mundy 2015.
3. In 1768, a sanctuary was dedicated to this Virgin and her cult statue moved from San Francisco, offering a *terminus ante quem* and possible motive for the drawing.
4. The text reads: 'Vm. bera lo que es de su gusto y me abisara; ba una orilla de una manera y la otra de otra para que vm. bea la que mas le cuadra.'
5. 'Representa el tamaño y ancho que ba demostrado en este papel' (Unidentified author, post-1768).
6. Compare the watermark found on the Virgin and Child with Heawood (1957, 107, entries 1870–873).
7. This provenance distinguished the drawings from those in another album, mentioned in nineteenth-century sources as being owned by the famous Alberto Urdaneta, about whom Pizano says nothing. We are grateful to Alessia Frassani for sharing forthcoming work as we completed this article and particularly for information about the nineteenth-century album in Urdaneta's collection. One should also note the description of the drawings in the now-lost Urdaneta album—mostly anatomical, architectural, or perspectival—does not match the character and content of the drawings that now exist. Moreover, if these were the same drawings, it is impossible to imagine them neither displayed nor mentioned in nineteenth-century celebrations of Vásquez.
8. These desires continue. A recent (2021) publication by Alessia Frassani offers a monographic celebration and argues that the artist's modern singularity extends back to his lifetime. To do so, she draws on the same evidence presented here but gives little weight to its incongruities. In her view, the later paper—half of the watermarks are from the late eighteenth century—must be the result of several subsequent generations of artists tracing Vásquez's at-that-point dispersed paintings; the drawings' uniformity must point to a use of tracing, even though wet-paper tracing was not an early modern practice; the absence of signs of use must point to later artists' memorialization of the designs, rather than implementation (Frassani 2021, 469n16). We find these arguments unpersuasive.

9. For some examples, see Musée du Louvre, 'Mexican art at the Louvre: masterpieces from the 17th and 18th centuries,' https://www.louvre.fr/en/expositions/Mexican-art-louvremasterpieces-17th-and-18th-centuries; New Spanish sections, devoted to monographic treatment, in Brown and Alcalá 2014; Fernández de Calderón 2017; and the 'Meet the Masters' section in Katzew 2017.
10. The grandfather of connoisseurship in art history, Giovanni Morelli, argued that stylistic quirks evident in the rendering of seemingly minor anatomical details would allow a work of art to be assigned to the specific hand of an artist. This method was best codified in Morelli 1880.
11. Terraciano uses different sources to present a similar timeline (2019a, particularly 7–9).
12. Valeriano's (ca. 1530–1605) modern biography was first laid out by Karttunen (1995), followed by León-Portilla (2001, 383–405) and Castañeda de la Paz (2013, particularly 167, 178, 190); the latter argues against charges he was 'not noble' (275–79). See also Castañeda de la Paz 2016.
13. Sotheby's Auction House. n.d.: Nicolás Enríquez (18th century, Mexican), *The Assumption of the Virgin*. https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2004/latin-american-art-n08030/lot.39.html?locale=en.
14. Christie's Auction House. n.d.: Nicolás Enríquez (1704–c. 1790), *The Assumption of the Virgin*. https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/Lot/nicolas-enriquez-1704-c1790-the-assumption-of-the-6172614-details.aspx .
15. An Indigenous woman (labeled 'pintora') who wields a paintbrush in the sixteenth-century Codex Telleriano-Remensis is perhaps another cue for this figure.
16. Live Auctioneers. n.d.: Amate paper, lot 0641. https://www.liveauctioneers.com/item/130189262_amate-paper. Despite those doubts, part of the codex *still* fetched a reported sale price of €190,000.

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