**Contributor: Cathrin Gordon**

**Gómez, Pedro Nel**

Born: Medellin, Colombia 1899; Died: Medellin, Colombia 1984

Born in Medellín, Colombia on July 4, Pedro Nel Gómez influenced a generation of artists as the first muralist in Colombia, and as a radical figure who insisted on the independence of artistic creation. Not only was he a controversial figure, but he earned significant recognition for accomplishments as artist, architect, civil engineer, urban planner, and diplomat. Gómez developed a form of social realism that sought to reflect the essence the reality experienced during this period. Between 1935 and 1938 he completed his first mural series in fresco at the Municipal Palace of Medellín. In the mural triptych entitled *de la Bordadora a los Telares, el Problema del Petróleo y la Energía, y el Trabajo y la Maternidad* the artist contends with issues of industrialization and labor conditions. This work also reflect his commitments to national development as a member of the Board of Public Works in Medellín. After World War II, the question of nuclear arms becomes a central motif in Gómez’s mythical realism. The artist’s artistic accomplishments contributed to the development of Modern Art in Colombia, and comprise the heart of the nation’s cultural heritage.

Between 1915 and 1922 Pedro Nel Gómez painted watercolor and oil landscapes, genre scenes, and still life compositions which were exhibited together with the work of artist Eladio Vélez. Although these early compositions employ a realist perspective, during this period, Gómez began to explore the role of technology in artistic expression. Based on these early successes, he founded the Antioqueña School of Watercolorists with Vélez. The Colombian public sphere of the 1920s severely restricted artistic expression, and Gómez turned to the Florentine Academy of Architecture and Fine Arts, finding inspiration in the heated political atmosphere of Italy. While there, he wrote the article *Noticia sobre el arte colombiano*, which was published in both the Italian and Colombian press.

Gómez returned to Colombia in the 1930s and assumed a position as Director of the School of Painting at the Institute of Fine Arts. The ideological debates between liberal and conservative parties contributed to a desire to capture every raw detail of social reality. Despite critics who accused him of creating a muralist style considered degenerate in comparison to Mexico’s los tres grandes (**Diego Rivera,** José **Orózco**, and **David Alfaro Siqueiros**), Gómez’s murals conveyed ideas such as liberation through knowledge and social progress, utilizing synthesized constructions of abstract forms that never departed from the realism of the figure.

The events of World War II, especially the nuclear arms question, influenced the Gómez’s creation of mythical realism. For example, *Raíces económicas y biológicas del desarrollo del Departamento de Antioquia* (1976) reflected the search for cultural identity, conceived in mythical and allegorical regional symbols. The artist assumed that one’s identity emerges from an understanding of one’s cultural background. Furthermore, he professed that understanding this identity occupied a crucial step to proper use of resources and thus a significant components of modernization.

Pedro Nel Gómez’s artistic accomplishments were paramount to the development of Modern Art in Colombia. Argentine historian and critic Ángel Guido hailed him as “el pintor de la patria” – a fitting title for an artist whose prolific creations comprise the heart of Colombia’s national and cultural heritage.

**References and Further Reading**

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Fig. 1: *De la Bordadora a los Telares, El Problema del Petróleo, El Trabajo y la Maternidad.* Fresco, 1935-1938.

http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Museo\_de\_Antioquia#mediaviewer/File:Murales\_de\_Pedro\_Nel\_Gomez-Medellin.JPG

**List of Works:**

*Self-Portrait with Hat*, 1941, Museo de Antioquia.

*Self-Portrait*, 1949, Biblioteca Luis Angel Arango, Banco de la República de Colombia.

*Gold Prospectors*, 1955, Casa Museo Pedro Nel Gómez.

Mural "The Colombian Republic,” Museo de Antioquia, Medellín, Colombia.

Mural "Coffee dance," Museo de Antioquia, Medellín, Colombia.