

FRANCISCO OLLER BY REBECCA HINSON

(HISTORY/NONFICTION)

Questions for *Francisco Oller* by Rebecca Hinson

LEVEL 1: What does it say?

General Understanding

- Explain Oller's contribution to Puerto Rican culture.

Key Details

- Oller was greatly influenced by European artists. Who were they and what distinguished their particular styles of painting?
- While Oller lived in Paris, the tradition of painting was shifting its focus from the formal lives of royalty and the upper class to informal views of ordinary lives and scenes. What evidence do you see in the paintings of the book?

LEVEL 2: How does it work?

Vocabulary

- What is the meaning of identity, meticulous, luminous, sketch, valley, plain, sacred, Impressionist, warehouse, thatched, jíbaro, suckling, and eagerly?

Structure

- The structure of *Cienfuegos Architecture* reflects the affinity that colonists had for the architecture of the Romans, the French, and the Moors. Then it proceeds to show how these styles influenced the architecture they created in Cienfuegos. How is the structure of Francisco Oller similar and different?

Author's Craft

- Analyze the Brooklyn Museum's text (below), noting how the point of view is similar or different than the point of view in *Francisco Oller*.

Oller emerged from the small art world of San Juan in the 1840s, spending twenty years in Madrid and Paris, where he was inspired by the art of Gustave Courbet and joined the avant-garde circles of such artists as Paul Cézanne, Camille Pissarro, and Claude Monet. While European Romanticism, Realism, and Impressionism formed a critical jumping-off point for Oller's aesthetic, his most important source of inspiration was Puerto Rico,

where he painted tropical landscapes, still lifes with indigenous fruits and vegetables, and portraits of distinguished artists and intellectuals.

LEVEL 3: What does it mean?

Author's Purpose

- In *Francisco Oller: A Realist-Impressionist*, Petra t.-D. Chu states, "Oller's increased tendency towards social realism. . . in large part was conditioned by Oller's permanent return to Puerto Rico in 1884. In this country, divided by issues like abolition and autonomy and disadvantaged economically, there was no use for art for art's sake, aesthetic theory, and formalistic experimentation, but instead, a need for an art of strong social consciousness and concern. Just as Courbet, on the eve of the Revolution of 1848, had abandoned his earlier Romanticism to embark on a path of down-to-earth realism, intending to "speak to them (the people) directly, so Oller, returning to Puerto Rico in 1884, responds to the needs of a society in upheaval by abandoning his involvement with Impressionism to devote himself to the creation of an art of Puerto Rico for Puerto Ricans." As the island sought independence first from Spain and later from the U.S.A, making paintings which defined the island's culture was timely. What evidence does the author give that Oller's paintings helped define a national Puerto Rican identity?

Intertextual Connections

- Drawing from *Francisco Oller* and Oller's own words in *Francisco Oller: A Realist-Impressionist* (below), interpret the painting, "El Velorio".

On this day the family and friends have kept vigil all night over the dead child, extended on a table with flowers and laces. The mother is holding back her grief, on her head she wears a white turban; she does not weep for fear her tears might wet the wings of this little angel on his flight to heaven. She laughs and offers a drink to the priest, who with eager eyes gazes up at the roast pig whose entry is awaited with enthusiasm. Inside this room of indigenous structure, children play, dogs romp, lovers embrace and the musicians get drunk. . . Two figures in the midst of the general disorder: the old countryman (pants rolled up) who comes to bid farewell to the dead child who is gone forever.

Intertextual Connections

The New York Times assigned Vivien Raynor and Ken Johnson to review 1984 and 2015 shows of Oller's work. Hinson never writes books which focus on the work of one artist, but in the case of

Francisco Oller, she made an exception. She felt compelled to give Oller the praise she believes he so richly deserved. Refute or confirm the evaluations of Oller's work below.

Vivien Raynor:

"If the artist hadn't fallen out with Cezanne (because of his own arrogance, it is said), he might have learned from him that art is not something accomplished on the run."

Ken Johnson:

"If he's not more widely known today, it's for complicated and not entirely unfair reasons. He was a good painter and, at times, an inspired one. But for most of his career, he was a facile imitator"

LEVEL 4: What does it inspire you to do?

Opinion with Evidence or Argument

- In addition to *Francisco Oller*, integrate information from *Francisco Oller: A Realist-Impressionist* (above and below) and *Jíbaros* (below) to write or speak about 'El Velorio' knowledgeably.

Francisco Oller: A Realist-Impressionist.

The custom of celebrating at the "wake of a little angel" is known in the Caribbean area by the names *baquiné*, *baquiní* or *florón*. The first two words are of African origin and many authors point out that this custom originated with the black slaves. On the other hand, it has been noted that this type of celebration has precedents dating back to the Middle Ages in Europe, where similar celebrations were held.

Jíbaros.

Discounted by many as superstitious folly, the *baquiné* is still observed today by many *jíbaros*, who celebrate life both in good times and in bad.

Sources

Rebecca Hinson, *Cienfuegos Architecture*

Rebecca Hinson, *Jíbaros*

Rene Taylor, *Francisco Oller: A Realist-Impressionist*

Brooklyn Museum, "Impressionism and the Caribbean: Francisco Oller and His Transatlantic World"

New York Times, "ART: FRANCISCO OLLER, PUERTO RICO GLIMPSED"

New York Times, "Francisco Oller, Core of 'Impressionism and the Caribbean,' at the Brooklyn Museum"