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Article

Machismo, Art and Latin America: How has this idea shifted?

The term machismo has been associated with the Latin American Region more than most. The word has the meaning of strong or aggressive masculine pride. Machismo can be conveyed in the way men express, or withhold their emotions, and the way they dress. When you are raised with strong beliefs regarding ideas of masculinity, it is hard to change or challenge them.

Whilst it may be easier to express different ideas of masculinity today than 30 years ago, especially in Fashion forward territories, in some Latin American regions, old ideas mostly reign supreme. There are signs of progress however, with macho-promoting telenovelas like “Sin Senos No Hay Paraiso” (2008) on the wane, and social media promoting different ideas of masculinity on the rise.

There is no more the “I can’t go to a gay bar because it doesn’t look manly.” Machismo is a term used to cover an umbrella of gender norms relating to how men behave, look, talk, what they do, and more than anything, it is used to describe what we know as toxic masculinity.

Today we see how the role of machismo has shifted, especially in the arts. In an exclusive conversation with two very different artists who are 30 years apart and from countries that happen to be side to side to one another, we can start to understand how the communication of machismo in their respective regions differentiate.

A lot of what catches other people’s eye in Latin America is due to culture and how embedded religion is, people tend to jump to conclusions easily. Some heads get turned and some mouths get wide open when someone lives their life differently. In Ecuador we can still see that machismo and gender norms have a heavy weight on society and is something that needs to change. In the case of Raúl, he has felt more deep stares now. “Before I felt it, you know with me dressing more “normally” or more put together one could say. But I had my ear pierced, my hair dyed, my tattoos would show sometimes and that made people stare. Now because I’m dressing differently, painting my nails, my tattoos will still show, is a bit more. I feel it more. People directly assume things about me. Just because of the little things they can notice on a day to day basis. They just jump to conclusions right away”.

This is why it is important to support artists that are trying to break machismo with the platform they have. Now the digital world and social media have provided us with a tool that lets us see more of each other. Says Raúl. “I think that artists have the power to educate their audience in a very unique and powerful way. For me I know that everything that I put out to the world will have an impact.”

When talking about artists that have an impact, there are many, Bad Bunny, David Bowie, Edvard Munch, Pablo Picasso, etc. Carlos Quintero a 55 year old Artist and Art Professor from Colombia in an exclusive interview explains to us how his art influences changed over time when he was growing up. “My influences have changed with time, or more so I get to discover something differently as I revisit them. For example the German artist Ernst Ludwig Kirchner who challenged with a few others the traditional academic style of painting. I think that many artists can challenge the “traditional” view of things not only with how they present themselves but through their mediums and ideas”.

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in Colombia, access to the western world has been limited and is missing a lot of museums, now in the digital age people can start expand more their horizons. Says Carlos. “A lot of people have never been to a museum. For example some art students go to their first museums once they start their careers, but now through technology some have started to visit digital museums, in general opening themselves up to the art world”.

Of course with the changes in generations that interest has grown but there has to be something or someone that encourages it. Maybe is your parents, teachers or artists. For Carlos it was his family: “My family wanted me to study art, I wasn’t really convinced about it and my friends were really surprised. Actually, I had a friend who got mad at me because I said I was going to art school”. A lot of this is due not only because of the misconception of a men choosing to study art instead of engineering, more so the worry of how are they going to be able to make money in a place like Latin America. There is also the jealousy of people who didn’t take a risk on breaking the stigma of men having to be the sole provider of the household, and not perusing what they really wanted to do with zero worries. “I was never worried about how I was going to make a living by being an artists or if I could be the provider of my home. I always knew that there were options, for example teaching. Which I found out early on in my studies that I wanted to do”. Time goes on and we still see how certain things haven’t changed so much. There is more space for art in Latin America than before yet certain ideas stay the same.

The art of creative expression in all its glory has shifted the idea of machismo in Latin America. Raúl and Carlos have brought us different their perspectives, especially with their chosen art expressions. Through them, we have learned about the Latin American culture and machismo. As well as that there is an existing desire for change, maybe not as fast as one might have wanted it to, but the change is here and is happening in many different fields. Let us think about the impact we can make with the platforms we have. How we can bend gender norms and what society has deemed as “normal”.