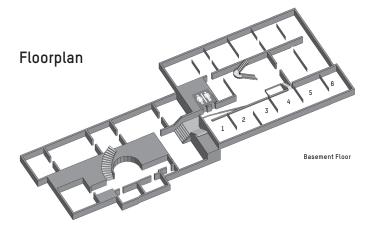
Mexico Mirrored in its Art: Prints, Independence, and Revolution

October 23 – December 15, 2013

Under the auspices of the Mexican Embassy, the Kunstmuseum Bern is exhibiting 51 prints and a piece of sculpture which entered the collection in 2012. They are the generous gift of the Government of Mexico, a token of the longstanding friendship and excellent cooperation between Mexico and Switzerland. The exhibition is bringing together works of famous contemporary Mexican and international artists produced in conjunction with the project "Estampas, Independencia y Revolución" (Prints, Independence, and Revolution) initiated in 2010 by the Museo Nacional de la Estampa of the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes in Mexico City.

The project was part of the celebrations for the Mexican Independence bicentenary (1810) and the Mexican Revolution centenary (1910). The participating artists, who were selected and invited by an academic committee, address the subject of freedom in their art. The results are works that adopt controversial, sometimes socio-political, sometimes surrealistic or abstract responses to the question of the cultural identity of the Mexican people. The prints were executed in editions limited to 100 in different fine-art printmaking studios in the country. Half of them were distributed among Mexican institutions, while the remaining prints were donated as gifts to leading public collections all over the world. The presentation of the exhibition has been thematically subdivided into the four areas of 'History', 'Figuration', 'Surrealism', and 'Abstraction', setting the framework for visitors to explore Mexico's history and its contemporary art.







Rooms 1 and 2: History

When we are confronted by contemporary Mexican art, it is inevitable that we simultaneously reflect on the historic moments that most profoundly impacted Mexico's history, such as when the country gained independence from Spanish colonial rule in 1810 and when, some 100 years later, the people revolted against the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz. Scrutinizing the issues of their own cultural, social, and geopolitical identity and reflecting on subjects such as life, death, and freedom are leitmotifs in the work of many Mexican artists since the beginning of the 20th century and are likewise very present in the sheets mounted in the exhibition.

The show begins with **Mónica Mayer's** silk-screen print **Yo no celebro ni conmemoro guerras**. In the context of the exhibition, it represents a postmodern 'manifesto' for a new, socially aware national art. The artwork was produced as part of a larger project: in 2008, together with the artist Victor Lerma, Mayer created a Facebook group ('Causes'), which has attracted more than 3,000 followers. The goal of the project was to promote national and international peace by means of public dialogue instead of fostering an empty repertoire of traditions and hero worship. According to Mayer, "[w]ar is always a tragedy, a conflict that cannot be resolved. (...) Perhaps wars are sometimes necessary, but they should never be celebrated."

The tradition of printmaking in Mexico and its impact on contemporary art is a further key point of departure in the exhibition. Its title reflects the engagement of contemporary Mexican prints with the history of a country that, for over a century, has instrumentalized this medium for the purposes of revolution and for educating the people. During the bloody violence of the war and the conflicts of the Mexican Revolution in the 1910s and 1920s, the press—with its lithographic illustrations—called on the people to rise up against the status quo. Sometimes satirically and sometimes in caricature, print illustrations in pamphlets portrayed the dramatic events of this epoch. They depicted political confrontations, murder, and catastrophes, or created ironic grotesques and new national symbols, such as portraits of the heroes and the fighters for agrarian land reform, Emiliano Zapata and Francisco 'Pancho' Villa. In this context, the graphic artist José Guadalupe Posada (ca 1852-1913) is still today regarded as the prophet and pioneer of this Mexican art movement. His extensive oeuvre of prints continues to be an indispensable point of reference for many contemporary artists. La Catrina is among his iconic works, the famous skeleton of a lady wearing a frivolous, feathered hat creation. In the exhibition, René Derouin cites it directly in the diptych La vida y la muerte, integrating the figure in the Mexican national emblem of an eagle perched on a prickly pear cactus and devouring a snake.

The visual expression of democratic ideas and propaganda in Mexico did not only have an outlet in the renowned monumental wall mural series of Diego Rivera (1886–1957), David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896–1974), and José Clemente Orozco (1883–1949), which were painted in conjunction with Minister of Education José Vasconcelos' literacy campaign.

It was especially those artists following in the tradition of Posada and belonging to the print collective Taller de Gráfica Popular (TGP, People's Graphic Workshop), founded in Mexico City in 1937, who united the artistic, political, and social goals of the ordinary and rural people in countless woodcuts and linocuts. One exemplary artist who was a member of this print collective was Leopoldo Méndez (1902-1969). Their work is still palpably present today and has a considerable impact on Mexican contemporary art. In the exhibition, the sheets of Adolfo Mexiac Calderón, Patria and Arturo García Bustos, Campesinos manifestando reflect the combination of folk, religious, and pre-Hispanic art and that of text and image, reminding us of communist propaganda during the first decades of the Soviet Union. Arturo García Bustos himself was a member of the TGP and, as a painter of wall murals, continually in touch with Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, José Clemente Orozco, and Frida Kahlo (1907-1954). Mexiac Calderón and García Bustos must be seen as the authentic heirs of the 'Mexican school' in art.

'Homeland' is a recurrent motif in the first exhibition rooms. Mimmo Paladino, the famous representative of the Italian Transavantegarde, confronts it with Death in Patria o muerte in a dramatic and gestural pictorial style. Many artists in the exhibition reflect not only on the subject of homeland from a political angle, but take up geographical and autobiographical content too. The exchange between Mexico's geography and the country's political history has always been constant and intense. Marisa Boullosa addresses this hand-in-hand relationship in an artistic confrontation with her own roots. She merges both private and historic events in her diptych Guanajuato y Guanajuato 2010. Guanajuato is renowned as one of the most important venues of the Mexican struggle for independence. There, in September 1810, an alliance of more than 20,000 men committed a massacre of the Euro-Spaniards, following Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla's call for armed combat against the Spaniards. Guanajuato is likewise the city where the artist's grandfather was born and currently her place of residence. Boullosa has made a composite print diptych, evoking a family album, with a photograph of her father as a little boy, a postcard of Guanajuato from 1910, the year of the revolution, and photographs of the town that she took in 2010. Continuity and change, a homeland that is growing increasingly eerie with encroaching modernization—the dangerous bars and ugly dish antennas—are key features in Boullosa's work.

Demian Flores' La patria is part of a series of paintings, drawings, and prints that the artist realized in the period from 2009 to 2010. The inspiration behind them was the 1962 painting with the same title by the Mexican artist Jorge González Camarena (1908–1980). This artwork served to illustrate the covers of school textbooks during the 1960s and 1970s, which were distributed free among millions of schoolchildren by the Ministry of Education. It is an emblematic image that helped contribute to a new iconography of national identity and accompanied recovery and reconstruction after the turbulent years of revolution.

Room 3: Figuration

The protagonists of Mexico's history play a prominent part in the art of many contemporary Mexican artists. Thus **Emiliano Gironella's** print *El tren de Troya* pays direct homage to Pancho Villa, the legendary general of the Mexican Revolution, and to his conquest of Ciudad Juárez in March 1911, which forced Díaz's regime to capitulate and paved the way for Francisco Madero's victory. The portrayal of Pancho Villa riding on a horse includes his characteristic sombrero and rifle. The halo surrounding his person is presumably an allusion to both the mythification of this hero and the cloud of dust that he and the hoard of armed men left behind after capturing the city.

Saúl Villa adopts the genre of the portrait in profile for *Servando* to depict "one of the few real heroes of the official version of history" in Mexico. Servando Teresa de Mier, Dominican priest and politician in the Viceroyalty of New Spain, actively advocated for Mexican independence and suffered persecution, exile, and imprisonment countless times for his unorthodox views. In contrast to Pancho Villa, who undeniably also owed a portion of his fame to Hollywood and the film industry, he was not elevated into the pantheon of national heroes. In light of all this, Saúl

Villa definitely has a stronger affinity to Servando's "humanity" and the conflicting nature of his character.

The protagonists in this room of the exhibition are not only historical figures. The fauna and flora of a country are also part of its identity. Mexico's native vegetation is highly diverse: tropical rainforests are typical for the south and the Yucatán Peninsula, whereas the north comprises largely desert and xeric shrubland as well as agricultural land. Nevertheless, the collective memory sees the palm as a symbol of the country, and in the iconography of Christianity it likewise references martyrdom. The English artist Joy Laville, who has been living in Mexico for nearly 60 years, combines both these facets of the tree in her print *Florero*.

Fernando Aceves Humana's lithograph *Untitled* is part of the series *En riesgo*. It is the product of just over a decade of exciting research of the holdings of the Muséum national d'histoire naturelle in Paris. The items of this taxonomic collection are testimonies of the West's conquest of the world, where one of the repercussions was the threat to the environment. At the same time they attract attention to the problems of illegal immigration, a phenomenon that today on the borders of Mexico and the US has become exceptionally dramatic. The death of an ecosystem stands in this artwork as a metaphor for the destruction of social and economic structures resulting from immigration. The consequences are insecurity, loneliness, and loss of identity. As the artist will have us know, the rest of society regards illegal immigrants with same distrust they have for some obscure species.

José Martín Sulaimán's *Recapitulando* turns a typically Mexican plant, the prickly pear cactus (Opuntia), into a historical and national symbol. An angel crowns a cactus plant of this genus as if it was a 'triumphal column'—an obvious allusion to the monument *El Ángel de la Independencia* in Mexico City. But in contrast to Enrique Alciati's sculpture (deceased after 1912), the angel holds neither a laurel wreath (an attribute of victory) nor a broken chain (a symbol of freedom). Instead he raises his left fist to the red salute of the communists and holds a snake in his right hand. The latter is the symbol for Coatlicue, the mother goddess of Mesoamerican cultures, who is important in pre-Hispanic culture as well as popular culture today. Behind a thorned branch, the hardly visible figure of an armed man stands next to the winged goddess. We can justifiably suppose him to be a revolutionary hero, presumably Emiliano Zapata.

Room 4: Surrealism

Mexico's ties to surrealism have a long and enduring tradition. As early as 1938 the French founder of surrealism André Breton (1896–1966) stayed for nearly four months in San Ángel in Mexico City as guest of the artist Diego Rivera. In Frida Kahlo's 'Maison bleue' in Coyoacán he met, for the first time, the Russian Leon Trotsky who, together with his wife, lived there as a political refugee. In the following months, further meetings took place between the kindred spirits and they planned the project of a joint manifesto on the relationship between art and revolution, which was drafted on July 25 by Breton and Trotsky under the title of Pour un art révolutionnaire independent. For diplomatic reasons it was only signed by Breton and Rivera. In the following years many European surrealist artists visited Mexico, and on January 17, 1940, the opening for Exposición internacional del Surrealismo: Aparición de la gran esfinge nocturna at Galería de Arte Mexicano in Mexico City took place. It was organized by the author César Moro (1903–1956) and the artist Wolfgang Paalen (1905–1959) together with Breton. All the surrealists who had emigrated from France, Germany, and England were invited to participate.

During World War II the English artist Leonora Carrington flew to Mexico. She had been living in a relationship with the surrealist painter and sculptor Max Ernst (1891–1976) until shortly before leaving. She remained in Mexico until she died in 2011 and was seen as the 'last surrealist'. The typical recourse to pre-Hispanic symbolism of the imagery in Mexican surrealism and magical realism is apparent too in her artwork <code>Sculpture/Vulturel</code>. The historical Surrealism succeeded in dissolving the gulf between Aztec culture and American and European culture. This opened up the avenue for artists to imbue their own indigenous traditions with new meaning and still does so today. These traditions are not

judged as archaic phenomena but viewed as a tool for reinventing social change anew.

When the Swede **Per Anderson** moved to Mexico in 1970, he quickly became fascinated with pre-Hispanic culture. Then most of the ancient buildings and archaeological treasures were still waiting to be discovered, hidden under luxuriant vegetation. "A small stone" as Anderson explains his work *En cada piedra hay una posibilidad,* "can belong to an ancient sculpture. A small fragment of clay can, in reality, be something very different. The imagination is thus stimulated in a very natural way."

Rubén Maya's piece *Dualidad cósmica R.Ha* is part of a series arising from the artist's reflection on the role of the unconscious in the creative process, a subject that had already preoccupied many surrealists. Maya finds his imagery in the unconscious. He has a clear goal in doing so: to stimulate inner knowledge and to view reality—and even the history of his country—with different eyes. The way he depicts figures with many eyes symbolizes the natural balance inherent in artistic perception, which unites reason and knowledge with intuition and the soul. Maya likewise addresses the tension between the human body and animal nature. Although we are not conscious of it, this rift is part and parcel of our daily activities and cannot be reconciled. Further, the buildings on the head of the bearded figure at the center of the composition express our mutual desire for stability and security.

In his artwork *Untitled*, Andrés Vázquez Gloria engages with a recurrent theme of his art: the identity of the Mexican people. "Already before the Spanish conquest," as the artist states, "multiculturality existed in Mexico, which hindered the definition of a homogenous Mexican identity." It is wrong to speak of a single Mexico because the country is not only geographically but also culturally and economically highly diversified. This has led to the development of a society that is increasingly individualistic, and the real heroes of history have been forgotten. They are the anonymous body of the people who sacrificed themselves for mutual ideals during the struggle for independence and the revolution. The print portrays a pile of skulls marked by letters of the alphabet. They do not stand for the mortal remains of the Mexican heroes José María Morelos, Guadalupe Victoria, Zapata, Hidalgo etc. but symbolize the many ordinary men and women who lost their lives fighting for freedom in their country.

Rooms 5 and 6: Abstraction

The last section of the exhibition reveals the great number of abstract approaches in contemporary Mexican art. The traditional subject matter of Mexican history and critical engagement with social problems—not least criminality, violence, and pollution—is intrinsic to this ensemble too. It appears surprisingly homogenous despite its variousness. Characteristic styles of art and symbols of the pre-Hispanic and the Christian traditions have been combined with modern motifs, and current events are viewed in relation to issues of cultural identity and multiculturality.

Irma Palacios is with certainty one of the most famous of Mexico's abstract print artists. Her artwork *Untitled* is an excellent example for her artistic approach, revealing the characteristic overlapping of floating elements against a background of densely woven horizontal lines. *Mónica Saucedo* too explores art at the crossroads of abstraction, figuration, and symbolism. The same is true for *Patricia Córdoba*, whose artistic decision to have her graphic *Sueño 168* printed on Mexican marble expresses her desire to explore the tradition of Mexican lithography as well as her attachment to the natural resources of her country.

In *Incombenza* the Italian artist Mario Benedetti again takes up subject matter that has captivated him for several years now. Corresponding to the leitmotif of the exhibition he has interpreted it anew. But he does not reveal what exactly the 'Incombenza' (assignment) here is supposed to be. We cannot say for sure whether the semi-circular and hovering form, which seems to float like a gray-black cloud on the sheet, represents a threat or a challenge to the Mexican people, their history, and their future. In 2010 the artist Boris Viskin celebrated his 50th birthday. This event led him to ponder on Mexican history as reflected in his own multicultural biography in the artwork *El cincuentenario de MI independencia*. He

is Mexican, but lived and worked for a long time in Israel and Italy. In his work we are confronted with the mingling of Christian and Jewish culture and religion with Mexican glyphs.

Ana Santos addresses the human condition in her art and strives to explore this issue in its various manifestations. Los que miran el caos depicts a city that we cannot identify and that is threatening to collapse. In this way the artist not only creates a symbol for the ferment of the independence movement and the revolution, but she likewise lends expression to the widespread concern among the Mexican people and criticizes quite openly the country's current social situation.

The exhibition concludes with an artwork by the Mexican sculptress and installation artist **Helen Escobedo**, who like Leonora Carrington died shortly after completing the work. From the 1980s onwards she addressed ecological and humanitarian problems in her art. A series of site-specific installations and performances were the result. In them she reflects on life in the polluted and densely populated metropolis of Mexico City. Her print **No la tires** is an outstanding example of this late phase of her oeuvre.

14000 BC / 2000 BC: Earliest traces of man / first settlement of Meso-

A Chronology of Mexico's History

american regions; 1200-200 BC: Preclassic period: the Olmec are the first advanced civilization in Mesoamerica; 300-900 AD Classic period: advanced civilization of the Mayas and culture of the Zapotec people; 900-1200: Postclassic period: younger Maya cultures and Toltec culture; 1321-1521: Late Postclassic: rise and fall of the Aztec Empire; 1519-21: The Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés conquers the Aztec Empire. Fall of the Aztec capital Tenochtitlan. Mexico becomes a major focus of European economic interests; 1525: Mexico comes under Spanish rule and then the Viceroyalty of New Spain (until 1535); 1810: The Catholic priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla initiates the quest for Mexican independence by issuing a cry for armed battle against the Spanish on September 16 (known as the 'Grito de Dolores'); 1821: After eleven years of war, Mexico is declared an independent constitutional monarchy; 1822: Augustín de Iturbide proclaims himself Augustín I, the first emperor of Mexico. He is overthrown a year later; 1824: The United Mexican States is established October 4. Drafting of the constitution, which introduces the federal model of government; 1846-48: The Mexican-American War. Mexico cedes around half of its territory to the US, including what today is Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas; 1858-72: Benito Juárez is the first indigenous president. Still today his person stands for patriotic resistance against foreign usurpation; 1861-67: France occupies Mexico because of unpaid debts. Emperor Napoleon III seeks to establish a Mexican monarchy which is dependent on France and proclaimes Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian of Austria Emperor of Mexico. On May 5, 1867, the Mexican Republicans defeat the French army; 1876-1911: Porfiriato: Dictatorship of General Porfirio Díaz. At the same time the country experiences a domestic economic upturn and international economic integration; 1910: Celebrations of the centenary of the commencement of Mexico's struggle for independence against Spanish rule. Díaz is reelected president of Mexico. The Mexican landowner Francisco Madero starts an opposition campaign against Díaz's reelection and plans from the USA an attack on the Mexican government, which is to take place on November 20. This is still today the official date for the beginning of the Mexican Revolution; 1911: Díaz is sent into exile. Madero is elected president due to the support of Emiliano Zapata, Pancho Villa, and Pascual Orozco. Madero's government resembles that of Díaz. Zapata and Villa continue fighting for land and justice for peasants and workers; 1913: In February violence escalates and rages over ten days (known as the 'Decena trágica'). Madero is assassinated. General Victoriano de la Huerta proclaims himself president. Venustiano Carranza argues for forming a new constitution and declares war against Huerta; 1914: Huerta is defeated. Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata form an alliance against Carranza's government; 1915: Álvaro Obregón defeats Villa's army; 1917: The Mexican Constitution is signed. It is still valid today; 1919: Carranza has Zapata assassinated. The Mexican Communist Party is founded (Partido Comunista de México, PCM); 1920: End of the revolution. Obregón becomes president. Reform campaigns for education and literacy are implemented in the rural areas of the country; 1923: Pancho

Villa is assassinated; 1926-29: Uprising of Catholic militia against the Mexican Government (known as the 'Guerra cristera'); 1929: The Partido Nacional Revolucionario, PNR (National Revolutionary Party) is founded. In 1938 it is renamed the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana, PRM (Mexican Revolutionary Party), and in 1946 in the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party); 1942: Mexico sides with the USA in World War II; 1968: Conflicts between students and government escalate, peaking in the massacre of Tlatelolco on October 2, only several days prior to the opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games in Mexico City; 1994: Armed uprising of rural indigenous people, the Neo-Zapatistas (*Ejér*cito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN), in the state of Chiapas; 2000: The results of the presidential and parliamentary elections mark a turning point in the traditional PRI system that had developed since the revolution; 2006: Felipe Calderón, the candidate for the Partido Acción Nacional, PAN (National Action Party), wins the presidential elections with a slim majority. The left protests against the election results. A social conflict in the state of Oaxaca escalates with violent skirmishes between the people and the local PRI government; 2012: The PRI representative Enrique Peña Nieto is elected as the new president of Mexico.

The Presidents of Mexico

1876-1911: General Porfirio Díaz; 1911-13: Francisco Madero; 1913-14: General Victoriano Huerta; 1914-20: General Venustiano Carranza; 1920-24: General Álvaro Obregón; 1924-28: Plutarco Elías Calles; 1928-34: Maximato'; 1934-40: Lázaro Cárdenas; 1940-46: Manuel Ávila Camacho; 1946-52: Miguel Alemán; 1952-58: Adolfo Ruíz Cortines; 1958-64: Adolfo López Mateos; 1964-70: Gustavo Díaz Ordaz; 1970-76: Luis Echeverría Álvarez; 1976-82: José López Portillo; 1982-88: Miguel De la Madrid; 1988-94: Carlos Salinas de Gortari; 1994-2000: Ernesto Zedillo; 2000-06: Vicente Fox; 2006-12: Felipe Calderón Hinojosa; 2012: Enrique Peña Nieto.

With artworks by:

Fernando Aceves Humana (b. 1969); Franco Aceves Humana (b. 1965); Per Anderson (b. 1946); Mario Benedetti (b. 1938); Pilar Bordes (b. 1948); Marisa Boullosa (b. 1961); Pier Buraglio (b. 1939); Leonora Carrington (1917-2011); José Antonio Castillo (b. 1958); Francisco Castro Leñero (b. 1954); José Castro Leñero (b. 1953); Patricia Córdoba (b. 1973); René Derouin (b. 1936); Helen Escobedo (b. 1934-2010); Manuel Felguérez (b. 1928); Javier Fernández (b. 1951); Demián Flores (b. 1971); Arturo García Bustos (b. 1926); Emiliano Gironella (b. 1972); Roger von Gunten (b. 1933); Raúl Herrera (b. 1941); Cisco Jiménez (b. 1969); Joy Laville (b. 1923); José Lazcarro Toquero (b. 1941); Nicola López (b. 1975); Luis López Loza (b. 1939); Gabriel Macotela (b. 1954); Javier Marín (b. 1962); Rubén Maya (b. 1964); Mónica Mayer (b. 1954); Adolfo Mexiac Calderón (b. 1927); Flor Minor (b. 1961); Terumi Moriyama (b. 1969); Guillermo Olguín (b. 1969); Irma Palacios (b. 1943); Mimmo Paladino (b. 1948); Alejandro Pérez Cruz (b. 1966); Enrique Pérez Martínez (b. 1975); Joel Rendón (b. 1967); Luis Ricaurte (b. 1964); Betsabé Romero (b. 1963); Rafael Ruiz Moreno (b. 1969); Alejandro Santiago (b. 1964); Ana Santos (b. 1978); Monica Saucedo (b. 1966); Raymundo Sesma (b. 1954); José Martín Sulaimán (b. 1958); Eloy Tarcisio (b. 1955); Roberto Turnbull (b. 1959); Andrés Vázquez Gloria (b. 1971); Saúl Villa (b. 1958); Boris Viskin (b. 1960)

Accompanying program

Public guided tours (in German)

Sunday 11:00 a.m.: October 27 Tuesday, 7:00 p.m.: December 10.

Exhibition admission fee only, no bookings required.

Kino Kunstmuseum: Documentary film on Diego Rivera: A Portrait of Diego: The Revolutionary Gaze

Directors: Gabriel Figueroa Flores and Diego López

80 minutes, Spanish and English

Showina

Thursday, November 21, 6:00 p.m.: (with Figueroa Flores present)

Saturday, November 23: 4:30 p.m. Sunday, December 1: 11:30 a.m.

For more information: www.kinokunstmuseum.ch

Public discussion on Mexican art (in English)

Thursday, December 12: 6:00 p.m.

The speakers are Milena Oehy, scientific collaborator at SIK-ISEA Zurich, Patricia Córdoba, artist, and Dr. Valentina Locatelli, curator

Information

Curator

Valentina Locatelli

Admission fee

CHF 7.00/reduced CHF 5.00

Private guided tours, schools

Tel.: 031 328 09 11, vermittlung@kunstmuseumbern.ch

Opening hours

Tuesday: 10:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Wednesday-Sunday: 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

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