

Mayanizing Modernity

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## **DEDICATION**

To my mother who has unconditionally supported me every step of the way.

And to my lifelong friend Ruthie Burkhalter for providing the much-needed comic relief during the stressful moments of graduate studies.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the cultural and political events of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Mexico that led to the Mayanization of Indigenous subjects in modern Mexican art. Situated in post-1910 Revolutionary Mexico, artists selectively chose specific motifs from ancient Maya works and applied them to modern indigenous subjects as a way create a heterogenous Mexican national identity. This thesis examines the role of the Academy of San Carlos and the *Porfiriato* in the shaping of both a national art form and national identity for Mexico. The issues of race, gender, and their intersectionality are central to this thesis because artists and thinkers primarily looked to the Indigenous woman to fulfill the role of Mexican national identity. Additionally, there was a tension between governmental action that condemned modern indigenous populations while at the same time utilized Mexican indigenous heritage, primarily through Aztec history, to distinguish the nation's history from those of Western countries. What is incredibly unique about the artistic representation of indigenous subjects is that many artist appropriate motifs from the ancient Maya while the majority of government sponsored events focused on the Aztec. The styles of these Mesoamerican civilizations are incredibly different. Many contemporary scholars have concentrated on the influence of Aztec works and history on modern Mexican art and minimized the role of Maya motifs. This thesis looks at the work of Mexican artists Roberto Montenegro, Lola Cueto, Diego Rivera, and Aurora Reyes Flores, in an attempt to highlight the abundant use of specific Maya motifs which reflected the early-twentieth century search of Mexican national identity through the construction of a cohesive Mexican artistic style.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>DEDICATION .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES .....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>I. CHAPTER ONE: National Identity, Race, and Gender.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Introduction: Situating the Problem.....	1
Mexican National Identity: Modernity and Indigeneity .....	15
Nationalism.....	19
The Issue of Race in Mexico .....	22
The Issue of Gender in Mexico.....	32
The Intersectionality of Race and Gender .....	35
<b>II. CHAPTER TWO: Modern Artists and the Mayanization of Indigenous Subjects.....</b>	<b>42</b>
Roberto Montenegro: Artist and Curator .....	42
Lola Cueto: The Modernized Tapestry .....	60
Diego Rivera: Evolution of the Indigenous Subject .....	70
Aurora Reyes Flores: Mexico's First Female Muralist.....	87
Conclusion: Selective Mayanization.....	91
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>96</b>

## LIST OF FIGURES

1. <i>Huitzilopochtli</i> , postclassic Aztec/Mexica sculpture, Museo del Templo Mayor, Mexico City. Photograph by Victoria Nerey, December 2019 .....	2
2. Aztec painted vessel, excavated from Templo Mayor, Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City. Photograph by Victoria Nerey, December 2019. ....	3
3. <i>Santusa</i> (1928), José Sabogal, Oil on canvas, at the Palacio de Bellas Artes on loan from Lima Museum of Art, Donation of Manuel Cisneros Sánchez and Teresa Blondet de Cisneros. Photograph by Victoria Nerey, January 2020. ....	5
4. Centennial Celebration, <i>Moteuczoma representing the era of Conquest</i> , 1910, Unknown, Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City.....	7
5. <i>Mujeres mayas</i> (1926), Roberto Montenegro, Oil on Canvas, Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photograph by Victoria Nerey, September 2017 at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston during <i>Paint the Revolution: Mexican Modernism, 1910–1950</i> . ....	13
6. Anonymous pintura de castas, 18th century, Oil on canvas, Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Tepotzotlán, Mexico .....	24
7. <i>The Princess Papantzin</i> (1880), Isidro Martinez, oil on canvas, 44 x 70 inches. Museo de Bellas Artes de Toluca, State of Mexico.....	36
8. Lintel 24, structure 23, <i>King Shield Jaguar II and Lady Xoc Performing a Bloodletting Ritual</i> , Yaxchilán in Chiapas, Mexico. The British Museum. ....	40
9. Lintel 26, Yaxchilán in Chiapas, Mexico. Museo Nacional de Antropología. Photograph taken by Victoria Nerey, December 2019.....	41
10. <i>Pescador de Mallorca (Mateo el negro)</i> (c.1915), Roberto Montenegro, Museo Nacional De Arte, Mexico City. Photograph by Victoria Nerey, January 2020. ....	44
11. <i>La lámpara de Aladino</i> (1917), illustrated by Roberto Montenegro .....	45
12. Prints from page 8 of <i>Planos en el tiempo: memorias de Roberto Montenegro</i> (2001). Photograph by Victoria Nerey, February 2020.....	46
13. Prints from page 9 of <i>Planos en el tiempo: memorias de Roberto Montenegro</i> (2001). Photograph by Victoria Nerey, February 2020.....	46
14. <i>Exótico</i> (1926), Roberto Montenegro, print. Photograph by Victoria Nerey, February 2020 .....	47
15. <i>Plantanales</i> (1926), Roberto Montenegro, print. Photograph by Victoria Nerey, February 2020 .....	47
16. <i>Reconstrucción</i> (1924), fresco, Roberto Montenegro, Colegio de San Pedro y San Pablo, Mexico City .....	48
17. <i>Bathers (Les Grandes Baigneuses)</i> (c. 1894-1905), Paul Cézanne, The National Gallery, London .....	48

18. <i>Bouteille et journal (Le Guéridon)</i> (Bottle and Newspaper (Small Round Side Table)) (1911), Georges Braque, Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany .....	49
19. <i>Houses L'Estaque</i> (1908), Georges Braque, Museum of Art, Berne.....	50
20. <i>L'église de Carrières-Saint-Denis</i> (1909), Georges Braque.....	51
21. <i>La familia rural</i> (1923-24), Roberto Montenegro, Oil on Canvas, Secretary of Education, Mexico City .....	53
22. <i>La fiesta de la Cruz</i> (1924), Roberto Montenegro, Fresco, Colegio de San Pedro y San Pablo, Mexico City .....	54
23. Retablo from the mid-19th century, from Guanajuato. <i>Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art</i> (1940). Photograph by Victoria Nerey, March 2020. ....	58
24. Retablo from the mid-19th century, from Guanajuato. <i>Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art</i> (1940). Photograph by Victoria Nerey, March 2020. ....	60
25. <i>Campo de coles, Santa Anita</i> (1913), Lola Cueto, Oil on Canvas, Museo Nacional De Arte. Photograph by Victoria Nerey, January 2020.....	61
26. <i>Teatro Cucuricholín</i> (1940), Lola Cueto, Museo Nacional De Arte. Photograph by Victoria Nerey, January 2020.....	62
27. <i>Dintel de Yaxchilán, copia de motivo prehispánico maya</i> , Lola Cueto .....	63
28. <i>Oaxaqueña</i> (1928), Lola Cueto, tapestry .....	64
29. <i>Mercado</i> (1928), Lola Cueto, tapestry .....	65
30. <i>Mujer de ojos grandes</i> (1921), Diego Rivera .....	72
31. <i>Creation</i> (1922), Diego Rivera, Fresco, Secretary of Education, Mexico City .....	73
32. Aztec Portal from <i>The History of Mexico</i> , Diego Rivera, Fresco, Stairwell in the National Palace, Mexico City .....	75
33. Detail of Aztec Portal from <i>The History of Mexico</i> , Diego Rivera, Fresco, Stairwell in the National Palace, Mexico City .....	78
34. <i>The Land of the Pheasant and the Deer: Folksong of the Maya</i> (1935), written by Antonio Médez Bolio, illustrated by Diego Rivera.....	79
35. <i>Perfil de indígena con alcatraces</i> (1938), Diego Rivera, charcoal and pastel .....	80
36. <i>Perfil de indígena con flores de cempazuchitl</i> (1938), Diego Rivera, charcoal and pastel .....	80
37. <i>The People's Demand for Better Health</i> (1953), Diego Rivera, Fresco, Hospital de la Raza, Mexico City.....	81
38. Detail from <i>The People's Demand for Better Health</i> (1953), Diego Rivera, Fresco, Hospital de la Raza, Mexico City .....	82
39. Detail from <i>The People's Demand for Better Health</i> (1953), Diego Rivera, Fresco, Hospital de la Raza, Mexico City .....	82
40. Detail from <i>The People's Demand for Better Health</i> (1953), Diego Rivera, Fresco, Hospital de la Raza, Mexico City .....	83
41. <i>The Tarascan Civilization</i> (1942), Diego Rivera, Patio Corridor of the National Palace, Mexico City .....	84



42. <i>The Great City of Tenochtitlán</i> (1945), Diego Rivera, Patio Corridor of the National Palace, Mexico City .....	85
43. <i>The Huastec Civilization</i> (1950), Diego Rivera, Patio Corridor in the National Palace, Mexico City .....	86
44. <i>Juchitán Market</i> (1953), Aurora Reyes Flores .....	89
45. <i>El primer encuentro</i> (1978), Aurora Reyes Flores .....	91

## Chapter One:

### National Identity, Race, and Gender

#### **Introduction: Situating the Problem**

Mexico's symbiotic relationship between politics and the production of art made visible the early twentieth century issues of national identity, race, and gender that would ultimately generate dubious representations of Indigenous women. The indigenous woman was forced into Mexico's role of 'national identity,' and largely through many publications such as *La raza cósmica* (1925) by José Vasconcelos, she was believed to be "purer" and more connected to Mexico's cultural roots.<sup>1</sup> Vasconcelos and other thinkers used the trope of the indigenous woman as one of the pillars in their ideologies about Mexican identity. However, while the indigenous woman was an essential piece in crafting modern Mexican identity because of her perceived roots to Mexico's Pre-Columbian past, the indigenous woman was also considered a controversial character because of her perceived role in the creation of the *mestizo* race.<sup>2</sup> The conflicting perceived role of modern Indigenous woman emerges as a legitimate problem for art historians because of the way she has been illustrated and characterized by the artists of

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<sup>1</sup> Adriana Zavala, *Becoming Modern, Becoming Tradition: Women, Gender, and Representation in Mexican Art*, (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Cordelia Candelaria, "La Malinche, Feminist Prototype," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 5, no. 2 (1980), 1-6. Candelaria writes that Malinche is believed to have been Malinal the daughter of an Aztec *cacique*, or chief. Her high social status meant that she would have been educated which would aid in the later in Spain's conquest. After her father's death and mother's remarriage, Malinal was banished and given to traders that would eventually sell her to a *cacique* in Tabasco where she lived until the arrival of Cortés. Because of her education, Malinal knew Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs, as well as some Mayan dialects spoken in Tabasco and would later learn Castilian Spanish. After Cortés' takeover of Tabasco, the *cacique* gifted a group of maidens to the Spanish including Malinal who would later be christened "Marina," was eventually raped and bore Cortés' first son thus creating the beginning of the *mestizo* race. Ultimately, because of this and her position in relation to Cortés, Malinal or Malinche, was considered a traitor.

the early modern era, seen prominently in the work of modern artists such as Roberto Montenegro, Diego Rivera, Lola Cueto, and Aurora Reyes Flores. Each artist made significant contributions to Mexican art history.

In addition to being a successful artist Montenegro was also a curator of folk art. Rivera was a prominent muralist in Mexico and gained international recognition for his murals. Although there is less scholarship surrounding the work of Lola Cueto, she also gained international recognition for her unique folk-inspired works. Also trained at the



Figure 1. *Huitzilopochtli*, postclassic Aztec/Mexica sculpture, Museo del Templo Mayor, Mexico City. Photograph by Victoria Nerey, December 2019.

Academy, Cueto was well known for her works that experimented with folk materials such as weaving and papier mâché. Lastly, Aurora Reyes Flores was Mexico's first female muralist and was involved in social activism for women's rights. From Mexico's Pre-Columbian visual traditions to the post-colonial era search for a national art style, the nation's evolving artistic practice was demonstrably some combination of iconography from the pre-Hispanic past, the Catholic Church, and the political regimes from one of the most turbulent periods in Mexican art, the post-1910

Revolution era from the 1920s to the early 1950s. The modern period stands out as one of Mexico's most influential because it built upon themes from the late nineteenth century, responded to the post-1910 socio-political struggles, and in many cases, emphasized indigeneity. The complexities of this artistic period are captivating because artworks reveal both the political and social sentiments of the Mexican public.

The problem of the Indigenous woman was very complex due to the intersectionalities of her role in society. There have been a number of scholarly analyses of the political problems in post-1910 Revolution Mexico, as well as some scholarship that analyzes the artistic representation of indigenous women in this period of Mexican history. Notable studies of the socio-political climate of Mexico



Figure 2. Aztec painted vessel, excavated from Templo Mayor, Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City. Photograph by Victoria Nerey, December 2019.

immediately before the 1910 Revolution include Michael J. Gonzales's article "Imagining Mexico in 1910: Visions of the Patria in the Centennial Celebration in Mexico City" which analyzes Mexico's 1910 Centennial event as a way to memorialize Mexican history, educate about past leaders, and reinforce the concept of the *mestizo* as well as a way to project Mexico's unique Pre-Columbian past through the emphasis on Aztec history, art, and culture [Figs. 1 & 2].<sup>3</sup> Additionally, other studies such as David Brading's article "Nationalism and State-Building in Latin American History" analyze the struggles for Mexico and other Latin American countries' struggle to define themselves as independent nations after their independence from Spain. Within the context of Mexico, Brading examines how nationalism shifted overtime and was influenced by the writings of Vasconcelos and Manuel Gamio, an influential twentieth century anthropologist.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, Dr. Stacie G. Widdifield's *The Embodiment of the National in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexican Painting* (1996) and Dr. Adriana Zavala's *Becoming Modern, Becoming Tradition* :

<sup>3</sup> Michael J. Gonzales, "Imagining Mexico in 1910: Visions of the Patria in the Centennial Celebration in Mexico City." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 39, no. 3 (2007): 495-533.

<sup>4</sup> David A. Brading, "Nationalism and State-Building in Latin American History." *Ibero-amerikanisches Archiv, Neue Folge*, 20, no. 1/2 (1994): 83-108.

*Women, Gender, and Representation in Mexican Art* (2010) both analyze how artists visually represented the indigenous woman throughout Mexican history and how these depictions were tied to Mexico's search for a national identity. Widdifield's book examines nineteenth century artists' tendencies to depict the indigenous woman as *mestiza*, whereas Zavala's book examines some of the problems that were caused by forcing the indigenous woman into the role of national identity.

In contrast to the many studies of the socio-political climate of early twentieth century Mexico and the role of indigenous woman as a key to Mexican national identity, there has been little scholarship on how many Mexican artists pull directly from the Mesoamerican style of the Maya despite there being little understanding of this particular ancient civilization during the early twentieth century. The artistic focus on Maya style merits examination because throughout Mexican history, governments glorified the Aztec society as the pinnacle of Mexican heritage as seen in the 1910 Centennial and Mexico's participation in various World's Fairs, yet much artistic practice of the early twentieth century pulled inspiration from an entirely different civilization. Additionally, the stylization of indigenous people appears to be specific to artists practicing in Mexico City. For example, many *Indigenista* Peruvian artists of the same period including José Sabogal [Fig. 3], Camilo Blas, and Julia Codesido, depict indigenous people in a more naturalistic manner as opposed to the intense stylization—and to some degree problematic simplification—practiced by many artists in Mexico City during the same time.<sup>5</sup> Sabogal, Blas, and Codesido all paint indigenous men and women in a looser style

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<sup>5</sup> Javier Sanjinés, "Indigenismo and Mestizaje." In *A Historical Companion to Postcolonial Literatures - Continental Europe and Its Empires*, edited by Poddar Prem, et. Al., (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 557-62. The concept of *Indigenismo* was present throughout Latin America and in Peruvian arts this took form by elevating the indigenous subject as a source of cultural authenticity.

indebted to post-Impressionism than Mexican artists Roberto Montenegro, Lola Cueto, Diego Rivera, and Aurora Reyes Flores who depict indigenous people in a manner that appropriates specific motifs from the Maya style as a modernist attribute. Therefore, the developing Mexican tradition of depicting indigenous people, specifically women, in such a stylized fashion is likely linked to Mexico's development as a modern nation, especially in the wake of the 1910 Revolution.

When considering this unique representation of indigenous women in modern Mexican art, one of the key themes is national identity, an issue that for Mexico began in



Figure 3. *Santusa* (1928), José Sabogal, Oil on canvas, at the Palacio de Bellas Artes on loan from Lima Museum of Art, Donation of Manuel Cisneros Sánchez and Teresa Blondet de Cisneros. Photograph by Victoria Nerey, January 2020.

the early independence period. After Mexican independence in 1821, one of the government's tasks was defining the new nation after hundreds of years under Spanish rule.<sup>6</sup> What was Mexico without Spain? How would the new nation represent itself internationally and domestically? Mexico faced the extraordinarily difficult undertaking of defining its political power to the rest of the world, primarily to the United States and strong European countries.<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, Mexico had to distinguish its cultural sophistication to the Western world that essentially saw it as an uncultured region whose only benefit was resource extraction. Ultimately, Mexico's early nationhood can

<sup>6</sup> Stacie G. Widdifield, *The embodiment of the national in late nineteenth-century Mexican painting*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> Gonzales, "Imagining Mexico in 1910," 495-533.

be interpreted as being Mexican enough to distinguish itself from its colonial oppressor but Western enough to harmonize with the other world powers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>8</sup> However, this search for national identity also intersects with issues of race which are particularly emphasized in artistic representations of indigenous women.

Racial tension in the early twentieth century was the result of lingering connections to the nineteenth century bourgeois and the racial caste system established during Spanish colonization. Although the *peninsulares* and *mestizos* were technically no longer politically and socially segregated, certain political regimes enacted measures to prevent the working-class and *campesino* class—people that would have been traditionally associated with pure indigenous lineage or a substantial amount—from having the same rights as wealthier members of society.<sup>9</sup> One example of this is the production of indigenous art.<sup>10</sup> There were no laws in place to protect the artistic styles and their artists until the mid-twentieth century. Without protective measures in place, the government and other public entities were able to take advantage of indigenous populations by profiting from forced public performances during the Centennial and from various indigenous crafts that were not legally protected until the mid-1950s. This is

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<sup>8</sup>Widdifield, *The embodiment of the national*.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 16. The colonial caste system was very complex and composed of hierarchical classes based on racial mixing. *Peninsulares* were Spaniards born in Spain, while *criollos* were people of pure Spanish descent but born in Mexico. For the term *mestizo*, see Zavala, *Becoming Modern*, 3. *Mestizo* or *mestiza* refers to someone of both Spanish and indigenous heritage. For the term *campesino*, see Christopher R. Boyer, “The Ecology of Class: Revolution, Weaponized Nature, and the Making of ‘Campesino’ Consciousness.” *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 41, no. 1 (2015), 40-53. *Campesino* refers to the specific rural laboring population of the larger umbrella term “working-class.” Additionally, *campesino* could but not always refer to a rural worker that was of indigenous descent.

<sup>10</sup> It should be understood that during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, indigenous art was referred to as ‘folk art’ which was a blending of Pre-Columbian and Spanish traditions. Weaving, pottery, and votive figures were and are still prevalent in folk art. The production of these primarily utilitarian objects blend the techniques of indigenous cultures and the ornamentation of Spanish culture to create what we understand to be ‘folk art’.

significant because until the early twentieth century, indigenous peoples made up around a third of Mexico's total population.<sup>11</sup> Despite this large number of indigenous people in Mexico and the growing pride in Mexico's unique cultural history, social and political leaders treated the then-current indigenous people with hostility.

Racial issues in the early-twentieth century go deeper than just the protection of indigenous art. It comes in the form of forced public spectacles like Mexico's Centennial and the political and social choice of utilizing the indigenous woman as a placeholder for and signifier of Mexican national identity. The 1910

Centennial [Fig. 4] was a large celebration in commemoration of the hundredth anniversary of Mexico's independence from Spain. This huge national event promoted the production of art, public monuments commemorating Mexican heroes throughout history, and large-scale parades and plays telling the history of Mexico and its culture, though many of these focused on the history of the Aztec. Although there were many civilizations throughout ancient Mexico, there was more known



Figure 4. Centennial Celebration, Moteuczoma representing the era of Conquest, 1910, Unknown, Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City.

about this portion of Mexican history from the records of Spanish accounts and the transcribed accounts of indigenous people during and after the conquest. Mexico's creation of the Centennial primarily came from European influence. Centennials became a popular trend in Europe because it was a way for nations to celebrate political and

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<sup>11</sup> Gonzalez, "Imagining Mexico in 1910," note 10.



social happenings in their history. However, the most important aspect of the Centennial was to commemorate important revolutionary battles that greatly changed the nation's history.<sup>12</sup> Although the main purpose of the Centennial was to celebrate Mexican Independence, the Centennial organizers also created parades with indigenous people dressed in traditional costumes in a way that emphasized Mexico's unique history to foreign spectators. However, these public spectacles often forced indigenous people to perform despite their unwillingness to do so, an aspect analyzed in greater depth later in the chapter, and it was very unlikely that indigenous participants were given any monetary reparations. The Mexican Government and elites had very open political and public disdain towards the indigenous population.<sup>13</sup> This was very prevalent in the Centennial's spectacles where indigenous people were forced into public performance but also expected to stay hidden from foreign dignitaries and tourists. It is important to understand the openly ambivalent relationship between the government and the indigenous population, insomuch as it may have potentially influenced how Montenegro, Cueto, Rivera, and Reyes Flores began to depict indigenous women. Although the political regimes of each period differed greatly, a common theme between each was the use of Mesoamerican mythology and history, and the history of colonization throughout the Americas as a foundation for the construction of Mexican identity both nationally and internationally.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, the Centennial heavily emphasized the Aztec civilization in various aspects of the event, yet what is interesting is that although the government and intellectuals like Vasconcelos primarily highlighted the Aztecs, the manner in which

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 496.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 498.

<sup>14</sup> James Oles, Chapter 7: "From Revolution to Renaissance 1920-34." In *Art and Architecture in Mexico*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2013).

Montenegro, Cueto, Rivera, and Reyes Flores depict the indigenous woman clearly draws from the Maya stylistic tradition. This concept will be further examined within the chapter.

The issues of gender and race were also rather large problems in the early twentieth century across the world, but within the framework of Mexico each possessed certain webs woven within other facets of Mexican history and culture. Gender roles were shifting with evolving technology and the movement for Mexican women's suffrage beginning in 1916.<sup>15</sup> This created a paradoxical perception of women moving into modernity but also remaining in their traditional roles. The resulting tension forged an unrealistic expectation for women to be both modern in the sense that women represented the emerging ideals of the twentieth century that embraced technological and societal development, and traditional in the sense that women also remained strong in their gender roles of homemaking, childrearing, and eventually representative of indigeneity, a concept that will be discussed at length later in the chapter in relation to *La India Bonita* competitions.<sup>16</sup> However, while non-indigenous women and the working class were overlooked and mistreated by the ruling regimes, the struggle specific to indigenous women was incredibly daunting. Unlike upper-class women, indigenous women were expected to emphasize their indigeneity, a view linked to Mexico's search for a national identity.<sup>17</sup> This reasoning stemmed from the idea that this group of women were more purely, that is, more racially, ethnically, and historically connected to Mexico's roots. Additionally, this ideology marginalized indigenous women even further, as the

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<sup>15</sup> Zavala, *Becoming modern*, 7 and 51-57.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 23-106.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

government capitalized upon the culture through administering public spectacles without providing any residual benefits to the indigenous population.

Overall, the lack of proper representation of indigenous populations is deeply rooted in Mexico's colonial past. Early twentieth century political and cultural institutions began to capitalize on indigenous artistic practice and customs. These concepts of representation and implications from the nineteenth century are significant because they were the result of the Academy of San Carlos and were aligned with the political regime. The Academy of San Carlos served as the major educational institution for Mexico and within the context of this research, it also served as the major educational institution for artists Montenegro, River, Cueto, and Reyes Flores.<sup>18</sup> For a long period of time, the instructors at the Academy of San Carlos were only from Europe which meant that the studio techniques were only European and associated with the European Academy.<sup>19</sup> For example, the Mexican Academy taught historical paintings, portraiture, and other accepted genres of art making that were also taught at the European Academy.<sup>20</sup> Within the frame of Western art historical research, the concept of the avant-garde developed over hundreds of years in opposition to the European Academy. Additionally, avant-garde and modern trends were not readily accepted by the Academy and these movements were not taught within the European Academy until well after their inception. In Europe, the avant-garde began with the development of social realism in the

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<sup>18</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, the following analysis on the Academy of San Carlos will strictly focus on the arts.

<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that the Academy was not the only artistic institution, Churches often used indigenous labor to paint works of art. These indigenous people were taught European technique and it could be argued that these works may be considered the first mestizo style, though this goes beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>20</sup> Widdifield, *The Embodiment of the National*.

nineteenth century which later spawned many other nineteenth century modernist movements such as the Impressionists, Post-Impressionists, and Fauves. These movements were rejected by the European Academy but over many years they eventually made their way into the curriculum. A similar phenomena occurred in the Academy of San Carlos but much of the evolution of San Carlos began with the changing leadership positions and faculty. The reason that a change in leadership at the Academy of San Carlos was central to the development of Mexican artistic practice was because students and other practicing artists felt that, in order for the Academy to represent Mexican socio-political ideologies, the faculty needed to understand Mexican culture and its history and therefore the faculty members needed to be Mexican rather than European.<sup>21</sup> The Academy's artistic practice eventually began to reflect Mexico's long-time search for a national identity and a national artistic style. This was primarily seen in the production of history paintings that redefined Mexico's history through its parallels to *mestizaje*. There were certain canons for depicting different races in conjunction with the accepted ways to depict various historical scenes. As the Academy reached the early twentieth century very little had changed, but more students studied in Europe in addition to their education at San Carlos. However, these traditions in Mexican painting were deeply rooted in the political and social movements of Mexico and, like the European Academy, reluctant to change its practice until the 1910 Revolution.

The Academy of San Carlos taught Roberto Montenegro and Diego Rivera who were classmates around 1903. Lola Cueto also attended The Academy of San Carlos and was the only female in the Academy during her time of study. It is not documented how

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

long Cueto attended the Academy other than the general ‘teens’ of the twentieth century and therefore in the middle of the 1910 Revolution. Lastly, Aurora Reyes Flores attended the Academy in the 1920s.<sup>22</sup> Each of these artists were classically trained which would greatly influence their artistic careers. The works these prominent artists depict accentuated features, both physical and cultural, that were associated with Mexican indigenous women. Because Montenegro and Rivera were studying in Europe during the teens of the twentieth century, their work contained similarities to the European artistic groups such as the Fauves that problematically appropriated non-Western indigenous art under the ideology that these cultures were “primitive” because they did not conform to the classical Western tradition of art making.<sup>23</sup> However, Rivera and Montenegro approached this concept through the lens of the Mexican indigenous person with the intention that this would aid in the search for a Mexican national style and identity, an issue that will be expanded upon later in the second chapter. Upon their return from Europe, Montenegro and Rivera would eventually influence other Mexican artists, with their work and they helped introduce European art trends. Each artist that will be examined depicts the indigenous woman as somewhat simple in her physicality and setting. This characteristic is more prevalent in the works of Montenegro and Rivera than it is in the work of Cueto and Reyes Flores. Within works by all artists that depict the indigenous woman, the darkness of her skin is emphasized and contrasted with lighter clothing, sometimes patterned, creating an intense contrast. These traits, among others

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<sup>22</sup> Dina Comisarenko Mirkin refers to the school as Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes, however, in other scholarly articles and books, this was the name of the Academy of San Carlos prior to its title change after the Mexican War of Independence. See Mikrin, Dina Comisarenko. 2005. “Aurora Reyes's ‘Ataque a la Maestra Rural’: The First Mural Created by a Mexican Female Artist” in *Woman's Art Journal* 26, no. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Joshua I. Cohen, “Fauve Masks: Rethinking Modern ‘Primitivist’ Uses of African and Oceanic Art, 1905-8,” *Art Bulletin* 99, no. 2 (June 2017), 136-138.

that will be discussed later in the thesis, display how the artists, government actors, and institutions framed the indigenous woman as its 'national identity'.

One of the earliest examples of this type of representation is Roberto Montenegro's *Mujeres mayas* (1926) [Fig. 5]. The painting is smaller in size, 31 ½ inches by 27 ½. Depicted in the foreground are four Maya women that have been visually flattened and placed over each other in a layered fashion. The first woman closest in the



Figure 5. *Mujeres mayas* (1926), Roberto Montenegro, Oil on Canvas, Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photograph by Victoria Nerey, September 2017 at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston during *Paint the Revolution: Mexican Modernism, 1910–1950*.

foreground has a more rounded head with a slight elongation more noticeable near the hairline. Her hair is pulled into an egg-like bun at the base of her head. This woman has a curved prominent nose with a flared nostril. At the bridge of the nose, the woman's visible eye is deeply set back which is emphasized by the light brown eyelids. Her mouth is slightly open with the corners angled downward. The woman wears a white dress with a rectangular-cut

neckline that reveals the woman's more flattened chest and long neck. Her skin is a dark brown with greenish tones in the face, ear, and upper neck. The second woman in the middle-foreground is stacked directly behind the first woman. This woman's head is more elongated than the previous, but she has the same type of bun-like hair, long nose, deeply set eyes, and a slightly open mouth. However, the viewer can see this woman's arms that extend to the bottom of the canvas. The two women in the back-middle ground

have similar facial features to the women in the foreground, but their mouths are closed. Behind these figures are simple huts that are most likely meant to indicate their village or homes. Each woman's face is in a profile manner, but their bodies are frontal. Their heads are elongated with an almost egg or almond shape that is mirrored in their hair which is pulled back into a bun. Each of their noses is large and bent at the bridge but all differ slightly in curvature. However, it is clear that the artist intentionally emphasizes this feature on each woman.

Due to the profile nature in which Montenegro depicts the women, only one eye can be seen on each woman. Their eyes are almond shaped, echoing the forms of their heads and hair. Montenegro appears to have taken stylistic motifs from proto-cubism which can be seen in the flattened spatial planes and thick brushstrokes in the background. Additionally, he drew inspiration from European movements that appropriated specific elements from non-Western indigenous art. However, Montenegro recontextualizes this through Mesoamerican and Mexican indigenous iconography through the use of the Maya figural style which can be understood through the female figures' elongated heads, prominent noses and full lips. While it was common for Latin American artists in this period to use European tradition, it is somewhat poignant for artists in Mexico to draw from European avant-garde movements because these artists were creating their own artistic canon separate from European history. This idea will be further expanded in the following chapter, but it is important to begin the analysis of Montenegro because he was one of the earliest artists to depict indigenous women in this profile manner that directly pulls from Mesoamerican art. Because of this, the viewer can see both corners of the eyes, which reinforce the flatness of Montenegro's painting.

Although Montenegro's composition may favor some aspects of the avant-garde trends, he learned studying in Europe, he clearly emphasizes these women's' indigeneity through the use of Maya motifs. Their eyes are a deep brown matching their emphasized dark skin tone. The dark skin is highly contrasted with the nearly pristine white dresses worn by each woman. Montenegro paints the women with long, slender necks that appear almost too long for an actual human. All of the women in Montenegro's painting have dark black hair that slightly blends into the face at the hairline. The women's' hair is slicked back into a bun, that like the eyes, echoes the shape of the women's' heads.

Montenegro's continual use of this emphasized oval shape creates a female figure that slightly distorts the human figure in favor of loosely employing Mesoamerican and Mexican indigenous motifs. This same type of representation of indigenous women is used by all of the artists and will be examined throughout this thesis. For example, each artist primarily places the indigenous woman with a frontal body but a head that is in profile. Additionally, each artist also depicts the indigenous woman with darker skin, large noses and lips, along with elongated heads. This thesis aims to understand the how the careful appropriation of specific motifs from the ancient Maya was related to Mexico's larger emphasis on indigeneity and modernity as a way order to craft a national identity.

## **I. Mexican National Identity: Modernity and Indigeneity**

However, before one can examine these works in more depth, it is important to understand the nation's cultural history that led artists to stereotype the representation and place these representations at the center of Mexican identity. A major role in how



indigenous women were represented in the early-twentieth century is tied to the *Porfiriato*. Porfirio Díaz's presidency was one of the most controversial presidencies in Mexican history. Díaz's first term as president was from 1877 until 1880 when he stepped down, as per the norm that a president should only serve one term. However, in 1884 changing his public stance on this, he ran for re-election and served from 1884-1911, a period referred to as the *Porfiriato*. Díaz's presidency over both periods totaled thirty years in office. The presidency, while having major issues regarding race and gender, also focused on technological advancement. For such a new country, modernization, both social and technological, was extremely important because it was thought to put Mexico on the same cultural and political level of European countries.<sup>24</sup> Stacie Widdifield describes this throughout her book, *The Embodiment of the National in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexican Painting* how Mexico was caught in a difficult struggle between claiming its pre-Hispanic past and the desire to be seen as a strong nation like those from Europe.<sup>25</sup> Although Widdifield's book focuses strictly on a small period of time in the nineteenth-century before the *Porfiriato*, many of these ideas surrounding artistic practice and national identity were still relevant during the *Porfiriato*, the period that would greatly influence Montenegro, Cueto, Rivera, and Reyes Flores. Widdifield chiefly analyzes the production of art; throughout all of history, governments and rulers have used art as a way to create an identity. One way for a nation to conceive of an identity is with cohesive subject matter in paintings, particularly figures of history paintings. Widdifield's extensive discussion on Mexico's struggle to find a national identity is significant to this study because the search for a cohesive subject matter lasted into the

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<sup>24</sup> Zavala, *Becoming Modern*, 7 and 51-57.

<sup>25</sup> Widdifield, *The Embodiment of the National*.

early twentieth century, the period in which Mexican art and its discourse utilized the indigenous woman as Mexico's cultural identity. Additionally, the issue of national identity became very prevalent in Mexico's participation in the World's Fairs of 1889 and 1900 in Paris which were events that allowed Mexico to showcase its prestige to other world leaders. Dr. Shelley Garrigan's book *Collecting Mexico: Museums, Monuments, and the Creation of National Identity*, analyzes the Mexican exhibit at the World's Fair. One of the problems she discusses is the planning committee's struggle to represent such a new nation.<sup>26</sup> This issue is similar to Widdifield's analysis of finding a specific national style. Both Dr. Widdifield and Dr. Garrigan's books are now classics in the field of Mexican art history and define the artistic and cultural scenes during the *Porfiriato*. Both scholars analyze the progression of national style within the framework of an increasingly global art world composed of World's Fairs and growing international art markets. This is important to this period because Mexico was quite literally in the spotlight of the art market and competed with other nations to prove its status as not only a nation but a developed nation despite being independent from Spain. Historically, the World's Fair was a chance for nations to showcase modernity and progress within their country. Mexico was under pressure to compete with nations around the world, though Garrigan implies that this competitive nature was particularly evident in relation to other Latin American countries. This was due in part to the similarities that Mexico had with other Latin American countries, particularly due to many of their shared ties to Spain. She seems to allude to the idea that Mexico wanted to be more advanced and more unique than European countries, but also more so than other Latin American countries.

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<sup>26</sup> Shelley E. Garrigan, *Collecting Mexico Museums, Monuments, and the Creation of National Identity*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 135-152.

The ancient civilizations of Mesoamerica, which flourished in what encompasses much of present-day Mexico, were entirely different from ancient civilizations in Colombia, Peru, and other Latin American countries. Many of the cultures in Central and South America utilized gold as a primary medium and their figural representation differed from those in Mesoamerica. Additionally, the styles within Mesoamerica were stylistically very different from each other. Garrigan's examination highlights the government's use of Aztec art and architecture as a means to express the nation's pre-Hispanic past but, in an effort to be seen as a modern nation, the planning committee took some liberties to modernize the ancient style. For example, the committee created an architectural structure with a style similar to the Aztecs but there were many stylistic inconsistencies. Within the World's Fair's competitive atmosphere, Garrigan reflects on previous scholarship that considers Mexico's representation of itself as inauthentic due to the planning committee's hyper-awareness of the nation's history.<sup>27</sup> This solution of using art and archaeology from throughout Mexican history in the World's Fairs in order to emphasize Mexico's unique history separate from Europe is significant to the subsequent and incredibly problematic exploitation of indigenous culture in the early-twentieth century that would culminate with the use of the indigenous woman as Mexico's national identity in the post-Revolution era. Additionally, these events reinforce Garrigan's discussion centered on the idea of Mexico's inauthentic self-image, the use of the indigenous woman as national identity is both unrealistic and an inaccurate representation of Mexico as a whole. Through these grand public events, scholars can clearly see

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

Mexico's progression of nationalism from the use of indigenous heritage to the use of the indigenous woman.

### **Nationalism**

Another spectacle that inaccurately represented Mexico's indigenous past was the Centennial on September 15, 1910 commemorating the hundredth anniversary of Mexico's Independence. People from all over Mexico were encouraged to come to Mexico City, and the event even attracted people from other countries.<sup>28</sup> Throughout the duration of the Centennial monuments, buildings, and new public art were unveiled to the public in remembrance of Mexico's past and hope for the future. The Díaz regime insisted on creating extravagant performances for the opening of the Centennial. Some of these performances told the story of Mexico and highlighted the cultures of indigenous populations past and present. Díaz's planning committee forced indigenous people to perform in the Centennial after a large portion of the native population refused to take part in the various public spectacles.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, Díaz had planning committee members meticulously create accurate costumes for the many periods in Mexican history that would be on display either in the parades or the grand play. All of these events capitalized on indigenous culture and people by using them as a public spectacle to showcase the nation's unique history distinct from Europe but at the same time, Díaz and other Mexican elites openly looked down upon the indigenous population.

Gonzales makes an important note in his article, that "while the Centennial celebrated the nation's Pre-Columbian cultures...elites considered contemporary natives a drag on development and an embarrassment" (Gonzales, 498). This paradox was the

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<sup>28</sup> Gonzalez, "Imagining Mexico in 1910," 495-497.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 514.

result of the Mexican government's goal of assimilating the indigenous population that made up about a third of Mexico's total population during the early twentieth century.<sup>30</sup> Even in the early-twentieth century, colonization was still a prerogative of the Mexican government to continue towards modernity. So, while the government and its representatives wanted to glorify the nation's Pre-Columbian heritage, were, at the same time, condemning current indigenous populations to poverty, and using these people for material gain. It can only be inferred that with an influx of people to Mexico City, both from Mexico and other countries, that there was some sort of profit from the spectacle that the Centennial created. Essentially, indigenous culture was being taken out of its original context for cultural and political capital. The Mexican government used the nation's unique history to differentiate itself from Western nations but in doing this, ancient indigenous styles were blended with each other in addition to aspects of modern styles, primarily coming from architecture at this point in history. But, while the government elevated the nation's unique history, it continually oppressed modern indigenous populations creating a paradox between claims and actions. This constructs the overall beginnings of the fetishization of a culture perceived to be pure and untouched but at the same time still believed to be inferior.

Another important aspect of the Centennial was the involvement of the artists in observation. Although the Centennial was intended as a celebration of Mexico's hundredth anniversary of independence from Spain, it was also an event that marked the eve of the 1910-Revolution. There were many public protests that conveyed the peoples' discontent. As mentioned earlier, Montenegro and Rivera attended the Academy prior to

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, note 10.

the revolution while it was still fairly conservative, so it can be understood that they were most likely being taught more along the lines of the late nineteenth century. This fact will be expanded upon during the analysis of gender. Because Cueto attended the Academy in the middle of the 1910 Revolution and during the Centennial celebrations, it is likely that she received a more liberal training than Montenegro and Rivera.<sup>31</sup> These differences in training are important and had an impact on the work of each artist. It can also be inferred that depending on how long Cueto studied at the Academy, and the fact that she attended school around the same time as David Alfaro Siqueiros, she was learning during student protests fueled by the ideologies of the well-known political theorist and artist Dr. Atl. Additionally, Dr. Atl organized an exhibition in protest of Díaz's inclusion of Spanish modernists—Anglo-Saxon modernism which was different than twentieth century Mexican *modernismo* and *modernistas* that strived to embrace the technological and cultural growth of modernity—for the Centennial.<sup>32</sup> This exhibition was student-run and reminiscent of the *Salon des Refusés*.<sup>33</sup> While there are no detailed records of the works exhibited and students that participated, Zavala makes an important note that this exhibition was almost foreshadowing the post Revolution fascination with “the Indian,” the working class, and the rural peasant.”<sup>34</sup>—Some artists like Saturnino Herrán were already experimenting with a proto-*indigenismo* before the end of the Revolution, but the concept of *indigenismo* will be expanded upon later in the chapter—This exhibition was

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<sup>31</sup> There is little documentation on Cueto's career and oeuvre except for newspaper clippings that still survive and the very few scholarly writings about her. See Flores, Tatiana. 2008. “Strategic Modernists: Women Artists in Post-Revolutionary Mexico” in *Woman's Art Journal* 29, no. 2. Flores provides a detailed bibliography of Cueto and in her notes, states that the majority of her information came from Cueto's daughter, Mireya Cueto, who saved ephemera related to her mother's career.

<sup>32</sup> Rubén Gallo, “Introduction: Media and Modernity in Mexico” in *Mexican Modernity: The Avant-Garde and Technological Revolution*, (The MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 2005).

<sup>33</sup> Zavala, *Becoming Modern*, 113-118.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 116.

important because it was an open protest of the Academy within the confines of the Centennial. Additionally, it is possible that Montenegro, Rivera, and Cueto were exposed to this exhibition to some degree given that all were in Mexico City around this time.

The exhibition would have been quite radical because it was an open protest of the academic construct in the Academy. Additionally, it was just before the outbreak of the 1910 Revolution and likely would have had political messages related to the social discontent with the Díaz regime. However, without the needed documentation of works in the exhibition, this is all speculation given the issues within the Academy and Dr. Atl's involvement with it as well as the general timeframe for when Cueto and Siqueiros attended the Academy. What is less speculative is the claim that the World's Fairs and the Centennial served the Mexican government to both assert modernity by showcasing public improvements and reclaim the nation's entirely unique past through spectacles that highlighted Mesoamerican roots. However, despite the nation's celebration of this past, the government systematically oppressed and looked down upon the contemporary indigenous populations.

## II. **The Issue of Race in Mexico:**

Racial tension in Mexico between those of Spanish descent and those of indigenous descent began during Spanish colonization. Throughout Spanish colonization, the oppression of indigenous populations was rampant. Various measures were put in place to restrict the lives of indigenous people and in terms of socio-economic status. Colonial Mexico's social spheres greatly impacted a person's life and one's class was

dictated by one's blood.<sup>35</sup> The highest members of society were *peninsulares*, those born in Spain and considered to possess pure Spanish blood. These were the only men capable of holding any position of power. *Criollos* were people with pure Spanish blood, but who were born in Mexico. So, while they were higher up in social status, they could not hold the highest positions in government. The lower class, commonly referred to by scholars as the *mestizo*, was broken up into smaller subsections based on hierarchies of Spanish, indigenous, and/or African blood. People within this broad lower-class were primarily stagnant when it came to moving upwards in social status. Those with pure indigenous or African blood were seen as the lowest members of society and referred to as savages.<sup>36</sup> During the colonial period, various measures were put in place to reinforce the social hierarchy. One of these methods was through the arts. An early artistic practice that reinforced the social caste were *pintura de castas* that depicted the role of each type of member of society.<sup>37</sup> Traditionally, these paintings depicted gender roles and racial roles. For example, caste paintings [Fig. 6] depicted a range of different racial mixings and social statuses that one might see in Spanish colonies. In this caste painting, one can observe how the artist emphasized skin tone and physical features of certain ethnic groups. It is a common consensus among scholars that within caste paintings, it was more accepted and more apparent when male and females were depicted together for the male figure to be white and the female to be either white or have darker, more native characteristics. The indigenous male was not a common subject within these paintings unless it was to emphasize his inferiority. For example, when paired next to a female the

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<sup>35</sup> Widdifield, *The Embodiment of the National*, 19-23.

<sup>36</sup> While the struggles of African people in Mexico should by no means be overlooked, the artistic style under examination focuses on that of the indigenous woman and therefore so will the research and analysis.

<sup>37</sup> Widdifield. *The Embodiment of the National*, 125-126.



male's skin tone would be exaggerated. Although caste paintings were no longer in fashion after Mexican Independence, this colonial racial concept permeated Mexican life in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The thinking and racial profiling seen in caste paintings may be seen within the works of Montenegro, Rivera, Cueto, and Reyes Flores. While these artists' works had different intentions than caste paintings, the social repercussions were very similar. Both the *casta* paintings and the modern works clearly dictate a role for the indigenous woman. *Casta* paintings place her subservient to



Figure 6. Anonymous pintura de castas, 18th century, Oil on canvas, Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Tepotzotlán, Mexico.

her white or *mestizo* husband while early modern works dictate her as humble, motherly, and simple under the overarching theme of Mexican identity. The influence of these caste paintings can clearly be seen in the works of each artist. Referring back to the painting *Mujeres mayas* by Montenegro, there is a distinct similarity between his painting and these caste paintings with the depiction of indigenous people. The emphasis on skin tone and certain physical characteristics reinforce her status within society. Although Montenegro and the other

artists in examination used the indigenous woman to depict Mexican identity, their similarities to *casta* paintings suggests and perpetuates racial differences.

Like other American countries, Mexico's interactions with the indigenous population have been tenuous. Despite granting indigenous people citizenship, the government still oppressed this population through various political endeavors. One example of this is the Hacienda system which took land away from indigenous populations during Spanish conquest and colonization.<sup>38</sup> Throughout Mexican history, even in its early nationhood, the ownership of land was tied to wealth. This traditional hierarchy persisted in Mexico up until the 1910 revolution.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, while the government wanted to celebrate Mexico's shared indigenous past, it actively profited from the commodification of native arts and crafts without actually providing any support to this largely marginalized population. The *Indigenismo* movement, or Indigenism, was a large aspect of what influenced many politicians, philosophers, and artists during the post-1910 Revolution state. One of the most controversial texts to come out of the post-Revolution era was José Vasconcelos' essay *La raza cósmica* (1925), later amended by Vasconcelos in 1948 to correct what he believed were misinterpretations of his text. The essay is written in a prophetic tone that envisions the Mexican race, specifically the *mestizo* race as the fifth and final race that will become superior to the rest of the world. This superior race will be fulfilled as racial mixing becomes rampant across the world, but Vasconcelos makes the important distinguishing characteristic that this race will be finalized when this 'full' racial mixing reaches the Latin American countries, including Mexico. It seems as though his reasoning for choosing the mestizo races of Latin America is because these people were born out of forced racial mixing. For Vasconcelos,

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<sup>38</sup> Eric Van Young, "Mexican Rural History Since Chevalier: The Historiography of the Colonial Hacienda." *Latin American Research Review* 18, no. 3 (1983), 18.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

this makes the Latin American people the chosen race to complete the world-wide racial mixing that inevitably will result in the Cosmic Race. This essay was and still is problematic for a number of reasons.

Arguably the main reason this text is problematic is the infatuation Vasconcelos betrays with regard to the Latin American indigenous population, specifically the Mexican indigenous people. The first part of Vasconcelos' essay centers around the Spanish American *mestizaje* born from colonization in the New World. Within this section he analyzes the glories and shortcomings of Spain and its colonies and often compares it to the United States and the English. He seems to imply that Latin American countries are more predisposed to survive than white races and ultimately become the 'Cosmic Race' because of their willingness to 'interbreed.'<sup>40</sup> This section in itself discredits the many oppressing factors that led to the multi-racial heritage of the large majority of Latin Americans. The second part of Vasconcelos' essay focuses on the 'what-if' scenarios in the formation of the fifth race. This section begins by analyzing the geographic advantages for Vasconcelos' "superior race" that will outlast the white race.<sup>41</sup> He writes of the possibility of science, implying its relation to European lineage, could potentially slow the coming of the fifth race. However, Vasconcelos goes on to say that this new Latin American race will abandon European thought and culture, and instead "the pyramid will again develop" implying that this new race will harken back to the ways of Ancient Americans.<sup>42</sup> This second section directly links Vasconcelos' 'Cosmic Race' to the indigenous culture, art, and traditions of pre-Spanish America. It also implies

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<sup>40</sup> José Vasconcelos and Didier Tisdell Jaén, *The Cosmic Race: a bilingual edition*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 7-22.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 23-27.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 24.

that in order for Latin Americans to achieve this higher sense of self and blood, that the people of Latin America must forsake European influence and instead embrace their indigeneity. Although this infatuation with indigeneity is seen throughout the manuscript, these ideas climax towards the end of the essay where Vasconcelos states that “the mestizo, the Indian, and even the Black are superior to the white in a countless number of proper spiritual capacities.”<sup>43</sup>

Another issue within Vasconcelos’ essay is the fact that he continually contradicts himself throughout each part. Additionally, in the prologue to the 1948 edition Vasconcelos contradicts what he had previously written in the original publication. Within the 1948 prologue itself Vasconcelos continually contradicts his own statements. These contradictions could potentially be seen as the products of internal antagonisms. Throughout his life, Vasconcelos identified as Mexican but later as Spanish because of his heritage.<sup>44</sup> Early on in the essay he refers to himself as a Spaniard which seems rather sharp because the essay claims that the people of Latin America, the *mestizaje* born out of Spanish conquest and colonization, will become the final race.<sup>45</sup> Even though Vasconcelos has pure European ancestry, he was born well after Mexican Independence.<sup>46</sup> This remark alone perpetuates the caste system of Colonial Mexico and highlights the racial separation still present in Mexico. However, he contradicts this sentiment later in his essay and uses the term “we” in reference to him and his fellow Mexicans and in some instances Latin Americans outside the geographical borders of Mexico. It almost appears as though his writing is also indicative of the sentiment during

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>44</sup> Gonzales, “Imagining Mexico in 1910,” 498.

<sup>45</sup> Vasconcelos and Jaén, *The Cosmic Race*. 14.

<sup>46</sup> Ronald Hilton, “José Vasconcelos.” *The Americas* 7, no. 4 (1951), 395.

Mexico's early search for national identity discussed previously within this chapter seen in the analyses of Drs. Widdifield and Garrigan; Mexico's early nationhood was characterized by being 'European enough' to be taken seriously but at the same time 'Mexican enough' to differentiate their cultural history rooted in the Ancient Americas. This idea was also depicted in nineteenth century history paintings as well as early twentieth century paintings. It should be noted that despite the many problems within Vasconcelos' text, this small detail indicates the still-present complexity of race in early-twentieth century Mexican literature. But this does not take away from the fact that Vasconcelos actively rejected and praised Mexican/Latin American identity, while at the same time proclaiming that the fifth race will become aligned with Ancient American aesthetics. This creates a paradox within Vasconcelos' theory because it rejects modern Mexican/Latin American identity but also relies on this identity as a key link to pre-Hispanic culture and Vasconcelos' utopian idea of the fifth race. Another contradiction is that in the early parts of the essay he focuses primarily on Mexican leaders, then in the second part of the essay states that the "promised land will be, then, in the region that today comprises all of Brazil, plus Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, part of Peru, part of Bolivia, and the upper region of Argentina."<sup>47</sup> Finally in the third section Vasconcelos tried to implement symbols representing these ideas into the artwork at the Palace of Public Education in Mexico.<sup>48</sup> Vasconcelos' continual contradictions throughout his own essay in conjunction with the overarching problematic tones creates an ideology that is very loosely rooted in historical fact and heavily perpetuates issues of race.

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<sup>47</sup> Vasconcelos and Jaén, *The Cosmic Race*, 24.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 39-40.

This essay circulated widely at the time it was published and relevant to this thesis because Vasconcelos was an influential Mexican political and social figure in the early twentieth century. Vasconcelos was very active during the 1910 Revolution and openly opposed Díaz, despite having many family connections to the dictator.<sup>49</sup> In his political career he was at one point the Secretary of Education, an incredibly influential position to have in any country. It can be understood that Vasconcelos would have had the power to implement some of his ideals into the nationwide curriculum during his tenure. Additionally, in his final note of the text Vasconcelos even admits to attempting to incorporate these themes into art at the Palace of Public Education in Mexico.<sup>50</sup> Vasconcelos' position of power held great influence on the search for national identity and national artistic style. Contemporary scholar Ana María Alonso tells us that during his time as Secretary of Education Vasconcelos sent artists to indigenous villages to collect different crafts in an effort to aid in the creation of national artistic style.<sup>51</sup> Her article does not give specifics as to which artists Vasconcelos sent into these villages, it is possible that this type of exposure to indigenous craft production could have had an influence into how artists, like those being examined in this thesis, interpreted the indigenous figure. But, the question still remains as to why these artists focused on the Maya style that emphasized the profile face with a larger nose and elongated head as opposed to the many indigenous styles they would have been exposed to during these trips to villages or objects seen in museum and gallery settings.

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<sup>49</sup> Hilton, "José Vasconcelos."

<sup>50</sup> Vasconcelos and Didier, *The Cosmic Race*, 39-40.

<sup>51</sup> Ana María Alonso, "Conforming Disconformity: "Mestizaje," Hybridity, and the Aesthetics of Mexican Nationalism" in *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (November 2004), 463-469.

What is so fascinating about José Vasconcelos is that early on in his career he self-identified as mestizo but later renounced this in favor of his ‘pure blood’ criollo status.<sup>52</sup> Alonso writes that much of Vasconcelos’ ideas were shaped by the concept of disconformity meaning that Mexican history was built through the continuous destruction and substitution of cultures. The Mesoamerican civilizations were destroyed and replaced by the Spanish which was destroyed and replaced by the independent state of Mexico that would later have many periods of political instability. This unique and rather tumultuous history, for Vasconcelos, was imbued with the concept of hybridity that influenced the ideas of *La raza cósmica*. In *La raza cósmica*, Vasconcelos refers to himself both as a Spaniard and a Mexican while at the same time he calls for the mestizo, the non-indigenous Mexican, to wake the ‘sleeping Indian’ or the then-contemporary indigenous person to aid in the effort of creating a national identity and culture. Vasconcelos’ infatuation with the indigenous arts and indigenous people was likely a contributing factor in how many artists depicted indigenous women in Mexican modern art movements.

In contrast to the ideas of Vasconcelos were those of well-known anthropologist Manuel Gamio (1883–1960). Gamio, often referred to as the father of Mexican anthropology, was a leader in the *indigenismo* movement in post 1910 Mexico.<sup>53</sup> Like Vasconcelos, Gamio was heavily interested in Mexico’s Pre-Columbian cultures. After Gamio earned his bachelor’s degree from the National Preparatory School of San

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> David A. Brading, “Manuel Gamio and Official Indigenismo in Mexico.” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 7, no. 1 (1988): 75-89.

Ildefonso, he worked on his father's ranch on the border of Veracruz and Oaxaca.<sup>54</sup>

While working on his father's ranch, Gamio learned Nahuatl which would greatly influence his later life's work.<sup>55</sup> From 1909–1910, Gamio earned his Master's degree from Columbian University under the guidance of renowned anthropologist Franz Boas.<sup>56</sup> Throughout his career, Gamio participated in and led excavations across ancient Mexican sites, but one of his most important projects was the reconstruction of the archaeological site Teotihuacán.<sup>57</sup> Gamio's archaeological work was incredibly important and helped scholars progress in their understanding of ancient Mexican cultures. Like Vasconcelos, Gamio also encouraged Mexican artists to find inspiration from Pre-Columbian works, and helped establish the Department of Fine Arts that was funded by the government.<sup>58</sup>

One of the most important texts that Gamio wrote was *Forjando Patria* (1916) predating Vasconcelos' controversial text *La raza cósmica*. Gamio believed that in order for Mexico to be a true nation, the new *patria* must be “built on hispanic iron and native bronze” meaning that Mexico needed a common race, language, history, and character.<sup>59</sup> Gamio's ideologies were rooted in the idea that native civilization grew out of geographical and biological influence.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, Gamio believed that Spain left Mexico as a “hybrid, defective culture” after independence.<sup>61</sup> Gamio's reasoning for modern Mexico's shortcomings were based on the idea that Mexico was composed of

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<sup>54</sup> Miguel León-Portilla, “Manuel Gamio, 1883-1960.” *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 64, no. 2 (1962), 356-57.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Brading, “Manuel Gamio,” 77.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*



two social groupings; the numerically smaller population that represented advanced and efficient civilization—here meaning the assimilated Mexican population or *mestizos*—and the numerically larger population that representing a backwards civilization—here referencing the indigenous population that made up the Majority of Mexico’s overall population.<sup>62</sup> His ideas of *indigenismo* were problematic because it referred to the indigenous person as a burden and problem for the Mexican government and greater population. Gamio’s ideas were also problematic because it exploited the indigenous woman as a means to achieve the cohesive mestizo population that Gamio believed would characterize an advanced Mexican nation. This exploitation influenced the manner in which artists depict indigenous women because Gamio idealized indigenous women as a necessary tool for the complete cultural unification of Mexico.

### III. The Issue of Gender in Mexico:

While race relations on a broad scale were continuously shifting in Mexico during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, it is important to look at the role of women in Mexican society to understand how race and gender impacted the indigenous woman. Traditional gender roles began shifting in the late nineteenth century with the introduction of new technology. Dr. Adriana Zavala’s book *Becoming Modern, Becoming Tradition: Women, Gender, and Representation in Mexican Art* thoroughly analyzes the role of femininity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>63</sup> Her book examines literature, art, political policy, and social events of the period and how women were viewed and treated within each cultural division. She provides an extensive example

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Zavala, *Becoming Modern*.

of the role of women in literature, examining how the ‘proper’ woman was associated with domesticity and the undesirable woman was depicted as lazy and vain. This foil was created in response to the highly differentiated roles for upper-class women.<sup>64</sup> The ‘traditional’ woman that much of society expected was also associated with motherhood and expected to bear children and partake in household activities. The cult of motherhood became politicized in an effort to expel ideologies that pushed for women’s rights.<sup>65</sup> Older ideologies viewed marriage and the home as the area in which women could contribute to society.<sup>66</sup> Zavala writes that this pigeonholed the woman into an idea of a maternal role where they were expected to assume the responsibility of providing a moral and gendered education to their children. Additionally, Zavala points out that many text outlets wrote about the longevity of wifely devotion and the maternal heart that eventually define the ‘eternal feminine’.

In the late nineteenth century, debates surrounding a woman’s place, either in the home or working sphere became an issue. While some argued that educated women would be able to teach their children moral and gendered ideas, others argued that women should stay in the domestic realm and not compete with men.<sup>67</sup> While men enjoyed the benefits of the Enlightenment, women were confined to the bourgeois tradition of household management.<sup>68</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, women were limited in their education, if they received any. Whereas in the early twentieth century while education was somewhat more acceptable, only a small percentage of girls and women

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 23-106.

<sup>65</sup> Alonso, “Conforming Disconformity,” 53-58.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>68</sup> Zavala, *Becoming Modern*, 33.

could read and write.<sup>69</sup> Women lucky enough to receive an education during this period primarily came from wealthy, upper-class families. There were some male scholars that believed that women should have access to education and entry into paid professions, as well as suffrage, but this was not the popular viewpoint.<sup>70</sup>

Male support for women's suffrage was largely due to the idea that it would benefit male politicians.<sup>71</sup> Early feminists pushed for women's equal access to higher education within Mexico City's schools, but there were refutations that women already had adequate access to these institutions and if they were given more they would lose their feminine qualities that made them good mothers and wives.<sup>72</sup> Additionally, there was a strange power struggle between women's education and her ability to work with feminine modesty and other traditionally feminine traits.<sup>73</sup> But during the 1910-Revolution early feminists likened women's rights to the revolutionary ideologies.<sup>74</sup> Despite the push for women's rights, women in the early twentieth century struggled to move outside of the acceptable confines of the traditional housewife and mother. Educated women were seen as more masculine and therefore undesirable.<sup>75</sup> These countering ideas of the role of women created tension and constructed an unrealistic expectation for women to be both modern and traditional. The pull between traditional femininity and equal rights surely would have made society's desirable qualities in women to be unrealistic.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 34 and note 55.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid,

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 54.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid,35.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 54.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 38-40.

#### IV. The Intersectionality of Race and Gender in Mexico:

During the mid-nineteenth century, Mexico struggled to find a national identity that affirmed cultural heritage without being too closely associated with Spain.<sup>76</sup> History painting was an important aspect in the careful creation of Mexico's history which became a way to craft the nation's identity. Widdifield's extensive research analyzes the Academy of San Carlos' role in aiding the government's search for national identity.<sup>77</sup> For the government and artists alike, history paintings became a way to retell stories from Mexico's pre-Hispanic past. Indigenous women in nineteenth century paintings became a tool for artists to tell stories of refined versions of Mexican history that were intended to serve the political climate of the period. Much of Widdifield's examination points out that when it came to the depiction of indigenous women, there were two roles she could fill; the role of a woman with a pure heart, or the role of the evil temptress. The pure of heart indigenous woman was fairer in skin tone while the temptress would usually be depicted with a darker skin tone. Part of the reason for this type of depiction was due to the Church's early role of liking the indigenous person as "closer to animal than to human".<sup>78</sup> Widdifield parallels this to the roles of Eve and the Virgin in European art.<sup>79</sup> Eve is often depicted as a seductress or shameful, while the Virgin is depicted as modest and pure. The depictions of indigenous people were also used to support the nineteenth-century colonization of the existing indigenous populations and this was often intertwined with the skin tone of figures within the painting.

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<sup>76</sup> Widdifield, "Introduction" in *The Embodiment of the National*.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, in "Mestizaje, Assimilation, and Conversion" in Chapter 4.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, "Resurrecting the Past: Embodiment of the Authentic and the Figure of the Indian."

One of Widdifield's in-depth examinations follows the story of Princess Papantzin, sister of Moteuczuma [Fig. 7]. In the story, the princess becomes very ill and dies. After her ceremonial burial, she is resurrected and relays a prophecy of the arrival of the true God, meant to be the Spanish. In all depictions, Papantzin has fairer skin with more European features while other figures in the scenes have darker skin tones with less Europeanized features. For Widdifield, these depictions, and others like it, imply a pre-conversion to Christianity and assimilation had essentially begun before the Spanish had



Figure 7. *The Princess Papantzin* (1880), Isidro Martinez, oil on canvas, 44 x 70 inches. Museo de Bellas Artes de Toluca, State of Mexico. [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/sidro-Martinez-The-Princess-Papantzin-1880-oil-on-canvas-44-x-70-inches-Museo-de\\_fig7\\_265035890](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/sidro-Martinez-The-Princess-Papantzin-1880-oil-on-canvas-44-x-70-inches-Museo-de_fig7_265035890)

even arrived.

Artists twisted the figures to fit their idea of the pre-converted

indigenous person

who therefore

would have been

willing to formally

convert to Christianity with the arrival of Cortés.<sup>80</sup> Additionally, this concept holds within it the idea of the noble savage. When indigenous people had lighter skin tones, it represented the *mestizo* class that was born out of Spanish colonization and represented the majority of Mexican people, specifically the new upper-class of politicians and artists. This was tantamount to the claim that those in power deserve it because they were intelligent enough to assimilate. It also implied that the current unassimilated population

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, "Mestizaje, Assimilation, and Conversion" in Chapter 4.

of indigenous people posed a problem to the status quo. Paintings like this effectively separate past natives who accepted assimilation with current natives that the Government was trying to convert.<sup>81</sup>

In relation to caste paintings, the attitude towards indigenous women in history paintings, in terms of physical representation, greatly changed. These post-colonial paintings pushed for the indigenous woman to have more European qualities. Paintings moved away from the traditional trope of savage to the ‘noble savage’ that implied a pre-conversion to Christianity before Spanish colonization. This change in representation of the indigenous population almost allows the government and artists to justify colonization and relates to the issue of assimilation throughout both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In nineteenth century history paintings, the indigenous woman was only acceptable in terms of her *mestizo* lineage and therefore her “European-ness” whereas the earlier caste paintings served to blatantly separate bloodlines and therefore the classes. However, it is interesting to the back and forth representations of indigenous women throughout Mexico’s historical artistic practice. As stated before caste paintings emphasized the indigenous woman’s low social class, darker skin, and had larger features whereas the nineteenth century paintings depicted the indigenous woman as *mestiza* and with more “delicate” European features. Although nineteenth century history paintings leaned more towards the *mestiza* rather than overt indigeneity, the racial and classist implications were still present even though depictions moved away from *pintura de castas*.

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

While paintings of the nineteenth century highlighted the *mestizo* early twentieth century paintings again shifted and instead embraced indigeneity. However, early twentieth century paintings emphasized the “primitive” indigenous features similar to colonial *castas* paintings. Montenegro, Rivera, and Reyes Flores all depict indigenous women with skin tones more similar to caste paintings. The works of Reyes Flores are quite intriguing because not only does she study at the Academy well after Montenegro and Rivera, her representation of indigenous women is incredibly similar to them. Reyes Flores attended school in the 1920s and according to Mirkin, Reyes Flores actively sought out painting professors who had similar political views. Despite ending her formal training at a young age, Reyes Flores formed relations with prominent artists Rivera, Frida Kahlo, María Izquierdo, and Orozco, along with influential poets and writers.<sup>82</sup> These relationships would greatly influence the themes in her art. *Juchitán Market* (1953) is an example of Reyes Flores’ work that depicts the indigenous woman in a composite manner and emphasized facial features. Ultimately, this painting, and others like it, focus on indigeneity as a means of creating a national identity and reinforce themes of the 1910 Revolution.

However, despite many artists emphasizing indigeneity, Lola Cueto is an outlier because her works do not focus on indigeneity in the same manner as her contemporaries. Her figures have lighter skin tones than those of her contemporaries, but the figures are still rooted in Pre-Columbian styles, specifically from the Maya. Cueto places many of her female figures in a composite pose with simple attire. Cueto’s work is also unique in that it utilizes traditional folk craft of weaving, although this will be analyzed further in

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<sup>82</sup> Dina Mirkin, “Aurora Reyes’s ‘Ataque a La Maestra Rural’: The First Mural Created by a Mexican Female Artist.” *Woman’s Art Journal* 26, no. 2 (2005), 19-25.

depth in the following chapter. What is significant within all these artists' works is that there is a dramatic shift in how the indigenous woman is rendered. She is no longer Europeanized and instead resembles imagery from Maya painted vessels. Part of this shift in representation is linked to grand events like the Centennial, the heightened interest in Pre-Columbian civilizations as more excavations of historical sites were being conducted, and the beginnings of the 1910 Revolution.

Furthermore, there was a distinct racial and gender issue in the post Revolution state encapsulated in *La India Bonita* competitions. India Bonita competitions were rooted in the ideologies of thinkers like Gamio who believed that the ideal Mexican woman was mestiza, and therefore the best of the indigenous and non-indigenous traditions.<sup>83</sup> This greatly differed from the ideology of Vasconcelos who believed that, although the final race would be mestizo, the indigenous culture and concepts of indigeneity played an important role. Therefore, the ideal Mexican woman needed to embody both indigeneity and *mestizaje*. The nation's "India Bonita" contests in post-revolutionary Mexico took this notion one step further and likened the indigenous woman with purity mirroring post-revolutionary nationalism.<sup>84</sup> Zavala writes that this beauty competition was historically important because it signaled the significance of race, gender, and class in the political climate as well as the image of ideal womanhood.<sup>85</sup>

Zavala also argues that this contest eroticized the indigenous woman despite the surface level intentions of highlighting the indigenous woman's purity. This contest, like the texts of Gamio and Vasconcelos, contradicts itself by posing one idea that is

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<sup>83</sup> Zavala, *Becoming Modern*, 153.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 154.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 155.



subverted by the next. Additionally, the contest and scholars each fetishize the indigenous woman by focusing on her race as well as her ability to further a political agenda. Zavala also emphasizes that another problem emerges within the context of class because it was wealthy members of society that dictated who was “Indian” and who was simply working class.<sup>86</sup> Later in her chapter, Zavala makes an interesting statement regarding how women in Mexico were expected to present themselves, specifically through the styling of hair. As the ‘bobbed’ hairstyle became popular, Mexican critics associated the style with the masculinized feminist and therefore the unideal woman.<sup>87</sup> For some critics, long straight hair was associated with *la Malinche* and was the modern Mexican woman’s inheritance from the Pre-Columbian period, therefore to cut one’s hair was to resign from *la raza cósmica*.<sup>88</sup> This idea is quite poignant especially because it blatantly describes the pressures that women were forced to face in early twentieth century Mexican society. It also describes how indigenous women were expected to present themselves and stay linked to the history. Seemingly small expected physical presentations cause ripples in how members of society treat women throughout Mexico both indigenous and non-indigenous. The many social expectations placed upon women was reinforced in the production of art.



Figure 8. Lintel 24, structure 23, King Shield Jaguar II and Lady Xoc Performing a Bloodletting Ritual, Yaxchilán in Chiapas, Mexico. The British Museum. [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E\\_Am1923-Maud-4](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E_Am1923-Maud-4)

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 163-165. In this section, Zavala describes a newspaper article that chose a working-class woman to be a part of the *india bonita* without any factual evidence that the woman was indigenous other than finding her working at a corn-grinding mill. She then points out that this woman was actually a member of the urban working class which was reinforced by her hairstyle and clothing. This was later ‘corrected’ by photographing provincial young women in costume.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 169.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

However, the production of art differs from critical scholarship in this period in that instead of primarily focusing on the Aztec as a means for indigenous female visual expectations, it instead applies Maya characteristics to the indigenous woman. For example, Maya stela and painted vessels depict human figures with an elongated head, a large nose, and full lips that are often slightly open. A few examples of this are the stelae at Yaxchilán [Figs. 8 & 9]. Each stela repeats this type of figural representation, a style that is seen throughout works created by the Maya civilization. The Maya had a long history of this type of figural representation throughout their reign. However, the primary focus of Mexican scholars, politicians, and artists was centered around the Aztec, a people they claimed to be one of the origins of contemporary Mexicans, but the Aztec didn't have the same type of figural representation. For example, a painted vessel found at the excavations of La Calle de Las Escalerillas at the Templo Mayor [Fig. 2] depicts a human in ceremonial costume likely representing an Aztec deity. The figural style of this figure is much blockier and thick in comparison to the figural representation on the Maya stelae. It is important to recognize that although not as much was known about the Maya civilization during the early twentieth century, enough was known by the general public to understand that the Aztec and Maya were completely different Mesoamerican people in very different regions of Mexico and Central America. This discrepancy between what scholars, politicians, and particularly artists claimed, and what they actually focused on, will be the basis for the following chapter.



Figure 9. Lintel 26, Yaxchilán in Chiapas, Mexico. Museo Nacional de Antropología. Photograph taken by Victoria Nerey, December 2019.

## **Chapter Two:**

### **Modern Artists and the Mayanization of Indigenous Subjects**

#### **Roberto Montenegro: Artist and Curator**

Roberto Montenegro's (1885-1968) contribution to the history of Mexican art is significant despite a somewhat small oeuvre compared to other artists of the period. Although Montenegro was one of the first artists involved in the Muralism movement after the Revolution and was later known for his surrealist-style works, this section will primarily focus on his involvement with *arte popular* or folk art.<sup>89</sup> In his early career, Montenegro worked in illustration and publications, and many of his smaller works are in multiple Mexican collections such as Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes and the Soumaya Museum. In addition, he also held a number of government positions throughout his life. In 1921 he held a position in Departamento de Artes Plásticas, was the director of Departamento de Bellas Artes in 1934, and the director of Departamento de Enseñanza Artística for the Secretary of Public Education in 1936.

Important to this thesis is Montenegro's involvement with folk art or *arte popular*; he was an advocate for the production of folk art and believed it was an important aspect of Mexican history that needed to be preserved both culturally and historically for then-current and future generations.<sup>90</sup> *Arte popular* was art made by indigenous and working class people after Spanish colonization. These works were considered crafts, not fine art, but played an important role in Mexican art history.

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<sup>89</sup>Justino Fernández, *Roberto Montenegro*, Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1962.

<sup>90</sup> Fernández. *Roberto Montenegro*.

Because of Montenegro's interest in folk art his paintings, prints, and other works often depict themes related to indigeneity that vary depending on the medium of his choice. Additionally, the manner in which Montenegro visually represents the human form changes based on the region where he produced the work and the artists and movements that he was in contact with at the moment. Montenegro's distortion and stylization of the human form, specifically the female form, is rooted in the political and social climate in post-revolutionary Mexico. As I will discuss later, his overt *Mayanization* of indigenous women reflects the popular sentiment that the indigenous woman was the ideal representation of Mexican identity. This concept inspired texts like Vasconcelos's *La raza cósmica* that believed that the Latin American population would ultimately be the turning point in the production of a racial regime because of their mestizo heritage.<sup>91</sup>

Many of the views related to Pre-Columbian and folk art are due to governmental leaders, like Vasconcelos, who implemented new educational programs among other initiatives that were intended to promote Pre-Hispanic heritage that had been suppressed for hundreds of years. It is likely that Montenegro's multiple positions of power helped shape how *arte popular* was perceived by the public in the early twentieth century as the attention on its cultural importance increased during and after the Revolution.

Furthermore, his writings, while not as radical as those of Gamio and Vasconcelos, carry similar sentiments, particularly the idea that the more traditional, or "primitive" aspects of *arte popular* were symbolic of a more aesthetically pleasing form of Mexican art.<sup>92</sup>

For example, Montenegro's essay in *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* analyzes the

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<sup>91</sup> Vasconcelos and Jaén, *The Cosmic Race*.

<sup>92</sup> Roberto Montenegro, "Folk Art" in *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art*, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, in collaboration with the Mexican Government, 1940).

aspects of folk art, such as weaving, that retain more indigenous motifs and therefore are more likeable to the viewer as aspect I will return to later in what follows. Although Montenegro's career advocating for the production of folk art had some positive aspects, like sparking interest in Mexican craft, his writing and art act as a testament to the overarching issues related to the perception of the then-contemporary working-class and indigenous populations.

Montenegro's interest in Mexican craft and indigenous style in general began with his education and experiences as a young artist. As discussed in the previous chapter, Montenegro attended the Academy of San Carlos. He first entered his formal academic training in 1904 at the age of twenty, and unlike the other artists that are analyzed within this thesis, he enrolled as an architecture student.<sup>93</sup> His artistic style would be greatly shaped later in Europe after he received a scholarship in 1905, the same



Figure 10. *Pescador de Mallorca (Mateo el negro)* (c.1915), Roberto Montenegro, Museo Nacional De Arte, Mexico City. Photograph by Victoria Nerey, January 2020.

one that Diego Rivera received a year later, to study abroad. Beginning in 1908, Montenegro spent time in Paris where he would be exposed to the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists, French Expressionists, Fauvism, and art nouveau. Many of these movements selectively appropriated non-Western

<sup>93</sup> Fernández, *Roberto Montenegro*, 9.



indigenous imagery in order to distance themselves from the burdens of western civilization. Due to the outbreak of World War I, the Mexican Revolution, and the Russian Revolution, Montenegro spent a fair amount of time in Mallorca, an island off the coast of Spain.<sup>94</sup> During this time he produced the painting *Pescador de Mallorca* (*Mateo el negro*) (c. 1915) [Fig. 10]. *Pescador* depicts a younger man with darker brown skin that has varying blue and red undertones, wearing blue shirt and grayish trousers, as he turns to the viewer. The young man, presumably named Mateo, looks at the viewer almost as if she were slowing him down or she had disturbed him while he is at work. His left hand is placed on the small of his back while the other holds a basket or plate with different varieties of fish. Behind Mateo is a somewhat rocky terrain that leads to a river or stream. Along the path there is an abundance of cacti that are blooming ripe with prickly pears. Montenegro's bright color palette of warm greens and blues lightened with yellow, highlights the richness of the landscape but he is careful to create a more naturalistic skin tone. All of these elements show that Montenegro was directly influenced by the post-Impressionists and French-Expressionists with his thick, flat brush strokes.

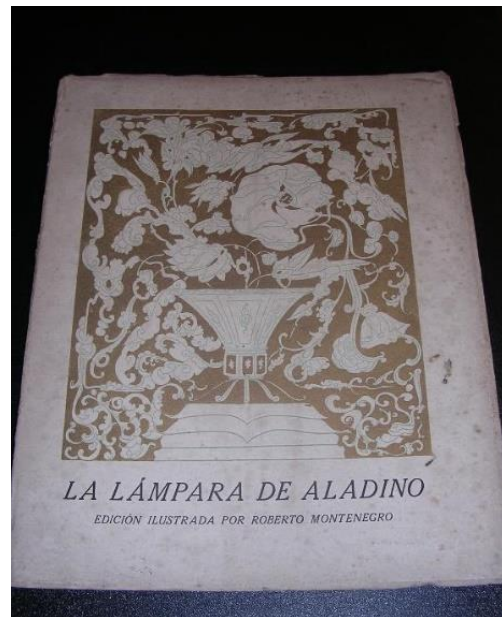


Figure 11. *La lámpara de Aladino* (1917), illustrated by Roberto Montenegro.

Although at first glance it may seem as

though this painting is rather trivial compared to his later works that focus on Maya

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 12.

figures, it marks an important point in the development of his painting, specifically in its representation of people of the working-class. In the case of this painting, Montenegro uses a bright color palette in his depiction of a Black male fish vendor. It is important to note that while this painting might be derivative of Post-Impressionist style, it does not overemphasize race through the exaggeration of physical features. I will further explain this concept later within the section as it relates to the artist's later depictions of Mexican indigenous women.

While in Mallorca, Montenegro was the illustrator of the book *La lámpara de Aladino* (1917) [Fig. 11] and drew inspiration from art-nouveau style.<sup>95</sup> Other examples of Montenegro's prints and illustrations

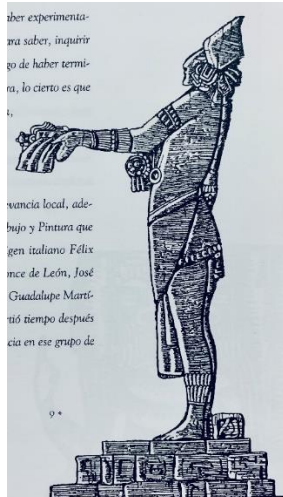


Figure 13. Prints from page 9 of *Planos en el tiempo: memorias de Roberto Montenegro* (2001). Photograph by Victoria Nerey, February 2020.

are seen in the book *Planos en el tiempo:*

*memorias de Roberto Montenegro* (2001)—a posthumous book comprised of writings, illustrations, and prints by the artist—which serves as a timeline of the development of his early works. This book is also important to the larger discussion of Montenegro's implementation of Pre-Columbian motifs in his art. Pages eight and nine include small plates (1919) [Fig. 12] that show Montenegro's study of the Maya style.<sup>96</sup> These prints closely examine the profile, stylized nature of the human figure in Maya art that Montenegro later recontextualized through a

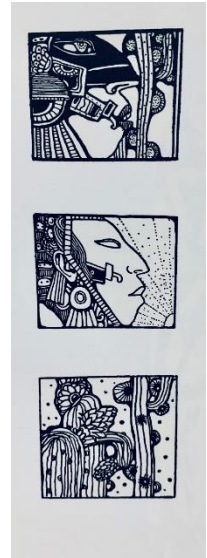


Figure 12. Prints from page 8 of *Planos en el tiempo: memorias de Roberto Montenegro* (2001). Photograph by Victoria Nerey, February 2020.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Roberto Montenegro, *Planos en el tiempo: memorias de Roberto Montenegro*. (México, D.F.: Artes de México, 2001), 111. (See Lista de Ilustraciones, "Págs. 8, 9, 23; Tomadas de: *Lírica Mexicana*, Madrid, Legación de México en España, 1919").

modern lens. Prints and illustrations like these are significant to his later practice because they allow scholars to pinpoint what formal elements Montenegro takes from ancient cultures and which ones he abandons in favor of a modern style. For example, the print on page nine [Fig. 13] is of a standing Maya figure—presumably male because there are no visible breasts—extending the arms and hands as if in a gesture of an offering. Montenegro appears to take some artistic liberty with this rendition because



Figure 14. *Exótico* (1926), Roberto Montenegro, print. Photograph by Victoria Nerey, February 2020.



Figure 15. *Plantanales* (1926), Roberto Montenegro, print. Photograph by Victoria Nerey, February 2020.

while the print is a direct reference to the Maya people and their style, the physique of the form, through its subtle nod to figures of art nouveau, is more delicate than the baroque tenacity of Maya forms. For example, the elongated head and prominent nose, characteristic of the Maya, are softened and have a subtle organic nature similar to depictions of the human form in works by artists such

as Alphonse Mucha. Other more striking examples of Montenegro implementing an art-nouveau stylization on indigenous people can be seen in his later illustrations *Exótico* (1926) [Fig. 14] and *Plantanales* (1926) [Fig. 15].<sup>97</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Esperanza Balderas and Roberto Montenegro, *Roberto Montenegro: ilustrador (1900-1930)*, (México, D.F.: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 2000), See prints *Exótico* (1926), Portada al suplemento del boletín de la revista *CROM Suplemento #1*. Col. Centro de Estudios Filosóficos Políticos y Sociales Vicente Lombardo toledano, and *Plantanales* (1926), 46 x 35 cm. Grabado. Publicado en *Revista de Revistas*. Col. Capilla Alfonsina.



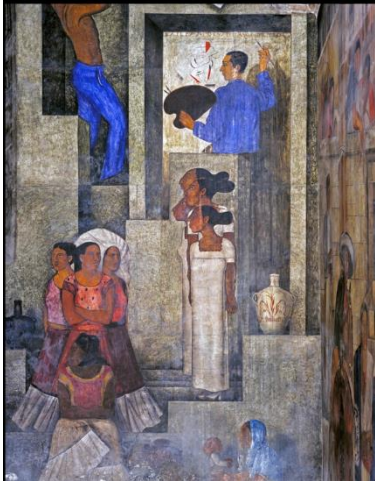


Figure 16. *Reconstrucción* (1924), fresco, Roberto Montenegro, Colegio de San Pedro y San Pablo, Mexico City. [https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/#/asset/ASCHALKWIJKIG\\_10313992020](https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/#/asset/ASCHALKWIJKIG_10313992020)

Although these works were created after Montenegro's return to Mexico and at the same time as his painting *Mujeres mayas* [Fig. 5] (1926), these prints reveal that Montenegro was still very interested in European styles and actively incorporated them into his work, and it raises the question as to whether his *Mayanization* of indigenous women is specific to his paintings. However, his mural *Reconstrucción* [Fig. 16] (1924) at Colegio de San Pedro y San Pablo in Mexico City features the four Maya women in his later painting *Mujeres mayas* (1926).

Instead of only giving the viewer a portrait of these women like in *Mujeres mayas*, Montenegro paints their entire figures in *Reconstrucción*. However, their bodies are still rather flattened. Montenegro gives some dimension to their breasts, but their long white



Figure 17. *Bathers (Les Grandes Baigneuses)* (c. 1894-1905), Paul Cézanne, The National Gallery, London. [https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/#/asset/ANGLIG\\_10313766461](https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/#/asset/ANGLIG_10313766461)

dressess fall nearly straight to their feet; only the first woman's feet are visible, and

she wears white high-heeled shoes. Additionally, it features five seated Tehuana women, two of whom Montenegro paints with the same profile face and emphasized facial

features. Although this may not be the earliest work of Montenegro's to incorporate Maya motifs, it reinforces to scholars that the artist began to incorporate his studies of Pre-Columbian art into his work.

In contrast to his prints, Montenegro's paintings like *Mujeres mayas* (1926) are stylistically similar to proto-cubist works like those of Cézanne's later career and Franz Marc blended with the conceptual element of the problematic 'primitive'. For example, both Cézanne and Franz Marc dramatically flatten the visual plane of the painting and simplify the forms within. A well-known example of this can be seen within Cézanne's *Bathers (Les Grandes Baigneuses)* (c. 1894-1905) [Fig. 17]. Cézanne flattened the plane by painting with broad, flat strokes that both blend and block color on the canvas. In the figures, Cézanne blends the colors more to resemble skin but strokes of blue, orange, and shade in between can easily be spotted, whereas in the background the sky and horizon are broadly blocked with sections of light and dark blue.

Montenegro's *Mujeres mayas* utilizes some of these techniques, primarily the blocking of background color and flattened visual plane. For example, within *Mujeres mayas*, the houses and landscape clearly pull from proto-cubist works like Cézanne's due to the visible fragmentation and simplification of form and space. Montenegro offers little perspective by flattening the depth of the painting and keeping the houses on the same visual plane. There is only a slight tonal difference in the reds, browns, and neutral in-between colors



Figure 18. *Bouteille et journal (Le Guéridon)* (Bottle and Newspaper (Small Round Side Table)) (1911), Georges Braque, Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany.

of the landscape that vaguely allude to hills or some sort of mountainous setting.

Although Montenegro has some tonal differences in the background portion, the values on the houses are blocky and do not have a gradient making them look rather flat.

Additionally, the greenery within the landscape is not particularly layered and casts no



Figure 19. *Houses L'Estaque* (1908), Georges Braque, Museum of Art, Berne. [https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/#/asset/AIC\\_780030](https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/#/asset/AIC_780030)

shadow on its surroundings furthering the flatness. Montenegro's earlier prints of Maya iconography surely influenced this work, specifically the elongated heads and large noses of the women. Montenegro blends the Maya visual elements with avant-garde styles and ultimately created a physical standardization of the indigenous woman. This is prevalent in the way that the women are

almost identical with the exception of a few

minor differences in their mouths and noses. Montenegro even wrote that the trends in the art world, specifically in the works of Picasso, Juan Gris, and Braque, among others, pushed him to transform his own work and move away from academic training.<sup>98</sup>

It is possible that these Cubist artists influenced Montenegro's color palette which shifts from the bright tones seen in *Pescador* to the earthy, muted tones in *Mujeres mayas*. For example, the deep earthy and muted tones dominate many of Georges

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<sup>98</sup> Montenegro, *Planos en el tiempo*, 53 and 54. See quote, “La educación clásica, severamente académica, con que yo cantaba, inspirada en el estudio de los viejos maestros, para copiar la naturaleza fielmente e imprimir la propia personalidad, pero sin salirse del objetivo realista, me desconcertó enteramente a llegar a París y al darme cuenta del movimiento que en esos momentos imperaba en sus medios artísticos. El cubismo en el arte, con Picasso, Juan Gris, Braque y otros muchos, transfiguraba mis intenciones y me hacía dudar; pero era necesario seguir esa corriente evolutiva.”



Braque's works. This can be seen in his work *Bouteille et journal (Le Guéridon)* (Bottle and Newspaper (Small Round Side Table)) (c.1911) [Fig. 18]. Braque's painting is inundated with shades of brown, red, and orange, with muted tones of blue and pops of green. But Montenegro does not pull from this type of planal fragmentation and flattening. Instead, it seems as though Montenegro looks to earlier paintings of Braque's like *Houses in L'Estaque* (1908) [Fig. 19] and *L'église de Carrières-Saint-Denis* (1909) [Fig. 20]. Both of these paintings use lighter sandy tones accompanied by layering that does not flatten the plane as distinctly as *Bouteille et journal*. Montenegro's painting *Mujeres mayas* appears to take the earth tones of *Bouteille et journal* and the less exaggerated spatial flattening of *Houses in L'Estaque* and *L'église de Carrières-Saint-Denis*.

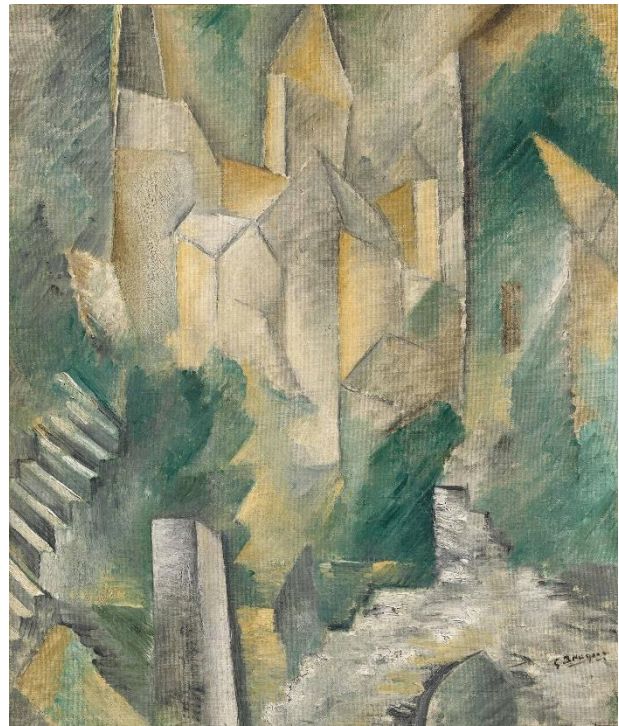


Figure 20. *L'église de Carrières-Saint-Denis* (1909), Georges Braque.

However, the figures in *Mujeres mayas* are exceedingly stylized and allude to a more fictitious, if not mythicized, representation of Maya art similar to artists like Paul Gauguin who idealized and exoticized Tahitian indigenous women.<sup>99</sup> In many of his paintings, Gauguin simplifies the bodily form of the female figures and emphasizes their

<sup>99</sup> The way Montenegro stylized the Maya women was similar to the ways in which European artists represented African and Oceanic figures and/or blended these motifs with Caucasian figures. These artists looked to specific people within these cultures; See Cohen, Joshua I. "Fauve Masks: Rethinking Modern 'Primitivist' Uses of African and Oceanic Art, 1905-8." *Art Bulletin* 99, no. 2 (June 2017), 136-165.

indigeneity through their tasks, clothing, and physical characteristics. Gauguin and later artists like Maurice de Vlaminck, André Derain, Henri Matisse and even Picasso, selectively chose and applied certain aspects of African and Oceanic art to their practice. Montenegro mirrors this by emphasizing certain physical characteristics of the Maya women and by placing them in a rather remote and simple environment. Montenegro flattens the figures by foregoing a strong gradient on the clothing to subtly distinguish their breasts from their somewhat cylindrical upper-torsos. The imagery within this painting radically differs from Montenegro's prints that were produced at the same time. It seems as though there was a disconnect between Montenegro's early prints, such as the ones from *Planos en el tiempo*, and the paintings he made in Europe. In his early painting *Pescador de Mallorca (Mateo el negro)* (c. 1915) Montenegro does not exaggerate any physical feature of the male figure, whereas in *Mujeres mayas*, the protagonists' features are extremely emphasized to draw attention to their indigenous heritage. The women's noses are very large, their heads are elongated and their full lips are gently open creating an image that directly references Maya stela and painted vessels. Although the subjects of *Pescador de Mallorca* and *Mujeres mayas* are of different ethnic backgrounds, we can infer that each came from marginalized populations. Still, Montenegro isolates the women as the figures in which he forces the viewer to see their "otherness." These women are the only figures in a nearly empty landscape. One might argue that because *Pescador de Mallorca* and *Mujeres mayas* were created nearly ten years apart, the difference is due to the evolution of the artist's larger practice. However, I do not believe this to be the case as evidence in one of his murals, *La familia rural* (1923-1924) [Fig. 21], which depicts a young family of the working class albeit a family that is mestizo

rather than strictly indigenous. Each of the figures have lighter brown skin as opposed to the intensely dark brown skin seen on the women in *Mujeres mayas*. The mother is positioned kneeling as she breastfeeds her child while her husband stands behind her stoically carrying a basket of fruit above his head. Montenegro consciously decides what figures become the mythic indigenous, one that is tied to race, because much of the painterly style is the same in both paintings. In each work, Montenegro uses thick flat



Figure 21. *La familia rural* (1923-24), Roberto Montenegro, Oil on Canvas, Secretary of Education, Mexico City. [https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/#/asset/ASCHALKWIJKIG\\_10313991392](https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/#/asset/ASCHALKWIJKIG_10313991392)

strokes for the background and more delicate strokes for the figures. Additionally, *La familia rural* also has flattened planes but there is more depth than in *Mujeres mayas*. In both paintings, Montenegro applies post-Impressionist, proto-Cubist, and Fauvist techniques, but *La familia rural* and *Mujeres mayas* differ in that Montenegro clearly differentiates Mexican social and racial classes. *Mujeres mayas* visually appears to be a compilation of the many movements that Montenegro studied in Europe, but the way he simplifies the Maya woman is also tied to critical writings of intellectuals like Vasconcelos, whom the artist had a professional relationship with when he returned to Mexico.



Figure 22. *La fiesta de la Cruz* (1924), Roberto Montenegro, Fresco, Colegio de San Pedro y San Pablo, Mexico City. [https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/#/asset/ASCHALKWIJKIG\\_10313990127](https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/#/asset/ASCHALKWIJKIG_10313990127)

Upon his return to Mexico in 1920, Montenegro was asked by the Secretary of Education, José Vasconcelos, to complete a mural for his personal offices. This invitation is significant because it directly links Montenegro to Vasconcelos. As discussed in the previous chapter, Vasconcelos became known for his radical ideologies about indigenous people and culture. It is possible that the interaction with Vasconcelos would have had some influence on Montenegro's practice, especially

given that his paintings of indigenous women drew influence from the scholar's writings. This can be seen in the fact that Montenegro actually placed Vasconcelos in the mural *La fiesta de la Cruz* [Fig. 22] for the interior of the stairs in the Colegio de San Pedro y San Pablo which was completed in 1924.<sup>100</sup> Montenegro originally placed Vasconcelos in this mural but Vasconcelos's portrait was later removed over some ideological differences between the two. Despite this difference in ideological opinions, some of the themes of Vasconcelos' writings are present in Montenegro's painting *Mujeres mayas*. The painting

<sup>100</sup> Fernández, *Roberto Montenegro*, 14-15.

then embodies a Mexican interpretation of European appropriation of non-western art and selectively isolates the indigenous female because of the influential ideology that the canon for Mexican national identity is indigenous woman.

Folk art in Mexico was considered indigenous art but there is a stark difference between this type of art and ancient American art made by the Pre-Columbian civilizations. It is likely that artists drawing from folk art knew that it was different from Pre-Columbian art because in exhibitions like *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* there are separate sections for both periods. The folk art that I reference throughout the remainder of this section refers directly to the art made by modern indigenous and working class populations. This type of art is itself a hybridization of Pre-Columbian and Spanish styles of art.<sup>101</sup> Typically, these works were created by non-academically trained artists. They were sold in markets and varied greatly depending on the region in which they were created. Montenegro's involvement in folk art began during the 1920s when he presented his first exhibition of Mexican Folk Art for Sonora News.<sup>102</sup> He later became a curator of *arte popular* for the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City. One of the most significant exhibitions that Montenegro curated was the Folk Art section of *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* (1940) that would travel from Mexico City to New York City. Montenegro wrote the catalogue essay on Folk Art/Arte Popular that highlights some of the issues that I analyze in this thesis. Overall, the essay provides commentary on different types of well-known folk art genres, including, pottery, weaving, and painting among others.

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<sup>101</sup> Roberto Montenegro, "Folk Art" in *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art*. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, in collaboration with the Mexican Government, 1940), 109.

<sup>102</sup> Fernández, *Roberto Montenegro*, 13.



This catalogue essay attempts to place folk art within Mexico's larger cultural history however, Montenegro's text has some issues related to his analyses of the different types of folk art. One of the first noticeable issues is the author's inconsistencies regarding the stylistic evolution and production of *arte popular*. For example, in his first section on pottery he describes that earthenware objects were a mixture of Mexican tradition—by which he probably means Pre-Columbian— and various styles of art that the Spaniards introduced during and after the conquest. However, the problem comes from the fact that he directly states that the styles of *arte popular* primarily carry characteristics “antedating the Conquest” which, on the one hand, immediately contradicts his statement that these objects are a mixture, and on the other, doesn't take into account that Spanish intervention inherently changes the “tradition” which he implies to be the more appropriate form of art.<sup>103</sup> Another example of such contradiction is his description of the *serape* as an object derived from the ancient American “tilma” and the Spanish-Arabian “manta.” Montenegro writes that the serape retains more of the ancient American tradition and “[defies] foreign influence and [triumphs] over bad taste.”<sup>104</sup> In this section he also writes that the modern civilizations are a detriment to the “primitive popular arts”: a statement which in itself is very problematic for a number of reasons.<sup>105</sup> Montenegro's description elicits a negative connotation towards folk art and disregards the evolution that the craft underwent between Spanish colonization and the early twentieth century. This is due to his ideas that the intervention of modern ideas inherently changes folk works.

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<sup>103</sup> Montenegro, “Folk Art”, 109.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

In the lacquer section, Montenegro writes that lacquer work still retains the traditional process because of the use of the *aje* [larva]. He continues by stating that while the ignorance of many buyers has introduced non-traditional imagery, the majority of lacquer work still retains its indigenous roots.<sup>106</sup> The way in which he describes this type of folk art is also problematic because it doesn't account for the large influence that Spanish art had on these types of objects.<sup>107</sup> He primarily references objects made in the colonial period and deems these as the 'traditional' works when in reality, the 'traditional' works that Montenegro refers to are those from the Pre-Columbian period. Many of the painted vessels that Montenegro refers to in his essay contain similar natural motifs to Pre-Columbian painted vessels, but these were ultimately different in style. The objects that Montenegro references are actually the objects that embody the concept of *mestizaje*, that of being both "indigenous" and "Spanish," products that are inherently mixed.

In his section describing masks, Montenegro writes that masks are indicative of the "imagination of the Indian."<sup>108</sup> He continues by stating that the masks reveal the religiousness, irony, and skill of the craftsman—though it is unclear what he means by religiousness and irony. Montenegro explains that masks in the Pre-Columbian period were made of stone and or shell, but contemporary masks were often painted wood or cardboard. He also explains that these masks were used in religious ceremonies that incorporated dancing. In his final examination of folk art he focuses on popular painting.

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 109-110.

<sup>107</sup> It should be noted that Spanish art was influenced by many other cultures due to Spain's history of Moorish occupation and cultural exchange with other countries. However, for the purposes of this research study, I only focus on the state of Spanish art during colonization and how it influenced Mesoamerican art, eventually forming into what scholars now understand and classify as Mexican Folk Art.

<sup>108</sup> Montenegro, "Folk Art", 109-110.

He discusses primarily retablos and ex-votos that were typically painted on tin or wood using oil paint. Retablos featured miracles of a saint somehow saving the donor from death or an accident.<sup>109</sup> Montenegro writes that modern painters believed these objects to be authentic representations of Mexican painting [see Figures 23 & 24]. In his brief description of Ex-votos, he explains that these are entirely of Spanish origin and are generally painted on silver.<sup>110</sup> His analysis of paintings is especially curious because the retablos he describes are indicative of paintings after Spanish conquest not before. This is fascinating because he previously implies that ‘traditional’ Mexican art comes from the tradition of indigenous culture and the type of retablo he describes is not indicative of any

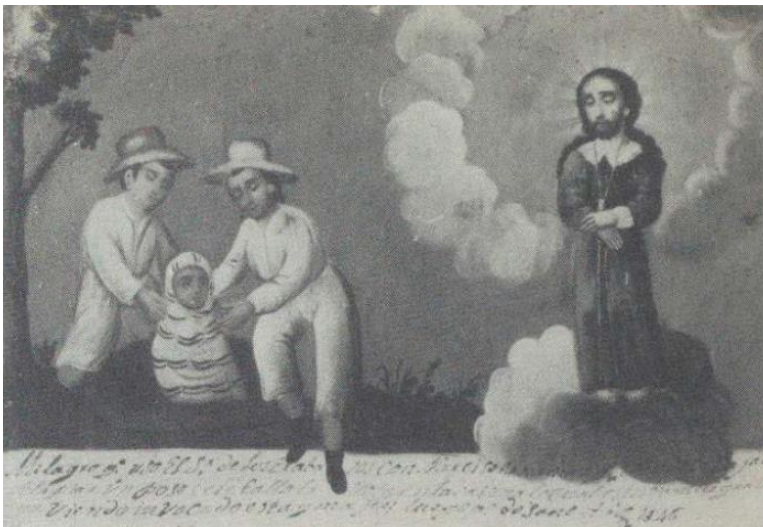


Figure 23. Retablo from the mid-19th century, from Guanajuato. Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art (1940). Photograph by Victoria Nerey, March 2020.

Pre-Columbian culture; instead, they reference a tradition common in European painting and manuscripts. Although there are many problems within these sections, Montenegro does contextualize a lot of the cultural significance for

the reader through his explanations of each type of folk art and their production process.

His analysis of folk art was important to the period because of his multiple positions of power within the Mexican government and art world. It is likely that his views surrounding folk art and its production influenced other practicing artists.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. 110.

Montenegro's writing reveals a sort of paradox in the reception of folk art. On the one hand Montenegro writes that folk art serves as an important connection to Pre-Columbian traditions, while on the other, he minimizes the fact that folk art traditions are rooted in Spanish colonization and are therefore a hybrid of both Spanish and Pre-Columbian traditions. Scholars can see through the progression of Montenegro's work that the artist moved from academic styles to more avant-garde styles. Eventually, Montenegro blended the concepts he studied, notably the European appropriation of non-Western art, with Mesoamerican iconography. This is seen prominently in his works that flatten the visual plane in a manner similar to European avant-garde movement while also drawing figural inspiration from the Maya. Montenegro's attitude towards folk art and his depictions of indigenous subjects are parallel because he interprets both as timeless and unchanging. Montenegro did not take into consideration that folk art would develop overtime and incorporate other influences. Additionally, the Spanish styles that influenced Mexican folk art were a combination of different European and Moorish styles. Montenegro overlooked the many different influences that permeated throughout Mexican folk art. Furthermore, Montenegro's depiction of indigenous subjects is unrealistic and acts as an appropriation of ancient Maya iconography rather than a true depiction of modern indigenous subjects. Montenegro's artistic, curatorial, and literary works reveal a unique point in Mexican art history because the way he visually represented indigenous women was also tied to Mexico's socio-political climate that praised ancient indigenous culture while condemning its modern counterpart.



Figure 24. Retablo from the mid-19th century, from Guanajuato. *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* (1940). Photograph by Victoria Nerey, March 2020.

### **Lola Cueto: The Modernized Tapestry**

Lola Cueto was an important artist in Mexican art history because of her unique use of folk art methods of production such as weaving and papier mâché. It is important to preface this section that there is little academic information available online and in English about Cueto despite her significant contributions to the history of Mexican art. Much of the critical scholarship surrounding Cueto has been produced from family archival sources, which for the purposes of this thesis are inaccessible. However, with the scholarship that remains available in addition to documents from the International Center for the Arts of the Americas (ICAA) digital archive at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, I have been able to piece together some of Cueto's biography and artistic



resume with the hope of helping highlight other important aspects of her career. Most of the scholarship surrounding Cueto focuses on her well-known production of puppets, but my research instead will primarily analyze three of her tapestries because they reveal Cueto's observation of ancient Maya works. Although, I also intend to discuss these in relation to some of her works seen at the Museo Nacional De Bellas Artes and the Museo Nacional De Arte in Mexico City.

Lola Cueto, born María Dolores Velásquez Rivas in 1897, came from a rather wealthy family and attended the Academy in the early teens of the 1900s.<sup>111</sup> Additionally,



Figure 25. *Campo de coles, Santa Anita* (1913), Lola Cueto, Oil on Canvas, Museo Nacional De Arte. Photograph by Victoria Nerey, January 2020.

during her time at the Academy, Cueto was the only female enrolled in classes and focused her studies on decorative arts which would eventually influence her later works. Cueto's paintings produced during her time at the Academy were influenced by Impressionistic style.<sup>112</sup> For

example, in her painting *Campo de coles, Santa Anita* (1913) [Fig. 25] Cueto creates a colorful cabbage field with loose brushstrokes. It is likely that this was one of the styles of art taught to students, but Cueto eventually forgoes this overt European influence in

<sup>111</sup> Tatiana Flores, "Strategic Modernists: Women Artists in Post-Revolutionary Mexico." *Woman's Art Journal* 29, no. 2 (2008), 15.

<sup>112</sup> John Xceron, "Who's Who Abroad?" *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 11, 1929.

favor of a more Mexican-folk style. This can be seen in her later painting, *Teatro Cucuricholín* (1940) [Fig. 26] which depicts puppets in a small theater. The work has muted tones with somewhat flattened and simplified subjects. However, as her early career developed, scholars can see how Cueto began to work more with textiles and



Figure 26. *Teatro Cucuricholín* (1940), Lola Cueto, Museo Nacional De Arte. Photograph by Victoria Nerey, January 2020.

puppets, both of which would eventually become the primary mediums of her practice. In addition to being a practicing artist Cueto was also a teacher, and her and her husband's home became a hub for up-and-coming artists.<sup>113</sup> Cueto developed a specific technique for her tapestries that began with the traditional woven aspect but Cueto blended this with the modern sewing machine for many of the embroidered embellishments on the surfaces of her works.<sup>114</sup> Her tapestries were also

unique in that she blended Pre-Columbian motifs with modern stylistic motifs such as gourd forms.<sup>115</sup> This blending of motifs is significant to the larger study of Cueto in this thesis because it reveals that the artist was aware of indigenous styles of art and consciously incorporating aspects of it into her work.

One of the most unique aspects of Cueto's work is that she uses traditional materials associated with folk art and produces works that are more aligned with what

<sup>113</sup> Flores, "Strategic Modernists," 15 and 16. In her introduction to Cueto's life, Flores describes Cueto's home as a location for young artists including the French artist Jean Charlot who also experimented with a type of Mayanization within some of his female subjects, however this deviated somewhat from the manner being examined here. However, it is worth analysis and will be discussed later within the chapter as a part of other depictions of the indigenous woman.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 16 and see note 36.

scholars would consider folk style works. Although Cueto is most known for her puppets, this section will concentrate on her tapestries and the materials she utilizes for her works.



Figure 27. *Dintel de Yaxchilán, copia de motivo prehispánico maya*, Lola Cueto, tapestry.

Like Montenegro, Cueto also studied the Maya style. An example of this is her tapestry *Dintel de Yaxchilán, copia de motivo prehispánico maya* (undated, possibly early to mid-twentieth century) [Fig. 27] that is a woven copy of Lintel 24, structure 23, Yaxchilán in Chiapas, Mexico. This limestone lintel, titled *King Shield Jaguar II and Lady Xoc Performing a Bloodletting Ritual* [Fig. 8], comes from the Late Classic period (c. 709 CE) and in the Maya tradition

depicts both figures in a profile-like nature with elongated heads, pronounced noses, and full lips. This tapestry, in comparison to Montenegro's prints [Figs. 12 & 13] appears to be represented in a less stylized way and closer to the original Maya object; meaning that the figures that Cueto depicts look as though they are a direct copy of the figures from the stela. Additionally, the glyphs in the tapestry are visually very close to those on the stela, albeit the glyphs are missing some details. This is likely due to the fact that the tapestry appears to be incomplete and the use of weaving as a medium. In contrast, Montenegro's prints are a little more block-like and seem to add embellishments in the background. In contrast, Cueto's tapestry appears to attempt the intricate details of the Maya baroque nature. Cueto emphasizes the rich patterns seen on the garments worn by the figures and



even alludes to the blood oozing out of the wife's mouth. While some aspects of the lintel are missing in Cueto's copy such as the intricate details in the glyphs and a lower portion of the King's wife, overall it appears that Cueto has tried to make her tapestry as close to the original as possible. Additionally, since there is no known date tied to this tapestry, perhaps it was unfinished given that the lower portion of the wife is missing. This work is significant in relation to two of her other tapestries, *Oaxaqueña* (1928) [Fig. 28] and *Mercado* (1928) [Fig. 29], because it shows scholars that she was looking at the Maya style and that certain aspects of this style matriculates into other works she created.

*Oaxaqueña* depicts an indigenous woman in traditional attire as she harvests some sort of crop from a plant as tall as her into a red bowl. Resting at the base of the tall plant there is an animal that looks like a black Xoloitzcuintli. In between the top of the plant and the woman's head there is a bird flying into the leaves that looks as though it might start pecking at the plant. Although the title refers to an Oaxacan indigenous woman, Cueto still incorporates some Maya motifs, notably the profile face of the woman with a fully visible eye, and a semi-frontal body. However, unlike Montenegro, Cueto does not over exaggerate the woman's facial features. The woman's nose, while one can see its bent nature which likely alludes to Mesoamerican

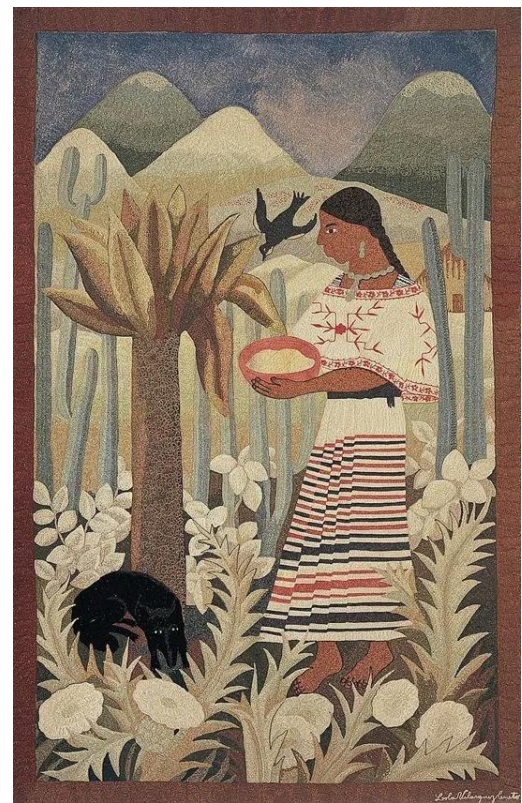


Figure 28. *Oaxaqueña* (1928), Lola Cueto, tapestry.

motifs, is not overemphasized like Montenegro or even Reyes Flores and Rivera—although these examinations will come later in the chapter. Perhaps this lack of focus on the facial features is due to the medium in which Cueto works, but given that her tapestry *Dintel de Yaxchilán, copia de motivo prehispánico maya* is a copy of an actual Maya stela, scholars can look towards the idea that Cueto is consciously making the decision to forego, to some degree, the focus on the woman's indigeneity.

Another example of her tapestry work is her piece *Mercado* (1928). This tapestry differs from the previous in that the main female subject sits in a frontal, rather than in profile, position as she holds her baby in fabric wrapped around her chest while selling

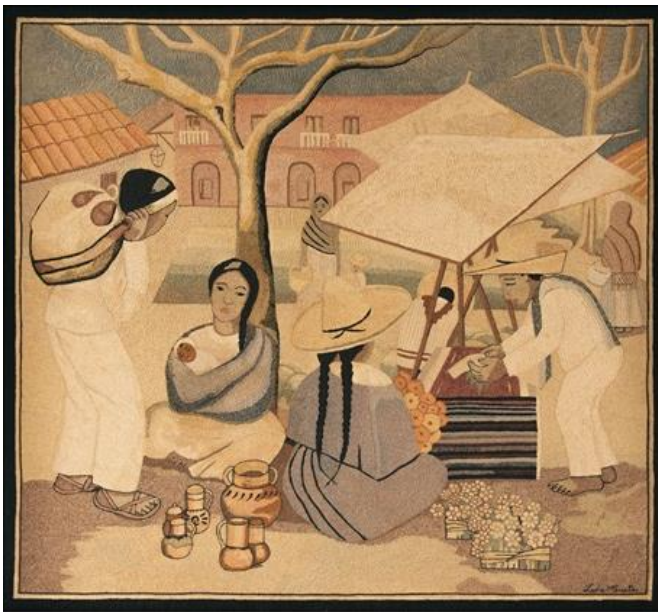


Figure 29. *Mercado* (1928), Lola Cueto, tapestry.

painted vessels. Within the scene there are multiple figures, both male and female, that are buying and selling items. To the right of the main female subject holding the baby there is another woman with a large hat and a blue patterned shawl, whose back is to the viewer, that is selling marigolds and an additional

type of white flower. All of the figures are rather flat like her figure in *Oaxaqueña*, but Cueto shows depth within this tapestry by differentiating the size between each person. Cueto places the male figure in the middle ground in a profile position with somewhat larger facial features similar to the female figure in *Oaxaqueña*. The male figure does have some similarities to the Maya figural style with the larger nose and full lips, but his

visible eye is closed making it difficult to determine if Cueto intended for the figure to visually reference Maya works.

However, if in this work it was her intention for the male figure in *Mercado* to reference Maya figural style then it is important to note that this type of representation of the male indigenous figure is more uncommon than depictions of indigenous women. This is primarily due to writings of Vasconcelos and his contemporaries that elevated the indigenous female as the ideal model for Mexican identity. Cueto is not the only artist to depict an indigenous male in this manner, Rivera has multiple works of art with indigenous men in this style, but it is much rarer to see indigenous men in this fashion because they are typically depicted as mestizo.<sup>116</sup> In Adriana Zavala's examination of gender roles and indigeneity in Mexico she writes that because women were associated with nature and men were associated with culture, the indigenous man was erased and categorized as mestizo while the indigenous woman became synonymous with national authenticity and identity.<sup>117</sup> The many references to indigenous culture in Cueto's work and in the other artists' works are indicative of the overall sentiment of the period where indigeneity became a focal point in Mexican society. Although the centennials prior to the 1910 Revolution and newly reformed government highlighted Mexico's Aztec heritage these artists are instead more interested in the Maya regions of the Yucatan and central America.

One of the most significant aspects about Cueto's work is that she utilized the traditional art form of weaving. In *C'est avec la mort de Maximilien* by André Salmon, Cueto is described as an artist that has the ability to make authentic art that incorporates

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<sup>116</sup> Zavala, *Becoming Modern*, 3.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

traditional motifs from high fashion to native fashion.<sup>118</sup> Salmon's description of her oeuvre is quite positive. However, it is important to note that the works Salmon analyzes are not her figurative tapestries *Oaxaqueña* and *Mercado*. Instead, Salmon analyzes her tapestries that have animals associated with Mexican indigenous cultures, such as the quetzal and jaguar/ocelot, and floral patterns.<sup>119</sup> He is quite fond of her work and her ability to use the traditional technique of weaving with the modern embroidery of the sewing machine. Salmon even goes so far as to question why the arts have looked down upon craftwork/decorative art when artists like Cueto have the ability to 'paint' with a sewing machine.<sup>120</sup> His positive review of Cueto's work is rather significant given the fact that it was written in 1929, rather early in Cueto's career. As he states in his essay, decorative arts were looked down upon. This type of art was thought of as a 'craft' which often has the negative connotation of being associated with 'women's work', and specifically within the context of Mesoamerica, weaving was greatly tied to a woman's role in society.<sup>121</sup> The craft of weaving became engendered with woman and womanhood, and in some Mesoamerican cultures became metaphors for sexual intercourse and social status.<sup>122</sup> Scholars know that weaving was a craft associated with

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<sup>118</sup> André Salmon, "[C'est avec la Mort de Maximilien." In *Exposition des tapisseries mexicaines de Lola Velasquez Cueto*. Paris, France: Salle de la Renaissance, February 1929.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. In "C'est avec la Mort de Maximilien" Salmon primarily discusses a tapestry with lions. Also see, André Salmon, "La obra de MMe. Velázquez Cueto, Mexicana." *El Universal Ilustrado* 12, No. 615, (Mexico City, February 1929), 47. In this brief article, other works of Cueto's are seen surrounding the small paragraph. These tapestries contain spotted felines, small dogs, floral motifs, and the quetzal, as well as a fish, and another tapestry that contains vignettes of men wearing large sombreros.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Rosemary A. Joyce, *Gender and Power in Prehispanic Mesoamerica*, 1st ed., (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 11 and 118.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 50-53, 159, 162-164, and 184-189. Joyce explains how weaving became associated with women's work by examining other craft production, such as pottery, that never gained the same gendered status as spinning and weaving (50-53). Later in her book she analyzes the many sexual symbolic meanings associated with weaving and it is important to note that Joyce primarily analyzes this within the context of noble members of Mesoamerican society engaging in heterosexual relations. For the Aztec, the craft became a metaphor for dancing, sexual attraction and intercourse for young men and women who were

women because of the many Maya and Aztec texts from the Classic and Postclassic periods that tie women to this type of production.<sup>123</sup> Although it is unclear whether Cueto knew about the specific connection of weaving within the Mesoamerican context, she would have at least understood that the medium even in the modern context was gendered. Additionally, weaving was also associated with the folk arts, therefore Cueto's use of the tapestry is poignant for two main reasons. First, Cueto's tapestries combined the traditional weave with the modern embroidery technique inherently elevating the status of this style of art. She called this type of tapestry the *DVC Tapestry*, labelled after her initials.<sup>124</sup> Cueto modernized the traditional tapestry by utilizing a sewing machine to embellish her designs.<sup>125</sup> Her unique technique elevates the status of the tapestry by proposing new avant-garde ideas through the reconciliation of craft tradition and modern technology.<sup>126</sup> Secondly, Cueto's tapestries are also poignant because they embody the principle of hybridity, a concept that Montenegro heavily discusses in his catalogue essay about Folk Art in *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* (1940). As discussed in the previous section, Montenegro's analysis on weaving was somewhat contradictory because he claimed that folk weaving was a blend of Spanish and Pre-Columbian craft but retained more indigenous characteristics. Although his weaving section was not centered around decorative works such as Cueto's, Montenegro's analysis implies that the craft of weaving produced hybrid works.<sup>127</sup> Cueto's tapestries then become an even more

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becoming adults (159). Weaving was also symbolic of new marriages, gendered performance and sexual pleasure (162-164). Joyce then analyzes how scholars came to understand that weaving was gendered as women's work based on the multiple surviving texts from the Maya and Aztec as well as archaeological evidence that links many noblewomen to the craft (184-189).

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 184-189.

<sup>124</sup> Flores, "Strategic Modernists," 16.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Montenegro, "Folk Art," 109

hybridized work by embodying the already hybridized folk style tapestry with modern embroidery techniques through the use of sewing machines.

Salmon is not the only critic that reviews Cueto's work in a positive light. Jean Xceron in 1929 and Jean Charlot in 1947 also have positive reviews of Cueto's work. For such an early article, Xceron even directly references Cueto's inspiration from Aztec and Maya.<sup>128</sup> The critic admires her strong grasp of Mexican folk art, a style he states has the same quality as works from Peru and Egypt.<sup>129</sup> What is so important about this document is that the critic details Cueto's rather successful career. Xceron wrote that after her time at the Academy, Cueto opened a school in Mexico to teach Folk Art to children.<sup>130</sup> Additionally, Xceron highlighted that after her exhibition in Paris, Cueto was expected to have an exhibition opening in Holland and soon after in New York.<sup>131</sup> Although the review was in relation to Cueto's puppets, Jean Charlot, a prominent French artist who had a successful career in Mexico, also had a positive review of Cueto's work. Charlot believed that Cueto had a deep grasp of the mediums she used and that her work was the embodiment of ancient styles transformed into folk.<sup>132</sup>

Despite Cueto having a rather successful career outside of Mexico she has been mostly overlooked in contemporary scholarship. This gap in scholarship indicates that Cueto was most likely overlooked because she was a woman practicing in the early twentieth century. One might argue that Frida Kahlo is an example of scholarship not overlooking a successful female artist, but it wasn't until recently that Frida gained

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<sup>128</sup> Xceron, "Who's Who Abroad?".

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Jean Charlot, "Papeles Picados: Lola Cueto." *El Nacional* (Caracas), May 6, 1947.

recognition without being analyzed in relation to Diego Rivera, and even now much of the scholarship surrounding her art is still in association with Rivera.<sup>133</sup> Cueto's unique works stand out against her contemporaries because of her ability to harmonize traditional and modern techniques of materials associated with craft and her ability to embed these works with Mesoamerican motifs both visually and contextually. Unlike her contemporaries she subtly nods to the Maya figural style with less exaggerated physical features.

### **Diego Rivera: Evolution of the Indigenous Subject**

Diego Rivera is arguably one of the most famous artists in Mexican art history. His large oeuvre encompasses a wide variety of stylistic evolution throughout his career. Rivera's work is important to this thesis because of the manner in which he depicts indigenous subjects with appropriated Maya motifs. He was heavily intrigued by ancient Mexican cultures and over his lifetime he collected one of Mexico's largest private collections of Mesoamerican art. Like the other artists examined in this thesis, Rivera attended the Academy in the early 1900s around the same time as Roberto Montenegro. Rivera began his studies at the Academy in 1897.<sup>134</sup> Like Montenegro, Rivera received a scholarship to study art in Europe.<sup>135</sup> He briefly returned to Mexico in 1910 at the start of the Revolution but travelled back to Europe to continue studying European avant-garde

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<sup>133</sup> A good example of this perpetual relation of Kahlo to Rivera is that on a recent visit to Frida's Casa Azul, there were no books about Kahlo's oeuvre in the museum shop but there were multiple books analyzing the life's work Rivera.

<sup>134</sup> Françoise Rambier, "Diego Rivera (1886-1957)," *La Nouvelle Revue Des Deux Mondes*, 1974. 619.

<sup>135</sup> Fernández, *Roberto Montenegro*, 9.

movements.<sup>136</sup> After Rivera's definitive return to Mexico in 1921 he joined the Communist party and, along with Javier Guerrero and David Alfaro Siqueiros, founded the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors whose manifesto was to raise the collective consciousness of people and mobilize them into action.<sup>137</sup> Much of this was related to Rivera's and Siqueiros's belief that Mexico needed a new figurative tradition that blended Mexican-Nationalism, Marxism-Leninism, and indigenous themes.<sup>138</sup> These ideas were reinforced with Vasconcelos's public programs that highlighted indigenous heritage and attempted to redress the history of conquest and colonization related to indigenous culture. Rivera claimed that Pre-Columbian art, specifically works of the Maya, Aztec, and Toltec, was the major way to achieve these ideas and under Vasconcelos's funding made trips to the Yucatán and Tehuantepec.<sup>139</sup> For Rivera these works distinguished Mexico's history and cultural legacy from European art and art movements. This is important because Rivera's studies of Mesoamerican art were informed by the larger interest of anthropologists and scholars during this period. Scholars like Gamio, Caso, and Boas were intrigued by the excavations of the Teotihuacán Valley as well as the Yucatan region, among other important Mexican sites. Barbara Braun, scholar and author of *Pre-Columbian Art and the Post-Columbian World: Ancient American Sources of Modern Art*, makes an important note that these researchers "*remained more interested in the imaginative rather than the practical reality of ancient Mexico, explaining it in religious and mythic rather*

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<sup>136</sup> Braun, Barbara. "Diego Rivera: Heritage and Politics" in *Pre-Columbian Art and the Post-Columbian World: Ancient American Sources of Modern Art*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993), 187.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 188. Also see quote and note 16 in which Rivera is stated that he observed Mesoamerican works, specifically those from the Maya, Aztec, and Toltec.



than social and political terms... They never questioned the archaeological record with regard to cultural change or complexity, nor were they interested in retrieving the culturally specific function and content of ancient artifacts".<sup>140</sup> Braun's notion becomes incredibly important to the analysis of Rivera's work, as well as the other artists, because it highlights one of the main problems surrounding these makers; the overly determined ambivalence of ancient culture and the inaccurate appropriation of ancient motifs. Rivera's connections to scholars like Gamio and Caso is complex and widespread. The artist wrote frequently for *Mexican Folkways*, a journal that had a strong emphasis on indigenous themes. Additionally, Rivera was known for collecting Pre-Columbian works from around Mexico. Rivera's close proximity to these scholars and works of art greatly influenced his practice which led him to idealize Mesoamerican culture, miscategorize, and blend many of these vastly different ancient styles under the general description of Aztec.<sup>141</sup>

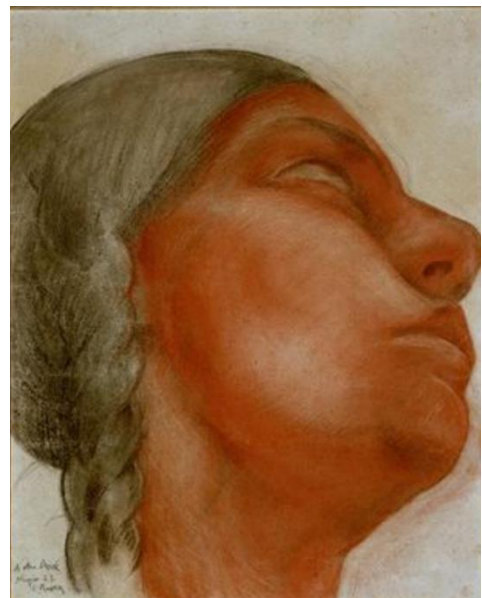


Figure 30. *Mujer de ojos grandes* (1921), Diego Rivera.

Because Rivera had such a wide-ranging career, scholars can track the shifts in his style. As a young artist Rivera's style was aligned closely with movements popular in

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 190. This quote from Braun's text is incredibly important because it highlights how early researchers and artists, among other influential public figures, crafted an ideal pre-Hispanic history and observed modern indigenous populations as though they had not developed overtime.

<sup>141</sup> An interesting aspect of Rivera's and many of his fellow artists' idealization of indigenous art and culture was that José Clemente Orozco directly opposed this notion. Orozco believed that the contemporary indigenous cultures artists were studying was a blending of Spanish and indigenous culture. Additionally, Orozco believed that the majority of the Pre-Columbian cultures had too much missing documentation and the ones that did were greatly influenced by Spanish models or fragmentary at best and therefore unlikely to resemble Pre-Columbian, specifically Aztec, originals. See Braun, 190.

Europe. His early paintings had many impressionist motifs, particularly ones that followed the blocked nature of Paul Cézanne, and eventually molded into the cubist style that Georges Braques and Pablo Picasso popularized in the early twentieth century. Even upon his return to Mexico after the Revolution, Rivera's style leaned heavily towards European avant-garde movements. In the early 1920s, scholars can see that Rivera became interested in sketching Mexican indigenous people, but his style is still rather naturalistic and academic. For example, in his 1921 sketch *Mujer de ojos grandes* [Fig. 30] depicts an indigenous woman in a foreshortened angle almost as if she were looking to the right corner of the page. Because the viewer sees the woman from below, the



Figure 31. *Creation* (1922), Diego Rivera, Fresco, Secretary of Education, Mexico City.  
[https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/#/asset/ADETROITIG\\_10313471902](https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/#/asset/ADETROITIG_10313471902)

woman's jawline and cheek are quite prominent in the sketch. Despite this dynamic position, Rivera still renders the woman more or less naturalistic. His murals at the Secretary of Education, painted

between 1921-1923, show the continued progression in Rivera's style as he moved closer into the muralist/cartoon-like style that he became associated with for the large majority of his career. Within Rivera's many portals at the Secretary of Education, the artist's

style shifts from more Europeanized to the folk-inspired style and themes. Details from *Creation* (1922) [Fig. 31], located with the Secretary of Education, are examples of Rivera's Europeanized style. One can see that Rivera began to incorporate folk aspects to his work like the somewhat simplified figures, but overall, each element retains similarities to his early works made while studying in Europe. Barbara Braun's historiographic essay of Rivera analyzes these murals in great detail. She writes that the themes within these murals were Rivera's attempt at elaborating on Vasconcelos's notion of human evolution in biological, nationalistic terms to do with *mestizaje*, but later Rivera developed these murals into a more militant, Marxist expression of Mexican history and culture.<sup>142</sup> Additionally, with its large size, the mural in his hands became encyclopedic. *Creation* marks an important shift in Rivera's work, because although these figures are not entirely idealized with strong Pre-Columbian visual characteristics, it was Rivera's initial effort to construct a new narrative of Mexican society.<sup>143</sup> Braun highlights that in this mural Rivera intentionally created Anglo, Creole, and Mestizo figures. She also makes an important note that Rivera is believed to have modeled the 'Indian' figures from Aztec stone sculptures carrying baskets and West Mexican terra-cotta figures, although he only used this visual representation for male figures within the mural, specifically macehuales or plebeian freemen that formed the base of Aztec society.<sup>144</sup> For Braun, Rivera's use of Aztec culture was due to his intense interest in the Aztec dualistic philosophy and metaphoric expression.<sup>145</sup> Braun's ideas are important for understanding Rivera's larger practice because this mural serves as one of Rivera's initial works

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 191.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 191-216.

incorporating Pre-Columbian motifs. But Rivera quickly shifts away from the Aztec figural

representation,

emphasized in

Braun's research, in

favor of the Maya

figural representation

but still claiming the

style to come from

the Aztec artistic

tradition. Although

Braun's analyses of

his murals include a

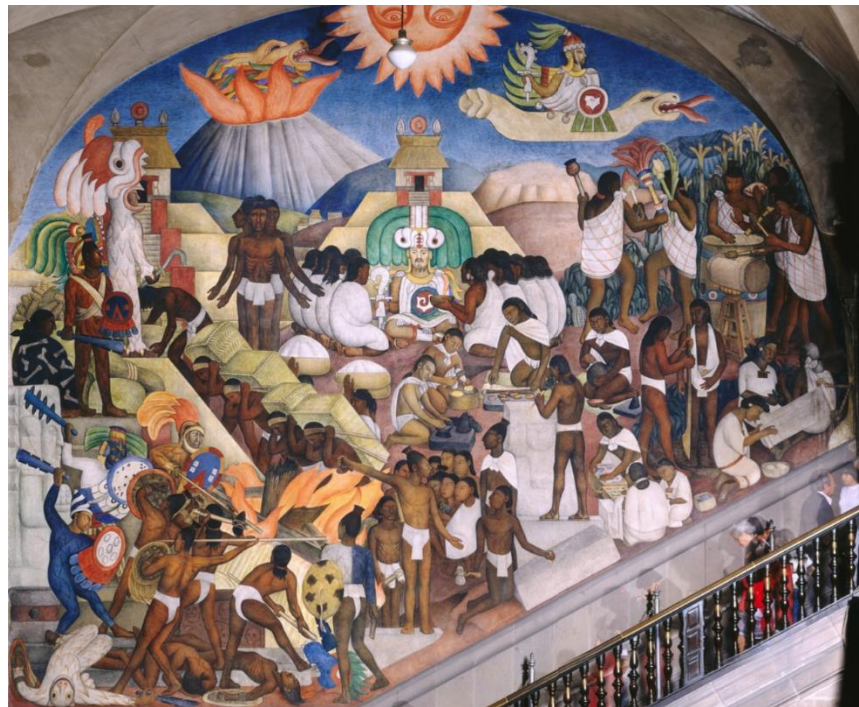


Figure 32. Aztec Portal from *The History of Mexico*, Diego Rivera, Fresco, Stairwell in the National Palace, Mexico City. [https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/#/asset/ADETROITIG\\_10313471992](https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/#/asset/ADETROITIG_10313471992)

brief explanation of the Maya influence as a minor element in Rivera's work, the Maya style actually plays a larger role than she alludes to in her chapter essay.

Rivera's later mural (1929-1935) for the National Palace stairwell in Mexico City fully embodies many of the folk and Pre-Columbian esthetics that Rivera appropriated and marks a dramatic shift in Rivera's visual representation of indigenous people.

Leonard Folgarait's "*Revolution as Ritual*" (1991) analyzes Rivera's stairway murals at the National Palace by providing a descriptive visual analysis as if he was walking the viewer through the Palace. Folgarait begins by formally analyzing Rivera's Aztec portal [Fig. 32] which depicts life in Mexico before the conquest. He then guides the reader along Rivera's timeline/narrative which follows along Mexican history and concludes

with well-known figures up until 1930 as well as a pseudo-future for the nation.<sup>146</sup> Each portal is inundated with overlapping figures, some of which are recognizable such as Hernán Cortés, while others are personifications of the general population within that moment of Mexican history. Within this extensive visual analysis Folgarait offers commentary on each point in history that Rivera depicts and the potential symbolism behind it by dissecting the loose narrative that Rivera constructs and the problems that Rivera encountered as the 'painter-historian'.<sup>147</sup> Rivera needed to focus on certain points in Mexican history such as Independence from Spain and the following notable presidents, ultimately allowing Rivera to compose a thematic history rather than strictly a chronological history. Folgarait's argument highlights many of the issues within Rivera's murals while at the same time recognizing their importance within the cultural context in which they were created. For example, Folgarait seems to find fault in Rivera's pre-imposed narrative that it is presented to the viewer almost as if there is no question about the logic in which Rivera composes Mexican history.<sup>148</sup> Meaning that the scenes unfolding force the viewer to not only construct the narrative of history but also reconcile the proper history and the imagined history.<sup>149</sup> This section of Folgarait's article is important because it emphasizes Rivera's ability to construct a pseudo-history. Although many of the figures within Rivera's mural are real Mexican historical figures, his construction of a thematic history overlooks a true understanding of historical events. He

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<sup>146</sup> Folgarait, Leonard. "Revolution as Ritual: Diego Rivera's National Palace Mural." *Oxford Art Journal* 14, no. 1 (1991), 18-19.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 23. Here Folgarait means that there is an ambivalent idealization with inaccurate appropriation. This is especially important to Rivera's work because he blends multiple Mesoamerican styles when depicting a scene related to Aztec mythology and history.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.



notes that Rivera's mural prioritizes the "discursive over the figurative" and organizes knowledge in a way that conditions the viewing of the mural and the public's consumption.<sup>150</sup>

Folgarait's argument is critical to Rivera scholarship because it focuses on Rivera's constructed thematic history it is understandable that Folgarait overlooks various details within the large mural. However, while Folgarait questions some of the details throughout the mural, notably the presence of the eagle in the Aztec portal, he overlooks an important aspect of Rivera's constructed narrative, specifically how Rivera depicted indigenous people. Barbara Braun's in-depth analysis of Rivera instead focuses on the overt Aztec themes and symbolism within this stairwell mural rather than Folgarait's account of Rivera as the painter-historian. Braun begins her essay by briefly introducing the geographic importance of the National Palace which was built over the ruins of the palace of Moteuczoma II and sits adjacent to the ceremonial Tenochtitlán.<sup>151</sup> Braun reads the stairwell mural and adjacent panels as a large triptych representing the fall of Teotihuacán to the post-revolutionary reconstruction. She links the fall of Teotihuacán to this mural because the downfall of Moteuczoma II is tied to the story of Queztalcoatl's expulsion from Tula.<sup>152</sup> In her analysis, she points out that many of the motifs show that

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>151</sup> Braun, "Diego Rivera," in *Pre-Columbian Art*, 205. In her book, Braun uses the spelling "Moctezuma", but instead I use the Nahuatl spelling seen in the more recent book *Mexico: from the Olmecs to the Aztecs* (2019). (See Michael D. Coe, Rex Koontz, and Javier Urcid, *Mexico: From the Olmecs to the Aztecs*. 8<sup>th</sup> ed., (Thames & Hudson, 2019), 7.)

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 205. And Coe, Koontz, and Urcid, *Mexico: From the Olmecs to the Aztecs*, 177-180. The story of Queztalcoatl's expulsion from Tula comes from the Toltec Annals which recounts how the Toltec civilization was formed, although many variations of this story were told shortly after Spanish conquest in order for the storyteller to claim Toltec familial descent. However, the common threads are as follows. Mixcoatl (Cloud serpent), the patron deity of hunting, and his people settled in Colhuacan where he had a son, Topiltzin born in the year 1 Reed (c. 935 - 937 CE) who was later identified with the Feathered Serpent or Quetzalcoatl. During his rule, the capital was moved from Colhuacan to Tula. The city had internal strife because Topiltzin followed the more peaceful cult of Quetzalcoatl that opposed human sacrifice and performing penences. His enemies, followers of the fierce god Tezcatlipoca (Smoking

Rivera was inspired by known Aztec codices and briefly states that “Rivera combined the visual references to Aztec relief and Toltec-Maya murals” but the statement only refers specifically to the figure of Quetzalcoatl.<sup>153</sup> Overall, her analysis of the stairwell mural is rooted in the Aztec motifs, and while Braun is correct that these motifs are important and play a large role in the work, she overlooks that many of the figures within the large-



Figure 33. Detail of Aztec Portal from *The History of Mexico*, Diego Rivera, Fresco, Stairwell in the National Palace, Mexico City.

scale mural are Mayanized despite Rivera’s claims that the mural is a story of Aztec history. Many of the overlapping figures begin to have elongated heads and larger facial features. Two figures in particular within the Aztec portal, both of which are closer to the viewer in the central foreground, are recognizably stylized as Maya [Fig. 33]. Rivera places these figures in a composite view where their heads are in profile while their bodies are frontal. One could argue that these figures are minor within the larger context

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mirror), the giver and taker away of life, lord of sorcerers, and patron of the warrior orders, forced Topiltzin out of the city. The former ruler and his followers became slothful and broke their priestly vows of celibacy. In his downfall, Topiltzin was tricked by Tezcatlipoca and was eventually banished. As he left the city, he burned or buried all of his treasures. Topiltzin travels with his followers, who eventually die in their perilous journey, and eventually finds himself on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. Dressed in full quetzal plumage and a turquoise mask, he lights himself on fire. His ashes rose the sky and he became Venus the morning star. In a version claimed by the Spanish to be known by Moteuczoma Xocoyotzin, Topiltzin does not light himself on fire and instead sails east with his followers on a raft of serpents and was believed to one day return. It is this version that causes the downfall of Moteuczoma II because he believed that Hernán Cortés was Quetzalcoatl returning.

<sup>153</sup> Braun, “Diego Rivera” in *Pre-Columbian Art*, 209.

of the mural that is inundated with Aztec stories. But these figures, instead, point to the fact that Rivera's combination of Pre-Columbian cultures is more prominent than



Figure 34. *The Land of the Pheasant and the Deer: Folksong of the Maya* (1935), written by Antonio Méndiz Bolio, illustrated by Diego Rivera. [https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/#/asset/ASCHALKWIJKIG\\_10313990842](https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/#/asset/ASCHALKWIJKIG_10313990842)

scholarship has previously analyzed and that his artworks contradict his own claims. For example, Braun includes a quote by Rivera in her chapter where the artist discusses his preference for works from Tlatilco over those from the Maya.<sup>154</sup> While this claim was in reference to Rivera's collecting practice it reveals that scholars need to examine the contradictions between Rivera's statements, the content of his art, and his eclectic collecting practice—one that later developed into the

Anahuacalli Museum whose architecture itself is a blending of many Mesoamerican cultures, and worthy of scholarly attention.

This appropriation of Maya style was likely in part due to Rivera's time spent in the Yucatan as a part of Vasconcelos's initiative for artists to study ancient sites along with the study of contemporary indigenous people and their art.<sup>155</sup> Rivera's observations

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 235 and note 118. Rivera's quote is as follows "Surely, the Maya in their best monuments attained an insuperable fineness and elegance. But the art of Tlatilco, throughout its evolution, attained a degree of character and imagination higher than the Maya."

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 190-191.



can be seen directly in the illustrations of Antonio Médiz Bolio's book *The Land of the Pheasant and the Deer: Folksong of the Maya* (1935). This book acts as documentation of Rivera's modern interpretation of Maya art and as material proof that Rivera and his contemporaries were greatly interested in Maya aesthetics despite the larger focus on the Aztec culture among other prominent Mesoamerican cultures such as the Zapotec and Tehuantepec. In each of the illustrations in the book



Figure 35. *Perfil de indígena con alcatraces* (1938), Diego Rivera, charcoal and pastel. [https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/#/asset/ASCHALKWIJKIG\\_10313990351](https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/#/asset/ASCHALKWIJKIG_10313990351)

scholars can see that Rivera studied the traits of Maya art. In the illustration *Hunter with Serpents, Deer and Two Birds* [Fig. 34], the figure, while stylized, contains many Maya motifs including the larger nose and breath scroll coming out of the hunter's and birds' mouths. Although Rivera takes artistic liberties within this illustration, it is clear that this



Figure 36. *Perfil de indígena con flores de cempazuchitl* (1938), Diego Rivera, charcoal and pastel. [https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/#/asset/ASCHALKWIJKIG\\_10313991678](https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/#/asset/ASCHALKWIJKIG_10313991678)

period was influential to his later works. For example, in his 1938 charcoal and pastel drawings of profiles of indigenous women, Rivera furthers the appropriation of Maya style and exaggerates the figures even more than those in his National Palace mural and the illustrations within Médiz Bolio's book.

*Perfil de indígena con alcatraces* (1938) [Fig. 35] depicts an indigenous woman in the exaggerated profile view with a pronounced nose, full lips, and dark skin. Her dark hair is

covered by a similarly dark-black shawl and covering almost the

entirety of her body are the large white calla lilies. Similarly, his *Perfil de indígena con*

*flores de cempazuchitl* [Fig. 36] depicts a younger, lighter skinned woman who shares similar characteristics such as a prominent nose and dark hair. However, this portrait is different in that the woman's visible eye and mouth are open. The woman's mouth is similar to many Maya representations of the human mouth because the lips are full, rounded, and gently opened with the corners of the lips at a downward angle. This is quite similar, for example, to the mouths of Shield Jaguar II and his principle wife seen on Lintel 26 of Yaxchilán, Chiapas [Fig. 9]—a counterpart to Lintel 24 [Fig. 8], the stela that Cueto copied in her tapestry. While these details are small, when examined with the other traits



Figure 37. *The People's Demand for Better Health* (1953), Diego Rivera, Fresco, Hospital de la Raza, Mexico City. [https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/#/asset/ADETROITIG\\_10313471838](https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/#/asset/ADETROITIG_10313471838)

such as the profile face, emphasized nose, and elongated heads, it shows that Rivera is actively observing the Maya style and incorporating its attributes into his practice.

An aspect of Rivera's work that stands out is his conscious choice of only depicting certain figures with Mayanized characteristics. His mural *The People's Demand for Better Health* (1953) [Fig. 37] in Mexico City's Hospital de la Raza is a prime example of Rivera's selective Mayanization. Barbara Braun also has an extensive analysis of this mural in her chapter on Diego Rivera. This mural depicts the many ancient Mexican healing practices that, in this case, are represented as the precursor to

modern scientific medicine. Although the mural has many different scenes taking place, it is more or less divided in half by time period with Aztec deity Tlazolteotl (goddess of dirt, debauchery, and childbirth) separating the two periods.<sup>156</sup> The modern period is to the left of Tlazolteotl while the past is to the right. Braun makes an important concession



Figure 38. Detail from *The People's Demand for Better Health* (1953), Diego Rivera, Fresco, Hospital de la Raza, Mexico City.

that Rivera gathers a variety of different medicinal practices from around Mesoamerica, including the Maya. However, much of her analysis is centered on Rivera's emphasis on the Aztec through his use of Tlazolteotl, who in this mural is depicted in a squatting position as a face emerges from her vaginal canal.<sup>157</sup> But, while Braun is correct in that the largest figure in the mural is an Aztec deity, she does not point out that Rivera Mayanizes many of the figures, even those

intended to represent present indigenous people and culture. For example, in the half

representing the past there is a female figure [Fig. 38] that appears to be painting or cataloguing medicinal plants, Rivera paints her with a radically profiled face even though her back is to the viewer. Rivera paints her with an elongated head, large nose, full and open lips, with dark skin and black hair. She is just one



Figure 39. Detail from *The People's Demand for Better Health* (1953), Diego Rivera, Fresco, Hospital de la Raza, Mexico City.

of many figures within the half representing the past that are depicted in this manner.

Rivera depicts both males and females in this fashion. What is even more significant

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, 226.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 226.

within this mural is that Rivera includes this Mayanization of figures in the portion representing the present [Fig. 39], however, he is more selective when applying this technique to contemporary figures. As mentioned before one can see where Braun points out that Rivera consciously segregates the classes, however, Rivera's conscious efforts are far more visible within this mural especially in the portion meant to represent the present era. In this section of the mural, Rivera reserves the Maya figural style for those with darker skin and based on attire, likely from the working class. This concept is apparent because each of the doctors in the present-half have lighter skin and, with the exception of the doctors/white-collar workers in the upper left corner [Fig. 40], the majority of this type of figure is given a dynamic pose. Rivera's positioning of the creole and mestizo figures allows scholars to see that the artist carefully decided which figures would be given the exaggerated indigenous features. His conscious decision to emphasize the



Figure 40. Detail from *The People's Demand for Better Health* (1953), Diego Rivera, Fresco, Hospital de la Raza, Mexico City.

physicality of each figure recalls the caste paintings discussed in the previous chapter. Whether this was the intention or not, Rivera's careful imposition of Maya-style figural traits reinforces the colonial caste system that played a crucial role in the disenfranchisement of indigenous people for hundreds of years. Rivera and his contemporaries as well as scholars in positions of power like Vasconcelos and Gamio sought to oppose their colonial heritage by praising their indigenous past. But, each of their careful decisions to emphasize indigenous heritage—for the artists the focus on



physicality rooted in the Maya style—instead acts as a twentieth century caste for the modern indigenous person within Mexican society.

A common occurrence in Rivera's work, whether it be his murals or small-scale drawings, the title or prominent theme of the work is often in relation to other Pre-Columbian cultures, such as the Aztecs. But Rivera rarely uses the term 'Maya' despite

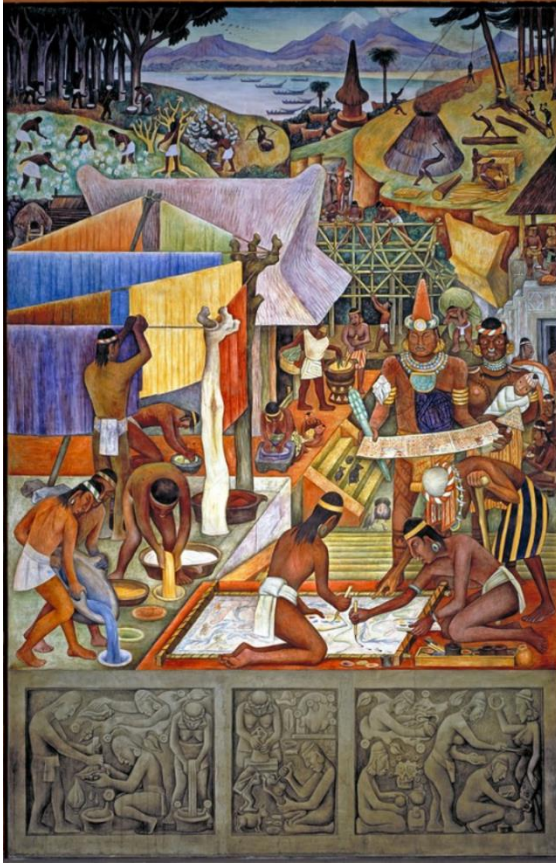


Figure 41. *The Tarascan Civilization* (1942), Diego Rivera, Patio Corridor of the National Palace, Mexico City. [https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/#/asset/ADETROITIG\\_10313471963](https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/#/asset/ADETROITIG_10313471963)

utilizing this style for the figures within his many works. This idea can be seen further in his later murals at the National Palace titled *The Tarascan Civilization* (1942) [Fig. 41], *The Great City of Tenochtitlán* (1945) [Fig. 42], and *The Huastec Civilization* (1950) [Fig. 43]. Figures that are in a profile or composite nature have the Maya style physical characteristics such as the large nose, elongated head, and full lips with a slightly opened mouth. Additionally, within these murals Rivera blends the Maya style

with motifs from the cultures that he explicitly references. The only example I

have been able to find at this point in my

research regarding the explicit connection of Rivera's works to the Maya style are his illustrations for *The Land of the Pheasant and the Deer: Folksong of the Maya* (1935).

Other scholars, such as Braun and Folgarait, have pointed to Rivera's direct utilization of

the Aztec culture and mythology as well as his idealization of the ancient people and their ways of life. Given Rivera's communist and Marxist themes within his murals, his idealizations of Pre-Columbian cultures betray contradictions. Rivera portrayed these cultures to more or less fit his ideas of Mexico's post-Revolution state. He, like many of his contemporaries, opposed strong imperialistic legacies such as the colonial Spanish

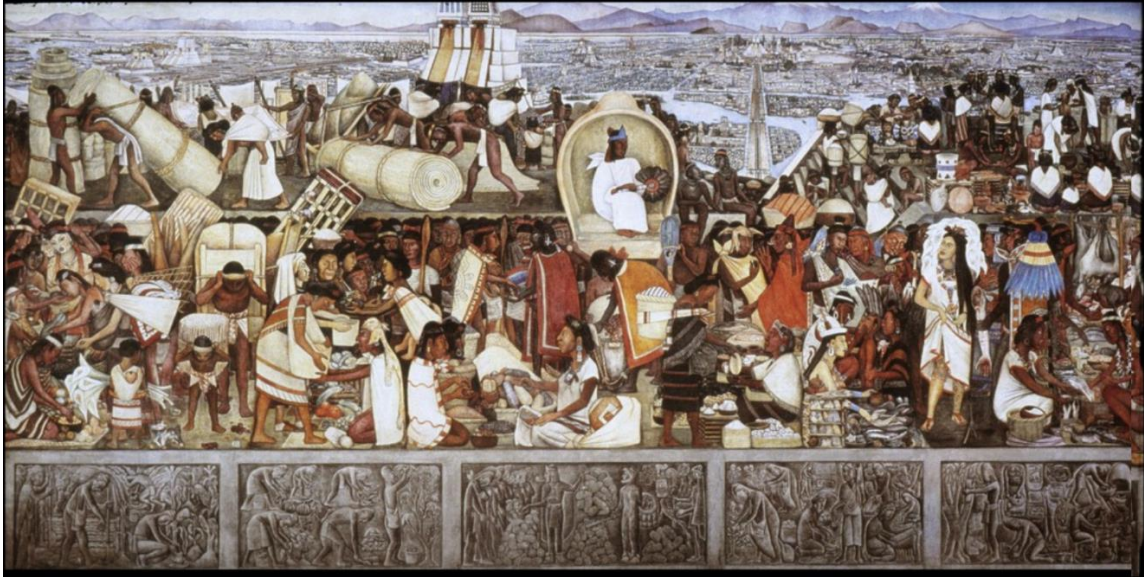


Figure 42. *The Great City of Tenochtitlán* (1945), Diego Rivera, Patio Corridor of the National Palace, Mexico City.

empire and the modern day United States of America.<sup>158</sup> However, he failed to recognize or intentionally overlooked the Aztec's imperialistic efforts throughout Mesoamerica.<sup>159</sup> Some of the civilizations and people that depicted in these murals paid tribute to the Aztec, and it was not a peaceful tribute in the way Rivera suggests in his murals.<sup>160</sup> For the Aztec's own people, the *macehualtin* (commoners) worked the land that belonged to the *calpolitin* (a group of families related by kinship or proximity of residence over long periods of time; elite members provided the land for commoners in exchange for

<sup>158</sup> Braun, "Diego Rivera" in *Pre-Columbian Art*. This concept of Rivera's Marxist tendencies and utopian view of Mexico's Pre-Columbian past permeate throughout Braun's chapter providing a critical highlight of Rivera's career to art historical scholarship.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 234.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

services).<sup>161</sup> The *macehualtin* were required to pay tribute to the Aztec nobility and likely would have been killed if they failed to do so.<sup>162</sup>

Additionally, during the invasion of Cortés and the Spanish, regions conquered by the Aztecs and those of their allies in the Triple Alliance of Tenochtitlán, Texcoco, and Tlacopan, were organized into tribute-paying provinces of the larger Aztec empire.<sup>163</sup> These provinces provided the Aztec empire with food and supplies but these were not voluntary tributes by any means. Rivera's utopian representation of the Aztec glosses over their imperialistic endeavors and instead vilifies the Spanish colonizer to fit the needs of the post-Revolution ideologies of the Mexican government and scholars like Gamio and

Vasconcelos.<sup>164</sup> Moreover, it inaccurately appropriates Maya figural style by labeling it as a different Mesoamerican culture, which to some degree creates

an erasure of cultural history as well as the formation of an inaccurate Mexican cultural and historical narrative.

Finally, Diego Rivera is an outlier in this study. While Rivera selectively Mayanizes women in his works like Montenegro, Cueto, and Reyes Flores, Rivera also

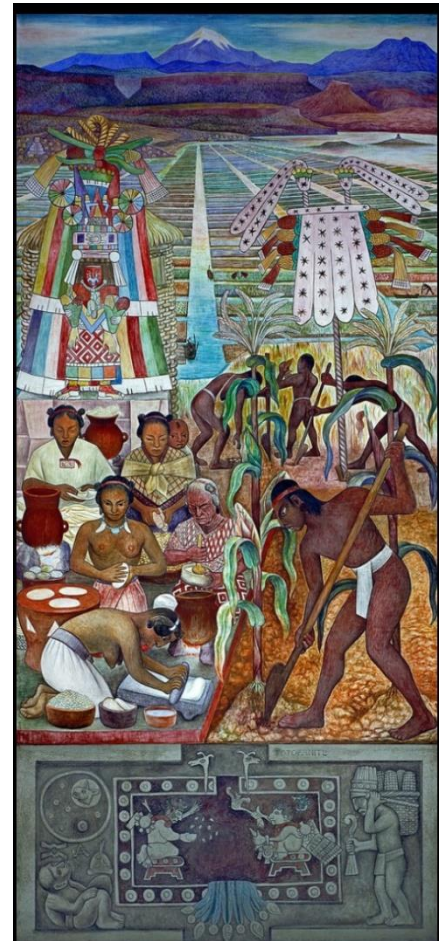


Figure 43. *The Huastec Civilization* (1950), Diego Rivera, Patio Corridor in the National Palace, Mexico City.  
[https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/#/asset/ASCHALK\\_WIJKIG\\_10313990297](https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/#/asset/ASCHALK_WIJKIG_10313990297)

<sup>161</sup> Coe, Koontz, and Urcid, *Mexico: from the Olmecs to the Aztecs*, 217-219.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 223.

<sup>164</sup> Braun. 1993. "Diego Rivera" in *Pre-Columbian Art*, 233-234.

Mayanizes indigenous men. Rivera is the only artist of the four in examination to continually depict indigenous men in this style. Cueto and Reyes Flores allude to this in some of their works, but it is not as exaggerated as the indigenous women. It is possible that Rivera's additional focus on indigenous men is due to his broad interest in Mesoamerican art. Over the course of his life, Rivera amassed one of the largest private collections of Pre-Columbian art in Mexico.<sup>165</sup> His obsession with collecting Mesoamerican objects permeated within many of his works, including the ones examined above. Rivera was more concerned with creating a new national Mexican standard of painting more than he was with national identity.

### **Aurora Reyes Flores: Mexico's First Female Muralist**

Like Lola Cueto, critical scholarship surrounding Aurora Reyes Flores's body of work is lacking despite her important position in Mexican art history as the nation's first female muralist.<sup>166</sup> Because there is a lack of scholarship on Reyes Flores, as with the section on Lola Cueto, one of the struggles within this section is assembling the history of the artist. In some aspects, there is more known about Reyes Flores than Cueto; therefore her biography is somewhat more substantial. However, the majority of archival resources about Reyes Flores are in family archives and unavailable to the general public. Additionally, because she is much younger than the other artists, some of her works are outside of the time constraints generally set for the thesis. They are still worth discussion because they exemplify how the use of Maya figural style persisted into the late twentieth

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 235.

<sup>166</sup> Dina Comisarenko Mirkin, "Aurora Reyes's 'Ataque a La Maestra Rural': The First Mural Created by a Mexican Female Artist." *Woman's Art Journal* 26, no. 2 (2005). 19.



century. It is the intention of this section and thesis to critically examine the information available and expand on research at a later point in my academic career when I am able to access archival resources. And finally, the section analyzing Reyes Flores hopes to serve as a stepping stone for a later study that is able to fully examine her work with contemporary artists of Mexico and critically study her art as a type of bridge between the muralists and contemporary Mexican artists.

Aurora Reyes Flores was born in 1908 in Hidalgo del Parral, in the State of Chihuahua, Mexico.<sup>167</sup> She was born to a rather wealthy family but when she was young she was forced into hiding because of her father's military and political connections.<sup>168</sup> This early formative period in her life greatly shaped her artistic development later in her life.<sup>169</sup> Reyes Flores attended the National Preparatory School when her family was no longer in political persecution and at the age of 13 she began taking night classes at the Academy.<sup>170</sup> Graduating in 1924 at the age of 16, Reyes Flores ended her formal arts training and the following year she had her first solo exhibition of drawings.<sup>171</sup> By the 1930s she had become a single mother with two children after divorcing her husband and for much of her adult life she was a teacher in public schools.<sup>172</sup> Also during this time, she formed important relationships with Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, María Izquierdo and José Clemente Orozco. While working as a teacher, Reyes Flores continued her artistic

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid. Mirkin writes that Reyes Flores's father went into hiding while her mother and the rest of her family fled to the capital. Here Reyes Flores's mother, Luisa Flores, made bread that Reyes Flores would sell in the market. This experience made Reyes Flores aware of the struggles of the working-class community

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. Mirkin uses the term Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes, but this was the same institution that each of the artists in examination attended, albeit under a new name.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

career and became a part of the League of Revolutionary Writers and Artists, an organization that influenced her practice through its social activism, as well as an active member of the Communist Party.<sup>173</sup> Reyes Flores was very active in social justice work particularly for women where she helped fight for women's suffrage and other women's rights like maternity leave.<sup>174</sup> All of these endeavors influenced the themes within her paintings. But what is also significant in Reyes Flores's work is that, like Montenegro, Cueto, and Rivera, she appropriates Maya stylistic motifs and incorporates them into some of her works.

One of the paintings that this concept is most apparent in is her painting *Juchitán Market* (1953) [Fig. 44]. This painting depicts a woman, presumably indigenous based on the exaggerated physical characteristics, in a market as she gathers fruit in her basket.



Figure 44. *Juchitán Market* (1953), Aurora Reyes Flores.

There are three other female figures within the painting, but they are significantly smaller, and Reyes Flores seems to cast darker shadows on them because they are not the focal point. Although Dr. Dina Mirkin briefly references this painting in her article about Reyes Flores, Mirkin does not analyze the Maya motifs that are present. The woman in *Juchitán Market* is in an odd composite view where the body is frontal and in a rather naturalistic pose, but the neck and head are in a profile position that is flattened and rather stiff. The woman has an elongated head with a white scarf covering her hair. Her nose is large and is accentuated by her prominent forehead and almond

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

shaped eyes that are deeply set into the skull. Reyes Flores also gives the woman large full lips with a mouth that is slightly open. It is clear that Reyes Flores was inspired by the Maya figural style but blends it with avant-garde painting techniques. Although Reyes Flores's painting was made nearly twenty years later, it has some similarities to Roberto Montenegro's *Mujeres mayas*, particularly in the way that Reyes Flores flattens the spatial planes. While both artists allude to spatial depth, their flattening of certain aspects reflects trends in modern art movements like Cubism. For example, Reyes Flores has a somewhat flattened use of perspective visible in the base of the market stall that leads to the background. However, the flattening is not as exaggerated as seen in Montenegro's works but this is likely due to shifts in the waning popularity of cubism during the 1950s.

Another example of Reyes Flores's use of specific Maya motifs can be seen in her mural for Delegación Coyoacán titled *El primer encuentro* (1978) [Fig. 45]. In this mural, she takes some of the principles of Maya figural technique and modernizes them by giving the facial features substantial changes in volume. The mural features scenes from Aztec mythology and presumably the meeting of Cortés and Moteuczoma seen in the right portion of the mural. In contrast, on the left side of the mural, Reyes Flores inundated the viewer with Aztec motifs such as the sunstone and multiple feathered serpents. Throughout this portion, she overlaps indigenous figures as they construct the important monument and perform some sort of ceremony in the background.<sup>175</sup> What is striking about this mural is the large winged Aztec being or deity that seemingly flies over the meeting and captures the viewers sightlines with its placement and size. This

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<sup>175</sup> It is difficult to say what exactly these background figures are doing because the digital images available are not the best quality and I have yet to find a scholarly article analyzing this specific mural.



Figure 45. *El primer encuentro* (1978), Aurora Reyes Flores.

figure notably has some of the Maya figural style, specifically with the profile face, large nose, and full lips but instead of being flattened in the way that the previous artists rendered this type of figure, Reyes Flores gives this figure dimension with well-formed facial features rather than simply flat. This seems to point

to the idea that the Mayanization of figures, both male and female, was possibly falling out of fashion, especially since this painting was created in 1978, fifty years after Montenegro, Cueto, and Rivera's initial paintings of indigenous women. The style of Reyes Flores' later work differs from the previous artists in the way that it shifted away from the early twentieth century movements such as Mexican muralism and began to resemble a style similar to some of the later Chicana/o styles that emerged in the late twentieth century. Reyes Flores' work acts as a bridge between two generations and regions of North American art production.

### **Conclusion: Selective Mayanization**

Montenegro, Cueto, Rivera, and Reyes Flores each depict the indigenous woman, drawn from specific motifs of the Pre-Columbian Maya forms, with the defining physical features of an elongated head, prominent nose, and full lips that are slightly open. Each

artist interprets this somewhat differently, Montenegro slightly stylizes the Maya figural motifs while Cueto simplifies it for the traditional medium of weaving. Whereas Rivera carefully chooses who to Mayanize based on race and class. Montenegro was an important figure in Mexican art history because of his various roles in museum leadership positions. Similarly, Rivera was one of the most well-known Mexican artists of the twentieth century and his attitude towards indigenous forms in his works would have also carried weighty implications. Both Montenegro and Rivera were in positions of power and had the ability to influence other artists and the people that viewed their work. Additionally, their works had the ability to reinforce some aspects of the government's political agenda, specifically the idealization of pre-Hispanic indigenous culture and modern indigenous populations.

In contrast, while Cueto had a successful career in Mexico and internationally her work is not as widely recognized today as Rivera or even the lesser known Montenegro. Her lack of recognition in critical scholarship is a disservice because her use of folk materials along with the subtle appropriation of Maya style creates an interesting play between past and present artistic style not seen in the work of her better-known contemporaries. Cueto's works, specifically her tapestries, are rooted in the pre-Hispanic art of weaving which was an important aspect of Pre-Columbian culture. Her tapestries deserve more recognition because of her unique technique that blended the traditional tapestry weave with the use of the sewing machine and modern embroidery techniques. The works that Cueto produced are an interesting for art historical scholarship because they act as a hybrid of Pre-Columbian, folk, and modern works of art through the medium and techniques used in their production.

However, the work of Reyes Flores acts as a bridge between the post-revolutionary period in Mexico and the contemporary period. Her works show the evolution in how indigenous figures were depicted. The ways in which each artist interpreted the social problem of the indigenous person, primarily the indigenous woman, was influenced by societal expectations of Mexican women. A common thread within the works was the use of white campesino attire on these indigenous women. Each artist often incorporates one brightly colored white piece of clothing on the woman which presumably acts as a nod to the social ideology that the indigenous woman was purer and more connected to Mexico's Pre-Columbian past. Additionally, the women are often placed in simple or rural landscapes that reinforce their socio-economic status. These works act as a modern caste, similar to the ones that Widdifield analyzes in the context of the nineteenth century. The Mayanization of these indigenous women created a canon for what the indigenous woman should look like physically and therefore predetermines her into a specific role in society.

There is still more research to be done related to each of these artist's use of specific motifs from ancient Maya works, especially since the larger focus socially and politically was primarily centered on the Aztec. Future research would entail a more in-depth study of the works that Cueto and Reyes Flores produced. The gap in scholarship surrounding their work is problematic because both artists had successful careers by any standard. Additionally, both artists worked as teachers while also maintaining their careers as practicing artists. This juggling of two careers, along with Reyes Flores's activist work, merits a lengthier examination because their situations reflect the expectations of women in early twentieth century Mexico. It is my hope that at the

doctoral level, I am able to access more archival materials related to these two artists and add to the current scholarship that discusses their work. I am also interested in how their other works compare to those examined within this thesis, specifically the progression, if any, in the visual representation of the indigenous woman. Cueto's works were less exaggerated than the other artists and I wonder if it could be a sign that to some degree she rejected the societal expectations of women? I am curious as to whether this idea has any merit and would be interested in having closer access to her tapestries and paintings. Again, Cueto's work is unique use of materials also warrants further research and the examination as to how her depiction of the human figure differs across various mediums. The fact that Reyes Flores was Mexico's first female muralist but there is a large gap in scholarship poses many questions. It is clear that between her art and social justice endeavors, Reyes Flores made an impact on the arts world and socio-political world as well. Mirkin wrote in her article that many of the women's rights issues that Reyes Flores fought for were present in her works. It would be interesting to see if these were present in her murals and how the spaces in which her murals were painted may have influenced the themes within the painting. Additionally, does Reyes Flores have any other works that depict indigenous women in a stylized manner and does this type of stylization conflict with the idea that her works are embedded with her political beliefs and stance on women's rights?

Overall, the Mayanization of indigenous subjects in post 1910 Revolutionary Mexico is a problem for art historians because artists selectively chose traits from ancient Maya works of art. In an effort of both the government and artists to create works of art that reinforced post-1910 Revolution ideas, many acts of Spanish colonization were

reinforced despite the nation's general claim that it opposed the acts of their Spanish oppressors. The selective choice of emphasized facial features and darkened skin in a way acted as a twentieth century caste similar to the *pintura de castas* that categorized the racial and social classes of colonial Mexico. This newly created twentieth century caste, whether intentional or not, reinforces ideas of the colonial era by singling out indigenous subjects which ultimately held heavy implications for modern indigenous populations.

While the selective choosing of Maya motifs was not exactly the same as depictions in caste paintings, it created an expectation and stereotype of modern indigenous people, primarily women. Therefore, the Mayanization present in these works becomes problematic because at the time of their creation there were still—and are still—Maya indigenous populations, among other well-known indigenous cultures, present in Mexico. This othering was likely present because of the continued assimilation efforts of the Mexican government. Indigenous people, like the Maya, were still a present “problem” for the government, although this problem is one that should be examined at the next level of scholarship. The selective choosing of specific Maya motifs acts as a Mexican interpretation of the European “primitive” ideologies. Montenegro, Cueto, Rivera, and Reyes Flores reinterpreted European art trends through Mexican history and ideologies of the Mexican state after the 1910 Revolution, ultimately creating an idealized notion of Mexican national identity through the stylized indigenous subject primarily in the form of Indigenous woman. Ultimately, their depictions of indigenous subjects mirrored the “othering” of the modern indigenous person present in early twentieth century Mexico.



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