

## **The Cuban Maja: La Mulata in the work of Víctor Patricio Landaluze**

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### **Abstract**

Spanish artist, Víctor Patricio Landaluze, is known in the twentieth century as “the most Cuban painter of his time.”<sup>1</sup> His prolific oeuvre is uncontested as the most detailed visual documentation of nineteenth-century Afro-Cuban quotidian life. Landaluze’s fascination with the Cuban mulata is recognized throughout scholarship on his work as an example of his racist ideology. However, Landaluze’s representations of the mulata illustrate her impact on his oeuvre not as a stereotype, but as an expression of his Spanish origins. Diverging from the typical derogatory characterizations of the mulata in contemporary Cuban popular culture, Landaluze appropriates the iconography of Francisco de Goya’s maja to create a figure still recognized as an emblem of Cuban femininity.

Landaluze’s mulata remained a symbol throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth of Cuba’s racial synthesis and distinction from Spain, in a manner similar to the maja’s popularity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a symbol of Spanish nationalism. Landaluze’s translation of the Spanish maja into the Cuban mulata, not only complicates the perception of his racism within Cuban art history, but also highlights the relationship between the mulata and maja as parallel prototypes of femininity significant to the identities of both Cuba and Spain.

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<sup>1</sup> Olga López Núñez and Denia García Ronda, *Víctor Patricio Landaluze (1830-1889)* (Bilbao: Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao, 1998), 9.