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## BOGOTÁ

## Beatriz González

MUSEO DE ARTE MIGUEL URRUTIA

After earlier presentations at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the Pérez Art Museum Miami, this retrospective—the most comprehensive showing to date of the work of Beatriz González, one of the most influential living Colombian artists—finally arrived at the Museo de Arte Miguel Urrutia in Bogotá. From the beginning, González (born in 1932 in Bucaramanga) has, driven by a radical eclecticism, undertaken a personal exploration of pictorial languages. Her reinterpretation of preexisting images is the subtle common thread that unifies her entire production. She has always been an omnivorous collector of the kinds of images that recur across her oeuvre: religious prayer cards, patriotic motifs, reproductions of artworks, photographs cut from the newspaper. Her first works inspired by news photos were three versions of *Los suicidas del Sisga* (The Sisga Suicides), 1965. In the images' poor quality she discovered an almost abstract character. From there, she began delineating her unmistakable style, characterized by flat figures and acidic colors that recall the language of advertising.

González ironically calls herself a “painter from the provinces,” alluding to Latin America’s subordinate relationship to Europe and United States. In reality, a retrospective view of her work reveals how she precociously embraced the expressive potentialities of Pop art but used them for social commentary. In the 1970s she experimented with unconventional supports, painting her own versions of works by masters of modernism but on inexpensive furniture or household objects. In *Peinador gratia plena* (Dressing Table Gratia Plena), 1971, for example, she replaced the circular mirror of an Art Deco vanity with her take on Raphael’s *Madonna della seggiola* (Madonna of the Chair), 1513–14. This process of apparently innocuous appropriation is, indeed, intrinsically political. González is mocking the tastes and aspirations of the bourgeoisie in search of cheap status symbols, since these popular works that circulated only through low-quality copies were reposing, according to the artist, a sociopolitical-economic dynamic of cultural imperialism tied to Latin American “underdevelopment.”

Beatriz González,  
*Peinador gratia plena*  
(Dressing Table Gratia  
Plena), 1971, enamel  
on metal on furniture,  
59 × 59 × 15”.



González's work took a more topical turn in the 1980s, reacting to the political and social climate in Colombia, already marked by a long civil war and by growing instability, corruption, and violence. *Decoración de interiores* (Interior Decoration), 1981, is her first explicitly political work, an imposing tapestry depicting Julio César Turbay Ayala, president of Colombia from 1978 to 1982, entertaining some guests at a private function. His administration was characterized by arbitrary detentions and torture, but here we glimpse a jovial character untroubled by the atrocities for which he was responsible. In the 1990s, González directly confronted the civil war: *Las delicias* (The Delights), 1996–98, was inspired by the suffering of mothers of soldiers who were kidnapped and held prisoner by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrilla group at an army base. And the new millennium confirmed González's social and political commitment. The 2007 sketches for *Auras anónimas* (Anonymous Auras), 2007–2009—black silhouettes of people carrying corpses in hammocks or wrapped in sheets—were integral to the powerful public project, still in place, for which she placed screen-printed versions of these same images in nearly nine thousand empty niches in the monumental cemetery of Bogotá. In *Zulia, Zulia, Zulia*, 2015, a series of monochromatic figures conveys the migratory tragedy of Venezuelans who illegally crossed the Colombian border.

This retrospective, curated by Mari Carmen Ramírez and Tobias Ostrander, accurately reconstructed the artistic and existential path González has followed over the past six decades, bearing lucid witness to Colombia's recent history. It showed how she developed a unique visual vocabulary that skillfully hybridizes the glorious tradition of history painting with popular codes of mass culture in order to recount the contradictions and lacerations of her own country and, by extension, those of the contemporary world.

—Eugenio Viola

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.