Intervención

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The Exhibition: Antonio Salazar and the Visual Documentation Workshop: Art, Eroticism, and Homosexual Militancy

Ir a versión en español

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ABSTRACT

Society has generally shown poor understanding regarding various economic, political, social, and sexual issues, thus the rejection of homosexuality. It was not until very recently that diversity was acknowledged as a right at both the legal and day-to-day levels. At the *Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas* (ENAP, in Spanish), now the *Facultad de Artes y Diseño* (FAD, in Spanish), there is a history of valiant struggle for the inclusion of this community, which has not been sufficiently vindicated.

This review explores how the exhibition *Antonio Salazar and the Taller Documentación Visual (TDV): Erotismo y Militancia Homosexual* (Visual Documentation Workshop: Eroticism and Homosexual Militancy, in English) presented the different social and cultural theories in the field of contemporary art and the artistic practices of the TDV militancy advocating against the oppression of social, political, economic, and sexual minorities.

KEYWORDS

art, Taller Documentación Visual, minorities, social policies, sexual policies, exhibition, homosexuality, diversity

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INTRODUCTION

In this review, I will discuss the exhibition *Antonio Salazar and the Taller Documentación Visual (TDV): Erotismo y Militancia Homosexual* (*Visual Documentation Workshop: Eroticism and Homosexual Militancy, editorial translation*), exhibited in November 2023 at the Verde and Rosa galleries in the San Carlos Cultural Center at the *Antigua Academia de San Carlos*. The Coordinación de Investigación, Difusión y Catalogación de Colecciones (Research, Dissemination, and Cataloging of Collections Coordination, editorial translation) of the Facultad de Artes y Diseño was responsible for the curatorship. The purpose of the exhibition was to highlight the political and social scope of the Taller Documentación Visual.

The purpose of this review is to promote the exhibition, which paid tribute to the founder of the TDV and showcased his artistic practices related to militancy against the oppression of social, political, economic, and sexual minorities during the 1980s and 1990s in Mexico.

The works in the exhibition are part of the TDV and Antonio Salazar's production as well as the artistic and historical collection of the FAD of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (National Autonomous University of Mexico,UNAM). They are in the *Antigua Academia de San Carlos* in the Historic Center of Mexico City.[1]

The exhibition comprised 65 pieces, divided into six thematic sections. The labels functioned as mediators between the pieces, the specialized concepts, and the visitors; thus, we limited their length to prevent information saturation and ease their reading. As for complementary content, it integrated a video regarding some of the offerings and exhibitions that the TDV held during the nineties. Likewise, I took a phrase from two of the paintings from the workshop to incorporate it as an installation in the section *The TDV and its Homosexual Militancy*.

The image of the exhibition consists of a digital collage created from a drawing by the artist Mariano del Águila, dated in 1781, and a photograph of *Jesús y el Diablo* (*Jesus and the Devil*) by the artist Antonio Salazar Bañuelos. In this picture, we used ochre colors to complement the colors of the rooms. Since it is a historical place, it is impossible to change the color of the walls. In the museography, mobile panels were used, which added a touch of another color; these also helped to distribute the pieces in a way that separated the various sections and themes.

[1] The catalogue is currently edited for online publication: https://coleccionessan-carlos.fad.unam.mx

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According to the Coordinación de Investigación, Difusión y Catalogación de Colecciones (Research, Dissemination, and Cataloging of Collections Coordination, CIDYCC), which curated the exhibition, the discourse presented the different social and cultural theories in the field of contemporary art and the artistic practices of the TDV related to militancy against the oppression of social and sexual minorities.

The exhibition was divided into the following sections:

1. El homoerotismo en el arte (Homoeroticism in Art)
2. Antonio Salazar y el academicismo (Antonio Salazar and Academicism)
3. Antonio Salazar
4. El Taller Documentación Visual (The Visual Documentation Workshop,TDV)
5. Arte político del TDV (Political art of the TDV)
6. Militancia homosexual (Homosexual Militancy)

The first of these sections dealt with *homoeroticism*[2] in art. This exhibition featured works from the 18th century, including drawings and engravings (Figure 1).



FIGURE 1. Author: Mariano del Águila, Untitled (1791), drawing in sanguine (Photograph: Sergio Carlos Rey, 2023; collection:FAD-UNAM).

[2] It refers to the social tendency characterized by the presence of erotic emotions or sexual desires focused on a person of the same sex (*The Free Dictionary*, 2013).

The second section was about the *academicism* of Antonio Salazar. In this case, the exhibition included classical sculptures of the TDV in contrast with contemporary ones (Figures 2, 3, and 4).



FIGURE 2. *Los Luchadores* (18th century), sculpture (Photograph: Sergio Carlos Rey, 2016; collection: FAD-UNAM).



FIGURE 3. Author: Policleto de Rodas, *Torso de Discóforo* (450-440 BC), plaster cast (Photograph: Sergio Carlos Rey, 2016; collection: FAD-UNAM).



FIGURE 4. Authors: Taller Documentación Visual, *No Te Hagas Bolas* (1994); poster (Photograph: Sergio Carlos Rey, 2019; collection: FAD-UNAM).

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The life of the artist Antonio Salazar, who co-founded and coordinated the Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas (ENAP, National School of Plastic Arts), constituted the third section of the exhibition. In addition, it also included information about the Academia de San Carlos and an artistic collective established in 1984, formed by a group of young artists whose production interests were related to the visibility of oppressed groups and the dissemination of a critique against the discrimination towards the homosexual community, and other topics such as racism, classism, compulsory heterosexuality, and the arrival of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the world (ENAP, 2004).

Here, we can find some of his works, ranging from a self-portrait—a painting featuring some of his friends—to nude photography and collages of male figures (Figure 5).



FIGURE 5. Author: Antonio Salazar, *Autorretrato* (1984), acrylic on canvas (Photograph: Sergio Carlos Rey, 2019; collection: FAD-UNAM).

Furthermore, the fourth section gave an overview of the beginnings of the TDV. Some of the pieces exhibited here include photographs of the collective members, sketches, and collages from a series titled *Patria Dios y necesito dinero, pero mucho dinero*. Additionally, it included a book published by the TDV for its fifteenth anniversary, which presents documentation of some of the numerous works created throughout the years (Figure 6).



FIGURE 6. Pink Book, 2004 (Photograph: Sergio Carlos Rey, 2022; collection: FAD-UNAM).

The fifth section focused on TDV's *Political Art*. Some pieces in this section show how the workshop resorted to icons of social struggle from the sixties and seventies, such as the Vietnam War, urban guerilla armed forces, and poverty and marginalization in Mexico (Figure 7).



FIGURE 7. Author: Taller Documentación Visual, *Ni Pa' Donde Jalar* (1985-1999), mixed media (Photograph: Sergio Carlos Rey, 2019; collection: FAD-UNAM).

The last section, *Homosexual Militancy*, presented works that represent an aesthetic tool regarding the body, sex, and *homosexual activism*, as seen in Figure 8.

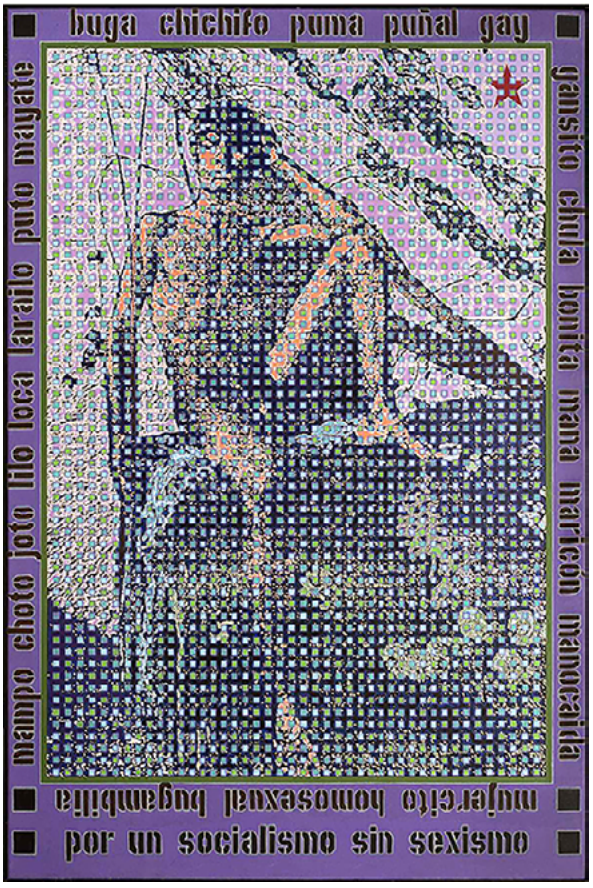


FIGURE 8. Author: Taller Documentación Visual, *Por Un Socialismo Sin Sexismo* (1984-1990), acrylic on canvas (Photograph: Sergio Carlos Rey, 2019; collection: FAD-UNAM).

ANALYSIS OF THE SECTIONS OF THE EXHIBITION

The section *El homoerotismo en el arte* exhibited the first case of *homosexuality*[3] and homoeroticism found in an artistic work by Mariano del Águila. He studied engraving and graduated in 1781 from the *Academia de San Carlos*, as stated in the certificate of Dr. Jaime Cuadriello.

Another peculiar case was also exhibited from the work of Manuel Vilar in 1852: that of *Tlahuicole*, a Tlaxalan general, in the act of fighting in a gladiatorial sacrifice. The representation of his muscular strength and excessive masculinity showcase Vilar's admiration for Indigenous physical types, probably by his sexual orientation: "[He was] the sentimental partner of the painting professor, Pelegrín Clavé, since their time as students at the Academy of San Lucas of Rome—reads the document of the first section, written by

[3] It refers to the romantic or sexual attraction or sexual behavior between members of the same sex (DLE, 2024).

Dr. Jaime Cuadriello based on unpublished documentation gathered by the historian Salvador Moreno—, although in Mexico they separated due to social pressure[4]".

In the second section, the obvious innate academicism of the artist Antonio Salazar, founder of the TDV, was appreciated: his work is influenced by the composition, lines, and forms of classical and academic works. I believe that his constant interaction with the San Carlos collections allowed him to replicate silhouettes, positions, and types reflected in *Los Gladiadores de Florencia* (*The Gladiators of Florence*, 1791), The *Discóforo* (1903) or the ancient torsos that evoke the eroticism of the Greco-Roman society and that appear in contemporary portraits that exhibit bodies, sexualities, and masculinities.

With *references to sadomasochistic and queer aesthetics*, Antonio Salazar revolutionizes the perception of classical works and appropriates their composition to generate new visions of art (Figures 2 and 3).

In the photograph, *No Te Hagas Bolas* (the title is derived from a popular expression in Spanish), Salazar presents three male bodies coiling and twisting one over the other. This composition was influenced by the sculpture *Los Luchadores* de Florencia, which arrived in 1791 as part of the founding shipment of the *Academia de San Carlos* (Figure 4).[5]

In the third section, it is noticeable how, from the beginning, Antonio Salazar Bañuelos was interested in making the oppressed visible and in spreading criticism regarding discrimination against the homosexual community.

Once the TDV was formed, within their works, the group also represented themes of racism, classism, *compulsory heterosexuality,*[6] and the arrival of the HIV/AIDS epidemic around the world in 1983.

The section of the TDV consists of pieces revealing the beginnings of the collective and part of its production and exhibitions over fifteen years of artistic work: it was founded in 1984 (ENAP, 2004). In my opinion, this group distinguished itself by proposing and executing collective pieces that addressed current social issues. In this sense, the groups of visual artists from the seventies, some of which also emerged at the *Academia de San Carlos*, are part of the TDV's background.

[4] Editorial translation.
[5] General Archive of the Indies, Listed No. 1 G-861-1 1791.
[6] This is the term used by the Tribunal on Crimes against Women in Brussels in 1976 to refer to one of the crimes committed against women: the persecution or forced "rehabilitation" of homosexual women (Rich, 1980: 653).

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In the *Political Art of the* TDV section, it is visible how important it was for the workshop to create a visual document that would bear witness to the way people lived and the vicissitudes occurring at that time. It was not just a matter of reflecting or copying reality, but rather the participation of the different workshop members that could help to give more prominence to the social, political, and sexual problems of the time. Thus, through their work, there would be a specific social claim for homosexuals.

The last section, *Militancia Homosexual*, showed how the TDV was one of the groups that supported the homosexual community at all times and actively participated through their art, making the fight and oppression against sexual minorities visible.

Their artistic production bears witness to key moments in the 1980s and 1990s in Mexico, as well as to the graphic art created using various techniques, which reflects how this group confronted the heterosexual patriarchal system from their trenches.

CONCLUSIONS

In the exhibition *Antonio Salazar y el Taller Documentación Visual (TDV).Arte, Erotismo y Militancia Homosexual*, the innate attachment of this artist to his academic training is evident. His work, both in its composition and in its twist and approach, has academic tendencies, despite its transgressive condition.

It was of utmost importance to understand the historical context in which the TDV's artistic works were developed. Through this knowledge, it is possible to better demonstrate their political scope even to this day, conceiving not only the relationship between the body and the image, but, mainly, the role it plays in the construction of identities around gender.

According to what was observed in the exhibition, what made the TDV different from other groups of the time was that it emphasized the production and experimentation with various types of materials and techniques, such as collage, acrylic on canvas, silkscreen, among others.

The original theme of the TDV led to an opposition to repression, and to support the marginalized in any sphere and in any society. In the workshop, this problem has been handled from economic, political, social, and sexual perspectives, to which the extreme violence that these groups face has been added: the student movement, military dictatorships, marginalization, AIDS, etc.

It is essential to review this type of exhibition, since in these times little value is given to curatorial and research work. It is gen-

erally thought that an exhibition is only about hanging a piece on the wall, when in reality it is a job that requires time, effort, and dedication, from the conceptualization of the exhibition—even for the elaboration and arrangement of the discourse—, the selection of the pieces, to the museographic design, and, finally, even the assembly. This exhibition was an example of this.

Furthermore, I can say that the exhibition was of utmost importance, as it contributes to the study of the social significance of TDV's work in the movement against the oppression of social minorities and the marginalization of the LGBT community, but also in raising awareness and preventing the HIV in the eighties and nineties in Mexico.

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FIGURE 9. Pink Gallery, 2023 (Photograph: Sergio Carlos Rey, 2023; collection: FAD-UNAM).

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