

# The historiography of pictorial art in 19th century colonial Cuba

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*We introduce to the representative texts on the historiography of pictorial art in 19th century, and the history they reveal, using descriptive statistical analysis to gain a quantitative understanding of the set.*<sup>b</sup>

## Introduction

Current studies on academic colonial painting produced in Cuba present a better picture than in previous years. The National Museum of Fine Arts and the Faculty of Arts and Letters of the University of Havana, among others, have contributed to this. There are some periodisations and articles that attempt to give a historical account of the development of painting during the period in question, but they are still insufficient for a broad and detailed knowledge of the subject. There is a need for studies that would make it possible to delve more deeply into certain thematic areas, time periods or artists, which could make up for the shortcomings that still persist.

The vision of academic painting produced in Cuba has been shaped, fundamentally, on the basis of the criteria of the authoritative voices on the subject that circulate in texts (books, catalogues, periodicals, etc.). The aim of this paper is therefore to explain which are the most representative texts and what is the history they reveal.

We present writings on art that refer to academic colonial painting, its artists and the contexts in which they developed. We do not intend at this point to make a totalising analysis, for that it will be necessary to combine historiographic visions with the analysis of works and collections. In addition, an exposition of the dissimilar meanings of historiography is given. We also look at some of the characteristics of Cuban historiography in its three historical periods (Colony, Republic, Revolution).

All of the above is done in order to place the art historiography, the starting point of our study, on a solid foundation. This is where these texts on academic colonial painting will be found, marked by the characteristics of the historiography of each period.

Finally, the statistical results of the set of texts dealt with in this work can be observed in order to obtain the quantitative description and composition of this historiographical sample. This means that future analyses will have at their disposal a wide range of writings with certain characteristics that allow for a historiographical type of research in which diachronic and synchronic views can be combined.

## Development

The distribution of the texts observed can be seen in figure 1, where the variability of media is appreciable,

with the highest percentage belonging to scientific articles and books.

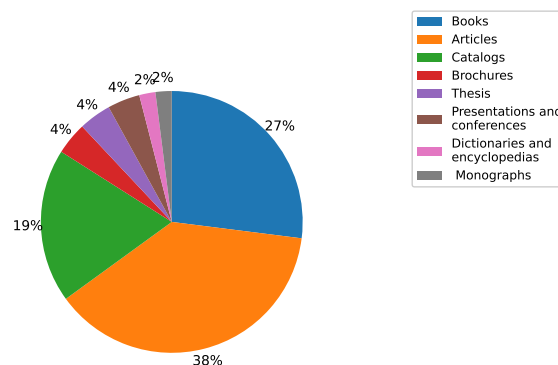


Figure 1: Composition of the texts under study according to their type.

Similarly, the distribution of texts by country is shown in figure 2. Note that the highest percentage (74%) belongs to texts published in Cuba and that their variability allows us to contrast the views on academic colonial painting produced in Cuba by authors from various parts of the world, where Spanish and American texts predominate after the Cuban ones.

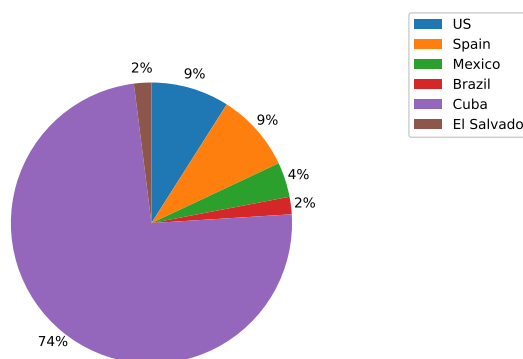


Figure 2: Composition of the texts that make up the object of study.

Figure 3 shows how the selection of these texts is composed according to the period to which they be-

long. Table 1 shows how the selected texts cover the three periods of Cuban history, as well as the variation within the same period. It should be noted that there are texts that are repeated in the same year; however, the intention is to show the variability and not the quantity.

Colony	Republic	Revolution			
1861	1924	1959	1983	2001	2013
1875	1936	1970	1986	2004	2016
1878	1947	1974	1990	2008	2017
1887	1950	1976	1991	2009	2018
1891	1952	1980	1994	2010	
	1953	1982	2000	2012	

Table 1: Distribution of texts by period and by year.

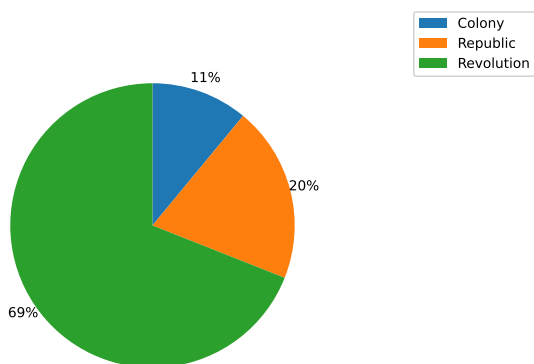


Figure 3: Distribution of the texts according to the period of Cuban history to which they belong.

### Conclusions

The selection of texts presented here leads us to affirm that there is a propitious working scenario for investigating and continuing to construct the view of academic colonial painting produced in Cuba from other visions and inputs. What has been presented in this review invites researchers to consider other perspectives on the pictorial art produced in Cuba under the norms established by the Academy of San Alejandro.

It highlights the growing interest of the scientific and academic community to investigate, using the historiographic method, the relationship between the Academy

of San Alejandro and its enabling context. This leads to the conclusion that the historiography carried out so far on the emergence and development of San Alejandro in the 19th century and the aspects surrounding it (painters, pupils, teachers, works) is, however, still scarce.

From the above, it is clear that it is necessary to combine not only the synchronic and diachronic aspects, but also the contextual aspects in which each of the texts cited here were written, as well as the fieldwork in the archives.

The aim of this study was to identify, even quantitatively, the elements from which future research into the academic painting of the colonial period in Cuba could be nourished.

For the Cuban colonial period, the texts presented meet certain requirements that will also make it possible to establish different approaches according to the socio-economic, social, cultural, geographical and political environments of the authors and their historiographical works.

The importance of taking up the issues raised in the works presented, the problematisation they propose, and the approach they provide, as well as the methodological processes they use, will lead to the development of more integrative proposals in future research. This is precisely the space that this historiographical exhibition is intended to establish, which obviously has the common denominator of the development of painting in Cuba, and among this the one with an academic character.

It should be remembered that the approach presented here does not have a totalising character, as the elements proposed by these authors require more in-depth work in which information is collated between the data provided by these authors, the documents present in the official archives and the texts describing the context of Cuba in the 19th century.

### Notes

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- b. Original version of this article is in Ref [1]

### References

[1] Duquesne, O. P., La historiografía sobre el arte pictórico en la Cuba colonial del siglo XIX, *Nexus*, **28** (2020) 1-30.