

**Omar
Rivera,
Patrick
Hajovsky**

Southwestern
University,
Texas, US

VISUAL EPISTEMOLOGIES OF RESISTANCE: IMAGING VIRGINS AND SAINTS IN CONTEMPORARY CUSCO

The project of indigenous modernity can emerge from the present in a spiral whose movement is a continuous feedback from the past to the future—a “principle of hope” or “anticipatory consciousness”—that both discerns and realizes decolonization at the same time.

-Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (citing Ernst Bloch)¹

In Andean aesthetics, visibility is a site of epistemic tension and a continual reverberation of colonialism. Through art that aligns with pre-

¹ *Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization*, *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 111:1 (Winter 2012): 95-109, 96.

colonial indigenous epistemologies, contemporary Andean artists resist colonial and post-colonial cultural domination. In particular, they resist viewers' designation of "syncretic" or "hybrid" to produce knowledge about art that has been fashioned by indigenous hands. Epistemological claims of "syncretism" and "hybridity" may be intended to transcend the borders between "us" and "them," between West and non-West, or between eras in Latin America that depend on the presence or absence of Spanish colonists, but such iterations can reinvest viewers in a history of misrecognition. Nevertheless, such terms are not sedimented, for indigenous artists continue to reclaim visibility as they steadfastly hold a mirror toward artistic and epistemic paradigms that attempt to translate, erase, or manage localized colonial differences. Their art allows for an escape from such demands, as they force an aesthetic reflection of being and knowing from within pre-colonial visualities. The alterities of their artworks must be embraced as such, and through the epistemologies that arise from them. Furthermore, Andean artistic practices are not simply filtered through Spanish colonial practices or in a kind of denial that only reaches back to pre-Columbian worlds; rather, indigenous artistic practices are intermingled with the colonial and its power, and must be acknowledged according to their own distinct aesthetic configurations.

Despite an emphasis on the convergence of distinct cultural lineages, syncretism can become invested in mixed social and national identities, concealing the liminal historical and material colonial conditions of artworks, whereas hybridity tries to recover them but yet can project formations of dichotomous dynamics of colonial political power in its

emancipatory utterance and intent.² Regretfully, theorizing through these terms and their synonyms can effectively impose logics of identity and difference in their participation within social forms of power and resistance, and reflect a voyeuristic fulfillment of categories that are foreign to the artworks we will focus on. When engaging art, these terms can both convey an awareness of social differences and impose arbitrary identities and liminalities onto artworks as analytical tools for understanding colonial histories. In this way, with respect to artworks, “we become invested in their misrecognition through time” and contribute, despite our appreciation and best intentions, to colonizing visualities.³

Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, drawing from indigenous Andean epistemologies, offers an alternative aesthetic approach to “syncretism” and “hybridity” through the Aymara concept of *ch’ixi*.⁴ Generally, this concept refers to the appearance of “something that is and is not at the same time” and discerns the possibility of relations that are not defined by identity and difference, or by fusion as destabilizing this dichotomy. In this sense, an artwork can be perceived simultaneously as composed of two contrasting elements and as being a mesh of them, yielding a thirdness that in-stills juxtaposed elements that dynamically blur together. In this thirdness, an artwork can be and not be indigenous, can be and not be colonial—it can be both and it can be neither. The visuality

² Dean, Carolyn and Leibsohn, Dana. (2003). Hybridity and Its Discontents: Considering Visual Culture in Colonial Spanish America. *Colonial Latin American Review* 12 (1), 5-35.

³ Hajovsky, Patrick and Rivera, Omar. Syncretism and Missed Encounters in Peru, *Latinx Spaces*. Retrieved from: <https://www.latinxspaces.com/latinx-art/syncretism-and-missed-encounters-in-peru>. See also the regional version in Spanish by the same authors, Sincretismo y desencuentros en el Cusco. *Contrastes* (2013), 8-13.

⁴ Rivera Cusicanqui, *Ch’ixinakax utxiwa*. See also Rivera Cusicanqui, Silvia. (2015). La universalidad de lo *ch’ixi*. Miradas de Waman Puma. In *Sociología de la imagen: Miradas Ch’ixi desde la historia andina*. Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón Ediciones.

at play here is like a pointillism which produces an environmental color, or that of textiles in which threads with distinct colors both blur and remain apart as if constantly coming in and out of focus, or the iridescence that, like a rainbow, seems to emerge from a surface as the viewer's angle or illumination source changes.

In the works we discuss below, this visuality applies to indigenous and Spanish iconographies (shimmering wings that are of both angels and macaws, and of neither, for example). *Ch'ixi* as an aesthetic form could be translated superficially as "hybridity" or "syncretism", yet it is not heir to scholarly and political approaches that remain within or react to epistemologies of identity and difference. Instead, Western eyes need to learn from artworks to see and know them through "*miradas ch'ixi*," that is, "*ch'ixi gazes*". In the conclusion we return to this point in order to further situate our discussion in relation to analytical concepts of colonial and postcolonial art, such as "hybridity", "syncretism", "mestizaje", and "decolonial aesthetics".

While the contemporary art scene in Cusco is thriving, we have chosen to focus on images created by the contemporary artists and instructors at the Escuela de Bellas Artes Quispe Tito, Richard Peralta and Edwin Jesus Quispecuro Nina. These artists are part of the New Cusqueño Arte movement, which is inspired by the style and iconography of colonial-period indigenous painters, mixing Renaissance and Baroque styles with contemporary technologies in the visual arts. Peralta's work reflects upon the political violence in Peru and the environmental destruction caused by globalization. Quispecuro Nina's work re-centers Andean women from the idealized colonial model of the Madonna in order to critique their social and cultural erasure. Moreover, these artists elicit an

epistemology informed by *ch'ixi* along visual registers of Andean cosmologies (specifically in terms of formal and elemental qualities) and iconographies. Their works can be regarded as visual performances that not only undermine dominant parameters of Western visibility, but also reveal interrelated perceptual, cosmological and epistemic dimensions of indigenous decolonial resistance. While bringing an indigenous, resistant aesthetic into relief, indigenous terms and concepts enveloped in *ch'ixi* help to elucidate a non-objectifiable cosmic relational interweaving, that, we contend, is a principle of Andean visibilities remaining in the colonial and postcolonial eras.⁵ Such terms, we argue below, enable the articulation of critical epistemic stances that do not draw from the concepts of “syncretism” and “hybridity”. Through this resistance, Peralta and Quispecuro Nina formulate an under-theorized and multi-layered indigenous visibility in which, for example, contemporary Andeans are cast as Christian saints and devotional icons of the Virgin.⁶

***Ch'ixi* as an Aesthetic Principle**

Ch'ixi is an aesthetic that has been observed but not fully understood by Western scholars. Yet, in Cusco, where *ch'ixi* is sensed and lived every day, artists allow its paradox to inform artistic invention and corresponding visual practices, especially in relation to time and ancestry as they figure in colonial and postcolonial conditions. In such a creative process, an epistemology is formed as an emanation of a city submitted to Andean cosmology, which weaves past and present through

⁵ The philosophical source of Andean cosmologies is Estermann, Josef. (1998). *Filosofía Andina*. Quito: Abya Yala.

⁶ See María Lugones' critique of Quijano in (2010). Toward a Decolonial Feminism, *Hypatia*, 25(4), 742-59.

a *ch'ixi* process.⁷ This turns the city into a recurrent and material cosmic fabric offering a vista of living, persevering, ancestral time—a thirdness that eludes the dichotomy of past and present. Such a fabric is constantly being engaged experientially, as Cusco is the only major metropolitan center in Latin America that still retains its pre-Columbian footprint. Though much of its fine architecture was dismantled to build the new colonial city, the stones that define the streets of the imperial Inka capital are left intact, and the city thus retains some of the space and character it had in pre-colonial times. Moreover, Cusco is a hub for global tourism, not least because it is the landing point for Westerners who look forward to fulfill their 'bucket list' at Machu Picchu. Nevertheless, in this environment, indigenous and mestizo artists are mobilizing ancestral epistemologies of *ch'ixi* to claim the temporalities, aesthetic centrality and distinctiveness of the city. They are developing a modern artistic movement that is global in its resonance with Western images yet also indigenous Andean in its aesthetics, negotiating pre-colonial and colonial visualities all the while.

The *ch'ixi* rendering of past and present affects the artistic imagination so as to inform artworks where images of apparently heterogeneous pre-colonial and colonial timeframes become interwoven. In them, there are translucent dominant images that let suppressed images shine through, creating imaginal layerings that disrupt colonized cultural and social hierarchies. There are images that begin as residual fragments of the destruction of cultures by colonization but then become phagocytic, ingesting what is not of them and enmeshing with it, creating monstrous

⁷ For recent discussions of pre-Colonial temporalities in the Andes see Swenson, Edward and Roddick, Andrew P. (Eds.). (2018). *Constructions of Time and History in the Pre-Columbian Andes*. Louisville, CO: University Press of Colorado.

and beautiful images that belong nowhere yet can be concretely instantiated in colonial and post-colonial art and ceremonial rites.⁸ The past in these artworks is not one that can be dug up through temporal logics that yield a syncretic present, or a hybrid present in which conflicting socialities can be discerned and disarticulated. These artworks are in diverse temporalities that may be described as simultaneity, spiralism, cyclicity, and spectrality, as in the stretching out of the present to allow for the co-inhabitation and blurring of heterogeneous socialities.⁹ That is, the temporal dimensions of colonial and postcolonial contemporary artworks can submit images (and their historical, cultural and social contexts) to *ch'ixi* processes that shape and vitalize them.

The artworks we will study teach us how to sense them, effectively initiating us into a visual epistemology rooted in pre-Columbian cosmologies more than in explicit and defined projects of social critique. In this sense, they continue an aesthetics that began in the colonial era with the Cusco School of Painting.¹⁰ In them, *ch'ixi* is foregrounded as a principle of reciprocity or *ayni*. As we have discussed, it names two elements that both maintain their distinctness while meshing with one

⁸ See Chapter 2 in Anzaldúa, Gloria. (2015). *Light in the Dark / Luz en lo oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

⁹ We are referring to Alejandro Vallega's analysis of anachronic temporalities in decolonial aesthetics. See his book (2014). *Latin American Philosophy from Identity to Radical Exteriority*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press; and Rivera, Omar. (2017). Reading Alejandro Vallega toward a Decolonial Aesthetics. *Comparative and Continental Philosophy*, 9 (2), 162-73.

¹⁰ As with other local traditions in the colonial viceroyalty of Peru, the Cusco School of Painting developed out of a regional interest in formulaic Christian subject matter that was represented in a realistic style derived from Seville and filtered through Lima. One of the defining moments of the School, the split of guilds in 1688 between Spanish and indigenous master painters, allowed the latter not only opportunities to invent upon the visual presentation of religious themes by incorporating indigenous subject matter but also the promotion of indigenous visualities that lended themselves to Christianity in the Andes.

another in a third expanse that eludes, yet is not a reaction to, logics of identity and difference. This is the expanse of the relational and reciprocal cosmos or *pacha*. And it is also the realm of witnessing, an act that is itself only possible as *ch'ixi*, an act of implication and distinction, which is also a call to reciprocity. Perhaps this is the meaning of *ñawpa pacha*, which names both ancestral times of the past and, literally, the “cosmos in the eye”, as if the cosmos witnesses us and calls us to maintain reciprocities while it interweaves our histories, socialities and natural settings. This “mirada *ch'ixi*” inhabits the images below.

Elemental Aesthetics of *Ch'ixi: Puriy*

Puriy is a Quechua word that can denote a specific kind of emplaced potency and movement of mountains and of rivers. It is a *ch'ixi* gathering of flow and stasis, as when sunlight bathes mountainsides or shines on stones, making them appear as water. In these cases *puriy* is a third phenomenality: not of stone, not of light, but also of both of them.¹¹ It cannot be readily envisioned, especially insofar as it is not like transport, locomotion, or other movements usually attributed to objects. Instead, seeing *puriy* involves a visuality turned toward the elements: light and water have a metamorphic effect on things and landscapes that make them appear in an in-stilled movement and with kinetic energy. It is a *ch'ixi* in which, for instance, light is reflected onto an object through the colors that reflect from other surfaces, which are perceived as dependent upon and blended with their light source. According to a sixteenth-century Quechua prayer to the God Wiracocha, it is also the movement

¹¹ Our discussion of an elemental aesthetics draws from John Sallis' work. See Sallis, John. (2018). *Elemental Discourses*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.

through which the cosmos or *pacha* can be seen as ordering the reciprocal relations that sustain life.¹² In these relations, elements interweave with one another without losing themselves, thus creating a third expanse where cosmic reciprocities transpire. Such reciprocities are evident when, gathered in a stone *intihuatana* (“hitching post of the sun”), reflected light manifests cosmic movement and allows for the cyclical organization of time, without which communities would lack agriculture.¹³ The visibility of *puriy*, then, is a gathering of sense toward the kinetic stillness of the cosmos, and implies exposure and intimacy with the presence of a force of cosmic ordering (*kamay*) that is the work of Wiracocha. Inka aesthetics is oriented (especially in stonework) toward an elemental visibility that teases out *puriy*. This is a visibility through which the ancestral time of the cosmos or *pacha* is seen as emanating from mountains, landscapes and rivers, the time that weaves the movement of the stars, of the seasons, of communities that gather in festivals, and of the rhythms of rituals and economies. As such it is an aesthetic, ontological, and epistemological enactment.

Stone is a preeminent element with regard to the visibility of *puriy*. Not only does it seem to move when exposed to water and sunlight, but it also shelters kinetic energy that resides in a tension between the rough and well-hewn stonework. In Sacsayhuaman, the Inka fortress outside of Cusco, there are corners in between large stone walls in which boulders

¹² Cummins, Tom and Mannheim, Bruce. (2011). The River around Us, the Stream within Us: The Traces of the Sun in Inka Kinetics, *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 59/60 (Spring/Autumn), 6. The citation is from Juan de Santa Cruz Pachacuti Yamqui’s *Relación de Antigüedades Desde el Reyno del Peru*.

¹³ For a discussion of “intihuatana” and pre-Columbian time, see Seoane, Francisco and Culchicón-Venegas, María José. (2018). Hitching the Present to the Stars: The Architecture of Time and Space in the Ancient Andes. In Swenson, Edward and Roddick, Andrew P. (Eds.). (2018). *Constructions of Time and History in the Pre-Columbian Andes* (239-262). Louisville, CO: University Press of Colorado.

are given curvature in such a way that one gets disoriented, as if staring at a choppy sea. This disorientation drastically affects a seeing that would be oriented toward objects, toward their identities and differences, rather than toward the reciprocities between them. This stony kinesis and sense of disorientation in and of vision, however, are perhaps key to a modulation of visuality that has remained as an aesthetic form and is manifest even in contemporary Andean art. The aesthetic effect of *puriy* is the sense that the cosmos is alive, a fabric that is constantly in processes of interweaving, and demanding reciprocity with it. This demand does not occur in the abstract; rather, it destabilizes bodies and perceptual patterns invested in objectifying stances that lead to controlling, instrumental and self-centered dispositions. In particular, it forces vision to be able to see not an object but the presence of a witnessing, cosmic sentience.

The elemental aesthetics of *ch'ixi* has a contemporary presence in the Virgin series by Quispecuro Nina. In the radiant splendor of the portrait of Misky Warmi, light passes through resin so as to illuminate our vision of a young Andean woman (figure 1). The effect of opacity and the translucence of the medium lifts her from her social invisibility into the cosmic realm of *pacha*. The Virgin series highlights contemporary Andean women, each eulogized as the venerable savior, a medium for salvation. The artist has suppressed Christ's role in these images, and the subsidiary role once given to the singular Virgin regains a central prominence in portraits of Andean women. Moreover, in the Virgin series, Andean women, the most marginalized in colonial patriarchal rule, may be understood to engage in a spiraling or "feedback" temporality and regain their indigenous centrality as the space-time



[Fig. 1]. Edwin Quispecuro Nina, *Misky Warmi*, 2016. Mixed media layered in resin: photograph transparency, gold leaf, oil, bougainvillea flowers. 20 x 30 cm.

earth goddess Pachamama, and as embodying *puriy* in the in-stilled presence of the portrait within the stony yet translucent work.

Amidst the encaustic sunburst that emanates from the dream-like vision of the young woman, bougainvillea petals are sustained in the resinous layers. The plant, which is seen all over Latin America and no less in the Andes, thrives even in industrial zones, offering a colorful permanence to the otherwise ephemeral portrait. To further evade the epithetic reference of Christ, the thorns of the plant are here removed, and yet the soft petals serve as a kind of crown of thorns over her brow. A flaming heart residing at the bottom outside of the composition reminds one of the religious undertones and of the metamorphosis of salvation from

masculine to feminine, together as one (and not one) in the image of a young and beautiful Andean woman.¹⁴

The Presence of Invoked Art

Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of "invoked art" as an art of *nepantla* can turn our attention on *ch'ixi* as an aesthetic experience of "presence". Even though they do not constitute the same epistemological position, Anzaldúa's *nepantla* is, like Rivera Cusicanqui's *ch'ixi*, an:

in-between state, [...] that uncertain terrain one crosses when moving from one place to another; when changing from one class, race, or sexual position to another; when traveling from the present identity to a new identity. [...] *Nepantla* is the place where at once we are detached (separated) and attached (connected) to each of our several cultures. [...] *Nepantla* is the midway point between the conscious and unconscious. *Nepantla* is a place where we can accept contradiction and paradox.¹⁵

In this respect, "presence" in and of *nepantla* refers to the mode of being of the artwork and to a kind of sensing triggered by it.

First, "presence" means a pause of the passage of time, a kind of stillness in the work that evokes a different temporal dimension. This is a deep time that Anzaldúa finds in totem poles, cave paintings, and rituals that

¹⁴ There is an unexplored relationship between Quispecuro Nina's work and Chicana artist Yolanda López's paintings using the iconography of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Our discussion here is a bridge between them, especially in terms of Gloria Anzaldúa's aesthetics.

¹⁵ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 56.

extend to the everyday household. These works show the in-stilled passing of ancestral time. Yet, this temporality is not only ancestral, but it is also cosmic. It is the time that is present, even visible, in the perception of landscapes that witness the passing of human time. For landscapes, humanity is but a transitory, shallow carved imprint. This form of temporal aesthesis resonates with the Quechua term for “ancient times”: *ñawpa pacha*, which can be translated as the cosmic past in the eye, or the cosmos as the visible past, or perhaps the past as the eye of the cosmos. Here witnessing and ancestral time come to define a modality of presence of a sacred artwork, and a visuality elicited by a cosmic past staring back.¹⁶

Second, “presence” means participation in the cosmos. “Invoked art” is not autonomous or geared toward psychological or emotional control. In fact, it is never just by itself in the sense that it is embedded within cosmic relations of reciprocity that are not at its disposal. These relations extend through communities, and into their natural settings and landscapes. “Invoked art” brings to relief various formations of these reciprocal relations as it comes to be enacted and ritualized. The artwork spreads into and with the cosmos, enhancing a sense of interrelatedness and human and non-human sentience that touches us. In other words, “invoked art” invokes the presence of the cosmos in a tangible ancestral time. This invocation reaffirms the reciprocal relations that embed communities in a sentient cosmos through a sense (including visual sense) of having their ancestors and landscapes as interpellating witnesses.

¹⁶ We are referring here to Anzaldúa’s notion of witnessing in aesthetics. See Anzaldúa, Gloria. (2015). *Bearing Witness: Their Eyes Anticipate the Healing*. In Cantú, Norma E. (Ed.). (2015). *Ofrenda: Liliana Wilson’s Art of Dissidence and Dreams* (31-34). College Station: Texas A&M University Press.



[Fig. 2]. Edwin Quispecuro Nina, *Camilita la Panadera dulce como el azúcar del pan de Paucartambo q se vende a lado del puente Carlitos III*, 2019. Oil and gold leaf on canvas. 120 x 90 cm.

Such presence is perceptible in the works of indigenous artists whose subjects are actual Cuzqueños doing what they do amidst a growing global vista. Quispecuro Nina describes his *Camilita la Panadera dulce como el azúcar del pan de Paucartambo q se vende a lado del puente Carlitos III* (figure 2) as an interpretation of “la dulzura,” the “fragile identity of the Dance of the Bakers of Paucartambo”.¹⁷ The mask she wears follows from a long-standing tradition of indigenous alterity that was performed in religious and civic festivals, in which her ethnicity is

¹⁷ Personal communication with Hajovsky, November 2019.

cast within a liminal moment by the white mask. The masked performance can be seen not as a representation of a particular racial/ethnic identity, but as attesting to the complex social fabric of Andean culture in which social categories do not fit and are at times enmeshed.

The English translation of “pan de oro” as “gold leaf” fails to capture the painting as the colonial, material *ch'ixi* between the sustenance of the warm bread sold by the road by Paucartambo bakers and the transformation of the precious metal into a medium of monetary and anagogic value. As gold leaf resides on the surface of the painting in baroque flourishes of vines and leaves, it also constitutes the medallion behind the angelic winged dancer as both a pattern for the Eucharistic bread and a solar backdrop that manifests the sacredness of *inti*. Yet the medallion is at the same time of neither religiosity; it is as a third. The dancer holds an in-stilled pose reminiscent of *puriy*, her hands reside on her hips in the rapid movement of the dance. Yet she approaches somewhat menacing behind the stoic mask and festival hat, her long hair tightly bound into cords by pink ribbon.

The gold leaf is not just a flourish to remind us of the surface of the painting, though, as it serves as a kind of barrier guarding the viewer from the dancer. It also evokes, in a flat temporality, the fine lace that drapes around Camilita's arms; its flourishes mimic her gesture as the quick thrust of the hip and shoulder of her lively dance. The artist's subject recalls the bodily connection between sustenance and the pleasures of life, the sugar crystals sprinkled onto the bread, and the festivals that are at once traditional means of cultural solidarity and transmission yet also have become in more recent years the objects of the tourist spectacle. The dancer in her in-stilled movement opens thus

a realm of communal reciprocity while standing as witness, in a *ch'ixi* kind of gesture where different cultural lineages in different temporalities are discernible while blurring into one another. The in-stilled movement of the painting, the invoked presence of Camilita, can inform ways in which historical, cultural and social knowledges are rendered and transmitted in a bursting of simultaneous pasts and presents. These temporalities are held still in the presence of a witnessing stance that elicits a *ch'ixi* responsiveness as historical consciousness. This responsiveness is a visual epistemology oriented toward processes of cultural formation and transmission.¹⁸

Witnessing, Reciprocity and Resistance

A *ch'ixi* aesthetics makes the works above both colonial and indigenous, but yet neither of these without the other. It exposes a third aesthetic realm where iconographic and cultural enmeshment and distinctness are not contradictory. This is a phenomenality with an elemental logic, as when light shines on stone, and results in an in-stilled luminosity of what may be called stonelight. The accomplishment of Quispecuro Nina's work is to allow the aesthetic effect of *ch'ixi* and *puriy* configure an ancestral, witnessing, invoked presence, eliciting the animating of reciprocities that sustain communities resisting colonial and postcolonial conditions. In Peralta's paintings, witnessing arises

¹⁸ See the discussion of aesthetics and the formation of a historical consciousness in relation to the work of Alejandro Jaar in Vallega, Alejandro. (2014). *Latin American Philosophy from Identity to Radical Exteriority*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

differently. Instead of staring back at the viewer as in Quispecuro Nina's work, Peralta's characters remain internal to the figural composition.¹⁹

Peralta's *En casa del herrero*, for instance, is a quote from Spanish painter Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez's *Apolo en la Fragua de Vulcano* (figure 3). Here, Apollo, the ancient Greek sun god, is not informing Vulcan of Venus' infidelity as in Velázquez's work, but instead interrupts the workshop of an anonymous conquistador, perhaps Pizarro himself. We are now transported to the colonial Andes where Spaniards, in the upper left, melt down Inka statues in order to make the golden swords forged in the workshop, some of which are hung above the conquistador as a series of crosses. Peralta implicates and interweaves military colonization with Catholicism and the market extraction of the prized metal from the Americas. He also recalls Andean religiosities in which gold had already been formed into sacred Inka images, like the ones found archaeologically in shrines on mountaintops, the sacred *apu* of the Inka. The Spanish referred to these figures as "idols", and under the guise of Christianity, they arrange them here to await their fate in the smelting pot. The material gold is thus a *ch'ixi* in which colonial and indigenous layers are both discerned and blurred. The sword-crosses symbolically refer to the military and spiritual conquests as well as the pragmatic transformation of metal for export to Spain. This is no less explicit than with a lone painting on the wall depicting the death of Atahualpa, and, on the mantle to the right, a series of mythological monsters from the Greco-Roman past, broken and in disarray, referring to the transmogrification

¹⁹ Liliana Wilson is another artist influential in Chicana feminism that has resonances with our discussion, especially in terms of stillness and witnessing in painting. See Cantú, Norma E. (Ed.). (2015). *Ofrenda: Liliana Wilson's Art of Dissidence and Dreams*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press.



[Fig. 3]. Richard Peralta, *En casa del herrero*, 2015. Oil on canvas. 190 x 130 cm.

of the ancient creatures by an infidelity forged from the Spanish Conquest of Peru.²⁰

In a glimmer of hope and desperation—a spiraling “feedback from the past to the future”—a young Andean boy, painted with war paint of the Amazon, escapes on the left with a large Inka sculpture and runs into our space feverishly glancing back at the unfolding scene. Transcending space and time, the boy is both witness and chief protagonist, acting to restore the reciprocities disrupted by colonialism, and absconding the sculpture in a way that is invisible to the colonialist’s eyes. The sculpture, animated by the boy, eerily looks directly at us, implicating us as active

²⁰ Peralta’s painting continues a colonial tradition of reframing the story of the capture of Atahualpa explored by Cornejo Polar, Antonio. (2000). *Writing in the Air: Heterogeneity and the Persistence of Oral Tradition in Andean Literatures*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.



[Fig. 4]. Koricancha-Santo Domingo, Cusco, 15th-16th centuries. Photo: Aaron Jiménez.

yet distant witnesses. Peralta's painting underscores our witnessing as a kind of seeing that was veiled to the conquistador and by the West—a seeing and knowing of *ch'ixi* as a cosmic reciprocity that remains.²¹ We, as viewers, also reside in between, both as witnesses to the boy's escape into our space from the destruction and dismantling of ancient cultures and incapable of aiding him in their recovery.

Cusco's Artistic Imagination in Resistance

These artists render a resistance of colonialism, past and present, as a disruption of reciprocities, that is, as an economic and social system that is based on exploitation of indigenous communities and the establishment of arbitrary social hierarchies. Cusco manifests this resistance as a lived and performed experience through the Inka streets and aesthetics of water, light and stone that are now punctuated with tourist markets. The city's presence is found in scale at its Koricancha-Santo Domingo

²¹ This discussion of coloniality as loss of reciprocity parallels Lugones's analysis of gender in the Andes in *Toward a Decolonial Feminism*.

complex (figure 4). Koricancha, “Golden Enclosure”, was the main complex dedicated to the sun and once held a golden statue of the sun god called PUNCHAO, which is long gone but perhaps looked like the one held by the boy in Peralta’s painting (figure 3).²² The sculpture was said to have been in the most sacred location in the curved interior of the wall, the same location where the Dominicans placed their high altar. A door connects the interior axis mundi of the church altar with the exterior upper space of the curved wall, where priests would perform mass for large numbers of neophytes in the early colonial period. Architecturally, much like the space of the city, Santo Domingo-Koricancha is a *ch’ixi* that is expressed not only in the Catholic attempt to convert indigenes, but also in the Andean conversion of Catholicism.

As part of the commission by the Dominicans of Cusco to fill their church with renewed contemporary paintings, Peralta spent over a decade creating numerous images of Christ, the Virgin, and saints, incorporating local audiences as subjects of the figural imagery (figures 5, 6). One of the stations of the cross found on the piers supporting the church of Santo Domingo could well be a photograph taken during the Crucifixion (had photographic imagery existed at that time), implicating the viewer as both voyeur and witness of the torture of the Savior (figure 5). This is one of the few places where the medium of paint has been allowed to update the religious imagery of the Church, whose art around the world still clings to its heydays in the Renaissance and Baroque eras. Peralta produces exalting results. Koricancha-Santo Domingo is filled with images such as these, which picture contemporary Cusqueños as part of

²² We are drawing from a discussion of PUNCHAO in Dean, Carolyn. (2010). *A Culture of Stone: Inka Perspectives on Rock*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.



[Fig. 5]. Richard Peralta, *Cristo Clavado en la Cruz*, 2009. Church of Santo Domingo, Cusco.

the religious imagery of the past. The scenes both reach back into biblical times and project into the present; the use of photographic realism to depict the scenes transports the viewer back and forth in the presence of a sacred space, and in one of the primary tourist destinations.

In this image there is *ch'ixi* not only of past and present, but also of religiosities. Presenting Christ on the ground suffering the pain of the nail crushing his hand, he is nothing but human. One can see it in his eyes, both staring at the nail and out through the picture plane, as if asking that someone see his moment of suffering, as if needing a human witness. In this moment there is an inversion of the divine that recalls César Vallejo's poem *The Eternal Dice*, which Peralta certainly knows:

My God, if you would have been man,

You would now know how to be God;
But you, who were always well,
Feel nothing of your creation.
man suffers you: the God is him!²³

This inversion of the divine is at play in the possibility of witnessing the suffering of the oppressed. At the same time, through the perspective of this image, through the engagement of Christ with the viewer, a *chakana*—the Andean-Christian cross—is formed as a symbolic bridge, a place of transition between different cosmic regions.²⁴ In this painting Peralta is humanizing Christ by embedding his pain into a logic of seeing and being seen, of human and cosmological reciprocity, a logic of *pacha*. And he does it in a *ch'ixi* aesthetic in which Andean and Christian religiosity both remain distinct and enmesh, opening a third expanse in which the divine is also human without contradiction.

Like Quispecuro Nina, Peralta's early training included copying colonial-period religious art, thus enveloping himself in the process of painting of the Cusco School in order to escape its bounds. This process may echo the modernist concept of anthropophagous, or, in the Catholic mode of the colonial and modern periods, Communion, in which one literally, not symbolically, eats the flesh of Christ.²⁵ Yet *ch'ixi* signifies another level of embodiment, a space of witnessing not abstracted but enmeshed and distinct, reliant on visual epistemologies based on the principle that the

²³ This is my translation. The Spanish version can be found in Eschleman, Clayton (Ed. and Trans.). (2007). *César Vallejo: The Complete Poetry*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

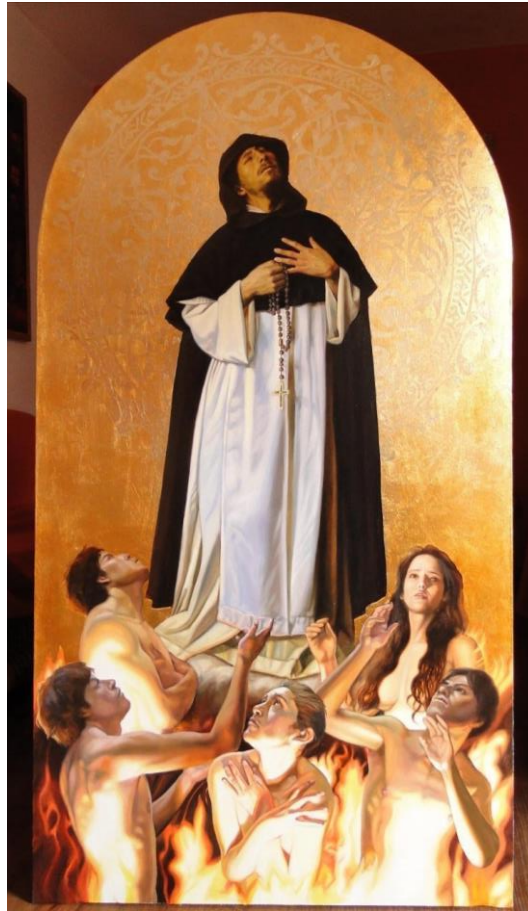
²⁴ Estermann, Josef. (1998). Apu Taytayku, *Studies in World Christianity*, 4, 7.

²⁵ This process of consuming and absorbing the colonial may remind us of the Brazilian modernist movement of Oswald de Andrade's manifesto and Tarsila do Amaral's painting on the subject.

past is present as a sensible in-stilled witnessing cosmos. Peralta's Santo Domingo commission relays the permanent presence of the past and future by centering on the religious subject of the stations of the cross. He relies upon a visuality that is informed not only by the realism that was developed in Counter-Reformation painting, but also by modern photography and its unabashed roots in the verisimilitude of the moment. Peralta bridges our distance to the divine in Santo Domingo through the use of photographic realism in order to depict the Passion of Christ in a way that is not commonly found in religious spaces, presenting the events of two thousand years ago as a series of contemporary "snapshots".

Beyond Purgatory

Peralta's image *Almas en el purgatorio* presents Saint Dominic in an ambiguous or metaphorical space defined by a textured golden background, undergirded by a group of naked human souls in the flames—four men and one woman—in the lowest register (figure 6). The four men are enraptured with gestures of supplication and redemption as they make pleas toward the saint. The only figure to directly engage the space outside of the canvas is the woman, who could well be a portrait of a contemporary Andean woman. Her expression is distinctively calm and whose gaze passes above the viewer's right, as if she visualizes a different kind of third space. In this vision, she is not as enthralled by the possibility of redemption as the men are.



[Fig. 6]. Richard Peralta, *Almas en el purgatorio*, 2012. Convent of Santo Domingo, Cusco.

Purgatory relies on a concept of a division of heaven and hell, one which did not exist in Andean cosmologies, yet it is a third, liminal space. In some respects purgatory may appear to a Westerner to be like *nepantla* or *ch'ixi*, yet it is defined within a moral exegesis of good and bad deeds, rather than reciprocal acts. Colonization and modernity appear in the guise of a process of redemption and salvation of indigenous peoples, a logic that enforces their oppression. In this sense, there can be redemption in the concepts of syncretism and hybridity as applied to colonial and contemporary Andean art. In its fusion of iconographies, “syncretism” can hide the historical conditions of oppression and erase

the concrete relations between oppressor and oppressed. “Hybridity” can recognize these, but makes salient polarities that are not conducive to reciprocity, leaving redemption as a compelling option.

In the artworks we have discussed, there is an alternative, decolonizing logic that necessitates an Andean third visual epistemology. Perhaps the lone woman in Peralta’s painting has come to embody it. She seems as if she is able to simply walk out of the painting into the *ch’ixi* streets of Cusco where she belongs. This painting allows for the sacred to enter into everyday interactions in ways that are not guided by moral or colonial authority but by sustaining reciprocities. Peralta’s and Quispecuro Nina’s virgins and saints are re-envisioned within a cosmology of reciprocity, not of redemptive colonization or liberation. Their works elicit a spiraling instead, or “a ‘principle of hope’ or ‘anticipatory consciousness’—that both “discerns and realizes decolonization at the same time”.

The suggestion here of purgatory as a space that can only be understood in terms of a polarity (heaven/hell, human/sub-human) is not only the basis of a social critique, but also a way in which Peralta’s painting elicits a nuanced aesthetic approach that we have tried to pursue here. Certainly, concepts such as syncretism and hybridity deliberately challenge simple polarizing social-aesthetic categories at the heart of the interpretation of colonial and post-colonial artworks. Yet, as Dana Liebsohn and Carolyn Dean discuss in their seminal essay on Latin American colonial art, “Hybridity and Its Discontents”, polarizing social critiques are insidious even within these conceptualities. In their view, “syncretism” can bolster a creole elite’s appropriation of indigenous art through the fetishization of an indigenous identity, furthering dichotomous colonial social and epistemic structures. “Hybridity” is a concept that does not lend itself to such a fetishization, but emerges as an

emancipatory idea that articulates anti-colonial resistance in a way that draws from narrow, modern notions of liberation and social critique. “Mestizaje”, in turn, as noted by Rivera Cusicanqui, is a sociological concept that can be mobilized by nationalist trends as well as by interests that seek to safeguard structures of internal colonialism.²⁶ In other words, sophisticated aesthetic approaches to the kind of social complexity and resistance at play in Peralta’s and Quispecuro Nina’s work can fall prey to political projects that end up in purgatory.

This point echoes Rivera Cusicanqui’s critique of decolonial theory, especially as developed by Walter D. Mignolo, in *Ch’ixinakax: utxiwa: Una reflexión sobre prácticas y discursos decolonizadores*.²⁷ She shows that even theoretical positions that articulate conceptualities attentive to the relationship between aesthetics, power and epistemology in colonial contexts can effectively participate in social and political demarcations that once again marginalize the very subjects they intend to liberate. For her, this is connected to the way decolonial theory relies on funds from American and European institutions, as well as publishing circles, that have become part of a global economic order. In this respect, by failing to take a non-Eurocentric stance, or by not assuming other decolonial gestures, many indigenous artists can be ostracized for not showing adherence to a language and theory that supposedly explains their artworks. This is certainly the case for Peralta and Quispecuro Nina, who

²⁶ For a more detailed elucidation of these points, see Rivera, Omar. (2020). Mestizajes and Resistant Alterities, *Inter-American Journal of Philosophy*, 11 (1, Spring).

²⁷ Cusicanqui Rivera, Silvia. (2000). *Ch’ixinakax: utxiwa: Una reflexión sobre prácticas y discursos decolonizadores*. Buenos Aires: Nuevo Offset Viel.

carefully re-work and work from the tradition of the Cusco School rather than representing decolonial aesthetics.

We intend our project to be much less ambitious than that of a decolonial aesthetics, either as a critique of eurocentric and colonial/modern aesthetics or as a specific artistic style. Having curated Peralta's and Quispecuro Nina's work in the United States, in Texas in particular, it became obvious that there is an affinity between their work and that of Chicana artists drawing from the border aesthetics of Gloria Anzaldúa. Through interaction with the artists, the role of Andean indigenous cosmologies in their work also became explicit for us. This experience led us to pursue the affinity of Rivera Cusicanqui's notion of *ch'ixi* and Anzaldúa's *nepantla* as a basis to understand these specific contemporary Cuzqueño artists. Certainly these two concepts, and the aesthetic traditions that arise from them, are not interchangeable. As our discussion above suggests, *nepantla* speaks of a state of transformation of the psyche that allows for the resistant inhabitation of colonial power differentials and the borders between social categories, while *ch'ixi* expresses dynamics of social practices through logics of reciprocity without synthesis or dialectics, and facilitates their recognition. Yet, they both give a ground for not falling into the traps of an aesthetic purgatory, one that expresses simple and dichotomizing social delineations and conflicts at the level of both oppression and resistance. In terms of the latter, one can point out investments in determining which art is "decolonial", which artists seek to "delink", etc. Drawing from indigenous cosmologies, Anzaldúa's *nepantla* and Rivera Cusicanqui's *ch'ixi* reveal aesthetic perspectives and artistic forms that live in their writings, and we have shown that they live beyond in contemporary works such as Peralta's and Quispecuro Nina's paintings. Each, on their own accord, respects the specificity of artists' relation to their subjects and materials

in ways that are culturally and historically situated. Resistance thrives because this relation is embedded in the cosmos, rather than being a part of a critical or liberatory aesthetic theory.

References

Anzaldúa, Gloria. (2015). Bearing Witness: Their Eyes Anticipate the Healing. In Cantú, Norma E. (Ed.). *Ofrenda: Liliana Wilson's Art of Dissidence and Dreams* (31-34). College Station: Texas A&M University Press.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. (2015). *Light in the Dark / Luz en lo oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Cantú, Norma E. (Ed.). (2015). *Ofrenda: Liliana Wilson's Art of Dissidence and Dreams*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press.

Cornejo Polar, Antonio. (2000). *Writing in the Air: Heterogeneity and the Persistence of Oral Tradition in Andean Literatures*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Cummins, Tom and Mannheim, Bruce. (2011). The River around Us, the Stream within Us: The Traces of the Sun in Inka Kinetics. *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 59/60(Spring/Autumn), 6.

Cusicanqui Rivera, Silvia. (2000). *Ch'ixinakax: utxiwa: Una reflexión sobre prácticas y discursos decolonizadores*. Buenos Aires: Nuevo Offset Viel.

Dean, Carolyn and Leibsohn, Dana. (2003). Hybridity and Its Discontents: Considering Visual Culture in Colonial Spanish America. *Colonial Latin American Review* 12(1), 5-35.

Dean, Carolyn. (2010). *A Culture of Stone: Inka Perspectives on Rock*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Eschleman, Clayton (Ed. and Trans.). (2007). *César Vallejo: The Complete Poetry*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Estermann, Josef. (1998). Apu Taytayku. *Studies in World Christianity*, 4, 7.

Estermann, Josef. (1998). *Filosofía Andina*. Quito: Abya Yala.

Hajovsky, Patrick and Rivera, Omar. (2013). Sincretismo y desencuentros en el Cusco. *Contrastes*, 8-13.

Hajovsky, Patrick and Rivera, Omar. Syncretism and Missed Encounters in Peru. *Latinx Spaces*, <https://www.latinxspaces.com/latinx-art/syncretism-and-missed-encounters-in-peru>.

Lugones, María. (2010). Toward a Decolonial Feminism. *Hypatia* 25 (4), 742-59.

Rivera Cusicanqui, Silvia. (2012). *Ch'ixinakax utxiwa*: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization. *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 111:1 (Winter), 95-109.

Rivera Cusicanqui, Silvia. (2015). La universalidad de lo *ch'ixi*. Miradas de Waman Puma. In *Sociología de la imagen: Miradas Ch'ixi desde la historia andina*. Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón Ediciones.

Rivera, Omar. (2017). Reading Alejandro Vallega toward a Decolonial Aesthetics. *Comparative and Continental Philosophy*, 9 (2), 162-73.

Rivera, Omar. (2020). Mestizajes and Resistant Alterities. *Inter-American Journal of Philosophy*, 11(1, Spring).

Sallis, John. (2018). *Elemental Discourses*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.

Seoane, Francisco and Culchicón-Venegas, María José. (2018). Hitching the Present to the Stars: The Architecture of Time and Space in the Ancient Andes. In Swenson, Edward and Roddick, Andrew P. (Eds.). *Constructions of Time and History in the Pre-Columbian Andes* (239-262). Louisville, CO: University Press of Colorado.

Swenson, Edward and Roddick, Andrew P. (Eds.). (2018). *Constructions of Time and History in the Pre-Columbian Andes*. Louisville, CO: University Press of Colorado.

Vallega, Alejandro. (2014). *Latin American Philosophy from Identity to Radical Exteriority*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.