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**MIGRATING MUJERES AND GENDER BENDING: CHARLES CHAPLIN'S
ATELIER AND THE EDUCATION OF SPANISH WOMEN PAINTERS IN
NINETEENTH-CENTURY PARIS**

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Abstract: In mid-nineteenth century Paris, when an art education was out of reach for most women artists, several male painters began opening private schools specifically catering to women. In Catholic Spain, opportunities were more restricted; therefore, leaving the country and attending these French *ateliers* were key to women's training as no government-sponsored academies accepted women at the time. By means of archival and historical research, this analysis applies theories of Judith Butler to explore the careers of two Spanish women painters: Alejandrina Gessler y Lacroix (1831-1907) and Antonia Bañuelos Thorndike (1856-1921) as they studied under academic painter, Charles Chaplin (1825-1891). Operating outside gendered norms and traveling outside of Spain changed the direction of Spanish women's art production and exhibition practices allowing them to subvert the conservative limitations in their home country and develop professional careers both within and outside of Spain.

Keywords: women artists, Charles Chaplin, Antonia Bañuelos Thorndike, Alejandrina Gessler y Lacroix, 19th century Paris, atelier, Spanish painters

The cosmopolitan city of nineteenth-century Paris with its abundance of cafés, museums, and exhibition venues drew a multitude of foreign artists, including Spanish women painters. Unable to enter formal academies in either France or Spain until the 1880s, these women studied under private instructors, who accepted

women as their pupils. One such instructor was Charles Chaplin (1825-1891). He was significant especially to artists Alejandrina Gessler y Lacroix (1831-1907) and Antonia Bañuelos y Thorndike (1856-1921). After departing Chaplin's atelier, Gessler y Lacroix and Bañuelos y Thorndike became accomplished professional artists as they received awards at national exhibitions, sold their work and were recognized in contemporary literature in both France and Spain. In addition to providing technical training for them, Chaplin created an environment in which both teacher and students operated outside the gendered norms in both subject matter and professional practices, which fostered female camaraderie and life-long student/teacher relationships. Consequently, I argue that this holistic training engendered his Spanish students in particular to experience greater international recognition than would have been possible in their native country, allowing them to subvert the limitations of conservative Spain.

By piecing together primary sources written by Chaplin's students and published journals from the time period in which they were working, I seek to present a deeper understanding of women's artistic education in nineteenth-century Paris. Though Chaplin trained French and American students, his involvement with his Spanish students will be of particular interest here. Research on Spanish women's educational practices is especially scarce. Estrella de Diego's 2009 book, *La Mujer y La Pintura del Siglo XIX*, presents a compelling quantitative study on exhibition practices of Spanish women in the nineteenth century, but does not address the career of any one artist in detail. Theresa Smith's groundbreaking work, *The Emerging Female Citizen: Gender and Enlightenment in Spain* (2008) explores multiple avenues of women's educational practices but is focused on eighteenth-century female artists. In addition, the work on Chaplin has also been scarce, with only a few two-to-three-page articles published.

Chaplin was not only instrumental as an instructor to his Spanish students, but also to world-renowned artists such as Mary Cassatt, Henriette Browne, and Eva Gonzales - on all of whom only a small number of sources exists. Despite significant advances in revisionist and feminist theory, much of this research has lately been insignificant. Studies on Louise Joplin, one of his students, have been most useful in exploring professional relationships between Chaplin and his female students. Joplin's autobiography, *Twenty Years of My Life 1867-1887*, provided an important insight into what it was like to work in Chaplin's atelier and Gessler Lacroix's

biography, *Biografía Artística de Anselma*, described the ongoing working relationship between teacher and student.

Methodologically, Judith Butler's application of psychoanalytical theory in *Gender Trouble* is surprisingly applicable in understanding these nineteenth-century painters. Even though Butler investigates gender oscillation through the lens of sexuality, her deconstruction of gender identity can be applied here. This study implements these theories exploring 'masculinity' and 'femininity' as they related to artistic practices as teacher and students deconstructed these binaries for the purpose of propelling their careers.

In order to understand the relevance of women studying art in a French atelier during the nineteenth century, it is necessary to first briefly explain the training practices historically available to Spanish women painters in their home country and clarify why there was a desire to leave. Though Spain has a reputation for being a more conservative country due to its strong Catholic roots and clear gender divisions, the Enlightenment philosophers in the eighteenth century paved the way for more progressive thinking especially in relation to women's education. In a rather progressive gesture, well-connected women were accepted into Spain's Royal Academy as early as 1752, i.e. years before women could become members of the Royal Academy in London or the *Ecôles des Beaux Arts* in Paris (A.A.B.A.M. 81-10/4).¹

By the time the Napoleonic wars erupted, Spanish women who had enjoyed drawing courses and exhibition opportunities were deprived again of any type of formal training. This action was not purely gender-specific as the war-time economic devastation led to a temporary moratorium on most provincial academies. The vast majority of male academicians traveled from Spain to Paris and Rome to continue their education. That said, while the state invested in its male artists by creating pensions to send them abroad, the same privileges did not extend to women.²

At home, there were only a few attempts to establish schools for women in the nineteenth century, such as the *Estudio de Niñas* and *Ateneo de Señoras*. The *Estudio de Niñas* was formed to teach basic art-making skills to the girls from the lower-class neighborhoods of Madrid (A.A.B.A.M. 1-33/16). Based on the more

¹ A.A.B.A.M is an abbreviation for Archivo del Academia de Bellas Artes de Madrid.

² For a more detailed explanation of Spanish artists who traveled to Paris and Rome during the nineteenth century, see *Pintores Españoles en Roma (1850-1900)* and *Pintores Españoles en Roma (1850-1900)* both by Carlos González and Montse Martí published in 1987 and 1989 respectively.

practical courses offered and the list of rules related to daily living, the school did not aim at generating professional artists (De Diego 183). The Spanish government formed and funded the *Ateneo* in December of 1868 in order to educate lower-class women in math, science, literature, and the arts (Saez de Melgar 12-13). By 1868, the concept of a woman artist following the male model of professionalism had begun to be realized in the United States, France, and England. In Spain, however, these government-sponsored programs were designed for the well-being of the nation's men and served as a solution to the poverty of women, who typically had no professional skills.

For aristocratic and upper-class women, private instruction would have been the best option for art training prior to the 1880s. Nevertheless, even receiving private instruction presented a host of problems. Firstly, society strongly disapproved of women stepping out of their roles as mothers to become artists (De Diego, 167). Secondly, any type of training they did receive was second-rate. Of the few male artists who offered private lessons including Antonio Pérez Rubio, Mariano Bellver, Francisco Miralles, Sebastian Gessa, and Modesto Urgell, they focused on landscapes or still life (appropriate subjects for the female student), unpopular in the Spanish exhibitions that awarded large-scale history paintings (199). Although the *Escuela Especial de Pintura, Escultura, y Grabado* began accepting women in 1878-9, the students were still banned from anatomical studies (190). Classes using live models were not implemented until 1897, after which Adela Ginés was the first student in the history of the school to receive an award at the *Exposiciones Nacionales* (191).

As was the case with their male colleagues, Paris provided more exhibition opportunities, better instruction, and access to the world's greatest works of art. The difference was that the Spanish woman was not supported by the state but had to fund her own studies abroad, consequently delineating those women who had both the financial means and the spousal or parental support to make the sojourn. In Paris, women painters had several options of studios where they could study. Some of the more popular studios included those of Charles Chaplin, Carolus-Durand, Leôn Bonnat, Édouard Dubufe, Alexandre Cabanal, and Jean-Hippolyte Flandrin (Garb 80). Chaplin, who catered only to women pupils, is of particular interest to this study.

Charles Chaplin (1825-1891), an artist with both English and French origins, established his career as both a Salon painter in the 1840s and 50s and as a decorative artist. In some sense, Chaplin has historically been considered a B-rated painter, receiving third place medals and honorable mentions rather than the *grand prix*. He painted the ceiling and panels of the Salon des Fleurs in the Tuileries in 1861 and l'Hemicycle in the Palais de l'Elysée. These decorative panels such as those found in l'Hemicycle included images of Venus, Juno, Diana, and Minerva (Morant 149). In both his large-scale commissions and easel paintings submitted to the Salon, women dominated his subject matter prompting the nickname "Peintre des Graces" (148). There is an overall consistency to his style. He painted women and young girls with a palette of pastel hues and light values. They are turned in a three-quarter view, painted from the knees up, dressed in lacy decorative costumes, and occasionally make seductive glances at their viewer.

Chaplin's style prompted many of his critics to comment on his art with a gendered vocabulary using terms such as "delicate" and "feminine". Ironically, this will be the same type of criticism that female artists typically received. For example, in an 1866 criticism in the French newspaper, *Le Petit Journal*: "Here it is, M. Chaplin's dream. The artist has summoned graceful and delicate figures; kneading them with a more feminine hand and making a work that pleasantly transports us a thousand leagues away from the dull realities of this world" (About, Salon de 1866: Salle C). In yet another art criticism, Chaplin's personal life took precedence over his works. For example, critic Paul Lefort attributed the artist's delicate and feminine style to the significant role that his mother and sister played in his upbringing (Lefort 246).

This association of Chaplin's art with a feminine style stayed with him throughout his career. Interestingly, years later as the instructor to Spanish artist Antonia Bañuelos Thorndike, Chaplin's art was referred to as more feminine than that produced by his female student. Of Bañuelos' 1890 work, Spanish art critic Don Agosto Comas y Blanco stated: "it is not a compliment, but Antonia Bañuelos paints much better than her teacher (...) there is a difference, a strange difference. Chaplin's painting is more feminine than Antonia Bañuelos" (83). While these comments diminished Chaplin's artistic contributions, they actually helped his career as a teacher to women by illustrating Chaplin's unusual role as a male teacher with professional traits associating him with the feminine gender. This pseudo-castration,

in a sense, transformed Chaplin into a type of eunuch, making him the ideal candidate for teaching impressionable society women. Ironically, Chaplin's failure "to conform to cultural imposed standards of gender integrity" (Butler 91) is what made his studio more appealing as Chaplin provided a gentle transition from the informal training by the female artist's father or private tutor towards the participation in a full-fledged artistic community. Eventually, this formal training would be applied towards participating at the annual French salons and in the case of his two Spanish pupils, Spain's national exhibitions. Chaplin's impact as a teacher to other women artists merits further investigation, especially because his studio is where they would receive the core of their artistic education. Even though he was not a notable artist, his contribution as a teacher to some of the most important women artists in the nineteenth century should not be underestimated.

Formed in the winter of 1853-4, Chaplin's atelier was known as the "oldest women's studio" as there were few artists at the time capitalizing on the under-represented market of women painters. Consequently, his pedagogical approach³ set the model for other ateliers devoted to training women artists and provided his students with a solid technique that they needed to propel their work (Morant 148). An analysis of the specific training within his studio and the relationship between student and teacher will clarify Chaplin's vital role.

Opening a studio directed towards women rather than men was not without some self-serving motivation. As women had fewer training venues than men, he could charge twice as much for tuition. Women artists generally came from families in which the price of tuition would have little effect on the family's financial well-being. The typical tuition for female students would have been 100 francs per month (\$150) (Fink 135). His students were individually invited and received a calling card reinforcing the prestige and formality of this academy; however, this card also requested payment in advance reminding the attendee that this was a business (Sainsaulieu 49). Chaplin's studio reflected the changing cosmopolitanism occurring in Paris during this time. In addition to the Spanish students, who are the focus of this study, some of his more notable female pupils included French artists Henriette Browne, Berthe Delorme, Madeleine Lemaire, Eva Gonzalez, American Mary Cassatt and English-born Louise Jopling (Morant 148). One could imagine a studio in which French, Spanish, and English flowed freely.

³ Based on his own academic training.

Chaplin formed an intimate studio in which it was not uncommon for his wife to visit the classes. In a letter written by his student, Eliza Haldeman to her mother: “His [Chaplin’s] wife came in while we were there, and talked very pleasantly to us” (February 19-20). To add to the family-like atmosphere of his studio, Chaplin also used his own children as models for his pupils to draw (*Biografía Artística de Anselma* 77). This inclusion of his wife and children into his studio created an atmosphere of propriety, allaying parents’ fears of inappropriate sexual relationships between teacher and pupil. This studio deemed as a “safe place” for parents to send their daughters contributed to Chaplin’s success. According to one of his earliest students, British student Louise Jopling wrote: “Monsieur Chaplin had a large following for his was the only atelier at that time where all the students were women, so that careful mothers could send their daughters there without complication between the sexes” (Jopling 3).

Academic training and figure studies were an important component of the training at Chaplin’s atelier. Students would study from plaster casts to practice copying. According to Jopling, in some cases, they even studied the nude which would have been unheard of in England or Spain at this time (Quirk 40). Not surprising, Cassatt and Gessler Lacroix would both produce nudes in their career.

For Chaplin’s more accomplished students, his academy provided a foundation in depicting convincing forms and more polished works worthy of being entered into international exhibitions. What made Chaplin’s students particularly successful is that he encouraged them to pursue their own style rather than replicate his own. According to Chaplin: “my only claim to fame will be of having been their master” (Belloc 374). For Browne, Jopling, Gonzalès, and Lacroix, their tenure in Chaplin’s atelier served as the starting point of their art career as they branched into their own independent careers. Eva Gonzalès went on to study with Édouard Manet. Gessler Lacroix developed working relationships with Léon Bonnat and Jean-Léon Gérôme. Cassatt also spent time studying with Gérôme as well as the Impressionists.

Gessler Lacroix and Bañuelos Thorndike did not attend Chaplin’s atelier at the same time; however, their experience shares some common features. Contrary to what might have been the perception of society on women in an all-female atelier during nineteenth-century Paris, both of these artists treated their tenure with Chaplin as a form of formal instruction looking to advance as professional artists rather than amateur painters. Secondly, both were connected to Chaplin in the art

criticism of their work. Finally, and most importantly, based on exhibition history and experimentation with subject matter both women experienced far greater success than their female colleagues who chose to remain in Spain.

Fellow student, Henriette Browne, befriended Gessler Lacroix in 1856 after Gessler Lacroix moved to Paris with her husband (*Biografía Artística de Anselma* 77). Their friendship would be life-long and Browne would have a lasting impact on Gessler Lacroix's career. After five years, Browne finally persuaded Gessler Lacroix, who initially hesitated due to her strict Catholic upbringing and her role as a wife in upper-class society, to enter Charles Chaplin's atelier. Her husband, the French real estate developer Charles Lacroix, also stepping out of his gendered construct, provided unequivocal support to his wife to develop a professional art-making career (*Biografía Artística de Anselma* 3). Browne devoted her life to painting, forgoing children, and served as the ideal role model for Gessler Lacroix, who seemed unfulfilled in a life of social calls and parties. Browne, who came from a similar social background, shunned the traditional role of society wife and mother to exhibit regularly at the Paris Salon beginning in the early 50s (Sanchez and Seydoux). By choosing to subvert this maternal and class identification, both women were able to thrive in their professional careers. As Butler argues "it becomes impossible to separate out 'gender' from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained" (5). These gender constructs created by religious beliefs, nationality, biology, and class are almost insurmountable making the gestures of these working women more important.

Like Gessler Lacroix, Antonia Bañuelos y Thorndike (Marquesa de Alceda) (1856-1921) also navigated in high society. As the daughter of a Spanish nobleman, Miguel de los Santos Bañuelos (1830-1906), she was born in Rome and traveled to Paris at a young age. She became involved in the *tertulias* (art communities) of Spanish painters, particularly Raimundo Madrazo (heir to an artistic dynasty in nineteenth century Spain) (*Pintores Españoles en Paris* 259). More than likely she had to have the support of her parents in order to study with Chaplin, when she joined his atelier in the 1870s. There is little documentation explaining how Bañuelos Thorndike ended up in Chaplin's atelier, but she was very well connected with Spanish academicians, the noble class, and eventually both French and American entrepreneurs upon the marriage to her husband, Fernando Quiñones de León y de Francisco-Martín.

It is evident that Chaplin encouraged his most promising students to exhibit at the annual Paris Salon. Browne, Jopling, Cassatt, and Gonzalès all actively exhibited their work. Gessler Lacroix and Bañuelos Thorndike were no exception and even extended their exhibition venues to include Spain's annual exhibitions. Gessler Lacroix made her debut at the Paris Salon in 1864 with *Holy Family* and continued to exhibit in Paris in the years 1865-8, 1873, 1877, 1878, and 1885.⁴ These submitted works included studies from nature, allegorical compositions, copies of famous artists, and portraiture, which would have been encouraged in Chaplin's studio (Azcue Brea 262).

Bañuelos Thorndike's listed works show a preference for portraits of women and children and included titles such as *The Little Fisherman*, *Baby Laughing*, and *Portrait of the Countess de Cherchedegne*. She exhibited a self-portrait at the 1878 Paris Salon (Walter, *Women in the Fine Arts* 25) and *The Guitar Player* (which features teenagers as models) (fig.1) at the 1880 Paris Salon (Ossorio y Bernard 67). Bañuelos Thorndike also exhibited her *Sleeping Child* and *Waking Child* (fig. 2) in the Madrid Exposiciones Nacionales in 1887 and 1890, respectively (Ossorio y



Figure 1, Antonia Bañuelos Thorndike, *The Guitar Player*, oil on canvas, 1880

Bernard 67). Because there is so little known about Bañuelos Thorndike, it is difficult to determine whether she painted portraits of children before entering Chaplin's studio or as a result of her time there. She differed from Gessler Lacroix in that she had her own children, and subsequently used her art to amplify her maternal role.

Gessler Lacroix's early works followed the traditional path of women artists: portraits of family members, copies of established works, and landscapes. She worked arduously in Chaplin's studio for two years before branching out into her own studio space (3). Regardless, she maintained a professional relationship with Chaplin frequently corresponding with him to gain his insight or approval.

⁴ *Biografía Artística de Anselma*, Sanchez and Seydoux, *Dictionary of Women Artists*, and Salon Catalogues from 1865-8, 1873, 1877, 1878, and 1885.

When Gessler Lacroix first began exhibiting her paintings at the French Salons, she strategically took on the pseudonym, Madame Anselma – a name she had used as a child in her journal writing (*Biografía Artística de Anselma* 1). By selecting the name Anselma she was also guaranteeing that her submitted works would be placed in the first rooms of the Salon as works were organized alphabetically in both the catalogues and the salon rooms.

Gessler Lacroix wrote about her first accepted canvas in her journal. “I was lucky that my painting was praised by various critics, most notably Edmond About. Chaplin encouraged me a great deal, assuring me that if I continued with my enthusiasm and ardent application towards art, I would arrive at becoming a painter” (*Biografía Artística de Anselma* 4). This quote supports not only Lacroix’s insecurity as a new artist, stating that it was “lucky” her painting was praised, but more importantly illustrates the importance of Chaplin’s support and encouragement necessary towards her growing professionalism. There is a unique connection between artist and teacher that extends beyond receiving more tuition for female students demonstrating that Chaplin took his job as a professional mentor seriously.

Gessler Lacroix began producing works that attracted the attention of the critics for the 1866 Salon. She submitted two life-size works: *A Bride in Novogorod* and *A Farmhouse in Sologne* (*Biografía Artística de Anselma* 5). Several French critics addressed these two works in their overall reviews of the exhibition. Edmond About wrote about her work again in *Le Petit Journal*:

I posted here two years ago about the first painting of a young woman, who signed her work “Anselma” and who like Henriette Browne, was a student of Mr. Chaplin. Then, Madame Anselma’s talent was pretty amateurish. She has made such progress in two years that it is difficult for me to ignore her work. Her canvas represents a small girl from Sologne. It is remarkable in many ways and has kept in certain parts a rough sketchiness seen in the child’s shirt and also seen in the ground where she walks. The work stands on its own perfectly; it is more than a pretty head and a nice landscape. As for the *Bride of Novogorod*, it is a one-of-a-kind gem with rich color. It is drawn sufficiently for the exception of the hands (June 17, 1866).

In these early criticisms, Gessler Lacroix has scarcely escaped the identification of an amateur artist. Edmond About had been tracking Lacroix’s progress, which he acknowledges here. Rather than standing on her own, she is compared to Henriette

Brown and identified as a student of Chaplin. About balanced several complimentary statements with a subtle critique of the artist's abilities. About uses the term "sufficient" to describe her drawing rather than a more flattering adjective. Instead of leaving the reader with a positive impression of this artist, About deliberately ends his evaluation with the critique of how unsuccessfully she painted the hands. To illustrate the impact that criticism had on Gessler Lacroix's technique, when looking at her existing works painted later in her career, the hands were frequently the most developed areas of her compositions, despite her overall sketchy style.

Similarly, Bañuelos Thorndike also exhibited quite frequently in both Madrid and in Paris and she, too, was the subject of art criticism. Like Gessler Lacroix, the early works connect Bañuelos Thorndike to Chaplin and then gradually address her work on her own merit. At the height of her career some of Bañuelos Thorndike's works were received quite positively, particularly her *Sleeping Child* from 1887 and *Waking Child*



Figure 2, Antonia Bañuelos Thorndike, *Waking Child*, oil on canvas, 1890, Colecció Municipal d'Art Ajuntament d'Alcoi

(fig. 2) from 1890. The children from both works became famous and frequently reproduced in illustrated periodicals in England, France, and Germany (Picon 27). While *Sleeping Child* was relatively ignored at the 1887 Paris Salon, it was awarded an honorable mention at Madrid's Exposiciones Nacionales that same year. *Sleeping child* was published on the front of the Spanish periodical, *La Ilustración Españoles y Americana* (June 30, 1887). Critics from the Spanish newspaper *El Correo* predicted that *Sleeping Child* would cause public attention (21-X-1887). Spanish critic V. de la Cruz called Bañuelos Thorndike's sleeping child a "model of ideal beauty" (121). In the Spanish newspaper, *El Imparcial*,

Sleeping child (80) presented by Antonia de Bañuelos, disciple of the celebrated French painter Chaplin, is wonderful. In the middle of all the chaos of the paintings that decorate the salon walls, stands *Sleeping Child*, imminently modern for its color, drawn in a way to be felt; it is as if this canvas was torn from the museum walls to

demonstrate painting from the past and the present. Is it a Rubens, a Jordaens, or Greuze? If time had not passed to darken the patina of this canvas, browning the skin of the sleeping child, we would not know truthfully to which of these three masters this work belonged, instead of a young artist. What more praise could we give her! That flesh beats as if life is running through the pearly and transparent skin. The delightful throat moves as the soft breath of the child passes through it. The head and body are relaxed suggesting that the artist has spent weeks and weeks studying the dream to reproduce it in all of its sweet reality with brushes and paint ('Las salas pequeñas' Las Exposicion de Bellas Artes, *El Imparcial*, June 4, 1887).

As was the trend in art criticism, this overt praise groups female artists with other artists rather than analyzing their work in their own right (De Diego, 233). While her brushwork demonstrates looseness and movement peripherally reminiscent to Baroque artists Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) and the coloring of Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678), the praise is somewhat superfluous. What is particularly interesting is that an effort has been made to compare Bañuelos Thorndike's work to Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725-1805) rather than her teacher. Chaplin's "happy domesticity" scenes are very much inspired by Greuze and more than likely would have been the source of inspiration for Bañuelos Thorndike. The Old Masters were listed as her teachers instead of Chaplin. When she re-submitted this work to Paris Universal Exposition in 1900, she received a bronze medal (Thieme-Becker 596).

In volume number 26, critic Fernández Flores, who used the pseudonym of Fernanflor, also wrote of this work in *La Ilustracion Española y Americana*:

I don't understand why this work was left out of being awarded a medal. Affirmatively, there is no other medalled artist who didn't admire this work or the select qualities of this brilliant painter. And still, I don't understand why it wasn't given some prize. If the Jury thought it seemed inconvenient to award her for special circumstances, then I ignore them; but it is incomprehensible that in all aspects it is considered worthy of a prize, yet this painting was 24th of the third place medals (XXVI, no. 2 1887).

It seems as if women artists submitting artworks to Spain's national exhibition had to be coded as a "special circumstance" to receive anything beyond an honorable mention. To get around this, it was not an uncommon concept for women artists to

submit the same works to multiple exhibitions, especially for artists like Gessler Lacroix and Bañuelos Thorndike, who could claim more than one country as their home.

Bañuelos Thorndike's 1890 work, *The Waking Child* (fig. 2), presently exists in the Colecció Municipal d'Art Ajuntament d'Alcoi. A nude child, draped in white lightweight fabric on top of red velvet bedding has blue eyes that look directly at the viewer. The child's body is contorted with gripped fingers and wiggling toes. The child's twisted movement and wild curly hair reiterates the quickness of the brushwork. What is interesting about Bañuelos Thorndike's approach is the aggressiveness in both posture and brushwork counteracts this very "feminine" subject matter. Of this work, famed Spanish novelist and critic, Emilia Pardo Bazán wrote "between respected works, one of significant merit is the adorable *Waking Child*, by Ms. Bañuelos" (Bazán 170). Spanish art critic, Fernanflor, called this work one of the "jewels of the show and it should have been compensated with a medal" (De Diego 254). Despite the celebratory praise of *Waking Child*, Bañuelos Thorndike would not receive a medal for this work.

Augusto Comas y Blanco in his book *La Exposición de 1890* elaborated on this work, even comparing it with her earlier *Sleeping Child*.

Chaplin is the teacher and Antonia Bañuelos the student. Chaplin has never abandoned his model, nor Antonia Bañuelos either. (...) Chaplin's painting is fresh and juicy, but not sincere: his tones are nice and delightful but not exact; his drawing is fake and conventional and not precise. Chaplin is nothing more than a charmer of form and color. In contrast, Antonia Bañuelos conserves some of the qualities of Chaplin, but puts more effort towards drawing, registers form with decision, and more accurately balances the colour creating more truth in her art. (...) *The Sleeping Child* in the last exhibition has woken up in this one. (...) If the *Sleeping Child* was a beauty, *The Waking Child* is a masterpiece. (...) Antonia Bañuelos has created a personality; not a single mother can pass by her paintings who has not dreamed of having a portrait painted by Antonia Bañuelos (83).

While the critic seeks to praise her technical skills above Chaplin, there is a gendered reading of her work. Reminding the reader of a connection to her teacher should be unnecessary nearly two decades after leaving his atelier and would not have been mentioned in critiques of male artists. Additionally, Comas y Blanco mentions

mothers as her audience rather than a general public or jury; thus, pigeonholing her work into amateur status both trivializing her work and professional career.

Regardless of these criticisms, students who studied under Chaplin took risks that subverted the expectations of women arts. To further support her professionalism, Bañuelos Thorndike is one of the few Spanish women artists for whom there are records of the prices of her work. Her *Gitanos* sold on May 10, 1895 for 138 francs and her *Petits Italiens vendant des violettes* sold for 460 francs on January 18, 1924 (Benezit 420). Even though neither of these amounts is terribly significant, what it reveals is that she painted her work to be sold, not as a hobby or to be given to family members. Her work habits were described by contemporary Jacinto Picón who wrote that she preferred the solitude of her studio to the cheerful bustles of parties (25). One of the premier etchers in Europe acquired the right to reproduce her work in periodicals in England, France, and Germany leading to a wider dissemination of her work (Picón 27). Bañuelos Thorndike tossed aside her aristocratic upbringing to focus on a professional art career.

In larger acts of subversion, Mary Cassatt would join Berthe Morisot as the only women Impressionists. Louise Joplin formed her own art school and continued to paint professionally. Henriette Browne traveled to North Africa to work as one of the few female orientalists.⁵ Gessler Lacroix would not only travel with Browne and create her own Orientalist work, but would also



Figure 3, Alejandrina Gessler y Lacroix, *The Feast in Tangiers*, oil on canvas, 1871, Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando

be the first Spanish female artist to exhibit the nude. Because Gessler Lacroix's biography explores both of these events in detail I will discuss both of these actions.

Following in the path of her contemporary, Henriette Browne, Gessler Lacroix was one of the few women Orientalists who traveled to Tangiers in 1871, where she

⁵ For a more developed discussion on Browne's visit and representation of the 'Orient' refer to Reina Lewis's article, "Only women should go to Turkey": Henriette Browne and the Female Orientalizing Gaze" located in *Race-ing Art History: Critical Readings in Race and Art History* edited by Kymberly N. Pinder.

created a series of paintings including *The Feast in Tangiers* (fig.3). Gessler Lacroix's journey is documented in her *Biografía Artística*.

We were presented to the pasha by Mr. Daluin... who proceeded to admit me into a grand ceremony celebrating the birth of the firstborn, that took place in the Ben Abdou's home in the Kasbah. Upon entering the home I thought we witnessed a scene from *1001 Nights*, this image impressed upon me so much that afterwards I faithfully reproduced what I had seen (10-11).

By creating *The Feast* as a woman rather than a male orientalist, Gessler Lacroix had created an empathetic representation of Middle-Eastern and African women not visible in those created by her male contemporaries. Rather than the over-sexualized languid figures typical of Orientalist art, she has painted a community of women – fully clothed and actively engaged with one another rather than passively waiting to be picked by the sultan. Being female rather than male would actually have given her an advantage in this situation as she could freely navigate the female spaces to create this work; yet by attempting this subject matter she was following the paths of prototypical masculine Oriental artists such as Eugène Delacroix, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, and Jean Léon Gérôme.

Her interpretation, however, normalizes the Oriental “Other” as the women gather celebrating a birth fully clothed and in relaxed, natural poses.

Gessler Lacroix continued to cross boundaries professionally by becoming the first woman artist to receive a gold medal for



Figure 4, Alejandrina Gessler y Lacroix, *The Feast in Tangiers*, oil on canvas, 1871. Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando

The Adoration of the Cross (fig. 4) at the Cádiz provincial exhibition in 1879 (*Cátalogo de los objetos...*). This is the first instance of a woman artist receiving a gold medal in Spain. This genre scene illustrates a religious procession involving both children and women, a frequent subject of Gessler Lacroix. In gratitude for the

gold medal, Gessler Lacroix donated this work to Museo de Bellas Artes in Cádiz, where it is presently displayed. Also located in the Museo de Bellas Artes are large ceiling panels that she would complete in 1883 for William H. Stewart's hotel (*Biografía Artística* 52).

After a stay in Italy, Gessler Lacroix began working on a nude portrait of Juno, which she would submit to the Paris Salon in 1885. Her model, Eugenia Leroux, would appear in several of her works. (*Biografía Artística* 19-20). Before beginning her *Juno* (fig. 5), Gessler Lacroix turned to her former instructor, Chaplin, for his approval and encouragement. She had not been his student for over twenty years. Chaplin's advice demonstrated his faith in his student and seemed to be the motivation that she needed.

Discouraged in every which way, I finally obtained approval from a rigid group of people to paint the nude. As a result, Chaplin advised me to show my colleagues and the public that Anselma was capable of realizing a work of great difficulty confirming an understanding of art. Inspired by this impetus, I undertook my *Goddess Juno* (*Biografía Artística* 20).

With Chaplin's support and regular access to a model, the artist completed *Juno* within two years. She wrote the following description of her finished work: "I painted the nude body seated over the clouds, surrounding her with white incarnate and



Figure 5, Alejandrina Gessler y Lacroix. *Juno*. Oil on canvas. 1885. Ateneo of Madrid.

heavenly garments. Arching behind the figure, a gold-colored gauze flutters, highlighting the back and the head in front of the white silver tail of a peacock" (20). There is a degree of modesty here that is not present in a traditional academic nude. The reclining figure

looking downward contrasts sharply with the standing full frontal nude bodies of Jean-Léon Gérôme or Jean Ingres. The mother-figure is excised of any sexuality,

reiterated by the artist's decision to conceal Juno's pubis with white drapery. Gessler Lacroix fully developed the hands, head, and feet, yet, when it came time to paint the breasts and lower torso, these parts lack full modeling; either illustrating the artist's overall reserve with the treatment of the nude or her attempts at a modest presentation.

Through her approach, Gessler Lacroix merges traditionalism and modernity. Gessler Lacroix's *Juno* returns to Ancient Rome with allusions to present-day French society. Juno's classical features are offset by her contemporary coiffure. Stylistically, the academic and glossy approach to the body is juxtaposed with the quick brushwork of the surrounding drapery. There is a push and pull between a clear iconography and an attempt at realism. By holding the golden scepter and crown in her hand, the nude figure is only loosely identified as Juno. Any apprehension that the artist must have felt was washed away by the dominance of primary colors. *Juno* was a painting meant to be noticed from a distance regardless of its placement at the 1885 Salon. In addition, she boldly signed her name "Anselma" in red at the bottom left corner of the canvas.

The 1885 Salon catalogue entry states: "49 – Anselma (Mme. M. Lacroix) *Junon; panneau decorative*" (*Catalogues des ouvrages* 280). According to the entry, this work was not to be considered a nude on its own accord, but actually part of a larger decorative project. Nudes covered the ceilings in many of Paris' public monuments and apparently *Juno* was simply one more form of decoration. Given that the *Art Monumental* section of the Salon had been in existence since 1880, *Juno*'s subtitle should be viewed with some skepticism, as this work was not placed with the other decorative panels, but with the individual canvases. Gessler Lacroix did not state in her journal that *Juno* was destined for an architectural site. The work also presently hangs on the wall at eye level and not on the ceiling with her other decorative works. The title must have been calculated in order to cut off the criticism in advance.

This attempted reticence further protected the artist from controversy. The act of a woman painting a nude created a heightened sexuality, putting Gessler Lacroix in a precarious situation. Therefore, in order to protect her own reputation while demonstrating her talents with the human figure she carefully had to think through the posture, style of the work, and most importantly, the subject matter. Juno does not interact with other male figures nor will she be a participant in a free-for-all

bacchanal. Gessler Lacroix's choice to paint motherly Juno versus the sexually-charged Diana was a deliberate one. Like *Feast in Tangiers*, Gessler Lacroix leans on a maternal identification to portray a normally taboo subject for women artists.

Of this work, French critic T. Veron wrote in the catalogue: "This nude is full of light. Her hair falls over her forehead in the Renaissance fashion of Diana of Poitiers. The expression of the goddess is cold (...). The luminous effect of the figure whose modeling is missing study, reveals a sketchiness to it. Apart from that, this work could have been completed from the posterior view, a valid complaint" (11-12). By suggesting Gessler Lacroix paint this nude from the posterior view, Veron is referencing the more conservative vantage point of the female nude. What is interesting about this suggestion is that while Veron was likely thinking about this more cautious approach because Gessler Lacroix was a female artist, Spanish artists, tracing back to Diego Velazquez and his *Rokeby Venus*, had been painting the posterior nude (the preferred view in Spain well into the twentieth century). Though maybe not entirely successful technically, Gessler Lacroix's attempt at a frontally nude figure subverted both gender expectations and national expectations for the display of the female nude.

Even American critic J. H. Haynie wrote of *Juno* in the *Morning News* suggesting the far reaching impact that this work had and the risk she took by painting this subject matter. Re-published in *El Heraldo de Madrid*:

She has painted the beautiful wife of the great Jove, with the face of a goddess reclining between clouds, a crown in her hand and a scepter, a peacock behind her and almost nude; with drapery painted with strong colors of red, blue, and yellow. (...) In sum, her nerve has a manly spirit with the gusto and delicate sentiment of the better sex (Madrazo).

Gessler Lacroix's attempt at the nude masculinizes her as an artist, her "delicate sentiment" feminizes her further blurring the gendered binaries.

She continued to push these boundaries. In 1891, Gessler Lacroix was commissioned to paint her grand opus, three large-scale ceiling panels in Madrid's Ateneo representing the allegorical figures of poetry, science, truth, and ignorance (several painted as nude) (*Biografía Artística* 33). Like her teacher, she would receive her greatest fame from ceiling panels. In June of that same year, Lacroix was

named the first woman as honorary member of foreign correspondent in Paris for the San Fernando Academy in Madrid as well as honorary member of the Ateneo in Madrid (*Acta de la Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando del 1 de junio de 1891*).

At the height of their careers both women were revered in contemporary periodicals circulating in Spain including *La Ilustración*, *El Día*, *Historia y Arte*, and *El Imparcial* among others. The popularity of traveling to Paris and the positive reception of the Spanish artist there enabled both men and women to branch out in various educational opportunities. Those female artists who stayed in Spain did not receive the same degree of reception, nor did they exhibit as actively as those who went beyond its borders.

Butler asked, “if gender is constructed, could it be constructed differently?” (10). Gessler Lacroix and Bañuelos Thorndike oscillated between Spanish/French professional worker and aristocrat/painter and amateur and all the gendered expectations for each of these codifications. It was this deconstruction of these categories with the support of a teacher, who also fell out of gendered norms, that contributed to their success. Chaplin’s atelier solidified educational practices and fostered his students’ success. His attention to portraits and women enhanced the previous self-education or regional training that these women would have had. Although Chaplin had gradually declined in popularity in France, Spanish women were continually drawn to his atelier (González y Martí 145). Through their painting and their involvement in the art world outside of Spain, they illustrated a break from the stereotype that women could not escape the status of amateur artists. As a result of the lack of surviving paintings, documents, and research on this subject, the careers of nineteenth-century Spanish women artists have remained relatively underdeveloped. Chaplin, in a similar manner, has been overshadowed by the French Impressionists; yet, his involvement in the education of women is key to understanding the Spaniards as they established themselves as artists in their own right.

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