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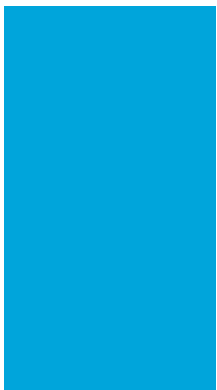
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Center for Latin American Studies
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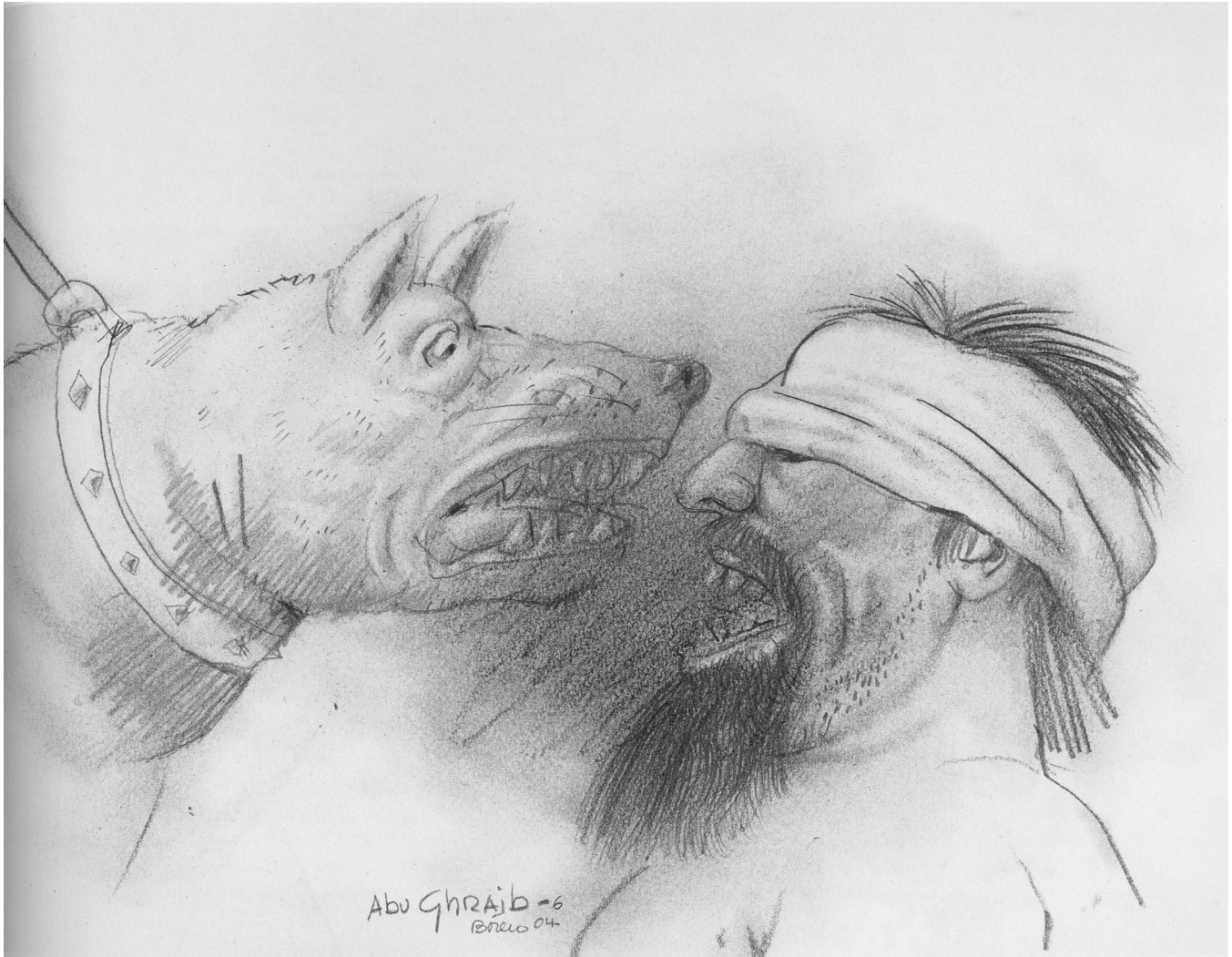
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During the spring semester of 2007, the Center for Latin American Studies hosted an exhibit of Fernando Botero's Abu Ghraib series of paintings and drawings which depict the abuses committed by American troops at that notorious Iraqi prison. In addition to holding a public conversation with the artist, the Center also organized a series of lectures to elaborate on the themes evoked in the artworks. The following essays were originally prepared for the panel discussion "Art and Violence" held on January 31, 2007.

CONTENTS

Botero and the Art History of Sufferingpage 1

Thomas W. Laqueur

Helen Fawcett Professor of History

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Art and Violence: Notes on Boteropage 11

Francine Masiello

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Botero and the Art History of Suffering

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I want to try to answer more fully this afternoon a question that Fernando Botero was asked when he was interviewed by Bob Hass at the International House here on Monday. What does this art say to us, tell us, demand of us that the well-documented photographic and forensic record of Abu Ghraib or the article by Seymour Hersh in the New Yorker that provoked the artist leave unsaid, untold, unasked?

Let me begin with his answer. Of course, he started with the pictures and the testimonies, Botero replied, not because he intended to reproduce them but because they helped him to imagine the atmosphere in the prison. I take this response literally—to imagine the air that suffused these ugly, crowded, harsh spaces—so as to paint that air on canvas. An artist “imagines,” he said. He transforms the public record through the power of art so as to “to make visible what is invisible.” In one sense this is a technical matter; it is what figurative painters do and what painters of great skill do well. But the visual artist deploys more than technique. There is, Botero says, a “concentration of energy, of emotion that goes into a painting... people feel it... they feel it.”

I will begin where he began, with the photographic testimony and then talk about what this artist, these pictures, and this place says to us about violence.

Some of the most infamous images are easy to recognize in the radically re-presented form we see next door: the pile of naked prisoners’ bodies forced into a heap of humiliated flesh; the bleeding wounds strangely joined in the photographs to a perversion of asepsis where the gloved hands of Americans are poised garishly next to an anonymous prisoner’s leg. Other pictures, one might speculate were too fixed in their abjection, too abstract in that they showed only the fact and not the act of humiliation to be painted—the prisoner smeared in feces for example. But there is another set of images missing, the most iconic one. Lynndie England did not engage Botero even though her photograph with a prisoner on a leash became the international trademark for Abu Ghraib.

I think there are two reasons for this, and both have to do with gender. Lynddie England—even the name seems preposterously innocent in these circumstances—became the poster girl for prison torture, I want to suggest, because she could be made to seem so pathetic, so silly, so powerless, so insignificant. A small woman, not very bright, from a coal town in West Virginia, she cuts a ridiculous figure. Nothing someone so clueless does need be taken to seriously; someone—her boyfriend with whom she was also photographed as if in yearbook—egged her on to do it; or she is playing her part in the sort of sadistic rituals of high school junior sororities. One almost feels sorry for the bewildered, ignorant, waif-like girl who took the rap for a system that was authorized by people far, far more powerful and important than she.

In any case, if a girl committed the paradigmatic abuse of Abu Ghraib it could not have been so bad or so embedded, the iconic image seems to suggest, because it remains difficult, given our cultural resources, to imagine women as violent. Lynddie England as poster girl thus allowed much of the world to ignore the central tropes of Botero's pictures: the sheer physical brutality of what went on; the masculine aggression and muscular power; the sexually inflected sadism; the weight of torture and humiliation as a historically male enterprise. Botero did not re-work England's photograph as art, I want to suggest, precisely because his anger was directed against the sort of mitigation—the not seeing—that her increasingly iconic picture made possible.

But there is a second reason why the most famous image of Abu Ghraib is unrepresented. I want to say something in a moment about the repertoire of Western art that informs—maybe too much—the work of this deeply historicist painter. But for now I want only to point out how little our tradition has to offer for depicting female violence. There are a few exceptions—Judith beheading Holofernes comes to mind—but not many. If, as I want to suggest, Botero's paintings take much of their energy from their appropriation of the past, then he had available to him only a very limited visual vocabulary through which to break through the numbness that the newspapers' poster girl induced. The pictures in the next room are about the violence that men do to men, even if we see little of the perpetrators except their hands and feet; it is about the

humiliations of gender reversal—forcing prisoners into bras and women’s underwear, peeing on them and so on. They are about men and beasts.

Let me turn now more specifically to this artist—to Botero—in relation to his subject matter: torture at Abu Ghraib. It is easy to think of him as the master of the happy, slightly pneumatic caricature, of a style that would seem at first glance—but only on a very short first glance—as deeply wrong for translating the photographs and testimony that came out of an American-run prison for Iraqis into art. In fact, he has all his life been engaged with painting suffering and violence. There is far more darkness than light in Botero.

His *Young Woman Crying* from 1949 may show, as he said, later “the tremendous sentimentality characteristic of the young,” but we can see in it already the weightiness, the twisting of limb upon limb, the embarrassment or worse of being seen to be in pain. He has long been interested in the hideous, the outrageous, brutal, grotesque qualities of life and especially life in a homeland that has been witness to so much violence and corruption. We can see some of this in his *War* from 1973—a year of violence in Colombia and in the Middle East—a painting that looks back to some of George Groz’s post-World War I pictures but also forward to the ones in this exhibit: the blood flecks on the body, the exposed buttock, boots, and death, lots of death. Then there is the dissoluteness and debauchery in his picture of a brothel in Medellín, to take another example—bodies heavy on the ground, cigarette butts on the floor that are painted like the streaks of blood on many of the pictures next door, a massive shoe very like the boot that comes from the edge frame to kick a hooded, lacerated prisoner in the back in the Abu Ghraib picture here seems poised to step on a cat. Cruelty and carnality are alive and well here. In other words, the extravagance of the pictures next door is very much a part of Botero’s sensibility and of the visual tradition from which he comes. (His vision is not so different in this respect from that of his countryman, Gabriel García Márquez.)

But more important than his long history of interest in violence is his commitment to fleshliness and through it to sensuality. Because these painting were done so quickly and the

pigments applied in thin layers with even the wounds and patches of blood indicated only by a deepening of color and not of paint itself, they don't have the surface sensuality of some of Botero's work. His reworking of Carravaggio's *Alof de Vignancourt* is a good example of flesh dressed up in sheen. But even without the well-worked surfaces of some of his other work, the pictures next door are great on flesh. And flesh is at the heart of torture. Torture in Botero, for better or for worse, is an exploitation of sensuality.

In the paintings next door Botero appropriates a huge swath of Western art's representation of suffering. It is, to make the point, again the body that is in pain even if it is the soul that suffers. Bodies in pain are heavy fleshly bodies, and Botero readily acknowledges what he owes to the tradition of depicting them. The Christ of Masaccio, of which he spoke in his conversation with Bob Hass, is heavy; so is the Christ of Mantegna, whom he much admires and has worked his way through. One is hard put to think of a binding of Prometheus in which the victim is not fleshly. The satyr Marsyas is a fleshly muscular creature whom Apollo flays in the Spanish painter Ribera's version of the story. Botero knows this artist well and has taken him on board. Look at the upside down bearded head from the seventeenth century in the Abu Ghraib series next door. We could take this story of flesh and violence though William Blake—*The Punishment of the Thieves*—in the late eighteenth century, to Goya and beyond.

These points suggest a third observation about Botero which helps us answer what his art adds to the documentary record of torture, and what it demands of us. It brings, I want to suggest, the energy and substance not only of this artist's labor and skill but also of the great tradition of depicting violence to bear on the shameful and shoddy prison in Iraq. Botero, as I have already said, is a thoroughly historicist painter. He is deeply learned in Western art practice. He spent more than a decade obsessed with the great painters of the Italian Renaissance, especially of the 1400's, but also later. He is explicitly indebted to Velázquez that master, like Goya, of both courtly grace and cruelty. His engagement with his predecessors is exceptional, right up to Picasso and beyond. What this means for us who see these pictures is that we become, through

him, the heirs of a way of seeing that we all know, even if we don't know we know it. In other words, the abused prisoners at Abu Ghraib—or at least their representations—take on the dignity of a long history of art engaged with violence.

All this is clear in the paintings next door. Look at any one of the blindfolded, bearded prisoners, their bodies streaked with sweat like beads of blood—thin pigment with a tiny dab of white to give the illusion of depth and the glisten of a drop, or at the wounded foot, or at the bound hand, and you see the tradition of the passion of Christ. Botero is not a religious man, but he is a man who says of himself that he is obsessed with the quattrocento and what it brought. The paradigmatic instance of suffering in the Western tradition, at least until the Holocaust which has not yet had a big impact on how the visual arts deal with violence and suffering—that is, the passion of Christ—is painted on the faces of Iraqi prisoners.

I could be more precise in making the case for Botero's historicity. From the more distant past, think of Andrea Del Sarto's 1530 drawing of a man hanging upside down and the upside down prisoner suspended from a rope next door. There is an even more explicit visual connection between the beast-like dogs in *Abu Ghraib 52* or *Abu Ghraib 81* with their dinosaur teeth and the dog-like beasts in Goya's *Proud Monster* and *There Is Something to be Gained* from *The Disasters of War*; they recall too the hunting dogs, some with armor-like padding, tearing at their prey in pictures like Frans Synder's 1625 *Boar Hunt*. It is as if Botero is appropriating not just Goya but the whole history of what dogs can do to the flesh going back to Ovid and the ripping apart of Actaeon by his own dogs after he was transformed into a stag for seeing the goddess Diana bath naked. The vomiting prisoner in Goya's *This Is What You Were Born For*, is taken up to make us imagine again what Goya had imagined. (The big difference is that Goya manages to represent the horrible messiness of violence—the collapse of order—while Botero isolates it in the tidied up spaces I want to mention briefly now.)

Two of my favorite pictures in this exhibit are among the small ones on the north-facing divider. One shows a prisoner in a narrow space painted in forced perspective. The reproduction

does not capture the delicate light, or maybe I should say the air that suffuses the room and almost purifies what is contained within it. But it does give you a sense of how the space not only draws us in but also forces us to regard the massive figure that incongruously occupies it. The other has a Vermeer-like window letting in light from the left where again the light and the room make demands on us to see violence where we might not have expected it. I bring this question of space to your attention because I think that one of the remarkable qualities of these paintings is oddly that they take the prisoners out of the spaces of the actual prison and frame them, sometimes behind a grid, in an almost unearthly purity. When one looks at the photographs the humiliated prisoners are almost swallowed up in filth and garbage; here they are in surroundings with qualities of another age. I will leave it to our discussion what you make of this strategy.

Finally, there are the hundreds of details in the paintings next door that demand our attention in a way that the documentary record does not. With the photographs we get the point—which is that “this happened”—right away, and we move on, embarrassed or discomforted. With the paintings we are invited to keep looking. I have my list of such details: teeth—often with gaps, sharp, almost animal-like, as if gnashing, as if the hard enamel felt the violence on the soft muscle. Swaths of pink that represent blood or bruises and take up big swaths of canvas that also remind us just how human these men are—the pink of flesh. (This too of course has historicist roots in Botero; I did not ask him, but I am sure, given his passion for Goya, that he took in the still life of meat still bright with blood and death and yet very much part of a recently living sheep.)

Let me make this point more generally. Images of suffering and violence constitute a claim, I want to suggest further, to be regarded, to be noticed, to be seen as images of someone to whom one has ethical obligations. They work insofar as they can sustain demands on those who engage them. In that sense they are an art, or more precisely, an artifice: facts transformed through craft into something that demands what the critic Jed Perl calls “slow seeing,” seeing that takes place in time, that is not, he says just a “a matter of imaging a narrative,” but “involves rather the more

fundamental activity of relating part to part.” “We need to see complex elements,” he continues, “and see that they add up in ways that become more complex—and sometimes simpler.”

Understanding violence in art in such a way as to make a difference is not so far from what the philosopher Alexander Nehamas says about what constitutes aesthetic engagement more generally: “To understand the beauty of something we need to capture it in its particularity, which calls for knowing how it differs from other things and that, in turn, is to be able to see, as exactly as possible, what these things are and how each one of them, too, differs from the rest of the world.” The decent response to torture demands this sort of engagement. In a sense it transforms the longing and desire for beauty into a longing to engage ugliness. The status of other human being becomes the object of exact, slow, active, engaging seeing. So, if this art does something, it demands that we look in way that the photographs with which Botero began do not, or at least do not so imperatively.

Let me conclude by taking this point on step further and making the case that seeing these paintings here at the University of California, in Doe Library, is an important aspect of—I would even say helps constitute—the political intervention by art against the violence that Botero made newly visible. In obvious ways this is what a university is supposed to do: making public, debating, adding to, modifying ideas and images and sounds that the commercial, governmental, and major cultural institutions of society may not be ready to deal with or to deal with so intensely. But, in a way it might have been a good thing that the Berkeley Art Museum did not find it possible to show the exhibition that found a home next door.

Libraries have historically been places of contemplation, places where one takes more than a glance at a text. Fast reading is for other places and occasions. There is nothing wrong with it; in fact it is and has been enormously important politically in the past 400 years and ever more so since the late eighteenth century. But there are not many places in our society that stand for slowness, and this is one of them. We do see the art next door as if in a gallery, the sort of space in which people tend to spend seconds in front of works of art as they rush through. But we also

see it in a library on a university campus; the adversity that Botero has faced in making his work public and that Harley Shaiken and the Center for Latin American Studies faced in bringing it may have produced the best of all possible worlds for regarding the art of violence next door. I want to end by thanking them for the remarkable feat of mounting and sustaining an exhibition of this quality and importance.

Art and Violence: Notes on Botero

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If you walk up and down the streets of New York, figural art from Latin America and Spain seems to take over. The bronze women of Juan Muñoz, huddling and chatty and larger than life, stand on one corner of Central Park South. The 50th Street subway stop of the IRT holds up the tile work of Liliana Porter, her Alice in Wonderland tableau withstanding the rumblings of trains and crowds. Even the imposing sculpture of José Artigas, standing at the juncture of Spring Street and Broome, is a pedagogical reminder of the revolutionary promise that once drove our spirits. And then we get to Botero. Buoyant, defiant, populist pleasures of flesh and bronze planted on sidewalks and medians as far as the eye can see. A coup d'état on the Upper East Side.

If Botero brings joy, it's because of the block size of his figures and their inflated, imposing presence. Bodies that announce to the world that bodies still count. Bodies of cats, of military generals, of oligarchs, and, it goes without saying, bodies of women. Gluttonous, overfed bodies that belong to the world's elite. Fat cats who stand in front of apartment buildings where only fat cats can afford to live. Some have been swept away by Botero's gargantuan forms to believe that he is feasting in the whimsical space of the apolitical. And, indeed, in his paintings, the flying big-bellied figures seem to soar with the lift of magical realism, one of Latin America's great exports in the realm of cultural kitsch. Postcards, t-shirts, notebooks, and calendars bear the imprints of Botero's blimpy figures. No wonder, then, that it's so difficult to make sense of his *Abu Ghraib* series in the context of his earlier work.

Populism leads us to easily digestible answers. Populist art, made popular for elites and the masses, works because it's approachable and rarely scares us; it works because its grammar is relatively straightforward. Even the uninitiated can have a good time. So in the show of the Latin American exotic that sells so well in the United States, we manage to erase the political when we wish, and to reinstate it when the impulse strikes us. In this context, it's easy to understand why the bourgeoisie, whom Botero derides, also manage to laugh with him, and still come back for more. These largely spontaneous experiences with Botero's art have resulted in the assimilation of his work into the fabric of American life; indeed, we think he belongs to us as much to us as

to anyone else. In the process, we defang him and forget the power of art. Once again, in the age of globalization, in a world where everything is easy to swallow and complexities are reduced to sound bytes, we also manage to flatten out the deep sensibilities of a thinking artist.

This may work well in the gallery world or even on the streets of New York, but the logic doesn't always add up, especially if we take Botero back to his Latin American roots. Here, in his Latin American framework, the conflicts between political purpose and visual aesthetic to a large degree can be reconciled and understood. It allows us to see in Botero's *Abu Ghraib* not a sudden turn to political topics, a deviation from apparent frivolity, but a long and continuous conversation about the relationship between art and violence especially in the peripheral South.

Let me frame it another way. With Latin America removed from the foreground of discussion, Botero's *Abu Ghraib* is linked perhaps to Richard Serra's now famous flyer or to the protests against the war by North American artists like Golub or Gronk; but when we situate Botero in his wider biographical context, and more decisively within a long practice in Latin America of speaking for those who have been silenced or disappeared, then his *Abu Ghraib* comes as less of a shock, hardly unnatural and out of sorts. Toward this objective, I want to claim Botero's recent series as a comprehensible and earnest offshoot of ethical expression that follows in the custom of many of Latin America's top visual artists.

Botero brings us the world of generals and buffoons, the greased pork of the Latin American big shots, figures who glide through times of hyperinflation and global crisis. In short hand, we might say that he comments on an expanding consumer world that in turn devours us all. Equally, he records the life of the *pueblo*, the bar rooms and dance halls of Latin life and, when painting his beloved Medellín, Botero delivers his subjects over to a history of disruption and loss.

In this respect, the *Abu Ghraib* paintings follow in the logic of Botero's earlier works which he began in the 1960s and which were devoted to scenes of Colombian violence, a legacy that has taken hundreds of thousands of lives since the 1940s. More recently, the series on Colombia's battle with the drug lords also converses with the *Abu Ghraib* series in form and

texture. This Colombian series from the 1990s was destined, in Botero's words, to illustrate the "absurdity of violence." It is in this series that you may remember a canvas that represents the murder of Pablo Escobar, a portrait of the guerrilla leader Tirofijo, and vultures flying down upon corpses somewhere near Medellín. It is here that we also see desperate figures locked in cramped prison cells like those that we see in the series on Abu Ghraib.

I don't know if technique and ideology can really be matched up. But it strikes me as important that since the late 1970s (with the rise of authoritarian regimes all over the South), Botero has concentrated his efforts on the representation of space: walls, fences, enclosed rooms with windows that let the countryside peek through, but which all the same lock human subjects within limited possibilities of movement. In the works on Colombia, prisons became a subject. Here, the walls of the institution are a rich blue, perhaps to remind us of the vibrant colors used to paint exterior walls of buildings in Colombian towns. In the *Abu Ghraib* series, however, the blue yields to grey and black, to greens and flesh-colored hues. It's as if the walls were an analogue for the body, taught and solid, holding pain. In the *Abu Ghraib* works, hope is lost. Violence is no longer absurdity; now, *Abu Ghraib* leads us to pathos.

Botero wasn't alone in this urge to represent Colombian violence. In earlier decades, his compatriot Alejandro Obregón devoted himself to painting social violence and dismembered bodies, depicting the atrocities of the civil war that started in the 1940s. And Doris Salcedo, much younger than they, took on Colombian violence in the 1980s through strategies of visual ellipsis. Abstract fragments and residues of political violence remind us of lives that are lost. Zippers, combs, shocks of hair are trace materials used in Salcedo's work to represent the trauma of life destroyed. But here in Botero's case, his work with massive bodies does another kind of work with mourning just as it signals a new black legend based on specular violence and specular pain.

From the monumental to the tragic, from ridicule to somber anguish, from abstraction to figurative representation, Latin America's artists and writers have not ever been far from these

concerns. If the 1960s, then, was a moment in which artistic and political vanguards were joined, it was also a moment for questioning the role of the artist vis-à-vis the masses and, in another line, the radical role of the artist before the state. It is the moment of Cortázar's public discussions with García Márquez about the appropriate role of the writer in international affairs (Viet Nam was to be the issue for that generation), and also the time of the Di Tella group in Buenos Aires with their giant installations and happenings that were the mark of the decade.

In these years, Botero declared through his passion for politics the inevitability of painting the tyrants who clouded the Latin American landscape (Londoño Vélez, 432). In all of this, the artist as intellectual with something to say was destined to make an intervention against the degradation of human life. Remember that no one wanted Socialist Realism in art, even less art with a message: rather, artists from Latin America searched for a modern concept of technique linked to a public engagement. An art that was not dogmatic. But an art that spoke outside the academies and reached public spaces. To go beyond ethnographic art, beyond folklore and still retain a vision. Not surprisingly, Picasso's *Guernica* was at the center of discussion in the 60s.

Although Botero has brushed through these conversations and throughout has declared himself to be against art as a weapon for social change, his craftsman's technique and eye for detail nonetheless reached the political. And, precisely through his long tradition as a student of visual arts, his influences and strategies of citation, he found another more oblique way to tell a political story.

Let's get to the flesh of the matter. I wonder when Botero looked at the Olmec heads or the famous Atlantes of the Toltecs if their giant forms didn't touch him. Imposing, the stones of a lost civilization often stand today as an allegory of our own lives in ruins, a sort of memento mori. They seem to laugh about our own waning of experience as they peer down from exceptional heights. It makes me think that these messages, even from pre-Colombian times, tell us that it's the body that prevails in the end, and by that I mean not simply the image we see, but also our bodies as a starting point for all interpretation. And later, the colonial Baroque comes in to help.

Polychrome martyrs for whom all pain is condensed in just a few drops of blood on the body. Tough skin that feels pain and absorbs it in gashes and open wounds. We feel the substance. We are here in a sensate world that demands us to be awakened. Work with the senses, then, as a way toward political awakening. Not the sentimental, which is self-gratification, but the world of feelings from which a regard for otherness begins. Presence as a beginning.

Tactility, corporeal space in ethical representation. Maybe this sounds like a move toward Levinas, but I want to claim that Botero's bodies, in some way inspired by pre-Colombian forms and the colonial Baroque, stand for presence when the tide of history has moved to erase them. Here, a line from an early poem by Yehuda Amichai in Chana Kronfeld's translation, "What is not of the body will not be remembered." (see also Amichai 1986, 31–32). Botero keeps this body present.

Perhaps the neofigural artists with whom Botero is identified in Latin America also found the need to give form to ballooning flesh in order to remind us of the bodies that were at stake in a wider political context. Not simply the Mexican muralists whose paintings were larger than life, but those who followed and in turn expanded the vocabulary for treating social representations in art: Cuevas in Mexico, Berni in Buenos Aires, and even Botero's compatriot Enrique Grau. At the center of their projects is not simply the status of the poor or the reworking of the popular figures whose myths are larger than life—the Juanito Lagunas in the *villa miserias*, picking up scraps of garbage to show a collage of urban experience—but also the idea of a popular life that surely deserves a face.

A conflict in art and politics emerges at this point. The neofigural artists of the 1950s had yet to confront the problem of the disappeared. For them, poverty and social injustice ran at a more conventional pace. Torture camps, detention tactics, the U.S. training school in Panama, the question of an interventionist politics in which human rights were cast to the wind had not yet reached page-one discussion in the news when those artists began working. The 1970s and 80s led us to these scenes of terror that still stay with us today. For that reason, the *Abu Ghraib* series

that we see here at Berkeley needs to stand as a reference for the horror that surrounds us not only on the East–West axis, but also for a long history of the disappeared that runs from Ciudad Juárez to Tierra del Fuego. A Latin America that is not immune to the scenes that a Baghdad prison camp offers. With prison camps, which in their full extension have held so many Latin Americans that even the current president of Chile can tell what it’s like from the inside. And here the debate with the disappeared gathers its paradoxical momentum.

Those of you who have read *One Hundred Years of Solitude* will remember that famous scene of invisibility that lies at the center of García Márquez’s novel. Here, despite so much attention to detail, so many pages of description of characters and events, so many wild delusions and scenes of unbridled inventiveness that gave magical realism its place in literary canons, here at the center of the novel is an episode that recounts the disappearance of workers who were part of the famous 1928 banana plantation massacre in Colombia. Piled up in train cars, corpse upon nameless corpse, only one character bears witness to the horror, but he can’t find any trace of this scene in the newspapers or official records. The point is that one of us must continue to write for the disappeared if official history elects to ignore them.

And this indeed has become the challenge for Latin America’s most interesting writers and artists: how to account for the disappeared subject that the state doesn’t want us to see. The 1960s inaugurated this project in Latin America combining an inquiry into the integration of vanguard politics with avant-garde art in order to represent violence. In some cases, and against the violence of the state, artists tried to bring violence to art. “Tucuman Arde,” an exposition in Argentina in the late 1960s, took up this claim when the artists of that group declared: “violence is now a creative action that produces new content and form. It destroys the system of official culture and moves on to create a truly revolutionary art” (Giunta, 333). The inflammatory rhetoric of the 60s was repeated throughout Latin America as incipient guerrilla movements cropped up throughout the continent. Others sought to register trauma and the ongoing crisis of meaning. Art as testimonial to horror; art that helps us to see.

Here we turn a corner. For this is the point where one elects the form with which to touch the sensibilities of the Other, to reach the audience, whether through figural art or through the power of abstraction. How to make a public see. How important then that a common motif running through the *Abu Ghraib* paintings are the blindfolded subjects who cannot access light or vision. We are also in this quandary, blind to the atrocities of torture, blind to the violence that surrounds us and numbs our feeling. Our sight has been taken from us.

Latin America's most interesting artists take on this challenge. A few examples from Chile: Guillermo Nuñez, detained and exiled in Paris during the dictatorship of Pinochet, echoed the pain of this experience when he painted the blinded eyes of those detained and imprisoned. Buchenwald, Auschwitz, and Chile's Villa Grimaldi coexist on his canvas, and through the repetition of horror he forces us to think of the role of the artist engaging with the past without losing sight of beauty. Catalina Parra represents Pinochet's reign of terror by referring to the legends of the *imbunche*, the witch of folkloric Chilean culture who, it is told, closed the orifices of victims so that they could not be part of the sensate world. She combines natural elements of wood and thread with photomontage from the U.S. dailies so that global interests share a space with the natural fabrics of local terror. And Eugenio Dittborn of the Chilean *avanzada* works through photo collage and painting to show the victims of Pinochet who were left blindfolded and dismembered. But more important, they disrupted the language and eye of those in power. And if the state kept meaning under surveillance, these artists sought to elude the silence with the residuals of other discourses, to forge other memories of trauma that the state all too readily denied.

I don't know if art is exorcism, as Derrida once proposed (1997, 9), but surely the excess of pain represented leaves us with an obligation to think. The avalanche of images contained within the archive of violence smothers us, asphyxiates us, brings us into the small spaces of the cell that hold prisoners in solitary confinement. We live in a kind of airless bubble with artificial breathing on call. *Respiración artificial*, or surrogate breathing, the title of so many

Latin American imaginative works about the conditions of existence under surveillance and state terror, is certainly felt in the *Abu Ghraib* paintings. But just as the paintings force us to breathe the air of confinement, they also force us to see.

These paintings are designated by numbers, a trope and practice that cannot escape the attention of anyone who thinks of detention centers and the human rights abuses therein. Numbers replacing identities that are taken away, to bring us to the bare life of people under detention. This forces us to move laterally. If not Abu Ghraib, then Guantánamo, or before that, the ESMA or Villa Devoto during Argentina's "Dirty War." Shuttling between styles and histories, Botero drops us squarely in the present. John Berger recently wrote: "Every painted image announces: *I have seen this*. That *this* refers to the sight represented." But he goes on: "Painting is first an affirmation of the visible which surrounds us and which continually appears and disappears. Without the disappearing, there would perhaps be no impulse to paint" (2001, 14). Similarly, Botero's paintings take us into the world of the invisible, the space that cannot be seen, the space that is prohibited, devoid of pity. And Botero, master of corporeal space, gives a narration to silenced bodies. Tactility draws us in. And constructs a memory of a before and after.

Monuments, we are reminded often enough, tend to make the real disasters invisible. They have us focus on the place of memory rather than memory itself. As an antidote, the painted canvas, even more than the photo, brings us into dialogue about memory as sentient subjects, willing to reflect on pain. Memory is also tested through the possibilities of contrasting a before and after in the artist's evolution and history. It is not that the large muscular bodies of the *Abu Ghraib* series only remind us of those bodies which are surely the center of a discourse on pain; rather, when we approach these works, we also need the earlier Botero of gleeful form in order to see how joy easily falls prey to abjection. It is a moment for thinking of individual subjects and how they fall from grace, but perhaps it also opens a dialogue about the experience of transition and movement. And from here we can posit the aesthetic moment as encounter with past and present, pointing to a future. The aesthetic, then, as a precondition that awakens us to the movement of political thinking. This is brought about even in Botero's system of citation.

It has been often said that Colombian neofigurative art takes not only from Cubism but also from the European Renaissance masters. But this craft also has a cultural logic that calls upon a memory of political history. Here's what I have in mind. The turn toward early Europe not only teaches Botero a particular detail to color and form, but thick brush strokes placed in evidence on the surface of these squared-off figures force us to reckon with the form and force of the body as sensual matter, as matter that in life has been subject to torture, to endless abuse and distortion over centuries. It is as if through citation, Botero brings us to the early start of contemporary violence: religious wars, wars of colonialism and conquest, the world of dark carceral visions that once belonged to the Inquisition. As the backdrop to the *Abu Ghraib* paintings, serialized and without titles, we feel the long march of history converging on the present horrors.

Up to here, I have been making a case for the phantasm of origins as if by situating Botero's *Abu Ghraib* in a larger context we might persuade ourselves of coherence. I don't think I'm a firm believer in linear truths, but let me twist things a bit to explain the reason behind my methods. A week before the Botero exhibit was scheduled to open on campus, it was asked why the Center for Latin American Studies was sponsoring his series on Abu Ghraib. After all, what does Abu Ghraib have to do with a Latin American agenda? The question is tricky and, though I made a minor effort to give you some links to hold on to, in fact we all fell into a trap. Here's why. It's not uncommon for us in the Latin American field to often trip over this matter for the question—what does Abu Ghraib have to do with Latin America?—fits into a pattern that often excludes Latin America from larger conversations about the world.

Should only U.S. citizens speak to the horror of torture or indeed only Iraqis? Does torture know a specific language or a single source of infliction? Precisely at a moment when we are told that utopias are globalized, the Latin American artist once again needs to justify a voice. A Colombian painter living in Paris, occasionally in New York and Italy, and probably touching upon every major city on the globe during the course of a lifetime, is not a stranger to globalization nor to the points in which his native Colombia intersects with the world. It need

not be defended nor should one have to explain it. Nor should we have to rehearse once again the globalization of defeat that encircles us all. To be in Latin America is to know actively of concentration camps and torture, of being snatched away in the middle of the night, of memories of national genocide that continue to haunt creative artists at work. Even if we vow to separate art from politics, as Botero once declared, we all know that politics explodes from within, creating politics from the materials of art, from paint and texture, composition and form. Maybe that's why we need to hold on to the body as our point of entry to the sense of the real. The bodies that speak beyond any single language and speak of the pain that encircles us all. In that case, Botero responds to the urgent and venerable plea: **habeas corpus**.

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