



# can Modernism

4 October 2024

“The local in the global  
context”

DU2401

## What is Mexican modernism?



José Chávez Morado, *Carnival at Huejotzingo*, 1939

Truly local – truly global?

## — VISITING HOMES OF INTERESTING PEOPLE — *Wife of the Master Mural Painter Gleefully Dabbles in Works of Art*

By FLORENCE DAVIES.

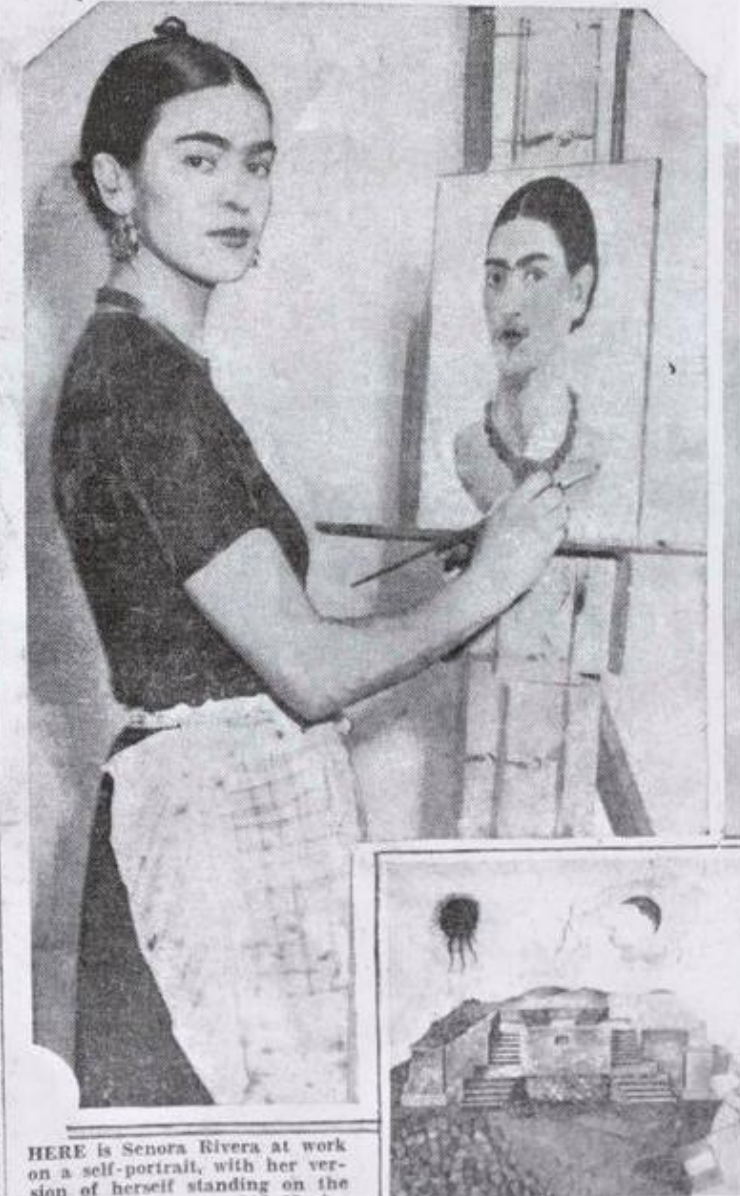
SOMETHING about the hilarious incongruity of a stuffed lion, a plaster-of-Paris horse, and a colored chromo of George Washington draped in garlands of red, white and blue crepe paper, all jumbled in the same shop window, proved to be too much for the sense of humor of Senora Diego Rivera, and so she simply had to do something about it. What she did was to go home and paint it, which may surprise people who think that Diego Rivera, the great mural painter now at work at the Detroit Institute of Arts, is the only artist in the family.

That, however, is all a mistake, since his wife, Carmen Rivera, or "Freda," as her friends call her, is a painter in her own right, though very few people know it.

"No," she explains, "I didn't study with Diego. I didn't study with anyone. I just started to paint."

Then her eyes begin to twinkle. "Of course," she explains, "he does pretty well for a little boy, but it is I who am the big artist." Then she twinkles in both black eyes fairly explode into a rippling laugh. And that is absolutely all that you can coax out of her about the matter. When you grow serious she mocks you and laughs again. But Senora Rivera's painting is by no means a joke; because, however much she may laugh when you ask her about it, the fact remains that she has acquired a very skillful and beautiful style, painting in the small with miniature-like technique, which is as far removed from the heroic figures of Rivera as could well be imagined.

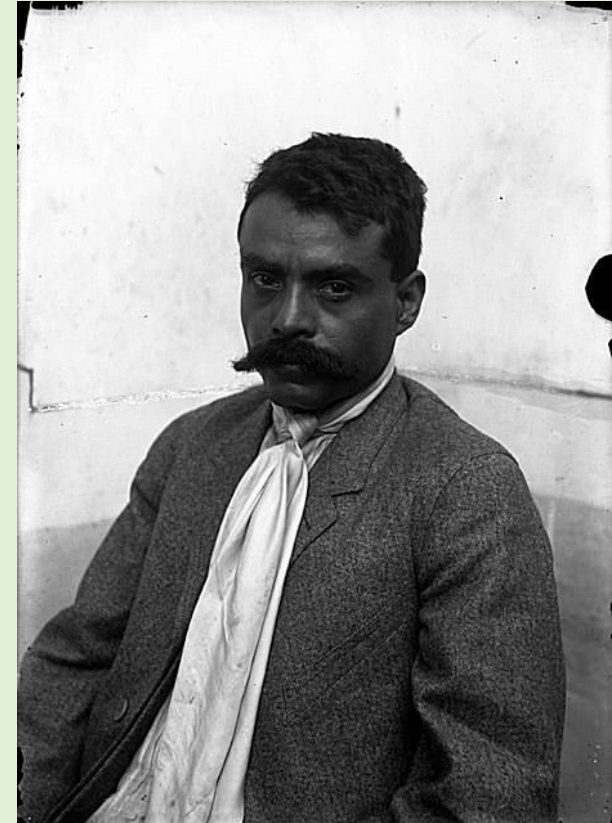
Thus, while her husband paints with large brushes on a huge wall surface, his wife, herself a miniature-like little person with her long black braids wound demurely about her head and a foolish little ruffled apron over her black silk dress in



HERE is Senora Rivera at work on a self-portrait, with her version of herself standing on the

## Precursors

The Mexican Revolution as a catalyst (1910–1920)



Augustin Casasola, Emiliano Zapata

Popular and print culture:  
José Guadalupe Posada  
(1852–1913)

José Guadalupe Posada, Calavera oaxaqueña, broadsheet, 1903



Suspicious towards European imperialist foundations & democratic models: in search for alternatives



*Peasants*, c. 1913, by David Alfaro Siqueiros, 1896 – 1974, Pastel on paper, Museo Nacional de Arte, INBA.



*Barricade*, 1931, by José Clemente Orozco

- General Alvaro Obregón and the consolidation period after the Revolution (1920 – 24): José Vasconcelos as Minister of Public Education (1920)
- nationalist authoritarianism under President Plutarco Elías Calles and the Maximato (1924 – 34)
- socialism under President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934 – 40)

## Is there one Mexican Modernism?

Estridentismo

Muralism & politics

Photography

Gendered perspectives

Popular culture and the forging of a modern Mexican nation



Ramón Alva de La Canal, El Café de Nadie, 1924.



## Manifesto of the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors

*To the Indian race humiliated for centuries; to soldiers made executioners by the praetorians; to workers and peasants beaten by the greed of the rich; to intellectuals uncorrupted by the bourgeoisie.*

...

*We appeal to common soldiers who, unaware of what is happening or deceived by their traitorous officers, are about to shed the blood of their brothers of race and class. Remember that the bourgeoisie will use the self-same weapons with which the Revolution guaranteed your brother's land and livelihood to now seize them.*



## Los Tres Grandes: “the voice of the voiceless”?



Siqueiros, Orozco, and Rivera (left to right) at the time of the creation of the National Mural Commission (1947).

- The monumental and the epic
- Leftist realism for the masses
- *mestzaje* and *indigenismo*: revisiting notions of what is modern and what is archaic
- The “myth of revolutionary nationalism”
- Aesthetic production became as a site of public debate about the character of *mexicanidad*



Diego Rivera (1886–1957)



Mural at the National Palace, Mexico City, 1929



Emiliano Zapata, 1931





Diego Rivera El Anahuac Mural – Man at the Crossroads, Rockefeller Centre, N.Y., 1930s (destroyed)



Diego Rivera Detroit Industries Murals (detail), 1930s

David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896–1974)



Torment and Apotheosis of Cuauhtémoc (detail), 1950–51



Self-Portrait, 1945

“We must become universal! Our own racial and regional physiognomy will always show through our work.”



From Porfirianism to the Revolution (detail), 1964

José Clemente Orozco (1883–1949)



Motherhood, 1924/25, National Preparatory School, Mexico



The Trench, 1926

*Destruction of the Old Order* (detail), 1926 (National Preparatory School, Mexico City)

*Catharsis* (partial view), 1934  
(Museum of the Palace of Fine Arts, Mexico City)

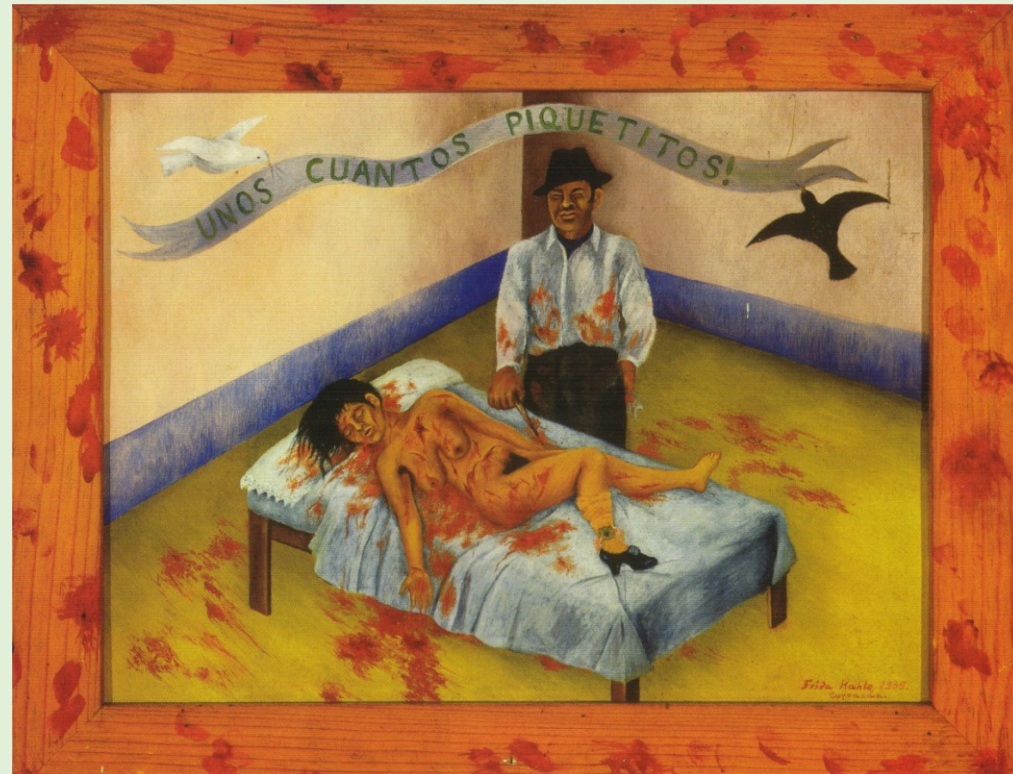
Revisiting Mexican Modernism:  
through women's eyes



Nahui Olin, Bautizo, ca. 1935

“Above all women must unite and fight together strongly to improve their condition. Women have to cease being luxury objects and transform themselves into a factor within the class struggle; they ought to evolve socially and participate directly in the revolutionary struggle.”

María Izquierdo, 1936



Frida Kahlo, *A few small nips*, 1935

You cannot bypass Frida Kahlo (today)



Self Portrait along the Boarder Line between Mexico and the United States



Untitled [Self-portrait with thorn necklace and hummingbird], 1940.

*My dress hangs there, 1933*



Gendered perspectives of Mexican modernism:  
Maria Izquierdo (1902–1955)



Bride from Papantla, 1944



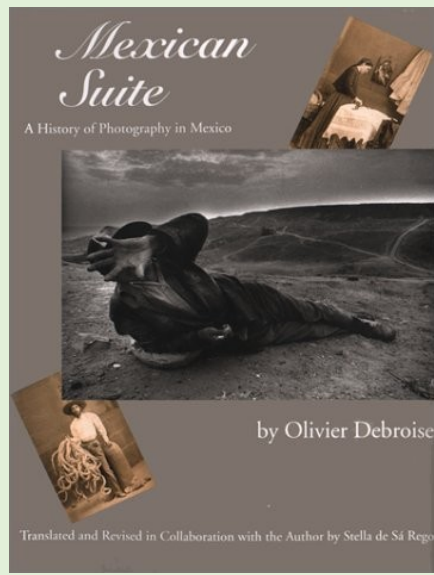
Still Life, 1948



Portrait, 1928



# Photography



Manuel Alvarez Bravo, *The Crouched Ones* (1934)

Lola Alvarez Bravo, *The Freeloaders* (1955)

# Tina Modotti (1896–1942)



## SOBRE LA FOTOGRAFIA ON PHOTOGRAPHY

By Tina Modotti

**S**ERIEUSE que se empleen las palabras "arte" o "artista" en relación a mi trabajo fotográfico, recibo una impresión desagradable, debida seguramente al mal uso y abuso que se hace de ellas.

Me considero una fotógrafa y nada más, y si mis fotografías se diferencian de lo generalmente producido en este campo, es que yo precisamente trato de producir no arte, sino fotografías honestas, sin trucos ni manipulaciones, mientras que la mayoría de los fotógrafos aún buscan los "efectos artísticos" o la imitación de otros medios de expresión gráfica, de lo cual resulta un producto hilerido y que no logra imprimir a la obra que producen el rasgo más valioso que debiera tener: LA CALIDAD FOTOGRAFICA.

Mucho se ha discutido en estos últimos años sobre si la fotografía puede o no ser una obra de arte comparable con las demás creaciones plásticas. Naturalmente las opiniones varían entre unos que si aceptan la fotografía como un medio de expresión igual a cualquier otro; y los otros, los míopes, que siguen mirando a este siglo veinte con ojos del siglo diez y ocho y que, por lo tanto, son incapaces de aceptar las manifestaciones de nuestra civilización mecánica. Pero para nosotros, los que empleamos la cámara como una herramienta, o como el pintor emplea su pincel, no nos importan las opiniones ajenas, buscamos la aprobación de las personas que reconocen el mérito de la fotografía en sus múltiples funciones y la aceptan como el medio más elocuente y directo de fijar o registrar la época presente. Tampoco importa saber si la fotografía es o no arte; lo que sí importa es distinguir en

Always when the words "art" and "artist" are applied to my photographs, am disagreeably affected. This is due to the bad use and abuse made of the

I consider myself a photographer, none. If my photographs differ from what is usually done in this field, it is precisely because I try to produce not honest photographs, without distortions or manipulations. The majority of photographers still seek "artistic" effects, imitating other mediums of graphic expression. This is a hybrid product that does not give its creator the most valuable quality it should have—photographic quality.

Whether or not photography may not be a work of art comparable to other creations has been much discussed in recent years. Naturally, opinions differ. There are those who do accept photography as a medium of expression on a par with any other, and there are others who continue to look at the twentieth century with eighteenth-century eyes, incapable of accepting the manifestations of our mechanical civilization. But for us who use the camera as a tool just as the painter does his brushes, averse to opinions that do not matter. We have the approval of those who recognize the merits of photography in its multiple aspects and accept it as the most elegant, the most direct means for fixing, for registering the present epoch.

To know whether photography is or is not an art matters little. What is important is to distinguish between good and bad photography. By good is meant that photography which accepts all the limitations inherent in



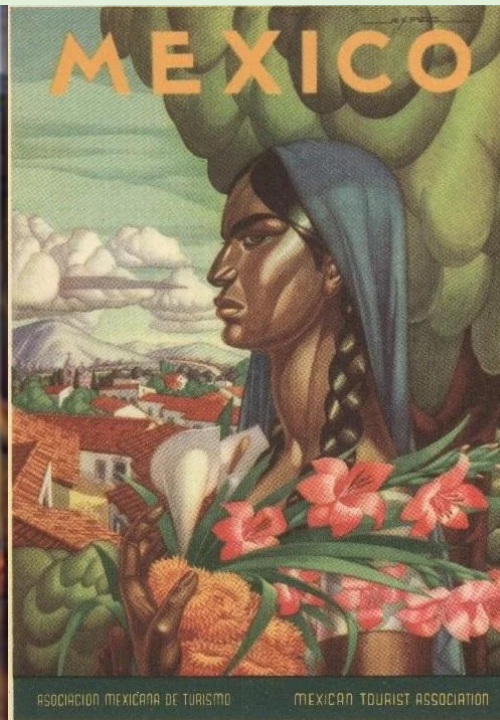
Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo with members of the Artists' Union at a May Day march. Mexico City. 1929.Credit

Photography as a socially committed art





María Izquierdo, *The Tourist*, 1940



## Palatable for the masses?

Women in indigenous-  
inspired costumes –  
a Tehuana everyday costume  
and a Tehuana holiday  
costume – in the Mexican  
Pavilion during the Ibero-  
American Exposition, Seville  
1929

