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Spanish Iconomachy and the Hybridization of Conetemporary Musical Identity:
Rosalía's "Pienso en Tu Mirá"

An adventurous and experimental methodology disguised by the beauty and effortlessness of her classical training characterizes Spanish singer and songwriter Rosalía's body of work from 2018. Flipping through the booklet of *El Mal Querer*'s vinyl album release, a visual expanse of alchemical symbols with references to Spanish painting and literature imbues the experience of her music with imagery and icons that work to situate her audience in a specifically Spanish context. The accompanying music videos to the songs from this album continue to elucidate such a visual program, but with a twist; they enmesh their myriad references to Spanish history with a distinctly contemporary aesthetic and musical language, captivating viewers around the world through a combination of the familiar with a perhaps lesser-known national history. Looking specifically to Rosalía's music video for "Pienso en tu mirá," this paper examines the expansive repertoire of Spanish imagery and cultural references that inundate and inform her production. Beginning with the politics of flamenco within which she produces her music, I intend to articulate her own reconfiguration of its inherent gendered codes to suggest a new direction for Spanish music that she is actively forging. Further, by looking to the realms of Spanish painting also referred to in this video, I suggest that her ongoing citation of different nodes of Spanish culture elucidates an iconomachy with a wider history of Spanish image-making and representation. I ultimately argue that this iconomachy, defined by Leslie Brubaker as a struggle to reconcile the intended semiotic valence of imagery, symbols, and icons within a given visual context, is foundational to her current production, and constitutes the methodology behind the formation of a unique musical and artistic identity constituted by the synthetic melding of Spanish history and the contemporary globalized music scene.

"Pienso en tu mirá" is the second single released from Rosalía's album *El Mal Querer*, which was released in its entirety in November of 2018. The Catalan artist has been commended for her seamless linking of flamenco melodrama and style with contemporary R&B, creating a new and fresh sound that continues to receive critical acclaim today. Julianne Escobedo Shepherd from *Pitchfork* Magazine attributes such a synthesis of styles to the emergence of an underground internet-based scene called *Global Bass* from the early 2000s. This movement involved and encouraged young music producers to tap into their countries' folk and melodic traditions in order to reinvigorate millennial dancefloor music, using new technologies to collapse pre-established musical boundaries and genres. Shepherd further suggests that this movement continues to provide a kind of antidote to the homogenization of popular music occurring as a result of the industry's increasing proximity and eventual overlap with the internet, as musicians have been orienting themselves to their own cultural singularity and hyper-locality. Within this creative context, Rosalía releases *El Mal Querer* – a testament to the synthetic and hybrid *Global Bass* movement by way of its musical intertwining of historical flamenco and Spanish stylizations with more contemporary sound mixing approaches.

Acting as a pendant piece to "Pienso en tu mirá," "Malamente," her first single and music video from *El Mal Querer*, operates similarly in its visual vernacular, infusing Catalan and Andalusian motifs with a popular "hypebeast" aesthetic, featuring current fashion trends from limited edition sneakers to the latest

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

streetwear from high-end designers. Employing a strong bass line and synthetic tones while foregrounding emphatic claps and stomps, "Malamente" infuses two seemingly disparate genres – flamenco and hip hop through song and dance. A young matador is seen subduing a speeding motorcycle mimicking the act of bullfighting, traditional flamenco dress is replaced by athletic wear, and equally, flamenco dance moves are mixed with hip hop choreography. Experimental and hybrid in its ontology, "Malamente," "Pienso en tu mirá," and their respective music videos demonstrate how *El Mal Querer* uses a Spanish visual language to exhibit a uniquely contemporary identity through an iconomachical contestation of the history of Spanish visual production.

"Pienso en tu mirá" is a contemporary piece that alludes to the pared-down instrumentation of classical flamenco musical stylings, emphasizing the clean sounds of simple guitar, claps, and stomps. Its accompanying music video employs a visual lexicon that most clearly refers to the artist's own Spanish history using motifs and symbols pertaining to flamenco culture, the bullfight, and distinct references to notable Spanish art. Synthesizing and repositioning visual pillars of Spanish cultural production in this way, Rosalía exhibits an act of iconomachy with images that have historically constituted an idea of Spanish identity. By her specific reconsolidation and reconfiguration of these icons, she articulates a new interpretation of this history, carving a new critical space in which a process of hybridization between contemporary, globalized influences such as hip hop and electronic music can begin to constitute Spanish identity in the present. I explore this by reading the music video for "Pienso en tu mirá" as a visual text that foregrounds violence and destruction – male truckers are shot in the chest, Rosalía herself is held at gunpoint, and several objects and spaces are depicted in the process of being destroyed. Using these forms of physical destruction as a point of departure, I will elucidate how this music video takes on an iconoclastic narrative in that the violence positioned against depicted bodies, spaces, and objects points to the wider conceptual iconomachy occurring toward

traditional Spanish culture and imagery that characterizes the album's conceptual arc.

Brubaker defines iconomachy as the *struggle* about images – an idea that will come to identify Rosalía's engagement with and repositioning of Spanish imagery and symbols (Brubaker, 42). Grounding her musical practice in traditional flamenco precedents as well as a broad history of visual representation unique to Spain, the physical and bodily destruction depicted in this video works to metaphorize a form of symbolic destruction within the broader realm of Spanish production. By *struggling* with the images of this unique past and breaking down its codes to be reassembled by her own hand, Rosalía articulates her individuality by melding contemporary stylings with Spanish music and visual representation, presented in a fragmentary and fractured state.

Conflating literal and conceptual decimation as an interlocked synthesis in this way, we encounter the closing scene of the music video with a newfound critical acuity. Rosalía stands on top of a crashed truck, debris and smoke spread throughout the frame – she is indifferent and unfazed, yet dominant (figures 1 and 2). This poignant conclusion, though at the end of the video, creates a conceptual frame to look through the entirety of the piece – one that privileges the destruction of past forms or representations in order to suggest the inauguration of a new synthetic approach between traditional Spanish and contemporary popular music. The reorientation of these motifs is carried out by the literal destruction of objects, spaces, and bodies in this video, rendering historic codifications and symbols of Spanish culture bare and vulnerable to her own reconfiguration. Rising from the ashes is Rosalía, the agential figure that represents an amalgamation of these fragments, piecing together the detritus to form something new. This interpretation will become clear as this paper walks through the length of the music video, highlighting its iconomachical contestation with the history of Spanish image-making.

The video begins by positioning the viewer in a moving truck, centering on a small figurine of a female flamenco dancer dangling from the rear-view mirror. The truck continues speeding down a straight, empty road until it makes crash contact into the wall of a building at its end, synchronized with an abrupt synthesized crash noise that becomes the consistent marker of the song's 3/4 time signature (figure 3). An association of this sonic marker with crashing resonates throughout the video, saturating it with a destructive air, and equally signalling the beginning of the abrupt and physically violent imagery to come. Just as the truck comes into contact with the wall, the camera cuts to a scene of Rosalía who stares directly at the viewer while being adorned with jewelry by multiple hooded figures (figure 4). Her gaze is steady and strong while a sea of hands swarm around her profile, dressing her as she sits immobile, only moving her lips to the lyrics of the song. One of the hooded figures then bites into her neck drawing blood, which is followed by a scene of an unaffected and indifferent male trucker being shot in the chest while standing in front of a truck – the bloodstain on his white shirt grows as the camera approaches the wound (figures 5 and 6). This bodily violence comes to characterize the chorus and title line of the song – "pienso en tu mirá, tu mirá, clavá, es una bala en el pecho" – which translates to: "thinking of your gaze, it nails me like a bullet in the chest."

The interaction of these two scenes between Rosalía and the male trucker begins to establish specific relegations of feminine and masculine space in this video at a larger scale – femininity is defined by the domestic realm, materiality, and vanity, while masculinity is positioned in opposition, identified by large

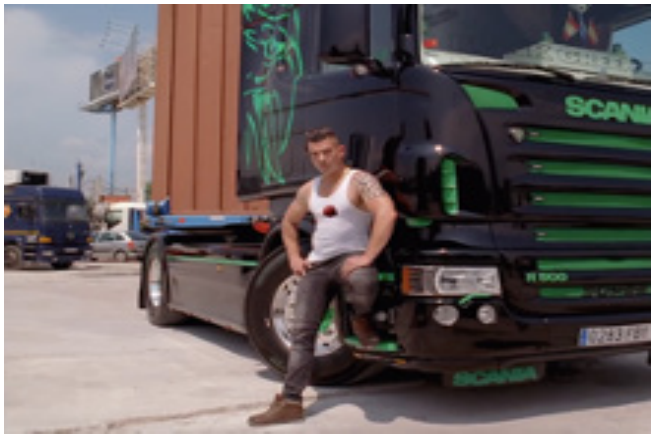

Figure 5

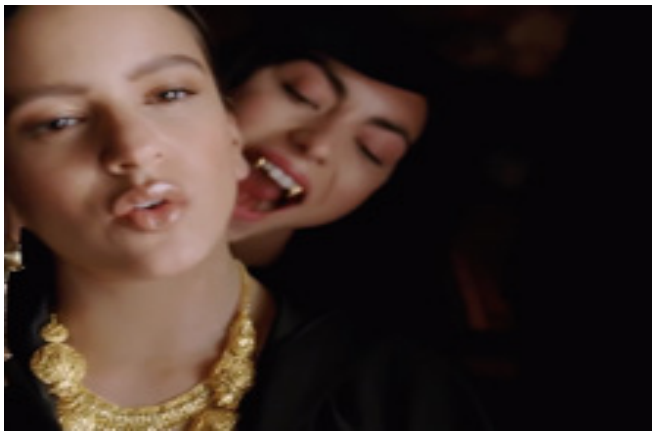

Figure 6

industrial vehicles, their presence in outdoor areas, and an appearance of rigor and machismo. Articulating spatial codifications in this way is the first point at which Rosalía begins her iconomachical contestation with the image of flamenco, whose gendered roles and spaces are baked into its visual references. These gendered codes become confused however, as the specific markers and symbols of masculinity are taken on by Rosalía in following sequences, complicating the exclusivity of her previous feminine affiliation. We are presented with scenes of Rosalía slowly adhering to a masculine identity and challenging the inherently gendered establishment of flamenco as the video progresses – she is seen cocking a gun in men's clothing, and later becomes the focal node of these previously male-oriented outdoor scenes, flanked by the imposing trucks.

Rosalía's play with bodies in this video by inverting gendered roles and prescriptions as such points directly toward an engagement with the politics of flamenco – the first of several specific cultural markers of Spanish history that the artist engages with. William Washabaugh argues that flamenco politics are hidden and "demonstrate the politics of bodies," in which its ideology is promoted physically, as it claims to be a politics that stands outside of thought and consciousness (1). He notes that there is an absence of political content in the flamenco song, but as its style emerged from the poverty and oppression of Andalucía, its political claims are seen as unintentional, yet ultimately undeniable. The body accomplishes its politics rather than the mind (Washabaugh, 4-5). Theorizing the corporeal nature of this cultural practice endows "Pienso en tu mirá" with a particular critical acuity that should be addressed. The choice to depict bodies destroyed – male truckers shot in the chest, and even herself shot in the back – can be interpreted as a direct assault on the history and politics of flamenco. The conceptual effect of this literal destruction of bodies extends to her reconfiguration of male and female spaces and roles in the flamenco world, suggesting that her own creative intervention can manifest only by dissolving its inherent gendered codes.

Flamenco is defined by Washabaugh as a musical style that celebrates distinct moments of sociality, one male-centered, and the other female-centered (1). The male realm is celebrated through public fraternity and male bonding where rhythm, poetry, and passion bind together the "simple folks" in southern Spain. Characterized as dark and musky, this style stands in contrast to the female-centered flamenco experience, which is identified as bright and blaring (Washabaugh, 2). Positioning the two in an antagonizing relationship, the high point of this cultural mode is the bullfight, where the matador stands for the disciplined and cultured man who subdues the wild nature of the bull. Flamenco dance and song imitate this dynamic – women dress in daring clothes and present themselves as hot and "natural" in contrast to the cool, cultured men. Washabaugh further states that this is a time for women to step outside of the suffocating privacy of the household and "take a walk on the wild side" (3).

In these introductory scenes, Rosalía offers a visualization and subsequent registration of the specific roles and spaces designated for men and women in the flamenco realm, but later neutralizes them with her iconoclastic approach. She presents herself as the protagonist in this video who is both the man and woman within the flamenco dynamic – she is simultaneously the woman bound to the domestic sphere, as well as the cool, collected man that tames the woman's furor. We see this most clearly in the scene where Rosalía, in an almost drag-like fashion, cocks a gun while sitting at a kitchen table. Seated with her legs comfortably spread, hair tied up, and wearing a red matador scarf wrapped around her neck, she loads her rifle with bullets while drinking

Figure 7

Figure 8

rum, establishing a masculine persona (figure 7). This second identity is further bolstered by the camera's frame cutting to a bracelet being placed on her wrist with the inscription *varón dandy*, referencing a fragrance for men from Catalonia in 1912 (figure 8). The publicity for this cologne in Spain was based on its character as the only "genuinely manly perfume," and was positioned as a virile fragrance that reinforced the masculinity of Spanish men for many years (Pérez, 189). Perhaps ambiguous at first glance, the male persona is registered only by her represented shift in attitude and the chosen Spanish symbols she associates herself with, including the matador scarf alluding to the male role in the bullfight, and the *varón dandy* bracelet referring to a particular brand of Spanish machismo.

The creation of this male persona is then complicated by the interspersing of scenes presenting Rosalía as a female counterpart to this identity. The sequence establishing her male persona is mixed with shots of her dancing in front of large trucks with her female-presenting backup dancers, as well as with scenes presenting her as a Virgin Mary figure whose aureole is made up of the multiple hands of the anonymous hooded figures from the beginning of the video (figures 9 and 10). Referencing the representation of the Virgin Mary in this way endows her cultivated female persona with a religious history that has had an impact on the formation of Spanish femininity at a larger scale. As a simultaneous figure of identification alongside her male association, Nancy Breuner notes that the Virgin Mary represents an ideal mother, the ultimate paragon, and that she derives her power from the qualities of self-denial and nurturance. She argues that Spanish women may respond to this image because they identify with these attributes, which are consonant with their own experiences in Spanish society (Breuner, 79). Although represented in the established feminine space of the domestic in the music video which could be read as fundamentally linking women to a state of passivity, Timothy Mitchell suggests that Mary's virginity operates not only as a symbol of purity, but of autonomy – she is free of the passions and desires that dominate the human psyche (131). Positioning the figure of Mary in this way, Rosalía extracts the agency of both the Spanish man in the flamenco realm as well as the agency emerging from Mary's virginal autonomy in these scenes. This agency as such endows her own creative practice with an authority that validates and strengthens her contemporary approach to reconstructing cultural identity. Further, both representations of Rosalía as the male and female counterpart to this multivalent character confront us with her consistent and direct gaze, drawing the viewer into an associative construction of meaning. What her strong address to the viewer demarcates, however, is the audience's own preconceived notions of masculine agency and feminine passivity in order to challenge them.

Rosalía's direct address to the viewer is consistent throughout her video, but is particularly poignant and worthy of critical attention in the scene where she physically destroys an object that emblematizes the viewer's gaze. As the camera wanders through the dark spaces of a house and enters a bedroom in which Rosalía is sat facing away, the viewer is identified as a bull. Horns emerge at the sides of the camera's frame, positioning the eyes of the bull as the eyes of the viewer. Approaching her from behind while she sits on the bed, blood begins to stain her back as the camera tightens its proximity to her body (figure 11). She turns to meet our gaze, and at this point of contact, the jump cut of the camera frames the bull as taxidermied and hung up on a wall (figure 12). The viewer's agency is consequently rendered

Figure 9

Figure 10

insignificant and delegitimized by this sequence. A following shot zooms into the bull's dark eye, which then quickly switches to a shot of a black olive held in between Rosalía's teeth, on which she proceeds to bite down and destroy (figures 13 and 14). In a rapid series of object parallels, the olive is equated to the bull's eye, which is immediately equated to the viewer's eye and gaze. This sequence that objectifies and subsequently emaciates the gaze of the viewer by Rosalía herself points to her refusal of pre-established and sedimented visual codes that have come to relegate and distinguish the masculine from the feminine in flamenco culture. Additionally, it powerfully works to build up her agency within the Spanish visual repertoire she engages with, placing her critique and constructed image at the helm.

Figure 11

Figure 12

Such a radical denial and destruction of this establishment is accompanied by sequences of a flamenco dancer performing on raging embers, interspersed among this process of signification that denies the viewer's gaze and their prior assumptions that are tethered to it. Participating in the narrative of this video as an emblem of flamenco culture, the dancer is represented as under strain, his movements seeming to simultaneously stifle an impending blaze sparking from the hot coal (figure 15). As a clear symbolic act, Rosalía uses this figure of the dancer to further express an iconoclastic imperative toward the inherent establishments of this Spanish history. The intermittent presence of this sequence reminds us that this video takes a critical stance toward the specific Spanish context and history within which she is working. It also has the additional function of pointing to the idea of flamenco literally under fire. T. J. Demos argues that the aesthetics of fire carry the meaning of a very physical transformation of material existence which is rapid, final, and nonnegotiable (98). This transformative violence inflicted upon the flamenco dancer suggests a tension with its wider symbolic expanse, a tension that Rosalía emphasizes in order to elucidate her own reconfiguration of the flamenco realm, and at a wider scale, the emblems of a broader Spanish history. The symbols of this culture are actively being destroyed and stripped down to be repurposed, and Rosalía's synthetic and hybrid

Figure 13

Figure 14

Figure 15

approach to contemporary flamenco music is the phoenix that rises out of its ashes.

This notion of hybridity or synthesis as it pertains to iconoclasm and her larger iconomachical relationship to images is taken up by Dario Gamboni and his discussion of Tony Shafrazi's spray painting of Picasso's *Guernica* in 1974. By inscribing the phrase "KILL LIES ALL" across Picasso's monumental piece, Shafrazi claimed that as an artist himself, he was "[bringing] the art absolutely up to date, [retrieving] it from history and giving it life" (124). In response to this event, Stockholm based artist Felix Gmelin suggested that a picture can be seen as a sum of destructions, and that the act of turning a painting into a masterpiece by placing it in the museum locks it in history and renders it "invisible in the present" (Gamboni, 127). By this logic, Gamboni then argues that an avant-garde perspective on iconoclasm can be linked to the desire and necessity to outstrip one's predecessors, in order to avoid becoming locked in history. With Shafrazi's act in particular, he notes that those who damage or "complete" works in order to bring them back from the status of historical monument to that of "iconoclastic" breakthrough, claim to belong to the group who are against "freeze-framing," and are not specifically against images or art (Gamboni, 129).

This perspective can equally be oriented toward an analysis of Rosalía's visual work. Although outside of a museological context, she exists within a specific realm of cultural production, and can be understood to be resisting the freeze-framing of Spanish culture in a historicized time-space. Like Shafrazi, her work aims to bring something up to date, by taking a historical emblem (or emblems) and rendering them relevant for the present. I do not intend to suggest that flamenco or Spanish culture itself is currently in a state of stasis or that it is suffering under the weight of historicizaiton per se. I rather intend to focus on Rosalía's combination of its sedimented codes with contemporary musical and visual stylings and the transformative effect it has for both flamenco and contemporary music. By this understanding, the iconoclastic and iconomachical nature of Rosalía's piece points to a renaissance of specifically Spanish aesthetics and musicality within new streams of popular culture, not with the intention to destroy the historic image of flamenco but to reconfigure it for a new platform of dissemination and reception, as well as to bolster new forms of creative individual expression.

Building upon the flamenco realm in which Rosalía situates herself, we can also examine the ways in which "Pienso en tu mirá" cites other forms of Spanish cultural production and imagery. Although she is identified as an artist that works exclusively with flamenco, this music video exhibits an engagement with Spanish history outside of song and dance, intentionally delving into the realm of painting. One particular scene presents a meticulously organized still-life arrangement – a porcelain figure of a female flamenco dancer is placed on a table surrounded by a selection of fruits, garlic, vases, perfume, cigarettes, and a bottle of *Anis del Mono* liqueur while the ceiling above crumbles onto it (figures 16 and 17). This scene immediately recalls the painted still-life arrangements of Caravaggio, Joachim Beuckelaer, or Francisco de Zurburàn. Situating a miniature statue of a flamenco dancer within this still-life scene, Rosalía positions her visual and musical work within an extensive discourse of Spanish representation by specifically citing the history of still-life painting in Spain.

William B. Jordan suggests that from the end of the sixteenth century, Spanish painters no longer conceived of still life imagery as merely decorative or symbolic, but rather changed its focus to explore a new relationship between the painter's eye, his brush, and his mind. An attention to representations without narrative content as such allowed the endurance of art and the power of the artist to take center stage (1). Spanish painter and teacher of Velàzquez, Francisco Pacheco, had published *Arte de la Pintura* in 1638, which dealt with all aspects of painting, including its theory, practice and iconography. Although hierarchizing its genres and placing still-life as inferior, he praised still-life for its "delight by variety" (Jordan, 9). Writing this book during the period of still-life production in Italy and the Low Countries which saw

Figure 16

Figure 17

the fame of Caravaggio, its popularity in Spain allowed the genre to flourish amongst many artists, including Zurburàn. Some still-life works attempted to achieve realistic monumentality through internal disegno, while others sought to emphasize the intimacy of sensory experience through a microscopic attention to detail (Jordan, 6). The multiple avenues by which the imitation of reality was achieved within this genre gestures toward how the still-life became known for its ability to test the limits of representation as a whole. Jordan further notes that this was an inherently "modern" approach to art, and that cubist painters in the twentieth century, including Pablo Picasso, used the still-life as a vehicle to explore and challenge the boundaries of artistic production (Jordan, 1).

By including a pack of *Rex* cigarettes, a bottle of *Anis del Mono* liqueur, and a small container of perfume into an otherwise traditional still-life scene, Rosalía incorporates distinctly contemporary aspects into its arrangement, but remains grounded within a specifically Spanish context. Rosalía's citation of this genre of painting directly alludes to the way in which it had challenged the status quo of artistic representation in the seventeenth century. As a genre that complicated the perception and ultimate trajectory of art production, its presence in the video suggests that a similar operation is occurring by Rosalía's imperative. She ultimately posits her video as a radical means of expression which, like the Spanish still-life, broadens the contours of what representation can look like and the evolutionary potential it can carry. Setting the still-life in a scene in which its surrounding sapce is crumbling further suggests a move away from this history while still maintaining an integral link to it. Using its revolutionary acumen to confront the ontology of representation allows her to move forward from this past while still adhering to the still-life's inherent challenge to the status quo, effectively translating it into a contemporary context.

By amalgamating these myriad references to Spanish history in order to repackage them and constitute a new Spanish identity, we can view Rosalía's individual creative expression in this video as linked to Laura Rascaroli's notion of the self-portrait film. Differing from an autobiography which creates interpretive coherence through a distinct narrative that the viewer can follow, Rascaroli builds the self-portrait film off of Michel Beaujour's concept of the literary self-portrait. He argues that the self-portrait in literature is a genre that attempts to create coherence through a system of cross-references, anaphoras, superimpositions or correspondences among homologous elements, in such a way as to give the appearance of anachronistic juxtaposition or montage, as opposed to the syntagmatics of narration (Rascaroli, 170-171). It does not matter how scrambled these elements appear to be, since the scrambling of linear narrative always tempts the reader to reconstruct its chronology in some way with the information they are given.

This line of thought relates specifically to Rosalía's work as a complex, disjointed narrative consisting of multiple layers, reconfigurations, and interpretations. Within the music video's difficult, non-chronological, montage-style narrative emerges its status as a self-portrait, allowing the viewer to construct meaning and correspondingly the artist's identity in relation to a redefined constellation of metaphors and symbols. Rascaroli argues that the self-portrait film clings to the analogical, the metaphorical, and the poetic, more than it does to narrative structure and coherence – meaning is not realized linearly, but rather rhizomatically (171). While

the construction of meaning by this framework might apply to music videos generally, its relation to Rosalía's video in particular is poignant given the iconomachy occurring between her chosen emblems of Spanish history. The way in which she destroys and reconfigures icons of tradition to constitute her own contemporary musical and artistic identity illuminate the methodology of the self-portrait film, and its relevance toward the fabrication of an image of the artist and her wider conceptual aims.

By this logic, we encounter Rosalía's music video with a more haphazard and bricolage approach to its interpretation – we read the symbols, codes, metaphors, and analogies in order to construct and conduct an interpretation with some coherence, and to give us a sense of the portrait of herself that is based in the history and culture of Spain. Effectively, Rosalía provides us with a framing of these symbols that enable a rhizomatic construction of meaning, but further reconfigures these codes to point to the dialectic space between Spanish history and contemporary music, the space in which she stakes her musical and artistic identity. Foregrounding the artist herself in the act of interpretation as such allows us to better understand the ways in which her Spanish musical identity is confronted with the homogenizing effects of the contemporary globalized music scene, and the ways in which the two are mediated by the video adhering to a methodology of self-portraiture. As such, the synthesis of these two seemingly disparate realms creates a trajectory along which hyperlocal musical stylings can both acknowledge their rich past and find further meaning in a constantly growing technological era. Rosalía's music video ultimately suggests that by breaking down the well-established emblems of traditional flamenco song and dance, as well as by engaging a Spanish history through the revolutionary nature of still-life painting, these forms can find new and reinvigorated life amidst the uncertain and expanded landscape of the musical present.

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