

*The “New Pantheism” in Contemporary Nicaraguan Landscapes and Literature.
A Visual and Textual Analysis of Works by Armando Morales,
Gioconda Belli and Omar Cabezas*

[El “nuevo panteísmo” en los paisajes y la literatura nicaragüenses contemporáneos. Un análisis visual y textual de la obra de Armando Morales, Gioconda Belli y Omar Cabezas]

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The works in which Armando Morales, Gioconda Belli and Omar Cabezas presented the guerrilla movement of the Nicaraguan revolution in 1979 reflect a common utopia: the “new pantheism”: the individual only matters as part of a whole: struggle only makes sense if it is for a collective; woman is portrayed as mother earth... The Nicaraguan landscape provided the bases for the ideology of the revolution, presenting a confrontation taken up by the work of the three authors: simultaneously a protecting divinity and a brutal danger that obliged the combatants to reconsider their values, not from a theoretical viewpoint but from that of survival. The local landscape gave form to history, culture, and to the new and present-day Nicaraguan society.

Keywords: new pantheism; Nicaragua; Armando Morales; Gioconda Belli; Omar Cabezas.

Las obras en que Armando Morales, Gioconda Belli y Omar Cabezas plasmaron la guerrilla de la revolución nicaragüense de 1979 reflejan una utopía común: el “nuevo panteísmo”. El individuo sólo importa como parte de un todo, la lucha sólo tiene sentido si es para un colectivo, la mujer es la madre tierra... El paisaje nicaragüense sentó las bases de la ideología de la revolución, presentando una confrontación que la obra de los tres autores recoge: fue a la par una divinidad protectora y un brutal peligro que obligó a los combatientes a replantearse sus valores, no desde la teoría sino desde la supervivencia. El paisaje local dio forma a la historia, la cultura y la nueva y actual sociedad nicaragüense.

Palabras clave: nuevo panteísmo; Nicaragua; Armando Morales; Gioconda Belli; Omar Cabezas.

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THE “NEW PANTHEISM” IN CONTEMPORARY
NICARAGUAN LANDSCAPES AND LITERATURE. A VISUAL
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With its lush, arable land and access to two oceans, two lakes and a river, Nicaragua has long been valued by colonial, imperial and dictatorial powers for its human and natural resources and economic promise. The Nicaraguan landscape has proven a lucrative site for coffee, cotton, banana and sugar plantations, an ideal location for a panisthmian canal, and a promising source of timber, mineral and energy reserves.¹ This same landscape has also, for centuries, been valued by local populations for reasons centered upon natural beauty, ancestral ties, physical and spiritual sustenance and resources for internal development.²

This analysis explores the prominent presence of the local landscape in the works of three iconic figures of contemporary Nicaraguan visual and literary culture. The Magical Realist landscapes that Armando Morales painted during the two decades following the 1979 Nicaraguan Revolution demonstrate compelling connections with the natural imagery that Gioconda Belli crafts in *La mujer habitada*³ and Omar Cabezas recounts in *La montaña es algo más que una inmensa estepa verde*.⁴ As *imaginaries*, these

¹ John Booth and Thomas W. Walker, *Understanding Central America*, 3 ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), 35.

² For a discussion of Nicaragua's history of rural and Native American traditions see David Craven, *The New Concept of Art & Popular Culture in Nicaragua Since the Revolution in 1979* (Queenston, Lewiston and NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 54-81.

³ Gioconda Belli, *La mujer habitada* (México: Editorial Diana, 1989).

⁴ Omar Cabezas, *La montaña es algo más que una inmensa estepa verde* (La Habana: Casa de las Américas, 1982). See David Craven, *Art and Revolution in Latin America, 1910-1990*, chapter 3 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), particularly for a discussion of the incorporation and significance of nature imagery within the larger context of Nicaraguan art (146-152), as well as

works construct the local landscape, with its diverse mountain ranges, rainforests and jungles, Lakes Managua and Nicaragua and the San Juan River, with a sense of pantheistic harmony, unifying humanity, divinity and the natural world in a way that is, at once, universal and specific. The images and texts together convey the ways in which the Nicaraguan landscape has shaped national belief systems, culture and revolutionary praxis. Simultaneously, they reveal conflicting perspectives, ideological disjunctions and nuanced complexities that challenge the notion of a national landscape. Together, these works evince the development of a “new pantheism” that became integral to the creation of the revolutionary New Men and Women who reclaimed their national soil and created a new Nicaraguan society centered upon human agency and egalitarian respect.

Broadly, pantheism refers to the belief that god and universe are one in the same; that divinity is collectively composed of all forms of nature and the cosmos.⁵ Merging spirituality, rationality and science, pantheist belief is that elements of the natural world are continually regenerative and strive toward unity, while individual beings live only one life.⁶ When conceptualized as *imaginaries*, the visual and literary images here considered communicate an alternative reality, in which the individual becomes freed from the constructs of modern social, political, and religious institutions. Although falling within the framework of “the society of the spectacle,” these works challenge the power structures critiqued by Guy Debord in his seminal 1967 essay.⁷ Instead, they demonstrate that, as posited by Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez in *Las ideas estéticas de Marx*, creative liberty and aesthetic pleasure are the mechanisms by which man may become his own “supreme

for a discussion of the prominent role of literature and poetry in the 1979 Revolution (123-142). This analysis has been profoundly influenced by David Craven, to whom I am greatly indebted for his pioneering work, publications and scholarly guidance in the social art history of Latin and, specifically, Central America.

⁵ Lynn Gamwell, *Exploring the Invisible: Art, Science & Spirituality* (Princeton University Press, 2002), 14. This definition is based upon the German Romantic conception of *pantheism*, as derived from Pythagoras’ contention that “man and the universe are both constructed from [one primordial] substance, [the monad],” and “that man is a microcosm of the universe and animated by a common spirit, a World Soul, which is divine and eternal.”

⁶ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “Pantheism and Christianity” (1923), in *Christianity & Evolution*, trans. René Hague (New York: Harvest, 1971), 58. Chardin develops his conception of pantheism throughout his lectures. Summarized in “How I Believe,” he states: “We now see beings as like threadless fibers, woven into a universal process. Everything falls back into a past abyss, and everything rushes forward toward a future abyss. Through its history, every being is co-extensive with the whole of duration; and its ontogenesis is no more than the infinitesimal element of a cosmogenesis in which is ultimately expressed the individuality — the face, we might say — of the universe.”

⁷ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1995).

being,” altering his own reality and “[making] that leap from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of liberty.”⁸

The philosophy of early twentieth century French Marxist theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin helps to further construct a framework for understanding the pantheistic and evolutionary thought that informed Armando Morales, as individual and artist. On several occasions, in interviews conducted during the 1980’s and 1990’s, Morales noted Chardin’s influence on his personal beliefs and artistic career.⁹ Learned in the mystical and spiritual beliefs of the ancients and in evolutionary science, Chardin contended that religion, and Christianity in particular, needed to adopt a multi-perspectival approach, within which a variety of disparate views and interests could intersect in order to progress with society and the reality of the common people. Chardin introduced Marxist, evolutionary and pantheistic thought to the teachings of Christianity with the belief that “sooner or later souls will end by giving themselves to the religion which activates them most as human beings.”¹⁰ Chardin’s writings emphasize the need for mutual human respect and the protection of basic human rights that dominant social, political and religious institutions have historically justified violating. This philosophical undercurrent links him with the revolutionary philosophy and practices of Augusto César Sandino, who sought to end the exploitation of an entire nation by a U.S.-backed military dictatorship.

Following his assassination by General Anastasio Somoza García in 1934, Sandino became an icon of national liberation, and the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (or, FSLN) was founded in his honor in 1961 to continue his fight for social, political and human justice. The FSLN’s defeat of the Somoza family dictatorship and success in the Nicaraguan Revolution of 1979 relied upon and perpetuated his legacy, which in many ways continues to shape national culture, identity and politics. An image of *Sandino en la montaña* from Morales’ 1993 *La saga de Sandino* lithograph series depicts, in almost non-hierarchical fashion, Sandino among a group

⁸ Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, *Las ideas estéticas de Marx* (México: Biblioteca Era, 1991 [1965]), 14. This point also speaks to an important notion emphasized by Sánchez Vázquez on 171-173—that in a complete subversion of the religious system as established in the Middle Ages, art, literature and meaning should no longer be mediated and dictated by church leaders. In the ideal, just society, the artist creates works without regard for how they may be received by the ruling structures, and instead, the artist is free to communicate directly with the public through his chosen artistic language.

⁹ “Morales: ‘Pintar es ver e imaginar’,” interview by Jean Piaget, April 1986, in *Ventana*, July 5, 1986, 3. Also see Cecilia S. De Birbragher, “Interview with Armando Morales,” *Arte en Colombia*, no. 45 (October, 1990): 146-149.

¹⁰ Chardin, “Pantheism,” 228.

of seven guerilla fighters (fig. 1).¹¹ The human figures, the bodies of their horses, and the enveloping jungle landscape merge into a unified whole that evokes both Gestalt theory of perception and Chardin's pantheistic theology.¹² The forms are so closely intertwined that each element of the tightly coherent composition relies upon the others to achieve maximum visual effect. By depicting awesome nature and figures in relatively equal relationship to one other, and using prismatic plays of light and a spectral palette, Morales not only reminds us of the subjective nature of sensory experience, but also demonstrates that we may perceive elements of both the beautiful and the sublime simultaneously and in no strictly defined manner.¹³

This imagery draws upon guerrilla warfare belief and praxis that to become one with the natural landscape would afford divine protection and power in battle—a concept that was popularized by revolutionary leader Che Guevarra and was fundamental to Augusto César Sandino's earlier revolutionary ideas and strategy.¹⁴ Morales, however, challenges the guerrilla notion of the land's omnipresent protective divinity by introducing a counter-discourse; *Sandino en la montaña* evokes a dialogue between

¹¹ Although Sandino the man has become a symbolic national figure since the Revolution in 1979, nowhere in the *Saga de Sandino* series does Morales depict Sandino individually or even as the dominant compositional figure. Morales rejects the representation of a single national icon and his suggestion, then, is that society can and should exist as a collective construction. Morales reminds the viewer that this notion of collectivism over individualism should permeate, ideally, throughout all aspects of national reality in order to create and maintain a society that is equitable, just, and of the people, but also universally harmonious in the larger regional context. Not only does the national identity become an egalitarian, collective construction, but so, too, do the national political, economic and cultural infrastructures.

¹² The notion of Gestalt Theory of psychology as applied to aesthetics and perception was first introduced at length by Rudolf Arnheim in *Art and Visual Perception* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954). As summarized by Arnheim in a later interview by Uta Grundmann, "Gestalt psychology was basically a reaction to the traditional sciences. A scientific experiment was based primarily on breaking down its object into single parts and defining them. The sum of the definitions then corresponded to the object. By contrast, the Gestalt psychologists, referring among other things to the arts, emphasized that there are common connections in human nature, in nature generally, in which the whole is made up of an interrelationship of its parts and no sum of the parts equals the whole." See "The Intelligence of Vision: An Interview with Rudolf Arnheim," <http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/2/rudolfarnheim.php>. Similarly, Chardin states that "We are unable, in reality, to understand the multiple[...]The intelligible world, the true world, can only be a unified whole. In consequence, the elements, the parts, the atoms, the monads, have no real and permanent value." See his "Pantheism," 57.

¹³ Gamwell, *Exploring the Invisible*, 24.

¹⁴ Donald C. Hodges, *Intellectual Foundations of the Nicaraguan Revolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 218. For a more detailed discussion, see Chapter 7: "Reflections on Strategy," 218-255.



1. Armando Morales, *Sandino en la montaña*, 1993, 56 × 75 cm, colored lithograph. © ArtAcatos, Sàrl. Printed in Catherine Loewer et al., *Armando Morales: Monograph and Catalogue Raisonné. Paintings & Drawings, 1974-2004*, 3 vols. (Manchester, Vermont: Hudson Hills, 2010). Permission for use and printing of images granted by ArtAcatos, Sàrl and Catherine Loewer.

the myth of the landscape as human protector and the reality of its brutish danger. The snaky, maze-like mountain jungle may be perceived, on one hand, as a camouflaging shelter and, on the other, as an engulfing, yet indifferent, force. Armando Morales’ oeuvre as a magical realist painter is imbued overall with this air of disjunction, as he draws upon contradictory ideas, histories and experiences to create images that lend to multi-lateral readings.¹⁵ Aside from establishing a dialogue between “landscape as mythic protector” and “landscape as harshly indifferent,” *Sandino en la montaña* also introduces dialectics between nature and culture, experience and representation, and reality and memory.

In *La montaña es algo más*, former guerrilla commander and FSLN member Omar Cabezas likewise presents a dialogic relationship between man and landscape, contrasting the mythic vision of guerrilla warfare with his own disjunctive experience as an individual voluntarily joining the fight

¹⁵ Craven, *Art and Revolution*, 131.

for the collective future.¹⁶ In an early description of the mythic aura of the mountain, also known as the Momotombo Volcano, Cabezas emphasizes the romantic notions that were associated with guerrilla warfare in the mountain jungles around León:

cuando me fui a la montaña, subí con la idea de que la montaña era un poder [...] hablábamos de la montaña como algo mítico, donde estaba la fuerza e incluso las armas, los mejores hombres, la indestructibilidad, la garantía del futuro, la balsa para no hundirse en lo más profundo de la dominación de la dictadura, la determinación de no resignarse [...] la certeza de que no podía ser así, que Somoza no podía seguir mandando toda la vida, no aceptar la invencibilidad de la Guardia.¹⁷

Much like Sandino himself, the actuality of the volcanic mountain became imbued with a sense of the mythic. Just as Sandino symbolized political martyrdom, revolutionary ideals, and the need, therefore, to persist toward liberation and justice, this mythic construction of the mountain was significant in the practical sense; its “tremendous force” and “indestructibility” contributed to the momentum and support—ideological as well as physical—backing the revolutionary cause.¹⁸

Although the myth failed to project the harsh reality to be endured by the guerrilla soldier, Cabezas acknowledges that it was the difficulty of this experience in and with nature that was fundamental to fashioning the “New Man” of the Revolution. Cabezas writes that it was:

Como que la montaña y el lodo, [...] la lluvia...la soledad, como que nos fueron lavando un montón de taras de la sociedad burguesa. Nos fueron lavando una serie de vicios. Allí aprendimos a ser humildes porque vos solo no vales ni mierda ahí adentro, aprendés a ser sencillo, aprendés a valorar los principios, aprendés a apreciar los valores estrictamente humanos que ahí van saliendo a fuerza, y poquito a poco se van muriendo todas las lacras, por eso nosotros decimos que la génesis del hombre nuevo está en el FSLN [...] Ahí nace el hombre nuevo en la montaña [...]¹⁹

¹⁶ “Dialogic” here primarily refers to the manner in which Cabezas’ text evoked dialogues between campesinos and urban guerrillas regarding differing views of and relationships to nature. It also refers, as pointed out in conversation with David Craven, to differing responses and exchange between the wide variety of classes and intellectual groups within the readership for Cabezas’ use of “street” language throughout the text. For a more broadly applicable definition of the term as employed by Mikhail Bakhtin, see Craven, *Art and Revolution*, 149.

¹⁷ Cabezas, *La montaña es algo más*, 28.

¹⁸ Cabezas, *La montaña es algo más*, 28.

¹⁹ Cabezas, *La montaña es algo más*, 99-100.

The Marxian idea that a “new man” would need to be created in order to create a “new society” that would liberate itself was fundamental to the Sandinistas’ revolutionary strategy.²⁰ Consistent with the pantheistic emphasis that “forces in nature exist in complementary, antagonistic pairs,” the FSLN likewise emphasized the creation of the New Woman to complement the gendered construct of the New Man.²¹ As art historian David Craven has noted, the women’s revolution in Nicaragua became integral to the nation’s larger revolutionary process.²²

Gioconda Belli is a former underground FSLN member, Sandinista political figure and women’s liberation activist. Her 1988 magical realist novel *La mujer habitada* is exemplary not only of the distinctive connection between The New Woman and nature, but also of feminine agency and participation in the Nicaraguan Revolution. Although fictional, the story that Belli tells poignantly speaks to the very real experiences of female guerrillas and FSLN members who fought alongside men as revolutionaries.²³ Belli’s parallel narrative follows Lavinia Alarcon, a young woman who joins the underground FSLN, and Itza, a young Indian woman who died fighting Spanish Conquistadors on the very same soil that she now inhabits as a reincarnated orange tree. Several landscape scenes painted by Armando Morales visually narrate the process of female rebirth in the form of a tree, with which Belli opens her narrative (fig. 2):

me encontré sola por siglos en una morada de tierra y raíces, observadora asombrada de mi cuerpo deshaciéndose en humus y vegetación [...] Hacía días que oía los pequeños pasos de la lluvia, las grandes corrientes subterráneas acercándose a mi morada centenaria, abriendo túneles, atrayéndome a través de la porosidad húmeda del suelo. Sentía que estaba cercano el mundo, lo veía acercarse en el diferente color de la tierra. Vi las raíces. Las manos extendidas, llamándome [...] Penetré en el árbol, en su sistema sanguíneo [...] Sentí su tacto rugoso, la delicada arquitectura de sus ramas y me extendí en los pasadizos vegetales de esta nueva piel [...] Me pregunto si habré

²⁰ Hodges, *Intellectual Foundations*, 79.

²¹ Craven, *Art and Revolution*, 134.

²² Craven, *Art and Revolution*, 134.

²³ Although this topic will not be addressed at length here, it is important to note that Belli’s narrative does not simply suggest that women are “earth mothers” who sprout from the land, nor does she suggest that women’s involvement in the revolution was free from gender biases; she deals equally with the conflicting views of the “proper role” of women as viewed within society and by other women, as well as with manifestations of male chauvinism or *machismo*, among other things. For historical accounts and testimonies of women involved in the FSLN, see Margaret Randall, *Sandino’s Daughters* (Rutgers, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995) and *Sandino’s Daughter’s Revisited* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994).



2. Armando Morales, *Cuatro bañistas*, 2000, 130 × 162 cm, oil on canvas. © ArtAcatos, Sàrl. Printed in Catherine Loewer *et al.*, *Armando Morales: Monograph and Catalogue Raisonné. Paintings & Drawings, 1974-2004*, 3 vols. (Manchester, Vermont: Hudson Hills, 2010). Permission for use and printing of images granted by ArtAcatos, Sàrl and Catherine Loewer.

llegado, por fin, a las tierras tropicales, al jardín de abundancia y descanso [...] Pero el árbol ha tomado mi propio calendario, mi propia vida; el ciclo de otros atardeceres. Ha vuelto a nacer, habitado con sangre de mujer.²⁴

La mujer habitada resonates with an air of animism, textually guiding us through reincarnation to emphasize that nature's cosmological spiritual presence is fundamental to a continued sense of connection to and respect for the local landscape. As with Belli's magical realist prose, one can return to Morales' images time and again, extracting details and reconfiguring meaning, without ever exhausting the potential to read them in a new way. In *Cuatro bañistas* from 2000, Morales suggests an elemental, organic connection between woman and landscape in a manner reminiscent of his earlier *Sandino en la montaña* lithograph dated 1993, and an image of a single *Bañista* from 1992 (fig. 3) hints at his interest in the transformative process by which the matter of one natural body eventually fades into that of another. In *Selva tropical I (Jungla)* from 1985, what at first appears an elaborate labyrinth of branches and trees reveals Morales' uncanny magical realist ability to subtly incorporate numerous pictures within the same painting (fig. 4). A closer look reveals that eerily curvilinear trees

²⁴ Belli, *La mujer*, 7-8.

3. Armando Morales, *Bañista*, 1992, 162 × 130 cm, oil on canvas. © ArtAcatos, Sàrl. Printed in Catherine Loewer et al., *Armando Morales: Monograph and Catalogue Raisonné. Paintings & Drawings, 1974-2004*, 3 vols. (Manchester, Vermont: Hudson Hills, 2010). Permission for use and printing of images granted by ArtAcatos, Sàrl and Catherine Loewer.



are imbued with human anatomy and identifiable female body parts. The central tree sprouts upward from a pyramidal base and appears to transform into a pair of legs connected to the lower half of a woman’s body (fig. 5). Above in the composition, seeming to form part of the upper portion of the trunk on a tree behind, a female breast is visible as if in profile (fig. 6). The composition is peppered with numerous other anatomical and facial elements, rendered in a sort of *tromp l’oeil* fashion that causes the viewer to continually question whether or not what he or she sees is actually present on the canvas.

Morales’ anatomical studies and figurative sketches further demonstrate the formal correlations between human and landscape elements. The prominent pyramidal base in *Selva tropical I* from 1987, for example, directly echoes the pyramidal base from which the central female figure in his 1984 *Sketch for Three Women* emerges. Similarly, *Selva tropical II*, also from 1987 (fig. 7), alongside an artist’s sketch of human feet outstretched in upward motion, reveals that the tree’s base assumes the form of a human foot. Finally, artist’s sketches of female torsos and limbs are reflected, in elongated form, in Morales’ anthropomorphic jungle trees, which are at once alluring and repulsive (fig. 8), as in *Study of Three Nudes* (fig. 9), and *Selva tropical I* (fig. 10).

Canonically, the feminine connection to nature has been symbolically and spiritually linked to childbirth, used as an allegory for nationhood, and



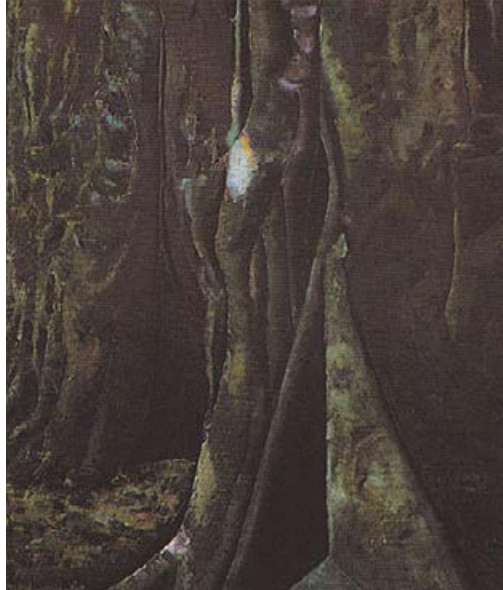
4. Armando Morales, *Selva tropical I (Jungla)*, 1985, 162 × 130 cm, oil on canvas. © ArtAcatos, Sàrl. Printed in Catherine Loewer et al., *Armando Morales: Monograph and Catalogue Raisonné. Paintings & Drawings, 1974-2004*, 3 vols. (Manchester, Vermont: Hudson Hills, 2010). Permission for use and printing of images granted by ArtAcatos, Sàrl and Catherine Loewer.

tied to notions of the rebirth and regeneration of civilizations. The experiences of Gioconda Belli and other female guerrillas remind us that reality is far more complicated than any canon will suggest. Although all FSLN members were to be viewed as “gender neutral,” a majority of women expressed tensions between fulfilling traditionally prescribed female roles and asserting political agency as guerrillas and revolutionary leaders. Several also emphasized that the revolution incited the desire to produce new life in the face of death in order to contribute to re-building the framework of society by raising children *outside* the confines of traditionally gendered social and familial institutions.

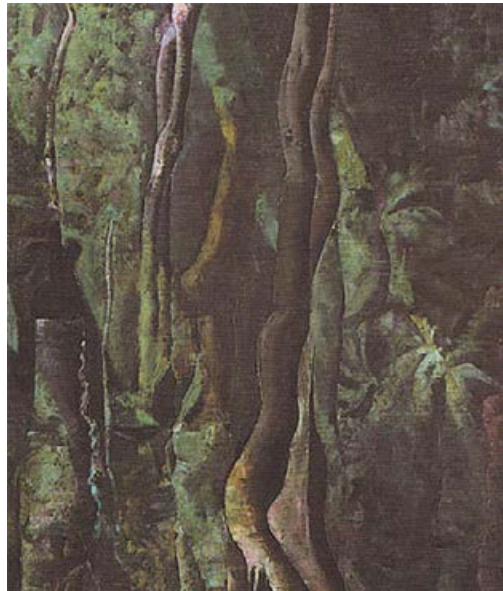
Morales’ constructions of women in landscape are, just as the canon itself, are problematic and anti-feminist, propagating antiquated gendered ideas and inequities. Although the canon may be reversed if we read these images as exemplars of David Craven’s notion that “the sexually liberated woman became a trope for the entire revolutionary process in Nicaragua.”²⁵ Among their many potential readings, Morales’ landscapes do, to some extent, depict women as agents of revolution. The poses of miniscule female figures in many of his later landscapes, such as *Rápido*, “*El peinado*” from 2001, are directly reminiscent of the poses in the *Mujeres de Puerto Cabezas* lithograph from his earlier *La Saga de Sandino* series dated 1993. Such works

²⁵ Craven, *Art and Revolution*, 134.

5. Armando Morales, *Selva tropical I (Jungla)*, detail of legs and lower body, 1985, 162 × 130 cm, oil on canvas. © ArtAcatos, Sàrl. Printed in Catherine Loewer *et al.*, *Armando Morales: Monograph and Catalogue Raisonné. Paintings & Drawings, 1974-2004*, 3 vols. (Manchester, Vermont: Hudson Hills, 2010). Permission for use and printing of images granted by ArtAcatos, Sàrl and Catherine Loewer.



6. Armando Morales, *Selva tropical I (Jungla)*, detail of female breast, 1985, 162 × 130 cm, oil on canvas. © ArtAcatos, Sàrl. Printed in Catherine Loewer *et al.*, *Armando Morales: Monograph and Catalogue Raisonné. Paintings & Drawings, 1974-2004*, 3 vols. (Manchester, Vermont: Hudson Hills, 2010). Permission for use and printing of images granted by ArtAcatos, Sàrl and Catherine Loewer.





7. Armando Morales, *Selva tropical II*, 1987, 150 × 200 cm, oil on canvas. © ArtAcatos, Sàrl. Printed in Catherine Loewer *et al.*, *Armando Morales: Monograph and Catalogue Raisonné. Paintings & Drawings, 1974-2004*, 3 vols. (Manchester, Vermont: Hudson Hills, 2010). Permission for use and printing of images granted by ArtAcatos, Sàrl and Catherine Loewer.

do more than simply evoke a sense of Romantic nostalgia for the past; they serve to symbolically link revolutionary “New Women” with the unknown women who, on December 25, 1926, helped Sandino retrieve arms from the waters near Nicaragua’s northeast coast.²⁶

The anthropomorphic and magical realist nature of Morales’ works does complicate a discussion of them as pantheistic. Nearly all modern Pantheist creeds oppose the use of Anthropomorphism, the assignment of human attributes to non-human entities, to represent god or divinity.²⁷ Magical realism, particularly as applied within the general Latin American context, intentionally incorporates mythic or magical elements into the realm of what we perceive as plausibly “realistic,” and accordingly pushes

²⁶ Catherine Loewer *et al.*, *Armando Morales: Monograph and Catalogue Raisonné. Paintings & Drawings, 1974-2004*, 3 vols. (Manchester, Vermont: Hudson Hills, 2010), 438.

²⁷ Gamwell, *Exploring the Invisible*, 16.



8. Armando Morales, *Anatomical Study* (female feet), 1989, 55 × 46.5 cm, charcoal on paper.

the boundaries imposed by Western tradition.²⁸ For Morales, this functions to provoke neither belief nor disbelief in the viewer, but rather, to produce unsettling tensions that disrupt and subvert the dominant, passively accepted narratives that define our individual "realities." Anthropomorphism is used in these works, not to anthropocentric ends, but rather to emphasize that humans are mortal, transient and individually insignificant except as bodies of particulate matter that contribute to the integral whole of the universe. As such, these magical realist applications of anthropomorphism are consistent with a pantheistic, non-species-centric view of divinity and the world, in a uniquely Nicaraguan way. This "new pantheism" emphasizes an egalitarian, universal landscape freed from institutionalized injustice. These notions were fundamental to creating the New Men and Women of the Nicaraguan Revolution, who in turn created a new society.

Morales, Cabezas and Belli share the utopian vision of a universal landscape that is freed from the inequities imposed by patriarchy, capitalism, dominant popular culture and corrupt political and religious institutions. Despite their differing experiences, perspectives and constructions of the national landscape, each of these artists has evinced the local landscape's prominent role in shaping national history, revolutionary praxis, literary

²⁸ *Gabriel García Márquez*, eds. Bernard McGuirk and Richard Cardwell (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 45.



9. Armando Morales, *Study of Three Nudes*, 1984, 162 × 130 cm, charcoal on paper.

and visual culture, and present reality. These works in part point to the development of a Modern Latin American Romanticism that is at once universal and specific. They suggest the notion of a pantheistic harmony in which the ideological and social constructs that inhibit common respect—for fellow humans and the world we live in—cease to exist. The “new pantheism” that they conceptualize is, indeed, utopian, but so was the ideal society that the New Men and Women of the Revolution were fighting for.

Present reality, however, has also been shaped by a volatile and fragmented past. While these works do not construct the Nicaraguan landscape in simply mythic or romantic terms, they are constructions, no less. In many ways, they are not indicative of a collective national conception of landscape, but rather, emphasize the subjectivity of human nature and the communicative power of the “society of the spectacle.” Produced within the context of a cultural revolution that sought to liberate the visual and literary arts, these constructions of landscape were not manipulated by an oppressive ruling class, but they have been mediated by personal experiences, beliefs, perspectives and memories. They reflect the mythic visions and narratives constructed by guerrilla leaders seeking support for the



10. Armando Morales, *Selva tropical I*, 1987, 201 × 162 cm, oil on canvas.

revolutionary cause, as well as the conflicted realities inherent to a revolutionary society negotiating between stasis and change.

Yet, how does *present reality* differ from utopian constructions and individual perceptions of the Nicaraguan landscape and society? How has Nicaragua’s volatile and fragmented history impacted the nation’s natural and human landscapes? What were the consequences, not only of the Revolution, but also of the Contra War that followed? Although considered a “success,” the reality of the 1979 Revolution is that it also left in its wake a war-torn landscape and many unanswered questions.

