

What is sculpture?

Limits and Expansions in
the Field of Ecuadorian art.
Case study 7th National
Sculpture Biennial San
Antonio de Ibarra.



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Abstract

The authors of this article have investigated the foundational concepts of sculpture and have examined the transformative process it has undergone since the late 19th century. This transformation, which at the time signified an expansion of the creative resources of traditional sculpture, gave rise to unprecedented proposals and works that, although eventually consecrated by the art institution, initially faced incomprehension from broad sectors of society that were theoretically ignorant (Dickie, 1969) and visually illiterate (Dondis, 1973), according to their judgment. By inertia, today there are still many voices that oppose artistic manifestations that adopt and explore the so-called expanded sculpture, as well as numerous others that, although educated, confuse it with adjacent categories that share the field in which it is located (Krauss, 1979).

For educational, social, and institutional purposes, this article provides a theoretical framework that mediates between tradition and expansion, addressing potential conflicts that arise when the art community is invited to participate in educational processes and cultural events where the word *sculpture* is mentioned, such as the National Sculpture Biennial in San Antonio de Ibarra.

Keywords: sculpture; artistic avant-garde; expanded sculpture; sculpture in the expanded field; sculpture biennial; Ecuadorian art; San Antonio de Ibarra

O que é escultura? Limites e expansões no campo da arte equatoriana. Estudo de caso: 7ª bienal nacional de escultura San Antonio de Ibarra

Resumo

Os autores deste artigo investigaram os conceitos fundamentais da escultura e examinaram o processo de transformação que ela sofreu desde o final do século XIX. Essa transformação, na época significou a expansão dos recursos criativos da escultura tradicional, deu origem a propostas e obras inéditas que, embora eventualmente consagradas pela instituição artística, enfrentaram inicialmente a incompreensão de amplos setores sociais teoricamente ignorantes (Dickie, 1969) e visualmente iletrados (Dondis, 1973), segundo eles. Por inércia, atualmente existem muitas vozes que se opõem às expressões artísticas que adotam e exploram a chamada escultura expandida, assim como são numerosas aquelas outras que, mesmo instruídas, a confundem com categorias vizinhas que compartilham o campo em que ela se encontra (Krauss, 1979). Para fins educacionais, sociais e institucionais, este artigo fornece um quadro teórico que permite mediar entre tradição e expansão, diante de possíveis conflitos gerados quando a comunidade artística é convidada a participar de processos educacionais e eventos culturais onde o termo “escultura” é mencionado, como acontece na localidade de San Antonio de Ibarra e sua Bienal Nacional.

Palavras-chave: escultura; vanguarda artística; escultura expandida; escultura no campo expandido; bienal de escultura; arte equatoriana; San Antonio de Ibarra

¿Qué es escultura? Límites y expansiones en el campo del arte ecuatoriano. Caso 7ma Bienal Nacional de Escultura San Antonio de Ibarra

Resumen

Los autores de este artículo han investigado los conceptos fundacionales de la escultura, y han examinado el proceso de transformación que esta ha experimentado desde finales del siglo XIX. Tal transformación, que en su momento significó la ampliación de los recursos creativos de la escultura tradicional, dio lugar a inéditas propuestas y obras que, si bien a la larga fueron consagradas por la institución artística, en su momento afrontaron la incompreensión de amplios sectores sociales teóricamente ignorantes (Dickie, 1969) y visualmente analfabetos (Dondis, 1973), a su juicio. Por inercia, en la actualidad no son pocas las voces que se oponen a las manifestaciones artísticas que adoptan y exploran la llamada escultura expandida, así como son numerosas aquellas otras que, aunque instruídas, la confunden con categorías colindantes que comparten el campo en que esta se ubica (Krauss, 1979). Para fines educativos, sociales e institucionales, este artículo proporciona un marco teórico que permite mediar entre tradición y expansión, ante posibles conflictos generados cuando se convoca a la comunidad del arte a participar en procesos educativos y eventos culturales donde se menciona la palabra escultura, tal como sucede en la localidad de San Antonio de Ibarra y su Bienal Nacional.

Palabras clave: escultura; vanguardia artística; escultura expandida; escultura en el campo expandido; bienal de escultura; arte ecuatoriano; San Antonio de Ibarra



Introduction

We are well aware of what we are talking about when we use the term *sculpture*; both the dictionary and common-sense account for its definition. Thus, with minor differences, when we say *sculpture*, we think of a three-dimensional and solid artistic object, of aesthetic quality and symbolic content, that has been masterfully shaped through the craft of carving noble materials, or modeling various plastic materials. However, a significant portion of this agreement, coined in the West, was called into question from the late 19th century onwards. This was when the logic of the monument (Krauss, 1979), deeply rooted in the foundational principles of traditional sculpture, clashed with the experimental and expansive endeavors of avant-garde art. This gave rise to manifestations that, while originating in the specific field of sculpture, far exceeded the initial definition. Hence, for example, Futurist, Constructivist, and Kinetic sculpture, and all the creative experiments and variations derived from these genres up to the present, some supported by new means of production and communication.¹

Later, during the 1960s and 1970s, many three-dimensional expressions were indiscriminately labeled as sculpture (Krauss, 1979) or were treated and categorized as such. This has opened up a century-long, still unresolved debate, especially in peripheral locations, about the rationale for inviting the art community to participate in cultural events, whether competitive or not, that mention the category of *sculpture*.

This article aims to clarify, or at least provide, a theoretical framework that allows for mediation between tradition and expansion in sculptural matters, for institutional and social purposes, and thus resolve the conflicts that arise today when, due to misunderstandings, at least two ways of understanding and practicing sculpture or what we consider to be such collide.²

1 As for *new media*, it is important to note that this phrase addresses both productive and communicative aspects; that is, new means of producing sculpture, and new means of communicating and circulating it. This dichotomy is evident when we talk about digital printing and net art. The former stands out as a new means of production; and the latter, as a new interactive field; both, however, have a significant value that to a large extent eclipses and imposes itself on the sense of the sculpted thing.

2 Part of the content of this article comes, with adaptations, from the doctoral thesis presented by its first author under the title *Kinetic Sculpture in Structural Steel. Movement as a mediating agent between work of art and spectator. Case Quito-Ecuador* (García, 2023). This thesis is available in the digital repository of the Polytechnic University of Valencia, and is considered in the references of this text: <https://riunet.upv.es/handle/10251/192893>.



Methodology

A four-level structure has been established. The first level involves a bibliographic inquiry into the traditional concept of sculpture and its avant-garde, modern, and contemporary expansion. The second level focuses on the sanitation³ artistic context, with its particularities and aspirations. The third level, building upon the previous one, analyzes the significance of the San Antonio de Ibarra National Sculpture Biennial and the works honored in its seventh edition. Using this as a case study, it examines the concepts, contexts, and challenges surrounding the biennial, including calls for submissions, discourses, and award-related controversies. This analysis aims to foster a broader discussion on defining sculpture in its multifaceted nature and institutional implications. Finally, as a constant, and inevitably, the information presented is offered for the knowledge and consideration of third parties, and their investigative and speculative processes.

Meaning, Expansion, Confusion

The word sculpture comes from the Latin word *sculptura* (to carve): all dictionaries consulted agree. From such sources, sculptural is defined as the “art of modeling,

carving or sculpting” (Diccionario General Ilustrado de la Lengua Española, 1987, p. 465); the “art of modeling, carving or sculpting figures from any material [...] or the sculpted work” (WordReference.com, “Sculpture”). A concept that has transcended beyond general understanding to enter the realm of art and specialized texts.

Such a definition, stable, simple, perfectly demarcated and socially shared, is undoubtedly widely used today. However, the sculpture debate is more complex and therefore requires a review of various theoretical perspectives.

Following this investigative logic, after reviewing countless theoretical texts, the origin of sculpture is now placed in Prehistory, long before the so-called invention of art (Shiner, 2010) or any subsequent theoretical construction. For George Bazin (1972), for example, sculpture represents the primordial artistic gesture, underlining its ancestral origin. In his opinion, for primitive man, painting was not essential, while the ability to carve was vital for his survival. Thus, the carving of stone emerges as the oldest and most essential artistic expression of the human being (p. 7); which is in agreement with what Gina Pischel (1983) proposed, who affirms that sculpture emerges as the first and original artistic expression, in parallel with painting and drawing (p. 9). In effect, other scholars agree with

3 From the locality of San Antonio de Ibarra, in Ecuador.

this criterion that considers sculpture as a foundational expression.

The mere technical transformation of any material, whether hard or malleable, with the purpose of giving it a form, instrumental or symbolic, would be sufficient to grant the crafted object the category of *sculpture*, regardless, evidently, of any cultural construction or theoretical speculation that may have been proposed at the time. The technical act, in itself, would be sufficient to speak of art and, within this realm, of sculpture. In order to better understand this perspective, it is relevant to mention the ideas proposed by Felix Duque (2001).

art and technique do not need, of course, to be concentrated in areas or things different from the technical (or from the supposedly natural), which explains the apparent mystery of why *for us or in itself* there has been —especially in the pre-modern world, but also today— art in many works that neither the men of that time considered a “work of art” (they would not know what that would be) nor we ourselves can have as an *exclusively* artistic work. [...] From this it follows, secondly, that art is an *overdetermination*, an addition that we project (anachronistically, in the cases considered) onto certain works.

Now, beyond its instrumental intentions (production of tools) and symbolic contents (figurines), sculpture is characterized by its three-dimensionality, in opposition to graphic expressions. Following this concept, Gina Pischel (1983) considers that “it is characteristic of sculpture to work with a form that constitutes a volume, which is a solid: a material, tangible, weighable volume that occupies a real space with effective three-dimensionality. This is the sculptural vision.” (p. 9). Just as Herbert Read (1994) states that “throughout historical epochs and until comparatively recent times, sculpture was conceived as an art of solid forms, of mass, and its virtues were related to the occupation of space” (p. 6); concluding in the same text, “the peculiarity of sculpture as an art, is that of creating a three-dimensional object in space” (p. 65). In agreement with Donis Dondis (1976), who points out that “it is essential for sculpture to be constructed with solid materials and to exist in three dimensions” (pp. 172-173).

Javier Maderuelo (2012), a contemporary sculptor and theorist, shares a similar notion:

Sculpture, better than any other artistic expression, is the art of giving shape. The image of the sculptor carving the shapeless stone or modeling the amorphous clay illustrates the idea of artistic creation as the act of giving form to matter. (p.15)

In sum, all the cited texts and authors agree in associating the sculptural phenomenon with the three-dimensionality of a solid form, and the act of giving shape to matter through the techniques of carving and modeling. Such agreement, in addition to so many other complementary elements coined over the centuries —symbolology and narrative, mimetic representation or realism, creative individuality, genius and the search for beauty—reigned for centuries, becoming the dominant convention of Western art.

However, this agreement, in the face of the birth of avant-garde and modern art, collided with sculptural expressions difficult to link to its antecedents. Concepts, themes, materials, techniques, and technologies, among many other constitutive elements, were questioned. Such a transformative phenomenon has been observed by countless scholars. For example, Manfred Schneckenburger (2001) argues that, during the 20th century, the concept of sculpture was subjected to a redefinition and deeper analysis than it had experienced in the entire previous millennium. It marked an era in which the classic distinctions between the sculptural nature of carved stone or wood and the plasticity of the composed object became blurred, even questioning the very existence of these distinctions (p. 407). According to Javier Maderuelo (2012), during this period, there was a search to transform sculpture into a modern art by moving away from rooted classical conventions. This implied abandoning the traditions that had historically defined sculpture around the human body, nature, and realism, noble materials, carving and modeling, mass and volume, thus marking a renunciation of the essential characteristics that had defined it for centuries (p.18).

In the same line of thought, Rosalind Krauss (1979), key to the reflection proposed in this article, pointed out the following:

We know very well what sculpture is. And one of the things we know is that it is a historically limited and not universal category. As with any other convention, sculpture has its own internal logic, its own set of rules, which, although they can be applied to a diversity of situations, are not in themselves open to too many changes. It seems that the logic of sculpture is inseparable from the logic of the monument. By virtue of that logic, a sculpture is a commemorative representation. It is situated in a concrete place and speaks a symbolic language about the meaning or use of that place. (p. 33)

Counterpointing within the same text:

But convention is not immutable and there comes a time when logic begins to fail. At the end of the 19th century, the logic of the monument began to fade. (p. 34)

Given the previous considerations, sculptural practice has faced challenges in terms of its recognition as such, especially when examined from its foundational principles, whether prehistoric or classical. So much so that scholars like George Bazin and Herbert Read have raised the possibility of its eventual disappearance. As Bazin (1972) points out, the art of stone modeling represents the oldest human gesture, and although it may be in danger of disappearing today, it remains a manifestation that has solicited human creativity over the centuries (p. 7). For his part, Read (1994) poses this question: to what extent can this art still be considered, in any traditional or semantic sense, as sculpture? (p. 6).

This transformation, which arose from various explorations, in line with the marked current of innovation in the field of art, the historical avant-garde, marked the transition from the classical conceptions of the time to what later became modern and contemporary sculpture. Already in the second half of the 20th century, Rosalind Krauss (1979), immersed in that phenomenon, points out that in the decade between 1960 and 1970, surprising creations were labeled as sculptures, such as narrow corridors with television monitors, large photographs of excursions, peculiarly arranged mirrors in common rooms, and even lines drawn on the desert floor; as if any effort,

however diverse, could claim the category of *sculpture*, regardless of its meaning, as if this category were infinitely malleable. According to this author, critical operations in post-war Latin American art contributed especially to this manipulation, molding and twisting the categories of sculpture and painting in a demonstration of notable flexibility (p. 30). In this period, Krauss argues, the concept of sculpture underwent a notable transformation. Now, it was materialized from filaments piled on the floor, redwood logs sawed and transported to the gallery, tons of earth excavated from the desert, or palisades (p. 33). From that moment on, according to Manfred Schneckenburger (2001), sculpture underwent a redefinition by incorporating a variety of materials, media, and spaces, ranging from everyday objects to actions, ideas, or video compositions. In his words, sculptures are exhibited in places as varied as galleries, streets, deserts, skies, and bodies, even in minds, generating a wide range of terms such as kinetic art, sky art, or body art, many originating in the United States. This unlimited expansion led to a crisis of sculptural identity (p. 500).

By 1970, sculpture tended toward what Lucy Lippard has described as its dematerialization into media images, notes, or ephemeral ideas. Efforts would concentrate on redefining sculpture according to the foundations of these new, innovative sources (Schneckenburger, 2001, p. 500).

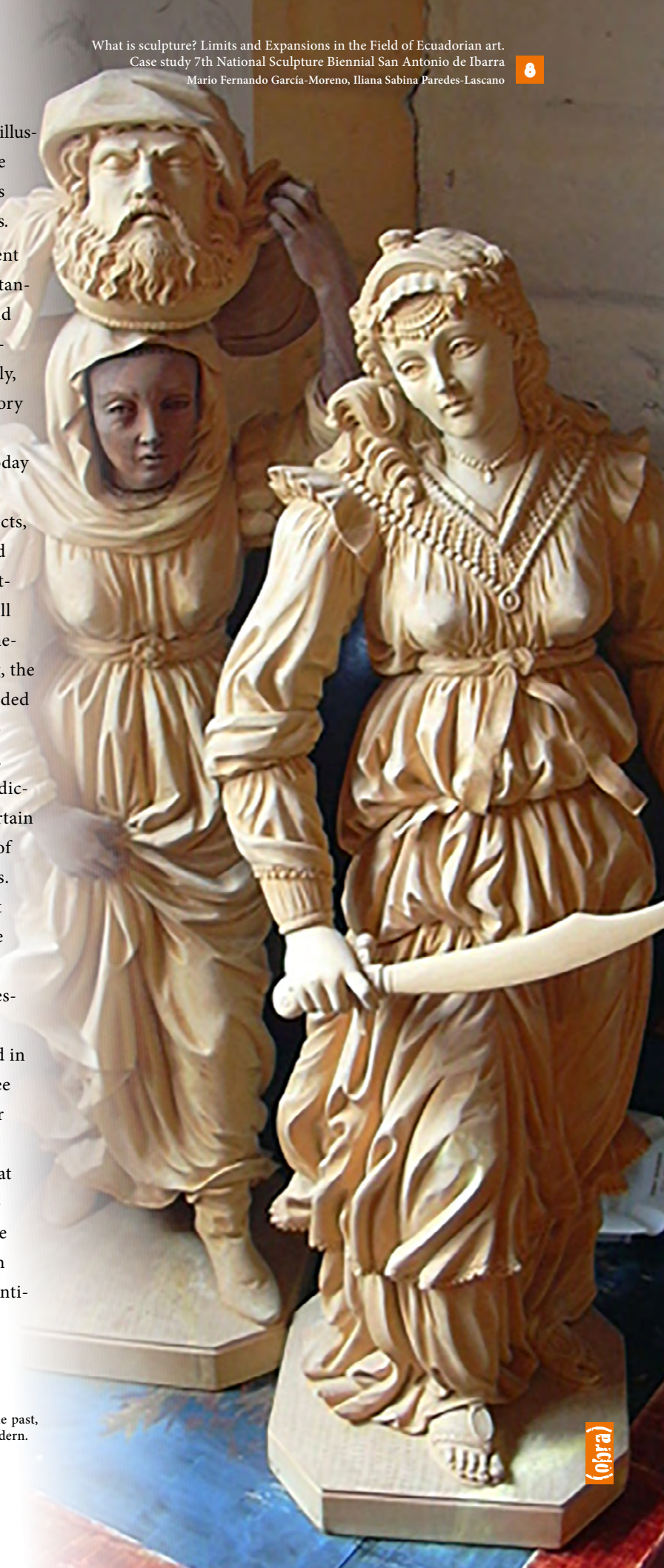
Currently, and within the same line of thought, Duarte Encarnação (2005) expresses the following:

Sculpture today is a concept of heterogeneous creation and visible expansion, a hybridization that does not assume predefined norms since the conquest of modern formulas manifested in the historical avant-gardes [...] Sculpture is no longer found as a closed category but as a resource or device that in its corpus contains the techniques and technologies that are common to it, not to say that everything could become sculptural if we were to find disseminations such as: installation, site-specific art, found object [...] or the mechanical device that incorporated into the body offers a new relationship of extension. (Encarnação, 2005, p. 47)

The cited quotes are sufficiently representative to illustrate, in the voices of experts, the conventions that have shaped the term *sculpture*, as well as the debate that has arisen around it in modern and contemporary contexts.

This theoretical framework evidences the current opposition and combat between two ways of understanding sculpture: the first, attached to foundational and 19th-century principles; and the second, to its dissolution. One defined and one undefined. Paradoxically, despite the notable transformation of sculptural theory and practice, a controversial and largely unresolved debate, traditional understandings and practices⁴ today coexist and develop side by side with contemporary sculptural expressions. Regarding the technical aspects, it can be said that, at present, traditional carving and modeling are in high demand and coexist with avant-garde and modern construction and assembly, as well as with computer modeling (3D software and parametric design), robotic shaping (CNC), digital printing, the intangible existence of the sculptural object in extended reality, and, moreover, with the development of artificial intelligence programs (generative design) that, surpassing the artist's absolute control, create unpredictable sculptural realities, thus jeopardizing, from certain perspectives, the creative and productive hierarchy of the author, a debate that this article does not address. This shows that —despite the expansive process that sculpture has undergone in recent centuries, and the expanded field in which it is located, including new technologies and theoretical perspectives— the ancestral interest that the sculptor (and the public) has in the worked material, in technical craftsmanship, and in the study of form seems to remain intact. These three elements, together, could constitute a good indicator to define and identify what is currently understood as sculptural, and thus to elaborate a redefinition that allows us to recognize such art among the “morphological promiscuity” (Schneckenburger, 2001), or the “series of surprising things” (Krauss, 1979), in which sculpture, from certain perspectives, and not in its entirety, is immersed today.

⁴ By traditional it is understood that which has been founded in the past, despite its denomination, see the art of the avant-garde and the modern.



San Antonio de Ibarra⁵: History, Characters, Techniques, and Workshops⁶

San Antonio de Ibarra is a small Ecuadorian town in the province of Imbabura, whose Spanish foundation dates back to 1693. Its artistic activity began in 1868 as a consequence of the Ibarra Earthquake.⁷ The task of reconstructing the Christian temples destroyed by that earthquake required artists specialized in imagery, coffered ceilings, altarpieces, and paintings; to this end, the Church hired image makers from the Quito School.⁸ Under his influence, Daniel Reyes⁹ (1860-1939), a sanantonience who was 9 years old at the time, studied in the city of Quito, where he completed his learning process of techniques, styles, and religious narratives. Upon returning to his hometown, he set up his own workshop together with his brothers. In 1880, with the support of the Church and the Parish Board of his locality, he founded the arts and crafts school-workshop Liceo Artístico, where classes in painting, sculpture, and carpentry were taught (Villalba, 2000), which would later become the *Daniel Reyes Institute of Higher Technology for Fine Arts*, the name it bears today. Consequently, many of the residents of San Antonio de Ibarra are dedicated to the craft of different types of sculpture (Villalba, 2000), with an emphasis on *imagery*.¹⁰ There are many workshops and stores in the town that produce and exhibit various objects, religious figures, realistic sculptures, furniture, easel paintings and all kinds of utilitarian and decorative objects, generally carved in fine wood. This artistic activity characterizes the town today.¹¹

The Reyes family's artistic tradition was maintained through their descendants, the brothers Daniel, Fidel, and Luis; later, Mariano and Alfonso; and currently, Numa, Marco, and Jacinto Reyes. Their legacy was transmitted from masters to apprentices and from parents to children, transcending the family nucleus and spreading throughout the entire town. Their ancestral craft lives on in children, nephews, grandchildren, and countless apprentices, constituting a complex social fabric. Some of them have maintained, or have had, commercial ties with various cities and institutions in Ecuador and around the world.

5 Photo album available at <https://photos.app.goo.gl/FFEx6MYBXZ9ZuPMz9>

6 The contents of this section have been adapted from the unpublished research entitled *The Art of San Antonio de Ibarra. Sculpture (imagery, religious carving, and decorative carving). Painting (religious and illustrated)* (García, 2008), commissioned by the Central Bank of Ecuador. The relevance of the details described, which are shown in greater depth in the author's text, stems from the need to contrast the artistic tradition of San Antonio de Ibarra with the reality of its current sculpture biennial.

7 City of Ibarra in Ecuador.

8 The *Quito School* refers to the sum of artistic manifestations originating in colonial Quito from the 16th century onwards, and subsequently radiating throughout the territory of the Royal Audience of Quito as a whole. It reached its peak locally in the 18th century as a result of the process of European cultural transmission over indigenous cultures. Quito was the capital of the Royal Audience of the same name, therefore, it maintained close ties with Spain and the Church, which facilitated the orthodoxy of its imagery. In fact, this particular school is considered one of the least syncretic in the Americas (Navarro, 2006). In this category, it had a great influence on vast regions of the continent and today its art is considered one of the most elaborate and beautiful of its kind. As for Ecuadorian territory, its outstanding artists were: Diego de Robles (Spanish), Father Carlos, Bernardo de Legarda, José Olmos (Pampite), Manuel Chili (Caspicara), Father Bedón, Manuel Salas, José Domingo Carrillo, Gaspar Zangurima, and Miguel Vélez.

9 Considered the most significant historical figure in San Antonio along with his siblings and numerous other locals, he was responsible for perpetuating the colonial imagery tradition.

10 Devotional sculptural genre of naturalist style, within the framework of the Catholic religion, developed primarily in Spain during the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries. Coinciding with the discovery, conquest, and colonization of the *New World*, this genre was integrated into the society and culture of all of Hispanic America.

11 Watch at <https://youtu.be/yT3BmJmJoDM?si=JMR0hXC5-rwBW42R>



Regarding technique, in accordance with the image-making tradition, contemporary San Antonio is characterized by the practice of wood carving, taken from Spanish imagery and its heir, the Quito School. Workshops are the dominant production model in San Antonio de Ibarra, where various social actors come together in a hierarchical order to carry out specific and complementary tasks. While there are a few individual artists in San Antonio, most work as part of a team. Parents, children, spouses, friends, and employees typically collaborate, mirroring the medieval and colonial production model. As in colonial times, workshops are based on complementary work. While there are a few individual artists in San Antonio, most work as part of a team. Parents, children, spouses, friends, and employees typically collaborate, mirroring the medieval and colonial production model. As in colonial times, workshops are based on complementary work. The youngest and strongest members of the team are responsible for roughing out and hollowing the blocks of wood, while the more experienced artisans focus on carving and polishing the sculpture. Once the carving is complete, the work is passed on to the polychromers, who apply flesh tones to the face, hands, and feet, gild certain parts of the figure, and decorate the garments with vibrant colors, gilding, and sgraffito. Often, these tasks are divided among several individuals, each specializing in a particular area. The group production system makes it difficult to identify the individual authorship of a work, which, when signed, generates some controversy in the field,¹² since it undermines the efforts of all those who participated in its execution. As such, San Antonio de Ibarra is a large community dedicated to wood carving¹³ and the trade of its products, where, above other sculptural expressions, colonial-style religious imagery stands out, although the existence of experimental and disruptive initiatives is undeniable, as is particularly evident in the town's *Religious Sculpture Salon* and the Biennial that is the focus of this article.



Figure 1. *Workshop.* Anonymous, 2020

Source: photographic archive of the authors.

¹² Pampite, Legarda, Caspicara, Zangurima, and other great masters of the Quito School, had workshops and directed the serial production of their work, hence the great difficulty in establishing their authorship.

¹³ In San Antonio, a *tallador* is understood to be someone who creates furniture, altarpieces, and carved reliefs in wood. On the other hand, an *escultor* is someone who creates free-standing religious images. However, in this article, the term *talla* is used in its universal meaning, that is, as a technique of sculpture, including the genre of religious imagery.



Figure 2. *Heart of Jesus.* Luis Marceliano, Luis Marcelo (carvers) and Juan Carlos (polychromator), 2008.

Source: photographic archive of the authors



Figure 4. *The return of Judith.* Juan Padilla, 2006.

Source: photographic archive of the authors



Figure 3. *Agonizing Christ.* Daniel Reyes, ca. 1920.
Collection of Jorge Villalba

Source: photographic archive of the authors



Figure 5. *Shelf with Christs.* Anonymous, 2021.

Source: photographic archive of the authors

The 7th San Antonio de Ibarra National Sculpture Biennial

Likewise, before entering into the central discussion of this article, it is indispensable to mention the importance and characteristics of the *National Sculpture Biennial of San Antonio de Ibarra*, founded in 2006 in response to the interest of its community to enter the Ecuadorian art scene and become one of the relevant artistic centers of the country.

This event is a way of searching for a more optimistic cultural and economic future and a way of pronouncing itself as a legitimizing instance of art. The 7th Sculpture Biennial is a symptom of recovery, a crucial fact for the history of Ecuadorian art.” (Ricardo, 2021, p. 5)¹⁴

From its beginnings to the present, seven editions have been held. The last of these was inaugurated on October 8, 2021, and had the participation of sixty sculptors from various locations in Ecuador who responded to the bases published in its call.¹⁵

This 7th Biennial is a testament to the status quo of sculpture in Ecuador, it is an expression of plastic and visual diversity [...] The door remains open to new interpretations of the sculptor’s practice without losing its representative link and always trying to achieve a unique language, anti-rhetorical and far from the anecdotal tone. (p. 7)

This last edition awarded prizes to the following works:

Meeting in the parish of San Antonio de Ibarra, in the offices of the “Daniel Reyes” Cultural Center on Tuesday, September 21 and Wednesday, September 22, 2021 [...] it was decided to award prizes and honorable mentions to the following works in their corresponding categories.

Category # 1

First prize: “What I Keep and Hope For” by artist Wilber Solarte

Second prize: “Construction IV” by artist Ilowasky Ganchala

Third prize: “Political Bug” by artist Juan Carlos Pañora Chacha

First Honorable Mention: “When I Ruled the World” by artist Charlotte Föster

Second Honorable Mention: “The Ship” by artist Daniel Espinoza

Third Honorable Mention: “Everyday Dementia” by artist Edison García

Due to the hierarchical structure and limitations of this text, only images of the top three works are shown here.



Figure 6. First prize: *What I keep and hope for*, by artist Wilber Solarte.

Source: Catalog of the 7th San Antonio de Ibarra National Sculpture Biennial, 2021, p. 29.



Figure 7. Second prize: *Construction IV*, by artist Ilowasky Ganchala.

Source: Catalog of the 7th San Antonio de Ibarra National Sculpture Biennial, 2021, p.16.

¹⁴ Catalog available at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1i1bl0CKP4xqtjTN9hDhEj2FU9DtgPMX/view?usp=sharing>

¹⁵ Bases available at https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NPcoASqYa416FHHfqzCmCWL74ZG_RrB9/view?usp=sharing.



Figure 8. Third prize: *Bicho Politicus*, by artist Juan Carlos Pañora Chacha.

Source: Catalog of the 7th San Antonio de Ibarra National Sculpture Biennial, 2021, p.59.

After reviewing and analyzing the award-winning works in Category #1,¹⁶ two realities become apparent:

- a. The historical artistic legacy of San Antonio has not been considered by the authors of the works, nor by the award jury.
- b. The awarded works correspond to the neighboring artistic categories studied by Rosalind Krauss (1979) in her article *Sculpture in the Expanded Field* (marked sites, earthworks and axiomatic structures), or other avant-garde and contemporary categories (conceptual art, object art and installation).

¹⁶ Analysis available at https://docs.google.com/document/d/1aZhIMgm_sOHUQ4Y39MPUnNa3pF6CLY0D/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=104758206575643972130&rtfpof=true&sd=true.



Figure 9. *What I keep and hope for*. Wilber Solarte, 2021.

Source: authors' photographic archive.

The first prize, due to its formal attributes and according to many of the participating sculptors,¹⁷ should be classified as an *installation* rather than a sculpture. Meanwhile, the second prize would fit into the category of *site-specific construction* or another category within the *expanded field*. Therefore, neither work would strictly adhere to the bases of the Biennial.

Discussion

Beyond the specific topic of San Antonio, it is essential to clarify certain recurring concepts in the local and other contexts in order to understand the universal dimension of the problem addressed. These concepts are *sculpture*, *expanded field* and *expanded sculpture*, which are often confused and generate controversy.

As for *sculpture* and *expanded field*, it is known that, since the twentieth century, and especially since the middle of this one, the definition of the term sculpture has been the subject of much debate. The emergence of modern

¹⁷ WhatsApp group chat available at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fycAu4YB70PhSCma3DwnPmcxBAdP23LJ/view?usp=sharing>.

and contemporary art expanded this genre to unsuspected dimensions, while at the same time, explicitly or veiled, it rejected it when its practice was based on foundational or traditional principles. Although today *everything is sculpture* see again the *indefinites* provided by Manfred Schneckeburger and Duarte Encarnacao, and the hegemony of contemporary art is increasingly installed in the educational and cultural institution, critical or analytical voices repeatedly emerge on this phenomenon, among which stands out the figure of Rosalind Krauss, who early on, and immersed in the epicenter of events, wrote a revealing and little understood article in the local environment: *Sculpture in the expanded field* (1979). There, she expressed her surprise at the manipulation that the sculptural genre had undergone at the hands of the critical operations of contemporary art of her time. At the same time, in an effort to define it, based on the construction of a field, she proposed the existence of three contiguous categories: hence the title of her text. To these already named categories, she added a fourth category, *sculpture*. Thereby, she implicitly contributed to the redefinition of the boundaries of a historically established genre, in relation to other artistic expressions that, due to being three-dimensional and contiguous, resembled it. Krauss did not mention the concept of *the expanded field of sculpture* in said text, nor did she speak of *expanded sculpture*, a phenomenon that, in fact, has shaped the sculptural expressions of the avant-garde, modern and contemporary, without ceasing to be so.

And, in relation to *expanded sculpture*, it is known that, at the end of the 19th century, faced with profound social transformations, sculpture was confronted with the need to try new creative possibilities; from there, a drastic expansive process of its traditional constituent elements occurred. Without ceasing to be sculpture, it expanded its productive resources, materials, techniques and technologies among them, the integration of new industrial materials, construction and assemblage, 3D modeling, printing and virtuality it distanced itself from realism, embraced the void, introduced real movement, extended its themes, objects and *patterns of representation* (McEvelly, 1984), etc.

From there emerged futurist, constructivist, kinetic, and digital sculpture; from there also abstract, ephemeral, and immaterial sculpture, among many other manifestations that for the time signified a revolutionary event. These faced harsh criticism, but in the long run, obtained institutional recognition.

Faced with this, paradoxically, when we speak of sculpture today, the image of a container that encompasses historical, ancestral, and modern practices arises in our minds —despite the fact that the latter was built in opposition to the preceding tradition. And it is that tradition composed (ancestral and modern), which persists today, and not only in the Sanantonience locality, that collides with the categories of contemporary art that can be considered sculptural or by artistic expressions that in an evidently late-emancipatory gesture boast of dissolving such tradition, locating themselves in a realm where material does not enamor, where craft is not indispensable, and in which the study of form has been replaced by meaning. It is the realm of artistic objects that, although three-dimensional, valuable, and contiguous, do not belong to the genre of sculpture.

Conclusions

Having reviewed the references cited in the first section, the debate arises between ideas such as *traditional sculpture*, *expanded sculpture*, and *expanded field*, from which, of the latter, emerge contiguous categories such as *marked sites*, *site-specific constructions*, and *axiomatic structures*. In the same way, and for a long time, terms and concepts were coined that named and today define those genres that emerged from the historical avant-garde and contemporary art, such as *conceptual art*, *object art*, and *installation*. So, why insist on diluting the term sculpture and its concept within a universe of artistic expressions that, due to their particularities, have their own names? And why insist on hierarchically applying these categories to artistic events that convene the local sculptors' community? From what has been examined, the confusion of concepts is evident, as well as the hierarchical superposition, of a modern cut, that, even today and anachronistically, is imposed on the local art institution —the already atavistic rejection of all tradition. This phenomenon has generated a legitimate claim from a large part of the Ecuadorian sculptors' community. Faced with this, it is essential to rethink the concept of sculpture, integrating tradition (universal and local) and expansion, as well as all the elements of historical becoming, around identity axes that characterize and distinguish it, as figure and ground, without falling into isolating purisms, of course; and with this concept, already clarified, to invite the art community to participate in educational processes or cultural events in which



such category is mentioned, for example, in the National Biennial of Sculpture San Antonio de Ibarra, or others located in different geography.

In order to resolve the aforementioned conflicts, it is recommended to implement a participatory methodology in the construction of events related to the studied natural phenomena, involving artists and other stakeholders in the art field in crucial decision-making processes. This could ensure that the events are inclusive and reflect the diverse perspectives and needs of the community, especially the creators. Similarly, it is advisable to integrate an anthropological perspective into the planning, considering its cultural particularities and needs through an approach sensitive to tradition and local context, facilitating its articulation with the identities and experiences of the involved individuals.

Finally, it is recommended to conduct a detailed, calm, and meticulous study of the theoretical texts that underpin current artistic notions. Through a proper understanding of these texts, art field stakeholders could better apply contemporary theories to benefit the practices of their environment.

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