

Casta Painting

IMAGES OF RACE
IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY MEXICO

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I

Painters and Paintings: A Visual Tradition and Its Historiography

CASTA PAINTING CONSTRUCTS racial identity through visual representation; it is one of the most compelling pictorial genres from the colonial period in Mexico in particular and the eighteenth century in general. Created as series of consecutive images, casta painting depicts the complex process of race mixing among the three main groups that inhabited the Spanish colony: Indian, Spanish, and African. While interest in the classification of races dates back to ancient and medieval times, the subject became highly fashionable in the eighteenth century as scholars and lay people alike sought to explain why people differed in color and behavior. Among the issues most widely debated was the extensive miscegenation that took place in the Americas. Scientists, travelers, and royal functionaries, among others, all advanced their ideas regarding the hybrid population of the New World. Casta painting provides a unique visual index of this long-standing fascination with the genealogy of humankind.

The first striking feature of casta paintings is that they were constructed as a progression of images recording the process of *mestizaje*, or race mixing, among peoples from the New World. Most sets consist of sixteen scenes depicted on separate canvases or copper plates. Occasionally, however, the scenes are represented on a single compartmentalized surface (fig. 1) or on a horizontal canvas that illustrates all the castas together (fig. 2).¹ Each image portrays a man and a woman of different races with one or two of their children, and each is accompanied by an inscription that identifies the racial mix depicted. In addition to presenting a typology of human races, most casta paintings include samplings of local objects, food products, flora, and fauna of the New World. A few works depart from this basic scheme of representation by portraying the different racial groups as part of a city view.

El Parián, for example, depicts the main marketplace (fig. 3). Here, the numbers next to the figures refer to a key inscribed on the back of the canvas that identifies the “types of people that inhabit Mexico City.”²

The works range widely in size, but scale and quality do not necessarily correspond. While paintings by noted artists tend to be larger than many that remain anonymous, there are small sets that are highly accomplished. In addition, a few images were created as book illustrations. The genre enjoyed such wide popularity during the eighteenth century that artists of all standings produced sets to supply an avid clientele. Some were created by the best artists of New Spain but most of the more than one hundred known series remain anonymous.³

Despite the evident interest that casta painting holds for scholars from various disciplines — art history, anthropology, history, literature, cultural studies, and others — the genre has only recently begun to garner significant critical attention.⁴ Still, the scholarship on casta painting is scarce and for the most part of limited use when trying to understand a pictorial genre that remained popular for an entire century. The problem lies in the methodological approaches that have been used to interpret these works since the late nineteenth century and the type of questions generally posited by scholars.

Interest in casta painting goes back to the last decades of the nineteenth century. In 1884 the French anthropologist Ernest Theodore Hamy acquired from a Parisian bookshop an incomplete set of casta paintings signed by Ignacio de Castro, which now resides at the Musée de l’Homme in Paris.⁵ Hamy’s study of Castro’s set initiated a trend that has persisted until today, namely the attempt to quantify the percentage of pure — that is, Spanish — blood in the different races



1 (left) Unknown artist, *Casta Painting*, ca. 1725, oil on canvas, 175 × 115 cm. Private collection.



2 (above) Unknown artist, *Casta Painting*, ca. 1770–80, oil on canvas, 104 × 245 cm. Banco Nacional de México, Mexico City.

3 (facing page) Unknown artist, *El Parián*, ca. 1770, oil on canvas, 55 × 90 cm. Private collection.

represented. Elaborate charts pinpointing the various degrees of mixtures often complement these studies.⁶ Most of these early studies, in addition to documenting the appearance of new sets, emphasize the paintings' supposed ethnographic value.⁷ In 1908, the French anthropologist R. Blanchard, for instance, referred to casta paintings as "documents of the utmost ethnographic significance in terms of the settings, trades, costumes, instruments, and accoutrements depicted. They are also important socially because they provide us with the names of the different types of mixed races." However, he regretted the paintings' scarce anthropological value, as he considered the rendering of the various figures to be "purely fantastic," thus constituting the works' principal flaw.⁸ This association of casta painting with ethnography may explain in part why the founding father of the history of colonial Mexican art, Manuel Toussaint, mentions the genre only in passing and then only with the intention of

documenting Castro as a Mexican, not Spanish, painter, as Hamy had claimed.⁹

An issue that has repeatedly been raised by scholars is the original function of casta painting. Since most of the paintings depict the same thing – a progression of racial combinations – authors have often attempted to establish a collective purpose for these works. Blanchard argued that Spaniards created the genre as a visual register of the various castas in order to distinguish themselves from mixed-blooded individuals, although he did not propose how.¹⁰ Drawing on the work of the Mexican historian Gregorio Torres Quintero, the art historian Teresa Castelló Yturbe has asserted that casta paintings served as a visual aid for parishioners (who kept separate books for Spaniards, Indians, and castas from the 1640s) in establishing the racial identity of those about to be baptized, married, or buried.¹¹ This theory, however, cannot be sustained because not a single set of castas has ever appeared in



the inventories of a church in Mexico. Furthermore, the nomenclature used for describing the different castas shows no consistency, thus precluding such a utilitarian function for the works.¹²

More generally, scholars have tended to place the production of casta painting within the context of the Enlightenment in Spain. According to the Spanish anthropologist Francisco de las Barras de Aragón writing in 1929, “the creation of these paintings was motivated by a spirit of scientific inquiry at a time when Spain was conducting an in-depth study of its possessions and was commissioning scientists to travel to its domains.”¹³ In 1973 the Spanish author Isidro Moreno Navarro published the first comprehensive study devoted to casta painting from the viewpoint of anthropology.¹⁴ He set out to demonstrate, through the use of intricate graphs, that while casta paintings show a limited number of racial mixtures, biologically the combinations were endless. Given that casta paintings did not accurately portray reality, Moreno Navarro contended that these works were born out of the taxonomic interest characteristic of the Spanish Enlightenment, a time when the influence of the Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus (1707–1778) was taking hold in Europe.¹⁵ While it is true that Linnaeus’s *Systema*

naturae of 1735 exerted a tremendous influence on scientists, philosophers, and intellectuals across the Western world, the earliest casta paintings predate the work of this taxonomist by more than two decades. As I shall show throughout this study, the interest in classification evident in casta painting preceded the Enlightenment, arising in classical and medieval times. To insist that casta paintings are solely the product of the Enlightenment in Europe is therefore not only reductive but also misleading.

In *Las castas mexicanas: Un género pictórico americano* (1989), which represents the first survey of the large body of casta painting, the Spanish art historian María Concepción García Sáiz devoted an entire section to addressing the function of casta painting. According to García Sáiz, the paintings were a sort of exotic souvenir destined for audiences in Europe.¹⁶ While she acknowledged that some paintings never left Mexico, thus reluctantly admitting that there might have been a local market for these works as well, she insisted that the paintings were a sort of snapshot of colonial life that would have naturally appealed to an “enlightened” foreign clientele.¹⁷ Since then, the Mexican art historian Elena Isabel Estrada de Gerlero has attempted to connect the production of casta paintings with the

Relaciones geográficas (Geographical Accounts), the series of elaborate questionnaires drafted by the Council of Indies beginning in the sixteenth century. The questionnaires requested detailed information about various aspects of the colony in order to govern it better; they were answered by colonial functionaries and were often supplemented with drawings.¹⁸ Even though there is no evidence that the large corpus of casta painting remotely responded to the requests of the *Relaciones geográficas*, the desire to link the paintings with a specific body of documentation represents another forced attempt to establish a function for these works.

The need to ascribe a definite function for casta painting (or to any work of art) demands to be examined. Unless concrete evidence exists that outlines the path intended for a given object (for example, whom it was made for and where it was intended to be displayed), the assumption that art has a discrete function is a fundamental fallacy. Moreover, bearing in mind that the production of casta painting spans an entire century, what might have given impetus to the creation of certain sets at certain moments cannot satisfactorily account for the impetus behind the creation of the genre as a whole. This book challenges the usefulness of assigning one specific function to casta painting, or of establishing a single, collective interpretation for such an extensive body of work. The task is not to explain what purpose the works served, but rather to interpret the images within the specificity of their own historical context.

In addition to the problem of the works' function, another issue that pervades the historiography of casta painting is that of the works' "realism." Scholars of the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth centuries generally took the racial nomenclature inscribed on the works at face value, thereby endowing the paintings with a documentary quality. Contemporary scholars have also made claims for the paintings' realism. García Sáiz, for example, has repeatedly suggested that casta paintings are slices of colonial life. According to her, the emergence of the genre in the eighteenth century signaled "a refreshing breeze of air in the overloaded atmosphere of religious art." Arguing that most colonial art relied heavily on European models, García Sáiz insisted that casta painting stood out as a unique genre, one in which "the colonial artist is asked for the first time to abandon the use of foreign models and look at his surroundings."¹⁹

The subject of realism in genre painting is not new to art historians, particularly to scholars of seventeenth-century Dutch genre painting. Whether viewed as

straightforward descriptions of nature, complex images with hidden meanings based on literary sources (such as emblem books), or simply as exercises in artistic virtuosity, the study of seventeenth-century Dutch genre painting has produced an abundant interpretative literature.²⁰ The basic nineteenth-century premise that Dutch genre painting mirrored reality, however, has long been dispelled. As the art historian Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann has keenly observed, "Dutch artists did not describe reality; in almost every case they constructed a plausible reality, partly by using elements of reality, partly by using their imagination, more like poets than reporters."²¹

While literature on Dutch genre painting is copious and polemical, that on casta painting is still too thin to have prompted any serious debate. Only a few comments uttered by historians have hinted at the constructed nature of these paintings. In his groundbreaking 1946 study of the presence of Africans in Mexico, Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán noted that most of the terms used to describe the different castas were inapplicable in ordinary communication.²² Magnus Mörner in 1967 adhered to this observation, maintaining that these terms were "the products of a few intellectuals and artists. Furthermore, they illustrate the almost pathological interest in genealogy that is characteristic of the age." After remarking on what he deemed an "absurd" juxtaposition in casta painting of peoples of different race and status, Mörner concluded that these works were an "entertaining genre of art, characteristic rather of eighteenth-century exoticism and rococo than of a serious effort to present the social realities of the Indies."²³

The racial terms inscribed on the paintings is a topic that will be addressed more fully in Chapter 2 but already these comments point to the contrived nature of casta painting. In the 1990s a number of studies by Estrada de Gerlero and myself emphasized the degree of artifice present in the genre.²⁴ Indeed, as in the field of seventeenth-century Dutch genre painting, to assume that casta paintings are simply renditions of daily life is to divest the works of the possibility of encoding any meanings beyond the purely descriptive. Likewise, to view the paintings simply as ethnographic documents or as conglomerates of "real" elements in "real" settings is to minimize the multiple hermeneutic possibilities that the works offer. This is not to say that the paintings' real-life referents are unimportant; in fact, casta painting would benefit greatly from a study focusing on the material culture it presents.²⁵ But this would be only one way of approaching this multilayered body of work.

Perhaps the fascination that both seventeenth-century Dutch genre and casta painting retains for today's viewers is related to the inability to interpret these works satisfactorily and unanimously; this inability goes hand in hand with the lack of written testimonies of the artists' or patrons' intentions. Nevertheless, as the art historian Michael Baxandall stated: "The account of intention is not a narrative of what went on in the painter's mind but an analytical construct about his ends and means, as we infer from the relation of the object to identifiable circumstances."²⁶ Rather than focusing on the artists' intentions, concentrating on the associations that a contemporary viewer might have brought to the images promises to yield more positive, or at least more interesting results, since it allows a sense of the culture from which the images emerged.

In the last decade, specialists of Dutch art have given more attention to the relationship between historical, social, and cultural conditions and the production of art, which has resulted in more engaging and convincing interpretations.²⁷ Of late, Mexican art historians have also published a number of immensely valuable studies that strive to understand the intellectual processes behind the creation of images, taking into account the specificity of their context.²⁸ The application of various methodologies such as art history, social history, and reception theory enables the viewer to understand better the context in which the works developed, thus permitting a more comprehensive approach to the complex issue of public reception.

This book undertakes as one of its most important tasks the investigation of the contemporary interpretation of casta painting, which is fundamentally linked to the ways in which image production codifies meaning. This process necessarily binds mnemonic functions to the process of representation. In other words, the way in which an artist creates images and how the viewer draws upon his or her recollection of prior visual experience is here considered. As the anthropologist Susanne Küchler and the art historian Walter Melion have observed, image production is "the locus of the heightened interplay of mnemonic processes and cultural formation."²⁹

One clarification: even though a contextual approach to the production of casta painting can provide insight into the works' meanings, this does not necessarily mean that all audiences of the eighteenth century understood these images in the same way. How an image was decoded depended largely on the cultural background of the individual viewer. This is as true of the eighteenth century as it is today.

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CONSTRUCTING A VISUAL TRADITION

The history of eighteenth-century painting in Mexico has yet to be written. Monographs are scarce, and there is still much that needs to be learnt about the artists and their working methods. Even so, in the study of casta painting the relationship between several artists is traced and thus insight may be gained into the modes of painting production in New Spain during this time. Certain sets stand out for their compositional originality but there is a great interdependence among them, and most of the paintings repeat long-established conventions. The artists often created more than one set and they routinely copied each other's work, which accounts for the transmission of models. Furthermore, in a guild-dominated network, styles and motifs were passed down from master to apprentice and from generation to generation.

Patterned after the medieval European guild system, the painters' guild in New Spain was the hierarchical governing body over artists. Its purpose was to maintain artistic standards and protect the interests of its members. As is well known, the hallmark of the guild system was the master-apprentice relationship. The owner of the workshop, a master craftsman, employed apprentices who worked unpaid in exchange for room and board and unrestricted tutelage in the master's art. When the apprentice had attained a certain degree of experience and proficiency, he became an *oficial*, or workshop assistant, and received pay. Established masters usually employed several *oficiales* at any one time to assist them with their various commissions. The aim of the apprentice was to become a master, but making the leap was not always a simple matter. Workshop assistants had to be examined by the *veedor* (inspector) and the *alcalde* (mayor) – the two main authorities of the guild. The examination was not only costly, but masters tended to promote their own children or other close kin in an effort to safeguard their artistic dynasties and retain control of the market.³⁰

In Mexico City, the artists guild is of prime importance in understanding the development of casta painting and its sustained popularity during the eighteenth century. The association of artists in academies also contributed to the development of the genre. Another key element that may account in part for the success of casta paintings and the wide range of quality they exhibit is related to the genre's subject. While the last ordinances (1686) for painters and gilders demanded that Indians – a euphemism used to refer to "unskilled" artists in general – be examined if they were to create religious images, establish a workshop, or open a shop,

they were free to paint landscapes, still lifes, and “any other subject” without having to be examined.³¹ Supervising the work of unexamined artists was not always enforced, but the freedom to paint secular themes was probably a factor that contributed to the great number of casta paintings and the extremely divergent facture of the works.

The earliest known set of casta paintings is signed and dated by a member of the Arellano family, possibly Manuel.³² So far only four paintings of this series have been identified (figs. 4–7).³³ While Arellano’s set focuses exclusively on individual racial types, his works are considered the prototype for the development of

7 (facing page) Manuel Arellano, *Rendition of a Mulatto*, 1711, oil on canvas, 101.6 × 74.3 cm. Collection of Jan and Frederick Mayer, Denver.

4 (right) Manuel Arellano, *Rendition of a Mulatto*, 1711, oil on canvas. Whereabouts unknown.

5 (below left) Manuel Arellano, *Rendition of a Chichimeco*, 1711, oil on canvas, 103.5 × 78.5 cm. Museo de América, Madrid.

6 (below right) Manuel Arellano, *Rendition of a Chichimeca*, 1711, oil on canvas, 103.5 × 78.5 cm. Museo de América, Madrid.





Dilección de Mariana y Felipe
en España en la Ciudad
de México el día de San Juan
el 22 de mes de Agosto
de Non Años =

H. G. N. 1763

8 (below) Attributed to Juan Rodríguez Juárez, *De español y de india, produce mestizo* (Spaniard and Indian Produce a Mestizo), ca. 1715, oil on canvas, 80.7 × 105.4 cm. Breamore House, Hampshire, England.

10 (bottom) Attributed to Juan Rodríguez Juárez, *De castizo y española, produce español* (Castizo and Spaniard Produce a Spaniard), ca. 1715, oil on canvas, 80.7 × 105.4 cm. Breamore House, Hampshire, England.



9 (below) Attributed to Juan Rodríguez Juárez, *De español y de mestiza, produce castizo* (Spaniard and Mestiza Produce a Castizo), ca. 1715, oil on canvas, 80.7 × 105.4 cm. Breamore House, Hampshire, England.

11 (bottom) Attributed to Juan Rodríguez Juárez, *De español y de negra, produce mulato* (Spaniard and Black Produce a Mulatto), ca. 1715, oil on canvas, 80.7 × 105.4 cm. Breamore House, Hampshire, England.



12 (facing page top) Attributed to Juan Rodríguez Juárez, *De español y mulata, produce morisca* (Spaniard and Mulatta Produce a Morisca), ca. 1715, oil on canvas, 80.7 × 105.4 cm. Breamore House, Hampshire, England.

13 (facing page bottom) Attributed to Juan Rodríguez Juárez, *De español y de morisca, produce albino* (Spaniard and Morisca Produce an Albino), ca. 1715, oil on canvas, 80.7 × 105.4 cm. Breamore House, Hampshire, England.





16 (above left) Attributed to Juan Rodríguez Juárez, *De indio y loba, produce grifo que es tente en el aire* (Indian and Wolf Produce a Hold-Yourself-in-Mid-Air Grifo), ca. 1715, oil on canvas, 80.7 × 105.4 cm. Breamore House, Hampshire, England.

17 ((above right) Attributed to Juan Rodríguez Juárez, *De lobo y de india, produce lobo que es torna atrás* (Wolf and Indian Produce a Wolf Return-Backwards), ca. 1715, oil on canvas, 80.7 × 105.4 cm. Breamore House, Hampshire, England.

18 (left) Attributed to Juan Rodríguez Juárez, *De mestizo y de india, produce coyote* (Mestizo and Indian Produce a Coyote), ca. 1715, oil on canvas, 80.7 × 105.4 cm. Breamore House, Hampshire, England.

14 (facing page top left) Attributed to Juan Rodríguez Juárez, *De mulato y de mestiza, produce mulato es torna atrás* (Mulatto and Mestiza Produce a Mulatto Return-Backwards), ca. 1715, oil on canvas, 80.7 × 105.4 cm. Breamore House, Hampshire, England.

15 (facing page top right) Attributed to Juan Rodríguez Juárez, *De negro y de india, produce lobo* (Black and Indian Produce a Wolf), ca. 1715, oil on canvas, 80.7 × 105.4 cm. Breamore House, Hampshire, England.

19 (right top) Attributed to Juan Rodríguez Juárez, *Indios mexicanos* (Mexican Indians), ca. 1715, oil on canvas, 80.7 × 105.4 cm. Breamore House, Hampshire, England.

20 (right center) Attributed to Juan Rodríguez Juárez, *Indios otomites que van a la feria* (Otomí Indians on the Way to the Fair), ca. 1715, oil on canvas, 80.7 × 105.4 cm. Breamore House, Hampshire, England.

21 (right bottom) Attributed to Juan Rodríguez Juárez, *Indios bárbaros* (Barbarian Indians), ca. 1715, oil on canvas, 80.7 × 105.4 cm. Breamore House, Hampshire, England.

the genre that portrays a father and mother of different races with their offspring as part of the same composition.

Modeled after Arellano's series are two sets attributed to Juan Rodríguez Juárez (1675–1728). Seven paintings have been located from the first series (see figs. 77–83); the second series numbers fourteen works and appears to be complete (figs. 8–21).³⁴ Many of the figures in the complete set strongly rely on Arellano's models, particularly the mulatto man holding a snuff-box and the heathen Indians (see figs. 14, 21). The uneven quality of the paintings suggests that the series was carried out by the artist with the help of assistants. A contemporary copy of the set further indicates that the practice of creating more than one casta series per workshop was established early in the century, and that artists borrowed from one another.³⁵ One way in which artists could have had access to similar designs was through sketches. In this respect, it is interesting to note that an anonymous painting that displays all the castas on a single surface recalls Rodríguez Juárez's figures (see fig. 1). The work's free execution suggests that it was made by a secondary artist, but its sketchiness could also indicate that it was intended to serve as a sample of the different racial prototypes in an artists' workshop – perhaps even Rodríguez Juárez's.

In addition to the evidence provided by the paintings themselves, the relationship between Arellano and Rodríguez Juárez is substantiated by documentary sources. Rodríguez Juárez was descended from a dis-





tinguished family of painters working in Mexico City in the seventeenth century. His father, Antonio Rodríguez (1636–1691/2), was a noted painter, and his maternal great-great-grandfather and grandfather were the renowned painters Luis and José Juárez (ca. 1585–1639; 1617–1661). Juan's brother Nicolás (1667–1734) was also an established painter. This artistic pedigree no doubt contributed to Juan's popular acclaim: he was widely known as the Mexican Apelles.³⁶

The pride that the Rodríguez Juárez brothers took in their craft is demonstrated by their founding of an academy of art in Mexico City in 1722 or before.³⁷ In 1728 they and other artists signed a letter authorizing friar Miguel de Herrera to petition the king for official recognition of the academy.³⁸ Nothing is known about how the academy operated, although the art historian Guillermo Tovar de Teresa has proposed that it was created in imitation of the drawing academy founded by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo and Francisco Herrera the Younger in Seville in 1660.³⁹ This suggests that while guild artistic practices were not abandoned, there was a desire on the part of these artists to elevate the status of painting to one of the liberal arts of the viceroyalty, and to demonstrate that it was an intellectual pursuit and not merely a manual craft.⁴⁰ It is not known whether Manuel de Arellano was part of this pioneering academy, yet it may be presumed that he had close personal and artistic ties with Juan Rodríguez Juárez from the fact that Arellano named Rodríguez Juárez the executor of his will in 1722.⁴¹

Closely related to Rodríguez Juárez's series is an incomplete set of castas attributable to José de Ibarra (1685–1756), of which nine paintings are known (see figs. 84–92).⁴² While a reliance on Rodríguez Juárez's models is clear, Ibarra introduced significant novelties, particularly the scene of the family eating *tamales* (corn-filled husks) and *buñuelos* (fried sweet bread) in an outdoor setting (see fig. 88). Another innovation is the depiction of the figures in full-length, as opposed to three-quarter-length. The connection between the two painters is further supported through documentary evidence. Records show that Ibarra was not only an active member of Rodríguez Juárez's academy and possibly one of his *oficiales*, he was also a close friend of Rodríguez Juárez and his brother Nicolás. Nicolás was a witness at Ibarra's first marriage in 1718, and Juan was a witness at his second in 1719. In 1722 Juan Rodríguez Juárez named Ibarra the executor of his will.⁴³

left Attributed to Juan Rodríguez Juárez, *Indios bárbaros* (Barbarian Indians), ca. 1715 (detail of fig. 21).

Ibarra is a key figure who links two important generations of painters – those associated with the Rodríguez Juárez brothers on the one hand and the so-called generation of the Maravilla Americana on the other.⁴⁴ The name derives from a book with that title written by the celebrated painter Miguel Cabrera in 1756. In his book, he defends the divine nature of the original image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. He also includes the *pareceres*, or opinions, of several painters of Mexico City who corroborate his conclusion, including Ibarra, Manuel de Ossorio, Juan Patricio Morlete Ruiz, Francisco Antonio Vallejo, José de Alcívar, and José Ventura Arnáez.⁴⁵ Many of these artists had gathered in a second Academy of Painting founded in 1753 and directed by Ibarra, the oldest and most acclaimed living artist of the time.⁴⁶

The establishment of this academy was a direct response to the formation of the Royal Academy of Art of San Fernando in Madrid in 1752; but as Tovar de Teresa has noted, it was also the continuation of the academy established by the Rodríguez Juárez brothers around 1722, of which Ibarra was a member.⁴⁷ The same desire to be formally recognized and to elevate the status of painting characterizes both academies. In fact, after the formation of the academy of 1753, many artists began to describe themselves in their wills, contracts, and other documents as noble practitioners of the liberal art of painting and/or as members of the Academy of Painting.⁴⁸ Colonial artists petitioned the king in 1754 to give his royal protection to their Academy of Painting, indicating that they gathered twice a week “to practice their art . . . improve it, and correct each other’s work.”⁴⁹ Twenty-five painters signed the petition, including several who created series of castas, such as Morlete Ruiz and Cabrera.⁵⁰ Although the plan to have the monarch recognize their academy failed, many of these artists attempted it again in 1768, adding sculpture to painting on this occasion.⁵¹ It took nearly three more decades for the king to support an art academy in Mexico: the Royal Academy of San Carlos was founded in 1783. The grouping of these artists is crucial for understanding how the casta genre continued to evolve into the second half of the eighteenth century. As president of the academy of 1753, Ibarra knew many of its members; thus it is not difficult to surmise that he brought the casta genre to the attention of Morlete Ruiz and Cabrera as well as other artists of their generation. Moreover, it is known that Morlete Ruiz was Ibarra’s apprentice when the older master established a workshop at his house.⁵²

Seven casta paintings are known from a set signed and dated by Morlete Ruiz in 1761 (see figs. 103–4,

106–9), which are published here for the first time.⁵³ Based on a comparison with these works, it is now possible to attribute three loose paintings from a second set in a private collection in Cádiz, Spain, to the same artist.⁵⁴ Morlete Ruiz (1713–?1772) was born in Guanajuato. In 1729 he moved to Mexico City, where he had a distinguished career. His marriage in 1733 was celebrated at Ibarra’s house in Mexico City, which testifies to the strong bond between them.⁵⁵ Morlete’s highly accomplished paintings are related to Ibarra’s in his preference for full-length figures placed in outdoor settings, but the compositions differ from the models of the earlier generation by showing the social rank and occupation of some of the figures, often conveying their attitudes. One painting, for example, portrays a Spaniard in military garb (see fig. 106), while another depicts a child excitedly reaching for the doll that her father holds up (see fig. 103).

Even though Morlete Ruiz’s set dates from 1761, the genre had been popular throughout the first half of the eighteenth century. An anonymous set datable to about 1730–50, for instance, is clearly based on Rodríguez Juárez’s series (figs. 22–31).⁵⁶ Written evidence also points to the wide appeal of casta painting before the 1760s. In 1759 a contemporary observer noted that the genre was fashionable among a Spanish clientele.⁵⁷

Among the best is a series signed by Miguel Cabrera (?1695–1768) in 1763 (see figs. 110–23).⁵⁸ As I shall show in Chapter 3, Cabrera is credited with introducing a number of important changes to the genre. The effectiveness of Cabrera’s set lies in his warm intimate style, especially in his extraordinary ability to convey emotion through the subtle physical contact between the figures. Indeed, Cabrera was one of the most successful artists of the eighteenth century; he received commissions from all sectors of the elite, including several religious orders and the archbishop of Mexico from 1748 to 1765, Manuel Rubio y Salinas. To fulfill his numerous commissions, Cabrera had a large atelier where he employed several apprentices and *oficiales*. Through his workshop and his involvement in the art academy of 1753, Cabrera was part of a close-knit network of artists. His association with Morlete Ruiz, for example, extended beyond their participation in the academy of 1753 and their examination of the original image of the Virgin of Guadalupe; upon Cabrera’s death, Morlete Ruiz appraised his paintings, a privilege that points to their close relationship.

Andrés de Islas and José de Páez were contemporaries of Cabrera. Their works often recall Cabrera’s style, but the exact nature of their relationship to him is largely unknown. In the 1770s Islas created at least

22 (below) Unknown artist, *De español e india, produce mestizo* (Spaniard and Indian Produce a Mestizo), ca. 1730–50, oil on canvas, 84 × 105 cm. Private collection.

24 (bottom) Unknown artist, *De español y negra, produce mulato* (Spaniard and Black Produce a Mulatto), ca. 1730–50, oil on canvas, 84 × 105 cm. Private collection.



23 (below) Unknown artist, *De español y castiza, produce español* (Spaniard and Castiza Produce a Spaniard), ca. 1730–50, oil on canvas, 84 × 105 cm. Private collection.

25 (bottom) Unknown artist, *De español y mulata, produce morisco* (Spaniard and Mulatta Produce a Morisco), ca. 1730–50, oil on canvas, 84 × 105 cm. Private collection.



26 (facing page top) Unknown artist, *De español y morisca, produce albino* (Spaniard and Morisca Produce an Albino), ca. 1730–50, oil on canvas, 84 × 105 cm. Private collection.

27 (facing page bottom) Unknown artist, *De negro e india, produce lobo* (Black and Indian Produce a Wolf), ca. 1730–50, oil on canvas, 84 × 105 cm. Private collection.





28 (top) Unknown artist, *De lobo e india, produce lobo torna atrás* (Wolf and Indian Produce a Wolf Return-Backwards), ca. 1730–50, oil on canvas, 84 × 105 cm. Private collection.



29 (top) Unknown artist, *De mulato y mestiza, produce mulato torna atrás* (Mulatto and Mestiza Produce a Mulatto Return-Backwards), ca. 1730–50, oil on canvas, 84 × 105 cm. Private collection.



30 (above) Unknown artist, *De india y coyote, produce zambaigo* (Indian and Coyote, Produce a Zambaigo), ca. 1730–50, oil on canvas, 84 × 105 cm. Private collection.



31 (above) Unknown artist, *Indios bárbaros* (Barbarian Indians), ca. 1730–50, oil on canvas, 84 × 105 cm. Private collection.



32 José de Páez, *Indios bárbaros montaraces. 1.* (Barbarian Mountaineer Indians), ca. 1770–80, oil on copper, 50.2 × 63.8 cm, Private collection.

two sets of castas dated 1772 and 1774 (see figs. 126–8, 129–30, 132–43) and as many as five others are sets modeled after his.⁵⁹ There is practically no information about Islas, but it is known that he was Cabrera's witness when he drafted his will a month before his death in 1768.⁶⁰ His participation in such a poignant moment in Cabrera's life indicates that the artists knew each other well and that their bond exceeded their professional interaction. While hardly as distinguished as Cabrera or Morlete Ruiz, Islas was a *maestro de pintor* (master of painting) who worked for official circles and who must have enjoyed a certain level of prestige.⁶¹

José de Páez (1720–?1790) also created several sets of castas which date from around 1770 to 1780 (figs. 32–43).⁶² His style, which can be described as sentimental despite the somewhat static and stilted poses of

the figures, is close to that of Cabrera, which may account in part for his great success. Almost nothing is known about Páez except that he was one of the most prolific artists of the eighteenth century, and it is highly likely that he catered to an export market; his paintings are found not only throughout New Spain but also in Peru, Guatemala, and Venezuela, among other places.⁶³ One of his casta sets, which is incomplete, includes scenes that hark back to some introduced by Rodríguez Juárez and Cabrera. The depiction of the family group next to a kitchen stove (see fig. 37), for example, recalls Rodríguez Juárez's painting of the same subject (see fig. 11), while the representation of the interior of a tobacco shop is closer to Cabrera's (see figs. 42, 122). Páez also introduced a number of new scenes – such as that of the interior of a choco-



33 José de Páez, *De español y mestiza, castiza. 2.* (From *Spaniard and Mestiza, Castiza*), ca. 1770–80, oil on copper, 50.2 × 63.8 cm. Private collection.

late shop with straw baskets at the back, bearing a street sign that reads “Chocolate. Bueno” (good chocolate) (see fig. 40) – that give his sets a distinct flavor. The idea that Páez’s sets were meant for export is supported by the way he signs them, explicitly mentioning that they were made in Mexico – “Jsp de Páez fecit, en Mexico.” Like Islas, several sets were created after Páez’s.⁶⁴ Two series by Buenaventura José Guiol (of whom unfortunately there is no information), for example, rely heavily on Páez’s models and are even close in style (figs. 44–5).⁶⁵

The bulk of extant casta paintings was created in the 1770s and 1780s, but establishing a relationship among the artists is difficult since there is a lack of information about them and their styles. Nevertheless, it is still possible to map the development of the genre through

a couple of examples following the establishment of the Royal Academy of San Carlos in 1783. In a significant twist of fate, it was a Spaniard, Jerónimo Antonio Gil (1732–1798), who founded the academy that finally received the support of the king. According to Gil, the main reason for establishing the academy was to train artisans from all disciplines by teaching them to draw, thus raising the quality of all the arts (drawing was largely held to be the foundation of good art). Gil specifically lamented that the guild system in New Spain had failed to uphold the quality of art:

There exist more than forty workshops where people trade with painting, sculpture, gilding, and construction; they are generally known as *tratantes* [traders], and without the most basic knowledge of



34 José de Páez, *De español y castiza, español. 3.* (From Spaniard and Castiza, Spaniard), ca. 1770–80, oil on copper, 50.2 × 63.8 cm, Private collection.

drawing, they sell scores of imperfect works, which are frightening to the sight. In addition, they accept many apprentices who aid them in their domestic chores, and thus prevent them from receiving proper training.⁶⁶

Gil's statement gives a sense of the quantity of workshops operating at the time in New Spain and of the somewhat lax state of artistic practice in the guild system. While Gil awaited the arrival of professors from Spain to work in the new academy, he temporarily employed local artists whom he considered sufficiently skilled, including José de Alcívar, Francisco Clapera, Rafael Gutiérrez, Juan Sáenz, Manuel Serna, and Mariano Vásquez. Gil was adamant that the artist-professors refuse private commissions but this demand,

as might be expected, could not be enforced. Although there is no evidence that casta paintings were created within the halls of the new academy, at least one of its professors created a set after it was established.

Francisco Clapera (1746–1810) painted a series datable to around 1785 (figs. 46–51). He was born in Barcelona and was a member of the Royal Academy of San Fernando in Madrid, but he made his career in the Americas and died in Mexico. He traveled to Peru (1776–80) as part of Viceroy Manuel de Guiror's retinue and in 1779 he disembarked in Mexico on the voyage back to Spain. There he met Gil, who had arrived the previous year and who convinced Clapera to stay and be part of the academy he was already planning.⁶⁷ Clapera occupied a number of posts in Gil's academy until at least 1791 when he was rebuffed after





35 (top left) José de Páez, *De mestizo e india, coyote*. 4. (From *Mestizo and Indian, Coyote*), ca. 1770–80, oil on copper, 50.2 × 63.8 cm. Private collection.

36 (top right) José de Páez, *De negro e india, lobo*. 5. (From *Black and Indian, Wolf*), ca. 1770–80, oil on copper, 50.2 × 63.8 cm. Private collection.

37 (above left) José de Páez, *De español y negra, mulato*. 6. (From *Spaniard and Black, Mulatto*), ca. 1770–80, oil on copper, 50.2 × 63.8 cm. Private collection.

38 (above right) José de Páez, *De español y mulata, morisco*. 7. (From *Spaniard and Mulatta, Morisco*), ca. 1770–80, oil on copper, 50.2 × 63.8 cm. Private collection.

39 José de Páez, *De lobo y mestiza, cambujo*. 10. (From *Wolf and Mestiza, Cambujo*), ca. 1770–80, oil on copper, 50.2 × 63.8 cm. Private collection.



requesting the position of director of painting, which was given to the Valencian Rafael Ximeno y Planes. Despite this major setback, Clapera remained associated with the academy. He was an official appraiser of the institution and served next to Ximeno y Planes as evaluator of the death inventory of Gil in 1798.⁶⁸

What sets Clapera apart from the other artists discussed up to this point is that he is the only known Spaniard to have painted a series of castas. Some of his scenes recall the models of other contemporary artists such as Ramón Torres (again, for whom there is little information), particularly the painting showing a Spanish male and an Indian woman placed next to a fruit stall and another showing weavers (see figs. 146, 156). Nevertheless, the blue color that dominates many of the works and the attention given to the figures' poses are clearly in concert with the Neoclassical ideals that Gil had introduced. In one of the paintings (see fig. 48), the contrapposto pose of the mulatto, for

40 José de Páez, *De español y morisca, albino*. 8. (From Spaniard and Morisca, Albino), ca. 1770–80, oil on copper, 50.2 × 63.8 cm. Private collection.

41 (facing page top) José de Páez, *De español y albina, torna atrás*. 9. (From Spaniard and Albino, Return-Backwards), ca. 1770–80, oil on copper, 50.2 × 63.8 cm. Private collection.

42 (facing page bottom left) José de Páez, *De chino cambujo y mulata, albarazada*. 11. (From Chino Cambujo and Mulatta, Albarazada), ca. 1770–80, oil on copper, 50.2 × 63.8 cm. Private collection.

43 (facing page bottom right) José de Páez, *De albarazado y mulata, barcina*. 12. (From Albarazado and Mulatta, Barcina), ca. 1770–80, oil on copper, 50.2 × 63.8 cm. Private collection.





44 Buenaventura José Guiol, 1. *De español e india nace mestiza* (From Spaniard and Indian a Mestiza is Born), ca. 1770–80, oil on canvas, 71.5 × 50.5 cm. Private collection.

45 Buenaventura José Guiol, 2. *De español y castiza nace española* (From Spaniard and Castiza a Spaniard is Born), ca. 1770–80, oil on canvas, 71.5 × 50.5 cm. Private collection.



facing page Buenaventura José Guiol, 1. *De español e india nace mestiza* (From Spaniard and Indian a Mestiza is Born), ca. 1770–80 (detail of fig. 44).





46 (facing page top left) Francisco Clapera, 1. *De español e india, mestiza* (From Spaniard and Indian, Mestiza), ca. 1785, oil on canvas, 54 × 40.5 cm. Denver Art Museum, Collection of Jan and Frederick Mayer.

47 (facing page top right) Francisco Clapera, 4. *De español y negra, mulato* (From Spaniard and Black, Mulatto), ca. 1785, oil on canvas, 54 × 40.5 cm. Denver Art Museum, Collection of Jan and Frederick Mayer.

50 (right) Francisco Clapera, 14. *De chino e india, genízaro* (From Chino and Indian, Genízaro), ca. 1785, oil on canvas, 54 × 40.5 cm. Denver Art Museum, Collection of Jan and Frederick Mayer.

example, is indicative of Clapera's more academic background. At the same time, he introduced new scenes, such as that depicting a drunkard passed out on the floor (see fig. 51).

Models continued to circulate from artist to artist. This is evidenced by a series signed and dated by Mariano Guerrero in 1787 (figs. 52–4)⁶⁹ that departs from Clapera's by fusing two family groups on a single canvas but is otherwise almost exactly the same. The connection between these artists is corroborated by documents. Guerrero appears with Rafael Gutiérrez (another artist of the Royal Academy of San Carlos) as an appraiser of a second inventory of Gil's paintings collection, which suggests that he knew Clapera.⁷⁰

The casta genre underwent a parallel development in Puebla, the second major city of the viceroyalty of New Spain, but there is substantially less information about the artists. According to documentary references, the first Puebla set was commissioned in the 1740s by the bishop of Puebla, Juan Francisco de Loaiza (1743–7), from Luis Berruenco.⁷¹ Berruenco was descended from a dynasty of painters in Puebla and was



48 (facing page bottom left) Francisco Clapera, 5. *De mulato y española, morisco* (From Mulatto and Spaniard, Morisco), ca. 1785, oil on canvas, 54 × 40.5 cm. Denver Art Museum, Collection of Jan and Frederick Mayer.

49 (facing page bottom right) Francisco Clapera, 13. *De barcino y mulata, chino* (From Barcino and Mulatta, Chino), ca. 1785, oil on canvas, 54 × 40.5 cm. Denver Art Museum, Collection of Jan and Frederick Mayer.

51 (right) Francisco Clapera, 15. *De genízaro y mulata, gíbaro* (From Genízaro and Mulatta, Gíbaro) ca. 1785, oil on canvas, 54 × 40.5 cm. Denver Art Museum, Collection of Jan and Frederick Mayer.



52 (right) Mariano Guerrero, 3. *De español y castiza, español*; 4. *De español y negra, mulata* (From Spaniard and Castiza, Spaniard; From Spaniard and Black, Mulatta), 1787, oil on canvas, 35.5 × 47.7 cm. Private collection.

below Francisco Clapera, 14. *De chino e india, genízaro* (From Chino and Indian, Genízaro), ca. 1785 (detail of fig. 50).



53 Mariano Guerrero, 7. *De español y albina, torna atrás*; 8. *De torna atrás e india, loba* (From Spaniard and Albino, Return-Backwards; From Return-Backwards and Indian, Wolf), 1787, oil on canvas 35.5 × 47.7 cm. Private collection.



54 (right) Mariano Guerrero, 15. *De barcino e indio gíbaro*; 16. *De gíbaro y mulata, tente en el aire* (From Barcino and Indian, Gíbaro; From Gíbaro and Mulatta, Hold-Yourself-in-Mid-Air), 1787, oil on canvas 35.5 × 47.7 cm. Private collection.





55 (top) Luis Berrueco, *Español con negra, sale mulato* (Spaniard and Black Makes Mulatto), ca. 1740, oil on canvas, 100 × 100 cm. Private collection, Palma de Mallorca, Spain.

57 (above) Luis Berrueco, *No te entiendo con india, sale china* (I-Don't-Understand-You with Indian Makes China), ca. 1740, oil on canvas, 100 × 100 cm. Private collection, Palma de Mallorca, Spain.

56 (top) Luis Berrueco, *No te entiendo con cambujo, sale tente en el aire* (I-Don't-Understand-You with Cambujo Makes Hold-Yourself-in-Mid-Air), ca. 1740, oil on canvas, 100 × 100 cm. Private collection, Palma de Mallorca, Spain.

58 (above) Luis Berrueco, *Generación de indios* (Generation of Indians), ca. 1740, oil on canvas, 100 × 100 cm. Private collection, Palma de Mallorca, Spain.



59 Luis Berrueco, *Castizo con española, sale español* (Castizo and Spaniard Makes Spaniard), ca. 1740, oil on canvas, 100 × 100 cm. Private collection, Palma de Mallorca, Spain.



60 Luis Berrueco, *Cambujo con india, sale albarazado* (Cambujo and Indian Makes Albarazado), ca. 1740, oil on canvas, 100 × 100 cm. Private collection, Palma de Mallorca, Spain.





62 Unknown artist, *De india y mestizo, produce coyota* (Indian and Mestizo Produce a Coyote), ca. 1790–1800, oil on canvas. Private collection, Mexico.



63 Unknown artist, *De chino y mulata, produce gíbaro* (Chino and Mulatta Produce a Gíbaro), ca. 1790–1800, oil on canvas. Private collection, Mexico.

extremely active, which suggests that he had a large workshop where assistants could have had access to his designs. This set, which allegedly displayed all the castas on one surface, has not been located, but there is another set of sixteen canvases signed by Berrueco in a private collection in Spain (figs. 55–60).⁷² Given the earlier development of the genre in Mexico City, it is likely that Loaiza's idea for the set that shows all the castas stemmed from his knowledge of similar sets created in the viceroyalty's capital. Nevertheless, the genre soon took root in Puebla, where casta paintings appear in inventories as early as 1752.⁷³ At least two sets of casta paintings are modeled after Berrueco's, including one that shows all the castas on a single panel (fig. 61).⁷⁴

Casta paintings were produced right up to the first decade of the nineteenth century. An incomplete set by an unknown artist shows that the originality and quality of the genre had declined over time to the point of becoming formulaic (figs. 62–3).⁷⁵ Here the figures are flat and inexpressive, and the rich detail of textures and accoutrements that had characterized

many sets from earlier decades has been lost. The demise of the genre in the nineteenth century is clearly tied to the rejection of a hierarchically structured society of castas following Mexico's war of independence from Spain in 1810; but, arguably, it is also related to the official abolition of the guild system in 1813.⁷⁶ While the waning of the workshop tradition was gradual, artists who aspired to attain recognition now attended the Royal Academy of San Carlos where other themes were favored, and taste was slowly undergoing a transformation with the introduction of Neoclassicism and the study of models from antiquity.⁷⁷ In short, the loss of interest in casta painting can be attributed to a combination of factors, including the unwillingness to collect them as a result of the new social and political reality of the country, the slow dismantling of the guild structure, and the gradual changes in taste. Why racial classification became the subject of such a unique pictorial genre and how the works were interpreted in their own day are the topics of the remainder of this book.

