

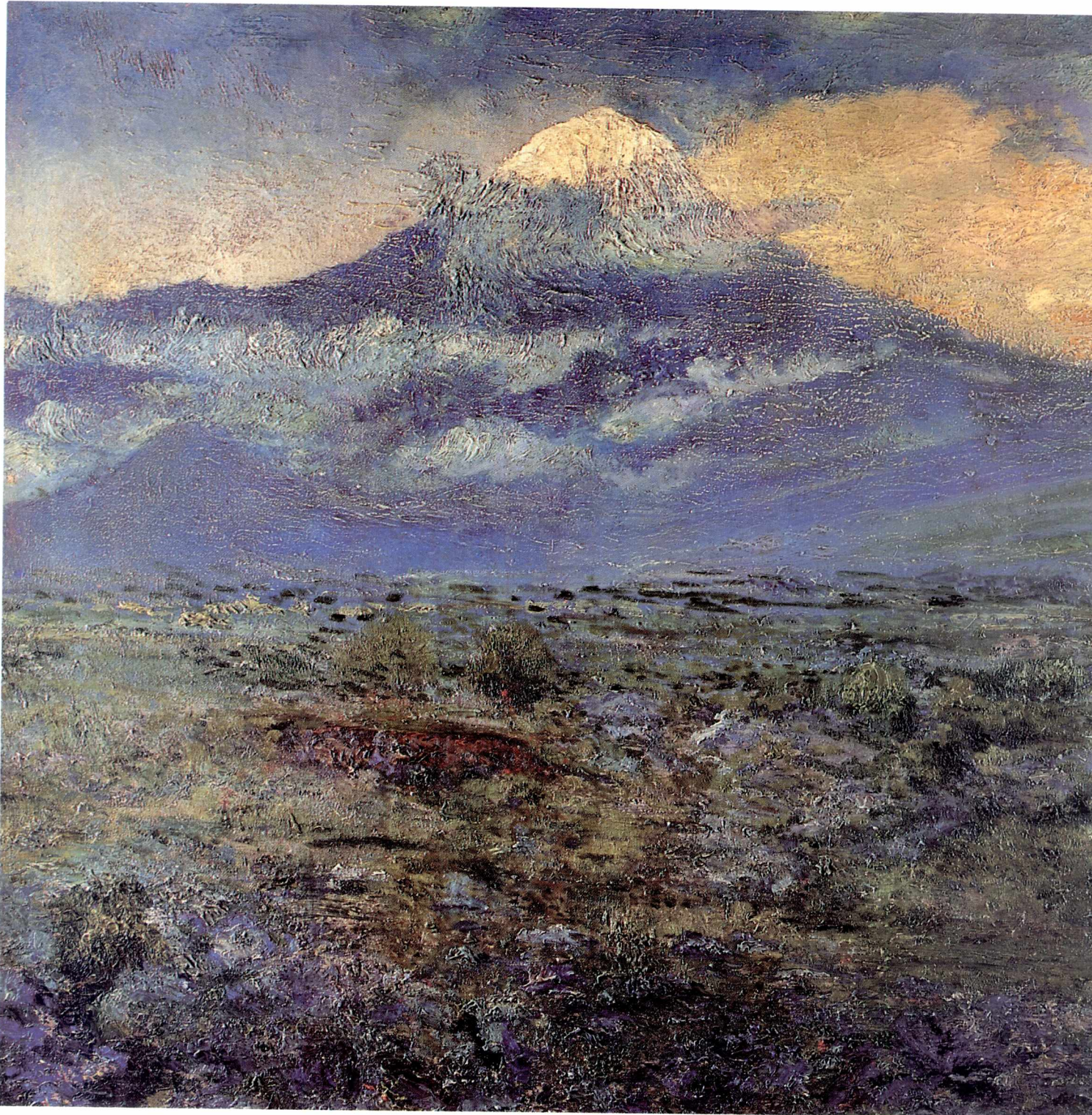


Landscape Painting in Mexico

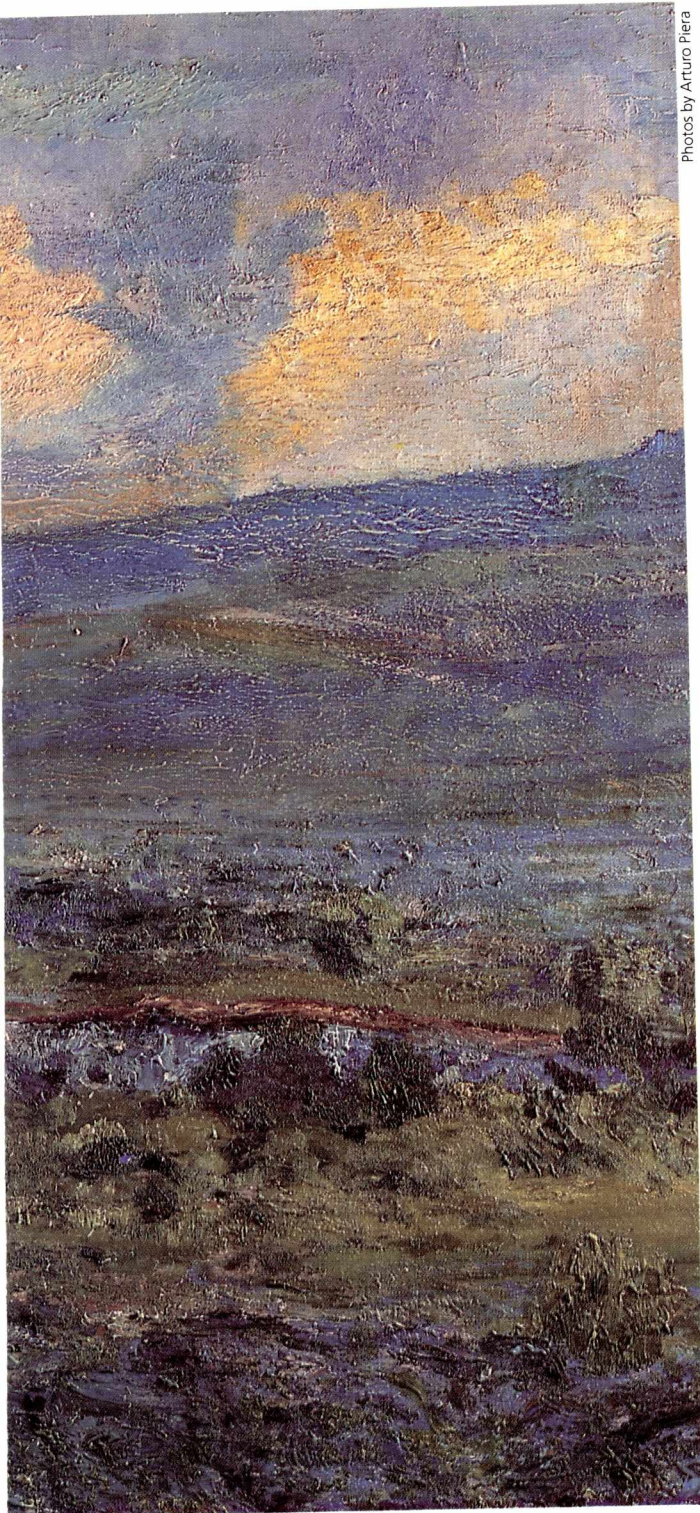
Joaquín Claussell

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Most of Clausell's extensive body of work is made up of landscapes, mainly using impressionist techniques mixed with a style all his own.



Photos by Arturo Pierra

Landscape painting in Mexico has attracted magnificent artists, from the foreigners who were inspired here to use their palette to capture the country's breathtaking natural beauty to painters born here. They all have put on canvas Mexico's clouds in a blue sky, the rivers and coastlines, the thick foliage, the multicolored jungles, the snow-capped volcanoes and the wide valleys. But there have been three great masters of the Mexican landscape, and all three painted from their own particular aesthetic convictions. José María Velasco represents the academic style; Joaquín Clausell, impressionism; and Dr. Atl, modernism.

Joaquín Clausell was born in 1866 in the Gulf of Mexico port of Campeche. When still a very young man, he went to Mexico City to study law. Despite his natural talent for sketching and painting, he did not enter the San Carlos Academy¹ then. He was interested in politics and participated actively in the opposition movement against the Porfirio Díaz regime for which he was arrested and jailed. After escaping from jail, he went to New York and from there sailed to France. Settling in Paris at the end of the rise of the impressionist school, he visited museums, art galleries and the ateliers of famous painters. He visited Camille Pissarro's atelier, where he must have learned about impressionist technique.

Clausell returned to Mexico in 1895. Two years later he concluded his law studies and, a year later, in 1898, he married Angela Cervantes, a descendent of the old Viceroyal nobility. Together, they set up housekeeping in an old mansion that Angela owned, the house of the Condes de Santiago de Calimaya. Joaquín had his studio built on the top floor where he painted the walls with surprising images.

Most of Clausell's extensive body of work is made up of landscapes, mainly using impressionist techniques mixed with a style all his own. He was particularly attracted to scenery on the Pacific and Gulf coasts, and he depicted them magnificently with his becalmed waters and his storm-whipped seas. Examples of this kind of scene in his work can be found in his seascapes *Storm on the Gulf*,

This page: *View of Orizaba Peak* (oil on canvas).

Previous page: *Surf* (detail) (oil on canvas).

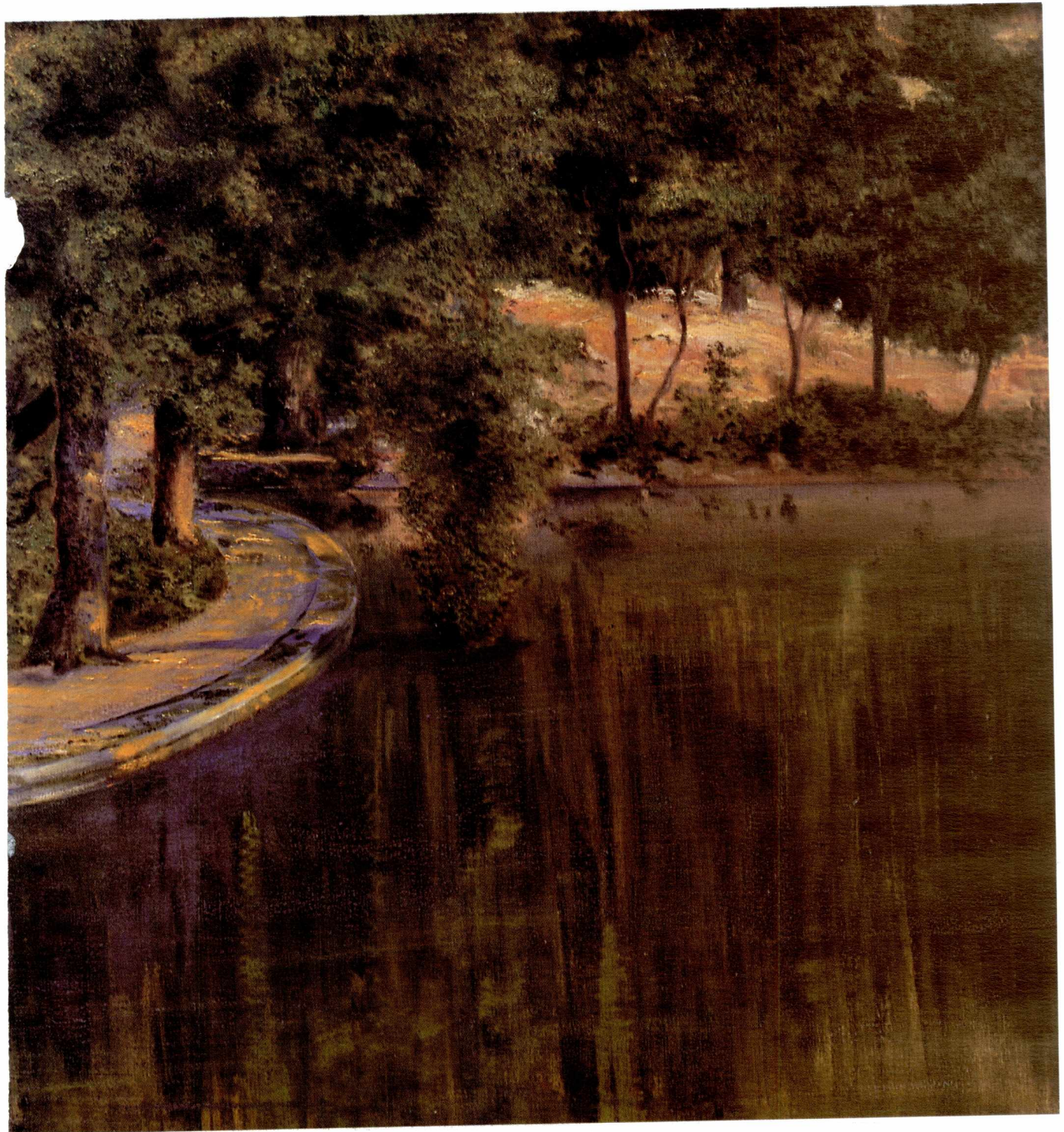
Next page: *Fuentes brotantes* (oil on canvas).

No years are given because Clausell did not date his canvases. [Editor's Note.]

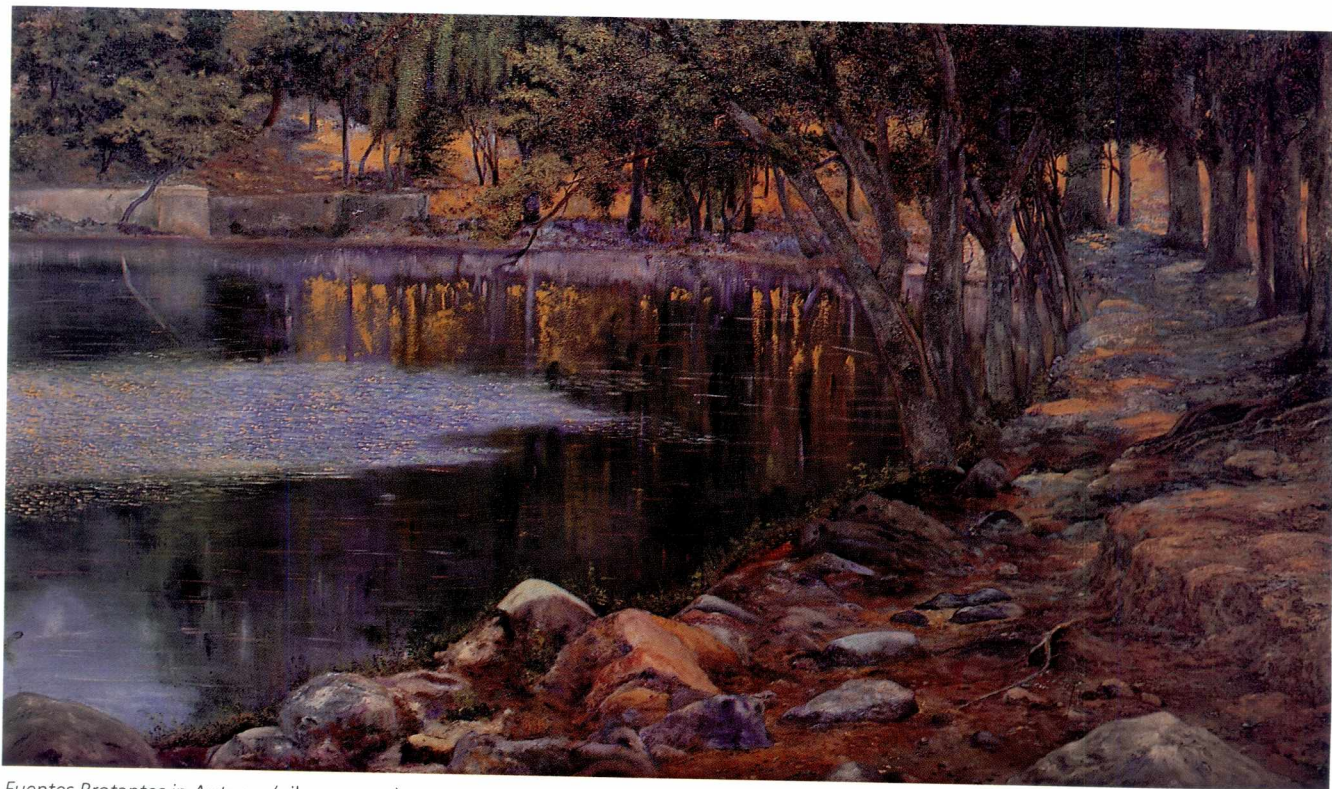
¹ Ever since its founding in 1785, the San Carlos Academy has been the most prestigious school of art in Mexico. [Editor's Note.]



Clausell may well have owed his interest in valley landscapes, and particularly



in scenes of volcanoes, to Gerardo Murillo, Dr. Atl, who was a close friend.



Fuentes Brotantes in Autumn (oil on canvas).

Spirals in the Sea of Campeche, Nocturnal Storm at Sea, The Bay of Manzanillo, The Bluff and *Whirlwind on the Gulf*.

Rivers and lagoons also captured Clausell's spirit. However, he will be remembered as the first to discover the pictorial attraction of the seas, whose beauty he rendered in many of his works.

He was close friends with Gerardo Murillo, Dr. Atl, and to him he may well have owed his interest in valley landscapes and particularly in scenes of volcanoes. Clausell did several paintings of both the Popocatepetl



Landscape and Bather (oil on the wood of the painter's palette).

and the Iztaccíhuatl volcanoes, although he never dared climb them, as Dr. Atl did. The mountainous Ajusco area and Xitle Peak also appeared repeatedly in his canvases, as did the very stark Pedregal area.²

Clausell painted the four walls of his studio with very unusual images, apparently with no unitary thread and at no particular date. Everything that went through his mind seemed to invade these walls: some images are exotic, emanating from the Far East; there are wild beasts semi-hidden in undergrowth. He was particularly obsessed with women, nude, bathing or dressed luxuriously. He also painted portraits of young ladies. There are landscapes, of course: in a small series of paintings worked as such on the walls. He even included religion, with several images of Jesus Christ and symbolic representations of Adam and Eve.

Joaquín Clausell's constant interest in landscape painting led him to travel untiringly around the country. On one of these trips, an accident ended his life in the Zempoala Lagoon region at the center of the Valley of Mexico, November 28, 1935. ❧

²The Pedregal is a volcanic area with impressive rocky terrain in the southern part of Mexico City. [Editor's Note.]