

Arte del Pueblo: 20th Century Mexican Arts of Social Protest

Residency Introduction by Nathan K. Scott

Mexican Revolution –

Porfirio Diaz was the dictator of Mexico from 1876 to 1910.

In 1910, the **Mexican Revolution** began, led by **Emiliano Zapata** and **Pancho Villa**, among others.

Among the goals of the revolution were: **land reform**, abolishment of the **hacienda system**, **labor** rights, **nationalization** of industry, universal **education**, **recognition** for Mexico's **indigenous** peoples, and a democratically elected nationalist government based on **Mexican culture and values**.

Cultural expression through **public art** and **theatre** became an important means to further these aims, once the main goals of the revolution were accomplished. The new leaders of the government called for appreciation of Mexico's rich Indian heritage, and promised honor and self-esteem to native peoples and **mestizos**.

Murals –

Visual arts – **murals** – were one important way in which artists could express themselves publicly. Murals were **open air**, **free** to the public, **large** in size, seen by **many**, **realistic** in style, and represented **populist** themes. They were also part of an ancient Mexican **tradition** that dated back hundreds of years.

Three of the most important muralists were **Diego Rivera**, **Jose Clemente Orozco**, and **David Siqueiros**. All three of these muralists began to paint public murals that promoted a new Mexican **identity**. “They believed art must relate to life, and inspire people to make changes in their lives.” (Scott, p. 52)

Their murals:

- Glorified Mexico's native / indigenous history
- Portrayed Spanish / colonial exploitation
- Celebrated Mexico's natural beauty
- Celebrated the heroes of the revolution
- Celebrated the struggles and lives of common men and women
- Were easily understood by non-literate people
- Presented a populist view of history

(Show the overhead transparencies – discussion of the contrasts. 10 min)

(Show video *The Frescoes of Diego Rivera* – 10 min)

Carpa Theatre –

Performing arts – carpa theatre – was another way in which the values of the Mexican revolution were spread. Carpa actors were both amateur and professional, but shared a belief and desire in and for a **better society**.

Carpa theatre groups moved from town to town and set up in the town square or the middle of a street. They presented a variety show that had music, skits and comedy, and was directly related to the daily life experiences of their audiences. Often times, carpa groups would be hired by trade unions to assist with **union organizing**. Carpa theatre groups would perform in the fields where workers were working, or next to industrial job sites when workers would be getting off work.

The Mexican Carpa theatre groups influenced groups in the United States, particularly the work of **El Teatro Campesino**. Teatro Campesino formed as a part of Cesar Chavez' United Farm Workers, a union of Mexican **migrant farmworkers** in California. The carpa style is still used in union organizing or to support labor strikes.

Carpa theatre is:

- itinerant,
- portable (they had no stages, but would perform under a hastily erected tent, or “carpa”);
- free;
- used little or no props;
- portrayed exaggerated and stereotyped characters;
- addressed popular themes of common interest;
- used a lot of humor;
- were very entertaining;
- used multiple short sketches rather than a long involved story;
- always had a message.

(Present the Teatro Campesino Acto of “*Las Dos Caras del Patroncito*”.
Do a dramatic reading of the script – 15 min)