

Lect 7: Mexico (everyone wants to go to Mexico)

Part I: Reinventing Muralism

→ Diego Rivera left Paris with a cubist painting (@ Picasso, Braque)
but also paints Landscape (1915) with a cubist style
WHILE in Mexico: civil war, feudal system implodes, 10 years after (1920)
stable gov

→ Rivera painting (from Paris) emblematic Mexican things.

1921: minister invites Rivera back, dedicated to muralism

state sponsored

He (before that) spend a year studying Renaissance & Byzantine fresco's

⇒ Arsenal of a cubist and a 14th century fresco expert

Before: we have seen how studying religious figure as a deliberate return to
a return to archaic values. We were looking at Easel Painting (individual viewer)

But with Rivera's turn to muralism introduces another revision
The mural is on another scale, which addresses a large
audience. Muralism has the ambition to represent
multiple subjects (collective, not individual);

↓
poses as conduit b/w
painter and one view

→ Move to muralism as a scale appropriate for collective recession, &
representing collective subjects

→ Creation (1922-23) explicitly religious, except for the edges, a biblical
no-man's land (tropical environment)

+ see Orozco (class division) vs Rivera (Exit from the mine as references
to the Christ and Goya's *Unco de Mayo*)

+ see Siqueiros (Portrait of the Bourgeoisie), mix of warfare and commerce (wall st)

Contemporaries

- ... The Mechanized of the Century (Rivera), engaged in material representation but look at the background: visual vocab really the drained at palette & planes of analytic cubism (like Girl with Mandolin)
he brings cubism to a space occupied by 14th century frescoes

→ Moves away from social representation to allegorical figure of a religious representation of deity attending a landlord with thunder.

→ Minister of public education sponsored the mural pgm to make up with Mexico's feeling of national pride (post civil war), relat° to Mayan & Aztec sub-cdp, colonial populat°, mixed / intermarriage, catholic (with Europe), diviso° between classes, industrial divisions.

How to define the nation? That was the role of muralism

→ create visual representation of national myths

(see Alliance of the peasant and the industrial worker)

(see the History of Mexico series)

Concerns:

→ state sponsored (art as instrument of the state)

→ Masculinization of the revolution (males attack, women grieve) // nation as a male-biased subject

→ Muralism is papering over the class divisions (still is socio-economic inequality)

They argue against the 1st concern: claim to the universal (practicing art closer to Plurigen)

→ "Arte Puro"

→ Tamayo, easel painting the line. Art is universal (art for art's sake)

emphasis on less involved from politics (this basically a political work)

+ purge from folkloric & vernacular element (or indigenous element)

// surrealist in still life with a foot; Woman in Grey (quote to Picasso, Ikenen sculpture)

These murals are more modernist in spirit than Rivera & Orozco's work (Greely)
Fusion of aztec motif & modernist sensibility

Part III Frida Kahlo

→ Waller & Mulvey (1985) organized Women in Mexico + Modotti's photography

→ Kahlo's work comes out of a strong familiarity with EU modernism + interest in Mexican vernacular (called "retablos" or ~~expos~~ "ex voto") painting & engages her own mixed heritage

→ Programmatic statement of that heritage: The two Fridas: split herself into EU Frida & Mex F and connects the two (hearts connected by artery)

Breton, visits Mexico, is taken by Kahlo's work

"like a grenade wrapped in a bouquet" (Sweetness & strength)

→ But she's not naive, she is knowledgeable (do not romanticize)

→ Girl with Death Mask (associates Day of the Dead, and evokes Symbolist painting of Belgian James Ensor(?))

→ Self-portraiture (Me and My Doll): tendency in AHIS to connect/explain art-works on the basis of biography ⇒ [tech term: biographism]

(Frequent & pernicious with women): that's a problem

→ The Broken Column (she did indeed have a grave car accident but...)

make reference to how the body is a means to show women's repression is a political issue

→ Compare that to representation in Mexican muralism (as allegorical figures) deployment / countermeasure to how it is represented in muralism

→ Cindy Sherman (80's photography, critique of representation of female in mass media) strategy: photograph herself in diff. outfits to speak to genre of photography (1978 Untitled Film Still) attacks stereotypes

Same with Kahlo, mobilize diff. signs (self-portrait with monkey)

conscious awareness of contingency of hybrid + multicultural identity

Sherman plays with class port's, gender portion, never really explores race

→ The Little Deer, collage of self-portraiture (Mulvey: it represents horror) unite & allude to her

(Part IV) Muralism USA

- 1930s, the muralists' fame exceed borders
- Kahlo was in Detroit; Rivera: making of a fresco showing the Building of a city
Depression express era of solidarity with working class
- Orozco representing American history
- Diego Rivera is the second living artist (after Matisse) to get a solo exhibit° at MoMA
He prepares off-the-wall murals, prepared on lieu of tearing his frescoes of the wall
- Siqueiros, Collective Suicide, (experimental techniques, lacquer & other, stencils & spray paint)
(Jackson Pollock studied with him)
The most left-radical: From the dictatorship...
(he even tried to assassinate Trotsky)