



Woman Seated in Doorway by Pablo O'Higgins

SURFACE TREATMENT

With COVID-19 rebounding and slowing gallery openings, we will keep your art experiences alive by looking back at some memorable shows. Today we recall the "Latin American Artists of the Past and Present" exhibition at IMAS in 2014.

Latin American Artists of the Past and Present

This is a modest exhibition that offers a taste of modern Latin American art.

BY NANCYMOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

Paintings, prints, and drawings by Latin American artists are currently being shown in the Central Gallery at IMAS. "Latin American Artists of the Past and Present" features artworks from the museum's Permanent Collection as well as some works on extended loan from the community. Limited to 20th century artworks, Mexican artists dominate the show. This exhibit projects a quiet demeanor with modest works, but still their imagery provides a pleasant stroll down the path of modern Latin American art.

The collection is interesting in that it offers a quick sampling of a few historical styles. Beginning with the Social Realists, it continues through the abandonment of nationalist themes into the psychological realm and ends briefly with some contemporary international ideas. The few works from Central and South America reinforce that flow.

Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros, the "big three" Mexican muralists who influenced the Social Realism movement in Mexico after

WWI, are represented here. Orozco's lithograph, "The Masses," is an expressionistic depiction of the needs of the faceless poor in Mexico and is characteristic of the artist's socialist concerns; he rarely glorified his subjects. Works by Rivera and Siqueiros are less recognizable, although a series of offset-lithography illustrations depicting everyday Mexican life by Rivera is nice. The common subject matter in his "Still Life" seems a long way from Rivera's passion for educating the Mexican people about their cultural roots through historical murals, tributes to folk traditions, and depictions of everyday life - the aesthetic that made him one of the most influential artists of the 20th century.

As a result of the Social Realists' artistic influence, European subject matter disappeared in favor of depicting the local, indigenous population; the lifestyles of the people became important. Pablo O'Higgins lithograph, "Woman in Doorway", Raúl Anguiano's painting, "The Huichols", and Leopoldo Méndez' print, "People on Carousel", are typical of this period. This localized art was a boon for artists; in conjunction with government nationalist propaganda it became known as the Mexican Modernist School and officially redefined art in Mexico.

Rufino Tamayo's lithograph, "Woman with Tree", and Carlos Mérida's "Untitled Painting" abandoned the political Social Realism style and movement while still expressing a cultural viewpoint. Mérida, A Guatemalan artist was one of the first to fuse European painting to Latin American themes, favoring a non-figurative geometric style. Tamayo fused together strands of Mexican art, American art, and European modernism. The Social Realism establishment rejected Tamayo, and when he became the official artist of the Mexican government, his rivalry with the main three Mexican muralists continued both in Mexico and internationally through the 1950s.

Artists such as Francisco Toledo and Manuel Felguérez moved Latin American art even further away from the social agenda after mid-century. Toledo's "Untitled Print" still demonstrates concerns with the Mexican culture, but his works generally incorporated surrealism, visual paradoxes, and elements of European painting styles. Felguérez' painting "Guided Visit" represents Mexican Neo-expressionist art. This abstract, non-figurative work is representative of the 1990's influence of the international art scene on Latin American artists.

As a collection built upon gifts from donors, the exhibit has an erratic feeling to it, but there are some seriously interesting works here. A video art module, "The Storm that Swept Mexico," discusses the Mexican muralists.

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