A PECULIAR IMAGE OF THE LATIN AMERICAN LIBERATOR SIMÓN BOLÍVAR
BY THE ROMANIAN ARTIST SAMYS MÜTZNER

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Abstract: This review explains how the image of Latin American Liberator, Simón Bolívar, was re-imagined by Romanian artist, Samys Mützner, during the commemoration of the centenary of the Angostura Address celebrated in Venezuela in February 15, 1919.

Keywords: Simón Bolívar, Samys Mützner, Armando Reverón, Latin America, Venezuela, Dr. V. Márquez Bustillo, Angostura Address, 1819, 1919

In 1919, the Venezuelan government under the provisional presidency of Dr. V. Márquez Bustillo, ordered the publication of a special edition booklet honoring one of Simón Bolívar's political master pieces known as the Discourse de Bolivar en el Congreso de Angostura (the Angostura Address). The document, originally written and presented by the Liberator in February 15, 1819 in the Venezuelan City of Angostura, gathered Bolívar's observations and political point of view with regards to the judicial aspects and the regularization of the South American war for emancipation. The edition of this commemorative brochure included a decree of four articles emanated by the presidential commission in charge of the dissemination of this special booklet. The first article demanded to make two editions of this commemorative pamphlet: one in Spanish and another one in English; the second request was to print 5,000 copies of each of these brochures including the peculiar image of Simón Bolívar by the Rumanian painter, Samys Mützner; the complete Angostura Address; a commentary about Bolívar's political thoughts and the importance of the Venezuelan Congress; a photograph of the house where the Liberator presented the Angostura Address, and a reproduction of the facsimile in which the Address was propagated in the Venezuelan Journal, Correo del Orinoco, back in 1819; the third article requested that all expenses were to be paid by the government using the funds from the Venezuelan National Treasure; and the fourth and last petition mentioned that the Ministries of Finances and Foreign Affairs were in charge of accomplishing all these tasks.

Interestingly, the image of the Liberator used to accompany this booklet was a sketch made in charcoal depicting the Liberator Simón Bolívar in a peculiar way re-imagining the Liberator on the plains of Angostura in a bucolic fashion that was recreated by the (1884-1959), a close friend and important prominent and prestigious painters of Venezuelan contemporary history. This unique image of the Liberator with a different visage showing characteristics that were not the common ones copied by traditional iconography, shows a long sideburns and a quite sophisticated moustache while posing with his emblematic suit completely buttoned up to his neck accompanied by his medal of honor sent to him in a letter written by descendants of General, George Washington. Simón Bolívar stands up posing in

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1 In 1919, the third volume of the journal Inter-America dedicated two pages (263-264) to the story behind this letter that included a medal, a portrait and a lock of hair from General Washington to Bolívar. The
front of the plains of the City of Angostura accompanied by the presence of tall palm trees, a typical technique that Mützner used and that was also emulated by Armando Reverón in many of his paintings.

Some interesting facts about this peculiar image of Simón Bolívar painted by Samys Mützner are that they resemble a well-known portrait of the Romanian Prince Alexander II Ghika (1834–1842), created in 1846 by the Austrian lithographer and painter, Josef Kriehuber. Mützner’s sketch of Bolívar also has some characteristics of a portrait of the Russian writer and painter Mikhail Yurievich Lermontov (1814–1841) made by the Russian artist, Pyotr Zakharov-Chechenets (1816–1846), and has some similarities with the last portrait of Lermontov by Kirill Gorbunov in 1841. The commonalities of these images portrayed by the aforementioned artists have similar physical postures, facial expressions, ornaments, and decorative symbols of status that Samys Mützner merges in a sophisticated technique with a personal touch that revives the image of the Liberator Simón Bolívar in the plains of Angostura.

Samys Mützner was born in Bucharest, Romania, in 1869. His artistic connection with Venezuela started when he moved to the island of Margarita to present an exhibition of some of his miniatures that influenced the course of Venezuelan artists since 1918. In the year of 1919, Samys Mützner completed in Caracas a sketch of Simón Bolívar posing in the town of Angostura. This image was disseminated internationally by the Venezuelan Government as a tribute to the achievements of the Latin American Liberator, Simón Bolívar. Mützner's techniques and unique imagination, use of colors and implementation of a vivid and vibrant impressionism, opened the doors to a new dimension that was indeed followed and later on used by many artists including Armando Reverón, a well-recognized Venezuelan painter. Reverón incorporated several techniques that were similar to Mützner's images of Caribbean landscapes, palm trees, and the use of a radiant solar light. Samys Mützner died in Bucharest, Rumania in 1959.

This sketch of the Liberator by Samys Mützner invited the reader to review the image of Bolívar through a very interesting and modern perception, presenting a fresh and vigorous visage of the contemporary Liberator, never seen before.

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letter was sent to Simón Bolívar from a family member of George Washington, and General Lafayette was the person who gave the letter to the Liberator. The content of the epistle included a special message to Bolívar: “LIBERATOR: An American of the family of Mount Vernon presents to you, through the honorable hands of the last of the generals of the independence of North America, the excellent Lafayette, a medal commemorative of the merit and the renown of the most positively grand and glorious man, a gift of the former capital of his native state and one that has been preserved in his family since the war of the revolution. To this souvenir is added a portrait of the great leader that contains a lock of his hair. Accept Liberator, these tributes offered to your virtue and to the illustrious services which you have rendered to your country and to the cause of mankind. May they be preserved in the archives of the liberty of South America in order that they may call forth the veneration of future ages and the homage of all Americans who, in a pure and victorious acclamation, salute you, Bolívar, the Liberator, the Washington of the south”. Inter-Amer. New York, N.Y: Doubleday, Page, & Co v3, (1919): 263-264.

* An interesting analysis about Armando Reverón's techniques can be found in: Elderfield et al 2007.
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Elderfield et al 2007  

Inter-America 1919  

ILLUSTRATION

Fig. 1. Simón Bolívar in 1819 by the Romanian painter Samys Mützner