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## 2 BELLAS ARTES AND ARTES POPULARES

### THE IMPLICATIONS OF DIFFERENCE IN THE MEXICO CITY

#### ART WORLD

LIZA BAKEWELL

It's *folklórico*," Mexican contemporary artists say when describing artwork they consider characteristically Mexican.<sup>1</sup> As an adjective, *folklórico* literally means folkloric, and it refers to the traditions of the so-called popular sector. One of those traditions, the most tangible and transportable, is represented by Mexican folk art, known in Spanish as *artesanías* or *artes populares*.<sup>2</sup> Woven sarapes, netted hammocks, coiled ceramics, carved wooden figurines, painted masks, lacquerware boxes, braided baskets, and bark-paper paintings are only a few examples of the rich diversity of objects categorized by Mexican elites as *artesanías* and *artes populares*. In contrast to them

stand the *bellas artes*, literally the beautiful arts. Western-oriented art forms, such as easel painting, orchestral music, staged theater, ballet, modern dance, and film, are all examples of *bellas artes*. Closely related to the distinctions drawn in Western art history and culture between “fine” art (*beaux-arts*) and “folk” art, the qualifications that compose the definitions of *bellas artes* and *artes populares* designate no absolute category of meaning; all that is absolute is that the actual objects to which they refer are, in a literal sense, hand-crafted human artifacts.

“Good” examples of Mexican folk art, from the perspective of an artist living in Mexico City today, epitomize Mexicanness or twentieth-century Mexican nationality in a way generally thought positive—not only well executed but *muy típico*, that is, typically Mexican in palette, shape, and sentiment, as in the state-financed Ballet Folklórico of Mexico City. Today contemporary artists, critics, dealers, and government officials often judge contemporary painting by how well it articulates the colors, materials, and motifs of Mexican *artesanías*. Cultural rootedness is highly valued in the Mexican art world. It is, perhaps, one of the Mexican Revolution’s most enduring legacies. “For me,” artist Janitzio Escalera (b. 1956) explained, “Mexican *artesanías* embody the real truthful culture, the authentic personality of America—all of Latin America, but especially Mexico. I learned about color from Mexican *artesanías*. All of it has a lot of color, texture, form. It is a special characteristic of Mexico.”

When assuming office, Mexican presidents have regularly issued statements similar to the following proclamation by President López Portillo to a visiting group of Indians during his presidency, 1976–82: “Mexico is distinguished from the rest of the world by our ethnic groups [i.e., the popular, non-European-oriented sector]. What would Mexico be were it not for what you signify and represent? Almost nothing!” (Riding 1985:204). Intellectuals, too, have frequently proclaimed the importance of ethnically rooted art to the making of twentieth-century Mexican identity. As Nobel laureate Octavio Paz has observed many times, “The [Mexican] Revolution, by discovering popular art, originated modern Mexican painting, and by discovering the Mexican language it created a new poetry” (1985:34; also 1987:92). And, as Rowe and Schelling have noted, Mexican modernity and Euro-American modernities are not synonymous. “A major factor in its difference—probably the major factor,” they argue,

“is the force of popular culture. It is a modernity which does not necessarily entail the elimination of pre-modern traditions and memories but has arisen through them, transforming them in the process” (1991:3).

Yet despite the praise for the popular arts on the part of politicians and artists in Mexico, a painting described as *folklórico* by critics is a painting considered bad, too much inspired by Mexican crafts. While cultural rootedness and nationalism are valued in the revolutionary Mexican art world, provinciality is not; a painting described as *folklórico*, *arte popular*, or *artesanías* is a painting considered provincial and backward, placed outside the contemporary, Western, cosmopolitan mainstream.

It was during the Mexican Revolution (1910–17) when insurgents challenged the nature of cultural and political relations between Mexico and Europe and criticized the Eurocentricity of the Mexican art world—its paintings, sculptures, iconography, style, and pedagogy (Charlot 1962). Recognizing the art world’s non-Mexican ways, dissident art students and intellectuals attacked the academy—the neocolonial institution—where, until the revolution, European-trained artists taught courses in Western-oriented “fine” arts within brick-walled studios protected from the popular sector. These dissidents rejected the connoisseurship of earlier collectors and their decontextualized sensibilities—their art-for-art’s-sake attitude toward collecting. Like the connoisseurs’ Victorian counterparts, who piled Persian rugs onto the cold floors of their English homes and lined their walls and bookshelves with African sculptures, nineteenth-century, Spanish-born Mexicans and their children interspersed Mexican “curios” among the more numerous examples of European imports that furnished their abodes.

By the 1920s, Mexican revolutionaries claimed a political as well as cultural victory. Ever since, the revolution, in its institutionalized form and through its programs of cultural nationalism, has sought to valorize the popular sector, especially the “indigenous” peoples and their cultural products, constructing them as repositories of Mexican national identity and authenticity. To the revolutionary art world, the popular sector—its people and its arts—was the starting point of a new aesthetic. It is for these reasons that I would use with reservation the adjective “Western oriented” to describe the *bellas artes*, for despite their Western orientation, many contemporary Mexican *bellas*

artes draw upon indigenous traditions—so much so that a casual reading of them renders insufficient information to distinguish one from the other. In other words, Mexican art may seem as popular in its orientation as it is bourgeois, as locally situated as it is universally focused, and as Mexican as it is international.

To describe the Mexican art world is to describe two historically and culturally constructed, opposing world views. One is based on cultural nationalism, a program of the revolution rooted in a populist notion of the popular sector and in popular expressions of culture. The other grows out of European bourgeois constructions of culture, which the Mexican Revolution sought to overthrow—at least ideologically. Of the two world views, the latter provides the warp of the art world's cultural and ideological fabric. The revolutionary ideology and policies of cultural sovereignty are its weft, woven inextricably into its bourgeois warp.

Yet the effort on the part of cultural and political elites to weave the popular sector into the political and artistic arena of the revolution ultimately contributed to more elaborately defined distinctions between the two sectors and their productions and created a tension between the two that characterizes the twentieth-century Mexican art world, a tension that all twentieth-century artists have had in the past and continue to negotiate in producing their work.<sup>3</sup> In sum, therefore, what the terms “fine arts” and “folk arts” may mean in other art worlds is only partially compatible with the complicated network of distinctions that categorize works as *bellas artes* and *artes populares* in the twentieth-century art world of Mexico City.<sup>4</sup>

In this chapter I will focus on the problematic relationship of artistic representation and national identity within the Mexican art world. Rather than feature the presence of the monolithic colonial past (the central concern of most recent scholarship on twentieth-century art and identity in Latin America—see Bayón 1987; Cimet 1987a, 1987b; García Canclini 1993; Rowe and Schelling 1991), this study will scrutinize twentieth-century, Mexican-generated, postcolonial identity, which at times works to maintain, rather than shed, a colonialist position. Despite the ideology of the Mexican Revolution and the efforts of its practitioners, and because of them, the categories of fine and popular art or (in the Mexican context) *bellas artes* and *artes populares* classify objects along lines of difference that ultimately contribute to a wider context of social definitions of progressive and back-

ward, Western and non-Western, urbane and provincial, European and Indian, white and brown, rich and poor, and male and female, and thus participate at the ideological level in reproducing the hierarchy evident in prerevolutionary times between the sexes, races, and classes.<sup>5</sup> Tessie Liu calls this “racial thinking”: thinking within a hierarchical framework that, while in its most pernicious form may produce discrimination, as she posits, and even genocide, in its less-overt forms can come “disturbingly close to many of the ‘acceptable’ ways that we conceptualize social relationships” (Liu 1991:159). Indeed, while, as Baddeley and Fraser note, “the persistent concern of Latin American [particularly Mexican] creative artists [has been] to give authentic expression to their own voices, to locate their own cultural identity” in their works (1989:2), apart from their repressive colonial past and the inequity of Western art history, at the same time, and overlooked in the literature, the Mexican art world maintains and usurps many of the oppressive measures it seeks to destroy. In sum, the categories of *bellas artes* and *artes populares* not only organize handwork into a hierarchy of objects in which one group of artifacts (*bellas artes*) is privileged over another (*artes populares*), but they organize people into a social hierarchy in which some persons (artists) are more privileged than others (artisans), as is characteristic of other systems of difference—those based explicitly on race, ethnicity, or gender, for example.

#### REVOLUTIONARY MANIFESTOS

The categories of difference and the social webs into which the fine arts and other arts are organized in Mexico's art world have their origins in the European academies of art, as they did before the revolution. It was in the European academy where the arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture emerged as “finer” than other cultural productions or productions from other cultures. Brought to Mexico in the eighteenth-century with the building of the Academia Real de San Carlos, the first New World art academy was a large, colonial building in downtown Mexico City, whose interior courtyard was lined with replicated Greco-Roman statues. It stood originally, as it stands today, as the bastion of European bourgeois taste and ideology, a place to find systematic training, both historical and practical, in the arts of “Western civilization.”

For the art world, revolutionary nationalism initially translated into an attack on the teachings of the academy—its valorization of Western culture and the hierarchical privileging of the *bellas artes*. Revolutionaries recognized the academy as a European invention; its courses in classical drawing, sculpture, and architecture as colonial imports; and its elitism and European orientation as a hindrance to the reconstruction of Mexico's cultural sovereignty. Ever since the revolution, Mexico's foreign and domestic policy has exploited the conviction that foreigners, especially Westerners—their capital, politics, and cultures—have threatened Mexican sovereignty and have made the fissures that run through Mexican society and divide rich and poor, elites and nonelites, ruling and populace, and whites and Amerindians ever more pronounced.<sup>6</sup>

It was in the 1920s when Mexican revolutionary elites—ruling, intellectual, and artistic—began to systematically locate their legitimacy, sovereignty, and authenticity in their country's Indian heritage and traditions, especially its *artes populares*. Early in the 1920s, painters, musicians, poets, and later filmmakers drew heavily upon indigenous colors, design motifs, musical scales, linguistic tropes, and panoramic landscapes for inspiration. Magazines, books, and newspapers celebrating Mexican indigenous art appeared on the scene, disseminating the shapes, forms, and colors of various Mexican arts and crafts (e.g., Atl 1922). The deference awarded to Indianness throughout the century by artists and the government (the latter through its secretaries of public education and tourism) distinguishes the Mexican art world from other Western and Western-oriented art worlds, a contrast noted regularly by artists who come to Mexico City to live. "When I arrived in Mexico," Argentine painter and architect Luis Maubecín told me, "it was a totally unexpected surprise to find Mexico so influenced by Mexican crafts, perhaps because in Argentina we are closed off and European oriented. We [Argentines] have no knowledge of what is being made in Mexico. Here art is incredible; it is so Mexican." It is so locally oriented, in other words.

Responding to the government's commitment to a public arts program, painters and government officials in the early 1920s initiated what came to be known as the Mexican Mural Renaissance, a government-funded program founded on the principle of "art of the people." It was joined by other nationally oriented (if not fully nationally funded) projects such as the establishment of the Ballet Folklór-

ico, which integrated indigenous dance traditions into its Western-oriented choreography, and by the excavation and reconstruction of archeological sites. All these artistic ventures had two goals in common. First, they were sponsored by the secretary of public education because, it was believed, art ought to be a vehicle for information, a democratic means by which the Mexican people—all Mexican peoples, literate or not—could learn "their" own history and locate themselves within this extended national community. Second, they aimed to celebrate the ideology, sovereignty, and new nationalism of the Mexican revolutionary state, not only by painting the articles of the 1917 Constitution on public walls, but by popularizing pre-Columbian icons and fostering anti-foreign sentiment, especially an anti-United States one.

Generally speaking, the mural renaissance was a microcosm of the revolution's nationalist programs, which aimed to create a unified nation in order to bring together a country decimated by its war-ravaged economy, by its destabilized political structure, and by the loss of 10 percent of its citizens. According to the new constitutional government, the uneducated were to have access to free, public education and well-paid jobs; the land of large farmers and aristocrats was to be appropriated and divided equally among the peasantry; Mexican labor was to be empowered by unions and celebrated and privileged over foreign labor; and the otherwise private, exclusive art world was to be made accessible to all Mexicans.

In an effort to bring the country together, philosopher, politician, and architect of the mural renaissance José Vasconcelos, appointed in 1921 by President Alvaro Obregón to the powerful position of secretary of public education, spoke in terms of an exceptional nation, one constituted by a special people, a "cosmic race." Vasconcelos also described Mexico as a sovereign nation but one composed of a cosmic, racial mixture of both Caucasian and Amerindian peoples. The cosmic race was made up of the offspring of Spanish fathers and Indian mothers. "We [Mexicans] are Indian, blood and soul," he pronounced, "the language and civilization are Spanish" (Riding 1985:201). The concept of the "cosmic race" was a tentative racial and cultural solution to the young republic's many political and economic woes, aimed to incorporate the "people" into the national picture in a way the economy and education ministry had failed to do.

Among artists the ideology of Mexican nationalism began with the

formation of a Syndicate of Revolutionary Painters, Sculptors, and Engravers of Mexico, and, although short lived, its manifesto, issued in 1923, presciently captured—at least in emotion if not in actuality—what would become the overarching ideology of the twentieth-century art world in Mexico:

#### DECLARATION

Social, Political, and Aesthetic of The Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors to the native races humiliated through centuries; to the soldiers made executioners by their chiefs; to the workmen and peasants flogged by the rich; to the intellectuals not fawners of the bourgeoisie . . .

. . . THE ART OF THE MEXICAN PEOPLE IS THE GREATEST AND MOST HEALTHY SPIRITUAL EXPRESSION IN THE WORLD [and its] tradition our greatest possession. It is great because, being of the people, it is collective, and that is why our fundamental aesthetic goal is to socialize artistic expression, and tend to obliterate totally, individualism, which is bourgeois.

We REPUDIATE the so-called easel painting and all the art of ultra-intellectual circles because it is aristocratic, and we glorify the expression of Monumental Art because it is a public possession.

We PROCLAIM that since this social moment is one of transition between a decrepit order and a new one, the creators of beauty must put forth their utmost efforts to make their production of ideological value to the people, and the ideal goal of art, which now is an expression of individualistic masturbation, should be one of beauty for all, of education and of battle. (Goldman 1981:3)

When muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896–1974) drafted the manifesto for the syndicate of revolutionary artists he did so with Vasconcelos's program of cultural nationalism in mind, a program that over the years turned into an enormous government-sponsored public arts promotion that involved, along with painters, the sponsorship of musicians, filmmakers, writers, and other artists. Like the syndicate's manifesto, cultural nationalism was a child of the Mexican Revolution, and its nationalist orientation has provided political rhetoric and has directed state policy toward the arts throughout the century. The revolutionary intellectual Pedro Henriquez Ureña described it well. Cultural nationalism, he explained (paraphrased by Jean Franco), is "not to be understood . . . in the nineteenth-century

sense; 'Culture is conceived of as social, offered and really given to all and founded on work'" (Franco 1970:84–85). In other words, as Franco noted, there were two impulses behind cultural nationalism in Mexico: "First, there was the desire to bring all sections of the community into national life. Secondly, the elite now sought, in folk culture, in the indigenous peoples and the environment, the values they had previously accepted from Europe" (1970:84–85), an agenda typical to other postcolonial cultural programs worldwide.

#### REVOLUTIONARY PARADOXES

Nevertheless, it was at the height of Mexico's revolutionary nationalism in the 1930s and its celebration of the popular sector that the Mexican government institutionalized the separation of the artistic categories "bellas artes" and "artes populares" with the creation of two state organizations, the National Institute of Fine Arts (INBA) and the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH). Both institutes have administered the arts ever since. The numerous responsibilities of these two organizations include the housing and curating of Mexico's cultural patrimony, beginning with its prehistoric archeological sites and extending to its contemporary easel paintings and sculptures. Founded and operating today under the auspices of the Secretary of Public Education, both institutions are largely responsible for educating the Mexican people about Mexican culture, ethnic groups, art, and history. INAH and INBA are responsible for the functioning of several public educational facilities and programs, including schools and museums. They oversee numerous publications, and they have active public outreach programs consisting of lectures, film series, workshops, and exhibitions. Children in the public school system are regularly sent on their own or with their parents to INBA and INAH museums to study a broad range of topics—from pre-Columbian history to contemporary Mexican painting.

Under the domain of INBA are all the arts from the mid-eighteenth century to the present. In contrast, INAH is the curator of all the arts, except architecture, produced in Mexico before then: from pre-Columbian times through the colonial period. The Museum of Modern Art in Mexico City, for example, with its twentieth-century painting and sculpture, is an INBA-operated museum, and the National Museum of Anthropology, with all its pre-Columbian artifacts, is an

INAH-operated museum. There are few collections of contemporary arte popular exhibited and curated by museums in Mexico. Those examples, however, such as are found in the Museo Nacional de Artes e Industrias Populares (the National Museum of Popular Arts and Industries) in Mexico City, are managed, staffed, and curated by INAH personnel, despite the fact that, like contemporary painting, the artes populares curated are twentieth-century creations. The institutionalized difference and segregation found in the organization of INBA and INAH museums and programs is one of the most overt indicators of the revolution's involvement in not only challenging but simultaneously perpetuating the bourgeois distinctions made between fine and folk.

### AMATE PAINTING

In 1985, in an effort to promote artesanías as art objects, a young, prominent private gallery of contemporary art in Mexico City hung the work of three *amate* painters (figure 2.1). Amate painting, or bark-paper painting, owes its existence largely to tourism (Stromberg 1984) and is usually sold in the marketplace or on the streets, but not in Mexico City art galleries. It is popular art. The gallery dealer collaborated with a neo-Mexicanist painter (Puerto Rican born) and an American anthropologist.

"We tried to make an exhibit which showed a type of Mexican popular art called amate," the young gallery dealer explained to me. "I had to go to an indigenous area in Guerrero [a state south of Mexico City] to pick these paintings up. . . . [My artist friend] and I picked out the work together."

He continued, "An American anthropologist wrote a text which was interesting because it spoke of the anthropological aspects of these painters' works. She wrote about the artists, their iconography, and all that. For me it was interesting, and because this is a gallery of contemporary art, the text helped to justify our interests in popular art. Generally this art is considered [by the rest of the art world] 'folk' or, perhaps better put, 'artesanías,' like 'crafts,'" he said, picking his synonyms from English. "At the last minute, however, we had a disagreement over her text. To me it was too anthropological. What I wanted to focus on was the aesthetic aspect of each painter," he stressed, as if to enact the 1920s reaction of the bourgeoisie to the

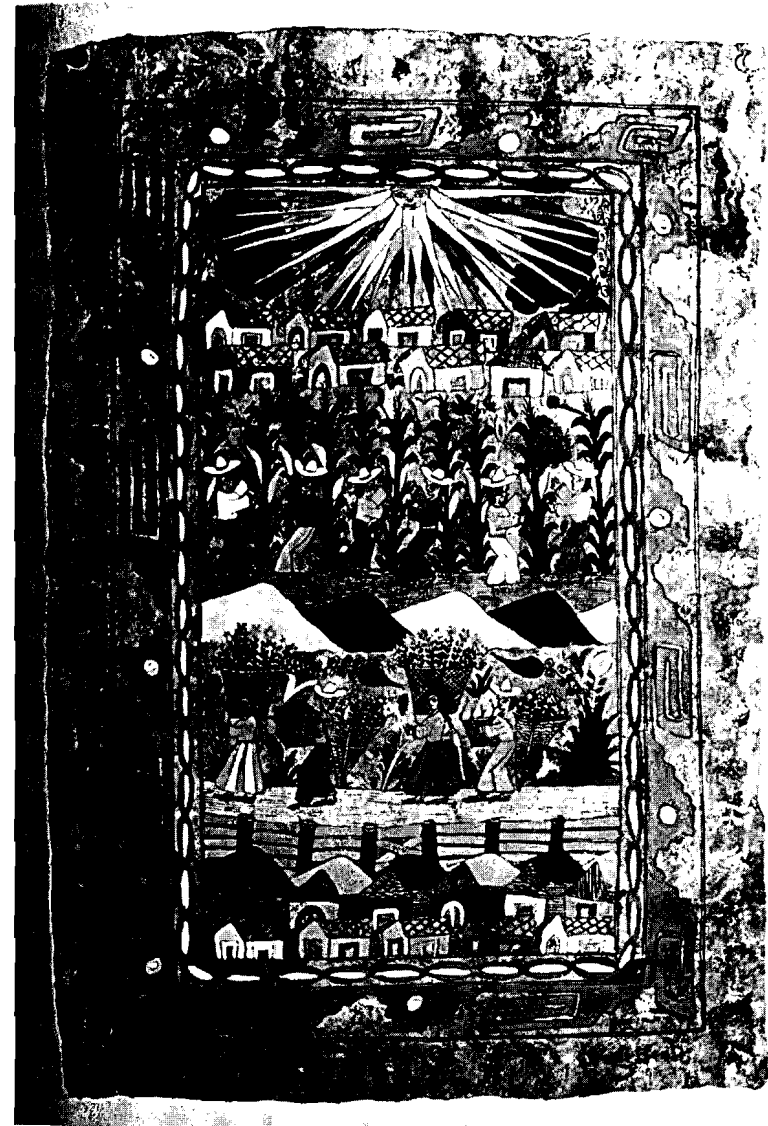


FIGURE 2.1 Simaco Hernández, *Labores del Campo*. Photograph by author.

Mexican policy of *indigenismo* promulgated by the founding father of Mexican anthropology, Manuel Gamio, along with his colleague, Vasconcelos.

"Each of the exhibitors had many followers in their hometowns, but [the ones we chose] represented the best examples of what was being done in amate painting at the moment. I wanted to emphasize that these painters were more than just painters of the popular art of amate painting but were each individual artists and had developed their own personal language. . . . [We sold them for] 100,000 pesos, about \$100. Each was an original work. It was a gift." The dealer paused and added, "But we wanted to offer them at low prices because we didn't want to put them at the price of a Venegas [whose work dealers and artists often describe as "primitive"], because it is another thing. The amate paintings continue to be arte popular," he concluded. Despite the aesthetic aspects the gallery dealer and others attributed to them, the gallery setting did not make amate painting into bellas artes.

In conclusion, painting on canvas is, in most cases, "arte," while amate painting is, in most cases, arte popular—unless painted by an artist. If the amate painters were considered artists, the dealer may have shown their work along with other paintings by artists like Venegas, but mixing the two professions (except for didactic purposes) is rarely considered.<sup>7</sup> He understood the context in which he was operating; those in the art world, public and private, including many of his peers, draw the boundaries between bellas artes and artes populares by carefully maintaining the boundaries between artist and artisan.

Mexican artists and other cultural elites have a clear idea where the boundaries lie, and although these boundaries vary with generation, class, and geographical location—and therefore may not mirror INAH and INBA's criteria—they are always drawn, despite how blurred those boundaries may appear to an outsider. "When we [young Mexican artists] talk about folklorization," artist Adolfo Patiño (b. 1954) explained to me, "we mean to say that there are artisans who believe that they are artists . . . and there are artists who work like artisans. . . . In my judgment, an artist who works like an artisan could be German Venegas, who gives his woodcarvings a popular art value. They are defined, clean, and well done. But his art work is not folklórico like artesanías; it is art."

### INSTITUTIONALIZED REVOLUTIONARY "ART"

The government's nationalistic mandate and its public policies have both enhanced and haunted the twentieth-century Mexican art world. On the one hand, the mandate has been the art world's (and other elite's) greatest ally because it has financially and ideologically supported much art production. On the other hand, it has been the art world's relentless nemesis because it challenges its Western proclivities and sensibilities. The two overarching questions that characterize postrevolutionary art appreciation in Mexico City might be articulated as follows: How much of the indigenous culture can artists and dealers incorporate into their work without appearing folklórico? And, how much of the Euro-American avant-garde modernism and now "postmodernism" can artists include in their work without appearing to violate their national identities and cultural autonomy? The task, Pierre Bourdieu (1984:1) noted in another context, is "to establish the conditions in which the consumers of cultural goods, and their taste for them, are produced, and at the same time to describe the different ways of appropriating such of these objects as are regarded at a particular moment as works of art, and the social conditions of the constitution of the mode of appropriation that is considered legitimate." While few art-world elites—painters, dealers, or critics—fully endorse the propositions of cultural nationalism, fewer are able to ignore them because nationalism pervades the art world in many different ways. Like the gallery dealer intent on exhibiting amate painting as art—stating that the cultural products of non-European-oriented Mexicans are as good as those informed by Western sensibilities and training—Mexican artists, dealers, and critics have for the past seventy years formed their artistic identities within the tensions produced by the bourgeois-revolutionary fabric.

The art world is constructed with two opposing authenticities. The ideology of cultural nationalism locates (popular Mexican) authenticity in a common Indian past; the bourgeoisie locates (artistic) authenticity in the avant-garde and the unique. If Mexican artists are not visibly nationalistic, they are not honoring their country and themselves and may risk being labeled "anti-Mexican" or "foreign" by public or private consumers. Because nationalism composes such a significant part of one's identity in the Mexican art world, these are harsh accusations. Yet artists, to be players in the contemporary, in-

ternational art world, must address the principles on which that world is built—that “fine” art is more valued than “popular” craft and that artists are more valued than artisans. Ultimately, the appropriation to which Bourdieu referred is part of a larger political process of identity politics and group formation characteristic of revolutionary Mexico.

### A PORTRAIT OF THREE ARTISTS

A brief portrait of three eminent artists—Diego Rivera, Rufino Tamayo, and Francisco Toledo—their modes of appropriation, and some of the discourses that surround their works will help to illustrate the politics and processes of identity politics involved in the production of “fine” art in Mexico (figures 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4). All three strategized their “national” identities differently, their strategies prominently occupying center stage in the Mexican art world at different periods during the century. All have been trumpeted, at one time or another, as the most important living Mexican artist. First, it was Diego Rivera (1887–1957) who broadly speaking for the first half of the century occupied this position. He was followed by Rufino Tamayo (1898–1991), who dominated most of the second half of the century, and now there is Francisco Toledo (b. 1940).<sup>8</sup>

#### DIEGO RIVERA

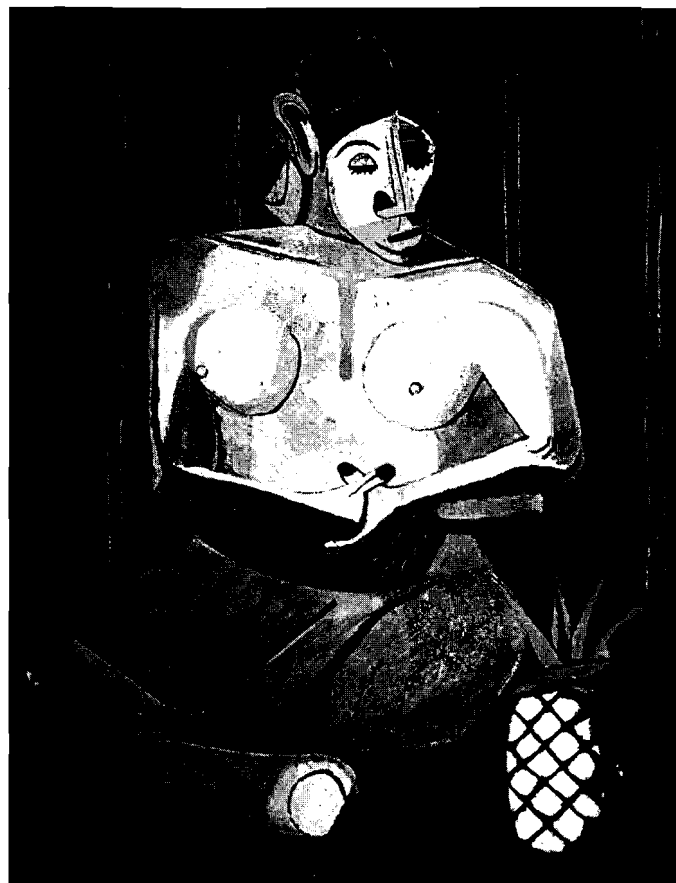
Diego Rivera, by far the most vocal and well known of the Mexican muralists, took it upon himself, throughout his career, to confront and deconstruct the bourgeois, neocolonial prejudices that isolated art from “the people” and from national identity. Due to Rivera’s close friendship with Vasconcelos and his aggressive personality, he was considered by many to be *the* man responsible for creating the visual vocabulary of the revolutionary government. In his painting he both glorified Indians and gave them a place in history. While he depicted the Indians as acted-upon by others during the initial stages of European contact and throughout the colonial period, Rivera also painted Indians as actors (occasionally leaders) in his pre-Columbian scenes (as builders of temples and ceremonial centers, and as master craftspeople), in his colonial scenes (as literal forgers of Mexico’s future history—as artisans, miners, laborers, and farmers), and in his twentieth-century scenes (as heroes of the revolution and builders of



**FIGURE 2.2** Diego Rivera, *Agrarian Leader Zapata*, 1931. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

the new republic). Fashioning himself as a wizard and his painting as sympathetic magic, Rivera intended his public works to have direct consequences for “the people,” and that included the living descendants of pre-Columbian Indians. In contemplating his life’s work, he wrote, “I sought to be . . . a transmitter, providing for the masses a synthesis of their wishes so as to serve them as an organizer of consciousness and aid their social organization” (Franco 1970:89). Rivera





**FIGURE 2.3** Rufino Tamayo, *Woman with Pineapple*, 1941. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

felt personally responsible for the valorization of the indigenous peoples (see Trotsky 1938).

For young artists today, Rivera seems hopelessly romantic and his paintings quintessentially folkloric. In his own time, however, Rivera's critics thought much worse things. They called his painted actors "Rivera's monkeys" (Herrera 1983:82). Even the revolutionary sensibilities of José Vasconcelos, architect of the Mexican mural renaissance, were challenged when Rivera assumed too much of a populist orientation. While Vasconcelos and other ruling elites sponsored the painting of such popular figures as Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa, both prominent revolutionary leaders, they in fact never placed their full



**FIGURE 2.4** Francisco Toledo. Photo © Carole Patterson.

support behind either Zapata or Villa. Indeed, Vasconcelos hailed not from the populist side of the revolution but from the more intellectual side, as exemplified in the image of Mexico's first revolutionary president, who was not a rough, grassroots leader as was Zapata, but the Paris and Berkeley, California-educated Francisco Madero (Franco 1970:85).

It was Diego Rivera's insistence on depicting an antibourgeois aesthetic that included not only painted examples of artesánías but artisans themselves that helped earn him and other muralists the reputation as a painter of "monkeys." Muralist José Clemente Orozco (1883–1949) did not support Rivera's style or the attention Rivera and others paid to the Indian in their painting. Rejecting it, Orozco said of

such depictions, "they led me to eschew once and for all the painting of Indian sandals and dirty clothes. . . . I do wish that those who wear them would . . . get civilized. But to glorify them would be like glorifying illiteracy, drunkenness, or the mounds of garbage that 'beautify' our streets, and that I refuse to do" (Charlot 1962:226-27; Franco 1970:90-91). Orozco had a modernist, bourgeois orientation, one that located art and artists above artisans and artesanías. He compared it to the universal, which to him stood diametrically opposed to the local; it was a sensibility that prevailed (and continues to prevail) alongside the national rhetoric of Mexicanness. It was also one that reflected a deep ambivalence toward the Revolution's agenda to incorporate local arts and people into its revolutionary community, albeit imagined, as Benedict Anderson (1983) would note. Orozco surmised, "The essential difference between painting at its noblest and painting as a minor folk art is this: the former is rooted in universal permanent traditions from which it cannot be torn apart, no matter what the pretext, the place, or the time, while folk arts have strictly local traditions that vary according to the customs, changes, agitations and convulsions suffered by each country, each race, each nationality, each class" (Charlot 1962:226-27; Franco 1970:90-91). Orozco was not alone in his thoughts.

In retrospect the muralist program could be shown to have appropriated folk arts and people but not elevated them, to have spoken for them but not with them, in short, that it was art *of* the people, as advertised in the syndicate's manifesto, but not *by* the people. Despite their overt differences, Rivera and Orozco, alas, shared a fundamental assumption: the indigenous peoples, as either glorified (by Rivera) or denounced (by Orozco), are not producers of cultural meaning. Either they are too unorganized, or they are too uncivilized; either someone must order them and speak for them as Rivera claimed was his goal, or they must shed their plight and "get civilized" as Orozco wished. In either case creation is the prerogative of the artist—the civilized, urbanized (white) male.

#### RUFINO TAMAYO

Rufino Tamayo, born only twelve years after Rivera, was never comfortable with the muralist's didactic program and eventually fled the Mexican art world to live for almost twenty years in New York and

Paris, where he became a successful painter of canvases as well as murals. It was not until the 1950s (and from then on only sporadically until the 1970s) that the government recognized Tamayo's work as exemplary of Mexicanness, but a postmuralist Mexicanness, which suited the image the government began to hold of itself as the head of a modern, cosmopolitan nation/state. Ironically, perhaps, this recognition first came in the form of a mural commission for the Palacio de Bellas Artes, although it followed on the heels of a retrospective of Tamayo's work at the Palacio held in 1948. With his years of European and U.S. experience, Tamayo's iconographically Mexican work was arguably stylistically located in the epicenter of the bourgeois, international, modernist movement. The paintings of Rivera and Tamayo stand for two different versions of painted Mexicanness. Throughout his long life, Tamayo focused on incorporating native peoples and traditions into his canvases in an effort to represent a Mexicanness that was neither ideologically focused nor folklórico. Tamayo is famous not for his socialist realism but for his renderings of a metaphysical, indigenous reality—a "*realismo mágico*," as some contemporary artists categorize it.

To many Mexican artists, old and young alike, Tamayo more than any other artist is thought to have established in his paintings a personalized, noncentrist sense of place. The fact that Tamayo is from Oaxaca is important to note: not only because Oaxaca is known for its living Mexican traditions and, more than any other Mexican state, has offered a gold mine of icons of Mexican identity, but also because Tamayo speaks from the position of a *oaxaqueño*, as does Francisco Toledo. In this sense his Mexicanness is experiential and participatory, painting in the first-person singular, as opposed to the third-person narration of the muralists. Most significantly, however, Tamayo's paintings derive more from his use of pre-Columbian sculpture and contemporary Mexican crafts or artes populares than from any overt reference to actual, living peoples. Despite his focus on Mexican indigenous traditions, Tamayo rooted his images as much in European modernism as in Mexico's past. It is not surprising that the official acceptance of Tamayo in the 1970s and 1980s came at a time when the government had openly reestablished its links to the modern world, a link that began in the 1940s and 1950s as politically and economically more conservative and capitalistic administrations periodically came to power.

The break from the Mexican School was a political event in every way. When in the 1950s and 1960s a small but vocal group of artists, following the lead of Tamayo, began to challenge the hegemony of the government-sponsored mural program with less didactic and more painterly art works, nationalist critics accused these painters of being “anti-Mexican.” Rather than proselytize the revolution’s ideology with “drum and bugle aesthetics” (Paz 1993:260), Tamayo, according to Paz, had a “relationship to art [that] was more authentic than the Muralists” (259). “[P]opular plastic inventions . . . do not appear in [Tamayo’s] painting because of wildly excessive nationalist or populist zeal. Their significance lies elsewhere. . . . Their value is affective and existential” (230). One can make an interesting comparison between Tamayo’s paintings and the built forms of Tamayo’s contemporary, Mexican architect Luis Barragán (1902–88), the father of the Mexican School of Architecture. Barragán is one of Mexico’s most famous twentieth-century architects, known for the private homes he built for wealthy Mexicans (figure 2.5). He and Tamayo have been the most instrumental in bringing an awareness of the aesthetic dimension of Mexican crafts to their upper-class patrons. When Paz proclaimed the importance of *artesanías* to the art of the revolution, he probably had Tamayo in mind. Tamayo’s paintings, like Barragán’s structures, bring together large, flat surfaces of *rosa mexicana* (Mexican pink, an unofficial national color), brilliant yellow, and vibrant blue in a way that reminds one of a Mexican marketplace. Tamayo’s paintings are firmly associated with the shapes of pre-Columbian sculpture and contemporary crafts, much as Barragán’s houses are rooted in pre-Hispanic architectonic structures and contemporary *artesanías*. The work of both, however, reflects Western influence: Tamayo’s painted forms are mixed with a European modernist palette and style, and Barragán’s houses also draw heavily upon modernism.

One of the key representational strategies of Tamayo and Barragán is how these two artists conspire to render the *artesanías* referents (the actual objects of inspiration) placeless. That is, they are identifiably Mexican, sometimes identifiably Oaxacan, but they are of no particular place within Oaxaca (e.g., the marketplace). In a Tamayo painting or a Barragán house neither time nor place interferes with the aura of Mexicanness that surrounds them. The method of each is abstraction, and that is the method of modernism. The magical



**FIGURE 2.5** View of a courtyard at Casa Prieto López with pulque pots, a “signature” of Barragán architecture. Photograph by Tim Street-Porter.

realism of Tamayo, therefore, straddles a Mexican regionalism, on the one hand, since it is evocative of Mexico, and, on the other hand, a non-Mexican modernism, since it draws upon the European avant-garde (Cardoza y Aragon 1986; Torres Michúa 1988/89).

In a 1989 interview Rufino Tamayo described how he found his life history spun into a web of half-truths promulgated by critics, dealers, and the government, in which his youth was characterized as *more* Mexican, *more* Indian, and *more* poor than it actually was, as if to counterbalance the strong influences of modernism found in his work. An interviewer asked him, "It is commonly believed that you experienced deprivation during your early days in Mexico City. We have been told that you were a poor Zapotec lad whose aunt sold fruit from a stall in the market. What was your adolescence in the capital like?" Tamayo replied, "Actually, I'm not Zapotec. I'm not Mayan or Aztec either; I am Mexican, a thousand percent. And, I wasn't poor. Of course, I had to work, but these are myths they write about me. My aunt was a wholesaler with a large fruit business. I helped her, of course, and so I was surrounded by tropical fruits," but this was not in the Indian marketplace (Esser and Nieto 1989:40). The practitioners of the antibourgeois, revolutionary rhetoric continue to seek their heroes in the popular sector of Mexican society, regardless of whether or not they were or are actually there, while their counterparts, the modernists, continue to extricate them from it. "Modern aesthetics," Paz wrote of Tamayo, "opened [Tamayo's] eyes and made him see the modernity of pre-Hispanic sculpture. Later . . . he appropriated those forms and transformed them . . . [an] impulse [without which Tamayo's work] would have dissipated or degenerated into mere folklore and decoration" (Paz 1993:234). A balance must be struck to mediate the tension that is produced from an agenda that is informed by other-than-revolutionary sources and programs.

#### FRANCISCO TOLEDO

Francisco Toledo shares much in common with Tamayo. Like Tamayo, Toledo was born in Oaxaca; his mode of appropriation is focused on the indigenous traditions, rather than the people, of Oaxaca; and his canvases have a strong modernist patina. In terms of his art, Toledo paints and sculpts the stories and myths he heard from his Zapotec-speaking grandfather. To him they are living traditions, not

just museum artifacts. However, despite their similarities Toledo's work stands in contrast to Tamayo's in significant ways: the most noticeable is Toledo's earthy palette and mythological iconography. Although in Toledo's canvases, prints, and frescoes there are no etherealized pre-Columbian sculptures or exaggerated market-place colors, it is not how and what Toledo paints that sets him apart. Instead it is Toledo himself—who he is and how he stands relative to indigenous peoples on actual as well as painted terms. Toledo adorns himself as a Mexican peasant and appears in Paris, New York, and Mexico City as a *campesino* in his *huaraches* or on occasion even barefoot, with his head shaded by the brim of a *sombrero*, out of which his thick, uncut black hair hangs long (figure 2.4). Toledo is from Juchitán, where he grew up speaking Zapotec and listening to his grandfather recite the legends of the Zapotec Indians (Peden 1991). His work is, in a sense, even more in the first person than Tamayo's. He really is Indian, but unlike the artesanías of other Indians, his work is considered "art" by the establishment, even while it draws heavily upon the world of artisans and even the materials of artesanías. As Mexican artist Adolfo Patiño put it, "We could say that the ceramics of Francisco Toledo are 'fine artesanías,' but it isn't true. It is art, no? Why? Because simply you are seeing that there is a creative definition which the popular artisans do not achieve, even though Don Francisco comes out of the Oaxacan popular art tradition; and he includes them, hints at them, and develops them in such a magnificent way. You can call it art. It is a pre-Columbian tradition because if you look through the ethnographic rooms or the archeological rooms at the Anthropology Museum [in Mexico City], you realize the rich imaginations those creators had, but you know that there were thousands of each figure there. You can see it. In Toledo's case there are not a thousand pieces. There is one."

Toledo's Indian persona and his bourgeois notions of "authorship," however, only partly describe the "artist." "The other thing, which is sort of odd but original," Oaxacan artist Emilio Sánchez pointed out to me in a 1987 conversation, "is the fact that Toledo has gone away from Mexico. The majority of his life he has spent outside of Mexico. He doesn't even live here, and nevertheless his childhood, his family, the Oaxacan ambiance have a lot to do with his development as an artist." Indeed, Toledo used to spend almost as much time in Paris and New York as he did in Mexico, although that has changed some-

what with his return to Mexico in the late 1980s. But to the people of Juchitán, which is home to the opposition political party COCEI (the Student-Worker-Peasant Coalition of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec) and place where both Rivera and Tamayo found many sources for their revolutionary iconization of Mexicanness, Toledo is a Robin Hood, spending much of the profits earned from the sale of his paintings (which average around \$30,000) and prints on enhancing the cultural and the political activities there. Taking what he has earned from the rich and distributing it among the people, he has become, as Cynthia Steele put it, a “cultural decentralizer” (1992:150). In the contemporary context, where the struggle to incorporate the low into the high continues to preoccupy the Mexican artist’s vision, Toledo contributes a variation on the theme quite distinct from his predecessors—one, I think, compatible with the postrevolutionary, postnational agenda the Mexican government’s posture is most likely to assume in the twenty-first century.

#### BELLAS ARTES AND ARTES POPULARES REVISITED

To write about twentieth-century Mexico is to write about a country that struggles to balance the demands of nationalism with the demands of internationalism. Toledo presents himself as a barefooted Mexican Indian, but is careful to spend time at his studio in Paris; Tamayo “modernized” the voice of the other, while the government and critics kept his Indianness intact; Orozco denounced the indigenous peoples as “uncultured and monkey-like,” while Rivera sang their praises before and after he wined and dined with the Rockefellers and the Fords. Both the adulation that native traditions receive from Mexican artistic, intellectual, and ruling elites, as well as the qualms elites have toward those traditions, dovetail with the politics of Mexico’s postrevolutionary racial identity. “Today in strictly ethnic terms,” Alan Riding reports, “90 percent of Mexicans are *mestizos* . . . but they cannot accept their *mestizaje*” (1985:3). Octavio Paz, in his essay on the Mexican character written over forty years ago, described the consequences of rhetorically embracing what in practice is rejected:

When we [Mexicans] shout [in Independence Day celebrations] “¡Viva México, hijos de la chingada!” [Long live Mexico, children

of the raped woman] we express our desire to live closed off from . . . the past. In this shout we condemn our origins and deny our hybridism. The strange permanence of Cortés [the Spanish father] and La Malinche [the Indian mother, and Cortés’s mistress] in the Mexican’s imagination and sensibilities reveals that they are something more than historical figures: they are symbols of a secret conflict that we have still not resolved. When he repudiates La Malinche—the Mexican Eve, as she was represented by José Clemente Orozco in his murals in the National Preparatory School [figure 2.6]—the Mexican breaks his ties with the past, renounces his origins and lives in isolation and solitude. (Paz 1985:87)

In essence the mestizo lacks a “pure past,” and this places Mexican identity and authenticity in a state of constant emergence. The dilemma is the same as the artist’s: how much a visible role should the Indian and her/his artifacts play in Mexico’s society, history, and biology, and how much a role should the West play?

To many in the upper and upper-middle classes—not only artists—blurring the boundaries between Indianness and one’s Western, bourgeois lifestyle might jeopardize a career; in the political world, it can lead to an elite’s success or failure. A notable example of the latter is the presidency of Luis Echeverría. When President Echeverría took office in 1970, he immediately talked in revolutionary terms of Mexico’s prehispanic origins, but that was what many of his predecessors had done at each of their own inaugurations. It is the expected rhetoric. However, when he removed all the Chinese vases and Persian carpets from Los Pinos, the presidential residence, and ordered them replaced with the weavings, paintings, and pottery of Mexican *artesanos*, and, in addition, requested that all women attending state dinners wear traditional Indian attire, the urban upper class was outraged (see Bakewell 1993).

President Echeverría, according to Lomnitz and Pérez-Lizaur’s study of the Gomezes, an elite family in Mexico City, is remembered as “the bad guy” who “served ‘jamaica’ water [an indigenous drink made with hibiscus flowers] to Queen Elizabeth . . . [and] insisted on foisting his lower class, *pelado* customs on the rest of Mexico” (Lomnitz and Pérez-Lizaur 1987:201). The Gomezes have never forgiven him; it “was a mistake and an unforgivable offense,” they cried, when the President’s wife not only donned native attire—an old theme, the



**FIGURE 2.6** José Clemente Orozco, *Cortés and La Malinche*, National Preparatory School, Mexico City, Mexico. Archives from the Audio-Visual Unit, Art Museum of the Americas, OAS, Washington, D.C.

feminization of the other—to greet the Shah of Iran, but along with her husband “threw out all the *beautiful French* furniture and china and replaced them with *coarse Mexican* handicrafts” (210, my emphasis). “Pelado,” according to the Gomez family, refers to a person “eating only tortillas, chile, and beans; having an uncultured form of speech; being lazy; and ‘leading a promiscuous life’” (195)—a derogatory synonym for “Indian,” in other words.

Linked by the government to the glories of the past, living Indians and artisans are often perceived as the debris left over from the Conquest, descendants of a violated and vanquished people, and derivative, rather than exemplary, of a once-glorious past. They are treated quite differently from the official promises of the revolution, protected as well as patronized but not exactly embraced by the government (cf. Cook 1983; Hewitt de Alcántara 1984; Lauer 1982; Rodríguez Prampolini 1982). It is a posture that García Canclini (1993) argues the government fosters because of the conflicts a traditional economy creates for capitalism. But this posture is engulfed in a complex cultural matrix. In a recent interview, Mexican textile artist Pedro Preux described the artisan’s dilemma: “The artisan is overvalued [in the rhetoric] and given little support in real life; it is said that he is the glory of the fatherland, but he is given nothing with which to go on living. . . . Politics here [in Mexico] towards artesanías seem to me to be misguided” (García Bergua 1989:17). Echeverría’s actions were those of a “pelado” because he integrated or mixed the culture of the indigenous peoples into his life too much—not a manly thing to do. Worse, it was for “all the world to see” (Lomnitz and Pérez-Lizaur 1987:201). This is not the image the bourgeoisie wants to project to the world. Echeverría defined Mexico’s identity such that it appeared too Mexican, almost quaint, and too mixed up with the indigenous culture for the Gomezes’ comfort.

#### THE BOURGEOIS WORLD ORDER

Despite the efforts of revolutionary governments in Mexico, the Mexican art world’s eighteenth-century bourgeois roots run deep, as do its world view and constructions of difference. As anthropologist Michael Jackson noted, it was during the rise of the bourgeoisie in the late eighteenth century that activities considered intellectual, aesthetic, and moral in origin were separated out from activities consid-

ered manual and sensual in origin (Jackson 1989). One was culture, "in the normative sense," as Pierre Bourdieu put it (1984:1), the other nature. To the bourgeoisie, Jackson wrote, "Culture almost invariably designated the refined mental and spiritual faculties which members of the European bourgeoisie imagined set them apart from the allegedly brutish worlds of manual workers, peasants, and savages" (1989:120). The activities of the latter belonged not to culture and the fine arts but nature. It was in the "repudiation of the low," according to Stallybrass and White (1986:ix), that the European bourgeoisie was able to produce its "status and identity." The dichotomy between *bellas artes* and *artes populares* is rooted in the culture/nature dichotomy Jackson described, an essentially Western and bourgeois categorization.

When Pedro Preux, the young, urban (non-Indian) textile "artist" quoted above, was asked in a 1989 interview to comment on the relationship of *artesanías* to art for a left-of-center, Mexico City magazine, he stated confidently, "People forget that the traditional artisan is a product of rural labor who turns into an artisan between sowing and harvesting the fields. During that time, the artisan makes fabric because he needs clothing, makes ceramics because he needs cooking pots" (García Bergua 1989:16). In keeping with this, *amate* painters are artisans because they are rural peoples—*campesinos*—and paintings by *campesinos* are not art, but *artesanías*. Indeed, *amate* paintings are documents of country life. Like an illuminated book of days, they keep time with the actualities of a farmer's life. Within them people till the land, plant the seed, harvest the fruits, weave the baskets, go to church, and attend village weddings, fiestas, and funerals.

The consequence of the culture/nature dichotomy, Jackson argued, was the formation of a social order based on a culture/nature sociopolitical hierarchy, in which cultural products and activities associated with the intellect and morals were more privileged than the activities of nature associated with the senses, the hands, and the body. Indeed, the latter was not and is not of culture or, rather, Culture with a capital C. Within the bourgeois art world the artist is fashioned as a *cultured* individual, a man of the intellect, inspired by the spirit, and a kind of disembodied creator, while the artisan is conceived of as earthbound, of nature, a *campesino*, and body-bound, since he or she is considered a *hand-laborer* or manual worker. By implication,

the labor of farmers—if we explore the bourgeois model to its logical conclusions—is unintelligent and an-aesthetic. "One idealizes that the artisan is as great as the artist," Mexican artist Adolfo Patiño explained to me, "but it is not so. I am aware that simply what happens is that artisans arrive at creations unconsciously and nevertheless something curious happens. You become aware that they are accidents. When they discover one [successful accident], they make forty the same. Nothing more than with variations. The point is that there is no intention to transcend the simple fact of presenting the painted element, the utilitarian element, the clay vessel."

As Jackson concluded for the workings of culture, so we might conclude for the workings of *bellas artes*: "Culture has thus served as a token to demarcate, separate, exclude, and deny, and although at different epochs the excluded 'natural' category shifts about among peasants, barbarians, workers, primitive people, women, children, animals, and material artifacts, a persistent theme is the denial of the somatic [the body] . . . where our sense of separateness and distinction is most readily blurred" (1989:121). Moreover, Jackson noted, "Exclusion of the body from discourse went along with the exclusion of the masses from political life" (120), including exclusion from the art world. If the indigenous people's expressive culture, their *arte popular* and so on, are categorized as part of the archeological and historical record (INAH) and not as one of the "beautiful arts" or *bellas artes*, it is because contemporary Indians are linked more to the past than to the present in the minds of policy makers, artists, and others in the art world. Indigenous peoples, in other words, are thought to form a "human bridge" to the past, as Scott Cook noted (1983:59). As a bridge to the past, or as part of the archeological record, they are in essence people without a history they can call their own, separated from the contemporary art world in which the *bellas artes* mark (art) historical moments.<sup>9</sup>

It is this bourgeois world view that Jackson described, exacerbated by a prevailing revolutionary program that partly informs the distress of the director of a state-owned, fine arts museum, who in 1988 said to me, "I am opposed personally to the joining together into one place producers of *artesanías* and producers of *arte*." Her galleries, however, were located on the second floor of the National Auditorium, a complex in which weekly scheduled activities on the ground floor



attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors. Our interview followed on the heels of one of the National Auditorium's ground-floor shows, which featured that particular week handcrafted objects, food, and music of Oaxaca, the state most famous in Mexico for its artesanías and indigenous populations. "I think that there should not have been any relationship between the two," she continued. "I was against putting together Oaxacan food, artesanías, and art—all three important sources of Oaxacan culture. But I think that each one ought to have its own forum. Painting, in this environment, passes for artesanías, and artesanías could be confused with the arts and so on." In sum, the Oaxacan show was a festive, loud, sonorous, and odoriferous occasion with its song, food, and dance, where the persistent theme was the celebration, not the denial, of the somatic. To have mixed the two art forms would have been to have mixed intellect with body, culture with nature, high with low. Given the nationalistic agenda, it was not coincidental that the Mexican government scheduled the two events simultaneously. Nor was it coincidental, given the bourgeois foundation of that nationalistic agenda, that the paintings were hung in the galleries upstairs, elevated from the events downstairs.

#### DIMENSIONS OF DIFFERENCE

Today there is little discussion of Vasconcelos's cosmic race except in historical terms, and the collective fervor of the manifesto issued by the Syndicate of Revolutionary Painters was short lived. Mexico's "cosmic race" is a term that described an ideal but never an actual ethnic and racial reality. Indeed, its failure to resolve or even to characterize national identity is evidenced by the number of arguments that are battled out regularly in the daily newspapers even at present. When Vasconcelos proclaimed, "We are Indian, blood and soul," he did not say *body* and soul. The Gómez family, Lomnitz and Pérez-Lizaur point out, "recognizes its *mestizo* origins yet defines itself as Spanish, white, and typically blue-eyed" (1987:196), despite the fact that few have blue eyes. Today an average upper-class or upper-middle-class Mexican family has little contact with people of the popular classes, "except, of course, with their domestic servants," as one Mexican political scientist ironically put it in private conversation.

"Mestizo" may literally mean "mixed," but as constructed in upper-

class, bourgeois Mexican society—the society to which the Mexico City artist aspires—it can connote skin color, class, and level of "cultural" sophistication, a series of associations underscored by a porcelain figurine that Banamex, a government-owned bank until recently, was selling in 1988. Advertised in color in the major Mexico City newspapers and labeled MESTIZO, the figurine was cast as a dark-skinned, wandering laborer. Indeed, if you did not know that *mestizo* meant mixed race, you might conclude from a visual reading of the porcelain figure that *mestizo* meant dark, poor, and homeless.

The (Indian) artisan and his/her artifacts, while implicated in the artist's nationalist/bourgeois dynamic, serve as the other against whom the artist and, for that matter, intellectual and political elites differentiate themselves, structure their social worlds, and create their representations of national identity. While the Ministry of Tourism markets the artesanías of indigenous peoples as exemplary of Mexico's otherness (the best of the Third World), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs markets the "art" of its "artists" as testimony to Mexico's cosmopolitanism and internationalism. Interpretive authority over Mexicanness rests in the hands of a few privileged elites, not in the popular sector. With this in mind we might read something more into Orozco's mural than Paz suggested; not only do La Malinche and Cortés stand for a problematic inheritance, but, perhaps more significantly, La Malinche is silenced behind the strong arm of Cortés, which runs diagonally across her naked body as if to warn of some prohibition: "You are no longer our interpreter." When Vasconcelos made his famous pronouncement, "We are Indian, blood and soul. . . . The language and civilization are Spanish," he left the Indian speechless—silenced, like pre-Columbian sculpture.

In sum, to return to Liu's argument to which I alluded in the introduction, she poignantly states, "The metaphors and reasoning behind race and racial thinking provide a generalized model for building all sorts of communities, including those defined by different criteria of affiliation such as culture, ethnicity, or nationality" (1991:158). Indeed, the reconstruction of postcolonial nations has often included a process of building a single, all-inclusive ethnic authenticity somewhere outside or within an exclusive bourgeois hierarchy. Its constructed unity and distance are essential to the nationalist imagination. "When difference [among ethnicities] disappears in this way,"



Rowe and Schelling write, "the popular is made to appear as a single thing rather than a multiplicity," and therefore, I would argue, facilitates the controlled positioning of its relationship to elite culture. "This notion that there is one popular culture is a mark of populism: the long-lasting appeal of folklore in Mexico . . . needs to be understood, therefore, in connection with the persistence of populism as a force" (1991:6), generated as much, if not more, by revolutionary rhetoric as by actual state policy. And, as they conclude, "The study of popular culture is incompatible with ascribing to the state a fictitiously neutral function, since what states have actually done is to seek to homogenize culture in order to consolidate the power of ruling groups" (10).

While Mexican artists do not necessarily seek to homogenize cultural difference in the way states do, the temporal, spatial, and symbolic shifts that occur in their works through processes of artistic production and appropriation, as briefly described above for the works of Rivera, Tamayo, and Toledo, have nonetheless contributed to the consolidation of ruling elite power. The investigation of popular culture in the context of Mexican nationalism "requires taking the cultural sphere as neither merely derivative from the socioeconomic, as a merely ideological phenomenon, nor as in some metaphysical sense preceding it. Rather, it is the decisive area where social conflicts are experienced and evaluated" (Rowe and Schelling 1991:12). Understanding the contingencies of value on which the terms "bellas artes" and "artes populares" rest, therefore, and the processes of inclusion and exclusion that support them is key to understanding constructions of revolutionary and now postrevolutionary Mexican identity and the dimensions of difference named in one of the most problematic ideological contexts within which the Mexican artist and artisan produce and shape—indeed, craft—their objects.

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#### NOTES

1. This research is based upon fieldwork I conducted in Mexico City, Oaxaca, New York City, and Los Angeles between 1987 and 1993. Quotes from artists without references are taken directly from fieldwork interview transcriptions.
2. Some aficionados distinguish between the two; the former is more craft than the latter, so a basket may be arte popular if woven in a particularly fine way.
3. Compare with the French Revolution as theorized by Michelle Perrot and Lynn Hunt (Perrot 1990:1).
4. I am presenting here a different picture than that described by Rowe and Schelling, who state: "The problem of appropriate terms arises from the fact that 'popular art' (*arte popular*) and 'folk art' (*artes folklóricas*) presume an integration of different worlds which may be wishful thinking. *Artesanía*, in Spanish, has no such pretension, and is now the preferred term" (1991:68). I have found that what is the "preferred term" depends entirely on the person with whom you speak. Often in conversation with Mexican cultural elites, as noted in note 2 above, "artesanías" incorporates tourist art and is more anonymous than "arte popular," which is a kind of "arte," albeit "popular."
5. See Griselda Pollock on hierarchies in the art world, especially gendered ones (Pollock 1988).
6. Foreign policy has changed dramatically since President Carlos Salinas de Gortari took office in 1988.
7. Indeed, those who do consider it are generally U.S. or European curators of Mexican art exhibits.
8. I have left Frida Kahlo out of this discussion because she was never touted during her lifetime as the quintessential Mexican artist by Mexicans. Indeed, she still is not by the government. It is very much an (upper class) male privilege. For the place of Frida Kahlo in this picture, see my forthcoming book (Bakewell 1996).
9. I am alluding to Eric Wolf's *Europe and the People Without History* (1982).

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## SPACE, POWER, AND YOUTH CULTURE

MEXICAN AMERICAN GRAFFITI AND CHICANO MURALS IN EAST LOS ANGELES,

1972-1978

MARCOS SANCHEZ-TRANQUILINO

Visual environments orchestrate signification, deploy and stage relations of power, and construct and embody ideologies through the establishment of frameworks of legibility. Such frameworks incorporate and fabricate cues to how they are to be reckoned with by individual subjects and groups.

—Donald Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science*

In print as well as in person, I often use the quotation "A Chicano is a Mexican American who does not have an Anglo image of himself" as a basic working definition for politicized Mexican Americans, that is, "Chicanos."<sup>1</sup> This citation, excised from an important article by