

## Abstract

During the mid-twentieth century, Colombia underwent a decades-long civil war now referred to as *la Violencia*. As a result of national political disputes, hundreds of thousands were killed, millions displaced or disappeared, and guerrilla warfare spread throughout the countryside. At the same time, a wave of abstract art was sweeping the globe, stemming from artistic hubs such as Paris and New York City. Colombian artists were inspired by this stylistic revolution, and began departing from national realistic conventions of painting into the new realm of modernism. In this paper, I argue that Colombian modernism and its burgeoning varieties of abstraction allowed artists to more adequately convey the terrors of *la Violencia*. Particularly, Villamizar, Obregón, and Botero utilize new modes of expression to capture a nation grappling with extreme violence for the first time in decades. Modernist abstraction allowed for a rawer exploration of emotion and turmoil, one that extends beyond the surface levels of pictorial nationalism and realism.

## La Violencia and Modernism

When a decades long Liberal Party administration found itself upended by a Conservative Party win in 1946, outbreaks of violence began occurring in the Colombian countryside. Followed by the assassination of Liberal Party head (Jorge Eliecer Gaitán) in 1948, and the militant Pinilla dictatorship of '53-'57, the country was plunged into social and political unrest. Senseless violence, murder, femicide, torture, and acts of intimidation permeated the nation well into the sixties.

How did Colombian art respond to this? Much like how global modernists reacted to WWII, Colombian artists broke with form in order to answer dire questions regarding humanity and its capacity for destruction, genocide, greed, and torture. Human forms were distorted (in the case of Botero), and broken down (Obregón and Villamizar). At its purest, Villamizar presents abstract geometry as an ordered reaction to national disorder.

# FORMAL MANIFESTATIONS OF LA VIOLENCIA IN MODERNIST COLOMBIAN ART: STUDIES OF VILLAMIZAR, OBREGÓN, AND BOTERO

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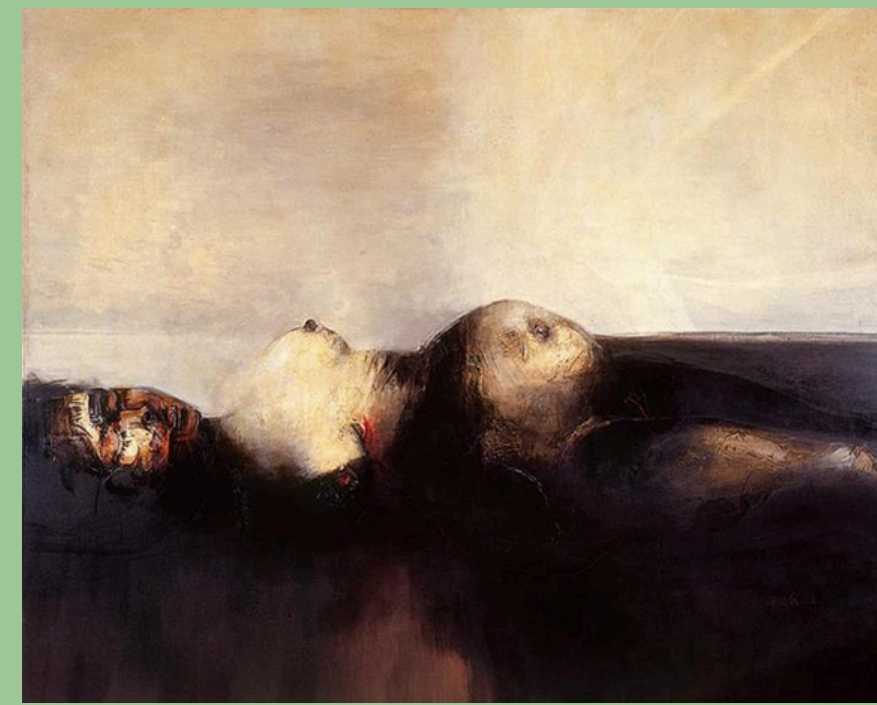
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## OBREGÓN



*Masacre 10 de abril (April 10th Massacre)*, 1948. Oil on canvas. 65 x 120 cm.



*Violencia (Violence)*, 1962. Oil on canvas. 155 x 168 cm.

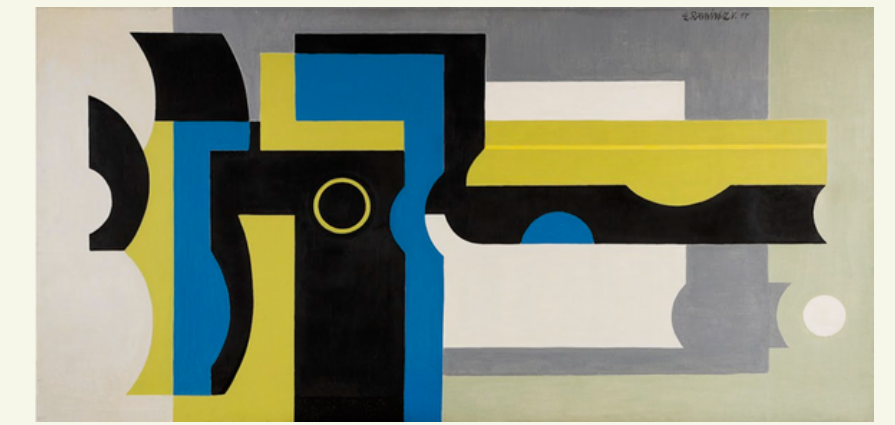


*Estudiante muerto (el velorio) (Dead student [the funeral])*, 1956. Oil on canvas. 140 x 175 cm.

Unlike realist, figurative, and even impressionistic styles, more abstract modes of expression allowed for the full expression of the complicated web of emotions incited by *la Violencia*.

Realistic forms require patience and time to develop, whereas abstract forms as well as thicker, less detailed brush strokes suggest brevity and an outburst of emotion, reflecting the desperation and pain of this time period.

## VILLAMIZAR



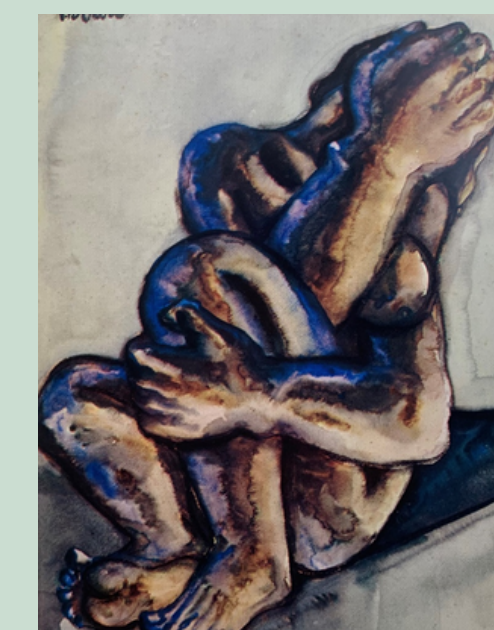
*Composición mecánica (Mechanical composition)*, 1957. Oil on canvas. 62 x 51 cm.



*El domador (The tamer)*, 1949. Oil on canvas. 75 x 100 cm.

Villamizar states that "the contrary of violence is construction, order, civilization." *Composición mecánica* is the peak of his geometric simplicity.

## BOTERO



*Mujer llorando (Woman crying)*, 1949. Watercolor. 22 x 17 in.



*Woman abducted by a demon*, 1967. Oil on canvas.

Botero's unnatural distortion of forms emphasize the horror of national femicide against rural Colombian women during *la Violencia*.