

José Eduardo Barajas
Where Does the Sun Rise?

Natalia de la Rosa

Occupation of the skies therefore acquires
a critical importance, since most of the
policing is done from the air.

Achille Mbembe

Chapter I

The Definition of a Method for the Study of Landscape

I.1 Introduction

Consolidated in the second half of the nineteenth century as an alternative to history painting, the genre of landscape painting has enjoyed an established place in the historiography of Mexican art for several decades. That is to say, within the pictorial hierarchy instated by the Academia San Carlos at the end of the eighteenth century, the landscape motif remained on a par with mythic, religious, and historical works. Under this classification, José María Velasco emerged as the representative painter of this model—the painter of Mexican landscapes par excellence, whose influence can be observed in the works of later political artists such as Dr. Atl, Diego Rivera, and Juan O’Gorman.

These brief notes take as their subject a series of drawings and stained-glass windows by José Eduardo Barajas and reconsider them in light of the aforementioned argument: In what ways is the tradition of landscape painting still meaningful today? Is the assertion that the study, representation, and resemanticization of the Valle de Mexico necessarily entails political painting still relevant? How does the influence of new muralism operate in these analog visual approaches?

I.2 Foundations for the Artist and the Painting of (*au plein air*) Landscape

In 1886, Eugenio Landesio systematized his study of the landscape in a treatise entitled *Cimientos del artista, dibujante y pintor (Foundations for the Artist, Draftsman, and Painter)*. The artist compiled the different artistic approaches to the representation of landscape and divided them into two categories: geometric and perspectival drawing. At the same time, he demonstrated that this

type of representation was based in optics through the study of linear and aerial perspective, shadow, and refraction. In this collection of notes, light emerged as the defining element of Landeseio's argument. Through this study, the Italian artist was able to bring together an entire pictorial and pedagogical system that would serve as the basis for different experiments within the genre; these, in turn, resulted in the production of paintings representative of a new kind of historical painting.

I.3 Perspectives, Shadows, Refractions, and Reflections

The foundations Eugenio Landeseio outlined in his manual are grounded in geometry—the study of lines, angles, surfaces, and shapes. The manual's objective was to explain the principles of geometry that inform the drawing of polygons and ellipses. Accordingly, the painter explained the theorems of linear perspective, derived from the scopic traditions of Renaissance and Cartesian Humanism, ending with a discussion of aerial perspective—a radical reinvention of the construction of space-time in art. Euclidean perspective is distinctive for its establishment of a rational and linear order constituted along parallel lines that function as the axis of representation. On the other hand, the author defined aerial perspective as a complement to this order, as that process dedicated to the exploration of the “modification that the highlights, shadows, and colors of objects undergo as a result of the interposition of the atmosphere that mediates between us and them.” Here, the artist refers to the arrangement of the natural elements that fall between a certain set of visual radii and their interaction with the given atmospheric conditions: changes in tone, transparency, illumination to the point of aerial decomposition. This study of the impact of atmospheric conditions on objects enabled the reconfiguration of the compositional arrangement, which instigated a crisis of horizon and thus made way for another kind of scopic regime, one determined by light and air, as Leonardo da Vinci explained in his *Treatise on Painting* (1435).

I.4 A New Perspective

In Mexico, the “new perspective” refers to that method of composition contingent on the conditions of curvilinear perspective. This concept was proposed by the painter Luis G. Serrano in 1934, and it would be debated and reworked by Dr. Atl, Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, José Clemente Orozco, and Juan O’Gorman over the course of the following decades. Also known as the “revolutionary perspective”—to use Daniel Vargas Parra’s phrase—the “new perspective”

took up a position on visibility that sought to predetermine the possibilities of the optical system and the viewer's critical reaction. The publication, *Una nueva perspectiva: la perspectiva curvilínea (A New Perspective: Curvilinear Perspective)*, written in the form of a manual, displays exercises and diagrams that explain how this model functions. Gerardo Murillo—also known as Dr. Atl—wrote the prologue to the book along with a few other vignettes. In these notes, he presents a series of landscapes which he used to contrast the theorems of Euclidean and curvilinear perspective. The changes in the elements represented in these plates occur as a result of adjustments to the aperture of vision, modified through the use of a lens (the antecedent of the wide angle), a tool capable of disrupting and curving our sense of the horizon. This act of rupture breaks with the rationalized order of straight and parallel lines and makes way for the use of ellipses. How can we think about this tradition of the study and application of perspective in the present? Has this line of work, systematized by Landesio, perfected by Velasco, and radicalized by the avant-garde, been reactivated in contemporary painting? Let's see.

A plastic banana sails stormily through a foaming sea, while above hangs a sky composed of faint floating clouds. The shocking yellow—the color of those leisure instruments so popular among tourists in Acapulco—contrasts with the transparent blue lines that surround it. On this canvas, José Eduardo Barajas channels Bob Ross to create a referent of tropical nostalgia. This painting could be considered a transitional piece in the artist's body of work. In it, Barajas confronts the horizon in the landscape, granting entry to a host of popular objects which help to reactivate a genre that has, until now in Barajas's local context, always been used to refer symbolically to events. Breaking with the traditional panoramic gaze that characterized the political landscapes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the painter offers us an alternative perspective, one that introduces the gaze into a space where it can remain afloat. In this painting, a passive sky is bombarded by a series of elements that invade the otherwise tranquil scene; and indeed, the painting oscillates between references to the violent seascapes of J.M.W. Turner and nods to John Constable's studies of the sky. Nevertheless, like the landscape dramatically punctuated by an indigenous ritual that Landesio painted from atop the Cerro de Tenayo using aerial perspective, this scene was designed for the intrusion of actions and concrete objects.

I.5 Foundations for the Artist and Painting of (Supranatural) Landscape

12:45 pm, 50 per cent battery, TELCEL, iPhone, dawn. Daybreak in a brilliant blue sky gives shape to an analog landscape. This image has the dimensions of a sheet of letter-size bond paper. Upon it the artist has drawn with black Bic pen and colored pencils. A simple palette, basic materials, and light shading that contrasts with the intensity of the black pen announce a general problem in Mexican painting.

This small but monumental work represents the first study in a series of fragments the artist produced daily, which together form a single action. Following the terms set forth by Landesio, this image embodies that possibility of connecting together a series of sections of reality in order to compose a historical painting. At the same time, it summarizes the cycle of corrupted visuality that moves from nature to the screen and back to the page. In a sense, it extrapolates the games DeviantArt structures according to a new condition of mimesis (which Harun Farocki illuminated through his discussion of videogames in the video *Parallel*), using renders that augment the qualities of landscapes—that is to say, a supraréalism. These works also constitute part of an experiential dictionary that the artist maintains—quotidian elements of his own confinement—where the ideal landscape only emerges against the background of a screen. The history of Mexican landscape is contained within this series of drawings, and, like a manual comprised of a selection of parts, it lays the foundations for an infinite possibility of landscapes that we can call supra-supranatural.

I.6 Artistic History, Economy, and Reality

One of the characteristics of the realist painting produced in this hemisphere is its capacity to convey the region's economic condition. If the previously-mentioned revisionist historiography of art focused its attention on the exploration of symbols, or even on the political allegories of *Mexicanidad* that the landscapes of José María Velasco and Luis Coto express, the landscapes produced in the practices of the post-avant-garde reveal the conditions of a baroque economy. They produce fleeting and dynamic scenes that capture the economic circumstances of their context.

Barajas's series *Golden Shower* reveals the exact moment when landscapes lost their horizon. In this piece, coins, colorful bills, references to tattoos, designs that allude to hip-hop, reggaeton, and graffiti tags—pictorial signs of the post-Internet age, whose gleam ricochets of the viewer's eye and directly recalls the paintings of the Hudson River School—supply the constitutive

elements of the regional order. The set of works varies in dimension, from its constitutive small drawings to its consolidation into mural form (itself a rejoinder to the spectacular murals, appropriated by the White-Latinx industry, of Times Square), and incorporates a series of investigations that moves between an analysis of the history of landscape painting on the one hand and an analysis of the possibilities for resignification that digital painting offers on the other. To a certain extent, these works constitute a cyclical, spiraling bridge that shifts between the two media, at the same time as a libidinal economy.

These paintings are a kind of conjuration of underdevelopment, conditions of the magical feudal economy of Our America. If Nicolás Uriburu's green landscapes, painted in the latter half of 1960, voice a call for the returning of America to its native condition, Barajas's landscapes of golden rain reiterate a formula dedicated to the reappropriation of the blue Pantone privatized by Bancomer—after all, this region's sky is not the most transparent, thanks to the industrial particles that currently invade our airspace and render a tone of that intensity impossible. Yet this blue sets off a complex redundancy—one that can also be seen in the work of the pop art *imaginero* Oscar Masotta—which seeks to return the color back to the painter. At the same time, these works constitute a new religious painting, a *Rompimiento de Gloria*, in which the capital bursts open to let in the divine. In *Golden Shower*, traditional religious symbolism—the ray of light that traverses the sky—has been reappropriated to indicate another kind of spirituality, that of a metaphysical economy struggling for materiality. And here emerges analog painting's *raison d'être*. Our point of view is situated from below. We await, anxious and merry, the shower of coins—monetary petals and confetti.

I.7 Fragments of Objects and Landscapes

A tour through *Golden Shower* offers insight into how this diary of 83 drawings originated and functions. The formula for landscape representations returns to its strategic and necessary turning point. In order to be able to express his formula for representing a landscape, Eugenio Landesio needed to systematize the method of painting in the form of a treatise. In Barajas's case, the baroque motif of the *Rompimiento de Gloria* reverts momentarily to something human and banal, to the primitive condition of the catacombs and the basic objects of survival. A series of questions about existence are interspersed with sunrises, sunsets, and abundant seascapes.

A cell phone, sign of life and of a new means of consuming nature. Objects suspended in subtle blue skies or delicate orange sunsets: an excessive dose of automated pills, toothpaste, spheres, chains, bottlenecks, copious liquids, foam and splattered fluids, refreshing and cool Powerade, a key on a ring, the charger our device needs to survive, a crooked nail, some headphones, a neat stack of coins (five to one pesos), nail clippers, a variety of jewelry, a plastic fly bag that hangs from a nearly invisible string, an electric flyswatter. On certain occasions, the warm sky takes on a carnal and violent shape; like a belt that clings to a body, the chains press against the sky and leave their mark on its surface.

The isolation of the skies lays the foundation for a study in sections that moves from recognizable segments of objects to their abstract details: the lower part of a cup of Maruchan soup, the tip of a pencil, a barely visible, sweating bottle of Gatorade, a doorframe, the corners of a cell phone. Another series of drawings emphasizes the landscape quality of these images through the dawning sun. In these, the details of each object invade and contrast with the sunrise: a long strand of hair appears, partially blocking the path of the sun, a broken glass filled with liquid does the same, a shining molar is splattered by a spurt of water. The horizon reappears in a seascape, along with a pair of wings, a scene that recalls Georgia O'Keefe's 1936 painting of a deer's skull hanging in front of a powerful, clear blue landscape. These portions, corners, close-ups of objects become newly surprising in the presence of unexpected liquids. This constant splashing can be seen in several different drawings in the series and confirms the maritime motif's function as an indicator of a space of desire. A dripping resistance—the sign that best describes our generation's lifestyle.

Chapter II

General or Landscape Painting

II.1 The Composition of Landscapes as Historical Episodes

José María Velasco's painting *Valle de México desde el Cerro de Santa Isabel* (1877) offers insight into a formula for constructing historical meaning through the genre of landscape painting. According to experts, this canvas depicts a visual metonymy representing a country. As Fausto Ramírez has brilliantly explained in his description of the work of Landesio and Velasco, these painters' works helped to define a "national landscape." This term refers to the use of narrative and symbolic possibilities in the construction of a broader commentary in which "historical time periods remain interconnected." The key in works like Landesio's *Valle de México desde el Cerro de Tenayo* (1869) lies in the artist's ability to present a pictorial proposal as a political commentary through rhetorical recourse to the idea of *pars pro toto* (part for the whole) in order to allude to racial, natural, and historical unification all in a single painting, albeit in support of a centrist and imperialist discourse. Furthermore, an anthropocentric vein that advocates for the modern project dedicated to the domination and control of nature also runs through this painting. So, why refer to these landscapes designed to offer a symbolic vision of the nineteenth-century national project? What is their connection to a series of nearly abstract drawings on Pellon paper by José Eduardo Barajas? Can Barajas's drawings be called pictorial—are they images that use suprealism to produce a condensed pictorial locus in order to evoke a specific economic and political moment? Do they indicate a tension in our current relationship to technology and a potential pathway to a future possibility of a posthuman understanding of nature?

A first attempt at answering these questions could point to the fact that Barajas's series was indeed realized after a stint working at the Museo Nacional de Arte, where the artist directly studied works by Eugenio Landesio, José María Velasco, and Luis Coto. Another explanation has to do with the artist's personal approach to defining landscape in his work, specifically the moment when the 83 fragments are united into a single piece. That is to say, Barajas makes use of a personal method of constructing outdoor scenes through the study of sections in order to create a historical painting. The difference lies in the fact that he translates that direct experience of landscape through filters, whether digital or architectural, that mediate his own contact with the exterior. The result of this process is the artist's series *Perspectiva aérea. Estás a punto de recibir una guía muy*

especial que revela cómo puedes ganar miles de dólares en línea en los próximos noventa días, o menos (Aerial Perspective: You Are About to Receive a Very Special Guide That Reveals How You Can Win Thousands of Dollars Online in the Next Ninety Days or Less). This group of works communicates the artist's rejection of the modern domination of natural elements and reveals a contemporary paradox.

The second manual Landesio wrote directly following *Cimientos* was *Pintura general del paisaje y la perspectiva* (1867) (*General Landscape Painting and Perspective*). For this project, the European artist examined the construction of landscape through the use of parts, sections, and genres. As Landesio explained it, in this model any given element does not simply correspond to a prop, but rather to a determining aspect of the composition. Thus, rocks, trees, and animals, for example, are constitutive of a locality. The painter outlined the following structure for arranging a landscape according to the same logic: "Localities and Episodes; the former includes cloudscapes, foliage, terrain, water, and buildings; while the latter includes history, popular scenes, military scenes, familial scenes, animals." This way of understanding the compositional conditions of a landscape unity in terms of fragments provides the basis for and shape of Barajas's new series.

Viewing this panorama, we may ask ourselves, which perspective allows for a current Mexican reality to be best expressed through landscape? In order to think about this question, it is important to keep in mind the critical circumstances that framed the invention of perspective and its epistemological model. In Jean Louis Déotte's terms, we should seek to determine the technical operation under which our new spacio-temporal condition functions, given that it was linear perspective that conditioned the terms of Western visuality and, to paraphrase Aníbal Quijano, of colonial visuality. Interpreting perspective in cultural terms, Martin Jay, for his part, outlines the qualities of the epoch's scopic regime. Thus, focusing on the concept of visuality, what might these drawings reveal to us, in light of the fact that the artist presents us with visual games that oscillate between the spectator who looks from below (*Golden Shower*), at eye-level (83 dibujos del diario), and from above (*Perspectiva Aérea*)—all with a horizon in crisis?

The compositional arrangement, in the sense of the ordering of fragments, in these series seems to be in dialogue with the Hito Steyerl's idea of vertical perspective. For Steyerl, this new perspectival model corresponds to a mode of seeing derived from a scopic regime that is geolocated and controlled according to the military logic of the drone. The moment when a new kind of gaze is disrupted, the fall from the sky is a key concept for Steyerl: "While falling, people

may sense themselves as being things, while things may sense that they are people. Traditional modes of seeing and feeling are shattered. Any sense of balance is disrupted. Perspectives are twisted and multiplied. New types of visuality arise.”¹ The trembling horizon implies the loss of meaning and orientation, so, what happens in landscapes that don’t have this organizing element? Steyerl continues, “With the loss of the absence of a horizon also comes the departure of a stable paradigm of orientation, which has situated concepts of subject and object, of space and time, throughout modernity. In falling, the lines of the horizon shatter, twirl around, and superimpose.”²

For the artist and theorist, Turner’s violent landscapes, exhibited through the sea, announce a break with linear perspective. The decisive scene of the sinking ship in the *The Slave Ship* (1840) not only marked a maritime tragedy, but also the collapse of the imperialist system. If Ucello’s painting *The Miracle of the Desecrated Host* (Scene 1-5, 1465-1469) framed the advent of the new world order in terms of coloniality, the English seascape, from which the Albertian window has disappeared, evokes the destabilization of the reigning economic organization and therefore, through its invocation of a disaster, of the collapse spatial control.

Steyerl goes on to consider the idea of the montage and its critical conditioning, contrasting it with the visual unification offered by mechanisms (yes, in Foucauldian terms) of the three dimensional. Vertical perspective, conceived out of a different kind of controlling gaze, is revealed through the geopolitics of verticality. Through a reading of Achille Mbembe’s concept of necropolitics, the author argues that verticality’s sovereignty is sustained through the use of technologies designed to inflict violence and operate in zones of conflict, returning to the Cameroonian theorist’s discussion of the “techniques of hologramatization.” These include sensors for unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), aerial reconnaissance planes, warning systems for Hawkeye planes, Hawkeyes, assault helicopters, and observation satellites. Steyerl underscores that technological tools like aerial views, Nosedives, and Google Maps imply an unstable spectator in contrast to linear perspective’s stable spectator. The tension lies in the notion that there exists in the vertical model a supposedly broader range of vision, when actually there is a greater sense of lack of control and confusion on the part of the observer. In this free fall and in the condition of

¹ Hito Steyerl, “In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective” *e-flux* 24 (April 2011). <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/24/67860/in-free-fall-a-thought-experiment-on-vertical-perspective/>

² Steyerl, “In Free Fall.”

drone extermination, the world is no longer divided among subjects and objects, but among superiors and inferiors.

The German author presents cinema, and specifically montage, as an option capable of countering this mechanized model of control of the gaze and corporeal disruption. According to Steyerl, cinematic space offers an alternative with its compositional heterogeneity, multifocal conditions, and curved lines. In Adornian terms, the culture industry of contemporary cinema has assimilated the “rendering” conditions of aerial perspective, which have resulted in a hyperrealism that has traded in the indexical relationship of the lens for green screens that “yield impossible cubist perspectives and implausible concatenations of times and spaces alike.” In this way, Steyerl highlights the critical possibilities of cinema. However, faced with the perpetual or parallel link to a military context (which Paul Virilio has also argued), she presents a paradox. The split from linear perspective has allowed for the imagining of a broad range of vision, where there exists a break with the horizon and multiple spectators (a collective, as Siqueiros called it). Steyerl’s conclusion, with the help of Adorno, determines that, in reality, this loss of ground could result in an advancement for freedom through a clear dialectic, where collapse is possibility and the fall impetus.

Returning to the body of work that is our subject, in what ways can an analysis of perspective in free fall inform our understanding of these works? We can determine that Barajas’s series *Perspectiva aérea* constructs a strategic codification and offers a concrete reading of the violent process of contemporary visuality. These works are aerial scenes, whose spectator-position is variable and multifocal. But it is important to note that, in contrast to the subject of Steyerl’s essay, these landscapes don’t elicit a sense of falling per se, but rather seem to evoke a state somewhere between free falling and floating. The superimposed layers and codes produce a dynamic perspective, the heir to the baroque’s compositions filled with movement, epitomized in El Greco’s landscapes of Toledo or in the oeuvre of David Alfaro Siqueiros.

Fragments of natural elements that have been appropriated from other landscape paintings (specifically those of Velasco), chromatic tests, graffiti-Gothic calligraphy, all characterized by an inorganic and industrial materiality, occupy a single plane. These objects update a dynamic scopic mode out of which a new formula for landscape can be construed. The result is montages and critical fissures that respond to homogenized virtual images and interpretations of nature. In these works, the painter seems to ask “Where does the sun rise?”, a question he poses from a place of

personal, economic, cultural, and artistic inquiry, where the digital plane of Photoshop and the chromatic spectrum (taken from a iMessenger sticker) offer the key to understanding a compositional capacity that constantly renews the conditions of superimposition—the moment when the algorithm and spam collide to facilitate a return to the analog. This return to the analog isn't a nostalgic reversion, as Claire Bishop has suggested of our reaction to the globalization of the contemporary art market, it is something resistant and disobedient. The artist's method for creating this series involved a ceaseless and infinite search for references on his cellphone. The latest apparatus to supplant the camera obscura, after the lens and film camera of previous centuries and decades, the cellphone occupies an ambivalent position, toggling between motive, light box, and means of production, distribution, and consumption. At an earlier point in the artist's process, the computer also played a role, but thanks to the conditions of the violent system of the Third World it was removed from the investigation. Traces of a laptop desk can be glimpsed in past series of drawings, but they no longer appear in these landscapes. It is the cellphone that contains the conditions for rethinking the idea of public art as well as the light of the painting.

In the 1960s, artistic exploration dedicated to determining the function of language (through references to Marshall McLuhan or Claude Lévi-Strauss) gave way to experiments in landscape based in codes. A powerful example of this trend is Rubens Gerchman's *Triunfo Hermético* (1972), a filmic experiment that operates through the structuralist repetition characteristic of the pop art tradition to create word-sculptures that signified and activated poem-landscapes (to use Esther Gabara terms): TERRA, AR, LUTE, MULHER, HOMME. In these exercises, language is recodified in various ways. In the case of Barajas's *Perpectiva aérea*, the painting exists in a network, insofar as it can be reconstructed through the sum of its links. However, the economic and political commentary of the piece resides in its necessary return to real space; it not only points to meaning through redundancy, but also to a material condition of production, contextualized in the place and condition of its creation.

Chapter 3

The New Muralism of Light

III.1 How a Fictional Rainbow Transmutes into Muralism

Linked to the ideas of the neo-avant-garde, new muralism is a category that was developed by art critics and theorists in America in the 1970s. An earlier iteration of muralism, which grew from a French Jacobin inheritance, had created a style of painting that disputed Mexico's nationalist mythmaking under the conspiratorial conditions that Charles Baudelaire once defined as inherent to the "painting of revolution." On the other hand, new muralism (a concept that I study in collaboration with Julio García Murillo) is an aesthetic proposal that fostered a series of narrative and pictorial experiments that reflected the political and economic perspectives of the time. Building on non-objectualist strategies that helped bring about an alternate mode of public art, works of new muralism created space for a different way of narrating history and the possibility of a future political project. In this sense, the appropriation and analysis of the media was decisive. Thus, how can landscape painting be assumed under the new conditions of an algorithmic logic in terms of muralism? The examples of landscapes we have analyzed thus far are directly linked to technological mechanisms and circulation. Indeed, Barajas affirms that he is a "scroller" and that the aerial perspective in his paintings functions as the container of these endless searches—a vessel not only for consumption in networks, but also, necessarily, of the intrinsic production of data that tech conglomerates save and redeploy. The questions that arise are as follows: How can these landscape compositions be understood as murals? Beyond an interpretation of a technologized nature—of the mechanisms of representation and a dynamic scopic mode—at what point do these images assume an architectonic or public dimension? Is that even possible?

As we have discussed, an important antecedent in the landscape genre is undoubtedly the art of John Constable and J.M.W. Turner. With regards to the specific study of the sky, Constable inaugurated a model of visual representation that would come to be known as the "meteorological landscape." For the English painter, the landscape had to be thought of as something ephemeral, for his study of it depended entirely on the climactic circumstances, as well as the time of day and the impression it made on him, which together could produce an infinite variety of colors. Painting reveals the quality of the natural manifestations that act as registers for the sky—a sky that, in Constable's view, doesn't exist in reality in and of itself, but rather forms part of the process of light perception that begins in the molecules of the air and ends in our eyes, and which we recognize as the atmosphere. Thus, the European artist took upon himself the task of defining a phenomenon dependent on two factors—the light spectrum and his perception of it through his ocular organ.

In Mexico, these ideas were addressed early on in the description of aerial perspective that Eugenio Landesio included in his manual. However, it was Dr. Atl who radically consolidated these ideas, taking theories of light, color, and composition as the determining factors for the creation of new references for the study of nature (a theme that Rebeca Barquera has studied in depth). Some of his commentaries on the matter can be found in a graphic text dedicated to the theme of the landscape, which he wrote for an exhibition organized at the Templo de la Merced. In this 1933 catalog, titled *El paisaje (un ensayo) (The Landscape (An Essay))*, Atl explained the significance of the research he was then conducting. He writes, “The landscape is a vast and complex stage that is modified by light, which cannot be fully comprehended except under very special circumstances of mental development. Its interpretation into visual art or even into literature demands an effort greater than that necessary for zoomorphic or anthropomorphic representations.” The Jalisco artist’s study takes up an idea of landscape that centers on the analysis of its constant transformation that examines its connection to the phenomenon of light and a new compositional axis determined by its relationship to the atmosphere, while giving way to the development of aerial perspective.

The relationship between Atl and Constable’s work can be seen in their similar use of color as a means of decomposing and varying pictorial space. Atl states, “Constable’s famous green, as Delacroix called it, was so penetrating because he never applied it as a flat wash, but rather built it up out of many distinct brushstrokes of different shades of green.” This technique involved the fracturing and decomposition of the color green into a variety of individual sections or swatches of color, such that every part would be endowed with its own force. These patches in turn melded together and multiplied, producing a vivacious surface that creates a direct reaction in our ocular organ. Outlining this method, Atl sought to mirror the sense of power and energy present in the object of representation (the sky) in the chromatic study, on the material level (his study of petroleum-resins), and in the coinciding (dynamic) composition.

Gerardo Murillo’s interest in the study of the light spectrum dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century. Following his first trip to Europe, Murillo began to analyze the ways in which light is able to determine the variations of an object in connection to the work of André Lhote. Previously, Dr. Atl’s objective had focused on defining the function of matter in relation to electromagnetism, as can be seen in his novel *Un hombre más allá del Universo (A Man Beyond the Universe)*, published in 1935 and begun a year earlier, or in works like *Amanecer en la montaña*

(*Sunrise on the Mountain*) (1916), *Nahui Ollin. Retrato futurista (Nahui Ollin: A Futurist Portrait)* (1921), *Dibujo constructivista (Constructivist Drawing)* (ca.1922), or in what would be his first murals on the exterior of the Ex Templo de San Pedro y San Pablo. In these different works, the geologist and landscape painter articulated a game between geometry, curvilinear crystals, and objects capable of altering the traditional possibilities of space and time, attempting to achieve an understanding of the cosmic dimension. The rigidity of the chromatic polyhedrons depicted in his novels and paintings contrasts with the dynamic curve of that crystal which can provoke interstellar journeys by altering matter: “No single body can live in the Universe without the Atmosphere. All bodies that make it up, from the most infinitely small to the most infinitely large, the known, those which we can touch, the invisible, and those that we imagine to be surrounded by an electric atmosphere—a molecule, an electron, an atom, a world, a solar system, nebulae, the cosmos—a plant, an animal, man—each is enfolded in an electric atmosphere.”

The spectrum upon which Atl reflected during these years admitted two ranks of reality, the microcosmic and the macrocosmic, each operating in relation to an electrified nebulous, whether atomic or astronomic. In this way, the landscape painter sought to test the behavior of certain phenomena in different strata of nature. The painter consolidated this model in later series, those which emphasized the study of the different levels of the atmosphere, specifically the troposphere and the stratosphere, through the sub-genre known as aero-landscape. This reference is interesting because it offers a parallel to the landscape tradition associated with the explorer that emerged out of the inventive narratives of science fiction (the storytelling that Donna Haraway offers us, for example). Although the volcanologist directly studied natural phenomena (as in the famous case of Parícutín), he also used a stellar instrument that redirected and altered his perception of his surroundings in terms of chromatic light, a method which revealed a stratum of supraréality. Atl is also of interest because these investigations formed part of an obsessive project public art in the city. Barajas’s series *Perspectiva aérea* ties into these reflections because it too is a construct dependent on light, which was born out of the artist’s interrogation of the role of luminous landscapes projected against screen under fictional possibilities, or from an exploration of the transit of the sun across the inside of his studio. Light also allows for the fragments and sections of this series to come together in another space, where materiality enters into crisis. The chromatic decomposition and restructuring of this piece announce an alternate condition of reception to that of earthly geography.

Finally, in order to understand the conclusion of this process it is necessary to return to Barajas's pictorial predecessors and the connections between his work and mural painting. In Barajas's early aerial scenes, produced in 2017 and 2018, blue and pink skies are invaded by popular elements and graffiti techniques (stencils, aerosols, and stamps). These paintings devolve into wall fragments, but not any old fragments. Rather, they conjure a wall stamped with urban codes that represent a specific collectivity—a crew. This strategy is evident in *Homiesparadise* (2018, LADRÓNgalería), a show which introduced an urban context into the interior of the gallery: logos that refer to a mercantile bubble in revolt and sculptural ornaments that enclose a mural-sanctuary evoke the social organization and popular religiosity of the Colonia Buenos Aires, where the gallery was located. These logos executed in the style of signs constitute a plastic reflection within the context of the autonomous local economy. As Antonio Caro demonstrated to us in the first work in his series *Colombia Coca-Cola*, in Latin America, the logos of multinational companies are not industrial prints, they are paintings.

In this newest iteration, the reflection and practice of mural painting attains a new scope and solution through the rainbow spectrum. After the whole process of analyzing the consumption of digital content, the study of landscape, and the monetary conjuration, Barajas's construction of an architectonic pictorial space reiterates and consolidates a baroque artifice, sustained on light and movement. The series *Perspectiva aérea* is like an unfurling code. That is to say, it is constituted of sections that give it meaning and whose transfer onto industrial paper produces a dynamic effect on our retina. At the same time, even though these drawings function on an individual level, they also come together to form an arrangement designed to invade a setting and take on another spatial possibility: light transformed through a series of stained-glass windows that coalesce into a variable yet enduring entity, through which the ensemble assumes a new role as a mural or sculptural environment. These stained-glass windows, adorned with designs that allude once more to popular religiosity (the Sacred Heart, wings, flames, a sun), were produced in order to activate the architectonic potential of the series of drawings *Perspectiva aérea*. This manifestation tackles the creation of an artifice in the baroque sense, drawing the spectator's subjectivity into play and constructing a dynamic scopic mode that is constantly changing and enveloping. At the same time, the luminous gothic-kitsch intervention is intended to disrupt a productivist notion of space in the name of returning to spaces where art and craft can converge,

an idea that John Ruskin as well as Wilhelm Worringer discussed in their descriptions of medieval art and architecture.

This composite announces another form of historical commentary through art. Barajas has surpassed the formulas of “political art” of the past decade, declining to refer to official symbols or the representation of the “other.” Nor does he assume the generalized conditions of “digital painting,” for he has always been suspicious of the technological medium and the dangers of the “algorithmization” of the user. Rather, he occupies a nexus between the Benjaminian skepticism of the “author as producer” (with regards to the conditions of the rupture or feeding of the system of production) and Clarie Bishop’s critique of the lack of a strong stance in the artworld in the face of art’s technological revolution and the digitalization of life. By the same token, he refrains from citing Mexican avant-garde painters. The painter only inhabits his own existence: the body itself manifests the conditions of a reformulated orientation by announcing another spacio-temporal stage outside of Western dichotomies. He structures a material and precarious resistance, confronting the conditions of a region in crisis from his position within that very region. Nothing more political than making evident and anticipating the scopic regime of epochal revenge.