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SIN FRONTERAS: MEXICAN PAINTERS IN A VISUAL/VIRTUAL DIALOGUE

By

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The purpose of this Project is to present a web-base look-up tool to allow users, students and researchers, which wish to find out more about information on Mexican painters. The authors desire is that it could become a world beating discovery tool.

The idea came from the IFLA Art Libraries Section Programme under the general theme: “Libraries without borders: Navigating towards global understanding”. Thus we begin by developing two concepts; borders and digital world.

Definitions:

Border is the line or frontier area separating political divisions or geographical regions; a boundary.

Frontier is an international border. It refers both to a geographical boundary as well as to a cultural one, physical and metaphorical meanings which refer to zones of response where different painters present their interpretations and ideas. The cultural boundary is related to the function of the artist in the words of Guillermo Gómez Peña: “The artist should overstep, make bridges,

interconnect, reinterpret and redefine; in order to find the external limits of his or her culture and cross over them..” (1)

Another concept related to frontier is crossing. This is a topic inviting research and development.

We could also understand frontier as a limit, an impossibility, an obstacle, a bump, as a narrow margin operation, or else as a playground where we develop our existence, as an anthropological place where we invent full personal or community lifeforms.

By crossing we weave connections, and protect the ‘other’ with hospitality. We transform the stranger in guest due to our ability or talent to greet, and secure the ‘other’ existence and the living together. (2)

Understanding our Mexican painters has to do with the artistic creation as expressed by Benedetto Croce, philosopher and Robin George Collingwood, historian. It develops exclusively in the creator’s head and when it springs out in order to be seen by others, it enters a new face of great social and cultural importance whose character is not only aesthetic but practical... (3)

For this paper, the social level as well as the cultural and **without frontiers** levels are important.

We are living in a digital world. The World Wide Web is crowded with data and there is an importance of providing access to information resources in an increasingly digital environment

The digital world transforms the physical object in digital image creating an entirely new form of information. Constraints of ownership and geographic location are lessened as Internet points to sources across the globe.

Information, Imagination and Inspiration

David. R. Dowell, librarian, in a dialogue within our profession suggests more than information in libraries, imagination and inspiration will lead us to innovation. He defines imagination as “the act of creating images in our minds of things we have not fully experienced through our senses.” (4)

The artist is always in the sense that he extracts from reality with the people. The social aspect has to do with the people. He takes out from them the material its image on which his creation rests. And through it delivers us his image. (5)

¿Could we compare this with the artistic creation? We, librarians by means of this presentation want to give information about Mexican painters as the beginning of the imagination that Dowell points out. (6)

In the words of the catholic theologian, Romano Guardini, “are in close connection with the elements of being, were born with the earth, are on it, work and live on it”. This is the case of the Mexican painters.(7)

We wish to navigate towards a global understanding of some of our Mexican painters in a virtual manner as a digital library without frontiers.

Therefore some images samples of Mexican painters on the web will follow:

- **[Raúl Anguiano:](#)**

1915-2006. Painter, muralist and engraver born in Guadalajara. He says “Art is my religion; art is the nostalgia of the lost paradise”. It returns to its origin and does not evolve like science because it gives the opportunity to make hybrids like Cubism that is a mixture of Cezanne’s geometric construction and African art.

Anguiano, as Cuevas, does not believe in the Mexican mural movement and enters to Surrealism. He works hard in his two studios in Mexico and in the United States. The museum Raul Anguiano includes graphic work, tapestry, ceramics, and paintings. His national and international exhibitions confirm the **without frontiers** paradigm.

- [José Luíz Cuevas:](#)

A master draftsman born on 1933, played a pivotal role in Latin America's drawing and printmaking of the sixties and seventies. He is also associated with Latin America's neofigurative movement, along with Fernando Botero a Colombian painter, and the Argentine artist, Antonio Seguí.

In 1953 Cuevas published "La cortina del nopal" (The cactus curtain), an article condemning aspects of the Mexican mural movement and advocating greater artistic freedom. This philosophy inspired the founding in 1960 of the group *Nueva Presencia*. His expression and figurative art reflecting the contemporary human condition, this shows the immigrants situation all over the world.

Cuevas' work was influenced by Goya and Picasso and the graphic art of Posada and Orozco's painting, as well as writers such as Dostoevsky, Kafka, Quevedo and Sade.

Cuevas has said that his drawings represent the solitude and isolation of contemporary man and man's inability to communicate. The immigrants' life gives us these experiences.

Cuevas was awarded the national Prize for Fine Arts in Mexico in 1981. He represented Mexico at the 1982 Venice Biennial. In 1992 the Museo José Luis Cuevas was inaugurated in Mexico City.

- [Dr. Atl Gerardo Murillo:](#)

Born in Guadalajara, Jalisco on October 3rd, 1875, died on August 15, 1964 in Mexico City. He studied at the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes. He exhibited his portrait in the Paris Salon of 1890 and decorated the walls of a Roman villa in Italy.

His pseudonym Dr. Atl in nahuatl means water, the fountain of life. He published books related to popular art and colonial architecture: *Las artes populares en México*, 1921-1922, *Iglesias de México*, six volumes and *Las sinfonías del Popocatepetl*.

- [Manuel Felguérez:](#)

Octavio Paz in his book *Lógica de la vida* says “The Felguérez propositions are things that one can see and touch. The multiple spaces display silently before our eyes and transform them in another space...in a similar way as the seed transforms in root, stem, flower, fruit.

This painter born in Zacatecas in 1928 has exhibited, in Europe, his murals in Osaka and in this manner demonstrates the **without frontiers** feeling.

- [Maria Izquierdo:](#)

Born in San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco in 1902, died on December 3rd 1955. She was the only woman whose name was included in José Clemente Orozco's monument in Guadalajara during the Plastic Arts year in 1964.

She defends the collectors' right and the nationalism of the Mexican painters. Her religious and popular subjects can be seen in the recently inaugurated museum Centro Cultural Tlatelolco of the National Autonomous University in Mexico City..

In 1929, she had her first individual exhibition in Mexico City, later on at the Arts Center in New York. Rufino Tamayo taught her the water-color painting technique.

- **Frida Kahlo**

Frida Kahlo born on July 6, 1907, and died on July 13, 1954, was a Mexican painter, who has achieved great international popularity. She was influenced as Soriano, by indigenous culture of Mexico as well as European influences that include Realism, Symbolism and Surrealism. Her self-portrait symbolically expresses her own pain, in her own words: “I paint myself because, I am often alone and I am the subject I know best”.

Of her 143 paintings, fifty five are self-portraits. Her father was of Jewish and Hungarian ancestry, her mother a devout Catholic of primarily indigenous and Spanish descent. Christian and Jewish themes are often depicted in her work. Her first painting “The Frame” was bought by the Louvre.

- **Roberto Montenegro**

“Born in the city of Guadalajara, Mexico in 1885, died in 1968 in Mexico City.. His death was mourned by the artistic community in Mexico and abroad. “ Montenegro began studying painting under Feliz Bernardelli. In 1904, then living in Mexico City, he began studying architecture, which he soon abandoned to take up studies in the Academy of San Carlos under Antonio Fabres, Julio Ruelas, Leandro Izaguirre and German Gedovius. His peers in the academy included Diego Rivera, Angel Zárraga and Francisco Goitia.”

“Soon after Montenegro's return to Mexico, José Vasconcelos commissioned him to paint frescos in the convent of San Pedro and San Pablo. In 1924, Montenegro finished one of his best works "Fiesta de la Santa Cruz" on the staircase of that building.” This convent housed the *Hemeroteca Nacional* from 1944 to 1979. Since 1996 is the place for the Technological Museum (*Museo de la Luz*)

- [José Clemente Orozco](#)

He was born in Zapotitlán, Jalisco on November 23, 1883 and died on September 7, 1949. Began his career as a cartoonist and published in several journals. His first murals in 1923 are at the National Preparatory School in Mexico City. In 1932-1934, he created “An Epic of American Civilization” his first mural painting at the Baker College, Dartmouth College, New Hampshire.

In 1939 he painted a fresco called “Prometheus” at Pomona College in California. His famous fresco called “Man of Fire”, on the dome of the Hospicio Cabañas in Guadalajara, depicts man’s physical and mystical struggles. Another example of the immigrants suffering not only of the Mexican people but other people as well.

- [Carlos Orozco Romero:](#)

Another painter born in Guadalajara on September 3rd 1848 was Carlos Romero, cartoonist as José Clemente Orozco, and illustrator under the pseudonym of Karikato in Mexican journals and the magazine *Revista de revistas*. In 1920 won a scholarship to study in Europe. In Madrid he met the painter Rafael Alberti and the Mexican writers Luis G. Urbina and Alfonso Reyes. Back in Guadalajara, he studied graphics with the Peruvian artist José Sabogal. He made friends with Rufino Tamayo, Manuel Rodríguez Lozano and María Izquierdo. 1928 was the year that marks the step from caricature to the drawing and painting. He has had exhibitions in the Art Center of New York and the Delphic Studios, the Art Institute of Chicago, the American Federation of Art, the Wilmington Society of Arts and the traveling exhibitions of the College Arts Association.

Founder of the Escuela de Pintura y Escultura “La Esmeralda” and director of the Museum of Modern Art in Mexico City. He has as disciples, the Mexican painters: Rafael and Pedro Coronel, Aceves Navarro, Orozco and

Rivera. His participation in the Venice Biennial in 1958, as well as in the Mexican and American painting exhibitions mentioned above make him a good example of painting **without frontiers**.

- [Diego Rivera](#)

Painter, muralist born on December 8, 1886 in Guanajuato, Mexico, died on November 25, 1957. He began as a Cubist painter, but wanted to make art that reflected the lives of the working class and the native people of Mexico. His artistic ideas about Mexico, its people and its history displayed in a series of murals in public buildings, in Mexico and the United States, the Rockefeller family in the RCA building, the controversial mural “Man at the Crossroads” in New York City, have contributed to erase the frontiers between these two countries.

- [Julio Ruelas](#)

1870-1907, Born in Zacatecas to some authors is a Romantic painter for others a representative of the Symbolist movement. He entered, as José María Velasco, the Academia de San Carlos in 1887. He studied at the Danzig Academy in Germany in 1891. When he returned to Mexico he was part of the founders of the group of the *Revista moderna* in 1898. He returned to Paris in 1904 until his death. He was an excellent draftsman and painter.

Justo Sierra, founder of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México in 1910, says speaking of Ruelas “I wish to write as you paint”.

- [David Alfaro Siqueiros](#)

Another muralist painter born, on December 29, 1896 in Chihuahua and died on January 6, 1974. His theoretical proposals, with which he confronted numerous plastic problems as well as technical and pictorial solutions,

placed Siqueiros as a vanguard artist in the Mexican contemporary art history.

His famous phrase “*No hay mas ruta que la nuestra*” (There is only one route, ours) can be seen in murals from Latin America, New York City, Argentina, Chile and Cuba.

- **Juan Soriano**

Was born in Guadalajara on August 18, 1920 died in Mexico City on February, 10, 2006. He entered the circle of the renowned artist Jesus Reyes Ferreira; also know as “Chucho Reyes, who introduced Soriano to pre-Columbian and colonial Mexican art as well as art from outside his country.

Mexican painters as María Izquierdo and José Chávez Morado as well as the photographer Lola Álvarez Bravo were closed friends of Soriano. In Mexico City he entered a personal dialogue with other Mexican painters: Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros and other vanguard artists who composed the famous “Contemporáneos” group.

Popular and indigenous arts as well as the expressive modes derived from Cubism, German Expressionism, Fauvism, The School of Paris, European Surrealism artists who had come as war refugees to Mexico at the end of the 1930s and into the 1940s were considered in his work.

Similar to Diego Rivera, he erased frontiers and is another example of Mexican artistic expansion. The Juan Soriano and Marek Keller Foundation created on 2004 in Mexico City promotes Juan Soriano`s work.

- **Rufino Tamayo**

Born in Oaxaca on August 26, 1899 died in Mexico City on June24,1991.Teresa del Conde, a Mexican critic and art historian, said that Tamayo could be called a classic artist. There is no naturalism in his work.

His paintings epitomize harmonic unity of Cubism and ancient Mexican sculpture and a cult of form balanced by his adeptness as a colourist.

In 1933 paints his first mural “El canto y la música” in the Conservatorio Nacional de Música and his second mural “Revolución” in the Museo Nacional de Antropología in 1933, both in Mexico City.

In 1943 at the Hilger Art Library, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, painted the mural “La naturaleza y el artista, la obra de arte y el espectador.”

He lived in the United States and when he returned to Mexico at the beginning of the 1950’s he undertook two more murals. (8)

His paintings have been exhibited, among other places, in the Philips Collection of Washington D.C., the Guggenheim Museum and the New York Public Library. His murals are in the Unesco building in Paris.

In the words of Octavio Paz in his book about Rufino Tamayo “Mexico, its history and its landscape, its heroes and its people, its past and its future are the central theme our painters”. (9)

- [José María Velasco](#)

Born in Tematzcalcingo, Estado de México in 1840 died in 1912. In 1868 entered the Academia de San Carlos where he was Eugenio Landesio, the famous European landscape painter, disciple.

He was also a landscape painter and began in a realist style which, due to his scientific knowledge, developed into the nature analysis. His landscape vision is full and atmospheric.

He painted the Valley of Mexico in several occasions with its transparent atmosphere which was peculiar to it, unfortunately not anymore, and its gigantic dimension. He as Dr. Atl, is another Mexican painter of the cosmic

space. In this way he discovered the characteristics of the national geographical contour for the painting. He painted ruins, attractive and romantic places also.

Notes:

- (1) Guillermo Gómez Peña, a Mexican artist founder of the “Taller de Arte Fronterizo”. Imágenes de [masdearte.com](http://www.masdearte.com) en la “Frontera”.Lo más destacable de los Projects Rooms. ARCO 2002.
http://www.masdearte.com/arco/item_recorridos.cfm?noticiaid=5976.
Consulted 19/01/08.
- (2) Aranguren Gonzalo, Luis. “Tentaciones de acción” Cuestión social. 16:1(2008)p.20.
- (3) García Ponce, Juan. *La aparición de lo invisible*. 2ª. Ed. México: Siglo XXI, 1971. p.3.
- (4) Dowell, David. R. “The “i” in libraries”. American libraries. 39(1-2):42. January-February 2004.
- (5) García Ponce, Juan. Op .cit.
- (6) Dowell, David, R. Op. cit.
- (7) García Ponce, Juan. Op.cit
- (8) Sullivan, Edward J. *Latin America Art in the twentieth century*. London:Phaidon Press, 1996. p. 29,39.
- (9) Paz, Octavio. *Tamayo en la pintura mexicana*. México: UNAM. Dirección general de Publicaciones, 1959. p.23-24.