

CONTEXT AND KANT IN THE AESTHETICS OF JOSÉ ENRIQUE RODÓ AND SAMUEL RAMOS

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In the classic essays Ariel (1900) and Filosofía de la vida artística (1950), the Uruguayan José Enrique Rodó (1872–1917) and the Mexican Samuel Ramos (1897–1959) present distinctive and divergent claims about aesthetics. While Rodó asserts the existence of an innate and abundant aesthetic sensibility among Latin Americans, Ramos believes that aesthetic experience is relatively rare and that aesthetic sensibility needs to be cultivated. While historical grounding in the Latin American context is missing in the works of both Rodó and Ramos, Ariel contains an argument for an innate Latin American aesthetic sensibility linked to high moral development along with the hope that Latin America's youth will use their aesthetic and moral gifts to advance Latin America's place in the 20th century. In Filosofía de la vida artística, Ramos argues that the aesthetic experience in Mexico is far from innate or even widespread: on the contrary, it is rare and much in need of further development. Kant, referenced by both Rodó and Ramos, in his Critique of Judgment, argues against a relationship between aesthetic sensibility and moral capacity. Rodó, then, is at odds with Kant while Ramos's view is closer to Kant's.

In the classic essays *Ariel* (1900) and *Filosofía de la vida artística* (1950), the Uruguayan José Enrique Rodó (1872–1917) and the Mexican Samuel Ramos (1897–1959) present distinctive and divergent claims about aesthetics. While Rodó asserts the existence of an innate and abundant aesthetic sensibility among Latin Americans, Ramos believes that aesthetic experience is relatively rare and that aesthetic sensibility needs to be cultivated.

Despite their ultimate philosophical differences in the area of aesthetics, Ramos was a great admirer of Rodó and he published an edition of Rodó's works in 1943. In his prologue, Ramos identifies Rodó as a major pioneer of Latin American philosophy: "Suddenly, without a cultural tradition to explain him, without precursors to announce his arrival, a spirit emerges that is as mature and well equipped as that of a European who has twenty centuries of tradition behind him. Yet, this European mind was born and shaped in

Latin America.”¹ Ramos contrasts Rodó with the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío, who was viewed by both Ramos and Rodó as inspired more by Europe than Latin America: “On the other hand, we can say of Rodó that he is Latin America’s thinker, and that his work exemplifies the unique course that all thought must follow if it wants to have life and meaning for the culture of this continent.”² (RPS, vii).

This article compares the notions of aesthetics adopted by Rodó and Ramos. It focusses on the anomaly that, while Ramos is powerfully drawn to Rodó’s roots in the experiences of the Americas, he ultimately fails both to explore Rodó’s aesthetics fully and to offer a well detailed critique of Rodó. Indeed, Ramos fails to ground his own aesthetics in a Mexican or Latin American context and so falls into the same sort of problem that he notes in Rodó’s work. A European philosopher’s work grounds both Rodó and Ramos’ approach to aesthetics. In what follows, I will also suggest ways in which these prominent and important thinkers responded very differently to Kant.

Rodó’s landmark essay *Ariel* (1900) has been published in various languages in over sixty editions. It was rapidly disseminated in Latin America as eight editions were published in the essay’s first decade. In 1908, the sixth and eighth editions were published in Mexico, one in Mexico City by the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria, and the other one in the northern city of Monterrey by order of General Bernardo Reyes, Governor of Nuevo León.

The Mexican historian Enrique Krauze recently observed that *Ariel* is a book that “would change the ideological history of Latin America.”³ With its clear reference to a character in Shakespeare’s last play, *The Tempest*, Rodó described Ariel as possessing characteristics he considered usefully symbolic of Latin Americans:

Shakespeare’s ethereal Ariel symbolizes the noble, soaring aspect of the human spirit. He represents the superiority of reason and feeling over the base impulses of irrationality. He is generous enthusiasm, elevated and unselfish motivation in all actions, spirituality in culture, vivacity and grace in intelligence. Ariel is the ideal toward which human selection ascends, the force that wields life’s eternal chisel, effacing from aspiring mankind the

¹ Samuel Ramos, *Rodó: Prólogo y selección de Samuel Ramos* (Mexico City: Ediciones de la Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1943), vii; my translation.

² *Ibid.*

³ Enrique Krauze, *Redeemers: Ideas and Power in Latin America*, (tr.) H. Heifetz and N. Wimmer (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), 25.

clinging vestiges of Caliban, the play's symbol of brutal sensuality.⁴

If Ariel embodies the more spiritual Latin American, in Rodó's interpretation, Caliban symbolizes the aggressive, practical, yet clumsy Anglo-American.

For nearly seventy years, Ariel was unquestionably and positively associated with Latin America in the Hispanic world. During the cultural re-examinations of the 1960s, however, left-leaning Latin American intellectuals became sensitive to the distinction between those who have to "bargain for their humanity" and who babble and want to make the borrowed word their own, as the Mexican philosopher Leopoldo Zea put it, versus those who grant humanity and own *logos*. In short, Zea refers to the differentiation between the civilized North and the barbarian South.

In 1969, three writers independently dethroned Ariel as representative of Latin Americans. They offered Caliban as a more authentic symbol for Latin America and the Caribbean because, in the perspective of the powers and dominations around this discourse, Caliban had not been considered fully human and had not mastered the language and discourse of Prospero. I am referring to Aimé Césaire's play "A Tempest. Adaptation of Shakespeare's *Tempest* for Black Theatre"⁵, Edward Brathwaite's poem entitled "Caliban"⁶, and Roberto Fernández Retamar's essay "*Cuba hasta Fidel*"⁷, which he later developed and published as *Calibán*.⁸

To North American readers it might seem odd that Ariel, Caliban and Prospero have captured the imagination of Rodó and many Latin American writers since 1900. However, Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and its characters unleashed many interpretations in the region, in part because it is widely accepted that the source of this play is the "New World." Specifically, accounts of the wreck of the sailing ship, Sea Venture, near Bermuda in 1609, which had departed from England bound for Jamestown, Virginia, likely served as inspiration to Shakespeare, who published *The Tempest* in 1611.

⁴ José Enrique Rodó, *Ariel*, (ed.) J. Symington, (tr.) M. Peden (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988), 1. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as A.

⁵ Aimé Césaire, *A Tempest: Based on Shakespeare's 'The Tempest.' Adaptation for a Black Theatre* (New York: New York Theatre Communications Group, 2002).

⁶ Edward Brathwaite, *Islands* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

⁷ Roberto Fernández Retamar, "Cuba hasta Fidel," *Bohemia*, vol. 61 (19 September 1969): 84-97.

⁸ Roberto Fernández Retamar, *Calibán: apuntes sobre la cultura en nuestra América* (Mexico City: Editorial Diógenes, 1971).

Thus, the many still timely themes in Rodó's *Ariel* emerge partly from the historical context of its publication. On the one hand, *Ariel* had a political, consciousness-raising mission on several levels. It was published just two years after the Spanish-American War when memories lingered of earlier imperialist episodes, such as the Mexican-American War and the annexation of Texas. There was considerable, deep worry in Latin America about the ambitions of the Colossus of the North; and yet there was no small amount of fascination with the United States. Rodó was aware that, with the close of the 19th century, Latin Americans needed to think carefully about their future. In one of the best analyses of *Ariel*, an article entitled "A Great Vanishing Act? The Latin American Philosophical Tradition and How Ariel and Caliban Helped Save It from Oblivion," Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert describes the historical backdrop of the essay this way:

Rodó's *Ariel* is born of the struggle against the imperialism that threatened to asphyxiate the cultural and political voice of Latin America. *Ariel* provides a new orientation point, a rallying cry to unify the continent in its struggle against the expansive empire of the North. After 1900, Latin American nations were involved in a rebuilding of what was becoming a "lost continent," lost under the shadows of economic and political policies that threatened the sovereignty of the nations of Latin America.⁹

At the same time, as other readers of Rodó's essay have pointed out, *Ariel* is also a kind of anti-positivist manifesto.¹⁰ Like many intellectuals of his generation, Rodó had been steeped in the Spenserian positivism that pervaded Latin American universities in the 1890s, including the University of Montevideo, where Rodó taught. However, by the turn of the century, he was primed to think in new ways that would demonstrate positivism's shortcomings and the damage it could do to societies. Gwen Kirkpatrick's analysis of the historical context of *Ariel* and its crucial role and enormous reach in Latin American aesthetics reveals that "Despite Rodó's lack of acknowledgment of a pre-Conquest American past or of its multi-

⁹ Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert, "A Great Vanishing Act? The Latin American Philosophical Tradition and How Ariel and Caliban Helped Save It from Oblivion," *The New Centennial Review*, vol. 7, no. 3, (Winter 2007): 152.

¹⁰ Gordon Brotherston, "Introduction," in Rodó, *Ariel. Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Gordon Brotherston* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967); Stephanie Merrim, "'Living and Thinking with Those Dislocations': A Case for Latin American Existentialist Fiction," *Hispanic Issues On Line*, vol. 8 (2011): 93-109.

ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity, his message found exponents even in the intellectual elite of the Mexican Revolution, as well as in various Indigenist circles, and helped to create a new space for the humanities and arts in a positivist and pragmatic *fin de siglo*.¹¹ Rodó's anti-positivist stance is found principally in what Enrique Krauze terms "the message of aesthetic and cultural 'salvation' expounded in *Ariel*."¹² The sense of the aesthetic in Rodó runs counter to the spirit of positivism, which holds that the real is the measurable and thus does not allow for the complexity, depth and breadth of aesthetic phenomena. Rodó wished for Latin Americans to explore these dimensions of aesthetics regularly.

In addition to the liberatory role *Ariel* plays in exposing the shortcomings of positivism while encouraging the arts in Latin America, the feature of the essay that is most germane to the topic of this article is a well-known claim Rodó makes about the aesthetic ability or capacity of Latin Americans. Rodó argues that belonging to some cultures, or what he calls "*razas*" (races), facilitates spiritual development. That is, according to him, some cultures (notably, the Latin American ones) are more likely to possess a balance of rationality, autonomy and the aesthetic sensibility necessary for the good life than others. He famously contrasts the presence of an innate aesthetic sensibility in Latin Americans with a lack of such sensibility in Anglo-Americans. He confesses that, while he admires some features of North American culture, he does not embrace it. At least in part because of the influence of utilitarianism, which Rodó sometimes manages to conflate wrongly with positivism, he believes that Anglo-Americans have abandoned ideals in their intense pursuit of material well-being. In his view, North Americans are workaholics who see material success as an end in itself. People who are so focussed on self-interest and material gain cannot develop, Rodó believes, a spiritual or aesthetic sensibility.¹³

In Rodó's words, "the North American has with his wealth achieved all the satisfaction and vanity that come with sumptuous magnificence—but good taste has eluded him." (A, 81). Yet an even

¹¹ Gwen Kirkpatrick, "The Aesthetics of the Avant-Garde," in *Through the Kaleidoscope: The Experience of Modernity in Latin America*, (ed.) V. Schelling (London: Verso, 2000), 189.

¹² Krauze, *Redeemers*, 37.

¹³ This point is captured well in Frida Kahlo's 1932 painting, "Self-Portrait on the Borderline between Mexico and the United States," in which the Mexican side shows indigenous imagery, earthiness and sunshine, whereas the steely U.S. side is modern, industrialized and dehumanized and the sky is grey from furiously belching smokestacks.

more negative assessment of Anglo-Americans by Rodó follows: “if a word may someday characterize their taste in art, it will be a word that negates art itself, the grossness of affectation, the ignorance of all that is subtle and exquisite, the cult of false grandeur, the sensationalism that excludes the serenity that is irreconcilable with the pace of a feverish life.” (*Ibid.*)

Furthermore, Rodó claims that democracy encourages mediocrity. North Americans, according to Rodó, would prefer to have large numbers of students educated in public schools who can all attain some minimal level of literacy (“readin’, ’ritin’ and ’rithmetic”) than to cultivate fewer but better students who demonstrate a capacity for understanding taste, wisdom and beauty. For Rodó, Benjamin Franklin’s philosophy is emblematic of the pitfalls of democracy because it encourages levelling:

Benjamin Franklin represents the highest point in North American morality: a philosophy of conduct whose ideals are grounded in the normality of honesty and the utility of prudence. His is a philosophy that would never give rise to either sanctity or heroism, one that although it may—like the cane that habitually supports its originator—lend conscience support along the everyday paths of life is a frail staff indeed when it comes to scaling the peaks. (A, 83)

Ariel, then, becomes a poetic manifesto for an aesthetic and individualist idealism that is, according to Rodó, more readily found among Latin Americans. Late in his essay, Rodó concludes, “A triumphant Ariel signifies idealism and order in life; noble inspiration in thought; selflessness in morality; good taste in art; heroism in action; delicacy in customs.” (A, 98)

While Rodó’s appeal to spiritual values was an antidote to the positivism that had been entrenched for too long at the University of Montevideo and throughout Latin America, he goes on to argue for a tight connection between aesthetics and ethics. Rodó writes, “There is no doubt in my mind that one who has learned to distinguish the delicate from the vulgar, the ugly from the beautiful, has made half the journey toward distinguishing good from evil.” (A, 51) Gordon Brotherston interprets this connection as follows: “Rodó suggests that man’s highest faculty is an aesthetic one, that morality is dependent in the last resort on beauty; and he assumes simultaneously

that beauty is not the property of the majority but the preserve of a select minority.”¹⁴ Again, this is reflected in Rodó’s words:

Never forget that an educated sense of the beautiful is the most effective collaborator in the formation of a delicate sensitivity for justice. Dignity and inner nobility will find no greater artisan. Never will an individual be more faithful to duty than when he moves from believing that beauty is something that originates outside himself to feeling it internally as aesthetic harmony. And never will that individual know goodness more fully than when he learns to respect the sense of beauty in others. (A, 50)

While Rodó’s generalizations and stereotypes about the aesthetic and moral capacity of Latin Americans and North Americans can have a certain power and can seem insightful, they are difficult philosophical claims to expand or support. Kant, in his *Critique of Judgment*, below argues against a relationship between aesthetic sensibility and moral capacity, such as the one that Rodó postulates:

There are those who would like to regard every activity of man to which his inner natural predisposition impels him as being directed to the ultimate purpose of humanity, the morally good. These people have, with the best intention, regarded it as a sign of a good moral character to take an interest in the beautiful generally. But others have, not without grounds, contradicted them by appealing to the [fact of] experience that *virtuosi* of taste, who not just occasionally but apparently as a rule are vain, obstinate, and given to ruinous passions, can perhaps even less than other people claim the distinction of being attached to moral principles. And hence it seems, not only that the feeling for the beautiful is distinct in kind from moral feeling (as indeed it actually is), but also that it is difficult to reconcile the interest which can be connected with the beautiful with the moral interest, and that it is impossible to do this by an [alleged] intrinsic affinity between the two.¹⁵

While I side with Kant on the lack of a necessary connection between the beautiful and the moral, Rodó still offers some thoughtful commentary on the roles of beauty and morality in Latin America and North America. Indeed, *Ariel* had a profound and immediate impact

¹⁴ Brotherson, “Introduction,” 7.

¹⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, (tr.) W. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 299.

upon publication in 1900 and continues to be provocative and challenging more than a century later.

However, in interesting ways, the notions Rodó expresses about aesthetics in *Ariel* contrast significantly with those elaborated by Samuel Ramos, in *Filosofía de la vida artística* (1950), a work published a half-century after the publication of *Ariel*. Ramos is better known for his *Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico* (1934), a book that attempts to articulate the nature of the Mexican psyche and culture. In *Filosofía de la vida artística*, however, Ramos established his *bona fides* as a reliable and innovative interpreter of Western philosophy, revealing a penetrating knowledge of concepts of aesthetics in works ranging from figures such as Plato, Aristotle and Kant to Hegel, Hartmann, Bergson, Scheler, Heidegger and Nietzsche.¹⁶

Uncharacteristically, Ramos scarcely mentions Mexico and Latin America in this book. Instead, he portrays aesthetics as a branch of philosophy that has been largely absent in Latin America, but one that Latin Americans would benefit from studying. In *Filosofía de la vida artística*, Ramos encourages his readers, presumably Mexicans, to make a concerted effort to cultivate a sense of aesthetics. He never suggests that Mexicans or Latin Americans possess an innate aesthetic sensibility such as the one Rodó posits. However, as mentioned above, Ramos was very familiar with the work of Rodó, who is the only Latin American referenced in *Filosofía de la vida artística*, though only in passing. Ramos wrote, "The artist's formation is never complete or definitive because his personality, as Rodó says, is being forged on the anvil throughout his life."¹⁷

Rather than arguing that Latin Americans have a special capacity for aesthetic sensibility, Ramos instead asserts the very different thought that people and cultures are fortunate to have powerful artists within their nations. Artists, for Ramos, are people of exceptional sensibility who represent a special, distinct minority of the human population. He notes the "otherness" of artists as follows:

¹⁶ Ramos would defer to Antonio Caso as the foremost Mexican thinker about aesthetics. Caso published two important books dealing with aesthetics: *La existencia como economía, como desinterés y como caridad* (1916) and *Principios de estética* (1925). In the latter work, Caso references exclusively European philosophers and demonstrates ample knowledge of traditional aesthetic theories. He does not mention Mexican philosophers or Mexico in this work, nor Latin American philosophers or Latin America.

¹⁷ Samuel Ramos, *Filosofía de la vida artística*, 2nd ed. (Mexico City: Espasa-Calpe Mexicana, 1964), 61. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as FVA. All translations are mine.

"The artist lives primarily through feeling, projecting more his subjective side in his reactions because his interior life is more intense than that of other people." (FVA, 61)

Those who are not artists, according to Ramos, may have only rare, though powerful, glimpses into the aesthetic experience:

Art reveals an unfamiliar spiritual life for all those who do not possess the artist's profound and original vision. Human reality is transfigured by the magic of art.... The revelation of spiritual life, the elevation and enrichment of its values, do not convert art into science or philosophy. Art performs this function not through concepts, but in its own way, through concrete images. Art goes beyond philosophy or science because it is not subjected to the requirement of real facts and can therefore move freely on the level of fiction. (FVA, 134)

Ramos, who refers to Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (as Rodó did, if only in passing), distinguishes art from philosophy and would not link aesthetics to morality as Rodó did. Ramos suggests that art is a sublime, transformational experience in life that we would do well to have more of: "Art is not...only a means of salvation. It is peace and comfort, it is liberation in appearance and revelation of spiritual life through intuition that does not appeal to reason, but to the evidence of feelings. Art is catharsis for the passions and a means of reaching unfulfilled aspirations." (FVA, 135)

Ramos gives a characteristically psychological explanation for the infrequent incidence of aesthetic experience in life: "Imagination and feeling are repressed in almost everyone because of the disturbances that these activities cause in normal life. Many desires have no place in real life. They are incompatible with real life." (FVA, 137)

Ramos's counter-theme to Rodó's is that art and contra-rationality represent modes of thought that are as valid as philosophy and rationality. For Ramos, art can be as crucial to understanding as philosophy is. The counter-rational or extra-rational can be as helpful to understanding as the rational. While Rodó believes that a well-developed and carefully cultivated sense of aesthetics is the likeliest guarantor of a mature ethics, Ramos concentrates on the roles that feelings and the contra-rational play in the ways that human beings live, express their lives and arrive at their judgments, postulating that such formulations are at least as beneficial and enlightened as rational ones.

While Rodó and Ramos have provocative ideas to offer in the two works I have referenced, they both disappoint in terms of advancing a theory of aesthetics in Latin America. Both represent, if in different

ways, clearly elitist views. Rodó promoted in *Ariel* the idea that a select few with superior intellect and education should take charge of navigating Latin America's future. Ramos privileged the ideas that artists possess superior powers, the sublime is a rare and often inaccessible experience for most people and Europeans are better positioned to theorize about aesthetics. Neither thinker manages to take historical context explicitly into account when discussing aesthetics as an activity or a mode of culture.

Rodó felt empowered as a privileged *pensador* on the threshold of a transformational century. Though he had good reason to be hopeful, his stance of focussing on the future at the expense of ignoring Latin American history, especially at that moment, seems problematic. Fifty years later, by the time Ramos had published *Filosofía de la vida artística*, he personally had experienced two decades of intense cultural commentary and scrutiny in Mexico of what it means to be Mexican and frequent discussions of how to grapple with so-called Mexican inferiority complexes. Inhabiting such a situation makes it all the more curious that *Filosofía de la vida artística* contains only a cursory paragraph on Mexican popular art in a brief section on primitive art (FVA, 126), and that Latin America is altogether absent in terms of its contributions to aesthetics, despite the flourishing arts scene in Mexico that Ramos would have witnessed in the thirties and forties.

One feature of *Ariel* that differentiates it from many other Latin American aesthetic formulations is that Rodó was oriented almost exclusively toward the future. Latin America's rich past, especially its indigenous heritage, has been more often the orientation for aesthetic meditations in Latin America. Even Rubén Darío, whose work is not known for its references to Latin America, stated in 1896 in his preface to *Prosas profanas*, a high point of *modernista* poetic production in Latin America: "If there is poetry in our America, it is in old things, in Palenque and Uxatlán, in the legendary Indian, in the sensual and fine Inca, and in the great Moctezuma on his golden throne. The rest is yours, democrat Walt Whitman."¹⁸

Place and time, context and situation, often the indigenous past, generally play an important role in 20th-century aesthetics in Latin America. Examples abound in literature. One now classic case is Julio Cortázar's short story, "The Night Face Up," which experiments with alternating narrations. This story seems simple enough and what happens to the protagonist seems not so uncommon. Enjoying a motorcycle ride through a large city, he is surprised by a careless

¹⁸ Rubén Darío, *Obras completas* (Madrid: Aguila, 1968), 546; my translation.

pedestrian. Avoiding her, he suffers an accident and winds up in traction in the hospital. Drifting in and out of sleep in his room, he slips at the same time in and out of a dream in which he, a Motecan Indian, flees the Aztec hunters who want to capture him for a mass sacrifice. The man in Cortázar's story, for almost the whole story, feels certain that he is the man who lies injured in the hospital. At the end of the story though, as he lies on an altar awaiting the stone knife of the Aztec priest, "he knew that he was not going to wake up, that he was awake, that the marvelous dream had been the other, absurd as all dreams are."¹⁹

Octavio Paz, a contemporary compatriot of Ramos, explores the aesthetics of architecture in his 1957 essay, "Critique of the Pyramid," included in recent editions of *The Labyrinth of Solitude*. Paz memorably proposes how the pyramids reflect Mexican political history and how they, with their oppressive and massive bases, steps and altars, differ markedly from Egyptian pyramids. Countless other examples from literature, architecture, and other art forms could demonstrate the prevalence of respect for layers of historical context in Latin American art and aesthetics.²⁰

Although Rodó may have nobly intended for *Ariel* to serve as a rallying cry for the young people of Latin America to embrace their future and work to shape it, the essay arguably wobbles in not more comprehensively taking the Uruguayan or Latin American past into account. Rodó was clearly well read in Greek classics and European (especially French) thought, though his philosophical preoccupations

¹⁹ Julio Cortázar, *Blow-Up and Other Stories*, (tr.) P. Blackburn (New York: Pantheon, 1967), 76.

²⁰ In Mexican photography, unexpected juxtapositions can distract the viewer's attention, but the sense of place, Mexico, is often very strong, even if history is not an explicit theme. In "El sueño de los pobres" (The Dream of the Poor) by Lola Álvarez Bravo, countless pairs of *huaraches* surround a barefoot, sleeping child. Graciela Itúrbide's "Señora de las iguanas" (1979) captures the serene expression on the face of an indigenous woman who happens to be wearing a head-dress of live iguanas. Similarly, her "Mujer Ángel" (1979), shows a woman from behind who is shrouded in black attire and facing an immense desert, who happens to be carrying a boom box. Itúrbide's "La frontera" (1989) captures a man with an exquisite tattoo of the Virgin of Guadalupe on his back as he prepares to cross the Mexican-U.S. border. Mariana Yampolsky is another photographer whose work strongly evokes Mexico. Her "Última mirada" (last look) humorously capitalizes on the Mexican openness toward death to show a coffin lid just ajar enough for viewers to see two eyes looking out. José Guadalupe Posada's *calaveras* (skulls) more famously capture Mexican death imagery. Many other Mexican photographers and artists emphasize a sense of place in their work.

were not concerned with Europe or Greece, as Ramos pointed out in his prologue. Rodó's starting point in *Ariel*, however, is the present without reference to the existence of a Latin American past. Samuel Ramos, who intended to delineate a "universal" theory of aesthetics by drawing on classical Greek and European sources, reveals in *Filosofía de la vida artística* that he believed such a claim for universal theory had not traditionally had a place in Mexican commentary. While historical grounding in the Latin American context is missing in the works of both Rodó and Ramos, *Ariel* contains an argument for an innate Latin American aesthetic sensibility linked to high moral development along with the hope that Latin America's youth will use their aesthetic and moral gifts to advance Latin America's place in the 20th century. In *Filosofía de la vida artística*, Ramos argues that the aesthetic experience in Mexico is far from innate or even widespread: on the contrary, it is rare and much in need of further development. While Ramos's essay lacks the confidence that Rodó projects in *Ariel*, it makes a powerful case for how art and the experience of the sublime are as important as philosophy for understanding experience. Ramos clearly believed that art and philosophy have equi-primordial roles in revealing truth and promoting understanding.

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