FEMALE SOCIETY PORTRAITS: REPRESENTING THE ELITE WOMAN IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY NEW SPAIN

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THESIS
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ABSTRACT

Since the early stages of the colonization of Mexico, the production of portraits in this territory had been limited to the representation of prelates, viceroys and other government officials. By 1700, however, the boom in the mining industry extended the production and circulation of portraiture beyond to a new and growing class of elites. This project examines the production and circulation of secular female portraiture in eighteenth-century New Spain. Focusing on the role of portraiture as an agent in the formation of individual and collective identities, this study delves into the ways in which portraits construct identity by mobilizing and representing values and ideas related to class, status and gender that circulated in eighteenth-century New Spanish culture. Specifically, this essay analyses how while mobilizing a visual formula borrowed from male official portraiture, society portraits of elite women engage viewers into an interpretation of pictorial conventions that is specific to the female gender, thus promoting a model of the Christian ideal woman. Finally, this essay explores the effects of the portrait’s display, in the construction of meaning by proposing the New Hispanic domestic interiors, specifically the salón de estrado, as a site where seemingly contradicting ideas about womanhood are negotiated.
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CHAPTER 1: PREFACE

The face and hands of Ana María de la Campa y Cos y Ceballos (Fig. 1), portrayed in 1776 by Andrés de Islas, emerge from a lavishly confectioned dress that draws our attention into the picture. This is not just a simple dress. This garment, which may be identified as a robe à la française, is depicted as a combination of delicately embroidered flowers and numerous garlands in white and red over a silver fabric, perhaps silk or satin, intricate white lace sewed to its three quarter sleeves, bust, and neckpiece; and finally a pair of bows made of embroidered ribbon attached to each sleeve. Complementing this array of ornamental details, two clocks hang from this woman’s waist and she wears a pair of intricately carved long earrings as well as a wide pearl cuff on each wrist. On her right temple she displays a black mole, or chiqueador, an element that although originally used for medical purposes, in eighteenth-century New Spain was adopted by elite women as a cosmetic mark. Equally devoid of its practical origins, a delicately painted closed fan in the woman’s right hand seems to be exposed in the foreground as she twists her wrist downwards. Creating a visual correspondence with the fan, in her left hand this lady holds with two fingers the stem of a pink rose.

The attention to detailed description, as well as the figure’s proportion and frontal orientation, disguises her actual physical body. Along with such overabundance of decorative elements, the lady’s attire supports a schematic marking of her body contours that creates a sensation of stiffness and artifice. Rather than a naturalistic form, the figure’s silhouette stands in for her body, like the popular santos de vestir, or wooden sculptures of saints in which only the head and arms were carved while the rest of the body would be suggested with real clothing. The setting in which this woman has been inserted further reinforces an effect of heavy artifice. On one hand, the heavy curtains that appear at her back, to the left, fill in any possible empty space
with a volume of flowing golden brown drapery. On the other, the inscription painted at the top right, activates the neutral background painted in a dark brown. The awkward placement of this inscription, as if floating on the surface, along with the little distance that there is between the curtain folds and the lady’s back serves to create an impossible spatial relationship that feeds the viewer’s awareness of the fictional nature of the picture.

“Overwhelming,” “heavy,” and “acartonados” (cardboard-like) are among the most common pejorative descriptions of portraits that follow the conventions of this image of Doña Ana María de la Campa y Cos y Ceballos. The consistent use of this formula has been explained by scholars as evidence of the artists’ lack of skill and inability to innovate. The latter is the case of the renowned art historian Manuel Toussaint. In his Arte colonial en México and Pintura mexicana, both written in the decade of 1930, published in the 1960s and still widely consulted references, Toussaint proposed a model that, echoing that of J.J. Winckelmann, saw the history of Mexican painting as an evolutionary process in which eighteenth century portraiture fell into a period of “decadence”, “debility” and “impotence”. More recent scholars have been less severe in their evaluation of eighteenth-century portraiture in New Spain. Nonetheless, most of them have approached it as the visual reflection of Mexico’s history thus neglecting what could be a rich discussion of portraiture, as a genre and as a practice, in eighteenth-century New Spain. For example, Rogelio Ruiz Gomar has attributed their abundance in the eighteenth century to the increasing “importance” that women were acquiring in the society of New Spain. In a more recent exhibition catalogue, De novohispanos a mexicanos: retratos e identidad colectiva en una sociedad en transición, the authors see portraiture as “the mirror of a civilization,” or a

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1 Manuel Toussaint, Pintura colonial en México (Mexico, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1990), 136
2 Rogelio Ruiz Gomar, “La pintura de retrato en la Nueva España,” El retrato novohispano en el siglo XVIII (Puebla: Museo Poblano de Arte Virreinal, 1999), 11
“testimony” that is useful for the “reconstruction of the history of the shift of spirits, values and mentalities.” ³ Treating portraiture as a symptom of a reality, these scholars see female portraits as a reflection of the “New Spanish society.”

³ De novohispanos a mexicanos: retratos e identidad colectiva en una sociedad en transición, exh.cat. (Mexico, D.F.: INAH, 2009), 14
CHAPTER 2: PORTRAITURE AND THE PRODUCTION OF MEANING

Negative claims such as the ones mentioned above reflect scholars’ implicit expectations with respect to portraiture. For instance, descriptions such as “acartonados”, a term that refers to flatness, seem to denounce these pictures’ lack of compliance with standards of realism as understood by twentieth century art historians educated in an Italianate tradition. On the other hand, reflectionist approaches like the one adopted by Ruiz Gomar are also based on the assumption that portraiture provides direct access to the once living sitter, the artist’s creative process, and more importantly, to the society to which they belonged. Although leading to different sorts of conclusions, these two prevalent approaches to eighteenth-century New Spanish portraiture assign portraits a passive role that does not acknowledge their cultural functions, and which ultimately leads to ahistorical interpretations.

Aiming at offering a new understanding of this genre in eighteenth-century New Spain, this essay addresses the production and circulation of female society portraits as processes that speak of the role of portraits as active agents in the formation of individual and collective identities. Thus this study considers portraiture as a genre that does not embody meaning, but instead produces meanings in ways that are different from other kinds of images. I am especially interested in the kinds of beliefs and ideas that viewers would have brought to these images and in how those discourses worked in dialogue with portrait conventions in the activation of meanings. Most particularly, I seek to analyze how images construct social identity by considering how portraiture conventions make visible broader gendered notions of honor and *calidad* (status) circulating elsewhere in the culture.
Granting portraits such agency in the general process of production of discourses is not arbitrary. The increased demand for female society portraits attests to a positive attitude towards these images that strongly supports their privileged position in eighteenth-century New Spain. Portraits’ authority to perform individual and collective identities can be understood when analyzing the kinds of notions and expectations contemporary artists, patrons, sitters, and viewers had with respect to this genre.

In spite of the lack of theoretical writing on the production of portraiture in the Viceroyalty of New Spain, the ideas proposed by influential art theorists from the Spanish Golden Age, Francisco Pacheco (1564-1644) and Antonio Palomino (1653-1726), shed some light regarding the production and understanding of this genre in the Americas. These authors agree on the idea that the artist’s main aim when painting a portrait should be the reproduction of the sitter’s actual appearance. For instance, in El Arte de la Pintura (1649), Francisco Pacheco states that “if the portrait artist were to fail in combining the effect of likeness and good facture, he must strive to accomplish at least likeness, because this is portraiture’s end, from which we define the image, when we say: this is an entity in which the original’s figure was passed on.”

Furthermore, Pacheco asserts that the achievement of likeness depends on the artist’s capacity to capture “the profiles of the whole and the parts,” by which he refers to the artist’s accuracy in drawing the exact features of sitters. Writing about half a century later, in Museo pictórico y escala óptica (1795) Antonio Palomino produces a similar notion of portraiture’s main objective

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4 Original quotation reads: “(…) que habiendo de faltar a lo parecido, o a lo bien pintado, si no se pueden juntar ambas cosas, se cumpla con lo parecido, porque éste es el fin del retrato; que es el mismo con que definimos la imagen, diciendo: que es una material en quien se pasó la figura del original.” In Francisco Pacheco, El Arte de la Pintura (Madrid: Catedra, 2001), 526
5 When speaking about those painters who achieved both likeness and good facture, Pacheco states: “porque, como tan grandes debuxadores, no pudieron ignorar los perfiles del todo y de las partes, en que consiste la certeza de lo parecido.” In Pacheco, El Arte de la Pintura, 526
as seen in his distinction between learning from nature and copying from it. The painter who
learns from nature knows how to select its most perfect features and reserve them in his memory
for their future combination in painting. On the other hand, copying, an artistic activity that was
reserved for the production of portraiture, entailed a direct transcription of what is before the eye.
In this manner, a portrait’s perfection, says Palomino, resides in its total similitude to the
original.\(^6\)

This notion of realism, still operative for eighteenth-century audiences, produced multiple
effects both in the production and experience of portraiture. As Ann Jensen Adams asserts in
relation to Dutch seventeenth-century portraiture, “the portrait (…) presents the conventions of
life and those of artistic practice in equally realistic terms, and it works to give the impression
that both refer to some external truth. They obscure or naturalize this process through their
subject, the human body”.\(^7\) By mobilizing truthfulness as one of its intrinsic features, the portrait
vividly evokes the sitter’s bodily presence while at the same time manipulates description in
order to emphasize desirable qualities.

Portraits’ presumed capacity to offer unmediated access to their sitters’ appearance and
self is not, however, the only mechanism through which these images produce meaning. In the
seventeenth and eighteenth centuries portraits often combined naturalistic description with
symbols and signs.\(^8\) So although portraiture is accommodated to “the real,” it necessarily
participates within larger discursive systems. As Ann Jensen Adams states, “the meaning of a

\(^6\)”Y a esto, llamamos propiamente estudiar de el natural, no copier, que eso solo se conde a un retrato,
donde la total semejanza es el mayor argumento de su perfección, aunque la perfección no sea su mayor
argumento: y aun en esto es necesaria tambi´n la discreción e inteligencia del artifice para saber elefir o la
luz o el contorno mas grato a el natural (…)” Antonio Palomino, *Museo pictórico y escala óptica*
(Madrid: Imprenta de Sancha, 1795), 158

\(^7\) Ann Jensen Adams, *Public Faces and Private Identities in Seventeenth-Century Holland* (New York:
Cambridge University Press, 2009), 52

\(^8\) Adams, *Public Faces and Private Identities in Seventeenth-Century Holland*, 53
portrait at any given moment, both as an object and as an image, does not inhere in the external referent of its symbols but is produced by the infinite number of systems of belief or knowledge-sometimes called discourses – that they help to produce.” Following Adams, I presume that for eighteenth-century viewers portraiture operated as a flexible medium in which identity was constructed through visual, symbolic, and semiotic means.

In light of these ideas, this study focuses on the relationship of portraits to specific notions of femininity among the members of the New Spanish elite. First I will consider how a similar visual formula for representing men and women engage in different notions of honor and calidad. Secondly, I analyze the dialogue commissioned portraits sustained with contemporary writings dealing with the issue of womanhood as revealed by the positions of moralist writers like Juan Luis Vives, Fray Luis de León and more recently in the case of New Spain, Fray Luis Martínez de la Parra.

Finally I will consider how female society portraits also produced meaning in relationship to other visual representations of women available on view in domestic spaces. The acquisition, commissioning, display and maintenance of material goods constitute clear signs of an individual or family’s economic stability and social position. As images intended for a semi-public display in domestic interiors, eighteenth-century portraits in New Spain clearly participated in a long-standing European tradition that conceived the display of portraiture as the materialization of one’s power, dignity, lineage and sense of identity to a specific social group. At the same time, commissioned portraits shared their space with other objects, such as painted folding-screens. Considering the crucial role spaces of portrayal play in the interpretative process of portraits, this

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essay explores the effects of the portrait’s display in the construction of meaning by proposing the New Hispanic domestic interiors, and specifically the *salón de estrado*, a hall in which ladies would host their visitors, as a potential site in which ideas about womanhood are negotiated. In order to examine such issue, I will bring to light the possibility that genre scenes depicting woman in a festive context, as painted in folding screens, may contest or complement the kinds of ideas about status and womanhood activated by portraits.
CHAPTER 3: THE CULTURAL LIFE OF PORTRAITS IN NEW SPAIN

As noted by scholar Joanna Woodall, naturalistic portraiture became central to European noble culture during the sixteenth century as it came to play a “vital ideological role” by facilitating the link between a human being and the personification of abstract concepts such as the majesty of the kingdom, the courage of a military leader or the status of a family. During the sixteenth century, the genre developed a repertoire of visual motifs and signifying tropes to communicate ideas of power, privilege and wealth. The expansion of portraiture in the seventeenth century was connected, as Woodall proposes, with elites’ “assertion of noble values” that were readily conveyed by conventions of style and composition.

Upholding Spanish Golden Age religious, royal and civil portraiture as its most immediate models, New Spanish portraiture was practiced with similar ideological ends. The circulation of painted portraits in New Spain finds its origins in the early years of the Conquest period. Dating back to the sixteenth century, portraits depicting the Spanish monarchs, archbishops and viceroyos were displayed at public spaces such as the Viceregal Palace and the Town Hall (Cabildo). Portraits also featured as the focal point of many works of ephemeral architecture constructed to celebrate important events related to the lives and deeds of those portrayed. This kind of limited and privileged display, along with specific formal and material characteristics of portraits helped shape the cultural life of portraits in New Spain by relating this genre with royal imagery.

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10 Joanna Woodall, Portraiture, Facing the subject (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 3
11 Woodall, Portraiture, Facing the subject, 3
12 Woodall, Portraiture, Facing the subject, 4
As scholar Inmaculada Rodríguez Moya has argued, official portraits follow a formula borrowed from Spanish royal portraiture first produced by painters of the Habsburg court such as Titian, Diego Velázquez and Juan Carreño de Miranda. In these works sitters of high lineage dressed in elegant attire, appear in either a half or full length, generally in a three-quarter view, occupying an interior setting defined by a heavy curtain and a desk or table, and frequently accompanied by a coat of arms. This formula not only directs the viewer’s attention toward the sitter, but also creates the effect of distance between the viewer and the depicted figure.

Solidly established in New Spain since the early seventeenth century, this formula was consistently used through the end of the eighteenth century. The formula produced stylistic and compositional harmony among pictures that were displayed together in galleries of viceregal and ecclesiastical portraits. The formulaic quality of these portraits should also be understood as a potential strategy to imbue them with a strong rhetorical tone that is suggestive of both the sitters’ distinct identities and their privileged social position in the broader context of the New Spanish society. This formula provided a format to present viceroyos and other Spanish officials in a solemn setting that, complimented by rich attire and other attributes, echoed their link with the Spanish Crown, an idea that was already implied in their appointments as royal functionaries.

The production of commissioned portraits in New Spain significantly increased throughout the eighteenth century. As scholars such as Michael A. Brown and Miguel A. Bretos have noted, the rise of portraiture may be attributed to the fact that by this period the boom of the mining industry supported the emergence of an entrepreneurial class composed of Creole citizens and Spanish immigrants who, given their lack of a noble title, strived to obtain titles of hidalguía.

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(gentry) by offering their favors to the Crown.\textsuperscript{15} Along with such lobbying, members of the local elite sought the fabrication of a public persona defined by visible signs that would proclaim their lineage and \textit{calidad} (status). As a part of this socioeconomic phenomenon, the New Spanish elite now began to decorate the interiors of their urban \textit{palacetes} (palaces) with their own painted portraits.\textsuperscript{16} Increased demand for painted portraits also supported the development of a wider repertoire of portraiture types. Following a long established European tradition, the members of this class began to form \textit{galerías de linajes} (lineage galleries), for which they commissioned \textit{retratos hablados}\textsuperscript{17} of the most important ancestors who were regarded as exemplars for future generations.\textsuperscript{18} Along with portraits comprising lineage galleries, there was also increased demand for other kinds of portraits including family, children, marriage and female portraits. Commissioned portraiture clearly became an important agent in the definition of individual and collective identities for the elite in eighteenth-century New Spain.

 Mostly practiced by the noble elite in the previous centuries, the commissioning of portraits and their display in domestic interiors served to indicate, in visual terms, the proximity between the emerging merchant elite and the noble class. The confirmation of the new elite’s emulation of the nobility’s values is not only observed in the commissioning of portraits and their display, but also in the way in which these images are composed and rendered. It is particularly revealing that although obsolete in Spain, by the eighteenth century, New Spanish

\textsuperscript{15} Brown, \textit{Portraiture in New Spain, 1600-1800} and Miguel A. Bretos “From Prehispanic to Post-Romantic: Latin America in Portraits, 500 B.C-A.D. 1910,”In Retratos. 2,000 Years of Latin American Portraits, exh. cat. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 38
\textsuperscript{16} Brown, \textit{Portraiture in New Spain, 1600-1800}, 107 and Inmaculada Rodríguez Moya, “De barrocos a ilustrados,”in \textit{De novohispanos a mexicanos: retratos e identidad colectiva en una sociedad en transición}, 27
\textsuperscript{17} Literally, “spoken portraits”. These were portraits painted \textit{post mortem}, in some cases immediately after the person’s death or some years later after literary or oral descriptions.
\textsuperscript{18} Rodríguez Moya, “De barrocos a ilustrados,”28
artists continued to use the Habsburg portrait formula in civil portraiture. We can see this in the portrait of Don Juan Xavier Joaquín Gutiérrez Altamirano Velasco (Fig. 2), the seventh count of Santiago de Calimaya, painted around 1752 by the renowned painter Miguel Cabrera. In this large scale portrait of great format, the sitter is represented in a full-length view, richly dressed in attire of French influence, standing by a table in front of a draped red curtain against a gray background. As is typical of society portraits in New Spain, in this case the sitter is accompanied by a coat of arms that indicates his position in a lineage of powerful aristocrats. Such emphasis on the sitter’s genealogy and status is further developed in the portrait’s cartouche at the lower left: Don Juan Javier Joaquín Gutiérrez is not only the Count of Santiago Calimaya in Mexico, but also the Marquis of Salinas del Río Pisuerga in Castile, lord of the Casas de Castilla, Sosa, Villa de Verniches, among other estates, a gentleman of the Sacred Roman Empire, and a functionary of the Crown in the Philippines. The same pictorial conventions can be found in portraits of members of the wealthiest Creole families of the viceroyalty, including those depicting the Sánchez de Tagle, Campa Cos and Jaral del Berrio.

Originally used both in Spain and in New Spain for official portraiture of male sitters, this compositional pattern also served as the model for a great number of female portraits of elite women produced throughout the eighteenth century. This type of composition, emphasizing the sitter’s elegant attire, serious demeanor, and rigid pose, facilitated strong visual consistency in

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19 The inscription reads: “El Sr. Dn. Juan Xa-/vier Joachin Gu-/tierrez Altamirano Velas/co, y Castilla Albornos,Lo-/pez Legaspy Ortiz de Oraa/Gorraez Beaumont, y Nava-/rra,Luna de Arellano, Códe/de Santiago Calimaya, Mar/-ques de Salinas del Rio Pi-/zuerga, Sr. de las Casas d Cas/tilla, y Soza, y delas Villas de/Verninches,y Azequilla,de Ro-/manco,y de Azuquequa d Na-/res, Cavallero del Sacro Romano/Imperio, por mro. del Sr. Emperador Car-/los quinto Adelâtado perpetuo dlas Islas/Philippines, Contador d S.Mag,d y del RI/y App.co Tribl. dela Sta. Cruzada; murió/el dia 17 de Junio de 1752, de Edad./de 41as.y 2 meses”.

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the portrayal of women and their husbands. At the same time, this compositional formula could also convey notions of feminine virtue essential to elite women identity and status.
CHAPTER 4: FEMALE SOCIETY PORTRAITS:

PRODUCING THE IDEAL CHRISTIAN WOMAN

While reprising the formula used in male official portraits, female society portraits also articulate contemporary notions of femininity. In signifying their sitters’ *calidad*, female society portraits operate within social registers that are specific to their gender. *Calidad*, a term that may be translated as “status”, referred to “an inclusive impression reflecting one’s reputation as a whole.”

*Calidad* also had a gender-specific component, as the parameters of correct behavior were different for men and women, especially for the members of the elite class. We can discern in female society portraits the representation of *calidad* confirming of a model of feminine behavior rooted in the values of propriety, virtue and decorum. As will be demonstrated, these proscriptions guided the interpretation of conventions like composition, setting, attire, demeanor, pose and symbols in ways that transformed sitters into models of Christian femininity. Given the essential importance of modesty for elite women, these indications of decorum could safeguard the female sitter from the risk that displaying herself in a portrait might entail.

In 1776, both Doña Ana María de la Campa de Cos y Ceballos (Fig. 1), and her husband Miguel de Berrio y Saldívar (Fig. 3) were portrayed in a pair of portraits. Painted by different artists, Andrés de Islas in the case of the woman and José Mariano Farfán in the case of the man, these portraits display remarkable formal continuities that allow for the possibility of considering them as pendant portraits. Displaying notably serious demeanors and rigid poses, Don Miguel and Doña Ana María are each depicted in a three quarter length view, standing in interior spaces defined in both works by a heavy curtain gathered to one side. In Doña Ana María’s portrait, her

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family’s coat of arms is painted on the curtain’s fabric and an inscription that reveals her full name and her titles of Countess of San Mateo de Valparaíso and Marchioness of the Jarral de Berrio is painted in the background in the sitter’s left side. These two elements are echoed in Don Miguel’s portrait with a coat of arms, located at the sitter’s right hand that is considerably larger than the one shown in Doña Ana María’s portrait. It is further echoed by a cartouche that includes an extensive inscription with his full name, titles and affiliations to military and religious orders, date of birth, among other details.

The compositional similarities these portraits share guaranteed a visual harmony between two works painted by different hands, and which were most probably displayed in the salón de estrado at couple’s palace in Mexico City, for their family, acquaintances, and other visitors. Don Miguel’s portrait participates in the long-standing tradition in New Spain according to which viceroys and other functionaries of the local government would be represented in a scheme that follows the traditional formula practiced in the Court of the Habsburgs and followed by the Bourbon dynasty in the eighteenth century. As observed by Inmaculada Rodríguez Moya, the mobilization of this formula in the case of portraits of viceroys and other government officials served as the foundation of the “political portrait” through which commissioners alluded to their relationship with the Crown in order to validate their authority in the colonies. Despite the fact that, unlike official portraits, these two paintings may have been commissioned for a domestic display, Don Miguel’s portrait still strongly evokes this connection for a number of reasons. As clear references to his power and status, the portrait includes attributes such as the cane or bastón de mando, which alludes to his commanding position as

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21 This palace is today known as the Palacio de Iturbide and is considered to be one of Mexico City’s architectural gems.
22 Rodríguez Moya, La mirada del virrey, 59
Marquis and Count, and the habit of the Order of Santiago with its symbolic Cross of Saint James. The inscription offers details that expand the meaning of these attributes; namely, that Don Miguel is the Marquis of Jaral de Berrio, Count of San Mateo de Valparaíso, a knight of the Order of Santiago, a member of the council of his Majesty in the Real Hacienda and major dean accountant of the Royal Courthouse and Audience of the Indies. In light of the conspicuous inclusion of these attributes and information, it is then possible to see how this particular portrait created and reproduced for its audience a version of Don Miguel’s public persona as a man with the power and status to perform soundly in the public arena.

The portrait of Doña Ana María, asserts her *calidad* as a married woman who belongs to the viceroyalty’s elite while also indicating her decorum and appropriate reserve. As an artistic and a social practice that operates within the assumption of likeness as the equivalent of the self, portraiture implicates the sitter in a process of public exposure. Exhibiting oneself in a costly painting generated potential risks as the portrait produced an unchangeable image of the self for future generations. Moreover, performing *calidad* through portraiture for a woman like Doña Ana María presented additional problems and potentially serious moral implications.

Since the early stages of colonization of the Americas, Spanish women played a key role in the colonial project as agents in the retention and promotion of the Iberian culture and traditions. 23 The diffusion of moral and spiritual values would guarantee the stability of the body politic, which as the Mexican bishop Juan de Palafox y Mendoza notes, was only possible

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through the control of the New Spanish society’s morale. The criteria for the judgment of a Spanish or Creole woman’s role and reputation within the New Spanish society were guided, as Asunción Lavrin points out, by a traditional model of womanhood based on values such as modesty (*recato*), piety and decorum. The sources for this model promulgated in New Spain through institutions such as the *colegios de niñas*, or schools for girls, like that of the “Viscaínas” are found in a series of prescriptive treatises that had widely circulated in Spain and its territories since the 15th century. Juan Luis Vives’ *Instrucción de la mujer cristiana* (1523), a guide for the education of Christian “virgins” and “married women” promoted a model according to which women should strive to maintain three main virtues: chastity, modesty and strength of character. Before marriage, the conservation of her purity and the honor of her family implied for women like Doña Ana María the “incorruption of her body and mind”, and the protection of her reputation outside the boundaries of the domestic realm. As established in Vives’s text, women should pursue a moral education that would allow them escape the evil of the world, to which they were prone to since birth as the heirs of Eve’s original sin. Avoiding such contamination with mundane activities and thoughts required the cultivation of *quietud* (quietness) and *recato* (modesty). In opposition to these virtues was *inquietud* (restlessness), a concept that expressed a woman’s promiscuity and/or excessive public exposure.

While self-display in portraiture could theoretically transgress social ideals of femininity, the popularity of female society portraits like Doña Ana María’s throughout the eighteenth

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24 In his *Ideas políticas*, Juan de Palafox y Mendoza states that the happiness of the kingdom depended on five main components, among which was the “honored nobility” (*nobleza honrada*). Juan de Palafox y Mendoza, *Ideas políticas* (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2006), 11
27 Vives, *Instrucción de la mujer cristiana*, 69
century suggests, that audiences were able to reconcile notions of feminine virtue and the attractions of painted portraits. Individual portraits like Doña Ana María’s transformed women into the protagonists of a fiction based on the artificial combination of signs and visual mechanisms. These portraits exhibit features that seem to have had an alluring effect on viewers. For instance, these portraits’ considerable dimensions promoted the capturing of the audience’s attention even while displaying them in highly decorated—and thus potentially distractive—settings. Likewise, the use of oil painting situated these pictures within a highly respected tradition of painted portraits, while at the same time produced a rich visual experience by facilitating the naturalistic depiction of the sitter’s body and dress. The inclusion of symbols, formulaic features and compositional schemas that come from a well-known portrait tradition provides a visual vocabulary that although familiar to the audience carries no intrinsic meanings. In this manner, the flexible interpretative process of portraits welcomes the viewer’s participation, resulting in the activation of multiple ideas regarding the sitter’s identity. As will be demonstrated, this dialectic process may have operated in favor of a positive reading of female portraiture.

The formula mobilized in Doña Ana María’s portrait was probably regarded as obsolete in Spain and the rest of Europe by the mid-eighteenth century. Presenting Doña Ana María in a three quarter view, standing in an interior space with a folded curtain at her back, this formula offers this lady’s image, as in the case of her husband’s portrait, a visual correlation with royal portraiture tradition that positively affected her public identity in more than one way. On one

28 It is notable that by this same time period Francisco de Goya, Luis Paret y Alcázar and other painters working in Spain like Anton Raphael Mengs no longer used this prototype in female portraiture. For examples, see Goya’s La reina María Luisa con mantilla (1799, Patrimonio Nacional, Madrid), Paret y Alcázar’s María de las Nieves Michaela Fourdinier, mujer del pintor (ca. 1780, Museo del Prado, Madrid) and Mengs’ La marquesa de Llano (1771-1772, Museo de la Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, Madrid)
hand, this kind of composition locates Doña Ana María in a solemn space that had been traditionally reserved for the monarchs, and which the fiction of the portrait allows her to occupy with the same impassivity and dignity as those who hold a higher lineage. From this perspective, establishing such visual parallelism facilitated for the New Spanish aristocracy, and especially for her family’s acquaintances, an enhancement, perhaps exaggerated of this woman’s nobility.

The claim to nobility is further activated by the conspicuous depiction of her family’s coat of arms. Contradicting the portrait’s presumed reproduction of the natural, this coat of arms is presented in a transversal position over the golden brown drapery with a remarkable flatness that eliminates the possibility of considering it as an actual embroidered piece that would otherwise assume the shape of the fabric’s folding. The inscription at the sitter’s upper left corner, which appears to float artificially in the portrait’s foreground, creates a similar effect. Such inconsistent rendering of these elements and their odd positioning directly point to artifice as a guiding principle in the production of these portraits, and furthermore to their audience’s adeptness in “reading” portraits through various registers of signification simultaneously. In the case of Doña Ana María’s portrait it is important to remark on the coexistence of a presumed true rendering of her appearance, visible through her face and hands, with signs that may not be found in an actual moment in real life. The fusion of these two seemingly contradicting effects, naturalistic representation and signs with iconographical meaning inserted in the composition, results however in a plausible representation of the sitter that functions effectively in the construction of her public identity.

While associating the sitter with royal portraiture, the setting of Doña Ana María’s image produces a different meanings as well. In contrast to the light palette that dominates her figure, mostly of white, silver, creams, pinks and yellows in certain details of her dress, the dark hues
utilized in the curtain and the brown colored background lead to an immediate identification of this setting as an interior space. Although the similarities in the compositional schema and the potential display as a pair may suggest that the spouses occupy the same space, Doña Ana María’s portrait lacks the cartouche her husband’s portrait exhibits at the bottom, which allows her body to stand more naturally and further distances her portrait from the official character his portrait evokes. In addition to this, the absence of attributes that allude to any official endeavor clearly sets the stage for a different interpretation. In light of this difference, the allusion to an interior space in the portrayal of a woman of Doña Ana María’s calidad activates in the portrait’s potential audience a series of assumptions and expectations held regarding women of her class.

Operating within the model prescribed in the writings of Juan Luis Vives, Fray Luis de León and Juan Martínez de la Parra, this interior space evoked by the painting’s composition potentially produced for its viewers a recreation of the horizon of displacement ascribed to the ideal Christian woman. Seen through the lens of this model of feminine behavior, Doña Ana María’s placement in this setting raises her as an example of the Christian wife who, as Fray Luis de León proposes, should stay inside the house to care for the conservation of her husband’s earnings, for the education of her children, and for the preservation of her own reputation. In this case, Doña Ana María’s implied preference for the encierro (enclosure) speaks of her own honor and that of her family. In this respect, the teachings of Vives are clear in declaring how a woman’s enclosure, or its transgression, may have a great impact for the rest of her family. In speaking about a maiden’s behavior, he says: “(…) may the maiden go to wherever place, since she has lost her virginity everything will turn into sadness, pain, dread and anger against herself.
What pain for her parents? What infamy for her parents? What sadness for the friends? What cries for the family?”

Representing Doña Ana María in this spatial context, which would be echoed by the room wherein the portrait was displayed, this portrait not only defines this woman’s own compliance with the precept of *encierro* but also reminds other women of her social class, who likely visited her home, of the appropriate behavior women of their class should maintain. In assessing the role of portraits such as the one painted for Doña Ana María in producing for their audience the concept of *encierro* as a characteristic behavior of the Christian woman, it is important to observe that this concept established a moral binary that was constantly enforced by civil and religious authorities in eighteenth-century New Spain. New legislations and policies implemented by the Bourbon government during the eighteenth century strove to achieve greater control over, and surveillance of, those who violated this model of womanhood. The visibility of prostitutes and other women of so-called loose morals was an issue of great concern that the viceroy Revillagigedo sought to solve with his second group of reforms in 1794. Illustrating this same kind of concern, when he writes about the dangerous nature of the streets in his *Discurso de la policía de la Ciudad de México* (1788), Baltasar Ladrón de Guevara, *oidor* and advisor for the Council of the Indies, mentions that “young women of bad morals” (*mujerzuelas de mala vida*) exhibited themselves in corners and doorways close to wineries, while other women “who did not prostitute themselves entirely, hung around waiting for invitations for a drink or joined groups passing by”.

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29 Vives, *Instrucción de la mujer cristiana*, 39
30 Baltasar Ladrón de Guevara, “Discurso de la policía de la Ciudad de México,” In *Antologia de textos sobre la Ciudad de México en el período de la Ilustración* (Mexico, D.F.: UNAM, 1982), 67
Public concern regarding the negative example this kind of women set for the rest of the population, and to whom women with the *calidad* of Doña Ana María stood as counterparts, can be observed in New Spain as early as the sixteenth century. For instance, in 1576 a group of men, including Diego de San Román, Diego García de Palacios and Jerónimo Romero, founded the first *recogimiento* of Mexico City for Spanish women who having worked as prostitutes now wished to change their lives. From this period all through the early nineteenth century, the *recogimientos* operated as institutions for the reformation of “repented” women (“*mujeres arrepentidas*”), who having led an immoral life wished to renovate their lives in accordance to the precepts of Christianity, or for those married ones who were in disagreement with their husbands.31 Conceiving of the *encierro* as a healing practice, these *recogimientos*32 allowed women to live temporarily in an environment that emulated the austerity of a convent. Ideally this lifestyle would direct them to reflect on their faults towards their husbands and their children, and allow them to forgive and be forgiven for their past transgressions.33

Along with such signification of the portrait’s setting, other attributes further allow Doña Ana María’s portrait to materialize specific ideas concerning the role of women of her class as social exemplum of propriety and decorum. While her husband holds a cane, the symbol of his authority, Doña Ana María holds in her right hand an embellished closed fan that she seems to lower in a discrete way towards her feet, while she holds with two of fingers in her left hand a delicately rendered pink rose. Originally a good imported from Asia, painted fans such as this one were painted in New Spain with diverse scenes that ranged from scenes of gallantry and

32 In this respect it is important to note that the name *recogimientos* derives from the word *recoger*, which means “to gather”.
33 Muriel, *Los recogimientos de mujeres*, 58
mythological scenes to compositions depicting important political events. Signaling the sitter’s sophistication as a consumer of luxury goods, the fan was also considered in the Hispanic context an object with strong sexual connotations, as “the guardian of the vergüenza”, or demureness. While this object could serve to refresh the lady’s face, or simply occupy her hands during a social gathering, in its open position, the fan was also used as a sort of screen that would cover the lady’s gazes, as well as a shield to dismiss an indecorous approach or as a cover to conceal her blushes. In most portraits, including Doña Ana María’s picture, the fan is not displayed in its open position, thus sacrificing what could be an ideal opportunity to exhibit the decorative richness of an object such as this one. Rather, by keeping this fan closed, it remains evident that the gesture she makes with her fan does not allow any kind of potentially dangerous interaction with those surrounding her, which in this case are implicitly the viewers of the portrait. As opposed to other more risqué gestures, the closed fan, as a convention, confirms this doña’s honesty and rectitude, while at the same time proclaiming both as desirable ideals among Christian women.

Like the fan, the flower that Doña Ana María holds an element of high signal value that further embellishes the picture’s themes. Contemporary interpretations of the flower’s meanings would have ranged from decorative to more symbolic associations. In a long-established tradition, the rose could recall Marian associations. On the other hand, flowers such as the one held by Doña Ana María appear in Early Modern European painted portraits such as

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35 Jaime Moreno Villarreal, “Elogio del calor y el abanico,” In El retrato novohispano en el siglo XVIII, exh. cat. (Puebla: Museo Poblano de Arte Virreinal, 1999), 33
36 Since the early years of Christianity, the rose was known to grow in Paradise without thorns. After the fall of man, the rose took its thorns to remind man of the sins he had committed and his fall from grace. In reference to this belief, the Virgin Mary was referred to as the “rose without thorns,” which alluded to her immaculate conception.
Rembrandt’s *Woman with a Pink* (c. 1660) as a sign of marriage and pure love. Dialoguing with this tradition, Doña Ana María’s flower may propose an underlying narrative related to the lady’s deep affection for her husband, one that is manifested, however, within the confines of marriage, a socially praised union.

Elite women’s expected moral rectitude, honesty and purity are implicated in another remarkable convention that has gained these portraits pejorative adjectives such as “acartonados” (dull): the lady’s serious demeanor and the rigid presentation of her body. Doña Ana María’s body is configured in a triangular disposition that is only interrupted by the movement of her hands. The rigidity of her body finds its parallel with the lady’s countenance, which is mostly defined by a sense of overpowering seriousness reflected in her small closed lips and her oblique, yet direct gaze. In this way, Doña Ana María’s portrait creates a fictional relationship with the spectator by suggesting that although she is looking at the audience, she does so with certain hesitancy.  

Although exhibiting herself through the very practice of portraiture, Doña Ana María seems to maintain the decorum and modesty expected from a woman of her class, and especially in her husband’s implicit presence. As features that are mobilized in numerous female society portraits of this period, the serious demeanor and rigid posture fabricates a standard, and yet believable sense of psychological insight shared by women of the same class. In this respect,

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37 In relation to the notion of portraiture as a fiction, Harry Berger suggests that a portrait is the visual and material evidence of an act of portrayal, of a “fiction”, and ultimately a sign of the sitter, the audience and the artist’s notions and expectations about the image and its role as a strategy of self-fashioning. Harry Berger, Jr., “Fictions of the Pose: Facing the Gaze of Early Modern Portraiture,” *Representations* 46 (1994): 90

38 The function of demeanor as an element of high signal value in seventeenth-century Dutch portraits is keenly analyzed by Ann Jensen Adams in the article “The Three-Quarter Length Life-Sized Portrait in Seventeenth-Century Holland. The Cultural Functions of *Tranquilitas*.“ In this essay, Adams demonstrates how serious demeanor, as a pictorial convention mobilized in three-quarter length view portraits, defined for contemporary viewers the neo-Stoic concept of *tranquilitas*, a discourse based on the pursuit of self-mastery and containment of emotions. Ann Jensen Adams, “The Three-Quarter Length Life-Sized Portrait in Seventeenth-Century Holland. The Cultural Functions of *Tranquilitas*,” In *Looking*
it is important to highlight that in spite of Doña Ana María’s portrait aim to evoke a sense of realism by means of a detailed rendering of the lady’s facial features, it must have been clear to contemporary viewers that the depiction of this lady’s bodily demeanor responded to a generic formula. Based on a scheme in which the sitter appears in a standing position with her gaze fixed towards the viewer, it is notable how the conventions used in this portrait help create an effect of stiffness and motionless demeanor that contrasts with the attire’s superfluity. Such counterbalance between the lady’s body language and dress is at the core of this portrait’s potential to evoke a meaning that transcends mimetic description or a mere celebration of sumptuousness.

This woman’s serious countenance and static-appearing pose contributes to a distancing effect with respect to the viewer that confirms her distinction and moral rectitude. This lack of engagement with the viewer demonstrates the “strength of character” that, as Vives says, a Christian woman requires to protect herself from evil. Vives advises his female readers that in aiming for knowledge and discretion they should avoid conversation, and especially with men: “(…) it is better and safer for you, daughter of mine, to sustain little communication with men (…) and do not want to be in this so urbane, since it does not befit you, that you will not be considered less discreet but wiser.”

Costume is another element through which portraits of women negotiated multiple meanings. Despite the fact that, as in the case of Doña Ana María’s portrait, the detailed depiction of the textures and designs of the woman’s dress may persuade the viewer to focus on its descriptive quality, it is important to acknowledge that by the period when this portrait was

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39 Vives, *Instrucción de la mujer cristiana*, 128
painted, clothing had, as Gustavo Curie suggests, “a fundamental role; it expressed social attitudes, was used to enhance the position of a class, to promote the seduction among the sexes or to manifest the moral censorship of the body.”40 The exquisite rendering of this dress, observed in the details of every embroidered flower in her dress’ fabric, the transparency of the lace rims attached to the sleeves and the collar piece, along with the jewelry that she wears, further reinforce the reading of her “superiority and distinction”.41 In this portrait and in others of similar typology, the combination of luxurious elements of dress is revealing of the sitter’s taste as much as of her belonging to the metropolitan elite, which by this time had assumed French fashion as a sign of sophistication.

A very different take on this aesthetic is found at the other side of the Atlantic in Goya’s representations of the petimetra in the series Caprichos attest for a negative view of women’s taste for French styles.42 With a similar tone, moralizing texts and sermons written in New Spain by religious figures such as Fray Antonio de Ezcaray and Juan Martínez de la Parra not only considered ostentation as a degenerative practice, but further condemned it as an activity of the Devil43. However, the recurrence with which New Spanish portraits seem to allude to luxurious attire as an admirable quality is suggestive of a considerable degree of tolerance and of its adoption as sign of identity among the members of the elite group.

43 It is interesting to note that Martínez de la Parra referred to ostentation practices as “Pompas del Diablo”. Juan Martínez de la Parra, Luz de las verdades católicas, Joaquín Ibarra, ed. (Madrid, 1789)
Vain as it may have seemed to some moralists, sumptuous attire was considered in New Spain as a sign of elevated social standing. As evidence of this attitude, it is useful to recall the letter of a wealthy Spanish miner established in New Spain, in which he asks his daughter in the peninsula to dress in accordance to her newly achieved position upon her arrival in New Spain: “Above all my daughter should dress in the color that she wishes, but should bring three silk dresses, velvet and satin basquiñas (...) and the headdresses that she would like”.

Francisco de Ajofrín, a Franciscan friar who travelled around New Spain, recorded a similar appreciation of dress in his travel diary: “The attire of the gente principal (most important people) is mainly in the Spanish style (...) and the fashion in the style of the señoras gachupinas (Spanish women).”

While clothing constituted a major sign of social differentiation in the realm of metropolitan public life, this was not the only connotation it activated in contemporary viewers. In contrast to the lower classes’ lack of fine clothing and its subsequent association with degeneration, dress acquired during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries strong moral connotations. Clothing and the proper coverage of the body, as Vives’s text suggests, was regarded as one of the crucial signs of a woman’s recato (modesty). In this respect, it is notable how, while visually appealing, Doña Ana María’s dress also conceals her body thus upholding the standards of decorum for a decent married woman.

As evidenced in the discussion of Doña Ana María’s portrait, female society portraits in New Spain mobilized a visual vocabulary that did not rely upon single intrinsic meanings. Rather,

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44 In Alberto Baena Zapatero, Mujeres novohispanas e identidad criolla (S. XVI-XVII) (Alcalá de Henares: Ayuntamiento de Alcalá de Henares, 2009), 190
45 Francisco de Ajofrín, Diario del viaje que hizo a la América en el siglo XVIII el padre fray Francisco de Ajofrín (Mexico, D.F.: Instituto Cultural Hispano-Mexicano, 1964), 77
multiple factors intervene in the portrait’s potential to produce meaning for its sitter and audience. Although we lack textual accounts of how portraits were viewed and experienced, the popularity of this genre attests to broad trust among elites in its capacity to convey social identity. The use of pictorial conventions such as the ones discussed stand as elements that separate these portraits from modern notions of realism or individuality. During this period, allusions to an impassive demeanor, hieratic pose, compositional formula, lineage and lavish attire denoted membership in a class and shared culture. These elements lacking traditional iconographical significance emerge as full of potential meanings when regarded from the perspective of specific contemporary discourses. Female portraiture reaffirmed the sitters’ social status and also activated ideas inherent in the specific notions of *calidad* that circulated in eighteenth-century New Spain. For this reason, it is crucial to underscore that ideas and values are not, as I have strived to point out, embedded in a portrait, but rather are activated by pictorial conventions that remain open to the interpretation of the audience.
Portraiture, both as an artistic and a social practice operates within an uncertain space of representation. Pictorial conventions, format, and technique are assembled in New Spanish female society portraits in order to produce signs and visual effects that would appeal to a mostly homogenous audience by evoking an array of ideas concerning status, class, and gendered identity. The fluidity of meaning allowed by this genre is possible not only by means of the formal and figurative features that define a portrait as such, but also by the image’s display in specific spatial contexts. In what follows I explore how these images produce meaning in relation to other representations in the domestic sphere, especially those rendered in a similar scale, medium and technique. I therefore propose an interpretative exercise based on a hypothetical, and yet historically possible, visual encounter between female society portraits like the picture of Doña Ana, and genre scenes depicting women, painted on biombos, or folding screens. This encounter would have produced a semiotic dialogue in which two apparently contradicting visions of femininity were negotiated to produce a complex definition of elite women’s gendered identity.

As noted by Marcia Pointon with respect to Europe, “portraiture was an organic part of the grand Baroque interiors of ‘private’ houses; it also marked out the most intimate and familiar spaces of the great houses of the eighteenth century”. The display of portraits in specific rooms considered most appropriate for the exhibition of such pictures played a key role in the reception

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of this genre. Mostly used as the focal point in rooms reserved for hosting visitors, portraits often served in the articulation of family histories and national hierarchies. In this way, display worked hand in hand with pictorial conventions to grant portraits a privileged position within the hierarchy of paintings, objects and furniture used to signify a family’s economic status. Elegantly appointed rooms furnished with luxury objects not only created a favorable setting for the experience of these portraits, but also critically shaped the paintings’ production of cultural discourses.

As in Europe, New Spanish domestic interiors, and particularly rooms open to a semi-public access, were decorated and furnished with fine goods, often Asian imports or local pieces of craftsmanship, in order to make explicit the wealth and status of owners from the newly emerging elite class. Although not a subject that has been well studied by scholars, it has been suggested that one of the most prominent rooms utilized for such purposes was the salón de estrado (Fig. ). In keeping with its Islamic origins, the salón de estrado was originally a sitting room with a wooden elevated platform covered with fine rugs over which cushions were placed to provide comfortable seating. Traditionally considered a feminine space, the estrado served as the reception hall where the lady of the house established her social authority through a remarkably rigid and formal protocol that included serving chocolate, tobacco and other delicacies to her guests.48

47 Pointon, Hanging the Head, 20
Originally, those ladies who were invited to spend their afternoons visiting in the salón de estrado sat on fine cushions, while men were seated in chairs or canapés. In the late eighteenth century, with the arrival of Imperial-style dresses, this layout changed and cushions were replaced by wooden pieces of furniture that, produced in local workshops, often reproduced styles such as Chippendale, or emulated Asian techniques such as the painting on lacquer and mother-of-pearl inlay, or displayed delicate decorative techniques such as wooden intarsia.

Among the pieces found at the estrado were chairs of various sizes and width, bufetes (buffets), bufetillos (smaller buffets), baules (trunks), papeleras (writing cases), escritorios (desks), escabeles (ottomans) and taburetes (stools). Other decorative items exhibited in this space included pieces of metalwork, European tapestries, oriental rugs, velvets from Spain or Italy, European clocks, Venetian glasses, feather-mosaics and lacquerware trays from the region of Michoacán, mirrors, tecali-stone table tops, Campeche cotton dyed cochineal red, pieces of decorative silverware and Chinese porcelains jars. Along with this array of luxury objects, paintings featuring secular themes such as genre scenes, mythological narratives and portraits contributed to evocation of the family’s opulence.

Catalogued in contemporary inventories as pieces of furniture, folding-screens, or biombos, contributed to the repertoire of painted visual representations available at the view of visitors at the salón de estrado. Biombos, named after the Japanese word “byo-bu” which alluded to its function as a shield for wind currents invading the interior of houses, were

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49 Canapés were pieces of French furniture similar to a sofa made out of elaborately carved wood and upholstered seats, armrests and backs.


51 Gustavo Curiel, “Costums, Conventions, and Daily Rituals …”, 24
popularized in New Spain in the seventeenth century as a result of the importation of these pieces from Asia through the trading route of the Manila Galleon. As suggested by scholars Sofia Sanabrais and Gustavo Curiel, painted biombos, like ceramics and other imports, soon became one of the most desired goods among elite consumers in New Spain.\textsuperscript{52} This increasing demand for painted biombos supported the development of a diverse repertoire of themes that, based on the pieces preserved to this date and the information revealed in published inventories, may be classified into five main categories: chinoiseries, allegorical representations, scenes related to the Conquest of Mexico, views of Mexico City, and genre scenes. In speaking about this last group, Gustavo Curiel and Antonio Rubial assert that, although occasionally inspired by European prints, New Spanish painters often adapted these scenes to emulate the appearance and energy of commercial and leisure activities held in public and private spaces of Mexico City.\textsuperscript{53} As such, views of the market of “El Parián”, of celebrations in honor of the viceroys, indigenous’ marriage ceremonies, the indigenous ritual dance of “El Volador”, or the Flying pole, and panoramic views of various water channels that surrounded the city became a frequent motif in the biombos painted during the eighteenth century.

Another type of biombos is a group of screens depicting festive scenes. Curiel and Rubial have interpreted these as illustrations of the elegant and exclusive tertulias (gatherings) where elite people would gather to dance and talk. Attributed by contemporary politicians and writers as a sign of Mexico’s adoption of French ways, by the second half of the eighteenth century New


\textsuperscript{53} Gustavo Curiel and Antonio Rubial, “Los espejos de lo propio: ritos públicos y usos privados en la pintura virreinal,” 49
Spain’s social life experienced important changes that liberated the elites from the monotonous and austere life of the seventeenth century. Cafés, *paseos* (promenades) and dances were included among the leisure activities practice by the elites. Avoiding the continuous state of disorder found in the city’s streets, by this period the Mexican elite organized gatherings in estates located in the outskirts of the city like San Agustín de las Cuevas, and practiced their *paseos* around the perimeter of *alamedas*, parks specifically created for this purpose, or along the banks of a river or water channels like that of La Viga.

Putting aside questions of intentionality of such representations or their accuracy as illustrations of actual gatherings held at the outskirts of Mexico City, my interest instead is in understanding how these painted screens would have acted in dialogue with portraits in the *salón de estrado*. Following the model of French prints depicting *fêtes galantes* in the style of those painted by artists like Antoine Watteau, Nicolas Lancret and Jean François de Troy, many of these biombos portray, in a bucolic tone, men and women engaged in activities such as dancing, playing music, playing card games, drinking, and wandering through garden-like settings. For instance, the folding screen currently identified as “Folding Screen with Pastoral Scenes” (Fig. ) depicts a group of figures strolling in an outdoor setting suggested by the presence of flowers, trees, flying birds and a water channel running in the background. The generic outdoor scene is

55 For examples of these scenes refer to Nicolas Lancret, *Dance Before a Fountain* (1724) (Fig. 4); Antoine Watteau, *Venetian Parties* (1717) (Fig. 5); and Jean François de Troy, *Declaration of Love* (1731) (Fig. 6).
given specific local flavor in the rendering of the figures who are dressed in accordance to the fashion trends followed by the Mexican urban elite. These figures on the biombo are depicted in accordance with the conventions of portraiture. For example, the woman in the second panel from left to right wears a dress with a French style that is essentially similar to the one seen in Doña Ana María’s portrait. Here the artist has been keen to offer a careful rendering of the fabric’s decoration by emphasizing the shine of the embroidered flower’s golden threads, and the transparency of the lace rims attached to the dress’ sleeves, neckline and petticoat. The woman also wears pearl cuffs on her wrists, as well as golden bracelets, necklace and earrings, and a *chiqueador* on her right temple. The demeanor and poses of the figures on the screen recall conventions of New Spanish portraiture from this period. For example, we see female figures who move their arms and hands in opposing directions (i.e. one arm towards the lower part of her body, while the other remains closer to the bosom) thus creating a similar body language to the one utilized in Doña Ana María’s portrait. The lady in the ninth panel appears in a standing position that, in combination with the triangular silhouette of her dress, produces the kind of hieratic effect observed in contemporary female portraits. As another convention found in portraiture, the oblique gaze of the three women portray also produces an implicit, yet discrete visual contact with the viewer.

While combining aspects of portraiture and genre scenes, the biombo invites a narrative reading. The arrangement of figures in pairs of men and women, located in panels 2-3, 5-6, and 8-9, as well as the particular gestures and gazes they portray engages our interest in their relationships. The man in the third panel seems to walk with great elegance and gallantry towards the woman in the second panel, while the man in the sixth panel twists his head towards the woman in the fifth panel as he points in the direction of the water channel with his right hand.
Finally, by bending his head to the left, the man in the ninth panel appears to look directly at the lady who stands in front of him. The color correspondences in the attire of these three pairs also draws them together visually. Linked through gestures, gazes and attire, these men and women appear to be related in an imprecise way. These pairs may be participating in a dynamic of courtship, or perhaps they are married couples enjoying leisure activity. In either case, in presenting women and men together in a context of carefree enjoyment, this scene seems to contest the model of the ideal Christian woman that we have seen promoted in portraiture.

The outdoor setting depicted on the painted screen presents an additional challenge to the image of ideal femininity developed in portraits. Comprised of trees, flowers of various colors, birds flying in the sky, clouds, and a stream with flowing waters, this setting recreates, within the sphere of the domestic, the atmosphere of a garden. Situating the figures in a natural landscape, complemented by architectural elements such as a small hut in the ninth and tenth panel and a building with four windows in the first and second panels, this scene counters the concept of encierro with an image of female mobility and visibility. Rather than a threatening space, the realm of the exterior is presented here as a pleasant space which women and men can enjoy together.

Although not suitable for the fabrication of a personalized and explicit assertion of power, lineage and calidad, the biombo, as an object of consumption, and the images represented within it still play an implicit role in the definition of a class identity. Owning this biombo of ten painted panels with borders of golden cordobán embellished with fine designs in repoussé, and displaying it in the salón de estrado constituted a sign of its owners’ wealth and their engagement in a social practice that was exclusive to the members of the metropolitan elite. Likewise, by evoking the kinds of leisure activities practiced by the elite, which unlike those
practiced by the lower classes (*jamaicas*), were approved by the government, these genre scenes produced for the members of this class a visual fantasy that would play at the advantage in the reassertion of their superiority and sophistication.\(^5\) Displaying anonymous elite ladies in a context of diversion, these *biombos*, with their implicit rupturing of *encierro*, speak of a developing favorable attitude towards a modern ways of urbane leisure, in which women were recognized as active participants. By borrowing features from portraiture, figures depicted on *biombos* upheld the appearance of feminine *calidad*; in locating these figures in new spatial and social contexts, *biombos* enriched and complicated the notions of feminine identity that female society portraits continued to produce and reproduce.

\(^5\) Part of the Bourbon administration’s new policies regarding the gathering of people, *jamaicas*, or fundraising parties to aid charities, were mistrusted by the authorities since it the people who attended these activities were considered to dance “sacrilegious” and “scandalous” rhythms that, like the *fandangos*, *chucumbés* and the *pan de jarabe*, supported the physical contact between men and women. Viqueira Albán, *Propriety and Permissiveness in Bourbon Mexico*, 123
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The increased production of society portraits during the eighteenth century in New Spain evidences the adoption of these images as signs of social distinction among the members of a new class of elites. Rather than passively reflecting identity, portraits functioned as active agents in the definition of individual and collective identities by communicating ideas regarding class, status, and gender. They do so by means of an interpretative process that engages the viewers in a flexible reading of the image. While replicating a formula used in official male portraiture, female society portraits articulate sitters’ identities in ways that are specific to their gender. The combination of conventions such as formulaic composition, rigid pose, serious demeanor and elegant attire contributed to define the calidad of elite women in accordance to the precepts of propriety, modesty and decorum. Additionally, female society portraits produce meaning in a dynamic relationship to other pictorial representations found at the salón de estrado, most particularly genre scenes painted on folding screens. By presenting a less rigid portrayal of elite women, these screens’ presence may complicate the interpretation of portraits, thus leading to a negotiation between two opposing notions of elite femininity.
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Fig. 1  Andrés de Islas. *Ana María de la Campa y Cos y Ceballos*, 1776.
Fig. 2 Anonymous. *Virgin of the Sorrows*, Eighteenth-Century, New Spain.
Fig. 3  Titian. *Phillip II*, 1551.
Fig. 4 Diego Velázquez, *Phillip IV*, 1623-1627.
Fig. 5 Miguel Cabrera, *Don Juan Xavier Joaquín Gutiérrez Altamirano Velasco*, ca. 1752.
Fig. 6 José Mariano Farfán de los Godos y Miranda. *Miguel de Berrio y Saldívar*, 1776.
Fig. 7 Francisco de Goya. *La reina María Luisa con mantilla*, 1799.
Fig. 8 Luis Paret y Alcázar. María de las Nieves Michaela Fourdinier, mujer del pintor. ca. 1780.
Fig. 9 Anton Raphael Mengs. *La Marquesa del Llano*, 1771-1772.
Fig. 10 Rembrandt. *Woman with a Pink*, Early 1660’s.

Fig. 11 Francisco de Goya. *Volavérunt, Capricho 61*. 
Fig. 12 Nicolas Lancret. *Dance Before a Fountain*, 1730 – 1735.

Fig. 13 Jean-Antoine Watteau. *Fêtes Vénitiennes*, ca. 1717.
Fig. 14 Jean-François de Troy. The Declaration of Love, ca. 1731.

Fig. 15 Unknown painter. Garden Party on the Terrace of a Country Home. ca. 1725.
Fig. 16 Unknown painter. “Escena de un sarao en una casa de campo de San Agustín de las Cuevas,” Eighteenth Century.

Fig. 17 Unknown painter. *Folding Screen with Pastoral Scenes*, Late Eighteenth Century.