

SANTIAGO HERNANDEZ

BOY HERO, ROMANTIC ARTIST, ESSENTIAL CARTOONER



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Santiago Hernández Ayllón was an extraordinary artist whose work is essential in the Mexican 19th century art history.

Precocious in many ways, Hernández participated in the civil war of the *polkos* that fought against the government of the President Valentin Gómez Farías and, at the age of fourteen, being a young cadet of the Military School, he took active part in the defense of the Chapultepec Castle during the attack of the General Scott's troops, a U.S. division that collaborated with France when the French Intervention in Mexico. He is the author of the well-known portraits of the *niños héroes* (six cadets that died in the Chapultepec Battle), that he drew by memory as a request of the principal of the Military School.

After working some time as artilleryman, Hernandez decided to focus on painting; he made oil paintings and taught drawing. Beside Constantino Escalante, He was one of the main promoters of the so-called *little press* as well as of the patriotic Liberalism during the first period of the French Intervention.

Between 1862 and 1863, He satirized the Conservative wing and the invaders at newspapers *El palo de Ciego*, *La Jácara* and *La pluma Roja*. When the army of Napoleón III arrived to Mexico City, Hernández took refuge in the Company of Mines of Real del Monte and Pachuca. He was discovered by the French there, but he could escape and enlist in the Nicolás Romero's guerrilla group and combated in the states of Hidalgo and Michoacán. In 1865, during the Empire of Maximiliano de Habsburgo, when Romero was arrested, Hernández was pardoned by Maximiliano, who commended him to work for the Scientific Commission of Teotihuacán.



Besides of being one of the most important cartooner of the 19th century, Santiago Hernández was also a great and prolific illustrator. He illustrated novels, portrayed political figures and elaborated historical paintings and landscapes for different types of texts, pamphlets and magazines. Among the books that He illustrated are jewels like *El libro rojo* (based on paintings of the artist Primitivo Miranda), *Martín Garatuza*, *Piratas del golfo*, *Memorias de un impostor* and *Los ceros* (all of them written by Vicente Riva Palacio); as well as albums of great format, like the *History of the Mexican railroad* and *Distinguished Men*.

The notice of his death in 1908 was published as a headline in many newspapers of the capital. His work was soon forgotten by the history of art and was revalued by the end of the 20th century.



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During the French occupation, a group of liberal intellectuals [Constantino Escalante, Hesiquio Iriarte, Santiago Hernández, Carlos Casarín, among others] founded the Nocturnal Academy of Philosophy. They created opposition newspapers such as *La orquesta*, *El perico*, *El espectro* and *El Palo de Ciego*.

Ricardo Pérez Escamilla
"Arriba el telón", *Nación de imágenes*

As a caricaturist, Santiago Hernández fought against the French Intervention (along with his colleague Constantino Escalante). When Napoleon's army arrived to the capital, Hernández took refuge in the cities of Real del Monte and Pachuca, where Macario Belle protected him. He was caught by the French army, but he escaped and enlisted in the Mexican army to fight against the invader under the command of the general Vicente Riva Palacio whom with he fight in battles in the states of Hidalgo and Michoacán. The journalist Irineo Paz wrote that in 1865, during the Empire, Santiago Hernández worked in the Scientific Commission of Teotihuacán.

Where is Benito?

In the mid-19th century, Grandville and other group of artists popularized visual games in his drawings: graphical enigmas, reversible and hidden images as well as other visual riddles. Hernández participated in this trend and created a great number of pictures with these techniques. For *La Orquesta*, Santiago Hernández made many caricatures in which the portraits of Benito Juárez and Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada are hidden in different objects and landscapes. An entertainment in which the artist play with his readers and put in question the impassibility of President Juárez and its untouchable image.

The style of Santiago Hernadez can be defined as baroque symbolism of combat. He is a forefather of the Mexican Super-Realism, a genre that became very popular for its political commitment. Hernández had an overflowed fantasy, but with politically centered ideas and convictions.

The main influence of Santiago Hernández was French drawer J.J. Grandville, to whom he made constant homages in his work. The images of Grandville in hands of Hernández resulted in amazing political images that fascinated Mexicans readers. If Grandville draw an eclipse where the sun and the moon are personified, Hernández expressed a scene of the electoral period where politics Lerdo de Tejada and Juan José Baz join forces to eclipse Juárez. The drawing in which Grandville painted a garden where the plants acquired human condition, Hernández reinterpreted it drawing an amazing paradisiacal scene where Lerdo de Tejada is Eve offering Juárez the apple tree of the dictatorship, and the plants of eden are the portraits of all the Mexican political class.

Santiago Hernández created his own imagery. In his work, one can feel the presence of the damned poets, a phantasmagorical universe that seems endless and close to the pagan iconography of the Early Middle Age. His drawings are oneiric, He is the first artist that portraits the Mexican political system as a monstrous nightmare.

The death of Constantino Escalante, occurred in October, 1868, he left an empty place difficult to fulfill in *La Orquesta*. However, in January, 1869, Santiago Hernández took over and guaranteed the continuity of the magazine. Hernández was not just an old friend of the founders of this magazine (Carlos Casarín and Escalante), but He was also a member of the Nocturnal Academy of Phylosophy and share political ideas. Moreover, he had the same esthetic worries that his deceased colleague.

There is a clear continuity between Hernández' political demands to the Government of Juarez in *La Orquesta* and the ones by Daniel Cabrera and Jesus Martínez Carrión to Porfirio Díaz in *El Hijo del Ahuizote*. Both seem to ask respect to the Constitution, democracy, reliable elections and no reelection. That is: *Constitution, effective suffrage, no re-election*, slogans that are in the origin of the revolution leaded by Francisco I. Madero. Intellectual-caricaturists like Escalante, Hernández and Cabrera, must be seen as important forefathers of the revolution because they are who spread in a massive way the demands of agrarian reform, labor, free education and welfare state, which were restarted later by the revolution of Emiliano Zapata that demanded agrarian reform, freedom, justice and law.

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Hernández portrays the figure of the homeland infected by smallpox. Each pustule on his face is the portrait of the members of President Juárez' cabinet. The biggest pustule is the picture of don Benito.



Besides de Daumier model (the artist-militant), Mexican romantics were influenced by the example of the committed intellectual, whose paradigm, Víctor Hugo, declared in 1841: "I am a little poet, but I am so much a soldier."

The Mexican journalists of that period took the ideas of the late Romanticism of Victor Hugo; they value the subjective consciousness, had a tragic view of the reality –so appropriate for the levels of violence that was happening in the country –; a sensitive perception of the nature – so necessary to love a country like Mexico –, and passion for liberty– so important to fight against the reactionary forces–, and as the Mexican reality of 1861 was particularly dramatic; it is, therefore, romantic taken to the extreme.

In Mexican Romanticism, the individual consciousness is extended into the collective through nationalism. In this sense (the same as in the Germany of the pre-romantics Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Cristoph Friedrich Schiller), Romanticism was an essential motor to consolidate a view of the Mexican nation. To finally organize the country: to define Mexico.

Throughout his life, Santiago Hernández collaborated anonymously and under different pseudonyms for different publications. It is known that he worked for *El hijo del Ahuizote* during many years without signing his drawings. During the President Juárez era, many cartoons appears published in newspapers signed as "Gaitán", an anagram:

~~S~~ ~~A~~ ~~N~~ ~~T~~ ~~I~~ ~~A~~ ~~G~~ ~~O~~
G A I T Á N

It is true that the signature "Hernández" appears only in some publications of the Presidents Benito Juárez and Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada period. It is also clear that He published many anti President Porfirio Díaz caricatures under the pseudonym of "Gaitán" as well as anonymously. He was one of the main collaborators of *El Hijo del Ahuizote*. Other collaborators of this publication include Eugenio Olvera and Jesús Martínez Carreón.

Santiago Hernández was a prolific portrait painter. He drew many of the iconic images of our national heroes such as the *niños heroes* (Boy Heroes) and the patriarchal Miguel Hidalgo. Many of his images are used in public schools and classrooms as decoration.

Mexican liberals of the 19th century build their version of the national history in order to create a National identity. Vicente Riva Palacio published *México a través de los siglos* (Mexico Throughout the Centuries); Guillermo Prieto wrote his *Romancero Nacional*, and the liberal artists such as Constantino Escalante, Santiago Hernández and Hesiquio Hiriarte made a considerable number of images illustrating historical events. These efforts built a national imagery that is still present nowadays.

Landscape is one of the elements that conforms a National identity. In Mexico of the 19th century, some painters and photographers utilize the landscape genre and pictured elements such as valleys, mountain ranges, volcanoes on canvas and lithographs.

During the Restored Republic as well as the Porfirio Díaz regime, the railroad was synonym of progress. Different artists made landscapes in which the railroad played an important role.

Santiago Hernández was one of the few Mexican professional caricaturists of the 19th century and one of the most prolific whose work criticized both liberal and conservative wings. His production goes from 1860 until early 20th century.