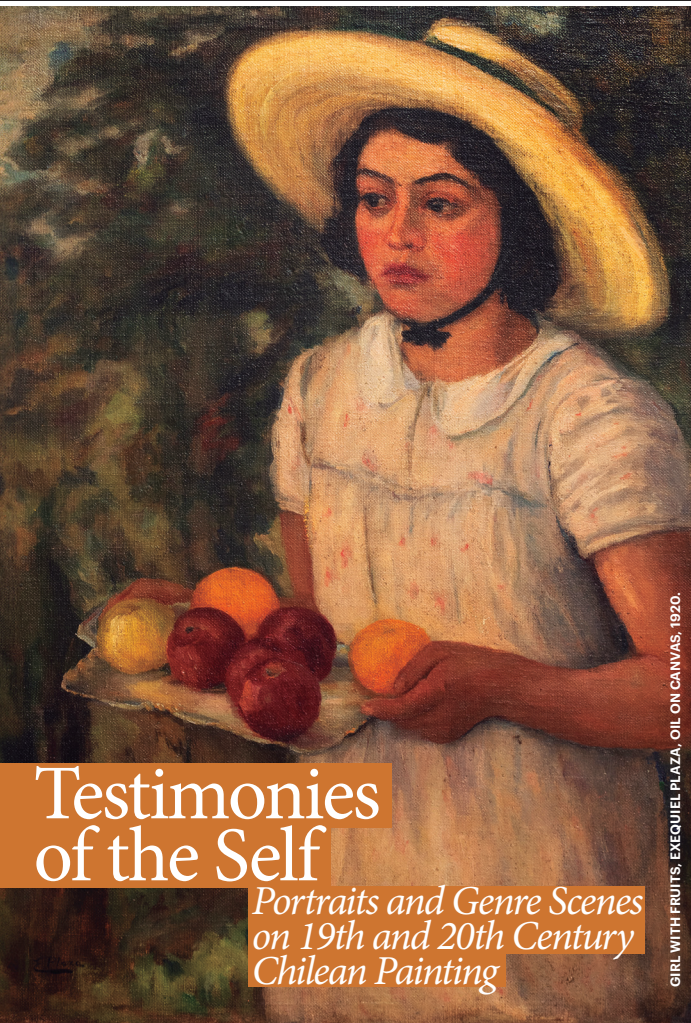




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Testimonies of the Self

*Portraits and Genre Scenes
on 19th and 20th Century
Chilean Painting*

GIRL WITH FRUITS, EXEQUIEL PLAZA, OIL ON CANVAS, 1920.

ALBERTO GATICA COLLECTION



The portrait emerged as the pictorial genre par excellence during the early years of the Republic. The religious images that once adorned the adobe walls of old colonial houses, originating from workshops in Quito and Cuzco, are beginning to be replaced by the faces of the new heroes of independence and the great ladies and gentlemen of the Creole oligarchy. Through the portrait they achieve the visibility they long for, they enter the scene. And they do so accompanied by the symbols that express their status, their place in the world. The book that conveys wisdom, the sword that underpins the general and the jewel that signals wealth and distinction. It is about power and beauty, about those called to populate the imaginary being formed, to leave their testimony in history.



The first to portray Chilean society were foreigners, who remained in the country for extended periods. The “mulatto” Gil de Castro, Rugendas, Monvoisin and Clara Filleul, to name just a few, gave life to an emerging visual arts scene.

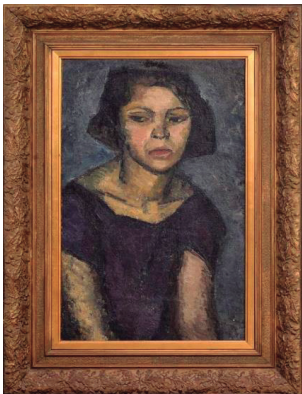


The founding of the Academy of Painting in 1849 allowed new generations of Chilean artists to enrich the local pictorial repertoire and with them came fresh faces and settings, diversifying the scene. The portrait ceases to be a primarily commissioned-based genre, achieving greater autonomy.

Freed from contractual formalities, portraits become mediated by affection, curiosity, and aesthetic exploration. It is not about power, but rather about the multiple expressions of love. Girls and boys are immortalized with their favorite toys, the face of the beloved woman becomes a depiction, a symbol of personal homeland, and artists depict themselves, to discover and project who they are.



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The new pictorial trends that emerged during the first decades of the 20th century can be appreciated in the portraits of artists such as Henriette Petit and Camilo Mori, who turned to simplified drawings and the use of rather somber colours, emphasizing the dramatic nature of their works.

