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Editorial

# SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION AS AN INSTRUMENT OF DIALOGUE THROUGH THE BODY: AN ANALYSIS OF SEXUALITY IN ART EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** This article offers a reflection on the objectification of the human body regarding sexuality and art education from the focus of plastic and visual arts. It raises a philosophical and ethical discussion about the importance of understanding the body in a non-reductionist way in today's education. The aim is to renew teaching and learning processes about sexuality with a comprehensive vision through art education, so that they are in accordance with the emergence of new values of sexual practices and respect for diverse forms of corporality expressed by social groups that intend to drive change in how body, sexuality and gender are understood.

**Keywords:** body, sexuality, art education, corporality..

## INTRODUCTION

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the body became a transcendental aspect in the life of human beings. The idea that the body was conducive to sin was left behind as a result of the emergence of social and cultural studies about the body; a line of thought flourished based on the idea that life cannot be conceived without the authentic proclamation of desire and body. In that moment, a discourse emerged and disarticulated the strict Catholic thought that had been spearheaded by different theorists of sexuality, such as Alan Soble (2001) and Judith Butler (2007), driving a reflection on sex and sexuality beyond the biological aspect.

Firstly, this research introduces a reflection on Immanuel Kant and Martha Nussbaum's debate about the idea of sex as an immoral act. Then, sexuality and corporality in the school environment in the Colombian context are addressed. Thirdly, a brief summary is presented pertaining to the representation of the sexed body in plastic and visual arts, which portrays the body as a carrier of meaning that can be read and interpreted (Le Breton, 2010). In other words, thinking about the body as a subject that is loaded with symbolic content. It is also possible to observe ideas about the body as a battlefield in contemporary artistic practices, this

stems from the stances on biopower (Foucault, 2009) and gender theory (Butler, 2007).

These three ways of thinking about the body have contributed to understanding the forms of aestheticizing followed by artistic practices from the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. Finally, works of plastic and visual arts by national and local artists such as Luis Caballero, Debora Arango, Alejandro Obregon, Alvaro Barrios, Angel Loochkartt and Gustavo Turizo, who have made use of the graphic representation of the sexed body and the performative presentation of this, are interpreted.

## METHOD

This study is a documentary research with a qualitative approach, it analyzes secondary sources related to sex education in Colombia, as well as texts by renowned authors in the field of social and human sciences. Likewise, a study was conducted based on the aesthetics of works by national and international artists, as well by classical plastic and sculptural art works. A hermeneutic of the body was established, which was understood through education and the arts, considering the position of authors on the concept of sexuality and its evolution, both in the educational field and throughout the history of art.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Debate about Ethics in Sexual Objectification

This section analyzes if the relationship between subject-object is a condition of sexual desire, and, therefore, if establishes some moral problems associated with this aspect. Likewise, it seeks to explain the moral status of desire and sexual activities considering some ethical theories to generate a reflection about what is moral, immoral and perverse in sexual activity.

The vindication of the body in the plight against stigmas, taboos, regulations and control by Judeo-Christian ideas has led to a series of debates about its importance and the role it plays in the life of human beings. The censorship that has been exercised on corporality and sexuality is largely due to the association of the corporeal with the carnal and, thus, with sin. This belief is deeply rooted in medieval thought.

The subject-object concept is analyzed from the theoretical terrains of the philosophy of sexuality, referring to the action by which a person is treated as an instrument or object (Braidotti, 2000). The use of this concept accounts for the fact that the concepts of individual and thing are used as synonyms. Therefore, it is necessary to establish the connection between sexual desire and the objectification of the individual, seeing as it takes into consideration the contemplation of the human body as an instrument of pleasure.

Connections between passions and instincts are part of human nature. The human being is a desiring subject, humans' sexual desire

is characterized by the presence of corporeal stimuli to drive said connections. From that sense, sexual attraction and sexual encounters generate a true dialogue in which body, corporality and eroticism converge.

This statement paves the way for debates on whether sexual desire is moral or not. From the Kantian point of view, human beings are reduced to an object of pleasure in the sexual act, therefore, the latter is immoral. However, Nussbaum's stance differs, she argues that sexual desire is not necessarily immoral and, consequently, objectification is not always morally questionable.

The acceptance of sex as an instrument or means of achieving passionate implosion and explosion of the subject entails the reaffirmation of the human condition. Although some sexual practices such as paraphilias (including pedophilia, zoophilia, necrophilia or rubbing) are immoral, sex should not be demonized (Nussbaum, 1995). Consequently, it is interesting to analyze the two positions on the nature of sexual desire. In the first place, the pessimistic stance affirms that sex denies the individual's subjectivity (Kant, 2007), and reduces him/her to a simple body of exclusive use for the attainment of sexual pleasure.

In general terms, from the perspective of Kant (2007), sex turns loved ones into objects of appetite, thus degrades human nature. Therefore, sexual desire is always immoral according to this stance. However, there is a counterpart, the optimistic stance, which claims that sexual desire is an integral part of humans since it consists of passions and instincts. So dictating an immoral character to sex outside of marriage or to romantic relationships is misleading (Nussbaum, 1995).

The aforementioned two positions have divided thinking regarding the purpose or characteristics that sexual activity must flaunt. Faced with this, it is worth asking: What is perverse in the use of a person as an instrument of pleasure? The thoughts of Kant and Nussbaum make way to a debate based on sexual practices. From a Kantian perspective, sex in principle is immoral and, consequently, it must be purged by marriage because a bidirectional intimacy leads to mutual commitment (Ojeda, 2021).

Kantian thoughts on sexuality are explained through the third formulation of the categorical imperative, strict conditions on an absolute moral law that does not depend on religion, class difference, or cultural and historical characteristics. Therefore, they are able to autonomously and self-sufficiently control human behavior. That is, "(...) act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end." (Kant, 2007, p.42). For Kant, sexual activity will then always be used to obtain pleasure from the use of the individual and that is where its immoral character emanates from.

Per Kant, the moral dimension of the subject claims its logical and psychological dimension, since the human being, as a rational being, is capable of self-governance, therefore, impulses and passions must be controlled seeing as they constitute forms of negation of humanity

based on its instinctive character. Desire or sexual impulse, according to Kantian ethics, represents an appetite for the enjoyment of another body. Hence, sexual encounters cannot be equated with love because there is no consideration of the person but a desire or appetite for the body, using the person as an instrument or object of amusement or pleasure.

Based on Kantian ideas, it can be said that the desire one person feels for another is not directed towards their humanity but towards their sex. So, mutual seduction between subjects moves towards the pleasure of their genitals and there is no mutual consideration in this aspect as rational beings, but as mere sexual objects. Therefore, the degradation of the individual arises from sexual impulse; thus, it is possible to consider in Kant that sexual desire is equated with hunger (2007); i.e., sex is an impulse that equates to gluttony, a mere carnal appetite that sacrifices human nature for sex.

Therefore, human's evolutionary process is being denied, for humans are also animals. Sex is natural to the condition of individuals and living beings. It does not state that the recognition of the other as human is denied through sexual activity, because if self-awareness and capacity for self-government are admitted, then the consent of sexual agents vindicates these attributes. If both agents want it and consent to it, then sex (even if only for the sake of pleasure) is the product of people's desire and thinking.

As a consequence of the above, according to Kant's philosophy, monogamous marriage is the moral condition for proclaiming what is good and permitted in sexual desire. Other sexual practices such as sex without marriage, prostitution, sadism and polygamy are immoral. It is through marriage that people can maintain their humanity and avoid the degradation of rational nature and the violation of moral codes or norms.

This brief exposition of what can be considered the Kantian theory of sexuality evinces an orthodox and normative approach to sexuality. Based on the aforementioned, it is possible to consider that the Kantian perspective is associated with the Judeo-Christian ideas that aim at the divinization of the body. The deification of the body perhaps intends to elevate humans above all living beings, due to the distinctive characteristic of its intellectual capacities, that is, the distinction between the rational and the instinctive being. Therefore, from a moralistic point of view, as long as body and mind are indissoluble, humans are able to control their impulses and passions. This is of vital importance, because it is what sets us apart from animals, and what brings us closer to them would be the opposite, that is, getting carried away by instincts, pleasure, carnal nature, implicit characteristics of sexual activity. Which means assuming that sex has nothing rational and moral about it.

However, this extremely orthodox thinking limits understanding sexuality from a broader perspective, so it is propitious to analyze Nussbaum's thoughts on the relationship between sexuality and morality, which lead to tensions and problems around various bodily practices. The author talks about *objectificatio* considering that the best translation of the term objectification in Spanish, according to the Royal Spanish

Academy (RAE) is *cosificación*, a concept that is used to talk about the instrumentalization of the subject. The author suggests various forms of recurrent objectification.

Considering the aforementioned, it is possible to reflect on the relationship between objectification (in a general sense) and the desire and vindication of the body. However, each of these forms of objectification encompasses different moral aspects. The key point of discussion is the free and consented instrumentalization of the human being.

The concept of objectification cannot be boiled down to simply treating a subject as a means, as Kant did, because it involves other spheres, which differ among them and are capable of interacting with each other or simply distancing themselves. However, in this case, there is no dehumanization or detriment to the dignity of one of the agents. Consequently, objectification is not problematic because the use of the subject as a means to an end does not entail degradation.

It can be inferred that, for Nussbaum, the moments in which objectification is morally questionable occur when the denial of the autonomy and subjectivity of the person takes place, for instance in case of rape, sexual harassment, certain types of pornography, among others. Therefore, in scenarios where there is equality and reciprocity, objectification is not reprehensible. It is on this point that it stands as a reaffirmation of the hedonistic world of the thinking subject.

Consequently, sexual desire cannot be considered immoral or perverse, since human nature is not degraded but reaffirmed, given that sexuality is also a relevant dimension of the human being. Perverse or immoral characteristics depend on the sexual practice and on the way it is directed towards a subject or object of pleasure. For example, some philosophers of sexuality regard zoophilia and sadism as perverse practices (Soble, 2001; Foucault, 2009; Butler, 2007).

After the previous analysis, it is necessary to emphasize that when free and informed consent converges with sexual desire by the individual (both in his body or mind and even only for his body), understood as an integral part of humanity, then a true communication of desires can take place, a dialogue that arises between bodies as a collectivity whose purpose is to achieve the sexual pleasure that is natural in individuals. Human beings are not only mind but also body, thus, the desire for corporality helps put humanity on display as long as the body is not isolated from the mind or is a simple object outside the soul, as the platonic perspective suggests.

A subject's sexual practices are based on his/her needs and interests, but also on his/her perceptions about sexual desire. This desire embodies the subjectivity of the individual who is formed in a given cultural environment. The latter influences how sexuality is conceived, which is not limited to the sexual act, it also contemplates feelings, emotions, identification and analysis of gender roles according to culture, self-exploration of the body, affectivity and belief systems. Hence, sexuality

requires an ethical component that must be developed under the intimate construction of the subject, considering the respect for the other.

Thus, it is possible to affirm that there aren't naturally good or bad sexual practices, but that explorations of these practices are presented in terms of the connection between one subject and another, based on a set of acquired cultural values. For example, incest is accepted in some cultures and rejected in others, but this same example works to explain that relationships in the midst of sexual practices must consider the dignity of the other or others. The latter constitutes ethics in sexuality, the practice and exploration of which compromises autonomy, trust, freedom and respect among subjects. This means that sexuality is an issue of interest for schools, which should integrate comprehensive sexuality in their curriculum instead of only focusing on the sexual act and its consequences.

### **Teaching Sexuality and Corporality in School**

In sexual practices, the body not only transmits passions and instincts, but it also generates aesthetic experiences that are ostensible within objectification, but only in when contemplation of the body comes first as a means of human pleasure and as a territory whose profusion of fantasies vindicates our nature. If passion means a suffering that originates from the emotion and the affection of emotions and feelings towards the body, then objectification is the appropriation of the corporal dimension in which each one is responsible for the game that is framed under the communicative phenomenon of pleasure.

Having said that:

Sexuality has a diversity of nuances and is always corporal, it is not possible to categorize all sexual practices as immoral, in general terms. There is a healthy sexuality, in which there is a mutual consent for the experience or sexual encounter: an ethical sexuality. However, the educational system is limited to teaching sexuality from a nominal, preventive and bio-organic sense. This means that teaching sexuality in school is oftentimes based on memorizing the names of body parts, focused on the reproductive sex organs, the way they operate, the use of contraceptives for the prevention of unwanted pregnancies and naming venereal diseases for the purpose of raising awareness about using a condom. (Pardo-Nieto, 2020, p.256)

In terms of the Colombian context on how sex education is addressed in schools in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Ministry of National Education (MEN, 2008) explains:

In Colombia, in the 60s, international trends that promoted birth control influenced the topics occasionally discussed in school, in the subjects of natural sciences and health or behavior and health. But in the 90s, the Constitution of 1991 reached a milestone in sex education since it enshrined sexual and reproductive rights. (Valencia-Villani, 2021, p.25)

Nowadays, it can be said that the main problem of sex education in Latin America is the lack of responsibility of the State to invest in teacher training on the subject, and the limitation of addressing all relevant aspects of sexuality and gender from primary basic education to secondary education. In this respect:

In most Latin American and Caribbean countries, responsibility for sexuality education policies falls on national institutions, primarily, with the exception of Argentina, Brazil and Saint Lucia, where they are established at more decentralized levels. In general, the leading agency for these policies at official level is the Ministry of Education. (DeMaria et al., 2009, p.489)

However, attempts to educate for sexuality starting in preschool, including the topic of gender diversity, have generated nonconformity of sectors with conservative and dogmatic ideals that are the banner of their structure. Therefore, thinking about the possibility of comprehensive sex education represents a threat to the sustainability of these ideals that exclude and reject gender diversity, because it is judged as something outside what is morally accepted. In other words, there is discrimination under that moral-religious standard, because it is considered outside the ordinary and the good.

Let us recall that in Colombia the church (along with its believers and priests) protested against the idea of teaching a class on gender in schools. According to them, the family is responsible for teaching children about sexuality, in pursuit of its own values and religion. Moreover, they rejected the term gender ideology because they were against sexual diversity. Internationally, the news was covered by Cable News Network (CNN, 2016).

The Catholic Church in Colombia joined the rejection expressed by civil organizations of a draft the MEN that intended to make school environments free of discrimination for children, abiding by a mandate of the Constitutional Court of Colombia. The first version of the booklet, which the MEN explained as an optional guideline for schools to apply, has been at the center of controversy in Colombia due to the recommendations it makes in terms of sexual orientation and gender identity.

In short, in Colombia, it is evident that there is a lack of awareness about the importance of sex education from all its aspects, including the gender perspective, to help decrease discrimination and encourage respect for diversity. Emphasis should be placed on the current outlook of children and teenagers in the Colombian context regarding the issue of sex education and the influence of information that is easily accessible through technology, as well as other trends that impact knowledge on this subject.

Society has denied the body of its historicity, meaning and emotionality, this has isolated the symbolic from the intellectual and the organic. We have seen that several institutions such as the church, the school and the family build a moral order aimed at the homogenization of children and young people's bodies. In other words, the effort to educate the population has focused on the collective development and very little on the subject, therefore, bodies are controlled through the way they dress (uniforms) and through the way bodies are thought of and expressed (Cevallos, 2006).

If we think that education should function as an engine that mobilizes consciousness, then education is the poetic and symbolic weapon for

processes of social transformation. The school cannot turn its back on and make invisible today's flaming landscape of disembodied sexuality, which burns due to the absence of the body, beyond the biological and the somatic, as a cross-sectional axis in teaching and learning processes. For in between anguish and forgetfulness, corporality roams the classrooms without the school realizing that children and teenagers fear, explore and experiment with the rampant thirst of a wanderer in the desert.

Cutting down on the differentiation of gender roles according to socially imposed prejudices, solely based on the binary male and female characteristics; fostering the vindication of women's rights in terms of their historicity and gender role in the social, economic, cultural and political development of a given context; generating awareness about their sexuality, put into practice based on positive values in favor of respect for the other and for oneself; encouraging spaces for reflection on corporality as a fundamental part of self-knowledge... these are all elements of comprehensive sexuality and are being studied by recent research in the Colombian context.

In this regard, a study was conducted in Armenia (Colombia) on the knowledge of sexuality by teenagers in a public educational institution; 196 teenagers in their senior year of secondary education took part. It showed that several of them had engaged in sexual relations, however, they had low levels of knowledge regarding sexuality.

It is clear that the concern of this reflection is related to the way in which teenagers are experiencing sexuality, their bodily practices and the symbolic networks of subjectivities (emotionality, corporality, identity, non-verbal language, among others). They are unaware of the fact, to the point of entering unexplored terrain without even questioning the consequences, not only in terms of health, but also in terms of the transformations that said experiences entail, those that mark the beginning and end of stages that are fleeting.

Another case is the study undertaken by Bedoya (2014) in Cartago (Colombia), which analyzed the social representations on sexual and reproductive rights of a group made up of nine male and female teenagers. The study sought to identify, characterize and analyze sexual practices, studying the sources of information used by them to construct social representations in sexual and reproductive rights.

The aforementioned leads to affirm that teenagers cross paths clandestinely, shying away from the mature words of their relatives and educators, because they seem afraid to ask for adequate guidance for sexual experiences. The school gives the impression that it covertly teaches sex education, instead of being open about it, it sings shy and dry tunes with narrowed lips in a trembling voice about sexual rights of people. Which is the same sexuality that must be explored and known from several axes, from the diverse, also in terms of gender issues.

Although teenagers recognize that they have the right to explore and live their sexuality, they show that it is still difficult for them to approach adults, most likely, due to adults' prejudice and impositions aimed at them. On the other hand, the work of *Family and school: contexts*

*associated with the beginning of sexual activity of Colombian teenagers* (Cabrera-Garcia et al, 2018), illustrates the significance of trust and respect needed in a family to engage in conversations between parents and children on the subject of sexuality. This study sought to analyze the relationship between the initiation of sexual activity of teenagers with respect to family and educational training.

The legal framework of sex education in Colombia is expressed in Law 115 of 1994, specifically in its article 14: "Sex education, taught according to the psychic, physical and affective needs of the students according to their age" (p.3). Apparently, the country acknowledges that educational institutions, whether public or private, have the obligation to promote teaching and learning processes conducive to training on sexuality, considering the multiple factors that influence it. It is worth noting that the MEN (2008) has created the Program of Education for Sexuality and Construction of Citizenship (Programa de Educacion para la Sexualidad y Construcción de Ciudadania, in Spanish), with the idea of strengthening the education sector in terms of the development of pedagogical projects for sexuality.

Although the MEN has made efforts to steer this training on comprehensive sexuality education through booklets, it has not been enough. Above all, because these efforts largely depend on family background, as studies mentioned above have evidenced. Bringing parents into this process is of vital importance to generate transformations beyond the classroom. Additionally, it is necessary to mention that Judeo-Christian prejudices and religious beliefs are quite influential in social relations in Colombia, from political power to educational practices.

That is why sex education in Colombia should be reconsidered and directed towards comprehensive sex education, focusing on sexual health and hygiene, reproductivity or birth control, to give way to equally important issues and problems such as understanding and providing accompaniment in cases of sexual abuse, sexual liberation, responsibility and awareness about corporal self-knowledge, debates about the assignment of gender roles, the right to privacy and healthy and non-judgmental sexual practice. In other words, to allow the subject in training to ask about sexual life and generate debates in relation to the ethics and philosophy of sexuality, understanding sexuality as a human dimension that is mediated by others, and that can be spoken and interpreted from political, cultural, artistic, axiological and ontological perspectives.

So far, this research has explained, in general terms and with some supporting research, the problems faced by the teaching of comprehensive sex education in the Colombian school environment. But higher education does not escape this. Generally, young university students enter the professional career with doubts about sexuality, despite already having an active sex life. This can drive problems of low tolerance or discrimination towards sexual diversity because university will likely be the beginning of a new stage of life, one in which they will find different

ways of expression and thought. Yet if these issues were not addressed at home or in school, they could be unprepared to live with that diversity.

For Gonzalez and Lopez (2015),

The onset of sexual relations by teenagers is taking place more and more at a younger age, this leads to doubts about the methodologies of sex education implemented in schools. Cases of young university students who still retain heteronormative prejudices regarding sexuality are a cause of concern. A qualitative study on the meanings of sexuality was conducted among university students enrolled in six psychology programs in private universities in different cities of the country, including Bogota, Ibague, Barranquilla and Cali. 53 students of the psychology program who were between first and eighth semester participated, 14 men and 39 women whose ages ranged between 18 and 35 years. It was found that the training they had received focused on a medical-healthcare perspective that addressed the functioning of the reproductive organs, encouraging rejection of sexual diversity and distant from their practical and daily needs. (p.137)

This allows us to compare the scenario in the school to the university, making visible the importance of the teaching processes of sex education and its incidence throughout the life of the subject. It is pertinent to delve even deeper into the perceptions, imaginaries and considerations of adolescent and young children about the body and sexuality in different educational levels to denaturalize the rejection of these issues and form less prejudiced and more reflective and critical subjects regarding the sensitive nature of humans in terms of freedom and subjectivity through corporality (which includes sexuality as a vital part of human life). The latter, despite being part of the field of knowledge of biology, does not mean that sciences are the only driver of pedagogical processes on comprehensive sexuality. On the contrary, gender studies that focus on sexuality and the body have shown that cultural ideas play a determining role in the construction of the symbolic and representational world of subjects and populations. Therefore, sexuality can also be approached from language, culture and art.

### **The Sexed Body in Art Education with Emphasis on Plastic Arts Education**

In the field of art education, cultural and social aspects, creativity, sensitivity and expressiveness are essential for the development of the subject. That is why it is possible for the area of school art education to contemplate a space to promote teaching and learning processes about the body as well as a comprehensive sex education. The latter refers to teaching sexuality, separating the biological element from cultural meanings and history. It should involve philosophical, ethical, and aesthetic debates about corporality and sexual desire.

The field of knowledge of art education includes more than artistic practices and the pedagogical and conceptual foundations on which they are based. It can also intervene in social and human sciences and in the fields of education and culture in an interdisciplinary way. (MEN, 2010, p.14)

The body in art education takes center stage in dance and theater classes, it is the main actor of its pedagogical processes, which is a significant advance in the idea and development of the pedagogy of

the body. However, discrimination, prejudices and inventions about the other are common since representations of the body are influenced by a conservative Judeo-Christian morality in which the image, drawing or painting of a naked body is abject in the school environment (Kristeva, 1980). This is why the body is limited in art education – from the perspective of the plastic and visual arts. As a result, it can be considered that the body, despite its symbolic power at social level, is biased by an accumulation of taboos and moral precepts; this is because symbolic representations of the sexed body have been repressed in schools.

In connection with the aforementioned, the pedagogical orientations for art education in basic and secondary education that have been determined by the MEN, show that art education has specific competences, namely: sensitivity, aesthetic appreciation and communication. These aim at the comprehensive development of students, so the three are intertwined to mobilize diverse knowledge and skills that allow children and young people to develop as sensitive and conscious subjects of sociocultural reality.

Developing sensitivity involves psychomotor stimulation of the body, body awareness and mental expansion, all of which enable students to think differently. That is, to encourage divergent thinking that opens possible ways to explore the world and minimize prejudices about what is different, making room for new forms of expression. This is closely related to the corporal because sensitivity heightens sensory contemplation, perception and awareness. In relation to the body and comprehensive sexuality in school, art education is a relevant space to teach about the sexed body based on iconic representations through plastic education. This is based on the fact that the development of sensitivity through art education also addresses processes of reflection and the possibility of generating critical thinking in the face of discriminatory prejudices with respect to sexual and gender diversity, making use of didactic strategies using the history of art.

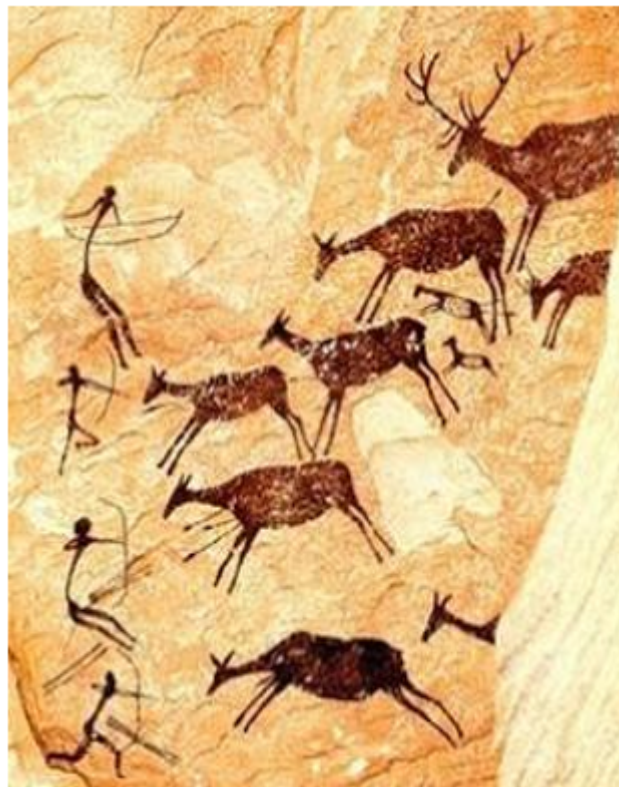
Throughout different times, the body has been the protagonist of taboos and assumptions depending on the way of thinking about it and perceiving it; this has generated different stances in different fields of knowledge. The social and human sciences have several ways of conceiving the body, associating it with binomials or categories of body-spirit, mind-body, control-freedom, object-subject, among others. This has led to debates about the subjectivity of the body, its tight link with sexuality and how it has been subject to expressions of resistance in the field of plastic and visual arts.

Sexuality can be understood as an experience that is lived in a culture managed between fields of knowledge, types of normativity and forms of subjectivity. That is, it is possible to know about sexuality from fields of knowledge such as medicine, biology, psychology, sociology, and others. Similarly, sexuality is subject to regulation by power systems, these normalizing their practices based ethics, religion, morality or law. And, finally, the forms of subjectivity refer to the different ways that individuals have to recognize themselves as subjects who construct their

own sexuality. The latter focuses on conceiving sexuality as an aesthetic experience related to desire.

Sexuality is the desires, relationships, activations, and identities that have to do with sexual behavior. Sexual desire is made up of a set of emotions – love, lust, attraction – and these can be aimed at any object. Although desire is often experienced through the body, it is created and stimulated in the mind and imagination through cultural representations. (Clark, 2010, p.17)

In plastic and visual arts, the representation of the body starts with a symbolic exploration of desire. This desire is initially embodied by the mimetic function of capturing what is perceived by the senses, to evoke the aspiration to reach the represented object (Gombrich, 2015). Subsequently, the body is represented graphically so that the sex of the characters can be distinguished, individuals are illustrated performing tasks that are part of everyday life, such as the cave painting of the Mesolithic period called *Phallic Dance*, located in the cave of El Cogul, Lleida (Spain).



Source: Gombrich (2015)

**Figure 1**

Cave painting of the Levantine art, located in Castellon

Source: Gombrich (2015)

In the Ancient Age, the representation of the body is explored through symmetry; the enlightened anthropometry of the Egyptians and Greeks translates into a quest to obtain an idealized perfection of the human body (Gombrich, 2015). This can be seen in the sculptures and in the evolution of the canon of the human figure, notably in the art of Ancient Egypt, for example in the *Portrait of Hesire* (on a wooden door of his tomb) (2778-2723 BC), and of Ancient Greece with the works of *The*

*Doryphoros*, sculpture of Polykleitos, (450-440 BC), which belonged to the classical period. With this work the artist presents the practice of the canon, which consists of the use of a proportion of seven heads and the use of the *contrapposto*. It is followed to the right by the work of *Hermes with Young Dionysius*, a Greek sculpture by Praxiteles, with the *contrapposto* and following the canon of eight heads (340 BC), period of classical Greek art. Finally, *Apollo of Belvedere* (350 BC), a sculpture of the Hellenistic period, follows the canon of eight and a half heads.



**Figure 2**

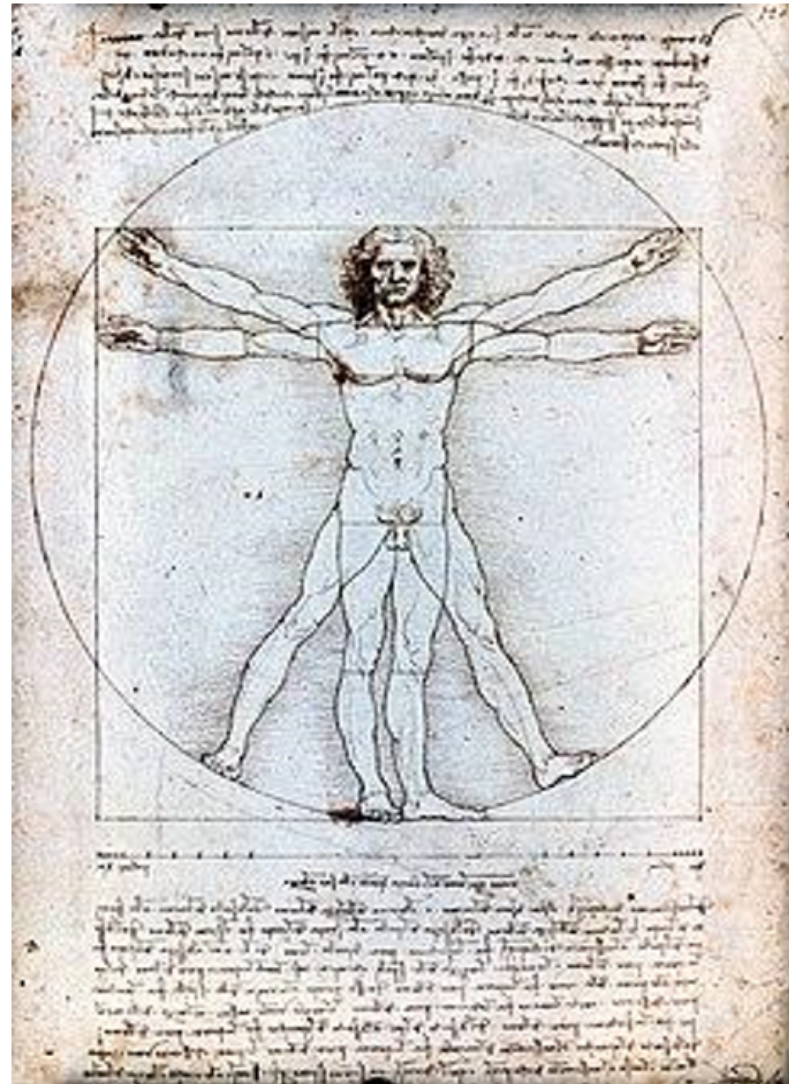
Relief of ancient Egypt and sculptures of ancient Greece

Source: Gombrich (2015)

Then, in the Middle Ages, there is an involution in the representation of the human figure, i.e., the body was the most important thing because it showed the humility of the soul. Therefore, art mostly had religious purposes (Le Goff & Truong, 2005) of simple figuration, until the arrival of the Renaissance. In this time, in which reality is studied through direct observation of nature (da Vinci, 2007), art continues with its religious themes, but the representation of the body sought a conceptual idealization by demonstrating the artist's technical and intellectual skills.



**Figure 3**  
Apse of Sant Climent, Taüll  
Source: Könemann (2005)



**Figure 4**

The Vitruvian Man or study of the ideal proportions of the human body

Source: da Vinci (2007)

Later, in the Modern Age, changes affect how the sexed body is address in the arts. Bodies are no longer portrayed with religious purposes, since transformations in thought, economy, industry and culture allowed clients to request ostentatious portraits to demonstrate the economic resources of the model (Baroque and Rococo) through overloaded forms and abundance of valuable objects in the composition. Likewise, the naked bodies showed off the voluminosity of the flesh with touches of mischief and eroticism.

These changes during the Modern Age also pertain to the representation of the body in the midst of power struggles (Neoclassicism), pictorial works that portray accounts through graphic representations of the suffering body and the triumphant body, as in *Liberty Leading the People*, by artist Eugène Delacroix (1830), the *Raft of the Medusa*, by Théodore Géricault (1818-1819), and *The Death of Marat*, a neoclassical painting by Jacques-Louis David (1793), one of

the most representative images of the French Revolution, in contrast to the portraits of Napoleon, such as the portrait by Jacques-Louis David (1801-1805) entitled *Napoleon Crossing the Alps*.

Subsequently, the avant-garde and trans-avant-garde of modern art emerged. The *isms* take over the artistic terrain and each of the artistic movements is distinguished from the other by formal characteristics and content in terms of the way of conceiving art and life. Artists are interested in interweaving reality, ordinary people and reflecting on the worldview. They try, in many artistic movements, to generate a different thinking for the times, to break the stereotypes and to renounce moral prejudice in the representation of the human body.

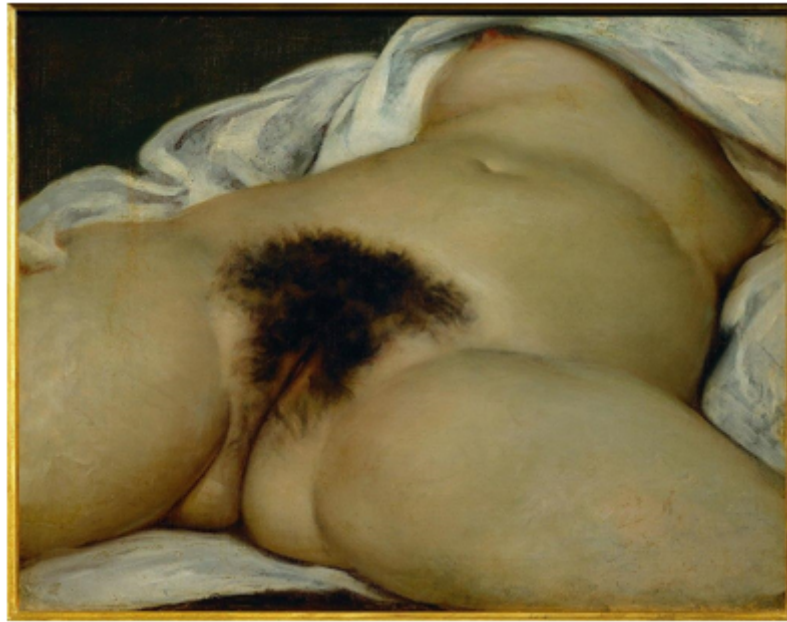
For this, the sexed body becomes part of the polemical atmosphere and the staging of controversial works due to their degree of realism, their little discretion and robust significance according to the contexts in which they were exhibited, gets rejected or hidden from the public for being too indecent. An example of this is the work *The Origin of the World*. Greater visualization is also given to women artists, who fought for the recognition of their talents.



**Figure 5**

French paintings of the romantic and neoclassicist style

Source: Kraube (2005)



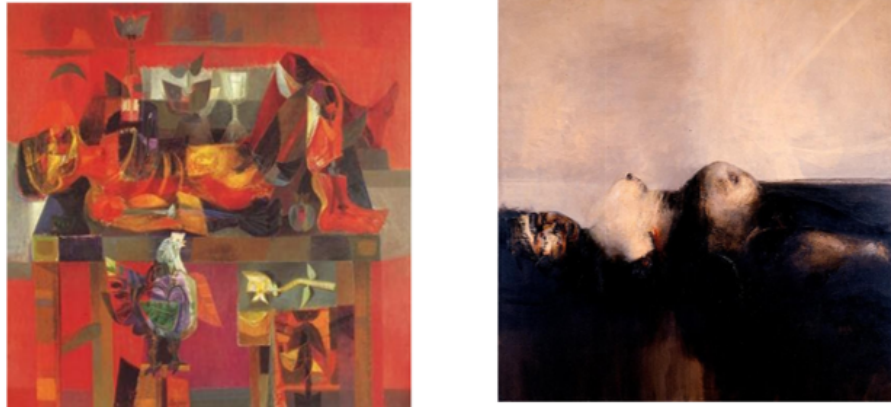
Source: Kraube (2005)

**Figure 6**

The Origin of the World (Gustave Courbet)

Source: Kraube (2005)

In Latin America, modern art was strongly influenced by political events. Power struggles, dictatorships, rebellions, revolutions, guerrillas, civil disobedience and clashes between civilians and the police constituted the daily input that fed artists' creation. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, artists such as Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros produced rebellious and revolutionary art that had the social transformations of the moment in mind. Colombia did not lag behind: difficulties in the dialogue between the students and the government generated conflicts and reprimands from the latter, often leading to fatal outcomes in protests. In this regard, pictorial works such as *The Fallen Student* (1956) and *Violence* (1962) by Alejandro Obregon transport us to those times that inflicted deplorable wounds; these works show the body victim of the conflict, a body in pain and immerse in torment.



**Figure 7**

**Pictorial works of Alejandro de Obregon**

Source: Red Cultural del Banco de la Republica (2020) and Museo Nacional (2020)

It is worth delving into the ways of expressing sexual desire, eroticism, body and corporality through contemporary artistic works that evoke desire, and into artists who revolted themselves and took a risk portraying the sexed body from a visual point of view in the context of North and Latin America in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the late 20th century, the return to the body was understood as an abstract notion. Beyond the reality of the body – although also present – what matters is its appearance, the external, the makeup and the body's virtual image; but also its ability to be a real object and, at the same time, a symbolic object of ferocious devastation. (Guash, 2000, p.499)

For Guash (2000), contemporary artists were interested in working the body from the real and the symbolic perspective. On the one hand, Illusionism tries to find the material of meaning and association on the body in objects. The object replaces the body. While the Object Art works with the relationship of intimate-public and sexed body through the body itself.

A concern for the corporal takes off in the 90s. Cultural and artistic studies review topics related to sexuality, eroticism, desire, body and gender with historical and theoretical perspectives. In North America, artists such as Robert Gober, Mike Kelley, Charles Ray, Cindy Sherman, Nan Goldin and Paul McCarthy used the body "as a support, as an object, as a subject, as an instrument of measurement of the world" (Guash, 2000, p.502).



**Figure 8**

Untitled #264

Source: Museum of Modern Art (2020)

In Latin America, art approaches the sexed body and the fragmented, aching body – the body as a biography. Artists Alejandro Obregon, Debora Arango, Luis Caballero and Alvaro Barrios experiment with a world in which the body speaks from the graphic representation of itself. Obregon paints naked bodies that are violated, pained, deformed and fragmented that are presented as the day-to-day of Colombia's social context at that time, while other artists paint irreverent sexed bodies. It is a manifesto of the body as a narrator of stories and of traces of life: "If the body can symbolize existence, it is because it undertakes it and because it is its actuality. (Merleau - Ponty, 1994, p. 181).

A repression of the forms of expression, especially in the artistic field took place during the military and extremely orthodox governments in Colombia. Pictorial depictions of nudes were rejected for being against morality. On many occasions, the work of Debora Arango was rebuffed and shunned by political powers, who forbid the public from appreciating this type of art that drove debates about the body, sexuality and gender roles.

In 1940, to add insult to injury, after disqualifying the works of Ignacio Gomez Jaramillo and Pedro Nel Gomez, Laureano Gomez ordered to shut down Debora Arango's exhibition (1907-2005) at Teatro Colon in Bogota, to which she had been invited by the liberal politician Jorge Eliecer Gaitan (1903-1948), then Minister of Education. Arango was an expressionist painter and a disciple of Pedro Nel Gomez, she was deliberately incorrect (Badawi, 2022) from the technical point of view and fond of the female nude.

A close friend of Laureano Gomez, Monsignor Miguel Angel Builes (1888-1971) had already criticized her harshly in Medellin, and Gomez would become his counterpart in Bogota, closing off the doors of the city for her, alleging public morality by pointing out in an article that her nudes were immoral, perverse and pornographic. (...) Another exhibition of Arango at the Instituto de Cultura

Hispanica in Madrid, in 1955, was shut down by order of the dictator Francisco Franco (1892-1975), (...) these episodes earned Arango three decades of artistic ostracism (Badawi, 2019, p.170-171)



**Figure 9**  
Mountains, a 1940 painting by Debora Arango  
Source: Museo de Arte Moderno de Medellin (2020)



**Figure 10**  
Homoerotic works by artist Luis Caballero  
Source: Red Cultural del Banco de la Republica (2020)

Due to its powerful homoerotic charge that was captured in a conservative era, the work of Luis Caballero constitutes a colossal plastic force with an unbridled expression. The artist presents the sexed body from the perspective of a desiring subject; sexual desire takes precedence over heteronormative morality, exhibiting the erect male sexual organs with strong prominence, which made orthodox discourses uncomfortable.

Dedicated almost exclusively and obsessively to the treatment of the naked male human body, usually in violent compositions involving couples, his work is located in a romantic naturalism that does not hide its desire to move through powerful form and content, alluding to the presence of irremediable violent death linked to human passions. (Gil-Tovar, 1985 p.127)

Anguish, brokenness and despair surround the dark atmosphere of several of his drawings. The sexed body is devoured by the desiring subject, revealing the duels between the immoral and the perverse in sexual activity in which the body is subject-object of an incessant struggle between surrendering to a new status of the morality of bodily desire. “It constituted an aesthetic that expresses the tension between the feminine and the masculine within a process of search and recognition of sexual identity” (Londoño, 2005, p.134).



**Figure 11**

Works by artist Dario Morales

Source: Gil-Tovar (1985)

The art of Dario Morales shows the representation of the ecstatic female body in the serenity of intimate, closed spaces, which dialogues with an apparent silence. Likewise, amidst the dualities offered by the atmosphere of his work, the breasts, pubic hair and labia majora of the vagina (i.e., the speaking parts of the female sexed body) are predominantly contemplated.

From the male perspective, women are the objects of desire. The work of Morales offers a curious case of objectification, considering Nussbaum (1995), the subject (woman) is not dehumanized, mistreated or exploited, on the contrary, although she is the subject of desire, her sexuality is exalted, and her sexuality is intensely free to explore the relationship between the corporal in relation and the use of objects around the body that seem unimportant, turning a solitary scene into poetry of eroticism in female forms. Therefore, in this case, objectification does not violate the morality of the subject, and drifts away from perversion and immorality. “Morales recreates the figure of a woman in areas of concentrated intimacy, she lies self-absorbed while surrendering to male contemplation, trying in vain to unravel a mystery” (Londoño, 2005, p.135).



**Figure 12**

**Artworks by Alvaro Barrios**

Source: Red Cultural del Banco de la Republica en Colombia (2020)

Poetic eroticism persists in the work of Alvaro Barrios, his representation of the sexed body transcends the mimesis of the sexual organs to present a discourse on the problems of gender and sexual diversity in Colombia. Paradoxically, these aspects are hardly mentioned in art history books in Colombia, considering that Barrios was inspired by works by other artists of international relevance such as Duchamp, who is considered to work with transvestism in several of his works. In this case, Barrios appropriates iconic images and reinterprets them from an erotic perspective.

Barrios transforms works by classical or contemporary artists (...) Marcel Duchamp has been a promoter – in an artistic sense – of cross-dressing in the modern era. In 1920, he assumed the personality of a woman who went by the name of Rose Sélavy, a name with which he signed most of his testimonies on the way of making art. A historic photo taken by artist Man Ray shows him impersonating an elegant lady. Likewise, Barrios portrayed himself wearing feminine outfits, recreating the atmosphere and technique reminiscent – albeit less appealing – of Duchamp's photographs as Rose Sélavy. (Marceles, 2007, p.189)



**Figure 13**  
Erotic works by artist Angel Loochkartt  
Source: Galeria La red (2020)

The paintings by Caribbean artist Angel Loochkartt, in addition to having a significant load of color and dynamism, were characterized by his interest in the human figure (Figure 13). The artist captured transvestites, lesbians, couples having sex, as well as other scenes. However, the interest of this study focuses on sexuality and sexual identity.



**Figure 14**  
Artistic works by Gustavo Turizo  
Source: John Better (2009)

Very little has been said about Turizo, there is still much to say about his work and his contribution to queer art in the regional and national contexts. The strange and irreverent elements are fundamental in the artist's work. His artwork echoes voices that whisper in the context of the Colombian Caribbean region; in the 90s, Turizo was a gay artist in a conservative, macho, heteronormative and homophobic society.

The transgression of his work turned into a convincing legacy, he was an openly homosexual artist who freely spoke about transvestism, making it the essence of his work. Turizo gives us an insight into a sexed body based on gender identity, sexual orientation and transformation. The feminine

and the masculine have a conversation to make the body the depository of sociocultural principles of sexing division.

Thus, in the plastic and visual arts, the body that is represented through an image, photograph or painting ultimately materializes the existence and corporal consciousness of the artist subject, who externalizes the internal dialogue about the idea of the body in the life and context surrounding it, that is, the body is used as a language (Le Breton, 2009). For this reason, it can be said that for the arts, the body is the generalized existence and essence, and in turn, existence is a desiring aesthetic experience.

In particular, when it is said that sexuality has an existential meaning or that it expresses existence, it should be understood as if sexual drama were, in its last analysis, a manifestation or a symptom of an existential drama (Cabra & Escobar, 2014, p.183).

Due to the representative and figurative power of plastic and visual arts, it is possible to engage in visible mimetic forms to construct or deconstruct a symbolic discourse about the body and sexuality in an original way, with all of the historicity of the graphic and visual representation. Art mobilizes creativity, consciousness and, in turn, potentiates critical thinking driven by value judgments – both aesthetic and ethical – about what is sensitive. On the other hand, it allows to approach the sexed body in a more didactic way.

Art, understood as a process or vehicle of expression, is a methodological alternative, a source of inspiration, a way of doing that offers us the opportunity to express, build sexuality with less words and with more games, emotions and facts... In short, with our whole body. (García, 2009, p.51)

In consideration of the above, artistic manifestations provide aesthetic enjoyment that is necessary for the desiring subject, from a hedonistic point of view that is also sensitive to human nature. The contemplation that is experienced when facing a starry night, the candid afterglow in the sky at sunset or even confronting ourselves with what we chose to escape from, such as the loss of a caress, an annoying song, a mime imitating us or the bowels of a corpse in the middle of a road... all these sensitive and aesthetic experiences arise from perception, and it is quite corporal.

Art itself is corporal, in terms of the manifestations that take place in humans' sensitive field, hence, talking about the body, sexuality or the sexed body is artistically enthralling. The project of workshops on sex education through art (Garcia, 2009) conducted in Spain, suggests a playful approach to comprehensive sex education that would be interesting to apply in Colombia. The point is that art drove constant participation of teenagers, resorting to different artistic modalities such as photography, collage, painting, dramatizations, music, among others. Each of these modalities had didactic strategies to respond to goals related to body image, self-perception, subjectivity, sexuality, sexual identity, ideas of love and others.

The main axis or leitmotif of universal art, in its long historical journey, has been the body. And the ways in which it has been exhibited and represented, offer a

map and a reflection of the changes of human beings and their different cultures, art has been a true engine for these changes. (Garcia, 2009, p.78)

In these workshops, art history was used as a didactic strategy to address the way the body has been perceived by different cultures and eras throughout the social and technological evolution of human beings. Images of artistic works were used to explain how the body was conceived in a certain context (Garcia, 2009) in a brief exhibition using simple language, which facilitated participants' quick understanding. This strategy to make the issue visible, share information, encourage debate and promote the independent search of young people regarding body and sexuality is relevant in these times where the image is so important for human consumption.

The image is precisely one of the symbolic languages that has the most influence on people's learning since it is easier to consume. Video games, the internet, advertising, memes, infographics, emoticons and others are part of the perceptual field, and human beings are increasingly exposed at an early age to interact with technology and media that are mostly audiovisual, much more visual than auditory. This has transformed the ways to communicate: to laugh in a chat it is much more convenient to make use of emoticons than to write "hahaha"; images have become abbreviations of the text and, therefore, of the processes of communication and understanding (Sartori, 1998). The internet is already a school, a know-it-all, a teacher that is funnier and allows observers to control time spent browsing. The current world focuses on seeing.

For this reason, teaching comprehensive sexuality through art education with a focus on plastic and visual arts is a process that fulfills what biology fails to address about sexuality and all its polychromies. Human beings have worried about expressing the beauty and ugliness of life through artistic manifestations, which draw attention to human creation and behavior.

In visual representation, whether pictorial, photographic or digital, the socio-political, cultural and historical context is framed in such a way that it is possible to understand corporal practices from different eras and cultures. Ideas about sex are necessarily part of those contexts and dimensions, and have always revolved around morality, stereotypes of beauty, ideas about gender, reproduction, fertility, motherhood or paternity, even biomedical advances. In short, the plastic arts reveal the strong connection between the sexed body and culture.

## CONCLUSIONS

To talk about sexuality is to appreciate the discovery of ourselves and others through social interactions. We relate in totality, with body and spirit. The corporal relationship must be a privileged and pleasant relationship. But sexuality overflows genitality to reach fantasies, emotional closeness, affective communion and gender identity. It has a direct impact on our personal and social well-being. The scientific development of sexology seeks to illustrate the instruments to better

understand sexual practices and promote sexual health as a basic and fundamental human right. (Zarco, 2020, p.25)

Finally, in terms of the symbolic representation of the sexed body in the painting of Colombian art, it can be concluded (supported on the examples addressed) that the construction of the idea of corporality in relation to sexuality can be thought about in three aspects: the first is sexual differentiation, that is, to overtly expose the sexual organs as a symbolic presentation of sexual transgression; the second has to do with the interaction between bodies deriving from sexual force, it means that images are presented in which two subjects display attraction, desire, but also the duality between virility and femininity as evinced in the imposing load of active/passive in the interaction between the represented subjects; and, finally, the confrontation with the social associations of the feminine and masculine with respect to society's moralistic alienation, which appear in the images that designate objects of sexual differentiation that allude to phallic forms or, on the contrary, relate to female activity, e.g., a lipstick, which are regularly associated with erection or feminine moisture and sensuality.

Perception helps observe paintings' sexual realities that compromise the vision of the natural world and the principle of divisive vision, but at the same time, it offers the possibility to fight against the symbolic imposition of forms, objects and images.

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