Contributor: Maria C. Tornatore-Loong

**Rendón, Manuel**

Born: 1894 – Paris, France; Died: 1980, Vila Viçosa, Portugal.

French-born Ecuadorian painter, Manuel Rendón Seminario (also known as Manuel Rendón), is credited for introducing Geometric Abstraction to Ecuador together with compatriot Areceli Gilbert de Blomberg. As a member of the Post-Cubist L’École de Paris in the 1920s, Rendón’s early oeuvre synthesised avant-garde styles, notably Cubo-Futurism, Purism and Surrealism, reminiscent of the techniques of modern masters such as **Juan Gris, Fernand Léger, Amédée Ozenfant** and **Giorgio de Chirico**, artists whom he greatly admired. In 1911, Rendón exhibited at the Café de la Rotonde (whose curator was **Henri Matisse**), followed by the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in 1916, the Salon des Indépendants, Société du Salon d’Automne, Salon des Tuileries, and the Salon des Surindépendants. He also exhibited with the vanguard ‘La Horde de Montparnasse,’ and joined ‘Clarté,’ the pro-Communist youth group commanded by the French novelist Henri Barbusse. Rendón’s indigenist works of the 1930s and 1940s, however, were painted in a Neo-realist figurative mode, depicting the exotic Ecuadorian landscape and the plight of the native population, while his mature practice of the 1950s to 1970s was characterised by geometric abstraction and pure linearity, culminating in kaleidoscopic colour and rhythmical kinetic qualities, as in the manner of the Divisionists.

As a young artist, Rendón rejected formal art training and enrolled at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Paris in 1910. While living as a bohemian, the artist struggled financially, particularly during the Great War, but survived by selling his oil paintings of Parisian street scenes, nudes and still-lifes. Despite political upheavals and economic uncertainties, life in Paris improved dramatically after the Armistice, resulting in Rendón receiving generous patronage; in 1918, he was represented by the Vildrac Gallery, directed by the wife of the French playwright and poet Charles Vildrac, and later sponsored by Othon Friesz, Henri de Waroquier, Charles Dufresne, and the Polish art dealer Léopold Zborowsky. From 1926 until 1937, Rendón was consigned under the legendary gallerist, art historian, collector and publisher, Léonce Rosenberg, a well-known champion of Cubism. He exhibited at Rosenberg’s avant-garde Galerie de l’Effort Moderne, alongside Parisian masters such as Braque, Gris, Picasso, de Chirico, Severini, Metzinger, Picabia and Léger, to name a few. As a member of ‘l’École Léonce Rosenberg,’ Rendón published many illustrations, compositions and poetry of a religious nature in Rosenberg’s *Bulletin de l’Effort Moderne*, a noteworthy forum for avant-garde ideas in Europe.

In 1920, at the age of twenty-six, Rendón journeyed to Ecuador, his parent’s country, for the first time, where he encountered the country’s bucolic landscape and its culturally diverse population. After travelling to his family’s estate in Cuenca, in the Azuay Province, Rendón produced a series of vividly coloured figurative works of the mountainous terrain, in addition to painting the ‘delicate and subtle shades to the most violent and barbarous hues’ of the Galápagos Islands after a brief visit. It was during this trip that Rendón was alerted to the worsening plight of the indigenous people due to the nation’s political crisis, massacres, military dictatorships and economic volatility which prevailed until the 1940s. Inspired by the work of Joaquín Pinto, Rendón combined the *costumbrista* painting tradition of Ecuador with the influences of European art techniques, portraying the region’s ‘types’ that resonated with the social realist paintings of Ecuadorian indigenists Camilo Egas, Eduardo Kingman Riofrío, Diógenes Paredes and others. In *Cabeza de hombre* *(Head of a Man)*, 1928, Rendón employed Surrealist elements and Cubo-Futurist techniques to capture the Ecuadorian’s aura, revealing his penchant for linearity, intense colouration, modulated tonality, ‘volume’ and ‘rotund plasticity,’ akin to Léger’s cylindrical, streamlined bodily formations.

From the 1930s to 1950s, Rendón and his wife, Paulette Everard Kiefer, author of *Galapagos: The Last Enchanted Islands* (1947) resided between France and Ecuador. He first exhibited in Guayaquil in 1937, with the Sociedad de Artistas ‘Allere Flaman’ and the Sociedad de Artistas y Escritores Independientes (1937-38), followed by the Salón de Bellas Artes (1943) and the inaugural Salón Nacional de Bellas Arts (1945) in Quito, where his Neo-realist portrait, *El Majordomo (The Butler)* 1940, was highly commended. This painting, which portrayed an indigenous character of strength and resilience set against dramatic lush Cuencan scenery, heralded a milestone in Rendón’s Ecuadorian artistic evolution. In 1948, he presented his first solo exhibition at Guayaquil’s Casa de la Cultura, displaying thirty figurative and abstract works. In these distinctive paintings, Rendón constructed subtle, curvilinear geometric forms, overlapped by rhythmical pauses suggestive of Constructivism, as in *Juego entre Columnas* (*Game between the Columns*), 1947. These abstract compositions directly influenced a generation of artists throughout Ecuador, Latin America and Europe including **Antoni Tàpies**, Antonio Saura, Enrique Tábara and Aníbal Villacís, among others.

In the 1960s, Rendón’s practice shifted to kinetic art. This transition heralded the artist’s rejection of rigid geometry, to incorporating organic linearity with pointillist brushwork arranged in highly textured kaleidoscopic, rhythmic patterns, as in *Composición, (Composition)* of 1963. By maintaining the effect of monumentality inherent in his practice, these kinetic works exuded ‘vibrant staccato pattern with tremendous luminosity,’ evoking the incandescent effects of stained-glass windows in Gothic cathedrals to reveal Rendón’s fascination with religious themes and transcendental symbols. Rendón was also a gifted muralist, executing mosaics reminiscent of the Byzantine era, as in the recently discovered relief mural that he completed in Mexico in 1980, after having been commissioned for Banco Central de Guayaquil, Ecuador, seven years earlier. The mural, installed in 2011, on the exterior of the Centro Cultural Simón Bolívar in Guayaquil, illustrates Rendón’s proclivity for geometric abstraction and preference for flattened curvilinear planes of vibrant, intense coloration with varying degrees of hue. Rendón is the recipient of several prestigious awards including first prize in painting at the First Bienal Hispanoamericana in Madrid (1951) and the Second Bienal Hispanoamericana in Havana (1954), and was the inaugural Ecuadorian painter invited to exhibit at the Pan-American Union in Washington D.C. in 1955. In 1969, Rendón received the award, *La* *Orden Nacional al Mérito*, the highest honour presented by the Ecuadorian government, and in 1971, the “Manuel Rendón Art Gallery” was established in Guayaquil’s Casa de la Cultura.

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Manuel Rendón Seminario, *Sans titre (Personnage et animal fabuleux) Untitled (Figure with mythical creature*), 1929, watercolour on paper, pasted on paper in Léonce Rosenberg’s album of drawings, manuscripts and dedications from various authors (1929 – 1943), Centre Pompidou, Paris © Centre Pompidou, Paris.

Manuel Rendón Seminario, *Composición (Composition)*, c1940s, oil on canvas, 64.8 x 80.8 cms., Private Collection.

Manuel Rendón Seminario, *Juego entre Columnas* (*Game between the Columns*), 1947, oil on canvas, 100 x 81 cms., Museo de la Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana, Quito © Museo de la Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana, Quito.

Manuel Rendón Seminario, *Composición (Composition)*, 1963, oil on canvas, 130 x 114 cms., Private Collection. Image reproduced in José Gómez-Sicre, 1985. *Manuel Rendón (Paris 1894 – Vilavicosa 1980)*, Guayaquil, Ecuador, not paginated.

Manuel Rendón Seminario, *Composición (Composition)*, 1975, oil on canvas, 33 x 41 cms., Private Collection. Image reproduced in José Gómez-Sicre, 1985. *Manuel Rendón (Paris 1894 – Vilavicosa 1980)*, Guayaquil, Ecuador, not paginated.