

How would a formal Peru be?

by **Guillermo Nugent**

The best and worst of the twentieth century emerged from the identification of the modern with the destruction of anything considered to be old or antiquated. Escape from the ties of the present demanded revolutionary forgetfulness of the surroundings. In art, politics and economics, the destruction of the old was imperative. Progress was vague for some and utopia was distant for others, but in one-way or another, all had to keep up. The best efforts, the most overwhelming victories, the most resounding failures and the most extreme cruelties all shared this perspective in the past century.

Shortly thereafter, however, a new attitude took shape to confront the call and the exposition of the most creative aspects of our world. There were no more attempts to invent new elements. Nowadays there is a sensibility that increasingly explores the novelty in the connection of the diverse, almost antagonistic, elements that dissolve the frontiers between the pure and the impure. It is like finding the astounding within the most familiar. This is the most effective response to the fundamentalism and xenophobia of our time that strives to assimilate any novelty as part of an unyielding conviction.

The work that Ana De Orbegoso gives us, proposes a critical and ironic detachment from the past, identities and current events. The baroque frames of our public culture are preserved, not destroyed. But the surprise is reserved for what is contained within the frame, most particularly the face. In reviewing the iconography of colonial virgins, De Orbegoso puts into evidence and question the existing limits between those who are inside and those who are outside the frame. It is the disruption of this order that still today passes as such in the official acknowledgment.

If informality did not exist, that is, that entire world outside the frame and the substance that makes up most of our daily life, the work Ana presents would be incomprehensible. Surely, the difference between the faces that are inside and those that are outside would have been minimal; it would have been merely a matter of clothing or some other feature in the surroundings. The images of this exhibit aim to answer a simple question, seldom posed explicitly: How would our country were it formalized, framed?

The chosen themes are the spaces of image veneration in colonial times. At first they were effective in the sense that they embodied a unique blend of subordination and negotiation, a transition from "paganism to sanctity," according to the fitting expression of Juan Carlos Estenssoro. It was due to the Republic -- a lethargic rather than defeated period of miserly and stingy society -- that the majority of the population was merged into a temporal dimension, a closed past, millenary and wonderful as long as it did not have contact with the present. It was to be kept at a distance, as an earthy example or an attic of colonial heritage.

This is the other angle of the aesthetic experience proposed by Ana Dte Orbegoso, a fluid coming and going, a festive collage of the shapes of the past and the faces of the present. Women no longer need to create the simultaneously impossible illusion of themselves as both virgins and ladies. To be in the picture, they need no more than to show themselves as they are in their daily lives.

The exhibit helps us feel and understand the future as an art of combinations -- of collecting, of gathering, and of permitting the images to open up possibilities for concepts.