**Between Surrealism and Abstraction in Chile: The Decembristas in Print**

Entre el surrealismo y la abstracción en Chile: los decembristas en publicaciones impresas

Entre o surrealismo e a abstração no Chile: Os dezembristas em publicações impressas

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**Abstract:**
Frequently hailed as the first exhibition of surrealist art in Latin America, the 1935 exhibition organized in Lima by the Peruvian poet and artist César Moro, with the help of the Chilean artist María Valencia, in fact featured work by a group of Chilean artists known as the “Decembristas.” The Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro wrote for the 1933 catalogue, which primarily promoted abstraction. Moro’s exhibition, the group’s third, was identified as surrealist through its provocative catalogue and by its presence in the “Surrealism around the World” spread in Minotaure. Both Huidobro and Moro spent time in Paris and are cited as introducing Surrealism to Latin America. Moro in part claimed these artists as surrealist as an affront to Huidobro, dedicating a page in the catalogue to denouncing him. In turn, Huidobro published a scathing rebuttal of Moro in his magazine Vital, pitting many of the Decembristas against Moro. This essay traces the Decembristas’ exhibition histories and their print coroll-

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laries—including two magazines started by the Decembristas themselves—to examine the tension between Surrealism and abstraction and how these discourses were mobilized by Moro and Huidobro toward their own ends.

**KEYWORDS:**
Moro, Huidobro, Decembristas, magazines, Surrealism, abstraction

**Resumen:**
Frecuentemente aclamada como la primera exposición de arte surrealista en América Latina, la exposición organizada en 1935 en Lima por el poeta y artista peruano César Moro, con la ayuda de la artista chilena María Valencia, en realidad presentó obras de un grupo de artistas chilenos conocidos como los “dezembristas”. El poeta chileno Vicente Huidobro escribió para el catálogo de 1933, que promovía principalmente la abstracción. La exposición de Moro, la tercera del grupo, fue identificada como surrealista por su provocativo catálogo y por su presencia en el “Surrealismo alrededor del mundo” difundido en *Minotaure*. Tanto Huidobro como Moro pasaron un tiempo en París y se les cita como quienes introdujeron el surrealismo en América Latina. Moro en parte calificó a estos artistas de surrealistas como una ofensa a Huidobro, dedicando una página del catálogo a denunciarlo. A su vez, Huidobro publicó una dura refutación de Moro en su revista *Vital*, oponiendo a muchos de los dezembristas a Moro. Este ensayo rastrea las historias de exposiciones de los dezembristas y sus corolarios impresos—incluidas dos revistas iniciadas por los propios dezembristas—para examinar la tensión entre el surrealismo y la abstracción y cómo estos discursos fueron empleados por Moro y Huidobro para sus propios fines.

**Palabras clave:**
Moro, Huidobro, Decembristas, revistas, surrealismo, abstracción

**Resumo:**
Frequentemente aclamada como a primeira exposição de arte surrealista na América Latina, a exposição organizada em 1935 em Lima pelo poeta e artista peruano César Moro, com a ajuda da artista chilena Maria Valencia, na verdade apresentou obras de um grupo de artistas chilenos conhecidos como “dezembristas”. O poeta chileno Vicente Huidobro escreveu para o catálogo de 1933, que promoveu principalmente a abstração. A exposição de Moro, a terceira do grupo, foi identificada como surrealista por causa de seu catálogo provocativo e de sua presença no “Surrealismo ao redor do mundo”, divulgado em *Minotaure*. Tanto Huidobro quanto Moro passaram um tempo em Paris e são citados como tendo introduzido o surrealismo na América Latina. Moro descreveu parcialmente esses artistas como surrealistas como uma ofensa a Huidobro, dedicando uma página do catálogo para denunciá-lo. Por sua vez, Huidobro publicou uma dura refutação de Moro em sua revista *Vital*, opondo muitos dos dezembristas a Moro. Este ensaio traça as histórias das exposições dos dezembristas e seus corolários impressos — incluindo duas revistas iniciadas pelos próprios dezembristas — para examinar a tensão entre surrealismo e abstração e como esses discursos foram empregados por Moro e Huidobro para seus próprios fins.

**Palavras-chave:**
Moro, Huidobro, dezembristas, revistas, surrealismo, abstração
Frequently hailed as the first exhibition of surrealist art in Latin America, the 1935 exhibition organized in Lima by the Peruvian poet and artist César Moro, with the help of the Chilean artist María Valencia, in fact featured pieces by a group of Chilean abstract artists known as the “Decembristas,” since their first show was held in Santiago de Chile in December 1933. The Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro wrote for the group’s 1933 catalogue, and although it quotes André Breton and Paul Éluard, it primarily promotes abstraction. The group’s second exhibition was covered in the magazine Pro (1934), co-edited by the Decembrista artist Jaime Dvor. While Pro’s two issues included work by Hans Arp and Joan Miró, it, too, did not identify as surrealist. Moro borrowed heavily from these earlier publications for his exhibition catalogue—the group’s third—and his show was received as surrealist in the local press. The exhibition was moreover identified as surrealist by the inclusion of its catalogue in the “Surrealism around the World” spread in Minotaure in 1937 and to some extent due to Moro’s subsequent involvement in the 1940 International Exhibition of Surrealism in Mexico City. By featuring these artists in his show and catalogue, Moro recontextualizes their work and inserts them into local debates that mobilized Surrealism.

Showcasing the work of the Decembristas was perhaps, for Moro, a way of countering the prevalent trend of figurative indigenista painting in Peru. Or perhaps Moro championed the work of the Decembristas as an affront to Huidobro, who, like Moro, had spent time in Paris and is cited as introducing Surrealism to Latin America. Moro harshly criticized Huidobro in the catalogue, and in return, Huidobro published a scathing rebuttal of Moro in his own magazine, Vital (1935). The rivalry flared again in Moro’s publications Huidobro o el obispo embotellado (1936) and El uso de la palabra (1939). Self-promotion figures prominently in this history, since these editors were themselves poets and artists who sought to create space for the kind of work that they wanted to produce, and to guide its reception. The final Decembrista exhibition, held in August 1935, coincided with the arrival of yet another publication, ARquitectura (1935-1936), edited by one of its members, Waldo Parraguez. Through this proliferation of magazines and catalogues, the artists involved presented their own narratives and contexts for their artwork.

As evidenced by these cultural debates in print, magazines and catalogues were the site in which Surrealism, abstraction, and other discourses were harnessed to different ends. Moro and Huidobro’s self-reflexive network of publications also underscores the ways in which magazines supplemented physical exhibitions; they rhetorically framed and contextualized them and also juxtaposed poetry and visual art, circulating such work to a broader audience. Lastly, these publications function as a valuable archive through which to access the
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1. Rafael Alfredo Ramírez Mendoza, “Transformar el mundo, cambiar la vida. El surrealismo en el Perú y los proyectos de renovación socio-cultural de José Carlos Mariátegui, Xavier Abril y César Moro,” (Ph.D. dissertation, UCLA, 2018). Moro’s work was shown alongside that of the Mexican artist Santos Balmori, the Dominican artist Jaime Colson, and the Chilean artist Isáías de Santiago.


5. Francis de Miomandre, “Deux peintres de l’Amérique Latine,” César Moro Papers, ca. 1925-1987 (bulk 1925-1956), The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, accession n° 980029, box 2, folder 2: “Surrealist exhibitions.” All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.


work produced by the Decembristas, which is now only available in reproduction. This essay will trace the history of the Decembristas’ exhibitions and their print corollaries, as well as Moro and Huidobro’s publications, to examine the tension between Surrealism and abstraction and how these ideas circulated alongside the Decembristas’ artwork between Chile and Peru in the 1930s.

CÉSAR MORO’S TACTICAL SURREALISM

César Moro (born Alfredo Quíspez Asín), a poet and visual artist, participated in surrealist activities in Paris, where he lived starting in 1925 before returning to Lima in 1933. In his first exhibition abroad, a March 1926 group show held at the Cabinet Maldoror in Brussels titled “Some Painters from Latin America,” he presented twenty-four paintings, watercolors, and drawings (the other three participating artists only exhibited twenty-eight works in total). Its reception demonstrated the European tendency to exoticize work from Latin America, with one critic remarking that “Nothing is more curious than the way in which they reconcile their immemorial tradition (which dates back to Inca and Aztec artists) with the latest lessons in contemporary technique.” Work such as Moro’s Mythologie indienne (1924-1926) might have invited such an interpretation based on its title, but in it Moro abstracts and deconstructs human figures. Moro’s work was also shown alongside that of Jaime Colson in the following March in 1927 at the Société Paris-Amérique Latine in “Two Painters from Latin America,” which featured six paintings and eight drawings by Moro, some under the heading “Peruvian Scenes.” A review titled “We Demand Paintings of Savages” refers to “Peru of the ancient kings, dressed in feathers, Peru of the Indians of the interior” and the catalogue essay describes the work as “evidence of that which is the most pure on the continent, the most ancient.” Yet in the same essay the writer admits: “We know almost nothing of the considerable movement of literature and art that is currently rousing all of Latin America.”

As José Carlos Mariátegui, a Marxist intellectual committed to the indigenous cause in Peru, had written in 1927 in the Peruvian magazine Mundial (1920-1931): “César Moro, Jorge Seoane, and the other artists who have recently emigrated to Paris are being asked for native themes [and] indigenous motifs.” While Moro understood the appeal of these self-exoticizing elements, he was also responding to Surrealism in his work. Art historian Michele Greet explains how artists like Moro “co-opted, interacted with, or contested the styles of tenets of surrealism in Paris between the wars.”

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Dali, and works at the Galerie Surréaliste; he also contributed to surrealist publications in France and introduced surrealist elements to some of the work that he published in Peru. While Surrealism in Latin America can be regarded as colonialist or imported, Moro understood it as an alternative to the primitivizing expectations for his work. Indeed, as scholar Rafael Alfredo Ramírez Mendoza explains in his study of Surrealism in Peru, “just as French surrealism projected its yearning for the primitive in Latin America, Peruvians tried to appropriate surrealism as a step toward building their own modern language.” Like the art of many of his contemporaries, Moro’s work—his artwork, poetry, exhibitions, catalogues, and magazines—chronicle his strategies for engaging with Surrealism without capitulating to its appetite for primitivism.

During his time in Paris, Moro painted Piéton (Pedestrian, 1926), which features a large, winged creature suspended above a landscape with a kind of walking sailboat, a work described by Ramírez Mendoza as his “first surrealist painting.”

Moro included this piece in the May 1935 show in Lima, Exposición de las obras de Jaime Dvor, César Moro, Waldo Parraguez, Gabriela Rivadeneira, Carlos Sotomayor, María Valencia, and reproduced it on the cover of the catalogue.

(The work was also included in the International Exhibition of Surrealism that Moro helped organize in 1940 in Mexico City.) Indeed, thirty-eight of the fifty-two objects on display in the 1935 exhibition were by Moro. Thanks to the help of María Valencia, Moro rounded out the exhibition with work by the Decembristas, as the invitation card states: “María Valencia and César Moro are pleased to invite you to an exhibition of their works and those of Jaime Dvor, Waldo Parraguez, Carlos Sotomayor, and Gabriela Rivadeneyra [sic], five Chilean artists known as the ‘Decembristas.’” In this announcement Moro separates himself from the group, which he names, and notably does not invoke Surrealism.

Moro organized the exhibition because he wanted an “opportunity to show his own works according to his own taste and criteria,” reported his friend and collaborator, Emilio Westphalen, the Peruvian poet. At the time of the 1935 exhibition, for Moro, Lima was a “sad and provincial milieu, as sordid as an empty barrel.” Moro’s opening text for the exhibition catalogue underscores this commitment to enlivening the local context. As he writes:

Exhibitions open and close; the windows that let in fresh air open and close. In Peru, where everything is closed in, where everything acquires, more or less, the color of a church at dusk, a particularly horrific color, we are simply afraid of wanting to prevent the possibility of success for any young person who wishes to paint; we intend to discredit painting in America to such an extent that not even one of those brave and intrepid painters can face a canvas
any longer without feeling the urge to send everything to hell and to replace it with a vacuum cleaner.  

Moro voices a desire to renew painting in Peru and, by extension, Latin America. The whimsical image of replacing painting with a vacuum cleaner resonates with surrealist poetics. By singling out painting, he points primarily to his own work, and perhaps that of Valencia, whose painting is reproduced alongside the essay, as most of the other works, including some of his own, are collages, sculptures, and drawings. Printed under Picabia’s quote “Art is a pharmaceutical product for imbeciles” and unsigned, Moro’s text reads like an opening editorial or manifesto, rather than a catalogue essay.

As in the catalogue, in the exhibition itself, Westphalen recollects that there was neither a “program nor explanations.” The titles were in French, “some were actually poems” and others jokes (such as A Very Moving Picture), which meant that there was nothing to “guide and indicate to the visitor or reader ways to see and understand” the exhibition (a tactic that is itself arguably surrealist—or perhaps, for Moro, simply provocative). About its venue, the Sala Alcedo, Westphalen writes that “a room used more than occasionally to exhibit ‘works of art’” had been covered by Moro “with extreme and unusual images,” but that the works were “framed, and there were objects on pedestals.” Westphalen notes that “even eleven years later Moro would delight in recalling the astonishment, bewilderment, and indignation,” of the public, and quotes him as saying: “They had never seen anything…more insolent than our 1935 exhibition.”

While in Westphalen’s telling Moro seems to revel in controversy, reviews at the time may have called the 1935 exhibition “strange” and “somewhat controversial” but overall it was well-received. As scholar Nuria Andrea Cano Erazo explains, audiences were used to seeing cutting-edge art at the Sala Alcedo. She recounts how La Prensa reported that the show drew a “large audience, among whom we were able to note distinguished people from our social and artistic spheres.” Another article in La Prensa refers to it as an exhibition carried out by “revolutionary artists,” where “strange forms and unusual colors were seen [and] given a freedom that must have exasperated meticulous teachers of perspective.” The article takes care to observe that “most of the works are by César Moro” and that “the artist pours into them, with a very energetic originality, his world of emancipated forms and colors” that produce “a world of poetry, of dreams, of images, which is not the world of topographers and surveyors; but which is nonetheless full of reality and pathos.” After describing Moro’s works, the article mentions that “the rest of the artists contribute to the exhibition with very few paintings. María Valencia, with two paintings and a collage, lets us glimpse her exquisite and soft temperament. It is difficult to say much about the others.”

17. César Moro, “Exposición de las obras de Jaime Dvor et. al.,” Exposición de las Obras de César Moro, Jaime Dvor, Wáldo Parraguez, Gabriela Rivadeneira, Carlos Sotomayor, María Valencia (Lima, 1935), np. (my translation, with assistance from Greet [“César Moro’s Transnational Surrealism,” 29] and Ades [“Surrealism and its Legacies in Latin America,” footnote 31]).
18. Westphalen, 309.
19. Westphalen, 308.
Overall, the exhibition is described as “belligerent” yet also as “special, youthful, and new.” The catalogue is described as “a true magazine,” slyly collapsing the two modes of publication.24

Indeed, the catalogue shared many characteristics with avant-garde magazines of the day. Its cacophony of fonts, page reorientations, and juxtaposition of texts and images also likely informed the exhibition’s reception as surrealist. As literary historian Kent Dickson argues, “the catalogue configures a sort of textual gallery or space, summoning the voices of surrealism and graphically performing the antics for which the surrealists were known in Paris.”25 It included quotations from surrealist-affiliated provocateurs like Dalí, Aragon, Picabia, Sade, Lautréamont, René Crevel, De Chirico, Éluard, and Breton, a list that Westphalen calls an “iconoclastic panoply of the great men of pre-surrealism and para-surrealism […], forming a kind of sampler of spiritual subversion.”26 These authors are listed in a table of contents that Moro forms into an acrostic of Rs and As, the latter of which includes “unedited” texts by Anguita, Rafo Méndez, Carlos [sic] Sotomayor, and Westphalen; Moro puts himself in both the French and Latin American sections.27 Like the exhibition, the catalogue foregrounds Moro’s work, featuring homages to Moro by Westphalen and Rafo Méndez. As Dickson notes, the catalogue can be read as a “flashy, confrontational, and shamelessly self-promoting document calculated above all to outrage conservative Peruvian art patrons.”28 Moro also reprints his work in the catalogue, including his 1935 collage Il y a cinquante ans… in which he juxtaposes disjunctive found images cut out from magazines, lining up fountain pen nibs resembling bullets near the barrel of a gun topped with an oyster shell, all overlaying an automatist poem.29 The collapsing of pen and gun implies at once the violence and power of writing. The collage, like the catalogue, implies multiple methods of seeing and reading, demonstrating how Moro repurposed visual and linguistic elements.

Aside from a tribute to Valencia by Eduardo Anguita, the catalogue does not mention any artists besides Moro, although it does include a few reproductions of the other artists’ work. There is Valencia’s painting featuring biomorphic figures and a kind of shooting star, as well as a sculpture by Parraguez, an intersection of straight and curving metal, and an assemblage by Dvor, wherein an abstract shape is severed in two by a spiny metal line. The inner double-page spread is labeled “Catalogue” and includes a list of the works included in the show. Most are identified by their materials or media (wood, sculpture, painting, collage), while Moro’s contain titles, primarily in French, and fill the majority of the two pages (Dvor and Valencia each have three pieces, Sotomayor has six, Parraguez and Rivadeneira each have one, Moro has thirty-eight).30 The rest of the catalogue features a barrage of quotations, such as “There is nothing incomprehensible” by Lautréamont, “Poetry should be made by all, not by one,” from

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25. Dickson, 5. Note that in the catalogue itself the term “Surrealism” only appeared in Moro’s reference to Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution in his rant against Huidobro.
27. Note that Carlos Sotomayor is the painter included in the show, while the text in the catalogue is by his brother, the poet Julio Sotomayor. For more on the 1940 exhibition see: Dafne Porchini and Adriana Ortega Orozco, “The 1940 International Exhibition of Surrealism: A Cosmopolitan Art Dialogue in Mexico City,” Dada/Surrealism 21 (July 2017): 1-23.
29. As for the poem, according to Greet, it “suggests a frigid atmosphere in which materialist decadence reigns over a nonsensical world.” Greet, “César Moro’s Transnational Surrealism,” 32.
30. While the catalogue lists six drawings by Sotomayor, on the following page a reproduction of what appears to be a three-dimensional undulating line on an uneven surface suggests that “drawing” here is used loosely for mixed-media work.
Crevel, among others. Moro’s rant against Huidobro takes up the final page of the catalogue, and the back cover is an announcement for El uso de la palabra, a journal that Moro co-edited with Westphalen, which was published several years later, in 1939.

The show was deemed “surrealist” almost immediately. The day after it opened La Prensa called it a “surrealist exhibition at the Alcedo Academy.” Federico More, who wrote about it in his liberal weekly Cascabel, refers to it as “the surrealist Moro-Valencia Exhibition.” Although he didn’t see the show, More calls it “the first of its kind in Lima. A serious, structured display of surrealism had never been seen before in this city.” He then asks: “What is surrealism?” to which he responds by calling it “a vast movement that has become universal […], a permanent revolution.” He calls Moro “one of the clearest examples of the avant-garde” who has been in the “headquarters of surrealism” collaborating with Breton, Aragon, and Dalí. As for the Decembristas, More says that they have “started a courageous movement for renewal in Chile” but appear “homogenous” in the company of Moro. More uses his review to elevate Moro to the international avant-garde through his association with Surrealism, a point which Moro reinforces by referring to the show as one of “surrealist painting” in an essay that More allowed Moro to publish about the show in Cascabel under the pseudonym Ruy Barbo. Moro also uses the review to denounce indigenism and to describe the work of each artist in more depth, including his own.

The exhibition was also claimed by the French surrealists. In 1935 Benjamin Péret framed it as surrealist in Cahiers d’art, noting that the movement, “llest it dry up, had to leave the narrow framework of the borders of this country and take on an international form.” He writes:

After Belgium, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Japan, Denmark, here is Peru, where a surrealist group has just formed, whose first manifestation was an exhibition bringing together works by: Jaime Dvor, César Moro, Carlos Sotomayor, María Valencia, etc., accompanied by a catalogue containing texts and poems by Rafo Méndez, César Moro, Julio Sotomayor, and Westphalen. In addition, our Peruvian friends announce the publication of a magazine: El uso de la palabra. This manifestation was not to the liking of the maniac of invention—Vincente Huidobro—who always believes himself to be plagiarized by the findings of others and this time devotes an entire pamphlet to slandering César Moro.

Further cementing its connection to Surrealism, two years later, the catalogue was included in the “Surrealism around the World” spread in the Winter 1937 issue of Minotaure. Although parts of the catalogue are obscured by other
material, the names of the artists are visible, as are the location and date of the show. While most of the other pieces included in the spread visibly invoke Surrealism, the catalogue’s affiliation is simply implied by its inclusion.\textsuperscript{35}

Yet there remains a fundamental ambivalence about the show’s relationship to Surrealism. For instance, Westphalen himself stated—in an essay conspicuously titled “The First Surrealist Exhibition in Latin America”—that “whether any or all of the work shown were ‘surrealist,’ no one from the public or the press could have determined.”\textsuperscript{36} Art historian Michele Greet likewise observes that “all three of the artworks reproduced in the catalogue were abstract, mixed-media compositions that approximated the free-form biomorphic shapes common in Arp’s work of the time,” adding that “none of these artists specifically identified themselves as surrealists.” Yet Greet, along with scholars Julio Ortega and Dawn Ades, all refer to the exhibition as surrealist.\textsuperscript{37} The catalogue’s reception as surrealist is complicated by the fact that the reproductions and many of the quotations had been poached from the 1933 exhibition catalogue, for which Huidobro wrote a catalogue essay. Moro’s accusation of Huidobro as a plagiarist indirectly refers to this previous context for the work. The fact that Moro used the same photographs and duplicated many quotations from previous Decembrista publications imbricates the 1935 catalogue within a Chilean context that foregrounds abstraction, unmooring it from Surrealism, and draws attention to Moro’s infighting with a rival poet.

**Huidobro and the Decembristas**

Moro reframed the work of the Decembristas by bringing it to Peru and showing it alongside his own work. In order to assess the role that the Decembristas played in the 1935 exhibition, it is important to analyze the previous context for their work. The first Decembrista catalogue, for the *Exposición de diciembre*, on view from the 19th to the 31st of December, 1933 at the Walton Bookstore in Santiago de Chile, includes a checklist that records the profusion of work on display—six paintings by Valencia, six works by Rivadeneira, eight pieces by Dvor, and an astonishing nineteen by Parraguez.\textsuperscript{38} The catalogue proclaims: “Our group is not a closed group. All who align with our spirit, as much in poetry as in art, can be a part of it.”\textsuperscript{39} This message suggests a much more inclusive tone than that of Moro’s exhibition, although the catalogue also contains tirades such as: “The Chilean public is especially idiotic, because they only see stupid things. It is as though someone were in charge of lovingly caring for their stupidity.”\textsuperscript{40} Through such statements, the 1933 catalogue seeks to draw in like-minded supporters while taking an oppositional stance toward the culture at large (in this case that of Chile, rather than Peru).

36. Westphalen, 308.
38. Unlike the 1935 catalogue, the 1933 catalogue did feature Rivadeneira’s work, a wooden frieze. Note that Sotomayor joins the group for their second exhibition.
40. Ibid.
The work of the Decembristas emerged out of Chile's particular artistic climate. The Grupo Montparnasse (1923-1930), which included Luis Vargas Rosas, Henriette Petit, Camilo Mori, Julio Ortiz de Zárate, and José Perotti, had established an art salon in Chile.\textsuperscript{41} The Decembristas benefited both from this introduction of European artistic tendencies and from the \textit{escuela activa} educational reform movement that had been active since the 1920s across Chile.\textsuperscript{42} The Decembristas were trained at the Nueva Escuela de Arte, an art school run by Carlos Isamitt Alarcón, who had researched art education in Europe, including the Bauhaus; the school began to publish its own magazine, \textit{Revista de arte}, in 1934, to which some of the Decembristas contributed.\textsuperscript{43} Emerging from this mix of influences, the Decembristas were among the first to exhibit abstract art in Latin America, predating Joaquín Torres-García's return to Uruguay in 1934 and the Madi group in Argentina, which formed in the 1940s.\textsuperscript{44}

Surrealism had been known in Chile since the translation of selections from Breton's manifesto in 1925 by the artist and critic Sara Malvar, a member of the Grupo Montparnasse.\textsuperscript{45} But it was also relayed by Huidobro, who had moved to Paris in 1916 and had rebuked the surrealist practice of automatic writing in his \textit{Manifestes} of 1925.\textsuperscript{46} Huidobro returned to Chile from Europe in 1932, a year before the Decembristas' first show (and Moro's return); like Moro, he acted as a link between the French and the local avant-gardes. Huidobro championed the work of the Decembristas. In his catalogue essay, “A New Constellation in the Sky of America,” Huidobro describes their work as “representative of an American renaissance,” notes their shared affinity for using “insignificant materials”, and compares the “lyricism” of their art to poetry.\textsuperscript{47} Through their example, Huidobro argues that Latin American art can compete with that of Europe: “I am certain that the four of them could be in the front row at any exhibition in Paris, London, or Berlin.” He goes on to note that “[T]hanks to this new constellation that has appeared in this hemisphere...from now on [...] we can return to America thinking that [...] we will find something for the spirit.”\textsuperscript{48} In this way, Huidobro's essay justifies his own return from Europe. While Huidobro, unlike Moro, does address each individual artist, he also similarly foregrounds himself through the catalogue, for instance, printing his poem \textit{Demandez votre mort} sideways across two pages in a variety of fonts.

In addition to publishing Huidobro's essay and poetry, the 1933 catalogue includes a list of Spanish-language poets recommended by the Mexican magazine \textit{Volante}, a list which includes Huidobro and Westphalen (but not Moro). The catalogue also features a barrage of quotations printed in a variety of typefaces and orientations, many of which thematize Huidobro's opposition to realism (“A work of art is a reality in itself and there is no reason to think it
is anything else”) as well as his advocacy of abstraction (“In art we are not interested in the forms of nature, we are interested in the forms of your spirit”).

The 1933 catalogue includes the same reproduction of the Valencia painting that Moro would use two years later, as well as many of the same quotations, such as those from Breton (“The imaginary is what tends to become real”) and Éluard (“You don’t have to see reality just as I do”), which in the Chilean context can be understood as anti-realist—or alternatively interpreted as surrealist, as in Moro’s catalogue. Moro’s aggressive stance against Huidobro was likely designed to obscure the fact that he had poached Huidobro’s artists and modeled his catalogue on Huidobro’s own.50

Huidobro and Moro were not the only writers framing the reception of the Decembristas in print. An artist from the group, Jaime Dvor (born José Dvoretsky Roitman), co-edited the magazine Pro along with the musician Eduardo Lira Espejo (who was married to Valencia). The second Decembrista exhibition was held in September 1934 and the first issue of Pro serves as its catalogue. The front cover lists the five artists and provides the address and dates for the exhibition, while the back cover includes the word “catalogue” and a checklist of the forty-six works on display: nine by Dvor, seven sculptures and six paintings by Parraguez, three works by Rivadeneira, nine by Sotomayor, and nine by Valencia.51 These “non-representative paintings and sculptures,” as one scholar calls them, were made with materials such as “pieces of wood, wire, cardboard, iron, brass, mica, rubber, nuts, insulators, and heated discs.”52 This show exceeded both the preceding and the subsequent one in scale.

However, unlike the catalogues by Huidobro and Moro and despite the use of the word “catalogue,” Pro identified as a magazine, demonstrating how closely aligned magazines and catalogues were as well as the fluidity between the roles of artist, writer, editor, and curator.53 Like the previous catalogues, Pro too contained poems, reproductions of art, and quotations. For instance, Pro’s first double-page spread54 includes a poem by Julio Sotomayor, brother of Carlos, and a cheeky address to “dear critics” that includes the quip: “Yesterday: Picasso, Gris, Lipchitz/ Today: Miró, Arp,” registering a shift from Cubism to biomorphic abstraction.55 The impact of Miró, who was also likely an inspiration for Moro, is palpable in Valencia’s constellations, while Arp’s pictorial vocabulary seems to resonate in the work of Rivadeneira and Sotomayor. A page of the issue is devoted to Arp, with enigmatic poetry and drawings of amoebic shapes under the title “The Air is a Root,” translated by Rivadeneira; it had first appeared in Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution in an issue that also included Moro. Pro also prints a musical score by Lira, titled “Poem,” dedicated to the poet Eduardo Anguita, whose work was also featured, as were the Spanish poets Juan Larerra and Gerardo Diego, along with Huidobro and Éluard.56

49. Exposición de diciembre, np. “Nature is one thing, art is another,” proclaims an unattributed quote, emphasizing this line of thinking. The only mention of Surrealism in the 1933 catalogue is a quote from Huidobro: “I am not a cubist, nor a creationist, nor a dadaist, nor a surrealist. I do not proclaim anything to the exclusion of something else: neither subconscientious, nor sensibility, nor intelligence, nor dreams, nor cold, nor heat. I proclaim man, with all his human faculties, the TOTAL man.” The word “total” would soon become the title of one of his magazines. This quote is placed above those by Breton and Éluard in the catalogue.

50. A more generous read, by Ades, is that Moro’s attack on Huidobro was an attempt to distinguish himself from “what Aragon described as ‘the accredited avant-garde.’” Ades, “Surrealism and its Legacies,” 410.

51. The exhibition was held September 12-29, 1934, at Catedral 1242, Federación de Estudiantes. The back cover contains a quote identical to that printed on the 1933 catalogue’s back cover: “If you leave this exhibition with a headache, take alviol;/ If you want to produce works as interesting as the ones you have seen, take a lot of phosphonervil leo-,” a playful take on advertising that hints at how provocative the forty-six works in the show were expected to be.


54 Pro, n°. 1 (Santiago de Chile, Sept. 1934). https://www.surdoc.cl/registro/3-41907

55. Pro, n°. 1 (Santiago de Chile, Sept 1934): np.

56. Quotations from Anguita, Huidobro, Juan Larrea, the Belgian writer Paul Dermée, and the French writer André Malraux are also included.
Much of the writing in Pro defended abstract art. In his contribution Huidobro continues to develop his theory of art versus nature. As he argues:

If I paint a man, an animal, a tree, a mountain, it will be said that I make concrete art. If I paint forms that have no immediate meaning in nature, it will be said that I make abstract art. However, no art is abstract, since those forms created by the artist exist in themselves, they are the object of art after he has created them and therefore they are concrete, although they may originally come from an abstraction.57

Huidobro argues for the ability of abstract art to express humanity and spirituality. He also refers to the Decembristas and promotes their September 1934 exhibition in his own magazine, Vital. Revista vitalicia, órgano de los vitalistas, printed that month, urging readers to visit the show in order to “vitalize” their spirits.58

Huidobro’s defense of abstraction is echoed elsewhere in Pro, as in a quote from Max Jacob (“A work of art is worthy in and of itself, and not for the contrasts that can be made between it and reality”) and through a translation of Jean Hélion’s essay “The Evolution of Abstract Art,” which touches on Cubism as well as the work of Paul Klee, Piet Mondrian, and Torres-García, who had deeply influenced Helion’s work and who would figure prominently in Pro’s second issue.59 These writings on abstract art were supplemented by printed reproductions of the Decembristas’ work, thereby priming the reader to consider the work as its own defense of abstraction. In a painting by Dvor, a line bisects a triangle and dark, crossed by dark, amorphous shapes. A painting by Valencia, with thicker lines and textured, small dots, perhaps applied using a thick brush or stamp, produce a head-like shape that occupies the bottom left of the canvas, while a circular shape hovers above it, as if tethered to the figure from the sky. A wooden frieze of geometric shapes by Rivadeneira is featured, as well as two pieces by Sotomayor; they consist of thick, drawn black biomorphic forms, one resembling a map. Most of the photographs of the work are attributed to the Chilean photographer Antonio Quintana, and several appear in Moro’s catalogue as well.60

The second issue of Pro, now bearing the subtitle Revista de arte, appeared in November 1934, only two months later, and it documents the reception of the September Decembrista show: “A group of rubbery old men with the appearance of young people stormed the September exhibition. Too bad for these good-for-nothings. Arousing anger is an attribute that is not bestowed on just any good young man. To attack is a historical symptom too obvious to be original. Praises and protests do not reach us.”61 Continuing this line of thought, elsewhere the

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59. Jean Hélion, “Evolución del arte abstracto,” Pro 1 (Santiago de Chile, 1934): np. This essay appeared previously in English as Jean Hélion, The Evolution of Abstract Art as Shown in the Gallery of Living Art (New York: A. E. Gallatin’s Gallery of Living Art, 1933), np. Note that debates about realism, reality, and abstraction were happening in various contexts to different ends; in New York, abstract art was defended against social realism for political purposes, while Huidobro seeks to defend its spiritual capacity.
60. The last two pages of this issue of Pro can be found in Westphalen’s papers, corroborating that Moro had likely seen it. Emilio Adolfo Westphalen papers regarding Surrealism in Latin America, 1938-1995, Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, accession n°. 2001.M.21, box 14, folder 15. Note that Quintana, an artist, photographed works for Revista de Arte as well.
magazine laments the art scene in Chile, a milieu described as friendly toward business and hostile towards artists. The magazine—by and for artists—with its interdisciplinary approach, offers an alternative to this bleak landscape, embodied by the bold nature of the Decembristas’ work, and indicating the need to contextualize it in print.

Two artists whose work stands in conversation with the Decembristas—Joan Miró and Joaquín Torres-Garcia—have a strong presence in the second issue. Miró’s bold lines, constellations, and deconstructed human forms seem like a key touchstone for the Decembristas. Huidobro praises Miró’s “economy of means” in an essay for this issue. As for the work of the Chilean artists, there are two reproductions of pieces by Dvor—a gouache and a series of metal spirals affixed to a flat surface—and a text by Lira praising his work. Lira’s piece culminates in the assertion that “what interests me most in his art is the vigor that concretizes the abstract.” Elsewhere in the issue a drawing by Valencia is reproduced comprised of bold lines and undulating forms, seemingly in conversation with the work of Miró. Rivadeneira and Torres-Garcia’s work alike relies on simple materials and geometric shapes. Pro 2 printed a drawing by Torres-Garcia that the artist had given to Huidobro, along with an essay by Torres-Garcia titled “Pseudo-Values in Modern Art,” written in Montevideo in September 1934. The work of Arp, a third crucial influence on the group, is also featured (Paolo et Francesca, 1926 a biomorphic sculpture), in addition to poems by the Chilean poets Julio Sotomayor, Eduardo Anguita, Rosamel del Valle, Volodia Teitelboim, and, Huidobro, along with the Spanish poets Vicente Aleixandre and Juan Larrera, and the Romanian poet and founder of Dadaism, Tristan Tzara, as well as selections of Lautréamont’s “Maldoror,” a touchstone for Surrealism, translated by Anguita. Picabia also has a quote featured (“People with good taste are often rotten”) which Moro would later include in his 1935 catalogue. As with the 1933 Decembrista catalogue, there are evident echoes of this issue in the catalogue that Moro put out the following year.

“AN ORIGINAL PLAGIARIST”

The back cover of the second issue of Pro focuses on a major concern that cuts across these magazines: plagiarism. Circulating in Chile was the accusation that Pablo Neruda had lifted “Poem 16,” one of his 1924 love poems, from “Poem 30” by Rabindranath Tagore, and the magazine included a reprint of a 1917 translation into Spanish of Tagore’s piece. A quote from Huidobro on the bottom of the back cover reads: “The poet will no longer imitate nature, because he does not grant himself the right to plagiarize God.” Huidobro’s own magazine, Vital, whose first issue had promoted the Decembristas, addresses what it calls “The
Neruda-Tagore Affair” in its second issue. On its front cover Huidobro reproduces the back cover of the second issue of Pro with the caption: “They want a fight, now they will know what a fight is.” (Img. 1) On the next page, Huidobro digs in, writing: “Where does Neruda’s hatred of Huidobro come from? Perhaps because some critic said that Neruda would not exist without Huidobro?”68 The rant playfully continues: “Huidobro is to blame for Neruda’s plagiarism [...]. Is
my presence in the world an obstacle to the happiness of Mr. Neruda and his friends?" Vital then reprints an article from La Opinión titled "Pablo Neruda, Plagiarist or Great Poet?" It is even more cutting, then, that Moro’s 1935 catalogue ends with his own charges of plagiarism against Huidobro, especially considering how clearly Moro had borrowed from the earlier Decembrista publications.

Moro, in his all-caps screed against Huidobro, titled “Warning” and printed on the back inside cover of his 1935 catalogue, seems to be addressing an audience familiar with Huidobro’s magazines and past work (and thus demonstrates his own familiarity with it). “Your Vincente,” he writes, is “a veteran social climber in America, who has used a piece of paper titled Ombligo to defraud the ignorance and good faith of his admirers.” Hederides Huidobro as an imitator of Pierre Reverdy and contests claims that Huidobro had helped invent literary cubism. Furthermore, he accuses Huidobro of plagiarizing Luis Buñuel’s poem “Une girafe,” published in Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution. He concludes that Huidobro is a “mediocre copyist and a nauseating literary puppet.”

As the scholar Dickson notes, “Moro dug up the dirtiest laundry he could find on Huidobro, and in doing so threatened a basic precept of Huidobro’s South American fame—his originality.” What was evident from Moro’s note was that he had read all of Huidobro’s recent work: Ombligo/Vital’s 1934 issue, both issues of Pro, and the 1933 Decembrista catalogue.

In the third issue of Vital, published in June 1935, Huidobro responded—almost in real time—to Moro’s 1935 provocation with a three-page rebuttal under the heading “A Little Fight,” accompanied by a long subtitle mocking the style of Moro’s titles (which Huidobro later suggests Moro stole from Max Ernst). Huidobro’s diatribe is deeply homophobic; the opening line focuses on Moro’s sexuality. He also denigrates Moro through his association with Surrealism, saying “the poems of this coquettish little Moro are a bad plagiarism, first of Éluard and later of Dalí.” He also ridicules Moro’s art, referring to the “pedestrian imitations of surrealist objects, such as the featured rifle published in his catalogue.” He then calls Moro a “slave of surrealism, where you have arrived too late” and accuses him of “imitating the magazines and catalogues we made in Paris and Madrid more than fifteen years ago and especially the one I did in Chile for the Exposition of December 1933.” Responding to Moro’s charges, Huidobro says that he admires Buñuel’s films but is unfamiliar with the text. In short, Huidobro claims that Moro in fact embodies all of the flaws that he had levelled against him: opportunism, plagiarism, and trickery. For both Moro and Huidobro, what is at stake is the value of originality as they vie for a place in the Latin American avant-garde. In this context, an affiliation with Surrealism, according to Huidobro, indicates Moro’s lack of originality.
Moro and Huidobro’s rivalry tends to overshadow the work of the Decembristas, who were instrumentalized in service of their squabble. For instance, in Vital’s following double-page spread, Huidobro rallies the Decembrista group to support him. In a piece titled “Clarifying Positions” Parraguez states: “I declare that I do not belong to any group. At the exhibition in Lima, which hinged on a certain Mr. Moro, my work was shown without my knowledge. It doesn’t bother me, nor does it please me. Regarding Mr. Moro’s slanderous assertions about Vicente Huidobro, I cannot support them for any reason.”

Next Huidobro prints a letter from Rivadeneira to Valencia:

I have discovered that: 1. Through your intervention I was included in an exhibition in Lima. 2. Such an exhibition conceals an attack on our friend Vicente Huidobro. I have not been consulted. If of my own volition I exhibit or not, attack or not, that’s fine. But if someone exhibits my work and this exhibition implies a disloyalty that I have no share in, precisely to the person who sponsored our first exhibition, that is unacceptable. I ask you not to forget, on future occasions, the formula that requires consulting the author before taking initiatives regarding their work. And when it comes to murky or unfair politics, count me out in advance from among your collaborators.

With this letter Rivadeneira distanced herself from the show and aligned with Huidobro—and blamed Valencia, rather than Moro, for the fallout. An unsigned letter disparages all of the artists involved: “They are the eternal little avant-gardists who appear in all countries, doing a balancing act between cubism, which they don’t understand, with futurism, expressionism, and surrealism, and then they stumble of their own accord and dissolve into nothingness. They remain forever weighed down by a bad imitation of Arp and a provincial copy of Miro.” As in the tiff between Moro and Huidobro, here imitation—including of Surrealism—is the true insult.

Vital also printed a letter from the poet Eduardo Anguita to Moro stating that the “magazine-catalogue” he had received from Moro’s show was clearly based on the 1933 exhibition catalogue: “I didn’t think you were so advanced as to ‘grasp’ the way of understanding magazines introduced by Huidobro in Chile in December 1933, and much earlier, in Europe, with his magazine Creación. Actually, its layout and construction reveal that our magazines were not unknown to you;” he then describes Moro as an “original plagiarist”—a fitting insult indeed. He also points out that neither Rivadeneira nor Parraguez gave Moro permission to show their work, and that Anguita’s own poem about Valencia had been written for Pro and not for Moro’s catalogue and accuses Moro of “slandering” Huidobro. On the back cover, Huidobro asserts that Moro
plagiarized the title of El uso de la palabra, as announced on the back of the 1935 exhibition catalogue, from the publication Légitime défense, published by Martinican students in Paris in 1932, and from his own poem Altazor. (Moro did regret choosing that title, but only because a French magazine was soon published with the same name L’Usage de la parole, 1939-1940).

Moro certainly read this issue of Vital and in turn published yet another retort in February 1936, now a direct attack on Huidobro, in a pamphlet titled Vicente Huidobro o el obispo embotellado (Image 2) (‘Vicente Huidobro or the

Bottled Bishop”). The first page is a defense of Moro written by Westphalen, who condemns Huidobro’s “stupid pretension to superiority” and “moral baseness” and derides his claims to being the “TOTAL” man.⁸⁴ He then laments the fact that “Huidobro has managed to get us talking about him for a moment.”⁸⁵ A letter to Moro from the poet Rafo Méndez, which goes on for over a page, describes Huidobro as “the literary landowner from the South [who] bursts in, presenting at public auction the counterfeit merchandise of an invented anecdote, peppering his trinkets with senile hypocrisy, poorly contained anger, and frank ignorance of the language.”⁸⁶ Another writer claims to have used Altazor to line her baby’s crib; a French screed by Moro titled “Dog Food” directly addresses Huidobro: “you are below plagiarism; you don’t even know the elementary rules of writing... you are nothing but an aggressive and pretentious illiterate.”⁸⁷ The publication also includes a letter from Eduardo Lira, the co-editor of Pro, who agrees that Huidobro and Vital are “ridiculous” but he also asks: “is Huidobro important enough to merit a second attack? Isn’t it absurd to continue giving him prestige and at the same time injecting life into him?...[T]hese little battles do not interest me. There are too many great and intense things to do in America.”⁸⁸ He then shifts attention back to Dvor, Valencia, and Carlos Sotomayor, and mentions that they are about to open their Salón de agosto: “Right now we are more interested in instigating a great movement of young people across America, connected with Europe.”⁸⁹ Although Lira’s letter is sympathetic, the editors of the pamphlet reject it, deeming it “childish,” and “disqualify” the artists from any claims to solidarity.⁹⁰

Lira tried to refocus attention on the Decembristas and their most recent exhibition. In fact, the Decembristas had sent Moro the catalogue for the Salón de agosto, held from August 24 to 31 in Chile in 1935, just a few months after the Sala Alcedo show.⁹¹ Valencia’s handwritten comment on the opening page of the catalogue in Moro’s archive reads: “Moro, [we’re] waiting for your works to arrive soon.” Dvor, Julio Sotomayor, Valencia, and Carlos Sotomayor had all also signed the front page, suggesting that at least a few months after the Lima show they were still on good terms. This catalogue is free from the disorienting arrays of fonts or quotations found in earlier publications. The opening page includes a “Message to friends in Chile” from Torres-García, connecting the catalogue to Pro.⁹² Poems by Westphalen and Julio Sotomayor are printed along the interior, as well as a prose piece by Fernando Alegría, alongside new reproductions of work by Valencia, Dvor, and Sotomayor; the list of works, sixteen in all, is printed under the word “catalogue” on the last page. This show moreover coincided with the launch of yet another publication edited by a member of the group: Parraguez’s magazine ARQuitectura, which featured previously unpublished reproductions of work by the Decembristas.

⁸⁴. Emilio Westphalen, untitled contribution to Vicente Huidobro o el obispo embotellado (Lima, Feb., 1936). 1. Huidobro edited the magazine Total (1936-1938), to which Westphalen refers.
⁸⁵. Ibid.
⁸⁶. “Una carta de Rafo Méndez,” Vicente Huidobro o el obispo embotellado, 2.
⁸⁹. Ibid.
⁹¹. The Salón de agosto opened in August 1935 and Vicente Huidobro o el obispo embotellado was published in February 1936.
ARQuitectura’s first issue, which contained a manifesto on architecture and writings by David Siqueiros, Le Corbusier, and Torres-García, also featured Parraguez’s “Essay on Modern Art,” accompanied by photographs of work by Dvor, Valencia, Sotomayor, and Parraguez himself. While the work was astonishing—a metal sculpture by Dvor combining lines, shadows, and shapes; a painting by Sotomayor that resembles a photogram; an abstract painting by Valencia; and a sculpture by Parraguez made of twisted metal sitting on a thick, circular base—the article tackles modern art more generally rather than analyzing the work of the Decembristas. Parraguez describes how abstraction and reality contribute to art in equal measure, adding drawings and diagrams to underscore his position, and the article muses on the relationship between artist, spectator, and critic. In his essay he refers to a November 1933 show that predates the Decembristas’ 1933 exhibition, organized by the Federación de Estudiantes de Chile, which had prompted a critic to dismiss his “laboratory test” sculptures, and argues that the work of art is itself reality, rather than needing to be representational (much as Huidobro had argued earlier). After 1935 it is unclear if the Decembristas stopped exhibiting in part due to the relentless squabbles between Moro and Huidobro, or for their own reasons. Regardless, the Salón de agosto was the last exhibition showing the Decembristas’ work, and the issue of ARQuitectura the last time their work was published. Parraguez devoted himself to architecture thereafter, while Moro and Huidobro continued to use their publications as battlegrounds.

BEYOND THE DECEMBRISTAS

Moro’s 1935 catalogue incorporated an ad for a forthcoming magazine, connecting his curatorial and editorial ventures. Although the back cover of the 1935 catalogue announced that El uso de la palabra was “coming soon,” it was not published until 1939, when Moro was already in Mexico City, where he lived from 1938 to 1948, fleeing political repression in Peru. In his opening essay, “La poesía y los críticos,” Westphalen directly engages with Surrealism calling it “nothing less than a new human attitude.” The magazine also contains poetry by Moro and a review praising an exhibition of Manuel Álvarez Bravo’s work held in Mexico in 1939, poetry and essays by Westphalen, as well as photographs by Manuel and Lola Álvarez Bravo, and a photograph by Eva Sulzer of the sculpture La piedra de los sacrificios in Mexico. There is a double-page homage to Picasso intended as a rebuttal to a piece by the Spanish writer Gregorio Marañón in another Peruvian publication. The homage includes texts by Moro, Westphalen, Wolfgang and Alice Paalen, Xavier Villarrutia, Agustín Lazo, Rafo Méndez, Éluard, and Breton, all praising Picasso, and some remarks by the latter reprinted from the first issue of Minotaure, for which Picasso had designed the...
cover. 98 But *El uso de la palabra* was primarily a vehicle for a text by Moro critiquing *indigenista* painting in Peru. 99

In “About Painting in Peru,” Moro condemns *indigenista* painting, writing “there are those who purport to remedy the great misery endured by the Indian in Peru, his total ostracism” through paintings or artifacts for tourists that, according to Moro, have the opposite effect of reinforcing Western stereotypes and stigmas. 100 Moro argues that the folklorism of *indigenismo* masks unequal conditions, distracting from the political exploitation of the indigenous population. Moro notes that those who question the movement are vilified: “Anyone who dares to look at the world with eyes that are not those of a brave *indigenista* painter or of a folklore writer is immediately treated as a foreign-loving, French-ified and bitter enemy of the Indian, of this fabulous cardboard myth that allows them to make a living.” 101 Unlike many of his contemporaries, who sought to break with Europe, Moro derides the “intellectual meridians that some place in Buenos Aires and other locations according to their poor, sentimental regionalism” and resents the logic that posits that one is either an *indigenista* or a “fake.” 102 Moro concludes: “I do not propose any school to replace another. I just want to subscribe to the postulate of ‘all license in Art.’ [...] Art begins where tranquility ends.” 103 Moro’s opposition to *indigenista* painting offers some insight into his interest in the abstract work of the Decembristas and his dalliances with Surrealism. However, Valencia wrote about *indigenista* painting in 1936 for the Escuela de Arte’s magazine, *Revista de arte*. She states there that, while work by José Sabogal could be “a little romantic,” Sabogal, Camilo Bias, Julia Codesido, and Carmen Saco are producing an art “of its time.” 104 Although she is Chilean, and so an outsider, she nevertheless perpetuates precisely the type of interest in *indigenismo* that Moro opposed. Moro was clearly directing his energies away from *indigenismo* in a way that differed from the artists he showed in his 1935 exhibition.

While Moro’s text does not mention Surrealism specifically, the back cover of the magazine announces the 1940 *Exposición internacional del surrealismo* and lists the contributing countries, including Chile, Peru, and Mexico. It names Breton, Wolfgang Paalen, and Moro as the organizing committee and promises that “the next issue of *El uso de la palabra* will be dedicated to the exhibition,” although it never materialized. Yet, *El uso de la palabra* does establish a link between Moro’s various activities, since its arrival had been advertised on the back of the 1935 catalogue and it in turn promotes the 1940 show, whose catalogue features the work of Manuel Álvarez Bravo on the cover. In his introduction to that catalogue Moro describes Mexico and Peru as “countries that retain, despite the invasion of the Spanish barbarians and the sequels that still persist, thousands of luminous points that must in short order join the line of fire.

102. Here Moro is referring to the rebuttals issued across Latin America to the Spanish poet Guillermo de Torre’s claim that Madrid was the “intellectual meridian” of Latin America. For more, see: Lori Cole, *Surveying the Avant-Garde: Questions on Modernism, Art, and the Americas in Transatlantic Magazines* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2018), 149-153.
of international surrealism.”\textsuperscript{105} He then praises surrealist painting, which he calls “the concrete adventure par excellence.”\textsuperscript{106}

Moro’s involvement in the 1940 exhibition was his clearest tie to Surrealism, although he voiced his commitment elsewhere as well. In a text titled “La poesía surrealista,” conceived as an introduction to the \textit{Antología del surrealismo} translated and published in Mexico in 1938, Moro writes: “Surrealism is the cord that ties the fire to the dynamite that will blow up the mountain.”\textsuperscript{107} For Moro, Surrealism was an alternative to the “sentimental regionalisms” he perceived in movements like \textit{indigenismo}. As Greet puts it: “Moro did not conceive of surrealism as a foreign import, rather he believed it to be the ideal visual and literary language with which to counter the entrenched nationalism of artistic production in the Americas.”\textsuperscript{108} Moro was also in regular contact with Breton, Éluard, and Péret, and integrated automatist elements into his own work.\textsuperscript{109} In 1934 he had written: “Surrealism is alive and living a fierce life. Once again we stand in solidarity with the directions set for surrealism by André Breton, placing our full confidence in him. From Peru, to world surrealism.”\textsuperscript{110} Here Moro both aligns with the movement and breaks with it by shifting agency from Breton to Peru. As Ortega writes, Moro was at once “a surrealist and more than a surrealist: he assumes surrealism’s rebellion, its profound sense of change as a moral response, and he explores it on his own account and within his own personal adventure.”\textsuperscript{111}

Yet, despite his involvement in the 1940 exhibition, by the early 1940s Moro had become disillusioned with the movement.\textsuperscript{112} As he phrased it in 1944, responding to an issue of \textit{VVV}:

> It may seem more than daring, insolent even, […] to clarify our stance with regard to a movement of such magnitude, of such prestige, as Surrealism. For many years it constituted our reason for being with the luminous blindness that endearing love gives. We would never have even dreamed that one day we would have to raise serious objections and express our severe disagreement with Surrealism.\textsuperscript{113}

Although here Moro departs from the movement, his earlier resistance to Surrealism’s primitivizing impulses, his critique of indigenism, his co-option of the Decembristas, and the way he jockeyed for position with Huidobro all suggest that the recourse to Surrealism for Moro always gestured toward internal concerns.\textsuperscript{114}

The art of the Decembristas was among the first abstract art produced in Latin America. Abstraction, for Moro, was a way of bypassing the figuration that he perceived as characteristic of \textit{indigenista} painting. Surrealism had also become a shorthand for non-figurative work, even though the Chilean artists...
that he chose to exhibit in 1935 did not adhere to the movement. As Greet writes, “Moro was basically usurping Huidobro’s group for his own purposes and aligning these young artists with surrealism.”¹¹⁵ But why did Huidobro take the bait? According to the scholar Kent Dickson, Huidobro might have ignored the provocation if other writers had not gotten involved; “had not works by his disciples, especially Eduardo Anguita, been included among the Chilean writers published in [Moro’s] catalog, making it seem as if Huidobro’s own circle had turned on him.”¹¹⁶ The attack was also disclosed in Chile by Pablo de Rokha in an open letter to Huidobro printed in the newspaper La Opinión.¹¹⁷ While the protracted, public fight might come off as unseemly, Julio Ortega has a more sanguine explanation; as he puts it: “almost all of the avant-garde enthusiastically exercised mutual animosity,” so that the significance of this polemical tenor is partly lost to us simply “because we no longer claim originality as an aesthetic principle.”¹¹⁸ For Moro and Westphalen “originality is the ultimate proof of one’s creative identity,” and the “duel,” as Ortega calls it, although brimming with pettiness and humiliation, nevertheless manages to “translate aesthetic and vital ideas that reveal the poetic action that gave them their identity.”¹¹⁹ According to Ortega, surrealist practice was a way for Moro to construct an “alternate scene of reading” and to build an “interpretive community.”¹²⁰ In many ways, Moro’s gambit paid off, as his work is often cited in a broader history of Surrealism. Eliding the controversy with Huidobro, as well as the abstraction of the Decembristas, Moro’s exhibition continues to be received as surrealist, demonstrating the power of the movement to overshadow local histories and alternate art historical trajectories, and reminding us of the need to revisit the printed materials that serve as archives of these enduring debates, so as to return the tension between Surrealism, abstraction, and originality to the work and its manifestation on view and in print.

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¹¹⁵. Greet, “César Moro’s Transnational Surrealism,” 35.
¹¹⁶. Dickson, 7-8.
¹¹⁷. Ramírez Mendoza, 191, footnote 142.
¹¹⁸. Ortega, np.
¹¹⁹. Ortega, np.
¹²⁰. Ortega, np.

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