

Mobile Monumental Landscapes: Shifting Cultural Identities in Mexico City's "El Caballito"

Seth Dixon

An equestrian statue with a stately, majestic horseman has been the civic monument *par excellence* from antiquity until the early twentieth century.¹ Such public memorials to kings or military heroes were seen as a way to secure their place in history. Simultaneously, their settings, which were often key public places, were reconfigured in a discursive attempt to reinterpret or influence public memory. The European equestrian tradition had been a part of monumental art long before Manuel Tolsá sculpted "El Caballito" in Mexico City in 1796. This statue's cultural representation of Carlos IV, a late eighteenth-century Spanish king, at times triggered deeply ambivalent reactions among Mexicans, and sometimes uncertainty and even indifference. Consequently, the statue was relocated (and renamed) on three occasions as various regimes after independence either distanced themselves from colonial symbolism or alternatively sought to re-emphasize a European heritage. Without a general consensus about the nature of Mexican identity in a newly independent Mexico after 1821, the cultural and political meanings of the memorial became the focus of polemic debates about public space, ethnic identity and how to mark national heritage in the landscape.

The fact that monuments in Mexico City are ideological representations is not the focus—the critical point is that the historical geography of a particular monument is bound up with changing definitions and practices of identity and heritage. Ideological representations are deeply embedded in a specific context including politics, culture, heritage, economics and identity. Understanding the particulars about the context is crucial to understanding how these interlocking processes are spatially mediated by subsequent generations.

Research about public monuments in geography often focuses on the official message intended by the government and artists that are iconographically and discursively embedded within the memorials.² Yet the "official message" is often resisted. How monuments are interpreted can change over time, and these shifts can restructure how place is conceptualized. It is argued here that the spatiotemporal context of these static monuments can be remarkably fluid, and that it is useful to consider how those viewing the monument (local residents, citizens, tourists, etc.) process and

Seth Dixon is at Rhode Island College in Providence. *Historical Geography* Volume 37 (2009): 71-91. ©2009, Historical Geography Specialty Group, Association of American Geographers.

interpret the original intended messages and add their own layers of meaning beyond the original intent of either the artist or patron. After a work of art is created, meaning is no longer the exclusive domain of the creator, so the intent of the artist (painter, architect, sculptor, etc.) and the patrons do not fully encumber the audience to interpret and respond to the work only according to the creator's initial intent.³ This polyvocality in the discursively constructed landscape is at the heart of understanding the complexity of the social dynamics of representation and place.⁴ Unfortunately, although much of the work in this vein theoretically acknowledges multiple meanings and frames for understanding monuments and landscapes, very few empirically show it beyond characterizing the resistance to the official cultural and political representations.⁵

Kenneth Foote notes in *Shadowed Ground* that there are four potential outcomes for landscapes of memory as to how they will be a part of communal identity.⁶ Some sites will be sanctified while others obliterated from the landscape. Foote sees these two actions as opposite ends of a continuum, with designed and rectified sites lying in between.⁷ This classification system inherently recognizes the fluidity of cultural identity and is both theoretically insightful and pedagogically useful. For a comparative analysis across regions this classification nicely reduces the complexity into a manageable framework. However, at the microscale of analyzing a particular city or even a single monument, this simplification loses much of the cultural context and details that show the diverse and often competing cultural factions that seek to leave their notion of heritage marked on the landscape in particular places. The very concept of a continuum, when applied to a particular city or monument, assumes a fairly unified reaction within the local population, its leaders and other visitors. This assumption would undervalue the potential polyvocality, fluidity and mobility across time and space.

The historical geography of the Carlos IV monument in Mexico City empirically shows several of the diverse and often conflicting possibilities of how a monument can not only be used, but also how that usage is received by a heterogeneous population; how a monument can be both literally and symbolically sanctified and obliterated, designated and rectified simultaneously and consecutively, by competing groups. Also, the distinct social classes and ethnic mix within Mexico City's social geography, as a backdrop for this example of public art, create an added layer of meaning.

Information about the commissioning, planning and construction of a monument can be found in government archives and period photographs; however, this only provides information about the meaning of a monument in a top-down manner.⁸ Newspaper editorials, novels, interviews and art magazines provide temporal snapshots of how various individuals understood the political and social significance of monuments and how they are used to construct both places and identities.⁹ While not indicative of all perspectives, these sources provide a critical reflection on the public's response to the government's representation of national

heritage in public places.¹⁰ These sources, coupled with a landscape analysis that immerses the monument in its geographic context, provide a narrative about how and why the physical and symbolic meanings have shifted over time.¹¹

The colonial monument to the Spanish king Carlos IV, situated for over a century on *Paseo de la Reforma* (Mexico City's premier boulevard), illustrates the divided and unsettled perspectives, fused in an effort to reconcile Mexico's colonial heritage. An analysis of the historical geography of the statue demonstrates that the diverse audiences live in close proximity to it, or simply view the monument, have a tremendous power to reinterpret the landscape to fit their own ideological purposes. Thus they can resist a hegemonic imposition of iconographic meaning that 'the people' might not favor. These shifts in meaning are not only an expression of resistance to the "official" meaning of a monument or statue, but are also indicative of fundamental changes in the self-perception of society with varying visions based on axes of identity such as ethnicity, gender and class.

Mexico City has witnessed drastic changes from the eighteenth century to today, as it has gone from the viceregal capital of New Spain to one of the largest cities in the world. As Mexico City and Mexico have changed, how many Mexicans perceived themselves and their society differently and interact with their history and heritage to reconfigure their diverse identities. Through all these shifts, perceptions of the meanings and symbolism embedded in this monumental landscape have also been reconfigured.¹² As groups redefine Mexico in terms of its relationship with Europe and within the Americas, the monuments meaning is reinterpreted and is often physically relocated to emphasize new interpretations. The Carlos IV statue, that was once a monument to Spanish colonial control and domination, has today become a symbol of Mexican art and cultural sophistication.

Statue of Carlos IV

The equestrian statue of Carlos IV stands about sixteen feet, not including the stone pedestal.¹³ In Mexico City it is often hailed as the finest equestrian statue in the New World.¹⁴ But this statue is also famous for its role in fixing memory in several social spaces, as it has been situated in four different places throughout Mexico City over a two-century period (Figure 1). The equestrian statue of Carlos IV today is best known as *El Caballito* (the Little Horse). Even this nickname is a subtle, yet powerful, part of the narratives that demonstrate the public's reappropriation of the meaning embedded into a symbolic landscape; the public reaction to the symbolism alters the interpretations of both place and identity.

The intended ideological meaning of colonial domination connected to the equestrian statue of Carlos IV is rooted in the colonial Bourbon court politics of the late colonial era and relations with the viceregal government in New Spain. In 1795, plans for large monumental statue of

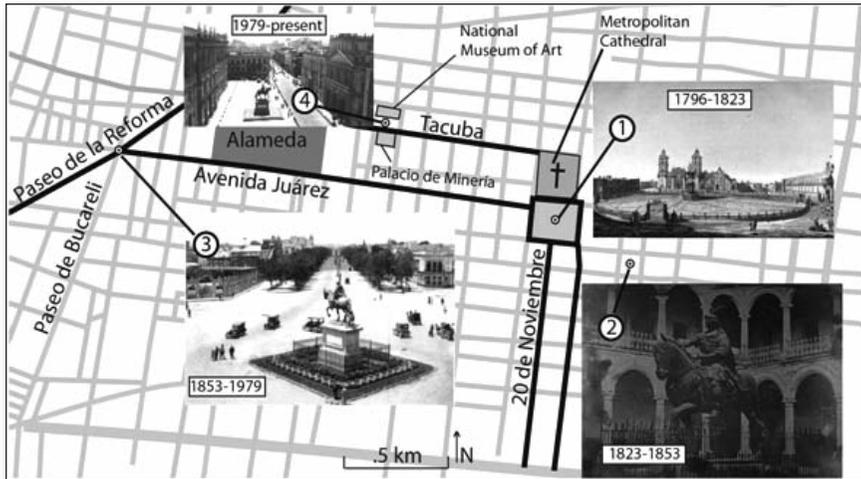


Figure 1. Sites of the Carlos IV statue in the historic center of Mexico City.

the current king, Carlos IV, was drafted by the viceregal government, and sent to Madrid for approval. Not surprisingly, the government of Carlos IV enthusiastically approved.

The rule of Carlos IV stands in rather stark contrast to that of his father as one of the worst kings in Spanish history.¹⁵ Carlos IV became king in 1788, but was not concerned with politics; he mainly wanted to hunt as a form of escapism. His wife, María Louisa, convinced him to promote Manuel Godoy, an extremely young, ambitious politician, to be the Prime Minister.¹⁶ Godoy, who started his career as a military man stationed in the royal bodyguard and happened to catch the future queen's eye, rose to prominence at a meteoric rate.¹⁷

This unlikely love triangle and its sordid details, seemingly straight from the pages of a romance novel, became central to how Carlos IV was remembered in both Spain and Mexico. Whether the details of these extramarital relations are accurately recorded or are more a compilation of spurious royal court gossip is immaterial for this study. What is pertinent is that these amorous scandals left a lasting image in the collective memory of Mexico, namely an image of an impotent king who ceded virtually all kingly and manly powers and rights to another. This too, was a major issue in how the statue was viewed. Most critics saw the unworthiness of Carlos IV as a ruler and, in light of Mexican *machismo*, as a man. This personal image of the Spanish monarch was thus seen as the embodiment of the ineffective and weakening Spanish Empire, as under his rule occurred the humiliating naval defeat at Trafalgar against the British and problems with Napoleon that played a role in the eventual loss of the American colonies. Additionally, the controversial appointment of Branciforte (Godoy's brother-in-law) as the Viceroy of New Spain in 1794 established the precedent that Carlos IV was not a strong monarch and that Prime Minister Manuel Godoy was the power behind the throne.¹⁸

Masculinity and horsemanship

When Godoy received the request from his brother-in-law to erect a statue of Carlos IV in 1795, this was seen as an opportunity to project an image of a strong monarchy. Such strength was something that both Godoy and Carlos IV wanted to inculcate on subjects of the crown. A prominently displayed civic monument would help project the image of a strong, noble head of state, especially one presenting the king as a triumphant military victor atop a horse.

Equestrian statues in public places visually normalized the eighteenth-century class relations associated with horsemanship that became part of the iconographic imagery and symbolism in statues. The horse was a symbol of wealth, position, prestige, power and cultural refinement associated with the gentry. The words *cavalier*, *chevalier*, *cavaliere* or *caballero* connote gentry, associating rank with equestrian prowess. Using a stallion for the statue, as seen in the example in Mexico City, adds gendered and sexualized meanings of strength and virility to the overall composition of the monument.

Besides a symbol of class and social prestige, the horse functionally acted as a pedestal, elevating the rider above the observing public. Equestrian statues were seen as a secular means of achieving immortality; they helped to shape the manner in which an individual's legacy was recorded and remembered by leaving an indelible mark on prominent public spaces.¹⁹ Artistic conventions that symbolize heroism and greatness, centering on the use of the horse had a deeply gendered dimension. Almost without exception, the equestrian statue portrays a man, triumphant, dignified, aristocratically dressed, bearing a symbol of their power or accomplishments.²⁰ The rider carries an emblem of power, such as a sword, specter, lance, shield or flag, which cast the rider as a supreme example of masculinity, showing strength, decisiveness, courage, and honor – in every way the embodiment of chivalry and *caballerismo*.²¹

From the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries, the horse itself was a recognized symbol of the nation.²² Only a true ruler could bridle, direct and control the nation as a master horseman does for the horse, by compelling it to submit its will to its master. Although a seemingly minor detail on the statue of Carlos IV, the horse has under its rear hoof a quiver of arrows, a symbol of indigenous and local resistance to Spanish colonialism being thoroughly crushed and controlled. This symbolism of controlling the local populace was central to the ideological rationale behind the widespread proliferation of equestrian statues in Europe after the Renaissance and its extension into the New World.²³ The embodiment of the relationship between the ruler and nation was stated in the proposal for the Carlos IV statue: "This [statue will be a] demonstration of paternal love of these extremely faithful and recognized vassals [of the king]...of ardent feelings of love and loyalty...the Equestrian Statue, for all, shall be a symbol of rendered vassalage."²⁴ Such faithfulness and loyalty echoed the obedience and submissiveness of the horse to the ruler.

During the Renaissance in Italy, recognized artists, such as Leonardo Da Vinci, Donatello, Michelangelo and Verrocchio, were marshaled by the richest families and cities to design and produce equestrian statues.²⁵ Spain's public art is within this same tradition, hiring and commissioning similar artists. The 1616 equestrian statue of Philip III that today stands in the Plaza Mayor in Madrid was originally designed by Giambologna, and completed by his student, Pietro Tacca.²⁶ In 1640, Tacca completed the equestrian statue of Philip IV, today situated in Madrid's Plaza de Oriente.²⁷ The aristocracy of Spain paid handsomely to extend this artistic tradition from the Italian Peninsula to the Iberian Peninsula, and in time, to the New World in Mexico City.

Plaza Mayor

The Spanish government arranged for the statue of Carlos IV was to be erected in the main square in colonial Mexico City, the Plaza Mayor. This plan resonated with the Spanish monarch on multiple levels, one being that Mexico City's Plaza Mayor would more closely resemble the prominent public spaces of Madrid by introducing a stronger European aesthetic. A preliminary version was quickly raised on the Plaza Mayor on Dec. 9, 1796.²⁸ This temporary, wooden statue was covered in a plaster mold and gilded with gold leafing; it adorned the Plaza Mayor until Manuel Tolsá could complete the final bronze version.

The ceremony for this gilded statue was planned for the Queen's birthday, and was dripping with flowery sycophantic poems and speeches. On Dec. 9, 1803, seven years to the day after the unveiling of the first wooden statue, the bronze version of the statue was finally inaugurated in the Plaza Mayor. The Plaza Mayor in the eighteenth century of the colonial era was described as the noblest area of Mexico City, being surrounded by the grand cathedral, the Viceregal Palace and the Palace of the City Council.²⁹

During the fight for independence, especially in the early years, Mexico City was considered one of the areas more loyal to the crown. The statue of Carlos IV was never in danger during the armed conflict that lasted from 1810 to 1821, coinciding with Spain's war with France. The fortunes of the insurgents turned when career military men of the colonial army, creoles such as Agustín Iturbide, saw that their political futures would be better served in an independent Mexico if they removed their support from Napoleon's brother Joseph.

When Agustín Iturbide maneuvered the political situation into becoming the Emperor of the newly independent Mexico, he prepared the Plaza Mayor to be the site of his coronation. While still nominally accepting the rule of Carlos IV's son, Ferdinand, the newly formed Mexican Empire was unsure of how to remember Carlos IV and the Spanish colonial legacy and crown. Consequently, the statue of Carlos IV was encased in a large wooden globe that was painted blue for the coronation ceremony.³⁰

This alternate monument did not permanently destroy the original, since the purpose of crowning Iturbide as an Emperor still hung some credence and legitimacy to Spanish royal power's right to rule. Iturbide commissioned this globe with the stated purpose of preventing the recently deceased Carlos IV from "witnessing" the ceremony; but the more obvious reality is that for those attending the coronation would not see the blatant reminder their colonial history at the dawning of a new era.³¹ Still, the new government was unwilling to part with that heritage completely by permanently destroying the monument and obliterating its memory from the landscape. The resultant landscape included an awkward, makeshift monument that only delayed reconciling the meaning of this statue in an independent Mexico.³²

After Iturbide's imperial government was disposed, in 1823, Guadalupe Victoria eventually succeeded to become the first President of the Republic.³³ The statue, in 1823, was seen not only as a colonial symbol, but also valued as a potential resource for the financially strapped country. Guadalupe Victoria suggested melting the statue to make bullets and cannons, helping to alleviate the financial difficulties of the fledgling nation. This plan would remove the symbol, but also serve a highly functional role for the government. Public opinion was mounting against Spaniards. On national holidays Spaniards and their property were threatened by lingering resentments and blind frustration. In this atmosphere, the very existence of Manuel Tolsá's masterpiece was greatly threatened.

Yet Mexican heritage, and how it was understood, was far from unified in the early nineteenth-century. There were many conservative historians, politicians and citizens that proudly celebrated their Spanish heritage and honored figures like Hernando Cortés and Agustín Iturbide as true Mexican heroes. These hispanocentrics were repulsed by the ethnic violence that Miguel Hidalgo sanctioned in his uprising. Lucás Alamán was an important conservative politician and historian who was an extremely powerful figure in Mexico before the 1850s reform movement. Alamán, fearful that popular Mexican nationalism would lead to the destruction of vital historical artifacts, led a group that would protect such items from what he perceived as overzealous and misguided patriotism. The equestrian statue of Carlos IV was one of those artifacts.³⁴

The statue was moved to the *Pontificia y Nacional Universidad de México* in 1823, out of the public eye (Figure 2).³⁵ The assumption that the more learned and educated upper classes would respect a Spanish heritage item more so than the general populous was not an unwarranted one since the statue was safely stored in the center of the ceremonial courtyard of the Catholic university.³⁶ Although the government only relocated the statue two city blocks away from the Plaza Mayor, the physical distance was not the issue; rather it was about separating the statue from the city's symbolic political, social, historic and public core. Of supreme importance was to transform one of the most crucial social spaces in Mexico City into a place without such an overt colonial memorial.³⁷



Figure 2. Statue of Carlos IV, hidden from the public eye, c. 1840. Courtesy of the George Eastman House, International Museum of Photography and Film.

Paseo de Bucareli

In 1852, a generation removed from the War for Independence, public sentiment had softened towards the Spanish colonial legacy in Mexico. The Mayor, Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, thought that the time had come for the masterpiece of Manuel Tolsá to be brought into the public eye again. He proposed that the statue be moved to the rotunda on *Paseo de Bucareli* closest to the Alameda, hopeful that a more peripheral location for the statue would no longer draw the ire of the residents of Mexico City, while simultaneously beautifying one of the most prominent promenades with public art.

Although peripheral, the new setting was extremely exclusive; the western end of Mexico City was becoming the elite region of the city, which in Mexico's socially stratified society meant a more pronounced Spanish ethnic background within this region. *Paseo de Bucareli* in the 1850s was the grandest boulevard in Mexico City; in an early attempt to appeal to a European sense of tradition and culture, the Spanish monarch was able to be displayed in a public setting again, albeit an extremely exclusive, predominantly European neighborhood.³⁸ A contemporary lithograph (Figure 3) highlights this neighborhood by placing it in the foreground, to emphasize the Alameda and rotundas of *Paseo de Bucareli* as some of the most noteworthy and sophisticated parts of Mexico City.



Figure 3. This southwest-viewing lithograph of Mexico City shows in the lower-right-hand corner an emerging Paseo de Bucarelli with four rotundas. The Rotunda connecting to the Alameda and Zócalo is the site of the statue of Carlos IV (Casimiro Castro, 1858).

This was a site that was peripheral compared to the rest of Mexico City in the 1850s and relatively minor compared to the statue's former site in the Plaza Mayor. Yet within another generation, this would become one of the preeminent social spaces in the city. During the period of French control of Mexico (1863-1867), the Emperor Maximilian proposed a new boulevard to connect the downtown grid to the Imperial Castle of Chapultepec. The point where this boulevard, soon to become the most important road in Mexico City, was to connect with the downtown grid was *Paseo de Bucareli*, at the rotunda of Carlos IV. What this statue meant to Mexicans could not so easily be ignored as the starting point of the most important boulevard, which in 1872 would be named *Paseo de la Reforma*.

As more public monuments lined *Paseo de la Reforma*, journalists and other public intellectuals began to note the irony of the Carlos IV being placed at the head of *Paseo de la Reforma*. Editorials and debates about statues centered on what was a suitable representation of the nation and what precisely should be seen as a part of Mexican heritage. The catalyst for these debates about the statue of Carlos IV was the placement of the Colossal Aztecs, the '*Indios Verdes*,' flanking Carlos IV at the head of *Paseo de la Reforma*. These indigenous statues caused an uproar juxtaposed with a monument to a Spanish King. The predominantly wealthy, upper-class Mexico City residents of the western Mexico City loathed the '*Indios Verdes*' as a representation of Mexican identity. The outcry against an indigenous representation of Mexican heritage caused many to note that the statue of Carlos IV was tacitly accepted by these same upper-class residents and their hispanocentric vision of Mexican identity.

One journalist of an anti-establishment newspaper, *El Hijo del Ahuizote*, noted that the attacks and anger against the Colossal Aztec Warrior statues on *Paseo de la Reforma* was truly anger at the "manifestations of a nationalism that remembers the martyred, suffering and progressive indigenous race." Noting the spatial juxtaposition, the journalist then berates the statue of Carlos IV, noting that it is a shame that Mexico "would glorify the most imbecile king the world has ever known: Carlos IV...It is a profanity that this is before the eyes of the world; because there it is visible on our boulevard, that the horse of this Emperor *Gachupín* tramples the noble weapons of the valiant Mexican Indians!"³⁹

Another journalist, in 1896, noted the state of culturally ambivalent representations on *Paseo de la Reforma* thus: "No one was been able to decipher the patriotic enigma on display in that series of figures that begins with Carlos IV...a Spanish king whose horse stomps on the Mexican weapons."⁴⁰ This was a considerable shift from the earlier days on *Paseo de Bucareli* where the statue was characterized as "extremely valuable" to Mexican cultural heritage by a liberal newspaper.⁴¹ The Catholic newspapers were famous for favoring a hispanocentric version of Mexican history and identity, and not surprising, did not find the work of Tolsá offensive. In 1903, a Catholic newspaper reported that Mexico has always "been ungrateful to the artist [Manuel Tolsá] who has beautified the city and barely remembers his name."⁴² Collectively, this shows that the national memory



Figure 4. The Carlos IV statue, anchoring the beginning of the tree-lined *Paseo de la Reforma*, in the early twentieth century. (photographer unknown, National Library of Mexico)

of Mexico at the end of the nineteenth century had not been fully reconciled and remained highly divisive despite massive efforts to synthesize a unified telling of national history.

Renaming the Statue

The shifting of memory and public discourse about the statue is also seen in the naming of the statue. In the 1890s, the equestrian statue of Carlos IV became locally known as *El Caballito de Troya* (The Trojan Horse).⁴³ The reference to Troy is a critique on the entire Spanish colonial rule and conquest. The Greek victory over Troy had used deceptive and devious gifts that deftly positioned their army to betray their rivals who had trusted them to behave honorably. The allusion to Troy was central to the common nickname for this statue; this allegorically served in the public's collective memory as a way to explain their relationship *vis-à-vis* Spain. There was some lingering distrust and resentment of the colonial history as well as resentment against those that favored a hispanocentric version of Mexican history and those in the government that were exalting all things European as modern, and therefore superior. It acknowledges the painful and conflicted legacy left by colonialism. Although this naming did not physically move the statue, it was discursively altered and accrued social significance.

The moniker *El Caballito de Troya* fell by the wayside as the more streamlined name, *El Caballito*, became more prevalent.⁴⁴ Today this is the

most commonly used name for the equestrian statue of Carlos IV. As this era of modernity ended with a violent revolution that began in 1910, it ended the government's infatuation with European aesthetics and European identity; the remaining European statues from that era were less a symbol of modern-day neo-colonialism. The 1910 Revolution began an era where the mestizo was embraced as the supremely Mexican ethnic identity. A hispanocentric vision of Mexican identity would be officially rejected as the dominant narrative after the 1910 Revolution and the statue became an iconic memory of a bygone era that would never return.⁴⁵ Consequently, that symbolism became less offensive and threatening. The removal of the Trojan reference in the early years of the post-revolutionary government was now fitting, but it also served a stronger purpose: it completely severed the connection to the Spanish monarch sitting on top of *El Caballito*.

With the name placing the focus on the horse rather than the rider, the reading of the monument can change as well. The horse in and of itself bears no anti-Mexican symbolism; as an equestrian monument, the renaming draws the audience to a natural, gentlemanly image instead of the political statement of Mexican subjugation. The suffix '-ito' in Spanish not only means little, it also implies a sense of intimacy and harmlessness that is comfortable. There is nothing little about this massive structure that could fit twenty five men inside the bronze molding and weighs over 20,000 kg.⁴⁶ The suffix is being used to emasculate and dethrone Carlos IV, making him, essentially, any old horseman on a truly magnificent horse. This effectively removed the militaristic, menacing and imperial messages of subjugation and control embedded in the original statue to one that could be more generally accepted in Mexico City and even found to be endearing.

Preserved as art

In the middle decades of the twentieth century, newspaper columns about the inappropriateness of *El Caballito* vanished, and it became a famous landmark and even an icon of the city. As Mexico City grew in population and areal extent, and the number of motorists grew, traffic congestion in downtown Mexico became a major logistical problem confronting the city's planners. Despite expanding traffic lanes and improving rapid transit, *El Caballito* was now in a poor place for a statue's finer details to be appreciated. Yet unlike 100 years earlier, many Mexicans were reluctant to see the statue moved to a place that would diminish its visual prominence in the public places of the city. *El Caballito* was still considered an important public monument that should always be a part of the public landscape of Mexico City, but the argument that was put forward was that it needed to be in a different place to increase traffic flow in an vital intersection and to allow greater appreciation and protection for the statue as a work of art.

In the 1970s, a pedestrian plaza was being redesigned outside of the National Museum of Art, with *El Caballito* to be the only outside



Figure 5. Today, *El Caballito* is in front of the National Museum of Art, facing the *Palacio de Minería*, with the alternate “*Caballito*” on *Paseo de la Reforma*. (author’s personal collection)

exhibit. As it had been part of the urban fabric of Mexico City for over 100 years, the thinking of the planning commission was to keep it in a public, highly visible area (Figure 5). This shift completes the “Mexicanization” of a statue that portrays a Spanish monarch. By placing the statue in front of the National Museum of Art, the emphasis is on the sculptor and the artistic beauty of the work, not the history or the monarch being memorialized. The pedestrian plaza is now named Plaza Tolsá and the guided tours through that region point out the statue and emphasize that this is the masterpiece of Manuel Tolsá. Manuel Tolsá, the sculptor of *El Caballito* and the neoclassical artist who founded and was the director of sculpture and architecture at the Academy of San Carlos in Mexico City, became the principal reason for maintaining this statue as a representation of outstanding Mexican art. In this place, the statue is now sometimes referred to as *El Caballito de Tolsá*, further distancing the statue from the colonial message and strengthening the heritage of Mexican art.⁴⁷

The new National Museum of Art on the street *Cinco de Mayo*, is paired with the *Palacio de Minería* (School of Mines or Palace of Mining), on the other side of the street. This building was designed by Manuel Tolsá and was acknowledged as his architectural masterpiece. This made the area an especially important place to be able to memorialize Manuel Tolsá and his accomplishments.

The historical packaging of *El Caballito* portrays it as a piece of Mexican art that happens to depict a Spaniard. Manuel Tolsá is characterized as a Mexican artist that helped propel the fine arts in Mexico through his work at the Academy of San Carlos who merely complied with the commission of the colonial government because it was politically pragmatic at the time.

This characterization of Manuel Tolsá as a Mexican artist underscores many points. Tolsá was born in Spain and trained in architecture and sculpting at the Royal Academy of San Carlos in Valencia and the Academy of San Fernando in Madrid, distinguishing himself at both of the royal art academies of Spain. Upon graduation he earned a post as profes-

sor of sculpture at the Academy of San Carlos in Mexico City and in 1790, he became the director of sculpture in this New World royal school.⁴⁸ At the outbreak of the War for Independence, Tolsá's actions went far beyond mere rhetoric that supported the crown and the viceregal government: he used the sculpting materials of the school to make cannons, cannonballs and other materials that would support the military efforts to put down the insurgency.⁴⁹ In addition to the already mentioned works of art and architecture, his work of the Metropolitan Cathedral in Mexico City is commonly referenced, as he sculpted the allegorical statues of Faith, Hope and Charity on the exterior as well as overseeing the project for a generation.⁵⁰ What is never mentioned is the bust he sculpted of Hernando Cortés, today found in the Cuernvaca, in the Castle of Cortés. A person of his education, status, ethnicity, birth and political alignments is today characterized as the quintessential *gachupín* of the colonial period—a privileged Spaniard who was a part of the colonial infrastructure. Being a *gachupín* is rarely forgiven in most modern tellings of Mexican history, yet Tolsá is forgiven for this because he is embraced for laying the foundation his contributions to developing Mexican art.

It is an article of faith in Mexico that Tolsá's work represents the finest equestrian statue in the New World, and that it is second in the world only to the Marcus Aurelius statue in Rome. Alexander Von Humboldt praised the monuments of Mexico as the likes of those that "would appear to advantage in the finest streets of Paris, Berlin and Petersburg. Manuel Tolsá, professor of sculpture at Mexico, was even able to cast an equestrian statue of King Carlos IV; a work which, with the exception of the Marcus Aurelius at Rome, surpasses in beauty and purity of stile every thing which remains in this way in Europe."⁵¹ Humboldt's praise of Mexico and Mexico City is well documented, as is the pride Mexicans took, and continue to take in how favorably they were judged in relation to their European counterparts.

This idea is frequently repeated in the newspapers and other publications in Mexico, where it is assumed that this personal assessment is universally upheld, and the craftsmanship still widely admired in Europe.⁵² However, art history books on the evolution of equestrian representation are frequently silent about *El Caballito*, contradicting the government's claim of its universal artistic importance.

Manuel Toussaint, the most recognized scholar of colonial Mexican art history, went so far as to almost accuse Tolsá of plagiarism in his assessment of the artistic merits of the statue.⁵³ "For all our pride in it, the statue of Carlos IV is not original. Tolsá's inspiration was Girardon's equestrian portrait of Louis XIV; his statue can almost be called a copy of it." He goes on to demonstrate that Tolsá owned a replica of Girardon's statue and that he relied heavily on that for his own work (Figure 6).⁵⁴ This critique fell on deaf ears in Mexico, as the idea of it being the best in the New World was the original rationale for keeping the statue. Without this rationale, *El Caballito's* existence and importance to Mexico City would need to be explained by some other means—or the criticism could simply be ignored.



Figure 6. Tolsá's Carlos IV statue and Francois Girardon's Louis XIV statue. (author's personal collection)

The Mexican government was emphatic that the statue was being conserved as a piece of art. The largest type on the pedestal is the phrase declaring: "Mexico conserves this as a monument of art."⁵⁵ The implications are that the historical memory is repugnant, yet the artistic value is sufficient to warrant the historical embarrassment of prominently displaying the former colonial monarch. In the newspaper articles about the monument and other sources, they frequently emphasize the groundbreaking production of the statue. The fact that it was the largest single casting in the world at the time was portrayed as a triumph of Mexican art.⁵⁶ These portrayals characterize Mexico as a culturally sophisticated society that would place a high value on the arts, as if to say "Mexican nationalism is sophisticated enough to be above that."

In the National Museum of Art, there is a permanent exhibit designed to teach the visitors about various principles involved in designing works of art, such as equilibrium, volume, proportion and scale. To illustrate these principles, *El Caballito* is used as the quintessential example of artistic perfection, validating the plaque outside the museum and justifying the continued public display of the statue in a post-colonial Mexico.

So what became of the site on *Paseo de la Reforma* where *El Caballito* used to stand? The actual spot is now a traffic circle, but on the edge of the same intersection a yellow-painted twenty-eight meter statue was inaugurated on January 15, 1992 by President Salinas de Gortari.⁵⁷ This eighty-ton geometric, industrial statue was titled the "*Cabeza de Caballo*" later to be referred to as "*El Caballito de Sebastián*" (Figure 5). This statue

was designed by Sebastián to resemble a horse's head, but also to act as a chimney that would release the foul odors of the sewer system above street level where it would not offend.⁵⁸ There is the horse but there is clearly no Carlos IV on this monument. Sebastián, a former student of the Academy of San Carlos has softened the symbolism of the Academy's first sculpting director, Tolsá.⁵⁹ This new monument would not compete and replicate the style of Manuel Tolsá but it keeps equestrian memory and tradition associated with the place without confirming the original colonial message.⁶⁰ As an art historian noted, "The *Caballito de Sebastián* is not a symbol of conquest but of liberation."⁶¹ This is noteworthy as it is a monument to a monument, but it is also a monument to a memory, of an era that once was, with elements left to be forgotten. Silence and forgetfulness about heritage and identity can be just as poignant and remarkable as hotly contested debates are.⁶²

However, it is also a memory that never was, as this memory, like so many others does not tell the story of how it happened, but reflects how it is remembered. This yellow statue shows that Carlos IV has officially been forgotten, even with his statue squarely in the limelight. Many Mexicans are happy to continue forgetting him and the role in Mexican history that he played because of the era that he represents.⁶³ Physically, many of the offensive odors of the sewer are purged through this new, yellow monument; symbolically, the memory of an inept colonial ruler has been discursively purged from the landscape.

Conclusion

More often than outright destruction, a monument with a highly contested message will be relocated to a different site in an attempt to use space to either minimize the prominence of statue in the public landscape or to use space to rearticulate the meanings of the monument itself. The removal of a monument from one place to another has profound impacts on the meaning of these places, as well as the meanings of the monument. The spatial politics of situating public monuments then requires an understanding of the monuments in the broader social geography of the streets and neighborhoods in which they are placed and relocated.

The embedded messages about ethnicity, class, gender and other forms of identity within the monuments on *Paseo de la Reforma* are an essential part of the larger story: the packaging of official Mexican culture and heritage. Despite the powerful discourses embedded in the monuments by the sculptors that are officially sanctioned by the government, Mexican audiences have demonstrated that messages in the landscape are not passively received by the people in a top-down dissemination of meaning. The official message intended by the patrons and embedded by the sculptors are not the only ones; the added layers of meaning ascribed to monuments by those viewing or engaging with statues, reconfigure the cultural interpretation of these sites and places. The audience and viewers of a landscape, not only those that have shaped and created the landscape,

can give the built environment meanings about culture, heritage and identity.

Some of the reinterpretations of the Carlos IV monument in Mexico represent a resistance to the official message of the monument espoused by the state. Yet, if we only see multiple discourses in a dialectic tension of power and representation, we miss an important dynamic of how heritage is memorialized and publicly mediated. Shifts in identity and self-perception, although not as heavily researched, are just as vital components of the telling and packaging of history as are the theoretical critiques of representation that academics often focus on. Landscapes of memory and heritage are incredibly dynamic as new generations reinterpret that past and create new national and ethnic identities.

The idea of a singular national heritage has always been problematic; narratives surrounding the idea of a unified national heritage have not only been contested, but history has been reinterpreted to alter the meaning of heritage. This struggle to “correctly” articulate Mexican heritage is manifest on the streets of Mexico City, having altered and reconfigures multiple places, each time for distinct purposes. Artistic and architectural treasures from the colonial period such as *El Caballito* are given new meanings to reflect modern Mexican priorities in this mobile, monumental landscape.

Notes

1. Georges Duby, Xavier Barral I Altet and Sophie Guillot de Suduiraut, *Sculpture: the Great Art of the Middle Ages from the Fifth to Fifteenth Century* (Geneva: Editions d'Art Albert Skira, 1990), 178. The advent of the automobile has changed the symbolism of the horse in a modernizing context, diminishing the iconographic potency of the equestrian statue.
2. For exceptional examples of this type of research see David Atkinson and Denis Cosgrove, “Urban Rhetoric and Embodied Identities: City, Nation, and Empire at the Vittorio Emanuele II Monument in Rome, 1870-1945,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 88:1 (1998): 28-49; Charles W. J. Withers, “Place, Memory, Monument: Memorializing the Past in Contemporary Highland Scotland,” *Ecumene* 3:1 (1996):325-344; and David Harvey, “Monument and Myth,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 69:3 (1979): 362-381.
3. For an example of this argument made more explicit, see Michel Foucault, “What is an author?” in Josué Harari, ed. *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structural Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979).
4. Nuala Johnson, “Sculpting Heroic Histories: Celebrating the Centenary of the 1798 Rebellion in Ireland,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 19:1 (1994):78-93.
5. This is not to say that no work before has not empirically shown a wide range of diverse options about monuments and how places are socially constructed to have symbolic meaning. An excellent example of work that does show the polyvocality for numerous perspectives is Jonathon Leib, “Separate Times, Shared Spaces: Arthur Ashe, Monument Avenue and the Politics of Richmond, Virginia’s Symbolic Landscape,” *Cultural Geographies* 9:1 (2002): 286-312.

6. Kenneth Foote, *Shadowed Ground: America's Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003). This framework was devised explicitly to understand landscapes of violence within the United States, however, the principles of how memory is expressed in the landscape are similar enough to use when discussing public monuments and statues elsewhere.
7. *Ibid.*, 8-10. Benjamin Forest and Juliet Johnson acknowledge that there are three distinct possibilities of how a new governments and societies can reinterpret the monuments of the *ancien régime*. Older monuments can be co-opted and glorified, disavowed or contested within the new political and cultural context following a dramatic change in government. This classification allows for understanding more cultural and political fluidity. Here I will examine the many possibilities that here were simply described as "contested." Benjamin Forest and Juliet Johnson, "Unraveling the Threads of History: Soviet-Era Monuments and Post-Soviet National Identity in Moscow," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 92:3 (2002): 524-547.
8. David Atkinson and Denis Cosgrove, "Urban Rhetoric and Embodied Identities: City, Nation, and Empire at the Vittorio Emanuele II Monument in Rome, 1870-1945," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 88:1 (1998): 28-49.
9. The translation of newspapers and all other sources from the original Spanish are the author's unless otherwise noted.
10. Brian Graham, G. J. Ashworth and J. E. Tunbridge, *A Geography of Heritage: Power, Culture and Economy* (London: Arnold, 2000).
11. Owen Dwyer and Derek Alderman, *Civil Rights Memorials and the Geography of Memory* (Athens: University of Geography Press, 2008).
12. For more on the topic of Mexican memory and its imprint on the monumental landscapes of Mexico City, see Thomas Benjamin, *La Revolución: Mexico's Great Revolution as Memory, Myth and History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).
13. It is listed as 4.88 meters, (16 feet), but is also mentioned as being fifteen feet, nine inches tall. Alfred Coffin, *Land Without Chimneys* (Cincinnati: The Editor Publishing Company, 1898), 156.
14. Justino Fernández, *El Arte del Siglo XIX en México* (México: Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas de la UNAM, 1967), 68. Justino Fernández attributes this popular idea to Alexander Von Humboldt, which will be addressed later in this paper.
15. Michael Myer, William Sherman and Susan Deeds, *The Course of Mexican History* (New York: Oxford Press), 265. "[Carlos IV] had become king, and quickly lent weight to the commonplace that great men seldom beget sons of their equal. He was inept and had little apparent interest in ruling the empire. His subjects grew weary of him and impatiently awaited the succession of Prince Ferdinand."
16. Manuel Godoy is alternatively references in historical records as Manuel de Godoy.
17. Prior to becoming queen, María Louisa was involved with many men, which led Carlos III to send at least six men to exile, including Luis Godoy, Manuel's older brother.
18. Jacques Chastenet, *Godoy: Master of Spain, 1792-1808* (London: Batchworth Press, 1953), 62-64.
19. Maurice Rheims, *Nineteenth Century Sculpture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams; 1977).
20. A notable exception to the general rule of only men being portrayed on equestrian statues is that of Joan of Arc. She has multiple equestrian statues in her honor in France and even Washington D.C., remarkable considering the

typical gendered representations in public statuary. The gilded appearance of some Joan of Arc equestrian statues could be construed to show that her breaking of the mold was divinely inspired and truly an exception to the rule. While it could be argued that this points to a military representation rather than a gendered representation, the number of non-military men portrayed on horses would suggest otherwise.

21. Walter Liedtke, *The Royal Horse and Rider: Painting, Sculpture and Horsemanship, 1500-1800* (New York: Abaris Books and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), 13-17.
22. Liedtke, *The Royal Horse and Rider*, 37-42.
23. Ceysson et al., *Sculpture*, 52-55.
24. Branciforte, quoted in Federico Gómez de Orozco, "Documentos Acerca de la Estatua de Carlos IV," *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* 2:5 (1940): 78.
25. Waters, *Italian Sculptors*, 77, 227-228. Ceysson et al., *Sculpture*, 52-55. Donatello's was the Gatamelata of Venice, while Leonardo Da Vinci was never able to complete his equestrian statue for the Sforza family of Milan as the molds was destroyed by cannon fire before it was cast. Michelangelo was a great admirer of Marcus Aurelius' statue, and redesigned the piazza and fashioned the pedestal that the statue was on before it was replaced with a replica.
26. Waters, *Italian Sculptors*, 216. Ceysson et al., *Sculpture*, 157. Giambologna is also referred to as Gian Bologna or Juan de Bologna. This statue of Philip III on horseback was moved from the Casa de Campo, the large western park in Madrid to the Plaza Mayor in 1848, where it still is today.
27. The statue was originally erected in front of the Palace of *El Buen Retiro*, and placed in the *Plaza de Oriente* in 1844.
28. Fernández, *El Arte del Siglo XIX en México*, 66.
29. Calderón Quijano, *Virreyes de Nuevo España*, 99.
30. Carlos Monsiváis, "On Civic Monuments and Their Spectators," in Helen Escobedo, ed., *Mexican Monuments: Strange Encounters* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1989), 108-110.
31. Carlos IV abdicated the throne in 1808 and died in 1819. His son Ferdinand VII had a claim to the Spanish throne, and after Napoleon's brother Joseph was removed in 1813, Ferdinand VII was restored to his father's throne. However, the cry for independence through Spain's New World colonies could not be undone, especially since the French control over Spain weakened the king's position tremendously.
32. For more on obliterated landscapes of shame, see Foote, *Shadowed Ground*.
33. He was not present in 1823, but a member of the Executive Triumvirate that ruled after Iturbide was disposed.
34. Supposedly the mortal remains of Hernando Cortés were also among the threatened historical artifacts that Alamán wanted to preserve.
35. Today the University is named *Universidad Pontificia de México* and is located in Tlalpan, in the southern sector of Mexico City.
36. Daguerreotypes were first produced in 1838, and this comes from the first set of daguerreotypes ever taken in Mexico City. Included in the set were the main Cathedral opposite the Plaza Mayor, the Aztec Calendar and other neo-classical forms of architecture. As a part of the visual archive in an era where images were so valuable, expensive and time consuming, the existence of this daguerreotype suggests that its value to some was immeasurable to Mexican nationalism.
37. The surrounding buildings were obviously constructed in the colonial era, but these civic and religious buildings were easier to continue using them. The

Cathedral was imposed over indigenous sacred space, but in the nineteenth-century, Catholicism had taken root and its Catholicism purified the colonial imposition to many. The colonial palace for the viceroy was converted into the National Palace and other buildings were necessary for the newly independent country to reconfigure to use the established infrastructure. A monumental statue with a message of colonial dominion was much more difficult to ideologically retrofit it quickly, especially considering its placement in the most prominent place in the heart of the capital.

38. Salvador Novo, *Paseos de la Ciudad de México* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2005), 42.
39. Anonymous, "Las Bellas Artes en México, los Españoles, el Clero y Tuxtepec," *El Hijo de Ahuizote* (November 13, 1898): 731. The term Gachupin is a derogatory word for Spanish-born people that took advantage of those that were born in the Americas. Unfortunately, it was common practice for journalists not to be cited for every article written.
40. Andrenius, "Los Monumentos del Patriotismo," *El Continente Americano* (May 10, 1896): 1.
41. Anonymous, "El Bosque de Chapultepec," *El Siglo XIX*, August 12, 1885): 3.
42. Anonymous, "Aniversario de la Estatua de Carlos IV," *El Tiempo* (December 10, 1903): 2.
43. Anonymous, "Las Bellas Artes en México, los Españoles, el Clero y Tuxtepec," *El Hijo de Ahuizote* (November 13, 1898): 731. This newspaper that opposed the government, in 1898 frequently complained about the exaltation of European goods and ideas over native ones, regardless of quality and content. As a part of this, it mentions that "our people have designated [the statue] with the name of the little Trojan Horse." Other references to this name include: Anonymous, "México Monumental," *La Voz de Mexico* (December 18, 1902): 1; Anonymous, "Méjico Monumental" *El Correo Español* (December 15, 1908): 1; Carlos M. Samper, "Cuentos Revolucionarios," *Nueva Patria* (October 12, 1914):4; Guillermo de Luzuriaga, "¿Qué Haría Ud. Con el Caballito de Troya?," *Jueves de Excelsior* (February 9, 1933): 8.
44. Last use of the name Caballito de Troya available to the author is Guillermo de Luzuriaga, "¿Qué Haría Ud. Con el Caballito de Troya?," *Jueves de Excelsior* (February 9, 1933): 8. (What would you do with the Little Trojan Horse?).
45. The twentieth century government that ruled after the revolution embraced the mestizo as the supreme icon of Mexican identity.
46. Caritino Gomez, "Algunos Datos Sobre 'El Caballito,'" *Jueves de Excelsior* (June 11, 1970): 19.
47. Roberto Vallerino, *Una Cabeza de Caballo* (Zapopan: Petra Ediciones), 6.
48. Jean Charlot, *Mexican Art and the Academy of San Carlos, 1785-1915* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1962), 44.
49. *Ibid.*, 48.
50. This is referenced in scholarly art histories of Mexico such as Fernandez, *El Arte del Siglo XIX en México* and Manuel Toussaint, *Colonial Art in Mexico* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1967). More importantly than these academic sources, it is noted on the plaque in Plaza Tolsá that was put up in 1979, listing this 'trinity of virtues' as one of his main accomplishments.
51. Alexander Von Humboldt, *Political Essay of the Kingdom of New Spain* (New York: AMS Press, 1811), Book II Chapter VII, 213-214.
52. For an example in a book published in the United States, see Coffin, *Land Without Chimneys*, 155. In Mexican Newspapers, see Anonymous, "Conversaciones Seminarias," *La Patria Ilustrada* (December 10, 1894): 1. In this newspaper article, no mention is attributed to Humboldt, but the rankings of the statues fol-

- low this line of thinking perfectly. More recently Fernando Benítez also echoed the same sentiment. He was quoted in Roberto Vallerino, *El Caballito de Sebastián* (México: Eds. Del Equilibrista, 1995), 26.
53. Elizabeth Wildmann, "Manuel Toussaint, 1890-1955," *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 36:2 (1956): 268-270.
 54. The original statue of Louis XIV was in Paris on the Place Louis le Grand, but was destroyed during the Revolution. A miniature survived and is today in the Louvre Museum.
 55. Plaque visible on the actual statue in Mexico City.
 56. Coffin, *Land Without Chimneys*, 155. Anonymous, "México Monumental," *La Voz de Mexico* (December 18, 1902): 1; Anonymous, "Colocación de la Primera Piedra del 'Caballito,'" *El Mundo Ilustrado* (July 12, 1908): 39.
 57. Anonymous, "El Presidente Salinas de Gortari inauguró 'El Caballo' de Sebastián," *El Universal* (January 16, 1992): 15.
 58. Vallerino, *Una Cabeza de Caballo*, 6-7.
 59. *Ibid.*, 45.
 60. *Ibid.*, 45.
 61. *Ibid.*, 7.
 62. Nuala Johnson, *Ireland, the Great War and the Geography of Memory* (Cambridge: University Press, 2003), 70.
 63. The statue is occasionally described as Carlos V or Carlos III in the press and by government officials in speeches.