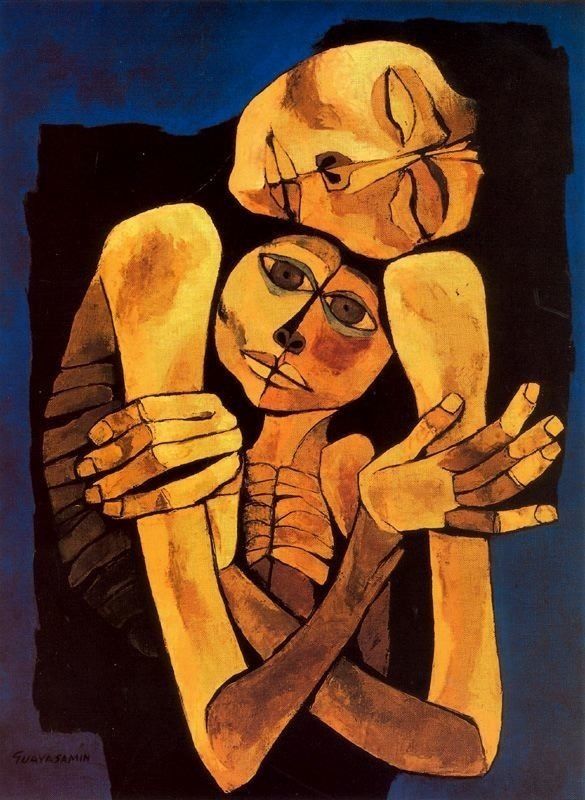
Contributor: Joseph Hartman

**Guayasamín, Oswaldo**   
Born -- 1919, Quito, Ecuador – Died: 1999, Baltimore, Maryland, United States

The work of Ecuadorian artist Oswaldo Guayasamín has long provoked strong emotions. His themes include the horrors of war; exploitation of indigenous peoples; the rights of women; and the injustices of prejudice and inequality. Considered expressionistic in nature, Guayasamín’s work reflects the haunting experience of human suffering, most often through images of indigenous peoples from the equatorial Andes. In his mature style, these indigenous figures would become refracted through geometry and formal manipulations; his iconic figures feature halved-moon faces, round eyes, and elongated fingers, torsos, teeth, and necks. Guayasamín’s long-fingered and knobby-toothed subjects evoke local populations from the artist’s home city of Quito. His art more broadly addresses and denounces the atrocities of the twentieth century; a century marked by world and civil wars, genocide, concentration camps, dictatorships, and torture. Called ‘Indigenous Expressionism’ by some, Guayasamin developed his signature style at the height of controversy surrounding the artistic trend in Latin America known as pictorial Indigenism; Indigenism or *Indigenismo* was a means for modern Latin American artists from countries with large indigenous populations to negotiate identity in the twentieth century.



Oswaldo Guayasamín*,**La Ternura,* 1989, oil on canvas, 135 x 100 cm, Fundación Guayasamín. Quito, source: http://www.wikipaintings.org/en/oswaldo-guayasamin/from-la-edad-de-la-ternura-series#supersized-artistPaintings-301512

The broad cultural practice of *Indigenismo*, which included writing, art, and criticism, was most prevalent in the Andes (Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia) and Mesoamerica (Mexico and Central America). The Mexican muralists, Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueros, were notable exponents of this style – artists whose works, alongside Pablo Picasso’s, have often been compared to Guayasamín’s. Although *Indigenismo* enjoyed success in the early twentieth century, by mid-century the practice had suffered severe criticism. This was on the grounds that practitioners of *Indigenismo* (by and large white men) had promoted an “official” kind of national identity through a generalised image of indigenous peoples, somewhat like the early modern trope of the ‘noble savage.’ Guayasamín, born of a Quechua father and half-indigenous mother, stood as an outlier in this critical sense. In fact, the artist often boasted that he painted images of poor, indigenous peoples from a first-hand perspective, adding proudly: “because I’m a native damn it!”

Throughout his long career, launched in part by the patronage of U.S. philanthropist Nelson Rockefeller, Guayasamín won numerous awards, includingbiennials in Barcelona and São Paulo, France's Legion of Honor, and UNESCO’s José Martí Prize. His crowning achievement, however, may be considered his *Capilla del Hombre (Chapel of Man)*. Located in Guayasamín’s upper-class residence in the hills of Quito, the *Capilla* was constructed posthumously in 2002 following the artist’s designs. The exterior architecture of the *Capilla* is reminiscent of Inka stone masonry and its interior is filled with Guayasamín’s paintings made throughout his career, especially those that pay homage to indigenous peoples of Latin America and their suffering spanning the pre-Columbian world through conquest, colonization and modernity. In the center of the building there is an ‘eternal fire’ lit in honor of the ongoing struggle for human rights and peace. Outside is a ‘Tree of Life’ under which the artist’s ashen remains rest.   
  
**References and Further Reading:**

*“Because I’m a native damn it”/“Carajo, soy un Indio. Me Llamo Guayasamín.”*

This quote is widely referenced; it comes from a video recording of the press conference at the start of the construction of the *Capilla del Hombre*. A clip of this press conferencehas been posted by the Fundación de Guayasamín: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6Zo2lgxrGA>, the quote can be found at minute 7:09.

Camón Aznar, José, and Oswaldo Guayasamín. (1981) *Oswaldo Guayasamín*. Barcelona: Polígrafa, 1981.

Carpentier, Anélica Ordoñez (2000) "Carajo, soy un Indio! Me llamo Guayasamin: La construccion social de las 'razas' en el Ecuador. Un Estudio de caso." *Tesis de Maestría: Ciencias Sociales Mención Estudios Ecuatorianos.* FLASCO, Ecuador.

Greet, Michele. (2009) *Beyond National Identity: Pictorial Indigenism as a Modernist Strategy in Andean Art, 1920-1960*. University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009.

Guayasamín, Oswaldo, and Jorge Enrique Adoum. (2003) *Guayasamín: Museo de la Ciudad, Valencia, del 26 de junio al 31 de agosto de 2003*. Valencia: Generalitat Valenciana, Conselleria de Cultura, Educació i Esport, Subsecretaria de Promoció Cultural.

Marín-Medina, José. (1998) “Pintura y universo de Oswaldo Guayasamín.” In *Una mirada sobre Ecuador*. Segovia: Diputación Provincial de Segovia.

Mella, Joseph S., Carlos A. Jáuregui, Edward F. Fischer, and Oswaldo Guayasamín. (2008) *Of rage and redemption: the art of Oswaldo Guayasamín*. Nashville, Tenn: Center for Latin American and Iberian Studies at Vanderbilt University and the Vanderbilt University Fine Arts Gallery.

Mesa Gisbert, Carlos D. (1991) *Oswaldo Guayasamín, pintor (Ecuador)*. La Paz, Bolivia: Periodistas Asociados Televisión.been posted by the Fundación de Guayasamín: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6Zo2lgxrGA>, the quote can be found at minute 7:09.

**List of Works:**

Oswaldo Guayasamín*, La Huelga (The Strike)*, 1940, oil on canvas, Maruja Monteverde Collection, Quito

Oswaldo Guayasamín*, El silencio (Silence)*, 1940, oil on canvas, Fundación Capriles de Arte Latinoamericano, Caracas

Oswaldo Guayasamín*, Huacayñan: Ecuador*, 1951, portable mural, oil on Wood, Private Collection, Quito