



## From humour to fine arts and vice versa: Atlántida in the twenties

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## Talía Bermejo

# FROM HUMOUR TO FINE ARTS AND VICE VERSA: ATLÁNTIDA IN THE TWENTIES

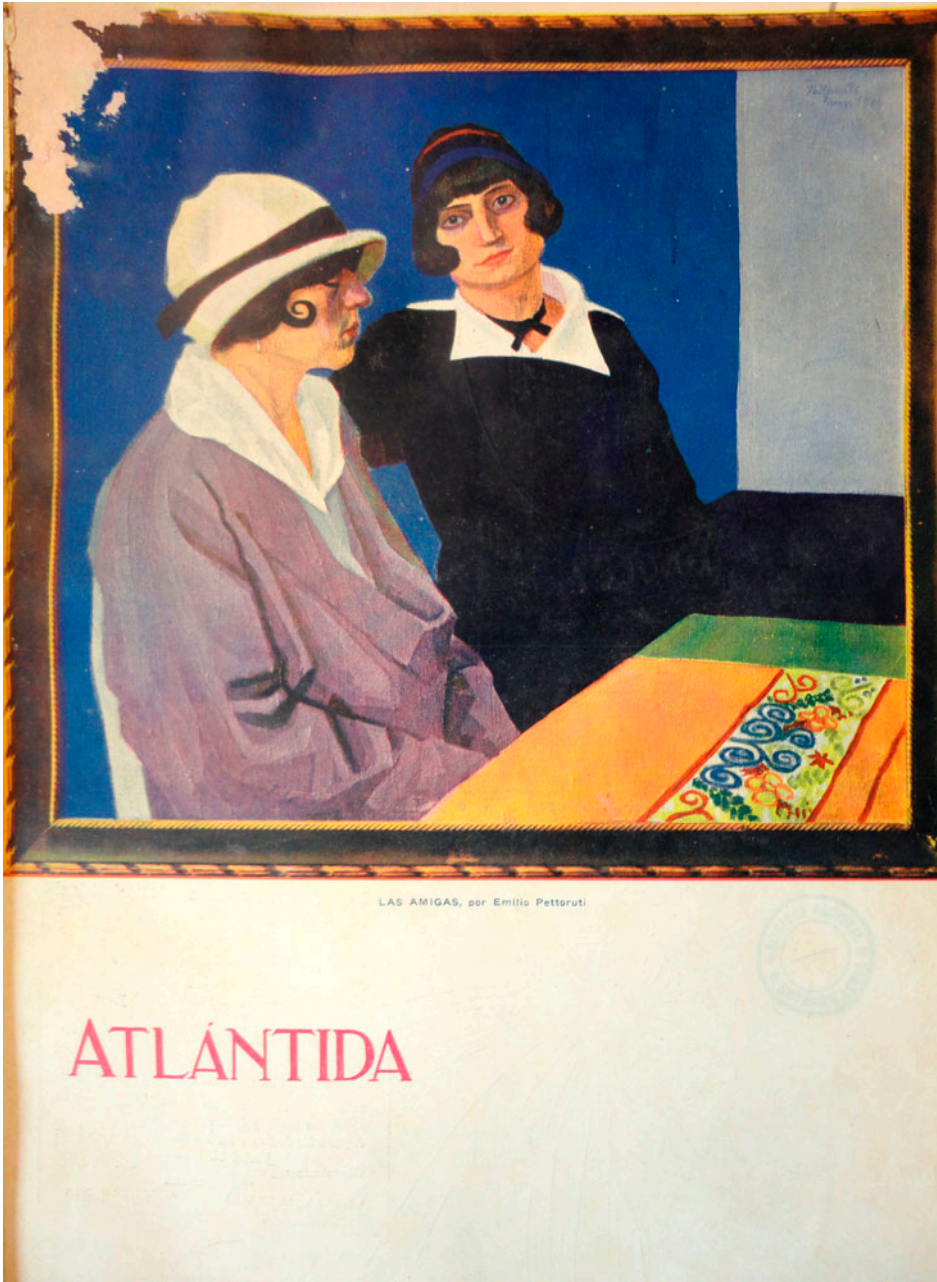
*From its foundation in 1918 by the Uruguayan writer Constancio C. Vigil, Atlántida magazine kept a well-defined interest in images. The covers, a clear example in that sense, displayed colourful works on full pages while the content itself reflected that through cartoons, graphic sections, vignettes, illustrations and photographs. Conceived as a mass-market project, Atlántida worked with images and texts resorting to the popular and the cultured within the magazine's layout. Thus, they implemented innovative strategies in the promotion of art, combining a humorous register with texts and images within institutional circuits. This essay is aimed at analysing that peculiar device articulating professional art reviews and reproductions of academic paintings linked also to the art market, with humorous illustrations and textual interventions which spoofed the artistic system. In this vein, the role played by cartoons will be studied, together with the criteria for choosing cover images and the introduction of professional criticism, to eventually focus on an emblematic case in Argentinean art history: Emilio Pettoruti's exhibition of 1924 and its counterpart, the Salón Ultrafuturista [Ultrafuturistic Salon], a satire of avant-garde proposals and, in short, a questioning of the progress of modern art through humorous means. Our intention is then to reflect upon the artistic promotion strategies which had an impact on the development of consumption, and among which humour turned out to be a critical component. The magazine will be thus conceived as a device for the circulation of imaginaries moulding the sensitivity of the time and the readers' artistic understanding.*

**Keywords:** *Atlántida* magazine; fine arts; humour; cultural consumption; Argentina

Conceived as a mass-market project, *Atlántida* magazine, published from 1918 by the publishing house of the same name and directed by the Uruguayan journalist and writer Constancio C. Vigil, kept a well-defined interest in the visual register. The covers were a clear example in this respect since they mostly featured colourful works of art on full pages. The content of each issue also reflected that visual interest through cartoons on covers, graphic sections, numerous vignettes, illustrations and photographs in every issue.

In the context of a well-established tradition locally since the times of the earlier *Caras y Caretas*, innovative strategies were developed to promote art combining

humour, academic painting, and professional criticism within the magazine's layout.<sup>1</sup> Conceived as a mass-market project, *Atlántida* worked with images and texts resorting to the popular and the cultured in the magazine layout. The purpose of this essay is to focus the attention on the peculiar way of articulating devices, typical of the arts system (reviews and reproductions of paintings), with humorous illustrations and textual interventions spoofing the artistic institution. In this vein, the magazine maintained longstanding aesthetic canons and traditional social values, and attempted to introduce at the same time the new artistic language of the second decade of the twentieth century based on humour. The magazine will not be approached to exhaustively analyse its material aspects and contents, but to reveal this mechanism. To that end, it is relevant to observe the role played by cartoons on art, the selection criteria for cover images, and the introduction of professional criticism. Last but not least, the analysis will be focused on an emblematic case among the local debates: Emilio Pettoruti's exhibition at the Witcomb Gallery, in October 1924, which called the attention of the professional critics, and at the same time displayed a humour which questioned the legitimacy of its own proposal. Such was the case with the Salón Ultrafuturista [Ultrafuturistic Salon] held at the Van Riel Gallery, in November of the same year, as a satire about the avant-garde, a questioning of the progress of modern art through humorous means. In this fashion, our intention is to reflect upon the artistic promotion strategies which had an impact on the development of consumption, and among which humour turned out to be a critical component. The magazine will be thus conceived as a device for the circulation of imaginaries moulding the sensitivity of the time and its readers' artistic understanding.



## I

*Atlántida Ilustración Semanal Argentina* was a weekly magazine, dealing with current issues presenting a variety of contents, addressing a wide readership, made up of sections that remained almost the same during the years this essay is focused on (1918–1924).<sup>2</sup> The editorial, which Constancio C. Vigil used to write (Rocha,

Uruguay, 1876 – Buenos Aires, 1954), entitled ‘La vida que pasa’ [Life which goes by], introduced a current issue which would be later elaborated in other sections.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the first of those articles, written by the end of the First World War, in March of 1918, worked as a declaration of optimism in the midst of the European disaster: ‘Let’s affirm our right to the time yet to come; let’s sing our song of hope facing the horrors of wars. In the long human night, we have all risen to await the dawn. Save Argentina! [...] Save America!’ In this way, the editorial was vividly expressing its new commitment with regard to the international situation and reflecting upon local events at the same time. Comments about current issues, social as well as political, continued in other sections such as ‘Acuarelas de la calle’ [Watercolours from the Street], ‘La pregunta del día’ [Today’s Question] and ‘De jueves a jueves’ [From Thursday to Thursday], signed by the ‘Sastre del Campanillo’ (The tailor of the Chime). In all of these cases, the humour was constant, through burlesque texts, extravagant pseudonyms and numerous cartoons by Oscar Soldati or José Friedrich, among other regular collaborators, and later through drawings by the famous American Charles Dana Gibson.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, there were sections in which satire dominated the political commentary. For example, one piece was entitled ‘El Salón de los Pesos Perdidos’ [The Salon of Lost Pesos], evidently referring to *Salón de los Pasos Perdidos* [Hall of Lost Steps] of the Parliament, which was signed in each issue by ‘El Bombero de guardia’ [The Fireman on Duty], or ‘Cartas abiertas a figuras prominentes, celebridades y algunos perdedores’ [Open letters to prominent figures, celebrities and some losers]. *Atlántida* used to inform its readers about everyday issues with audacity, while at the same time the texts articulated its own political positions and interests, always and strategically resorting to humour.<sup>5</sup> Education and upbringing, health, morals and good habits, advice for women and social articles, built other nuclei of interest. Oral culture filled a significant portion of each edition, seeking to help the reader to feel identified with articles about beliefs, legends or popular myths, and also proverbs, both satirical and clearly moralistic. Other sections contained a conglomerate of varied knowledge ranging from ‘Magia y sus trucos’ [Magic and its tricks] to ‘Los últimos inventos’ [The latest inventions].<sup>6</sup> Distinguished figures and prominent names from national history and universal art and literature such as Manuel Belgrano, Lord Byron, Leonardo Da Vinci or Goethe, among many others, were mentioned in a series of anecdotes about their lives and works. These articles provided the reader with the vivid and narrative quality of those ancient characters.

All in all, these elements revealed a cosmopolitan and multicultural profile: the magazine was addressed to a heterogeneous readership placed among the middle sectors of immigrants from diverse origins for whom traditions were still of great importance and whose interests encompassed oral wisdom and formal knowledge.<sup>7</sup> This variety of topics could appeal to a wide range of tastes and the focus placed on the day-to-day covered the readers’ needs with updated information each week. Apart from the large number of satirical columns and cartoons and the emphasis placed on the visual, other factors contributed to reach a wide social spectrum: the predominance of short articles written in an entertaining and simple language, which could be read in one sitting and did not require extensive foreknowledge of the topics, the extensive print run, which in the first year reached 45,000 weekly copies, and, finally, the price accessible to customers of

moderate financial resources (between 1918 and 1924, it cost 20 cents in the capital).<sup>8</sup> In this context, illustration provided a significant identification tool among the readers, since it represented an add-on which stimulated the reading of images independent from the wording itself. That is to say, the image did not merely serve as a companion to the text, but as a device capable of building meaning on its own.

At the same time, illustration had a prevailing place in the sections devoted to the different artistic disciplines, such as the theatre review, 'Cortina arriba' [Curtain up], which had an ironic tone beginning with the author's pseudonym, 'Lucifero' [Lucifer]. Literature was developed in the sections 'El libro de la semana' [Book of the Week] and 'Noticias literarias' [Literary News], and the publication of poems and short stories (among them 'Los rivales' [The Rivals] by Maxim Gorky and the New Adventures of Sherlock Holmes by A. Conan Doyle, presented in various fascicules) could be found as well. Music was covered in the section 'Lo que la gente canta' [What people sing], with lyrics and scores from popular songs.<sup>9</sup> Among the large number of collaborators who contributed between 1918 and 1924 could be mentioned well-known Argentinean writers such as José Ingenieros, Alberto Gerchunoff, Arturo Capdevila and Leopoldo Lugones, naturalized Argentineans such as Horacio Quiroga (in charge of the cinema column) and Alfonsina Storni and foreigners such as Rabindranath Tagore, Gabriela Mistral and José Ortega y Gasset.

It is striking that throughout the first editions there was no part devoted to the fine arts. Instead, *Atlántida* chose an alternative way to address the topic through humour. In fact, at the beginning, the fine arts were alluded to through cartoons which introduced issues connected with the trade of the artist, the art market, the art dealers, the buyers and the collectors by means of parody. Among various examples, a particular cartoon showed a very stylish and smart artist chatting with a certain aristocratic lady, 'Last year – says the woman – you said my portrait cost two hundred pesos .... Why are you charging me three hundred pesos now? – Because you are bigger' (May 2nd, 1918, s/p)<sup>10</sup> This is a satire about the system of the arts, about the commissioning of the paintings, the place the artist attributed to himself, who, as a matter of fact, was making fun of his wealthy clients. Among the cartoons signed by Gibson and presented as 'Obras maestras de Gibson' [Masterpieces by Gibson], many parodied art collecting and the great patrons. For example, 'The rich woman gets supremely bored among such magnificence' showed a lady from high society dozing off in a luxurious gallery full of works of art (January 2nd, 1919, s/p). This parody was intended to replace an article about art and the result was that inquisitive and challenging look acting as a critic's commentary with didactic purpose.

Both humour encouraging these views and political satire characterized another section entitled 'El Gran Rotativo', which was presented as a separate publication within the same magazine with exorbitant numbering (in 1918, it started at 889,676,780, year 84, and by 1924, it had reached 9,000,000,000,236, year 96). At this point, curiously, the first articles about plastic art began to appear. A subsection entitled 'Crítica de Arte' [Art Critique], within 'El Gran Rotativo', questioned the professionalism of both art critics and artists:

The painters and sculptors, who out of vanity or with the fair hope of promoting their works, need “El Gran Rotativo” to announce their exhibitions or new work, should give some painting or small sculpture as a present to our art critic, whose competence and impartiality are remarkable as well as unquestionable.

In exceptional cases, when indispensable, it would be advisable for the artist to also show some courtesy towards our director, who is a great collector of works of art, “to help blow the artist’s own trumpet”.

Apart from that, it is well known that the art reviews of ‘El Gran Rotativo’ are a model in their genre and they are so strict that some people consider them extremely harsh. However, whenever there were reasons for it, equal passion was to be shown for the compliment, noble recognition for the efforts of he who sacrificed himself for the sake of art (December 26th, 1918, s/p).

Thus, the magazine addressed the arts through humour, and the reader was plunged into a space where the solemnity of ‘great art’, the inspiration of the ‘genius’, the rich patron’s power, or the critic’s reputation were matters at least to be put to question. As early as 1920 the first articles in a different register appeared, and it was in 1923 that this section was the work of critics recognized in the specialized media. In the context of a diversified cultural offer, the reader could find specific information about exhibitions and artists circulating in the city, and even some references to Argentineans completing their training in Europe. It is worth noting that the encounters between the popular sphere and the ‘cultured’, between the high and the low, constituted a leitmotiv throughout this entire period. Regarding the productions on the covers, they tended to show the ‘cultured’ side of art.<sup>11</sup> Yet, it is noticeable that there where the stability of the established values and good taste seemed to prevail, significant examples of that same humorous discourse could be seen in different registers throughout the publication.

## II

Between 1918 and 1924, the images on the cover followed different criteria: works by foreign artists dominated the first year and, after 1919, local artists were incorporated as well, but always with less frequency. Many of the works produced were circulating in Salons in Buenos Aires and, from time to time, there was a reference to the point of sale and the name of the gallery where the work was exhibited (Witcomb or Müller in most cases); in several cases, even the private collections to which the painting belonged were mentioned. In this way, the selection intended to meet the artistic market’s demands, still inclined to favour the consumption of European productions.<sup>12</sup> The themes, of a naturalist style always, varied from female portraits, family scenes, children, countryside or seascapes, to historical portraits of distinguished men. Illustrations were also included (such as those signed by the German painter and draughtsman Gustavo Goldschmidt, or by the Italian Antonio Marchisio), ordered for various special occasions such as the celebration of a national anniversary (local or foreign) or the promotion of a

well-known international actress who would later perform in the city. Typically, the woman was represented through *clichés* of feminine beauty displayed in a contemporary and hedonistic frame, often set in allegoric contexts or in idyllic rural scenes.<sup>13</sup> Last but not least, oil portraits of high-class ladies from Buenos Aires by the painter and gallery owner Frans Van Riel were published, and at the same time he signed the photographs from the graphic section, together with Witcomb and others.

The list of paintings reproduced shed light on the relationship between the editorial criteria and contemporary artistic and commercial circuits. Most of the images covered a vast area of the field, practically disconnected from the avant-garde renewal of the twenties and dominated by naturalism easy to decode, numerous works by second-rate European painters and a set of minor pieces by important artists. The picturesque themes, or those devoted to feminine beauty or the leisure of the high classes, fostered a taste for conservative syntax and pleasant scenes, devoid of conflict. On the other hand, those artists who enjoyed the wealth of critical acclaim were aligned with the moves of the market and with their relative weight in this context. Hence, some artists were represented by private galleries: Spaniards Julio Moisés, Álvarez de Sotomayor, Anglada Camarasa, the Englishmen Thomas Gainsborough, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and the Swedish painter Anders Zorn. Such artists coexisted in the magazine with some Argentinean counterparts who were also financially supported by art buyers. Among them we could mention Carlos Ripamonte, Fernando Fader, Jorge Bermúdez, Juan L. Pedemonte and Luis Tessandori, who in the 1910s and 20s developed successful commercial careers. It is worth mentioning the case of the Uruguayan Pedro Figari (his works were published in three editions of the magazine), who was advocated by the renewal 'martinferrista' and at the same time by more traditional collectors due to the rural imagery in his paintings. All things considered, the European stamp being displayed in galleries in Buenos Aires is also seen in *Atlántida*, and the place taken up by the Argentinean artists was reserved mainly for those working with topics close to the contemporary definitions of national art such as hills, the north of Argentina, areas bordering Buenos Aires, the urban landscape, plus an iconography depicting local types and customs – an echo of the exhibition policies in private salons – thus leaving almost no margin for new proposals and languages beginning to spread from the mid twenties.<sup>14</sup>

### III

In this context, the inclusion of Emilio Pettoruti in 1924, one of the main artists identified with the avant-garde, meant an abrupt break in aesthetic cannons ruling the covers' visualization; however, the effect did not translate into a new editorial policy. As was expected, the 'rioplatense' artist's arrival was applauded in the avant-garde, especially in the magazine *Martín Fierro*.<sup>15</sup> In this regard, his influence in *Atlántida*, mainly biased towards conservative art in its forms and themes, was, at least, controversial. Even more, considering that, among the publications of general interest, *Atlántida* was one of the few magazines that dedicated its pages to Pettoruti while he was in Europe preparing his trip to Argentina that same year.<sup>16</sup>



At first his presence was in fits and starts, but then, Pettoruti would get to be one of the most modern exceptions – both reverberant and controversial in the local circuits with the exhibition in the Witcomb hall in October that same year.<sup>17</sup>

Once he was in Buenos Aires, the artist met and made friends with the director of the magazine, Constancio C. Vigil, who informed him that an exhibition was under way to disparage the validity of his own proposal. It was the so-called Primer Salón Ultrafuturista [First Ultrafuturistic Salon], which was to be held in the Van Riel gallery on November 27th that same year with the purpose of setting up an exhibition to spoof the works exhibited the previous month at the Witcomb. In his memoirs, Pettoruti recalled this episode but he avoided making comments about Vigil's position regarding the organization of the event; however, he faced the challenge, and apart from urging his director to help in any way, he decided to take part with his own works.<sup>18</sup>

Three days after the opening of the exhibition at the Witcomb, on October 16th, 1924, the cover of *Atlántida* exhibited an oil painting by the artist called *Las Amigas* [The Friends]: two women of constructive traits featured in a smooth, flat, neutral space of colourful shapes. However, to the disappointment of the readers looking forward to some reference to this work, the section 'Artículos de Arte' [Art Articles], managed by José M. Lozano Mouján, covered the exhibition by Agustín Riganelli at the *Asociación Amigos del Arte* [Friends of Art's Association] instead. There were enough reasons to give the latter great priority. On the one hand, the association had had a significant role in the graphic media since its beginnings through the regular advertising of all its activities. On the other hand, the sculpture by Riganelli welcomed the aesthetic canons accepted by most readers and critics, and had also been bestowed with the honour of several awards.

The following issue (October 23rd), which allowed time to reflect upon Pettoruti's works' impact, focused attention on him.<sup>19</sup> Respecting the same layout he would use in the graphic section to cover different events such as art exhibitions, the article contained photographs of the artist and of his works. But, vis-à-vis other cases, this seemed to reveal the critics' difficulties in openly talking about the new languages. Being aware of this, Lozano Mouján tried to understand, and appealed to the painter's words in an interview, to construe the images which demanded new codes of perception, a 'new sensitivity', and greater awareness of the avant-garde movements then booming in European capitals from impressionism onwards. The initial question was to shed light on a basic concept: 'How would you classify your art, as an objective or a subjective? and what tendency does it belong to, cubism, expressionism or futurism?' However, Pettoruti's efforts to elaborate on that made clear the need for other viewpoints: 'Then are yours the same inside out?' To which the artist replied: 'No; but they remain the same thanks to the harmony which comes not only from the colour, but also from the lines that enclose such colour' (Lozano Mouján, October 23rd, 1924).

One week later, *Atlántida* published a small cartoon which summarized the confusion generated among the readership by the emergence of the avant-garde languages. The scene showed a customer receiving the delivery of a work she had ordered. Although the painting did not boast any recognizable figurative element, the client objected, 'My dear Pettoruti, I think that you've made my mouth a bit too big.'

Some days later, an exhibition showing Fader's twentieth anniversary in arts was mounted at the *Asociación Amigos del Arte*. The event was covered by *Atlántida* following the same format as the one used in the graphic article about Pettoruti's exhibition. Everything which had before indicated uncertainty and an effort to grasp a different language, was now giving way to a fluent and accurate wording. Fader symbolized the modern and acclaimed artist who revealed the power of national production (Lozano Mouján, October 30th, 1924, 31, 49)<sup>20</sup> easily identified with 'impressionist tendencies', and the producer of a realistic art focused on observation of the rural landscape. The presence of both painters simultaneously made it easier to compare, and more than once they were identified as the two sides of the coin (Lozano Mouján, November 6th, 1924, 6). Pettoruti had managed to shake the artistic scene and divide public opinion, while Fader reaffirmed his dominant position.

The notion of national art was one distorted concept in the controversy. Once more, its defining elements were under discussion, especially its plastic motifs: 'Can a painting be considered local just because there is a *gaucho* in it? If Shakespeare's works are set in Venice or Denmark, are they not English?' (Lozano Mouján, November 6th, 1924, s/p)<sup>21</sup> According to *Atlántida's* critic, national art, 'even though produced in lands far away from the homeland, should bear the symbol of our race'. However, he sceptically considered this possibility due to cosmopolitanism, regional differences and modern life itself which with its 'easy means of communication makes everything equal'. With these arguments, Lozano Mouján supported the validity of the criticism of national art that had been the centre of the debates for more than twenty years, as was particularly the case during the May Revolution Centennial (1910). While, on the one hand, the critic questioned the arguments regarding positivist nationalism (as the geographic and social context determines the artistic production of a nation according to that line of thinking) on the other hand, he resorted to Martín Malharro's words about the difficulties in creating an 'Argentinean school'.<sup>22</sup>

Although Lozano Mouján admitted he was not much biased in favour of a futuristic or cubist language, he discredited the main argument which fed the Salón Ultrafuturista: the alleged lightness in execution belonging to the 'extreme' tendencies. Finally, the moment came to cover the event through the pages of the weekly. The November 27th edition came out with a cover by Jorge Larco caricaturing the visitors to the salon. In the previous one the inclusion of Larco had been announced, which meant, though temporary, a certain air of renewal in the area.<sup>23</sup> Always eclectic, the covers had favoured portraits and genre painting scenes, although until that moment humour had not reached the inside of the magazine. The selection, as mentioned before, reflected the dominating interest in artistic consumption, and a significant percentage of the pieces reproduced between 1918 and 1924 were works displayed at that moment in galleries. Even if there was no intention to commercialize the works, the reader would find an illustration linked directly to a particular exhibition. This cover by Larco captured a scene of incomprehension with a couple of elegant and funny visitors looking at some imaginary works. The following week, the section 'El Gran Rotativo', which parodied current affairs dealt with in other sections, depicted the same kind of irony:

When the world was on the verge of artistic decline; when nobody believed it possible to react against the anaemia brought about by academic exhaustion, there fatefully came what had to come: the caramel of ultra futurism.

The most wonderful manifestation of art this century: The “Primer Salón Ultrafuturista” of Frans Van Riel is phenomenal. Our best pictorial masters’ wonderful brushes have met to make up an amazing combination of lines, colours and shapes.

[...] Pettoruti, and especially his disciples, deserve the glory of having given to the world the only thing which deserves to be called art.

Let’s fill our mouths now with this exclamation: “At last!”

Whole centuries of hesitation and doubts have got a crowning moment after the efforts, eagerness and sacrifices of the Corots, Fregonard, Murillo, Rembrandt, Van Dyck, Zuloaga, Fader, Blázquez, etc., etc.

And enough on remarks! The works themselves speak with their mute and awesome eloquence! (December 4th, 1924, 48).

The article was illustrated with three of the paintings exhibited in the Ultrafuturistic Salon; the graphic section showed a photograph of the assistants and of five other works, while in the previous issue two canvases Pettoruti had sent and the work of a certain Esquimal had been published. While the latter ones were customarily laid out, the ones in the ‘Rotativo’ appeared upside down, with no title or author mentioned, and in the tone of the text. Although *Atlántida* did not show any affinity with the avant-garde, it interpreted the mockery as a joke without much further thought and, perhaps, by means if this it tended to favour a thoughtful view of the novelty. This stance became evident in a small statement signed by Leonardo Tusó:

An exhibition dancing without music: has it been intended, perhaps, to badly damage modern aesthetic production? Has it been achieved? Certainly not; that would have been a harsh task, certainly unworthy of “La Chacota” [The joking mood]. What was sought was found: a proof of good humour. And, perhaps, something else which the authors of the farce themselves did not manage to discover.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, from the newspaper *La Protesta* the voice of Alfredo Chiabra Acosta (Atalaya), loyal to the activist style, did not dispense with irony, and attacked the champions of traditional art directly and intensely: ‘They were mummies galvanized with envy and resentment’, a ‘throng of idiots’ fuelled by ‘low passions’ (November, 1924, 2).<sup>25</sup>

Having strongly sided with well-established values and with a scathing pen, other graphic media, such as *La Época* or *La Razón* motivated general bewilderment and spread the idea that great art was something else, something quite different to what could be seen at the Witcomb and parodied at the Van Riel. For the directors of the Witcomb, coming across avant-garde productions would be sporadic, in a line of exhibitions which tended to privilege traditional poetics. In the case of Frans Van Riel, he would have probably intended to take part in the controversy and to leave his mark when the aesthetic debates were about to reach a climax when one of his main competitors was monopolizing newspapers and magazines. Undoubtedly, both gallery directors were well aware of the upheavals that they were causing, and of the distant potential of these exhibitions commercially speaking; although we cannot help but wonder what Van Riel's commitment could have been to a salon which parodied the modernist progress, and reacted against aesthetic innovation, a position which his future reputation would help him forget.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to imagine commercial purposes (at least immediate ones) for this kind of behaviour, both in the case of those venturing pieces breaking with the contemporary aesthetic norms, and in the case of those making fun of them. The renovating exhibitions of the Witcomb, and especially that of Pettoruti's, were far from being profitable financially speaking. At this point, it is worth citing an article by the journalist Juan José Soiza Reilly, published in another weekly of similar characteristics, *El Hogar*, published by the firm Haynes, who also worked for *Atlántida*, and with whom Vigil was connected in his early days (Bontempo 2013). Appealing to humour, Soiza Reilly described with irony the art customer's preferences in 1924, comparing Pettoruti's scanty sales with the commercial success of Carlos de la Torre (1856–1932), who had recently exhibited at the Witcomb. Under the title 'La Reacción Artística' [The Artistic Reaction], Soiza Reilly elaborated on the existence of 'guards' and 'criminals' (artists with new aesthetic proposals) in the corridors of the National Salon, on 'revolutionary' exhibitions and 'rebellion germs', which showed an image of clash and confrontation in the artistic context, an image which was closer to the expectations of the readers of an avant-garde publication, like *Martín Fierro* or *Proa*, than to those of the readers of magazines such as *El Hogar* or *Atlántida*. There is even room to think that in 1924 those readers and spectators might have felt more at ease in places populated with 'little wagons with oxen' or 'little clouds' made by 'the only Argentinean painter who sells all the paintings that he exhibits', than among the compositions of Pettoruti, whose works would comprise the 'last hope which we have against the victory of the art in the cafés ...' (Soiza Reilly, October 24th, 1924, 8). By 1924, this self-educated painter's sales were proving the validity of the naturalist languages in the commercial context. As far as local artists are concerned, they found the use of certain themes and artistic resources particularly effective in terms of marketing. Illustrative of this trend were the 'gauchos' and the rural landscape, realized with techniques well known by art buyers (such as the loose-brush stroke, the sketched pastry), and with an interest in the recreation of atmospheres. Many of these pieces were created in a small format (some no larger than 9-10 cm).

## IV

If the promotion of the avant-garde was not a profitable policy for the gallery owners, it could work as an advertising strategy anyway. Regarding *Atlántida* editorial elections, the attention given to Pettoruti proved once more the possibilities of humour as a reflective means, able to raise new questions about art. Until that moment, graphic humour or satirical texts favoured a more liberal look about painting (they kept appealing to the stereotypes coming from the 'cultured' world of art though), or, at least, they set up an imaginary according to which established values were sensitive to questioning: the inspiration or the brilliance of the artist, the aura of the work, the innovation of the avant-garde or academic art lost solemnity in the face of illustrators' and writers' casual parody.

Nevertheless, *Atlántida* employed more than one register to talk about fine arts. Humour was a constant displayed in all the sections, and, at the beginning, represented the central means of introducing the topic. Then, when the articles on art that were produced by professional critics became more frequent, the magazine introduced a new voice in the field, a position prone to favouring the recognized poetics. From the point of view of the images, the cover followed the same guidelines. They used to commercialize paintings whose originals could be observed live or, eventually, acquired in Salons in the city. Even when the works by Argentinean painters reproduced by *Atlántida* took up a space considerably smaller than those of foreigners, the art column privileged exhibitions by the locals. At the same time, the cartoons published during the period between 1918 and 1924 caused a clash between these aesthetic-ideological standpoints, adding one critical element as well as introducing breaking points through an inquisitive view which created tension between the established values and the possibility of questioning them through parody. The twenties were a period of expansion for the art market and collecting was beginning to be part of the consumption habits of new middle and upper-middle sectors of society. In this context, the mass distribution of *Atlántida* opened up the possibility of introducing new appraisal and consumption habits in the field, favouring – in the face of 'great art' – the development of a versatile view that allowed both humorous display and critical reflection.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

### Notes

1. According to Beatriz Sarlo, 'the miscellaneous system of the magazine consists in the juxtaposition of texts gathering rhetoric, poetics and different objectives (...)' (1985, 160). Within the plentiful bibliography about the magazine, Ohmann (1996) may also be consulted. Probably, among the organs of popular graphic media, *Caras y Caretas* had the most significant record regarding the use of humour linked to the arts. On this matter, see Rogers (2007).

2. It was the first publication produced by the publishing house of the same name. One year after, in 1919, the popular weeklies *El Gráfico*, *Billiken* and *Para Ti*, still published today, began circulating. The title was taken from the poem by Olegario V. Andrade, 'Canto al porvenir de la raza latina en América' [Song to the Future of the Latin Race in America], published in the first issue: 'Enchanted *Atlántida* which Plato sensed! Golden promise of the human future reserved for the prolific race, whose breast conceived for History, the Caesars of genius and sword. Here he shall perform what he could not for the ancient world in the rigid wreckages: the most beautiful vision of visions! To the colossal anthem of the deserts, the eternal communion of the nations!' (March 7th, 1918, s/p). So, *Vigil* was establishing the Latin American profile of the new publication, meanwhile distancing himself from firstly from David Peña's magazine (*Atlántida. Ciencias, Letras, Arte, Historia Americana, Administración*, published between 1911 and 1914) and secondly from the older magazine of the same name edited by Emilio Berisso and José Pardo in 1897. For a general overview of these publications, see the pioneering work by Lafleur et al. (1999) and Girbal-Blacha and Quatrocchi-Woisson (1999).
3. María Laura Bontempo (2007) has studied *Vigil*'s career and *Atlántida*'s relationship with previous editorial projects in which it was involved. Such was the case of the magazine *Mundo Argentino*, which, from 1818, was *Atlántida*'s main competitor together with the weekly *El Hogar*, both by the publishing house Haynes. For further information regarding the publishing house itself, see Bontempo (2013).
4. Soldati (Rosario, 1892 – Buenos Aires, 1965) was a painter, art critic and illustrator, and worked as artistic director of *Atlántida*. His cartoons were also published in *PBT*, *Crítica*, *Billiken* and *Mundo Argentino*. He was a journalist and artistic director of the magazine *El Hogar*. In 1930 he exhibited for the first time in the National Salon. His works are kept at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes [National Museum of Fine Arts]. Friedrich, a Czechoslovakian who settled in Argentina at the beginning of the twentieth century, was a draughtsman and cartoonist. He also collaborated in the magazines *Plus Ultra* and *Fray Mocho* (<http://www.museodeldibujo.com>). Finally, Gibson (1867, Roxbury, Massachusetts 1944, New York) worked for the American magazine *Life*. He became famous for the so-called 'Gibson girl', considered the first American feminine stereotype. See Patterson (2008).
5. Of profuse tradition in Europe, humour was also an extended device in the local publications from the end of the nineteenth century. Regarding this, see the work by Malosetti Costa (2005), Szir (2009, 2011) and Rogers (2007). In recent years, new research has been carried out about the articulation between the image and the word in local publications; this is the case of the volume compiled by Malosetti Costa and Gené (2013).
6. In this line the reader could find sections ranging from 'La página de Conan D'Ache' [Conan D'Ache's page], devoted to 'El arte de la veterinaria' [The Art of Veterinary], 'Artículos de Billiken' [Billiken Articles], about projects by Edison, Japanese fans, the origins of hockey or 'La cueva del viejo Vizcacha' (Old Vizcacha's Cave, in reference to José Hernández's cynical character in his poem 'Martín Fierro'), which put together anecdotes about historical characters, *coplas*, tips on beauty to 'Máximas de Tolstoyan' [Tolstoyan Maxims].

7. For further analysis about the spectrum of readers in that period, see Sarlo (1985), Altamirano and Sarlo (1997), Prieto (2006), Eujanián (1999).
8. In turn, the products advertised – cosmetics, food and utensils, clothes and furniture – were in general not sumptuous ones such as the products advertised in the luxury *Plus Ultra*, which, for instance, cost one (1) peso.
9. The use of strategies seeking the reader's participation is worthy of comment; for example when they opened a monthly contest named 'We are in need of some wording for this drawing', by which the reader was invited to send a suitable text for such caricature. Nevertheless, as a humoristic counterpart to this calling, the Publishing House was pleased to make warnings such as: 'Those spontaneous collaborators and specially those getting along with muses on Parnassus are begged not to refer their lucubration for the moment' (March 7th 1918, 51).
10. The price for that alleged portrait fixed by the anonymous artist is a curious matter as the man would be a local artist quoting his work at a price relatively high if compared to objects of daily use such as a dining set advertised in the same magazine (for instance, an oak dining set consisting of a cupboard and side table, a table plus six upholstered chairs cost \$285). However, the parody about the artist who could not live on his art was also frequent, such as the one that reads: '– Master, it must be very difficult to paint pictures.' – 'More difficult is it yet to sell them' (April 24th 1919, s/p).
11. The illustrations by José Friedrich, included on the cover due to their importance as part of the visualization of the weekly, deserve further analysis. Devoted to political satire, these illustrations introduced the reader to issues regarding the local context or foreign politics, and will be analysed on the following pages.
12. For further details of these circuits, see Bermejo (2011).
13. Although no further analysis will be made about this issue, it is worth mentioning that, in spite of women's predominant presence on *Atlántida's* covers, ladies did not represent the privileged addressees, as in another publication by the same publishing house, the magazine *Para Ti*. Regarding this, see Bontempo (2011).
14. Regarding these issues, see Bermejo (2016), Artundo (2000). The art articles tended to be in the same line as the cover reproductions: among the artists reviewed during the period were Luis Sargent, Jorge Berheim, Romero de Torres, Carlos de la Torre, the Argentineans Gregorio López Naguil, Mario E. Canale, Alfredo Guido, Fernando Fader, Benito Quinquela Martín, the above-mentioned Pedro Figari and others.
15. On Pettoruti's reception in the context of modern art, see Wechsler (1998).
16. Julio Paz's articles, at the time *Atlántida's* reporter in Europe, gave witness of that expectation regarding Pettoruti's return after the years of education in Europe (February 8th, 1923, 10). See Wechsler (1998).
17. Pablo Curatella Manes's exhibition and the opening of the Primer Salón Libre [First Free Salon] are as well worth mentioning, held in the same venue.
18. However, he then admitted that the episode was very traumatic, causing 'one of the deepest moral depressions of his life' (2004, 185, 187–9).
19. Paradoxically, the cover of this issue, whose art section was dedicated to Pettoruti, reproduced *El Carrero* [The cart driver], by Héctor Nava, a rural scene of naturalist style, usual in this format.
20. An analysis of Fader's career is in Baldassarre (2011).

21. Jorge Luis Borges also used the example of Shakespeare to address similar issues, in 'El escritor argentino y la tradición' [The Argentinean writer and tradition] 1951.
22. Miguel Angel Muñoz (1998) analyses these debates in the context of the *Exposición Internacional de Arte del Centenario* [International Art Exhibition of the Centennial] of 1910.
23. Larco was another consecrated artist belonging to the staff: the artist Emilio Centurión, who was in charge of caricaturing him for that occasion, was responsible for the production of other portraits of the staff in 1923. See *Atlántida*, November 13th, 1924, 51.
24. Also in the article by Guzmán Kalomel (April 12th, 1924, 4).
25. An analysis of Atalaya's positions is in Wechsler (2003), especially on pages 173 to 181. Cf. Artundo (2004).

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