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Leopoldo Méndez, Revolutionary Art, and the Mexican Print:

In Service of the People

by

Deborah Caplow

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of**

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

1999

Program Authorized to Offer Degree: Art History

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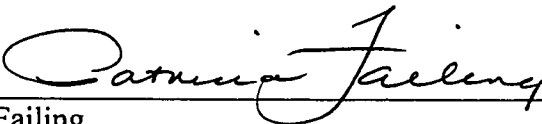
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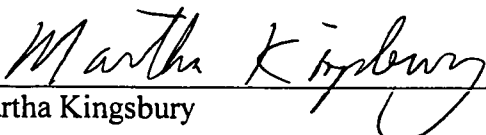
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Abstract

Leopoldo Méndez, Revolutionary Art, and the Mexican Print:
In Service of the People

by Deborah Caplow

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This dissertation situates the Mexican printmaker, Leopoldo Méndez (1902-1969), as a leading member of the Mexican art world of the twentieth century, revealing his central role in Mexican art and politics. His significance is demonstrated through analysis of his extensive body of politically motivated prints and his participation in a number of important art movements and organizations.

Méndez came to maturity in the dynamic artistic environment of post-Revolutionary Mexico. In the 1920s he participated in the Stridentist Movement, a group of Futurist and Dadaist-inspired avant-garde writers and artists, and produced prints with revolutionary themes.

In the late 1920s Méndez committed himself to leftist political action and refined his graphic skills. Méndez's participation in the Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios (LEAR), from 1933 to 1937, led him to develop a graphic idiom based on Mexican and international sources. Méndez was the first to adapt the style and motifs of José Guadalupe Posada to political printmaking, publishing satirical prints in LEAR's journal *Frente a Frente*. In LEAR Méndez evolved a new model of artistic practice based on the collective method and the production of prints and murals for the proletariat.

In 1937 Méndez was a founder of the Taller de Gráfica Popular (Popular Graphics Workshop, TGP), a collective printmaking workshop. Under Méndez's leadership the Taller created ephemeral political prints, portfolios of prints, illustrated books, and, from

the late 1930s to 1945, powerful anti-fascist and anti-Nazi images. The TGP became an international art center in the 1940s and 1950s. In the late 1950s, Méndez turned to publishing fine art books that reproduced the paintings of the Mexican muralists, prints by Posada and folk art.

This dissertation demonstrates that Méndez deserves to be considered a major figure in the history of twentieth-century art because of the high quality of his work and his leadership in the creation of modern Mexican art.

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Chronology: Life and Work of Leopoldo Méndez

I am indebted to the chronologies provided by Raquel Tibol in *Leopoldo Méndez 1902-1969*, Francisco Reyes Palma in *Leopoldo Méndez: Oficio de grabar*, and Rafael Carrillo Azpeitia in *Leopoldo Méndez: Dibujos, grabados y pinturas*, and to Elena Poniatowska's interview of Méndez, "60 Años de Leopoldo Méndez." The following dates and details are a compilation of their research and my own.

1902

Méndez was born June 30th, Mexico City. His mother, María López, who was from a rural, indigenous background, died when he was less than a year old. His father, Luis G. Méndez, was a carpenter with progressive, Maderista convictions, whose own father had died fighting against the French during the time of Maximilian (1860s). Leopoldo Méndez was raised by his father, siblings and aunts. The most attentive of his relatives was his Aunt Manuela.

1914

As a child in a public school in Mexico City, Méndez spent time drawing with his schoolmates. A drawing by Méndez of General Venustiano Carranza was published in the newspaper, but attributed to his drawing teacher.

1917-1919

Studied drawing and painting at the Academy of San Carlos. His teachers were Germán Gedovius, Leandro Izaguirre, Saturnino Herrán, Ignacio Rosas, and Francisco de la Torre. Fellow students included Antonio Ruíz, Julio Castellanos, Rufino Tamayo, Agustín Lazo, Fermín Revueltas, Gabriel Fernández Ledesma and Francisco Díaz de León.

1920-1922

Studied painting and printmaking at the Escuela de Pintura al Aire Libre (EPAL) in Chimalistac and Coyoacán. Also contributed drawings to magazines and newspapers, in particular *Zig-Zag*, a progressive magazine published by Pedro Malabehar.

1923

Worked as a substitute manual arts and drawing teacher in the Mexico City elementary schools, from March to November, using the system developed by Adolfo Best Maugard, based on the seven elemental motifs from pre-Hispanic art and Mexican folk art. Joined the Stridentist Movement, working on the journal *Irradiador*, the first of many collaborative projects with the Stridentists, along with Manuel Maples Arce, Germán List Arzubide, Germán Cueto, Fermín Revueltas, Ramón Alva de la Canal, Jean Charlot, and others.

1924

Continued to work with the Stridentists, participating in an exhibition at the Café de Nadie. Worked as an assistant to a stage designer, Tarasona.

1925

Along with others of the Stridentist group, Méndez moved to Jalapa, where Maples Arce secured work for his companions with the progressive government under Governor General Heriberto Jara. The group began to publish the journal, *Horizonte*, with illustrations by Méndez and Alva de la Canal. Except for Maples Arce, the members of the group lived together in a small house in Jalapa.

1926

Illustrated the first edition of *Zapata Exaltación* by List Arzubide, with drawings, paintings and woodcuts.

1927

Designed the cover for the second edition of *Zapata Exaltación* and the cover of *El Movimiento Social en Veracruz* by Maples Arce. Left Jalapa for Veracruz when General Jara fell in a political coup.

1928

Lived in Veracruz, where he worked with Dr. Ignacio Millán on the journal *Norte*, which attempted to keep the spirit of Stridentism alive. Through Millán Méndez found work dissecting rats at the harbor to see if they carried plague, the "most unpleasant job I ever had." Illustrated the cover of *Un Fragmento de la Revolución* by Praxedis Guerrero and Enrique Barreiro Tablada, using imagery similar to that of *Zapata Exaltación*.

1929

Joined the Communist Party of Mexico (Partido Comunista de México, PCM), at that time a small organization with fewer than 100 members. Participated in a demonstration by the Unión de Trabajadores de la Compañía Terminal del Puerto de Veracruz (Union of the Workers of the Terminal Company of the Port of Veracruz) in conjunction with the Liga Anti-Imperialista de las Américas (the Anti-Imperialist League of the Americas) to protest the murder of Julio Antonio Mella and in support of the revolutionary forces of Sandino in Nicaragua. Directed a political conference sponsored by this group. Left Veracruz for Mexico City, where he joined the Agoristas, a group of Communist artists and writers, and contributed his woodcut, *La Revolución Que Hace Arte*, to the cover of a book of poems presented by the Agoristas in an exhibition of poetry in the Carpa Amaro (Amaro circus tent). Signed up with the Cultural Missions, and spent nine months in San Pedro Tlaquepaque and Ameca, in the State of Jalisco, teaching art to rural school teachers and their students. Worked as a teacher of popular arts in Cultural Mission workshops in Chalco, Ixtapalapa, Ixtlahuaca, and Mexico City. Worked for the Secretaría de Educación Pública (Ministry of Education, SEP) on their publications, *El sembrador* and *El maestro rural*. Met artist Pablo O'Higgins, with whom he maintained a life-long, collaborative friendship.

1930

Traveled to the United States by automobile with List Arzubide, Carlos Mérida and an unnamed third companion. In Los Angeles Méndez and Mérida had an exhibition at the

politically progressive bookstore-gallery of Jake Zeitlin. Illustrated *La corola invertida*, by María del Mar, published by the author in Mexico City, and *The Gods in Exile*, by Heinrich Heine, published by Ampersand Press in Los Angeles.

1931

Along with Juan de la Cabada, O'Higgins and Siquieros, Méndez founded the Lucha Intelectual Proletaria (Intellectual Proletarian Struggle, LIP), which lasted only a few months. They published one issue of *La llamada* (*The Call*), illustrated with Méndez's woodcut, *Arte Puro*.

1932

Appointed Director of the Section of Drawing and Plastic Arts of the Ministry of Education (SEP), at the beginning of the year. Was concurrently a member of the newly formed Consejo de Bellas Artes (Council of Fine Arts) of the SEP along with Tamayo and Best Maugard. The three artists were asked to design reforms in the Escuelas de Pintura al Aire Libre. Started an open printmaking workshop in the SEP building. The Council of Fine Arts rejected Méndez' proposals for the integration of drawing and puppet theater arts into the school art curriculum later in the year, and Tamayo took over his position as Director. Kept a teaching position and continued to work on puppet theaters with Teodoro Méndez, Germán Cueto, Lola Cueto, Graciela Amador, Angelina Beloff and other colleagues. Held an exhibition at the Art Institute of Wisconsin with Mérida. Had his first one-person show, *17 Grabados de Leopoldo Méndez* (*17 Prints by Leopoldo Méndez*) at the Galería Posada in Mexico City. The brochure for the exhibit included a short introductory essay by Jorge Juan Crespo de la Serna.

1933

Along with de la Cabada, O'Higgins and Luis Arenal, Founded the Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios (League of Revolutionary Writers and Artists, LEAR), an activist organization that came to include almost all politically concerned artists, writers and intellectuals in Mexico City between 1933 and 1938. Exhibited his work at the Milwaukee Art Institute.

1934

Held a temporary position as a painting teacher at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas (School of Plastic Arts) in Morelia, Michoacán. Painted murals there at the Morelia Museum and the College of San Nicolás (now destroyed). Began working as a contributing editor and artist for *Frente a frente*, the periodical of LEAR. Illustrated *Corridos de la Revolución* (*Corridos of the Revolution*) by Celestino Herrera Frimont. Contributed to *El Mauser* (*The Mauser*) a newspaper for Communists in the military and police forces.

1935

Produced a series of woodcuts for LEAR, including *Hoja Popular No. 1*, *Inscríbese*, and *Como Pretenden*. Began teaching in the Taller-Escuela de Artes Plásticas of LEAR.

1936

Began working with Vicente Lombardo Toledano, who appointed him Director of the Department of Cultural Esthetics and Journalism at the Universidad Obrera. Painted a mural, *Gaseado o La Guerra y el Fascismo* (*Gassed or War and Fascism*) at the Talleres Gráficos de la Nación (now destroyed), with a team of painters from LEAR that included O'Higgins, Alfredo Zalce, and Fernando Gamboa. Participated in a number of exhibitions through LEAR, two in Mexico City, one in Guadalajara, and another in February at the ACA Gallery in New York as part of the American Writers' Congress.

1937

Painted murals, now destroyed, in Morelia with a team of LEAR painters, including O'Higgins, Marion and Grace Greenwood, and others. Participated in the Congreso Nacional de Escritores y Artistas in January. Presented the opening speech for LEAR's exhibit *Exposición Colectiva de Artes Plásticas* (*Collective Exhibition of Plastic Arts*) at the Palacio de Bellas Artes. Took part in the exhibition *Un Siglo de Grabado en México* (*A Century of Prints in Mexico*) sent to Republican Spain by LEAR. The exhibit traveled to Barcelona, Madrid and Valencia. With O'Higgins, Arenal and Raúl Anguiano, Founded the Taller de Gráfica Popular (Popular Graphics Workshop, TGP), a collective printmaking workshop. Working collaboratively and individually, the members of the TGP produced political prints for leftist causes as well as images that celebrated Mexican culture. Méndez was active in the Taller from 1937 to 1959. The LEAR and TGP co-produced the *Calendario de la Universidad Obrera* (*Calendar of the Workers' University*) for the year 1938. Began working with the journal *Futuro*, the periodical of the Universidad Obrera.

1938

Opened a workshop for the TGP on Calle Cuauhtémoc. In July the TGP moved to Calle Belisario Domínguez. Contributed three lithographs to the TGP portfolio, *La España de Franco* (*Franco's Spain*), which had other lithographs by Arenal, Anguiano and Guerrero. With other TGP members, produced a series of lithographs for the Liga Pro Cultura Alemana, advertising their fifth lecture series on Nazi propaganda and espionage at the Palacio de Bellas Artes. Created the linoleum print satirizing the oil industry, *Con una Piedra Se Matan Muchos Pájaros* (*With One Stone You Can Kill Many Birds*).

1939

Produced the portfolio, *En Nombre de Cristo* (*In the Name of Christ*), in a run of 3,200 copies, based on the murders of 200 or more rural school teachers by fanatical Catholic campesinos between 1936 and 1938. The series was used by the Department of Fine Arts of the SEP as part of the campaign against the Cristero Movement. Traveled to the United States for nine months on a Guggenheim grant. Married Andrea Hernández.

1940

Worked as a printmaking teacher in the TGP's summer art courses for Americans. Was imprisoned for a brief time in conjunction with Siqueiros's failed assassination attempt against Trotsky. Produced *Con Una Piedra Se Matan Muchos Pájaros* (*With One Stone One Kills Many Birds*) and *Nueva York* (*New York*).

1941

His position with the Escuela de Artes Plásticas (School of Plastic Arts) of the SEP ended and he began a new position under the Dirección General de Educación Artística Extraescolar y Estética (The General Section of Extracurricular and Esthetic Artistic Education).

1942

Designed the tombstone of Tina Modotti, with a memorial poem by Pablo Neruda. Created the wood engraving, *La Carta (The Letter)*, the lithograph *Mariscal S. Timoshenko, Sus Triunfos Son los Nuestros (Marshall S. Timoshenko, His Triumphs Are Our Own)*, and the linoleum prints, *La Venganza de los Pueblos (The Vengeance of the People)* and *Deportación a la Muerte (Deportation to Death)*, and *Calavera de Stalingrado (Calavera of Stalingrad)*, all of which were published in *El libro negro del terror nazi (The Black Book of Nazi Terror)* in April, 1943.

1943

Participated in the publication of *El libro negro del terror nazi*, produced by Hannes Meyer. This book, a collaboration between leftist European exiles and Mexican intellectuals, was one of the earliest works anywhere to document Nazi atrocities in texts, photographs, prints and drawings. Illustrated the cover of the book *Das Siebte Kreuz (The Seventh Cross)* by Anna Seghers, then living in Mexico as a refugee. Published a portfolio, *25 Prints of Leopoldo Méndez*, through La Estampa Mexicana, the TGP's publishing house. The TGP moved to the Calle Regina.

1944

Became the center of a political controversy when the gallery Decoración refused to hang his print *El Gran Atentado (The Great Attempt)*, a portrayal of the attempted assassination of President Avila Camacho. La Estampa Mexicana published *Incidentes melódicos del mundo irracional (Melodic Incidents of an Irrational World)* with forty wood engravings and scratch board illustrations by Méndez and text by Juan de la Cabada. Contributed illustrations to the periodical, *Tricolor*.

1945

Began work in the government's literacy campaign. Created his self-portrait, *Amenaza Sobre México (Menace Over Mexico)*, also called *Lo Que Puede Venir (That Which Could Happen)* for an exhibition of 140 of his prints at the Art Institute of Chicago, at the request of Carl Schniewind, Curator of Prints and Drawings at the Art Institute. *Incidentes Melódicos* was awarded the prize as the best illustrated book of the year at the IV Feria del Libro (Fourth Book Fair). The TGP moved to Calle Quintana Roo.

1946

Méndez and O'Higgins painted a mural in the Hospital Numero 1 del Instituto del Seguro Social (Hospital Number One of the Social Security Institute), called *La Maternidad y la Asistencia Social (Maternity and Social Assistance)* (now destroyed). Left or was

expelled from the Communist Party. Along with Enrique Ramírez y Ramírez and José Revueltas, also recently expelled from the PCM, formed a new organization, Grupo Insurgente José Carlos Mariátegui, which published a periodical, *El Insurgente (The Insurgent)*, to which Méndez contributed illustrations.

1947

Became a founding member of the Partido Popular (Popular Party), after taking part in the Mesa Redonda de los Marxistas Mexicanos (Roundtable of Mexican Marxists), a political conference organized by Lombardo Toledano. Established a new relationship with the Instituto de Bellas Artes (Institute of Fine Arts, INBA), in which he could substitute prints for teaching, the works of art to be incorporated into the collection of the Bellas Artes. Over the years Méndez contributed 250 prints to the collection. The Estampa Mexicana published *Estampas de la Revolución Mexicana, 85 grabados del TGP (Prints of the Mexican Revolution, 85 Prints of the TGP)*. Made the linoleum print, *Hambre en la Ciudad de México en 1914-1915 (Hunger in Mexico City in 1914-1915)* and the woodcut *El Embajador Wilson Arregla el Conflicto (Ambassador Wilson Arranges the Conflict)* for the portfolio. Created a drawing of Juárez used for a poster. Created enlarged prints as backdrops for a UNESCO conference in Mexico City. Made ten linoleum prints for Emilio Fernández's film *Río Escondido (Hidden River)*.

1948

Traveled to the Congress of Intellectuals for Peace in Wroclaw (now Breslau), Poland, where he met Picasso, among others. Traveled to Czechoslovakia, Italy, France, England and Germany. Brought an exhibition of the TGP to Prague and Warsaw; another exhibition of the TGP was presented in Lisbon and Paris. In Méndez's absence the TGP moved to new quarters on the Calle Netzahualcoyotl. Participated in the conference of the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina (Confederation of Latin American Workers) in Mexico City and contributed prints for a TGP album on the occasion of the conference. Made ten linoleum prints for Emilio Fernández's film *Pueblerina*. Created the print *Calaveras Aftosas con Medias Nylon (Calaveras with Foot and Mouth Disease in Nylon Stockings)*.

1949

Participated in the production by the Estampa Mexicana of *El TGP, Doce años de obra artística colectiva (The TGP, Twelve Years of Collective Artistic Work)*, for which he wrote the prologue and Hannes Meyer the introduction. Created a large-scale mural (twenty-four square meters) on plastic, *Jugando con Luces (Playing with Lights)*, based on the refraction of electric light, for the pavilion of the Nacional Financiera (National Finance Company) at the Exposición Objetiva del Gobierno de México (Objective Exposition of the Government of Mexico), in the National Stadium. Paid homage to his friend Silvestre Revueltas in a woodcut, *Silvestre Revueltas Muerto (Silvestre Revueltas in Death)*. Made *Ora Si No Hay Tortillas (Hey, So There are No Tortillas)*. Contributed eleven prints to the filmstrip, *Quiénes Quieren la Guerra, Quiénes Quieren la Paz? (Who Wants War, Who Wants Peace?)* for the Bryant Foundation, Los Angeles.

1950

Increased his involvement in the international peace movement, gathering signatures for the Stockholm-based Call for Peace. Worked on the TGP's brochure, *Queremos Vivir* (*We Want to Live*) for the Comité Mexicano por la Paz (Mexican Committee for Peace). Created five linoleum prints for Emilio Fernández's film *Un Día de Vida* (*One Day of Life*), and thirteen linoleum prints for Salvador Toscano's film, *Memorias de un Mexicano* (*Memories of a Mexican*).

1951

Wrote the introduction for an exhibition of Polish prints, *El Grabado y el Libro Polaco* (*The Polish Print and Book*) at the Palacio de Bellas Artes.

1952

In November Méndez was awarded the International Peace Prize of the World Council of Peace in Vienna. Created six woodcuts for the film by Roberto Galvadón, *El Rebozo de Soledad* (*The Rebozo of Solitude*). Went to Aguascalientes to begin a mural on the life and work of Posada, on the hundred-year anniversary of Posada's birth, but the governor of the state, who had commissioned the mural, died, and his replacement did not continue the funding of the project.

1953

Created a large-scale mural (sixteen square meters) on plastic for the Automex automobile factory. Visited the Soviet Union. Made five linoleum prints for Emilio Fernández's film *La Rosa Blanca* (*Momentos de la Vida de José Martí*) (*The White Rose* (*Moments from the Life of José Martí*)).

1954

Made five linoleum prints for Emilio Fernández' film, *La Rebelión de los Colgados* (*The Rebellion of the Hanged*), based on the novel by B. Traven.

1955

Ran (unsuccessfully) for municipal office as a candidate of the Partido Popular.

1956

Made a photographically enlarged, large-scale mural print, *José Guadalupe Posada*, now destroyed, at the Talleres Gráficos de la Nación. Participated in a TGP portfolio, *Grabados del TGP*. The Mexican Embassy in Cuba sponsored an exhibition of his work, *40 Grabados de Leopoldo Méndez* (*40 Prints of Leopoldo Méndez*), which traveled to various cities in Cuba.

1957

Created a backdrop for an homage to Garibaldi in the Palacio de Bellas Artes.

1958

Began to plan for the establishment of the Fondo Editorial de la Plástica Mexicana (Mexican Art Publishing Company), involving the photographer, Manuel Alvarez Bravo, the writer Carlos Pellicer, the politician and writer, Rafael Carrillo Azpeitia, and the director of the Banco Nacional de Comercio Exterior, Ricardo J. Zevada. Obtained the support of President Adolfo López Mateos. Left the Partido Popular.

1959

Withdrew, though not entirely, from the TGP, in the face of increasing sectarian dissension among the younger members. Went to the Netherlands for most of the year with José Sánchez and Alvarez Bravo, to supervise the production of *La Pintura de la Revolución Mexicana* (*The Painting of the Mexican Revolution*), a large-format book about the work of the Mexican muralists. Made a print for Gavaldón's film, *Macario*.

1960

Was awarded the Premio José Guadalupe Posada (José Guadalupe Posada Prize) in printmaking at the Segunda Biental Interamericana de Pintura, Grabado y Escultura de la Ciudad de México (Second Interamerican Biennial of Painting, Printmaking and Sculpture of Mexico City). Won a silver medal for *Madre* (*Mother*) and *El Rebozo* (*The Rebozo*) in the Primer Certamen Latinoamericano de Grabado (First Latin American Competition of Printmaking) in Buenos Aires.

1961

Made three prints on plastic for Gavaldón's film, *La Rosa Blanca* (*The White Rose*), about the nationalization of the oil industry in 1937. Left the TGP officially.

1962

The Instituto de Bellas Artes arranged an *homenaje* (homage) for Méndez on the occasion of his sixtieth year, with a retrospective exhibition at the Museo Nacional de Arte Moderno (The National Museum of Modern Art). *Artes de México* published a long interview of Méndez by Elena Poniatowska, with numerous reproductions of Méndez's work. Traveled to the Soviet Union to attend the National Congress of Art.

1963

Edited the book, *José Guadalupe Posada: Ilustrador de la Vida Mexicana* (*José Guadalupe Posada: Illustrator of Mexican Life*), published by the Fondo de la Plástica Mexicana.

1964

Began but did not complete a 32-meter-square graphic mural for the Otomí hall of the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City. Created thirty etchings for *A la Orilla de Este Río* (*On the Banks of This River*), an autobiography by Maples Arce.

1965

Participated in the Segunda Biental Americana de Grabado (Second American Printmaking Biennial) in Santiago, Chile.

1966

Made four lithographs for Emilio Fernández's film, *Un Dorado de Pancho Villa*. Gave up the TGP archives to current members of the TGP, after which many prints were sold and the archives broken up.

1967

Exhibited in Gallery Villa Caliente in San Diego, California.

1968

Was a cofounder of the Academia de Artes (Academy of Arts). Sold 280 prints and 300 drawings to collector Salomón Marcovich.

1969

Finished editing and producing *Lo Efímero y Eterno del Arte Popular Mexicano (The Ephemeral and the Eternal in Popular Mexican Art)*, a major book about Mexican folk art, subsequently published by the Fondo de la Plástica Mexicana in 1971. Died on February 8th of liver cancer.

1970

The exhibition, *Leopoldo Méndez, 1902-1969*, in honor of the artist, took place at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Patricia Failing for her guidance throughout my graduate training and for her encouragement in this and other projects. Her careful reading of my dissertation and many thoughtful suggestions have been essential to its completion. I am also grateful to Martha Kingsbury for her valuable advice, and to Susan Casteras, whose kind help has been most appreciated. Special thanks to Mary Ellen Anderson for her assistance in this long process.

I am especially grateful to generous friends in Mexico: Mariana Yampolsky and Arjen van der Sluis, whose friendship and help were immeasurable; La Familia List -- Eric List Eguiluz, Adi Crespo de la Serna Weber, Gilberto Crespo de la Serna Iglesias, Doris Weber Uher, Eric List Crespo de la Serna and Robin List Crespo de la Serna, for their gracious hospitality and warm friendship as well as the encouragement they gave me in my research. I would like to thank Francisco Reyes Palma for insightful discussions about Leopoldo Méndez and other related subjects, as well as for his brilliant writings about Mexican art history. Alfredo Zalce, Alberto Beltrán and Arturo García Bustos, former members of the Taller de Gráfica Popular, kindly gave their time and shared their memories with me. I am grateful that I had the opportunity to meet and talk with José Sánchez, Germán List Arzubide and Gabriel Figueroa, who generously agreed to be interviewed and who are no longer living. I would also like to thank Pablo Méndez, whose recollections of his father provided valuable insights; Mireya Cueto, daughter of Lola and Germán Cueto and puppeteer par excellence; and María O'Higgins, widow of Pablo O'Higgins, who kindly gave me her time and assistance.

Jules Heller, Seymour Kaplan and Stan Kaplan, former guest members of the TGP, have also shared their memories of Méndez and the Taller with me. Jules and Seymour have been astonishingly generous with their time and have shared valuable written and visual materials with me. The scholarly work of Helga Prignitz-Poda has also been an inspiration to me throughout my research and writing.

I appreciate the Instituto de Artes Gráficas de Oaxaca for allowing me to photograph the Leopoldo Méndez collection, and Ricardo Pérez Escamilla for giving me access to his private library. I am also grateful for the support I received from the University of Washington in the form of Chester Fritz and University of Washington Dissertation Grants, which enabled me to conduct my research in Mexico City during 1995.

I would especially like to thank my mother, Barbara Caplow, for her love and attention, and Harriet McNeal for her fond encouragement and gently motivating words. I am grateful to my father, Theodore Caplow, who inspired my love of art history and scholarship. Thanks also to my sisters Dorothy, Florence and Julie Caplow and Julie Evered, and my brothers Peter, Ted and Jim, whose presence in my life has made everything seem more possible. I would also like to thank Christine Allen for her thoughtful kindness. Francine Loeb has helped me and seen me through my work, as have Arlene Gillis, Paul Hoskin, Richard Isaac and Jane Saxton. I couldn't have done it without them.

Most of all I am grateful to Jim and Alice.

Introduction:

In 1971, when the celebrated Mexican painter David Alfaro Siqueiros was working on the Polyforum Cultural Siqueiros (Siqueiros Cultural Polyforum) in Mexico City, he painted a wall of portraits of the great artists of the twentieth century in Mexico, commemorating fifty years of Mexican muralism. The six artists were the muralists Diego Rivera (1886-1957), José Clemente Orozco (1883-1949), and Siqueiros himself (1898-1974); the painter Dr. Atl (Gerardo Murillo) (1875-1964); and the printmakers José Guadalupe Posada (1852-1913) and Leopoldo Méndez (1902-1969) (fig. 1). All these artists had major roles in Mexican art in the twentieth century and were associated with the Mexican mural movement. The discourses in which they participated form the basis of a history of art in Mexico in the twentieth century. The inclusion of Méndez in Siqueiros's pantheon is significant -- in spite of the shifting loyalties, sectarian arguments and polemics that characterized his career, near the end of his long and turbulent life Siqueiros set aside his personal differences to formulate a clear visual conclusion about the most important twentieth-century Mexican artists. His recognition of Méndez's significance coincides with the opinions of many of their peers, although Méndez has remained in relative obscurity both in Mexico and elsewhere.

Méndez participated in a wide variety of historically important art movements and projects in Mexico between 1920 and 1969. He was a political activist, printmaker, painter, art teacher, and designer and publisher of art books. In the 1920s Méndez created paintings and prints as an integral member of the Stridentist Movement, a group of avant-garde Mexican artists, and in the 1930s he was one of the founders of two important arts organizations, the Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios (League of Revolutionary Artists and Writers, LEAR), and the Taller de Gráfica Popular (Popular Graphics Art Workshop, TGP), where he produced an extensive body of politically motivated graphic

work. In 1958 Méndez founded and directed the Fondo Editorial de la Plástica Mexicana, a major art book publishing company through which he produced a number of extremely high-quality books about Mexican art. Méndez worked tirelessly throughout his life to support mutually held goals of a generation of Mexican artists, remaining faithful to concepts of art and artist developed during the early days of post-Revolutionary art in Mexico, when artists began to see themselves as active participants in a new society, responsible for communicating their ideology to the people and helping the oppressed masses achieve political and economic equality. Méndez worked in the context of a Mexican artistic renaissance and, in conjunction with his fellow artists, constructed political and historical meaning through a rich vocabulary of images that became inextricably linked to his time and place. Méndez's graphic work, his illustrations for books, broadsides, posters, leaflets, films and fine art prints, formed an alternate practice to the murals of Mexico, equally significant and worthy of attention. His involvement with the art of the book in Mexico extended from his first Stridentist illustrations in the mid-twenties, to the prize-winning illustrated book, *Incidentes melódicos del mundo irracional* (*Melodic Incidents of the Irrational World*) of 1944,¹ to his impressive accomplishments in art book publishing at the end of his life, when he turned from making his own art to promoting the cause of Mexican art. His monumental books on the muralists, Posada, pre-Columbian art and Mexican folk art are unsurpassed in quality to the present.

This dissertation will provide the first comprehensive, analytical overview of the activities and work of Méndez. My study will examine the significance of Méndez's art and activities in the major art movements in which he was an important player. I will present a reevaluation of his work, situating it in the context of twentieth-century

¹ Juan de la Cabada, *Incidentes melódicos del mundo irracional: 40 grabados originales de Leopoldo Méndez*. Mexico City: La Estampa Mexicana, 1944.

Mexican art and politics, and analyze his role in the creation of a new model of Mexican political art. My dissertation will demonstrate that Méndez is a primary figure in the history of twentieth-century Mexican art, and by extension, in modern art in general. This study is intended to bring the work of Méndez to the attention of North American, European and Latin American audiences. While much of the information gathered here will be familiar to scholars of Mexican art, I present new material on Méndez's work in Mexican political art that will provide insights for any reader interested in the subject. I hope to shed light on Méndez's immense contribution to the art of Mexico by interpreting the varied and complex strategies by which he created a visual history of his time and place.

At the end of the Mexican Revolution in 1920, the artists of Mexico were presented with an unusual set of opportunities and challenges. An undeveloped country, rich in tradition and history, Mexico experienced an artistic and cultural renaissance of unprecedented proportions, consciously generated by a community of creative, revolutionary intellectuals. Almost all significant artistic production took place in Mexico City, where the arts were oriented toward collective activity, and the important politically motivated art movements began there, although there were regional affiliations and manifestations of these movements. In addition, most professional art education took place in Mexico City, where many artists, including Méndez, formed associations that lasted throughout their lifetimes. Méndez belonged to a generation of young artists who emerged into this situation in the 1920s and, as Siqueiros testified, he played a role in the development of a Mexican political art and a modern Mexican cultural identity that is equal to more well-known artists in the twentieth century, such as Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros himself. He was part of a large group of engaged, politically motivated artists who came to maturity together and worked in a number of governmental and artistic organizations for their entire careers. During the 1920s and '30s a powerful unity of

purpose and activity developed among the artists and intellectuals of Mexico, and, in spite of notable political complexities that often divided them into ideological factions, an atmosphere of collaboration and mutual interest prevailed to an extraordinary degree. Leftist politics brought a large number of artists together, and Méndez was a key figure in this world, although he claimed no individual credit and tended to stay in the background. His affiliations grew to include intense collaborations with many artists and political organizations in Mexico and international connections with leftist artists and intellectuals in the United States, Europe and South America. During the 1930s and '40s Méndez worked closely with the community of European exiles in Mexico on a number of anti-fascist artistic projects. After the Second World War and into the 1950s and 1960s he continued his international collaborations, focusing on the cause of world peace. The significance of these efforts was recognized when he was awarded the International Peace Prize by the World Council of Peace in Vienna in 1952.

Because of his adherence to social, political and aesthetic ideals originally associated with the Mexican Revolution, his lack of desire for personal fame, and his de-emphasis on the self, Méndez is in many respects more representative of the ideal of the "Mexican artist" as imagined in post-Revolutionary cultural discourse than more famous artists like Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros. Méndez believed that artists should work collectively and anonymously, not for personal gain, but for the benefit of society. He lived out this belief more consistently than the well-known muralists, and participated fully in the progressive artistic circles of his time. Though never widely known, Méndez has been highly respected in Mexico, and in Mexican scholarship he is often referred to as the direct successor of José Guadalupe Posada, whose satirical prints of skeletons and other folk motifs have provided a ubiquitous model for Mexican artists since the 1920s.

Méndez's personal background was consistent with the popular myth of the anonymous worker-artist from a humble environment: his father, a political radical, was a

shoemaker, and his mother was of indigenous Nahuatl heritage, originally from a village outside Mexico City, in the state of Mexico. Méndez's heritage, therefore, was that of both working class and campesino, two groups that were of paramount importance in the iconography of post-Revolutionary art in Mexico. Almost from the first Méndez identified with the working class in his art, and made class issues a central theme of his work. Although he was an artist and an intellectual, Méndez remained working class in economic terms. He opposed the concept of making art for profit, and his financial circumstances were exceptionally modest throughout his life. For Méndez, the true value of his art was in its social usefulness, not in its value as a commodity. He produced art collaboratively to further political aims, and chose a style of figurative realism over abstraction, thus consigning himself to a narrowly viewed art-historical category of socially motivated realist art. In determining to work as a political artist, Méndez was subject to forces that impelled him to deal with difficult imagery that included themes of violence and oppression. Positioning himself in opposition to injustice, fascism and war, he became embedded in a discourse of power relationships, in which he constantly strove to reveal the effects of those relationships in society. He saw the artist as an active social agent, whose obligation it was to protest against what he/she believed was wrong. He was on the leading edge of art practice in Mexico because he made it his life's work to portray important events as they happened, and because he was able to represent the most salient aspects of those occurrences with a high degree of technical skill and imaginative ability.

In addition, Méndez exhibited an unusually adept stylistic control, altering the appearance of his prints to suit his material and audience. He was an exceptionally versatile artist, with an extraordinary aptitude for distilling the most significant aspects of the subjects he portrayed into strong, expressive images. Although Méndez considered himself a realist, his work was highly imaginative, incorporating influences from Cubism, Italian Futurism, German Expressionism and Surrealism. He was not generally drawn to

Soviet-style socialist realism, although he produced several images that emulated the Soviet style, and his prints were distinctly different in appearance from those of American social realists of the 1930s, whose works were less confrontational and more generic in their criticism of social conditions than were his prints. Méndez employed a wide range of art historical sources in his work, including Pre-Columbian, Renaissance and Baroque art, nineteenth-century Mexican painting, Mexican vernacular art, especially the work of Posada, and contemporary European art. He was also influenced by the conventions of theater, cinema and photography. Méndez's ability to incorporate these sources into his work increased during his career, so while his early prints are lively, inventive and powerful, the prints from his middle and later years are richly layered, complex images.

There are several reasons why Méndez has not been widely appreciated. His collaborative approach and his own wish to remain in the background have certainly contributed to his lack of recognition. In addition, the printmaking medium is generally not accorded the high status of painting or sculpture, and does not traditionally have a high market value. Those artists who are known for their printmaking, like Rembrandt, Dürer and Goya, are included in the canon of art history primarily because of their paintings, while printmakers like Käthe Kollwitz, who did not produce paintings, are much less well known. Also, many of his best works, as politically motivated objects, had an ephemeral quality.² His posters and broadsides were timely and topical and not intended to be preserved, and his book illustrations were not designed to be displayed as autonomous art objects.

²The momentary quality of political prints produces an ironic situation in the present. Curators at the Library of Congress and the University of New Mexico, for example, are currently collecting as much of the work of the Taller de Gráfica Popular as they can. The ephemeral materials, oddly enough, have great value now, because of their rarity, and because of the history of their use. Méndez and his associates did make fine art prints as well, and this produced a double audience, the workers and political activists on the one hand, and bourgeois collectors (museums, libraries, galleries and individuals) on the other. Currently the value of Mexican political prints is increasing rapidly as renewed interest in this medium and its rarity create a collection value.

While in the 1940s many American museums and private individuals in the United States, Mexico and Europe purchased Méndez's fine art prints, after 1950 his work was not always collected with the same fervor as his production waned and political art was devalued in the art market. As art historian Eva Cockcroft points out, in the United States in the 1950s Mexican political art was reassessed as "nationalistic" and direct attacks on capitalism were classified as propaganda.³ In general, mainstream modernist art criticism and art history in the United States have marginalized representational political art since the late 1940s, and only recently have critics and art historians taken political art as a serious topic for discussion. In Mexico, political subject matter has never been rejected by artists, art critics or art historians, although after the 1950s succeeding generations of artists came to view the work of their predecessors, the muralists and political printmakers, as historically determined and old-fashioned.⁴ Méndez's obscurity to the general art public in Mexico may have more to do with the privileging of painting over printmaking and his self-effacing policy of anonymity than with the content and quality of his work.

European and American art history and criticism have also relegated Mexican art to a marginal position, reducing the subject to only a few major figures, usually Rivera, Siqueiros, Orozco, Rufino Tamayo and, more recently, Frida Kahlo. Twentieth-century Mexican art during Méndez's lifetime was much more than the work of these painters, and the high quality of art production in Mexico included many other art forms that are almost unknown outside of the country. Within Mexico, the major muralists, Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros, were only one part of a large group of painters, printmakers, photographers, cinematographers, architects, musicians, composers, dancers, actors,

³Eva Cockcroft, "The United States and Socially Concerned Latin American Art: 1920-1970," in Bronx Museum of Art, *The Latin American Spirit: Art and Artists in the United States*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1988), p. 191.

⁴For a discussion of this issue, see Shifra Goldman, *Contemporary Mexican Painting in a Time of Change* (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 15-22.

writers and sculptors who, often working in concert, created a vital and powerful artistic milieu. Their innovative work created a dynamic cultural environment and their influences extend into Mexico's contemporary culture today.

Recent examinations of Méndez have emphasized the high quality of his work and his keen sensitivity to world events, as well as his ingenious blending of signs and symbols to express political conditions.⁵ These qualities were also recognized during his lifetime and afterward by his friends and colleagues in Mexico and in other countries. In Mexican art scholarship Méndez is always mentioned as an important figure, often on an equal footing with Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros, and yet very little in-depth documentation of his life and work exists. He was an artist of immense skill and imagination, and left a large body of graphic work that is important both artistically and historically. Yet there have only been two studies of his life and work in Mexico until now: the 1970 *Leopoldo Méndez*, a short biographical account by Méndez's friend, the writer Manuel Maples Arce;⁶ and *Leopoldo Méndez: Oficio de Grabar*, a brief, insightful study by art historian Francisco Reyes Palma, which also presents short excerpts from Méndez's published writings and private notebooks.⁷ In 1963, Mexican writer, Elena Poniatowska published an in-depth interview with Méndez that serves as the best single primary written source on Méndez.⁸ A 1981 exhibition catalogue, *Leopoldo Méndez: Artista de un pueblo en lucha*, brought together a number of short texts about Méndez by his colleagues, as well as excerpts of his writing.⁹ Along with Reyes Palma's *Leopoldo*

⁵The most recent of these studies are: Jules Heller, *Codex Méndez: Prints by Leopoldo Méndez (1902-1969)* (Phoenix, Arizona: Arizona State University Art Museum, 1999); and Francisco Reyes Palma, *Leopoldo Méndez: Oficio de grabar* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional Para La Cultura y Las Artes, 1994).

⁶Manuel Maples Arce, *Leopoldo Méndez* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1970).

⁷Reyes Palma, *Leopoldo Méndez*. Méndez's notebooks exist somewhere in Mexico; unfortunately, I was not able to gain access to them. They may be in the possession of his son, Pablo Méndez, but he was vague about their location when interviewed.

⁸Elena Poniatowska, "Los 60 años de Leopoldo Méndez," *Artes de México*, no. 45 (July 1963): pp. 2-20.

⁹*Leopoldo Méndez: Artista de un pueblo en lucha* (Mexico City: Centro de Estudios Económicos y Sociales del Tercer Mundo, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1981).

Méndez: Oficio de grabar, which has excellent illustrations, a large-scale book of reproductions of his prints, drawings and paintings, *Leopoldo Méndez: Dibujos, Grabados, Pinturas*, published by the press Méndez established, illustrates a wide selection of his work.¹⁰ A recent catalogue, *Codex Méndez: Prints by Leopoldo Méndez (1902-1969)*, written by scholar and printmaker Jules Heller, is the first monograph on Méndez in English.¹¹ This work was published in March 1999, in conjunction with Arizona State University Art Museum's *Codex Méndez*, the only large-scale exhibition of the artist's work in the United States since the 1940s. An examination of the general literature on Mexican art of the twentieth century yields a small amount of information about Méndez, from a paragraph to a few pages. Articles in journals and newspapers, published when the artist was alive, or shortly after his death, are numerous and have also provided useful information.

An authoritative 1992 study of the Taller de Gráfica Popular by German art historian, Helga Prignitz-Poda, *El Taller de Gráfica Popular en México 1937-1977*, represents many years of scholarship by Prignitz-Poda on the organization that Méndez founded and in which he worked for more than two and a half decades.¹² The Taller documented its own work of the period from 1937 to 1949 in a comprehensive, illustrated 1949 survey, *TGP México: El Taller de Gráfica Popular: Doce años de obra artística colectiva/The Workshop for Popular Graphic Art: a record of twelve years of collective work*.¹³

In addition to material about Méndez and the Taller de Gráfica Popular, a number of scholars have published significant works relevant to this study on Mexican art of the

¹⁰Rafael Carrillo Azpeitia, *Leopoldo Méndez: Dibujos, grabados, pinturas* (Mexico City: Fondo Editorial de la Plástica Mexicana and Nacional Financiera, 1984).

¹¹ Heller, *Codex Méndez*.

¹²Helga Prignitz-Poda, *El Taller de Gráfica Popular en México 1937-1977* (Mexico City, INBA, 1992).

¹³Hannes Meyer, ed., *TGP México: El Taller de Gráfica Popular: Doce años de obra artística colectiva/The Workshop for Popular Graphic Art: a record of twelve years of collective work*, introduction by Hannes Meyer, prologue by Leopoldo Méndez (Mexico City: La Estampa Mexicana, 1949).

post-Revolutionary period. Reyes Palma's 1984 *Historia social de la educación artística en México (notas y documentos)* and art historian Laura González Matute's 1987 *Escuelas de pintura al aire libre y centros populares de pintura* both review the history of art education in Mexico in the 1920s and '30s. Reyes Palma has examined the history of the Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios and its publication, *Frente a Frente*, in two articles, his 1989 "Radicalismo artístico en el México de los años 30: Una respuesta colectiva a la crisis," and the 1984 "La LEAR y su revista de frente cultural." Art historian Alicia Azuela's 1993 "El Machete and Frente a Frente: Art Committed to Social Justice in Mexico" compares *Frente a Frente* with *El Machete*, a publication of the early muralists. *El nacionalismo y el arte mexicano*, a collection of essays from the 1986 IX Coloquio de Historia del Arte of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, provides useful information on the post-Revolutionary period in Mexican art in such essays as Esther Acevedo's "Las decoraciones que pasaron a ser revolucionarios," Azuela's "Educación artística y nacionalismo (1924-1934)," and Raquel Tibol's "El nacionalismo en la plástica durante el cardenismo." Tibol has also compiled a number of important original documents in her 1974 *Documentación sobre el arte mexicano*, and has written a study of printmaking in Mexico, *Gráficas y neográficas en México* of 1987. A catalogue of the 1991 exhibition, *Modernidad y modernización en el arte mexicano 1920-1960*, includes insightful essays about the construction of modern art in Mexico after 1920, such as Karen Cordero Reiman's "Ensueños artísticos: Tres estrategias plásticas para configurar la modernidad en México, 1920-1930," and Reyes Palma's "Vanguardia: Año cero," along with essays by art historians Olivier Debrouse, Rita Eder, Ana Isabel Pérez Gavilán, Teresa del Conde, Luis Martín Lozano and Jorge Alberto Manrique.¹⁴ Historian Luis Mario Schneider, the leading scholar of the Stridentist

¹⁴References for these sources include: Francisco Reyes Palma, *Historia social de la educación artística en México (notas y documentos)* (Mexico City: INBA/SEP, 1984); Laura González Matute, *Escuelas de*

Movement, has compiled information and documents concerning this movement in his 1983 *El estridentismo: Antología*, *El estridentismo: México 1921-1927* and *El estridentismo o una literatura de la estrategia* of 1970.¹⁵ Schneider's works are primarily oriented toward the written aspects of the movement. Joël Audefroy's unpublished 1996 manuscript about the Stridentist Movement, "Stridentopolis 1921-1929: Essai sur une avant-garde au Mexique," is a valuable overview of the written and visual work of the Stridentists, although the author does not analyze individual works in depth.¹⁶

In Mexico City I was able to study the Instituto de Bellas Arte's Leopoldo Méndez Archives, a source of written documents concerning Méndez, with material by Méndez and others. I was also able to gain access to the personal archives of Germán List Arzubide, and the private libraries of Mariana Yampolsky, Arturo García Bustos, Ricardo Pérez Escamilla and Richard Kempe. The Instituto de Artes Gráficas in Oaxaca allowed me to examine and photograph their large collection of Méndez prints and drawings.

In addition, between 1995 and 1999 I have been able to interview a number of people who knew Méndez personally: Alfredo Zalce, Alberto Beltrán, Mariana

pintura al aire libre y centros populares de pintura (Mexico City: INBA, 1987); Francisco Reyes Palma, "Radicalismo artístico en el México de los años 30: Una respuesta colectiva a la crisis," *Artes plásticas: Revista de la Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas* 2, no. 7 (December 1988-February 1989): pp. 5-10, and "La LEAR y su revista de frente cultural," in Centro de Estudios del Movimiento Obrero y Socialista, A. C., *Frente a Frente: Edición facsimilar* (Mexico City: Centro de Estudios del Movimiento Obrero y Socialista, A. C., 1984); Alicia Azuela "El Machete and Frente a Frente: Art Committed to Social Justice in Mexico," *Art Journal* 52, no. 1, (Spring 1993): pp. 82-87; Alicia Azuela, "Graphics of the Mexican Left," an expanded version of "El Machete and Frente a Frente," in Virginia Hagelstein Marquardt, ed., *Art and Journals on the Political Front, 1910-1940* (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 1997), pp. 246-248; Esther Acevedo, "Las decoraciones que pasaron a ser revolucionarios," Alicia Azuela, "Educación artística y nacionalismo (1924-1934)," Raquel Tibol, "El nacionalismo en la plástica durante el cardenismo," in *El nacionalismo y el arte mexicano* (IX coloquio de historia del arte) (Mexico City: UNAM, 1986); Raquel Tibol, *Gráficas y neográficas en México* (Mexico City: SEP/UNAM, 1987), Raquel Tibol, *Documentación sobre el arte mexicano* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1974); Museo Nacional de Arte, *Modernidad y modernización en el arte mexicano 1920-1960* (Mexico City: INBA, 1991).

¹⁵Luis Mario Schneider, ed., *El estridentismo: Antología* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1983); Luis Mario Schneider, *El estridentismo: México 1921-1927* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1985); and Luis Mario Schneider, *El estridentismo o una literatura de la estrategia* (Mexico City: INBA, 1970).

¹⁶Joël Audefroy, "Stridentopolis 1921-1929: Essai sur une avant-garde au Mexique" unpublished manuscript (Mexico City: n. p. 1996).

Yampolsky, Arturo García Bustos (all members of the Taller de Gráfica Popular); the writer Germán List Arzubide; Gabriel Figueroa, the Mexican cinematographer; Gilberto Crespo de la Serna, son of the writer and critic Jorge Juan Crespo de la Serna; Mireya Cueto, daughter of Germán and Lola Cueto; José Sánchez, the TGP's printer; María O'Higgins, widow of painter/printmaker Pablo O'Higgins; art critic Raquel Tibol; and Pablo Méndez, Méndez's son. List Arzubide, Sánchez and Figueroa have all since died. In the United States I interviewed printmakers Jules Heller, Seymour Kaplan and Stan Kaplan, guest artists at the Taller de Gráfica Popular in the 1940s. All those interviewed remembered Méndez as a warm companion and an inspiring artist of high integrity.

While the written works on Méndez have provided valuable information and perspectives on the artist and his milieu, they offer, at most, brief analyses of his work. In addition to my interviews, archival research and a study of the publications to which Méndez contributed illustrations and written statements, I was able to gain insights on the art and career of Méndez through a careful examination of his production dating from the 1920s to the 1960s. My study is the first to examine the whole range of Méndez's artistic output in the context of the art and politics of his time, analyzing demarcations in his career that have not been previously noted. I will demonstrate how the stylistic and iconographic development of his prints paralleled local and world events, and outline the clear and consistent aesthetic trajectory he followed in the service of his leftist political ideals. Accordingly, this dissertation is organized chronologically, considering Méndez's work in terms of the significant stages of his career. In the process I discuss almost 100 graphic works by the artist, a representative proportion of the approximately 700 prints Méndez created during his lifetime. I will also examine several painting and publishing projects by the artist. My analysis of Méndez's work will consider his influences and sources and will provide a number of comparisons with other significant work, both Mexican and European. Most Méndez scholars stress the influence of Posada, for

example, but this study will be the first to explore specific stylistic and conceptual relationships between the works of Posada and Méndez. I will also be presenting new interpretations of Méndez's position in the Stridentist Movement, the avant-garde, Futurist-inspired literary and artistic movement in which Méndez participated from 1923 to 1927. My chapter on the Stridentist Movement is the only in-depth examination of Stridentist visual artists in English to date. Schneider's work, which is only available in Spanish, focuses primarily on the writers of the movement. Audefroy's "Stridentopolis 1921-1929: Essai sur une avant-garde au Mexique" does include the visual artists of the movement, but this unpublished manuscript is not readily accessible to researchers. The only written material in English about Stridentist art is a five-page article in *Artforum*, "The Stridentists," by French art historian Serge Fauchereau, which offers only a limited view of the visual artists of the movement.¹⁷ The information presented in my dissertation on the artists of Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios (League of Revolutionary Writers and Artists, LEAR) is also a unique contribution. Reyes Palma and Azuela have studied LEAR and *Frente a Frente* in great depth, but they have not presented lengthy analyses of the LEAR's visual production or the work of individual artists. There is virtually nothing in English about LEAR except for Azuela's articles on *Frente a Frente*. There are also no published sources that focus on the powerful anti-fascist and anti-Nazi images created by Méndez and his colleagues or on the remarkable *El libro negro del terror nazi* (*The Black Book of Nazi Terror*) and the contributions to that work by the artists of the Taller de Gráfica Popular.¹⁸ Méndez's film images have not been studied in any depth, nor have his significant achievements in art book publishing been examined previously.

¹⁷Serge Fauchereau, "The Stridentists," *Artforum* 26, no. 6 (February 1986): pp. 84-89.

¹⁸*El libro negro del terror nazi* (Mexico City: El Libro Libre, 1943).

This dissertation will not focus on Méndez's personal life, for several reasons. The most obvious is that there is a distinct lack of detailed information concerning his private life; he seems to have kept his domestic sphere separate from his artistic practice, and there is little in the written record about his emotional experiences or intimate relationships. There are few published photographs of the artist, three of which I have included here (figs. 2-4). In addition, Méndez worked collaboratively during most of his career, and so his creative endeavors were part of a collective process, in relation to the groups in which he was a major player. Méndez did not position his activities within the modernist rubric of the artist as a solitary, creative genius. He functioned instead as an exemplar of an inspirational social and political mythology, subsuming his individuality within a broader collective project. Méndez concentrated the qualities of the modern political artist, acting in relation to the forces of history. He produced most of his art in the context of public, political activity, and as a consequence, most of his prints can only be understood in terms of his dedication to purposes defined and outlined by the ideologies and practices of the movements to which he belonged.

Although specific published information about Méndez himself is limited, visual and circumstantial evidence of his participation in the artistic community of his time is very extensive, so this study of Méndez's work and activities from 1919 to 1969 will provide a unique understanding of Mexican art and politics. My analysis of Méndez's art in the context of his participation in important artistic groups and political activities will attempt to widen a narrow view of Mexican art that has prevailed in the United States, and to a lesser extent in Mexico, since 1920. Méndez's life and work are part of a larger story, which is itself only one strand of many histories in Mexican art. The story of Mexico's revolutionary graphic art and Méndez's central role in that story have both been overlooked, and deserve a new examination. This is the most comprehensive examination

of the work and career of Méndez to date and I hope that it will serve as a base for further study for other scholars.¹⁹

I have divided this dissertation into nine chapters. In the first chapter I present a brief overview of Méndez's childhood, his education at the Academy of San Carlos and the Open Air Painting Schools of Chimalistac and Coyoacán. I also provide extensive background information about the dynamic post-Revolutionary cultural period in which Méndez and his peers came of age, and during which the discovery of Posada and other forms of Mexican art, the Mexican mural movement, and the first experiments in printmaking took place.

The second chapter explores the Stridentist Movement, the energetic and innovative efforts of writers and artists to invent new art forms in Mexico and Méndez's place in this unique avant-garde group. I address Méndez's progression toward political graphic art at this time.

In the third chapter I examine a transitional period between 1927 and 1933, when Méndez explored a number of artistic and political avenues, including graphic work, teaching art, puppetry and book illustration. In this stage Méndez was developing both his skill as a printmaker and his ideological affiliations, in the process of becoming a mature, politically concerned artist.

Chapter Four concerns Méndez's experiences in LEAR, his involvement in LEAR's publication, *Frente a Frente*, the production of a number of confrontive political prints for LEAR, and the establishment of an art school for both artists and workers. This chapter also focuses on significant national and international political developments, such

¹⁹I will not discuss the non-political art of the period addressed, work by such painters as Tamayo, Kahlo and María Izquierdo, although that is another important history, because the greatest impetus in Mexican art during Méndez's lifetime came from the desire to use art as a weapon, to advance the cause of leftist political forces and to fight against reactionary power. The expression, "art as a weapon," originated with Diego Rivera: "Since the proletariat has need of art, it is necessary that the proletariat take possession of art to serve as a weapon in the class struggle." Diego Rivera, "The Revolutionary Spirit in Modern Art," *Modern Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (Autumn 1932), in David Shapiro, ed., *Social Realism: Art As a Weapon* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1973), p. 57.

as LEAR's participation in the Proletarian and Popular Fronts, support for President Lázaro Cárdenas and LEAR's participation in the American Artists' Congress. In addition, I discuss Méndez's central role in the development of a new model of Mexican political art based on graphic political images and collective working methods.

In the fifth chapter I examine the formation and early years of the Taller de Gráfica Popular, Mexico's most influential printmaking workshop. In these years the members of the TGP, with Méndez as a strong leader, produced collaborative, anti-fascist graphic work. Méndez's traveled to the United States on a Guggenheim fellowship, and the unity of the collective was strained by the incident in which Siqueiros implicated the members of the collective in his failed attempt to assassinate Leon Trotsky. Siqueiros initiated the first of a number of attacks on the Taller, criticizing the collective for failing to acquire an off-set press to mass-produce political prints. The Taller was further disrupted by internal disagreements about the pricing of its work and the first resistance to Méndez's leadership of the collective. This period concluded with the departure of a number of members in 1940, leaving a core group of six printmakers.

The sixth chapter concerns the war years, during which Méndez and other members of the TGP lent their efforts to the production of numerous anti-Nazi images, including their collaboration with European exiles in Mexico, the prints for *El libro negro del terror nazi*, a book that documented the atrocities that the Nazis were committing throughout Europe. In this chapter I also discuss Méndez's illustrations for the book *Incidentes melódicos del mundo irracional*. Méndez's *Amenaza sobre México* (*Menace over Mexico*), his remarkable self-portrait of 1945, is a profound examination of the historical situation of Mexico and Méndez's own position as an artist at the close of the war. I end the chapter with analyses of two additional images that expressed his hope for a more peaceful world.

The subject of Chapter Seven is the stable middle period of the TGP after the war, with Méndez's leadership established clearly, new members of the Taller and many guest artists from around the world. During this period, Méndez produced several inventive, cinematic *calavera* prints and began making images to be used in films. The Taller summarized its twelve years of existence in *TGP México*, and Méndez and other members of the Taller focused on labor union and anti-war activities and images. Méndez was expelled from the Communist Party in 1946 and joined the Partido Popular in the following year. The Cold War began to make an impact on the Taller at the end of the 1940s and the collective established strong international ties with socialist countries as their access to the United States was curtailed by American foreign policy.

In Chapter Eight I discuss the slow dissolution of the Taller, through conflicts over political affiliations and Méndez's role in the TGP, including the unfortunate controversy generated by the peace prize Méndez received in 1952. Although Méndez's production of prints was greatly reduced in this period, he created two impressive, unusually large-scale prints, *The Making of Tortillas* and *Homage to Posada*, that demonstrated his mastery of the graphic medium.

Chapter Nine, the last chapter, examines the work of Méndez in the Fondo Editorial de la Plástica Mexicana, the fine art book publishing company he started in 1959. This chapter also concerns the departure of Méndez from the Partido Popular, the sponsorship of the publishing company by the president of Mexico, Méndez's refusal to protest the imprisonment of Siqueiros, and the last, definitive break with the much-changed Taller. I examine Méndez's final images, including his complex images for the film *La Rosa Blanca*. This chapter ends with Méndez's death in 1969.

Because so much of this dissertation concerns visual political commentary, it is useful to preface these chapters with a brief summary of Mexican history. The themes of Mexican art in the first half of the twentieth century were both local and international.

The obvious, primary focus for the artists of the post-Revolutionary generation was on the creation of a national art, centered around the great dramas of Mexican history: the Conquest of Mexico in 1521, the Wars of Independence from Spain from 1810 to 1821, the progressive presidency of Benito Juárez from 1858 to 1872, the French invasion of Mexico under Maximilian from 1864 to 1867, the long, despotic dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz from 1876 to 1911, and finally, the Mexican Revolution, a complex, bloody civil war that lasted from 1910 to 1920.

The Mexican Revolution, the most recent and the most immediately significant of these histories, was the formative event in the lives of Méndez and most of the artists who came to maturity during the 1920s. Because the Revolution was so dramatic and cataclysmic, the major players in the Revolution took on a mythic stature, and inspired Mexico's artists to create an ongoing narrative in which the Revolution and its promises were always present. Seven historical figures, heroes and villains, stood out in the procession of victory and defeat that was the Revolution; their stories were later the basis of much of the narrative and iconography of not only Méndez's work, but of an entire generation of Mexican artists.

The drama of the Revolution unfolded in a cycle of violence. Porfirio Díaz was forced to leave Mexico in 1911, in the first rebellion of the Revolution, led by the liberal Francisco I. Madero. Madero, elected to office in 1911, was brutally murdered on the orders of General Victoriano Huerta, a former Díaz supporter, in 1913. Three forces combined to rid Mexico of Huerta: the campesinos of the state of Morelos, led by the charismatic agrarian reformer, Emiliano Zapata; the armies of the wild "Centaur of the North," Pancho Villa; and the forces of the aristocratic statesman-soldier, Venustiano Carranza. When they defeated Huerta in 1914, the three forces turned on each other. Carranza, the most politically sophisticated of the three, emerged as the victor and arranged to have Zapata murdered in 1919. Shortly afterward, Carranza's most important

general, Alvaro Obregón, rebelled against him and Carranza in turn was assassinated in a village hut on his flight from Mexico City to Veracruz. Obregón took office in 1920, instituting a period of relative peace in Mexico. Over a million people had lost their lives in the Revolution, and the country was ready for stability. The early 1920s were a time of welcome peace. The new government initiated a process of reconstruction that included vast educational projects, political restructuring, and the construction of a myth of national unity. Interest in Mexico's heritage, focusing on its indigenous aspects, became a dominant theme throughout Mexican culture. Initially the people of Mexico responded with great enthusiasm, only gradually coming to realize that corruption and oppression were a continuing condition of their political system. Pancho Villa was killed in 1924, and Obregón was assassinated by a fanatic Catholic in 1928, leaving all the main actors of the Revolution dead by 1930. It was in this atmosphere of spectacular drama that the artists like Méndez came of age and began to create a new national identity through the production of art.

The pattern of broken allegiance, betrayal, false friendship and assassination set during the Revolution, counterbalanced with the much-discussed but unfocused ideals of the Revolution, created a unique political and artistic milieu characterized by these tensions. The Revolution promised for Mexico a future that included agrarian reform, national control of natural resources, universal education, democratic equality, and the benefits of a modern society. During the 1920s the artists were the agents of a visual construction of the triumph of the Revolution and the future of Mexico, and later, in the 1930s and afterward, the critics of the successes and failure of Mexico's hopes. In Mexico artists and intellectuals held to the concept of the continuing, unfinished revolution, a vision of contemporary history that provided inspiration for much of Méndez's work. This view was reinforced by the awareness that the goals of the Revolution had not been met, combined with the belief that a real socialist revolution was

forthcoming. This concept of the continuing revolution was different from, but coincided with, the official government line that the State was continuing the work begun during and after the Revolution, an idea that was carried out by official rhetoric and symbolized by the successive names of the ruling party. Originally called the National Revolutionary Party (Partido Nacional Revolucionario, PNR) from 1929 to 1938, the PNR became the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (Party of the Mexican Revolution, PMR) from 1938 to 1946, and has been called the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI) from 1946 to the present.

In addition to their turbulent national history, Méndez and his colleagues focused on compelling international conditions, particularly the rise of fascism throughout the world in the 1930s, the Spanish Civil War, the Second World War and the Cold War. Artists in Mexico felt the urgent need to warn of the terror of fascism and to express the unwavering determination of the anti-fascist forces, and they were deeply affected by the divisions between capitalist and communist countries before and after the end of the Second World War. As an engaged, activist artist, Méndez created a significant body of art that responded to these historical forces from his earliest creative years in the 1920s to his death in 1969.

Chapter One: Méndez's Formative Years

It was against the dramatic historical background of the Mexican Revolution that Leopoldo Méndez passed his childhood and adolescence. He lived through the Revolution as a boy and entered the Academy of San Carlos while the war continued to rage. During his training at the Academy and in the experimental Open Air Painting Schools, and through his association with the painters of the Mexican mural movement, Méndez experienced the cultural and artistic renaissance that came with the years of peace in the early 1920s.

Childhood in Mexico City

Méndez was born in Mexico City into a working-class family. His mother died during his infancy and he was raised by his father, his seven siblings and two of his aunts. For a sensitive child, the war must have been traumatic; his intense political feelings as an adult originated in part from his experiences then. He had strong reactions to the *Decena Trágica*, the Ten Tragic Days, during which General Victoriano Huerta overthrew the elected president of Mexico, Francisco Madero, in a violent coup. In a 1963 interview with the Mexican writer, Elena Poniatowska, Méndez narrated the story of his political awakenings:

I was ten years old when the Decena Trágica ended with the treason of Victoriano Huerta and the murders of President Madero and Vice-President Pino Suárez. Then I experienced my first political lesson, on my head, without discussion: my brother Joaquín, six years older than I, hit me on the head with all his might, saying 'Maderista, watch out!' This while grenades that the reactionaries were exploding at the Ciudadela were going off over the roof. But my sympathies with Señor Madero were reaffirmed due to an unfortunate occurrence. They had sent me to the dive on the corner...to buy a bottle of beer...At the moment I was going into that depressing establishment, the carriage that was carrying the body of Señor Madero was going by. The proprietor of the bar was standing at the door...When the carriage had gone by, the man went back into his establishment,

hopping strangely up to his counter, where a fat woman, no longer young, was sitting. I went in behind the owner, who gave a tremendous slap on the top of the counter and yelled: 'Now yes, burn everything that smells of Madero!' In response there was a burst of laughter from the people in the bar and the fat woman. I left the place sad and confused, carrying a bottle full of beer. The scene engraved itself on my mind forever and my heart was wounded with red-hot iron. It's true, I feel it and see it as though it were today, in spite of the passage of so many years. Why did these things impress me so profoundly? Perhaps for the following reasons. My father was a passionate Maderista, anticlerical and with a hatred of the Spanish that he could not repress. The owner of the bar was a foreigner. Moreover, my father was also an anti-Porfirista with his own reasons and experiences for being so. In his youth he and his brother had been merchants in a mining town called El Oro and the chief of police had burned their store and made them flee. I had also seen the demonstrations of the poorest of the people running all over the city demanding the renunciation of Díaz and supporting Señor Madero. What stronger motives than these to be a Maderista?¹

Later in the Revolution, his family, like many others in Mexico, faced hunger at times when the war created shortages. He remembered another traumatic event. When the family ran out of food he had to go with his aunt Manuela, with cooking pots in hand, to scavenge for food at the carcass of a dead horse, an event he depicted in 1947, in his autobiographical print, *Hunger in the City of Mexico in 1914-1915* (fig. 203).²

In spite of the Revolution, his childhood was not entirely difficult. He went to primary school, where he showed an affinity for drawing. In 1914 his art teacher sent General Venustiano Carranza a drawing of him Méndez had copied from a photograph. Méndez remembered that the teacher sent General Carranza the portrait for his saint's day and that afterward it was published in a newspaper, with the credit given only to his teacher.³

¹ Poniatowska, pp. 6-7. (All translations of works in Spanish or French mine, unless noted.) *Maderistas* were supporters of President Francisco Madero, who was elected in 1911 and murdered in 1913 during *La Decena Trágica*, the Ten Tragic Days, during which General Victoriano Huerta directed a coup bringing down Madero's progressive government.

² Mariana Yampolsky, panel discussion, *The Taller de Gráfica Popular, 1937-1977*, "Printmakers' Charge," Annual Conference of the Southern Graphic Council, Phoenix: Arizona State University, March 18th, 1999.

³ Poniatowska, p. 6.

The Academy of San Carlos

In 1917 Méndez finished primary school and went directly to the Academy San Carlos in Mexico City. The Academy of San Carlos is the oldest academy of art in the Western Hemisphere, founded in 1785 in the heart of Mexico City.⁴ When Méndez entered the Academy the institution was in a time of great transition. From 1911 to 1913 an earlier generation of art students, including David Alfaro Siqueiros and José Clemente Orozco, rebelled against the academic conservatism of the school, forming the student-led Union of Painters and Sculptors, and striking against the Academy. In 1913, Alfredo Ramos Martínez, a painter who had studied in France, was appointed Director of the Academy and initiated an open-air school based on the theories of the French Barbizon painters. This school, located in the suburb of Santa Anita Iztapalapa, was the predecessor of the open-air painting schools in the 1920s, but the experiment in *plein-air* painting was cut short in 1914 by the victory of General Venustiano Carranza over Huerta and a subsequent change in the administration of the Academy.

In 1914 Ramos Martínez was replaced as director of San Carlos by the artist Dr. Atl (the Nahuatl pseudonym of Gerardo Murillo). Dr. Atl's influence on twentieth-century Mexican art was immense. Atl had studied art and traveled in France, Italy and Spain, from the 1890s to 1903, when he returned to Mexico. Siqueiros describes Dr. Atl's seminal role:

Dr. Atl, upon his return from Europe, initiated a campaign of proselytizing, though without concrete theoretic formulation, in favor of mural painting and the 'Mexicanization of art.' Atl was then a socialist of the Italian-Spanish type, or better yet, an anarcho-sindicalist. His aesthetic inquietudes paralleled his political

⁴Today San Carlos is still one of the most important art schools in Mexico, located in the same building as it was in the eighteenth century.

activities in the Casa del Obrero Mundial (House of the Workers of the World) against the oligarchic dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz.⁵

Atl was a strong supporter of Francisco Madero (1873-1913), who became the first democratically elected president of Mexico in 1911, at the beginning of the Mexican Revolution, even though Atl was further to the left politically than Madero. Art historian McKinley Helm credits Atl with being the first to introduce Communism to Mexican artists:

Any catalogue of the preachments which issued from the voice of Dr. Atl in the days when he cried in the Mexican wilderness should record that he was the first native painter to talk about Communism. Except for a tincture of Russian Communism filtering in chiefly from across the American border, the Mexican variety of communistic thought had been a local product, stemming not from Marx but from the Spanish legal tradition and the Indian way of life. Dr. Atl's Communism was in reality a kind of poetic, almost a biblical socialism.⁶

Atl was also passionate about Renaissance art, and extolled the virtues of Michelangelo to the students at the Academy.⁷ In 1910, during the celebrations marking the centennial of Mexico's independence from Spain, Atl was instrumental in arranging a large exhibition of the work of Mexican artists at the Academy of San Carlos as a Mexican alternative to the official government-sponsored exhibition of Spanish art. In addition, Atl took an interest in Mexican folk and popular art, practitioners of which were often organized into guild-like workshops. In fact, the guild system prevailed in Mexico well into the nineteenth century. In 1921 Atl organized the first important exhibition of Mexican folk art in Mexico City. The combination of his interests inclined Atl toward collective work on the guild model, as he opposed the conventions of academic art training. Before the

⁵ David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Cómo se pinta un mural* (Mexico City: Ediciones Mexicanas, 1951), p. 26.

⁶ McKinley Helm, *Modern Mexican Painters* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941), p. 12.

⁷ Jean Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance, 1920-1925* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 47.

Mexican Revolution, Atl organized students into a Centro Artistico, which, according to Helm, “painted houses and garden walls in provincial towns to earn money for tubes and brushes.”⁸ It was Atl who first thought of doing murals in the National Preparatory School, but his project was postponed permanently by the beginning of the Mexican Revolution. The artist and art historian Jean Charlot (1898-1979) quotes Atl’s words when Atl was, ironically, appointed director of the Academy:

Being the foe of academic institutions, how can I present a plan of reform, suggest a curriculum for a setup that I judge pernicious. I find myself in this dilemma; whether to propose that the school be scrapped, or else converted into a workshop geared for production, like any industrial workshop of today, or like all art workshops of all epochs when art flowered vigorously.⁹

When Carranza led his revolutionary army eastward from Mexico City during a temporary setback, Atl led a large group of art students to the city of Orizaba to fight alongside of Carranza, establishing the Academy of San Carlos in exile in Orizaba. According to Charlot, who participated in the Mexican mural movement during the 1920s, “Dr. Atl, a staunch foe of art for art’s sake, saw to it that the students missed nothing of the horrors that were a daily fare. Under Dr. Atl’s fierce tutelage, the art students were exposed to the horrors of war.”¹⁰

However, after 1915 the Academy returned to its traditional format, and from 1917 to 1920, when Leopoldo Méndez studied at the school, San Carlos was still under the domination of Neo-Classical artists. His teachers included the well-known and accomplished academic painters, Leandro Izaguirre and Germán Gedovius. Izaguirre employed a European academic style to portray historical Mexican subjects, such as his

⁸Helm, p.12.

⁹Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance*, p. 49.

¹⁰Jean Charlot, *Mexican Art and the Academy of San Carlos 1785-1915* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962), p. 164.

Torture of Cuauhtémoc (fig. 5), and Gedovius painted semi-Impressionist works, such as his *Mother from Tehuantepec* (fig. 6), which blends indigenous and European motifs in the domestic scene of mother and child. Méndez also studied under more innovative teachers like Saturnino Herrán, who painted indigenous and pre-Columbian subjects in a Symbolist-inspired style. *Our Gods* of 1916 (fig. 7), is a study for a mural Herrán intended to paint concerning the syncretic encounter between the Aztec and Spanish religions.

Before 1920 avant-garde art along European and American lines was virtually unknown in Mexico, despite reports from Rivera and Siqueiros, both of whom spent time in Spain and France in contact with contemporary European art movements. From 1909 to 1921 Rivera lived in Paris, where after a period of experimentation he became a leader of the “classical” Cubists, a group including Jacques Lipchitz, Gino Severini, Juan Gris, and André Lhote.¹¹ Siqueiros, in Europe from 1919 to 1922, also experimented with new art styles and ideas, coming to Paris in 1919 to meet with Rivera. In Paris the two Mexican artists discussed a new role for art in a post-Revolutionary Mexico. According to Siqueiros, they brought with them their respective political and formal concerns, reflecting their recent experiences :

In Paris I met Diego Rivera. Thus was produced the encounter between the new fervor and new ideas, of the young Mexican painters who had participated directly in the armed struggle of the Mexican Revolution, represented by me, and the very important period of formal revolution in the plastic arts of Europe, represented by Rivera.¹²

In 1921, when Siquieros published the first and only issue of the journal *Vida-Americana*, in Barcelona, he proclaimed a new movement in the arts of Latin America, in his “Tres

¹¹ Helms, Cynthia Newman, ed., *Diego Rivera: A Retrospective* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986), p. 45.

¹² Siqueiros, *Cómo se pinta un mural*, p. 27.

Llamamientos de Orientación Actual a los Pintores y Escultores de la Nueva Generación Americana” (“Three Calls of Present Orientation to the Painters and Sculptors of the New American Generation”). This manifesto, indebted to the rhetoric of Italian Futurism, states:

We extend a rational welcome to every source of spiritual *renewal* from Paul Cézanne onwards: the invigorating substance of *impressionism*, purifying *cubism*, in all its ramifications, the *futurism* which liberated new emotive forces... (Dada is still in its birth process)... We must give back their lost values to painting and sculpture, and at the same time endow them with new values... We must live our marvelous dynamic age!¹³

Unformed though Siqueiros’s credo was, it pointed to the new directions that Mexican art was about to take, and was a strong new voice directed at the artists of Mexico.

Nonetheless, while their reports from Europe were of interest to young artists and intellectuals in Mexico, it was not until Rivera and Siqueiros returned to Mexico in 1921 that they began to make a real impact on the artists there.

In spite of the upheavals of the Mexican Revolution, at the end of the ten-year war most visual artists received their educations at the Academy of San Carlos, often coming to Mexico City from the provinces to attend the prestigious school. Méndez and his classmates at the Academy were a slightly later generation than Rivera, Siqueiros and Orozco. Most of them, including Méndez, were too young to have participated in the Mexican Revolution, although they experienced its effects first-hand. They were a talented group of young artists, many of whom later became well-known muralists, printmakers and teachers. Erasto Córtes Juárez, a leading printmaker and member of the Taller de Gráfica Popular during the 1950’s, remembered this group:

¹³ Siqueiros, *Art and Revolution* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), p. 21.

Leopoldo and I formed part of that class of the Academy of San Carlos that consisted of: Fermín Revueltas, Julio Castellanos, Antonio M. Ruíz (el Corsito), Francisco Díaz de León, Gabriel Fernández Ledesma, Rufino Tamayo, Emilio Amero, Rosario Cabrera, Ricardo X. Arias, Agustín Romo de Vivar, Juan Campos...I think it was a magnificent class, now that the beloved companions have acquired undoubtable prestige through their works...Leopoldo Méndez and Julio Castellanos were the 'zocoyotes' ['cubs,' or mascots] of the group. Both of them soon acquired great prestige as they were always distinguished by their surprising talent and their great sensitivity.¹⁴

Córtés Juárez also recalled a time when the model for their clothed life drawing class did not show up. Méndez offered to model for the class in order not to waste time. The charcoal portrait of Méndez that Córtes Juárez made that day (fig. 8) is perhaps the only image of Méndez from this time. It shows a handsome, intense boy of sixteen, with an expression in accord with Córtes Juárez's description: "...eyes constantly alive, like his gaze, as a symptom of his personality, demonstrated his remarkable intelligence all through his valiant life."¹⁵

In keeping with the antiquated pedagogical methods of the Academy, Méndez acquired technical skills through copying plaster casts and figure drawing. He recalled his years in the Academy:

As to my formation, I consider that studying at San Carlos was good for me because we always had a live model. During the time that I was there, we studied and drew more than they did in later years. All of us took it very seriously, with more of a sense of responsibility. The classes began at eight in the morning and ended at ten at night. Julio Castellanos and 'El Corsito' Antonio Ruíz were my companions. We worked with real passion trying to resolve our problems, at times with good directions from our teachers and at times with no direction, because there are teachers whom one can call maestros and others who are just teachers. I can say that my maestros were Izaguirre, Herrán and Gedovius.¹⁶

¹⁴Erasto Córtes Juárez, "Recordando a Leopoldo Méndez," *TGP Año 1, Numero 0* (Mexico City), October, 1970.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Poniatowska, p. 7.

However, like his fellow students Méndez was probably frustrated by the conservatism of the art education he received. The vivid experiences of the Revolution the students had lived through and the rebellion of the art students from 1910 to 1915, along with information about art experimentation sent back from Europe via letters and publications, gave the students a new view of artistic practice that their experiences at the Academy did not support. They reacted against the academic training San Carlos offered, perceiving it as unnatural and outdated. The painter Rufino Tamayo, best known of the artists Díaz de León listed, expressed the anger and disappointment that the young students felt during this turbulent era:

As soon as I arrived at the school I perceived its poverty and mediocrity. I was not the only one to feel this repulsion, and soon a group of rebellious boys formed, among others, Agustín Lazo, Leopoldo Méndez and Francisco Díaz de León. Our rebellion was directed against a system of teaching that held that art had to be a servile copy of nature. We rebelled against the principles imposed by the academicians, for whom perspective was everything.... Together we made noise, we protested, we attacked the divinities of the moment, among whom was the maestro Germán Gedovius, a deaf-mute who taught us using signs. We also had the maestro Leandro Izaguirre, professor of a ridiculous course called 'Color Class.' Yes, in this class they showed us the colors, but they never told us the most important thing: how to mix them.¹⁷

The Open Air Painting Schools

After graduating from the Academy, Méndez continued his art education in the open-air painting schools, established through the innovative policies of José Vasconcelos, the new Minister of Education in the post-Revolutionary government of Alvaro Obregón, which lasted from 1920 to 1924. The new government of Mexico began

¹⁷Rufino Tamayo, "Tamayo por Tamayo," in Cristina Pacheco, *Luz de México: Entrevistas con pintores y fotógrafos* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1988), pp. 579-580.

a program of cultural and educational renovation in the interests of forming a national identity. Art historian Esther Acevedo describes this period of national redevelopment:

Without a doubt the reconstruction of the State was necessary after the conflict between factions during the Revolution. Nationalism served as an ideological-cultural instrument for those who were attempting to bring the country forward, legitimizing the process and giving it an influence on the organization of society. It thus filled a vital function in the passage from the barbarity of the Revolution to the civilizing task of post-Revolutionary reconstruction.

Throughout history societies that have tried to convert themselves into nations have needed to provide themselves with a cohesive and homogeneous identity. Upon Obregón's rise to power, Mexico had a recoverable past and a future open to the discourse of history.¹⁸

Vasconcelos, as one of the most important agents of the process of cultural nationalization, had a tremendous influence on Mexican artists. Before the Revolution he participated in the Sociedad de Conferencias (Society of Lectures) from 1906 to 1909 and the Ateneo de Juventud (Youth Athaeneum), from 1909 to 1914. These two organizations were forums for young radical intellectuals who opposed President Porfirio Díaz. The members of these groups were especially averse to the ideas of the *científico*, a group of positivist social thinkers who molded political policy in the Díaz regime. The members of the Sociedad de Conferencias and the Ateneo de Juventud studied European philosophy, reading works by such writers as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche and Miguel de Unamuno, and in particular Henri Bergson's *L'Evolution Créatrice*. They also held a series of public lectures and philosophical discussions. The study of these texts formed the basis for their humanistic approach to Mexican social and cultural policy, and many of them, including Vasconcelos, became important cultural leaders after the Mexican Revolution.¹⁹ From

¹⁸Acevedo, p. 174.

¹⁹Michael C. Meyer and William L. Sherman, *The Course of Mexican History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 561-562.

1909 to 1913 Vasconcelos took an active part in Francisco Madero's revolutionary movement against Díaz and served in Madero's government after Díaz's defeat. From 1915 to 1919 Vasconcelos joined Carranza's faction and participated in the highly complicated power politics that characterized the later phase of the Revolution. He supported the presidency of Obregón after the fall of Carranza and in 1921 Obregón appointed Vasconcelos as the first Rector of the National University. Vasconcelos turned all of his efforts to education and the eradication of illiteracy. According to art historian Francisco Reyes Palma:

Far from concerning himself with the problematic of high culture, the rector turned all of the efforts of his collaborators to the project of a literacy campaign, sustained by the voluntary participation of the reduced sector of the population that had achieved the privilege of the written word. At the same time he promoted an initiative to federalize education and implement a national educational system under the coordination of the Ministry of Public Education.²⁰

Later the same year, Vasconcelos assumed the post of first Minister of Education in the newly formed Secretaría de Educación Pública (Ministry of Education, SEP), and intensified his efforts to bring education to the masses of Mexico. He modeled his project on that of the missionary friars of sixteenth-century Mexico, sending "maestros misioneros" ("missionary teachers") to remote areas throughout Mexico to promote literacy and to train rural school teachers. At the same time Vasconcelos incorporated the theories of the Soviet Commissar for Public Education, Anatoly Lunacharsky, whose policies revolved around the creation of art in public spaces, cultural festivals, publication of books in large, inexpensive printings, and the construction of public libraries. Vasconcelos also looked to the example of the North American literacy movements, especially the pedagogical theories of John Dewey, and the promotion of public libraries

²⁰Francisco Reyes Palma, "La educación artística postrevolucionaria (1920-1934)," in *Historia del Arte Mexicano*, no. 96 (1982), pp. 117-118.

by the Carnegie Foundation.²¹ Vasconcelos created the new Ministry of Education with three branches, basing it on a combination of outside influences and his own intuitive inspiration:

I had my Law outlined in my mind. I had had it from the time of my exile in Los Angeles [In 1918, during the last months before the overthrow of Carranza by Obregón, Vasconcelos lived in Los Angeles for several months] before I dreamed of being Minister of Education, when I read what Lunacharsky was doing in Russia. I owe my plan to him more than to any other outsider...I drew it up in a few hours and corrected it several times, but the complete outline appeared to me in a single instant, like a flash of lightning which illuminates a design that is already there.

In a word, my plan set up a Ministry with branches all over the country, divided functionally into three great Departments: Schools, Libraries, and Fine Arts. Under the heading of Schools come all scientific and technical instruction in its various branches, theoretical as well as practical. The creation of a special department of Libraries was a permanent necessity, for the country was struggling along without serving the reader, and only the State can create and maintain such services, which are complementary to the school, the adult school, and schools for youths who cannot matriculate in secondary or professional schools. The Department of Fine Arts took under its wing -- starting with the teaching of singing, drawing, and physical education in all the schools -- all the institutes for more advanced work in the arts, such as the old Academy of Fine Arts, the National Museum, and the Conservatories of Music.²²

Leopoldo Méndez, then, graduated from the Academy of San Carlos at the precise moment that the arts and public education were becoming inextricably linked. The new Socialist government launched a massive project to establish universal public education at the beginning of the 1920s, creating, for the first time in Mexico's history, a nationwide system of free schooling. Between 1920 and 1930 the Mexican government built thousands of urban and rural schools and equipped them with teachers, books and supplies. Art education was a major component of the new education and the arts were elevated to a national necessity. An entire generation of new artists emerged from this

²¹Ibid., p. 118.

²²José Vasconcelos, *A Mexican Ulysses* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), pp. 152-3.

project, participating in the open-air painting schools, now centers of artistic experimentation rather than the Barbizon-inspired school of 1913. At the same time, the Institute of Fine Arts and the Ministry of Education were developing an inclusive art education system, providing, in addition to the open-air painting schools, workers' night schools and art education in the public schools.

In 1920 Alfredo Ramos Martínez was reinstated as the Director of the Academy of San Carlos. Continuing his interrupted attempt of 1913, he decided to revive open-air art education and founded the Escuela de Pintura al Aire Libre at Chimalistac as an alternative to the Academy. The Escuela de Pintura al Aire Libre (the Open Air Painting School, EPAL), also known as Casa del Artista (House of the Artist), was a new experiment in *plein-air* painting, now with a political emphasis based on Revolutionary ideas. Over the next few years other open-air schools were established in Coyoacán, Xochimilco, Guadalupe Hidalgo, Tlalpan, and Churubusco, all areas on the outskirts of Mexico City. The open-air painting schools were an innovative parallel to the Academy, and Ramos Martínez invited a group of young artists to join him in the new experiment. The schools were a welcome alternative for the generation that had just emerged from the Academy, with its continuing artistic conservatism. According to Reyes Palma: "With the Revolution, the country was different, but the Academy of San Carlos continued to be the same....In contrast to the chaos outside, notions of perspective ordered the world, with a mathematic precision."²³ At the Open Air Painting School at Chimalistac young artists were able to further their art training in a collegial, experimental atmosphere, working with the encouragement of the charismatic Ramos Martínez. Díaz de León recalled that:

Ramos Martínez was an extraordinary inspiration. In spite of his limited dialectic, he possessed a great ability to convince -- to make us see that the simplicity of our

²³Reyes Palma, *Leopoldo Méndez*, p. 7.

techniques, our unconventional painterly solutions and the devoted observation of Nature were the means to succeed in expressing our artistic concepts sincerely.²⁴

The first Escuela de Pintura al Aire Libre moved from Chimalistac to a disused hacienda in Coyoacán and then to a former monastery in Churubusco. At the end of 1920 the Escuela de Pintura al Aire Libre held its first exhibition in the Academy of Fine Arts, and in 1921 the open-air schools came under the auspices of the newly formed Instituto de Bellas Artes (Institute of Fine Arts), part of the Ministry of Education. Vasconcelos was a regular visitor to the School in Coyoacán and often brought eminent people with him to show them this unusual experiment.²⁵

Although Ramos Martínez urged the students to look to nature for inspiration, in reaction to the Neo-Classical art training still in effect in the Academy, the Escuela de Pintura al Aire Libre, unlike the 1913 open-air school, was not a Barbizon-inspired site of idyllic *plein-air* painting. Encouraged by Vasconcelos to promote the ideals of the new government and designed to include students from many social sectors, the school practiced a program of nationalistic and revolutionary art training. However, in the first phase, many of the students came directly from the Academy. Laura González Matute, in her study of the open-air-painting schools, describes the school in Chimalistac:

From the first moment this new school had all the characteristics the Schools of Open-Air Painting would have: leaving the students in complete freedom to create their works and to give them freely materials subsidized by the Ministry of Education, such things as canvas, rollers, brushes, paints and whatever else was necessary.²⁶

²⁴Francisco Díaz de León, *Catálogo de la exposición de las Escuelas de Pintura al Aire Libre* (Mexico City: INBA, 1965), p. 147.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶González Matute, *Escuelas de pintura al aire libre y centros populares de pintura* (Mexico City: INBA, 1987), p. 75.

In the open-air painting schools they developed a new mixture of styles and subject matter. According to art historian Sylvia Pandolfi:

This new democratic orientation responded to the ambitions of the youths who now were motivated to study visual arts by the new pedagogical approach being put into practice. Nevertheless, no one questioned Ramos Martínez's system: 'In order to create true art we must inevitably look to our own native values.'²⁷

The Escuela de Pintura al Aire Libre thus allowed young artists to develop outside of the Academy, and to experiment with innovative forms of expression. The few existing examples of art done in the open-air-painting schools by those artists who went on to have successful careers demonstrate a new interest in portraying the indigenous people of Mexico. This attitude would later be termed *indigenismo* (indigenism), a focus on indigenous people and culture that took hold early in the 1920s and influenced virtually all artists in Mexico at that time. In an open-air school painting by Díaz de León, *The Pottery Vendor* from 1922 (fig. 9), an Indian woman sits in a landscape, in front of an assortment of decorated pottery and lacquer vessels. She looks directly at the viewer, her face sad and worn. The work is painted in a semi-Impressionist style, while portraying completely Mexican subject matter. In addition to its indigenous subjects, the painting expressed the intense interest in Mexican folk art that arose in the post-Revolutionary period. Fernando Leal's *Campamento de Coronel Zapatista* (*Encampment of a Zapatista Colonel*) of 1920 (fig. 10), portrays a group of Zapatista soldiers and a *soldadera* (woman soldier or camp follower) seated on the ground as though at a picnic. They wear the typical clothing of the Mexican Indian, and the soldier in the center of the painting plays a harmonica, with his rifle at rest on his lap. The harmonica, an inexpensive and highly portable instrument, was often used by the troops during the Revolution. The Revolution

²⁷Sylvia Pandolfi, "The Mexican Open-Air Painting Schools Movement (1913-1935)," in Erika Billeter, ed., *Images of Mexico: The Contribution of Mexico to 20th Century Art* (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 1987), p. 125.

itself was distinguished by the production of hundreds of *corridos*, popular songs that were related to the battles and heroes of the Revolution, sung by the soldiers and their companions in the campgrounds of the Revolution. The central figure in the painting is further marked by the emblem of the Virgin of Guadalupe on his hat. Zapata's soldiers often wore on their hats images of the Virgin of Guadalupe, considered the guiding spirit of Mexico, and the inclusion of this symbol here, along with clothing, fruit and indigenous facial features constitutes a step in the making of a new iconography in Mexican art. Leal's painting combines indigenous and Revolutionary subject matter, and as Matute points out, the work is "...one of the first paintings that marks the beginnings of the thematic approach that characterized the Mexican school of painting."²⁸ Leal's son, Fernando Leal Jr., believes that the painting offers a new interpretation of the Indian, embedding the Zapatista soldiers in three phases of Mexican culture: the Pre-Hispanic, represented by the pottery; the Colonial, symbolized by the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe; and the Revolutionary, symbolized by the rifle. "This last is represented in the rifle that the Zapatista holds. This detail seems insignificant, but it is a complete innovation: before it was forbidden to paint armed Indians."²⁹ Matute concludes that:

The Indian, regardless of the marginal place that he always occupied in Mexican society, was, in the plastic work of the artists of the Open Air Schools of Painting, the hero, the new man, the image of Mexico, was taken up like a flag, or emblem of the new nation that arose after the revolutionary stage. Through the foment of nationalism, the putting into practice of a series of social reforms, the support of education, as well as the development of artistic practices, the State succeeded, in addition to satisfying certain demands of the people, in advancing its hegemony.³⁰

In addition to the nascent *indigenismo* of the new art practice, the new approach incorporated Post-Revolutionary ideals of national reconstruction and new ways of

²⁸González Matute, p. 83.

²⁹Fernando Leal, Jr., "Un retrato con palabras," in Pacheco, *Luz de México*, p. 3.

³⁰González Matute, p. 83.

looking at various aspects of Mexican culture, including indigenous folk art, the naive art of the provincial townspeople of Mexico and Mexican popular art from urban areas. Associated with the desire to provide universal education was a complex attitude toward the indigenous cultures of Mexico.

In the early 1920s artist and teacher Adolfo Best Maugard developed a curriculum for teaching drawing to Mexican children based on the shapes and lines of Pre-Columbian and Mexican Indian art. At the same time, one of the primary aims of Mexican education was to promote the assimilation of the indigenous population into a new, modern Mexican culture. Best Maugard published his *Método de dibujo: Tradición, resurgimiento y evolución del arte mexicano* in 1923, under the auspices of the Secretaría de Educación (Ministry of Education, SEP).³¹ This text contained a lengthy introduction by the writer José Juan Tablada, in which he explains the social function of Best Maugard's method in terms of the current national artistic and political developments in Mexico:

The three great factors that have occurred with the publication of this work are: the artists, one of whom created the philosophy that informs it; the people, who will receive stimulating examples and abstract lessons...and the State, that for the first time in the history of our culture involves itself economically and systematically in the relations between the artists and the people.³²

Best Maugard stressed formal and expressive qualities in the creation of art, seeing his method as a way of validating the vernacular traditions of Mexico and defining Mexican nationality, asserting: "Popular art is above all the synthetic expression of the soul of a people, of their tastes, their ideals, their imagination, their concept of life."³³ His method

³¹ Adolfo Best Maugard, *Método de dibujo: Tradición, resurgimiento y evolución del arte mexicano* (Mexico City: Departamento Editorial de la Secretaría de Educación, 1923).

³² José Juan Tablada, introduction to Best Maugard, p. x.

³³ Best Maugard, p. 14.

outlined formulas based on the simplification of all forms to combinations of seven basic motifs found in pre-Columbian art and Mexican folk art. The application of his method produced patterned and decorative paintings distinguished by a colorful, untutored appearance (fig. 11), similar to the highly stylized designs in Mexican pottery, weaving and lacquer ware.³⁴ However, Best Maugard did not introduce social, political or historical subject matter; instead he emphasized form and the individual imagination:

...all the effort of the artist is expressionistic, not impressionistic; he paints that which he wishes to express of his feeling, not what impresses his eyes in the environment. In this way an enormous field arises for true creations; in this way that which the artist paints is original, it is a work of his imagination or translation of his interior world, of his inheritance, and upon the disappearance of the fictive details of certain things, there remains the simplified, stylized object.³⁵

As art historian Karen Cordero Reiman has pointed out, the Best Maugard method coincided with the early stage of Mexican muralism. Like the images produced with Best Maugard's method, the first, experimental murals, Rivera's *Creation*, Siqueiros's *The Elements*, and Orozco's *Maternity* (figs. 12-14), all painted in 1923 in the National Preparatory School, had no overt political content. Instead, these murals expressed abstract concepts in European-influenced styles, drawing on Byzantine, Renaissance and Art Deco sources for inspiration. After 1923, the politicization of Mexican art increased in intensity. Best Maugard method's lack of political content and adherence to decorative style then limited it to an educative role, applied to art teaching in the schools.³⁶ Between 1919 and 1924 the method was introduced to over 70,000 Mexican school children in the

³⁴These basic design elements were a spiral, a circle, two half-circles curved around each other, an s-shaped line, a snake-shaped line, a zig-zag line, and a straight line, all of which could be combined with one another.

³⁵Best Maugard, p. 25.

³⁶Karen Cordero Reiman, "Ensueños artísticos: Tres estrategias plásticas par configurar la modernidad en México, 1920-1930," in *Modernidad y modernización*, p. 62. Cordero Reiman discusses the Best Maugard method as the beginning of a line of development that eventually led to the more "intimist," non-political work of Rufino Tamayo, Julio Castellanos, Agustín Lazo and others.

Mexico City area.³⁷ Later criticisms of the method emphasized its ornamental aspects. A 1934 article by Rivera in *Mexican Folkways* described the method as having a limited value:

Unfortunately Best's method, which was an intelligent, subtle and sagacious qualification on the line elements in the Mexican decorative arts, would have been of immense value in the industrial schools, the School of Fine Arts and, in general, in all the high schools for the guidance of the spirit toward the comprehension and estimation of the still existing remnants of Mexican art, to which invariably the society of this country, above all those incorporated into the occidental civilization, prefer the abominable examples of foreign trash. But Best's method, because it constitutes as someone has pertinently said, 'A shorthand for ornamental drawing,' was absolutely inadequate for developing the instinct and imagination of the child, for it did nothing more than imprison his personality within new molds.³⁸

The open-air painting schools made use of the Best Maugard Method, while incorporating Impressionist and Post-Impressionist European influences through Ramos Martínez's instruction. Eventually other forms of popular art made their way into the open-air painting schools. The students began to admire the paintings on the walls of *pulquerías* (bars that sold *pulque*, a kind of beer from the maguey cactus), Mexican folk art, ex-votos (small votive offerings painted on wood or tin) and the work of the printmaker José Guadalupe Posada. A painting by Gabriel Fernández Ledesma, *Primera Comunión* (*First Communion*) (fig. 15), painted while the artist was a student at the Open Air Painting School in Coyoacán in 1922, provides an example of the influence of vernacular culture. The child is painted simply, a central figure surrounded by religious symbols, in the manner of Mexican ex-votos, looking straight at the viewer as though herself a small image of a saint.

³⁷Cordero Reiman, p. 59.

³⁸Diego Rivera, "El Dibujo infantil en el México actual/Children's Drawing in Present Day Mexico," in English and Spanish, *Mexican Folkways*, Special Number, "Pinturas y dibujos de los niños de las escuelas primarias" (November 1934): p. 14.

Many of the students in the first phase of the open-air painting schools had been Leopoldo Méndez's companions at San Carlos, among them Díaz de León, Fernández Ledesma, and Ramón Alva de la Canal. Charlot and Fermín Revueltas, both of whom came from outside Mexico, also joined the school.³⁹ These students experimented in the visual arts, printmaking in particular, looking for new ways to express the emerging sense of national identity in Mexican art. When the school moved to Coyoacán, the student population began to include children and adolescents from middle-class and working-class backgrounds.

Méndez began to study at the Open Air Painting School in Chimalistac sometime in 1920, shortly after it was established, and continued to attend the school when it moved to Coyoacán in 1921. He apparently did not produce works with nationalistic subject matter at this point in his career, although the tendencies that were developing around him certainly must have made an impression. His work seems to have been more in keeping with the Impressionistic approach of Ramos Martínez, as he described doing landscapes at the Open Air Painting School:

I was the youngest of the students of the new school in Chimalistac directed by Ramos Martínez, and perhaps also the one with the most illusions and greatest curiosity. Studying there was useful to me because we began to see outside of the four walls of an enclosed studio. What was not good for me was that the only thing I could do was to paint static things and no teacher asked me to paint life and movement. I sat in front of the landscape without being able to see the human figure, animals. Fortunately I had to work to eat, and so I illustrated stories, poems and articles that my friends gave me, published in magazines and newspapers. These themes asked more of me than landscape.⁴⁰

Méndez's participation in the open-air painting schools as an advanced student undoubtedly included many theoretical discussions about the nature of art and the role of

³⁹Revueltas, though Mexican, had recently returned from Texas, where he had gone to boarding school.

⁴⁰ Poniatowska, p. 6.

the Mexican artist. According to a brief biography of Méndez by the writer Manuel Maples Arce, Méndez joined the other students at Chimalistac and Coyoacán with a “passion for *plein-air* painting.” Maples Arce recalled Méndez at that time: “He still lived in a world of sensory impressions, but as soon as he distanced himself from the aesthetic emotions of light and color he came to renew his vision, feeling the drama of Mexico.”⁴¹ Arce recounted that he and Méndez often talked at length about art then, and also that while traveling in Europe during the 1920s he sent Méndez books of art, drawings and Japanese prints.⁴² Although no images produced by Méndez survive from his time in the Open Air Painting Schools at Chimalistac and Coyoacán, his use of the print medium in the mid-1920s suggests that he learned graphic techniques from Charlot, as did his fellow students at the school.

The Discovery and Influence of Posada, and Other Cultural Influences

Graphic art and particularly the prints of José Guadalupe Posada (1854-1913) were a great discovery at this time. Mexico had a great tradition of satirical prints in the nineteenth century; lithographs and etchings were used to illustrate articles in newspapers and journals and as editorial cartoons. Posada, who had begun his career as a newspaper illustrator, evolved a unique style that drew from vernacular sources with great imagination and skill. His output was tremendous, perhaps as many as fifteen thousand images.⁴³ Posada worked in almost total anonymity, producing woodcuts, wood and metal engravings and zinc etchings that had universal appeal for the citizens of Mexico City. He provided witty, satirical images to illustrate periodicals, broadsides and *corridos*. His *calavera* prints were skeletons that depicted a wide variety of human activity, especially political events and festive occasions. Originating with prints of the Medieval

⁴¹Maples Arce, *Leopoldo Méndez*, p.10.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ron Tyler, ed., *Posada's Mexico* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1980), p. 6.

Dance of Death, and also corresponding to Pre-Columbian imagery of skeletons and skulls, *calaveras* came to be associated with the Days of the Dead in Mexico, and showed up every November, along with sugar skulls, toy coffins and other playful allusions to death.⁴⁴ Posada developed his *calaveras* to a new level of complexity, using them to lampoon politicians and public figures, a practice that appealed to the Mexican artists and printmakers of the post-Revolutionary period. Posada also chronicled the Mexican Revolution from its first stirrings in 1909 to his death in 1913. He often based his prints on contemporary photographs by Victor Agustín Casasola (1874-1938) and his team of photographers, bringing an instantaneity to his graphic work as he followed the events of the day.⁴⁵

Posada's prints were rescued from oblivion in 1921 by Charlot, who noticed that the prints were being sold on street corners in the center of Mexico City. Upon inquiring, he found the workshop where Posada had worked, and found the original plates still in use. Charlot, who as a young prodigy painted Cubist easel paintings and Symbolist-inspired murals, arrived in Mexico from France in 1921, already very interested in fresco painting and in wood block printing. Charlot was from a wealthy French family, the Goupils, but his grandmother was Mexican, and the family was interested in Mexican culture. In 1889 the Goupil family purchased a collection of Pre-Columbian artifacts and codices from the French collector of Mexican antiquities, François Aubin, and donated the codices to the Bibliothèque Nationale in 1898.⁴⁶ Charlot studied these works as a very

⁴⁴Cut-paper *calaveras*, sugar skulls, toy coffins and other objects associated with death still appear in the markets in Mexico the weeks before the Days of the Dead.

⁴⁵ Casasola worked in Mexico City and compiled an archive of nearly 500,000 photographs of all aspects of Mexican life from about 1900 to 1938. His photographs of Porfirio Díaz, Francisco Madero, Venustiano Carranza, Alvaro Obregón, Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa, along with thousands of historical events and events from the lives of anonymous Mexicans, form a vast visual history of Mexico in the first part of the twentieth century. Posada used a Casasola photograph of Zapata, for example, as inspiration for his famous print of Zapata (figs. 16, 17). Later Méndez and other printmakers were also to make extensive use of the Casasola photographs as visual sources. The Casasola collection is now housed in the Fototeca Nacional (the National Photographic Archives) in Pachuca, Mexico.

⁴⁶*México en la obra de Jean Charlot* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1994),

young man and decided to incorporate Aztec imagery into his art while still in Paris. When he came to Mexico, with great enthusiasm for the new Mexican mural movement, Charlot became an assistant to Rivera while Rivera was painting his encaustic mural, *Creation*, in the National Preparatory School. At night, Charlot, with the contemporary art of Europe fresh in his mind, painted his own Cubist and Futurist-inspired mural, *The Massacre in the Templo Mayor* (fig. 18), in a stairway of the National Preparatory School. His was the first true fresco to be painted in Mexico since the Colonial era.

It was while he was working on the murals at San Ildefonso that Charlot discovered the work of Posada. Charlot began to reproduce the images and showed them to Orozco and Rivera, who were impressed by them to the extent that they both later considered Posada a major influence on their work. Posada's workshop was very close to the Academy of San Carlos, in the heart of Mexico City, so Rivera and Orozco both came into contact with Posada and his work while they were students at the Academy. Rivera constructed an elaborate myth concerning his relationship with Posada. Although no proof exists that Rivera knew Posada personally, or that Posada ever had students, in his autobiography Rivera claimed to have studied with Posada:

...I met and came under the influence of the great folk artist, José Guadalupe Posada, the most important of my teachers....He knew as much about form and movement as any man I have ever met. It was he who revealed to me the inherent beauty of the Mexican people, their struggles and aspirations. And it was he who taught me the supreme lesson of all art -- that nothing can be expressed except through the force of feeling, that the soul of every masterpiece is powerful emotion.⁴⁷

pp. 40-50.

⁴⁷Diego Rivera, *My Art, My Life: an Autobiography with Gladys March* (New York: The Citadel Press, 1960), p. 18.

Orozco, who like Rivera and Siqueiros, received his formal art training at the Academy of San Carlos, gives a more down-to-earth description of his encounters with Posada:

Posada used to work in full view, behind the shop windows, and on my way to school and back, four times a day, I would stop and spend a few enchanted minutes watching him.... This was the push that first set my imagination in motion and impelled me to cover paper with my earliest little figures; this was my awakening to the art of painting.⁴⁸

The influence of Posada on Rivera and Orozco, whatever their actual relationship with him, can not be underestimated, though neither painter worked in the style of Posada. It was, rather, Posada's subject matter and the emphasis of the multi-faceted daily life of the Mexican people, along with the expressive, dramatic and often surreal qualities in his prints, that helped to free the muralists from their academic training and enabled them to focus on the vernacular aspects of Mexican culture. Posada's work was made in the moment, based on contemporary events as they occurred. Many of his prints illustrated sensational crimes or political events, while others were produced around holidays like the Days of the Dead or the feast day of the Virgin of Guadalupe, or they were created to accompany *corridos*, the topical ballads of Mexico. As art historian Dawn Ades points out:

For the muralists, seeking a way of engaging directly with revolutionary Mexico and creating a popular art, Posada offered a visual resource unlike any in the world of official art... Posada, and other artists like him, had been making images of immediate relevance, showing political corruption and aspiration, the effects of the modernization of Mexico, and a society in conflict. Perhaps it was not Posada's intention to underline the political division of classes, in the contrast between the peons in their wide-brimmed hats and the upper classes with their top hats in the *Metamorphosis of Madero*, but it is easy to see how the muralists could

⁴⁸José Clemente Orozco, *An Autobiography* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962), p. 8.

use these images as such, and how far Posada could support their ambition to make an art for the people.⁴⁹

Later, both Rivera and Orozco incorporated images from the work of Posada into their murals. In his most direct quoting of Posada's work, Orozco used the *calavera* motif in his Dartmouth murals of 1932, in his satire of academic life, *American Civilization -- The Gods of the Modern World* (fig. 19). Here, a skeleton mother gives birth to a skeleton baby in a mortarboard, who is received into the arms of a skeleton professor, with an audience of *calavera* academicians. In 1947 Rivera honored Posada (as well as Seurat and Cézanne) in his autobiographical mural, *Dream of a Sunday Afternoon on the Alameda* (fig. 20). Rivera portrayed himself as a young boy standing to one side of a skeleton figure, La Catrina, based on a popular print by Posada (fig. 21), while Posada himself appears on her other side. La Catrina holds each of the artists by the arm, in a connecting, maternal gesture.

However, Posada's greatest stylistic and technical influence was on printmakers like Méndez, who transformed the tradition of vernacular printmaking into self-conscious political satire in the 1930s. Posada's prints, with their uniquely Mexican style and content, connected the work of printmakers of this time to vernacular Mexican imagery that was still being disseminated to the non-elite people in Mexico City. Méndez learned about Posada in *Mexican Folkways*, a bilingual publication about Mexican folk art and contemporary culture produced by Frances Toor between 1925 and 1933.⁵⁰ The July/September 1928 issue was entirely devoted to Posada. Méndez would also have seen

⁴⁹Dawn Ades, *Art in Latin America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 122.

⁵⁰*Mexican Folkways* was an important collaboration between American and Mexican artists and observers of Mexican culture, sold both in Mexico and the United States. Diego Rivera was the art editor for *Mexican Folkways*, and many Mexican and North American writers and artists contributed the texts and illustrations. The work of the muralists, colonial art and architecture, indigenous customs and folk art were documented in *Mexican Folkways* by photographers Edward Weston, Tina Modotti and Manuel Alvarez Bravo. *Mexican Folkways* presented a vague cultural nationalism in the interests of promoting all aspects of Mexican folk and popular culture, and provided a forum for contemporary Mexican fine art as well.

the first book on Posada, *Monografía: las obras de José Guadalupe Posada, grabador mexicano* (*Monograph: the Works of José Guadalupe Posada, Mexican Engraver*), which appeared in 1930, edited by Frances Toor, Pablo O'Higgins and Blas Vanegas Arroyo, with a foreword by Diego Rivera.⁵¹ Méndez recalled his interest in Posada at that time:

When I returned from the Cultural Missions I began to get to know the prints of José Guadalupe Posada more deeply through the magazine that Frances Toor published: *Mexican Folkways*.... There was much talk then about José Guadalupe Posada as a precursor to the Mexican mural movement, even though... this was years later than its beginnings.⁵²

Over time Méndez himself became a leading expert on Posada. One of Méndez's last projects was a major study of Posada's work, the most inclusive work on Posada ever published, with over 900 illustrations of Posada's prints.⁵³ Méndez often acknowledged his debt to Posada. In a 1957 interview he said:

Truly I would like for Posada to have had a great influence on my work. I would like him to have influenced me in every aspect, in every one of his disciplines. Posada was a great example, for the volume of his work and for the feeling he was able to give.⁵⁴

In the same interview Méndez also underscored the importance of Posada's political affiliations, a point not often made in the Posada literature. Méndez asserted that Posada was a precursor of the Mexican Revolution:

⁵¹José Guadalupe Posada, *Monografía: las obras de José Guadalupe Posada, grabador mexicano* (Mexico City: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1930).

⁵²Poniatowska. p. 8

⁵³José Guadalupe Posada, *Jose Guadalupe Posada: Ilustrador de la vida mexicana* (Mexico City: Fondo Editorial de la Plástica Mexicana, 1963).

⁵⁴Anaya Sarmiento, "Entrevista con Leopoldo Méndez," *Diorama de la Cultura*, supplement to *Excelsior* (Mexico City), 1957, n.d, n. p.

Posada was at the side of the Revolution from the start. In the years that Ricardo Flores Magón rented the press of the Hijo de Ahuizote, Posada worked there. Moreover, at that time he published a paper called *El Fandango*, dedicated to the working class.⁵⁵

In the early 1920s, Posada's prints were among the many new forms of expression to gain popularity among artists, his work revived almost single-handedly by Charlot. Charlot also brought a portfolio of his own expressive wood block prints from France, a series portraying the Stations of the Cross, called *Viacrucis* (fig. 22) which he showed to his friends at the open-air painting schools. He also began teaching them how to make wood block prints. Charlot's own woodcuts from the time of the open-air painting schools are rough and unfinished figurative works in a primitivist style (fig. 23).

Post-Revolutionary Mexican art took its inspiration from many other new sources as well. During the 1920s Mexican artists were captivated by the realization that they had an extraordinary pre-Columbian, and colonial artistic heritage, and they also discovered that folk and popular art, so present in daily life in Mexico, were continuations of long traditions. Major work at important pre-Columbian sites, like historian Manuel Gamio's excavations at the ruins at Teotihuacán outside of Mexico City, began during the Obregón regime, as did the restoration of colonial buildings. In 1921, Roberto Montenegro and Jorge Enciso organized the first exhibition of Mexican folk art, with an accompanying book by Dr. Atl, *Las artes populares en México*.⁵⁶

In the early 1920s, artists in Mexico also encountered European Cubism, Futurism, Dadaism, German Expressionism and Russian Constructivism. Charlot, Rivera, Siqueiros, Roberto Montenegro, Dr. Atl and others were responsible in part for

⁵⁵Ibid. *El Hijo de Ahuizote* was an anti-government newspaper during the regime of the dictator Porfirio Díaz. The paper published satirical cartoons and prints, some by Posada. Ricardo Flores Magón was a major revolutionary theorist of the early 1900s, whose writings influenced Francisco Madero, and helped bring down Díaz's government. At the time of this interview, Méndez was working on his print, *Homage to Posada* (fig. 225), in which he included a portrait of Flores Magón.

⁵⁶Gerardo Murillo (pseud. Dr. Atl), *Las artes populares en México* (Mexico City: Editorial Cultura, 1922).

introducing new ideas and examples, and they were able to communicate their experiences to a sophisticated group of young, highly educated artists, who were eagerly throwing off an academic training in favor of an energetic, politically motivated art production. The cultural publications, *El Universal Ilustrado*, *Zig-Zag* and *Revista de Revistas*, presented recent developments in European literature and art to an educated audience in Mexico City. Artists and intellectuals, inspired in part by early post-Revolutionary Soviet art experimentation, began to consider themselves cultural workers, rather than part of an elite. As part of the new collective approach, the artists identified with the Medieval and Renaissance guild system, and they admired Italian Renaissance painting. Its monumental qualities seemed suited the task that they took on -- the ideological education of the masses, albeit with an ideology made up of complex and often conflicting sets of concepts.

Their deep affinities for the art of these earlier eras also may have resulted from the fact that to live in Mexico is to be surrounded by Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque architecture and art works; extensive and highly decorated ruins of Pre-Columbian buildings, along with ceremonial sculpture, jewelry, and pottery; and contemporary indigenous domestic architecture, weaving, embroidery and ceramics. Mexico's visual environment is richly layered -- historically and aesthetically complex. The ruins of Aztec and Mayan temples and the fortress monasteries of the sixteenth century contain extensive and highly developed cycles of mural painting. In hundreds of Dominican, Franciscan and Augustinian monasteries, Renaissance fresco paintings (Renaissance in style and date, often executed by indigenous painters trained by European artists) demonstrate that Mexican artists had an impressive mastery of fresco technique that they used to create delicate, expressive figures in complex compositions. Mexico City and the surrounding area are particularly rich in Pre-Columbian ruins and Conquest-era churches.

Vasconcelos enlisted artists in the production of murals as part of his national education campaign, and the early murals reflected the blending of European, Pre-Columbian, Colonial and Mexican popular and folk arts. The atmosphere of cultural nationalism of the post-Revolutionary period, embodied by Vasconcelos's projects and revolutionary ideologies, and the new mural movement encouraged artists to discard purely European influences, and to reclaim their own cultural history. Artists such as those in the open-air painting schools had already rebelled against nineteenth-century European academicism, and now they turned to Mexican art production for models and inspiration. A new mythology of Mexican identity evolved very quickly, and in the early 1920s artists wanted to reject styles such as Impressionism or Cubism in favor of something entirely new and "Mexican." The combination of an emerging revolutionary national identity and the government's support for the arts was a potent one. Reyes Palma explains the situation thus:

Around 1922, Carlos Mérida proclaimed in an interview: 'The structure known as "American art" (the continent) is currently being erected in Mexico.' By coining this phrase, the Guatemalan painter trained in the Parisian avant-garde, was, to a certain degree, establishing a new hub for the cultural world. Before long, this comment acquired the proportions of a self-fulfilled prophecy, as of which (sic) the myth of Mexican cultural centrality would encounter its tautological destiny, although it had to compete with the rival myth of the School of Paris.⁵⁷

Vasconcelos took the lead in the nationalist art movement, specifying both content and medium. He emphasized the role of the arts in culture and education, while setting up a powerful directive to all Mexican artists -- to dedicate themselves to the social good through an art that expressed official Mexican cultural policy:

The true artist must work for art and for religion, and the modern religion, the modern fetish, is the socialist State, organized for the common good, thus we have

⁵⁷Francisco Reyes Palma, "Mythical Structures in Perceptions of 20th Century Mexican Art," *Curare*, no. 9, (Autumn 1996): pp. 1-7.

not held exhibitions to sell small canvases, neither have we put decorative works in state schools and buildings.⁵⁸

Along with mural painting, all the arts took on a new nationalistic and politicized aspect. The Obregón government focused on ways to enhance its post-Revolutionary position, using a new concept of nationalism as a unifying force. Art historian Esther Acevedo describes this period:

In 1920, after ten years of armed struggle, the Obregón regime proposed a conciliation of interests of various social sectors with the aim of reaching the longed-for social peace; even though this conciliation had as its only result the illusion of commonality between those above and those below. The Obregón government generated the required conditions for nationalism as an ideological banner to convert rapidly into a founding discourse.⁵⁹

Along with the artists' alliance with the State and their rejection of the Academy there came a shift away from the centrality of easel painting toward a multiplicity of art forms, including mural painting, sculpture, and graphic art, most of which was oriented in one way or another toward the nationalistic cultural discourse of post-Revolutionary Mexican society. As in post-Revolutionary Russia, easel painting was temporarily relegated to a lesser status as a bourgeois art form, too closely identified with art for art's sake to be accepted in the new cultural system.

Mexico also became an attractive site for artists and intellectuals from other parts of the world in the 1920s, particularly the United States and Europe. Immediately after the establishment of Obregón's government, many North American and European artists and intellectuals came to Mexico because of the ferment in the arts. In the early 1920s writers D. H. Lawrence, Katharine Anne Porter and Hart Crane, photographers Edward

⁵⁸José Vasconcelos, "Zig-zags en la república de las letras," quoted in *El Universal Ilustrado*, November 23, 1923, in Reyes Palma, *Historia social de la educación artística en México*, p. 16.

⁵⁹Acevedo, p. 174.

Weston and Tina Modotti and the painter Paul (later Pablo) O'Higgins, among many others, came to Mexico to do creative work. Some of them stayed in Mexico, others returned to their own countries and popularized the Mexican artistic renaissance. The influx of foreign visitors provided valuable points of contact between artists in Mexico and those in other countries.⁶⁰

The Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors (SOTPE)

In 1923 Siqueiros, Rivera, Orozco, Xavier Guerrero, Fermín Revueltas, Ramón Alva Guadarrama, Germán Cueto and Carlos Mérida launched the Sindicato de Obreros Técnicos, Pintores y Escultores (Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors, SOTPE) and issued their *Manifiesto del Sindicato de Obreros Técnicos, Pintores y Escultores* (*Manifesto of the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors*) in the newspaper of the Syndicate, *El Machete*, articulating the new radical politics of art in Mexico.⁶¹ This declaration marked the beginning of the first phase of Mexican muralism, and was also the first declared doctrine of Mexican political art in the post-Revolutionary period.

In the SOTPE manifesto the group of artists expressed a remarkable unity of purpose. Siqueiros, Rivera and Orozco were later to disagree profoundly and publicly with one another, but in 1923 they were able to formulate a joint statement. The *Manifesto* proclaimed the rights of the indigenous people, workers and campesinos, and promoted a nationalist, anti-bourgeois and indigenist political-aesthetic agenda:

⁶⁰ For a detailed discussion of foreign visitors to Mexico and the cultural relations between the United States and Mexico, see Helen Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican: Cultural Relations Between the United States and Mexico, 1920-1935* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1992), and James Oles, *South of the Border: Mexico in the American Imagination 1914-1947* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993).

⁶¹ Later, both Siqueiros and Rivera referred to the Syndicate by another name, the Sindicato de Pintores, Escultores y Grabadores Revolucionarios (The Syndicate of Revolutionary Painters, Sculptors and Printmakers). Siqueiros, *Cómo se pinta un mural*, p. 29; Rivera, "¿Hay un crisis en la pintura mexicana?," in *Arte y política*, 2nd ed. (Mexico City: Editorial Grijalbo, 1979), p. 287. Apparently this was an alternative name for the group, and reflects the importance of printmaking from the beginning.

To the Indian race humiliated for centuries; to soldiers made executioners by the praetorians; to workers and peasants scourged by the greed of the rich; to intellectuals uncorrupted by the bourgeoisie....Not only are our people (especially our Indians) the source of all that is noble toil, all that is virtue, but also, every manifestation of the physical and spiritual existence of our race as an ethnic force springs from them. So does the extraordinary and marvelous ability to create beauty. *The art of the Mexican people is the most important and vital spiritual manifestation in the world today, and its Indian traditions lie at its very heart.* It is great precisely because it is of the people and therefore collective. That is why our primary aesthetic aim is to propagate works of art that will destroy all traces of bourgeois individualism. We reject so-called Salon painting and all the ultra-intellectual salon art of the aristocracy and exalt the manifestations of monumental art because they are useful.... We believe that while our society is in a transitional stage between the destruction of an old order and the introduction of a new order, the creators of beauty must turn their work into clear ideological propaganda for the people, and make art, which at present is mere individualist masturbation, something of beauty, education and purpose for everyone....⁶²

The manifesto attempted to define a new direction in Mexican art, based on collective work and the creation of monumental art for the people. As art historian Alicia Azuela points out, the manifesto opens with a call to the “popular trinity,” the peasant, soldier and worker, (also called the “revolutionary trinity”) allying the sympathetic reader with this political grouping.⁶³ The emphasis on the indigenous heritage of Mexico is deeply significant. As Mexicans, almost all of whom have a combination of Spanish and Indian ancestry, the embracing of Indian culture represented a radical rejection of everything European in themselves.

The manifesto attributed Mexican creativity to the indigenous part of the Mexican blend, as a reclaiming of the Mexican heritage. However, as mentioned above, the first major murals commissioned by the Obregón government, Rivera’s *Creation*, Siqueiros’s *The Elements*, and Orozco’s *Maternity*, echoed European themes and forms. Not until the

⁶²Anita Brenner, *Idols Behind Altars: the Story of the Mexican Spirit* (New York: Payson & Clarke, 1929), p. 254-255.

⁶³Azuela, “Graphics of the Mexican Left,” p. 251.

painters had completed these experiments did they begin to paint frescoes that represented Mexican subjects in new styles. The muralists did not actually use indigenous methods or motifs to any significant extent; rather, they focused on Mexico's history, cultures and people in a mythic fashion, adapting European rather than pre-Columbian mural styles and techniques. In the 1920s, in spite of the rhetoric of the SOTPE manifesto, most of the murals depicted scenes from the Conquest of Mexico or the Mexican Revolution more than aspects of contemporary indigenous cultures. For example, while Rivera's first murals in the Ministry of Education cycle portrayed a utopian world inspired by his study of Pre-Columbian art and his recent trip to the indigenous communities of Tehuantepec, *Tropical Mexico* and *Xochipilli and His Votaries* (fig. 24), for example, most of the murals in the same cycle depicted events from urban life and the Mexican Revolution combined with idealized images of an imaginary Communist revolution, as in his 1928 *Distribution of Arms* (fig. 25). Other than *Maternity*, Orozco's murals in the National Preparatory School focused almost entirely on the Mexican Revolution, while Siqueiros stopped painting to work as a labor organizer from 1924 until 1930, after which he made a number of easel paintings.

The Syndicate came to include most of the young mural painters, including Charlot and Alva de la Canal, both of whom were also active in the Stridentist Movement at the same time. It is unclear whether Méndez was a member of SOTPE; he himself did not claim to have been, but he was certainly associated with the members, many of whom had been his classmates at the Academy and the Open Air Painting Schools at Chimalistac and Coyoacán and who were later to be his close collaborators in other organizations. In 1945 Rivera, a notably unreliable source, discussed Méndez's role in the Syndicate:

....The Syndicate of Painters, Sculptors and Engravers really never was a union, but a gathering of souls from which emerged a group of interesting and powerful

artists, from Orozco, the eldest of us, to the great Leopoldo Méndez. The youngest of us, the true successor of José Guadalupe Posada, he was the novice, ‘copete de hueso,’ [‘forelock of bone,’ untranslatable expression, a nickname for Méndez], we called him this not only because of the prominence of his forehead, but also for his austerity and stubbornness in his persistence and charge against any obstacle with his head down.⁶⁴

Although Méndez later created a number of murals, he did not paint any in the 1920s.

Years later Méndez explained the reasons that he did not join the muralists at this time:

When Diego began to call on the young painters to fight for the murals, I went to him and brought a little painting for him to look at. Diego examined it and said to me: ‘One example is enough,’ and put my little painting away, and, I think, lost it. So I did not return to join the muralists and I continued with my graphic work.⁶⁵

In addition to the murals, printmaking took hold as a medium to communicate revolutionary ideas. According to Azuela, Charlot taught the woodcut technique to Siqueiros and Xavier Guerrero, “who became so enthusiastic about its potential for mass communication that they introduced it to *El Machete*.”⁶⁶ Charlot later recalled that most of the muralists learned printmaking, “because they wanted to put across a message...”⁶⁷ During the two years of SOTPE’s existence, from 1922 to 1924, Siqueiros and Guerrero made simple graphic images with revolutionary content to illustrate *El Machete*, which was edited by Rivera, Siqueiros and Guerrero. The masthead of the newspaper was a woodcut designed by Guerrero, a clenched fist holding a machete (fig. 26), with the inflammatory caption, “The machete serves to cut the cane, to open paths in the shady woods, the decapitate snakes, to split the wheat from the chaff and to humble the pride of the impious rich.” Siqueiros contributed the woodcut print, *La Unidad del Campesino*, el

⁶⁴Diego Rivera, “¿Hay un crisis en la pintura mexicana?,” p. 287.

⁶⁵Anaya Sarmiento, n. p.

⁶⁶Azuela, “*El Machete* and *Frente a Frente*,” p. 83.

⁶⁷Charlot, *Mexican Mural Renaissance*, p. 248.

Soldado y el Obrero (*The Unity of the Campesino, the Soldier and the Worker*) (fig. 27), the revolutionary trinity, to the third issue of *El Machete*,⁶⁸ and the two artists created variations on this theme for *El Machete* a number of times. This image put into graphic form the theoretical union of the three sectors of Mexican society to which the SOTPE *Manifiesto* was addressed.

After the end of the Obregón presidency and the election of Plutarco Elias Calles in 1924, the Mexican government moved to the right politically, while the muralists became more radical. Rivera, Siqueiros and Guerrero joined the Partido Comunista Mexicana (Mexican Communist Party, PCM), and Vasconcelos stepped down from his post as Minister of Education. After a series of acrimonious confrontations between the muralists and the government, support for the murals was withdrawn, with the exception of the cycle in the Ministry of Education. Rivera, in spite of his membership in the Party, continued to cooperate with the government; he retained the commission for the Ministry of Education project and dominated the building entirely.⁶⁹ The Syndicate fell apart at the end of 1924. But as the organization was dissolving, Siqueiros stressed the importance of printmaking as a parallel to the mural painting, saying, "If they deny us the fixed walls of public buildings, we will continue our great mural movement by making portable murals of the pages of *El Machete*."⁷⁰ *El Machete* became the newspaper of the Communist Party in 1925, and remained in publication well into the 1930s.

Méndez After the Academy and the Open Air Painting Schools

Méndez's experiences at the Academy and the open-air painting schools, and his close association with the muralists, formed a basis for his later approaches to art

⁶⁸*El Machete*, no. 3, April 1-15, 1924.

⁶⁹At this time the government suspended support for Orozco's work at the National Preparatory School, but renewed funding in 1926 allowed Orozco to finish the mural cycle then.

⁷⁰Quoted in Philip Stein, *Siqueiros: His Life and Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1994), p. 50.

education and visual practice. In 1922 Méndez left the Open Air Painting School at Coyoacán and, along with painters Rufino Tamayo, Agustín Lazo and Julio Castellanos, his former classmates from the Academy, began to teach art in the public schools of Mexico City under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. They used the Best Maugard method, which at that time was in its heyday. That the twenty-year-old Méndez employed the method indicates that he was willing to apply its formalist precepts in his teaching. He was as yet unformed as an artist and had not yet developed his political approach to art practice. According to Francisco Reyes Palma:

...it was enough to apply the method conceived by Adolfo Best Maugard, with its seven abstract elements taken from the most ancient Mexican art and the manifestations of popular art, supposedly timeless and without an identifiable artist.⁷¹

In 1921 Méndez worked for the illustrated newspaper, *Zig-Zag*, edited by Pedro Malabehar. Malabehar assigned Méndez's friend, the writer Manuel Maples Arce, the task of writing a piece about the nocturnal life of Mexico City. In his biography of Méndez, Maples Arce recounted that he and Méndez took numerous long night walks around Mexico City. The sketches that Méndez made of their experiences in cabarets and restaurants accompanied one of Maples Arce's stories, and Malabehar then hired Méndez to further illustrate the magazine.⁷² The drawing *La Costurera (The Seamstress)* (fig. 28), from 1921, one of the earliest known extant works of art by Méndez, exhibits his life-long interest in portraying workers at their tasks. The image is the one of the first of Méndez's many depictions of the drama of public life; although the seamstress bends over her work in an interior space, she is an actor in the political realm, embedded in a social hierarchy. She is not, for example, a middle-class woman in a domestic setting and

⁷¹Reyes Palma, *Leopoldo Méndez*, p. 8.

⁷²Maples Arce, *Leopoldo Méndez*, p. 8.

her sewing is not a pastime, but her livelihood. From this time on, Méndez almost never created images that concerned private life, or focused on personal existence as such -- his work revolved around the representation of the individual or the group in society, acting out political roles in symbolic ways. In terms of style, at this stage Méndez was exploring a number of possibilities; *La Costurera* also manifests the abstract qualities that were soon to be a distinguishing feature of Stridentist art.

By 1922, with the completion of his formal training at the Academy of San Carlos, his participation in the Open Air Painting Schools at Chimalistac and Coyoacán, and his introduction to the society of contemporary artists in Mexico, Méndez was poised to participate in a dynamic artistic environment as a professional artist. He had started his own career as a teacher of art, and his interest in new forms of graphic art and painting would involve him, along with a number of his colleagues from the Academy of San Carlos and the open-air painting schools, in the emerging Stridentist Movement.

Chapter Two: Méndez in the Stridentist Movement

At the end of 1921, Méndez was awakened to the stirring possibilities of the first Mexican avant-garde movement. The Stridentist Movement, begun by Maples Arce, was a unique experiment that gathered together a small but active group of writers and visual artists from 1921 to 1927. At first centered in Mexico City, and later in Jalapa in the state of Veracruz, this movement wedded texts and images in an innovative, inventive new style influenced by Italian Futurism and Dadaism.

Manuel Maples Arce's *Actual Número Uno: Hoja de Vanguardia*

In December 1921, Méndez's friend and intellectual companion, Maples Arce, published his manifesto, *Actual Número Uno: Hoja de Vanguardia Comprimido Estridentista de Manuel Maples Arce* (Now: *Number One. Manuel Maples Arce's Leaflet of the Avant-Garde Stridentist Pill*). Surprising the public and inspiring his colleagues, Maples Arce's single-handed act founded the Movimiento Estridentista, or the Stridentist Movement. *Actual* (fig. 29) was produced in large broadsheet form and pasted on the walls of Mexico City at night, to be read the next morning. This manifesto was the inspiration of a youthful iconoclast, who had no clear idea of what would result from his dramatic gesture. Luis Mario Schneider, the foremost scholar of Stridentist literature, asserts:

One can not talk yet of the existence of a movement. That which can be seen in this flyer is a personal tone that transmits a call to Mexican intellectuals to form an artistic society based on the necessity of testifying to the vertiginous transformation of the world.¹

¹Luis Mario Schneider, *El Estridentismo: Mexico, 1921-1927*, p. 11.

The document consisted of a prologue, fourteen numbered paragraphs, and a “Directory of the Avant-garde.” The prologue presented iconoclastic slogans placed around a photograph of a dapper Maples Arce. The opening references to European and South American intellectuals, most notably the Italian Futurist writer, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, are followed by attacks directed against Mexican culture, “Death to Father Hidalgo, Down with San Rafael and San Lázaro” (referring to the great hero of the Mexican War of Independence and two popular saints). The manifesto was written in a rhetorical style reminiscent of the Futurist manifestos of Marinetti. According to Schneider:

The most important section of the manifesto is that which contains the fourteen points that Maples Arce developed with anarchy and boldness, extracted from the Futurist manifestos of F.T. Marinetti and from some ideas of Spanish Ultraísmo put forth by Guillermo de Torre and R. Lasso de la Vega [also influenced by Futurism].²

The first paragraph states:

In the name of the contemporary Mexican avant-garde, sincerely horrified by all the notary plaques and signs plastered on the doors of chemists and dispensaries consecrated by the cartulary system, with twenty centuries of effusive success in pharmacies and drugstores subsidized by law, I position myself at the clattering apex of my unique modernity, equilaterally convinced and eminently revolutionary...³

Maples Arce also proclaimed his avant-garde sympathies in the first of the fourteen points:

...Aesthetic truth is only a state of incoercible emotion developed on a background of integral equivalence...things have no possible intrinsic value, and

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 41.

their poetic equivalence flourishes in their relationships and coordinations, those which only manifest themselves in an internal sector, more emotional and more definitive than a dismantled reality...⁴

This remarkable paragraph by the twenty-three-year-old writer strongly suggests a familiarity with the ideas of the philosopher Henri Bergson, whose works, as mentioned above, had been studied by the members of Vasconcelos' circle in the years preceding the Revolution. Maples Arce's main points, that "things have no possible intrinsic value" and that "their poetic equivalence flourishes in their relationships and coordinations," are consistent with Bergson's concept of the relativity of ordinary language, and his emphasis on internal experience (as opposed to intellectual apprehension) ties into Bergson's concepts of the role of intuition. In his third point, Maples Arce quotes Marinetti's "An automobile in motion is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace," and the fifth point begins, "Chopin to the electric chair!" reminiscent of the rhetorical violence of the Italian Futurists. Point number seven declares:

Enough now of Creationism, Dadaism, Paroxism, Expressionism, Syntheticism, Imaginism, Suprematism, Cubism, Orphism, etcetera, etcetera, of isms, more or less theoretical and efficient. Let us make a quintessential, purified synthesis of all the flourishing tendencies...⁵

The sophistication of Maples Arce's analyses is remarkable in light of his youthfulness and relative isolation, connecting as it did to elements of Futurist and Dadaist thinking. Although Maples Arce himself had not yet traveled abroad at the time of his first manifesto, the Mexican Revolution had taken place in the wider context of world events, including World War I and the Russian Revolution, and young intellectuals of Mexico were accustomed to traveling to the United States and Europe. In addition to

⁴Ibid., p. 42.

⁵Ibid., p. 42-43.

Rivera and Siqueiros, artists Best Maugard, Roberto Montenegro and Carlos Mérida had also been in Paris during the 1910s, while Fermín Revueltas had spent the years of the Mexican Revolution in San Antonio and Chicago, arriving in Mexico in 1920. When Charlot arrived in Mexico in January 1920, he brought with him a copy of Guillaume Apollinaire's *Caligrammes*, introducing the poet's experimental typography to Mexican writers and artists.⁶ Siqueros, who returned to Mexico from Europe in 1921, had become acquainted with Mexican artist Marius de Zayas (a minor player in New York Dada) while they were both in Paris. The illustrations for Siqueros's journal, *Vida-Americana*, included an abstract portrait of art dealer Ambroise Vollard by de Zayas (fig. 30), as well as a pencil drawing by Siqueros, *Retrato del Sastre W. Kennedy* (*Portrait of the Tailor W. Kennedy*) (fig. 31), dated 1920. As Reyes Palma points out, the drawing shows the influence of the former Italian Futurist painter Carlo Carrá, whom Siqueiros met in Italy in 1919.⁷ The overall composition of Siqueiros's drawing is reminiscent of Carrá's "metaphysical" style, augmented by Futurist force lines in the lower left-hand corner. The work also shares the absurdist quality of the paintings and drawings of Dada artists such as Max Ernst, particularly in its use of illogical, tilted space, odd juxtapositions of objects and the inclusion of the tailor's dummy as a female surrogate.

Dadaist and Italian Futurist work also reached public attention in Mexico through Mexican journals and newspapers. The illustrated weekly papers, *Revista de Revistas*, *El Universal Ilustrado*, and *Zig-Zag* (for which Méndez produced drawings), published articles about the European avant-gardes, sent from Europe by Mexicans who were traveling or living there. An article about Italian Futurism in *Revista de Revistas*, August 1919, included a greeting by Marinetti to the author José de J. Núñez y Domínguez, inserted as a typographical element. The article also included a number of reproductions

⁶Francisco Reyes Palma, "Vanguardia: Año cero," in *Modernidad y modernización*, p. 43.

⁷Ibid. Carrá abandoned Futurism during World War I and began working in the style of de Chirico's "metaphysical" painting.

of Futurist works.⁸ The journals also published articles about Dada, the most important of which, according to Schneider, was the essay in *El Universal Ilustrado* in February 1921. Entitled “El endemoniado Dada se adueña de París” (“The Demonic Dada Moves to Paris”), the essay described Tristan Tzara’s role in the founding of the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, Francis Picabia’s involvement with New York Dada and the beginnings of Dada in Paris. The article contained a reproduction of *Dada Bulletin Number 6* and a photograph of Picabia. Schneider speculates that the Dada Bulletin and the photograph might have influenced the format of Maples Arce’s *Actual Número Uno*.⁹ Maples Arce was also in direct contact with avant-garde European intellectuals. In 1921 he published a poem in the Spanish Ultraist magazine *Cosmópolis*, and received a number of positive responses:

From France and Italy I got books and pamphlets which I read with great interest. Marinetti sent me his Futurist manifestos and some illustrated monographs on the painters of his movement -- Boccioni, Severini and Soffici. From France I received magazines and books by Pierre Reverdy, André Salmon, Blaise Cendrars, Pierre Albert-Birot, Philippe Soupault; I stayed in touch with some of them. Great was my joy when I saw the parcels with foreign stamps arriving, which brought me the avant-garde books and reviews. In some of these publications the paintings of Picasso, Juan Gris, Braque and several other painters appeared, which I showed to my friends....¹⁰

The “Directorio de Vanguardia” (“Directory of the Avant-garde”) that concludes *Actual Número Uno* lists about 150 names of cultural figures Maples Arce considered important, mostly from Europe, Mexico and other countries of Latin America (the exact number is difficult to determine due to misspellings and random punctuation). Demonstrating his familiarity with contemporary culture, Maples Arce included a remarkable variety of writers and artists, such as Jorge Luis Borges, Rivera, Siqueiros,

⁸Schneider, *El estridentismo: Mexico*, p. 22.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Manuel Maples Arce, *Soberana juventud* (Madrid: Editorial Plenitud, 1967), p. 124.

Pierre Reverdy, Juan Gris, Marie Laurencin, Tzara (sic), André Breton, Marcel Duchamp, Eric Satie, Giorgio de Chirico, Walter Pach, Picasso, Max Ernst, Kandinsky, Marinetti, G. Severini (sic), George Bellows, Jean Cocteau, Francis Picabia, Guillermo Apollinaire and Schwitters (sic). Maples Arce probably knew of many of these figures through his reading, and it is likely that Rivera and Charlot, who had recently arrived from Paris, suggested many names of people they knew there.¹¹

In addition to establishing European contacts, Maples Arce corresponded with Latin American intellectuals; the Argentine writer Borges reviewed Maples Arce's book, *Andamios interiores* (*Interior Scaffolds*), in the Argentine literary magazine *Proa* in 1922.¹² In 1927 American writer John Dos Passos visited Maples Arce in Jalapa, later translating Maples Arce's *Urbe*, published as *Metropolis* in English.¹³

Maples Arce Gathers the Stridentists Together

From the beginning a combination of modernity and enthusiasm for the Revolution distinguished the Stridentist Movement. Preceding the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors by almost a year, and outlasting it by three years, the Stridentist Movement constituted a parallel to the muralist movement, closely connected to its early stages. Charlot, Alva de la Canal and Revueltas, active members of the Stridentists, all participated in the mural painting in the National Preparatory School or the Ministry of Education. List Arzubide described the strong connections between the Stridentist movement and the mural movement in the early 1920s:

...because they coincided; precisely when Diego began to paint at the Preparatory School in those days when we were publishing *Ser*, even the front cover of *Ser*

¹¹ Serge Fauchereau, "The Stridentists," p. 80.

¹² Jorge Luis Borges, "Andamios interiores de Manuel Maples Arce," *Proa* (Buenos Aires) (December 1922): pp. 120-123.

¹³ John Dos Passos, *Metropolis* (New York: T. S. Book Co., 1929), translation of Manuel Maples Arce, *Urbe*.

was made with a drawing that Diego had left on top of a table in the Preparatory School. He was painting that big fresco that he was doing, and one day, Miguel Aguillón Guzmán and I were there, and we went in; Diego wasn't there, we saw a pile of papers there, we took one with us and this served as the front cover....I especially remember that we went to greet Orozco, who was a bit difficult, but he received us nicely. After that Miguel Aguillón put out a student newspaper and then the students began to have some fondness for the muralists, especially since in those days a group of students defaced Orozco's paintings in the Preparatory School, which provoked Ramón Alva de la Canal's group to produce a manifesto. In this manifesto the names of Germán Cueto, Alva de la Canal, Leopoldo Méndez appeared, protesting against the attacks...and after that Diego paid attention to us. We wanted to be with him and with Jean Charlot, who had come from Paris and was in close contact with Diego, since he was also painting in the National Preparatory School.¹⁴

After 1924, however, as indicated above, the withdrawal of government funding for everyone in the Syndicate except Rivera resulted in the dissolution of the unified group effort. When the government gave walls of major buildings to Rivera, he employed other painters as his assistants rather than working with them as equal collaborators. To some extent, the visual art production of the Stridentist Movement was the result of the exclusion of the younger and less well-connected painters from government-sponsored mural projects; they no longer had mural commissions to sustain them as artists as they had in the brief period between 1922 and 1924. Méndez, as one of the young artists who did not have an opportunity to paint murals at this time, joined the Stridentist Movement in 1923.

The Stridentists attracted young, radical artists in part because they combined the political avant-garde and the aesthetic avant-garde in their activities and art production. In his autobiography Maples Arce remembered how he decided to publish *Actual Número Uno*:

¹⁴Germán List Arzubide, interview with Esther Hernández Palacios, in Instituto Veracruzana de Cultura, *Estridentismo: Vuelto a visitar* (Veracruz: Instituto Veracruzana de Cultura, 1997), p. 69.

Remembering that on the eve of the Proclamation of Independence Father Hidalgo published a newspaper called *Despertador Americano* (*American Wakeup Call*) I thought, 'This is what is necessary to bring about literary independence. People are sleeping,' I told myself; 'to wake them from their profound dream, it is necessary to shout, to shake them up, to hit them with sticks if required'...The appropriate strategy was that of rapid action and total subversion. I had to use expeditious means....There was no time to lose.¹⁵

The Stridentists, like the Italian Futurists, loved the dynamism of machinery, modern modes of communication and transportation, and, most of all, the urban environment. Unlike the Futurists, however, the Stridentists concentrated on the present, rather than the future, and they involved themselves in the post-Revolutionary reconstruction of Mexico, albeit in a subversive and oppositional mode. Maples Arce explained that:

We were not trying to be Futurists, but 'in the present,' but not in the present in the laggardly manner of those who reproduced current themes and techniques, because that is not actuality, rather that of a vital creation that took into account the spiritual disquietudes and the whole complex of emotions and supersensitive forces of mankind.¹⁶

The Stridentists emphasized newness, emotionality and engagement. They wanted to shock the bourgeoisie, but in spite of Maples Arce's proclamation in the first point of *Actual*, they did not actually discard concepts of aesthetic value; rather they wanted to create new poetic and artistic languages that would redefine and expand what was aesthetically acceptable in Mexico at that time. The Stridentists created a unique blend of styles based on Italian Futurism, Cubism, Russian Constructivism, and even the Art Nouveau and Art Deco styles popular in the 1920s in Mexico.¹⁷ They may have seen the

¹⁵Maples Arce, *Soberana juventud*, pp. 122-3.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 132.

¹⁷Mexico experienced active Art Nouveau and Art Deco phases, with works like the Aubrey Beardsley-like images of Roberto Montenegro, whose prints of Nijinsky were widely known. A recent exhibition of Art Deco at the Museo Nacional de México, in 1997, included Stridentist work as examples of Art Deco.

work of the Belgian printmaker, Frans Masareel, whose stark expressionistic woodcuts focused on the alienating effects of urban life. They were also influenced by contemporary photography, and used photographs by Edward Weston and Tina Modotti in their publications. In his autobiography Maples Arce remembered the innovative diversity of the visual artists of the Stridentist Movement. His reference to Leopoldo Méndez is an index of the relative importance of Méndez in the group, and reveals Méndez's orientation to politically oriented art even at that time:

I saw with pleasure how Revueltas interpreted the landscape in a different style, the sculptors modeled with audacious concepts; Alva de la Canal reconciled his Coyoacán Impressionism with more constructivist forms, and Leopoldo Méndez, through a deeply social interpretation, captured the popular spirit in his prints.¹⁸

The Stridentists' positive portrayals of the urban environment and their interest in the Mexican Revolution (and the Russian Revolution) distinguish them from the Futurists and the Dadaists. In fact, in 1924 Maples Arce, disapproving of Marinetti's pro-Mussolini leanings, disclaimed any affinity with the Italian Futurists, saying that Marinetti's poetry was "as reactionary as colonial poetry, which steers clear of current innovation."¹⁹ And unlike the Zurich Dadaists, whose praxis centered around non-logical behavior, in a deconstructive response to civilization's decline into war and madness, the Stridentists participated in political activities, associating with labor unionists and politicians. In this they had more in common with Berlin Dada, the members of which took part in leftist demonstrations and activities. In December 1922 Maples Arce wrote an article, "The Stridentist Movement in 1922," in which he articulated his approach to the politics of post-Revolutionary Mexico:

¹⁸Maples Arce, *Soberana juventud*, p. 132. Méndez appears to have joined the Stridentists sometime in 1922 or 1923. During this time he worked as a teacher of art and sold drawings to illustrated newspapers and journals. In 1924 he worked briefly as an assistant to a set designer, of whom only the last name, Tarasona, is known.

¹⁹Fauchereau, p. 87.

The few intellectuals who went into the Revolution were rotten. Their intellectual tyranny continues and the Revolution has lost all its meaning and all its interest...No spiritual agitation corresponds to the exterior shocks (of the Revolution, mine). In Russia, the Suprematist painters sadly affirm the unrest of the Bolshevik moment; as have the November group in Germany. But Mexican intellectuals have remained impassive...However, the uneasiness of the post-Revolutionary period, the syndical explosions and the tumultuous demonstrations were a stimulus for our iconoclastic desires and a revelation for our interior shaking up. We too could rise up. We too could rebel.²⁰

However, in an affirmation of Stridentism's autonomy and in resistance to defining the movement as a static phenomenon, Maples Arce concluded this article: "Stridentism is not a school, or a tendency, nor an intellectual mafia, as those here may style it; Stridentism is a strategic reason. A gesture. An eruption."²¹

The Stridentist approach to art was oppositional in a way that the mural movement was not, although Stridentist writers and artists identified closely with Mexican national identity and the ideals of the Mexican Revolution. As free agents, excluded from the mural projects funded by the Ministry of Education, the Stridentists were radical and iconoclastic, while at the same time they were crafting a new aesthetic that challenged the conventions of art. Unlike the muralists, the Stridentists did not ally themselves with the aims of the Mexican government in the production of the new national identity through narrative art. The Stridentists were not willing to serve as state propagandists; they did not follow the official line for artists proposed by Vasconcelos, and carried out by Rivera in particular. For instance, they did not restrict themselves to portraying Mexican subjects, and they were not organized as a union of artist-workers. Instead, they fashioned their identities as urban intellectuals, creating a café society for themselves while combining their political and personal lives in texts and images. In spite

²⁰From *El Universal Ilustrado*, 28 December 1922, quoted in Schneider, *El estridentismo o una literatura de la estrategia*, p. 58.

²¹Ibid., p. 60.

of their enthusiasm for the new socialist system that resulted from the Revolution, the Stridentists refused to romanticize the Mexican Revolution or the Mexican State, instead taking a stand against hypocrisy in the new society. Their opposition was both conceptual and political. The Revolution itself had been full of contradictions, brutality and corruption coexisting with the most idealistic of intentions. The most well known novel of the Revolution, *Los de Abajo* (*The Underdogs*) by Mariano Azuela, an edition of which was published by the Stridentist publishing house in 1928, portrayed the soldiers of the Revolution as leaves in the wind, each one fighting for reasons unknown to him.²²

Post-war Mexico was a strange mixture of energetic idealism and appalling corruption. Although the Constitution of 1917 contained articles guaranteeing rights to public education, land reform for peasants and labor organization for workers, many of the generals of the Revolution used their governmental positions to amass great wealth and power. Mexico developed a one-party system, forming a ruling party, the Partido Nacional Revolucionario, which later became the current ruling party of Mexico, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional. The concept of a continuing revolution, supported by the government and independent theorists alike, appealed very strongly to many artists and intellectuals of the 1920s. During the 1920s, many artists joined the Mexican Communist Party, while others remained non-aligned, but most intellectuals and artists in Mexico felt a strong national identity, regardless of their position on the political spectrum. The Stridentist Movement was irreverent and absurdist, and at the same time it allowed for a free range of leftist political alliances.

Méndez participated in the Stridentist Movement as an equal, but because of his affinity for working-class and revolutionary politics and issues, his *obrerismo* (translated loosely as “labor-unionism,” or “identification with the workers and unions”) and his habit of wearing denim overalls like a laborer, Germán List Arzubide dubbed him the

²²Mariano Azuela, *Los de Abajo* (Jalapa: Ediciones Estridentista, 1928).

“dandi en oberoles,” or “dandy in overalls.”²³ List Arzubide continued to use this expression to describe Méndez throughout his life.²⁴ By a reversal, the phrase implies that the other Stridentists were dandies *not* “in overalls,” while emphasizing Méndez’s proletarian background and self-identification with the workers. Certainly, the photograph of Maples Arce, dressed in suit and tie, with glossy hair and a carnation in his lapel, on *Actual No. 1*, projects the image of a dandy, a sophisticated man of the city, with leisure to spend in his task of astonishing the bourgeois. A photograph of the Stridentists taken in 1926 (fig. 32) shows a group of serious, self-conscious, well-dressed young men. On this occasion Méndez is dressed in a suit and tie, as are the others, so although Méndez did usually dress in worker’s clothes, he obviously did not wear them all the time. List Arzubide’s characterization of him in proletarian terms may have been partially an exaggeration, most likely referring to Méndez’s working-class background and the relative intensity of his identification with the proletariat.

The first *Actual* was followed by two other issues, equally radical in content. Altogether four Stridentist manifestos appeared, the second of which was published in Puebla in 1922, resulting from a collaboration between Maples Arce and List Arzubide. Maples Arce gradually gathered together a group of writers, artists and musicians. The writers included Salvador Gallardo, Salvador Novo, Germán List Arzubide, Arqueles Vela, and Luis Quintanilla (who called himself “Kin Taniya”). For the most part they wrote poetry, but they also produced short novels, essays, and in the case of List Arzubide, works of historical and social analysis. Stridentist writing emphasized the dynamic, urban and technological aspects of Mexican society, expressing their excitement about participating in Mexico’s new era. Stridentist poetry owes much to Futurism and Dadaist writing, in its rejection of themes and styles of the past, opposition to societal

²³Germán List Arzubide, *El movimiento estridentista* (Jalapa, Mexico: Ediciones de Horizonte, 1926), p. 65; and List Arzubide, interview by author, Mexico City, 16 January 1996.

²⁴List Arzubide, interview by author, Mexico City, 20 February 1998.

norms, imaginative combinations of incongruous elements, playful use of language and invention of neologisms -- all shockingly new in Mexican literature. Despite Maples Arce's denunciation, the writings continued to draw on the hyperbolic writing style of Marinetti and the innovative sound-poetry of the Dadaists. Stridentist writers combined words freely, and invented their own brand of mysterious romanticism. Much of the work has a cinematic quality. Arqueles Vela's short story, "La Señorita Etcétera," makes use of Futurist-related typography and incomplete phrases to describe a vague relationship with an unknown woman through the eyes of a man who arrives in a strange city. List Arzubide integrated references to sound, cinema and American popular culture into such poems as "Cinemática," in which he writes:

La América se vuelve sensitiva
 el jazz band lo tocan ahora
 borrachos de gasolina
 el viento es presuntuoso
 se cree un tenorio
 porque alguna vez levanta las faldas
 pero nunca ha venido al cine.
 PALETAS-CHICLES
 Esta canción no está en los fonógrafos...

America becomes sensitive
 gasoline drunks now touch
 the jazz band
 The presumptuous wind
 believes itself a rake
 because once it lifted skirts
 but it never went to the cinema.
 POPSICLES-CHICLETS
 This song is not in the phonographs.²⁵

Stridentist writers also included the Revolution and its aftermath as primary subject matter. Maples Arce's *Urbe* and List Arzubide's *Zapata exaltación* expressed the

²⁵List Arzubide, "Cinemática," in Schneider, *El estridentismo: Antología*, p. 56.

writers' youthful enthusiasm for the Revolution and the social activism that came immediately afterward, when the workers of Mexico took to the streets to demonstrate for better wages and living conditions.

The visual artists attracted to the new movement included artists who were involved in the open-air painting schools and the mural movement. The most important of these Stridentist visual artists were Leopoldo Méndez, Fermín Revueltas, Alva de la Canal, Germán Cueto, and Charlot. Maples Arce had known them since their days at the Academy of San Carlos and the open-air painting schools. He invited them to work on Stridentist projects, and they remained associates for many years, long after the end of Stridentism as a movement. They worked in a variety of media. Méndez, Revueltas, Charlot and Alva de la Canal painted and made wood block prints, and illustrated Stridentist books with drawings and prints, while Cueto made masks, the most well known of which are portraits of Méndez and Germán List Arzubide (figs. 33, 34). Unlike the muralists, however, the Stridentists rarely drew upon Mexico's indigenous heritage. Rather, they focused on themes from contemporary life: the urban environment, signs of modern technology such as airplanes, telegraphs and radios, or the Mexican and Russian revolutions.

In 1924 the Stridentists published the three issues of *Irradiador: Revista Internacional de Vanguardia* (*Illuminator: International Avant-Garde Review*).²⁶

Méndez contributed his drawings to the journal:

I did drawings of a modernist type. I wouldn't say that they were Cubist, but they had a certain influence from that which Diego Rivera had brought to Mexico from his Cubist era in Europe.²⁷

²⁶Schneider has been unable to locate any of the three issues of *Irradiador*: "All my efforts to locate the journal *Irradiador* were futile. There seem to have been three issues, possibly published during the months of September, October and November [1924]." Schneider, *El estridentismo o una literatura de la estrategia*, p. 73.

²⁷ Poniatowska, p. 7.

In addition to the regular members, many other artists were attracted to the group. Siqueiros and Rivera were loosely associated with the Stridentists. They were mentioned by name in the list of important cultural figures in the “Directory of the Avant-garde” at the end of *Actual No. 1*, and Rivera contributed to *Irradiador*. His *Calligrama* (*Calligram*) (fig. 35), for the cover of the first issue of *Irradiador*, is the only known example of an experimental typographical image by Rivera. The title associates it with Apollinaire’s calligrams, but this particular work, with its arrows and mathematical symbols, and the suggestions of sound and movement, owes more to Futurist typographical art than to Apollinaire’s poetic experiments.

Tina Modotti and Edward Weston, who came to Mexico in 1923, became involved with the Stridentists through their friendships with Charlot, List Arzubide and Rivera:

One day, Tina and Weston decided to go to the Café de Nadie. Maples Arce and Germán List Arzubide rose to greet Tina. List declared to her, ‘we are your most devoted admirers.’ He did not give a second glance at Weston. Leopoldo Méndez, in contrast, offered him his hand cordially.²⁸

Modotti’s photograph, *Electric Wires* (fig. 36), appeared in the Stridentist journals *Horizonte* and *Norte*, and Weston’s photograph *The Armco Steel Company in Middleton, Ohio*, with its dramatic furnace chimneys, was used on the cover of the third issue of *Irradiador* (fig. 37). Modotti also made a remarkable photographic portrait of List Arzubide (fig. 38), in which the poet appears with his head bent down, his face hidden, portrayed at an eccentric angle that communicates his sensitive and unconventional personality.

²⁸ Quoted from an unacknowledged source, in Audefroy, p. 402.

The Café de Nadie. Stridentist Events, Written and Visual Art

In 1923 the Stridentists started to meet at the “Café de Nadie” (the Cafe of Nobody) in the Colonia Roma in Mexico City (actually called the Cafe Europa). Maples Arce discovered the deserted cafe and claimed it as a perfect existential space. German List Arzubide described the cafe: “there was no owner, no waiter and no customers,”²⁹ while Arqueles Vela recorded the finding of the cafe:

Before Maples Arce descended into the shadow of this cafe, nobody had noticed the state of inexistence in which it found itself and in which it was dying. Its inert, catastrophic life, the building buried by a great cataclysm, insinuated itself, with the vagueness of solitary visits, filled by a tragic and cosmic forgetting. Its walls, its furniture, its mirrors, its waiters were there with an attitude latent with life, with which they had to be the objects, people and things of a petrified city. Of a city that in full activity became static with boredom and lava...³⁰

A woodcut by Alva de la Canal depicts a deserted cafe (fig. 39), empty chairs and bare tables, the word “cafe” on the door in backward letters, a clever trick, as the artist would not have needed to plan the reversal of the word usually required for the print medium. The Stridentists met regularly at the cafe; the group included the Stridentist writers and artists, as well as others, including the composers Manuel M. Ponce and Silvestre Revueltas.

In the newly named Café de Nadie on April 12, 1924, the group held a Stridentist evening similar to Futurist and Dadaist evenings, with poetry reading, music and an exhibition of paintings and sculpture by the artists. An invitation in the journal *Irradiador* (fig. 40) invited the public to an evening of “History of the Café de Nadie by Arqueles Vela,” “Poems by Maples Arce, Germán List Arzubide, Salvador Gallardo...,” “Exhibition of Painting -- Fermín Revueltas, Leopoldo Méndez, Jean Charlot, Xavier González,” “Masks by German Cueto,” and “Stridentist Music.” The price was one

²⁹List Arzubide, *El movimiento estridentista*, p. 62.

³⁰Schneider, *El estridentismo o una literatura de la estrategia*, p. 72.

hundred pesos (quite high), and the invitation also stressed that “*Irradiador* is the Only International Magazine of the Avant Garde in America.”³¹

In his book *El Movimiento Estridentista* List Arzubide later provided the first written description of Méndez, referring to this Stridentist evening:

The exhibition was taken apart by the muscular scaffold hands of Leopoldo Méndez, the ultimate dandy in overalls, sign of a future that rooted its ascending life with his legs, cemented as a laborer’s ; elevated to the height of a fluid and safe chimney, he could lift the last dreams of the Stridentist afternoon with his mechanical arms. Afterward, his steps that would sow a new potency, would be lost in the last district of the multitude, and still his bronze face was as hard and radiant as an imposition of the truth.³²

Two paintings by Alva de la Canal, both titled *Café de Nadie* (figs. 41, 42), executed in a Cubo-Futurist style, depict the debonair Maples Arce at the Café de Nadie. The first painting portrays Maples Arce in a swirl of people and newspaper clippings, emphasizing both the role of the press in publicizing the movement and the supremacy of the written word for the communication of ideas and feelings. Eric List Crespo de la Serna, the grandson of Germán List Arzubide, points out that the painting is a kind of “Last Supper,” with Maples Arce surrounded by his apostles. The 1924 original of this painting has been lost or destroyed.³³ In 1930 Alva de la Canal recreated the work, adding significant details. While the first version was a contemporary portrait done in the spirit of the time, the second, painted after the Stridentists disbanded, demonstrates Alva de la Canal’s awareness of the historical importance of the group. This is reflected in the

³¹List Arzubide, *El movimiento estridentista*, pp. 62-66.

³²*Ibid.* p. 66.

³³The circumstances of the disappearance of the first version are unclear. According to Eric List Crespo de la Serna, the painting was destroyed in Jalapa in 1927. “La gráfica estridentista,” unpublished essay (Mexico City, 1997), p. 12. But mysteriously enough, there are color reproductions of the 1924 painting, including the cover illustration of Schneider’s *El estridentismo: México 1921-1927*. The exact circumstances for the creation of the second version are unknown, but it is possible that Alva de la Canal painted it for Maples Arce, as it appears in a photograph of a Stridentist reunion in the 1960s in Maples Arce’s office, illustrated in Schneider’s *El estridentismo: Una literatura de la estrategia*, n.p.

addition of the words, “El Cafe de Nadie,” as well as the names of the leading members of the Movement. The second work also includes collaged excerpts of Stridentist texts, and employs a variety of avant-garde type faces associated with the original Stridentist publications. The name Manuel Maples Arce appears above the central figure. This portrait of the poet is a quotation of Charlot’s woodcut frontispiece for Maples Arce’s *Urbe* (fig. 43). The young man with a dramatic lock of hair over his forehead to the left of Maples Arce is identified as Arqueles Vela. A figure in the upper left-hand corner, with a heavy brow and dark crest of hair, represents List Arzubide, with eyes downcast as in Modotti’s well-known photograph. The man with the glasses is Salvador Gallardo, his name written in the same lettering as Alva de la Canal used on the cover of Gallardo’s book, *El pentagrama eléctrico* (fig. 53). In the lower left-hand corner Cueto is depicted by a modernist sculptural composition that reflects his own style. The names of Méndez and Revueltas are written at the top right-hand corner; Méndez’s name appears on an excerpt of the essay on muralism he wrote in the Stridentist journal *Horizonte*.³⁴ The one unidentified figure, in the lower right-hand corner, could be Alva de la Canal himself, as he appears near the artist’s signature. The compositional elements, executed in various states of abstraction, make reference to modernity, especially to Cubism, Futurism and Russian Constructivism. The importance of the written word and the cosmopolitan appearance of the group are emphasized in the painting in a way that is unique in Latin America at this time.³⁵

In 1927 Méndez created an oil painting, *Portrait of Maples Arce* (fig. 44), which, at first glance, seems to be a conventional portrait. Maples Arce sits with his hands folded, wearing a suit and tie, his usual attire, and the sensitive rendition of his face is realistic and sympathetic. However, the background is composed of Stridentist icons.

³⁴Leopoldo Méndez, “La estética de la revolución: La pintura mural,” *Horizonte* 1, no. 8 (November 1926): pp. 45-48.

³⁵List Crespo de la Serna, p. 5.

Shapes and forms that suggest railroad tracks swirl off into the distance, and flags, signals and signal posts in a Russian Constructivist style frame the left side of Maples Arce's face. The dark circles of the railway signs, partially hidden by red flags, echo Maples Arce's dark, round eyes. Behind him on the other side an apparent stairway leads to nowhere. At the top of the canvas, Futurist lines of force suggest the dynamism of rapid movement in a modern world.

In addition to the Stridentist evening at the Café de Nadie, there apparently was one other Stridentist evening, and perhaps there were more, not recorded. List Arzubide mentions an evening "in honor of Huitzilopochtli" (the Aztec god of war), presented by the writer José Juan Tablada in the National Museum: "Mouldy hall of useless words glued by the applause of all the lectures offered to the daily multitudes by the panderings of archaeology..."³⁶

The Stridentists were also interested in other kinds of performance. In September, 1924, the Stridentist writer Luis Quintanilla (Kin Taniya) opened his Teatro Mexicano del Murciélago (Mexican Theater of the Bat), inspired by Chauve-Souris, the Russian dance and theater company of Nikita Balieff, which Quintanilla had seen in New York the year before.³⁷ Possibly more Stridentist in spirit than in form, the pieces that Quintanilla wrote and directed drew inspiration from the cultural innovation in effect in the Stridentist Movement. The production consisted of a series of short sketches adapted from Mexican folklore and traditional folk dances, with titles like the "Danza de los Viejitos" ("Dance of the Old Ones"), and "Danza de los Moros" ("Dance of the Moors"), both of which are common folk dances, and "Piñata." Original music was composed for the pieces by

³⁶List Arzubide, *El movimiento estridentista*, p. 74.

³⁷ I have not been able to determine what Quintanilla's production actually was, dance or theater, or a combination of both. Balieff's well-known theater production was a revue that incorporated Russian ballads, folk songs, prints, engravings and toys in a combination of burlesque and mime. Performances took place in Paris, London and New York during the 1920s and 1930s. *Oxford Companion to the Theater*, 4th ed., 1983, p. 52.

Francisco Domínguez and played by a forty-piece orchestra. Tina Modotti was among the actors. The catalog, written by Quintanilla, stated:

Let us take this opportunity to affirm, for once and for all, that the MURCIELAGO is not the name of a drama or a comedy, or of a predetermined theater piece, but that, like the words opera, comedy, vaudeville, it only indicates a special genre and a new theatrical art. It is the ultimate transformation...all those that see it can be convinced that the MURCIELAGO has an entirely distinct character, and a really extraordinary originality.³⁸

Between 1921 and 1928 the Stridentists maintained a press, Ediciones Estridentistas, with which they produced the three issues of *Irradiador* and the journal *Horizonte*, along with many books of poetry, novels and essays. Stridentist publications featured Futurist and Dadaist-inspired typography and were usually illustrated with woodcuts or drawings. Stridentist books were a significant development in the art of the book, an important art form in the period from the 1920s to the 1940s in Mexico.³⁹ The writers and visual artists worked together to create works that expressed the ideas and aesthetics of the movement. The collaborative approach, a notably important aspect of Stridentist literary and artistic practice, remained the basic working method for Leopoldo Méndez throughout his career. According to List Crespo de la Serna.:

Maples Arce, List, Arqueles Vela, Gallardo, wrote, and the plastic artists adorned the poetry. One could say that they functioned as illustrators, but I believe that this would be a very limited assessment. Illustration, as I understand it, tends to repeat the text or part of it in drawings. The Stridentist books were integrated, conceptual entities. Each book was the product of a team of two. The graphic aspect in no way repeated the text, it added to it with gratuitous images, with its own style, rapidly developed, in which one can clearly observe the spiritual communion of two worlds....The Stridentist books were above all, objects of art. More than being illustrated books, they are integrally designed books.⁴⁰

³⁸Schneider, *El estridentismo o una literatura de la estrategia*, p. 226.

³⁹High-quality, handmade artists' books were produced in great numbers from the 1920s to the 1940s in Mexico, by the Stridentists and other artists, and remain a subject for future study.

⁴⁰List Crespo de la Serna, pp. 8-9.

In their Mexico City period, the Stridentists developed a distinctive visual style, based on prints, drawings and typography accompanying text. As List Crespo de la Serna noted, the illustrations that accompanied the texts often retained their autonomy, as in *Urbe*, discussed below, in which Charlot's woodcuts are associated with the text in a kind of free association, rather than as direct illustrations of the text. The Stridentists combined the dynamism and simultaneity of Italian Futurist painting with the geometric abstractions of Cubism and the utilitarian formalism of Russian Constructivism, blending these styles into a unique primitivist simplicity, with motifs drawn from urban life. Their wood block prints of buildings, skyscrapers, electric wires, telephone wires, hot-air balloons, airplanes, steamships, bridges, and radios constructed an urban visual field that expressed their admiration for the present, their attraction to the symbols of modernity, and their love for Mexico City, already an enormous metropolis with a population of 500,000 in 1921. As art historian Karen Cordero Reiman explains:

The covers of the Stridentist journals and works...demonstrate the creative and aggressive use of typography as a formal element, taken from Futurism. The graphic work returned constantly to symbols of modernity: the radio, the scaffolding, skyscrapers, indications of cultural and material change. The *Edificio Estridentista* [*Estridentista Building*]...by Ramón Alva de la Canal and Charlot's cover for *Urbe: super-poema bolchevique en 5 cantos* by Maples Arce, are kin, in spite of their greater graphic simplicity, to the architectural fantasies of the Futurist Antonio Sant'Elia. Alva de la Canal's oil painting *El Café de Nadie* ...and Luis Quintanilla's cover for *Radio*, designed by Roberto Montenegro, reflect the intent to recreate formally the sensory complexity of the contemporary urban ambiance, with its bombardment of visual and auditory information.⁴¹

In 1924 Charlot made woodcut prints for the cover, frontispiece and five text illustrations for *Urbe: super-poema bolchevique en 5 cantos*, by Maples Arce.⁴² Inspired by the Futurist love of the new, Charlot's woodcut images also owe much to Russian

⁴¹Cordero Reiman, p. 63.

⁴²Manuel Maples Arce, *Urbe: Super-poema bolchevique en 5 cantos* (Mexico City: Andres Botes e Hijo, 1924).

Constructivism. The cover depicts a cityscape, with red and black patterned buildings, and a rhythmic variation of the name “Maples Arce.” The image bears a striking resemblance to the cover of a Russian edition of John Reed’s *Ten Days That Shook the World* (fig. 46), which also uses the overlapping of red, beige and black in the lettering. Charlot’s woodcut illustrations include his frontispiece, the calligraphic portrait of Maples Arce; an image of two tall buildings with a hot air balloon floating between them; a tilted cityscape with enigmatic figures and an obscure airplane shape; the depiction of an aqueduct with a train going over it; a harbor scene with steamships and searchlights; and an image of a giant ocean liner (figs. 47-51). The Stridentist admiration of the city appears here in graphic form for perhaps the first time. The poem and the woodcuts are examples of the Stridentists’ positive attitude toward the Russian Revolution and the revolutionary spirit in Mexico. They demonstrate the Stridentists’ tendency to associate the personal with the political and express their love of urban modernity. *Urbe*’s dedication reads “A los obreros de México” (“To the workers of Mexico”). Canto IV of *Urbe* includes images of the ocean, soldiers, Russian workers, strikers, gardens, dreams, and the poet’s turbulent internal mental state:

Urbe Canto IV

Entre las matorrales del silencio
la oscuridad lame la sangre del crepúsculo.
Las estrellas caídas,
son pájaros muertos
en el agua sin sueño
del espejo

Y las artillerías
sonoras del atlántico
se apagaron,
al fin,
en la distancia.

Sobre la arboladura del otoño,
sopla un viento nocturno:
es el viento de Rusia,
de las grandes tragedias,

y el jardín,
amarillo,
se va a pique en la sombra,
Súbito, su recuerdo,
chisporrotea en los interiores apagados.

Sus palabras de oro
criban en mi memoria.

Los ríos de blusas azules
desbordan las esclusas de las fábricas,
y los árboles agitadores
manotean sus discursos en la acera.
Los huelguistas se arrojan
pedradas y denuestos
y la vida, es una tumultuosa
conversión hacia la izquierda.

Al márgen de la almohada,
la noche, es un despeñadero;
y el insomnio,
se ha quedado escarbando en mi cerebro.

De quién son esas voces
que sobre nadan en la sombra?

Y estos trenes que aullan
hacia los horizontes devastados

Los soldados.
dormirán esta noche en el infierno

Dios mío,
y de todo este desastre
sólo unos cuantos pedazos
blancos,
de su recuerdo
se me han quedado entre las manos.

In the thickets of silence
 darkness laps up the blood of twilight.
 Fallen stars
 are dead birds
 in the mirror's
 sleepless water.

And the Atlantic's
 loud artillery
 was silenced
 at last,
 in the distance...

Over the masts and spars of autumn
 blows a nocturnal wind:
 it is the wind of Russia,
 of the great tragedies,

and the yellow
 garden
 founders in the dark.
 Its memory suddenly
 sparkles in the dimmed interiors.

Its gold words
 pass through my mind.

Rivers of blue blouses
 overflow the floodgates of factories
 and the mutinous trees on the sidewalks
 speak out in gestures.
 The strikers try
 stone-throwing and insults
 and life is a wild
 conversion to the left.

At the pillow's edge
 night is a precipice
 and insomnia
 has kept picking at my brain.

Whose voices are these
 that float in the darkness?

And those trains that howl
toward ruined horizons.

The soldiers
tonight will sleep in hell.

My God,
and from all this disaster
only some blank
bits
of its memory
have stayed in my hands.⁴³

Maples Arce recounted the emotionally charged situation in which he wrote *Urbe*:

One May Day, in the afternoon, I was coming back from Mixcoac on foot, all public transportation having been paralyzed by a workers' demonstration. Dust devils blew in the streets and proletarian groups were returning, carrying banners with slogans and red and black flags. Waves of workers dressed in denim followed one after another, and one heard the cheers for the leaders and the unions. In spite of my fatigue from my walk I was fascinated by the movement of this mass of humanity. I had the impression that what was happening and the festive gathering of the workers arrived at my heart as an apotheosis. The interminable parade under the faint sun of the afternoon seemed very beautiful to me. My spirit, filled with the emotion of the moment, resonated with this event. Thus I walked, thinking and dreaming, across the city, integrated into the glorious march of the workers....In the Chamber of Deputies reasonable discourse was replaced by the surprising outburst of pistol fire. While fanatical groups of military men and politicians raised obstacles to progress in Mexico, in order to gain power for themselves, the workers marched on the alert in demonstrations, and for my part, I saw these spectacles and reflected on the circumstances and responsibilities of the men who could influence the destiny of the nation. When I returned to my house, under the influences of this stimulus, I sat down to write a poem of hope and desperation. I saw clearly the need to give an aesthetic dimension to the Revolution, and in *Urbe* I united my intimate emotions with the outcry of the people.⁴⁴

⁴³Mark Strand, ed., *New Poetry of Mexico* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1970), pp. 165-167.

⁴⁴Maples Arce, *Soberana juventud*, pp. 147-48.

In *Urbe* the young poet combines the two themes of revolution and emotion by alternating images of revolutionary struggles, factories and workers' demonstrations with poetic descriptions of an idealized city.

The other members of the group followed the lead of Maples Arce, experimenting freely; their iconoclastic stance was not merely a pose, but reflected the belief that they could change society by inventing new forms of expression in support of the individual and the group. List Arzubide described the atmosphere of political excitement that surrounded the Stridentists:

Look, I think that this was in the atmosphere. In those days I published a book called *Plebe*, that was dedicated to Flores Magón [a precursor of the Mexican Revolution, a liberal follower of Madero with anarchist leanings], and I was part of a group of anarchists. I don't think that Manuel belonged to any such group, but the Soviet victory resounded on all sides: moreover, it was the hour that the world united with that which represented the spirit of the moment. We all felt this delight and even in Maples' poetry he dedicated a book, *Urbe*, to the Soviet victory, in which he talked of the Soviets, and which he called 'bolshevik poem.' It was in the air, we felt that it was in reality a struggle for the people....I was a member of the Communist Party, Maples wasn't; he was a classic liberal, a progressive liberal, but liberal.⁴⁵

Here List Arzubide positioned himself and Maples Arce politically, stressing the Stridentists' general enthusiasm about the Mexican and Russian revolutions -- "the spirit of the moment." At the same time he associated himself with anarchism and emphasized the difference between his more leftist politics and Maples Arce's "liberalism." While all the members of the group were in sympathy with revolutionary ideals, and produced texts and images relating to political issues, there was a range of political affiliations among them. List Arzubide and Méndez appear to have been the most radical of the Stridentists. Méndez, already strongly identified with the proletariat in the early 1920s, became more

⁴⁵Germán List Arzubide, Interview with Esther Hernández Palacios, in Instituto Veracruzana de Cultura, *Estridentismo: Vuelto a visitar*, 1997 (Veracruz: Instituto Veracruzana de Cultura), pp. 69-70.

politically engaged during his collaborations with List Arzubide. Méndez's illustrations for List Arzubide's *Zapata exaltación*, for example, were the first explicitly political images of his career.

Alva de la Canal's cover illustration for List Arzubide's book of poems, *Plebe: Poemas de rebeldia* (fig. 52), is a confrontational image that reveals the influence of Russian Constructivism. In this iconic image, a giant fist (a theme later explored by Rivera and Méndez, discussed below), fills the foreground in front of a forest of tree-like factory chimneys. In addition to its iconic placement in the center in an extreme close-up view, the fist is further reified by its setting; the smoke from the factory chimneys makes a kind of halo around it. The angle of the hand and wrist implies the presence of the worker, the dynamic social force connected to the factory and rebellion, further symbolized by the exclusive use of red and black.

Alva de la Canal's 1925 illustration for the cover of *El pentagrama eléctrico* (fig. 53), a book of poems by Stridentist writer Salvador Gallardo, is a chaotic, Cubo-Futurist image in which the lines of telephone wires and triangular shapes like the sails of ships, overlie a background of what appear to be clouds. This image is a precursor to Alva de la Canal's 1926 cover illustration for List Arzubide's *El movimiento estridentista* (fig. 54), in which the artist made use of the same dynamic, geometric swirl, here incorporating the letters of the title in a Futurist style. Alva de la Canal also included a subtle pre-Columbian design element: the abstracted figure of Quetzalcoatl, the pre-Columbian snake god, with its jagged teeth and round eye, appears near the top left-hand side of the illustration. This part of the image is unusual in the Stridentists' work, as the indigenous past was generally of little interest to them.

The Stridentists' Years in Jalapa

In 1925 Maples Arce finished his law degree and found employment in Jalapa, Veracruz, under the auspices of General Heriberto Jara, the radical governor of the state of Veracruz. Jara's liberal views and generous patronage gave Maples Arce the opportunity to continue his Stridentist activities in Jalapa, where he worked first as a state judge, and then as General Jara's official secretary. Maples Arce invited List Arzubide, Méndez, Vela, Cueto, Alva de la Canal and others to Jalapa, where he appointed them to official positions. In effect the Stridentist Movement relocated to Jalapa. Art historian Karen Cordero Reiman points out the irony that the most urban of the art movements in Mexico took place partly in the provinces. List Arzubide had issued his manifesto in Puebla, and two more Stridentist manifestos were generated by student groups in Zacatecas in 1925, and Ciudad Victoria in 1926. As Cordero Reiman explains:

In contrast to the focus of the majority of artistic movements in the 1920s on the valorization of rural culture on the national level and the conciliation of interests and ideologies, the Stridentist Movement, with its combative and cosmopolitan orientation, erupted in the cultural field like a dissonant force. Unlike the current that sought to reevaluate previously unknown segments of the human and natural landscape of Mexico, Stridentism promoted an urban utopia that had never existed in Mexico.⁴⁶

Because this urban utopia was an imaginary construct created by the Stridentists, based on a system of visual and written signs that signified the modernity of the city and the valorization of technological progress, they were able to transfer their affinity for urban life to their new location without hesitation. They reinvented Jalapa as "Estridentópolis" ("Stridentopolis"), in a humorous renaming that asserted the Stridentist reality in the new site of their cultural activities. Without breaking their ties to Mexico City, they inaugurated a new phase of buoyant activity under the sympathetic patronage of

⁴⁶Cordero Reiman, p. 62.

General Jara. Once they were situated in Jalapa, Jara allowed the Stridentists to take on some of the cultural functions of the state government, and gave them government funding for their publishing house, Ediciones Estridentista, and their journal, *Horizonte*. The support of General Jara, and the incorporation of the Stridentists into the state government, was a type of patronage common in post-revolutionary nations. In the early twentieth century, for example, the governments of Mexico and the Soviet Union both encouraged artists to participate in the building of their new societies, working collectively in the interest of the proletariat, contrary to the rubric of aesthetic autonomy that has characterized other modernist art efforts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Stridentist experience in Jalapa had several other parallels in Mexico as well, including Vasconcelos's patronage of the muralists in the early 1920s, the official support received by Rivera and a few other muralists throughout the late twenties and into the 1960s, and the official patronage in the state of Jalisco -- Siqueiros received financial support from Governor Guadalupe Zuñiga in the 1920s, and Orozco from Governor Everardo Torpete in the 1930s. The Stridentists were fortunate to have General Jara as a benefactor. He seems to have given them free rein in their work, and sufficient funding and employment to maintain them in their activities.

From 1925 to 1927 the group lived communally in a house in Jalapa. Méndez recalled his years in Jalapa with great pleasure:

Neither illustration work or my work in stage illustration gave me enough to live on and things were very difficult. So I went with Maples Arce to Jalapa. There I began to work in a printing press with Ramón Alva de la Canal. We made the covers and illustrations for a magazine that we published there: *Horizonte*. Our general headquarters was Jalapa. The heads of the Stridentist Movement were Manuel Maples and Germán List Arzubide. There we joined together, all those who participated in or sympathized with this movement. In addition to the leaders, Ramón Alva de la Canal, Arqueles Vela, Germán Cueto, Enrique Barreto Tablada and I and others whose names I do not recall, came to Jalapa. To go out into beautiful Jalapa never ceased to be an adventure for me. But the adventure served me as the first experience of working and living in a group. We all, with the

exception of Maples Arce, who was the Secretary of the State Government, lived in a little house in the most bohemian manner that I had lived and seen, some of us sleeping on the floor, the most unfortunate, and others on some benches that someone had made for a non-existent room. We never had a centavo and nobody wanted to give us credit. But the important thing was that we worked with a will in a fraternal ambiance. There I began to make prints with Ramón Alva...then came the uprising of Gomez y Serrano and everyone returned to Mexico City however and whenever he could.⁴⁷

The kind of communal life and work that Méndez experienced as a young man in Jalapa set a pattern for the rest of his life. He never again lived in a group like the one in Jalapa, but he most often worked in large groups in collaboration with a number of close friends and associates.

In Jalapa the Stridentists published ten issues of *Horizonte* and a number of books, including *Los de Abajo* (*The Underdogs*), by Mariano Azuela, *Zapata exaltación*, by List Arzubide, the first book about Emiliano Zapata, and List Arzubide's *El movimiento estridentista*.⁴⁸

Horizonte, edited by Méndez and Alva de la Canal, was both a Stridentist publication and an official government publication of the State of Veracruz. The magazine, illustrated with woodcuts and photographs, contained articles on Mexican culture and politics, often focusing on regional events in the State of Veracruz, such as the building of new schools in rural areas, as well as incorporating Stridentist poetry and fiction. Whereas much of the work of the Stridentists, such as the illustrated books of poetry and poetic prose were read by a sophisticated audience of urban intellectuals, as an official publication *Horizonte* was distributed widely in the state of Veracruz to a diversified public that likely included teachers, students and government officials, and

⁴⁷ Poniatowska, p. 7.

⁴⁸ Germán List Arzubide, *Zapata exaltación* (Jalapa: Ediciones Estridentista, 1926, 1927, 1928); List Arzubide, *El movimiento estridentista* (Jalapa, Mexico: Ediciones de Horizonte, 1926); Mariano Azuela, *Los de abajo* (Jalapa, Mexico: Ediciones Estridentistas, 1926).

possibly workers and campesinos. Alva de la Canal and Méndez designed the covers. For the cover of the July 1926 issue of *Horizonte* Méndez painted *The Roofs of Jalapa* (fig. 55), a tilted, off-center, geometric composition of the tile roofs that cover the narrow streets of Jalapa. This work expressed the Stridentists' love of the city, in soft blues and whites, using innovative, jazzy, Stridentist rhythms. Méndez published a number of woodcuts and paintings in *Horizonte* and illustrated *Zapata exaltación*, by German List Arzubide. His 1927 portrait of Manuel Maples Arce was published in Maples Arce's book of poetry, *Poemas interdictos*.⁴⁹

In Jalapa Méndez published an article on Mexican muralism, in *Horizonte* of November 1926.⁵⁰ Here he presented his views on art and culture in Mexico, focusing on the issue of national identity, as derived from the Mexican Revolution. He described how, at the Revolution's end, the Mexican, mestizo inheritance took precedence over the Europeanized, superimposed culture of the Porfirian era. Méndez criticized the rejection of Creole identity by two turn-of-the-century Modernist Latin American poets, the Nicaraguan Rubén Darío and the Mexican Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, who wrote about the European past, including Medieval fantasies about "castles and princesses."⁵¹ This was the writing against which Stridentist writers were reacting with their experimental poetry. Lack of concern with political matters on the parts of these poets, and their orientation toward European culture and art for art's sake, were evidently repugnant to Méndez at this point in his political development. Méndez contrasted the two poets with the people of post-Revolutionary Mexico, who, after winning the struggle for their rights,

⁴⁹Manuel Maples Arce, *Poemas interdictos* (Jalapa, Veracruz, Ediciones de Horizonte, 1927).

⁵⁰Méndez, "La estética de la revolución: La pintura mural."

⁵¹Rubén Darío (1867-1916) and Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera (1859-1895) were part of the Modernist movement in Latin American literature, which coincided in Mexico with the reign of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1880 and 1884-1911). For a discussion of Latin American Modernism, see Jean Franco, *The Modern Culture of Latin America: Society and the Artist* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1970).

acknowledged their indigenous, Mexican culture and influenced the youth of Mexico to adopt the positive qualities found therein.

The youth are not defrauded: they found in the people all the virtues that the European civilization, dominant in Mexico, did not have, they found the people to be vigorous, idealistic, and just, and so they have joined the people.⁵²

Méndez also praised the vitality of the *corridos*, popular songs that came from all the regions of Mexico, particularly those that came from the melding of populations that occurred during the Revolution. He compared the music of the people to that of the educated composers of the Conservatory. After briefly describing the work of the muralists, who “knock on the hard heads of the bourgeoisie,” Méndez concluded this essay with a succinct statement of the aesthetic basis of his own artistic work. The credo formulated in the period of Méndez’s association with the Stridentists was to remain the core of his belief system throughout his life:

The urgency of expressing the feelings of a free people, to put their spiritual yearnings at the service of the Revolution, made the painters abandon the concept of art for art’s sake, though that at least required or permitted artistic work to be refined until perfected, in exchange for a momentary work, without careful outlines, but in the end this has created a new aesthetic, one of protest, full of popular longings, and that lives in the full multitude of rebellion, is strong and great and captures us with the emotion of battle -- this is life.⁵³

Although he was not yet a member of the Communist party, in this essay Méndez expressed the belief that art that responded to immediate circumstances, in service to the needs of the masses, had its own aesthetic values, different from “artistic work to be refined until perfected,” and more suited to Mexico’s current dynamic situation. In

⁵²Méndez, “La estética de la revolución,” p. 47.

⁵³Ibid., p. 48.

addition Méndez linked emotion and political action, very much like Maples Arce did, for example, in *Urbe*.

As can be seen from these aesthetic approaches of Maples Arce and Méndez, Mexican art of the latter half of the 1920s parted company with the Soviet system, which began to require artists to follow the aesthetic dictates of the Communist Party under Stalin. Artists in Mexico were accustomed to almost total independence in artistic matters, and Diego Rivera, who visited Moscow in 1927-1928, could not adjust himself to the strictures placed on him there. In Mexico artists agreed on their basic motivations, developed and shared stylistic innovations, and argued among themselves about visual strategies to achieve their mutual goals. Méndez, along with the other Stridentists, stressed a “momentary” art, one that would capture the excitement and emotion of the Revolution. The Stridentist emphasis on spontaneity and immediacy reflects Futurism’s influence, but it was also a result of the Stridentist awareness of the “spirit of the moment,” as List Arzubide phrased it, the focus on the present that was basic to Stridentism. To a lesser extent this sense of the immediate prevailed in the work of the muralists, who were illustrating the recent, dynamic history of the Mexican Revolution, which artists and intellectuals in Mexico conceptualized as a continuing revolution. The work of Mexican artists differed greatly from neo-academic Soviet socialist realism, which by the late 1920s served in part to create the impression of the permanency and inevitability of the Stalinist regime. From this time on, Méndez devoted himself primarily to a politically motivated art that focused on immediate events, with his own stylistic explorations and developments, within the context of a number of artistic group efforts.

Méndez's Work in the Stridentist Movement

Méndez produced a number of powerful images as a member of the Stridentist Movement. Méndez's first-known woodcut print, *Hombre* (fig. 56) of 1925, is one of the most abstract of his Stridentist images. The figure fills the pictorial space, truncated hands obscured by feathery shapes, feet cut off at the bottom edge of the image. The man's bowed head and bent back are criss-crossed by two diagonal lines, which suggest the form of a post or pillory, across which other lines, like jagged barbed-wire, intersect with the diagonals. Using a rough, spare technique, Méndez here alluded to the Crucifixion, without supplying specific narrative detail. With this work he expressed the themes of torment, sacrifice and the human struggle against oppression that would be major preoccupations for him throughout his career. Although *Hombre* does not provide enough information to associate it with a particular political situation, after this time Méndez came back to these themes repeatedly, putting them into a sociopolitical context.

From 1925 on, Méndez often incorporated religious symbolism in his work as he did in *Hombre*. As citizens of a Catholic country, Mexican artists were inculcated with religious imagery from childhood, and they transformed the material of Catholic imagery into the new religion of revolutionary politics. As noted above, the first work of the muralists drew on European religious art; subsequent murals, often painted in churches and chapels, continued to use the forms of religious art: the basics of Mexican Catholic practice were expressed as revolutionary phenomena. Catholic saints became the icons of the political hero or martyr, while religious processions were emulated by the massing of the people in revolutionary activity. Rivera's 1926 murals at the National Agricultural School at Chapingo, for example, turned the inside of an hacienda chapel into a paean to the new life promised by the revolution. His monumental painting, *The Liberated Earth with the Natural Forces Controlled by Man* (fig. 57) on the altar wall, took the place of the Madonna that might have been there, while in *The Blood of the Revolutionary*

Martyrs Fertilizing the Earth (fig. 58) Rivera portrayed Zapata and his general, Otilio Montaño, as Christian martyrs in their tombs. Other of Rivera's works and murals by other artists, Orozco in particular, employed similar conventions. Although Méndez seems to have held strong anti-clerical views, he often made iconic portraits of political figures, he depicted the fervor of the masses in revolutionary upheaval, and he used religious imagery in satire. The martyred figure of *Hombre* is the first in a long series of images with Catholic texts in which Méndez expressed the themes of sacrifice and redemption, as he created dramas of class struggle and resistance.

In addition to woodcuts, Méndez began to use linoleum as a print medium in Jalapa. According to Gerardo García, the printer who worked on *Horizonte*, the linoleum for Méndez's prints came from the remodeling of the government palace:

I remember that...many of the prints that the maestro Leopoldo Méndez chiseled were made with a type of linoleum. There was a lot of left-over linoleum and he used it to make his prints; several covers of *Horizonte* and the illustrations of books were made with this green linoleum that was brought from the palace to the government printing office.⁵⁴

Linoleum block printing became a standard technique for Méndez and his associates, because it was easy to work, inexpensive and readily available.

Méndez used the visual conventions of the Stridentists, the rough and casual graphic work, the geometric irregularities and the eccentric composition, but he altered them to suit his message. Some of his early graphic work reflects the light-hearted life that the Stridentists led in Jalapa. *Danzón* (fig. 59) from 1926, for example, portrays a couple dancing a popular Mexican ballroom dance; the two figures are drawn in simple lines against a geometric background.

⁵⁴*El Estridentismo: Memoria y valoración* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1983), p. 26.

However, in many respects, Méndez's work paralleled that of the muralists during the 1920s. While other Stridentist artists, like Alva de la Canal and Charlot, created highly simplified, partially abstract designs and images, Méndez began to create socially critical images, such as portrayals of events of the Revolution and scenes depicting class struggle. Méndez's prints from the 1920s reflect his commitment to the ideals of the Mexican Revolution as well as its hoped-for but incomplete social reforms. During the 1920s both the myth and the reality of the Revolution were very much at the forefront of the national consciousness, in part because the conflict did not end conclusively with the election of Alvaro Obregón, and in part because many of the goals of the Revolution were tragically thwarted after its conclusion.

List Arzubide's poetic biography of Zapata, *Zapata exaltación*, written in 1926 and published by the Stridentists, with illustrations by Méndez, was the first book written about the Revolutionary hero, and List was one of the first to recognize the power of Zapata as a symbol of the uncompleted ideals of the Revolution.⁵⁵ This book was an important step in the construction of the post-Revolutionary identity of Zapata. Emiliano Zapata (1879-1919), a campesino from the state of Morelos, became one of the most important figures in the new mythology of the Revolution. From 1911 until his assassination in 1919, Zapata fought single-mindedly for the radical agrarian reform of Mexico. His *Plan de Ayala*, published in 1911, promoted communal land ownership and local control of villages and challenged both the ownership of agricultural land by large haciendas and the debt peonage that the hacienda owners inflicted on their workers. The Constitution of 1917, which has dominated Mexican politics and government up to the present, included *Article 27*, which gave the government the right to confiscate large

⁵⁵List Arzubide, *Zapata exaltación*. List Arzubide had fought in the Revolution, starting at the age of fourteen, in the forces of Carranza, fighting against the forces of Zapata. After the Revolution was over, he began to admire Zapata for his radical, agrarian politics. In studying the life of Zapata, List Arzubide went to Morelos to talk to the campesinos who knew him. His life of Zapata, therefore, is based on contemporary first-hand accounts. List Arzubide, interview by author, Mexico City, 16 January 1996.

land-holdings, established communal village lands called *ejidos*, and asserted the claim of the Mexican government to all subsoil resources.⁵⁶

Although the Constitution of 1917 was supported by the three warring generals, Carranza, Zapata and Villa, Carranza became the eventual winner of the bloody struggle among the three factions. In a betrayal of mythic proportion, Carranza had Zapata assassinated in 1919.⁵⁷ After the death of their leader, Zapata's generals decided to throw their support to Alvaro Obregón, Carranza's rebellious general, who took control of the country after the murder of Carranza. Carranza's death marked the end of the Revolution and the beginning of a period of relative peace and stability in Mexico. After the death of Zapata, the victors effectively absorbed the losing agrarianists into the government, and created the myth of a unified Mexican state.

The way in which the Mexican Revolution ended was of great significance to the course of Mexican history and art. The inclusion of Zapata's army leadership in the new government resulted in the official adoption of Zapata as a mythical revolutionary figure, as well as the recognition of the value of his ideals, and their incorporation into the national ideology.⁵⁸ The government of Mexico used imagery of the Mexican Revolution and Zapata's agrarian reforms to legitimize its activities. In addition, Zapata's image took

⁵⁶Two other important provisions of the Constitution were *Article 123*, which gave workers the right to form unions and to go on strike, and *Article 3*, which provided for universal public education and restricted private primary schools to secular education.

⁵⁷Zapata was fighting against the forces of Carranza, when one of Carranza's generals, Pablo González, set a trap for him. A colonel in Carranza's army, Jesús Guajardo, pretended to be interested in going over to Zapata's side and arranged a meeting with Zapata at the Hacienda Chinameca in southern Morelos. When Zapata entered the hacienda with a small contingent of his men, he was gunned down in an ambush. Myths immediately sprang up among the campesinos of Morelos concerning Zapata's death, chiefly that he had not really died and that he would return someday.

⁵⁸For a discussion of the construction of the myth of Zapata, see Ilene V. O'Malley, *The Myth of the Revolution: Hero Cults and the Institutionalization of the Mexican State, 1920-1940* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986). O'Malley describes the long controversy over Zapata and Villa and their eventual inclusion into the national myth: "On August 25th, 1931, Mexican Congress voted to declare both men national heroes, inscribed in gold on the wall of the congressional chambers. Thus Zapata was officially incorporated into the hagiography of the Revolution." O'Malley, p. 60. Zapata's stature among the indigenous people and campesinos of Mexico is still such that the group that led the 1994 uprising of Mayan people in the state of Chiapas invoked Zapata in the name of their army, The Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista Army of National Liberation, EZLN).

on Christ-like proportions, as in Rivera's image of the dead Zapata in his mural at the National Agricultural School at Chapingo. Along with Zapata, the struggles of the campesino, the soldier and the worker, the revolutionary trinity, became the official imagery of the post-Revolutionary culture of Mexico, adopted by artists in solidarity with the underclass and promoted by the Mexican government as a symbolic gesture toward the democratization of the country.

Méndez's illustrations for *Zapata exaltación* and *Horizonte* depict the common people of Mexico involved in political struggles during and after the Revolution. The creation of the prints and paintings for *Horizonte* and *Zapata exaltación* represented a crucial moment for the artist. Whereas Méndez made light-hearted images such as *The Roofs of Jalapa* and *Danzón* in 1926, by 1927 his most significant work focused on Zapata and the Revolution. Méndez began to construct images concerning oppression and resistance, as he would throughout the rest of his career. At the same time, Méndez began to experiment with a variety of styles, as he would from this period on.

Of the Stridentists Méndez was the only visual artist to evolve a narrative approach to revolutionary subject matter in the print medium. While Alva de la Canal produced politically charged images, they were highly iconic, like his illustration for *Plebe*. Siqueiros, Guerrero and Orozco had created prints with revolutionary content during the early 1920s in *El Machete*, but Méndez's work was more innovative and expressive than their primitivist woodcuts. Méndez focused increasingly on the struggle for land and power, adding verbal narrativity to his work as he developed political themes, perhaps reflecting the influence of the themes and styles of Rivera and Orozco's murals of the mid-twenties. Both Rivera and Orozco had depicted scenes from the Revolution in densely packed images, Rivera in the Ministry of Education Building and Orozco in his murals in the National Preparatory School.

While Méndez's 1927 cover illustration for List Arzubide's *Zapata exaltación* (fig. 60) is an austere line drawing portrait of Zapata, with heavy black lettering for the title, author and publication information, the red and beige woodcut illustrations on the front and back covers of the 1928 edition of *Zapata exaltación* depict the class conflict of the Revolution (figs. 61, 62). The front cover depicts a scene from the life of Zapata: the hero, identified by his large sombrero, sarape, bandolier and rifle, defends himself against a hacienda worker, a smaller and less powerful figure than Zapata, who wears a Spanish beret, with a cat-o-nine-tails in his hand. It was part of the legend of Zapata that he suffered abuse at the hands of the overseer of the hacienda that had taken his village's lands. The composition is based on strong diagonals in the main part of the image, and the title and author of the book are carved into a banner at the top in simply executed letters. The back cover portrays the soldiers putting down their weapons and replacing them with farm implements to return to the land, and Zapata's slogan, "La Tierra es para los que la Trabajan," ("The Land Belongs to Those Who Work It") appears on a red streamer behind the three intertwined soldier-farmers. The strokes of the woodcut images outline contoured forms, giving a three-dimensional effect to the figures. Méndez's manner of portraying bodies in these prints is reminiscent of the figural style developed by the muralists in the 1920s. Rivera especially used chunky, rounded forms composed in curvilinear blocks in his depictions of people, their sturdy appearance perhaps serving to emphasize their proletarian affiliations. This kind of figure type, a new image of the working-class hero that departed from Greco-Roman idealism, became a convention in Rivera's work and appears to have influenced Méndez at this time. And as Méndez did in the illustrations for *Zapata exaltación*, Rivera often framed his compositions, such as the 1928 *Distribution of Arms* in the Ministry of Education murals, with banners and/or architectural details.

Méndez returned to the subject of brutality and oppression continually over the next forty years, creating a class-based iconography that typically portrayed the innocent as sacrificial victims, or as active revolutionaries, heroes inspired by the passionate moment of resistance to oppression. He adhered to Marx's dictum:

The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism of the weapon, material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses. Theory is capable of gripping the masses as soon as it demonstrates *ad hominem*, and it demonstrates *ad hominem* as soon as it becomes radical. To be radical is to grasp the root of the matter. But for man the root is man himself.... The criticism of religion ends with the *categorical imperative to overthrow all relations* in which man is a debased, enslaved, abandoned, despicable essence.⁵⁹

In the mythic duality of oppression and resistance the implication is that the violence of the oppressor is excessive, unjustified, random and illogical, whereas revolutionary violence is rational and just, and is the necessary means to overcome the conditions in which humans are "debased." From this time on, Méndez continued to examine violence in this ideological context, developing more and more complex and varied presentations of the issues and themes first expressed in his illustrations for *Zapata exaltación*.

Méndez explored the theme of revolutionary confrontation in his painting on the cover of the *Horizonte* of March 1927 (fig. 63), a lively, colorful composition with three puppet-like figures, in red, white, brown, blue and gray. A worker and a campesino dance with lighted torches, holding a hammer and sickle between their clasped hands. A caricature of a rich man, with a fiendish, mask-like face, a dagger clutched in one hand and a money bag in the other, lies on the ground in a bed of flames. His arms and legs are upraised in a childish display of anger. The capitalist character in the print resembles the Mexican papier maché Judas figures traditionally exploded at Easter that also appear in

⁵⁹Karl Marx, introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, quoted in Maynard Solomon, ed., *Marxism and Art* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979), p. 53.

the murals of Diego Rivera (fig. 64). The campesino and the worker on the other hand, are graceful and young, representing revolutionary hope and energy. Méndez did not, however, idealize these figures in the Greco-Roman tradition; rather, he represented the men in a fluid, Modernist style. Here Méndez equated curving forms with the positive portrayals of the young revolutionaries and angular, jagged lines with the negative depiction of the capitalist villain, a strategy he used from time to time in later prints to distinguish between positive and negative characterizations. In this drawing the iconographic grouping of the soldier, worker and campesino is reduced to worker and campesino -- the soldier replaced by the rich man, and the flames acting as a visual divider between the rich and the poor. The campesino and the worker are surrounded by yellow streams of light from the flames of their torches, and the rich man lies on the dark ground silhouetted against the fire. Méndez has reduced the oppressor to a helpless mannequin, and the victorious dance of the campesino and the worker indicates the promised victory of the Revolution.

The illustrations for *Zapata exaltación* and the cover of *Horizonte* are the earliest known of Méndez's works which address the theme of class conflict. On the cover of *Horizonte* he portrayed the worker and the campesino as dynamic social agents. In addition to expressing class issues, these works are perhaps the first of a number of images by Méndez in which the revolution is acted out as a kind of oppositional ritual, the theatrical aspects of the images functioning as visual correlatives to the concept of an ongoing revolution. Art historian Griselda Pollock addresses the performative aspects of political representation in her essay "Feminism/Foucault -- Surveillance/Sexuality," in which she points out:

In Marx's most sustained writing about class and class relations -- a historical narrative and anatomy of France during 1848-1851, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) -- a theatrical metaphor is repeatedly employed to make us understand that class, while constituted materially in actual social relations of

production, effectively functions through representation. The 'political' sphere in a bourgeois state is a representation of class forces and relations in struggle.... The political is also a composite of institutions, discourses, personnel, rituals, effects that can be best understood as a kind of staging of the social relations that create the necessity for this sphere of representation and discourse. The political is a space for the realization or performance of class by means of a specific script and using quite distinct costumes, a performance of those relations according to a logic specific to the state -- the political realm, the sphere of political representation.⁶⁰

Méndez's work from the mid-twenties until the end of his career accorded almost entirely with Pollock's analysis of representation of the class struggle as a drama. Although virtually nothing is known about his work as a set design assistant in the early 1920s, his work indicates that he was interested in theater as an art form. His focus was on the theatrical public and political aspects of life: Pollock's "institutions, discourses, personnel and rituals." In the early images of Zapata and the illustration for *Horizonte*, Méndez began to stage confrontational and heroic dramas in his prints, in terms of simple binary oppositions, a practice he adhered to from this time on, with a few exceptions. The cover of *Horizonte*, with its triumphant figures, is a positive image of ritual performance. The illustration on the front cover of *Zapata exaltación* is another type of ritual act, the playing out of roles of dominance and resistance, while that on the back cover is a peaceful version of the theme of triumph. These two kinds of narratives became central to Méndez's work over the years. In a dialectical play of opposites, some images would portray opposition to the abuse of power, while others depicted the joyful, triumphant moment enacted dynamically. Later, when fascism became a pressing issue, the tragedy of defeat and annihilation at the hands of oppressive forces was added to this dramatic iconography. In many of these images, Méndez used conventions reminiscent of Baroque painting, especially distinctive framing devices, strong diagonals and compositions of

⁶⁰Griselda Pollock, "Feminism/Foucault -- Surveillance/Sexuality," in Norman Bryson et al, *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), pp. 1-2.

figures turning dramatically into spaces in the backgrounds, all devices employed by the muralists as well.⁶¹ Along with the muralists, Méndez thus began to make significant contributions to a developing national iconography of class conflict. The conventions they developed portrayed the businessman, the industrialist, the politician, and the henchman, along with the campesino, the worker, and the soldier, in a Mexican context. The front and back covers for *Zapata exaltación* and the cover of *Horizonte* are early versions of this semiology, and lack the visual intensity of Méndez's later images. In 1928 Méndez still employed the light-hearted approach of the Stridentists, and it was only after he entered the political realm as an active player that his imagery gained the narrative power of the confrontational stands his affiliations entailed.

Méndez illustrated the cover of Maples Arce's brochure, *El Movimiento Social en Veracruz* (fig. 65), for a celebration of May Day 1927, with the same kind of austere line drawing that he used for the 1926 edition of *Zapata exaltación*.⁶² The two figures of men with mattocks over their shoulders, involved in the reconstruction of Veracruz, are visually united by the elegantly simple overlapping composition, the lines portraying their faces suggesting Art Deco style. This was one of Méndez's last images from the Jalapa phase of the Stridentist Movement

The Departure from Jalapa. The Dispersal of the Stridentist Movement

When Governor Jara was suddenly deposed by his political enemies in 1927, the Stridentists were forced to leave Jalapa in haste. According to List Crespo de la Serna:

⁶¹Baroque influences on twentieth-century Mexican art are understandable given the profusion of Baroque painting, sculpture and architecture in Mexican churches and other locations. Siqueiros acknowledged the Baroque heritage in his art, especially that of El Greco, in 1947, "...I try to adapt his [El Greco's] teaching to the conditions and forms of our time...." David Alfaro Siqueiros, "The Creed of David Alfaro Siqueiros," in *Art and Revolution*, p. 92.

⁶²Manuel Maples Arce, *El movimiento social en Veracruz*, 1927.

One gloomy day General Jara received a message from the murderous and corrupt hero of the revolution, Alvaro Obregón. In this message he announced that he [Jara] had one day, not only to leave the governorship of Veracruz, but also to leave Veracruz itself, under the pain of being shot if he did not comply. The General had to depart on the run, obviously. The next day, the soldiers that took over from Jara made an assault on the offices of *Horizonte*, breaking and burning everything. There was lost the original painting of *The Café de Nadie*, along with all the originals of the journal [*Horizonte*] and the books, originals, not only published, but in fact some that were yet unpublished, various issues ready to go, etc. This almost-unknown fact, perhaps deliberately ignored by Mexican artistic historiography, constitutes without a doubt, one of the historical tragedies of the national plastic art.⁶³

Although Méndez and List Arzubide later worked on a Stridentist publication, *Norte*, published in Veracruz in 1928, the departure of the group from Jalapa effectively ended the Stridentist Movement. The members went different ways, while only one member of the movement, Germán List Arzubide, retained his identification as a Stridentist. List Arzubide, who died in 1998 at the age of 100, maintained to the end that he was the “last of the Stridentists.”⁶⁴ List Arzubide also claimed that the Stridentists formally ended the movement in 1928, with his document “Cuenta y Balance.” In this text he declared:

Moreover, as whole-hearted revolutionaries, we knew that every revolution that did not decapitate itself in time, ended up by being reactionary.... We were the only revolutionaries worthy of sacrificing our struggle for lack of those who could inherit it from us.⁶⁵

⁶³List Crespo de la Serna, pp. 11-12. Assuming this anecdote, which originated with List Arzubide, is true, it would account for the fact that there are large gaps in the corpus of original Stridentist material, including the absence of *Irradiador*.

⁶⁴Germán List Arzubide, interview by author, Mexico City, 20 February 1998. In a characteristically self-effacing gesture, when the government of Mexico honored List Arzubide by erecting a statue of him on the Avenue of Poets in Chapultepec Park in Mexico City, the writer insisted that the statue include all the Stridentists. A sculpture designed by the poet's grandson, Robin List Crespo de la Serna (fig. 66), incorporated Stridentist imagery: an airplane and buildings in a Stridentist style, Charlot's aqueduct from *Urbe* and portraits of Maples Arce and List Arzubide.

⁶⁵List Crespo de la Serna, pp. 12-13. Published in 1944 as Germán List Arzubide, “Cuenta y balance,” *La Pajarita de Papel* (Mexico City) no. 27, 1944, n. p. The original date of this document is not known, and a Stridentist publication, *Norte*, was published in Veracruz in 1928, so the date of final end of the Stridentist

In 1926 List Arzubide published the first book about Stridentism, *El movimiento estridentista* (*The Stridentist Movement*), in which he compiled many of its important documents, literary productions, photographs, and prints. He dedicated the book to the Aztec god of war: “Huitzilopochtli, Manager of the Stridentist Movement -- Homage to Aztec Admiration.” The Stridentists were poetic myth makers, and List Arzubide’s book presented the fanciful comments of the artists about each other, self-representations and illustrations of literary work, rather than a straightforward description of the movement’s history. The book ends with celebratory reviews of the book from newspapers and journals throughout Latin America, and letters addressed to List Arzubide from many Latin American countries, including Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, Uruguay, Costa Rica, Argentina, Chile, and Puerto Rico, as well as Mexico and Paris. Out of the thirty-nine laudatory texts, only two mentioned Leopoldo Méndez, in keeping with the relative anonymity in which he was situated from the 1920s to his death.

Of the Stridentists, only List Arzubide was as politically engaged as Méndez. The work of the visual artists, Charlot, Cueto and Alva de la Canal, in particular, focused more specifically on abstract qualities and formal issues. Méndez derived inspiration from List Arzubide’s literary work and political engagement; his illustrations for *Horizonte* and for List Arzubide’s *Zapata exaltación* are the first examples of Méndez’s lifelong interpretations of political and historical issues. His images from this period, while demonstrating the influences of the Stridentist aesthetic, begin to form a body of work that represents the human figure in the context of a social drama, combining text and image in a narrative of history and politics. As a reenactment of oppositional roles in the struggles between classes, Méndez’s prints tell the story of the continuing revolution, the conflict between good and evil, represented by the oppressors and the victims, the

sacrifices and the victories of the people and the struggle of the individual toward freedom and happiness in a world determined by political forces. His work is peopled by characters who are agents of struggle, sacrifice and resistance, as individuals or as members of the masses. They are always in the public eye, always actors on the political stage.

By the end of the Stridentist years, Méndez had developed his political awareness and committed himself to creating revolutionary art. He had chosen printmaking as his primary medium, and had begun to master graphic design and techniques. In the process he incorporated stylistic influences from the Stridentists, while assimilating other European and Mexican influences. Equally important he had formed what were to be life-long artistic relationships and established his role in the circle of friends who were to remain, like himself, at the center of Mexican culture. Although at this point the Stridentist Movement was essentially over, and its members dispersed from Jalapa, they continued to communicate and work together for years to come.

Chapter Three: The Years After the Stridentists: Political Art, Political Activism

After leaving Jalapa in 1927, Méndez began a six-year period during which he developed as an artist and political activist. He continued to produce politically motivated woodcuts as well as fine art prints, gaining stylistic and technical mastery of the print medium. He joined the Communist Party and established close ties with fellow activists in Mexico City in a number of organizations. In 1930 he traveled to the United States for several months and held the first solo exhibition of his work in Los Angeles. He also held a position as Director of Drawing and Plastic Arts in the Ministry of Education and experimented with children's puppet theater as an educational art form.

Méndez in Veracruz

From Jalapa Méndez went to the city of Veracruz, where he lived for about a year and a half. Here his friend Dr. Ignacio Millán, who was also associated with the Stridentist Movement, got him work for the Sanitation Department of the Port of Veracruz. He dissected rats to see if they carried the plague, later feeding them by the bucketful to the sharks in the bay, "the worst job I ever had in my life."¹ While living in Veracruz Méndez also worked on the magazine *Norte* (*nortes* are strong winds that blow in the winter in the region of Veracruz), published by Millán, apparently in three issues in 1928.² *Norte* was evidently a short-lived attempt to continue the literary and artistic work of the Stridentists. In the third issue of *Norte*, List Arzubide is listed as literary editor and Méndez as artistic director.³ Méndez's illustrations for the front and back covers of *Zapata exaltación* appeared on the cover of this issue, spread out to create one continuous image.

¹ Poniatowska, p. 7.

² Reyes Palma, *Leopoldo Méndez*, p.15.

³ *Norte* (Veracruz, Mexico), no. 3 (August 1928).

In 1928 Méndez illustrated the front and back covers of the book *Un fragmento de la revolución*, by Praxedis Guerrero and Enrique Barreiro Tablada (figs. 67, 68).⁴ The images, like the cover illustrations for *Zapata exaltación*, are woodcuts in red ink on cheap yellow paper. However, although Méndez still sometimes used the fluid, rounded forms and eccentric angles that characterized his illustrations for *Horizonte*, these prints represent a new style for him; they have stronger, simpler lines, more stable compositions and more radical content than the illustrations for either *Horizonte* or *Zapata exaltación*. On the front cover of *Un fragmento de la revolución*, Méndez used a hammer and sickle motif for the first time, while on the back he portrayed a group of revolutionary soldiers learning to read in an open-air rural school, their rifles leaning against one of the posts of the thatched roof. On the front, Méndez surrounded the hand holding the hammer and sickle with the title, author, date and place of publication on banners as design elements, as he had previously in the covers of *Zapata exaltación*; on the back he used the slogans “Más Tierras, Más Fusiles, Más Escuelas Para Los Campesinos” (“More Land, More Rifles, More Schools for the Campesinos”), embedding the text within the image in horizontal bands that divide the scene into three equal parts, which echo the three demands of the slogans. In 1928 Tina Modotti, whose photographs had appeared in *Horizonte*, was creating similar images, using symbolic elements in powerful compositions that represented the Mexican Revolution and the Communist Party. Her photograph *Bandolier, Corn, Guitar* (fig. 69) signifies three aspects of Mexican life -- corn as the basic nourishment, the guitar as culture and the bullets as the Revolution, while another, *Bandolier, Corn, Sickle* (fig. 70), express Modotti’s Communist affiliation with a specifically Mexican iconography.

⁴Praxedis Guerrero and Enrique Barreiro Tablada, *Un fragmento de la revolución* (Córdoba, Mexico: Ediciones Norte, 1928).

Méndez's illustrations for *Un fragmento de la revolución* go beyond simple support for the Mexican Revolution to express the more specific demands of the continuing revolution and the aims of the Mexican Communist Party (Partido Comunista de México, PCM). These prints demonstrate an increased militancy similar to the prints of Xavier Guerrero and Siqueiros. Guerrero's woodcut masthead for SOTPE's *El Machete* of 1924 (fig. 26) has the same vigorous lines and frontal presentation as Méndez's 1928 wood block prints for *Un fragmento de la revolución*. Both artists used combinations of texts and symbols in their designs. Like Méndez's image on the front cover of *Un fragmento de la revolución*, Guerrero's wood block depicts a hand holding a hammer and sickle, and displays the title of the publication on a banner. Méndez's prints are more polished and technically accomplished than Guerrero's rough, proletarian image, but their messages are the same -- they are both calls to action. Siqueiros's woodcut for *El Machete, The Unity of Campesinos, Soldiers and Workers* (fig. 27), portrays the revolutionary trinity standing in front of a mass of bodies. The grouping of the figures close to the front of the pictorial plane and the repetition of identical, simplified forms is similar to the composition of Méndez's woodcut on the back cover of *Un fragmento de la revolución*, and both images convey the concept of the unity of the masses after the success of the Revolution.

In the process of his commitment to social change, Méndez developed a variety of styles and strategies to express his ideas and reactions to events, based on the many influences that surrounded him in a dynamic artistic milieu. As mentioned above, his first political images, those illustrating *Zapata exaltación*, *El movimiento social en Veracruz* and *Un fragmento de la revolución*, already show the great variation in style that would characterize his work from then on.

In the 1920s and '30s, in addition to their acquaintance with the concepts and works of contemporary European artists, Mexican artists who were making prints were

interested in the satirical traditions of Francisco Goya, Honoré Daumier and the nineteenth-century Mexican satirical newspaper lithographers, José María Villasana and Constantino Escalante, whom Charlot called the “American Daumiers.”⁵ Mexican artists began to especially admire the prints of Posada. As mentioned above, the first book on Posada, *Monografía: las obras de José Guadalupe Posada, grabador mexicano* (*Monograph: the Works of José Guadalupe Posada, Mexican Engraver*) appeared in 1930.⁶

The rawness and directness of German Expressionism, with its focus on the tragic side of human existence, was particularly compelling to Mexican artists. The early graphic work of Orozco shows a strong relationship with German Expressionism, and the people in his prints of the 1910s resemble the awkward and distorted figures of Emil Nolde. The politically motivated prints by the German artists Käthe Kollwitz and George Grosz and the Belgian printmaker Franz Masareel correspond to the subject matter that Mexican artists were exploring in the 1920s and '30s. In addition, the print medium, often used by German Expressionist artists, was especially appropriate for the simplification of forms to express political content. Works such as Kollwitz's lithographic poster of 1920, *Vienna is Starving Its Children* (fig. 71), used the skeleton motif to portray human suffering in an almost pictographic manner, while the depiction of death as a crowned dancing figure referred to the *Danse Macabre*. Images such as these, similar to Posada's prints in their iconography of skeletons and death, were more profoundly tragic than Posada's prints, and probably appealed to Méndez's increasingly political engagement and desire to convey powerful messages to the public.

Mexican artists were exposed to a wide variety of contemporary art through exhibitions held in Mexico City. For example, the graphic works of the artists Lyonel

⁵Jean Charlot, *An Artist on Art*, vol. II (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1972), p. 138.

⁶José Guadalupe Posada, *Monografía: Las obras de José Guadalupe Posada, grabador mexicano* (Mexico City: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1930).

Feininger, Alexei Jawlensky, Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee were exhibited in Mexico City at the National Library, in 1931.⁷ Also in 1931, Gabriel Fernández Ledesma organized an exhibition of contemporary prints at the Salón del Arte in Mexico City that included artists like Max Beckman, George Grosz, John Heartfield and Emil Nolde.⁸ An exhibit of Soviet prints and posters was held in Mexico City sometime in the 1930s, and a show of Japanese prints took place in Mexico City's Sala de Arte in 1931.⁹ As mentioned above, Russian Constructivist work was a strong influence, as can be seen in Stridentist graphic art such as Charlot's cover of *Urbe* and Alva de la Canal's cover of *Plebe*. In Mexico artists developed new graphic styles that amalgamated these influences with the intent of convincing the masses of the urgency of political unity and action.

Méndez joined the Mexican Communist Party sometime in 1929. He probably considered this decision for some time, and produced the strong images of *Un fragmento de la revolución* while going through the process of committing himself to the Party. His conversion to Communism was apparently based more on his deep convictions about social injustice than on political theory. Alberto Beltrán remembered that Méndez once told him that he became a Communist because of his childhood experiences:

Leopoldo was more politically congruent [than other artists] because his early life was linked with the lower levels of society, with problems that he had lived, that to take action in favor of these people was not a theory, but a reality for him. I remember asking him one time how he had become a Communist, and he said, 'through a prayer'....the Magnificat that they sell outside of churches, that he read as a child, because it said that one day justice would come for the poor and the

⁷This exhibition came from the collection of Galka Scheyer, who brought the paintings of the Blue Four to the United States in 1924 and continued to exhibit them into the 1940s. Scheyer arranged the exhibition through Rivera, whom she had met in San Francisco in 1931. According to Scheyer, "The exhibition in Mexico was a great success. People came streaming in and looked and discussed for hours." Quoted in Amy Baker Sandback, "Galka Scheyer: Print Emissary" *Print Collector's Newsletter*, vol. 21 (May/June 1990): pp. 47-49.

⁸Azuela, "Graphics of the Mexican Left, 1924-1938," p. 263, p. 268, note 26.

⁹ Posters for these exhibitions illustrated in Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, *Diseño antes diseño: Diseño gráfico en México 1920-1960* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1991), pp. 67-69.

rich would die. Yes, this was a proclamation against the rich and he told me that it was because of this that he became a Communist and not by reading Marxism or other things...so it was a very unusual Marxism, I'd say that it was more romantic...and actually, most people who knew Leopoldo, even if they weren't artists, noticed that he was more sentimental and romantic...¹⁰

As if to confirm Beltrán's testimony two significant events coincided with Méndez's entrance into the Mexican Communist Party, dramatic, even "romantic" incidents that linked Mexican Communists with international politics and anti-imperialist activities. In 1928 ties developed between the Mexican Communist Party and Augusto Sandino, the Nicaraguan revolutionary general, who was then fighting against the dictatorship of Díaz in Nicaragua. Mexican artists, including Méndez, joined in demonstrations against the dictatorship and United States involvement in Nicaragua, in a group called *Manos Fuera de Nicaragua* (Hands Off Nicaragua). List Arzubide, who had been working with Méndez on the journal *Norte* in 1928, was closely involved in an important international affair, and told the following story:

Sandino's forces captured an American flag in a battle in Chipote, Nicaragua, in 1929, proof that the United States was aiding the Nicaraguan government, a violation of international law. Sandino's representative brought the flag to Veracruz, Mexico, where Rivera received it, taking it to Mexico City and delivering it to Hernán Laborde, head of the Communist Party. The Communist Party showed the flag to the Mexican Senate, denouncing United States imperialism and provoking an indignant response from the American government, which demanded the return of the flag. After that, the PCM entrusted the flag to me and I departed from Mexico to deliver the flag to the World Anti-Imperialist Congress in Frankfurt, Germany, a conference attended by delegates from many countries, including Henri Barbusse, Nehru and Madame Sun Yat-Sen. It was too late to go to Germany from Veracruz, so I had to travel by way of New York. I wrapped the flag around my body and took the train from Mexico to New York. It was very hot through Texas and the South, especially with the wool flag underneath my clothing. It was the 4th of July in New York, and I hung the flag out the window, as a great joke. At the Congress in Frankfurt, I took the platform

¹⁰ Alberto Beltrán, interview by author, Mexico City, 10 March 1996, tape recording. Other than this information, I have been unable to locate any specific information concerning Méndez's entry into the Party.

and denounced the United States. I removed the flag from my body to great ovation. The audience began to sing the *Internationale* in many different languages. I was unable to return to Mexico, so I was invited by workers in the USSR and went there for about a year.¹¹

Modotti took a photograph of the Hands Off Nicaragua Committee (fig. 72), showing a diverse group of activists with the captured flag before List Arzubide took it to Germany. This incident is an indicator of the compelling political environment that Méndez entered as he joined the outlawed Mexican Communist Party. In addition, in January of 1929, Julio Antonio Mella, a leftist Cuban student in exile, was assassinated in Mexico City.¹² In the first recorded instance of his participation in direct political action Méndez took part in protests against the murder of Mella and in support of the Nicaraguan forces of Sandino, organized by La Unión de Trabajadores de la Compañía Terminal (the Union of Workers of the Terminal Company) in Veracruz, under the auspices of the Liga Antimperialista de las Américas (the Anti-Imperialist League of the Americas).¹³

The incident with Sandino, who himself was assassinated in 1934, and the death of Mella at the hands of Cuban agents, involved Mexican Communists in world affairs, in a serious and dangerous theater that only increased in intensity through the end of the 1920s and into the '30s. International leftist politics, with the twin themes of anti-imperialism and anti-fascism, filtered into Méndez's work in the 1930s. A change in

¹¹ Germán List Arzubide, interview by author, Mexico City, 16 January 1996. While List Arzubide was in the Soviet Union he made many important contacts with Russian artists and writers, including poet Vladimir Mayakovsky and cinematographer Sergei Eisenstein. He also developed an interest in children's theater and popular puppet theater.

¹² Mella, who had gained prominence in Cuba for his political theories and activism, was in Mexico as a political refugee. He wrote articles for *El Machete* and worked for the newspaper in Mexico City. He was murdered while walking on a street in Mexico City with Tina Modotti, who also worked for *El Machete* and who had become his lover. His death became a public sensation in Mexico, causing massive outcry against the Cuban government by leftists, and a conservative backlash against Communists. Modotti was the focus of the police investigation and the target of a vicious yellow journalism campaign. Accused of the attempted assassination of the president-elect, Pablo Ortiz, Modotti was expelled from Mexico in 1929.

¹³ Reyes Palma, *Leopoldo Méndez*, p. 161.

subject matter demonstrates a shift in his attention from a national to a more global outlook. He created images of the Mexican Revolution in the late 1920s and early 1930s, in the mid-thirties he began to depict contemporary domestic fascism, and by the late 1930s, around the time of the Spanish Civil War and the first stirrings of world war, he started to focus on increasingly pressing international issues.

Mexico City Again, Travels, Graphic Work and Teaching Art

When Méndez returned to Mexico City in 1929, he began a period of collaboration with artists and writers during which he became involved with a wide variety of political and artistic groups. In 1929, Méndez joined the organization Agorismo, a group of Communist-affiliated intellectuals and artists. The members, who also included the writers María del Mar and Gilberto Bosques, issued a statement of purpose:

Ours is a group of action. Expansive intellectuality directed toward the masses. Agorismo is not a new theory of art, but rather a definite, virile position of artistic activity confronting life.

We think that art must only have profoundly human objectives. The mission of the artist is that of the interpreter of daily reality. While there are collective problems, whether emotional, ideological or economic, a passive attitude is unworthy.

Having defined this position, we consider questions of technique and aesthetic theory secondary: the important thing is to respond categorically to the rhythm of our time.

Agorismo:
art in movement
creative speed,
the socialization of art¹⁴

¹⁴ Schneider, Luis Mario, "Hector Pérez Martínez: ¿Estridentista o Agorista?" in *Estridentismo: Memoria y Valoración* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1983), p. 233.

These words, though not attributed to a particular author, accord with Méndez's emphasis on the political aspects of art and his relative disregard for formal concerns (they are secondary, rather than irrelevant) that characterized Méndez's practice at this time. This statement, whether or not Méndez had a part in formulating it, is consistent with his earlier opinions regarding art expressed in *Horizonte* in November 1926. Again the emphasis is on instantaneous response to political events and total commitment to social and political change. The doctrine expressed by members of Agorismo has much in common with the theories of the Stridentists, and ultimately with the Italian Futurists, especially the emphasis on contemporaneity, the rhythm of the present, and speed and modernity, in conjunction with social awareness. Both groups produced experimental work. However, the members of Agorismo identified more explicitly with current proletarian struggles, their "expansive intellectuality directed toward the masses."

Méndez provided the cover illustration for the catalogue of an exhibition held by members of Agorismo in a circus tent, the Carpa Amaro (Amaro Circus tent), in the center of Mexico City, where they displayed copies of their poems. Méndez's 1929 woodcut, *La Revolución Que Hace Arte* (fig. 73), portrays a Zapatista soldier, with bandolier and sombrero, playing a harmonica while seated on a railroad track. Behind him are two other soldiers facing backward. The railroad is a potent symbol of the Mexican Revolution -- much of the Revolution was fought along the lines of the railways, and the victorious strategies of the rebels Villa and Zapata centered around gaining control of the trains and transporting people and supplies by rail. The railroad system was also a marker of modernity, built by foreign engineers, with foreign investments, during the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, and considered one of the major accomplishments of his regime. In addition, the Zapatista soldiers represent the struggle for agrarian reform that was promoted by the Agoristas, and that had become a major topic in art in Mexico. Moreover, because the soldier is on the tracks playing music on a harmonica during a

peaceful moment, the print communicates the message that the war was a temporary condition. The image also implies that among the Mexican Revolution's positive effects was the creation of opportunities for the working classes (soldiers, workers and campesinos) to make their own art, an important and continuous theme in national cultural policy during the 1920s. This print also quotes, whether consciously or unconsciously, Fernando Leal's painting, *Campamiento Zapatista* (fig. 10), discussed above, one of the earliest portrayals of Zapatista soldiers. The central figure in Leal's painting is also at rest, playing a harmonica, a familiar instrument during the Revolution. Méndez's black and white image, however, is more austere than Leal's colorful painting. Leal's Zapatistas form a comfortable group in a pastoral setting, backed by an Impressionist-style landscape. The figures are relatively static, and the artist emphasized their indigenous cultural attributes -- clothing, blanket, and fruit -- and their Indian physiognomies. Méndez's soldier sits between two anonymous soldiers on a railroad track, his head and body turned away from his companions, his face mostly covered by his hat. He is everyman, playing out a role and bearing the hopes of the Revolution as an icon of social change. Again Méndez referred to the performative aspects of the Revolution, as the title of the print emphasized. It is the "revolution" itself that is making art, embodied by the soldier/musician as a symbolic agent representing the creative process that could come out of the victory of the Revolution. However, the soldier conveys a sense of solitude, of being lost in the music he is playing. The dilemma of the isolation and detachment necessary to the creative process was a theme that Méndez used again later in several depictions of artists, notably his self-portrait, *Amenaza Sobre México* (*Menace Over Mexico*) of 1945, the *Portrait of Verdi* of 1953, and his 1956 *Homenaje a Posada* (*Homage to Posada*) (figs. 192, 214, 225), all discussed below. The apparent contradiction between Méndez's promotion of collaborative working methods

and his portrayals of solitary artists points to a conflict that may have existed within Méndez himself about the creative process.

Although he had been producing politically charged images since 1926, by 1929 Méndez was working in organizations that used art specifically as a tool to enhance their oppositional positions. He was developing a wide network of associations that would be important to him throughout the coming decades. He was also becoming an active member of the artistic and political opposition to the government. While associated with Agorismo, for example, Méndez also worked on the journal *Crisol*, put out by the Bloc of Intellectual Workers, whose members included Maples Arce, List Arzubide, and Fermín Revueltas, companions from the Stridentist Movement, as well as Diego Rivera, Dr. Atl and other intellectuals, artists and educators.¹⁵ Méndez associated too with the group 30-30 (named after a type of rifle used during the Mexican Revolution), a movement that opposed the conservative trend in the Academy from 1928 to 1930.

Méndez continued to develop his skill as a printmaker during the late 1920s and early 1930s. His control of graphic line and composition increased greatly, resulting in the creation of subtle, carefully composed images. During this period some of his prints do not contain overtly political themes. In 1930 he illustrated Heinrich Heine's *The Gods in Exile*.¹⁶ His illustrations for *The Gods in Exile* appear to be his only works in which he referred to Classical mythology. In the woodcut print *Neptune* (fig. 74), the bearded god sits in the foreground with his trident raised in the air, one arm over the reclining, nude figure of a woman. In the background a small boat rides over turbulent waves, with three small praying figures on the deck, presumably at the mercy of the god of the seas. The boat in the background and the variation in scale between the foreground and the background give the print the appearance of a biblical scene, while the classical figure of

¹⁵Ibid., p. 365.

¹⁶Heinrich Heine, *The Gods in Exile* (Los Angeles: Ampersand Press, 1930).

Neptune dominates the entire image. The image demonstrates the high level of technical ability he had achieved in printmaking. The figures are not simplified as they were in Méndez's prints for *Zapata exaltación* and *Un fragmento de la revolución*. The image is detailed, with finely etched lines that create a complex composition of intertwined bodies, waves and boat.

In his 1931 wood engraving *Lamentación (Lamentation)* (fig. 75), Méndez also demonstrated his growing mastery of the print medium and his versatility of style. Two women mourn in a surreal setting, in postures suggesting a lamentation for the dead. Under an archway that serves to frame the central image, one woman kneels in a posture of grief, her shawl covering her face; the other stands next to her, raising a shawl over her head, her sad face an expressive play of areas of light and dark. In this work, Méndez's angular forms are again associated with negative subject matter, as they are in Méndez's cover for *Horizonte* of March 1927 (fig. 63), only here they emphasize the tragic theme of the print. In the background a mysterious figure runs out of a dark doorway onto a slanted sidewalk. This work is very different from *Neptune*; the stangely tilted, illogical perspectives and complex combinations of angles and textures are characteristic features of Stridentist graphics. Méndez's treatment of the theme of the two grieving women draws on Renaissance conventions of lamentation, while the scene in the background has much in common with the enigmatic figures and settings in works by Max Ernst or Giorgio de Chirico. As he often did, Méndez used Baroque conventions in this image: portrayal of intense emotional experience through the theatrical poses of the two figures, the inclusion of ornate drapery, the framing device of the archway and the shawl, and the dramatic recession into space behind the two women. At the same time, the print is very close in theme and spirit to the 1926 painting *Tata Jesucristo (Father Jesus Christ)* (fig. 76), by the Mexican artist Francisco Goitia (1886-1969).¹⁷ Goitia's highly expressive

¹⁷Goitia was an original and eccentric painter who worked as an illustrator of battle scenes during the

painting portrays two women in mourning, one with her face covered by her hands and hair, the other with a grieving countenance similar to that of the standing woman in Méndez's print. Méndez was probably familiar with this painting, and may have drawn on it unconsciously when composing his wood engraving. This print is one of the few by Méndez in which women appear as primary subjects. For some reason, although Méndez worked closely with a number of women throughout his career, he did not often depict women, and when he did, they are usually embedded in traditionally female roles. In the thematic of oppression and resistance, women in Méndez's work usually play the part of the abused and downtrodden. This print is no exception. The women portrayed are passive respondents to situations over which they have had no control, and their attitudes of grief hold no promise of future dynamic action.

Méndez's five woodcut illustrations for the 1930 handmade book, *La corola invertida*, by Agorismo member María del Mar, included *A la Guerra, A la Guerra (To the War, To the War)* (fig. 77).¹⁸ The print, one of five that illustrate the poetic, experimental text, accompanies a passage about the lawless, anarchistic nature of the Revolution. Del Mar wrote:

The city destroyed, blood and tears. The great tragedy alongside of intimate, humble numerous other ones. Every man with the right to relieve his sorrow with a mauser or a revolver, onto others, onto dogs, onto the lamp posts. To kill because someone ordered it, and afterward by instinct, in rage. All that a person has hidden, to the war, to the war. It was worth so much to kill lions in the woods.¹⁹

Méndez's treatment of the theme shows the influence of Posada that coincided with Méndez's study of Posada's work at that time. Two revolutionary generals ride in an open

Revolution. His work is powerful and expressive, often concerning themes of death. Goitia became a recluse in later life, living in poverty by the railroad tracks in Xochimilco, in the outskirts of Mexico City.

¹⁸ María Del Mar (Angeles Maull), *La corola invertida* (Mexico City: n. p., 1930).

¹⁹*Ibid.*, n. p.

car, shooting guns off into the air with an air of casual menace, while their chauffeur brandishes a bottle. The simple, sketchy lines, the broad areas of black and white, the depiction of action, the anecdotal quality of the image, and the convention of using clouds to represent the puffs of smoke from the gun and the dust behind the car, all come from Posada prints, such as *El Asesinato de La Malagüeña* (*The Murder of La Malagüeña*) (fig. 78), circa 1897. The open convertible often appears in Posada's work as a symbol of power, used in a stately procession, as in *Entry of Madero into Mexico City* or *Zapata and Followers* (figs. 79, 80), both circa 1911. Méndez's print varies from Posada's in several important ways, however. Whereas the Posada used the automobile as a ceremonial marker, Méndez's open car is the symbol of the corruption of the post-Revolutionary generals, the setting for their disorderly, irresponsible conduct. The characters in the car are remarkably relaxed, especially the main character, whose lounging position poses a striking contrast to his wild behavior, showing exactly how at ease he is in his position and how indifferent he is to the social good. The eccentric and cinematic composition is characteristic of Stridentist work, with the view from above, the strong diagonal and the truncated edges, while the dog scattering off to the side is a brilliant piece of erratic humor. The influence of film can also be seen in this composition. Méndez's inclination toward using theatrical devices in his images was probably strengthened by the general interest in film and photography that prevailed in Mexico at this time. In 1930 the Soviet film maker Sergei Eisenstein was in Mexico for a year to make his film *Qué Viva México*. Impressed and fascinated by the work of the muralists, Eisenstein dedicated sections of his film to Siqueiros, Rivera and Orozco. He also met and spent time with both Rivera and Siqueiros. Eisenstein and Siqueiros had a number of theoretical conversations about the relationship between film and other visual art while Siqueiros was in internal exile in Taxco, and it is possible that Méndez came into contact with Eisenstein through Siqueiros, as Méndez and Siqueiros were colleagues in LIP, discussed below, at exactly

this time. In the early 1930s, as Mexico continued to attract the interest of American and European artists and intellectuals, Mexican artists in turn became increasingly cosmopolitan in their outlook. Méndez was now coming into contact more frequently with foreign influences and began to travel outside Mexico.

In 1930 Méndez made a trip to California with the painter Carlos Mérida, Germán List Arzubide and another (unnamed) companion, driving a Ford motor car. He recalled his journey with great amusement, recounting how they went as supposed delegates to a meeting of the California Automobile Club, welcomed by state government officials in several Mexican cities along the way. Because the roads of Mexico were very rough, their car broke down a number of times. On one of these occasions, they happened to break down just in time to avoid falling into a reservoir in the dark. While spending the night in the car there, they smelled something:

...the wind brought us the miasms of a nearby cadaver. With a lantern we went to look for it and I was astonished by the spectacle of a dead dog in a state of decomposition, covered by butterflies with silvery wings, carnivorous butterflies that were devouring it. What a shame! I should have made a drawing with the fresh impression of this sight. It was like a dream!²⁰

List Arzubide remembered that they were the guests of the governor of the state of Guanajuato, where Méndez illustrated some literacy primers, being paid with paper.²¹ Once they crossed the border, they found themselves in the United States of the Depression era. Méndez was especially affected by the signs of poverty and unemployment they encountered. He related an encounter with an unemployed American worker:

²⁰Poniatowska, p. 8.

²¹Germán List Arzubide, interview by author, Mexico City, 16 January 1996.

I remember a man, tall and strong, who came up to us on the street, saying: 'I haven't had breakfast. I haven't eaten. Yesterday I had work and today I don't.' Later he explained to us: 'I dared to approach you because you are Mexican. My countrymen don't like me and won't give me anything.'²²

They also had an accidental meeting with some bootleggers whom they stopped to help along the road. Later they found out that Al Capone was holding a meeting in Los Angeles, and Méndez surmised that the gangsters they had met were on their way there. He was also amused at an event that pointed out cultural differences to him:

I remember a really comical incident when we crossed the line from Arizona to New Mexico. We encountered a well-proportioned, very dignified Indian couple. On seeing them, our photographer-companion prepared to capture their portraits. They were coming in a two-wheeled cart. For the Indian man, it was one motion to see our ingenuous photographer and to deal him a sure blow with the large whip he was carrying. Camera and photographer landed on a beautiful nopal cactus! Imagine, to come from Mexico to fall into a cactus in the United States. Naturally, there was no photograph. A Mexican can not photograph an Indian in the United States with impunity.²³

In Los Angeles Méndez and Mérida had an exhibition in the bookstore-gallery of Jake Zeitlin, who supported many leftist artists with shows.²⁴ In Los Angeles Méndez met Jorge Crespo de la Serna, a Mexican critic then teaching at the University of California in Los Angeles. Crespo de la Serna was responsible for bringing Jose Clemente Orozco to California to paint the Prometheus mural at Pomona College in 1931. He was also later a major player in the Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios.

²²Poniatowska, p. 9.

²³Ibid., p. 10

²⁴Zeitlin was famous for his bookstore-art gallery. Siqueiros had an exhibit of lithographs at Zeitlin's gallery in 1932, mentioned in Stein, p. 72, and the gallery was the first on the West Coast to show Kollwitz's prints, in 1937. A recreation of the Kollwitz exhibition is documented in Center for Southern California Studies in the Visual Arts, *Käthe Kollwitz, Jake Zeitlin Bookshop and Gallery: 1937* (Long Beach: The Art Museum and Galleries, California State University, Long Beach, 1979).

On the way back the young men ran out of money. List Arzubide and Méndez separated from their companions and made their way to Guadalajara. There they scraped up enough to pay for a hotel and one train fare. List Arzubide went Mexico City where he could obtain some funds to send to Méndez, who waited in Guadalajara:

Who knows how many days it took, because I remember that they didn't give me anything to eat in the hotel. In Guadalajara I met a friend from there who was very nice, and he frequently treated me to a meal at a restaurant and at other times invited me to his house where they ate well. But he couldn't imagine to what degree I valued his consideration. He surely thought that since I was on my way back from the United States, my pockets were full of money.²⁵

The trip was Méndez's first exposure to another culture, and his exhibition in Los Angeles was the first major showing of his graphic work. His application for the Guggenheim Foundation grant that enabled him to travel in the United States in 1939 may have been stimulated by this memorable journey to California.

From 1929 to 1933 Méndez worked for the Ministry of Education (SEP) in several capacities. In 1929 Méndez worked for about nine months in the Bureau of Cultural Missions of the SEP, in the states of Jalisco and Zacatecas. The Cultural Missions were a project of the Ministry of Education from 1926 to 1947. Based on the idea of religious missions, the Cultural Missions were designed to educate rural schoolteachers, who often had very rudimentary educations, throughout Mexico. Groups of educators, including normal school teachers, public health nurses, teachers of industrial arts and agriculture, music and theater teachers, and visual artists, were sent into the countryside to give workshops to teachers and to start projects in selected rural schools. A number of artists participated in the Cultural Missions, including Méndez, Pablo O'Higgins and Alfredo Zalce, teaching painting and drawing to teachers and students.

²⁵Poniatowska, p. 10.

Zalce and O'Higgins painted murals on rural schools in several locations. Méndez probably taught painting and drawing, but he did not mention murals in his remarks about his work in the Cultural Missions.²⁶ When he returned from his months in the field he began a life-long, though intermittent, career as an art teacher with the Ministry of Education. He explained his attitude to his government employment as follows:

Since that time I have worked for the Mexican state with true interest in all that I have considered useful, and have criticized everything that I thought negative or contradictory. I am for this reason a product of my country and my government, in its anguished revolutionary progress and its setbacks. To combat the setbacks with criticism I worked in the most radical press with prints and drawings.²⁷

Like most artists in Mexico, Méndez was concerned with education in general and art education in particular. The government of post-Revolutionary Mexico developed a system of education to further its socialist aims, intended to create new, fully educated citizens who would share the collective responsibility for the development of Mexico in the modern world. At the end of the Revolution very few young children attended school and Mexico's literacy rate was very low.²⁸ Education was considered a necessary step in the process of national reconstruction and modernization, with a large proportion of the national budget committed to the schools. The enormous project of education engaged the interest of the most energetic and idealistic members of society. The child-centered pedagogical theories of American educator John Dewey formed the basis for much of the educational practice in Mexico in the 1920s and 1930s, when the federal government established thousands of public schools, virtually creating a national school system where there had previously been none. Because Vasconcelos and other leaders in the field of

²⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ In 1910 only 30% of children between the ages of six and ten were in school, and the literacy rate was around 32 per cent for men and 24 per cent for women. *Encyclopedia of Mexico*, s.v. "Education: 1889-1940."

education had included the arts as a central aspect of a holistic education, the arts were integrated into all levels of basic schooling, including primary education. Education was intended to produce a socialist citizen, capable of self-actualization and cooperation as a member of a new socialist society.

In the early 1930s Méndez contributed illustrations for the SEP publications *El Sembrador* (*The Sower*) and *El Maestro Rural* (*The Rural Schoolteacher*), both of which were directed toward campesinos, urban and rural public schoolteachers and the members of the Cultural Missions. Maples Arce described Méndez's work:

An important time for Méndez was when he worked for the magazine, *El Sembrador*, published by the Ministry of Education and destined for the campesinos, to whom the graphics clarified the often mysterious texts. The format of the magazine changed in short time and it assumed the aspect of an illustrated poster. This publication was delivered to the countryside, where it was awaited avidly, due in large part to the prints of Méndez, Díaz de León and Ezequiel Negrete, who interpreted in a tremendous manner the matters addressed in the text. The words of the rural school teacher completed and explained the themes. But undoubtedly the attention of that simple audience was directed at the prints, which moved them.²⁹

Méndez's 1929 woodcut illustration for *El Sembrador*, *El Adios* (*The Goodbye*) (fig. 81), portrays the relationship between rural and urban worlds. A man in the foreground, dressed in a jacket and trousers, a schoolteacher, waves a white handkerchief at a white-muslin-clad campesino riding on a burro in the distance. Méndez's composition still followed Stridentist conventions. The dramatic slash of the white road, drawn at a tilted angle, the difference in scale between the figures, and the sinuous lines of the man in the foreground are all characteristics of Stridentist graphics.

In 1929 Méndez began his life-long friendship and association with the Pablo O'Higgins (1904-1982). The two artists became close collaborators in several

²⁹Maples Arce, *Leopoldo Méndez*, p. 15.

organizations and many artistic projects. O'Higgins, an American by birth, had come to Mexico in 1924 to assist Diego Rivera in his murals at the National Agricultural School in Chapingo. O'Higgins remained in Mexico, becoming a major player in the arts community. He and Méndez became close collaborators in the Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios (LEAR) and in the Taller de Gráfica Popular (TGP). While O'Higgins made a number of important prints, mainly lithographs, and some wood block and linoleum prints, he concentrated on easel and mural painting more than did Méndez. He developed a distinctive style in which he expressed his solidarity with the worker and the working class, his passionate *obrerismo*. His many depictions of the workers of Mexico, prints and paintings, are characterized by his thick, nervous line and simple compositions. His *Ladrillero (Brick Maker)* of 1945 (fig. 82) is a Daumier-like, sympathetic portrayal of manual laborers, while his haunting *Hombre del Siglo XX (Man of the Twentieth Century)* (fig. 83) of 1939, depicts existential and real poverty in a simple, powerful composition of light and dark rectangles. O'Higgins provided a valuable link between artists in Mexico and in the United States, as he maintained strong ties to the United States, and introduced many Americans to the Mexican art scene throughout the years, while also arranging for a number of exhibitions of Mexican work in the United States. His close friendship with Méndez was a remarkable artistic relationship, lasting for almost forty years. From 1930 until the 1950s O'Higgins and Méndez belonged to the same political and arts organizations and worked together on dozens of projects.

In 1931, Méndez, with O'Higgins, Siqueiros, Luis Arenal, and Juan de la Cabada, all members of the Communist Party, started the Lucha Intelectual Proletaria (the Intellectual Proletarian Struggle, LIP). This group was one of the first of the openly oppositional artists' organizations that appeared in Mexico in the 1930s, and Méndez's participation in the founding of LIP marked a distinct change for him. From then on, he was not only an active member of the organizations he joined, but a cofounder. LIP was a

very short-lived organization, in existence long enough to produce one issue of a large-format wall newspaper, *Llamada* (*Cry*). Méndez contributed a militant image for *Llamada*, the 1931 woodcut *Arte Puro* (*Pure Art*) (fig. 84). In this roughly drawn satire a top-hatted leader with a dollar sign on his tail coat directs his two men in a fight against the workers. His mask-like face, the focus of the image, is reminiscent of George Grosz's caricatures. A comparison with Grosz's *Der Blutige Ernst* (fig. 85) of 1919, reveals the same treatment of the face, with the thick, brutish head, the hat, the grotesque, grinning mouth, exposed teeth and violent gestures. *Der Blutige Ernst* portrays a facial type that Grosz developed as a personal convention and used in many of his characterizations of vicious Germans, so Méndez may have seen other of Grosz's works, but it is also possible that he saw this particular image. In the Méndez print the leader is the only figure with this facial pattern. The young man in a suit with a rifle on his shoulder, wearing stylish urban shoes, is labeled "arte puro," and another more loutish man, with a gun and a flag, has the word "demagogia" on his gun. One of the workers has the word "trabajadores" ("workers") written on the leg of his trousers. The print is an ideological statement painted with very broad strokes, in keeping with the radicalism of LIP, which supported the efforts of the illegal Communist Party. As Reyes Palma describes:

LIP...had an ephemeral existence: barely two months, in which it could function as a breathing space for the forbidden PCM (Mexican Communist Party)...LIP experienced the clandestine status and asphyxiating atmosphere of anticommunist persecution during the *Maximato*...Even more than Agorismo, LIP corresponded to the Communist Party's cultural aims.³⁰

Siqueiros, who had been under house arrest in Taxco for his political activities, joined LIP in defiance of his sentence, and in opposition to the government. He wrote an

³⁰Reyes Palma, "La LEAR y su revista de frente cultural," p. 5.

article for *Llamada* called “Art in the Service of the Proletariat,” proclaiming the necessity of the engaged artist to use art for revolutionary propaganda.³¹

This stand was particularly risky during the *Maximato*, the period of political reaction that began with the election of General Plutarco Elías Calles in 1924 and lasted until General Lázaro Cárdenas was elected president in 1934. Calles (1877-1945), president of Mexico from 1924 to 1928, was a complex figure. At the beginning of his presidency Calles implemented Revolutionary principles of agrarian reform, labor union rights and universal education, and initiated extremely harsh suppression of the Catholic Church in Mexico. Calles later made a turn to the right. During the *Maximato* (referring to his informal title “Jefe Máximo,” “Supreme Chief”), Calles became increasingly despotic; Calles only held the office of president from 1924 to 1928, but he controlled the Mexican government through a series of puppet presidents from 1928 to 1934. Although in principle Mexico had a democratic, socialist government, wealth and power were concentrated in the hands of Calles’s followers, a group of corrupt, opportunistic strongmen, many of them generals who had survived the Revolution, amassing wealth and gaining political power in the 1920s and becoming part of an entrenched political system.

Under Calles a new party, the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (the National Revolutionary Party, PNR) was formed. The PNR was the forerunner of the current Partido Revolucionario Institucional (the Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI) which is still in power in Mexico today. In 1930 Calles and his successors banned the Communist Party and broke off relations with the Soviet Union. The government also crushed trade unions, suspended agrarian reform and encouraged foreign investment. The democratic ideals of the Revolution endured in the ideology and actions of many Mexicans, but the

³¹Ibid., p. 11.

majority of the artists and intellectuals now stood in opposition to the government, often working against it from within, mostly in the Ministry of Public Education (SEP).

Méndez's Work in the Ministry of Education and Puppet Theater

In 1932 Méndez was appointed the Director of the Section of Drawing and Plastic Arts of the SEP, a position which he held for about a year. He founded an open graphics workshop/studio in the basement of the SEP building, and attempted to make a number of improvements in the public school arts curriculum. He was especially interested in the integration of the arts into public education on all levels, based on increased technical and theoretical training for drawing teachers and a systematic curriculum. As a corollary of his redesign of public art education, Méndez opposed the continuation of the open-air painting schools, which were, by 1930, small neighborhood art centers. He and Siqueiros accused the schools of promoting art for art's sake; they believed that the schools were producing non-political art that did not serve the interests of the people, and that the funds expended on the open-air schools should be redirected to programs in all the public schools or toward centers of art education for adult workers.³² Along with a more rigorous technique-based training in the arts Méndez wanted to incorporate manual arts and theater arts into the public school education. He was especially interested in puppet theater, which he thought would involve children in all aspects of design, drawing, writing and production.³³

Mexico had a long tradition of puppet theater, with a famous marionette theater, Títeres Rosete Aranda (Rosete Aranda Puppets), run by the Rosete and Aranda families. This remarkable puppet theater started in 1835 and became a family tradition through

³²The opposition to the open-air painting schools by Méndez, Siqueiros and officials in the SEP, and decreased government funding for the schools, led to their closing by the end of 1937.

³³Leopoldo Méndez, "Informe sobre el estudio de los programas de dibujo, en las escuelas primarias y técnicas, del año de 1931 con sugerencias para el año de 1932," to Antonio Ruíz, 1931, from the Leopoldo Méndez Archives.

several generations, continuing well into the twentieth century, with the last performance of the company taking place in 1958.

During the 1920s, artists Germán and Lola Cueto started working with puppets in their house on Mixcalco Street in the heart of Mexico City. Their experiments took place in an exciting atmosphere of the artists' community. According to writer Margaret Hooks in her biography of Tina Modotti:

With the founding of the revolutionary artists' syndicate in 1922, Cueto had built a collective art workshop in the patio, renting the several houses which faced each other across a narrow alleyway at the back of the property to other artists. His most famous, and rowdiest, tenants were Diego and Lupe.

It was here that Tina may have found the subject of what is today considered to be her first serious photograph. Germán and his wife, Lola Cueto, had founded a marionette theater, for which Germán, an adept sculptor in all media, and Lola, a painter and designer, made the puppets and did the stage design. The performances were held in the large patio of their home.³⁴

Modotti's photograph, *My Latest Lover* (fig. 86) of 1923, is a stark representation of a cowboy puppet, most likely one of Lola Cueto's creations. The puppet appears in high relief with a flat black shadow. It is unknown what the Cuetos' puppet plays were like, but they took place in the context of the early Stridentist Movement.³⁵

In 1929, the writer Bernardo Ortiz de Montellano started a puppet theater, El Periquillo, under the auspices of the SEP. The puppets were made by the brothers Guerrero, street puppeteers, with backdrops by the painter Julio Castellanos. Also in 1929, Montellano, Castellanos, and the painter Antonio Ruíz started another puppet

³⁴Margaret Hooks, *Tina Modotti: Photographer and Revolutionary* (London: Pandora, 1993), pp. 81-82.

³⁵At this time there was an international interest in puppet theater among artists, especially among the Dadaists. As noted by Mel Gordon, the Zurich Dadaists used marionettes on at least one occasion during performances at the Galerie Dada in 1917, and in 1919 in Berlin, Walter Mehring performed a puppet play with mixed media for a Dada evening at the cabaret, Schall und Rauch. Mel Gordon, ed., *Dada Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1987), pp., 16, 65. Both of these performances were directed entirely at adults; Mexican artists may have produced puppet plays for adults in the 1920s, but by the late 1920s and early 1930s puppet theater was intended primarily for children, though adults were, as usual in children's theater, present in great numbers in the audience.

theater in La Casa del Estudiante Indígena (The House of the Indigenous Student), the boarding school for indigenous children in Mexico City. Both of these projects aimed to educate children politically, and the performances included a folk tale, *El Sombreroón*, and a play called *Viva la revolución*, “based on frescoes by José Clemente Orozco.”³⁶ In the same time period, children’s theater groups toured the areas around Mexico City, putting on plays with revolutionary content. An article by Frances Toor in *Mexican Folkways* in 1929 described several plays for children:

The first program of one of these Sunday morning entertainments in a public open-air school, in one of the poorest neighborhoods, consisted of folk songs and dances and a play that showed conditions as before the Revolution on a hacienda...and the changes brought about by the division of land...There are meetings of protest with the hacendado. The dialogue reveals the slavery of these peons; their eternal indebtedness to the owners, which the sons inherit and to which they are always added. Then when the Agrarian Law forces the division of the land, there is freedom, cooperation, a new order. The audience was deeply interested and the actors, themselves workers, of the Night School of Drama and Dance were excellent.

Another government department interested in dramatics is the National School of Music Dance and Drama. Their first play at the beginning of the season, was a dramatization of Dr. Azuela’s ‘Los de Abajo’ or the ‘Under Dogs’....³⁷

Although not mentioned in the text, the accompanying photograph shows a puppet show with a large crowd of working-class adults and children around it (fig. 87).

In 1932, Méndez and a group of artists and writers, many of whom had been involved with the Stridentists, decided to start a puppet theater under the auspices of the SEP. They were inspired by List Arzubide, who, after the incident of the flag of Sandino, had been to the Soviet Union between 1929 and 1931, and became very interested by

³⁶Angelina Beloff, *Muñecos animados: Historia, técnica y función del teatro de muñecos en México y en el mundo* (Mexico City: Ediciones de la Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1945), p. 182.

³⁷Frances Toor, “El principio de un teatro mexicano/The Beginning of a Mexican Theater,” *Mexican Folkways* 5, no. 2 (1929): pp. 62-63, text in Spanish and English.

children's theater there, including puppet theater.³⁸ Meeting Germán and Lola Cueto in Paris on his return trip to Mexico, List Arzubide conveyed his enthusiasm and suggested that they establish a children's puppet theater in Mexico. Upon their return the Cuetos and List Arzubide joined with Méndez, Méndez's brother Teodoro, Ramon Alva de la Canal, the writer Graciela Amador, and the artists Julio Castellanos and Angelina Beloff. They started a puppet theater called the Teatro Guiñol del Departamento de Bellas Artes de la SEP (the Puppet Theater of the Department of Fine Arts of the Ministry of Education). Their theater was the beginning of what has been known as the "Golden Age of Mexican Puppet Theater."³⁹ Along with the other members of the group, Méndez designed and made hand puppets, while List Arzubide wrote puppet plays for children. Again Méndez was working in a group of visual artists and writers, collaborating this time not on books and illustrations but on theatrical productions made with high-quality "artist's puppets." The group gave a performance at the Cueto home and invited Narciso Bassols, then Minister of Education, and the composer Carlos Chávez, the Director of the Departamento de Bellas Artes (Department of Fine Arts), to attend. The two were sufficiently impressed that they subsequently helped the theater obtain funding from the Department of Fine Arts. The composer Silvestre Revueltas, who composed music for at least one puppet show, *Rin-Rin Renacuajo*,⁴⁰ described the work of the puppet theater in the following terms:

The children's theater that Graciela Amador, Leopoldo Méndez, Germán Cueto and his wife, and their collaborators, are trying to establish, is of great educational worth. It talks to children in their own language, of things they know, and at the same time offers new things through its presentation and intentions. The children are acquiring, unknowingly and in an agreeable and amusing manner, a vigorous

³⁸Germán List Arzubide, unpublished report on the Leningrad Children's Theater, 1931. Leopoldo Méndez Archives.

³⁹Sonia Iglesias Cabrera, and Guillermo Murray Prisant, *Piel de papel, manos de palo: Historia de los títeres en México* (Mexico City: FONCA, 1995), p. 184.

⁴⁰Beloff, *Muñecos animados*, p. 184.

ideology, a sense of justice and duty, that thousands of boring lessons, and even more boring advice, would never give them.⁴¹

List Arzubide's puppet plays, the most well known of which are *Comino vence al diablo* (*Comino Conquers the Devil*) and *Comino en el país del los holgazanes* (*Comino in the Land of the Good-for-Nothings*), were performed all over Mexico City and on the radio, communicating socialist values to Mexican children.

Méndez wanted to introduce puppetry and puppet plays like these into the curriculum of the public schools as a way to interest children in multiple aspects of art and literature, and as a technique for communicating leftist political values. At the end of 1932, Méndez, Tamayo, Chávez and Best Maugard were among the members of a Consejo de Bellas Artes (Council of Fine Arts) in the SEP, formed to study the arts education curriculum in the public schools. Méndez's ideas about the inclusion of puppet theater arts in the public schools and other aspects of his proposed arts curriculum reform met with strong opposition, and as a result he left his position as Director of Drawing and Plastic Arts, which was taken over by Tamayo. Méndez explained:

...I wanted to make a puppet theater with puppets or marionettes, that the students would manage; for them to do everything, puppets, decorations, etc., because the theater has always had a plastic sense and in it children can translate their impressions, their emotion. I think that people do theater from the time they are little. But no, the Council did not like my idea and they let me go.⁴²

Méndez gave up his administrative duties, but kept teaching art in the public schools.⁴³ The SEP continued to fund puppet theaters, though not within the public schools, and they continued to flourish during the 1930s and '40s. Iglesias Cabrerías explains:

⁴¹ Iglesias Cabrera and Murray Prisant, p. 185.

⁴² Poniatowska, p. 11

⁴³ Reyes Palma, *Leopoldo Méndez*. p. 162.

In 1934 two groups were created: the Teatro Rin-rin (Theater Rin-rin), directed by Germán Cueto, and the Teatro de Títeres Comino (Comino Puppet Theater), under the direction of Leopoldo Méndez. Both toured the rural schools of the Federal District, this being 60 years ago, when Mexico City still had unpopulated areas, cornfields and vacant lands, where they would present adaptations of popular stories and legends.⁴⁴

Photographs of the artists assembling the puppet theater and rehearsing a puppet play at the SEP building, and putting on a performance for a working-class audience show a large-size puppet theater and an inventive production taken directly to the streets of Mexico City (figs. 88, 89).

Méndez directed the puppet theater, Teatro de Títeres Comino, for a short while, soon leaving it to other artists. Alva de la Canal took over from Méndez, and finally Loló de la Canal, the sister of Ramón Alva de la Canal, became the director of the Teatro de Títeres Comino, which she ran until 1948. A number of other puppet troupes existed at the same time as this theater, directed by artists and writers. They developed characters like Comino (fig. 90), the hero of List Arzubide's puppet plays, who entertained thousands of children over the years. Díaz de León and Fernández Ledesma created *La Bruja* and *La Muerte* (Death and The Witch) (fig. 91), striking puppets that portrayed the mythical qualities of the characters in a dramatic fashion. The most well known of these puppet theaters were the Grupo Periquito, directed by Graciela Amador from 1935 to 1939, and the Grupo Nahual, directed by Lola Cueto from 1933 to 1958. Both of these puppet theaters adapted Mexican folk tales for performance, in addition to presenting original plays written specifically for puppet theater. The Grupo Nahual worked on literacy campaigns in the rural areas of Mexico during the 1940s.⁴⁵ Lola Cueto also created an album of etchings of the puppets, her own and folk puppets from around

⁴⁴ Iglesias Cabrera and Murray Prisant, p. 185.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 182-194.

Mexico. The innovative, handmade puppets from these groups are in now in private collections, such as the collection of Mireya Cueto, daughter of Germán and Lola Cueto, herself a puppeteer, or at the Museo Nacional de Títeres (National Puppet Museum) in Huamantla, Tlaxcala. Méndez's involvement with the puppet theater was one of his many projects that concerned the education and entertainment of large groups of people, and the puppet theaters were an aspect of his ongoing political activity. Like others of his projects, puppet theater combined media in image, text and performance.

Exhibitions and *Concierto de Locos*: Méndez Comes into His Own

While Méndez had worked with the Stridentists, Agorismo and 30-30 as a somewhat junior member, he gradually grew into a mature artist and political activist in the early 1930s. With LIP and the puppet theaters, Méndez was an originator rather than a follower. Though he maintained a quiet role, he was now acting as a colleague with formative ideas. He began to exhibit his own work, which was beginning to be known in Mexico and the United States. In 1932 Méndez had an exhibition at the Art Institute of Wisconsin with Carlos Mérida, and he had his first one-person show, *17 Grabados de Leopoldo Méndez (17 Prints by Leopoldo Méndez)* at the Galería Posada in Mexico City. The brochure for the exhibit included a short introductory essay by Jorge Juan Crespo de la Serna. Crespo de la Serna praised Méndez's work in the following terms:

...Behind the apparent 'facility' of his prints one notices the persistent wakefulness, the nervous disquietude of his soul, the pain of the gestation devoted to his will; his most dissimilar expressions give awareness of a telluric reality dragged from the cherry wood, the boxwood and the cedar, with the help of the gouge and the penknife. In a marker of his career, Méndez presents this elegant exhibition of woodcuts, all impressed with an incisive and burning emotion. In successful shades in the contrast of whites and blacks, a habitual characteristic of prints, this artist gives us the sensation of a vibrant range of warm colors, admirably harmonized. Méndez is the painter who engraves prints and always stamps on them the luminosity that only color can give....Of the closest affinities

that Méndez honors, one can guess his love for two colossi of our soil: Posada and José Clemente Orozco....⁴⁶

Crespo de la Serna's perception that Méndez's prints gave the impression of being in color accords with Méndez's own feelings about his work. According to Yampolsky, "Leopoldo always said that he thought in color when he was doing his prints."⁴⁷ It is also significant that Crespo de la Serna mentions Posada and Orozco as influences on Méndez, as these were perhaps the two artists Méndez admired the most. It is likely that Méndez discussed his aesthetic concepts with Crespo de la Serna before the essay was written. The brochure also includes a list of Méndez's prints in American museums and galleries: two in the Metropolitan Museum, six at the Zeitlin Gallery in Los Angeles, and two at the Delphic Studios in New York.⁴⁸ The essay by Crespo de la Serna and the list of prints are an index of Méndez's growing stature as a professional artist.

Méndez's 1932 woodcut print, *Concierto de Locos* (*Concert of Crazies*) or *Dios Padre y los Cuatro Evangelistas* (*God the Father and the Four Evangelists*) (fig. 92), is a pivotal work from this time, revealing Méndez's own place in the cultural environment through his pointed commentary on the current situation. Reminiscent of popular religious prints in Mexico, the work portrays an Old Testament robed figure of God, surrounded by four "evangelists," the well-known cultural figures, Rivera, Siqueiros, Atl and Moises Sáenz, all people with whom Méndez was well acquainted. The unusual depiction of God has elements of mystical Catholicism, as the bearded figure holds an eye in a triangle, a symbol of the trinity, over one of his eyes. Méndez's deity is quite similar in style to a 1921 wood block print *The First Day*, from *Metamorphic Creations of God*,

⁴⁶Jorge Juan Crespo de la Serna, in Galería Posada, "Segunda exposición: Grabados en madera de Leopoldo Méndez" (Mexico City: Galería Posada, 1932), n.p.

⁴⁷Yampolsky, interview by author, Mexico City, 15 September 1995.

⁴⁸The Delphic Studios was a creation of Alma Reed, who had lived in Mexico in the 1920s and was a major patron of Orozco.

by the German Expressionist Ernst Barlach (fig. 93). Barlach's woodcut, an image that Méndez might have seen, also portrayed God as a robed, square-shouldered, geometric figure in simple, uncomplicated lines. In the lower left corner of *Concierto de Locos*, Diego Rivera, dressed in a pre-Columbian cape, kneels on the ground in front of a *teponaztle*, an Aztec wooden drum, beating the instrument with two sticks. His frog-like appearance is greatly exaggerated, with bulging eyes and thick lips, his body bare other than the cape. Above him, the painter Dr. Atl, known for his fierce opinions and his influence on the muralists during the Mexican Revolution, swings noise-makers, his bearded chin in the air. By 1932 Atl had become reactionary in his political beliefs, to the point of publicly supporting Hitler. In the upper-right corner, Moisés Sáenz (1881-1941), Director of the Cultural Missions, rings a school bell. Sáenz played several important roles in education, most notably as private secretary to Vasconcelos, then as Subsecretary of Public Education before heading the Cultural Missions.⁴⁹ A grotesquely caricatured Siqueiros squats at Sáenz' feet, playing a one-stringed harp, in the tradition of his Biblical namesake, King David, though the harp is actually shaped like a sickle, half of the Communist hammer and sickle. As art historian Helga Prignitz-Poda points out, both Rivera and Siqueiros are crowned, Rivera with a plume, Aztec style, and Siqueiros with a feudal crown with a star at the top.⁵⁰ Each member of the concert plays out a social role while expressing strong opinions about Mexican culture and what direction it should take. Although still openly a Marxist, Rivera was now aligned with Trotsky while at the same time he was working for the government in Mexico, and the Fords and the Rockefellers in the United States; his actions had generated controversy among artists in Mexico. Rivera also represents the indigenist aspects of Mexican art, in accord with his many idealized

⁴⁹Sáenz promoted progressive educational concepts in Mexico during the 1920s and '30s. Educated at Columbia University, he wrote his Ph.D. dissertation on the educational theories of John Dewey and rural education. In the 1930s he began to question the Mexican government's approach to indigenous education and to oppose the policies of assimilation.

⁵⁰ Prignitz-Poda, p. 23.

depictions of the Mexican Indian and the pre-Columbian era. Siqueiros represents Communism, Sáenz stands for the educational bureaucracy as it related to the arts, and Atl represents nationalism -- his noisemakers look like little Mexican flags. Each character is alone, isolated in an idiosyncratic discourse of his own, though tied together in a symmetrical composition that reinforces their mutual participation in the culture of Mexico. It has not been ascertained under what circumstances Méndez created this print, but it is significant that he was closely associated with all the people he caricatured here, and had been for many years. These men were important figures in the highly politicized art world in which Méndez himself played an important part, and he reacted to their posturing from his own, independent point of view. The print is a commentary on the direction the arts and art education were taking in Mexico at that precise time in history. As Prignitz-Poda explains:

It is the representation of the Mexican Renaissance, of the 'revolutionary' mural movement, whose apostles believe themselves to be 'the four.' The dissonance apparent in the print honestly characterizes the conflictive situation of the artists. As singers of the gospel of the new art, each figure goes about the world proclaiming his version of the truth, believing it to be the only one.⁵¹

The print is in poster form, purporting to be an announcement of a radio concert. The text of the poster reads in part, "Radio-Concierto por Dementes de la Castañeda...Por primera vez en el mundo, los enajenandos transmitirán su canto por radio" ("Radio-Concert for the Demented of La Castañeda...For the first time in the world, the idiots will transmit their song on the radio."). La Castañeda was a well-known mental hospital, but it seems unlikely that such a radio concert actually took place, as the text, with its insulting implications, does not demonstrate a relationship with the real inmates of La Castañeda. Although Reyes Palma accepts that the poster is a *bona fide*

⁵¹Ibid.

announcement of a concert, he does not offer any documentary evidence to establish that a radio concert actually took place,⁵² and it is possible the print is an elaborate joke. The poster could simply be a humorous way to imply that the four figures in the image should perhaps be in the mental hospital themselves.

In this work Méndez openly lampooned the contradictory situation in which Mexican artists found themselves. By placing Rivera and Siqueiros in the foreground, he focused in particular on their relationship. Rivera had been dismissed from the Mexican Communist Party in 1929 for displaying pro-Trotsky tendencies, and Siqueiros had been expelled from the Communist Party in 1930, but was still aligned with the Stalin and the Soviet Union. They had begun a series of public disagreements about art that had become increasingly dramatic at this time, as had the conservative views of Dr. Atl.⁵³ The portrayal of (presumably) cacophonous sound in *Concierto de Locos* suggests that Méndez was of the opinion that the public expressions of these personages consisted of nothing but noise. Again Méndez formulated political activity as performance, situating the figures in a matrix of relationships based on action and display. The divisions Méndez expressed so brilliantly in this print were undoubtedly both a source of irritation and amusement to artists and intellectuals in Mexico. The artists of Mexico continued to seek avenues of action that would enable them to be effective agents of social change, but as Communists and leftists they involved themselves in prolonged sectarian disputes. At this time, for example, although Rivera continued to be an accepted and important cultural figure in Mexico as well as in the United States, his political stands led to his relative exclusion from groups of activist artists. Although he was never actually ostracized in Mexico, and continued to work with many individual artists, he never, for example,

⁵²Reyes-Palma, *Leopoldo Méndez*, "Lista de obras," p. 173

⁵³ I have not been able to ascertain the reason that Sáenz was included in the group, although Méndez had worked under him at the Department of Public Education, and presumably was making a pointed comment about Sáenz's views, possibly on indigenous education.

joined LEAR, the most inclusive activist arts organization in the history of Mexico.

Rivera's shifting political identifications were confusing and erratic; during the 1930s he allied with Trotsky, but by 1940, when Trotsky was assassinated, Rivera had repudiated Trotsky's ideas and was attempting to reenter the Communist Party. In contrast, Méndez was a member of the PCM throughout the 1930s and was closely allied with Siquieros, a Stalinist who had been expelled from the Party, in those years.

The print also addresses the difficult and complicated relationship between the arts and the government of Mexico, which was in a right-wing phase under the de facto rule of Calles. Leftist artists and intellectuals could no longer support the government, but were nonetheless dependent on it, the SEP in particular, for their livelihoods. This dilemma has affected artists in Mexico from the 1920s to the present, and has played out on the level of the group rather than the individual. For example, while many artists remained in their individual government-sponsored occupations, usually teaching or making government-sponsored art, two organizations in which Méndez was to be involved (the Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios and the Taller de Gráfica Popular) made the groups' financial independence from the Mexican government basic tenets of their existence. Offers of government support at various times for these organizations created heated controversies that were destructive to the groups, even as individuals continued to depend on government support for pragmatic reasons. Moreover, even though leftists often found themselves opposed to the government of Mexico, there was general agreement that public education and government sponsorship of the arts were two positive aspects of the state. Artists in Mexico believed that the government could represent the people, that their national identity was compatible with activist politics, and that their positive contributions through art and education would move the country forward. Not unlike American leftist artists who worked for the WPA, at this point artists in Mexico hoped that the government and the people could be equal partners in an ideal

society. Mexican artists supported education and agrarian reform, and other positive aspects of the national government, which was still nominally socialist and nominally revolutionary.

The *Concierto de Locos* may have been the first politically satirical wood block print with identifiable public figures since the time of Posada, who often mocked known personages, for example in *La Metamórfosis de Madero* (*The Metamorphosis of Madero*) of 1911 (fig. 94), which portrays two stages in the political career of Francisco Madero. Posada presented the future president as a diminutive, childlike intellectual in 1910 and a giant, bombastic *hacendado* (hacienda owner) in 1911 when he became president. Madero was in actuality both an intellectual and a *hacendado*, but the distortions of scale and Madero's ridiculous appearance serve to point out both his pretensions and the change in public opinion toward him from one year to the next.

Concierto de Locos, a satire of four major Mexican cultural figures, was an indication of Méndez's central role in the discourse of art and politics in Mexico in the early 1930s. The print implies his close familiarity and involvement with the issues and controversies that concerned Mexican artists at this time. Méndez had been working in Mexico City since the end of 1929, participating in a number of leftist organizations. He had traveled briefly to the United States and had begun exhibiting his work there and in Mexico. He had worked in the Cultural Missions, grown to be an influential arts educator in the SEP, and had experimented with puppet theater. Through these years he refined his graphic skill and developed a determined political position. At the beginning of 1934 Méndez's concerns led him to join with other artists in forming one of Mexico's most significant activist arts organizations, the Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios.

Chapter Four: Méndez and LEAR, the Proletarian and Popular Fronts

In 1933, after much discussion, former LIP members Méndez, Siqueiros, O'Higgins, de la Cabada and Luis Arenal, among other activist artists and intellectuals of Mexico City, started LEAR. Their purpose was to bring together leftist artists to advocate for the interests of the working class and to combat the growing menace of fascism in Mexico and abroad. Méndez was to devote the next four years to this organization, seeing it through a change from a confrontational, proletarian-oriented group to an inclusive, Popular Front organization. He produced political graphics, painted murals with other LEAR artists, edited LEAR's journal, *Frente a Frente*, participated in exhibitions, conferences and meetings, and organized and directed LEAR's art school, the Taller-Escuela de Artes Plásticas (Workshop-School of Plastic Arts, TEAP). In the process Méndez became a recognized leader in a new model of Mexican political art.

The Beginnings of LEAR. The First Phase of *Frente a Frente*

In many ways LEAR was a successor to the Sindicato de Obreros, Técnicos, Pintores y Escritores (SOTPE). Like the participants in SOTPE, Agorismo and LIP, many of whom also joined LEAR, the members of LEAR were closely allied with the Mexican Communist Party, though membership in the Party was not a requirement. Unlike SOTPE, Agorismo and LIP, however, LEAR grew very rapidly and came to include practically all the members of the artistic and intellectual avant-garde in Mexico City. Nonetheless, the operations of LEAR were humble, at first supported solely by the membership. As Angelina Beloff remembers:

... 'the headquarters' of LEAR were a big open space that only had as furniture a huge table, some benches and some blackboards. The walls were covered with posters and proclamations. That morning, when I went to give my class [Russian classes] I found the headquarters empty, except a table, one which Juan de la

Cabada was sleeping peacefully, during the time when he had 'no fixed domicile.' Now Juan is a well-known writer and does not suffer the penuries he did then. I went back to my house and arranged for my students to come there for classes. That headquarters of LEAR in the Calle San Gerónimo were in an old building; I had to go through various hallways and dirty little patios where equally dirty and ragged children played, which made a great effect on me...such misery....Later LEAR had better headquarters.¹

At its height, LEAR had over 500 members. Their accomplishments and activities were impressive in their number and diversity. Over the years, they published a journal, *Frente a Frente (Face to Face)*, produced murals, backdrops, banners, posters, flyers and other works of art, organized conferences, exhibitions, film showings, puppet shows, theater productions, and national congresses of writers and artists, and took part in labor union activities, supporting the demands of teachers, workers and campesinos.²

However, according to Francisco Reyes Palma, the origins of LEAR are obscured by the marginality caused by both the illegality of the PCM and by the complications of international Communism during the Stalinist era:

Even the founding moment of the organization remains ambiguous; in the official documentation, the point of initiation is established between February and March of 1934 (Letter from Luis Arenal, secretary of the organization, to Joseph Freeman, secretary of the John Reed Club of New York. Mexico City, January 22, 1934); according to LEAR's 'Declaration of Principles and Statutes,' it was the following month ('Declaration of Principles and Statutes' of LEAR, 1936). Nonetheless, there are preexisting documents, as well as various testimonies, by which the creation of the League was in 1933 (letter of January 13th, 1934, in which José Baños N., secretary of the Anniversary Committee in honor of Julio Antonio Mella asks the League to send a delegate to participate in the tasks of the Committee.³

¹ Angelina Beloff, *Memorias* (Mexico City: UNAM/SEP, 1986), pp. 86-87.

² Juana Gutiérrez, Nanda Leonardini and Jenny Stoopon "La época de oro del grabado en México," *Historia del arte mexicano*, no. 101, p. 6.

³ Reyes Palma, "La LEAR," p. 5. Méndez put the date of the origins of LEAR as 1933, which is probably when the founding members began to plan the organization. In Poniatowska, p. 11.

Although the organization was to change direction politically in 1935, when LEAR first came into existence members followed the directives of the 1928 Sixth Congress of the Communist International, which emphasized the class struggle and encouraged the working classes in all countries to rise against the ruling classes, with the slogan “class against class.” From this stance, LEAR also followed the statutes of the Plenum of the Mexican Communist Party, as a single-front proletarian organization. Reyes Palma points out that:

This tactical adjustment led them to characterize, in a sectarian manner, the Mexican government and its cultural strategies as a social-fascist one, which it was necessary to oppose using all of its resources.⁴

LEAR took a confrontational stance, allying itself with the proletarian masses and militating against the Mexican government. The members conceived of LEAR as an international organization, and established links with groups in many different countries, including the John Reed Clubs in the United States, the International Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists in Krakow, the Union of Revolutionary Writers of the Soviet Union, and the Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists of France.⁵ LEAR’s newspaper, *Frente a Frente* (*Face to Face*), first published in November 1934, took its title from the concept of “class against class.” Méndez, Siqueiros, Juan de la Cabada, Miguel Nava and “Rab Kor” were listed as editors.⁶

The first issue of *Frente a Frente* presented a summary of the six Declarative Principles of LEAR. They stated that:

⁴Ibid., p. 6.

⁵Ibid., p. 7.

⁶Ibid., p. 8. The pseudonym, “Rab Kor” stood for “rabochii korrespondient,” or worker-correspondent, and belonged to a yet-unidentified writer who sent regular reports to LEAR from Moscow.

The League of Revolutionary Writers and Artists (LEAR) is a single-front organization at the service of the working class against the current capitalist regime and its disastrous consequences of crisis and degeneration with its sequels of Fascism, Imperialism and War. The second principle: As such a single-front revolutionary organization, the recognition of the class struggle and the determined intention of bringing this forward by means of the most vigorous and widespread intellectual campaign in favor of the great masses of workers and campesinos is the only necessary qualification to be an active member of LEAR. The third: To unite, then, the truly revolutionary intellectual forces in order to oppose the corrupting institutions and trends in the bourgeois arts and sciences is one of our principal functions. Fourth: To define the positions of reactionary artists and writers who are openly in the service of the church and the exploiting class, and to denounce and unmask implacably those in disguise who try to penetrate or already are within the ranks of the proletariat so that they can betray them, while pretending to defend them, is one of the most urgent and important tasks. Fifth: Through literature, painting, music, theater and the other expressions of intellectual work, we must demonstrate ceaselessly the unfailing class content in favor of capitalist domination that is embedded in so-called 'culture' that the bourgeoisie provides in each and every of its sectors, either from the archbishop, from the university seats and government schools or from its pseudo-revolutionary political parties. Sixth: The Soviet Union, the only country where culture is used to benefit toiling humanity, is the Torch that signals the way for the proletariat of other countries of the world. In Mexico, only when workers and campesinos achieve their economic and political emancipation, will culture be fully at the service of productive forces, today oppressed and subjugated by a gang of hypocritical leeches and blood-thirsty ruffians. The League of Revolutionary Writers and Artists (LEAR) puts and will put all of its forces at the side of the workers, to contribute to their great work of liberation.⁷

Although many of the original members of LEAR had also belonged to SOTPE, there are significant differences between the founding principles of the two groups. The emotional tone of SOTPE's Manifesto of 1923, its emphasis on the indigenous people of Mexico and its focus on aesthetic issues stand in contrast to LEAR's focus on class struggle and the development of revolutionary cultural strategies. The eleven years that had passed since SOTPE's Manifesto had seen an increasing politicization of artists in Mexico, along with their commitment to international Communism. Now leftist Mexican

⁷ *Frente a Frente*, no. 1 (November 1934): p. 3.

artists were embedded in an uncompromising Marxist discourse. The editorial accompanying this issue set up a binary opposition within Mexican society:

HERE: the workers' muscles, the hand that sows and proletarian thought.
 THERE: The blood-sucking capitalist, the pocket of the bourgeois, puffed up behind the revolver of the general and the saber of the inspector of police.
 On one side: workers, campesinos, soldiers: ignorance, slavery, misery and more misery.
 On the other side: exploiters: rulers, industrialists, hacienda owners: opulence and power.⁸

The editorial condemned Mexico's current government as "burgués-feudal" ("bourgeois-feudal"), and deplored the official pretense of socialism in Mexico.⁹

Méndez responded to the position expressed by the editorial with a satirical anti-government print that criticized Rivera's collaboration with the government. Méndez's 1934 wood engraving, *Calaveras del Mausoleo Nacional* (*Calaveras of the National Mausoleum*) (fig. 95), on the cover of the first issue of *Frente a Frente*, illustrates the way in which LEAR's confrontational stance translated into visual terms, and at the same time, reveals the current complexities of Mexican cultural politics. Méndez depicted the inauguration of the Palacio de Bellas Artes (Palace of Fine Arts) in Mexico City, using *calaveras* in the style of Posada. The event was a government-sponsored gala; the Palacio de Bellas Artes is an enormous, extravagant Beaux-Arts building that had been under construction since 1904, and members of LEAR would have been opposed to the elitist luxury of the occasion and of the building itself. In the foreground are two seated skeletons, representing Rivera and Carlos Riva Palacio, the president of the newly formed Partido Nacional Revolucionario. They are clapping as they look over their shoulders at the viewers with open-mouthed grins. In the background is the grand hall of the Palacio

⁸Ibid., p. 4.

⁹Ibid.

de Bellas Artes, with a *calavera* orchestra on stage and *calavera* audience in the pit and the loges. The caption, which appears to one side of the print identifies the characters and setting, in case the viewer had any doubt: “*Calaveras del Mausoleo Nacional*” (“*Calaveras of the National Mausoleum*”), and the names Riva Palacio and Diego Rivera. In the caption, Riva Palacio says: “Get them out of here, gendarmes, (calling) those yelling nobodies,” while Rivera comments, “Bravo! 'cause they aren’t letting us enjoy our party in peace!” As mentioned previously, at this point Rivera was no longer in the Communist Party and was openly supporting Trotsky.¹⁰ Increasingly isolated from other Mexican artists, he had been spending much of his time in the United States, painting murals for American industrialists, generating his own controversies there. When he returned to Mexico at the end of 1933 he worked on the National Palace murals, commissioned by the Calles-backed government.¹¹ From 1931 until 1935 Siqueiros held a one-person campaign against Rivera, accusing him of artistic stagnation and political opportunism in a series of attacks that resulted in the famous debate of 1935, discussed below. In May 1934 Siqueiros published “Rivera’s Counter-Revolutionary Road” in the American leftist journal *New Masses*, connecting Rivera’s support of Trotsky with his ineffectiveness as a revolutionary artist. Siqueiros condemned Rivera’s use of the fresco medium and his lack of technical inventiveness, as well as his relationships to his wealthy

¹⁰ Rivera later invited Trotsky to live with him, when the Russian leader sought refuge in Mexico in 1937, and worked with Trotsky and André Breton on their “Manifesto: Toward a Free Revolutionary Art” (published as André Breton and Diego Rivera, “Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art,” *Partisan Review* (Fall 1938): pp. 49-53). Siqueiros’s aesthetic and technical criticisms were ironic, given that Trotsky and Rivera were in agreement about the necessity for artists to find their own ways of expressing themselves. Herein lies the great paradox of Siqueiros, that he would not have been allowed produce his experimental and innovative art within the confines of the Soviet system, yet he opposed Trotsky, whose aesthetic theories would have allowed artists more freedom of experimentation in their making of revolutionary art. For the relationship between Siqueiros and the Soviet Union, see William Richardson, “The Soviet Siqueiros: David Alfaro Siqueiros and the Soviet Imagination,” paper presented at the conference, *Otras Rutas a Siqueiros*, Mexico City: Museo Nacional de las Artes, 1996.

¹¹ For a discussion of the politics of the mural see Leonard Folgarait, “Revolution as Ritual: Diego Rivera’s National Palace Mural,” *Oxford Art Journal* 14, no. 1 (1991): pp. 18-32.

patrons.¹² The stage was set, therefore, at the time of the publication of the first issue of *Frente a Frente*, for a concentrated offensive against Rivera as a “counter-revolutionary” and government collaborator. Méndez’s print represents LEAR’s confrontational approach to art and politics in its first phase, before the inauguration of the government of Lázaro Cárdenas and the establishment of the Popular Front in Mexico, discussed below. The sectarian politics of the Mexican left that would soon be forgotten, temporarily, in the Popular Front, are in full play in *Calaveras del Mausoleo Nacional*. Méndez has written “IV Internacional” on Rivera’s forehead, referring to Trotsky’s Fourth Communist International, and “PNR” on the forehead of the Riva Palacio. Rivera sits in a chair with a dollar sign (also used for the peso) on the back, and Rivas Palacios in a chair with a swastika on its back. At their feet at the bottom of the picture plane, a much smaller *calavera* with jackboots, a black cap and a pistol menaces a *calavera* working-class couple, expelling them from the concert hall. The music that was performed at this event was the *Sinfonía Proletaria* (*Proletarian Symphony*) by the composer and conductor Carlos Chávez, later a member of LEAR, but at that time collaborating with the government in the inauguration ceremonies. A notice displayed prominently on the floor next to this scene announces the program: “Today, *The Sun, Proletarian Corrido*, Tickets 25 pesos,” emphasizing the irony and injustice of charging a high price for the government-sponsored performance of a work with a supposedly proletarian theme. The apparent harshness of this mocking image is somewhat mitigated by the fact that the *calavera* is a humorous motif, used during the Days of the Dead to make fun of death. Sugar skulls with the name of a person are often given to friends and relatives, and the macabre humor is not usually considered to be insulting or threatening.

¹²David Alfaro Siqueiros, “Rivera’s Counter-Revolutionary Road,” *New Masses*, May 29, 1934. For a discussion of Siqueiros’s attacks on Rivera in the early 1930s, see Desmond Rochfort, *The Mexican Muralists* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1993), pp. 149-150.

This print appears to be the first use of the *calavera* motif in post-Revolutionary graphic art. In fact, Méndez was the first artist to emulate Posada's work directly, both in style and iconography. His 1932 *Concierto de Locos* appears to be the first Mexican art print to satirize known personages since Posada. Méndez's 1934 *Calaveras del Mausoleo Nacional* also attacks public figures, and Méndez again focused on Rivera. However, in *Concierto de Locos* Méndez portrayed Rivera as an equal participant in a cultural controversy, one of a group of equally absurd men that included Siqueiros, Atl and Sáenz, whereas in *Calaveras del Mausoleo Nacional* Méndez cast Rivera as a counter-revolutionary, an enemy of the people. This was quite a dramatic change in attitude on the part of Méndez, and presumably, his colleagues in LEAR. The broader issue of the shifting alliances of the Mexican Left is brought out in these two images of Rivera. Méndez's own stance as revealed through these two works indicates his chosen place in the Mexican leftist art world. In *Concierto de Locos*, for example, Méndez placed Siqueiros and Rivera in the foreground and mocked them equally, implying that they had become ridiculous in the public eye. His bold critique of Rivera, Siqueiros, Atl and Sáenz indicates that he considered himself outside of the controversies in which they were engaged. Méndez's attack on Rivera in 1934 in *Calaveras del Mausoleo Nacional* came from another direction. Because this satirical image appeared at the founding moment of LEAR, displayed on the cover of the first issue of *Frente a Frente*, in this case Méndez's print represented not only his views but those of the group, and must be seen in the context of Siqueiros's contentious discourse concerning Rivera, now cast as a complete outsider. On this occasion Méndez was not an independent observer, but a representative of a collective viewpoint.

In *Calaveras del Mausoleo Nacional* Méndez uses a number of conventions taken from Posada, while adding a complexity of composition and political intent of his own. The figures themselves are more identifiable and have more facial detail than the typical

Posada *calavera*, and in general Méndez includes much more visual description than Posada would have, especially in the background. Posada's prints tend to have simple spatial compositions, with most of the action in the foreground. In *Calaveras del Mausoleo Nacional*, the opera house is portrayed in a kind of Baroque composition, with deep recession into space, a series of arches, opera boxes and curtains leading up to the stage in the background. The main characters in the foreground are framed by an arch, a device Méndez used often. The little *calaveras* at the bottom of the print are pure Posada, although they too are more fully delineated as social types than the figures found in Posada's work. A print by Posada, *Soldadera Zapatista* (fig. 96), has similar small figures at the bottom of the image, but these characters are generic campesino types, waving their arms at the galloping woman soldier. The little figures in the Méndez print, on the other hand, represent two different social roles, the police and the urban proletariat. They are identified by their clothing, the policeman in cap and boots, and the working man wearing overalls, his wife in a dress and shawl. As Méndez did in this print, Posada often made the principal figures in his prints much larger than the secondary ones, showing their relative social and psychological importance, a technique also seen in Medieval and early Renaissance painting and in folk art. Méndez used this technique in other of his prints and in general employed dramatic differences in scale in many of his compositions later on.

While the muralists Rivera and Orozco later claimed Posada as their greatest influence in their autobiographies and other writings, and Orozco included skeletons in the Dartmouth murals in 1932, Méndez's wood block prints of the early 1930s were sophisticated, self-conscious *graphic* reworkings of Posada's prints, and would have been recognized as such by other artists. Méndez was producing a new genre in Mexican art with his topical caricatures and use of *calaveras*. He incorporated and altered Posada's style and iconography to contemporary, politically directed ends. Méndez also depicted

themes painted by the Mexican muralists in graphic form; he shared their focus on Mexican history, especially the Revolution, and their desire to portray Mexican culture. These influences, along with German Expressionist, Russian Constructivist, and Stridentist styles and subject matter, created a range of possibilities for the appearance of the Mexican political print. After Méndez, a number of artists, such as Luis Arenal, O'Higgins and Alfredo Zalce, and the members of the Taller de Gráfica Popular, employed the same methods for similar purposes, and in fact, the direction of Mexican political printmaking was entirely altered by Méndez's innovations. While not consciously acknowledged by the painters of Mexico, Méndez's recontextualization of Posada through his own printmaking most likely contributed to Posada's reputation as the progenitor of twentieth-century Mexican art. The publication of the *Calaveras del Mausoleo Nacional* on the cover of the first issue of *Frente a Frente* gave the image wide dissemination among leftist artists and intellectuals, and put Méndez's artistic efforts into the foreground of Mexican political artistic expression.

In addition to Méndez's cover illustration and the "Declaration of Principles and Statutes" of LEAR, the first issue of *Frente a Frente* contained other woodcuts, announcements, and invitations to join LEAR: "Worker: You Carry the Vital Forces of the Class that will Develop the Important Art of the Future. Do You like to Write? Why not Join the Literary Section of LEAR?" and "Workers: Join our Section of Song and Music. Send us *Corridos* and Proletarian Songs."¹³ A number of articles about art and politics supported the principles of LEAR, the most significant and formative of these essays relating to the relationship between Mexican and Soviet culture. An essay reporting on a speech by the Soviet writer Maxim Gorky at the Congress of Russian Writers in Karkov was followed by a short piece by Germán List Arzubide, "Is There a Bourgeois Art and a Revolutionary Art?" Both essays highlighted the role of the

¹³*Frente a Frente*, no. 1 (November 1934), p. 6.

proletariat as maker and recipient of true (revolutionary) art, as opposed to the decadent, self-serving art of the bourgeoisie. List Arzubide praised John Reed's book about the Russian Revolution, *Ten Days That Shook the World*. He contrasted Reed's book and works by Communist authors Henri Barbusse and Maxim Gorky with "boring and useless" modernist literature that lacked revolutionary content, asking:

What does all this prove? That we are two worlds face to face ['frente a frente'], On one side, those who love great struggles, the masses in movement, the beauty of rebellion and protest, the combat by the people for liberty; on the other, those who, despising all this, love to recount their sufferings, find the image of their own decadence beautiful and submerge themselves in decadence as sybaritic egoists.¹⁴

Although neither essay explicitly describes the form that revolutionary art should take, the official Soviet position at this time mandated socialist realism as the only legitimate style. This stand was institutionalized at the First Congress of Soviet Writers, when Andrei Zhdanov defined socialist realism as "realism in form and realism in content," a doctrine that was communicated to Communist groups throughout the world. However, Mexican artists and writers were deeply involved in creating new, Mexican, art forms, and their desire to experiment overshadowed dictates from Moscow. Although LEAR members admired the Soviet Union as the leader of world Communism, they themselves were living and working in very complex political and social conditions. While they had set themselves against the Mexican government, they also had a long history of working within the government, especially in the SEP, as noted above, and the government did not attempt to control their artistic or intellectual activities. In contrast, Soviet writers and artists were finding it more difficult to experiment artistically, or even to function as artists at all, due to the increasingly repressive nature of Soviet cultural

¹⁴Germán List Arzubide, "¿Existe un arte burgués y un arte revolucionario?" *Frente a Frente*, no. 1 (November 1934): p. 9.

policy in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Soviet-style socialist realism required artists to submit to the control of the Stalinist government, in order to glorify the achievements of the Russian Revolution and its consequent benefits as the Soviet government wanted them to be portrayed. For Mexican artists, the failure of the Mexican Revolution and the poverty and corruption that still prevailed in Mexico under a supposedly socialist government, in conjunction with their liberty to criticize that government, set up real conditions that inhibited the development of Soviet-style socialist realism. Mexican artists were more inclined to work in a socially critical mode, focusing on adverse social conditions, class conflicts and the rise of fascism. For example, Méndez's 1934 woodcuts, *El Accidente* (*The Accident*) (fig. 97), in which a worker has fallen in a construction site, and *El "Juan,"* also called *Pos Pa' Qué Luchamos* (*So For Wha' Do We Fight*) (fig. 98), which shows the poverty-stricken family of a soldier next to a wealthy family, are works that emphasize the evil effects of capitalism on the working class. Rather than promoting socialist realism, the essays and images in the first issue of *Frente a Frente* demonstrate LEAR's focus on the unification and education of the masses in the context of an international proletarian movement. *Frente a Frente* presented an idealized image of the Soviet Union, as well as agitating for better social conditions in Mexico. Many Mexican artists aligned themselves with the Soviet Union politically, and leftist artists embraced the idea of realism in general, in the sense of representational and figurative depictions of the external world, usually with political intent, but they were not sympathetic to the strictures of socialist realism as set forth in the Soviet Union. Méndez for example, disliked the Soviet work he saw at the New York World's Fair in 1939, stating:

...the whole [exhibit] gave the impression of a big calendar. The rest of the painting in general was quite academic and I was not even interested enough to see who the artists were.¹⁵

In turn, the Russian response to an exhibition of the Taller de Gráfica Popular in 1940 was quite negative, as discussed below.

It was not until 1936 that the members of LEAR defined their aesthetic-political stance more explicitly. In an editorial in *Frente a Frente*, in August 1936, the writer or writers stated their group position, and this was still not very specific:

The social function of the revolutionary intellectual is that of a militant activist, a capable guide to point out with accuracy the dangers that culture faces in this moment... We, intellectuals of the left, consider ourselves products of a historic moment characterized by economic contradictions... an incomparable social force that motivates us and brings us to struggle collectively, for our own sakes and at the side of the masses, whose exploitation we confront, as if we are also victims of it. Our attitude is thus the struggle against the oppressive classes and in favor of the oppressed.

This declaration implies the awareness that the only possible mental position lies in honesty and in order to be accepted in the group that we have chosen it is necessary to get rid of all reserve.

The mass of writers and artists disperse at the clash of interests of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The indefinite condition of social layering -- petit bourgeoisie -- from which we come, lacks cohesion, is the lack of cohesion, the dispersion in action, when it acts, and the regrouping into two factions, one on the right and the other on the left. We of LEAR are on the left.

This position is the only consequence of our philosophical thesis. We think that for art to unfold and persist as the expression of our age, it must change course, following the direction indicated by social reality.¹⁶

As Reyes Palma points out, the first three issues of *Frente a Frente* (the second and third issues were published in January and May of 1935), belong to the first phase of LEAR, the "proletarian front."¹⁷ In fact, the publication is numbered accordingly, the first

¹⁵Poniatowska, p. 14.

¹⁶"¿Con quiénes y en contra de quiénes está la LEAR?" *Frente a Frente*, no. 5 (August 1936): p. 2.

¹⁷Reyes Palma, "La LEAR," p. 5.

three issues in numerical order, while the numbering started over with the fourth issue, *Frente a Frente Segunda Epoca, No. 1*. The first stage was marked by LEAR's militant campaigning for revolutionary change in Mexico, its interest in the Soviet Union and proletarian issues, and its opposition to the PNR.

The PNR, however, began to change under the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas. When Lázaro Cárdenas ran for president in 1934 as the representative of the PNR left wing, his faction opposed the conservative policies of the government under Calles and his cronies. Cárdenas had fought in the Mexican Revolution under Calles and Obregón, becoming a brigadier general, and later served as Secretary of Government (equivalent to the United States Secretary of the Interior), and Secretary of National Defense, and later won the governorship of his native state, Michoacán. He was active in the PNR during the early 1930s. Based on Cárdenas's political affiliations, at first LEAR members believed that Calles and Cárdenas were more or less equivalent. LEAR took the stand: "Ni con Calles, ni con Cárdenas" ("Neither with Calles, nor with Cárdenas").¹⁸

However, upon taking office, Cárdenas emerged as a remarkable leader and innovator. He was the first president of Mexico since the Revolution untainted by corruption, and his reputation for personal and political honesty was unquestioned. As important as Cardenas's integrity was his determination to implement the reforms laid out by the Constitution of 1917. Although Cárdenas was an active member of the PNR, the party of Calles, before his election he had led an agrarian movement within the party that proposed radical reform of land and resource distribution. This group of the PNR was responsible for the nomination of Cárdenas during the 1934 party convention. During the election campaign Cárdenas traveled throughout Mexico, meeting personally with workers and campesinos, assuring them of his desire to improve the conditions of all

¹⁸Gutiérrez, et al, p. 2.

Mexicans. This began a pattern of governance that Cárdenas carried into his presidency. Throughout the campaign Cárdenas directed his attention toward the common people:

In virtually every village, Cárdenas repeated his slogan: 'Workers of Mexico, Unite!...If you have rights,' he told the stevedores, 'you must recognize your duties to your other class brothers; for if we are to give true help to an organization, it must prove to us that it is not wrapped up in egoism, but is working for all the toilers who do not even today enjoy the fruits of the Revolution....The doors of the National Palace,' he told barefoot, illiterate citizens of the tropical town of Soconusco, 'are always open to the workers and peasants.'¹⁹

In spite of their political differences, Calles originally supported Cárdenas as president, but the two leaders began to disagree publicly almost immediately after the election of 1934. In the first year of the Cárdenas presidency, Calles opposed Cárdenas's agrarian reforms and support of labor unions, publicly declaring himself against Cárdenas's reforms in 1935. After this open break, Cárdenas began to replace Calles appointees in civilian and military positions. Labor unions and other Cárdenas supporters staged large-scale street demonstrations against Calles. Eventually, Cárdenas sent Calles into exile in California, where he remained until his death in 1945.

As indicated above, LEAR was very suspicious of Cárdenas and the PNR at the beginning of the president's tenure. Nonetheless, the organization was given a chance to participate in a government-sponsored conference:

In its first phase, LEAR's impact was very small...When the PNR invited LEAR to participate in its first Congress of Revolutionary Writers, the party had more than one million followers, whereas the membership of the Communist Party barely exceeded six hundred and LEAR had only thirty members. During the Congress, LEAR made four basic demands: freedom for political prisoners, freedom for oppositional organizations, freedom of the press, and re-establishment of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, their

¹⁹Nathaniel Weyl and Sylvia Weyl, *The Reconquest of Mexico: the Years of Lázaro Cárdenas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 127.

colleagues in the PNR asked for government support to establish a publishing house that could disseminate the ideology of the Mexican Revolution.²⁰

However, in spite of overtures by the Cárdenas administration and the PNR, LEAR maintained its oppositional attitude toward the government at this point. Luis Arenal's woodcut for the cover of the second issue of *Frente a Frente* (fig. 99) serves as a sign of the militant, proletarian stance of the organization at that time. A group of workers, fists raised in the air, confronts the viewer. The men wear overalls, and the artist has also included women and children, whose active participation in the demonstration emphasizes the unified stance of the workers. The graphic style is deliberately simplified; the picture plane is filled with the workers' bodies arranged in a rhythmic pattern, and the repetition of upraised arms creates a wave-like effect that indicates action, although the relatively immobile positions of the workers also give the impression of an inert mass of downtrodden people desperate for political change. Arenal carved the wood block in reverse, so that the bodies and faces of the workers are white against a black background. The eyes are deep black, which gives the people a somewhat ghostly air, almost as though their faces were skulls or *calaveras*. A linoleum print of Russian workers, by Vladimir Kozlinsky, *Meeting*, from 1919 (fig. 100), portrays the faces of the crowd with the same rudimentary, sketchy strokes as Arenal used. In both prints the eyes are dark streaks on blocky faces, the endless repetition of forms and upraised hands implying the will of the multitude. Another print of the same theme, Frans Masareel's *The Strike* (fig. 101), also created in 1919, depicts the crowd in confrontation with a man who, by his overcoat and top hat, is obviously a representative of the owning class. In this image, Masareel has emphasized the urban setting, the contrast of the modern factory with the cobble-stone street, and the striking workers in their own environment. The crowd is still an

²⁰ Reyes Palma, "Workshop of Popular Graphics During the Times of Cardenas," in *Images of Mexico*, p. 111.

anonymous sea of faces, but the gestures and expressions of the leaders of the strike are more individualized than those of the workers in the prints of Arenal and Kozlinsky. The twentieth-century theme of the masses seen in each of these works was repeated numerous times in the work of Mexican artists from the 1930s on. Méndez too made many images of the masses, but his representations of the theme took a different form. In Méndez's prints, such as *La Protesta (The Protest)* (fig. 146), discussed below, the faces of the crowd are highly individualized, and in general in his depictions of the masses Méndez often included a figure who stands out from the rest.

The third issue of *Frente a Frente*, of May 1935, had a photomontage on the cover, and used photographs, line drawings and wood block prints to illustrate articles and announcements. A photograph of a workers club in Moscow (fig. 102) accompanies an article on the architecture in Mexico, and a two-page photomontage of smiling Russian workers and children (fig. 103) illustrates a report by a recent Mexican visitor to the Soviet Union. At the bottom of the page is the sentence, "We demand the resumption of diplomatic relations with the USSR!"²¹

Four articles in this issue are of particular interest. Manuel Vivanco's essay on Vicente Lombardo Toledano, "El 'Futuro' de Lombardo" ("The 'Future' of Lombardo"), accuses the well-known labor leader, of collaborating with reactionary thugs and ignoring the plight of striking workers on a number of occasions, while pretending to be allied with revolutionary forces.²² A woodcut (fig. 104), probably by Méndez (and if so, ironically, as Méndez was an ardent follower of Lombardo Toledano two years later), depicts the labor leader with two fascists, running over a pile of bones and skulls, his hand on a swastika. But Lombardo Toledano was to change status with the next issue of

²¹ *Frente a Frente*, no. 3 (May 1935): pp. 10-11.

²² *Ibid.* p. 4.

Frente a Frente, as LEAR began to identify itself as part of the Popular Front. Reyes Palma points out:

One demonstration of this opening [from the Proletarian Front to the Popular Front] was that Vicente Lombardo Toledano, the 'super-traitor' labor leader, as he was termed in the first epoch of *Frente a Frente*, is given a forum in these pages: having traveled to the USSR conferred a certain aura of the prodigal son on him.²³

In the third issue Siqueiros contributed an essay accusing Rivera of counter-revolutionary activity, including attending a state banquet in honor of Amelia Earhart during her visit to Mexico, and planning a mural at the League of Nations, both of which Siqueiros associated with imperialist programs. He also stressed Rivera's Trotskyist leanings once again.²⁴

Also in this issue were a summing up of the first five months of the Cárdenas regime, written by Hernán Laborde, the director of the Communist Party of Mexico, and a report from the American Writers Congress that took place in New York in April of 1935.²⁵ LEAR sent a number of delegates to this Congress, including Orozco, Tamayo and Juan de la Cabada. Both of these articles attacked the Cárdenas government. Laborde acknowledged that Cárdenas had already made a number of positive gestures, such as advocating for an increase in the minimum wage and for the development of socialist education, investigating the complaints of workers at a Ford plant in person, approving of strikes, releasing political prisoners from the infamous Islas Marías prison, promising LEAR that he would allow *El Machete* (previously banned) to be circulated freely, and indicating that he would move toward the re-establishment of relations with the Soviet Union. However Laborde insisted that these steps were inadequate, a "leftist facade that

²³Reyes Palma, "La LEAR," p. 11.

²⁴*Frente a Frente*, no. 3, (May 1935): p. 8.

²⁵Hernán Laborde, "Cinco meses de gobierno cardenista," *Frente a Frente*, no. 3 (May 1935): pp. 6, 17; "La LEAR en el Congreso de Escritores Americanos," *Frente a Frente*, no. 3 (May 1935): pp. 9, 19.

will impress and fool many.” Among Laborde’s accusations were the following: Cárdenas had paid a half a million dollars to compensate “capitalist yankees” for losses incurred during the Revolution; he had accommodated the United States by devaluing the peso; he had “flirted” with Hitler; he had repressed strikes in a number of cases; he had encouraged foreign capital; he sent troops against campesinos who had reclaimed hacienda lands in the state of Puebla, and he brutally suppressed protests in Chiapas State against the enslavement of the Indians by strongmen of the PNR. On the balance, Cárdenas came out poorly:

Only a blind man could fail to see that this Government continues the politics of its predecessors in a higher stage of the process making the capitalist world more fascist while preparing for war, while the struggle for markets, the feverish armament race and the aggressiveness of fascism -- the political provocation of Hitler and Roosevelt’s plans -- are rapidly pushing the world into a new global slaughter.²⁶

The report by members of LEAR at the American Writers Congress also denounced the government of Mexico in general, communicating a series of demands in the form of proposals to the Congress. They accused the government of putting rural schoolteachers in danger in the complicated rural politics of the time; they denounced the government’s indifference to attacks on the Communist Party by Camisas Doradas (Gold Shirts), members of an extreme right-wing, pro-Nazi party, the Alianza Revolucionaria Mexicanista (Revolutionary Mexican Alliance, ARM); and they called for a halt to repression of campesinos who occupied rural land holdings.²⁷

However, in the next issue of *Frente a Frente* in March 1936, LEAR would change its assessment of the Cárdenas government entirely. However, the adamant tone of the third issue was, in some ways, an indication that under Cárdenas’s progressive

²⁶Laborde, “Cinco meses.” pp. 6, 17.

²⁷“La LEAR en el Congreso de Escritores Americanos,” pp. 9, 19.

governance the left was gaining confidence, and the climate of repression that Mexico had experienced under Calles had lifted enough for vigorous criticism to emerge and to be disseminated publicly.

At the beginning of 1935, in addition to *Frente a Frente*, LEAR began to produce a series of large-scale graphic posters directed toward the working classes that publicized political controversies. They were posted on walls and distributed during meetings and demonstrations. In March 1935, Méndez made the wood block print for LEAR called *Hoja Popular No. 1* (*People's Broadsheet, No. 1*) (fig. 105). The poster presents a *corrido* called "Al arriero y a las mulas" ("To the Mule-drivers and the Mules"), along with Méndez's illustration. As in the broadsheets of Posada, the song takes up most of the space, with a small print at the top showing the theme of the *corrido* -- a brutal eviction of a poor family by two thugs, one with a swastika on his hat, the other with a dollar/peso sign. The man with the swastika, who raises his right leg in a goose step, also has a badge on his jacket with the letters "ARM," the Alianza Revolucionaria Mexicanista. The words of the *corrido* connect the ARM with both the Nazis and American gangsters, in particular Al Capone: "...In the school of Al Capone, he perfected his training..." According to Reyes Palma, the ARM and other right-wing organizations attacked left-wing groups often and created a climate of fear strong enough that LEAR had to maintain armed guards in its headquarters.²⁸ While *Hoja Popular No. 1* was the first such print that LEAR produced, satirical broadsheets had been used since the time of Posada to disseminate information and opinions. Maples Arce had used the broadsheet format in his Stridentist manifestos, and *El Machete* was affixed to the walls of public places as well. Méndez had produced *Concierto de Locos* in poster format in 1932, and he continued to make prints in the form of broadsheets, posters, and leaflets from the early thirties until

²⁸Reyes Palma, *Leopoldo Méndez*, p. 16.

the 1960s. In *Hoja Popular No. 1* Méndez again used the graphic style of Posada, with his sketchy faces and simple composition illustrating a *corrido*.

Another print by Méndez also addresses the threat of the Camisas Doradas, who drew much of their power from psychological tactics. Like the *Hoja Popular No. 1, Cómo Pretenden (How They Try)* (fig. 106) shows Camisas Doradas attacking a group of unarmed demonstrators with clubs, daggers and pistols. The workers hold a banner that reads, in Spanish, “Down with Capitalist Exploitation,” and one of them is slumped on the ground holding the pole in his hand, presumably injured. These prints were made at the beginning of a strong anti-fascist movement in Mexico, constituted to combat the powerful alliance of wealthy reactionaries, the most conservative wing of the Catholic Church, and pro-fascist and pro-Nazi politicians and their followers, all of whom supported Franco, Mussolini and Hitler. Perhaps the ferocity of the violence directed toward the Left by Mexican fascists at this time is indicated by the fact that both prints portray the actions of strong oppressors against weak and helpless proletarian victims. This type of depiction became more prevalent in Méndez’s anti-fascist prints of the late 1930s and early ‘40s. As he had in *Hoja Popular No. 1*, Méndez drew on Posada in this print. Foregrounds filled with struggling figures are a common sight in Posada’s prints of crime scenes, and the upraised knife wielded by one of the Camisas Doradas looks like a murder weapon in Posada’s many scenes of stabbing. Méndez again used Posada’s convention for gunfire, as he had in *A la Guerra, A la Guerra* (fig. 77), in the little cloud of smoke that hits the standing worker in the chest.

Two woodcut prints, *El Fascismo I (Fascism I)* and *El Fascismo II (Fascism II)* (figs. 107, 108) of 1936, continue the anti-fascist themes portrayed in *Cómo Pretenden*. Again Méndez depicted the Camisas Doradas as murderers; in these prints they are even more sinister, with covered eyes, downturned mouths and enlarged hands holding guns. Their street clothes and their revolvers, weapons not associated with the military, identify

them as fascist civilian members of the ARM. They wear a type of fedora familiar from *Hoja Popular No. 1* and *Cómo Pretenden*, another sign of their membership in the ARM. In *El Fascismo I*, a *Camisa Dorada* walks among the bodies of unarmed workers in overalls, the most prominent of whom lies on a flag with an emblem, presumably a hammer and sickle, though the hammer is hidden by his body. He is dramatically foreshortened in the European tradition of representing the death of a saint or martyr. His hammer lies on the ground beside him, a visual complement to the incomplete symbol on the flag. In the background, in a scene of continuous narrative, two men with clubs are savagely beating a woman who puts her hands over her face in defense. The attacker in *El Fascismo II* appears to be the same man as in *El Fascismo I*, though here he is wearing a suit-coat and a tie. He shoots his revolver at short-range into the face of a worker; again Méndez used the Posada portrayal of clouds for gun smoke. In the background is another continuous narrative: in a scene typical of Posada's execution scenes, an identical row of men with rifles are executing workers in overalls in individualized poses, who have their hands in the air. As the rise of fascism and the threat of war abroad were reflected in political violence in Mexico, Méndez's representations of the political events became correspondingly more intense in their depictions of violence.

Hoja Popular No. 2 (fig. 109), unattributed, but possibly by Méndez, of December 1935, is an announcement of an anti-Calles demonstration, one of many that took place after the election of Lázaro Cárdenas, during a time when Calles attempted to maintain his behind-the-scenes power, before his final expulsion from Mexico by Cárdenas in April 1936.²⁹ On one side the poster reads "Gran Manifestación AntiCallista!" ("Huge

²⁹In 1935, when Calles began to hint at the possibility of a coup by his supporters to overthrow Cárdenas, the President consolidated his forces and Calles left the country voluntarily for a three-month stay in the United States. Calles returned to Mexico and continued to attack the Cárdenas government in the press. Public opinion against Calles grew, along with Cárdenas's impatience with the former dictator, and on April 9, 1936, police and military personnel went to Calles's hacienda to arrest him. They found him in his bed, reading a copy of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. He was sent back to the United States, where he lived until he died in 1945. A harshly satirical print by Méndez and Zalce portrays Calles at the moment of his arrest, in bed with his book on his lap (fig. 200).

Anti-Calles demonstration!”). The central image is a biting satirical portrayal of Calles dressed as a pirate, with a patch over one eye and a bare chest. He holds a dagger in one hand and a sword in the other. He strides through a mound of skulls, thrusting his sword into a pile of gold coins and jewels. In the background the letters ARM can be seen. The Calles figure is, like the thugs in *Hoja Popular No. 1*, wearing a dollar/peso sign. The print documents the anti-Calles sentiment that manifested itself after the election of Cárdenas, and the gradual shift by LEAR toward Cárdenas. *Hoja Popular No. 2* was an important indication of LEAR’s continued solidarity with the labor movement and its transfer of allegiance to Cárdenas, and marks the first graphic representation of the LEAR’s nascent alignment with the new government.

The Popular Front, New Directions in Mexican Political Art, the Taller-Escuela de Artes Plásticas, and LEAR’s Murals

In the middle of 1935, as the new administration began to demonstrate its sincere intent to introduce radical reforms in Mexico, LEAR began to support Cárdenas and his policies, at the beginning of what Reyes Palma calls the second stage of LEAR.³⁰ Around the same time, Communists in the Soviet Union and Europe began to promote the concept of a Popular Front. In August, 1935, the Seventh World Congress of the Third Communist International met in Moscow, and formulated a new policy of cooperation with the non-Communist countries, with the aim of allying Communist and progressive forces against the Axis. After years of orientation toward oppositional class struggle, Mexican Communists were enjoined to support a Popular Front and embrace other progressive or democratic political organizations in a common fight against fascism. LEAR began to take a more open position, welcoming new members from a broader spectrum of political alliances than it had previously. In keeping with the Popular Front

³⁰Reyes Palma, “La LEAR,” p. 10.

strategy, the members of LEAR were inclined to have a more positive attitude toward the government, and the increasingly progressive policies of Cárdenas made it possible to support his administration with ever-greater enthusiasm.

LEAR's membership grew rapidly with the inclusion of a number of leftist organizations with related aims, among them the Sindicato de Escritores y Artistas Proletarios (Syndicate of Proletarian Writers and Artists, SEAP), the Federación de Escritores y Artistas Proletarios (Federation of Proletarian Writers and Artists, FEAP) and the Asociación de Trabajadores de Artes Plásticas (Association of Plastic Arts Workers, ATA).³¹

Almost from the beginning LEAR had a wide and diversified audience for its written and graphic production. *Frente a Frente* was directed at both the intelligentsia and the working class in Mexico, and beginning in 1935, great efforts were also expended to distribute the journal internationally. Arenal led the campaign to disseminate *Frente a Frente* in New York, Chicago and California, where there were great concentrations of Latin American migrant workers. Links with the Communist Party, John Reed Clubs, New Masses, the Club Mella of Cuban expatriates in the United States and other organizations of Latin American leftists provided a number of American outlets for the publication. The sale of *Frente a Frente* in the United States was an important source of income for LEAR. The organization also sent copies of *Frente a Frente* to the International Union of Revolutionary Writers in the Soviet Union and to the French Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists.³² The graphic work of LEAR artists was posted on the walls of Mexico City and distributed to workers at demonstrations and other meetings.

³¹Ibid., p. 9.

³²Ibid.

Although they continued to produce prints for LEAR's activities, after the third issue of *Frente a Frente*, Méndez and Arenal were no longer on the editorial board, nor did their work often appear in *Frente a Frente*. Instead, they worked in the Taller-Escuela de Artes Plásticas (TEAP), started in 1935 by Siqueiros (who was also no longer an editor of *Frente a Frente* after the third issue) as part of the Plastic Arts Division of LEAR.

The Taller-Escuela was in part a result of the heated discussions between Siqueiros and Rivera that took place in 1934 and 1935. In September 1935, in front of a large audience at the headquarters of the LEAR, Rivera and Siqueiros hammered out a nine-point agreement which they both signed. They arrived at the following conclusions:

1. The Mexican mural movement must analyze itself self-critically, and learn from its experiences, in order to be able to create a new, revolutionary art, useful to the workers.
2. The first phase of revolutionary art had only been embryonic, had only been the first step on the road to a political art of the masses.
3. The movement, in fact, was only the work of some individuals; the organization left much to be desired.
4. Art had served the demagogic interests of the government more than the interests of the campesinos and workers.
5. Almost all artistic production of the first phase of the movement is today found in the possession of foreign collectors.
6. The Mexican people hardly knew the works, much less could one talk of any usefulness for workers and campesinos. Foreign collectors had specialized in a few Mexican artists: in first place, Diego Rivera, then in José Clemente Orozco, and only in third place in David Alfaro Siqueiros.
7. The artists had concentrated too much on mural painting, falling into the grave error of not organizing a cooperative workshop planned with a union, to execute a whole series of modalities of moveable, revolutionary plastic art, capable, because of its form, content and low price, of penetrating to the most impoverished levels of the worker and campesino masses. We refer to prints, reproductions of drawings, printed sheets with texts and illustrations, portable paintings, reproductions by mechanical means, etc.
8. It has been an error to execute murals only in the interiors of great buildings; portable graphic work would be easier to see. In this point the work of Siqueiros in Los Angeles is outstanding.
9. One important cause of all these failings has been the insufficiently revolutionary political orientation of the artists. They, in spite of their intentions,

have been romantics, politically ingenuous, and have sought out beautiful and appropriate architecture for their painting rather than strategic locations.³³

This remarkable document outlined a new direction for Mexican art, reexamining as it were, the basic premises laid out in the SOTPE manifesto twelve years earlier. The premises reposition Mexican art entirely, reevaluating the mural movement as it evolved in the 1920s, and reaffirming the collaborative method hoped for in the first days of mural painting. The new effort would wrest Mexican art from the hands of government and individual collector, moving it from the art market into the sphere of political action by devoting all artistic efforts toward the benefit of the workers and campesinos. This could be accomplished by emphasizing graphic, portable art. Whereas collaborative monumental art production had been the *sine qua non* of the early 1920s, promoted by Siqueiros and Rivera equally, by 1935 the practice of mural painting had become almost entirely individualized.³⁴ Rivera, having garnered the greatest number of governmental and private commissions of all Mexican muralists, was the foremost practitioner of mural painting in Mexico and in the United States, and had an international reputation as a mythical, heroic artist-activist. His acquiescence to what amounts to a new manifesto about the political function of art was a significant acknowledgment of his continued idealism. Even though he was not a member of LEAR, he was the most well-known artist in Mexico, and his cooperation was important for symbolic reasons at the least.

The concepts expressed in the nine points must have come out of innumerable discussions among members of LEAR. As a member of the Executive Committee of LEAR and LEAR's Division of Plastic Arts, Méndez, who was present at this event as a member of the audience, was well situated to formulate these ideas along with Siqueiros

³³Prignitz-Poda, p. 34.

³⁴Around this time, however, mural production in Mexico was about to increase. Under the patronage of Cárdenas murals were again supported by the Mexican government.

and other artists of LEAR, like O'Higgins and Arenal. Clearly, the principles in this document are in congruence with Méndez's actual practice at this time. In fact, they outline an art strategy Méndez had been following since his work with the Stridentists in the mid-twenties, and which he was to follow until the 1960s. At this point, with Méndez's influence and leadership, collective production and graphic art became the new model for Mexican political art, filling a void left by the ideological failure of the Rivera-dominated mural movement, and renewing the original principles of revolutionary art as established in the early 1920s. This approach to political art was further strengthened in the next few years with the founding of the Taller de Gráfica Popular in 1937. Méndez would have been in complete accord with the commitment to free art from governmental patronage, to provide art for workers' causes, to establish collaborative workshops, and to produce graphic work or murals in public places.³⁵

An accordance with this strategy, the Taller-Escuela de Artes Plásticas (TEAP) of LEAR was established in October 1935, as both a workshop for members of LEAR and as a night art school for workers; Siqueiros, as one of the instructors of the workshop, gave the inaugural speech at its opening, although he soon went to New York and established his Experimental Workshop there. Most of the other members of TEAP were painters and printmakers, many of whom became very well known. They included Tamayo, Castellanos, Carlos Orozco Romero, Antonio Pujol, later primarily known as painters; the photographer Manuel Alvarez Bravo; and Méndez, Arenal, O'Higgins, Angel Bracho, Ignacio Aguirre, Feliciano Peña, and Gabriel Fernández Ledesma, who also painted but were known for their graphic work. All of the printmakers except Ledesma were later members of the Taller de Gráfica Popular.³⁶

³⁵Later the dogmatic adherence to these methods would prove to be impracticable for financial reasons, when artists in the Taller de Gráfica Popular discovered that they needed to sell their art to survive, but for now, in LEAR, the modest incomes of the participants, often gained through teaching jobs, were enough to sustain individuals and the organization.

³⁶Prignitz-Poda, p. 34.

Méndez had central role in the establishment of TEAP. He also created the poster for the opening of the workshop/school. *Inscríbese (Sign Up)* (fig. 110) is a dramatic wood block print in red, yellow and black on a beige background, an invitation to workers to enroll in the new school, a visual equivalent of the announcements in *Frente a Frente* directed toward proletarian writers, actors and dancers. In a different style from anything by Méndez to this time, the poster depicts four workers in overalls marching together, behind a large red arrow pointing downward. The words “Taller-Escuela de Artes Plásticas” cover the arrow in block letters, in beige against the red background. To the side of the worker furthest on the right is the word “inscríbese” (“sign up”) in cursive writing, slanting down as though issuing from his mouth. The men’s youthful-looking faces are only slightly individualized, with eyes of different shapes looking in the same direction, as though focused on their future in the school they will be joining. The men’s bodies overlap one another in a rhythmic pattern and the hands of three of them are visible -- two on each side of the arrow. The hands to the left of the arrow are larger than life while the hands to the right of the arrow are only a little larger than life-size; both hands of the worker in the middle are visible, and one of his hands is paired with one hand of the man on either side of him and on either side of the arrow. The emphasis on the eyes and hands of the workers serves a multiple purpose. The depiction of wide-open, staring eyes in the rather mild faces of the workers shows their eagerness to arrive, while underscoring the importance of artistic visuality. Large, mobile hands identify the men as workers, who, like artists, work with their hands; at the same time their pointing fingers, that reinforce the message of the arrow and text, indicate their determination to participate. At the bottom of the poster are lists of subjects taught and the teachers. The subjects are: painting, drawing, printmaking, scene-painting, sculpture, and the history of art through Marxism. Méndez, O’Higgins, Siqueiros, Alvarez Bravo and Tamayo, among others, are listed as teachers. The text forms a geometric design that serves as a ground

over which the workers walk. The way that the print makes use of the arrow and geometric depictions of the human figure is reminiscent of Russian Constructivist images, and the whole composition is at once static and dynamic. The red arrow unifies the four figures, acting as a banner and as a ribbon of honor. The letters on the arrow are very geometric, while the cursive “inscríbase” is free-form and playful. Although the men are in motion, they move as a block, and are held together by the rectangle and triangle of the arrow. The effect of the poster is not particularly militant, but instead somewhat welcoming. The work fulfills LEAR’s aims of directing art to the proletariat, while directing the proletariat to art.

Besides the education of workers, one of the first projects of the Taller-Escuela de Artes Plásticas was the completion of the murals in the Abelardo Rodríguez Market. The Section of Plastic Arts of LEAR had taken on this unique mural project in 1934, working with the administration of a newly constructed model market building in a working-class district near the center of Mexico City. Originally under the nominal direction of Rivera, the project was actually overseen by O’Higgins, who had worked with Rivera, and it was funded by moneys allotted to the construction of the market. A team of artists created the mural cycle on the walls, hallways and ceilings of the bustling, indoor public market. The murals were the first to appear in a truly public site; all the other murals of the Mexican mural movement had been painted in government buildings to which entry was restricted. The murals in the market were designed to capture the everyday world of working people, expressing the themes of the economics of agricultural production in a capitalist system, as well as the nutritional benefits of the food produced. They show the process of growing, harvesting and distributing food in Mexico, with an emphasis on the exploitation of the workers, whether they were rural or urban producers of food. Marion Greenwood also painted a fresco mural depicting the exploitation of miners. In addition to O’Higgins, who was by this time a long-time resident of Mexico, three American

artists worked on the Abelardo Rodríguez murals, Marion and Grace Greenwood and the sculptor Isamu Noguchi. O'Higgins focused on the exploitation of the workers by large landowners and warned of the dangers of fascism, Marion Greenwood painted an extensive mural on the theme of the agriculture in relation to capitalist exploitation and workers' resistance, and Noguchi created a remarkable wall mural of painted plaster and cement that expressed the concepts of communal labor and struggle against fascist aggression (figs. 111-113). The other artists were Mexican: Pedro Rendon, Antonio Pujol, Angel Bracho, Raúl Gamboa, Miguel Tzab, and Ramón Alva Guadarrama. Unfortunately, work was halted when the government suspended funding for the second phase of the Abelardo Rodríguez Market mural project.³⁷ Although they are unusually experimental in comparison to many of the other more well-known murals in Mexico, they remain neglected and in a state of disrepair today.

In January and February 1936, Méndez,¹ O'Higgins, Zalce and Fernando Gamboa painted murals at the Talleres Gráficos de la Nación (the National Printers' Workshops) (now dismantled, and possibly in storage at an unknown location) under the auspices of TEAP. Like the frescoes in the Abelardo Rodríguez Market, these murals strove for an immediacy unusual in Mexican mural painting. The Abelardo Rodríguez Market murals directed their messages to working-class people in a public location, with didactic purposes adapted to the site and its functions. The painters of the printers workshop murals used the printers themselves as models for the figures in the murals, in an effort to particularize their message to the people who would see them during their workday. For the first time, the artists portrayed actual workers in their own workplace. However, the murals were not mundane, as the theme was the dramatic struggle against fascism in Mexico. In the stairwell of the Talleres Méndez painted *Gaseado* (*Gassed*) (fig. 114), a portrayal of an agonized man with a gas mask at his side, gasping for air, a more

³⁷Ibid., p. 41.

sophisticated version, perhaps, of his *Hombre* of 1925, again a single male figure in a contorted pose of martyrdom.

The July issue of *Frente a Frente* also reported that in May of 1936, a brigade of LEAR painters, which included Méndez, O'Higgins, and Zalce, among others, made a "cultural expedition" to Morelia, the capital of the state of Michoacán. They brought an exhibition of painting, drawing and prints with them and installed it in a space in the College of Saint Nicholas of the University of Michoacán. Members of LEAR gave talks and showed films in conjunction with the exhibition, while nine artists painted murals in the library of the Confederación Revolucionaria Michoacana de Trabajo (Revolutionary Confederation of Labor of Michoacán). In a gesture of support for Cárdenas, they also painted a monumental portrait of the president that hung on the facade of a public building. There could have been no better way for the painters of LEAR to honor Cárdenas than to paint these murals and his portrait in Morelia, the city in which he carried out the duties of state governor before becoming president of Mexico. The report concluded with the hope that LEAR could establish cultural brigades of this type that would carry out similar projects in many parts of Mexico.³⁸ Unfortunately the murals painted in Morelia, like much of LEAR's works, were destroyed. Art historian Raquel Tibol described the murals and their fate:

Of the fourteen panels with revolutionary themes painted in the Michoacán Federation, among those the two excellent paintings by Anguiano on the themes of Revolution and Counterrevolution, the notable painting by Santos Balmori on Liberty, and the figure of Lenin advancing, painted with extraordinary skill by Zalce and Méndez, nothing has remained because a few years ago an architect who was remodeling had them destroyed.³⁹

³⁸*Frente a Frente*, no. 4 (July 1936): p. 19.

³⁹Raquel Tibol, "El nacionalismo en la plástica durante el cardenismo," p. 246.

It was Méndez's misfortune that none of his mural paintings survived. All of them were covered over or destroyed during his lifetime. In fact, in spite of his fame as a printmaker, Méndez also thought of himself as a painter, and was frustrated by his lack of opportunity to paint as well as make graphic work.⁴⁰

In addition to these mural projects, TEAP members painted murals portraying the history of Mexican education in the Centro Escolar Revolucionario (Revolutionary School) on the grounds of the Belén Penitentiary. Members of LEAR also painted numerous murals as members of the SEP's Cultural Missions during 1936 and 1937. In an interview in 1975, the painter/printmaker Ignacio Aguirre recalled his work in the Cultural Missions in the State of Hidalgo:

The role of the painters within the Cultural Missions was very important. Because the first thing we did was to paint the municipal building white and paint a sign on it saying 'Municipal Building.' Then we had to make a marionette theater, then find out what the principal problems of the community were. And we had to organize the people of the area around this main issue, and try to present the problem along with its solution. At times it was because there was no water, communication, school or teachers. The hardships were so much worse then than they are now. Then, after all of this, a little before leaving, we had to paint the school with the students, addressing the educational problems along with the main problem of the area.⁴¹

Members of the Cultural Missions painted many murals in rural schools, few of which are known to survive -- no survey exists of the projects done at that time. Moreover, the Cultural Missions were carried out under extremely difficult conditions, during a time when right-wing elements in the Catholic Church had encouraged a resurgence of the Cristero Rebellion originally directed against the repressive policies of the Calles administration in the late 1920s. Mexican education, newly constituted as the

⁴⁰Yampolsky, interview by author, Mexico City, 15 September 1995; and Pablo Méndez, interview by author, Mexico City, 20 July 1996.

⁴¹Prignitz-Poda, p. 43.

Mexican “socialist school” by the Cárdenas government, was particularly targeted during the mid-1930s, when hundreds of school teachers were killed or wounded by the Cristeros, fanatic Catholic peasants who believed that the schools were teaching their children atheism and sexual immorality. Zalce, who participated in the Cultural Missions as a painter and art teacher, told Méndez many stories of attacks against schoolteachers that he heard firsthand in the field, material that Méndez used in a series of prints in 1939.⁴² In addition, *Frente a Frente* published a long article by the writer Juan de la Cabada, about the attacks in August of 1936, listing the names of teachers and the locations in which they were killed, in states all over Mexico.⁴³

The Second Phase of *Frente a Frente*, Support for Cárdenas, The American Artists' Congress

The progress of LEAR's mural teams, along with other of LEAR's cultural activities, were reported at length in *Frente a Frente*. However, the publication increasingly focused on the European political situation. *Frente a Frente* also changed its format after the third issue. The issue of March 1936, the first issue of the second series, was quite different in appearance from the first three issues, larger, and illustrated with photographs rather than wood block prints. In fact, the issues of the publication from the fourth to the last issue, number 12, of November 1937, are mostly illustrated with photographs and photomontages, and prints appear only occasionally. The causes of this change are not completely clear, but Méndez and Arenal, who contributed woodcuts to the earlier issues, were now occupied with TEAP, and were no longer on the editorial board. *Frente a Frente* was publishing more news stories and editorials about events in Europe as the political situation there worsened, and photographs and photomontages

⁴²Alfredo Zalce, interview by author, Morelia, Mexico, 12 July 1996, tape recording.

⁴³Juan de la Cabada, “¿Cómo está y qué necesita la gran masa de maestros mexicanos?” *Frente a Frente*, no. 5, (August 1936): pp. 12-13.

were more expedient for immediate documentation of conditions in Europe and Mexico. The journal increasingly featured photographs from Europe, possibly from publications brought to Mexico by European refugees or by Mexicans returning from Europe. In the March 1936 issue, for example, Alvarez Bravo's photograph *Striking Worker Assassinated* (fig. 115) appears as a part of a two-page photo-essay, while on the cover of the third issue, of May 1936, the same photograph was incorporated into a photomontage that included photographs of Hitler, Mussolini and Calles (fig. 116). On the cover of the July issue of 1936 were two European images. The upper right-hand image is a reproduction of a 1931 Soviet lithographic poster by Gustav Klucis, called *USSR -- The Shock Brigade of the World Proletariat*, and the lower left-hand image is a photomontage by the Berlin Dadaist John Heartfield (fig. 117). Heartfield's composition combines a swastika made of gold coins with small figures of Hitler gesticulating in each of the spaces formed by the arms of the swastika, two men in gas masks and three wounded men in hospital beds at the bottom of the image.

The July issue also contained a review by Arqueles Vela (a former Stridentist) of LEAR's exhibition at the Biblioteca Nacional (National Library) that took place from July 24th to August 7th.⁴⁴ Sixty members participated, including Siqueiros, Orozco, Tamayo, Charlot, Mérida, O'Higgins, Díaz de León, María Izquierdo, Alfredo Zalce and Méndez. All the future founders of the Taller de Gráfica Popular showed prints there. The article reproduced Méndez's *El Fascismo I*. The issue also published a review by Gabriel Fernández Ledesma of an independent exhibit, *Exposición de Propaganda Tipográfica* (Exhibition of Typographic Propaganda), at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, in which *Inscribase* appears as an example of experimental, political typography. Ledesma called Méndez's work "vigorous, expressive and executed in a magnificent technique."⁴⁵

⁴⁴Arqueles Vela, "La exposición de artes plásticas de la LEAR," *Frente a Frente*, no. 4 (July 1936): pp. 20-21.

⁴⁵Gabriel Fernández Ledesma, "Exposición de propaganda tipográfica," *Frente a Frente*, no. 4 (July

Cárdenas's increasing popularity with members of LEAR took dramatic form in the *Frente a Frente* of July 1936. The first two pages of the magazine made it clear that LEAR whole-heartedly supported the President. Throughout the first half of his six-year term Cárdenas increasingly pushed for democratic change based on the Constitution of 1917. By now the members of LEAR approved of Cárdenas's programs, and as they changed their estimation of his performance as national leader they began to portray him in more positive terms. They eagerly endorsed Cárdenas's policies as he revitalized agrarian reform, which had languished under the *Maximato*, allowed for greater labor union activity, and promoted and developed the national education system, especially in rural areas. They also supported Cárdenas's international politics: he welcomed refugees from the Spanish Civil War, and actively opposed fascism in Europe and in Mexico. The lead article carries the title in bold letters: "A Marxist Interpretation of Lázaro Cárdenas," while on the facing page another slogan, "The people support Cárdenas against fascist Callismo and the reactionaries," is surrounded by three photographs, one of a mass demonstration of trade unions and the other two showing murderous acts by Calles's henchmen (fig. 118).⁴⁶

As a member of the Popular Front, in February 1936, LEAR participated in the first American Artists' Congress Against War and Fascism in New York, sending Siqueiros, Orozco, Luis Arenal, Antonio Pujol, Roberto Berdecio, Rufino Tamayo and Jesús Bracho as delegates, along with exhibitions of paintings and graphic works by LEAR artists.⁴⁷ The Congress was an international forum for leftist artists, and this meeting came about as American artists shifted from the Proletarian Front to the Popular

1936): p. 23.

⁴⁶*Frente a Frente*, no. 4 (July 1936): pp. 2-3.

⁴⁷The term American Artists' Congress refers both to the organization and two Congresses, the second of which was held in late 1937. The American Artists Congress organized exhibitions and other events into the 1940s.

Front, with the aim of uniting as many artistic groups as possible in the fight against fascism. Reyes Palma points out that:

More than an event, this congress represented a permanent, organic formation, the materialization of a broad cultural front. Charged with bringing together all artists, the congress had to keep itself apart from conflicts between artistic tendencies. The only requirement for affiliation was that the members maintain their opposition to fascism, war and imperialism. Thus, the logic of this opening-up led to the disappearance of older manifestations of the Proletarian Front such as the John Reed Clubs.⁴⁸

The speakers emphasized the dangers of a coming world war and promoted the social functions of art in the context of the Popular Front. Art historian Meyer Schapiro gave his seminal talk, "On the Social Basis of Art," proposing that artists change the subject matter

of their work to reflect social conditions.⁴⁹ The painter Gilbert Wilson, relating his experiences of a visit to Mexico, praised the Mexican muralists for their political engagement and modernity:

...Here was art as I had never before experienced it; but from that moment on I knew it was what I wanted Art to be -- a real, vital, meaningful expression, full of purpose and intention, having influence and relation to people's daily lives -- a part of life. Here was the first *modern* art I had ever seen. At least, it was the first creative work done in my own time that seemed to have any need, any excuse for being.⁵⁰

Artists from many parts of the United States, Europe and Latin America attended the Congress. The American Artists' Congress held an exhibition of the work of

⁴⁸Reyes Palma, "La LEAR," p. 11.

⁴⁹Meyer Schapiro, "The Artist in Society," in Matthew Baigell and Julia Williams, eds., *Artists Against War and Fascism: Papers of the First American Artists' Congress* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1986), pp. 103-113.

⁵⁰Gilbert Wilson, "A Mural Painter's Conviction," in Baigell and Williams, p. 129.

American printmakers that toured the United States, also published as the book, *America Today: A Book of One Hundred Prints*. The introduction of the book contained sections on printmaking and printmaking techniques. One of these texts, written by Ralph Pearson, explained the author's concept of the role of the artist:

By direct contact with his audience the artists avoids the censorships proceeding from both the profit motive and lay officialdom. He also gains the inspiration which arises from a sense of usefulness, which is inherent in that contact... The artist, for the first time in our history, has his chance to produce with the sure knowledge that his work will be used by the society in which he lives.

The advantages to the general public of this direct contact are no less important. Art is taken out of the studio, the gallery and the art museum and put to work in the homes and public buildings of everyday. The artist ceases to be an ornament of the pink-tea, a playboy companion of the dilettante patron, a remote hero with a famous name. He becomes, instead, a workman among workers. He paints murals on a scaffold of planks and ladders. He prints his etchings, lithographs or wood blocks with hands which know ink and the rollers and wheels of his press. He works. He produces. He lives.⁵¹

Pearson's ideas parallel those of Mexican artists since the 1920s, including the artists of LEAR. He stressed the usefulness of art, the placement of art in public places, and the identification of the artist as a worker. These were the same concepts emphasized by Méndez and other artists in Mexico throughout the 1920s and '30s.

The work of the American printmakers shown at the Congress has some commonality with the Mexican political prints of the same period, but in general, the American work was notably different from the Mexican. There were obvious points of contact between the Mexican and American printmakers, and some of their themes and interests were the same: the subjects of the worker, factories, poverty and the complexities of modern life. But the American handling of these themes tends to be less

⁵¹ Ralph M. Pearson, in American Artists' Congress, *Graphic Work of the American Thirties* (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1977), an unabridged republication of American Artists' Congress, *America Today: A Book of 100 Prints* (New York: American Artists' Congress, 1936), p. 7.

politicized and more descriptive, and American artists portrayed social conditions with a documentary attitude. In comparison the artists of LEAR tended to make images of a more confrontational nature. *Adobe Brick Maker* by Kenneth M. Adams, Philip Evergood's *Portrait of a Miner*, and *Factory District* by Will Barnett (figs. 119-121) are all executed with a kind of sympathetic social realism that depicts work, the worker and working-class conditions in a generic critique of the harmful effects of capitalism. Many of the prints portray poverty in regional, rural environments or in big American cities. There were few anti-fascist prints in the American Artists' Congress Exhibition, and in general the American prints lack the drama and extremism of Mexican prints, with no equivalent to Méndez's biting, Posada-influenced satires such as his 1934 *Calaveras del Mausoleo Nacional*, or his violent *Fascism I* and *Fascism II* of 1936.

In addition to LEAR's exhibitions, the organization manifested a strong ideological presence at the Congress. Orozco and Siqueiros both represented LEAR. Orozco read the "General Report of the Mexican Delegation to the American Artists' Congress" and Siqueiros presented "The Mexican Experience in Art." Orozco's speech focused on the production of anti-fascist art; the unionization of cultural workers in Mexico, particularly the organization of "artist-teachers" into trade unions; and the de-commodification of art.⁵² Siqueiros explained the new directions LEAR proposed for Mexican art practice:

...What is the new direction formulated by the League of Revolutionary Artists and Writers? The League has adopted the principle that revolutionary art is not only a problem of content or theme -- but a problem of form. It has adopted the idea that revolutionary art is inseparable from forms of art which can reach the greatest number of people. The new line of art adopted by the League is founded on the principle of discipline within the organization. It has adopted the principle of self-criticism as an instrument for advance. It has also adopted the principle of teamwork as distinguished from isolated individual work. Instead of painting in

⁵²José Clemente Orozco, "General Report of the Mexican Delegation to the American Artists' Congress," in Baigell and Williams, pp. 203-206.

the official buildings far from the masses, the League wants to help the Mexican workers to find a form suitable to a graphic art of revolutionary propaganda. The League will develop an art economically accessible to the largest number of people. This will give us tremendous possibilities of creating new forms of art.⁵³

These speeches revealed the latest thinking about art and politics among the membership of LEAR, and as such were extremely important as blueprints for future action. Méndez, who already worked collectively in LEAR and the Taller-Escuela de Artes Plásticas of LEAR, and who surely would have agreed with Orozco and Siqueiros on all their points, may have had a hand in the writing of these reports. Furthermore, he was to adhere to the concepts articulated by Orozco and Siqueiros at the American Artists' Congress when he and his colleagues founded the Taller de Gráfica Popular the following year. The principles of unionism, collective action, self-criticism, wide dissemination of art to the workers, the use of art as propaganda, and the production of graphic art as a means for promoting revolutionary ideas were to form the core of beliefs and activities of the Taller and remained Méndez's working method for the many years he was involved in the organization.

After the American Artists' Congress, LEAR sponsored another Popular Front event, its own Congreso Nacional de Escritores y Artistas (National Congress of Writers and Artists), in January 1937, in Mexico City, inviting representatives from Latin America and the United States. Waldo Frank, Joseph Freeman and Charmion Von Wiegand were among the American representatives, while writers Juan Marinello and Nicolás Guillén came from Cuba to participate. Members of the Cárdenas government participated in the Congress -- Luis L. Rodríguez, a personal aide of the President gave the opening speech, and Gilberto Bosques and Gonzalo Vázquez Vela from the Ministry of Education also spoke. The Spanish Ambassador to Mexico, Félix Gordon Ordaz, and

⁵³David Alfaro Siqueiros, "The Mexican Experience in Art," in Baigell and Williams, p. 211-212.

the Spanish writer Marcelino Domingo, along with Waldo Frank and Juan Marinello, requested support for the Popular Front in Spain.⁵⁴

Frente a Frente, no. 8, of March 1937, a special issue devoted to the Congress, printed the speeches mentioned above. The “Resumen del congreso” (“Summary of the Congress”), presented an analysis of three stages of LEAR: the first, characterized by an ambiance of hostility and persecution, the second, in which the group operated within the context of the progressive national government, and the third, exemplified by the Congress. The summary emphasized the unity and internationalism of the Popular Front:

Through this organizing work, an event has taken place in which are reunited all the elements that form the vanguard of the Mexican intellectuals, taking shape in the progressive revolutionary thought that will lead the writer, the man of science, the artist toward the road to freedom in the evolutionary process of humanity....The Congress had another interesting and important aspect: that is the solidarity with international questions, against fascism and in favor of democracy and liberty...its attitude, in the case of Spain, in favor of the Popular Front, makes known its energetic condemnation of the position of the disloyal military; its sympathy for the prisoners found in the jails of Central and South America, with the consequent protest against the governments that try to gag the free expression of thought; its friendship with the Cuban revolutionaries...are aspects that must be taken into account and that demonstrate the clear position of the Congress against the forces of repression and reaction.⁵⁵

Méndez's name appears as one of the speakers at the opening of the art exhibit of the Congress. There were also short interviews with participants. Méndez expressed the ideology of the Popular Front in his statement, at the same time retaining his emphasis on the nationalistic aspect of Mexican leftist politics:

Art that exists at the pleasure of the bourgeoisie can only serve that class, and all such individual attempts, with their partial value, are condemned to failure. All really important art in Mexico can only follow the road of the artist's total identification with the interests of the national majority. This identification

⁵⁴Prignitz-Poda, p. 46.

⁵⁵“Resumen del congreso,” *Frente a Frente*, no. 8 (March 1937): p. 22.

requires concrete and definite activities in plastic production based on direct observation of the dynamics of popular struggle with a true appreciation of all indigenous and international plastic values that can be used to advantage.⁵⁶

The Congress ended with definite commitments to the Popular Front and the government of Cárdenas. Immediately afterward, the Ministry of Education began to give LEAR financial support and radio time to promote its projects.⁵⁷ During 1937 LEAR grew to a membership of 500, including almost all intellectuals and artists of any note in Mexico City. LEAR also established branches in Guadalajara and Morelia. However, the increase in size, and government financial support for LEAR brought dissension to the organization. Accusations of opportunism were leveled toward new members.

In April of 1937, the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda invited LEAR to send a delegation to the Congress of Writers in Valencia, Spain. Undoubtedly inspired by the Congress, touched by the arrival of Spanish child refugees in Mexico and alarmed by the news of the grave situation of the Spanish Republican cause, a large contingent of LEAR members decided to go to Spain:

It seemed that the letter caused a small revolution within LEAR. An exhibition was organized precipitously, 'One Hundred Years of Revolutionary Mexican Art,' to present in Valencia, in Madrid and lastly in Mexico, in the autumn of 1937. Most of the artists wanted to attend the conference, but some could not leave immediately due to family obligations or various commitments. Thus, the delegation that went was not the totality of LEAR, but an important part of it: Silvestre Revueltas, Fernando Gamboa, José Chávez Morado, María Luisa Vera,

⁵⁶Leopoldo Méndez, in "Algunas intervenciones," *Frente a Frente*, no. 8 (March 1937): p. 12. The same series of interviews presented the opinions of Carlos Chávez, once so harshly lampooned by Méndez in *Calaveras del Mausoleo Nacional* on the cover of the first *Frente a Frente*, but now a member of LEAR, with its new inclusive membership. In keeping with the Popular Front policy of accepting divergent viewpoints, many of the members interviewed, including Chávez, articulated individualistic, apolitical ideas. Chávez stressed the importance of the new music of Mexico in relation to the music of the past: "The artist of today must exist in the present and only has one way to do this: to be immersed in history to extract from it the experience of past generations, and to know the world of the present well to be able to interpret its own necessities with all developments and resources." Carlos Chávez, in "Algunas intervenciones," p. 12.

⁵⁷Reyes Palma, "Workshop of Popular Graphics," p. 113.

Antonio Pujol, Juan de la Cabada, Carlos Pellicer, Juan Marinello, Octavio Paz, Nicolás Guillén (to name a few of them). There they met up with David Alfaro Siqueiros, Angélica Arenal and Tina Modotti....Overnight, the most active members abandoned Mexico.⁵⁸

The departure of these core members, LEAR's rapid growth, and the withdrawal of many of the original group from LEAR led to its eventual dissolution. The end of LEAR was somewhat indistinct, but sometime in 1937 or 1938 the organization ceased functioning and the members put their efforts toward other projects.

LEAR, with Méndez as one of its most active members, had accomplished a great deal in its four years of existence. The organization had consolidated the artistic Left in support of working-class issues and in opposition to fascism in Mexico and abroad. During the Siqueiros-Rivera debates LEAR had defined a new direction for leftist artists. Printmaking and portable art (such as easel painting), mural painting in public locations, collective methods of art production, and art education for the working class were established as the foundation of a new artistic practice, renewing the original goals of the mural movement of the early 1920s. This development positioned Méndez as a leader in Mexican political art. Méndez and other artists of LEAR had disseminated political graphic art to the working class, had painted a number of collectively produced murals and had established the Taller-Escuela de Artes Plásticas, the art school for workers and artists. The organization had also held several important exhibitions. LEAR, after its earlier confrontational approach toward the Mexican government, had lent its support to the progressive administration of Cárdenas. Members of LEAR had established extensive contacts with leftist artists and intellectuals in other countries, especially through their significant presence at the American Writers' Congress and the American Artists' Congress. When LEAR no longer seemed viable, some of the members of LEAR's

⁵⁸Prignitz-Poda, p. 46.

Plastic Arts Division, not wanting to dissipate the artistic energies of LEAR's engaged graphic artists, were inspired to continue the work of LEAR in a new form, establishing a graphic arts organization, the Taller de Gráfica Popular (Popular Graphic Workshop, or People's Graphic Workshop, TGP).

Chapter Five: The Taller de Gráfica Popular: The Early Years

In the next phase of Méndez's career, he helped found the Taller de Gráfica Popular, the organization with which he is most commonly associated. In the early years of the collective workshop, the members worked together to produce images that protested against fascism and other forms of oppression. Méndez's reputation as an artist continued to grow, and he received a Guggenheim Fellowship that enabled him to travel to the United States. Méndez and the Taller also experienced a number of crises that led to the first disruption of the unity of the organization.

The Beginnings of the Taller

At the end of 1937, Méndez, at that time the director of LEAR's Taller-Escuela de Artes Plásticas (TEAP), and distressed by his perception that newer members were joining to take advantage of LEAR's government funding, proposed that members of TEAP set up a collaborative graphic workshop that would be separate from LEAR. Méndez described how he conceived of the TGP:

LEAR died of the worst illness: opportunism. Many people joined because it was a way of getting a little work. But some of us did not want to attend the funerals of LEAR....I thought that the disbanding of LEAR was a serious matter...and so I proposed that we reunite in a workshop, even if it were small, but that we would have our tools there and do some work..¹

By the end of 1937 Méndez had invited O'Higgins, Arenal, Raúl Anguiano and Angel Bracho to form the new organization. Zalce, Xavier Guerrero, José Chávez Morado and Fernando Castro Pacheco joined the Taller in early 1938.²

¹Poniatowska, p.11.

²Prignitz-Poda's informative study of the TGP remains the best source for information concerning the organization. Because the focus of this study is Leopoldo Méndez and because Prignitz-Poda's study is so

O'Higgins recalled:

The idea of founding the Taller came from the noggin of Leopoldo. One day, on leaving a meeting of LEAR, walking, I said to him: this is not working very well any more; then he proposed that we commit ourselves to producing graphic messages for the Mexican people. In these difficult moments, this seemed like a good idea to me, I told him we ought to look for other comrades. He called Luis Arenal and afterwards he got the others together....³

In fact, the new collective, the Taller de Gráfica Popular, worked in conjunction with LEAR at the end of 1937 on a joint project, using the studio facilities of TEAP.⁴ The first project of the new Taller was a calendar of twelve lithographs for the year 1938, for the Universidad Obrera (Workers' University).⁵ Méndez, who began his long association with labor leader Vicente Lombardo Toledano sometime in 1935 or 1936, was the director of the Universidad Obrera's Departamento de Cultura Estética y Periodismo (Department of Aesthetic Culture and Press) in 1936 and 1937, and the commission for the calendar came as a result of his involvement with the university. The calendar was credited to both LEAR and TGP, the first and only instance when a graphic project was attributed to both organizations.⁶ Méndez's calendar illustration for January 1938, *Río Blanco*, is a color lithograph depicting a 1907 strike by petroleum workers (fig. 122). In a

detailed and comprehensive, I have not attempted to duplicate her work on the Taller in this dissertation.

³Pablo O'Higgins, "Fragmentos de entrevistas," in *Leopoldo Méndez: Artista de un pueblo en lucha* (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM, 1981), p. 32.

⁴Prignitz-Poda, p. 56.

⁵The Universidad Obrera came into being in 1936 as a project of Lombardo Toledano and other Marxist intellectuals and academics who had been professors in the Universidad Nacional de México (National University of Mexico), now the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (National Autonomous University of Mexico, UNAM). When they were expelled from the National University in 1933 they began to plan a university for the education of workers and the study of workers' issues. The new university included a progressive department of anthropology set up to study conditions of indigenous and rural populations. The Universidad Obrera published a journal, *Futuro*, to which Méndez contributed a number of illustrations between 1936 and 1945. List Arzubide taught and lectured at the Universidad Obrera, which is still in existence, throughout his life. Discussed in Victoria Lerner, *La educación socialista: Historia de la revolución mexicana periodo 1934-1940* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1979), pp. 170-171.

⁶Prignitz-Poda, p. 56.

surreal composition, unarmed workers face anonymous soldiers, whose inspiration comes from the enormous figure of Díaz on a horse. Posed as an equestrian statue, the tyrant looms over his soldiers like a nightmare.

From the beginning, the Taller focused on current events. Sometime shortly after the foundation of the Taller, O'Higgins explained its mission and intentions:

That which gave us strength and permitted us to develop in a useful form was that, immediately after getting together, our first plan of action took into consideration how to connect graphic art with the immediate problems of Mexico. This led us to look for the political content in various parts of the country that we needed as a base for the TGP, a content that would not be closed, but would bring the most open form possible to the widest sectors of the people. Thus the TGP achieved a secure and dynamic base that permitted it to interpret not only Mexican events, but also international affairs; for example, the struggles for national liberation in other countries.⁷

O'Higgins's emphasis on both Mexican issues and international affairs indicates the extent to which the Taller came into being as both a local and an international organization. The Taller was founded during the Popular Front era, but its primary focus was on the collective idea and popular movements such as labor unions, rather than on the coalition of artists and intellectuals of the Popular Front. In an insightful essay introducing an exhibition of the TGP's work, Mexican cultural historian Alberto Híjar discusses the fact that the members of the TGP, coming together during the time of the Popular Front as an inclusive organization, tended to lack ideological definition. Their focus was not on theoretical topics, but on immediate issues such as the rights of workers, support for the policies of the Cárdenas administration (such as the nationalization of the petroleum industry, and educational and agrarian reform) and the struggle against fascism. Furthermore, they had to balance their intention of working for the benefit of the masses with the desire to cooperate with a progressive government focused on national

⁷*Enciclopedia de México* (Mexico City), s.v. "Taller de Gráfica Popular."

unity during the Cárdenas era and World War II. Like LEAR, the TGP was a leftist organization, but unlike LEAR, it did not begin its existence in opposition to the government, despite participating in the discourse of revolutionary action. The Cárdenas administration was itself sufficiently radical politically that the TGP did not find itself in disagreement with the government's policies. At the same time, the collective method and the Taller's realist, political emphasis led to a new kind of artistic production:

The TGP proved initially the possibilities of making of creation not an ineffable process, but a technical appropriation and a signification of concrete historical situations...based on a radical discussion, on the encounter of the roots of the dominant determinations and their possibilities of artistic transformation. This new practice of creation and signification aroused international interest: after muralism, that seemed incapable of manifesting in workshops away from Siquierian proclamations, an organization with open perspectives had appeared in Mexico. On these bases, the maximum suppression of subjectivity in production is the resource of an artistic drive to improvement, given that it managed to put the brakes on lyricism in exchange for the clarification of signs. To arrive this way at a unification between technique and signs, for concrete historical eloquence, neither for the future nor for highly developed sensibilities, appeared to pose an artistic practice of rupture with capitalist production.⁸

Híjar points out here that the members of the TGP focused primarily on historical and political themes rather than personal or poetic, i.e. "lyrical" subject matter. He discusses the Taller as a center of production of ephemeral images that responded to immediate events, directed at a proletarian audience. The Taller was independent of the dogmatism that characterized Siqueiros's practice; the TGP accepted members of diverse political opinions, excluding only those with fascist leanings. The Taller's emphasis on creating collective, topical work of high quality with no aim of financial gain or personal fame constituted a "rupture with capitalist production."

⁸Alberto Híjar, "El TGP: La otra práctica," in Instituto de Bellas Artes, *TGP: Taller de Gráfica Popular: 40 años de lucha gráfica, 1937/1977* (Mexico City: INBA, 1977), pp. 3-4.

From the first, consistent with Popular Front practice, the prints of the Taller focused on the growing menace of fascism in Mexico and Europe. Their feeling of immediacy was due to the urgency the founders of the TGP felt in the climate of the pre-War period. Many German and Spanish refugees came to Mexico as political refugees in the late 1930s, bringing first-hand accounts of the terrors of fascism in their countries and other countries of Europe. In addition, Mexico's fascist movement became very strong in the late 1930s, and the Camisas Doradas were a strong, belligerent force, not to be ignored by the artists and intellectuals of the Left.

The TGP also worked on projects that needed immediate responses, such as brochures, leaflets, posters, banners and backdrops for specific events such as political demonstrations and labor rallies. They often had to make prints on one day to be distributed the next. They plastered posters on the walls of Mexico City, employing *aficheros*, men whose job it was to put their posters up during the night. A 1948 photograph shows a worker pasting up a poster, his brush in hand and a bucket of glue next to him on the sidewalk, with two onlookers watching (fig. 123). Another photograph (fig. 124), taken on a corner in the historic center of Mexico City in the winter of 1942-1943, documents the presence of the TGP on the city's walls, in this case in the form of a poster by O'Higgins in support of the Soviet army during the Battle of Stalingrad. Méndez's linoleum print from the late 1940s, *Taller de Gráfica Popular* (fig. 125), is an expression of the TGP's consciousness of the propaganda value of their prints. A worker gazes at the corner of a building in downtown Mexico City. A TGP poster appears on the wall facing the viewer, while the imaginary, depicted viewer stands around the corner, presumably looking at still another Taller poster on the wall. The work is a statement of the mission of the TGP, to get their anti-fascist, pro-union, pro-Cárdenas messages to the working classes, "el pueblo" ("the people") of Mexico. In this context the members of the TGP were independent of the mainstream press, as they themselves owned and controlled

the means of the production and distribution of their work. The image is doubly referential, with a picture within a picture, alluding to the reception of the work by its intended audience. In addition, the print is a handmade object, representing another handmade object, competing with commercially produced work. This print, as the product of an independent artist/artisan, is also a sign of the workshop itself, a message reinforced by the block letters on the right of the image. This image constructs the identity of the Taller as a historical and cultural phenomenon. *Taller de Gráfica Popular* resembles a photograph by Modotti, *Campesinos Reading El Machete* (fig. 126), from 1929. Here Modotti, who was illustrating and writing for *El Machete* at the time, photographed the newspaper in the hands of the campesinos to whom it was directed. The headline reads, “Toda la Tierra, No Pedazos de Tierra!” (“All the Land, Not Pieces of Land!”). The semi-abstract composition of round hats and square newspaper creates a lively rhythm that directs the viewer’s attention to the message of *El Machete*, while at the same time the image is a promotion of the newspaper itself. This photograph, like the print *Taller de Gráfica Popular*, is a consciously self-referential commentary on the process of disseminating information and propaganda to the workers. In the process of creation and distribution, the handmade prints of the TGP became public art on the walls and in the street. As art historian and critic Raquel Tibol explained it:

The products of the TGP entered into competition with the chromos of calendars and posters of commercial advertising. Along with the ideological battle, they had to unleash another against taste that was corrupted and manipulated by powerful circumstances. The taste of the public was important to the Taller...and it also mattered what effect their work would have on people.⁹

⁹Raquel Tibol, “José Chávez Morado: Imágenes de identidad mexicana,” in *José Chávez Morado* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1980), p. 18.

The members of the Taller felt that a major change took place in their organization when the municipal government of Mexico City banned the practice of putting posters on walls in 1956.¹⁰

In addition to their prints, fliers, and banners, the members of the TGP also painted backdrops for rallies and made agit-prop-like floats, at least on one occasion.¹¹ Their instantaneous reaction to large-scale events such as labor rallies required them to make prints for mass meetings and demonstrations in great haste. This sense of urgency created a feeling of purpose and camaraderie among the members of the Taller, and gave them the feeling of satisfaction that their topical work would be received by a wide audience at the time that it was the most relevant. That their work was often inspired by bursts of emotion and excitement was consistent with Méndez's earlier emphasis, in the Stridentist Movement and Agorismo, on the importance of strong feelings acted upon in the moment: "the emotion of battle" that Méndez described in his 1926 essay on muralism in *Horizonte*, and Agorismo's "art in movement, creative speed, the socialization of art," of 1930. Because the prints were made quickly, for specific, time-limited purposes, often with intense emotional content, Méndez and other members of the Taller preferred art that was not highly polished. Méndez himself, however, was a perfectionist in his work. He often rubbed out or threw away plates that he had started or even finished, often to the dismay of his associates, whose opinions of Méndez's pieces were more favorable than those of their creator.¹² And as Méndez developed as an artist,

¹⁰Yampolsky, interview by author, Mexico City, 15 September, 1995.

¹¹Hannes Meyer, ed., *TGP Mexico El Taller de Gráfica Popular: Doce años de obra artística colectiva/TGP Mexico The Workshop for Popular Graphic Art: a Record of Twelve Years of Collective Work* (Mexico: La Estampa Mexicana, 1949), p. xv. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find any more specific information about the intriguing "allegorical floats," such as their content or appearance. They sound as though they could have been late, Mexican versions of Soviet agit-prop. The TGP may also have been inspired by agit-prop-like floats made by Siqueiros's Experimental Workshop in New York in 1936, for May Day and 4th of July celebrations in New York City. For a discussion of these floats, see Laurance Hurlburt, "David Alfaro Siqueiros: The Quest for Revolutionary Mural Form and Content, 1920-1940," Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1976, pp. 190-192.

¹²Yampolsky, interview by author, Mexico City, 11 March 1996; and José Sánchez, interview by author,

his prints became more complex and more elaborate, especially during the late 1940s to the 1960s.

At the same time, as explained below, the TGP did in fact have a dual audience; the members created both public art and “fine art,” a distinction that was blurred by the issuance of the ephemeral art in fine art editions on good paper. They were not so doctrinaire as to want to make art only for the proletariat, and however much they identified with the workers and the working class, their status as artists put them into a privileged social position as members of the intelligentsia, not the working class. The fine art prints were intended to generate needed income, and presumably they were made because the work was esteemed highly enough by its creators that they wanted enduring versions of it to be preserved by museums, galleries and private collectors.

In 1937 the TGP began to work with a master lithographer, Jesús Arteaga, who also printed the graphic work of Orozco, Siqueiros and Julio Castellanos. He allowed the group to use his facilities and helped them with lithographic technique. Méndez remembered his kindness to the Taller:

Generously he gave us the largest room....There we worked on, among other things, the originals for the calendar for the Universidad Obrera and a brochure celebrating the creation of the Confederación de Trabajadores de México....This workshop with its two good hand-presses and mountains of cardboard sheets, between which he carefully placed the lithographic impressions, gives the idea of what it was to be an artisan in the golden age of graphic arts in Mexico.¹³

At the beginning of 1938 Méndez began to assemble a workshop for the TGP by asking the Universidad Obrera, and the Secretaría de Hacienda (Department of Revenues) for donations of used equipment and materials, including an old lithographic press, a

Mexico City, 6 March 1996.

¹³Poniatowska, p. 16.

hand-press and lithographic stones. Méndez also offered to trade printing work by the Taller for space in a commercial lithography shop.

The first printing press of the Taller, which Arteaga obtained for the workshop, created a mythic heritage for the TGP. Arenal remembered the press with fondness. He described their printing press in a 1975 interview:

The first press that arrived at the Taller caused great joy among the members. Due to the stamp of origin on the forged iron, 'Paris 1871,' the press immediately gained the nickname, 'The Commune.' For the artists it had a great significance, and they wove legends around it. The more it creaked and resonated in the patio, the more enthusiastic the descriptions of the good 'Commune' became, which was so old that it practically did not function any more.¹⁴

In March, 1938 the founding members of the Taller de Gráfica Popular formulated their program in a simple statement:

This workshop is constituted with the end of stimulating graphic production in the benefit of the interests of the people of Mexico, and to this objective, it is proposed to bring together the greatest number of artists to work constantly, principally through the method of collective production.

All the production of the members of the Taller, be they individual or collective, must be realized in such a way as not to favor reaction or fascism in any manner.¹⁵

At some point the Taller elaborated on this statement, and the TGP's "Declaration of Principles," published in 1949, stated:

The Taller de Gráfica Popular is a center of collective work for the functional production and study of the different branches of printmaking and painting.

The Taller de Gráfica Popular continually puts its forces toward production that will benefit the progressive and democratic interests of the

¹⁴Ibid., p. 59.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 21.

Mexican people, principally in its struggle against fascist reaction.

Considering that the social end of a work of art is inseparable from its artistic quality, the Taller de Gráfica Popular works to develop the individual technical capabilities of its members.

The Taller de Gráfica Popular will lend its professional cooperation to other workshops or cultural institutions, to workers or popular organizations, and to all progressive movements and institutions in general.

The Taller de Gráfica Popular will defend the professional interests of artists.¹⁶

As mentioned above, the Taller was politically inclusive, and did not exclude artists on the basis of any political affiliation other than fascism. The principles of the TGP coincide almost exactly with the new directions for Mexican art outlined by Orozco and Siqueiros at the American Artists' Congress the year before.

The Taller also required the artists to attend weekly meetings, accept collective criticism and contribute twenty percent of their earnings from the sales of their work to the Taller. There was also an entrance fee to join the Taller, an amount that was occasionally an obstacle for aspiring members. Méndez's characteristic kindness to younger artists is indicated by the following anecdote:

The fee that we established was fifteen pesos so we could have a fund, and one day a *compañero* [companion] came to tell me very sadly that he needed the fee back because he had broken his glasses. I told him yes, naturally, since a myopic painter can not work without his glasses. He did not return the fifteen pesos, but this *compañero* stayed in the workshop because he had strong ideas.¹⁷

The members of the Taller also agreed to limit their art to realistic portrayals of the themes concerned. Their adoption of realism was a significant influence on the visual forms taken by their graphic work. By realism they meant representational, figurative art with a focus on social issues, as opposed to abstract, apolitical work, but the Taller did

¹⁶Meyer, *El Taller de Gráfica Popular*, p. 10.

¹⁷Poniatowska, p. 11.

not specify a particular kind of realism. They would have agreed with Meyer Schapiro's criticism of abstract artists when he spoke at the First American Artist's Congress:

The social aspect of his art has been further obscured by two things, the insistent personal character of the modern painter's work and his preoccupation with formal problems alone. The first leads him to think of himself in opposition to society as an organized repressive power, hostile to individual freedom; the second seems to confirm this in stripping his work of any purpose other than a purely 'aesthetic' [one]....

....The conception of art as purely aesthetic and individual can exist only where culture has been detached from practical and collective interests and is supported by individuals alone.¹⁸

The members of the Taller for the most part did not create images concerning the private and the personal aspects of life, although all the members did produce such work from time to time. As Méndez had been doing since 1926, and as the artists of LEAR had done, the TGP illustrated historical and current events, focusing primarily on the public and the political, executing their prints with varying degrees of abstraction, experimentation and innovation. Looking back twenty years after the founding of the Taller, Méndez declared:

From the beginning we did not plan an aesthetic program to revolutionize form. Our intentions were of such a nature that the end we pursued had more weight. Graphic art with social themes led us to consider forms that we could bring to the masses, the people; for that reason we emphasized realist tendencies in our Declaration of Principles and we have studied documents on realism to focus our work better. We have kept close to matters of immediate interest; we have never worked especially for exhibitions, as many artists' organizations do; our work has always been the function of a problem.¹⁹

When Méndez declared that they did not make art "especially for exhibitions," he meant exactly that. Along with the public dissemination of their ephemeral works, the TGP had hundreds of exhibitions of their work, and produced prints on high-quality

¹⁸Schapiro, "The Artist in Society," pp. 106, 108-109.

¹⁹*Enciclopedia de México*, s.v. "Taller de Gráfica Popular."

paper, but generally the prints of the Taller as a collective were produced in response to immediate political circumstances, and many of the prints in exhibitions were restrikes of prints that had originally been produced as ephemeral prints on inexpensive paper.²⁰ The Taller differed from LEAR in this respect; whereas members of LEAR produced some work privately, the work they created as members of the organization were almost always used for political purposes. In contrast, over the years, while most of the prints of the members of the Taller were politically motivated, the members recognized the need to generate income, and some work of the group was produced in special fine art editions. They also illustrated books and other texts, and later on Méndez produced prints for films. *Incidentes melódicos del mundo irracional*, a book written by de la Cabada and illustrated by Méndez, for example, while a celebration of Mexican indigenous and national identity, did not have *explicit* political content, although the story and images centered around themes of violence, oppression and the defeat of irrational power. A small proportion of the work of the Taller, such as book plates and New Year's cards, created under the auspices of the organization, had no overt political implications at all. Méndez's ingenious book plate for Ronald Campbell, for example, and his New Year's card of 1948, an image of a child on a carousel (figs. 127, 128) are non-political works.

In March 1938 the Taller had its first exhibition at the Artists' Union of Chicago, under the auspices of LEAR. It is significant that the TGP had this exhibition in the United States; it marks the beginning of the long collaboration with American artists, political activists and curators sympathetic with their views and appreciative of their prints. The artist Carlos Mérida, who had exhibited in Los Angeles and Milwaukee with Méndez, was in Chicago on the occasion of his own individual exhibition, and gave a

²⁰Prignitz-Poda, pp. 423-446. Prignitz-Poda lists all the exhibitions she could document through her study of the TGP archives and records. Between 1938 and 1960, the TGP had at least 140 exhibition in Mexico, thirty-four in Latin America, sixty-nine in the United States, seventy-seven in Europe, two in China, four in Israel, five in Japan, one in Lebanon and one in Australia. In addition Méndez and other members took part in numerous other solo and group exhibitions during that time.

lecture at the Artists' Union on the exhibition, praising the artists of the TGP. Mérida's support for the TGP is an indication of the degree of acceptance of differences among the artists of Mexico. Mérida himself was by this time painting in a mostly abstract, apolitical mode.

The Russian reaction to an exhibition of the Taller in Moscow in 1940 was less positive. After their initial exhibit at the Artists' Union of Chicago, the members of the TGP had mounted five well-received exhibitions in New York in 1939 and 1940 and were eager to show their work in the Soviet Union. They sent an exhibit with 101 prints by fifteen artists to Moscow, hoping for a favorable reception. The response, however was quite disapproving. According to Prignitz-Poda:

...they received a critique so negative that without a doubt it could be called annihilating. Like some paternal counsel, the Moscow review started with lines of benevolent praise. It called the efforts of the artists to put their art at the service of the interests of the people and human progress interesting...but before the end of the first page he launched the attack: he did not consider that their qualities were well developed. He [the unnamed reviewer] suggested eliminating certain passing flaws that were found in the working out of non-realist influences and the sooner that they surpassed these, the better it would be for the artists....He disapproved of expressionist influences in all the work....'Unfortunately, the schematization derived from the principles of Cubist art manifests in many other Mexican works of art.'...The critic observed that many of the works represented the life of the people, but lamented that 'there is not a single one in which the campesino or worker is given the features of moral or physical beauty.'²¹

Here the differences between the aesthetics of socialist realism and those of the Taller take specific form. The Soviet critic was disappointed that the prints of the TGP did not idealize Mexican life or the Mexican people. The confrontational and satirical work of the Taller, created in response to Mexican and international issues, was in direct conflict with Soviet neo-academic painting that glorified the achievements of the Soviet State. Unlike

²¹Ibid., p. 73.

Soviet artists, the members of the TGP did not portray the proletariat as members of an idealized socialist society. The members of the Taller greatly valued the campesinos and the workers of Mexico, but they saw the members of the working classes as either victims of the effects of capitalism and fascism or as dynamic social agents in resistance to oppression. The members of the Taller considered themselves comrades in a revolutionary struggle, in alliance with the working classes, not as representatives of a fully realized socialist government.

Images of Protest Against Oppression and Fascism

In July 1938 the members of the TGP rented their own space on the Calle Belisario Domínguez. They worked in a collegial atmosphere in what amounted to a tenement building in the center of Mexico City. The new location had three rooms around a patio, in one of which was their old printing press. A contemporary American visitor, McKinley Helm, described the environment of the Taller in his 1941 account of Mexican modern art:

My companions decided the time was ripe for my introduction to the Taller de Gráfica Popular. We walked over to the avenue Belisario Domínguez and down that shabby street into the dingy quarters of the old city. We entered the patio of an ancient palace, of which a portion of the stately entrance is occupied by a cobbler. It was one of those dreary tenements -- you will too often find them in the heart of Mexico City -- in which an open-air toilet in the middle of the courtyard disobligingly serves a couple of hundred tenants. In three small rooms off the patio twelve artists contubernally (sic) operate a shop which produces today, by and large, the most glamorous prints to be found anywhere in the Western Hemisphere.²²

In the fall of 1938 the artists of the TGP worked on their next major project, a series of eighteen lithographic posters advertising anti-Nazi lectures at the Palace of Fine

²²Helm, pp. 189-190.

Arts, sponsored by the Liga Pro-Cultura Alemana (the League For German Culture), a group of German political exiles in Mexico (figs. 129, 130). The prints are exemplary in their political and stylistic sophistication, and the artists put great effort into portraying the dangers of fascism in graphic terms. Méndez worked on the project in conjunction with TGP members O'Higgins, Zalce, Arenal, Xavier Guerrero, Antonio Pujol, Isidoro Ocampo, Raúl Anguiano, Angel Bracho, Ignacio Aguirre, Everardo Ramírez, Jesus Escobedo and Francisco Dosamantes, and two American guest artists, Robert Mallary and Jim Egleson. It is in this series that the skill and imagination of all the members came to bear.

Méndez's lithograph, created for the lecture, *Propaganda y Espionaje Nazis* (*Nazi Propaganda and Spying*) (fig. 131), is a surreal composition of a headless torso, basically a shoulder and a pair of arms with enlarged hands, one of which holds a Molotov cocktail. In place of its head the figure has a megaphone, which curves sinuously up out of an empty collar to point threateningly at the continent of North America, including Mexico. Inside the megaphone appear small swastikas, and wavy lines indicate the noise emitted by this monstrous being.

As Méndez's print indicates, Surrealist influence appears to have crept into the work of the Taller at the end of the 1930s, especially in this series of lithographs. The French Surrealists had developed a strong attraction to Mexico during the 1930s. In 1936 former Surrealist writer Antonin Artaud traveled in Mexico, and in 1938 Surrealist André Breton visited Mexico. Breton associated closely with Trotsky and Rivera, and in 1938 Breton, Trotsky and Rivera wrote their influential "Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art," which appeared in the *Partisan Review*, though without crediting Trotsky as an author.²³ Later, on returning to France, Breton published "Souvenir du Mexique" in *Minotaure*, a lyrical presentation of many aspects of Mexican art, from pre-

²³ André Breton and Diego Rivera, "Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art."

Columbian to contemporary.²⁴ In addition, an International Exhibition of Surrealism took place at the Galería de Arte Mexicana in Mexico City in 1940, organized by André Breton, Cesar Moro and Inés Amor. A number of Surrealist artists came as refugees to Mexico during and after World War II, including Remedios Varo, Leonora Carrington, Wolfgang Paalen, José Horna and Kati Horna. Many of the members of the TGP, including Méndez, were Stalinists, and thus in the opposing political faction from Breton, a Trotskyite. But the Surrealist enthusiasm for Mexico, and the presence of Surrealism in Mexico seem to have freed the artists of the TGP to experiment with Surrealist strategies, some of which coincided with those of German Dada artists like Heartfield, whose work appeared in *Frente a Frente*. Perhaps Heartfield's alignment with Stalin gave the members of the Taller permission, in effect, to use Surrealist-inspired imagery in their prints. The fantastic figure in Méndez's lithograph for the conference seems a good example of these influences.

Luis Arenal and Antonio Pujol collaborated on the poster for the third lecture, *El Fascismo Alemán (German Fascism)* (fig. 132).²⁵ The two artists had been members of Siqueiros's Experimental Workshop in New York, and collaborated with Siqueiros in Mexico on the 1939 mural *Portrait of the Bourgeoisie* at the Electrician's Union (figs. 133, 134), in which Siqueiros used photographs and photographic techniques. Siqueiros's mural also shows Surrealist influence, with distortions of scale, the overlapping of transparent figures, and incongruous juxtapositions. The mural also draws from Italian Futurism with dynamic force lines and the portrayal of modern society in terms of the machine. The lithograph by Arenal and Pujol is related to *Portrait of the Bourgeoisie*: it portrays two figures wearing battle helmets, one with a death's head and a bayonet for an

²⁴André Breton, "Souvenir du Mexique," *Minotaure* ser. 3, no. 12, 13 (May 1939): pp. 29-52.

²⁵Arenal, one of the founding members of LEAR, was married to Siqueiros's sister and worked with Siqueiros as a member of his mural team. Pujol also worked with Siqueiros. Both Pujol and Arenal participated in the attack against Trotsky that Siqueiros organized in 1940 and had to leave Mexico.

arm, the other a bird-headed figure. Birds appear twice in the *Portrait of the Bourgeoisie*, once as a parrot-headed demagogue and once as a war eagle. The bird in the print resembles both of the birds in the mural, and at the same time looks somewhat like a vulture. Bayonets are depicted prominently in the center of the mural and in the print, and the image of a burning building with little square windows appears in both. In the print, underneath the two figures a city lies in ruins, its fleeing inhabitants silhouetted alternately in black against white and white against black. It seems likely that the lithograph and parts of the mural were based on the same sketches. Prignitz-Poda compares this print, with its collage-like effects, to the photomontage work of Heartfield and the Spanish artist Josep Renau, who also worked with Siqueiros on *Portrait of the Bourgeoisie*.²⁶ The similarity to scenes of disaster by Posada is evident as well, especially his print *The End of the World* (fig. 135), in which the buildings are tilted at the same illogical angles as the houses in the background of the later print. And a 1931 semi-abstract painting by Orozco, *Los Muertos (The Dead)* (fig. 136), portrays tilted, destroyed buildings similar to the Posada print and the anti-Nazi lithograph.

Two prints by O'Higgins also show the influence of Heartfield's photomontages. His lithograph advertising a lecture by Lombardo Toledano, *El Tercer y el Cuarto Reich (The Third and the Fourth Reichs)* (fig. 137), portrays a fist holding a hammer breaking through a swastika, while his print for another lecture, *El Hombre en la Sociedad Nazi (Man in Nazi Society)* (fig. 138), shows a worker shackled and tied to a large swastika. O'Higgins may have seen Heartfield's 1934 *Blut und Eisen (Blood and Steel)* (fig. 139), a montage of four axes dripping blood, bound with ropes. This powerful image, which became a sign of resistance in Germany, deconstructed and recontextualized the Nazi symbol. Heartfield remembered the circumstances under which *Blut und Eisen* was distributed:

²⁶Prignitz-Poda, p. 61.

Brave underground fighters from the Reich took copies over the border and so, the montages were even distributed in the big cities of the fascist barbarians...My montage 'Blood and Iron,' showing four bloody hatchets bound together in the form of a swastika, was one of the montages that became famous...and appeared as graffiti on stone walls and was reproduced on mimeographed pamphlets.²⁷

Isidoro Ocampo's lithograph, *Como Combatir El Fascismo (How to Combat Fascism)* (fig. 140), advertising another lecture in the series by Lombardo Toledano, is entirely different in style from the posters by Arenal, Pujol and O'Higgins. Instead it resembles Méndez's print *Inscríbese* (fig. 110), his poster for the Taller-Escuela de Artes Plásticas of LEAR. Ocampo's print expresses the strategy of the Popular Front in a naive and optimistic image of unity, lacking the expressive potency of the other posters discussed here. Like the workers in Méndez's image, the men are connected visually to emphasize their political solidarity. A businessman, a soldier, a worker and a campesino, all identifiable through their clothing, and all with similar features, stand facing the viewer with their arms linked at the elbow, forming a chain-like pattern. Their bodies form a nearly perfect rectangle which reinforces the message of solidarity, literally a block of people united in purpose, each representing a sector of Mexican society. Significantly, Ocampo added a new element to the revolutionary trinity of worker, soldier and campesino by including a member of the middle-class, expressing the principle of cooperation of the Popular Front.

The American artists who worked with the TGP on this series, Mallery and Egleson, created works that echoed the style of the majority of the other prints in the series. Mallery's lithograph for the lecture called *Juventud Perdida (Lost Youth)* (fig. 141), expresses the theme of childhood lost, depicting an appropriately toy-like robot form with bayonets for arms and tank treads for feet, superimposed on a profile of a

²⁷Douglas Kahn, *John Heartfield: Art and Mass Media* (New York: Tanam Press, 1985), p. 91.

young man. Egleson's print, for the lecture *Economía Totalitaria* (*Totalitarian Economy*) (fig. 142), portrays a pair of hands, one of which holds a sword that pierces a loaf of bread, while the other throws bullets to a crowd of skeletal figures.

Altogether these eighteen posters represented a remarkable collaboration between the members of the Taller themselves and between the TGP and the community of German exiles opposed to fascism. The two-color lithographs were printed in runs of 2,000 each and posted on the walls of Mexico City, which created a powerful impression and constituted effective publicity for the lecture series.²⁸

By 1938 the concept of working with a broad coalition of progressive forces had completely taken precedence over the confrontational policies of the Proletarian Front of the early 1930s. In March 1938, under President Lázaro Cárdenas, the PNR changed into the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM), remaining the official party, while actively encouraging the participation of all sectors of the Mexican polity in the Popular Front. Also in March, Cárdenas suddenly nationalized the foreign-owned petroleum industry and the entire country rallied behind his actions.²⁹ Members of the Communist Party and other radicals who had previously been skeptical of Cárdenas's ability to effect social change lent him their support, and the Taller made a number of prints in favor of Cárdenas's policies.

The TGP continued to support the policies of Cárdenas through the end of his term at the end of 1940. Méndez's 1938 lithograph, *El Imperialismo y la Guerra*

²⁸Meyer, *El Taller de Gráfica Popular*, p. ix.

²⁹Cárdenas decided to expropriate the petroleum industry after foreign owners of seventeen petroleum companies defied a Mexican Supreme court order requiring them to improve working conditions and wages in the oil industry. While Cárdenas's brave move was immensely popular in Mexico, the American and British companies were outraged. Great Britain broke off relations with Mexico and the United States instituted an embargo of Mexican oil into the United States, also refusing to sell petroleum industry equipment to Mexico. Some American politicians lobbied for United States military intervention in Mexico to reclaim the oil industry. The American companies demanded payment of \$200 million dollars. The Mexican government offered compensation of \$10 million, finally settling on a payment of \$24 million. The crisis took a toll on the Mexican economy, affecting social programs, but the nationalization of the oil was tremendously symbolic, reinforcing as it did Article 27 of the Constitution of 1917, which restricted all rights to land and subsoil resources to Mexican citizens.

(*Imperialism and War*) (fig. 143), is a composite image -- a stalking figure made up of cannons, flags and bayonets strides like Goya's Colossus over a burning town, the capitalist's top hat and the Nazi swastika symbolizing the international union of big business and fascism. A pacifist quote from President Cárdenas at the bottom of the image condemns the role of industry and capital in imperialist war: "...to bring to the consciousness of the popular masses, the conviction that the necessary elimination of imperialist wars depends of the solidarity of the workers...."

Méndez had begun to make lithographs in 1937, when he started the Taller and gained access to a lithographic press, and his works in this medium were more flowing and expressive than his woodcuts or linoleum prints. This difference is due in large part to the nature of the technique itself, as lithography is based on drawing, rather than incising the image, but he may also have been experimenting with a new approach because of Surrealist influences, and the increasingly dramatic subject matter he was portraying as fascism grew stronger and war more inevitable.

Méndez created a number of images that had more fantastic qualities than previous work, using lithographic and other print techniques. A linoleum block print from 1936, *El Gran Obstáculo* (*The Great Obstacle*) (fig. 144), is the first of three imaginative treatments of the themes of oppression and resistance. A gigantic fist grows out of a desolate field to block the progress of a tank that advances on it. In the tank are three figures, a top-hatted figure, with a dollar sign on his hat, representing capitalism, a man in a pork-pie hat with the now-familiar letters, ARM, and a man with a pear-shaped face, who steers the tank, who is a caricature of the corrupt labor leader, Luis Morones, at this time an accomplice of Calles. In *El Gran Obstáculo* Méndez quoted a section of Rivera's 1926 mural cycle at Chapingo, in which Rivera portrayed a giant red fist emerging from the ground (fig. 145). Like Méndez, Rivera painted the fist as a symbol of protest, but his image, isolated from any surrounding context other than the earth, is more iconic and less

narrative than Méndez's print. However, both symbols are synecdochal evocations of the same idea: the hand stands for the power of resistance by those who toil in the earth. The symbol of the upraised fist also appeared in Alva de la Canal's cover for *Plebe* (fig. 52) and in O'Higgins's poster *El Tercer y el Cuarto Reich*. The image represents a new direction for Méndez, who followed this one with two similar images in 1937. The extreme contrast of scale and the dramatic symbolism manifested in the giant fist set this print apart from his earlier work. Like *El Gran Obstáculo*, his linoleum print *La Protesta* (*The Protest*), and the woodcut *Tierra del Chicle* (*Land of Chicle*) (figs. 146, 147) make use of the same kinds of strategies in a kind of magical realism.³⁰

In Méndez's *La Protesta* a gigantic figure (another colossus, similar to the figure in *El Imperialismo y la Guerra*) arises out of a crowd of protesters, his face contorted with emotion and his upraised fist clenched. In the foreground a man with a whip is beating a naked man, who is crawling toward the mass of people in the back. The giant man points an accusatory finger at the tormented victim. The cover illustration for *Tierra del Chicle*, by Ramón Beteta, also uses a surreal composition to express a highly emotional response to brutal oppression. The book concerns social and agricultural conditions in southern Mexico, and Méndez's print was a dramatic response to an ostensibly objective account. A large head of a man, with staring eyes, grows out of a twisted chicle tree. Little figures on either side attack and struggle -- again a man with a whip beats a defenseless figure, in a nightmarish scene to the left of the tree, while in the right foreground tiny people flee, one of them climbing the vines of a tree. These three prints are the forerunners of *El Imperialismo y la Guerra*; all four prints use illogical

³⁰I have been capitalizing the word "Surreal" when referring specifically to relationships between work under discussion influenced by Surrealism, and using "surreal" without the initial capital to connote dreamlike, fantastic qualities of images that may or may not have direct Surrealist influences. The term "magical realism," often used to describe a genre of Latin American literature, exemplified by such works as Gabriel García Márquez's 1967 *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*), has been used historically to describe specifically Latin American imaginative narratives in which realistic and fantastic elements coexist.

compositions and expressionistic representations of bodies and faces to portray the drama of domination and resistance.

Méndez's 1940 flyer, a linoleum print, *Con una Piedra Se Matan Muchos Pájaros...* (*With One Stone One Kills Many Birds...*) (fig. 148), is another image that uses fantastic imagery, but drawing upon different precedents. The cartoon-like print depicts two workers throwing a rock at a vulture standing on a nest, labeled "Nido de las Cias. Petroleras" ("Nest of the Petroleum Cos."). The vulture holds coins with dollar and pound symbols in its claws. In the nest are three chicks that have the bodies of vultures and the heads of British, American and Mexican oil industry businessmen. Below this image are two long quotes from President Cárdenas, dated February 1940. These texts summarize Cárdenas's revolutionary thoughts about the overall situation of the Mexican people vis-à-vis foreign interests and big business in Mexico:

The enthusiastic and superficial judgment of those who criticize the work of revolutionary governments and demand of them the immediate success of their program maliciously overlooks the resistance of affected interests that during centuries have established a regimen to maintain, in alliance with exterior forces, a position of opposition to the impulses of social justice. The fact that they pursue only their hold on our natural resources and the exploitation of our human energies, still constitutes obstacles that added to the burden of ignorance, misery, insecurity and the biological and moral depression of the proletarian majorities, prevents the constructive force from consolidating and realizing itself in an efficacious manner to satisfy the growing necessities of the population in a more human and more just system.³¹

The print bears a remarkable similarity to a well-known 1871 wood engraving by Thomas Nast, *A Group of Vultures Waiting for the Storm to Blow Over* (fig. 149), which satirizes Boss Tweed (William Marcy Tweed) and his Tammany Ring, corrupt officials in New York who stole millions of dollars from the public treasury. Nast, whose cartoons were effective weapons in the fight to get rid of Boss Tweed, used the same metaphor as

³¹Text accompanying *Con una Piedra Se Matan Muchos Pájaros...*

Méndez did, a huddled group of vultures with human heads representing vile corruption. A large rock is about to fall on Nast's vultures, like the stones that the workers throw at the nest of petroleum companies. Perhaps Méndez knew the work of Nast. In any case, the vulture, a ruthless scavenger, and a common sight in Mexico, is a logical symbol for greed and exploitation. A 1938 satirical print by O'Higgins, *Franco* (fig. 150), that satirizes Franco supporters in Mexico, also uses the vulture as a negative symbol. The print depicts two giant vultures, one of which is a *calavera*, looming over a group of tiny people who are trying to buy food, which the birds are hoarding. One vulture stands on sacks of beans and corn, the other on a bag marked "monopolio" ("monopoly"). A loudspeaker on the side of the "Casino Español" (a well-known Spanish bar in Mexico City) blares out the words, "Bombardeos sobre Madrid, mujeres y niños muertos, viva Franco!" ("Bombardment over Madrid, women and children dead, long live Franco!").

In addition to posters, fliers and banners, the Taller de Gráfica Popular began to produce portfolios of prints on selected themes. In 1939, toward the end of the Spanish Civil War, Méndez, Arenal, Raúl Anguiano and Xavier Guerrero published a portfolio of fifteen lithographs, *La España de Franco* (*Franco's Spain*).³² Because of Franco's virulent anti-Communism and his alliances with Hitler, Mussolini, and the Catholic Church, reactionary forces in Mexico applauded his coming victory. The Spanish Civil War disappointed and discouraged the international Left, and the Second World War would loom more ominously after the fall of Spain. The response of the Taller was to caricaturize the victors in an effort to diminish them psychologically, a kind of visual "cutting down to size."

Méndez's lithograph, *La Toma de Madrid* (*The Taking of Madrid*), also called *Las Puertas de Madrid* (*At the Gates of Madrid*) (fig. 151), refers to the long siege of

³²The lithographs are generally dated 1938, but according to Prignitz-Poda, the portfolio was published in 1939. Prignitz-Poda, p. 61.

Madrid by Franco's Nationalists.³³ Méndez portrayed a half-sized Generalissimo Franco at the head of a stunted, highly distorted army. Franco's face is entirely obscured by a large spiked helmet, and his legs flail in a goose step. Méndez used multiple images of Franco's legs to indicate motion, a device reminiscent of both Futurist painting and cinematography.³⁴ Franco's flags, with swastika and fasces, are cut off by the top of the picture plane. A half-sized bishop struts to Franco's right, brandishing his rood; he wears a helmet with fasces and an ax in place of his miter, and his face is partially hidden by his large kettle-like helmet. Only his large, frog-like mouth can be seen. Surrounding these two central figures are a number of North African troops, some barefoot, carrying rifles over their shoulders. The procession turns out to be going in a circle -- what pretends to be a triumphant entry into a conquered city becomes instead a pathetic farce in a surreal landscape, with a bare suggestion of a town in the distance. This town looks one in North Africa or Mexico, or like the towns depicted by Orozco in his many prints and paintings of the Mexican Revolution, such as his *Pueblo Mexicano (Mexican Town)* (fig. 152) of 1930. The style of Orozco appears in the expressionistic use of lithographic line, dynamic repetition of forms and distortion of the human body, especially in the depiction of the troops, who are outlined with varying degrees of detail. As has been mentioned, Méndez admired Orozco's work greatly, and counted him among his most important influences. Heller confirms that:

The work of Orozco also exerted a silent influence upon Méndez and the Taller: his prints and murals were admired for their universality, apocalyptic vision, plasticity, breadth of vision, and revolutionary content. Méndez carried a copy of Orozco's autobiography under his arm until the binding literally fell apart. Beltrán [Alberto Beltrán, TGP member] told me that a delegation from the Taller was

³³The Loyalists defended Madrid for twenty-eight months, from November 1936 to March 1939. The fall of Madrid to Franco's forces was the final blow to the Loyalist cause and marked the end of the war.

³⁴Siqueiros was also using photographic techniques in his murals at that time, most recently in the *Portrait of the Bourgeoisie*, on which he superimposed projected photographs.

once sent to Orozco's studio, inviting the master to join the Taller as a working member, but he declined.³⁵

In *La Toma de Madrid*, Méndez effected satire through the strategy of confusion, belittling and truncation. The print, while humorous, confounds the expectations of the viewer with a confusion of signs. Franco, the main actor, is made half-size, and his face completely hidden, the bishop is a weird imitation of a military man, and the North African troops are depicted in a sketchy manner that undermines their ability to signify military might. Méndez was, after all, addressing his message to an audience that hated and despised Franco and the Spanish fascist movement.

Another print in the portfolio, by Xavier Guerrero, *Franco Planeando Su Ofensiva* (*Franco Planning His Offensive*) (fig. 153), also makes use of broad caricature. The distorted, ugly faces depicted in the print are reminiscent of the figures of the German artist Georg Grosz. Like Méndez Guerrero attempted to diminish the importance of Franco by graphic means. Franco is shown as a small figure surrounded by advisors, one of whom is a Nazi general with a swastika on his helmet and his sleeve. The members of the Taller appeared to be trying to vanquish Franco with satire, even though by this time the Republicans faced certain defeat and the first wave of Spanish refugees were coming to Mexico. The prints in the portfolio would have been of great interest to the members of LEAR who had been in Spain, as well as other Mexican and foreign leftist intellectuals and cultural figures who were concerned about the fall of Spain. According to the Taller's printer, José Sánchez, these prints, like much of the Taller's work, were given away on the streets of Mexico City.³⁶

During its formative period TGP members participated in an ongoing discussion concerning the alliance of the collective with the Communist Party. In the 1930s, some

³⁵Heller, *Codex Méndez*, p. 32.

³⁶Sánchez, interview by author, Mexico City, 6 March 1996.

members considered the possibility of making the TGP into a cell of the Mexican Communist Party, but Alfredo Zalce, who never became a member of the PCM, resisted this idea. Instead, Luis Arenal acted as the official link between the Taller and the Party, and the TGP as a whole, as did LEAR, joined forces with the Soviet-inspired Popular Front.³⁷ The association between the fascist victory in Spain and the coming world war was clear to leftists in Mexico, as it was to leftists in other countries, and the domestic presence of Mexican fascists made the world political situation ever more urgent. Méndez's fantastic print, *La Amenaza del Fascismo* (*The Menace of Fascism*) (fig. 154) of 1937, reveals the artist's concern about the effects the rise of fascism could have on Mexico. Combining the international with the regional, the two-headed figures of Hitler and Mussolini loom over a Mexican family outside their simple shack in the middle of a corn field. The cheery clown-like countenances of Hitler and Mussolini contrast with their real intentions. Their joint body holds a dagger in one hand while helmeted soldiers in gas masks stare ominously out of the darkness behind them. Swords form sharp diagonals, punctuating the empty eye-sockets of the gas masks. In contrast, the little family is lit by a fire outside the door of their hut; the mother is making tortillas by hand while the father, dressed in the traditional white clothing of the campesino, looks on from the doorway, one child awake by his side, the other sleeping. The life they lead is the basic, traditional life of the Mexican rural poor -- there is no trace of the world outside; they are completely self-sufficient, everything made by hand. They are probably illiterate and have no awareness of the threat of international war. The viewer is aware of their predicament, however, and the illusion of protection seems all the more poignant. The Mexican family, seemingly safe from harm, stands for all defenseless civilians.

³⁷Prignitz-Poda, p. 60; and Zalce, interview by author, Morelia, Mexico, 20 November 1995, tape recording.

In 1938 Méndez produced the TGP's next portfolio of prints, *En Nombre de Cristo* (*In the Name of Christ*). Again he portrayed the victimization of the defenseless by the forces of evil. The twelve lithographs, all by Méndez, depict the murders of rural schoolteachers during the Cristero rebellion, the reactionary Catholic peasant uprising that plagued Mexico from 1926 until the late 1930s, discussed above. The uprising occurred in several phases, the most active of which was from 1926 to 1929. Supported by conservative forces within the Catholic Church, the Cristero rebels revolted against the anti-clericalism of the Calles regime, which outlawed church services and took away land and power from the Church. During the 1930s, the Cristeros rose up again during the Cárdenas administration, this time focusing on the teachers in the rural socialist education system.

Before making *En Nombre de Cristo*, Méndez had produced a flyer, *Maestro Tú Estás Solo* (*Teacher You Are Alone*) (fig. 155), with the words, "Maestro Tú Estas Solo Contra: Las Guardias Blancas Asesinas, Los Ignorantes Azuzados Por Los Ricos, La Calumnia Que Envenena y Rompe Tus Relaciones Con El Pueblo. Combate Con la Propaganda Ilustrada Que Es Arma Efectiva." ("Teacher You Are Alone Against: The White Guard Assassins, Ignorant People Incited by the Rich, The Calumny that Poisons and Breaks Your Relations with the People. Fight Back with the Effective Weapon of Illustrated Propaganda"). The linoleum block print illustrating these words shows a school teacher surrounded by four attackers: two masked men, one with a knife and one with a pistol on one side and a man and a woman, unarmed but pointing accusingly at the school teacher. The school teacher is a small figure in comparison to his attackers; he holds a chair with which he will try to defend himself, and a book, the symbol of his calling, lies open on the floor. The image is very much in the style of Posada, many of whose prints portrayed dramatic scenes of robberies and murders, and it shares the sensationalist presentation common to many of Posada's images. In fact, Posada's print

Corrido, “*Un Asalto en Tepito*” (*Corrido*, “*An Assault in Tepito*”), circa 1910 (fig. 156), is remarkably similar to *Maestro Tú Estás Solo*. Both artists utilized the same kind of tight, circular composition of figures and action to depict their subjects. In each print a group of men wearing sombreros attacks a smaller middle-class man, his social status signified by a white shirt and dark trousers. The implied class differences are a significant element of each print. Méndez and Posada both portrayed scenes of strong oppressors against defenseless martyr-figures who have no chance of escape, a common theme in the work of both artists.

In addition to this flyer, a 1938 advertisement in the form of a letter composed by Zalce (fig. 157), offered rural school teachers a monthly subscription to a series of such fliers, suggesting the various ways in which to distribute the material. Simple block prints with captions accompany the instructions: “It passes easily under doors....It is suitable for putting on walls and posts, trees and rocks...It is easy to distribute in meetings... You can put it on railroad cars.” The flyer stresses, “Revolutionary propaganda must rain on the whole country. Our flyer is a weapon.” *Maestro Tú Estás Sólo* could well have been one of the flyers referred to in Zalce’s letter.

Méndez’s portfolio, *En Nombre de Cristo*, combines documentary specificity with symbolic imagery. Each lithograph is accompanied by the name of a teacher and a brief account of the circumstances under which he died. The inclusion of factual details, such as the place and exact date, put these prints into a category of documentary realism, although Méndez depicted the events in imaginative dramatic form. *Profesor Juan Martínez Escobar* (fig. 158), for example, makes use of Surrealist strategies. A worker in cap and overalls, at the head of a mass of ghost-like figures, points to a figure of Jesus holding a dagger. The hands of the assassin and the right hand of the worker are larger than life, and the worker’s pointing hand is directly in the center of the work. The top of Jesus’ head is open above his crown of thorns and a sinister-looking campesino wearing a

sombrero is revealed inside. While the eyes of Jesus are downcast in mock piety, the assassin within the body of Jesus and his accuser have wide-open eyes, and a multitude of staring eyes form the background of the work. The eyes, some overlapping, others attached to sketchy faces, are a kind of visual metonymy, standing for the witnessing eyes of the world. Méndez employed the device here specifically as a sign for accusation; even the pointing finger of the worker serves to direct his gaze of condemnation toward the assassin, focusing the eyes of the multitude and the viewer as a multiple, accusatory eye. As usual in Méndez's representations of masses of people, the faces are individualized; the staring eyes have different shapes and their gazes take different directions. One set of superimposed faces stands out in front of all the others: in this group the faces are all the same person, with one clear face in the middle at the top of the cluster. This is a sensitive-looking man without a hat, presumably the ghost of the teacher, as all the other figures wear hats, and teachers are portrayed without hats in the other prints in the series. Beneath his face, another set of eyes, more firmly defined than the rest, gazes at the viewer over the head of the murderer. This print is another example in which the Surrealist presence in Mexico appears to have influenced Méndez. The many disembodied eyes reflect the Surrealist interest in bodily fragmentation, and the dual identity of the unmasked campesino/Christ, the multiple images of the teacher's face, and the dreamlike gazes of the multitude are also reminiscent of Surrealist concerns.

The grouping of bodies, eyes and faces appears in other Mexican works of art in the 1930s, a time when mass movements were increasingly manifested through extremely large mobilizations of people, both on the Right and the Left. Orozco's 1935 lithograph, *Las Masas (The Masses)* (fig. 159), bears some striking similarities to Méndez's print. Orozco depicted a multitude of tightly massed bodies, their legs and arms moving in Futuristic lines of force. Here the mouths, eyes and pointing hands are repeated with the kind of same Surrealist distortions, but Orozco focused on the mouths of the crowd; the

grotesque mouths are a synecdochal reference to demagoguery, to the mindlessness of the masses. In Méndez's *Profesor Juan Martínez Escobar* the masses are represented as leftist, progressive political forces. In contrast, Orozco's portrayal of the masses is a negative one. His crowd is a threatening mob of grotesquely dehumanized creatures, acting as one insentient being. This depiction of the masses is consistent with Orozco's complex misanthropic attitude. His murals and easel paintings tended to focus on the most disturbing aspects of humanity's behavior. In both prints, the mass is an organic whole; both prints demonstrate the preoccupation of artists with the mass movements of the twentieth century. Siqueiros's mural, *A Portrait of the Bourgeoisie*, on which TGP members Arenal and Pujol worked, shows a similar interest in the mobilization of large numbers of people in the political arena. In the mural, Siqueiros makes use of large blocks of marching people to indicate that the background of world politics was the body of the people in motion.

Another lithograph in the series, *Profesor Arnulfo Sosa Portillo* (fig. 160), as expressive as *Profesor Juan Martínez Escobar*, takes a more straightforward approach, though the symbolism in this work is equally significant. Prignitz-Poda cites the newspaper account on which Méndez based this image:

A party of armed men...set fire to the school and killed the rural school teacher Profesor Arnulfo Sosa Portillo, with machetes. His body was found abandoned in the Municipal Building. This teacher, on understanding the danger he was in, had taken refuge in the Municipal Building, but did not find the security he sought there, as the authorities were forced to flee and abandoned him to his fate....³⁸

The attackers, coarse-featured campesinos in large sombreros and country dress, wield large machetes against the teacher, swirling around in a macabre ballet. The victim falls toward the viewer, dramatically foreshortened, like St. Matthew in Caravaggio's *Calling*

³⁸Prignitz-Poda, p. 61, quoted from *El Universal* (Mexico City), April 7, 1937.

of *St. Matthew*. As in *Profesor Juan Martínez Escobar*, the artist has emphasized the hands, those of the teacher being especially large and expressive, while the attackers all have small, tense fists.

In a 1939 lithograph, *Danza de la Muerte* (*Dance of Death*) (fig. 161), TGP member Chávez Morado employed some of the same devices as Méndez did in *Profesor Arnulfo Sosa Portillo*. In Chávez Morado's print, a circle of armed men swing their arms around above their heads, two of them wielding swords, and the third a mattock. Like the attackers in the Méndez print they are dressed in loose-fitting clothing, and bend their knobby knees into the center of the circle. However, although they are directing their weapons at one another, the figures also appear to be fighting the shadows that surround them, or an invisible enemy, as much as each other. Their dance, though here symbolic of abstract violence, also refers to Mexican folk dances. Not only does Death often appear as a character in folk dances, but one of the men is also wearing the stripes on his shirt and pants that are typical of either Death or jaguar costumes in Mexican folk dance (fig. 162). One of Méndez's last prints, the lithograph *Danzante* (*Dancer*) (fig. 163) of 1965, is, in fact, a dramatic representation of a dancer with striped jaguar body paint. In the light of these other images, *Profesor Arnulfo Sosa Portillo* can also be read as a kind of dance of death, Chávez Morado's scene turned sideways, with the victim the focus of the "dancers." The theme presented in *Dance of Death* is the irrationality of mindless violence, expressed in the action of symbolic figures, while the Méndez lithographs of the killing of teachers depict historical events. However, just as the dancers hide their identities with their costumes, the *Cristero* fanatics targeted the school teachers as symbols of governmental suppression of Catholicism. They murdered the school teachers in secrecy, often disguised by darkness, in a kind of ritual action, hoping to restore the balance of their religious life by annihilating the representatives of social change. Méndez emphasized the sacrificial aspects of these events in all the prints in the portfolio. Even

the title of the series, *En Nombre de Cristo*, identifies the irony of the campesinos' crusade against the teachers while creating an association in the viewer between the deaths of the teachers and the martyrdom of Christ. The prints were used as part of the government's campaign against the Cristeros, given to members of the public free of charge, with the intent of converting them to a point of view favorable to the rural teachers and turning them against the Cristeros. The appropriation of religious imagery reinforced the message directed to a devoutly religious population.

The fantastic quality of the lithographs in *En Nombre de Cristo* and other prints of Méndez around this time was most likely related to several factors: the unacknowledged influence of Surrealism, the desperate world situation, with the horrible inevitability of war, and the need to express political realities imaginatively in order to make an impact on the viewer. Méndez and the other members of the Taller worked continuously on anti-fascist projects from 1937 until the end of the Second World War.

The Taller was based on cooperation and collaboration in art production; the printmakers influenced each other, and they often worked together on the same print. One effect of this close association was that there is a stylistic and conceptual overlapping among the prints of the Taller. Méndez himself was tremendously versatile, and was able to create images in many styles and techniques, while O'Higgins, for example, developed a highly distinctive body of work, mostly lithographs, which Méndez occasionally emulated. The work of other artists, Alfredo Zalce and José Chávez Morado in particular, was almost as diverse as that of Méndez, and they produced a body of work that was of similarly high technical and imaginative quality. Yet others, who joined the Taller in the mid-1940s, mostly younger artists like Alberto Beltrán, Arturo García Bustos, and Mariana Yampolsky, were clearly under the influence of Méndez, and created prints that look like his work. Often the artists shared the same motifs, styles or compositions while producing prints that had very different meanings and visual effects.

Members of the Taller acknowledged Méndez's leadership in terms of his graphic skill and imagination. Chávez Morado claimed that Méndez always took his plates home to work on them, averting criticism while he was working on them. Chávez Morado may have been exaggerating, as other members recall working with him at the workshop. Later accounts by Beltrán, Heller, Yampolsky and others stressed the cooperative, egalitarian nature of the TGP's working method, including the criticism of Méndez's plates and prints in process. Yampolsky explained that Méndez worked in both the TGP's studio and at home.³⁹ However, Chávez Morado also acknowledged Méndez's skill and influence, explaining that Méndez was like a teacher to the group:

Now I understand perfectly. It is not possible for people to tell a man who puts all his passion into a painting or a print, 'Hey, no, put in this, put it here.' Criticism comes once the work is realized. In literature, dance, in the other arts the criticism functions perhaps before the finale, but when you are making a print, you have to launch into it and do it; that is what Méndez did. He brought us marvelous prints, and that was our school.⁴⁰

Méndez's Guggenheim Fellowship

By 1939 Méndez's stature as an artist was such that he was able to obtain a Guggenheim award to travel in the United States. His proposal to the Guggenheim Foundation was very ambitious and far-reaching. He intended to produce a series of lithographs and woodcuts depicting American factories and workers, as the first part of his project, to be called *El Hombre en el Desarrollo Industrial y Científico de los Estados Unidos del Norte* (*Man in Industrial and Scientific Development in the United States of the North*). The second part consisted of an extensive study of Renaissance painting technique, contemporary fresco, and encaustic, tempera and lacquer techniques in Mexico and the United States. The third part was to be an investigation of modern painting

³⁹Yampolsky, telephone interview by author, Seattle, Mexico City, 16 July 1999.

⁴⁰José Chávez Morado, *José Chávez Morado* (Mexico City: Editorial Patria, 1989), p. 19.

materials which he would use in experimental works of his own.⁴¹ He was also planning a survey of Pre-Columbian mural painting in Mexico. The technological and industrial orientation of this plan indicates the extent of Méndez's affinities with Siqueiros, whose emphasis on new materials and techniques, especially important in the late 1930s, is paralleled in Méndez's Guggenheim proposal. Siqueiros's Experimental Workshop in New York and his *Portrait of the Bourgeoisie* are two projects that must have interested Méndez. These technical experiments were consistent with the view of Communists and other leftists during the 1930s, '40s and '50s, that industrialization, accompanied by workers' control of the means of production, was key to the development of the proletariat.

Henry Allen Moe, then Secretary of the Guggenheim Foundation, made a number of suggestions for Méndez's itinerary and gave him letters of introduction to artists and university professors along his route, including the distinguished anthropologist Franz Blom at Tulane University. Méndez set out in March 1939 and traveled to New York, through the south. He was very impressed by the Tennessee Valley Authority project and by the enormous foundries in Birmingham, Alabama. He was also startled by signs of racism and discrimination in the United States, as he had been by poverty on his trip to California in 1930. In Texas he had the following experience:

One cold and rainy afternoon while I was driving on a road in Texas I heard singing and I stopped at the side of the road. I saw from afar many people lined up on a hillside. They were black prisoners who were singing. Meanwhile on the other side of the highway there were big fields in which workers were toiling, also black prisoners. The police guards on horseback looked just like the foremen on the haciendas of the Porfirian era lording over the hacienda workers, who were also prisoners, but these black prisoners were singing while they worked. I stood there making sketches until the mounted guards became suspicious and came over to order me to move on as fast as possible. There were, I think, more than 300 black prisoners there. The South!⁴²

⁴¹ Leopoldo Méndez, statement of plans, February 24, 1938, Guggenheim Foundation Archives.

⁴² Poniatowska, p. 12.

In New York Méndez especially enjoyed the opportunity to go to museums. He was overwhelmed by his visits to the Frick and the Metropolitan Museums, and regretted having to leave before seeing everything:

With sadness in my heart I started back to Mexico...I drove along thinking that I would never again have a chance to see the my beloved paintings in the rich museums of the United States.⁴³

Although he had expected to be in the United States for a year, Méndez had to end his trip after only seven months. Apparently Méndez had recently married and his wife, Andrea Hernández, came along unexpectedly on all or part of the trip. A letter from Moe offers surprised greetings “to your wife -- of whom I had not heard before...”⁴⁴ In September 1939 Méndez was back in Mexico and wrote Moe, requesting a variance in the terms of the grant. Due to the ill health of his wife, who was pregnant and having a difficult time traveling on rough roads, they had returned to Mexico. He proposed a major change, that he would stay in Mexico and paint murals there, instead of finishing his year in the United States. His letter to Moe informed him of his hopes:

Something exceptionally interesting developed on my return to this country. Hearing I was back, the directors of the National Training School for Teachers in Mexico approached me with a request to do a series of murals inside their building. I went to look at the walls and to discuss themes with them -- and I became tremendously attracted to the project. Technically, it would be the first time I had done any fresco painting entirely alone; contextually, the possibilities stretch as limitless. The school has no money to pay and could only provide me with the sheer materials, so that it would not be a job so much as a great personal experience and a considerable step in development....Would it be at all possible for me to obtain three months' allotment from you during the six months here? I would then go to New York City directly after the completion of the mural project and receive the remaining three months' allotment there....⁴⁵

⁴³Poniatowska, p. 15.

⁴⁴Henry Allen Moe to Leopoldo Méndez, March 31, April 14, May 4, 1939, Guggenheim Foundation Archives.

⁴⁵Méndez to Moe, September 15, 1939.

In a short and regretful letter Moe politely denied his request.⁴⁶

None of the projects listed in Méndez's original Guggenheim Foundation application or his revised proposal were completed, although Méndez did fill a notebook with sketches as he traveled through the southern United States to New York, and later produced a few prints based on his trip. Curiously, his memories of the journey, as related to Poniatowska in 1963, do not include any references to Andrea, perhaps because by that time they had been divorced for many years.

A 1940 zinc print *Nueva York (New York)* (fig. 164), a view of Wall Street made after Méndez's return to Mexico, was inspired by his trip to New York. The print harkens back to his Stridentist work. The streets are tilted at eccentric angles, and the dynamism of the city is represented by active, short strokes around the bright center path, on which small black and white people dash hurriedly. The church at the end of the street points to the view that money is the religion in a capitalist society. It seems logical that Méndez would return to a Stridentist style with this print, one of his few cityscapes, given the Stridentist emphasis on the urban setting. At the same time, the tilted, geometric composition resembles work by the Bauhaus artist, Lyonel Feininger, in particular Feininger's Cubo-Futurist composition for the *Manifesto and Program of the Weimar Bauhaus*, a woodcut of 1919 (fig. 165). Like Méndez's *Nueva York*, Feininger's print portrays a church, or a church-like building. However, the subject of Méndez's print, the canyons of Wall Street, as the center of American capitalism, with its tiny rushing figures, communicates a message about the dehumanization of the city under the capitalist system, quite a different view of the urban environment from its celebration in Stridentist imagery and in Feininger's radiant print.

⁴⁶Moe to Méndez, September 18, 1939.

The Trotsky Affair, Siqueiros's Criticisms of the TGP, and the First Rupture in the Collective

After Méndez's return from the United States in 1940, the Taller experienced a period of upheaval and internal conflict. The first event of importance affected Méndez deeply, rupturing his long and presumably cordial relationship with Siqueiros. Siqueiros involved the TGP and Méndez, as its director, in his attempt to assassinate Leon Trotsky, then living in Coyoacán, a suburb of Mexico City.⁴⁷ Two of the participants in the attempt, Luis Arenal and Antonio Pujol, were members of the Taller, and Siqueiros used the printmaking equipment occasionally. A number of contradictory accounts exist, but it is certain that Siqueiros and his team used the facilities of the TGP to change into paramilitary disguises on the night of the assassination attempt, without the permission of the general membership.⁴⁸ The next day, all the members of the Taller were either interrogated or arrested as they arrived at the workshop. Chávez Morado's account appears to be the most precise:

The envoys of Stalin demanded that the directors of the PCM, Hernán Laborde and Valentín Campa, organize the assassination of Trotsky. They refused and were expelled from the Party. Siqueiros accepted with pleasure. And for us of the Taller the affair was particularly serious because the group commanded by Siqueiros disguised themselves in the Taller de la Gráfica Popular, before the assault on Trotsky's house. That night Antonio Pujol asked Leopoldo to lend him the key to the Taller. Méndez lent it to him, because he liked Pujol very much... The next day after the attempt, we came to the Taller and saw some fake

⁴⁷At 3:00 a.m. on May 24, 1940, Siqueiros led a small band of followers to Trotsky's house in Coyoacán, where they machine-gunned Trotsky's bedroom and kidnapped one of his secretaries, Robert Sheldon Harte. Trotsky, his wife and grandson hid under the bed. Trotsky's grandson received a slight wound but otherwise the three were unharmed. The body of Sheldon Harte was found buried in the floor of a cabin outside of Mexico City a few days later. This was the first of two attempts on Trotsky's life, the second of which took place on August 20, 1940, when Trotsky was murdered at his desk by Ramón Mercader del Río (alias Frank Jackson) by a blow to the head with an ice-axe.

⁴⁸Prignitz-Poda, pp. 70-71. Prignitz-Poda states that the conspirators used the Taller under the pretext of a meeting. In interviews Zalce, Beltrán and Sánchez each told a slightly different story. Chávez Morado's account matches Zalce's most closely, and also reveals internal conflicts in the PCM. Zalce, interview by author, Morelia, Mexico, 12 July 1996, tape recording; Beltrán, interview by author, Mexico City, 10 March 1996, tape recording; Sánchez, interview by author, Mexico City, 6 March 1996.

mustaches and a guitar case. A few hours later the police fell upon us. They took us to the Sixth Delegation and afterward to the Pocito, when they found out who had lent out the keys....Leopoldo...believed that the Communist Party had deliberately sacrificed him. And he ended up furious at the PCM, saying, 'it's necessary to start another party.' And the offense led him slowly to the campaign portrait of López Mateos and to the PRI. This still hurts me.⁴⁹

Méndez was put in jail for a short while (either a few days or a few weeks, depending on the account -- Prignitz-Poda puts it at a few days, while José Sánchez, jailed along with Méndez, put it at more than a month, as did Alfredo Zalce and Alberto Beltrán).⁵⁰ It was a bitter experience that damaged Méndez's friendships with Siqueiros, Arenal and Pujol, who all left Mexico for a number of years.⁵¹ Méndez was humiliated by the experience of being jailed, and remembered it later with great emotion:

In my short imprisonment I cried desperately upon seeing my pregnant wife, insulted by agents of the police reserve and, much later at the prison door, to see her bathed in tears, with my son in her womb...I was not ashamed of this weakness.⁵²

Although Siqueiros and Méndez did not make an open break, Chávez Morado also stated, "Leopoldo acquired a hatred of Siqueiros and the Communist Party. He was disillusioned and from there changed into a Lombardista [follower of Vicente Lombardo Toledano]."⁵³ The Trotsky affair was perhaps a defining moment for Méndez. His previous accordance with Siqueiros's ideological positions apparently did not extend to the attempted assassination, and he was insulted and angry at having been involved.

⁴⁹Chávez Morado, *Chávez Morado*, p. 18.

⁵⁰Prignitz-Poda, p. 70; Zalce, interview by author, Morelia, Mexico, 12 July 1996, tape recording; Beltrán, interview by author, Mexico City, 10 March 1996, tape recording.

⁵¹Arenal went to the United States, Siqueiros to Chile and Pujol to Argentina. Arenal and Siqueiros returned to Mexico in 1944 and Pujol came back in 1959.

⁵²Reyes Palma, *Leopoldo Méndez*, p. 163. From Méndez' notebooks, undated.

⁵³José Chávez Morado, "La pintura como destino y pasión," in Cristina Pacheco, *Luz de México*, p. 231.

Although he remained a member of the PCM throughout the next six years, he must have made it clear that he did not support Siqueiros's most recent actions. The sense of urgency that arose during the Second World War, including the whole-hearted support for the Soviet Union's war efforts, may have delayed Méndez's break with the Communist Party, but it is likely that the rift with Siqueiros created a significant change in Méndez's alliances.⁵⁴

On his part, Siqueiros, perhaps feeling antagonistic toward Méndez because of his negative reaction to the Trotsky affair, began a prolonged campaign against the Taller, and by extension, Méndez. Upon his return from South America in 1944, Siquieros, who had started up his own "Center of Realist Modern Art" in his house in Mexico City, began a series of criticisms of the TGP. In a review of an exhibition of the Taller, in which, ironically, his own prints appeared, Siqueiros accused the members of the TGP of having elitist and antidemocratic attitudes because they used antiquated technical methods, especially traditional manual printing presses, to produce their works. Even though he himself used hand presses for his own graphic work, he thought that the members of the Taller should buy an offset press. Siqueiros compared the TGP to Rivera, and referring back to his earlier criticisms of Rivera, he equated the technical means of production by the Taller with the "stagnation of form" of which he accused Rivera. Siqueiros was adamant that the TGP should start producing runs of thousands of prints with offset printing, and maintained this polemical stance for many years.⁵⁵ The response of the Taller was always to be the same: that they did not have the capacity or the desire to run an offset press, which would need to run day and night to make up for the cost.

⁵⁴The attitude among many on the Left was that the Soviet Union under Stalin was the sole European defense against Hitler. In any event, Lombardo Toledano's political stand, discussed below, was a strange case. He was not a member of the Communist Party, but he was an ardent follower of Stalin.

⁵⁵ Prignitz-Poda, p. 95, quoted from David Alfaro Siqueiros, "México y la URSS en el arte de la pintura," lecture, Instituto de Intercambio Mexicano-Ruso, October 15, 1945.

Mass production of graphic work was also counter to the artisanal values of the Taller. In 1963 Méndez was still defending the Taller's position:

...To me it has always been and continues to be a worthy idea, but it does not fit into the reality of the Taller. A machine of this type prints four thousand copies an hour. In one day of work one could run a great quantity of drawings given that five, six, seven drawings can be printed on one plate. That is to say in one hour -- if one makes four prints in one plate -- 16,000 copies of a print can be printed. This requires a very efficient apparatus of distribution such as belongs to a big business, and we have never been big businessmen! In addition, a machine can not be idle; it is necessary for it to work constantly to justify its existence and to pay for itself. Neither are artists going to run it. It would be absurd to ask artists to manage it themselves. For this reason I am against the mechanization of the Taller as it is today.⁵⁶

The attacks by Siqueiros did not, however, prevent future collaboration with members of the Taller. Méndez and Siqueiros served on a committee organized by Arenal in 1945 to work on 1945 and 1946, two journals edited by Arenal and illustrated by members of the TGP, Siqueiros and other artists.⁵⁷

In 1940 members of the Taller disagreed over the issue of the pricing of their work. Chávez Morado, Anguiano, Dosamantes, Escobedo and Ramírez were of the opinion that prints should be given free to workers and that tourists and the middle class should be charged thirty pesos per print. The price of prints had been set at eight pesos for everyone, although the TGP often provided free prints for political events. Méndez, Zalce, Bracho, Aguirre, Francisco Mora and O'Higgins wanted to keep the eight-peso system of pricing as it had been. The acrimonious discussions about this issue revealed tensions about the amount of control Méndez wielded in the group. Although Méndez was considered the head of the Taller until his resignation in 1952, this position was not clearly spelled out over the years. The TGP elected a director every year, and Méndez was

⁵⁶Poniatowska, p. 17.

⁵⁷Prignitz-Poda, p. 96.

usually chosen for the position. In fact, Méndez managed the affairs of the TGP; he was the one ultimately responsible for publications, pricing, distribution, hiring and correspondence. The disagreements in 1940 resulted in the departure of the artists who wanted to change the pricing system.⁵⁸ Ironically, these artists started their own art gallery, Galería Espiral, a for-profit enterprise which failed after a year.⁵⁹ The Taller was left with six members: Méndez, Zalce, Bracho, Aguirre, Mora and O'Higgins. The Taller had not been able to resolve dilemma of balancing revolutionary values with issues of patronage, and the collective was not able to withstand the strains that came from opposing opinions and feelings of resentment.

The TGP had accomplished a great deal in its three years of existence. The collective had experienced a strong and enthusiastic beginning, and the members had created a variety of successful artistic projects. Works such as Méndez's portfolio *En Nombre de Cristo* addressed pressing Mexican issues, while the collection *La España de Franco* and the posters for the Liga Pro-Cultura Alemana reflected the increasing complexity of the global political situation.

From 1937 to the war years Méndez experienced an extremely active, fermentive period, playing a central role in the establishment of the Taller, providing artistic inspiration to his colleagues and producing powerful anti-fascist images for a wide variety of leftist organizations. This phase of his career was only the prelude of an even more intense period of active anti-war artistic activity during World War II. Méndez and the TGP continued to produce anti-fascist images as Hitler and the specter of Nazism became ever more recognized as a clear worldwide threat.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 77.

⁵⁹Zalce, interview by author, Morelia, Mexico, 20 November 1995, tape recording.

Chapter Six: The Taller de Gráfica Popular: The War Years

During the years of World War II, Méndez continued to make images of Mexican subjects, and at the same time concentrated increasingly on international politics. He created powerful anti-Nazi prints, including images for *El libro negro del terror nazi*, a unique work that documented conditions in Europe, produced by European political refugees in conjunction with Mexican artists and writers. The Taller regrouped its forces under the able management of Hannes Meyer, a former director of the Bauhaus, who helped the TGP establish its own publishing house, La Estampa Mexicana. The works produced by this press, notably the illustrated book *Incidentes Melódicos del Mundo Irracional* and a portfolio, *25 Prints of Leopoldo Méndez*, brought some financial security to the TGP, and the group gained new members. At the end of the war years Méndez created some of his most complex images, including a masterful self-portrait, *Amenaza sobre México*, and two optimistic prints: *El Nuevo Amanecer* and *Cuando Nace un Hombre Todos los Animales se Alegran*.

Méndez's Anti-Nazi Images

The beginning of the Second World War affected the remaining members of the TGP greatly. The sense of urgency they had felt from the first stirrings of world war increased, and they worked feverishly to combat fascism with images. Hannes Meyer, who became the business manager of the Taller in 1942, later described the many aspects of the TGP's work during this period:

The outbreak of World War II in 1939 multiplied the activities of the TGP also: illustrations for the anti-fascist press, backdrops for rallies, graphic exhibitions against the Nazi terror, etc. Under the slogan, 'Mexico's first line of defense is on the Soviet front,' a broadly conceived poster campaign was spread throughout the country. In order to defray the cost of each series of 5,000 posters, we sold a special edition of 200 copies on good paper to sympathizers. For the 'Libro Negro

del Terror Nazi,' (The Black Book of Nazi Terror), ten members sketched a series of 32 indictments, and Robert Mallery lithographed a poster for the Anti-Terror Exhibition. The rally which massed in the 'Zócalo,' the capital's central square, to listen to the President's Declaration of War on the Axis in June 1942, was greeted by the Taller's allegorical floats, and the war's end was hailed by Bracho's poster 'Victoria' and A. Zalce's graphic announcement of the official victory celebration.¹

In spite of the divisions that had split the Taller, Méndez continued to be very productive, creating numerous anti-fascist images as he had during the 1930s. Starting in 1940, he began to create prints directly concerning the war. Méndez's gift for distilling topical elements of a generalized nature from current events to create a visual history is especially apparent in these prints of the early 1940s.

An example is a pair of prints that illustrate the theme of grief in wartime. *La Carta (The Letter)* (fig. 166), a wood engraving probably from around 1942, is heavily coded with narrative symbols. A woman sits hunched over at a wooden table with a letter in her hand, her other hand covering her face. Above her head float small, indistinct shapes; they look a little like finger prints, but give the effect of chaotic inner thoughts propelled into being by the strength of emotion. The viewer can tell that the setting is a German household by the background, where there are three pictures, the middle of which bears the outline of a figure giving the *Heil Hitler*. There is a banner with a swastika under the picture, revealing that this has been a patriotic family. The simple clothing of the woman and the plain furniture also imply that she is from the working class. The cluster of signs that identify the family as Nazi sets up an ironic disjunction. The former lives of the absent son or husband and the woman resonate in the surroundings, while the present and the future are saturated with the poignancy of loss. The other print, also called *La Carta (The Letter)* (fig. 167), a woodcut from 1942,

¹Meyer, *TGP Mexico*, p. xv.

portrays the same theme but the image presents no narrative detail other than the letter and the table, so that the woman could be anywhere, at almost any time. Both prints show the influence of Kollwitz, whose images from World War I also depicted intense internal responses to the effects of public events. Kollwitz created many images of the reactions of parents to the news of the deaths of their children. Like Kollwitz, whose grieving women and men demonstrate their helplessness through their postures, heads bowed, shoulders bent and hands held close to the body, Méndez portrayed these women in the passive mode, using the same signs of powerlessness as Kollwitz did. As a serious student of printmaking, and especially the political print, Méndez would have known Kollwitz's woodcuts *The Parents*, and *The Widow* (figs. 168, 169), from her 1923 portfolio *War*. Both these prints portray the grieving of those who have lost a family member in the war. Méndez's prints of this theme are some of his only depictions of domestic experience, and even here the subject is linked to political events. They are also among the few images of women in his work.

El Libro Negro del Terror Nazi and Das Siebte Kreuz

The diversity of Méndez's work in the early 1940s can be seen in his six illustrations for the 1943 *El libro negro del terror nazi en Europa* (*The Black Book of Nazi Terror in Europe*).² This remarkable book contained 298 pages of text, photographs, drawings and prints concerning the Nazis' effect on Europe. The book was designed by Hannes Meyer, who later became the business manager of the Taller. Meyer, a Swiss architect, directed the Bauhaus from 1927 to 1930 and worked as an urban planner in the Soviet Union from 1930 to 1936. In 1939, Meyer and his family moved to Mexico, invited by the Mexican government to head the Institute of Urban Planning at the

²*El libro negro del terror nazi*. As far as I could determine, this significant book has never been studied in depth, and will be a subject of further investigation by the author.

National Polytechnic Institute. Due to the change of Mexican administration in 1940, Meyer's position never materialized, and he began to work with a German exile organization, Alemania Libre (Free Germany), which had a small press, El Libro Libre (The Free Book).³ Meyer arranged for El Libro Libre to publish *El libro negro del terror nazi*, which contained prints by a number of members of the Taller. He described its origins:

In the winter of 1942-43 the idea of this book was conceived by a group of political refugees in Mexico. Sponsored by President M. Avila Camacho, it was carried out in collaboration with outstanding intellectuals, artists and writers from all parts of the world.⁴

The sponsors of the book were the president of Mexico, Manuel Avila Camacho, the president of Peru, Dr. Manuel Prado, and the president-in-exile of Czechoslovakia, Dr. Edward Benes. The editorial committee consisted of the Czech writer André Simon, German writers Bodo Uhse, Anna Seghers, Ludwig Renn and Egon Erwin Kisch, and Mexican writers Antonio Castro Leal and Juan Rejano. Fifty-six writers and twenty-four visual artists participated in the creation of *El libro negro*, including, in addition to the editors cited above, Thomas and Heinrich Mann, Leon Feuchtwanger, Alexei Tolstoy, Mikhail Sholokov, Ernst Bloch and Vicente Lombardo Toledano. The group of visual artists was composed of European, American and Mexicans. The book published thirty-two works by TGP members Méndez, O'Higgins, Meyer, Aguirre, Bracho, Chávez Morado, Zalce, and Gonzalo Paz Pérez. *El libro negro* also used illustrations by the German artists Käthe Kollwitz and John Heartfield, Belgian artist Franz Masareel,

³Meyer probably met Méndez and other members of the Taller through the German leftist community soon after his arrival in Mexico. Meyer would have seen the posters that the Taller produced for the Liga Pro Cultura Alemana in 1939. His involvement with the TGP continued until he returned to Switzerland in 1949.

⁴Meyer, *TGP Mexico*, p. 8.

Americans George Gropper and Jim Egleson, and a number of Soviet artists. As Leal explained in the introduction:

Much has been written on Nazism, but surely there is no book, in any language, like this that we offer to the Spanish-speaking public. Here the reader will find the fundamentals of Nazism in their most despicable application, in Germany as well as in the rest of the occupied countries. The various articles that form this text are of the utmost importance for the facts that they reveal and for the opinions that they contain. They are the work of writers -- some of them world-famous -- of politicians, university professors, diplomats, priests and ministers, journalists and social activists who succeeded in escaping from the claws of Nazism, often from one country to another, and who, in spite of belonging to different political sectors, represent all -- in diverse shades of meaning -- anti-fascist opinion.⁵

El libro negro brought together an enormous amount of written and visual evidence about Nazi activities throughout Europe in a single source; 10,000 copies were printed.⁶ The essays were grouped according to country or region, and illustrated with appropriate photographs, drawings and prints.

Méndez's linoleum print, *Deportación a la Muerte* (*Deportation to Death*) (fig. 170), shows Méndez's concern about the Nazi extermination of European Jews. The work is generally dated 1942, and it is not known if Méndez produced the image specifically for the book. The print was placed at the beginning of an essay by Dr. Leon Weiss, "The Extermination of the Jews," which summarized the destruction of the Jews to date in Europe, including the fact that of over three million Polish Jews only half a million remained.⁷

Although *El libro negro* compiled information from a wide range of sources and is distinguished by the high quality of its essays and art work, the book did not present the news about Nazi terror to the world for the first time. By 1943 Nazi plans to exterminate

⁵*El libro negro*, p. 11.

⁶Reyes Palma, *Leopoldo Méndez*, p. 163.

⁷*El libro negro*, pp. 239-246.

the Jews and other groups were far advanced. In 1941, the Nazis began to send Jews from all over Europe to camps in Poland. Although the Germans attempted to conceal the concentration camps from the rest of the world, news of their plans began to reach the West in 1942, when the Bund, a Jewish socialist organization in Poland, issued the first report about the mass deportations and killings. The information about the “Final Solution” was communicated to the Allies in the spring of 1942 by the Polish Underground and the Vatican, and subsequently relayed to American Jews in November 1942. Communists, Catholics, and Gypsies were also taken to concentration camps, and Méndez must have been very aware of the situation through reports in the leftist press and direct information from the many political refugees who arrived in Mexico from Europe before and during the War. These refugees were often in communication with those who stayed behind.

Méndez, and many of the participants in the book project, probably read a monthly column in *Futuro*, the journal of the Universidad Obrera, called “Movimiento Obrero e Internacional,” with a section on each country of Europe. The July 1942 issue reported that the Jews of Poland were being concentrated in ghettos throughout the country. By the next issue, in August 1942, the column presented this information:

The terror is also ferocious, especially against the Jews, 700,000 of whom, a fifth of the population of Poland, have already been physically destroyed. On the 17th of April the Nazis organized a bloodbath in the Warsaw Ghetto and inaugurated mobile toxic gas chambers where they can kill up to 100 persons at one time. These chambers are also used for political prisoners, especially in the terrible jail of Pawiak and the camp of Auschwitz. In the latter, a few weeks ago, 1,000 political prisoners were killed in an area where they were experimenting with a new toxic gas.⁸

⁸*Futuro* (August 1942): p. 21.

Méndez's *Deportación a la Muerte* is one of the earliest-known artistic images of the Holocaust by an artist outside the camps.⁹ The print is also one of the first images of the Holocaust in any medium to be widely disseminated, as even photographs of deportations and concentration camps were not seen outside of German jurisdiction until later, mainly after the war. The print clearly associates the deportations to the camps with Nazi anti-Semitism and the extermination of the Jewish people. Méndez's portrayal of Jewish deportees rather than Communist prisoners indicates his understanding of the implications of the news he was receiving and his sensitivity to current events. Genocide was different from political detention, and the Jews were targeted as an entire population, not as political adversaries. Méndez thus portrayed unarmed Jewish men, women and children, identified by their beards (in the case of the men) and costumes, crowded into the boxcar. The German soldiers, silhouetted against the train by the light of their own lanterns, block the door with their rifles. The plume of smoke in the distance, that signifies the locomotive, is eerily evocative of the smoke that came from the chimneys of the crematoria. As art historian Ralph Shikes has observed, the print has a "medieval flavor."¹⁰ The outlines of the Jewish prisoners are as stiff and thick as the lines in Medieval stained glass. Méndez must have been aware that the Nazis were destroying a culture that had maintained many of its traditions since the Middle Ages, and in this image he portrayed the people of Jewish villages of Eastern Europe, rather than the assimilated Jews of the towns and cities.

Another print by Méndez, possibly made for the book, illustrated the essay "La Gestapo, Asesinos en Comandita" ("The Gestapo, Murderers in Petty Command"), by

⁹It is possible that the print is the first artistic image of the Holocaust by a non-interned artist. There may exist other images that were published in leftist or Jewish publications of the time, but I have not located any.

¹⁰Ralph E. Shikes, *The Indignant Eye: The Artist As Social Critic in Prints and Drawings from the Fifteenth Century to Picasso* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 383.

Rudolf Fuerth.¹¹ The image portrays three members of the Gestapo torturing two naked men (fig. 171). Méndez captured the “banality of evil,” discussed by Hannah Arendt in her coverage of the trial of Adolf Eichmann,¹² with the casual stance of the German on the left, whose rolled-up sleeves and expression of indifference imply the routine nature of this work for him, and reveal his emotional detachment from the scene.

While Méndez published more prints in *El libro negro* than any other TGP member, O’Higgins and Zalce both provided images of Nazi oppression against the Jews. A lithograph by O’Higgins, *Jude (Jew)*, depicts the humiliation of Jewish men, dressed in rags, hands bound, forced to walk on a public street with signs that identify each one as “Jude” (fig. 172). Zalce’s *Expulsión (Expulsion)* (fig. 173) portrays a scene of a family, most likely Jewish, dispossessed of their home and belongings by the Germans. Unlike *Deportation to Death*, which portrays a step in the process of the “Final Solution,” the prints by O’Higgins and Zalce refer to the daily cruelty with which the Germans treated the Jews, rather than their destruction as a people.

Méndez expressed his admiration for Communist efforts against fascism in another print for the book, a portrait of Antonio Gramsci, the leader of the Italian Communist Party, who died in an Italian prison in 1937 (fig. 174). Another print, *La Venganza de los Pueblos (The Vengeance of the People)* (fig. 175), also called *Homenaje al Heróico Ejército de Guerrilleros Yugooslavo (Homage to the Heroic Army of Yugoslavian Guerrillas)*, honors the people of Yugoslavia in their heroic resistance against the German invasion of 1941 and their continuing struggle against the German occupation. This print accompanied the essays on the German occupation of the Balkan countries, placed at the beginning of an article called “Resistance and Treason in the

¹¹ *El libro negro*, pp. 75-85.

¹² Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1963).

Balkans,” by Erich Jungmann.¹³ As in his caricature of Franco, *La Toma de Madrid*, also used in *El libro negro* in the section on Spain, Méndez portrayed the aggressors as small and despicable: a distorted Hitler, his body covered in wolf-like hairs, holding a naked baby in each claw-like hand, cowers before the battle-axe of a Yugoslav peasant. Two of Hitler’s henchmen, similarly craven and hirsute, huddle behind Hitler, while the giant figure of the ax-bearer emerges from a town in flames. The town is visible through his translucent leg and foot. A host of peasants and soldiers, surrounded by flames, back him up, wielding an assortment of weapons, including guns, swords and sickles. Again Méndez has portrayed a single enormous individual emerging at the forefront in a metonymic representation of the masses in resistance. *La Venganza de los Pueblos* is reminiscent of Kollwitz’s *Peasant Revolt* (fig. 176), which also has a large figure leading a crowd of peasants. Even more dramatic than Kollwitz’s image, the extreme violence of this print again raises the issue of revolutionary violence against oppression. This is righteous violence, the rage of Christ and the money changers in the temple. The giant, axe-wielding peasant has clearly been pushed to the breaking point; his resistance is the logical response to the Germans’ violent abuse of power. The viewer can identify with the rage expressed here, and the Nazis in the image are sufficiently dehumanized and demonized that they can not be pitied.

Méndez’s *Corrido de Stalingrado*, called *Timoshenko* in *El libro negro* (fig. 177), is a problematic work, one of the few images by Méndez in which the lack of metaphorical clarity seems to undermine its intended effect. Méndez produced the print for the Taller’s yearly series of *calaveras*, probably in October of 1942.¹⁴ The Soviet

¹³Ibid., pp. 188-198.

¹⁴Date attributed by Reyes Palma, *Leopoldo Méndez*, pl. 116. The TGP had a tradition of making *calaveras* every year for the Days of the Dead, which are November 1st and 2nd. In the weeks before the Days of the Dead, mass-produced *papeles picados* (paper cuts), with *calavera* images, appear in the markets, sometimes with designs by Posada. The TGP distributed its own *calavera* prints, usually with political messages, taking advantage of the ongoing tradition, and appealing to the popular taste as well as the interest of educated Mexicans.

general, a terrifying skeleton on a skeleton horse, gallops over the Germans, also skeletons, who lie in various poses of defeat, under the hoofs of the horse. The image is confusing, as the horseman is reminiscent of the horsemen of the Apocalypse, not generally considered a positive image. In addition, the most likely response to the print would normally be sympathy for those being trampled. Most other Méndez prints direct the sympathy of the viewer toward the victims.¹⁵ The violent image is meant to convey the sense of victory, but the implacable, inhuman, mounted *calavera* is too threatening visually for the viewer to identify with. Instead of expressing the will of the people, or portraying their suffering, as in most depictions of revolutionary violence, the horseman seems to attack the viewer, disrupting the possibility of a sympathetic reading. Nonetheless, *Corrido de Stalingrado* is a memorable image, perhaps even an unconscious protest against war.

A Méndez lithograph from 1942, *Mariscal S. Timoshenko, Sus Triunfos Son los Nuestros* (*Marshall S. Timoshenko, His Triumphs Are Ours*) (fig. 178), not included in *El libro negro*, features an almost photorealist technique in its portrayal of the same Soviet general as in the *Corrido de Stalingrado*. Here Méndez adopted a Soviet socialist realist style to lionize the military hero, using the red star and block lettering often seen in Soviet posters, as a dramatic counterbalance to Timoshenko's carefully composed, photographically realistic, dignified face. The artist's keen sense of design is evident in this print. Two stars on Timoshenko's collar echo the red star to his left and, along with the triangular shapes of the collar, point back to the red star and lettering, creating a

¹⁵*Las Camisas Doradas Contra los Chóferes* (*The Gold Shirts Against the Taxi Drivers*), a later TGP print by Zalce, presents the same difficulty as *Corrido de Stalingrado*. One of the prints in the portfolio *Estampas de la revolución mexicana* (*Prints of the Mexican Revolution*) of 1949, the image was based on a photograph by Manuel Montes de Oca that appeared as the cover for the magazine, 1946. Both the photograph and the print portray the collision between a horse and an automobile, with the dismounted rider on the ground, during a confrontation between the Camisas Doradas and the taxi drivers' union. Like the *Corrido de Stalingrado*, the print involves a horse, but here portrayed as the victim of the automobile. The viewer's sympathy would logically extend to the horse rather than the automobile, whose human occupant is not visible. These two prints, however, are the only patent miscalculations in the vast body of work created by the Taller, and point out the difficulties of producing political prints that convey their messages clearly.

geometric rhythm that enlivens the otherwise sober portrait. Méndez's appropriation of a socialist realist style for this portrait of the Soviet general, a non-Mexican hero, is a kind of homage to the Soviet people. Although it has not been determined why Méndez chose Timoshenko as his subject, *The Corrido de Stalingrado*, a depiction of Timoshenko as a general in the Battle of Stalingrad, reveals how important the Soviet participation in the fight against Germany was. At this time the United States had not yet entered the war in Europe, and the Germans had invaded Russia, so many leftists relied on Stalin and the Soviet Union's Red Army as the only bulwark against Hitler. The right side of this print showing only the portrait of Timoshenko was published in black and white in the journal *Futuro*, the organ of the Universidad Obrera, in June 1942, with the caption "Mariscal Simeón Timoshenko, héroe de la Unión Soviética, destructor de la Blitzkrieg" ("Marshall Simeón Timoshenko, hero of the Soviet Union, destroyer of the Blitzkrieg").¹⁶

A comparison of these two portrayals of Timoshenko is a comparison of extremes. The first print memorializes Timoshenko's participation in the Battle of Stalingrad, employing the *corrido* form, often used in Mexico to commemorate significant historical events. The second image is a conventional portrait of a hero done in the socialist realist style of the subject's own culture. In the first image, the hero is caricatured in a turbulent drama of violent action and movement, and in the second, the general is given iconic status. As can be seen in these two portrayals of Timoshenko, Méndez was beginning to alter his style for individual prints according to his subject matter.

Other images for *El libro negro*, such as those by Masareel and Gropper, are also notable for their use of skeletons. These are not the *calaveras* of the Mexican tradition, although they resemble them, but are responses by the artists to the death visited upon the world by the Nazis. In an untitled print by Gropper (fig. 179) a bestial skeleton crouches

¹⁶Manuel Méndez, "Valmy-Moscú," *Futuro* (June 1942): p. 12.

over a globe, its jaws poised over New York, dripping venomous saliva from its open maw. A print by Masareel (fig. 180) depicts a skeleton diving like a bomb into a multitude of people, a maniacal expression on its face, while another (fig. 181) portrays German tanks in a flat landscape, each with a skeleton peering out.

El libro negro apparently had no parallel in any other country. News from Europe was very fragmented, and lone individuals struggled against great odds to provide the Western powers with accurate reports of atrocities and massacres. Witnesses had difficulty convincing governments in the West of the existence of the Final Solution. Tragically, in spite of the unique value of *El libro negro*, the fact that the book was published in Spanish, in Mexico, apparently limited its effectiveness as a tool to bring about action.¹⁷

In 1943 Méndez created another powerful anti-Nazi image, his color woodcut illustration for the cover of the book *Das Siebte Kreuz* (*The Seventh Cross*), by Anna Seghers (fig. 182). Anna Seghers (1900-1983) was a German Communist in exile in Mexico and the United States during the Nazi era, and was later to gain international fame for her books about the period before and during the Second World War. *The Seventh Cross*, a book about German resistance to the Nazis in the 1930s, portrayed the Nazis' brutality against the innocent.¹⁸ The book was an important anti-Fascist document, made into a Hollywood movie of the same name in 1944, during a period of anti-German propaganda production. The plot concerns a breakout from a Nazi prison camp during the 1930s by a group of socialists who had been imprisoned and tortured for their political beliefs. The main character, George, is the only one of the seven men who escapes to safety. The others are caught and brought back to the prison camp, where they are beaten and tied to six of the seven trees that have been cut to the height of a man and prepared as

¹⁷For a detailed discussion of the official policies of denial and inaction about the Holocaust see Arthur D. Morse, *While Six Million Died: a Chronicle of American Apathy* (New York: Hart Publishing Co., 1967).

¹⁸Anna Seghers, *The Seventh Cross*, trans. James A. Galston (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1942).

instruments of torture for them . When the seventh man can not be found, the commander of the camp is replaced, the trees are cut down and the wood is given to the prisoners to be used as kindling. George's escape gives hope to the other men in the camp. An unnamed narrator says, looking back:

Never perhaps in man's memory were stranger trees felled than the seven plane trees growing the length of Barrack III. Their tops had been clipped before, for reasons that will be explained later. Crossboards had been nailed to the trunks at the height of a man's shoulder, so that at a distance the trees resembled seven crosses....

... What would it have amounted to, compared to what we felt when the six trees, and finally the seventh one, were cut down? A small triumph, assuredly, considering our helplessness and our convict's clothing; but a triumph nevertheless -- how long was it since we had felt the sensation? -- which suddenly made us conscious of our own power, that power we had for a long time permitted ourselves to regard as being merely one of the earth's common forces, reckoned in measures and numbers, though it is the only force able suddenly to grow immeasurably and incalculably.¹⁹

Méndez's print shows the Nazis as vicious, faceless men attacking an unarmed victim. Again he adapted his style to his subject matter. The print is executed in a tight, finely detailed style, with dramatic contrasts of texture and pattern. Méndez may have chosen to make a neat, compact composition with precise marks to depict the orderliness and rigidity of Nazi cultural practices, delineating his forms with "Germanic precision." The image is the type seen before in Méndez's political work, such as his illustrations for *Zapata exaltación*, *Cómo Pretenden*, *El Fascismo I* and *El Fascismo II* or the prints for *En Nombre de Cristo*, in which the innocent are attacked by anonymous, violent assailants. However, *Das Siebte Kreuz* takes this type of imagery to a logical extreme, so that the uniform, boots, gun and swastika of the frontmost German, whose face is completely hidden behind the dead tree, became a trope for Nazism in general, a symbol

¹⁹Ibid., p. 3.

of the terror generated by the ferocious actions of the Nazis in the background, who, clothed exactly like the figure by the tree, are beating their powerless victim without mercy. The officer in the foreground has both hands on the holster of his gun and the men in the back wield their truncheons high while one of them kicks their captive excitedly with his booted foot. The theme of attack that Méndez had expressed so often before is here converted to a representation of sadism. The Nazis appear to be deriving satisfaction from their cruel exercise of absolute power; they are not only opponents, but torturers. In addition, the exaggerated masculinity of the Nazis includes the fetishistic leather boots and phallic weapons associated with sadistic pleasure. In Méndez's previous portrayals of politically motivated assaults, the assailants have faces and they attack their victims from close quarters. In the 1928 illustration for *Zapata exaltación*, the earliest work of this type, Zapata and the overseer engage in a hand-to-hand struggle as equals. The whip in the hand of the overseer is small and not very dangerous-looking, while Zapata is the stronger of the two and appears to be winning. In *Cómo Pretenden*, *El Fascismo I* and *El Fascismo II*, the workers, though defeated, have resisted bravely. The sinister qualities of the Camisas Doradas are conveyed through their facial expressions, postures and weapons. Although Méndez developed a convention of signifying the Camisas Doradas by their fedoras and street clothes, their clothing does not really distinguish them from other urban Mexicans; they wear ARM badges to identify them as Camisas Doradas. In *Profesor Arnulfo Sosa Portillo* (fig. 160), the murderers are more spontaneously violent than the Nazis in *Das Siebte Kreuz*; the campesinos are dressed in their usual clothing, which is not coded, as Nazi uniforms, boots and weapons are, to convey the role of the sadist. *Das Siebte Kreuz* suggests the absolute triumph of evil. The dead tree, in the shape of a cross, is another powerful symbol, overlaid on the human figures, implying the sacrifice of the innocent and the total destruction of civilized life that would result from a

Nazi victory. The tree is connected to images of the Passion, many of which depict the cross as a tree with truncated branches.

World War II, which involved the threat of total annihilation of large populations and included countless acts of deliberate torture and extreme cruelty, obviously made a great impression on Méndez. His work in the 1940s became more complex and more expressive than his earlier work, and his depictions of violence, oppression and resistance from this time on were even more dramatic than before.

Hannes Meyer and La Estampa Mexicana: The TGP Regroups

After the publication of *El libro negro del terror nazi*, Hannes Meyer joined the Taller as its financial manager and publisher. His organizational abilities and sense of purpose revived the Taller financially at a time when its resources were at a low point. One of Meyer's first endeavors was the establishment of the Taller's own publishing house, La Estampa Mexicana (The Mexican Print), in 1942. Immediately La Estampa Mexicana published an album of Posada's prints and a portfolio of twenty-five prints by Leopoldo Méndez, a selection of works from the 1930s and early 1940s, successful projects that brought the Taller a measure of financial security.²⁰ The members of the TGP also worked on a portfolio of the work of Posada.²¹ According to Meyer:

²⁰Leopoldo Méndez, *25 Prints by Leopoldo Méndez* (Mexico City: La Estampa Mexicana, 1942). This portfolio was a selection of Méndez's work from the 1930s and early '40s, many of which were fine art prints of his political work that had appeared as broadsides and flyers. The prints in this retrospective survey were: *Sudor de Sangre* (*Sweat of Blood*), *Sueño de los Pobres* (*Dream of the Poor*), *Jinetes* (*Horsemen*), *Casateniente* (*Landlord*) (a fine art print of *Hoja Popular No. 1*), *Concierto de Locos*, *El "Juan,"* *Accidente* (*Accident*), *Concierto Sinfónico de Calaveras* (*Symphony of Skeletons*) (a fine art print of *Calaveras del Mausoleo Nacional*), *Establero* (*Stableman*), *El Preso* (*The Prisoner*), *Papeleros* (*Paperboys*), *Mitín Improvisado* (*Street Meeting*), *Ilustración Para un Corrido* (*Illustration for a Corrido*), *Niñas Tejedores* (*Child Weavers*), *Chiclero* (*Chicle Worker*) (a fine art print of *La Tierra del Chicle*), *El Rayo* (*Lightning*), *Juárez*, *El Nido del Buitre* (*Nest of Vultures*) (a fine art print of *Con una Piedra se Matan Muchos Pájaros...*), *Fascismo I* (*Fascism I*), *Fascismo II* (*Fascism II*), *La Carta* (*The Letter*), *Por Enseñar a Leer* (*For Teaching How to Read*) (a fine art print of *Maestro Tú Estás Solo*), *Protesta* (*Protest*), *Portada de un Libro* (*Book Cover*) (a fine art print of *Das Siebte Kreuz*), and *La Venganza del Pueblo* (*The Vengeance of the People*). The portfolio demonstrated Méndez's technical mastery of the print medium, and situated him in the international art market, through the process of converting the original utilitarian prints into fine art prints. The intended clients for these prints were museums, libraries and collectors in Mexico

This child, E.M. (La Estampa Mexicana), was born in 1942, when the artists of the TGP made the decision to publish, in 100 copies, a portfolio of thirty prints by their authentic grandfather of the graphic arts: José Guadalupe Posada. The entire collective participated in this work, that necessitated not only printing the copies, but cutting, gluing, assembling and binding the 100 portfolios of the edition. After having finished fifty copies, the World War intervened, and for a lack of Chinese rice paper the completion of the work was delayed for five years [...] From its original, primitive form, full of flaws and lifted up by a celestial romanticism (due to its economic base) the E.M. developed fighting for its existence [...] ²²

With the money from the Estampa Mexicana and the funds received through the sale of *El libro negro*, the Taller began to regather its forces. Meyer obtained a government position in the Department of Housing at the end of 1942, and turned over the running of the Taller to another European exile, the German Communist organizer, Georg Stibi, in 1943. Stibi continued the task of reorganization that Meyer had started, working as the business manager of the TGP until 1947, when Stibi returned to Germany and Meyer rejoined the Taller for two years.²³ The Taller moved to the Calle Regina. Now that the Taller had its own press and an administrator, the artists were able to concentrate on their visual production.

Méndez became the center of a cause célèbre in 1944 when a lithograph he entered in an exhibition of graphic work in the Decoración gallery was rejected for political reasons by a jury made up of the printmakers Carlos Alvarado Lang, Julio Prieto and Francisco Díaz de León. Méndez's print, *El Gran Atentado* (*The Great Attempt*) (fig. 183), portrayed the attempted assassination of the President of Mexico, Manuel Avila Camacho, by a gunman associated with right-wing military and clerical forces. In the print, the president walks in unison with Father Hidalgo, the hero of Mexican

and abroad.

²¹ José Guadalupe Posada, *25 Prints of J. G. Posada*, prologue by Leopoldo Méndez (Mexico City: La Estampa Mexicana, 1943).

²² Prignitz-Poda, p. 84-85

²³ Ibid., pp. 86-87.

independence and President Benito Juárez, the great nineteenth-century leader, all three drawn in fine lines, floating in the air in an imaginary space, seemingly unaware of the ambush that is happening. Méndez represented the assassin as an anonymous, ghostly military man enveloped in a cape, wearing a peaked officer's cap, shooting his revolver from around a corner. To the side of the gunman a diminutive, donkey-headed orator brays, spewing swastikas onto a map of Mexico, standing on three children's alphabet blocks with the letters P A N on them. PAN was then and is still the acronym for the Partido de Acción Nacional (National Action Party), the right-wing party of Mexico, which at that time had openly fascist leanings. (The PAN is still extremely conservative in the present, representing the interests of industry and banking as well as the Catholic Church in Mexico.). Although the jury claimed to have rejected the print on aesthetic grounds, the owner of the gallery, Eduardo Méndez (no relation to Leopoldo Méndez), apparently objected to the depiction of the PAN, and declared that the jury acted on "their understanding that I did not want to convert my gallery into a political platform." The artistic community of Mexico City rallied around Méndez on this occasion; the list of supportive artists included Rivera, Orozco, Siqueiros, and Chávez Morado. President Avila Camacho, the subject of the lithograph, bought a copy of the print for 500 pesos.²⁴ Due to the publicity around the incident, the Taller attracted a number of new members.²⁵

Incidentes Melódicos del Mundo Irracional

In 1944 Méndez, having spent many years focusing on politics and war, turned to a somewhat lighter theme with illustrations for the book, *Incidentes melódicos del mundo*

²⁴Ibid., p. 88. The support Méndez received from Rivera and Siqueiros, who were usually at odds with each other, is another example of the shifting alliances in Mexican art politics.

²⁵Prignitz-Poda recounts that "In July of 1944 there were seven members ([Ignacio] Aguirre, [Angel] Bracho, [Francisco] Mora, [Isidoro] Ocampo, O'Higgins and Zalce); at the end of the same year they increased from nine to eleven; Beltrán and Fernando Castro Pacheco entered and Arenal and Raúl Anguiano rejoined." Ibid., p. 88-89.

irracional, by Méndez and Juan de la Cabada, published by the Estampa Mexicana. The book, printed in a run of 1,200 copies, was a great financial success, finding buyers in the United States and Mexico, including libraries, museums, galleries and private collectors. *Incidentes melódicos del mundo irracional* won the prize for the best illustrated book of the year at the IV Feria del Libro (Fourth Book Fair) in Mexico City in 1946. *Leopoldo Méndez: 25 Prints*, a portfolio of Méndez's prints from the book, appeared in 1945, with a prologue by Carl Schniewind, curator of prints and drawings at the Art Institute of Chicago, one of the museums most interested in the work of the Taller.²⁶ The English title of the portfolio indicates that it was intended for the American market. The publication of the book and the portfolio, the prices of which were beyond the reach of the average worker, indicates the Taller's growing dependence on a dual audience. On the one hand, the TGP addressed the people of Mexico, the masses; on the other hand, they appealed to the collector, the sympathizer, the people with money to buy illustrated artists' books and fine prints. It was a mark of the increasing pragmatism of the Taller, under the efficient management of Meyer and Stibi, that they addressed both of these audiences, though the marketing of the work to generate income was also an ideological inconsistency that was never resolved. In any case, the work was not highly profitable, and Méndez himself was never prosperous. He did not own a car, for example, and he did not have his own studio until 1960.

De la Cabada's text for *Incidentes melódicos*, blending myth and fantasy, was loosely based on Mayan folk songs from the Yucatan, which appear in the original Mayan, with Spanish translations. Forty ingenious linoleum and scratch board prints by

²⁶Leopoldo Méndez, *Leopoldo Méndez: 25 Prints*, prologue by Carl Schniewind, (Mexico City: La Estampa Mexicana, 1945). Schniewind visited Mexico and the Taller during the early 1940s, and bought a large collection of Méndez's work. Katharine Kuh, curator of painting and sculpture, and Peter Pollock, publicity director, both at the Art Institute of Chicago during the 1940s, also had a special interest in Mexican art and spent time in Mexico. Their interest in the art of Posada led them to collect his work and subsequently the work of later printmakers. The Art Institute of Chicago held a large exhibition of Posada's work in 1944.

Méndez accompany the text. The fable tells the story of Doña Caracol, a snail-woman, and her husband, Don Ardilla, a squirrel, who represent the innocent in the animal world. After the death of the squirrel, Doña Caracol is taken off by El Zopilote, a sinister vulture, who wears a top-hat and a suit coat, common iconography for businessmen and Uncle Sam, suggesting his links with capitalism and imperialism. He flies with her to an imaginary city, where she sings for the people, while the vulture pretends to sing along with her. El Zopilote becomes drunk and unruly and the crowd discovers that he can not sing. In their rage they kill him and string him up on a tree. The snail-woman and the sun sing to a dawning day.

Manuel Maples Arce praised Méndez's illustrations:

Méndez made 40 prints for *Incidentes melódicos del mundo irracional* which illustrate it magnificently. All of them have great power: the land, the harvest, the elements, the insatiability of man, as much in love as in hunger, life, death, intertwine with the animals of ancient Mayan fables with grace and enormous potency of expression. In some of the prints fine irony contrasts with tenderness, as in the moving scene of Doña Caracol crying over the Jabalí. In the drunken vulture's dance he is confused by his vertiginous movement; he has already lost his head and his senses, and does not know where his feet are, and in crushing her about whom he was singing, he reveals himself to be a farcical fool. When the feline and the crowd attack, pain clenches the claws of the raptor, and Méndez's satisfaction in the punishment of the people bursts forth, while in the scene of his death Méndez withdraws, content to have served justice.²⁷

The images for *Incidentes melódicos del mundo irracional* were a departure for Méndez in several ways. They were perhaps a welcome relief from the numerous prints concerning contemporary political events, focusing instead on the folk tales and music of the Mayan people, though they too illustrated the struggle of the innocent against a ruthless oppressor. The text and illustrations draw on Surrealism and magical realism, with the odd conjunctions of animal and human, emphasis on irrationality, and dream-like

²⁷Maples Arce, *Leopoldo Méndez*, pp. 32-33.

narrative that combines music, poetry and prose. The prints are among the very few examples in his work of Pre-Columbian imagery, which he used throughout the book.²⁸ Animals important to Mexican indigenous peoples, past and present, appear in the tale: the snake, the jaguar, the bat, the deer, and the vulture. These are also found in great numbers in folk art and Pre-Columbian art. Méndez explored ways to incorporate Pre-Columbian motifs into the images, most dramatically in *The Snake* (fig. 184), in which the massive body of the snake curves sinuously, filling up most of the pictorial space. The snail-woman recoils in one corner, in another, the squirrel dives into a squash to hide, and above the jaws of the serpent, as though supported by them, a man strides across a corn field. Mesoamerican plants surround the snake. The image of the serpent is very significant in Pre-Hispanic art, standing for water, caves and sky. In Mayan languages the words snake, sky and the number four sound alike. Glyphs, the Aztec and Mayan written form, used animals to signify numbers, the snake representing the number four. Snakes also signify transformation and rebirth because they shed their skins, and the open mouth with a forked tongue is commonly represented as an attribute of a god.²⁹ Quetzalcoatl, one of the most important of all the Aztec deities, is represented as a plumed serpent, a symbol of life. In the *Madrid Codex*, the sky-snake forms a part of a section of calendar (fig. 185) associated with rain and thus life and fertility. The similarity between Méndez's snake and the snake of the *Madrid Codex* is unmistakable. Like the Pre-Columbian artist, Méndez created a semi-abstract, decorated snake with open jaws and prominent fangs. Like the snake in the *Codex* the snake Méndez created is also associated with nature; Méndez's snake is intertwined with squash, corn and beans, the plants that sustain the

²⁸Méndez used the Aztec symbol of the eagle, cactus and snake, also the national symbol of Mexico, found on the Mexican flag, in his 1945 *Amenaza Sobre México* (fig. 192), and a pre-Columbian glyph appears in *The Making of Tortillas* (fig. 224) of 1957, as an architectural detail. These may be the only other uses of pre-Columbian imagery in Méndez's work.

²⁹Mary Miller and Karl Taube, *An Illustrated Dictionary of Ancient Mexico and the Maya* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993), p. 149.

indigenous people of Mexico, while the sky-snake of the *Madrid Codex* is surrounded by plants, rain and animals, and has sun designs on its skin.

As in Pre-Columbian art, Méndez's illustrations for *Incidentes melódicos del mundo irracional* combine the natural and the human worlds in ingenious compositions. *La Piel de Tigre* (*The Jaguar's Skin*) (fig. 186) is a lively design of animal-masked humans dancing with a jaguar, like the snake an important symbol in Pre-Columbian art. *Espúlgate los Recuerdos* (*Comb Out the Memories*) (fig. 187) depicts a Mayan woman in traditional *huipil* (a woman's garment), whose hair becomes a river. Reyes Palma describes the book as a complicated play of signs:

In 1944, Leopoldo Méndez and Juan de la Cabada had a fortunate encounter in the book *Incidentes melódicos del mundo irracional*, king of the complicity of language and the transgression of frontiers. There, the plot of the tale, the rhythm and musical notation of Mayan songs, offered by the story-teller, conjoin with the visual structures of the codex and the hybridization of the printmaker's images. He introduces us to the mixing of genres and species, transfiguring realities in a social zoology. The typographic signs determine the space, which, wisely, he populates with beings diluted in the metaphors of the writer and prey to cycles of mutations: the effluvia of the woman-snail, with her hair in the wind and her big mouth of flower and song, resolves in her arms that supplicate to the sky; or another, the woman-rider-river, ritual of hygiene and fluid with memory, is inhabited in turn by passers-by and by women occupied in washing clothes....

...the bicolored games of the prints, printed from a double plate, met with a magnificent reception among lovers of art, who, surprised, did not find any equivalent in other modern printmakers.³⁰

Although on the surface *Incidentes melódicos del mundo irracional* seems light-hearted and fanciful, the tale also has political undertones. The dialectic of life and death, oppression and struggle, play out in this narrative in the same way as in the rest of Méndez's work of this time. The suggestion of the World War is not far away. *La Ejecución del Zopilote* (*The Execution of the Vulture*) (fig. 188) is a grim reminder of the

³⁰Reyes Palma, *Leopoldo Méndez*, pp. 34-35.

fate that awaits evil-doers. In the foreground, Don Zopilote hangs from a dead tree in darkness, while in the distance the campesinos are celebrating the dawning of a new day. Though far in the background, this crowd is quite individualized, as in other of Méndez's depictions of masses of people. In between the two scenes fires are burning. Justice has been meted out, but the image also bears resemblance to other Méndez prints. The dead tree also appears in Méndez's cover illustration for the *Siebtte Kreuz*, where it signifies the torture and death meted out by the Nazis. In *La Ejecución del Zopilote* the tree stands for the death of the vulture and destruction of his power as well as for the evils that he embodied. In *La Venganza del Pueblo* Méndez portrayed a gallows on which Yugoslavian villagers executed by the Nazis are hanging. In this case a dead tree supports one end of the gallows and fires burn in the background. The image of hanging was particularly potent in Mexico, as summary executions by hanging were extremely common during the Mexican Revolution. Several well-known images of these events exist, among them, documentary photographs from the Revolution, and most notably a Posada print *Campesino Ahorcado* (*Campesino Hanged*), itself based on a photograph (figs. 189, 190). These images would have been familiar to Méndez.

The final image of *Incidentes Melódicos del Mundo Irracional*, *Se Va la Noche, Entrará el Día* (*The Night Goes Away, the Day Will Come*) (fig. 191), represents the transcendence of life over death. The print depicts Doña Caracol, ascended into the sky, supported by what appear to be the branches of the same dead tree as in *La Ejecución del Zopilote*, now sprouting leaves. Behind her a jocular sun smiles broadly, heralding a new day and a new era.

Méndez's Self-Portrait of 1945, *Un Nuevo Amanecer* and *Cuando Nace un Hombre*

Near the end of World War II, Méndez documented his state of mind in a magnificent self-portrait, *Amenaza Sobre México* (*Menace Over Mexico*), a moody self-

examination that cataloged major themes of his work (fig. 192). The print was commissioned by Carl Schniewind for an exhibition of 77 drawings and 64 prints by Méndez at the Art Institute of Chicago that opened in January 1945.³¹ A detailed wood engraving, the print is also called *Lo Que Puede Venir* (*That Which May Come*) or *Lo Que No Debe Venir* (*That Which Must Not Come*).³² The image is a mental landscape created at a crucial stage in Méndez's personal history. This is also one of only three known self-portraits by Méndez; the other two are his 1947 *Hambre en la Ciudad de México en 1914-1915* (*Hunger in Mexico City in 1914-1915*) (fig. 203), discussed below, and a small linoleum print of Méndez in profile, his *Autoretrato* (*Self-Portrait*) (fig. 193) of 1954. *Amenaza Sobre México* is the first of a small series of Méndez's prints that concern the inner world of the artist in relation to political issues and world history, and that examine the act of creation. Coming at the end of the war years, it is also the last of his anti-Nazi images.

In the bottom third of the print, which is in vertical format, Méndez portrayed himself deep in thought, lying on a portfolio book of Posada prints, the words "Méndez 1945" at the top edge of the page below him. On his left and below him on the page, a skeleton in the style of Posada, possibly symbolic of the artist's own death, points to the artist's hand, which holds an engraving tool, and on his right is another Posada-like figure, an ambiguous image, a frog-like man pierced by angular lines which could be weapons, or may be another printmaking tool. Méndez's body is highly textured; he wears a corduroy shirt with wavy lines, and his legs end in a kind of plait, twisted like a

³¹ As mentioned above, Schniewind had a great interest in Mexican prints. A press release from the Art Institute of Chicago for Méndez's exhibition starts out, "DYNAMIC MEXICAN ARTIST Exhibits Prints and Drawings at the Art Institute," and goes on to claim, in an exoticizing manner, that Méndez was "...A pure-blooded Mexican Indian, his work is deeply rooted in all that is best in Mexico's great cultural heritage. He is an ardent student of ancient Aztec and Mayan art." press release, Art Institute of Chicago, January 1945.

³² Reyes Palma, *Leopoldo Méndez*, p. 175; and Carrillo Azpeitia, *Leopoldo Méndez: Dibujos, grabados, pinturas*, pl. 68. Reyes Palma calls the print *Lo Que Puede Venir* or *Amenaza Sobre México*, while Carrillo Azpeitia gives it the title, *Lo Que No Debe Venir*.

snake's tail. Like many of his prints from this time on, the work is a kind of catalog of printing strokes, demonstrating the virtuosity Méndez had developed in the print medium.

The image of the artist in contemplation, detached from the world but compelled by it, is essentially a Romantic motif.³³ As Reyes Palma points out, "Méndez used to say that the popular artist possessed a "hand guided by emotion...."³⁴ Méndez also described the artistic process:

Creation is a desire inborn in man. The true artist has always been one whose senses were all awake; he creates with his mind, his eyes, his hands -- with his whole being. Because of this, art is a direct expression of the whole man. It is this and nothing less which differentiates an engraving of Posada's from a cut in a scientific textbook.³⁵

In the self-portrait, Méndez portrayed himself fully embedded in the work of art, his whole body stretched out on the oversized pages of Posada's prints. Both the artist and the book are further contained within the larger context of Méndez's own print.

However, *Amenaza Sobre México* is not only a portrait of Méndez, but also a portrayal of Mexico at a precise moment in history, that is, at the end of World War II. Above and behind Méndez and the book upon which he reclines, in the middle ground, appears a wall of nopal cactus, a giant rattle-snake and a cross with an eagle crucified upon it, its wings pinned by crossed daggers. The cross is in the shape of a swastika, formed by scythe blades on its three ends. The main vertical piece of the cross is a dagger sunk into the ground through the cactus. The snake slithers out of the eagle's talons, winds around the cross and faces the background with open jaws, out of which issues a procession on the march toward Mexico City in the distance. The parade continues the

³³The theme, however has its origins long before the Romantic era. One of the most well-known examples is Dürer's *Melancholia*. Méndez, of course, as a printmaker, knew the work of Dürer and may well have been quoting it here.

³⁴Reyes Palma, *Leopoldo Méndez*, p. 21.

³⁵Leopoldo Méndez, in Meyer, *TGP Mexico*, p. xiii.

sinuous line of the serpent. A bishop steps down from the jaws of the serpent, following the long line of people carrying religious banners and goose-stepping soldiers who wave a flag with a skull and crossbones. Two contorted bodies lie on the ground under the marching feet. On its way into the distance the procession passes by two crucified people with Inquisition dunce caps on, being burned at the stake.

Méndez thus cast the Catholic Church, which was very politically conservative in Mexico, as a negative force allied with fascism. The cross is converted into a swastika and the bishop gives his blessing to an army of soldiers and fanatics issuing out of the mouth of the snake. The Inquisition scene along the road to the city brings the past into the present and suggests the long, repressive history of the Church in Mexico, expressing Méndez's own anti-clerical sentiments.

The mid-section of the print is a brilliant deconstruction of a primal Mexican symbol. The eagle on the nopal cactus with a serpent in its talons is the Mexican national emblem, the image that appears in the center of the Mexican flag. This image was central to the Aztec myth of the founding of Tenochtitlán ("the place of the nopal cactus rock"), the city that became Mexico City. According to legend, the Mexica, later called the Aztec, wandered from the north of Mexico into the Valley of Mexico. The Mexica settled in a marshy place where they saw an eagle perched on a cactus with a snake in its claws, and afterward dominated the entire central part of Mexico. The eagle and the jaguar were also the totems of the two Aztec warrior groups, and the eagle symbolized human sacrifice, the word for sacrificed human hearts being *cuauhnochtli* (eagle cactus fruit).³⁶ As in *Incidentes melódicos del mundo irracional*, Méndez transformed pre-Columbian imagery to his own purposes, in this case expressing his profound sense of doubt and concern for the future of his country, the world and his own place in history. His portrayal of the eagle, serpent and cactus recontextualizes the symbol of Mexican national identity

³⁶Miller and Taube, p. 83.

by joining the symbolic triad to the cross and the swastika, and then taking it apart again, depicting the snake let loose to disgorge the evils threatening Mexico. The eagle, a national emblem normally associated with strength, triumphant over the serpent, is here turned into the Aztec symbol of human sacrifice, representing the sacrificial victim, rather than the savior of Mexico.

Méndez also drew upon nineteenth-century sources in this print. The depiction of Mexico City in the distance is a distinct reference to the landscape paintings of the city by José María Velasco (1840-1912), who depicted the Valley of Mexico many times between the 1870s and the 1890s. A comparison of the background of Méndez's print with Velasco's 1877 *View of the Valley of Mexico from the Hill of Santa Isabel* (fig. 194) reveals the similarities in the two compositions. Méndez brought the city nearer to the foreground and set the view at a squared-off horizontal angle, but he included the winding road, the hilly promontory with cactuses and the causeway that leads into the city. Velasco's painting also included an image of a cactus and an eagle, as a symbol of Mexican identity. As art historian Dawn Ades observes, concerning the eagle and the cactus:

...Although of course part of the natural scenery, these recall the myths of the founding of Tenochtitlán....This image, whose tradition goes back to the pre-Hispanic screenfolds, became the emblem of Mexico. The significance of the causeway, too, which connects the winding road to the city and is so important structurally to the picture, would not have been lost on Velasco's audience. It was one of those constructed to link Tenochtitlán from its island to the shores of Lake Texcoco. (Today, Mexico City has spread to cover almost the whole area). ...The painting as a whole, then, relates clearly to the historicist nationalism...whereby Mexico's pre-Spanish past was invoked to strengthen the idea of Mexico as a nation....³⁷

³⁷Ades, p. 106.

Méndez thus embedded himself visually in specifically Mexican cultural traditions and discourses that defined him as a person and as an artist: pre-Columbian iconography in the eagle, the snake and the cactus, conflated with the sign of Mexican nationhood to double as imagery of cultural nationalism: the Colonial, represented by Mexico City; the nineteenth century, represented by the academic paintings of Velasco; and the popular graphic tradition of which Posada was the most significant example. He used the combined composition of all these elements to express the current political situation in Mexico and his relationship to it. This complex self-representation is a brilliant document of the position in which Méndez and all Mexican artists and intellectuals found themselves at the end of the Second World War.

In early 1945 the war was almost over. The Allies invaded Germany in the fall of 1944, the Yalta Convention was convened in February 1945, and Allied victory was more or less assured. In spite of the favorable outcome of the war, the world was in a state of chaos and destruction and the future unknown. Méndez's print expresses his anxiety about the future and reveals his uncertainty about his place in the world and his relationship to history. The image also depicts the dangers which faced Mexico, which had a strong fascist movement throughout the 1930s and '40s. Méndez had expressed his concerns about domestic fascism continuously, from the early 1930s on, including his 1944 lithograph *El Gran Atentado*, which was a direct attack on the fascist-allied party, Partido de Acción Nacional. Méndez himself was trying to find productive ways to effect political change. His membership in the Communist Party was about to end, which was to be a major change for him, and he now allied himself more closely with Vicente Lombardo Toledano and his labor movement politics. In addition to situating Méndez in his own culture and history, the self-portrait poses a question; the artist, his back turned to the events of the present, contemplates the future, wondering what action to take next. Artists, intellectuals and political activists throughout the world were facing the same

dilemma. Jean-Paul Sartre, writing about the post-war era, expressed a widely felt concern for the artist's position in relation to history:

The question which our age puts to us and which remain *our* questions are of another order. How can one make himself a man in, by and for history? Is there a possible synthesis between our unique and irreducible consciousness and our relativity; that is, between a dogmatic humanism and a perspectivism? What is the relationship between morality and politics? How, considering our deeper intentions, are we to take up the objective consequences of our acts? We can rigorously attack these problems in the abstract by philosophical reflection....But from 1940 on, we found ourselves in the midst of a cyclone. If we wished to orient ourselves in it we suddenly found ourselves at grips with a problem of a higher order of complexity....³⁸

Until 1945 Méndez had portrayed historical events from many points of view and in many contexts, but in this image he included himself, and by extension all artists, in the historical process. The role he portrayed for himself was ambiguous and confused, a perfect reflection of the historical moment described by Sartre. The artist must act, but how?

Un Nuevo Amanecer (fig. 195), a print made on an acrylic plate in 1947, presented a partial answer to the question posed by the 1945 self-portrait. In Mexican reproductions of this work the title is *Un Nuevo Amanecer* (*A New Dawn*). However, Czech scholar Norbert Fryd, in his work on Mexican printmaking, *Mexická Grafika*, gave it another, more revealing title: *Hitler je mrtev, Lidice ziji! Drevoryt* (*Hitler is Dead, Lidice Lives Again!*).³⁹ The Czech words explain the print: Lidice was a mining village in Bohemia with about 450 inhabitants. When, during the war, a group of partisans assassinated Reinhard Heidrich, *Gauleiter* of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, the Germans

³⁸Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 217.

³⁹Norbert Fryd, *Mexická Grafika* (Prague: Statni Nakladatelstvi Krasne Literatury, Hudby a. Umeni, 1955), p. 244. Norbert Fryd, at one time cultural attaché to the Czech embassy in Mexico City, wrote an introduction to a catalog of TGP work in 1948 when Méndez was in Prague, in addition to *Mexicansk Grafik*, his comprehensive work on Mexican printmaking and the Taller de Gráfica Popular.

blamed the people of the village of Lidice, because one of the conspirators was from the village. The Germans decided to make an example of Lidice, so they killed the men, sent the women to concentration camps and gave the children of the village to German families to raise. Then they razed Lidice to the ground. After the war Lidice became a symbol of reconstruction, and the site was eventually made into a memorial to the victims.⁴⁰

With his print, Méndez created his own memorial to the people of Lidice, and accordingly used a style that expressed a European feeling and sensibility. The landscape and figures in the print do not *look* Mexican. The skeletons of a horse and a person in the left foreground are real skeletons, not *calaveras*, while a man plowing a field with horses (not the oxen commonly used in Mexico) heads into a sunrise in the right background. The image is full of hope, beautifully balanced, similar in composition to a seventeenth-century Dutch landscape painting. The left-hand side of the print is in shadow, with a suggestion of a passing storm in the sky, and the horizon is high, weeds covering a mound above the skeletons. In contrast, the farmer is lit from behind by the white space left above him, and dynamic layers of fan-like lines above him create a luminous sunrise. The dead are neither buried nor forgotten, but the print suggests that their bones will fertilize the earth and that the work of the living is to begin life again.

A work in a similar spirit, but very Mexican in content, "*Cuando Nace un Hombre Todos los Animales se Alegran*," Cuautla 1945 ("When a Man is Born All the Animals Rejoice," Cuautla 1945) (fig. 196), from 1949, also expresses the idea of rebirth in the aftermath of death, symbolized by the harvest at the year's end (in Mexico the corn is harvested in the winter, after the rainy season of summer and fall). This print was made as a New Year's card, one of the sources of income for the members of the Taller, all of whom made cards for sale each December during the 1940s and '50s. Yampolsky

⁴⁰*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1965 ed., s.v. "Lidice."

remembers seeing Méndez make this print, and she recalls that the idea of the image was that the human birth symbolized the birth of the new year.⁴¹ The print portrays a humble, dilapidated village in the state of Morelos, where a woman has given birth in a small adobe house. The wall of the house is open to view, revealing a kind of nativity scene: an iron bedstead, a mother in bed, a midwife, who hands a child to the mother, and religious pictures on the walls. Outside, in the foreground, are six large, dry cornstalks with ears of dried corn. Crows perch on the stalks, eating the left-over corn. Three large *coscomates*, round thatched granaries traditionally used for storing corn, probably filled with the harvest, frame the village in a triangular composition. In keeping with Méndez's increasing versatility and ability to adapt his style to his purposes, this print is very different from other images by Méndez. The village is filled with odd details, like a painting by Breughel, particularly one of those relating to Netherlandish proverbs. Méndez depicted the house where the birth has taken place with a cut-away device common to portrayals of the stable in Renaissance nativity scenes. At the door of the house stand two mysterious owl-faced figures, dressed in long robes. The taller of the two has a cloth over his arm with a cross on it, though he is wearing a fedora. The smaller figure is dressed like an altar boy. Meanwhile several other peculiar scenes are occurring: a cat with a chicken in its mouth emerges from the window of the upper story of the main house; across the road in a similar house we see a fox jumping out of a window with a bone in its mouth; and around the side of that house, by one of the granaries, a dog dressed as a person with a hat, looking like a caricature of a thief, is filling a bag with corn that pours out of a hole in the *coscomate*, ready to be loaded onto a waiting horse. The whole village is in a state of disrepair, but human efforts to maintain their daily life are also in evidence. A man dressed in the white clothing of a campesino loads recently harvested corn into top of the *coscomate* while the dog steals from below, and another

⁴¹Yampolsky, telephone interview by author, Seattle, Mexico City, 16 July, 1999.

person disappears around a corner carrying a heavy load of the harvested cornstalks. All in all the print is ambiguous. The date in the title, 1945, corresponds to the end of the war, but the work is signed with the artist's initials and the date 1949. The focus of the image is the birth scene, and the message of death and rebirth is carried out in the harvest images. Humans are born as a part of the natural world, and provide the food for the animals around them, but the hopeful symbolism of this portion of the print is contradicted by the oddly desolate quality of the cornstalks and the crows and the surreal images of animals in human guise.

Méndez's work became more complex and varied throughout the 1940s. Increasingly he used continuous narrative and cinematic techniques, as in this work, where he presents a complex of allegorical images and at the same time set the whole image up as though it were a still from a movie. Méndez began to create images for films in 1947, with his prints for the film *Río Escondido*, and his work of the late 1940s is increasingly cinematic in composition and style.

The war years were a time of great productivity for Méndez and the other members of the Taller. Their anti-fascist images were widely disseminated, as single prints and in publications such as *El libro negro del terror nazi*. During this period, Méndez produced powerful images concerning the effects of the War and the uncertainties of the future. His *Amenaza sobre México* was a unique statement of the political, historical and existential position of the concerned artist. As the TGP established its own press under efficient management, the work of Méndez and other members of the TGP diversified and became more sophisticated. The audience for the work of the Taller widened to include museums and private collectors in the United States and Mexico. New members joined and two previous members came back to the TGP, and the workshop entered a stable, productive period in the post-War years.

Chapter Seven: The Taller de Gráfica Popular: The Middle Years

In the years after the Second World War the Taller was an important center for collective work, attracting new members and guest artists from Mexico and abroad. Méndez's leadership gave a clear direction to the group, and members collaborated on a number of portfolios of prints, as well as numerous other graphic projects for leftist organizations. In 1947 La Estampa Mexicana published *TGP México: El Taller de Gráfica Popular: Doce años de obra artística colectiva/TGP Mexico: The Workshop for Popular Graphic Art: A Record of Twelve Years of Collective Work*, a comprehensive illustrated monograph that summed up the past work of the Taller. Méndez created a number of ingenious *calaveras* and began to produce prints for films. In 1946 Méndez was expelled from the Communist Party and in 1947 he joined the Partido Popular (Popular Party, PP), after which the TGP produced graphic work in support of the PP and its labor union affiliates. In the later 1940s the Cold War began to make its effects known and the TGP turned its efforts toward the creation of anti-war images.

Post-War Years, Guest Artists, and Méndez's Leadership of the Taller

After 1945 the Taller entered a very productive phase. La Estampa Mexicana published portfolios and books, as well as prints on good paper and collections of postcards aimed at the foreign market, which consisted both of tourists and visitors to Mexico City and interested individuals, galleries and museums outside of Mexico. Museums in the United States, such as the Art Institute of Chicago and the Metropolitan Museum, had begun to collect work by members of the TGP. In addition, museums and private collectors in Mexico began to acquire the works of the Taller. Méndez arranged with the Mexican government's Instituto de Bellas Artes (Institute of Fine Arts, INBA) to provide the institution with prints from each project he worked on, for a salary, in place

of teaching. He submitted more than 250 prints to the archive over a period of several years.¹ The members of the Taller also continued to donate their work to unions and leftist organizations.² The TGP had begun to assemble an archive of its prints in 1938, and had sold prints, portfolios and illustrated books through La Estampa Mexicana since the early 1940s, but the targeting of private audiences for the Taller's work increased after the war years.

In the late 1940s the Taller attracted many visitors from the United States, Latin America and Europe, some of whom stayed as guest artists for a few weeks or months and others who joined the group permanently. American artists Jim Egleson and Robert Mallary had worked with the TGP on the series of anti-Nazi posters in 1938. They, along with artists Max Kahn and Conny Kahn, Eleanor Coen and Marshal Goodman, also attended a session of summer courses that the TGP put on in 1940, and their connections with the Taller persisted throughout the war years. Mariana Yampolsky, Elizabeth Catlett and Charles White had all come to Mexico to join the TGP, Yampolsky in 1944 and Catlett and White in 1946. White returned to the United States, while Yampolsky and Catlett remained in Mexico and stayed with the Taller. Robert Mallary, Jules Heller, Seymour Kaplan, Stan Kaplan, Max Kahn, and Eleanor Coen were guest artists at the TGP during the late 1940s.

Many of these artists returned to the United States and started collective printmaking workshops in their communities. Gloria Heller, Jules Heller and Arnold Mesches founded the Graphic Arts Workshop in Los Angeles in 1947, producing a filmstrip about the Taller, *Mexico City's Famous Taller de Gráfica Popular*, with 100 reproductions of prints by TGP members.³ This workshop lasted for several years before

¹ Reyes Palma, *Leopoldo Méndez*, p. 164.

² In 1945, for example, when Pablo O'Higgins visited Seattle to paint a mural for the Ship Scalers' Union, he gave the union a collection of TGP prints. At the same time he probably gave a set of the Taller's 1938 anti-Nazi posters to the Seattle Art Museum, which currently owns twelve of the eighteen prints.

³ *Mexico City's Famous Taller de Gráfica Popular*, film strip with text (Los Angeles: Bryant Foundation.

dissolving in the early 1950s. Artist Byron Randall, along with the Artists' Guild of San Francisco and the California Labor School established a short-lived graphic workshop in San Francisco, putting on two exhibitions of work of the Taller. Randall's 1948 brochure for the TGP exhibit (fig. 197), possibly the only print to result from the workshop, demonstrates the clear influence of the Taller, including the use of *calaveras* for political satire. A related collective, the Graphic Workshop of New York, lasted from 1949 to around 1957. The 1950 manifesto of the group (fig. 198), signed by Leonard Baskin, Antonio Frasconi and Stan Kaplan, among others, with its collective, political orientation and the simple woodcut illustration, showed the American artists' ideological and artistic concordance with the ideas of the Taller.⁴ The statement echoes the principles of the TGP, emphasizing the social purpose of art, collective work, mass audience, and cooperation with unions and leftist organizations. The artists are clear about their influences, declaring:

We draw inspiration from the great peoples' artists: Goya, Daumier and Kollwitz, and seek guidance from the two great contemporary collectively organized groups; the Mexican Graphic Workshop and the Chinese People's woodcut artists.⁵

1947).

⁴Information about the American workshops comes from Prignitz-Poda, pp. 123-124; Jules Heller, interview by author, Mexico City, 5 February 1996; and Seymour Kaplan, interview by author, Phoenix, Arizona, 20 March 1999.

⁵*Manifesto of the Graphic Workshop of New York*, reproduced in Prignitz-Poda, p. 122. It is significant that the American artists acknowledged the same graphic influences as did the members of the Taller: Goya, Daumier and Kollwitz. They acknowledged their debt to the Taller, along with the Chinese Woodcut Movement. The Chinese Woodcut Movement came into being in the 1930s, before the Chinese Revolution, and persisted well into the post-Revolutionary period. It was started by Lu Hsun (1881-1936), author of social realist fiction, and the League of Left-wing Artists. The movement promoted the wood block print as a revolutionary medium. Through Lu Hsun's *Morning Flowers of the Garden of Art*, collections of foreign prints published in 1929 and 1930, the Chinese were exposed to prints by Soviet, European, American and Japanese artists, and Lu Hsun and his associates organized workshops to teach wood block printing. The Chinese admired Soviet prints, the work of Frans Masareel, and the prints of German Expressionists, especially those of Kollwitz. The Chinese also drew on their own folk tradition of wood block printing. Interestingly, there is no evidence that the TGP was in contact with the Chinese printmakers at this point. The TGP did have an exhibition in China in 1956, discussed below, and it is possible that the American artists were a point of contact between Mexico and China. Although the printmakers of Mexico and China apparently did not communicate with one another until the mid-1950s, the Chinese, like the Mexicans, used block prints to express revolutionary content, and, like Mexican printmakers, they admired the work of European printmakers. Some of the prints produced by the Chinese were remarkably similar to the work of

The guest artists, along with Mexican members of the TGP, remembered that Méndez, who enjoyed the company of his fellow artists, was also a warm family man devoted to his wife and children. Heller remembers a trip to the Mexican countryside in his old Buick with Méndez, Méndez's wife Andrea and their children, Pablo and Andrea; the occasion was the investing of Méndez's wife as the *comadre* (godmother) of a newborn baby. There Méndez relaxed with campesino friends. The hosts offered them a holiday banquet and *pulque*, the alcoholic drink typical of country people in central Mexico.⁶ Méndez was as comfortable among the campesinos as he was among the intellectuals and artists of Mexico City.

Méndez's son, Pablo Méndez, described his father as loving, attentive parent:

My father taught me about the country. We often went to the countryside. My father didn't know his mother, who was an indigenous woman from near Amecameca [a town in the state of Mexico], but his way of enjoying being where he was like an indigenous person.... Once we went to a demonstration and my father joined in the middle; he wasn't interested in being at the head of the demonstration, and he told me to be careful.... He loved music, Mexican songs, which he sang at parties, and also Beethoven, Hayden, Brahms, Bach.... In his last years he only talked about colloquial things....⁷

Yampolsky described the atmosphere of the TGP when she arrived there as a young artist in 1944. She had heard about the Taller through a talk given by TGP guest

Mexican printmakers. A 1936 woodcut, *Lu Hsun On His Death Bed* (fig. 199), by Huang Xinbo, closely resembles Méndez's 1949 *Silvestre Revueltas Muerto* (fig. 219). The Chinese and Mexican print movements were a part of a world-wide phenomenon of leftist, revolutionary printmaking. The relationships between these movements have not been systematically explored and will be the subject of the author's further study. Politically motivated prints were also created in many countries of Europe; Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, France and Greece all developed the political print during the 1930s and '40s. For further information on the Chinese Woodcut Movement, see Shirley Hsiao-ling Sun, *Modern Chinese Woodcuts* (San Francisco: Chinese Culture Foundation, 1979), and *50 ans de gravures sur bois chinoises 1930-1980* (Paris: Centre de Recherche de l'Université de Paris, 1981).

⁶Jules Heller, "Memories of the Taller de Gráfica Popular," undated letter to Seymour Kaplan on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Taller in 1987.

⁷Pablo Méndez, interview by author, Mexico City, 20 July 1996.

artists Kahn and Coen at the University of Chicago in 1940, and went to Mexico to join the Taller. She recounted her first experiences of the Taller:

When I arrived at the Taller on the Calle Regina I first met José Sánchez [the Taller's printer], who said, 'come in, come in.' My first impression was of a tall blonde man working at a lithographic stone, Pablo O'Higgins. Pablo made no distinction between those he had known for twenty years and those he didn't know. He said, 'come on in,' with a heavy hand on my shoulder. 'What do you do?' 'I draw.' 'Fine, fine, you should become a member of the TGP.'... Then Leopoldo came in. They were two of the handsomest men I had ever seen, Pablo blonde, Leopoldo with floppy dark hair, both the same height. Leopoldo didn't speak English, but was terribly nice, giving a feeling of great friendship and good will.... Pablo was an instant friend, Leopoldo no; he was more intellectual, more reserved, more discerning. The feeling between the two of them was something I have never encountered before or since.... Leopoldo was a combination of depth and uncertainty which helped me overcome my own uncertainties. He was an extremely intelligent, brilliant, self-made man, he suffered poverty.... Leopoldo was a leader, a source of strength, interested in everyone, and gave the same attention to beginners as any one else, with never the least idea that he was superior....⁸

During the late 1940s Méndez was the acknowledged leader of the Taller, and the collective was stable and undivided. In 1947 the members of the Taller worked together on a portfolio called *Estampas de la revolución mexicana*, eighty-five prints on the theme of the Mexican Revolution. The prologue explains the Taller's postwar concerns:

In the summer of 1945, at the end of the Second World War, we the artists of the 'Taller de Gráfica Popular' in Mexico, D. F., met with the object of planning a work program, taking into consideration the repercussions of the new national and international situation in the field of artistic activities.

The war had ended with an overwhelming victor of the democracies over Nazism and Fascism. Mussolini and Hitler were dead, but Nazism and Fascism continued, and are still continuing to lurk in the ideological field.

The World had entered the 'Atomic Era,' thanks to the combined efforts of several nations, but imperialism seized upon the fruits of science for its own profit, thus menacing the peace of all freedomloving (sic) nations, amongst them the Mexican nation.

⁸Yampolsky, interview by author, Mexico City, 11 March 1996.

Seeing the imperialistic danger over Mexico, and the menace of reaction both within and without the country, we decided to help our country actively, by means of graphic art, in the battle against the enemies of the Mexican Revolution and its social conquest....

....And so we present, in this monograph, a series of the most important episodes that have taken place from the time of Porfirio Díaz to the present time. We start our work at the very moment when the imperialistic pressure on our country is most acute, and when it has to face many postwar economic and social problems.⁹

Estampas de la revolución mexicana was a collective effort by the entire membership of the Taller and also included work by some of the guest members who came from the United States and other countries. Jules Heller recalled that the members of the Taller worked on the prints in the evenings, as a group. Photographs of the Revolution and the post-Revolutionary period by Casasola and his photographic team were put on the wall and the Taller invited historians and poets to talk about Mexican history and politics. In this stimulating atmosphere, the artists selected images from the wall and put their initials next to them. They then made preparatory drawings inspired by the photographs and put their work on the floor for other members to critique. Friday evenings were set aside for formal critiques, during which any member could comment on work that was displayed. Because artists and intellectuals in Mexico still held to the idea of the continuing revolution, the prints for *Estampas de la revolución mexicana* actually covered the era from the Revolution up to the 1940s. Sometimes two artists would work on the same print, one drawing the image and the other doing the actual engraving. According to Heller, Méndez and Zalce worked together on a piece from this series, *Plutarco Elías Calles es Deportado por Ordenes del General Lázaro Cárdenas, 1936* (*Plutarco Elías Calles is Deported on the Orders of General Lázaro Cárdenas,*

⁹Taller de Gráfica Popular, prologue, *Estampas de la revolución mexicana* (Mexico City: La Estampa Mexicana, 1947).

1936) (fig. 200). Zalce did the drawing directly on the linoleum, and Méndez did the engraving.¹⁰

Méndez participated in these sessions at the Taller as a teacher and as a member open to criticism. As mentioned above, he was a perfectionist about his own creations. He also worked constantly; Yampolsky remembers that he always had a sketchbook or a printing plate on his lap, and he would draw or engrave even during meetings. In addition he suffered greatly from his habit of procrastination, probably linked to his perfectionism.¹¹ In spite of his enormous productivity, he left several projects unfinished, including a number of prints and murals. In 1963, in a poignant admission, Méndez told Poniatowska:

Always less time remains for me; always the days pass more rapidly; every day fills me with a greater desire to work, to make prints, and to paint....I must do the mural in Chapultepec [a mural at the Anthropology Museum, never completed]! So many things wait for me....And really I so want to do things well!...¹²

Méndez did an ingenious satire for *Estampas de la revolución mexicana*, *El Embajador Lane Wilson "Arregla" el Conflicto* (Ambassador Lane Wilson "Fixes" the Conflict) (fig. 201). In 1913 Henry Lane Wilson, the American ambassador to Mexico, supported General Victoriano Huerta in his coup against the elected government of Mexico, in the course of which Huerta's men murdered President Madero, Vice-President Pino Suárez and the president's brother, Gustavo Madero. Lane Wilson was acting independently of the United States government, influenced by British and American investors in Mexico, who were especially interested in Mexico's petroleum. When President Wilson realized what had happened, he recalled the ambassador from his post.

¹⁰Jules Heller, panel discussion, *The Taller de Gráfica Popular*.

¹¹Yampolsky, interview with the author, Mexico City, 28 July 1996.

¹²Poniatowska, p. 20.

Méndez depicts Lane Wilson manipulating key players in Mexican politics like chess pieces, a look of feigned innocence on his oversized face. He holds a chess piece in the form of Huerta in his right hand; Madero and Zapata, or a Zapatista soldier, also chess pieces, lie tumbled on their sides on the board, pushed over by Lane Wilson's left hand. Two sinister figures whisper in the ambassador's ears, both with dollar signs on their glasses. They appear to be personifications of foreign capital. Méndez's print had a resonance with more recent events. While the fall of Madero was precipitated in part by his resistance to foreign petroleum investors, the nationalization of the oil industry by Cárdenas in 1938 was a point of national pride for all Mexicans. Cárdenas's bold move was seen as redressing the injustice visited on Mexico by British and American investors from the Porfirian era through the administration of Madero and up to 1938. *El Embajador Lane Wilson* is therefore a referent to the whole history of natural resources in Mexico since before the Revolution, and it ties together the Revolution of Madero and the Revolution of Cárdenas. A Posada print, with which Méndez could have been familiar, uses a similar strategy to satirize Porfirio Díaz's relationships with big business (fig. 202). As Méndez did in *El Embajador Lane Wilson*, Posada used illogical differences of scale in this print to imply corruption concealed by denial. The dictator embraces two diminutive, elderly men, who are dressed in children's night shirts. The rhyme under the image says:

Acaso la banca, el rico comercio
 No acuden solícitos a verme hasta aquí?
 Pues bien escuchádme, oíd mis palabras:
 Dejad que los niños se acerquen a mí.

Are you trying to tell me that banking and the rich businessman
 don't bring requests to me even here?
 But listen to me well, listen to my words:
 Let the children get close to me.

Posada introduced a similar elements of pretense and ingenuousness in his depiction of the three figures; the father-figure, who, like Lane Wilson, gazes directly at the viewer, has a look of wide-eyed innocence, while the old men appear deceptively playful and harmless, as well as ridiculous.

Another linoleum print Méndez created for the portfolio, *El Hambre en La Ciudad de México en 1914-1915* (*Hunger in the City of Mexico 1914-1915*) (fig. 203), is an autobiographical work. The print refers to Méndez's childhood experience during the Revolution, when he went with his aunt to scavenge for food. A woman and three ragged children stand waiting as two men butcher an emaciated horse. Behind them in the far distance is the Diana, a golden Neo-Classical statue that is still a signature landmark of Mexico City. Méndez was twelve in 1914, and would therefore have been the young boy in the white shirt, standing next to the woman, his Aunt Manuela, so this work is actually a kind of self-portrait.¹³ Méndez has created a strange illusion: his aunt (and to a lesser extent the children), a live person suffering from extreme hunger, resembles a skeleton, and thus looks like a *calavera*. Méndez portrayed himself as an observer as he did in *Amenaza Sobre México*, emphasizing his role as the witness and portrayer of historical events. Here the child watches the men cut up the horse, storing the scene in his memory to be visually recreated more than thirty years later. The desolation and starvation experienced by civilians during the Mexican Revolution, as depicted in the image, were also familiar and current conditions during and after World War II, when enormous populations struggled to survive.

Estampas de la revolución mexicana was a major project. Meyer described its production and distribution:

...the series of '85 Prints of the Mexican Revolution' was undertaken by a group of sixteen artists and, under the strict supervision of all concerned, was completed

¹³Yampolsky, panel discussion, *The Taller de Gráfica Popular*.

in two years. Of the total edition of 550 portfolios and 46,750 prints, 2/3 were sold within a year. 10% were presented to progressive cultural organizations all over the world -- Capetown, Buenos Aires, Jerusalem, Montreal, Moscow, New York, Lisbon, Berlin, Geneva --. In spite of the differences in quality in the work of the sixteen artists, the collection is held firmly together by a common technique -- 22 x 30 cm, linoleum cut -- and a common patriotic and revolutionary spirit.¹⁴

Around the same time as the TGP made *Estampas de la revolución mexicana*, Méndez created his lithographic poster, *Homenaje a Benito Juárez* (*Homage to Benito Juárez*) (fig. 204). Heller remembered watching Méndez produce the print for a celebration in Juárez's honor: "...it flowed from his brush so freely, one would think that the brush itself contained a memory of the face of Juárez."¹⁵ The image is an icon of the most revered president of Mexico. Méndez's graceful calligraphic portrait of Juárez portrays the essential elements of the face that every Mexican knew from early childhood.

Calaveras and Cinema

In the late 1940s Méndez created a number of humorous *calaveras* with ingenious compositions and incisive wit. Méndez's 1947 *Calaveras Aftosas con Medias Nylon* (*Calaveras with Foot-and-Mouth Disease in Nylon Stockings*) (fig. 205) is a fanciful work about a serious subject, the contamination and adulteration of Klim-brand canned milk. In the foreground a *calavera* cow stands under a stone arch in one of Méndez's typical, dramatic framing devices. She is clothed in dress, shawl and stockings, her hair in two braids, and she shoots her rifle at a little demon *calavera* shaped like cans of milk, asserting the power of the people against corruption. Small, horned grocery boys dash off on bicycles in the background. The clever use of skeleton-demons is a skillful adaptation of Posada's work, which often features these motifs, but not the combination of the two.

¹⁴Hannes Meyer, *El TGP México*, p. xv.

¹⁵Heller, *Codex Méndez*, p. 38.

A *corrido* underneath the image condemns businesses, politicians, bankers and journalists for their role in deceiving the public, and attacks the “gringos” for sending adulterated milk to Mexico during an epidemic of foot-and-mouth disease: “But one day, people, with the rifle of sanitation, all the exploiters will be sent to the bone-pile.” The scene portrayed is cinematic, the impression of hectic motion effected by the postures of the characters and the backward movement of the Klim milkcan-demon, the bicyclists and a “real” cow that is leaping into the open door of a grocery store. The rifle-toting *calavera* cow is dressed like a character in a cowboy movie, and she also resembles La Adelita, a *soldadera* (female soldier or camp follower), a familiar persona in portrayals of the Mexican Revolution.

Another *calavera* indicates Méndez’s interest in new media, *Ora Sí Ya No Hay Tortillas, Pero ... ¿Qué Tal Televisión?* (Hey, If There Aren’t Any More Tortillas ... How About Television?) (fig. 206), from 1949. The image presents societal changes of the post-war period, when television was becoming more widespread, and is a remarkably early recognition of the power of the new medium. The print portrays an urban scene, with a group of skeletons looking at a television in a shop window. The television screen is filled with *calavera* gentlemen toasting with wine glasses, eating steaks and wearing suits and tuxedos. Their opulent life style is symbolic of the new post-war consumerism promoted and promised by television. The skeletons looking at the screen seem to be seeing television for the first time, and Méndez depicted them as impoverished members of the urban working class, in contrast to the affluent, grinning characters on the television screen. A skeleton couple fills the foreground. The husband wears the overalls and cap of a laborer, and the *calavera* woman and the *calavera* baby in her shawl are thin and gaunt, even for skeletons. In depicting the woman and infant as emaciated from hunger, Méndez mixed motifs in an overlapping of signification. The trope of the hungry skeleton is something like death dying, or thirst thirsting. As in *El Hambre en La Ciudad*

de México en 1914-1915, the skeleton motif is a shifting sign. In *El Hambre en La Ciudad de México* Méndez's portrayed his Aunt Manuela as practically a skeleton, resembling therefore a *calavera*, while here, in a curious inversion of the metaphor, the *calavera* woman resembles a starving, skeletal woman. Behind the couple a *calavera* man in a shabby overcoat and a fedora, looks at the television with fascination, while in front of him two boy *calaveras* gape open-mouthed at the screen, the smaller of the two pointing directly at the plate of food depicted on the television. Above the image, framed by two skulls, are the words "Calaveras Televisiosas, todo por un hoyito" ("Calaveras depraved by Television, everything for a little hole [opening]"). "Televisiosas" is a clever neologism, a play on the word "viciosa," -- "vicious, depraved, defective." The print is perhaps a conscious reference to a very similar work, a 1937 painting, *Summer* (fig. 207), by Antonio Ruíz. In the painting a couple dressed almost identically to Méndez skeleton couple, the man in overalls, the woman in dress and shawl, stand transfixed in front of a shop window with a display of mannequins wearing bathing suits in a tropical beach setting. The postures of amazed longing are almost identical in the two pieces. Both refer to consumerism and the gap between rich and poor, both depict the ironies of capitalism expressed through the image of the workers looking at the unavailable products of their labor, and both contrast the simple, traditional lives of the Mexican worker with the excesses of modern bourgeois leisure.

Méndez's *calaveras* refer to film and television, *Calaveras Aftosas Con Medias Nylon* replicating the set and action of a Western movie and *Calaveras Televisiosas* addressing the phenomenon of a new medium directly. In a reversal of the model set forth by Marshall McLuhan, in which newer media base their formats on older media, especially at first, these prints use an old medium to represent new ones: the innovations of film and television are captured in handmade prints, a less technologically advanced medium.

Méndez was undoubtedly thinking in filmic terms at this time, as 1947 was the year that he began to produce prints to be used as backgrounds for the beginning and ending credits for films. The period of the 1940s and early 1950s is considered the Golden Age of Mexican cinema, and hundreds of high-quality films were produced during this time, many of which won international acclaim. At the request of his friend, cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa, Méndez worked on seven films by the famed director Emilio Fernández: *Río Escondido* (1947), *La Perla* (1947), *Pueblerina* (1948), *Un Día de Vida* (1950), *La Rosa Blanca (Momentos de la Vida de José Martí)* (1953), *La Rebelión de los Colgados* (1954) and *Un Dorado de Pancho Villa* (1966). Méndez also produced images for three films directed by Roberto Gavaldón, with cinematography by Figueroa: *El Rebozo de Soledad* (1952), *Macario* (1959) and *La Rosa Blanca* (1960, different from *La Rosa Blanca* of 1953).¹⁶ Figueroa gave Méndez stills from the films as he photographed them, and Méndez used these images as a basis for the prints. According to Figueroa, Méndez wanted the prints to be like moving murals for mass audiences in movie theaters, reaching more people than the murals in public buildings.¹⁷ The images were also sold as individual prints and are among Méndez's finest work. Because the images accompanied films, they are in series, and reflect the films' narrative content. Méndez also varied the style of his film prints according to each film. Figueroa and Méndez collaborated on the films as equals; Figueroa remembered that Méndez's skill and certitude was such that he never had to alter the finished prints once Méndez completed them.¹⁸ He described Méndez's work in admiring terms:

For me, learning that which was Mexican was connected with the intensity that Leopoldo Méndez had in his prints and that was very much in accordance with the intensity that I have....

¹⁶Reyes Palma, *Leopoldo Méndez*, p. 167.

¹⁷Gabriel Figueroa, interview by author, Mexico City, 10 February 1996, tape recording.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

The collaboration with Leopoldo Méndez in the cinema was as follows: we would give him a film that we had just finished, he would interpret the theme and make eight or ten prints that we could use as the background for the titles. Then we would photograph them and put them on the screen. First just the print, without any letters on top, so that the audience could admire it at the size of the screen. It was a totally new possibility, seeing a print enlarged to this size, it was a real mural. Afterward we would put the titles on top but continue to show the print until it changed to another. The prints that appeared in *Río Escondido*, *Pueblerina* and *La Rosa Blanca* were the strongest and most beautiful that he did.¹⁹

On the screen Méndez's prints appear in quick succession as the backgrounds to the credits, often with dramatic music and voice-over narration, providing an almost subliminal preview of the action to come at the beginning credits and a synopsis of the film during the ending credits.

Méndez's prints for *Río Escondido* are stark parallels to the cinematographic images of the film. *Río Escondido* tells the story of an idealistic rural schoolmistress who comes to a remote village only to find that a brutal *cacique* (political boss) is terrorizing the community, denying the people of the village their basic rights, symbolized by his closing of the school and his control of the town water supply. He and his henchmen kill anyone who objects to their domination. The schoolteacher encourages the townspeople to resist, and she herself shoots the *cacique* when he attempts to rape her. The movie ends with an armed uprising, the formerly hopeless peasants united in armed struggle against their oppressors. The movie explores several themes in Mexican history and politics: the oppression of the landless and the need for agrarian reform; the importance of education, including both basic literacy and political education; access to health care, as symbolized by clean water; and the necessity of armed revolution. These are important themes in Mexican history in particular, stemming from the Mexican Revolution, and in Latin American history in general, more recently expressed in the revolutionary uprisings in

¹⁹Gabriel Figueroa, "El arte de Gabriel Figueroa," *Artes de México*, no. 2 (Winter 1988): p. 51.

Cuba, Nicaragua and El Salvador, after which revolutionary governments emphasized land redistribution, literacy programs and health care reforms. They are the same issues addressed by the Mayan people of Chiapas, Mexico, in the uprising that began in January 1994 and which continues today. Méndez's linoleum prints recapitulate key scenes in the film, without duplicating them exactly. *Las Antorchas (The Torches)* (fig. 208) represents the final moments of the action, when the peasants finally take up arms against the *cacique* and his men. It is a night scene, and the film shows a long shot of the peasants converging in the intersection of two dirt streets, carrying torches. Méndez's print is a close-up view from a side angle, with one of the townspeople in the foreground. Like *La Venganza de los Pueblos*, the image recalls the Kollwitz 1903 print, *Peasant Revolt*, also a portrayal of an armed uprising. Méndez used the same sweeping diagonal movement of bodies and upraised arms to express unity of purpose and determination. The religious procession, a ubiquitous sight in Mexico even today, is here converted to the drama of political awakening.

Of the prints Méndez made for *Un Día de Vida (One Day of Life)* of 1950, the most compelling are *Fusilamiento (Execution)* and *Fusilado (Executed)* (figs. 209, 210). *Fusilamiento* portrays a young peasant facing a firing squad. Méndez placed the young man at the very edge of the pictorial space, like a film close-up, creating a dramatic portrait with thickly incised, swirling lines that define the young man's face and upper body. Four truncated rifles jut out around the edge of the image and point at the man's heart; the cut-off composition is a dramatic device that puts the viewer in the place of the executioner. In the background a group of soldiers and peasants line a wall, staring at the execution scene. As usual in Méndez's depictions of large groups of people, the members of the crowd are highly individualized. Several other images resonate with this one: Goya's *Executions of the Second of May* and *Executions of the Third of May*, photographs of the execution of the Emperor Maximilian, and Manet's painting, *The Execution of*

Maximilian. There were also many Casasola photographs and Posada prints of executions during the Mexican Revolution. However, Méndez made his image more immediate than any of these by the extreme close-up and the positioning of the viewer behind the rifles. The upraised chin and eyes of the young man, his determined expression and the low angle from which he is seen contribute to the heroic effect of the image. The extraordinarily active lines on his body and face extend into the area around him and create a shimmering effect that suggests a kind of spiritual transcendence. An area of white around his head further heightens the impression of martyrdom already communicated by these lines, his exposed chest and his vulnerability in the face of certain death. *Fusilado*, the image that corresponds to the moment after the young campesino's death, is a variation on the religious imagery in *Fusilamiento*. The two women mourn over the body, one of them prostrate with grief, while the other stands enveloped in the white light of the incised lines, holding out her arms in a ceremonial gesture. Here the lines are like upward-moving, dancing flames, similar to the flames in *La Venganza del Pueblo*.

Whereas Méndez used strong, fluid lines for the images in *Río Escondido* and *Un Día de Vida*, he altered his graphic style for the 1953 *La Rosa Blanca (Momentos de la Vida de José Martí)* (*The White Rose (Moments in the Life of José Martí)*), demonstrating his versatility and imagination. The linoleum prints for this film reconstruct scenes from the travels of the nineteenth-century Cuban revolutionary writer, José Martí (1853-1895), and Méndez employed a graphic style that corresponded to the era in which Martí lived. The prints are among the most detailed that Méndez ever produced, with delicate, fine lines and accurate perspective. *Catedral de Habana (Havana Cathedral)*, *Puente de Brooklyn (Brooklyn Bridge)*, *Vista de Zaragoza (View of Zaragoza)* and *Verdi* (figs. 211-214) reveal Méndez's skill in delineating architectural form and texture as well as his ability to create atmospheric effects.

In Méndez's later work he increasingly included references to the art of the past, drawing on fine art as well as vernacular art traditions. In *Catedral de Habana* the Cathedral and surrounding buildings are rendered with great precision -- the artist seemed to delight in the profusion of Baroque decoration, each brick and stone depicted in such a way as to emphasize the strong shadows produced by the tropical sunlight. The minute, shimmering strokes used for the sky and ground suggest the tropical heat of Havana. A well-dressed woman wearing a crinoline, with a small child by her side, walks across the plaza in one direction, while a heavily laden, barefoot worker trudges away from them. A horse and carriage cross the plaza in the same direction as the woman and child, and a woman in dark clothing heads toward the entrance of the cathedral. A few other shadowy figures stand in the side entrance of the church and two others in the shadow of the carriage. With these few small figures Méndez created an almost subliminal narration of the social realities of the Cuba in the days of Martí, suggesting the injustices that Martí struggled to overcome. The beauty of the ornate cathedral is a backdrop for the subtle depiction of social stratification and the importance of religion and wealth.

Méndez's *Brooklyn Bridge* is a detailed portrayal of the great bridge when it was still new. With the exception of several extended trips to Venezuela and Europe, Martí lived in New York from 1880 until his death in 1895. The Brooklyn Bridge, which was finished in 1883, had just been built at the time depicted in the print. The bridge is a heroic presence; the span stretches to the far shore in an intricate web of rigging. The grandeur of the bridge is emphasized by the view from below. Méndez used curved, interlocking strokes for the sky, suggesting the tremendous energy that surrounded the Brooklyn Bridge, referring back perhaps to the Stridentist delight in modern technology and urban scenes. Sailing ships and steam boats, representing old and new technologies together, further define the moment in time and signify the unceasing activity of the modern city, as well as the importance of New York as a seaport with world-wide

connections. It was from this harbor that Martí set forth by ship on his many journeys, including his last, fatal voyage to Cuba, where he died in a futile attempt to liberate his homeland from Spain.

The *Vista de Zaragoza* is another work filled with architectural pattern and texture. Méndez outlined each red tile of the roofs of the Spanish city, and he used his printmaker's skill to create a dramatic interplay of light and shadow. Two figures overlook the leaning church tower that rises into a stormy sky. The impression of wind and weather in this print comes from different types of stroke than the ones used in the prints described above, rolling forms that alternate with elongated wedges, swirling around the tower, while in the foreground the balcony is saturated with sunlight that again casts dark shadows and highlights the architectonic environment of brick, stucco and tile.

Méndez's masterful portrait of the Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi, also created for *La Rosa Blanca*, is one of his strongest works, demonstrating the artist's familiarity with European culture and history. Verdi's face is beautifully rendered in fine detail, while behind him scenes from the Italian struggle for independence play out dramatically in a mountainous landscape. The revolutionary leader, Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882), mounted on a white horse, leads his men into action in the highlands of Sicily. This print is multi-layered composition. Martí's admiration of the Italian revolutionary and of the music of Verdi overlap with Méndez's own revolutionary ideals, while the portrayal of Verdi, like Méndez's own self-portrait, *Amenaza Sobre México*, expresses the situation of the artist in relation to political action. Like Méndez, Verdi sits in contemplation. The scenes playing out behind him are both historical and imaginary, a kind of vision the composer has as he sits down to write his patriotic operas. In the case of Verdi, the perception of his surroundings is auditory as well as visual. The sounds of battle, implied by the activity erupting behind the composer, are funneled into his ear, almost literally, by

the wedge-shaped composition of the struggling revolutionary forces.²⁰ For the artist, contemplation and observation are necessary to the act of creation, but for a revolutionary artist, the dilemma of inaction is particularly acute, producing a moment of tension that can only be relieved by action.

Around the same time Méndez began creating work for films, he also started to experiment with large-scale prints and engraved surfaces. He used two techniques: photographic enlargement for temporary installations, and engraving on large sheets of plastic. He made a graphic enlargement for a 1947 UNESCO conference in Mexico City, a mural-like enlargement on the theme of Posada in 1956, a ten-meter square lucite mural for the national automobile company, Automex, in 1953, and a photographically enlarged backdrop for a celebration of the life of Garibaldi in 1957 at the Palacio de Bellas Artes. His monumental engraving on lucite for the Nacional Financiera bank, executed in 1949 with the assistance of Alberto Beltrán, was an experiment in the play of light on plastic. *Jugando Con Luces* (*Playing with Lights*) (fig. 215), one of the few of Méndez's works that might be termed socialist realist in style, measured twenty-four meters square, and portrayed a steel fabricator at work in a factory. The image heroicizes the worker in a cinematic scene of modern industry, a continuous narrative of the dynamic forces of production expressed through the processes that bring the metal to the worker in the foreground. In the center background trains bring in the raw materials that go into the burners and smelters behind. In the left foreground the machinery of the factory in motion displays the power of the ore transformed into gears, wheels and giant augers. Méndez portrayed the worker as a powerful social agent; he is a modern Vulcan, hammer and tongs in hand, a serious artisan working his craft in an ideal modern society.

²⁰I am grateful to Professor Martha Kingsbury for pointing out the aural aspects of this image in a conversation in Seattle, 15 June 1999.

The Partido Popular and CTAL

During the war Méndez had focused on European events. After the war he maintained an international perspective but often returned to Mexican themes. He continued to be very active artistically and politically. Around 1946 Méndez was dismissed from the Communist Party. Although the exact reasons are not known, the Trotsky affair and his growing allegiance to Lombardo Toledano probably weakened Méndez's loyalty to the Party. He was expelled during one of many purges that took place during the 1940s, along with a faction headed by the labor leader Enrique Ramírez y Ramírez and the writer José Revueltas.²¹ After his expulsion from the Party Méndez joined the Grupo Insurgente José Carlos Mariátegui, headed by Ramírez y Ramírez and Vicente Lombardo Toledano, founder of the Universidad Obrera, labor leader and politician.²² Lombardo's non-Communist Marxist politics supported the idea of a continuing revolution in Mexico, in which workers would ally with the progressive forces of the government. The contradictory policies of Lombardo Toledano, who was against the Mexican Communist Party but in favor of the Soviet Union, allowed him to support both Joseph Stalin and President Miguel Alemán, a moderate politician in Mexico's ruling party.

In January 1947, Lombardo Toledano organized "La Mesa Redonda de los Marxistas Mexicanos" ("Round Table of Mexican Marxists"), calling for the establishment of the Partido Popular, which would be a democratic, anti-imperialist independent party with a strong labor union orientation. The CTM (Confederación de Trabajadores de México, Confederation of Mexican Workers) expressed its support for

²¹ Zalce, interview by author, Morelia, Mexico, 12 July 1996, tape recording, and Alberto Beltrán, interview by author, Mexico City, 10 March 1996. According to Zalce and Beltrán, the PCM expelled Ramírez y Ramírez and Revueltas, and most of the TGP who were members of the PP, in 1946, but neither of them knew the specific reasons.

²² Lombardo Toledano had founded the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (Confederation of Mexican Workers, CTM) in 1936, and the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina (Latin American Federation of Labor, CTAL) in 1937, under the government of Lázaro Cárdenas.

the Partido Popular during its Fourth National Congress in March 1947, although the union, which was dominated by adherents to the PRI, the ruling party of Mexico, did not actually participate in the formation of the party.²³ Méndez and O'Higgins participated in the round table and subsequent discussions. Diego Rivera, formerly alienated from most of the left in Mexico due to his friendship with Trotsky, was one of the founders of the PP, having renounced Trotskyism around the time of Trotsky's assassination in 1940.²⁴ Méndez, along with other members of the Taller, including Alberto Beltrán and Angel Bracho, joined Partido Popular when it was established in 1947.

The Taller worked on a cloth backdrop for first Assembly of the PP in November of 1947, painting giant portraits of four important historical figures in Mexico: Hidalgo, Morelos, Juárez and Madero. American scholar and artist Gloria Heller, who was then a guest of the TGP with her husband Jules Heller, described the manner of working collaboratively on this project:

After a number of discussions six members offered to execute the work. These members met regularly to firm up the concept, for which each one presented a preliminary sketch. The sketches were analyzed, criticized and combined in such a way that finally they presented a definitive sketch, first to the general meeting of the Taller and then to the Partido Popular to get their opinion, after which they began their work on the mural.²⁵

A photograph of the giant backdrop (fig. 216) reveals the surreal aspect of great political spectacles. The event looks like the large-scale political rallies in Germany or Stalinist

²³Rosendo Bolívar Meza, "La Mesa Redonda de los Marxistas Mexicanos: El Partido Popular y el Partido Popular Socialista," *Estudios de historia moderna y contemporánea de México* XVI (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma de México, 1993), p. 205.

²⁴Prignitz-Poda, p. 138. As Prignitz-Poda points out, the divisions between the Mexican Communist Party (PCM) and the PP were peculiar given that both parties were oriented toward the Soviet Union. Internal partisan politics were also complicated. Their disagreements were sometimes based on obscure, personal relationships. For example, Rivera left the PP in 1949 because he thought that Lombardo Toledano did not run the organization well and that he traveled abroad too frequently.

²⁵Prignitz-Poda, p. 123.

Russia. The enormous faces, icons of the Mexican Wars of Independence and the Mexican Revolution, symbolize the concept of the continuing revolution with their monumental presence here, looming over the massed audience below like psychic projections of the historical background of the party itself.

Following their initial support for the PP, some members of the Taller continued to produce images in support of Lombardo Toledano's labor union projects. Historian Barry Carr explains Lombardo Toledano's international role:

During World War II and the period from 1945 to 1948, the CTAL, under Lombardo's energetic direction, extended the Cardenista project of revolutionary nationalism throughout the Caribbean and Central and South America. The promotion of antifascist national fronts in Latin America during the war years closely followed the strategy of the ailing Comintern and the Soviet Union and succeeded in building an extensive network of progressive labor movements throughout Latin America on the basis of the Popular Front's principles. While Lombardo was increasingly marginalized within the CTM, the dean of Mexican Marxism became the most successful hemispheric labor figure in the Americas.²⁶

In 1948 the Taller put out a portfolio of ten prints on the occasion of the tenth anniversary celebrations of the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina (Latin American Federation of Labor, CTAL) in conjunction with the Third General Congress of the union. The Taller hosted a reception for the Latin American delegates and also presented an exhibition of TGP work.²⁷ Méndez created the linoleum print, *Asesinato de Jesús R. Menéndez* (*Murder of Jesús R. Menéndez*) (fig. 217), in memory of a slain Cuban labor leader, for the portfolio. The image draws on European and Mexican traditions of funerary portraits. The martyred activist lies in a shroud, with a standard of the Confederación de Trabajadores Cubanos (Confederation of Cuban Workers, CTC) behind him as though on a wall, and a mourning woman in a shawl embraces him in a kind of

²⁶*Encyclopedia of Mexico*, s.v., Barry Carr, "Vicente Lombardo Toledano."

²⁷Prignitz-Poda, p. 128

Pietà. A closer look reveals that the banner is actually the first of a multitude of similar banners, suggestive of a labor demonstration and implying the continuing political work of Menéndez's comrades. Foliage placed behind the dead man's head suggests a cluster of laurel leaves, symbolizing honor. The composition and feeling of the image strongly resemble Kollwitz's woodcut *Memorial for Karl Liebknecht* of 1919 (fig. 218), with the same eulogistic theme of grief for a slain hero. In Kollwitz's print the mourning figure is a man rather than a woman, and the corpse is depicted in a very stiff and hieratic manner. But like Kollwitz, Méndez used light and dark areas to highlight Menéndez's body and its surroundings, and the sorrow expressed by the figure bending and embracing the dead man are very similar to Kollwitz's print.

In 1949 Méndez made another memorial print, *Silvestre Revueltas Muerto* (*Silvestre Revueltas Dead*) (fig. 219), one of eleven images produced by the TGP for the book *Silvestre Revueltas, genio atormentado*, by Guillermo Contreras, about the Mexican composer and leftist activist.²⁸ Revueltas (1899-1940) was the brother of the writer and activist José Revueltas (1914-1976) and the painter Fermín Revueltas (1902-1935). All the brothers were close associates of Méndez.²⁹ Again, as in the Kollwitz print and *Asesinato de Jesús Menéndez*, a shrouded figure lies in the foreground attended by mourners. Méndez indicated the intimacy of his relationship with the composer with the extremely close-up, detailed rendering of Revueltas's face and chest. He also did not include any references to Revueltas's political life or his musical career. In the background, above and behind the dead composer, three seated women in shawls bend their heads in a poignant display of grief. In this work Méndez may have been referring again to Goitia's painting, *Tata Jesu Cristo* (fig. 76), as he also may have in his print

²⁸Guillermo Contreras, *Silvestre Revueltas: Genio atormentado* Mexico City: n.p., 1964. I have not been able to ascertain if the book was published in an earlier edition.

²⁹Fermín was a comrade of Méndez in the Open Air Painting Schools, the Stridentist Movement and LEAR. Méndez had also been on close terms with José, and with Silvestre from the 1920s until his death in 1940. Méndez worked in LEAR with all three brothers.

Lamentación (fig. 75), in 1930. Méndez probably drew on a Posada print as well when creating both *Asesinato de Jesús Menéndez* and *Silvestre Revueltas Muerto*. Posada's *Llegada del Cadáver del C. General Manuel Gonzáles* (*The Arrival of the Body of General Manuel González*) (fig. 220) also portrays the subject in the near foreground, and the face and chest of the dead man are the focus of the image, as they are in both of Méndez's images. Although *Asesinato de Jesús Menéndez* and *Silvestre Revueltas Muerto* both belong to the tradition of honoring the death of a hero, the portrait of the Cuban labor leader is somewhat generic and weighted with political symbolism, as befits the function of the image. *Silvestre Revueltas Muerto*, a life-like portrait, is a personal homage to a friend. But Méndez, in keeping with his usual pattern of constructing images that portray performative events, depicts public displays of feeling in both prints.

Méndez's enthusiastic support for the Partido Popular and the international labor connection afforded by CTAL reinforced Méndez's already strong affiliations with working class causes. Méndez eventually ran for office in Mexico City in 1955, as a Partido Popular candidate for municipal deputy. A typewritten letter from Méndez to the local electorate, addressed to "Compatriota" ("Compatriot"), revealed his desire for democratic reform in Mexico in a continuation of the policies of Cárdenas. He expressed his support for the economic autonomy of Mexico and the rights of the workers to organize and strike. He had apparently decided that at this point he could be more effective as a local politician than as an artist:

I have told you sincerely and loyally that I am not a professional politician, I am an artist of the people concerned with improving the quality of my works day by day so that they might be ever more useful for the unique object of my inspiration, the anonymous Mexican people, who fight every day for the material and spiritual necessities of life. Now I am taking a break in my activities as a professional artist, with the belief that I can be useful to Mexico...in the people's struggle for national independence, democracy and peace.³⁰

³⁰Leopoldo Méndez, undated letter, Leopoldo Méndez Archives.

This appeal to his fellow citizens articulates Méndez's life-long self-identification as an artist in service of the people, and expresses his major political hopes at this time. However, Méndez's campaign for public office was unsuccessful, and he returned to his life as an activist artist in the Taller.

TGP Mexico

In 1949 the Taller issued a bilingual, illustrated survey of its past work, *TGP México: El Taller de Gráfica Popular: Doce años de obra artística colectiva*/TGP *Mexico: The Workshop for Popular Graphic Art: a Record of Twelve Years of Collective Work*. In the prologue, Méndez articulated his political-aesthetic stand:

In this edition you will find the TGP as it really is. There is no retouching or make-up. There are no reflectors to spotlight any detail that appears positive or to shadow a mistake. This is an attempt to present the faithful image of the TGP on its twelfth anniversary....Above all it will serve as an example to plastic artists who are interested in joining together so as to work progressively and collectively. It will help those artists who form groups that they can't give life to in spite of all good intentions.

Another purpose of this album is to show the working class that art and artists are not strangers to it; that some artists faithfully fight beside them, faithful also to the traditions of the Mexican plastic realism, trying always to put their creative capacity at the service of the people, conscious that thus they raise the desire of the development of art to the heat and height of the daily battle that the workers fight for their well-being and progress. Thus, the workers can also realize that art is a career and a social activity that is useful, and not the idle pastime that the bourgeois philosophers pretend it is. The artists and the workers will understand that the artist can be a useful collaborator with whom it can acquire an effective, solid and permanent collaboration....³¹

Here Méndez expresses his *obrerismo* more emphatically than ever before, as he stresses his belief in the importance of the unmediated work of art and its connection to the interests of the working class. He is especially insistent on the usefulness of art both in

³¹ Leopoldo Méndez, in Meyer, *TGP México*, p. v.

providing images for the causes of the working class and as an activity for workers.

Whereas in 1926 Méndez had described in vague, romantic terms the “new aesthetic, one of protest, full of popular longings, and that lives in the full multitude of rebellion, is strong and great and captures us with the emotion of battle,” in 1949, after years of involvement with labor union and proletarian issues, Méndez concentrated more directly on the social functions of art for the benefit of the working class in particular.

TGP México served as a comprehensive overview of the work of the Taller to date, and illustrated examples of all the major graphic projects of the group, along with important documents, such as the “Declaration of Principles” of the Taller and the prologue of the portfolio *Estampas de la revolución mexicana*. In addition to the work of members of the collective, *TGP México* presented the work of the many guest artists who worked with the Taller over the years, including a number of North and South American, European, and Mexican artists who were not members. The Artistas-Huéspedes (Guest Artists) section of the book reproduced prints by Hannes Meyer, his wife Lena Bergner, the Czech artist Koloman Sokol, the Uruguayan Galo Galecio, Americans Jules Heller, Charles White and Robert Mallery, among others, and Mexican artists Siqueiros, Gabriel Fernández Ledesma, Carlos Mérida and Isabel Villaseñor, all of whom were well-known artists.

Méndez, the de facto leader of the Taller, and Meyer, who was again the head of La Estampa Mexicana and the TGP’s business manager, were responsible for the financial success of the TGP. They also initiated and maintained the TGP’s numerous contacts with artists throughout the world. At the same time, Meyer admitted in his introduction to *TGP México* that the Taller had trouble meeting its own expectations. In a partial answer to the issues brought up by Siqueiros over the years, Meyer presented the situation of the TGP in the late 1940s, explaining the dilemmas facing the members of the collective and describing their solutions:

...With frankness we must confess in this self-criticism, that we still have not succeeded in launching the work of the TGP in truly popular editions at truly low prices. All the projects of inexpensive distribution have come up against an empty cash box. Moreover, there is a lack of a good means of distribution. The 'Calaveras,' the 'Flyers,' and 'Primers' are an exception. One step further toward the popularization of the work of the TGP are the 24,000 illustrated post cards in four collections of twelve cards that were published in 1948.

A successful distribution resulted from the interesting effort by the government newspaper *El Nacional*, which published a print from *85 Estampas de la Revolución Mexicana* each day for three months....

The dream of an offset press has long since gone up in smoke. Our practical experience teaches us the advantages of cooperating with a well-equipped press, with the prints produced under the supervision of the artist or the publishing house [La Estampa Mexicana]. The magnificent work of Juan de la Cabada, *Incidentes Melódicos del Mundo Irracional*, illustrated with the beautiful prints of Leopoldo Méndez, was printed this way, under the personal supervision of the artist, in the Talleres Gráficos de la Nación....³²

Although Meyer stressed the shortcomings of the TGP's distribution system, his analysis may be an indication of the extremely high political standards the Taller set for itself, as he does cite several projects that were widely distributed to the public, and the TGP always gave its work to leftist causes as the occasion demanded.

The Cold War, Anti-War Activities, and International Connections

Meyer stated some other major preoccupations of the TGP in the post-war period in the introduction of *TGP México*:

The question of the TGP's future is in practice identical with the Mexican nation and of the revolutionary forces within. An art that is true to the life of the people is inseparably bound to their destinies. Mexico, along with the other Latin American countries is exposed to economic and cultural invasion from their 'good neighbor' to the north. 80% of Mexico's trade is with the United States.

This is a threat to the Mexican national economy on all fronts, to industry, education and art -- to the entire achievements of the Mexican Revolution, in short. The very existence of the type of life-reflecting art that has found a home in

³²Meyer, *TGP México*, pp. xvi-xviii. I have translated the Spanish text here, as the Spanish is more specific than the English translation.

the TGP, and is one of the people's weapons, is perforce also in danger. What use can the world's imperialism have for an art that would inspect Wall Street's evil exports -- race-hatred and anti-Semitism, ignorance and bigotry, war-mongering and the atom bomb? The amount of gold and surrealist painting that has turned up in fashionable 42nd Street, in New York, 'displaced' by the war, is surely significant. Hailed as the sum and end-all of Art, mystical and abstract form has been used to camouflage social injustice and existentialism has been made to furnish the artificial fog. The TGP has nonetheless seen through them, and has drawn what it sees.³³

Meyer's analysis of the world situation and the TGP's place in it, especially in regard to the United States, shows his awareness of the dilemmas that the TGP faced in the late 1940s. The Cold War had become an obvious factor in global politics, and the arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union was of great concern. In addition, the swing to the right in the United States, with its virulent anti-Communism, the imposition of the loyalty oath on academics by the House UnAmerican Activities Committee and the rise of Joseph McCarthy, all had a dampening effect on the free exchange of art and ideas between Mexico and the United States. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, guest artists from the United States came to the Taller in great numbers, but by the mid-fifties these visitors were less frequent. The United States Department of State listed the TGP as a Communist front organization in 1951 and members of the Taller were forbidden to travel to the United States.³⁴

At the end of the 1940s the members of the Taller began to focus on the issue of world peace, articulating their concerns in anti-American terms in a new Cold War discourse. In 1949 the TGP made a filmstrip, *¿Quiénes Quieren la Guerra -- Quiénes Quieren la Paz? (Who Wants War, Who Wants Peace?)*, with a text in Spanish and English. Méndez contributed four prints to the filmstrip: a linoleum print of a mother grieving over a casket, a print satirizing capitalist exploitation of factory workers, his

³³Ibid., p. xxiii.

³⁴Prignitz-Poda, p. 142.

Asesinato de Jesús Menéndez and *Un Nuevo Amanecer*, which was used as the concluding print of the film strip. The script presents the issues in stark, oppositional terms, a doctrinaire response to the conflicts between the United States and the Soviet Union in the Cold War era. The text describes the devastation of the post-World War II period around the world, criticizes the imperialist, capitalist exploitation of Latin America and other Third-World countries, attacks the aggression of Western nations against the Eastern bloc countries, pleads for the liberation of colonized peoples, and praises a wildly diverse assortment of public figures seen to be in favor of peace, such as African-American singer-activist Paul Robeson, the American Socialist Henry Wallace, the Soviet composer Dmitri Shostakovitch, Lázaro Cárdenas and Lombardo Toledano. Ignoring the issue of nuclear weapons, the script expresses the nearly hysterical fear of the United States that leftists in Mexico felt during the Cold War:

The people want to live. The working class and the campesinos and all of humanity do not want to occupy the tombs of war. Plans for war will be destroyed and replaced by plans for peace, life, liberty and democracy....A third world war would destroy democracy and our constitution. The imperialists would control the unions, democratic political parties, work contracts and the prices of basic necessities...Our factories, fields and our own homes would be invaded and occupied by armed forces of the United States...Our youth, brothers and children would be enlisted as cannon fodder to fight under the orders of the Yankee helmets....Our Mexican earth would be totally occupied by the army of the United States....Our raw materials and our natural resources would be expropriated to be converted into products of war by the United States....We must impress on the those who provoke war the fact that the people of America have marched to war for the last time. The masses of the world put their forces against the unleashing of a new war. Peace -- only peace will give us a life worthy of living. Let us leave death in its tomb when we ended the last war gloriously. We do not want a step backward. We want Peace -- Peace -- and Peace!³⁵

³⁵Taller de Gráfica Popular, *¿Quiénes quieren la guerra -- Quiénes quieren la paz? (Who Wants War, Who Wants Peace?)* (Mexico City: Taller de Gráfica Popular, 1949). The script I have is in Spanish.

With connections to the United States restricted, the TGP strengthened its ties with Latin America, China, Western Europe and the Eastern Bloc countries during the late 1940s and the 1950s.

The Taller held a series of exhibitions in the Soviet Union in the 1950s and early 1960s. In 1955 a major exhibition in Moscow received several of the same criticisms as had the TGP's exhibit in 1940, although the overall reception of the work was somewhat more positive. The Soviet critics once again pointed out the lack of socialist realist qualities, saying the work "fails to portray the happiness of the people and popular customs and to make color prints." They also criticized the TGP's "use of allegories," and qualities of "primitivism" in the work.³⁶

In 1956 the Taller sent a major exhibition of its work to China with TGP member, Ignacio Aguirre. The exhibit was well received, and a book of the Taller's prints was published in China the following year. *El Arte Mexicano* is an extensive survey of the TGP's work, with eighty-seven prints illustrated.³⁷ Aguirre also gave a course on printmaking to Chinese artists. Aguirre remembered the positive response of the Chinese, some of whom copied prints from the exhibition by hand.³⁸ The work of the Chinese printmakers had paralleled that of the Taller for many years, and their commonalties of purpose and style would have been obvious to the Chinese audience. In conjunction with the exhibition in China, the TGP published writings of Mao, probably his "Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art."³⁹

In 1947 Méndez traveled to Eastern Europe as a delegate to Congress of Intellectuals for Peace in Wroclaw, Poland, where he met fellow-Communist Pablo Picasso, the continued through Poland, Czechoslovakia, Germany, France, Italy and

³⁶Prignitz-Poda, p. 161.

³⁷Ignacio Aguirre and Hsiang-Sheng Feng, *El arte mexicano* (Beijing: 1957), text in Chinese.

³⁸Prignitz-Poda, p. 166.

³⁹Ibid. While Prignitz-Poda does not specify which writings the TGP published, a copy of this work in English, and excerpts translated into Spanish, can be found in the Leopoldo Méndez Archives.

England. During the trip he made many contacts among printmakers, other artists and intellectuals, and established exchanges between Eastern Europe and Mexico. One of the people Méndez met through his connections with Czech artists and intellectuals, Czech scholar Norbert Fryd, visited Mexico and published a comprehensive study of Mexican graphic art, *Mexická Grafika*, in 1955, in Czech.⁴⁰ In 1950, the TGP had a major exhibit in Stockholm and held a traveling exhibition in Poland, both of which were highly acclaimed. In return, Polish artists sent an exhibition of Polish prints and artists' books to Mexico in 1952, called *El grabado y el libro polaco* (*Polish Printmaking and the Polish Book*).⁴¹ In the same year the TGP had an exhibit in Bolivia, organized by the Bolivian artist Roberto Berdecio, who had been a guest artist at the Taller in the 1940s. The occasion of the Bolivian exhibit was the nationalization of the tin mining industry there. The exhibit was well received, with over 35,000 people in attendance.⁴²

In spite of the Cold War the second half of the 1940s were a positive, successful time for the Taller de Gráfica Popular. The collective method worked at its best during this period, and Méndez's leadership was accepted and welcome. Guest artists from many countries, along with enthusiastic members of the TGP, created an international atmosphere of cooperation and productivity. The TGP formed new ties with leftist activists in many countries and contributed its work to national and international leftist organizations, with a strong focus on world peace. Méndez developed a variety of visual

⁴⁰Fryd, *Mexická Grafika*. Fryd's book also presented an extensive overview of Mexican art from pre-Columbian art to twentieth-century art.

⁴¹Leopoldo Méndez, *El grabado y el libro polaco*, exhibition catalogue (Mexico City: n.p., 1952).

⁴²Prignitz-Poda, p. 153.

strategies for creating increasingly varied and complex images in a broad range of styles that were adapted to the subject matter of his prints.

Chapter Eight: The Taller de Gráfica Popular: The Final Years

In contrast to the relative calm of the late 1940s, the 1950s were a time of upheaval in the Taller and in Méndez's personal life. Political differences among the members of the Taller caused significant and harmful discord, centering around controversies between Communists and members of the Partido Popular within the TGP. Siqueiros renewed his attacks on what he saw as the Taller's "archaic techniques" and directed criticism toward Méndez as the leader of the TGP. In spite of the tensions resulting from these conflicts, the TGP continued to be very productive, creating a number of powerful anti-war images. Méndez made some of his finest prints during this period, especially his *Making of Tortillas* and *Homage to Posada*, large-scale, detailed works in triptych format that demonstrated his complete mastery of the graphic medium.

Internal Dissension, Siqueiros Revisited, Méndez's Peace Prize, Anti-War Images

In 1950 the TGP began to experience the same kinds of interpersonal difficulties and bitter dissension as they had in 1940. Newer members of the Taller, young artists who belonged to the Silvestre Revueltas cell of the Communist Party, most notably Arturo García Bustos, Francisco Mora and Elizabeth Catlett, began to agitate for a greater role for the Party in internal TGP affairs.¹ The disappearance of a typewriter and a watch from the Taller provoked an incident in which accusations of theft were directed at the young Communists. An investigation led by Méndez proved inconclusive, but the Taller received several chastising letters from the Silvestre Revueltas Cell on behalf of its members in the TGP. The letters demanded an apology from the TGP, which it did not give, leaving the situation unresolved.²

¹ Arturo García Bustos, interview by author, Mexico City, 25 June 1996, tape recording.

² Silvestre Revueltas Cell to Taller de Gráfica Popular, April 21, 1950, May 26, 1950, February 22, 1950. Also, minutes of a session of the TGP, April 21, 1950, Leopoldo Méndez Archives.

In 1952 Siqueiros renewed his criticisms of the TGP, in stronger language than before, attacking the members of the Taller in an article in the first issue of his magazine, *Arte Público*. Prignitz-Poda summarized the contents of Siqueiros's argument:

He called the TGP the 'Taller Católico de Gráfica Popular,' and accused them of inundating the country with 'religious prints,' and of adhering rigidly to archaic techniques, and of inventing 'puerile excuses' for not acquiring an offset press. He added that the TGP had lost all of its genuinely collective character, because of a certain quantity of intellectual *caciquismo* [bossism], a phrase that alluded to Méndez, without acknowledging that it could well be applied to himself. And, to sustain his attack, he cited as informants Bracho, Aguirre and Arenal, that is to say the faction that attributed an anti-democratic posture to Méndez and attacked him for his adherence to traditional methods.³

In December of 1952 Méndez went to Aguascalientes to start work on a mural celebrating the life and work of Posada. Disappointingly, Méndez was not able to complete this project -- his patron, the governor of the state, died in office while Méndez was beginning the work, and the new governor did not fund the project. While he was gone the members of the Taller held elections, installing Bracho as director of the TGP. In the past, this post had usually gone to Méndez by default, but now the position was used by the faction opposed to Méndez to take control of the Taller.⁴

The situation within the TGP became more difficult in 1953. In 1952 Méndez, as a member of the Comité por la Paz Mexicano (Mexican Committee for Peace) won the International Peace Prize of the World Peace Council for his anti-war artistic work. He received an award of 6,000 pesos in Vienna at the World Congress of Peace in 1953. Although the prize was officially given to Méndez, he himself requested that the name of the Taller be added to his award. This award brought further internal conflicts to the TGP.

³Prignitz-Poda, p. 157.

⁴Yampolsky, telephone interview by author, 16 July 1999. According to Yampolsky, Méndez had the job thrust upon him numerous times over the years, and did it because none of the other members wanted to take the responsibility. Méndez was considered the leader of the Taller in spirit from 1937 until 1952.

Many of the members believed that Méndez should share the money with the entire Taller. Even though Méndez considered it a personal award, in the interests of harmony he decided to divide the money with the other members.⁵ But dissension concerning the award and the continuing militancy of some of the younger, Communist members, along with animosity between the Partido Popular and the Communist Party, slowly eroded the unity of the TGP during the 1950s.

In spite of the tensions in the collective, Méndez produced a number of memorable anti-war images in the 1950s. One of the few images in which Méndez addressed issues of racism, his optimistic portrait, *Paul Robeson* (fig. 221), combines the twin themes of peace and liberation. Robeson holds a dove in his out-stretched hand, while surrounding his head are the two halves of a broken chain. This print is one of Méndez's most positive images, even religious in its apotheosis of Robeson, portrayed here as a Christ-like figure, the dove of peace in his hand like the Holy Spirit. This print belonged to a series made by the TGP to celebrate African-American heroes and heroines, initiated by African-American artist Elizabeth Catlett in 1953-1954.⁶ Catlett organized the project, educated the members of the Taller about racial conditions in the United States, and arranged for the publication of the series, called *Against Discrimination in the U.S.*, in Paul Robeson's newspaper, *Freedom*. Catlett recalled the Taller's participation in the project:

I brought a proposal to the Taller to do a series, because Pancho was doing inserts for a magazine called *El Maestro Mexicano*, and 80,000 copies went out every month to rural schools in Mexico. He was doing an insert every month of Mexican heroes, like Juárez, and Hidalgo, and Zapata and so forth...Somebody brought a photograph from Oaxaca...of this little country school with one table and all these little raggedy kids sitting around it, and the only adornments in the whole room are all of Pancho's prints hanging around the walls.

⁵Pablo Méndez, interview by author, Mexico City, 20 July 1996.

⁶Catlett is African-American in ancestry and background, but became a Mexican citizen in the 1960s.

So I thought it would be nice if we would do a series on African American heroes....I did all the research, I got photographs of all the people, from Crispus Attucks to Paul Robeson. And there were women. I wrote a little something on each one...Everyone was so enthusiastic, everybody wanted to do Frederic Douglass, and then everybody wanted to do Harriet Tubman, and I said no, I'm doing Harriet Tubman. And they did [the series], and some other artists who were there also...John Wilson, Margaret Burroughs, everybody did something that they wanted to do. And I took the whole thing to New York.⁷

Catlett's report describes the cooperative working methods of the TGP, the use to which the prints were put (in this case in rural schools) and the presence of American guest artists, providing a picture of the ambiance of the Taller in the early 1950s, a working atmosphere in many respects unchanged from the Taller's earlier years, in spite of the growing divisions and power struggles among the members. The strengths and weaknesses of the TGP at this time were described eloquently by a guest artist from the United States, Morton Dimondstein:

I worked with the Taller for one year during 1951. My simplistic image of the Taller was shattered in the reality of a group of powerful personalities, with widely different levels of talent, each with different commitment and political philosophy. This merged in dialogued conflict, members pulling apart and rejoining, some leaving. However, producing a fusion of powerful readable images and social purpose. It reflected Mexico's history, influenced that history, the art production becoming its own history. The future will see it as a major movement of the arts in the XX century.⁸

In addition to their promotion of the generalized idea of world peace, Méndez and the members of the TGP began to focus on the threat of nuclear war later in the 1950s, as

⁷Elizabeth Catlett, interview with Melanie Herzog, 15 June 1991, in Melanie Herzog, "Elizabeth Catlett: an American Artist in Mexico" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1997), p. 138-139. Unfortunately, according to Herzog, the series did not appear in *Freedom*, because the editors did not like O'Higgins's image of Frederick Douglass. The other members of the TGP did not want to take O'Higgins's work out of the set, and the series remained unpublished, though it was "exhibited around the world."

⁸Morton Dimondstein, undated letter sent to Seymour Kaplan on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Taller in 1987.

the Cold War increasingly propelled the United States and the Soviet Union into the nuclear arms race. A 1958 print by Mariana Yampolsky, *La Guerra Nuclear Transformaría al Mundo en un Campo Desolado* (*Nuclear War Would Transform the World Into a Desolate Landscape*) (fig. 222), portrays the force of a nuclear blast in an abstract composition unusual for the members of the Taller. Méndez's color woodcut, *Es Peor Sobrevivir* (*It Is Worse To Survive*) (fig. 223), also from 1958, portrays the horrors of the aftermath of nuclear war. Reminiscent of Goya's *Disasters of War*, the print depicts a terrifying scene. A charred figure, arms cut off above the elbows, stands on a field of the dead bodies of women, men and children. The ground they lie on is red, as is the background, with its billowing clouds and waves of heat that surround the living human being. This print is a departure for Méndez. As Yampolsky did in her anti-war image, Méndez employed a greater degree of abstraction than usual to portray this difficult subject. *Es Peor Sobrevivir* expresses the extreme pessimism and terror generated by the possibility, and even imminence, of nuclear holocaust. The print compares to his anti-Nazi prints in its intense depiction of suffering.

The 1950s were a difficult time for Méndez. He ran his unsuccessful political campaign for the Partido Popular, after which he was expelled from the PP, he divorced his wife, Andrea Hernández, and began to live with another woman, Micaela Medel, and he watched the TGP gradually fall apart. The Taller did not come to a sudden end as an organization. Rather, Méndez, O'Higgins and the younger members loyal to Méndez, Beltrán, Yampolsky, Fanny Rabel and Andrea Gómez, gradually withdrew from the group. People stopped going to meetings and eventually, according to Yampolsky, they "just gave up."⁹ By the end of the 1950s Méndez, along with his supporters, stopped working at the TGP or attending meetings.

⁹Yampolsky, interview by author, Mexico City, 28 July 1996.

According to Pablo Méndez, during the 1950s his father was depressed and anxious, both because of his family troubles and the problems with the TGP. Pablo Méndez described his father's feelings of guilt over leaving his wife and children and his distress about personal attacks from hostile members of the Taller. Méndez was also under financial pressure because he now had to support two households.¹⁰ Mariana Yampolsky also remembered Méndez's state of mind during these years:

In the last years of his life the doubts increased, until he doubted his own work; but in spite of this however, not for an instant did he start to doubt the creative richness of his people and the rewards of his struggle.¹¹

The Making of Tortillas and Homage to Posada

While Méndez was active in politics and in organizing exhibitions for the Taller in Mexico and abroad in this period, he did not produce as many prints as he had in previous years. However, Méndez created some of his best works in the 1950s. *The Making of Tortillas* of 1954 (fig. 224) is a large-scale wood engraving that Méndez created as the model for a mural designed to fit into a stairwell.¹² The print is a kind of triptych, as are several other large prints in horizontal format that Méndez made after this one. In this case the image was intended to be transferred to the mural format and to fit the three walls of the planned architectural setting. *The Making of Tortillas* is also one of the few prints in which Méndez used pre-Columbian imagery. On the right-hand side of the image an Indian woman sits by an open fire, making tortillas by hand, in an open-air

¹⁰Pablo Méndez, interview by author, Mexico City, 5 June 1996.

¹¹Yampolsky, "Fragmentos de entrevistas," in Centro de Estudios Económicos y Sociales del Tercer Mundo, *Leopoldo Méndez: Artista de un pueblo en lucha* (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1981), p. 33.

¹²Seymour Kaplan, interview by author, Phoenix, Arizona, 20 March 1999. Seymour Kaplan, guest artist at the TGP in 1949 and 1954, bought this print from Méndez in 1954, at which time Méndez told him about the mural. Apparently this mural project, like so many planned by Méndez, was never realized. Kaplan did not know where the mural was going to be located. The image reproduced here is a photograph of Kaplan's personal copy of the print, which I have not seen reproduced elsewhere.

structure that is half house, half ruin. A crumbling masonry wall separates the woman from the rest of the scene; on the wall are Aztec glyphs for corn and tortillas. In the mid-section of the print is a landscape with a pyramid in the middle ground and a grain elevator in the distance. A man with a loaded burro moves downward at a diagonal toward the pyramid and the grain elevator, presumably delivering his harvest. On the left side is a corn processing plant, in a rural setting, with women workers at the assembly line. This print accords with Méndez's opinion that Mexico needed to modernize (despite resisting the offset press), while at the same time it shows sympathy for the traditional way of life represented by the Indian woman making handmade tortillas. It is one of the few landscape images Méndez made, and even so, it includes a grain elevator and a large factory. The juxtaposition of the ancient and modern worlds, ruins and modern buildings is oddly ambiguous in its effect. The smoke that billows up from the ancient cooking fire joins the smoke from the factory chimneys at the top of the image. It is as though Méndez was not truly convinced about the value of the industrialization of the Mexican countryside, although in theory, the clean, efficient factory workers are enjoying a better life than the indigenous woman at her humble hearth. The scenes on the right with the burro, the pyramid and the woman making tortillas all seem to belong to the past, and are balanced both in form and content against the images of modern Mexico on the left. However, as Méndez knew, the scenes on the right were also contemporary and reflected social reality. In all probability the workers in the factory returned home to scenes such as the one on the right, and the corn they made into flour at work was still brought to the modern factory carried on the backs of burros.

Méndez's *Homenaje a Posada (Homage to Posada)* (fig. 225) of 1956, in the same horizontal, three-part format as *The Making of Tortillas*, is as much a summation of Méndez's artistic and political career as his 1945 self-portrait, *Amenaza Sobre México*. Though ostensibly a realistic portrayal of the artist at work, the print contains allegorical

elements and is actually an imaginative reconstruction of Posada's working environment before the Mexican Revolution. Posada sits at his work table, holding his engraving tool like a dagger. He looks thoughtfully out his window at a scene of a violent street demonstration, in which mounted policemen attack white-clothed peasants. The revolutionary theorists Ricardo Flores Magón and Lázaro Gutiérrez de Lara stand to one side of Posada. They were among the first to resist the Díaz regime, beginning at the turn of the century. The workshop's type-setter looks on from the background. The calendar on the wall gives the date, 1902, the year that Flores Magón briefly worked as the editor of the satirical newspaper, *El Hijo del Ahuizote*, a paper which Posada illustrated with his caricatures, so the room is most likely the workshop of the newspaper. Flores Magón holds a document which declaims, "There will be no draft, the pretext with which the present-day *caciques* [political bosses] drag from their homes those whom they hate." The incident outside the window, therefore, is a scene of forced conscription of workers and campesinos. The Díaz regime drafted the poor into the army and the *rurales* (the rural militias) as a method of social control. Like Russia, which almost had a revolution in 1905, Mexico had a long period of social unrest before the actual Revolution erupted in 1910. Though there is no evidence that this exact moment ever occurred, Méndez, in this image, situated Posada directly into the heart of the revolutionary tradition of Mexico, as a precursor of the Revolution, along with Flores Magón and Gutiérrez de Lara, two of the most important revolutionary thinkers of the time. Méndez furthermore portrayed Posada as reacting to immediate events just as Méndez and the members of the TGP did, depicting Posada's instantaneous response in the most literal fashion, as Posada is shown engraving on the plate what he saw outside the window as it was happening. American artist Lucienne Bloch, who worked on the Rockefeller Center Murals with Rivera in 1933, reported a similar scene, which she recorded in her diary at the time:

Diego was now working on the extreme left side of the main wall, painting a group of young people listening to a professor... The students would gaze through a huge lens, and toward the center they would, according to the sketch, see a scene of unemployment. But on the day Diego was to begin the scene, a violent demonstration took place on Wall Street in desperate response to the conditions of the Depression; Ben Shahn brought in newspaper photos showing the commotion, and Diego painted the scene directly from those clippings, with the police on their horses holding clubs, ready to strike.¹³

Here Bloch describes Rivera's interest in portraying topical political subject matter, in this case an event quite similar to the one outside Posada's workshop in Méndez's print. In the cases of Posada and Rivera, the artists were illustrating history in the making, focusing on the violent repression of political demonstrations. Méndez's portrayal of this theme in *Homage to Posada* signifies that he considered the engaged, instantaneous response to injustice and oppression to be one of the most important aspects of Posada's work and, by extension, his own.

However, Méndez's *Homage to Posada*, like his self-portrait of 1945, *Amenaza Sobre México* and his 1953 *Verdi*, also examines the existential role of the politically concerned artist. Posada, while cast as a revolutionary artist, is portrayed in a moment of contemplation, working on a print of the violence outside. Posada has stopped working to observe and absorb. And the street scene outside was literally a creation of Posada's imagination, as Méndez quoted it directly from one of Posada's own prints of a political demonstration, *Continuación de las Manifestaciones Anti-Reeleccionistas* (*Continuation of the Anti-Reelection Demonstrations*) (fig. 226), of 1892. Posada also treated the theme of the press gang in his 1903 print, *Casa de Enganches* (*Recruitment Office*) (fig. 227), which depicts the forced conscription of men and women to work on plantations during the Díaz regime. In addition to the direct quote of the subject matter of the Posada print, Méndez's print, a brilliant piece of printmaking as such, is practically a catalogue

¹³Lucienne Bloch, "On Location with Diego Rivera," *Art in America* (February 1986): p. 115.

raisonné of the graphic lines used by both Posada and Méndez, an homage to Posada both in form and content. It is fitting that Méndez produced this masterpiece after a lifetime of dedication to graphic art, and it is proof and acknowledgment of his debt to Posada.

Another work, Alfredo Zalce's 1948 *Posada* (fig. 228), is an amusing caricature that emphasizes a different side of the artist and acknowledges the major inheritors of Posada's legacy. Posada is depicted as a sturdy man, much like the Posada in Méndez's print. Like Méndez's Posada, he sits at a table, holding an engraving tool, at work on a new image. However, he is casually tossing off a completed image, and Zalce has surrounded him with his admirers, all depicted as *calaveras*. At his left is Méndez himself, dressed in his workers' overalls, a tool in his own skeletal hand. Orozco, recognizable by his thick glasses and broad face, peers over Posada's shoulder; Rivera's enormous head and big grin appear on the right of Posada; and Dr. Atl, his skull a tall dome, wearing hiking boots (a reference to his vocation as a vulcanologist), gazes at the viewer from the corner of the table by Méndez. With the exception of Siqueiros himself, the artists Zalce depicted are the same as those Siqueiros included in his mural at the Polyforum Cultural Siqueiros, in which he honored Méndez as a primary figure in Mexican art. A *calavera* newsboy, quoted from one of Posada's images, *Rebumbio de Calaveras* (*Calaveras in a Hubbub*) (fig. 229), grabs a print to distribute. Sometimes published as the image described above, the print actually has two parts. The newsboy provides a transition to the left side of the entire print (fig. 230). The print in Posada's hand is one of a series that are cast into the wind, over the people of Mexico City, who are divided into two groups: the bourgeois, who run in fear from the images, and the poor, who welcome them eagerly. In this work Zalce focused on the accepted view of Posada as a producer of art for the people, and emphasized his great influence on Mexican artists. In contrast to Zalce's print, Méndez's far more serious portrayal of Posada incorporates questions Méndez also raised in *Amenaza Sobre México* and *Verdi* concerning the

creative inner life of the politically motivated artist. It is significant that the three prints in which Méndez addressed this compelling theme are among his most complex and imaginative images. *Homage to Posada* was in a way the culmination of Méndez's years of work as a graphic artist. He would honor Posada once again, when he was no longer working primarily a printmaker, by producing his *José Guadalupe Posada: Ilustrador de la vida mexicana*, a comprehensive illustrated survey of Posada's work, discussed below.¹⁴

The 1950s ended with the dissolution of the original Taller. Political and interpersonal conflicts had made it impossible for the members to work together as unified group. Méndez was saddened and disillusioned by the process, although he had created several compelling images during the 1950s, including his masterful *Homage to Posada*. With the TGP as he had known it gone, this period was the end of Méndez's collective work in graphic art. At this time, although he continued to make prints, Méndez began to produce and publish books, establishing a publishing house in Mexico City.

¹⁴*José Guadalupe Posada: Ilustrador de la vida mexicana.*

Chapter Nine: Méndez and Publishing, Last Images

In the late 1950s Méndez continued to be active politically, but in the twists and turns of Mexican partisan politics he was expelled from the Partido Popular in 1958, as he had been from the Communist Party twelve years earlier. Although still socially concerned, Méndez seemed to turn toward the center of the political spectrum; in 1957 he had supported the PRI's candidate for president, Adolfo López Mateos, who later became the primary patron for the Fondo Editorial de la Plástica Mexicana, the publishing house Méndez started in 1958. Méndez accordingly did not join with other artists and intellectuals in a boycott of the government-sponsored Biennial to protest the jailing of Siqueiros in 1960. Méndez's participation in the exhibit ended a tentative attempt at reconciliation with the then current members of the TGP. During the last years of his life Méndez produced a series of magnificent illustrated books about Mexican art, including definitive studies of Mexican muralism, the prints of Posada and Mexican folk art. In the 1960s Méndez did not produce many prints, but he created dramatic images for two films, *La Rosa Blanca* and *El Dorado de Pancho Villa*.

Méndez Leaves the Partido Popular, The Final Break with the TGP

In 1958, Lombardo Toledano and Enrique Ramírez y Ramírez, the two leaders of the Partido Popular, had a falling out, and Méndez, Beltrán, and other members of the TGP were expelled from the PP, along with Ramírez y Ramírez.¹ Beltrán explained the event as follows:

¹ Beltrán, interview by author, Mexico City, 10 March 1996, tape recording. Beltrán believes that Méndez began to disapprove of the influence of the Soviet Union in the politics of the PP at the time of his expulsion. This may have coincided with Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party in 1956. While I found nothing by Méndez on the subject, José Chávez Morado, a TGP artist who belonged to the Communist Party for many years, summed up his experiences and opinions in 1989, "Recapitulating, I entered in Stalinism and I continued in Stalinism. I observed the departures, the expulsions, the persecutions, the breakings up, and I separated from that to the point that I can not consider myself, even remotely, a communist man. I was there because I thought it was my place, with the intent to

There came a struggle with the Partido Popular. The old attitude of Leopoldo that politics should be more nationalistic, now clashed with Lombardo so they expelled him from the party. I think that there needed to be a more nationalistic politics and that Lombardo practically lived in the Soviet Union at that time, going and coming, and I think that he lost the vision of the Mexican reality, he said that the world was going to be socialist, that at the end of the Second World War half the world had become socialist, there was the Soviet Union, the socialist countries of Europe, and China... and on the other hand the Americans said they had to have the atomic bomb as a deterrent, so they had the bomb as a pressure. So Leopoldo started working very hard for peace and the Taller helped in this campaign for peace....I think that Méndez came out the winner, because he no longer saw things in such a partisan political way, but he did not stop being a man with a critical judgment of the injustice in society, but now he was not in favor of a group. This reflected in the Taller; at that time the criticism began because a lot of new people had come in who were in the Communist Party, and they wanted to take power in the Taller and get rid of Méndez.²

In 1957, in what would appear to be a shift toward the center politically for Méndez, he had supported the presidential campaign of López Mateos, the progressive candidate of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI). Although during his term of office López Mateos instituted a number of important social reforms, and maintained a friendly relationship with Castro and the new revolutionary government of Cuba, in the first months of his presidency his government used violent means to suppress a strike by the railroad workers union. Siqueiros responded with numerous attacks on the government in the first year of the López Mateos presidency, and the president had Siqueiros jailed for sedition in 1960. Méndez's personal reaction to the imprisonment of Siqueiros has not been ascertained, but Méndez was perhaps not overly inclined toward sympathy in light of his own, unwarranted arrest in 1940, during the

change....Nonetheless, Stalinism permeated my generation and I resisted believing in what in truth happened in the USSR....Many of us were fooled, and I was no exception. I only reacted when the revelations of the Twentieth Congress of the PCUS [Partido Comunista del Unión Soviética, Communist Party of the Soviet Union] happened in 1956." Chavez Morado, pp. 27-28.

²Beltrán, interview by author, Mexico City, 10 March 1996, tape recording. While Beltrán's account lacks a linear chronology, his basic narrative explains the course of events for Méndez during the 1950s in general terms.

Trotsky affair, and the unrelenting criticisms Siqueiros had been leveling at him and at the TGP. In addition, by 1960, the year of Siqueiros's arrest, López Mateos was the major patron for Méndez's last important project, discussed below. Méndez's public actions certainly demonstrated a remarkable lack of solidarity with Siqueiros, whose imprisonment evoked national and international protests, including boycotts of the government-sponsored 1960 Second Bienal Interamericano de Pintura y Grabado (Second Biennial of Interamerican Painting and Printmaking), by many Mexican artists and intellectuals. The TGP was divided about the boycott. At the time the members of the TGP were attempting a reconciliation after several years of conflict, and were working on an enlarged edition of *Estampas de la revolución mexicana*, renamed *450 años de lucha: Homenaje al pueblo de México (450 Years of Struggle: Homage to the People of Mexico)*, with funding from the Mexican government. Most of the members of the Taller joined the boycott of the Biennial, but Méndez, O'Higgins, Beltrán and Yampolsky chose to enter their work in the exhibition, ending all semblance of cooperation with the TGP. The artists who participated in the exhibition defended their stand, and according to Prignitz-Poda:

They emphasized that Siqueiros had been detained as an artist, and not due to his political position, and that they were going to remain completely on the sidelines...Méndez's faction reproached the majority for their inability to cooperate and for the poor quality of their artistic work; they denounced their attempt to 'reheat the old soup,' through the project of the second edition of the album and accused them of trying to hide their failings behind old glories. They also denounced their economic dependence on the Chamber of Deputies, in frank contradiction with their radical political postures.

The accused, in turn, reproached Méndez's faction for their rebellion against the resolutions of the majority, their obstinate position and their lack of a political position.

At the end of 1960, the excision of Méndez's group decided the destiny of the TGP. The years of world recognition, honors and prizes in Mexico and abroad, had passed.³

³Prignitz-Poda, p. 181.

While he had really left the Taller several years before, the incident of the Biennial was the end of Méndez's involvement in the Taller, an unfortunate finale to the years of commitment and dedication he had invested in the organization.

The Fondo Editorial de la Plástica Mexicana and Fine Art Books

In 1958, as the Taller was no longer a viable center of collective work for Méndez, he formulated the idea of starting the Fondo Editorial de la Plástica Mexicana, a publishing house that would produce fine art books, just as he had thought up the Taller de Gráfica Popular when LEAR was falling apart in 1937. Méndez gathered together a group of collaborators for his project: the poet Carlos Pellicer, Manuel Alvarez Bravo, writer and politician Rafael Carrillo Azpeitia, and the banker Ricardo J. Zevada. Méndez enlisted the support and financial backing of President Adolfo López Mateos, who had been an official of the Talleres Gráficos de la Nación in 1937 when Méndez and O'Higgins painted their murals there. Gabriel Figueroa, a relative of López Mateos, related the story of how Méndez obtained government funding for the Fondo Editorial:

Leopoldo came to me and said: 'Gabriel, I need a big favor, I want to present a project to the President, to make a book of the Mexican Revolution and its murals; very well made, well printed, so that the murals will become known throughout the world. Talk to him for me.' So that day I went to see López Mateos and said to him: 'I have a message from Leopoldo Méndez, to find out if you are interested in celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Mexican Revolution with a book that would have all the Mexican mural painting in it.' Then López Mateos, after thinking for a few seconds, answered: 'Have Leopoldo Méndez come to my house tomorrow morning.' ... when we saw López Mateos he said: 'I received your message, how good that you came. I agree, only, since you are an artist, a great artist, you will be responsible for the quality of the book, the contents, and everything.' 'Of course, Mr. President.' 'I will give you everything that you need, collaborators to write texts, everything, but in order that it will be printed well, it will be necessary to send for samples from around the world so that the reproductions will be faithful to Mexican painting.'⁴

⁴Gabriel Figueroa, in *Leopoldo Méndez: Artista de un pueblo en lucha* (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1981), pp. 43-44.

Méndez chose a Dutch printing house to produce the book, *La pintura mural de la revolución mexicana* (*Mural Painting of the Mexican Revolution*).⁵ The Netherlands was chosen because of the high quality of reproductions guaranteed, and Méndez spent almost a year there in 1959, with Alvarez Bravo and the Taller's printer, José Sánchez, making sure the book would be produced as intended. His careful supervision of the production resulted in a magnificent volume, the only large-scale, comprehensive, illustrated book of the Mexican murals ever to be published, printed in Spanish and English editions. 10,000 copies were printed. Méndez was proud of the high quality of *La pintura mural de la revolución mexicana*, and he was pleased that the book would increase the audience for Mexican art in other countries. He explained how the book was received:

As in Europe they do not know Mexican art, it is difficult for them to understand it, that is it is hard for the European to enter into Mexican art, but the book of mural painting has begun to have a successful influence in Europe, where mural painting is very little known. In England, an important person in the world of the plastic arts commented: 'I did not have the least idea that they painted like this in Mexico, that these things existed in that country!'

The book has also had success in Japan and in the United States. Now Mexican muralism has penetrated throughout the world by means of a work executed with great determination.⁶

Méndez's work with the Fondo Editorial de la Plástica Mexicana was an enormous contribution to Mexican culture, a recapitulation of his life-long interest in the art of Mexico, and an acknowledgment of the influences most important to him artistically. In addition to the *La pintura mural de la revolución mexicana*, Méndez also produced a major book on Posada, *José Guadalupe Posada: Ilustrador de la vida mexicana*, published in 1963, with extremely high-quality reproductions, still the most

⁵*La pintura mural de la revolución mexicana* (Mexico City: Fondo Editorial de la Plástica Mexicana, 1960). This volume actually covers the entire range of mural painting up to the late 1950s. The title is another application of the concept of the continuing revolution in Mexico.

⁶Poniatowska, p. 20.

extensive collection of Posada's work to date. A third work, *Lo efímero y eterno del arte popular mexicano* (*The Ephemeral and Eternal of Mexican Popular Art*), was published in 1971 after Méndez's death.⁷ This is an extensive, two-volume study of the folk art of Mexico, voluminously illustrated with photographs by Alvarez Bravo and Yampolsky, among others. The two volumes documented all aspects of Mexican folk art as fully as possible, with photographs taken in regions throughout Mexico. Like *La pintura mural de la revolución mexicana*, and *Jose Guadalupe Posada, Ilustrador de la vida mexicana*, *Lo efímero y eterno del arte popular mexicano* remains the most comprehensive examination of its subject to date.

Other important books, *Flor y canto del arte prehispánico de México* (*Flower and Song of the Pre-Hispanic Art of Mexico*) and *Maestros europeos en las galerías de San Carlos de México* (*European Masters in the Galleries of San Carlos in Mexico*) resulted from Méndez's involvement with the publishing house.⁸ They represented other facets of his interests in Mexican art: pre-Hispanic art and the art of the Academy. He was the designer and producer of these major works, and guaranteed high standards for all the books he created. It seems fitting that he should have concentrated on publishing books at the end of his life. With the dissolution of the Taller de Gráfica Popular, for Méndez the time of collective printmaking had passed, and he saw a way to fill a void in the cultural landscape of Mexico. The books that he produced presented images and text concerning everything he cared about in art, except for his own art and that of his peers.

⁷*Lo efímero y eterno del arte popular mexicano* (Mexico City: Fondo Editorial de la Plástica Mexicana, 1971).

⁸*Flor y canto del arte prehispánico de México* (Mexico City: Fondo Editorial de la Plástica Mexicana, 1964); *Maestros europeos en las galerías de San Carlos de México* (Mexico City: Fondo Editorial de la Plástica Mexicana, 1973).

Last Images

Although Méndez's publishing work now occupied most of his time and his health was failing (he died of liver cancer in 1969), during the 1960s he created some of his finest prints. Méndez worked with Gabriel Figueroa on two films, *La Rosa Blanca* (distinct from *La Rosa Blanca* of 1953), directed by Roberto Gavaldón in 1960, based on a story by B. Traven, and *Un Dorado de Pancho Villa*, directed by Emilio Fernández, in 1966. The prints for *La Rosa Blanca*, made on plastic film, are among Méndez's most complex works, approximately the same size and shape as his *Homage to Posada* of 1956 and *The Making of Tortillas* of 1954. (Both of these are 78.5 x 36.2 cm and the prints for the film are 60.9 x 33 cm). Each print has a masterful composition, carefully planned to express the political message of the artist most effectively.

The print *Porfirio Díaz* (fig. 231), made for *La Rosa Blanca*, depicts the aged president of Mexico at a moment shortly before he was deposed in 1911 by the revolutionary forces of Madero. The print combines allegory and caricature in a complex interplay of signs and symbols. The image is theatrical, organized like a stage, divided into thirds, with Díaz in the center. Behind and to the right of Díaz, in a gallery that resembles the hall of the National Assembly in the National Palace, members of the Assembly, a group of top-hatted, aristocratic politicians, applaud and gesture obsequiously, as though an audience in a theater. Their hats, tumbling over the protective railing that separates them from the action, lend an photographic impression of instantaneity to the whole image. Behind and to Díaz's left a man in a bow tie and bowler hat directs riflemen to shoot at an unarmed crowd of workers who are advancing with banners toward the throne from the left. Méndez used direction symbolically in this print to represent Left and Right politically, as Rivera often did in his murals. In the foreground, very foreshortened, an imposing Díaz sits on the eagle throne of Mexico in full regalia, covered with medals and ribbons, with an air of arrogance and detachment.

His pose could be interpreted as dignified if it were not for the surrounding events. His booted feet and his sword press sadistically into the body of the recumbent figure of a woman whose body is also in the cruel grasp of the talons of the eagles that hold up the throne. The claws of the eagle are disproportionately large, symbolizing Díaz's violent methods of rule and his abuse of the nation. In a subtle signification of the Mexican national symbol, the woman has the sinuous shape of the snake, and the eagle claws of the throne grasp her body, as the eagle grasps the snake in the national emblem.

Furthermore, she has fallen onto a Mexican flag, so this composite sign is situated on the flag, completing the reference to the woman as a symbol of nationhood. Other bodies lie nearby, and the point of view is extremely low, bringing the viewer in close contact with the fallen figures, while emphasizing the impression of Díaz's implacable and irresistible power. The woman with the flag, surrounded by symbols of power, plays the part of oppressed Mexico, and her body is the body politic, while the men with guns denote the brute force of the henchmen and overseers of the dictatorship. In the film a voice-over narration explains that the dictator gave away Mexico's oil resources to foreign investors. Another of Méndez's images of power and oppression, the overall message of the image is Díaz's sacrifice of the people for the benefit of the powerful and wealthy oligarchy of Mexico.

In contrast, *La Revolución y el Petróleo* (*The Revolution and Petroleum*) (fig. 232), presents an idealized image of Francisco Madero as the leader of the Mexican people. Like *Porfirio Díaz*, the print is divided into three parts. An over-sized Madero stands at a table in the center of the image, signing the document that restricted the rights of foreign oil investors. Méndez portrayed Madero in a standard iconography associated with Soviet leaders. A comparison with the 1929 eulogistic painting of Lenin, *Lenin on the Tribune* (fig. 233), by Aleksandr Gerasimov, one of the better-known Soviet socialist realist painters, reveals the similarities between the two works -- the forward thrust of the

body, the masses, the flag -- even Madero's face looks like that of Lenin. These portraits, with their emblematic content and gestural conventions, are a type of iconic presentation traditionally associated with depictions of saints and other mythic figures. Madero gestures defiantly with his body against the impersonal forces of capital and foreign investment. Again Méndez has put the forces of reaction to the right of the president, and the progressive, revolutionary forces on his left. The left third of the print is made up of symbolic images. At the bottom left corner a pair of claw-like hands grasping a bag of gold coins thrusts forward from outside the frame. Above the hands are four long rifles that point at Madero, reminiscent of the weapons in Méndez's print *Fusilado*. The guns form a horizontal barrier across three oil rigs, symbolically threatening to close them off from the Mexican people. This section of the print is dynamic and static at the same time. The rounded shape of hands, coins and bag counterbalance the straight lines of the guns and the triangles that form the oil rigs. In the center foreground and right side of the print crowds of Mexican citizens from all social classes turn their faces and bodies toward Madero, who stands as their bulwark against the forces of capital. Madero seems to float above the crowd, larger than life, in an imaginary space, the white band in the Mexican flag creating a silhouette of his profile. As usual in Méndez's prints, the masses here are remarkably individualized; Méndez delineated each tiny face in the foreground and many in the background with fine, precise lines. The narrator in the film explains that Madero was the first Mexican president to tax petroleum, at three centavos a barrel, and that he was assassinated because of this action. *La Revolución y el Petróleo* presents the dialectic opposite of *Porfirio Díaz*; both prints show Méndez's view of the historical progress of Mexico through the class struggles that opposed international capitalism and internal despotism.

This is a very different Madero from the image of the president that Méndez constructed in 1947 for *Las Estampas de la revolución mexicana*. In that print, *Francisco*

I. Madero (fig. 234), Méndez portrayed Madero as a diminutive figure, a representative of the bourgeoisie. He rides in an open car, wearing a jacket, tie and pin-striped trousers, and he holds a bowler hat in his hand. He waves to an audience off-stage, putting the viewer in the position of the welcoming crowd. However, Madero's arms are curiously short, to the point of distortion, suggesting his political impotence. A man in a top hat sits on one side of Madero and an armed soldier on the other. In the background we see the nineteenth-century equestrian statue of Charles IV dressed as a Roman emperor, by Manuel Tolsá, a familiar sight in the center of Mexico City. A crowd of people sit on the statue waving their arms, some holding flags. The small figure of Madero is visually overwhelmed by the statue, the two large buildings on either side, and the crowd behind him. Whereas in *La Revolución y el Petróleo* Madero is himself is monumental in stature, in the earlier image he is overshadowed by the equestrian monument. Although Madero was an icon of Mexican history, the 1947 image appears to express Méndez's ambivalence about this leader, who was an idealistic, middle-class liberal more than a true revolutionary. In contrast, the Madero of *La Revolución y el Petróleo* is as strong a leader as Méndez could make him. Perhaps this change in iconography reflected Méndez's own political moderation during this time period, or maybe he was responding to the drama of the film. Unlike most of the work Méndez produced to accompany Figueroa's films, these images, *Porfirio Díaz* and *La Revolución y el Petróleo*, are entirely Méndez own imaginative creations. That they do not correlate to any images in the film itself may account for their visual complexity and imaginative compositions.

Guardias Blancas (White Guards) (fig. 235), also from *La Rosa Blanca*, is a scene of oil workers on a rig, working under the rifles of the *Guardias Blancas*. The *Guardias Blancas* served the dictator Porfirio Díaz, and were subsequently the henchmen of the foreign oil corporations. This image, more photographically realistic than the other two, recreates a scene in the film that depicts the oppression of the workers in the oil fields.

The space is evenly divided into black and white areas by the use of wide spacing between the lines, while the composition is a figure eight receding into the distance. The impression of bright sunlight comes from the sketchy lines and large areas of white. A circle of men work around a giant shaft in the middle-ground of the image while guards stand around them, guns pointed inward at the workers; in the background another group of laborers and guards can be seen at the same tasks. The composition communicates a sense of entrapment and servitude. The three powerful and expressive prints from *La Rosa Blanca* represent the culmination of the graphic skill Méndez developed throughout his life. They also reiterate the themes of class struggle, oppression and resistance that were constantly present in his work.

At the end of 1964 Méndez made a New Year's card (fig. 236). It is a reworking of *Cuando Nace un Hombre Todos Los Animales Se Alegran* of 1949. Here the childbirth scene, a small part of the earlier image, is expanded to fill the whole print. The odd Breughellesque details of the original are omitted, and the room is depicted with careful detail. The four women in the simple house are all occupied with useful tasks, one presenting the newborn child to the mother, one readying the plain wooden cradle, and another looking in a wardrobe. Méndez gave the image all the serenity and domesticity of a Dutch genre painting, while at the same time portraying the many small items that mark it with a specificity of time and place. Méndez blended his realist sympathy for the rural poor with an optimism about new life and the possibilities for a dignified existence for all Mexicans. Again he used the metaphor of human birth as the birth of the new year, as he had in 1949, in *Cuando Nace un Hombre*. However disillusioned he may have become through the bitter ending of his involvement with the TGP, it is clear that he never gave up faith in the future.

Méndez made lithographs, rather than relief prints, for the 1966 film, *Un Dorado de Pancho Villa*. These images, among the last that Méndez created, are very different in

appearance from his other graphic work for films. José Sánchez related that as Méndez's health worsened his hands began to tremble violently, but he was still able to do these prints, by holding one hand with the other.⁹ An image of the Mexican movie star, *María Dolores* (fig. 237), is a lyrical, close-up portrait of a woman at a window of a train. Méndez used glistening highlights to emphasize her face and eyes. The print has an almost photorealist effect. The print *Pancho Villa* (fig. 238) uses the same shadowy technique to produce an impression of motion. Villa emerges out of the darkness, surrounded by areas of flowing whiteness.

During the 1960s Méndez, then working full-time directing the Fondo Editorial de la Plástica Mexicana, had his own studio for the first time in his life, at the publishing house, where he lived and worked during the last years of his life. He began to paint in oil, encaustic and watercolor. He had always painted and always wanted to do more than he did, and his notebooks were filled with sketches for murals as well as prints. Many of the paintings from the 1960s, however, were of a personal nature: paintings of flowers, nudes, and portraits: his old friend Maples Arce, and an unfinished 1968 portrait of Sánchez, the printer for the TGP and his friend of many years (fig. 239). This was perhaps his last work.

The Death of Méndez

Méndez continued to study the art of Mexico. He maintained a correspondence with Charlot, then living in Hawaii, concerning an article Charlot was writing about the printmakers Manuel Manilla and son (name unknown), who were associates of Posada in Mexico City.¹⁰ In a letter from Méndez to Charlot, dated August 18, 1968, written in a shaky hand, Méndez apologized for a delay in sending Charlot some photographs of the

⁹Sánchez, interview by author, Mexico City, 6 March 1996.

¹⁰This may have been Charlot's 1969, "José Guadalupe Posada and His Successors," in Ron Tyler, ed., *Posada's Mexico* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1979), pp. 29-57.

Manillas' prints. Méndez provided some useful data about the images, and ended the letter to Charlot, his friend of almost fifty years, on a poignant note:

I appreciate so much that you consider me a major artist and I can not tell you what my soul feels on reading your words and those of Zohmah [Charlot's wife], also because I am going to cry. I send the two of you a big, big, tight, tight embrace. Leopoldo.¹¹

In 1968 Méndez was named a founding member of the Academia de las Artes en México (The Academy of Arts in Mexico), an honorific organization that is part of the national Instituto de Bellas Artes.¹² He celebrated this occasion with a banquet at a restaurant with his friends from the Stridentist Movement: Maples Arce, List Arzubide, Arqueles Vela, Germán Cueto, and Salvador Gallardo. List Arzubide recalled this event:

...we lingered over the meal remembering our literary and artistic battles. The idea of death did not pass through anybody's mind, least of all the death of Leopoldo, the youngest of us all, the richest in creative wisdom. Nothing presaged his end.¹³

Three months later Méndez was in the hospital with terminal liver cancer. When List Arzubide and Maples Arce went to see him there they found him in a wheelchair in the hall:

...He looked at us smiling and made a gesture of greeting and begged us not to approach because he was ill with a contagious disease [Méndez believed he had hepatitis]. We greeted him from afar, promising him we would return as soon as it was sure that it was nothing serious.

¹¹ Leopoldo Méndez to Jean Charlot, 15 August 1968, Jean Charlot Archives, Honolulu, Hawaii.

¹² The role of the Academia de las Artes is somewhat ambiguous. Each year the organization awards membership to various cultural figures for their outstanding achievements in the arts. The Academia also has a building and offices, and houses a large archive of TGP prints, which are, however, inaccessible to the public or to scholars. Otherwise the Academia does not appear to be very active in cultural affairs.

¹³ Germán List Arzubide, "Recordando de mi amigo Leopoldo Méndez," in *Leopoldo Méndez: Artista de un pueblo en lucha*, p. 28.

Manuel and I returned to the hospital and they informed us that it was not possible to visit Leopoldo because of the delicate state of his health. The next day, Manuel informed me of the death of this great artist.¹⁴

Méndez died on February 8, 1969 at the age of sixty-seven. His death was commemorated by many newspaper articles and a number of exhibitions of his work. Maples Arce ended his 1970 biography of Méndez with this eulogistic description:

Man of extraordinary qualities, of an intrinsic creative capacity, and exigent as an artist, he possessed moreover the precious gift of sincerity, constantly reflected in his conduct and his work. Leopoldo Méndez was always a congenial companion; he had a peaceful nature, without affectation or roughness, and was frank without falling into rudeness: he demonstrated a natural equilibrium in all his parts. An ingenuous grace brought him close to popular culture ['lo popular']. He himself was always a man of the people, and his sense of art was vital in conception. One saw in him an expression of political, moral and aesthetic ideas, along with action.... What a magnificent friend has departed! What an artist of high quality we have lost! What a man of noble nature has disappeared! With him we feel that something of our youth has gone.¹⁵

Along with his role as a leader and collaborator, throughout his life he had remained a loyal and warm friend, and it is not an accident that the writers and artists with whom he had begun his career in the Stridentist Movement gathered around him at the end of his life.

In his last years, in spite of his failing health and the strain caused by his breaks with the Partido Popular and the TGP, Méndez created a memorable body of work in publishing. The books on Mexican muralism, Posada and folk art were an achievement in some ways as significant to the history of Mexican art as Méndez's prints and paintings. In these volumes Méndez made the murals, prints and artifacts available for study in a way they had never been before. There have been no equivalents to these works before or

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Manuel Maples Arce, *Leopoldo Méndez*, p. 37.

since. In fact, *Pinturas murales de la revolución mexicana* is the best source of illustrations for many of the murals of Mexico and in some cases the only source. There is no more complete compilation of Posada's work than *José Guadalupe Posada: Ilustrador de la vida mexicana*, and the *Lo efímero y eterno del arte popular mexicano* remains the most complete documentation of Mexican folk art to this day. These works represent Méndez's final legacy to the Mexican people. In addition to these books, Méndez's late prints for the film *La Rosa Blanca* were among his most complex and highly developed images, addressing for the last time the themes of the Mexican Revolution that Méndez had explored since the earliest beginnings of his long career as a printmaker.

Conclusion:

When Maples Arce wrote “something of our youth has gone,” on the occasion of Leopoldo Méndez’s death in 1969, he was suggesting that this event marked the passing of an era, for Méndez was present at the inception of Mexico’s post-Revolutionary artistic renaissance, along with his colleagues in the Stridentist and mural movements. As one of the most active members of the idealistic generation of artists and writers who came together in the 1920s, Méndez’s quiet presence was felt as a constant in Mexican art from the 1920s until his the end of his life. As has been shown in this study, the pattern of Méndez’s life and work paralleled and reflected most of the important phases of the history of Mexican modern art in the twentieth century. I have chronicled his multifaceted talents and abilities in the context of the important art movements of his time. While not as well known as some of his more celebrated contemporaries, he was a primary figure in every significant stage of the development of a distinctly Mexican political art, and the events of his career repeatedly placed him in a central position in movements and organizations that created modern Mexican culture.

The purpose of this dissertation is two-fold. My primary objective has been to present Méndez as one of the most important of a number of major figures in Mexican art who belongs on an equal footing with more well-known artists such as Rivera, Orozco, Siquieros, Tamayo and Kahlo. My other objective has been to demonstrate, through my study of Méndez’s exemplary work and career, that Mexican art of the twentieth century is not a local phenomenon, but is sophisticated and international, deserving of a more central place in the canon of twentieth-century art history. While early Mexican modern art was strongly affected by the European influences artists like Rivera, Siqueiros and Charlot brought to Mexico at the end of the Mexican Revolution, by the 1930s Mexican artists and intellectuals were full participants in a global dialogue. Interactions between

Mexican, American and European artists were direct and mutually influential. Mexican artists assimilated European and Mexican forms to create a new Mexican aesthetic, developing techniques and collaborative artistic methods that attracted international attention.

I have focused on three aspects of Méndez's artistic practice. The first and most important is his artistic output. In the course of his career, Méndez produced over 700 prints, a large body of work of extraordinarily high quality and great timeliness. Through his early, inventive adaptation of Posada's work, his incorporation of many other influences and his own innovations, Méndez began to create a new, Mexican graphic idiom, which determined the direction and appearance of Mexican political printmaking. As he matured he drew on an increasingly wide range of art-historical sources, and his prints became steadily more complex and conceptually sophisticated. He was a master of composition and his technical command of the print medium was unusually accomplished. His work was highly imaginative, original and expressive. Méndez's earliest extant work coincides with the blossoming of a Mexican cultural identity based on the hopes of the Mexican Revolution and the validation of the Mexican heritage. Later, in the 1930s, he opposed fascism and oppression in Mexico with lively, satirical Posada-inspired images. During the war years Méndez created powerful anti-Nazi prints. From the 1940s to the 1960s Méndez continued to develop his artistic skill and versatility, extending his range of production to include book publishing, film images and mural-sized prints.

Second, I have emphasized Méndez's active and influential promulgation of his political and cultural ideals. He adhered to the idea that his mission was to make art in service of the people, to inspire action, create awareness of injustice and oppression and give hope for a better future. With this intent he created inexpensive, widely distributed prints that addressed specific local and international political issues. His collaboratively

produced images set international precedents for the socially concerned political print in the period after World War I until the 1960s. At the same time, Méndez maintained extremely high artistic standards, promoting craft values in his handmade prints, artists' books and publishing projects. While incorporating many of Posada's techniques and styles, Méndez may also have unconsciously modeled his life on that of Posada, who was an unknown artisan working in obscurity and producing art for the working class. Although Posada has been accorded much of the attention he merits, in part through Méndez's emulation of his style, until now Méndez himself has remained almost anonymous, relegated to a relatively minor position even in Mexican art history. I recognize the irony of my project -- in pulling Méndez out of the collective milieu to privilege him as a significant artistic individual, I am working against his own fundamental ideals. However, my intention has been to bring him to the attention of a wider audience, examining his work in the broader context of Mexican political art, thereby creating greater understanding of not only Méndez, but a whole range of artists and art practices in Mexico.

The third significant aspect of Méndez's practice was his determined and effective promotion of Mexican art throughout his lifetime. He was especially influential in popularizing the work of Posada, the consummate Mexican printmaker, through his own adoption of Posada's techniques and motifs and through his publication of Posada's work. From the early 1920s on, Méndez worked to advance the interests of the artistic groups to which he belonged, most notably the Stridentist Movement, LEAR and the Taller de Gráfica Popular. All of these groups were in the vanguard of Mexican art, experimenting with new visual forms and collaborative methods. Méndez supported these organizations by organizing exhibitions, editing and contributing writing and art work to publications, and actively participating in events and activities. In addition, he was a dedicated teacher of art, in the Cultural Missions, the Ministry of Education, the Taller-

Escuela de Artes Plásticas of LEAR and in the Taller de Gráfica Popular. At the end of his life, Méndez actively promoted Mexican art in his last major undertaking, the publishing of high-quality books about Mexican art through the Fondo Editorial de la Plástica Mexicana, the publishing company he established for the express purpose of bringing the art of Mexico to Mexican and international audiences.

I have followed these three aspects of Méndez's artistic career in my chronological examination of his life and work. As the chapter on Stridentism reveals, Méndez was politically active in a diverse group of energetic, experimental writers and artists who opposed the accepted conventions of art in Mexico and explored new literary and visual idioms inspired by European contemporary art, their love of modernity and urban life, and by their identification with the Mexican Revolution. The Stridentist Movement, a parallel to the Mexican mural movement, produced a series of illustrated manifestos, books and journals. These texts and images, loosely based on Futurist and Dadaist concepts, allowed Méndez to develop the graphic techniques that he had learned in the open-air painting schools. His Stridentist experiences exposed him to a wide range of avant-garde influences and concepts that contributed to his innovative practice in his later work. As the most politicized of the visual artists in the movement, Méndez began his life-long focus on the unending drama of oppression and resistance during this period. He cast the class struggle as a performance, using what Griselda Pollock describes (referring to Marx) as "a theatrical metaphor...repeatedly employed to make us understand that class, while constituted materially in actual social relations of production, effectively functions through representation."¹ Méndez's first extant works concentrated almost exclusively on Mexican themes and helped establish the new nationalist iconography of post-Revolutionary Mexico. His 1925 woodcut *Hombre*, his illustrations for List Arzubide's *Zapata exaltación* and his March 1927 cover for

¹ Pollock, p. 1.

Horizonte were among the first of Méndez's images of revolutionary subject matter and among the earliest prints with narrative revolutionary content in Mexico. The Stridentist Movement was also the beginning of Méndez's involvement in the art of the book, as well as his first experience of collaborative work with artists and writers.

At the end of the twenties, after the Stridentists disbanded, Méndez experimented with a variety of visual styles, illustrating two handmade artists' books, *The Gods in Exile* and *La corola invertida*, with woodcuts that showed his growing versatility in the graphic medium. Méndez began his study and emulation of Posada at this time, and his illustrations for *La corola invertida* are the first evidence of Posada's stylistic influence in Méndez's work. He was in fact the first printmaker to adapt, expand and recontextualize Posada's vernacular style to express revolutionary concepts, influencing a wide range of other printmakers. His adoption of the graphic style of Posada, coming at the beginning of the 1930s, was very likely a major, unrecognized factor in the canonizing of Posada in Mexican art. After 1930 the muralists also began to claim Posada as a major influence and to use his motifs in their work, following Méndez's precedent.

Méndez's 1929 *La Revolución Que Hace Arte* and *Arte Puro* of 1931 are examples of his continuing political focus, coming at a time when, along with many of his colleagues, Méndez was becoming increasingly militant and seeking ways to portray confrontational concepts in art. His satirical, inventive print *Concierto de Locos* of 1932 placed Méndez in the center of the contentious Mexican political art scene. At this time Méndez positioned himself as an observer, free to criticize all the figures in the print. Other major works in the 1930s demonstrated Méndez's increasing virtuosity as a political printmaker and his acute awareness of the significant events of the time. His confrontational woodcut *Calaveras del Mausoleo Nacional* is the first known use of Posada-like *calaveras* in post-Revolutionary printmaking. This print belongs to the phase of his career in which he became more politically partisan, taking part in the Communist-

affiliated artistic opposition to the Mexican government. Rivera and the official party, the PNR, were the objects of his ridicule in a brilliant, Posada-inspired satire.

Méndez's prints of the second half of the 1930s demonstrate his growing ability to create effective visual synecdoches to represent historically significant current events. Compelled by the world situation, he directed his artistic efforts toward opposing the rise of fascism in Mexico and Europe. His powerful, early anti-fascist images, such as *Fascismo I* and *Fascismo II*, focused on domestic fascism in Mexico. The 1938 anti-Franco portfolio *La España de Franco*, produced in collaboration with other members of the newly founded Taller de Gráfica Popular, included Méndez's Orozco-influenced lithograph *A las Puertas de Madrid*. In 1939 Méndez created the dramatic portfolio *En Nombre de Cristo* to protest the murders of teachers by reactionary Catholic campesinos. In these prints and in *La Protesta*, *La Tierra del Chicle* and *El Imperialismo y la Guerra* Méndez demonstrated his assimilation of Surrealist influences. In 1938 the artists of the Taller worked with the German community in exile on a series of dramatic posters advertising anti-Nazi lectures, the first of several significant collaborations with European exiles in Mexico. By the end of the 1930s the TGP was a dynamic center of political art production in Mexico and was beginning to extend its influence to other countries. The prints of the Taller were the ubiquitous visual images in the political milieu of their time. Regularly displayed on the walls of Mexico City and distributed during union rallies and political demonstrations, the leaflets, brochures and posters of the TGP were the materials that workers and leftist activists saw while participating in political activities; these images acted as an inspirational visual accompaniment to highly charged public events. At the same time, the members of the TGP disseminated their work in books, portfolios and fine-print editions to an international audience.

In the shift from a local to a global practice, these artists never abandoned their Mexican outlook and aesthetic. Méndez and the printmakers of his circle continued to be

influenced by the Renaissance, Baroque and nineteenth-century academic art of Mexico, and to adapt Mexican vernacular forms and idioms to suit their purposes. The work of Méndez and the TGP was confrontive and specific, following the satirical tradition of Posada, with a distinctive aesthetic developed by Méndez and other Mexican printmakers during the 1920s and '30s. Soviet art critics attacked the work of the members of TGP in the 1940s and '50s because they did not adopt a neo-academic style to idealize Mexican society and because, according to Soviet standards, the TGP portrayed reality in overly imaginative and distorted forms. Méndez, although a Communist, seems to have disregarded the Soviet criticisms and to have considered socialist realism as simply another visual option among many. He created his 1942 *Mariscal S. Timoshenko, Sus Triunfos Son los Nuestros*, a portrait of the Soviet hero, in an academic Soviet socialist-realist style to complement his Soviet subject matter, but in the same year he portrayed the Soviet general again, in his *Corrido de Stalingrado*, as a *calavera* in a dynamic Mexican idiom. While Méndez and his colleagues had a paradoxical relationship to official support, their work within the government, usually as teachers, came from their impulse to further progressive aims of the Mexican state. Unlike Soviet artists, this relationship did not obligate them to produce pro-government prints. When they did produce such prints, as in Méndez's 1938 lithograph, *El Imperialismo y la Guerra*, it was because the political attitude expressed, in this case by President Cárdenas, coincided with their own ideology.

During the Second World War, Méndez and the members of the TGP directed their maximum efforts toward the defeat of fascism. The international situation brought artists from many countries into close communication and Méndez became even more sophisticated and global in his outlook. He contributed some of his most powerful images to *El libro negro del terror nazi*, the unique book produced by Europeans in exile in Mexico and their Mexican supporters, under the direction of Hannes Meyer, former

director of the Bauhaus. *El libro negro* was a heroic effort by a large group of writers and artists to present first-hand testimony about Nazi depredations in Europe. Méndez's 1942 print, *Deportación a la Muerte*, probably created for *El libro negro*, was one of the earliest artistic images of the Holocaust to be made by someone outside the concentration camps. Two other works that appeared in *El libro negro*, *Corrido de Stalingrado* and *La Venganza del Pueblo*, are among the most dynamic depictions in printmaking of resistance to the Nazi conquest of Europe. Another such work, Méndez's cover illustration for the novel *Das Siebte Kreuz*, portrays the Nazis' dehumanizing cruelty in a dramatic, tightly executed composition. During the war Méndez also illustrated *Incidentes melódicos del mundo irracional*, Juan de la Cabada's imaginative folk-tale based on Mayan songs and legends. In his prints for the book Méndez blended fantastic imagery with pre-Columbian symbolism, creating a series of inventive, appealing images that addressed the theme of oppression and resistance from a more light-hearted perspective. These prints, in which Méndez celebrated an indigenous Mexican aesthetic, are an example of his indifference to Soviet socialist-realist standards.

As the Second World War came to an end, Méndez faced the classic existential dilemma of the post-War era. Many leftists experienced despair and desperation when the unity forged by the anti-fascist struggle suddenly disintegrated at the end of the war. Méndez's eloquent self-portrait, *Amenaza sobre México* of 1945, expressed the profound anxieties of the time, examining the role of the concerned artist in history and politics, while deconstructing Mexican imagery to portray the dangers of fascism still threatening Mexico. In contrast to *Amenaza sobre México*, in 1947 and 1949 Méndez shifted his perspective and created *Un Nuevo Amanecer* and *Cuando Nace un Hombre Todos los Animales se Alegran*, two lyrical prints that convey a sense of renewed optimism about the world situation. Later, however, Méndez was deeply affected by the Cold War and the

nuclear threat, producing images such as his searing, anti-nuclear *Es Peor Sobrevivir* of 1958.

In the 1940s and '50s the Taller was a international center of collective art work, producing thousands of politically concerned images that were distributed to the working classes of Mexico and shown in exhibitions throughout the world. Throughout Méndez's career, he and his colleagues addressed their work to a dual audience. While aiming to satisfy the aesthetic concerns of an intellectual audience, their primary intention was to create art for the working classes. The work of Stridentists had been directed primarily at a Mexican audience, but by the 1930s, in LEAR and the Taller, Méndez and his comrades were producing art intended for an international audience of all classes. Works like Méndez's *Taller de Gráfica Popular* demonstrate his dedication to his working-class audience, while *Incidentes melódicos del mundo irracional* was sold to collectors, museums and libraries in Mexico and the United States. In spite of Siqueiros's criticisms, the Taller's work did reach a mass audience over a long period of time, and while it is impossible to measure the direct impact of the images on the public, the style of the TGP became inextricably linked to leftist political action and artistic expression.²

During the late 1940s and into the 1960s Méndez worked with cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa on a number of prints that were used in Mexican films. He produced some of his most memorable images for these films, including *Fusilamiento* for the 1950 *Un Día de Vida*, and the dynamic, sensitive portrait of the composer Verdi for *La Rosa Blanca* of 1953. Cinematic elements of composition and an awareness of the effects of new media entered Méndez's non-film work, especially in his ingenious *calavera* prints

²An example of the strong association between the Mexican printmakers and the political image can be seen in the following: "Visiting galleries with Franz Kline around 1955, I asked him how he felt about making prints, perhaps lithographs, thinking that his vivid white and black image could be perfectly suited to the velvety inks and papers of the medium. 'No,' he said, 'printmaking concerns social attitudes, you know – politics and a public...' 'Politics?' 'Yes, like the Mexicans in the 1930s; printmaking, multiplying, educating; I can't think about it; I'm involved in the private image'..." Thomas Hess, quoted in Huntington Gallery, *El Taller de Gráfica Popular: Block Prints and Lithographs by Artists of the TGP from the Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery* (Austin, Texas: Huntington Gallery, University of Texas, 1985), p. 9.

of 1947 and 1949, *Calaveras Aftosas con Medias Nylon* and *Ora Si Ya No Hay Tortillas*. The influence of Posada can again be seen in these images, as Méndez elaborated on the more simple, straightforward style of Posada to create multi-layered works of trenchant social criticism. Méndez also borrowed directly from Posada in such works as *El Embajador Wilson "Arregla" el Conflicto* of 1947, which as I have shown closely follows the compositional structure of Posada's satirical *Porfirio Díaz*.

During the 1950s and '60s Méndez's produced fewer prints, but his work from this time demonstrates a great virtuosity in the graphic medium. *The Making of Tortillas* and *Homage to Posada* are remarkable for their size and narrative detail. His late politically motivated prints *Porfirio Díaz*, and *La Revolución y el Petróleo* created for the 1960 film *La Rosa Blanca*, are complex, symbolic images. In these Méndez returned to the themes of the Mexican Revolution which were the first focus of his art, portraying the mobilization of the working class in opposition to oppression and dictatorship.

Almost all of Méndez's work discussed here was produced in a collaborative context. His Stridentist years were a time of intense cooperation. In their Mexico City phase, the Stridentists were a lively, close-knit group, gathering at the Café de Nadie and other locations. Together they published the journal *Irradiador*, illustrated books of prose and poetry, and held at least two Stridentist evenings. In Jalapa, the artists and writers lived communally and produced illustrated books and the Stridentist journal *Horizonte*. As I have pointed out, the writers and visual artists of the movement collaborated closely on their projects and granted a degree of autonomy to illustration unusual in the art of the book. The literary experimentation in Stridentist texts clearly inspired Méndez to employ visual strategies that included imaginative, metaphorical representations of a wide range of subject matter, an influence that persisted throughout his career.

After Méndez left Jalapa, he began a six-year period of active development. He joined the Communist Party at the end of the 1920s, and solidified his beliefs and his

artistic practice in relation to radical leftist politics. As one of the founders of LEAR, he devoted four years to organizing leftist artists for the common purpose of opposing oppression and fascism. LEAR aimed its efforts at the working class and the leftist intelligentsia of Mexico and other countries, reaching a broad audience through its publication, *Frente a Frente*. LEAR established international ties with other leftist groups and joined the world-wide Popular Front in opposition to the rise of fascism. In LEAR, Méndez participated in numerous discussions about the role of the political artist, and implemented concepts of art production formulated during the 1935 debates between Siqueiros and Rivera and at the American Artists' Congress. During this period he was a prime mover in the development of a new model of Mexican political art. Following the principles first articulated in the early 1920s of creating art for the masses, political artistic practice was redirected toward the collective production of graphic, portable art for wide public distribution at low cost. Méndez also headed LEAR's Taller-Escuela de Artes Plásticas, the newly created art school for artists and workers.

Méndez was following this model in 1937, when he organized his colleagues from the Plastic Arts Division of LEAR to create a new collective graphic art workshop, the Taller de Gráfica Popular. Méndez was the guiding spirit of this collective for almost twenty years. Clearly acknowledged as a leader and an inspiring teacher of printmaking, he influenced his contemporaries and younger artists, creating an enormous body of work that addressed pressing social and political issues of the time. Whether in the production of the ephemeral work of the Taller posted on the walls of Mexico City or the TGP's fine art prints, Méndez continued to maintain the collective approach. Consistent with their ideals, the members of the TGP also released their work to the public domain and did not object if it was used without attribution. As far as they were concerned it was public property, to be used for the benefit of society.

The course of the Taller did not always run smoothly. As I have described, outside pressures and internal divisions created several ruptures in the organization. The first of these came in 1940, when Méndez and other members of the Taller were implicated in Siqueiros's attempt to assassinate Trotsky, and Méndez was wrongly imprisoned. This affair marked the beginning of an unfortunate division between Siqueiros and Méndez. Siqueiros began to accuse the TGP and Méndez of formal "stagnation" (a term he had previously applied to Rivera), because the Taller did not acquire an off-set press to make larger runs of prints. Méndez and other members of the TGP spent many years defending themselves against Siqueiros's accusations. At the same time, disagreements among the members led to the departure of all but six artists by 1940. However, during the war years artists set aside their sectarian differences, the TGP gained new members and some former members returned to the organization. In spite of the vicissitudes of the project, Méndez continued to uphold his commitment to collective art production. He worked in close collaboration with the large exile community in Mexico City on anti-fascist projects, as well as illustrating *Incidentes melódicos del mundo irracional* with De la Cabada, creating an inventive, original blend of image and text based on Mexican themes.

After the war, like many others in this era, Méndez was expelled from the Communist Party as the failures of totalitarian socialism and the ascendancy of capitalism weakened old allegiances and created deep divisions in the party. Méndez joined Lombardo Toledano's labor unionist Partido Popular and devoted himself to labor union causes through the PP.

The late 1940s were a prolific and stable period for the Taller, during which the membership grew and many guest artists came to work with the collective. American artists who came to the TGP as guest artists were inspired by the example of the Taller to create their own collective workshops, including the Graphic Arts Workshop in Los Angeles and the Graphic Workshop of New York. At the same time the TGP established

close connections with American and European artists and Méndez traveled to Europe for an extended visit, meeting artists, intellectuals and leftist activists during his trip. His contacts in Eastern Europe led to several exhibitions of the prints of the Taller there and the publication in Prague of *Mexická Grafika*, an overview of Mexican art and the graphic work of the TGP.³ In turn, Méndez arranged cultural exchanges from Eastern Europe such as the 1952 exhibition *El grabado y el libro polaco (The Polish Print and Book)* in Mexico City.

During the 1950s, although the collective work with the Taller and his political partisan activities came to an end, Méndez continued to work collaboratively in several ways. He continued to create film images with Figueroa, and he worked with a number of other people to establish the publishing company, the Fondo Editorial de la Plástica Mexicana.

Méndez had been an active figure in the promotion of Mexican art for many years, through the many publications to which he contributed and exhibitions he helped to organize, through teaching art to others, and through the steadfast support he gave to all the collective projects in which he participated. In LEAR and the Taller de Gráfica Popular Méndez exerted tremendous cultural influence in Mexico and other countries by his active advancement of Mexican graphic art. As I have indicated in the last chapter, Méndez dedicated his final years to the preservation and promotion of Mexican art and culture through the production of fine art books. The books produced by the Fondo Editorial de la Plástica Mexicana in this period, such as *La pintura mural de la revolución mexicana* and *José Guadalupe Posada: Ilustrador de la vida mexicana*, represent the culmination of Méndez's career and are testament to his knowledge of Mexican art history and his mastery of production and design. They are among his most significant achievements and reflect his eclectic, scholarly and sympathetic mind. At the

³Fryd, *Mexická Grafika*.

end of his life, after producing a large body of outstanding graphic work, he put aside his own art in his desire to bring the past into the present and preserve it for the future.

Méndez's work continues to appear from time to time in publications in Mexico, used for purposes which would have earned his approval. For example, in October 1992 Méndez's print of the snake from *Incidentes Melódicos del Mundo Irracional* appeared as the central image for a poster protesting the commemoration of the 500 years since Columbus (fig. 240). The activists who made the poster colored the print and put text around the edges:

A 500 Años de la Invasión Seguimos Resistiendo Porque: Arrancaron nuestras frutas, Cortaron nuestras ramas, Quemaron nuestro tronco, Pero no pudieron matar nuestras raíces. (500 Years after the Invasion, We Continue Resisting Because: They tore down our fruit, They cut our branches, They burned our trunk, But they could not kill our roots.)

Méndez's name does not appear on the poster, but the use to which the image was put was in keeping with Méndez's own ideals. In 1995 after a brutal massacre of unarmed peasants at Aguas Blancas in the state of Guerrero, a publication called *La Guillotina* used Méndez's prints from the 1948 film *La Pueblerina* and the 1950 film *Un Día de Vida* in an article about the killings, "Violencia Sin Fin" ("Violence Without End"). Others of Méndez's images were scattered throughout the magazine, including *Porfirio Díaz*, which appeared as the centerfold.⁴ None of these prints were attributed to Méndez. Although the images were almost fifty years old, they still conveyed the terrible cruelty, injustice and sorrow they were originally designed to express. While specific circumstances have changed over time, Méndez's prints captured enduring political and social tensions in Mexican society. The continuing appropriation of Méndez's work for new political causes points to its lasting power.

⁴*La Guillotina*, no. 31 (August-September 1995).



Figure 1. David Alfaro Siqueiros. *Portrait of Leopoldo Méndez*, from *The March of Humanity*, 1971, mural, acrylic and pyroxaline paint on cement, Polyforum Cultural Siqueiros.



Figure 2. Leopoldo Méndez, ca. 1935, black and white photograph.



Figure 3. Leopoldo Méndez, ca. 1944, black and white photograph.

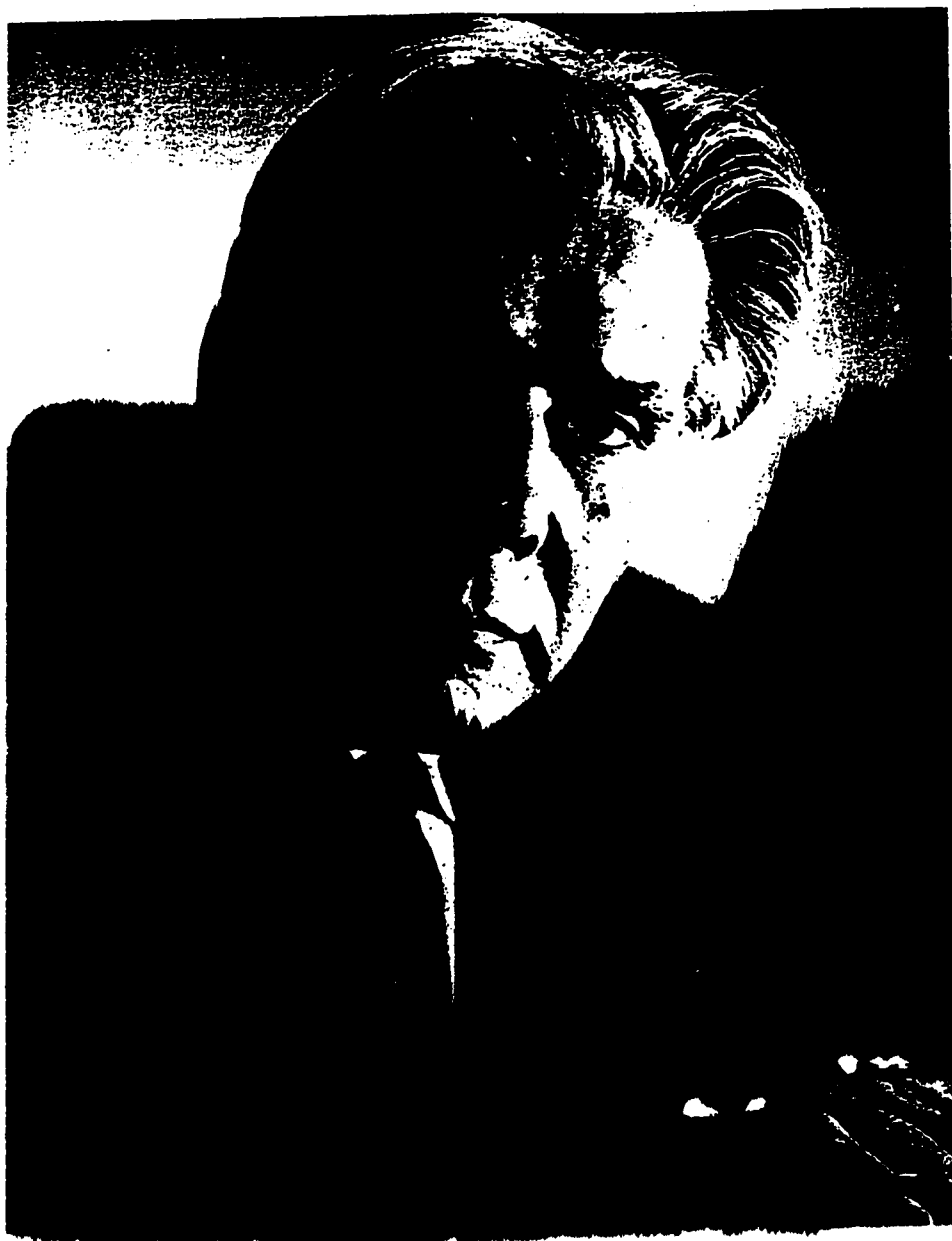


Figure 4. Leopoldo Méndez, ca. 1965, black and white photograph.



Figure 5. Leandro Izaguirre. *Torture of Cuauhtémoc*, 1893, oil on canvas, Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico City.

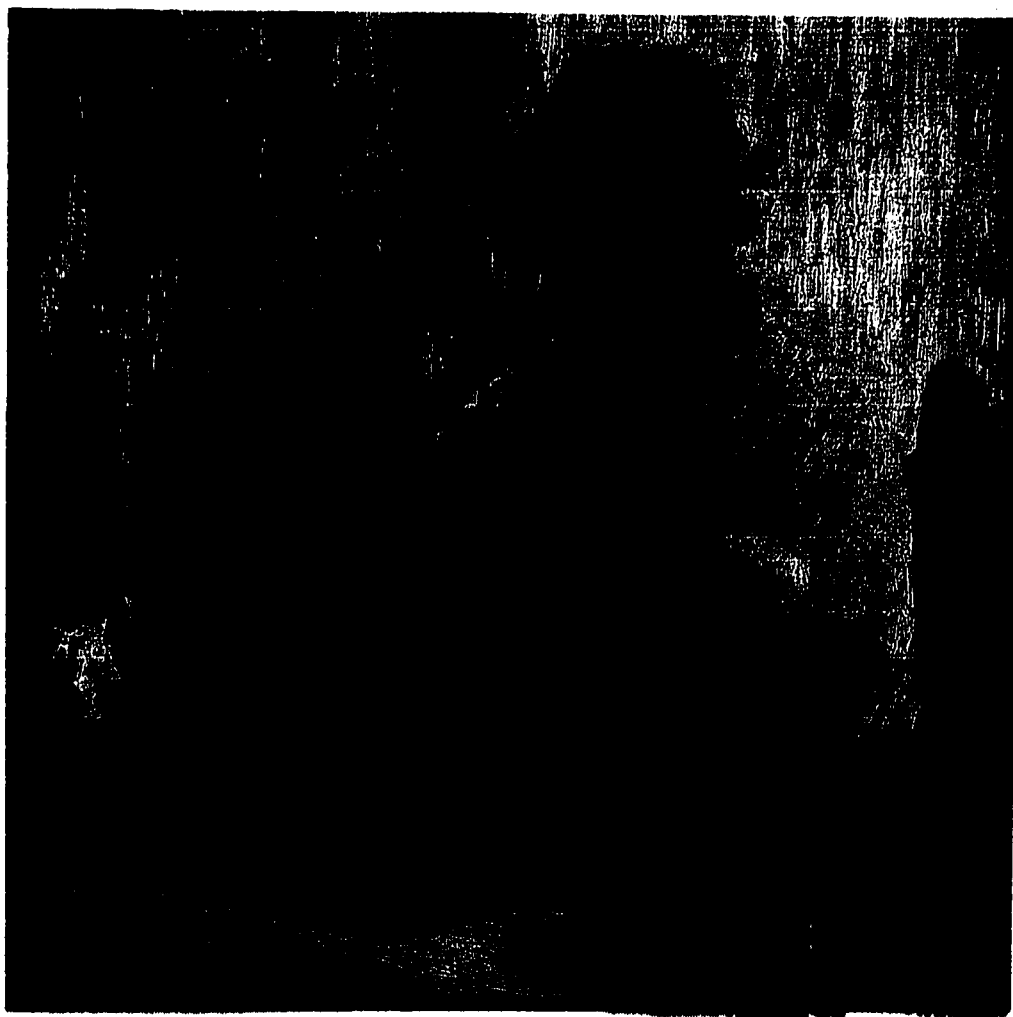


Figure 6. Germán Gedovius. *Tehuana*, 1918, oil on canvas, Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico City.



Figure 7. Saturnino Herrán. *Our Gods*, 1916, left panel, oil on canvas, Coll. Alicia G. de Herrán.



Figure 8. Erasto Córtes Juárez. *Portrait of Leopoldo Méndez*, ca. 1917, charcoal on paper.



Figure 9. Francisco Díaz de León. *The Pottery Vendor*, 1922, oil on canvas, Coll. Patrimonio de Jalisco, Guadalajara, Mexico.



Figure 10. Fernando Leal. *Campamento de Coronel Zapatista* (*Encampment of a Zapatista Colonel*), 1921, oil on canvas, Coll. Fernando Leal Audirac.



Figure 11. Painting done with Best Maugard Method, ca. 1924.

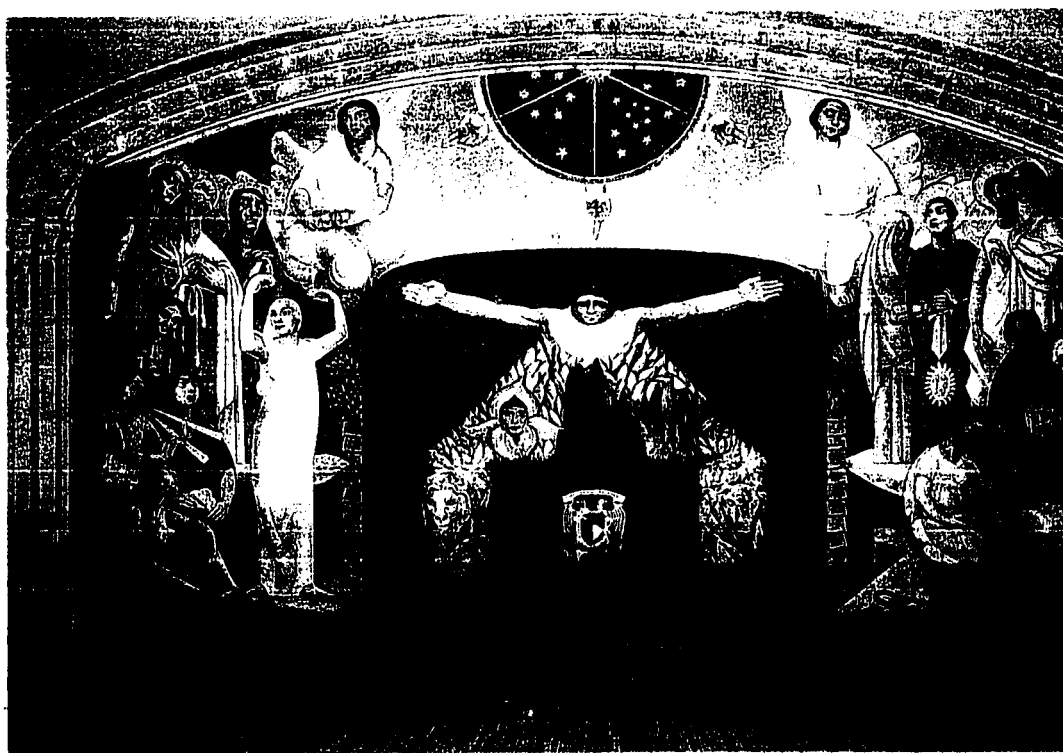


Figure 12. Diego Rivera. *Creation*, 1922-23, encaustic and gold leaf, Anfiteatro Bolívar, National Preparatory School, Mexico City.



Figure 13. David Alfaro Siqueiros. *The Elements*, 1922, encaustic, Colegio Chico, National Preparatory School, Mexico City.



Figure 14. José Clemente Orozco. *Maternity*, 1922-23, fresco, National Preparatory School, Mexico City.



Figure 15. Gabriel Fernández Ledesma. *Primera Comunión*, 1922, oil on canvas.



Figure 16. Victor Agustín Casasola. *Zapata*, 1910-1912, black and white photograph.

**EL
ENTIERRO
DE
ZAPATA.**



De izócar participaron
al Gobernador poblanco
que ya Zapata el inhumano
los suyos lo sepultaron.
Las órdenes se hicieron,
tal nueva por confirmar,
el cadáver de exhumar,
como de hecho lo hicieron.
mas... ni la suya encontraron
los que fueran a buscar!

Tal noticia resultó
no quedar le en confirmada;
la muerte no se aclarada
y en duda el hecho quedó.
Zapata siempre le huyó
a la tremenda pelusa,
que no respeta persona,
por más que sea General;
aquel Atila fue el
usa y venga muy truhán.

¿Cómo se pueda explicar
que el tremendo foragido
que tan zarandado ha sido
en todo pueblo y lugar,
llega logrado escapar
de que le toque un balazo,
una pedrada, un trancazo,
que cadáver lo volviera,
al al peligro se metiera
en toda ocasión y caso?

Lo ve das es que el Atile,
que resultó cimitarra,
le vacila el corazón
cuando en la muerte cavila.
El lleva vida tranquila,
jugándose general,
un hombre grande y formal
que por los pulcos combale;
mas esto es un disparate,
que bien le sea un gran castal.

Lo que le gusta a Emiliano
es andar muy galoneado,
bien vestido, bien montado,
y con el rifle en la mano;
tener de pl se un arcabuz,
pa á vela aligrementa,
lutarle comodamente
y estar de las lulas lójas,
lo mismo que los conejos,
que los huyen rícidamente.

Me cuentan que cuando li gran
sus gentes a un campamento
laman allí se aliste la
y a la plación se entregan;
como las muchachos juegan;
y entretanto al jefe aquí,
sienta a sus costinabros del,
se oculta de sus soldados,
y una conta los comindra
los que ahen don lo está el.

Aun, mi buen Zapata,
no te vayas a asustar,
pues te puedes enfermar
y entonces Morelos grita.
Tú le haces mucha fallita,
que contigo se muy feliz,
no has cometido un delito,
tu vida es recta y honrada;
en la criatura mimada;
cive goza, sé feliz.

¡Fíjate bien en esconderte,
pues te pueden traicionar;
y entonces ¡qué va a pasar!
con el hombre tan valiente!
Un lástima impertinente
tu vida pudiera ser.
Haces muy bien en temer
y en defender tu existencia,
porque tienes la conciencia
del bien que puedes hacer.

¡Oye, apasionado valiente!
Como le chiquen al cuero!
Quítate mucho aparcero,
que así vivas mejor.
No temas ningún temor,
que al fin tu existencia es buena
no temas ningún temor,
ningún disgusto o dolor,
porque de ardoroso amor
está la alma noble llena.

Tú eres siempre bendito
que incendia haciendas ni aldeas,
a tal dicen, no lo creas;
tan-tan con tigo has sido.
Sin duda te han confundido
con alguien que mal obró.
No te aflijas, se acabó;
guerra de tu Abel y Mayo,
enfila tu buen caballo
y en darle que ya empezó!

Te bendicen muchas viudas,
muchas doncellas te aclaman,
su salvador te proclaman,
y en ello no tienen dudas.
Aun las piedras, que son mudas,
tienen lengua para ti,
y con voz franca,
ellas tus hazañas cantan,
y en las cimas se levantan,
queriendo mirarte así.

Adiós, mi buen general,
mi soberano Zapata,
perdona la musa ingrata
y el canto tan desigual.
Tú que eres ya colosal,
y que te igualas a Atila,
recítame un buen lequile,
por tu fama de valiente,
que al temer a la gente
ni tu alma jamás vacila.

PRECIO TRECE CENTAVOS

IMPRESA DE ANTONIO VARGAS ABOYTO México, D. F. - Tel. 111 - Año 1914

Figure 17. José Guadalupe Posada. *Corrido: Emiliano Zapata*, 1910-1912, zinc etching.



Figure 18. Jean Charlot. *Massacre in the Templo Mayor*, 1922, fresco, National Preparatory School, Mexico City.



Figure 19. José Clemente Orozco. *American Civilization -- The Gods of the Modern World*, 1932-34, fresco, Baker Library, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire



Figure 20. Diego Rivera. *Dream of a Sunday Afternoon on the Alameda*, 1947-48, fresco, Museum of the Alameda, Mexico City.



Figure 21. José Guadalupe Posada. *La Calavera Catrina*., ca. 1900, zinc etching.



Figure 22. Jean Charlot. *Viacrucis, XII, Il Meurt*, 1918-20, woodcut.



Figure 23. Jean Charlot. *Figure*, ca. 1922, wood block print.



Figure 24. Diego Rivera. *Tropical Mexico and Xochipilli and His Votaries*, 1926, fresco, Court of Labor, Ministry of Education, Mexico City.



Figure 25. Diego Rivera. *Distribution of Arms*, 1928, fresco, Court of the Fiestas, Ministry of Education, Mexico City.



Figure 26. Xavier Guerrero. Masthead of *La Machete* and *The Parceling of Land*, *La Machete*, No. 2, 1924, woodcut.



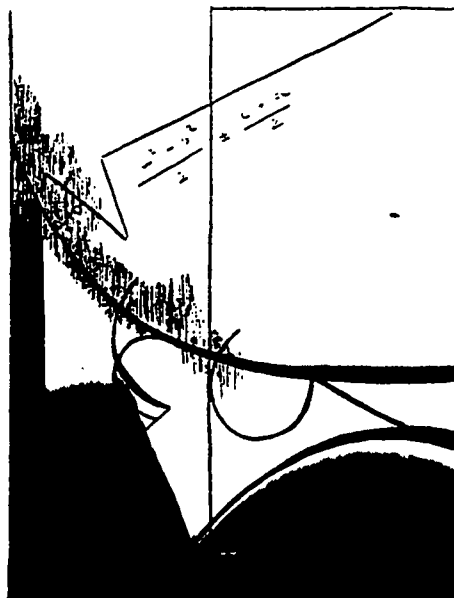
Figure 27. David Alfaro Siqueiros. *La Unidad del Campesino, el Soldado y el Obrero* (*The Unity of the Campesino, the Soldier and the Worker*), *El Machete*, No. 3, 1924, woodcut.



Figure 28. Leopoldo Méndez. *La Costurera*, (*The Seamstress*), 1923, ink drawing.

NO HAREMOS LITERATURA HISPANO-AMERICANISTA

MAYO-1921



AMBROISE VOLLARD.

Por MARIO DE ZAYAS.

VIDA-AMERICANA

REVISTA NORTE CENTRO Y SUD-
AMERICANA DE VANGUARDIA.

PRECIO : 40 C DE DOLLAR - 2 PESETAS - 4 FRANCS

Figure 30. Marius de Zayas. *Ambroise Vollard*, 1920, ink drawing, cover of *Vida Americana*.



Figure 31. David Alfaro Siqueiros. *Retrato del Sastre W. Kennedy* (*Portrait of the Tailor W. Kennedy*), 1920, pencil drawing.



Figure 32. The Stridentists in Jalapa, 1925, black and white photograph. From left to right: Germán List Arzubide, Ramón Alva de la Canal, Manuel Maples Arce, Leopoldo Méndez and Arqueles Vela.



Figure 33. Germán Cueto. *Portrait Mask of Leopoldo Méndez*, ca. 1924, clay sculpture.

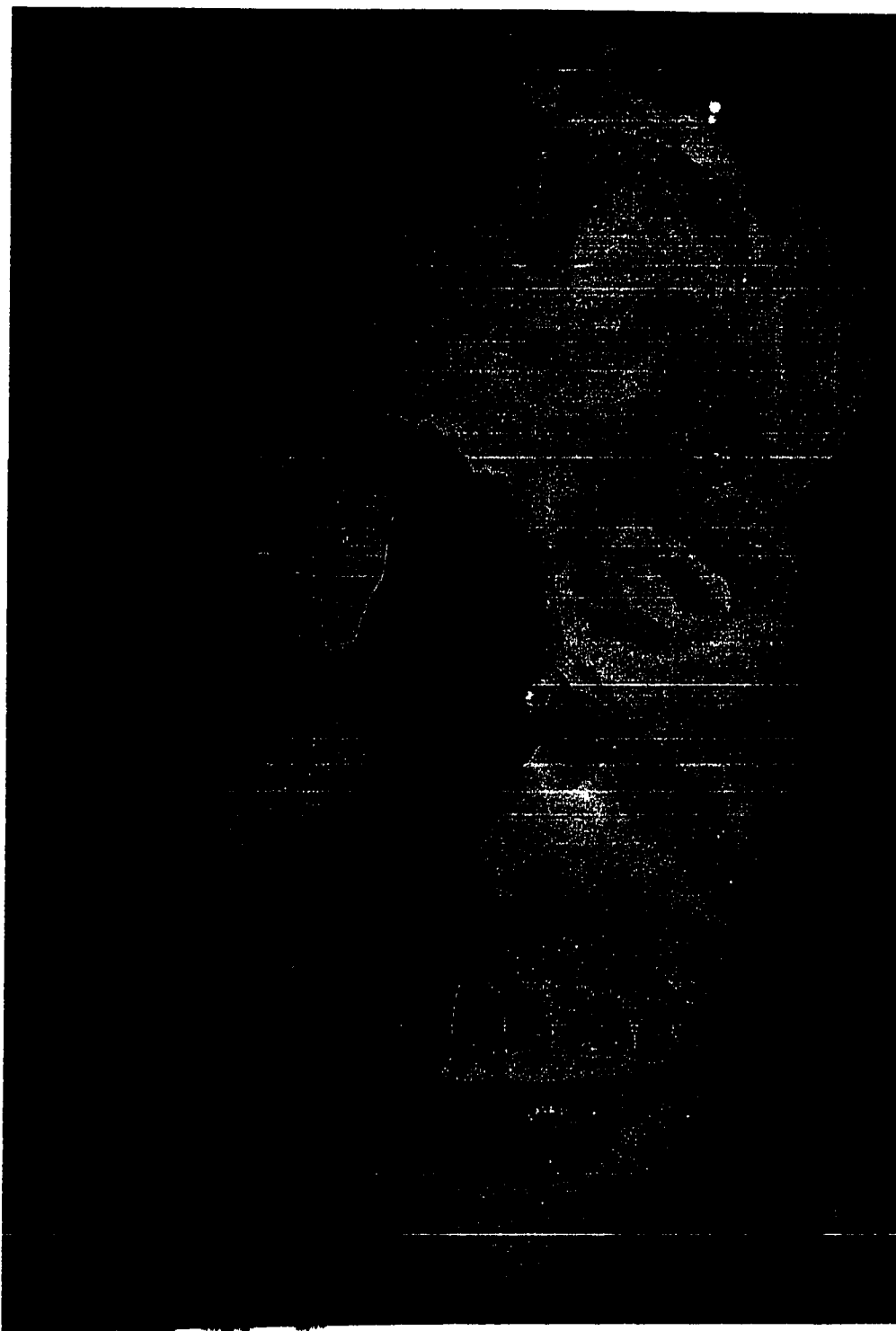


Figure 34. Germán Cueto. *Portrait Mask of Germán List Arzubide*, ca. 1924, clay sculpture.



Figure 35. Diego Rivera. *Calligramas*, 1924, drawing.

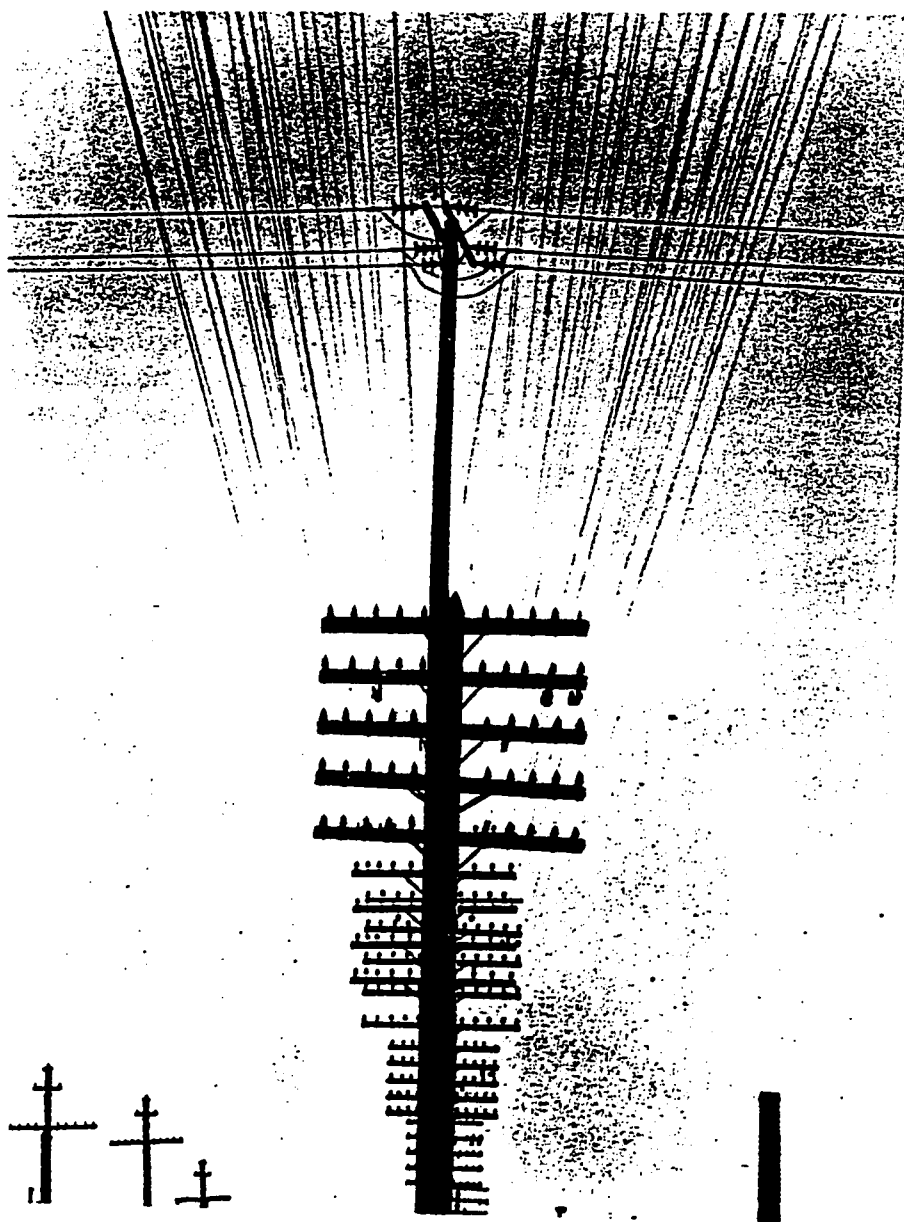


Figure 36. Tina Modotti. *Electric Wires*, ca. 1925, black and white photograph.



Figure 37. Edward Weston. *The Armco Steel Company in Middletown, Ohio*, 1925, black and white photograph, cover of *Irradiador*.



Figure 38. Tina Modotti. *Portrait of Germán List Arzubide*, ca. 1925, black and white photograph.



Figure 39. Ramón Alva de la Canal. *Café*, 1924, woodcut.

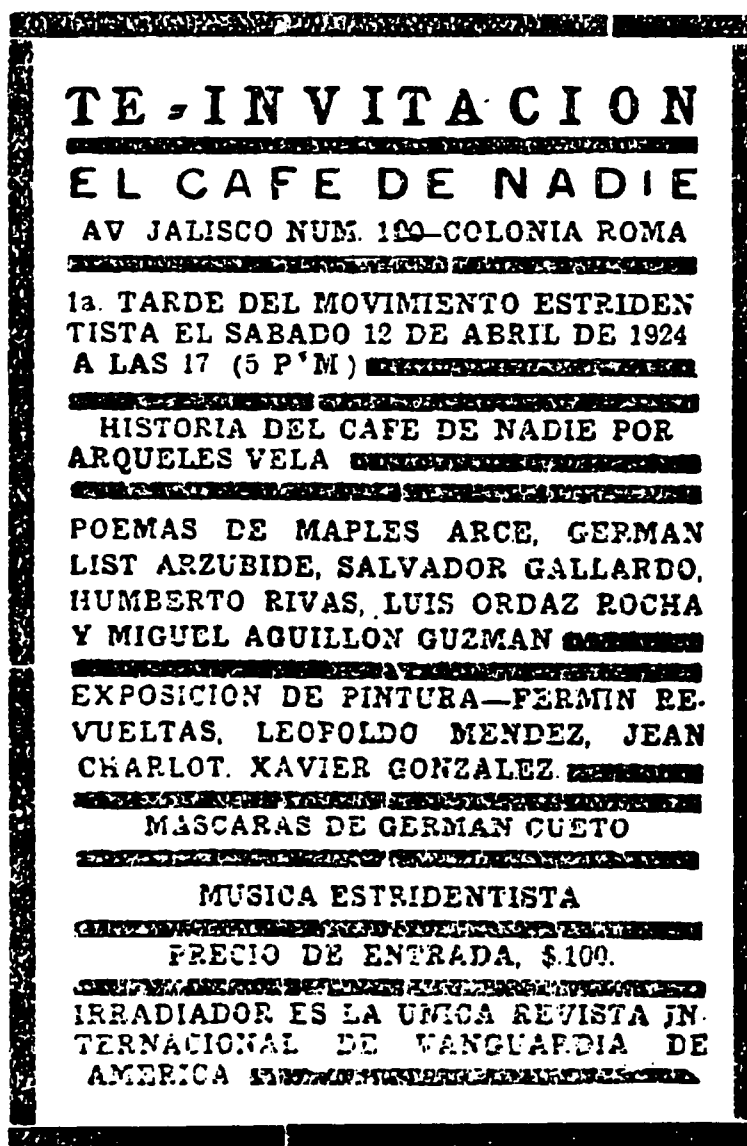


Figure 40. *Té Invitación El Café de Nadie*, in *Irradiador*, 1924.



Figure 41. Ramón Alva de la Canal. *El Café de Nadie*, 1924, oil on canvas.

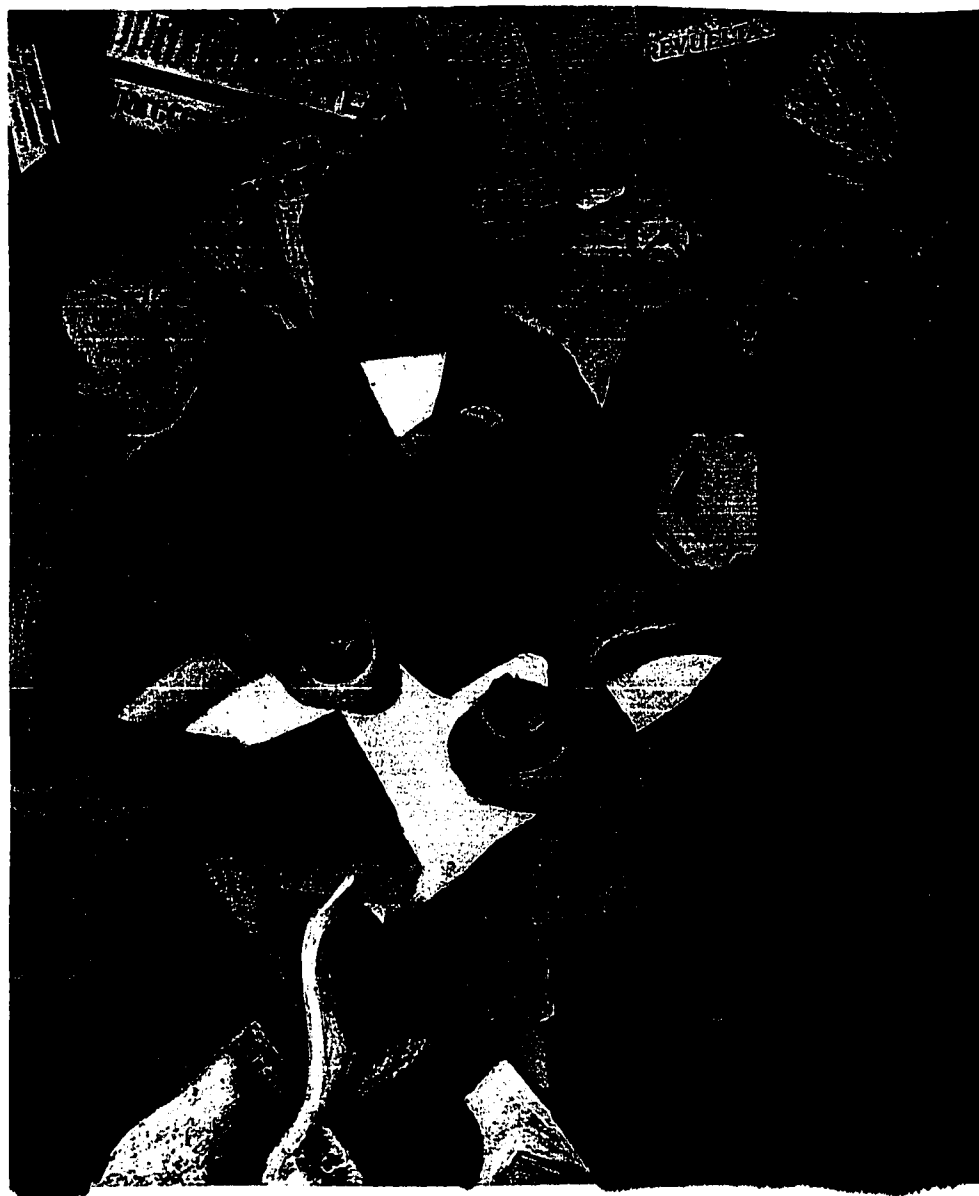


Figure 42. Ramón Alva de la Canal. *El Café de Nadie*, 1930, oil on canvas.

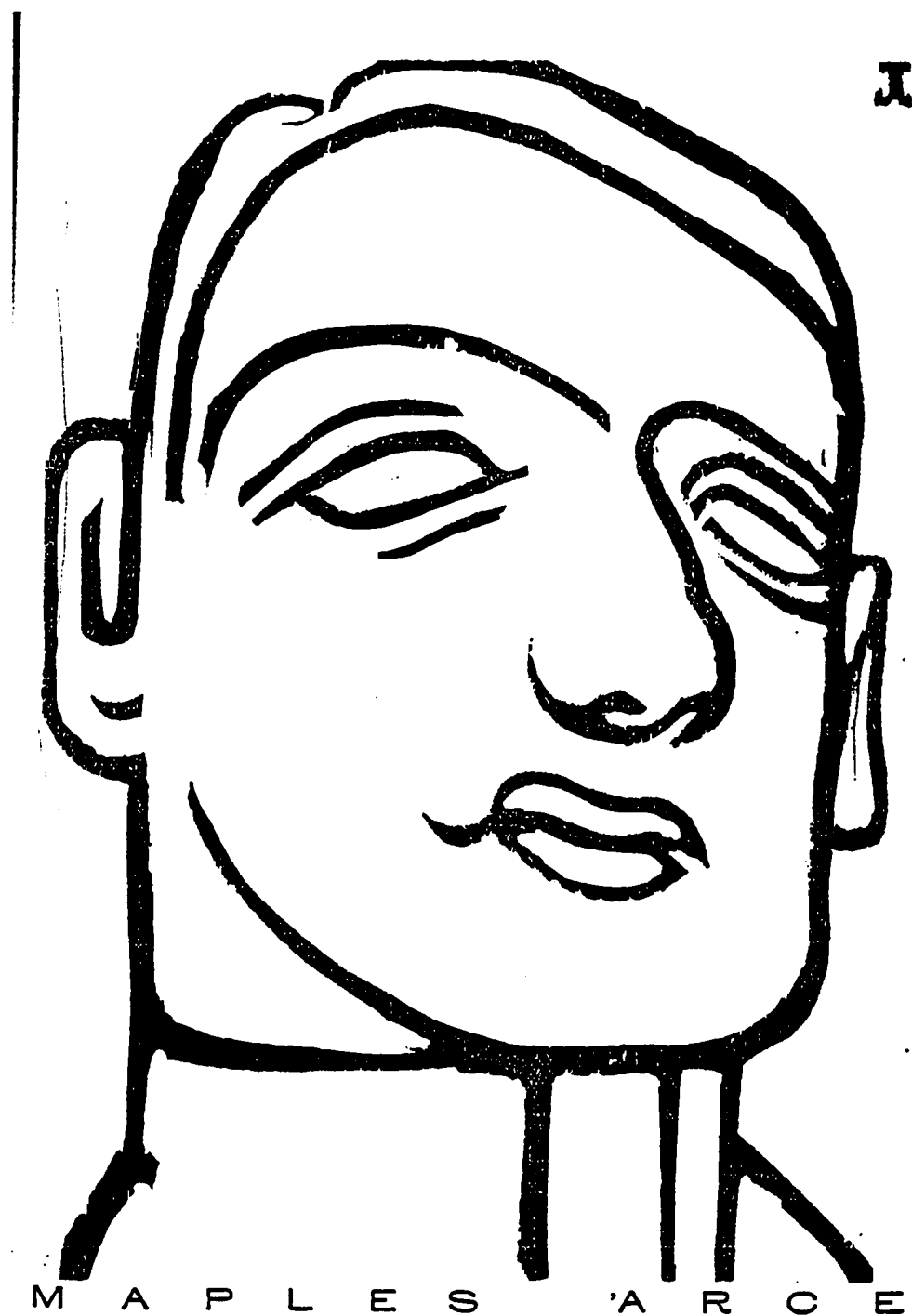


Figure 43. Jean Charlot. *Manuel Maples Arce*, frontispiece for *Urbe*, 1924, woodcut.



Figure 44. Leopoldo Méndez. *Portrait of Maples Arce*, ca. 1925, oil on canvas.



Figure 45. Jean Charlot. Cover for *Urbe*, 1924, woodcut.



Figure 46. Sergei Chekhonin. Cover for John Reed's *Ten Days That Shook the World*, 1923, woodcut.

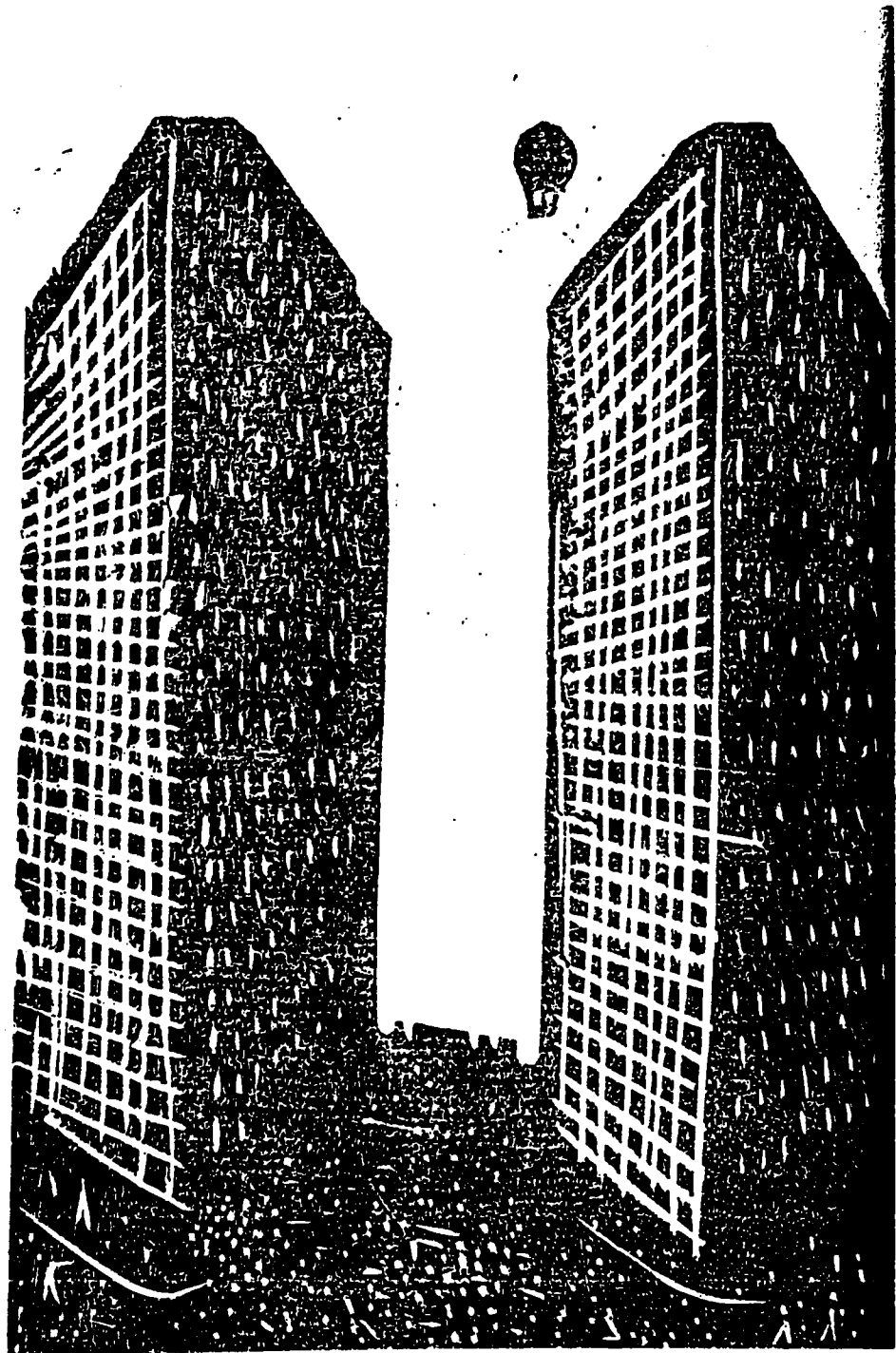


Figure 47. Jean Charlot. Illustration for *Urbe*, 1924, woodcut.



Figure 48. Jean Charlot. Illustration for *Urbe*, 1924, woodcut.

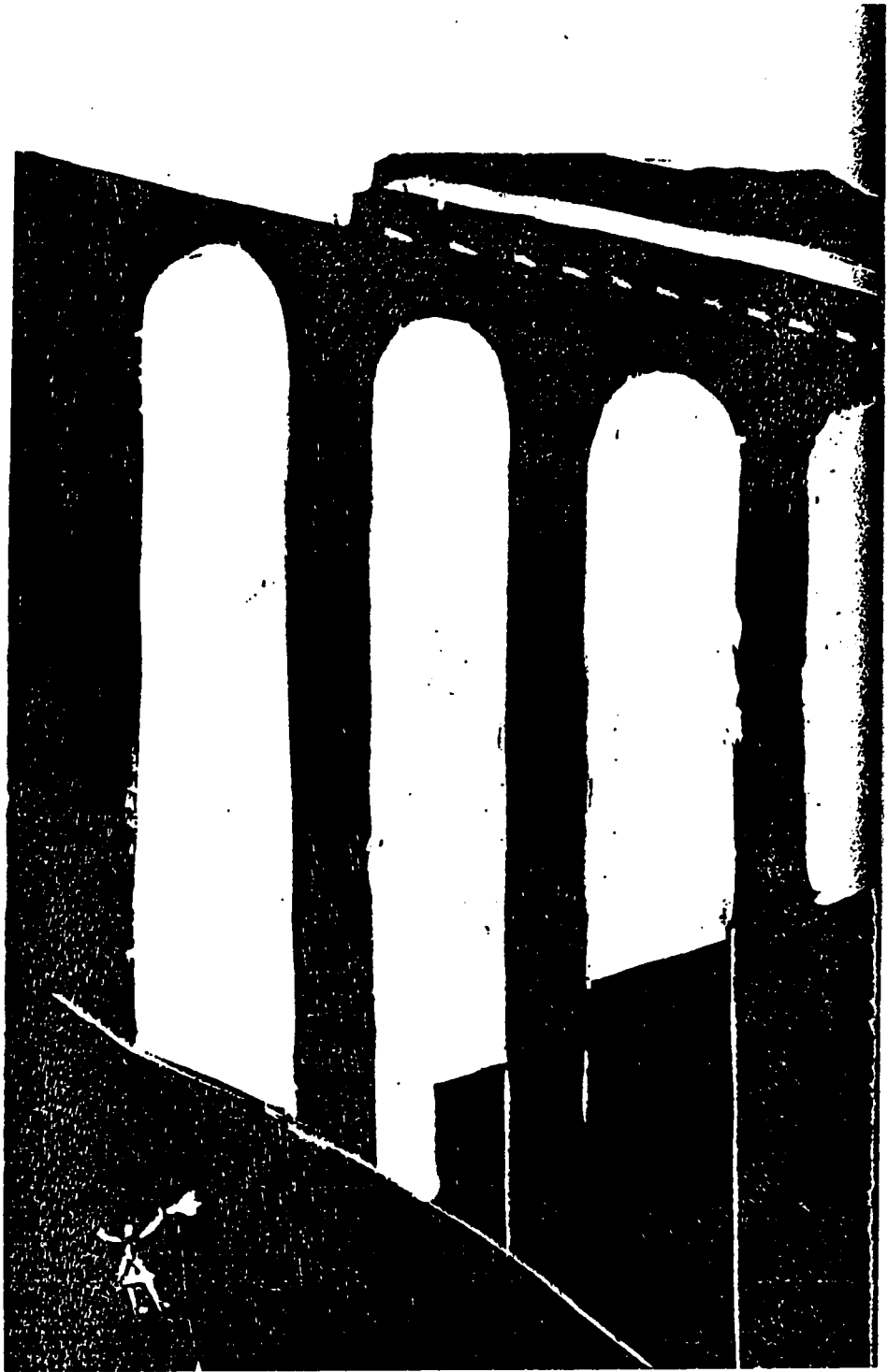


Figure 49. Jean Charlot. Illustration for *Urbe*, 1924, woodcut.



Figure 50. Jean Charlot. Illustration for *Urbe*, 1924, woodcut.



Figure 51. Jean Charlot. Illustration for *Urbe*, 1924, woodcut.

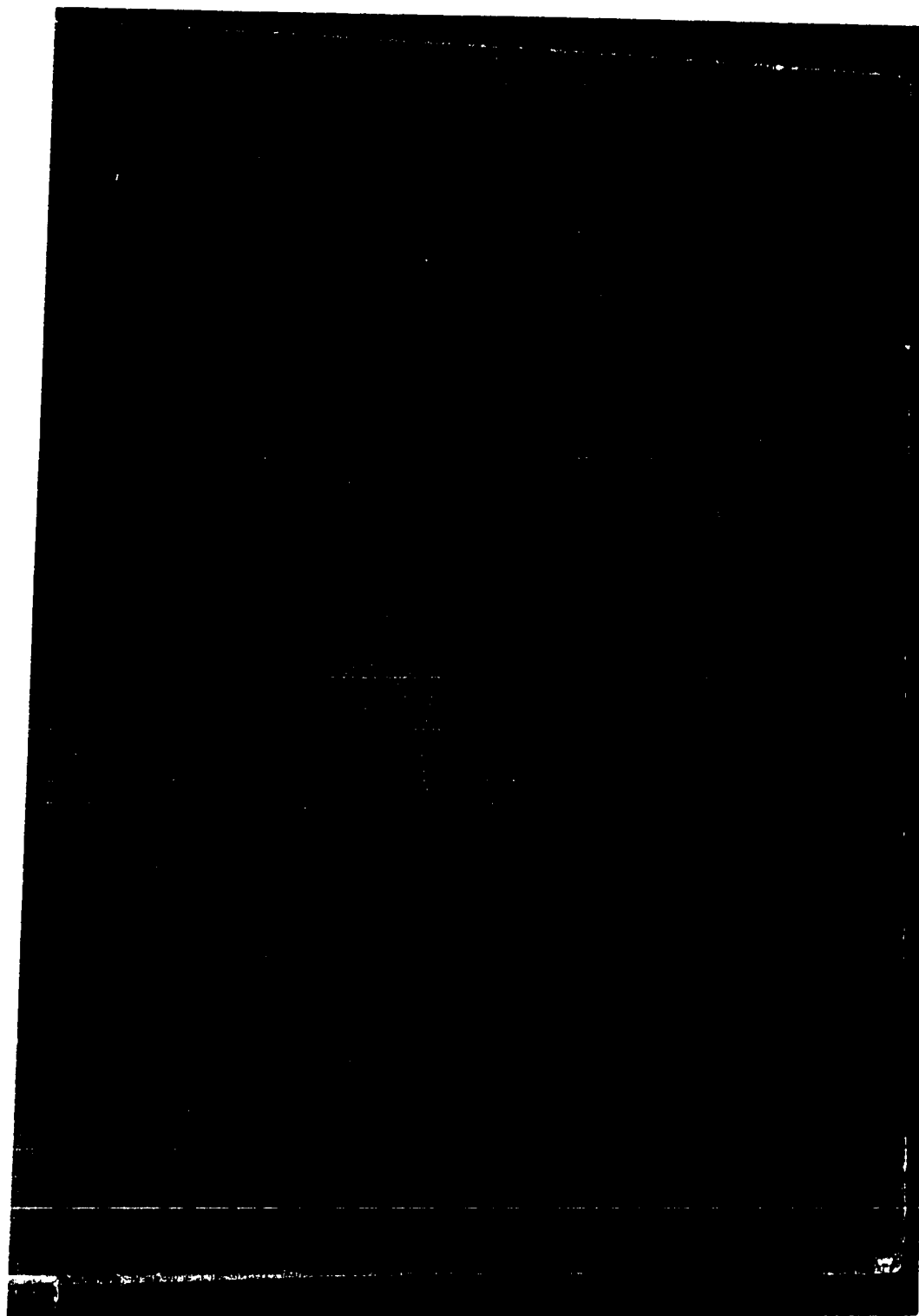


Figure 52. Ramón Alva de la Canal. Cover for *Plebe: Poemas de Rebeldia*, 1925, woodcut.

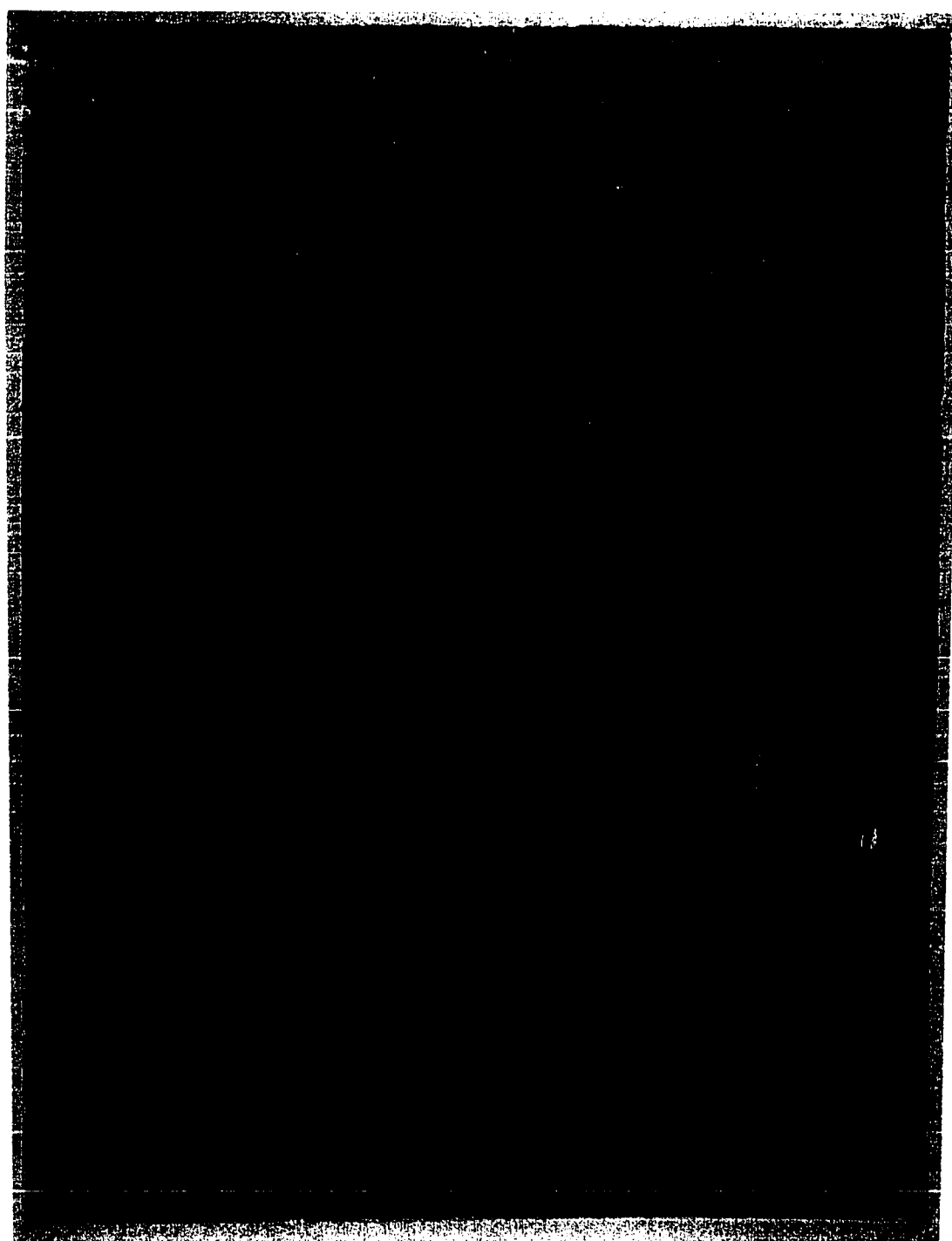


Figure 53. Ramón Alva de la Canal. Cover for *El Pentagrama Eléctrico*, 1925, woodcut.

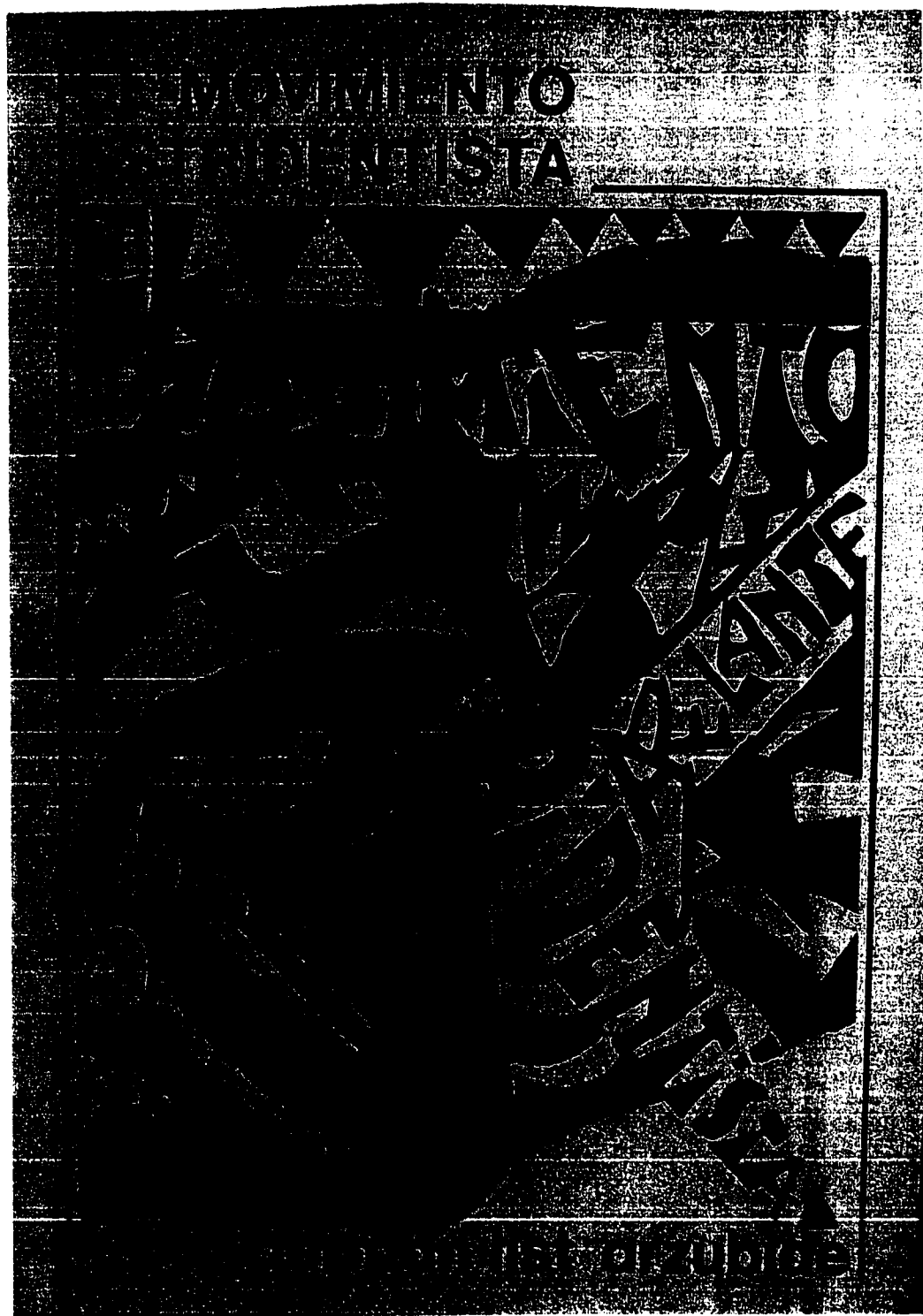


Figure 54. Ramón Alva de la Canal. Cover for *El Movimiento Estridentista*, 1928, woodcut.

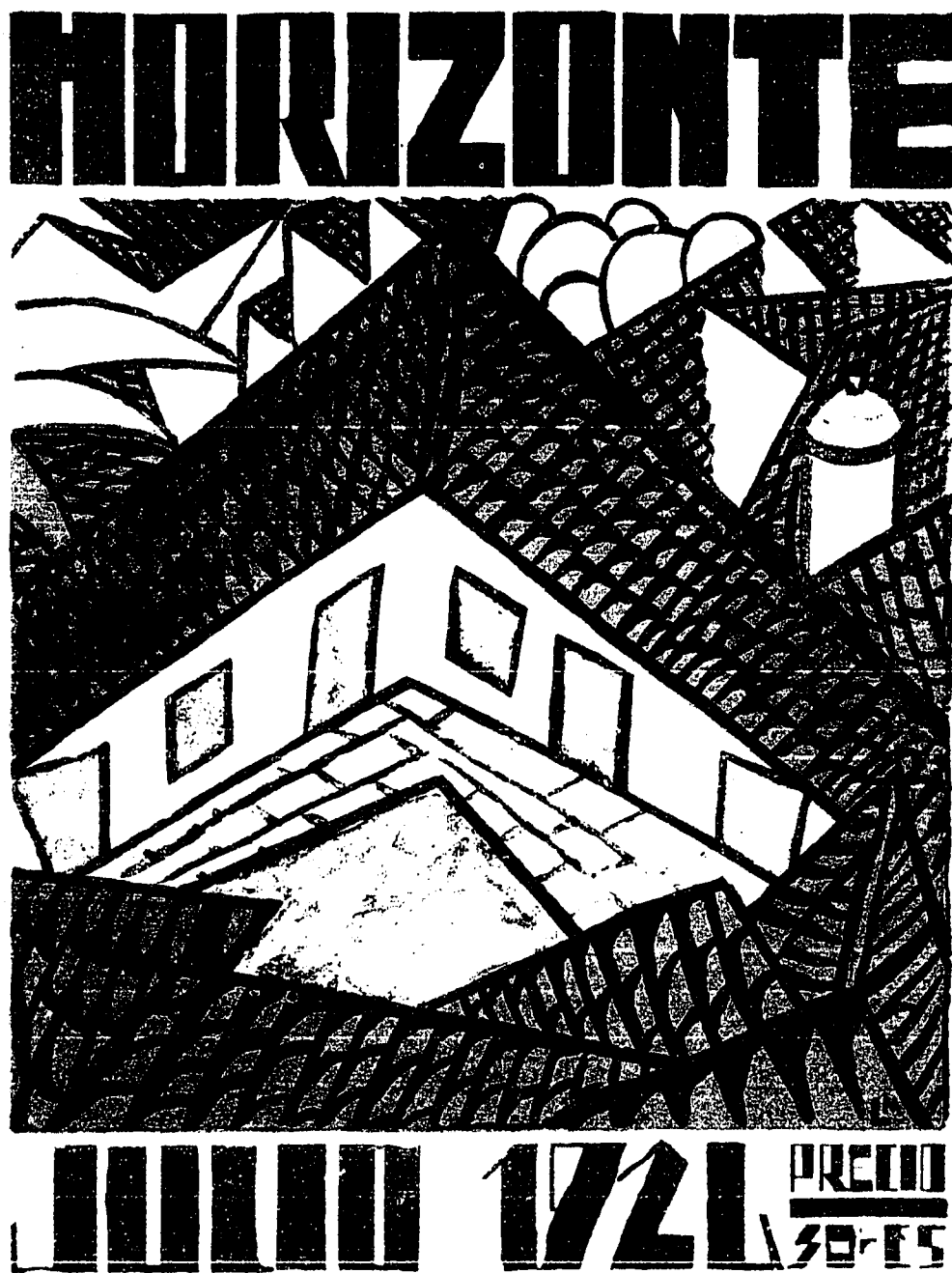


Figure 55. Leopoldo Méndez. *The Roofs of Jalapa*, cover for *Horizonte*, July 1926, watercolor.



Figure 56. Leopoldo Méndez. *Hombre*, 1925, woodcut.

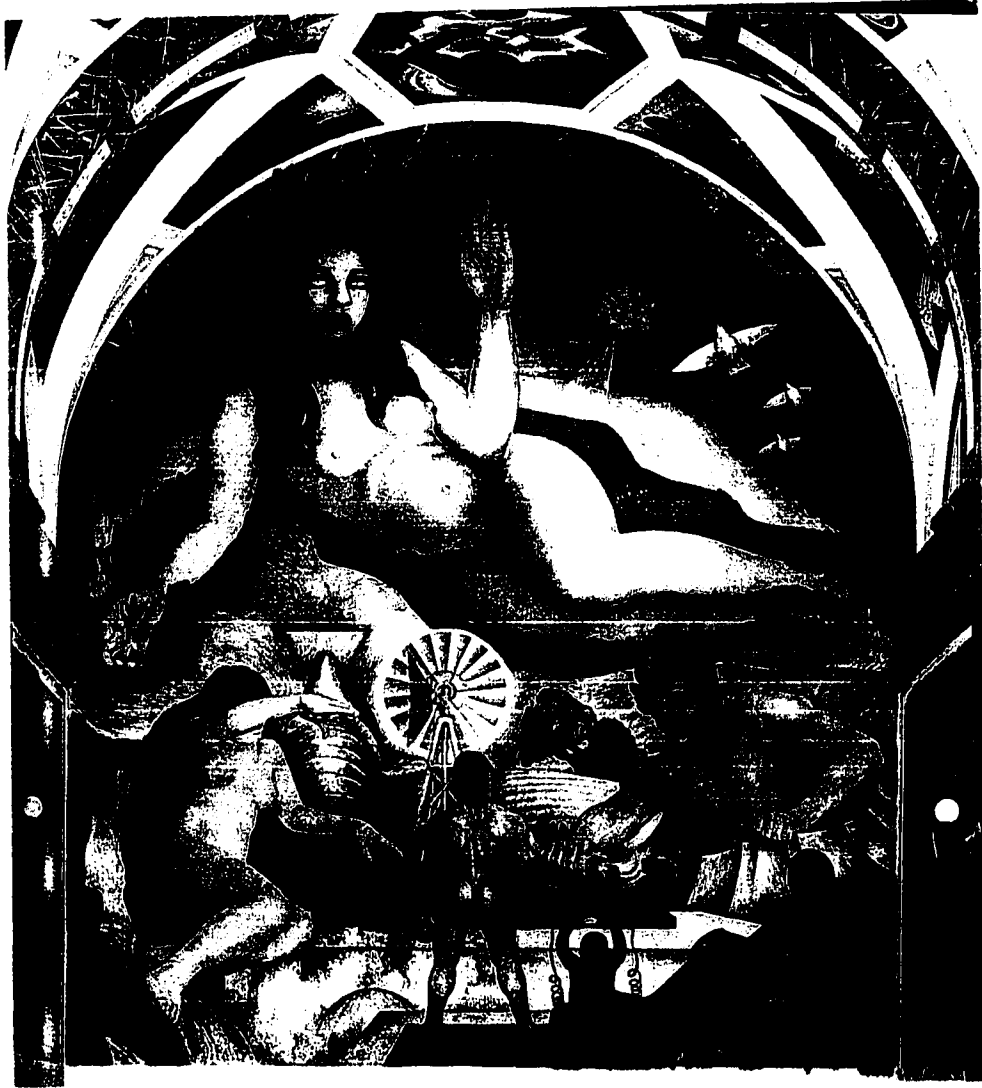


Figure 57. Diego Rivera. *The Liberated Earth with the Natural Forces Controlled by Man*, 1926, fresco, chapel, north wall, National Autonomous University, Chapingo, Mexico.

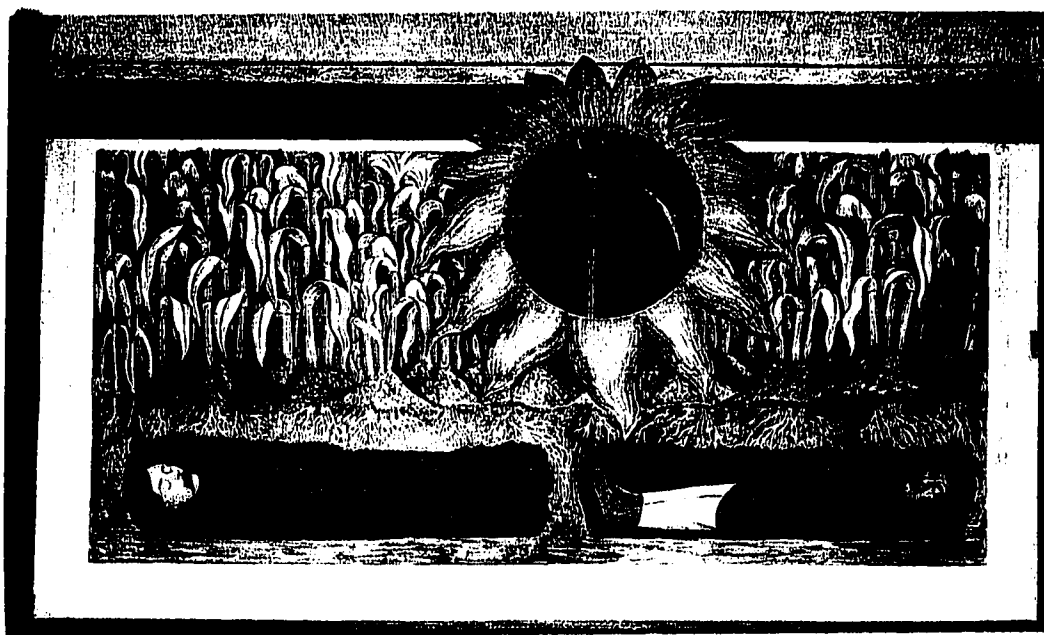


Figure 58. Diego Rivera. *The Blood of the Revolutionary Martyrs Fertilizing the Earth*, 1926, fresco, chapel, east wall, National Autonomous University, Chapingo, Mexico.

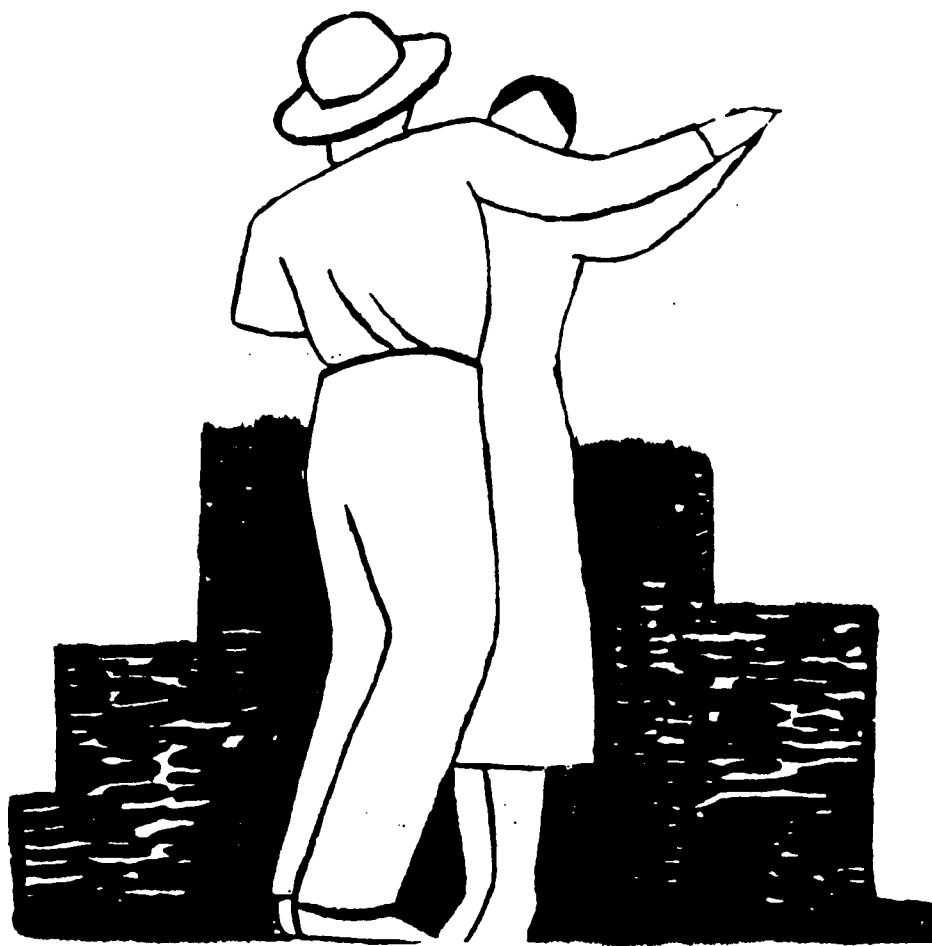


Figure 59. Leopoldo Méndez. *Danzón*, 1926, woodcut.

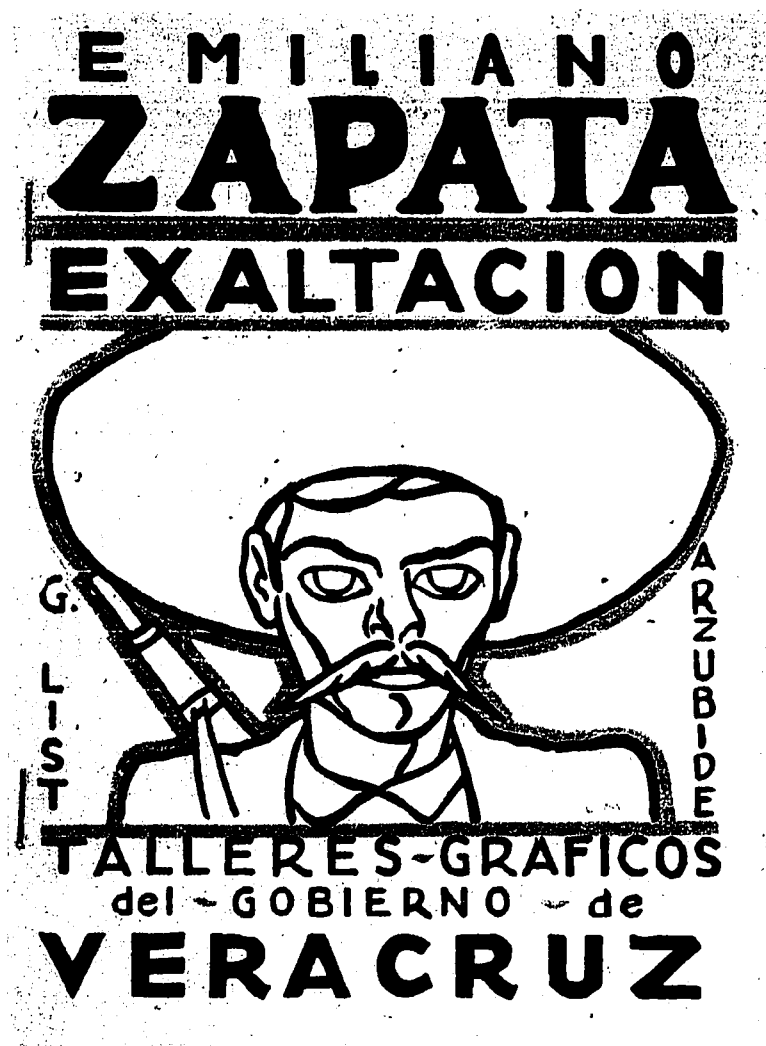


Figure 60. Leopoldo Méndez. Front cover for *Zapata Exaltación*, 1927, drawing.



Figure 61. Leopoldo Méndez. Front cover for *Zapata Exaltación*, 1928, woodcut.



Figure 62. Leopoldo Méndez. Back cover for *Zapata Exaltación*, 1928, woodcut.

HORIZONTE



MARZO ~ 1927
~ PRECIO ~ 30¢ ~

Figure 63. Leopoldo Méndez. Cover for *Horizonte*, March 1927, oil on canvas.



Figure 64. Diego Rivera. *The Burning of the Judas*, 1923-4, fresco, Court of the Fiestas, Ministry of Education, Mexico City.

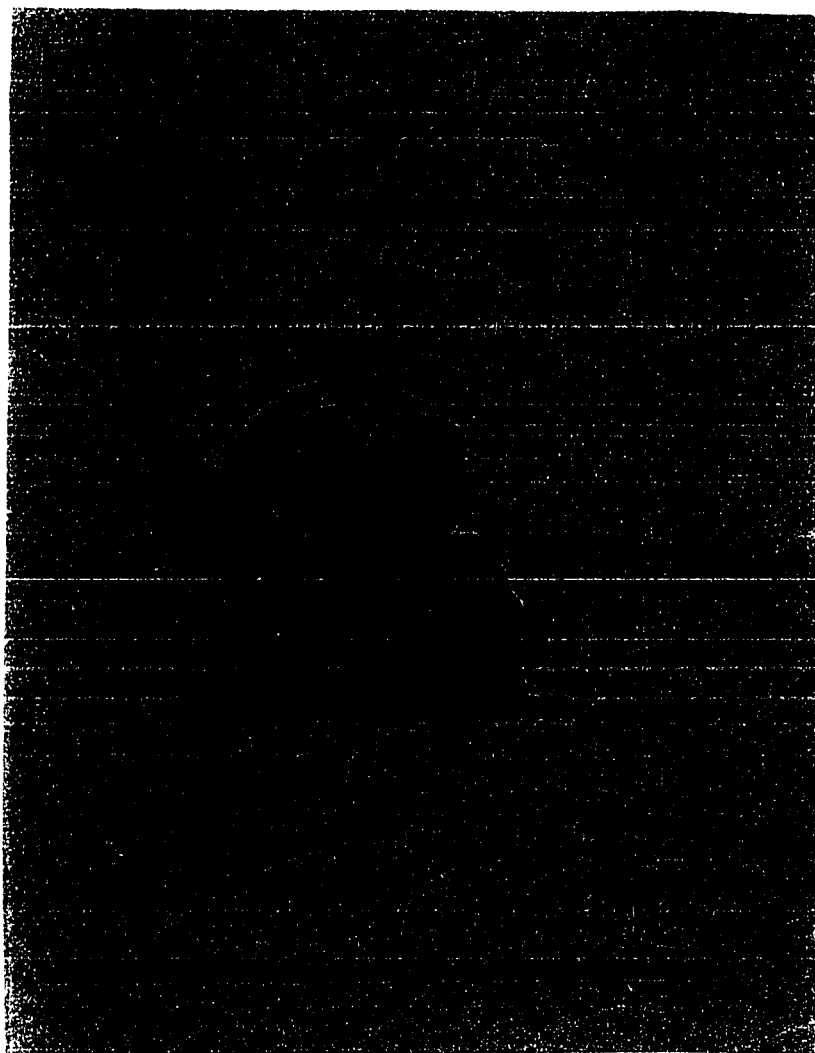


Figure 65. Leopoldo Méndez. Front cover for *El Movimiento Social en Veracruz*, 1927, drawing.



Figure 66. Robin List Crespo de la Serna. Stridentist monument, 1997, Avenue of the Poets, Chapultepec Park, Mexico City.



Figure 67. Leopoldo Méndez. Front cover for *Un Fragmento de la Revolución*, 1928, woodcut.

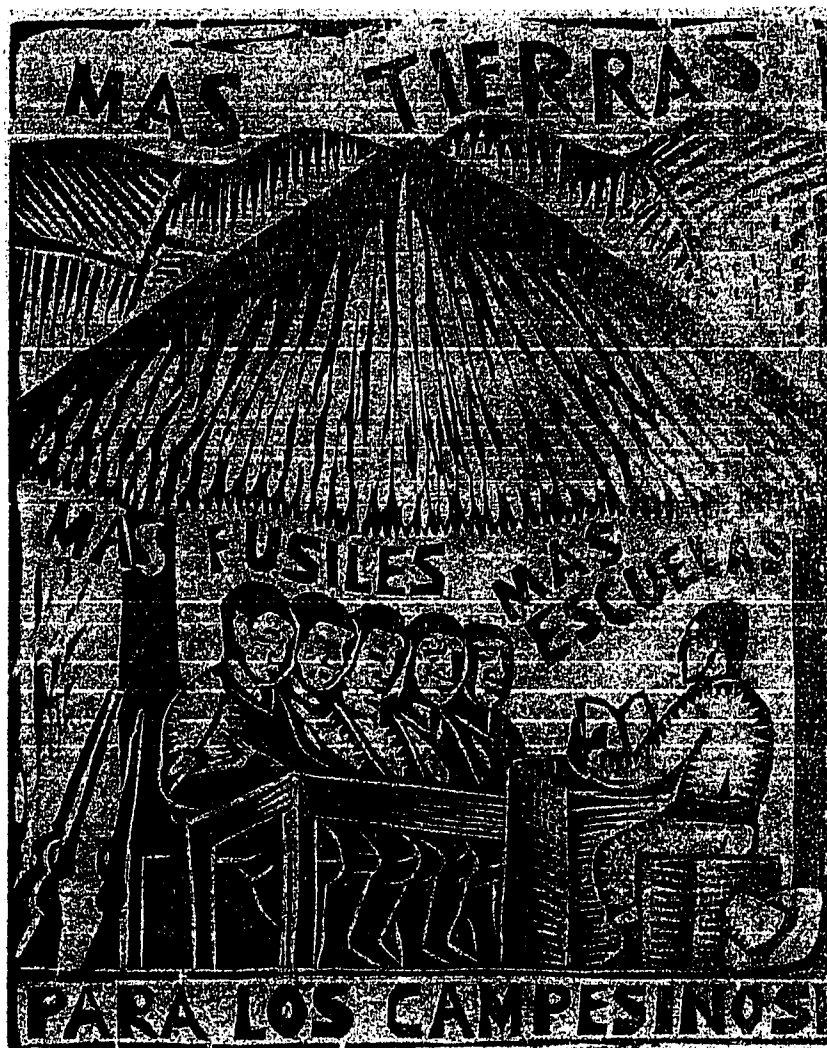


Figure 68. Leopoldo Méndez. Back cover for *Un Fragmento de la Revolución*, 1928, woodcut.



Figure 69. Tina Modotti. *Bandolier, Corn, Guitar*, 1927, black and white photograph.



Figure 70. Tina Modotti. *Bandolier, Corn, Sickle*, 1927, black and white photograph.



Figure 71. Käthe Kollwitz. *Vienna is Starving Its Children*, 1920, lithograph.



Figure 72. Tina Modotti. Hands Off Nicaragua Committee with American flag captured by Sandino, 1928, black and white photograph.

AGORISMO

PRIMERA EXPOSICION DE POEMAS - 1929



Figure 73. Leopoldo Méndez. *La Revolución Que Hace Arte* (*The Revolution That Makes Art*), 1929, woodcut.



Figure 74. Leopoldo Méndez. *Neptune*, 1930, illustration for Heinrich Heine's *The Gods in Exile*, woodcut.



Figure 75. Leopoldo Méndez. *Lamentación* (Lamentation), 1930, woodcut.



Figure 76. Francisco Goitia. *Tata Jesucristo (Father Jesus Christ)*, 1926, Museo Nacional del Arte, Mexico City, oil on canvas.



Figure 77. Leopoldo Méndez. *A la Guerra, A la Guerra* (To War, To War), 1930, illustration for María del Mar's *La Corola Invertida*, woodcut.



Figure 78. José Guadalupe Posada. *El Asesinato de La Malagüeña* (*The Murder of La Malagüeña*), ca. 1897, zinc etching.



Figure 79. José Guadalupe Posada. *Entry of Madero into Mexico City*, ca. 1911, zinc etching.



Figure 80. José Guadalupe Posada. *Zapata and Followers*, ca. 1911, zinc etching.

Mi Primo Aniceto

Entre todos los muchachos del harrio y de la ranchería, era el más inteligente y el más hombre.

Había estado en la escuela el tiempo indispensable para aprender a deletrear. Desde muy pequeño subió a la categoría de jefe de familia y tuvo que enfrentarse con el rudo trabajo del campo.

Su padre, el tío Demetrio, del que me acuerdo vagamente por su silueta nazarena, había muerto en la epidemia de tifo que asoló los contornos. Entonces, Aniceto se hizo cargo de la madre y de los hermanos menores. El horizonte del mundo se redujo para él a los linderos del rancho de los Charcos, y las horas del día, desde la madrugada hasta la noche, estaban integralmente repartidas en las labores más rudas.

Cuando apuntaba el lucero del alba o se veían las Siete Cabrillas, empezaba la ordeña para que llegara la leche a buen tiempo. Para cuando el sol salía, él ya había ordeñado, apartado las vacas de las crías y curado a los becerros enfermos.

Con qué alborozo llegaba a la cocina a la hora del almuerzo! Era un remanso; cerca de la abuelita desgranaba su buen humor y se enredaba en bromas con los rapaces menores. Hacía su plan para el trabajo del día, que era siempre igual, pero había que darle el toque de novedad y de aliento cotidianos. Las vacas se encerraban en el "jagüey", allí los pastos eran abundantes; los becerros a la "manga", en donde había buenos agujeros. Después, a traer los bueyes para uncir, antes que calentara mucho el sol. Siempre había que abrir, que voltear, que sembrar, que escardar o que asegurarse algunas tierras. El día lo pasaba abriendo surcos, comía al pie de la balsa la pitanza que le llevaba alguno de los hermanos menores, y al caer la tarde soltaba la yunta para ir a recoger las vacas de ordeña a fin de que pasaran la noche en los establos rudimentarios. Volvía cantando entre las veredas, tronando su honda y gobernando su ganado con voces certeras y oportunas.

Los colegiales del pueblo que íbamos al rancho a pasar el fin de semana cerca de los abuelos, admirábamos a Aniceto porque sabía más cosas que las que nosotros aprendíamos en los libros. Era de la misma edad nuestra y él hacía la tarea de los hermanos mayores. Aseurraba la madera para los yugos y los timones, cor-

taba el cuero crudo para las coyundas, uncía los bueyes con voces de mando y golpe seguro y arriaba la yunta trazando con su reja y su arado el cuadrilátero de la tierra labrantia.

Aniceto sabía el nombre de las vacas, de los bueyes y de los toros, y a los que no lo tenían él se los acomodaba. —¡En, Tumbaga! ¡Ora, Cintiyo! ¡Arriba, Jolino! Todos los animales conocía su voz y hasta obedecían sus llamados.

Los domingos eran días propicios a los grandes acontecimientos del rancho. Cuando no iba a misa y se quedaba con nosotros en el campo, Aniceto siempre inventaba algún entretenimiento fuerte y regocijado.

—Vamos a ver, muchachos; saquen al toro "Homero", que lo vamos a topar con el del rancho vecino.

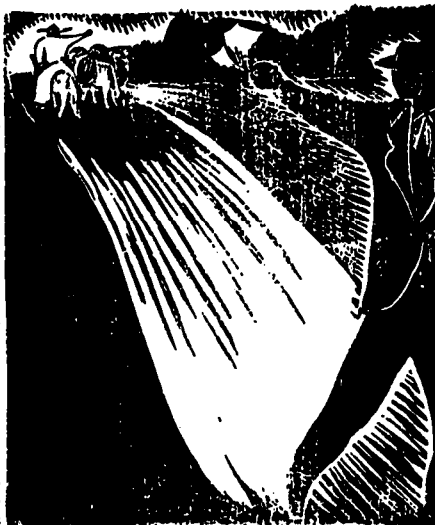
Aquellas peleas de toros eran sensacionales; caminábamos con nuestro campeón, irrumpíamos en la propiedad ajena, acorralábamos a los contendientes y la acometida de las fieras ponía el espanto en nuestro corazón y el temor en la rancencia. Muchas veces los dueños del rancho invadido nos echaban en carreta o venían a formular cerca del abuelo reclamaciones amenazantes. Cuando alguno de los toros salía con una asta quebrada o sangrante desgarradura en la piel, nos sobreecgía la impresión de las tragedias irreparables.

Era también el primo Aniceto un buen andarín y un experto leñador. —Ahora, muchachos; agarren sus hachas y vamos hasta la cumbre del cerro de San Diego, al potrero de "El Chopo"; allí "haremos leña" y si no se cansan los llevo a "La Campana", donde hay una piedra enorme que al golpearla suena como esquila.

Itajábamos leña, hacíamos vibrar la roca misteriosa, buscábamos frutas silvestres y de vuelta tatemábamos elotes en pleno campo y comíamos como una tribu nómada. Aniceto nos guiaba, nos advertía de los peligros y nos hacía ligera la expedición contándonos las anécdotas de la ranchería.

De regreso al caserío, encontrábamos en la casa solariega la resignada pobreza, la santa piedad de las mujeres y la providente asistencia de los abuelos...

El Rancho de los Charcos hubo de venderse. La buena madrina, que era la dueña, agotó su fortuna en hacer servicios a toda una parentela desvalida y ahora llegaba el turno a las tierras que se habían



(Madera de Leopoldo Méndez).

E L S E M B R A D O R 15

Figure 81. Leopoldo Méndez. *El Adios (The Goodbye)*, 1929, illustration for *El Sembrador*, woodcut.



Figure 82. Pablo O'Higgins. *Ladrillero (Brick Maker)*, 1945, lithograph.

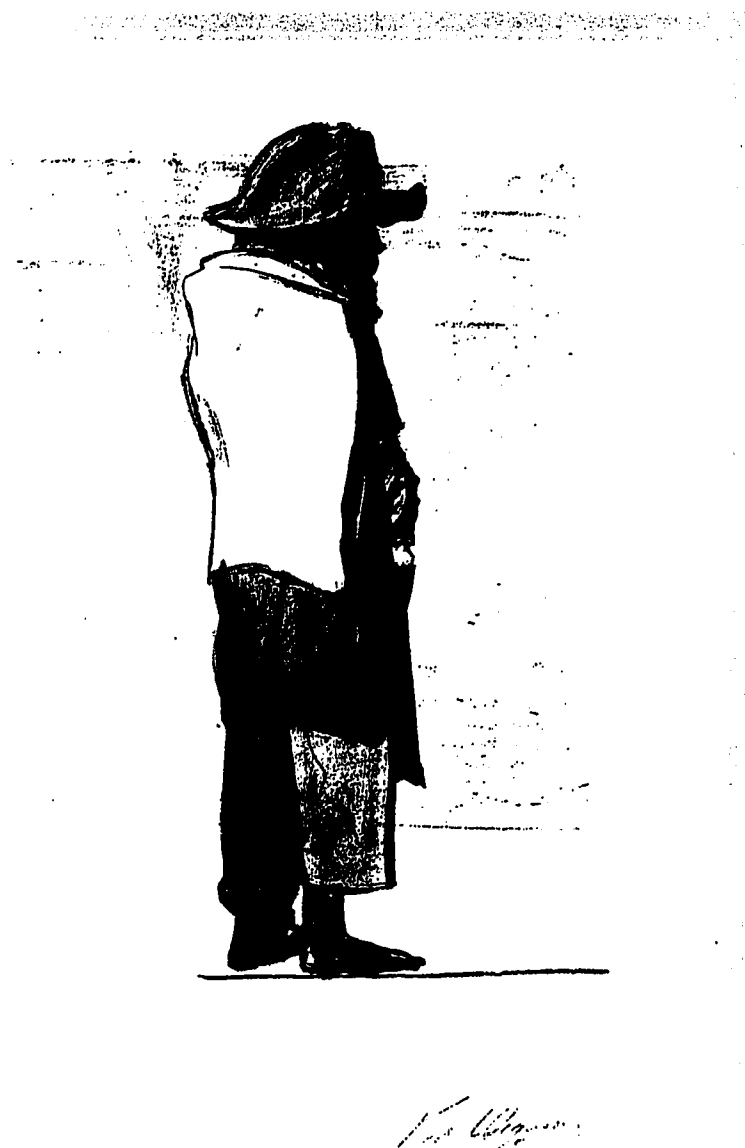


Figure 83. Pablo O'Higgins. *Hombre del Siglo XX* (*Man of the Twentieth Century*), 1939, lithograph.



Figure 84. Leopoldo Méndez. *Arte Puro (Pure Art)*, 1931, woodcut.



Figure 85. George Grosz. *Der Blutige Ernst*, 1919, drawing.



Figure 86. Tina Modotti. *My Latest Lover*, 1923, black and white photograph.



Figure 87. Neighborhood puppet show, black and white photograph, 1929, Mexico City.



Figure 88. Members of the SEP puppet theater assembling and rehearsing a puppet show, ca. 1932, black and white photograph.



Figure 89. A SEP puppet theater production in Mexico City, ca. 1932, black and white black and white photograph.



Figure 90. The puppet Comino, black and white photograph, 1930s.

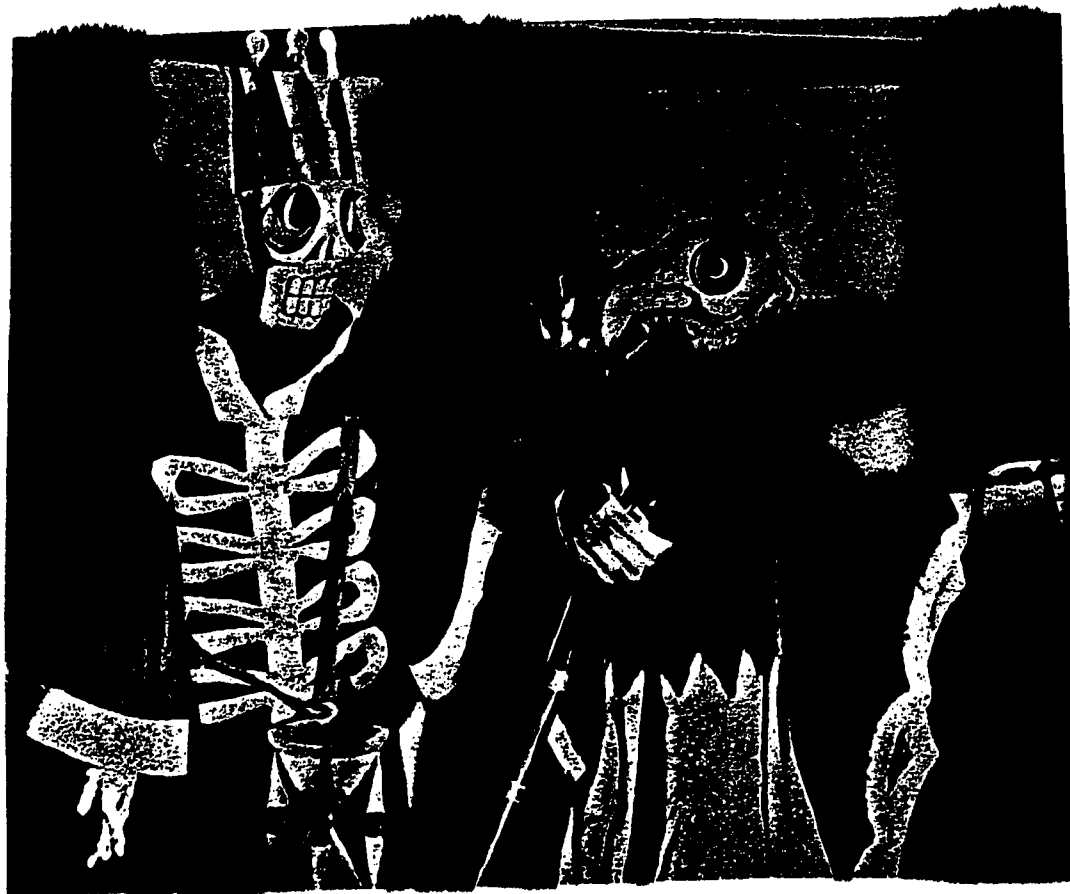


Figure 91. Francisco Díaz de León and Gabriel Fernández Ledesma. The puppets La Bruja and la Muerte, 1930s, black and white photograph.

Beneficencia Pública en el Distrito Federal

RADIO-CONCIERTO POR DEMENTES DE LA CASTAÑEDA



Miércoles 24 de Febrero. - De las 21 a las 22 h.

ESTACION RADIO-DIFUSORA X. E. F. O. ⁹⁴⁰ KILOCYCLOS

Por primera vez en el mundo, los enajenados transmitirán su canto por radio.

!!! ESCUCHELOS USTED!!!

Figure 92. Leopoldo Méndez. *Concierto de Locos (Concert of Crazies)*, 1932, woodcut.



Figure 93. Ernst Barlach. *The First Day*, 1921, woodcut.



Figure 94. José Guadalupe Posada. *La Metamorfosis de Madero* (*The Metamorphosis of Madero*), 1911, zinc etching.



Figure 95. Leopoldo Méndez. *Calaveras del Mausoleo Nacional* (*Calaveras of the National Mausoleum*), 1934, wood engraving.



Figure 96. José Guadalupe Posada. *Soldadera Zapatista*, ca. 1911, zinc etching.



Figure 97. Leopoldo Méndez. *El Accidente* (*The Accident*), 1934, wood engraving.



Figure 98. Leopoldo Méndez. *El "Juan,"* 1934, wood engraving.



Figure 99. Luis Arenal. Cover for the second issue of *Frente a Frente*, 1934, woodcut.



Figure 100. Vladimir Kozlinsky. *Meeting*, 1919, woodcut.



Figure 101. Frans Masareel. *The Strike*, 1919, woodcut.

ció el criollo, así nació el mestizaje.

En la arquitectura religiosa, tanto como en la civil, se refleja claramente el estado de explotación de las masas. En las iglesias encontramos los elementos decorativos sensuales de las residencias, así como en éstas vemos combinados gran número de símbolos religiosos. Todo esto ricamente trabado.

Aparecen los palacios municipales como nueva arma de dominación, castigando a los artesanos que no se sometían a los trabajos impuestos por los encomenderos. La cárcel es el elemento más importante de este tipo de edificios.

Encontramos en la ciudad de México, un tipo de habitación, para artesanos, consistente en un cuarto que es taller y un tapanco que funciona como recámara, añadiéndose en algunos casos una pequeña cocina; este tipo es el llamado de "taza y plato". Este tipo de construcción no tuvo por objeto proporcionar facilidades al artesano, sino más bien prevaleció el propósito de lucrar, pues el artesano pagaba alquiler. Como "casa económica" tiene una buena disposición. Sin embargo, su reducido número no se compensaba con el excesivo de residencias, iglesias, conventos (Cholula, Pue., tenía más iglesias que casas). Fuera de este único ejemplo en que la

no encontramos ningún otro contrario, las épocas ulteriores ni la ganancia crece al grado de degenera y se torna perjudicial redondo".

Siglo XVIII.—Con el auge exclusivo de la clase feudal-terceros y se complican al igual las iglesias. El oro cuelga de los labios, a la vez que los santos fin buscados nichos de las residencias alternan con los símbolos religiosos lastimosos entre tupidas enramadas. Siglo las clases dominantes de mente la explotación de que campesinos, mineros y artesanos trabajo y su hábil técnica por taba la construcción de estos arquitectura.

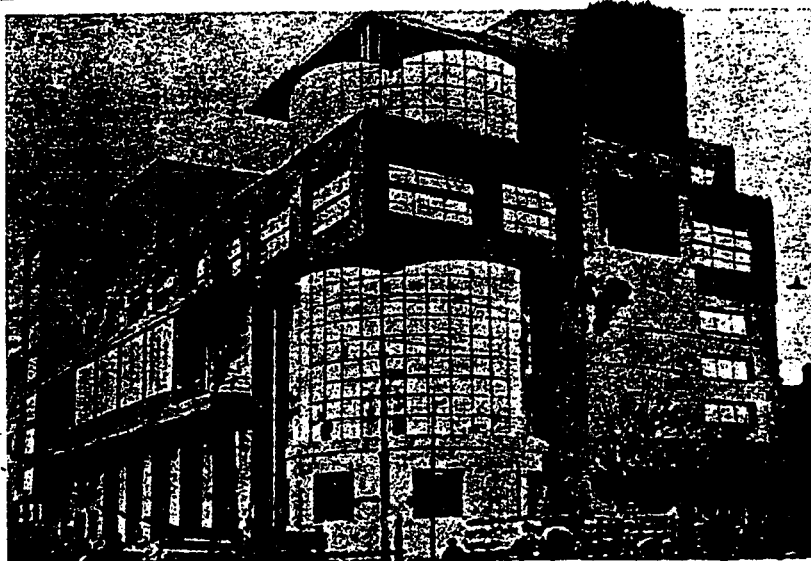
Siglo XIX.—La arquitectura cede a la de las anteriores en la religiosa y a la de residencias

truirse

ya no anterior disputa burgueses cesa es pios de que hac y resid

Siglo siglo 24 fluencia europea hace o en la s pación cios of privaba tales er de la J tuación estaba. Despué impera demagc Mexica miento lo el m gran nicas e servar

J
e
s



club obrero. - moscou.

según los arquitectos rusos la obra arquitectónica no tiene valor ni interés, aún estético, sino en la medida que sirve para la colectividad.

Figure 102. Workers' club, Moscow, *Frente a Frente*, May 1935, black and white photograph.



Figure 103. Russian workers and children, *Frente a Frente*, May 1935, photomontage.



Figure 104. Possibly Leopoldo Méndez. *Lombardo Toledano, Guardias Blancas and ARM, Frente a Frente*, May 1935, woodcut.



Al arriero y a las mulas

Corrido por CRISTOBAL SUAREZ.

Al arriero y a las mulas
que Hitler manda dora-
re necesario ponerlas
con verdad en su lugar.

Ponemos en lo que son
unos "camión dorados",
criminales que alimientan
los RICOS y nos ALIADOS.

Monero igual que Altamira,
Napco, Morán y Padilla...
Pero ahora voy a separarme
momento del arriero.

Este es Nicolás Rodríguez
de quien tengo en la memoria
nada más una probanza
de toda su negra historia.

Después de acabar el pitu
con hijo de DE LA HUERTA
además hejando al OTRO LADO
hecho la mosquita muerta.

Tratando de pronunciarse
por los panque libro pagado
lo agarraron en San Diego
con el traero embarrado.

En el caso de LAVENWORTH
poco tiempo lo albergó,
¡famepista de los crímenes!
¡Ni nada le pasó!

En la escuela de AL CAPONE
perforación en carrera
fregando al género humano
de la siguiente manera:

Con cierto periodismo
—"LA GUÍA DEL CONFRA-
DOR"

Huoncho a los judíos
va conserio por favor.

Sabido es que Nicolás
nació ya para como feroz
pero la vida se lo puso
detrás de los torbellinos.

Por los noches le prefiere
los vollos a Santos,

¡qué caso que vendiera
mucho NALION MEXICANA.

"Padre Antonio, —le decía—
luminoso los veas;
¡cuántos otros a imitar!
¡Puta llorosa de pena."

EL TRAIDOR le contestó:

—Hijo, habla mucho DE PA-
TRIA.

¡Pues gracias a eso ya
me retiqué de harlo plata.

Nicolás con tal monero
en la mañana siguiente
se pasó a otro bando,
un gringo terriciento.

Tramaron entre los dos
después al médico
le van bien por la tierra
jerma del americano.

De los Angeles al norte
con los terrenos colados;
no piden inversiones,
ni ellos y NADA DÍA.

Por Neco en su revista
—"LA GUÍA DEL CONFRA-
DOR" comparaba nivel dejerio
a un RICO ENCANTADOR.

Y luego en SANTA SUSANA
un garito organizó
"GRAN CASINO MEXICANO"
recuerdo que lo llamó.

donde a emborrachar llevaba
como alcahueta del gringo
a los pobres mexicanos
los maldones del domingo.

Al alardear ya estaban
los polizontes inventados
por el juego de los maldones
y por el trago inmoderado.

Preparados los tintos,
contratos y el expediente
a firmar los investigan
Nico y el terrorista.

Cuando el dueño de operarios
los ingresan merca-
reían que sus pocos bienes
habían pasado a otras manos.

Si a entregar su propia casa
el FAISA se resaca
el gringo y DON NICOLÁS
le echaban con policía.

Que vida de sacrificios
y de tanto trabajar
era cuenta se robaban
no se daban a pensar.

De la noche a la mañana
NICO desapareció
y todo incuso pasaba
en la miseria quedó.

Mientras, Nicolás traba
de privaciones dinero
que por prestarse de GANCIO
le pagó el rico extranjero.

Huyendo con su rápida
al PASO-TEXAS llegó
al tal Nicolás Rodríguez
y otro negocio planeó.

"FERIA DE REVOLUCION"
en Chihuahua planeó
y a todos los Municipios
uno por uno cobró.

Contrabandista de drogas
a Nicolás no le digo
porque puede vomitar
al todo los cuento y digo.

Sólo pongo aquí en el rol
unos troncitos colados,
chica muestra de quien es
EL JEFE DE ESTOS DORADOS.

Es igual que el de Cananea
este corrido se apunta,
para en la cárcel deberán
estar DON NICO Y SU YUNTA.

Guerra y Fachismo

1914 —do, mecen en armamento,
una trampa de la guerra imperia-
lista iniciada en el 11. Los propios
"estadados de paz" continúan ya el
origen de la guerra que ahora vi-
ne. Verrales, con colas de hierro
vuelto al cuello de los países tra-
icionados por los bandoleros ca-
lifornianos, franceses, italia-
nos y portorriqueños, ha sido el
principal promotor de los más
viles sentimientos patrióticos ca-
tife el pueblo alemán, corrompido
ya por una tradición de alianza
y odio de raza. Allí se lanzó el
fascismo hitleriano en el poder. Y
hasta pasados tres años de go-
bierno no se le ocurre al bufo
Hitler violar el Tratado de Ver-
dadero, a manera de llamando je-
ringa para lograr más brutalidad
al pueblo y arrojarlo a la matanza.
Tal raza no es sino producto de
la descomposición, de la impu-
dencia del régimen nazi para salvar
la situación económica de guerra
que atravesaba Alemania. En
vez de hacer Hitler hubiera im-
puesto una revolución proletaria, las
cláusulas del Tratado de Versalles
relativas a Alemania hubieran des-
aparecido en el instante mismo de
establecerse el gobierno socialista
y, por consecuencia, la inmediata
actual de otra guerra imperialista
sería evitada.

Después de atacar tanto a los
judíos, Hitler decreta "que hasta
los obreros de esa raza deben tra-
bajar en las fábricas de armamen-
tos." La misma capitalista alema-
na —el Japon tiene dividido
el 50% (la mitad) de sus ingresos
para presupuesto de guerra.

Sin embargo, desde Hitler, el
delirio de más ambición que im-
pone la batida de la humanidad,
todo lo a porción. Representativa
del capitalismo corea la paz. Ma-
ta el país se dice delirio de la
paz. Pero ya lo tenemos bom-
bando cañones como en la guerra
del 11. Los mismos marchan por
los calles de las ciudades a los
obispos, crucifijos en alto, imi-
tando a los soldados para matar
un miembro de Dios.

La verdadera paz sólo la podría
traer los obreros y campesinos
el fraternizar en los frentes de
batalla y, reconociendo que entre
capitalistas no hay nada que per-
der, cada quien viente sus armas
a sus respectivos países, para he-
cer la revolución o la guerra en
ellos. Los gobiernos de obreros,
campesinos y soldados, que repri-
men definitivamente el ferocismo
de los correspondientes capi-
talistas explotadores.

MARZO
1935

1 LEAR
LIGA ESCRITORES
Y ARTISTAS RE-
VOLUCIONARIOS

HOJA POPULAR No.

Figure 105. Leopoldo Méndez. *Hoja Popular No. 1* (People's Broadsheet No. 1), 1935, woodcut.

COMO PRETENDEN

Aterrorizar a las MASAS TRABAJADORAS los ESBIRROS ASESINOS A SUELDO del Capitalismo.

EL ATENTADO DE STO. DOMINGO CONTRA EL PUEBLO TRABAJADOR: Mujeres arrastradas, niños lastimados, estudiantes y obreros heridos a balazos, hogares Saqueados.



Los "Camisas Doradas" entran en acción para establecer en México el "terror fachista"

¡Una manifestación popular de obreros, campesinos y estudiantes, tota con lujo de barbarie, por un asalto de "camisas doradas"! ¡El local de una organización revolucionaria, saqueado y quemado, en presencia de la policía, que prestó la complicidad de su abstención, ayudando a la impunidad de los ladrones saqueantes, que se quieren hacer aparecer como políticos y sólo son forajidos a sueldo del capitalismo, para aterrorizar a los trabajadores e impedirles que luchen en defensa de sus intereses de clase!

¡Así han comenzado Mussolini en Italia, Hitler en Alemania, Dollfus en Austria, Lerroux en España y todos los asesinos y explotadores de las masas trabajadoras!

¡ALERTA! Obrero, Campesino, Estudiante, Empleado, Intelectual, Pequeño Comerciante. ¡Defiéndete contra el terror blanco y contra la marcha del fascismo en México, ingresando a la "Liga Nacional contra el Fascismo y la Guerra Imperialista"!

¡¡Todos los trabajadores contra los "camisas" de todos colores!

¡ ABAJO LOS ASESINOS DE LOS TRABAJADORES !

LEAR

LIGA DE ESCRITORES Y ARTISTAS REVOLUCIONARIOS

Figure 106. Leopoldo Méndez. *Como Pretenden* (How They Try), 1935, woodcut.



Figure 107. Leopoldo Méndez. *El Fascismo I* (*Fascism I*), 1936, woodcut.



Figure 108. Leopoldo Méndez. *El Fascismo II* (*Fascism II*), 1936, woodcut.

LEAR Hoja Popular Anticallista

México, D. F., Diciembre de 1935

No. 2

Domingo 22. - 10 de la mañana
Gran Manifestación
Anticallista

Partid del Costado Norte de la Alameda por la Av. Hidalgo



El Pirata Sueña con sus Tesoros Amasados con Sangre y Duelo del Pueblo

Figure 109. Possibly Leopoldo Méndez. *Hoja Popular No. 2* (People's Broadsheet No. 2), 1935, woodcut.



Figure 110. Leopoldo Méndez. *Inscribase (Sign Up)*, 1935, woodcut.



Figure 111. Pablo O'Higgins. Abelardo Rodríguez Market Mural, 1934, fresco.



Figure 112. Marion Greenwood. Abelardo Rodríguez Market Mural, 1934, fresco.



Figure 113. Isamu Noguchi. Abelardo Rodríguez Market Mural, 1934, painted plaster and cement.

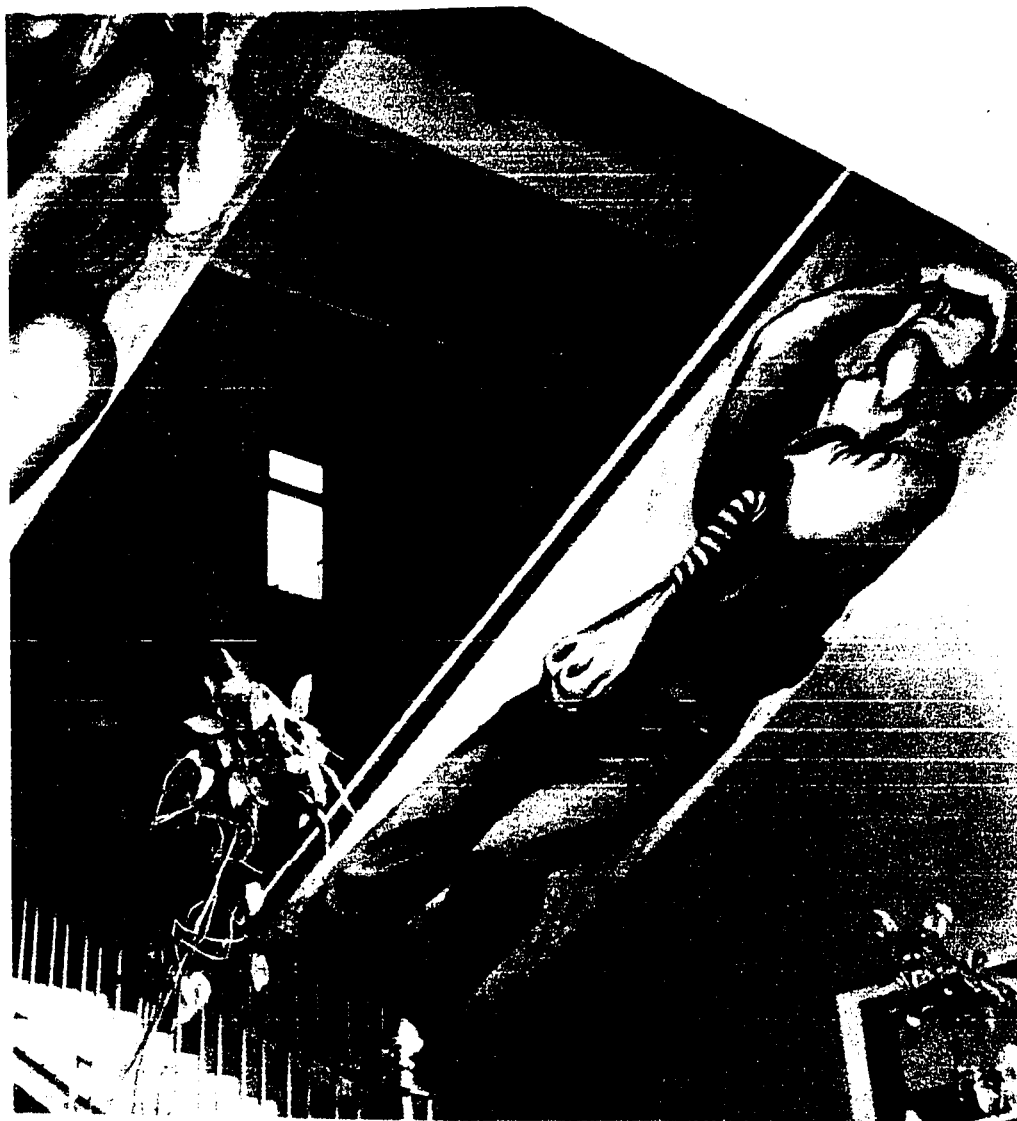


Figure 114. Leopoldo Méndez. *Gaseado* (*Gassed*), 1936, Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, fresco, dismantled.



Figure 115. Manuel Alvarez Bravo. *Striking Worker Assassinated, Frente a Frente*, March 1936, black and white photograph.



Figure 116. Cover for *Frente a Frente*, May 1936, photomontage.



Figure 117. John Heartfield, Gustav Klucis. Cover for *Frente a Frente*, July 1936, photomontage and lithograph.



pueblo apoya a Cárdenas contra...

callistas filtrados por desgracia en el
mo. Sábado 18 de abril de 1936; cobirre
venciendo" a un chofer huelguista.



Obreros, campesinos, intelectuales... contrincantes electorales que se rucoparon a la mano asesina del tiranuelo

callismo fachistizante y la reacción

Figure 118. "The people support Cárdenas against fascist Callismo and the reactionaries," *Frente a Frente*, July 1936.



Figure 119. Kenneth M. Adams. *Adobe Brick Maker*, ca. 1936, lithograph.



Figure 120. Philip Evergood. *Portrait of a Miner*, ca. 1936, etching.



Figure 121. Will Barnett. *Factory District*, ca. 1936, lithograph.



Figure 122. Leopoldo Méndez. *Río Blanco*, 1937, lithograph.



Figure 123. Putting up posters for the TGP, 1948, black and white photograph.



Figure 124. A corner in the historic center of Mexico City, winter of 1942-1943, black and white photograph.



Figure 125. Leopoldo Méndez. *Taller de Gráfica Popular*, 1940s, woodcut.

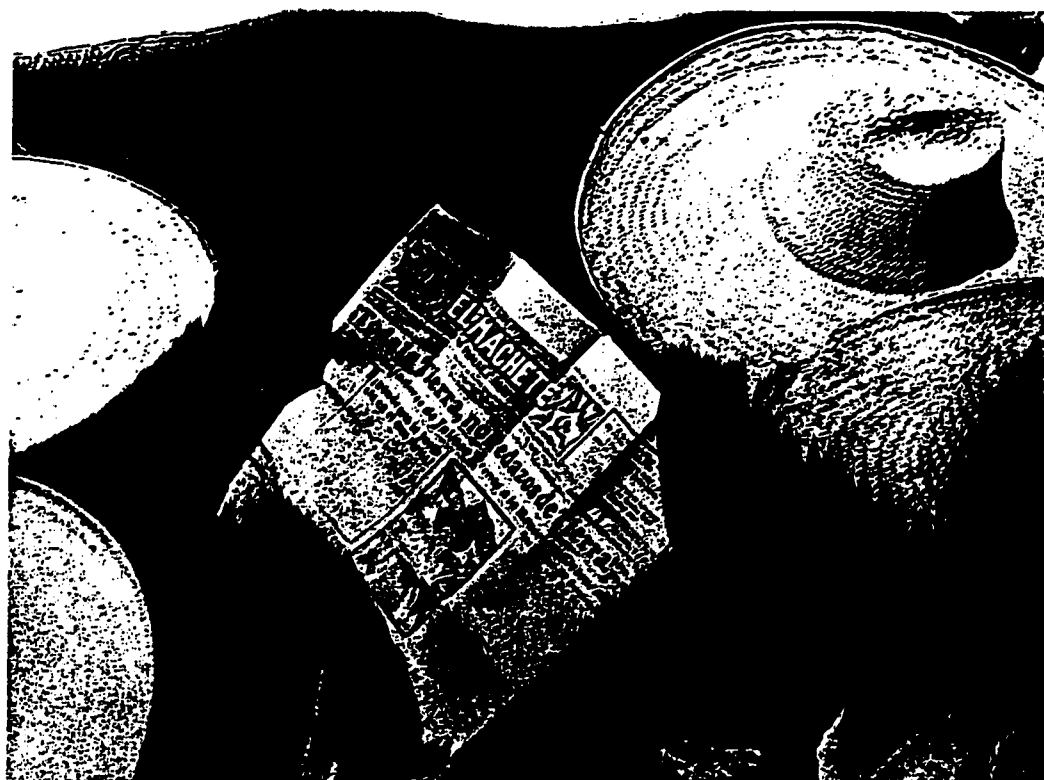


Figure 126. Tina Modotti. *Campesinos Reading El Machete*, 1929, black and white photograph.



Figure 127. Leopoldo Méndez. Book plate for Ronald Campbell, 1944, wood engraving.



Figure 128. Leopoldo Méndez. New Year's card, 1948, linoleum print.



Figure 129. Series of Anti-Nazi posters for Liga Pro-Cultura Alemana, 1938, lithograph, Seattle Art Museum.



Figure 130. Series of Anti-Nazi posters for Liga Pro-Cultura Alemana, 1938, lithograph, Seattle Art Museum.

EL FASCISMO

3ª CONFERENCIA

(ORACIÓN)

Lic. Víctor Manuel Villaseñor

JUEVES 27

DE ABRIL

PALACIO DE

BELLAS ARTES

A LAS 20 HORAS

ENTRADA LIBRE

RADIO

X E F O

Y

X E U Z



LIGA PRO-CULTURA ALEMANA EN MEXICO

Figure 132. Luís Arenal and Antonio Pujol. *El Fascismo Alemán* (German Fascism) 1938, lithograph.



Figure 133. David Alfaro Siqueiros, Luis Arenal, Antonio Pujol, et al. *Portrait of the Bourgeoisie*, left side, 1938, nitro-cellulose pigments, Electrical Worker's Union, Mexico City.



Figure 134. David Alfaro Siqueiros, Luís Arenal, Antonio Pujol, et al. *Portrait of the Bourgeoisie*, center, 1938, nitro-cellulose pigments, Electrical Worker's Union, Mexico City.



Figure 135. José Guadalupe Posada. *The End of the World*, ca. 1900, type metal engraving.

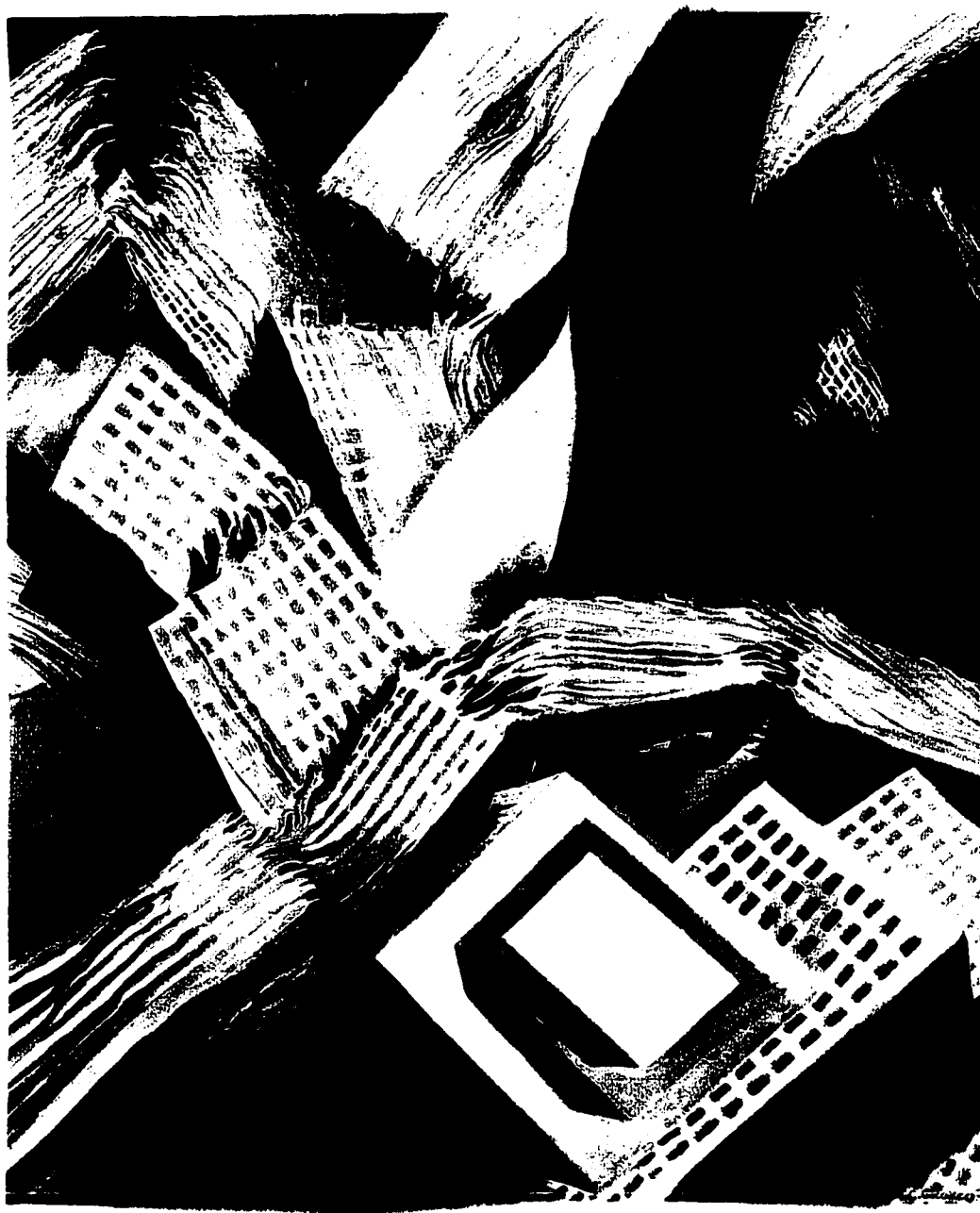


Figure 136. José Clemente Orozco. *Los Muertos*, 1931, oil on canvas.



Figure 137. Pablo O'Higgins. *El Tercer y el Cuarto Reich* (*The Third and the Fourth Reichs*), 1938, lithograph.

EL NAZISMO

7^A CONFERENCIA EL HOMBRE EN LA SOCIEDAD NAZI

ORADOR

Lic. MANUEL
R. PALACIOS

MIÉRCOLES 19
DE OCTUBRE
PALACIO DE
BELLAS ARTES
A LAS 20 HORAS
ENTRADA LIBRE

LIGA PRO
CULTURA
ALEMANA
EN MEXICO



Figure 138. Pablo O'Higgins. *El Hombre en la Sociedad Nazi* (Man in Nazi Society), 1938, lithograph.

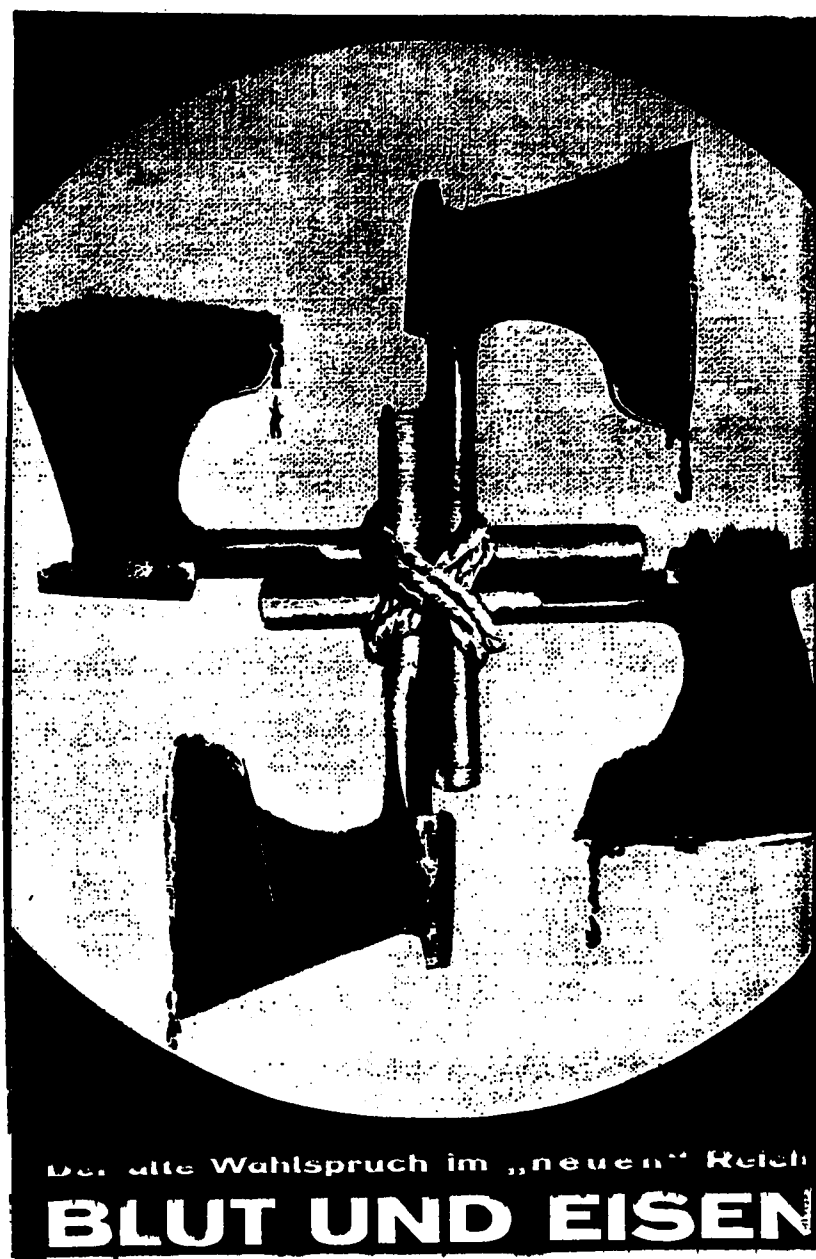


Figure 139. John Heartfield. *Blut und Eisen* (*Blood and Steel*), 1934, photomontage.

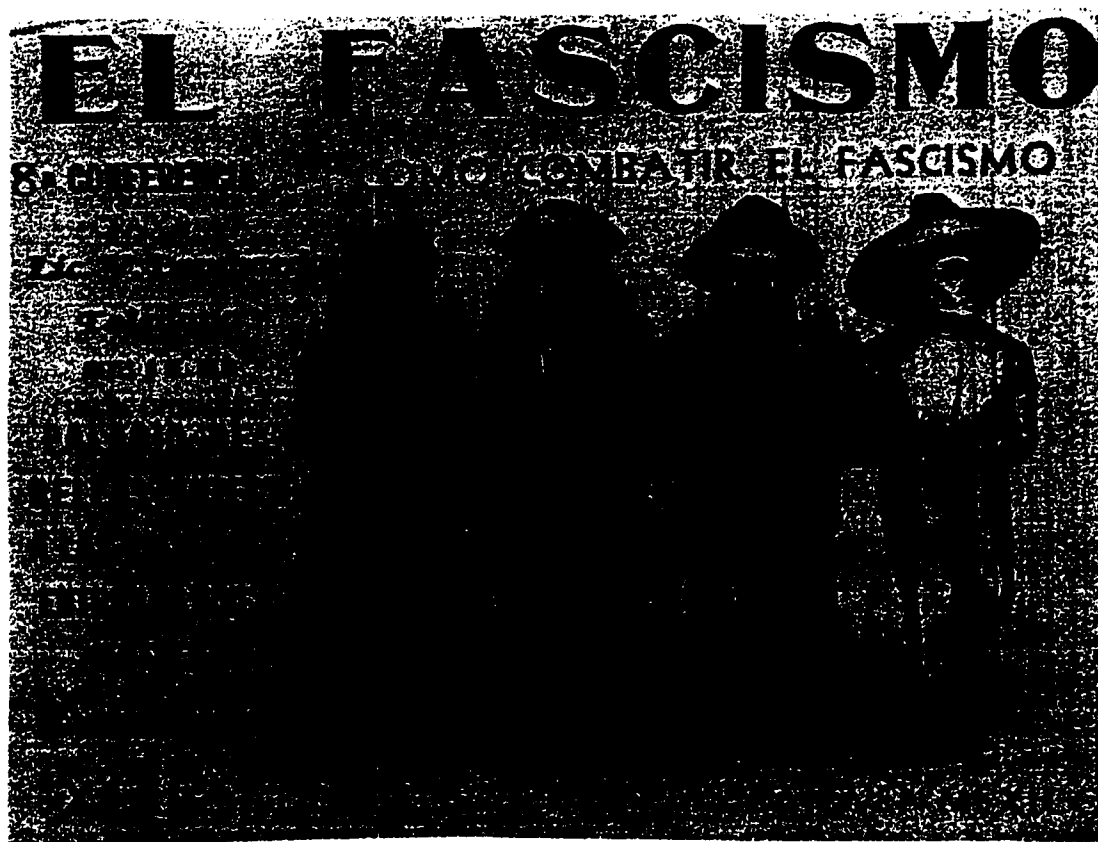


Figure 140. Isidoro Ocampo. *Como Combatir El Fascismo* (*How to Combat Fascism*), 1938, lithograph.

EL NAZISMO

4^A CONFERENCIA JUVENTUD PERDIDA

ORADOR

L. ALEJANDRO
CARRILLO

MIERCOLES 5
DE OCTUBRE
PALACIO DE
BELIAS ARTES
A LAS 20 HORAS
ENTRADA LIBRE

**LIGA PRO
CULTURA
ALEMANA
EN MEXICO**

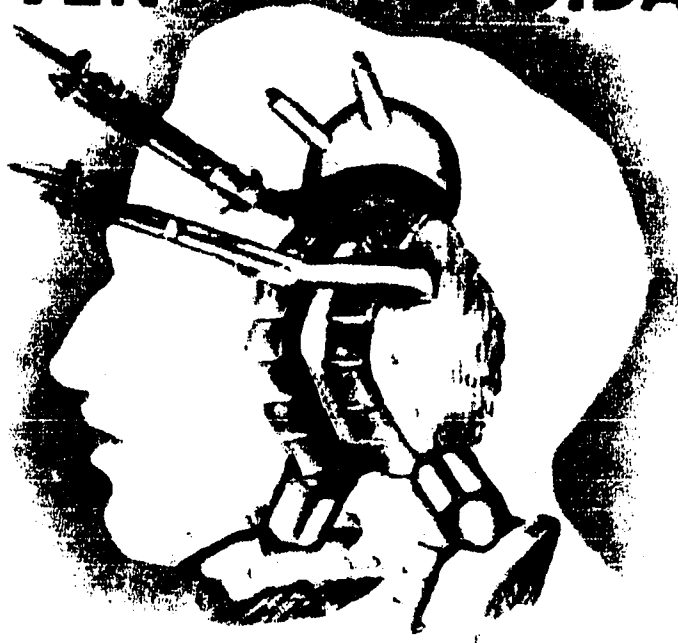


Figure 141. Robert Mallery. *Juventud Perdida* (Lost Youth), 1938, lithograph.



Figure 142. Jim Egleson. *Economía Totalitaria* (*Totalitarian Economy*), 1938, lithograph.

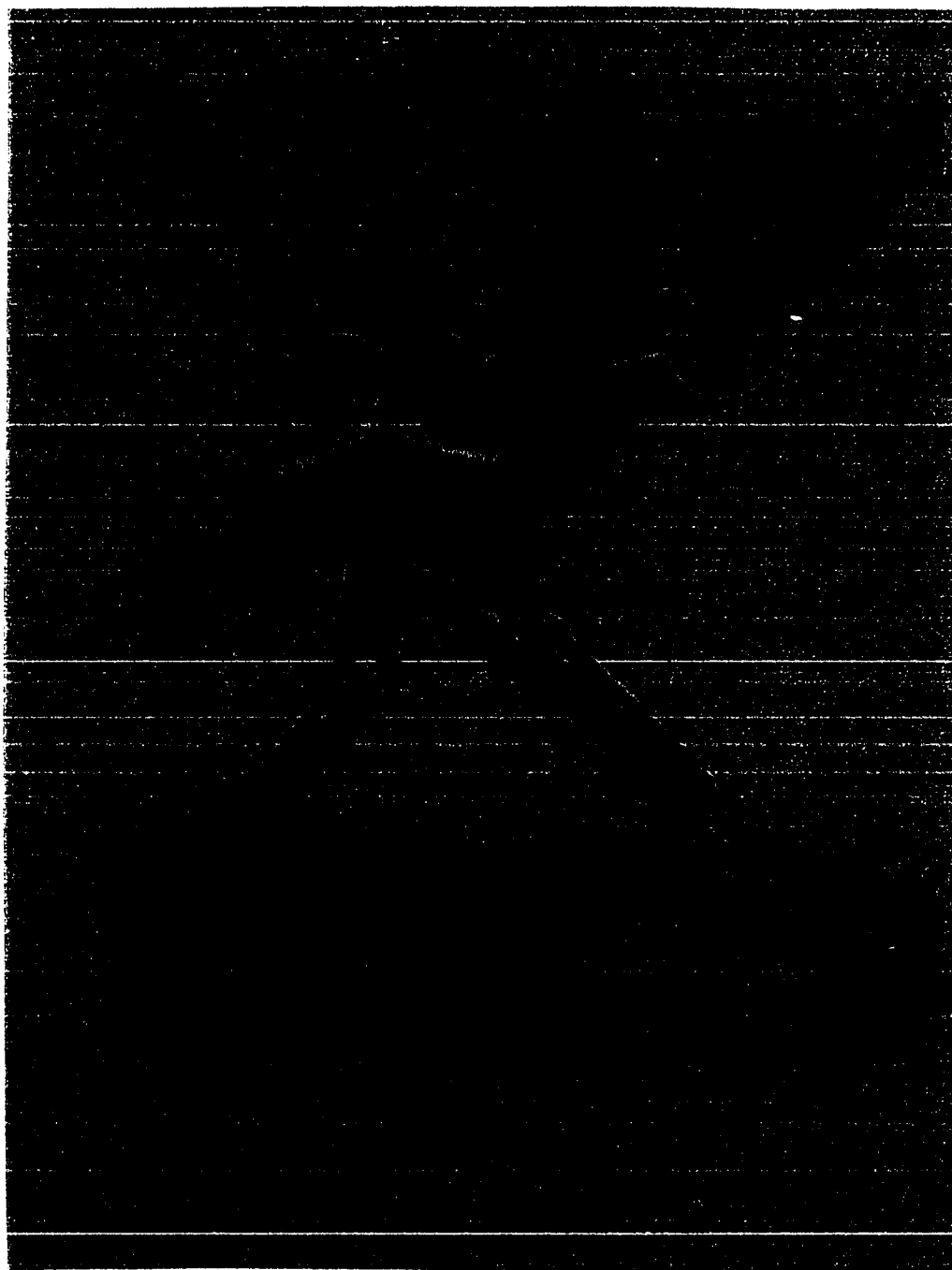


Figure 143. Leopoldo Méndez. *El Imperialismo y la Guerra* (*Imperialism and War*), 1938, lithograph.



Figure 144. Leopoldo Méndez. *El Gran Obstáculo* (*The Great Obstacle*), 1936, linoleum print.

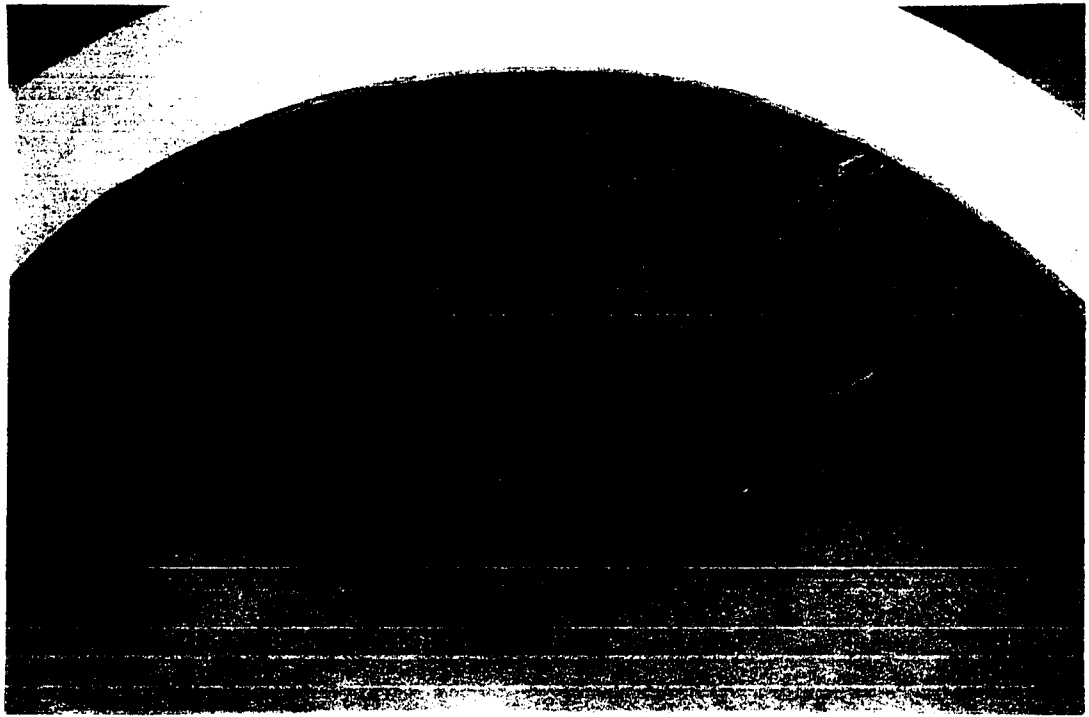


Figure 145. Diego Rivera. Giant fist, 1926, section of mural at National Autonomous University at Chapingo, Mexico, fresco.



Figure 146. Leopoldo Méndez. *La Protesta (The Protest)*, 1937, linoleum print.



Figure 147. Leopoldo Méndez. *Tierra del Chicle* (Land of Chicle), 1937, woodcut.



Figure 148. Leopoldo Méndez. *Con una Piedra Se Matan Muchos Pájaros...* (*With One Stone One Kills Many Birds...*), 1940, linoleum print.



Figure 150. Pablo O'Higgins. *Franco*, 1938, lithograph.



Figure 151. Leopoldo Méndez. *La Toma de Madrid* (*The Taking of Madrid*), 1938, lithograph.

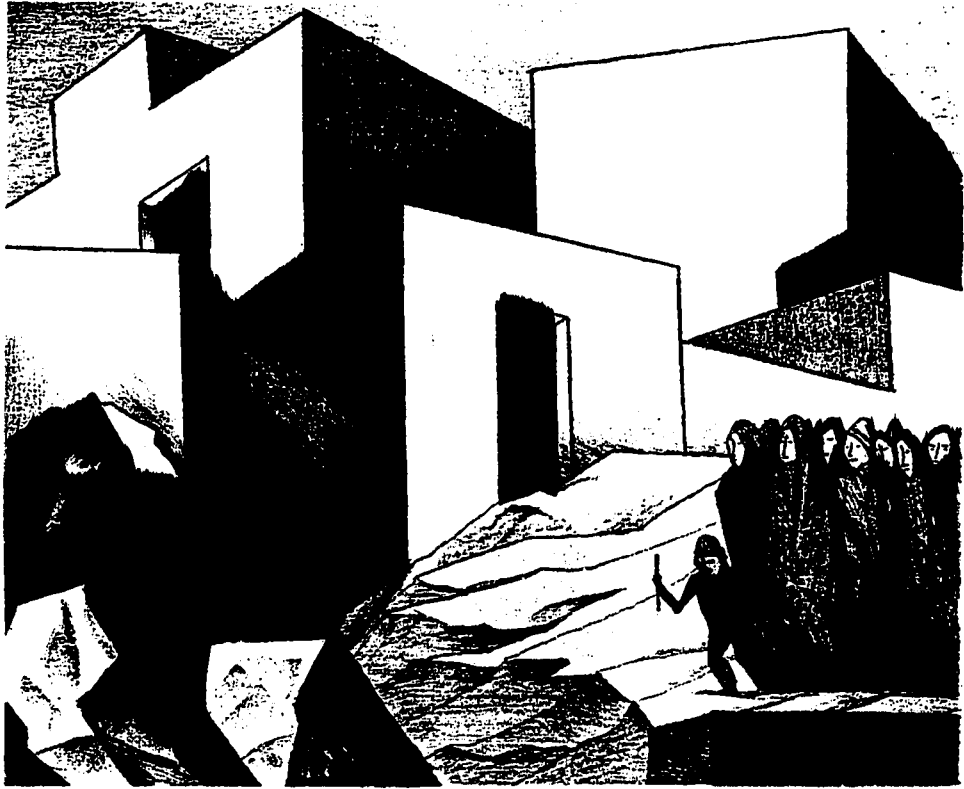


Figure 152. José Clemente Orozco. *Pueblo Mexicano (Mexican Town)*, 1930, lithograph.

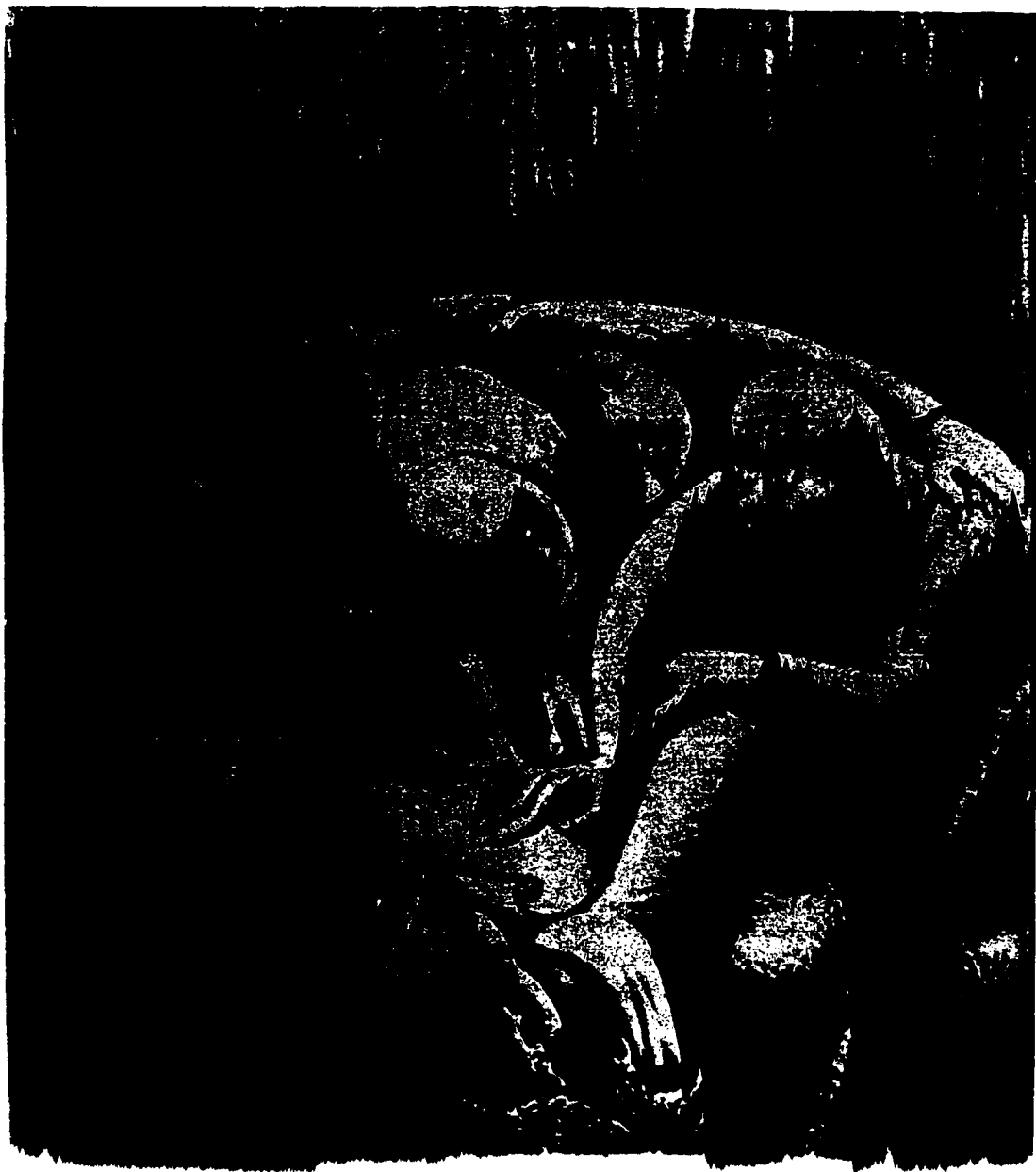


Figure 153. Xavier Guerrero. *Franco Planeando Su Ofensiva* (*Franco Planning His Offensive*), 1938, lithograph.



Figure 154. Leopoldo Méndez. *La Amenaza del Fascismo* (*The Menace of Fascism*), 1937, lithograph.

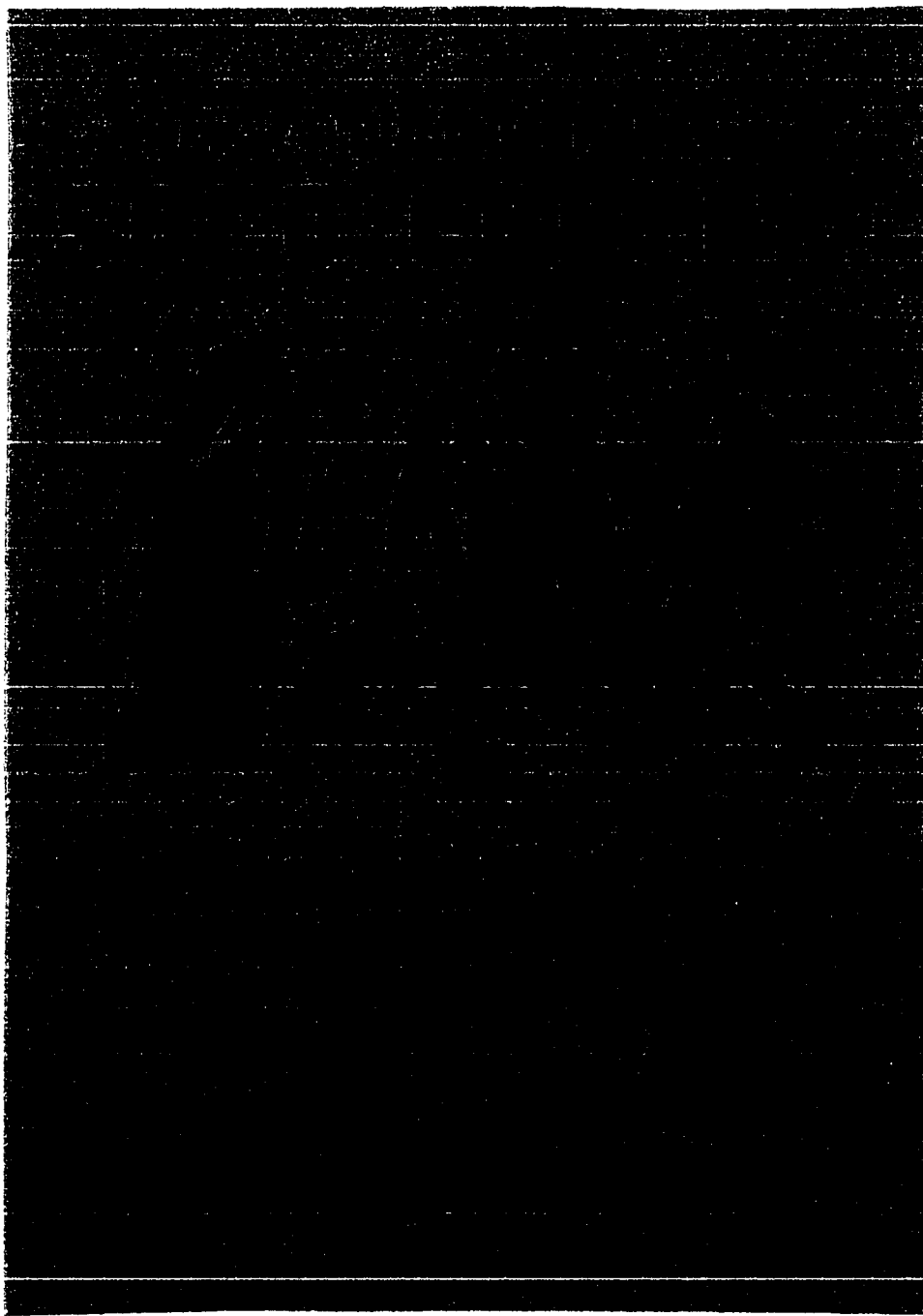


Figure 155. Leopoldo Méndez. *Maestro Tú Estás Solo* (*Teacher You Are Alone*), 1938, linoleum print.



Figure 156. José Guadalupe Posada. *Corrido*, "Un Asalto en Tepito" (*Corrido*, "An Assault in Tepito"), ca. 1910, zinc etching.

Compañero:

Adjunta enviamos a usted una muestra de la publicación mensual que se titula: "HOJA POPULAR ILUSTRADA" y otros trabajos diversos pero con un fin semejante al de aquella, como le será fácil apreciarlo.

Creemos que esta Hoja es de gran ayuda a los maestros foráneos en general pero, principalmente, a los MAESTROS QUE TRABAJAN EN EL CAMPO, a menudo en lugares remotos y mal comunicados donde, con pocas o ningunas garantías se encuentran a merced de las fuerzas reaccionarias locales y nacionales que se oponen al desarrollo de su heroica misión, USANDO DE TODOS LOS MEDIOS, siendo la resistencia del maestro a los embates reaccionarios muy débil, pues él solo no podrá luchar con probabilidades de éxito sin contar con medios técnicos de propaganda: imprenta, grabados, etc.

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Figure 157. Alfredo Zalce. Advertisement in the form of a letter, 1938, linoleum prints.



Figure 158. Leopoldo Méndez. *Profesor Juan Martínez Escobar*, 1938, lithograph.

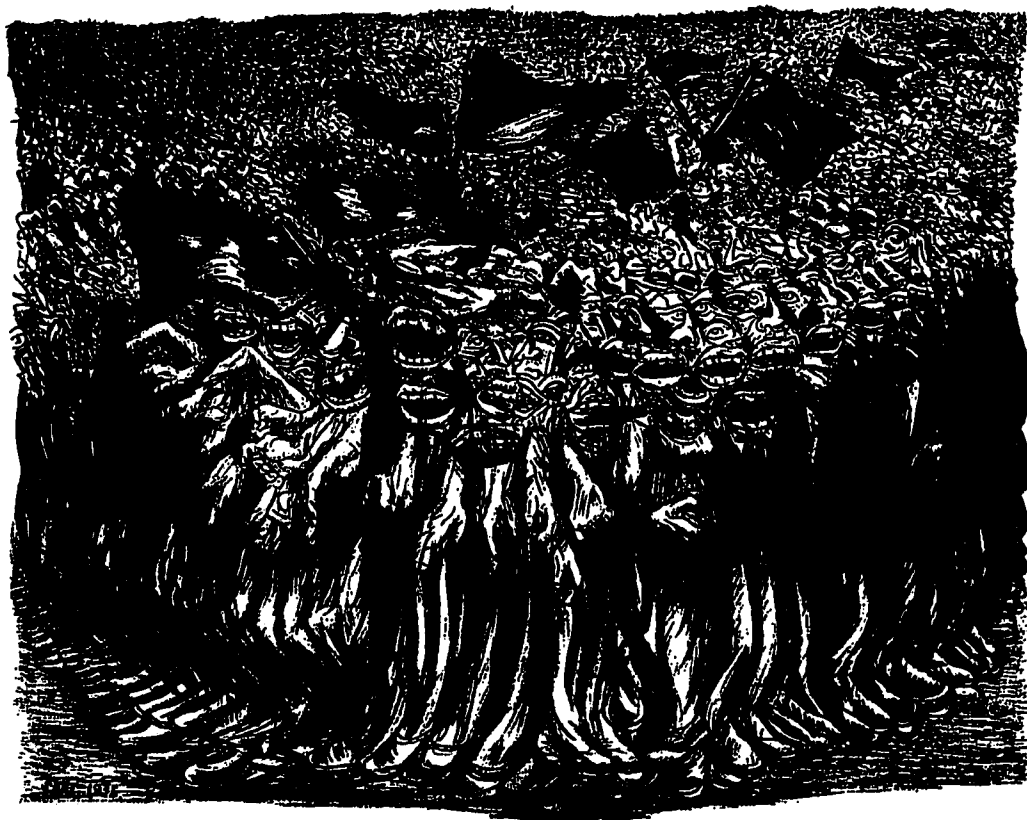


Figure 159. José Clemente Orozco. *Las Masas (The Masses)*, 1935, lithograph.



Figure 160. Leopoldo Méndez. *Profesor Armulfo Sosa Portillo*, 1938, lithograph.



Figure 161. José Chávez Morado. *Danza de la Muerte* (Dance of Death), 1939, lithograph.



Figure 162. Jaguar mask and costume, Acatlán, Puebla, 1987, color photograph.



Figure 163. Leopoldo Méndez. *Danzante (Dancer)*, 1965, lithograph.



Figure 164. Leopoldo Méndez. *Nueva York (New York)*, 1940, zinc etching.



Figure 165. Lyonel Feininger. Composition for the *Manifesto and Program of the Weimar Bauhaus*, 1919, woodcut.



Figure 166. Leopoldo Méndez. *La Carta* (*The Letter*), ca. 1942, wood engraving.



Figure 167. Leopoldo Méndez. *La Carta* (*The Letter*), 1942, wood engraving.



Figure 168. Käthe Kollwitz. *The Parents*, 1923, woodcut.



Figure 169. Käthe Kollwitz. *The Widow*, 1923, woodcut.



Figure 170. Leopoldo Méndez. *Deportación a la Muerte* (*Deportation to Death*), 1942, linoleum print.



Figure 171. Leopoldo Méndez. *La Gestapo, Asesinos en Comandita* (*The Gestapo, Murderers in Petty Command*), ca. 1942, linoleum print.

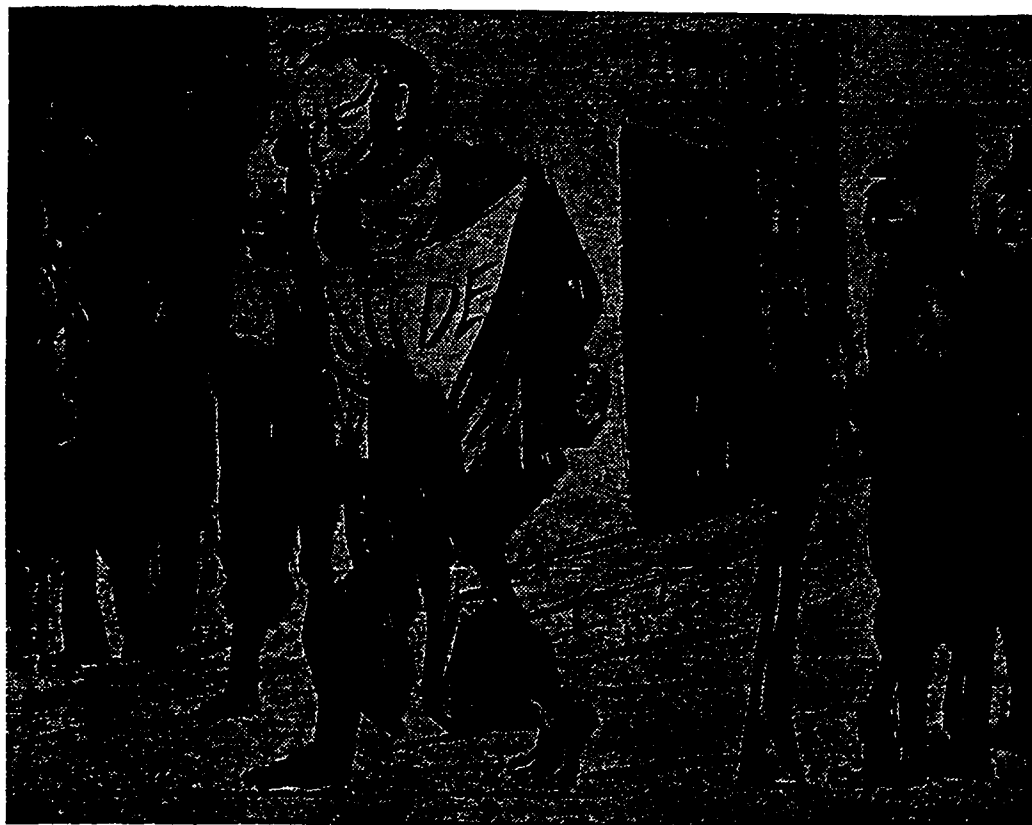


Figure 172. Pablo O'Higgins. *Jude (Jew)*, ca. 1942, lithograph.



Figure 173. Alfredo Zalce. *Expulsión* (*Expulsion*), ca. 1942, linoleum print.



Figure 174. Leopoldo Méndez. *Portrait of Antonio Gramsci*, ca. 1942, woodcut.



Figure 175. Leopoldo Méndez. *La Venganza de los Pueblos* (*The Vengeance of the People*), 1942, linoleum print.



Figure 176. Käthe Kollwitz. *Peasant Revolt*, 1903, etching.



Figure 177. Leopoldo Méndez. *Corrido de Stalingrado*, 1942, linoleum print.



Figure 178. Leopoldo Méndez. *Mariscal S. Timoshenko, Sus Triunfos Son los Nuestrs* (*Marshall S. Timoshenko, His Triumphs Are Ours*), 1942, lithograph.



Figure 179. George Gropper. Untitled, ca. 1942, lithograph.



Figure 180. Frans Masareel. Untitled, ca. 1942, ink drawing.



Figure 181. Frans Masareel. Untitled, ca. 1942, ink drawing.

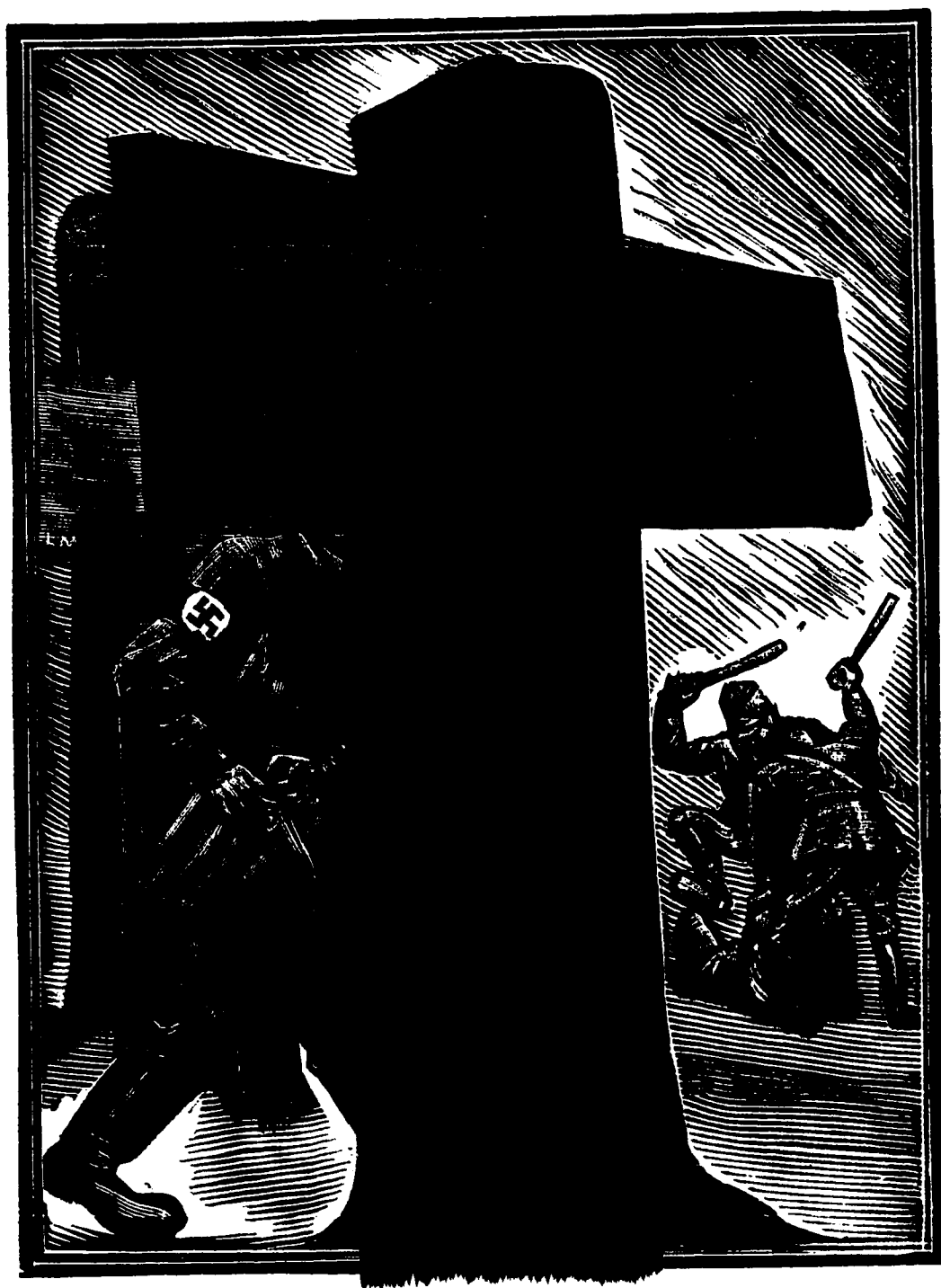


Figure 182. Leopoldo Méndez. Cover for *Das Siebte Kreuz* (*The Seventh Cross*), 1942, woodcut.



Figure 183. Leopoldo Méndez. *El Gran Atentado* (*The Great Attempt*), 1944, lithograph.



Figure 184. Leopoldo Méndez. *The Snake*, from *Incidentes Melódicos del Mundo Irracional*, 1944, wood engraving.

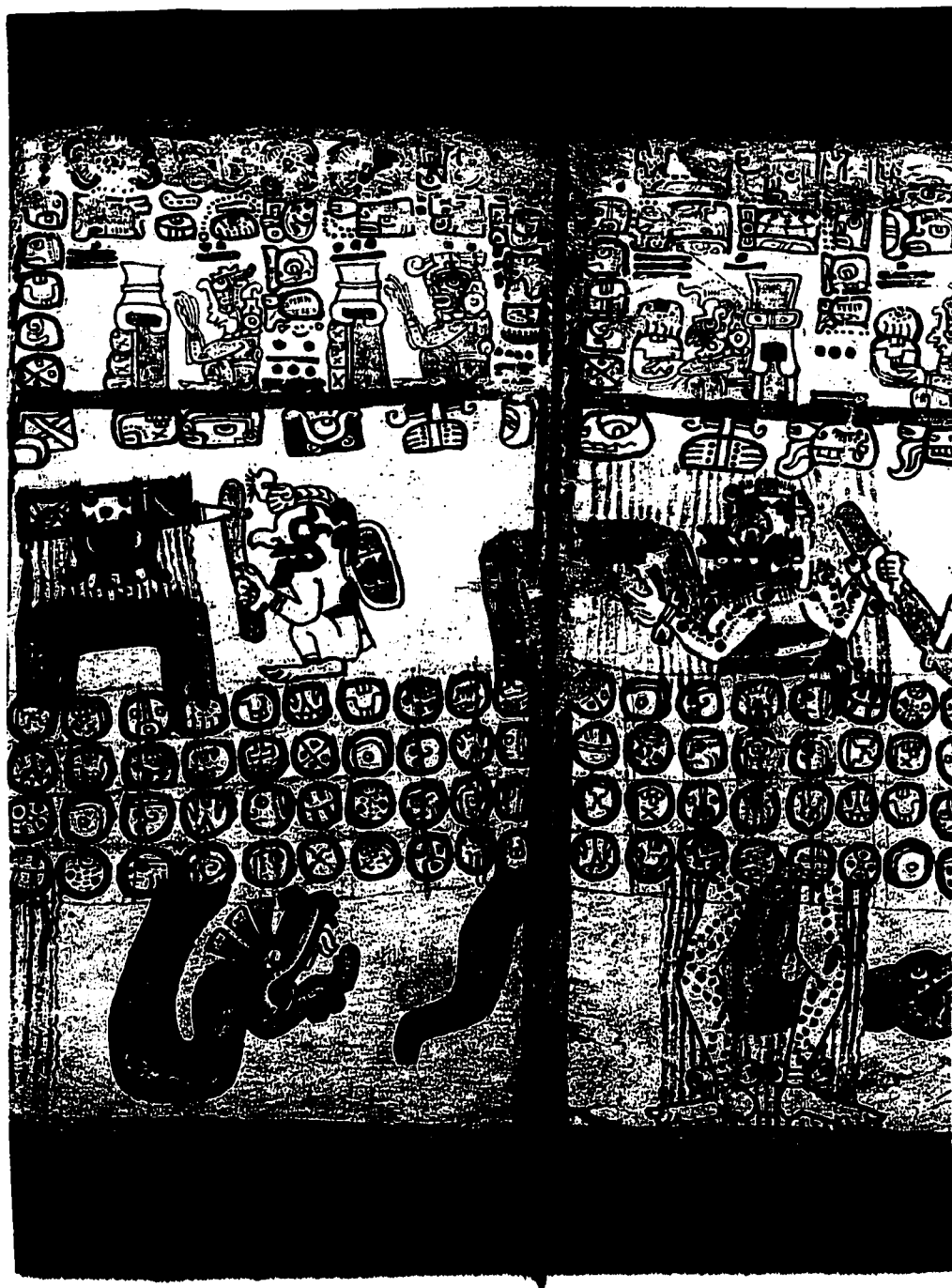


Figure 185. Page from the Madrid *Codex*, early 1500s.

de tortuga
y dice:
"¿Hay una sagrada piel de tigre
donde asentar
mi instrumento de este Carnaval?"

--¿Acaso estás ebrio, cantor?
*¡Cuidado rompas el tunkul!,
¡cuidado con la flauta!,
¡cuidado con romper la propia tarola
de concha
de tortuga
de nuestro Carnaval!*
*¿Altera tu razón el torrente de esta baraúnda,
o ya te sientes agotado, ahito de tocar?*

Entonces grita
y grito:
"¡Felicidades a todos! Buenos días
y con la venta de mi Abuelo
(que no por la de Dios, insisto,
sino la de Satán) vengo
a los umbrales de las puertas a cantar
este Carnaval
entre un mico y un tejón".

*Tíralos lejos
y tú sésquate del camino de ellos
porque asoma el Sol
y estruendoso te grita
que hasta la opuesta orilla
brotará el rosál.*

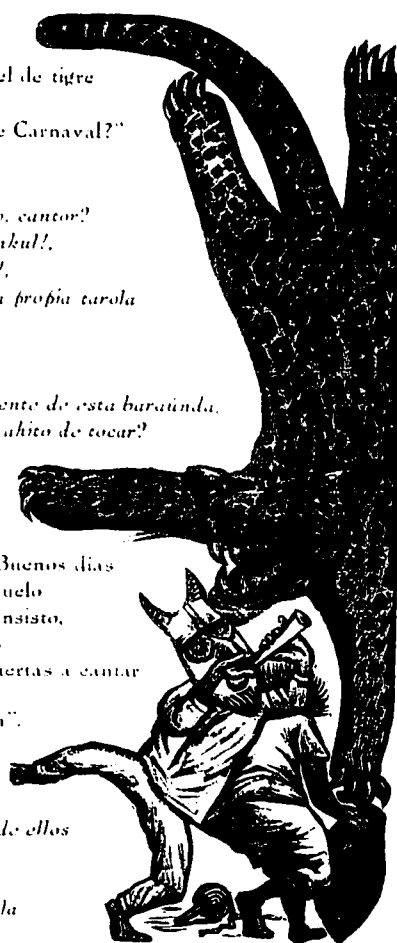


Figure 186. Leopoldo Méndez. *La Piel de Tigre (The Jaguar's Skin)*, from *Incidentes Melódicos del Mundo Irracional*, 1944, wood engraving.

—Otra vez grito yo:
 “¡Ay, las muchachas del Verano,
 las jovencitas
 que hace tantos años
 quise o me quisieron!
 ¿Serían
 oropéndolas acaso?
 ¿Pájaros carpinteros
 de los que pican la corteza
 del árbol,
 de los que agujeran y penetran?
 ¿De cuáles?
 ¿De los que la médula del palo
 abren y parten,
 o de los que rebanan la madera?”

—Espúlgate los recuerdos
 y numéralos tú mismo;
 pero sésgate del camino
 y ve hacia donde la luz quiere asomar
 y brotará de nuevo tu rosa.

—Hermana de mi padre y de mi madre,
 a ti te grito, ¡tía!

—¿Dónde estás, hijo,
 dónde andas, corazón?

—No lo sé, ni sé por dónde;
 pero vengo del río.

—¿Qué traes de regreso?



Figure 187. Leopoldo Méndez. *Espúlgate los Recuerdos* (Comb Out the Memories), from *Incidentes Melódicos del Mundo Irracional*, 1944, wood engraving.

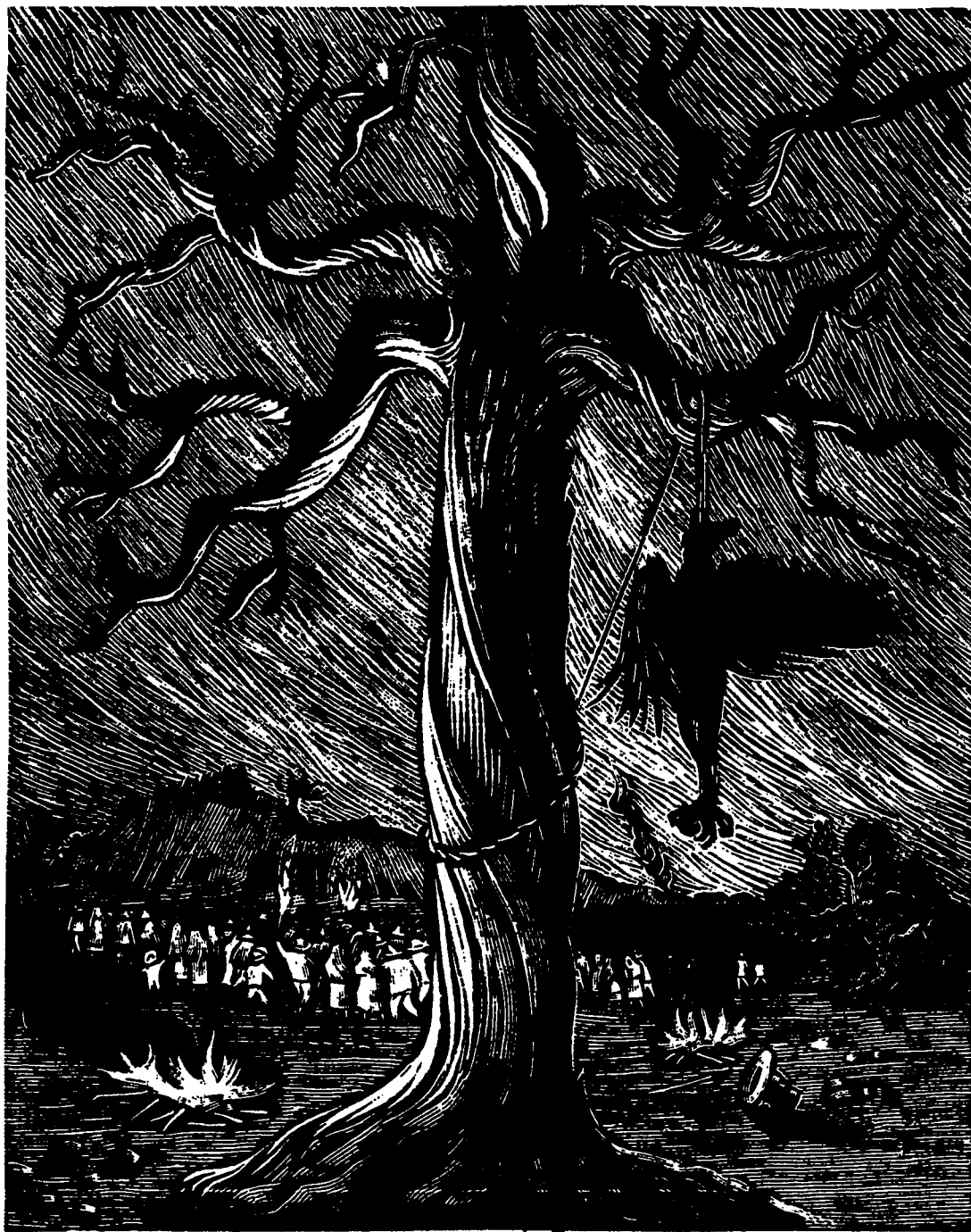


Figure 188. Leopoldo Méndez. *La Ejecución del Zopilote (The Execution of the Vulture)*, from *Incidentes Melódicos del Mundo Irracional*, 1944, wood engraving.



Figure 189. José Guadalupe Posada. *Campesino Ahorcado* (*Campesino Hanged*), ca. 1910, zinc etching.



Figure 190. George Grantham Bain. *Rebel Hanged by Federals Near Torreón, Mexico*, 1912, black and white photograph.



Figure 191. Leopoldo Méndez. *Se Va la Noche, Entrará el Día* (*The Night Goes Away, the Day Will Come*), from *Incidentes Melódicos del Mundo Irracional*, 1944, wood engraving.



Figure 192. Leopoldo Méndez. *Amenaza Sobre México* (*Menace Over Mexico*), 1945, wood engraving.

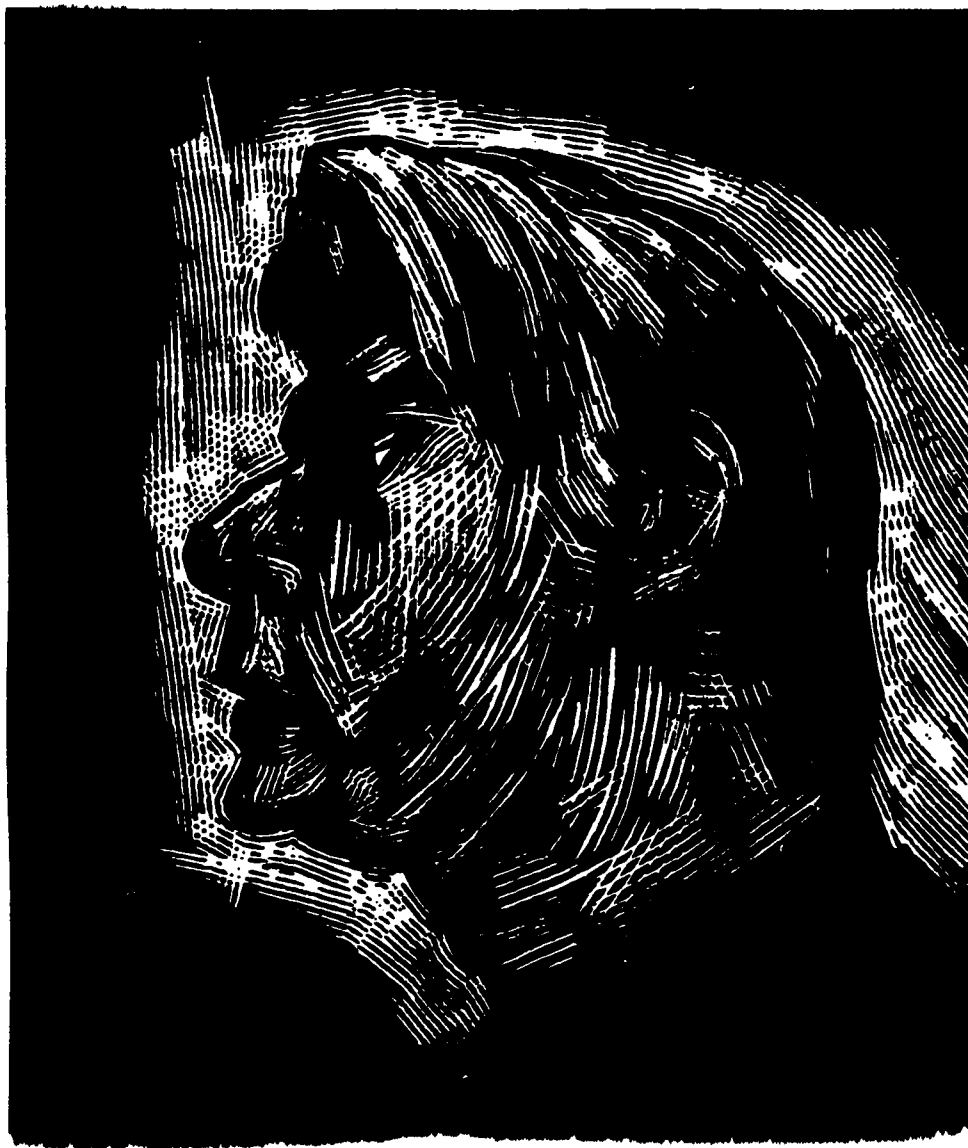


Figure 193. Leopoldo Méndez. *Autoretrato (Self-Portrait)* 1954, linoleum print.



Figure 194. José María Velasco. *View of the Valley of Mexico from the Hill of Santa Isabel*, 1877, Museo Nacional del Arte, Mexico City, oil on canvas.



Figure 195. Leopoldo Méndez. *Un Nuevo Amanecer* (*A New Dawn*), 1947, acrylic engraving.



Figure 196. Leopoldo Méndez. "Cuando Nace un Hombre Todos los Animales se Alegran," Cuautla 1945 ("When a Man is Born All the Animals Rejoice," Cuautla 1945), 1949, wood engraving.

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Figure 197. Byron Randall. Brochure for the TGP exhibit in San Francisco, California, 1948, linoleum print.



MANIFESTO

The Graphic Workshop's purpose is to contribute towards a popular and meaningful social art.

The Graphic Workshop uses art as a powerful and universal form of communication.

The Graphic Workshop artists believe that only through collective effort can an art be produced which would interact with the broadest mass of people.

The Graphic Workshop believes that the graphic medium, because it lends itself to large low-priced editions and because of its traditional popular character, is the logical artistic means to reach mass audiences.

The Graphic Workshop welcomes and seeks the cooperation of trade unions, progressive peoples organizations, student and youth movements to work with us toward a truly great American popular art.

We draw inspiration from the great peoples artists: Goya, Daumier and Kollwitz, and seek guidance from the two great contemporary collectively organized groups; the Mexican Graphic Workshop and the Chinese People's woodcut artists.

The content of our art is the content of the people's lives, their hopes, their hardships, their struggles and their aspirations.

We affirm that our art will not only mirror people's struggles but serve as another tool in that great movement toward the final and ultimate victory of the people.



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STAN RAPLAN
LOUISE KRUGER

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JERRY MARTIN

LEONA PIERCE
ED WALSH, JR.

Issued on the occasion of the Graphic Workshop's First Exhibition, held at the Tribuna Subway Gallery, New York, Jan., 1950

Figure 198. Anonymous. Manifesto of the Graphic Workshop of New York, 1950, woodcut.



Figure 199. Huang Xinbo. *Lu Hsun On His Death Bed*, 1936, woodcut.



Figure 200. Leopoldo Méndez and Alfredo Zalce. *Plutarco Elías Calles es Deportado por Ordenes del General Lázaro Cárdenas*, 1936 (*Plutarco Elías Calles is Deported on the Orders of General Lázaro Cárdenas*, 1936), 1947, linoleum print.

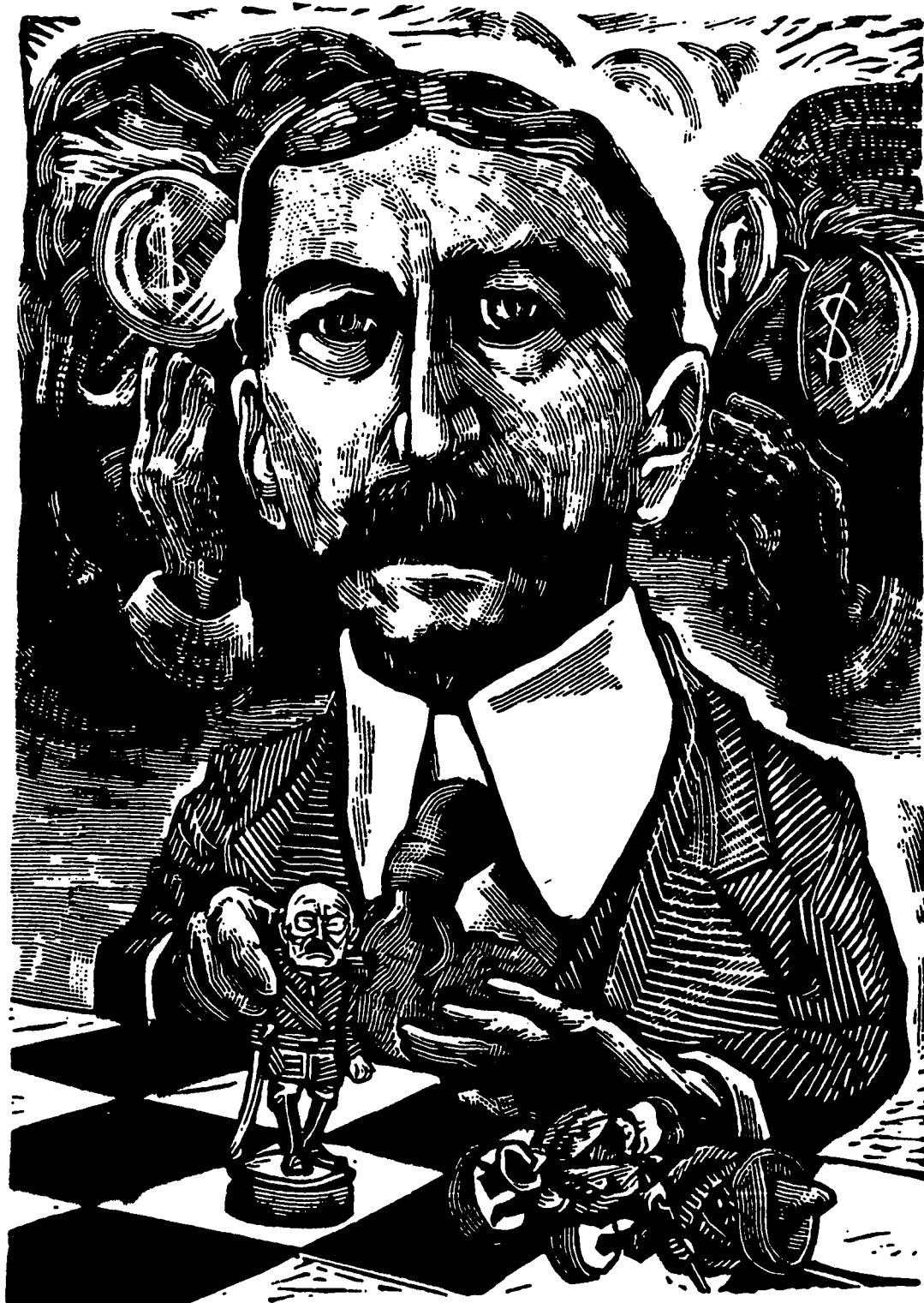


Figure 201. Leopoldo Méndez. *El Embajador Lane Wilson "Arregla" el Conflicto* (*Ambassador Lane Wilson "Fixes" the Conflict*), 1947, linoleum print.



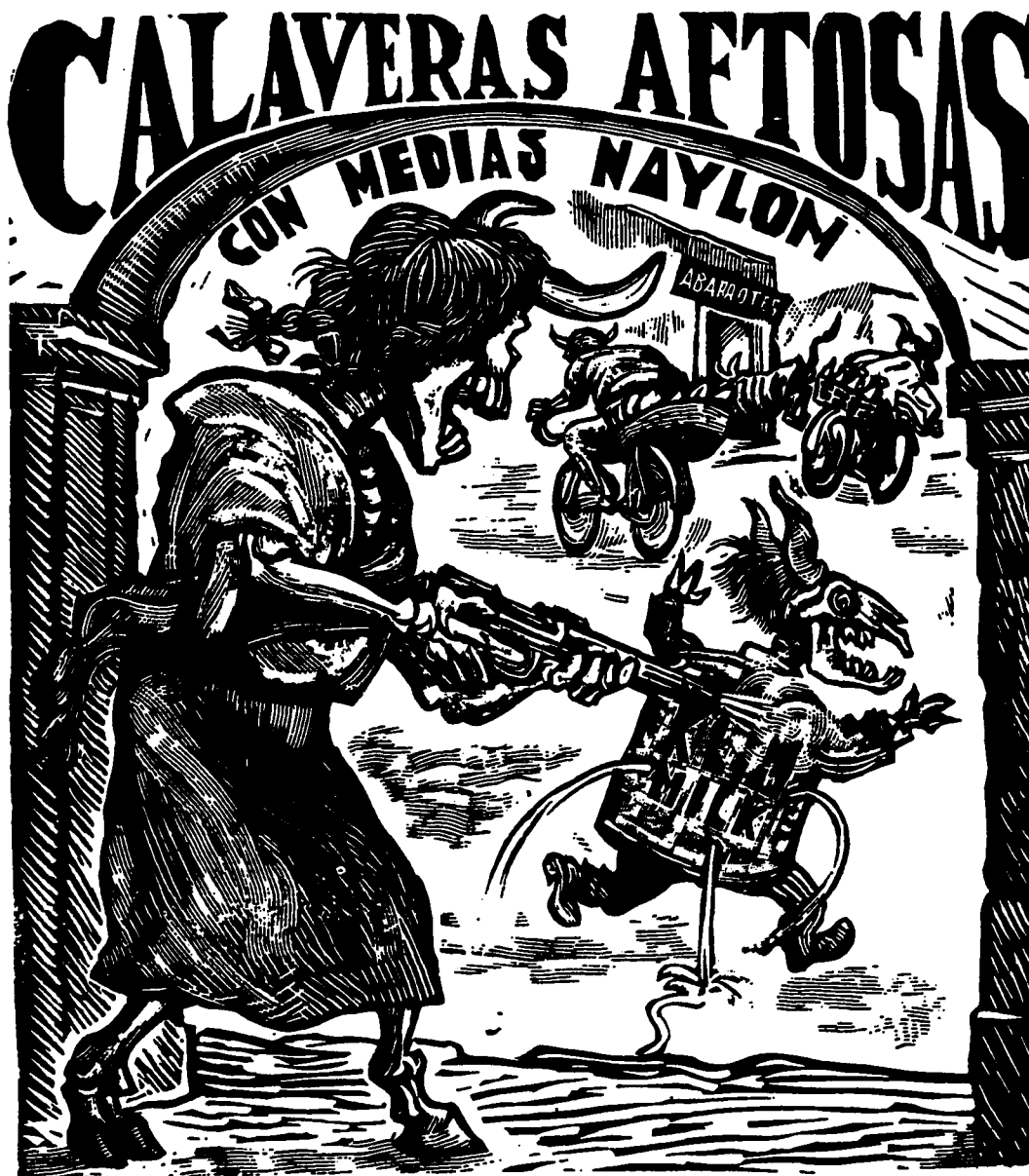
Figure 202. José Guadalupe Posada. *Porfirio Díaz*, 1898, zinc etching.



Figure 203. Leopoldo Méndez. *Hambre en la Ciudad de México, 1914-1915* (*Hunger in Mexico City, 1914-1915*), 1947, linoleum print.



Figure 204. Leopoldo Méndez. *Homenaje a Benito Juárez* (Homage to Benito Juárez), 1947, lithograph.



Paran la oreja señores,
sírvanse compadecer,
a este pueblo que no canta
porque no puede comer.
Pues es tal la carestía
que así, como sin querer,
se comió su propia lengua
y al otro mundo se fué.

Comerciantes, agiotistas,
senadores, diputados,
banqueros y periodistas,
me tienen bien amolado.
La política oficial
para abaratar los precios,
sólo puede impresionar
a los tontos y a los necios.

Primero, intervencionismo,
luego, libre concurrencia,
pero lo cierto es que sigo
en la mayor indigencia.
Coyotes y contratistas
siguen haciendo millones,
mientras que yo compro menos
con los recientes tostones.

Dizque a causa de la aftosa
en bacines enlatada,
los gringos nos han enviado
leche muy adulterada.
Pero un día de esto, señores,
con el rille sanitario,
a todos los hambreadores,
he de mandar al osario.

Figure 205. Leopoldo Méndez. *Calaveras Aftosas con Medias Naylon* (*Calaveras with Foot and Mouth Disease in Nylon Stockings*), 1947, linoleum print.



Figure 206. Leopoldo Méndez. *Ora Si Ya No Hay Tortillas, Pero ... Qué Tál Televisión?* (Hey, If There Aren't Any More Tortillas ... How About Television?), 1949, linoleum print.



Figure 207. Antonio Ruíz. *Summer*, 1937, Museo de Hacienda y Crédito Público, Mexico City, oil on canvas.



Figure 208. Leopoldo Méndez. *Las Antorchas* (*The Torches*), 1947, linoleum print.



Figure 209. Leopoldo Méndez. *Fusilamiento (Execution)*, 1950, linoleum print.



Figure 210. Leopoldo Méndez. *Fusilado (Executed)*, 1950, linoleum print.



Figure 211. Leopoldo Méndez. *Catedral de Habana (Havana Cathedral)*, 1953, linoleum print.

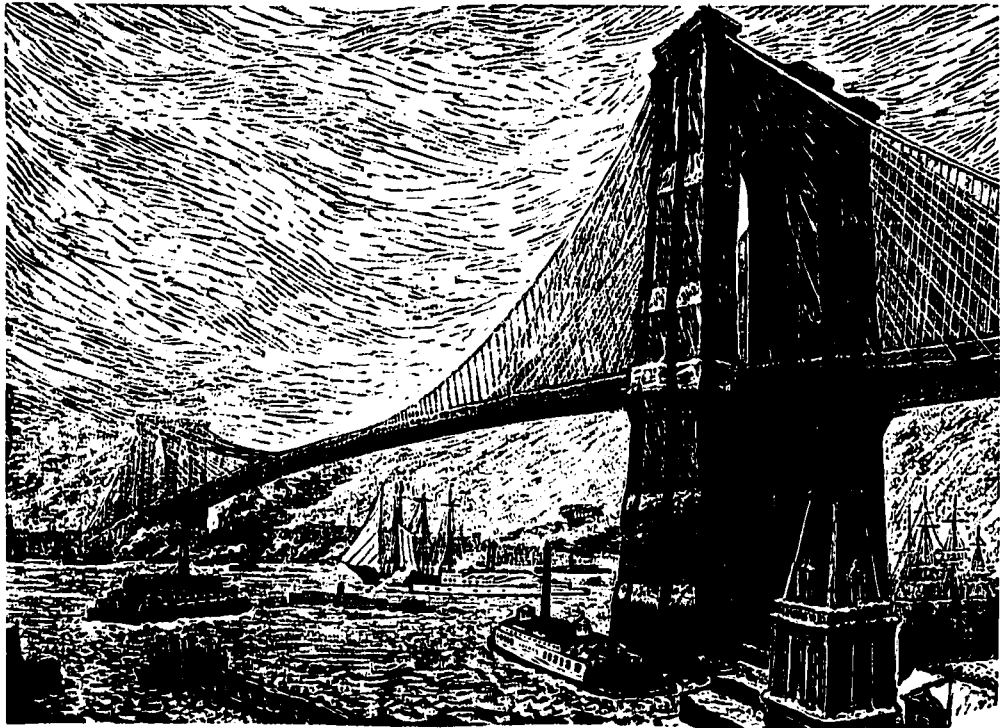


Figure 212. Leopoldo Méndez. *Puente de Brooklyn (Brooklyn Bridge)*, 1953, linoleum print.



Figure 213. Leopoldo Méndez. *Vista de Zaragoza (Vista de Zaragoza)*, 1953, linoleum print.



Figure 214. Leopoldo Méndez. *Verdi*, 1953, wood engraving.



Figure 215. Leopoldo Méndez. *Jugando Con Luces* (*Playing with Lights*), 1949, plastic engraving.



Figure 216. Giant backdrop, Inauguration of the Partido Popular, 1947, painted cloth, black and white photograph.



Figure 217. Leopoldo Méndez. *Asesinato de Jesús R. Menéndez* (*Murder of Jesús R. Menéndez*), 1948, linoleum print.



Figure 218. Käthe Kollwitz. *Memorial for Karl Liebknecht*, 1919, woodcut.



Figure 219. Leopoldo Méndez. *Silvestre Revueltas Muerto* (*Silvestre Revueltas Dead*), 1949, linoleum print.

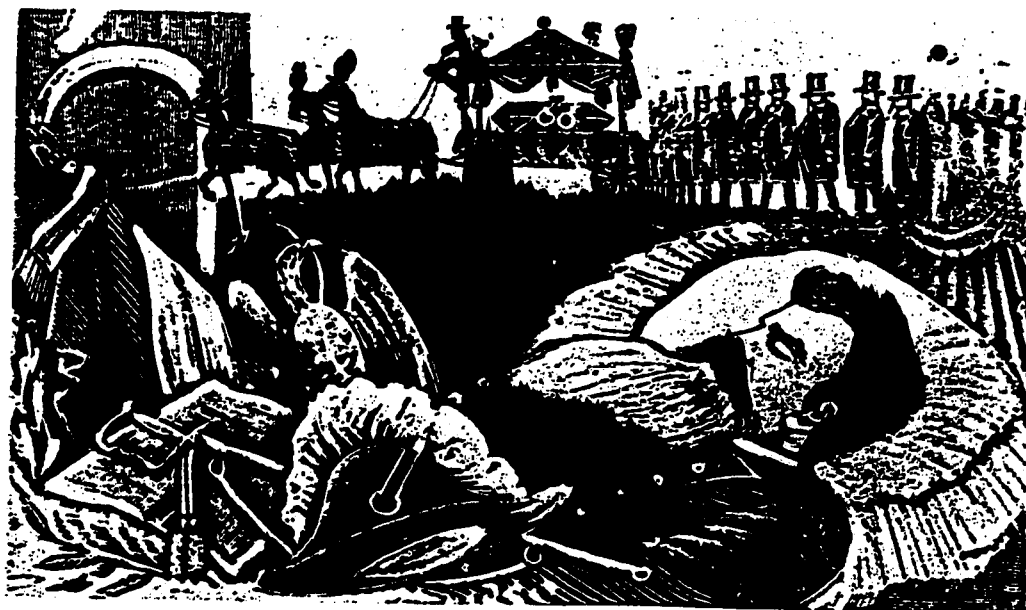


Figure 220. José Guadalupe Posada. *Llegada del Cadáver del C. General Manuel Gonzáles* (*The Arrival of the Body of General Manuel González*), 1893, type metal engraving.



Figure 221. Leopoldo Méndez. *Paul Robeson*, 1954, linoleum print.



Figure 222. Yampolsky, Mariana. *La Guerra Nuclear Transformaría al Mundo en un Campo Desolado* (Nuclear War Would Transform the World Into a Desolate Landscape), 1958, linoleum print.



Figure 223. Leopoldo Méndez. *Es Peor Sobrevivir (It Is Worse To Survive)*, 1958, woodcut.

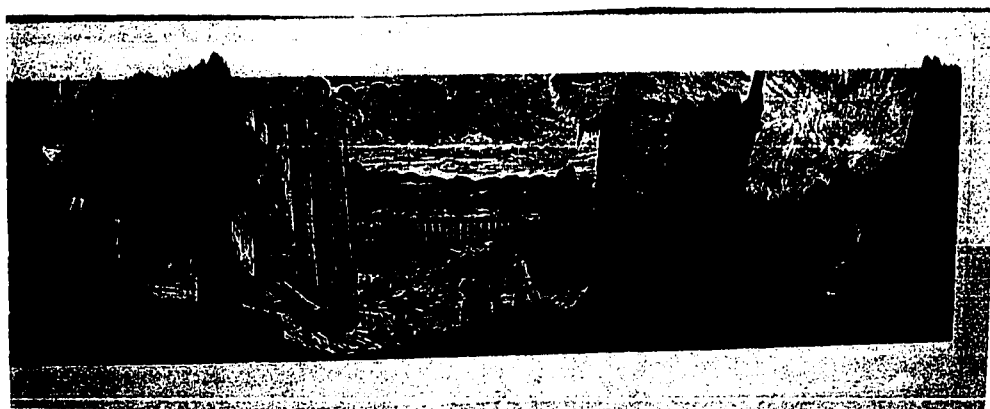


Figure 224. Leopoldo Méndez. *The Making of Tortillas*, 1954, linoleum print.



Figure 225. Leopoldo Méndez. *Homenaje a Posada* (*Homage to Posada*), 1956, linoleum print.



Figure 226. José Guadalupe Posada. *Continuación de las Manifestaciones Anti-Reeleccionistas* (Continuation of the Anti-Reelection Demonstrations), 1892, type metal engraving.



Figure 227. José Guadalupe Posada. *Casa de Enganches* (Recruitment Office), 1903, zinc etching.



Figure 228. Alfredo Zalce. *Posada*, right-hand side, 1948, linoleum print.



Figure 229. José Guadalupe Posada. *Rebumbio de Calaveras* (*Calaveras in a Hubbub*), ca. 1900, type metal engraving.



Figure 230. Alfredo Zalce. *Posada*, entire view, 1948, linoleum print.



Figure 231. Leopoldo Méndez. *Porfirio Díaz*, 1960, engraving on film.



Figure 232. Leopoldo Méndez. *La Revolución y el Petróleo* (*The Revolution and Petroleum*), 1960, engraving on film.



Figure 233. Aleksandr Gerasimov. *Lenin on the Tribune*, 1929, oil on canvas.

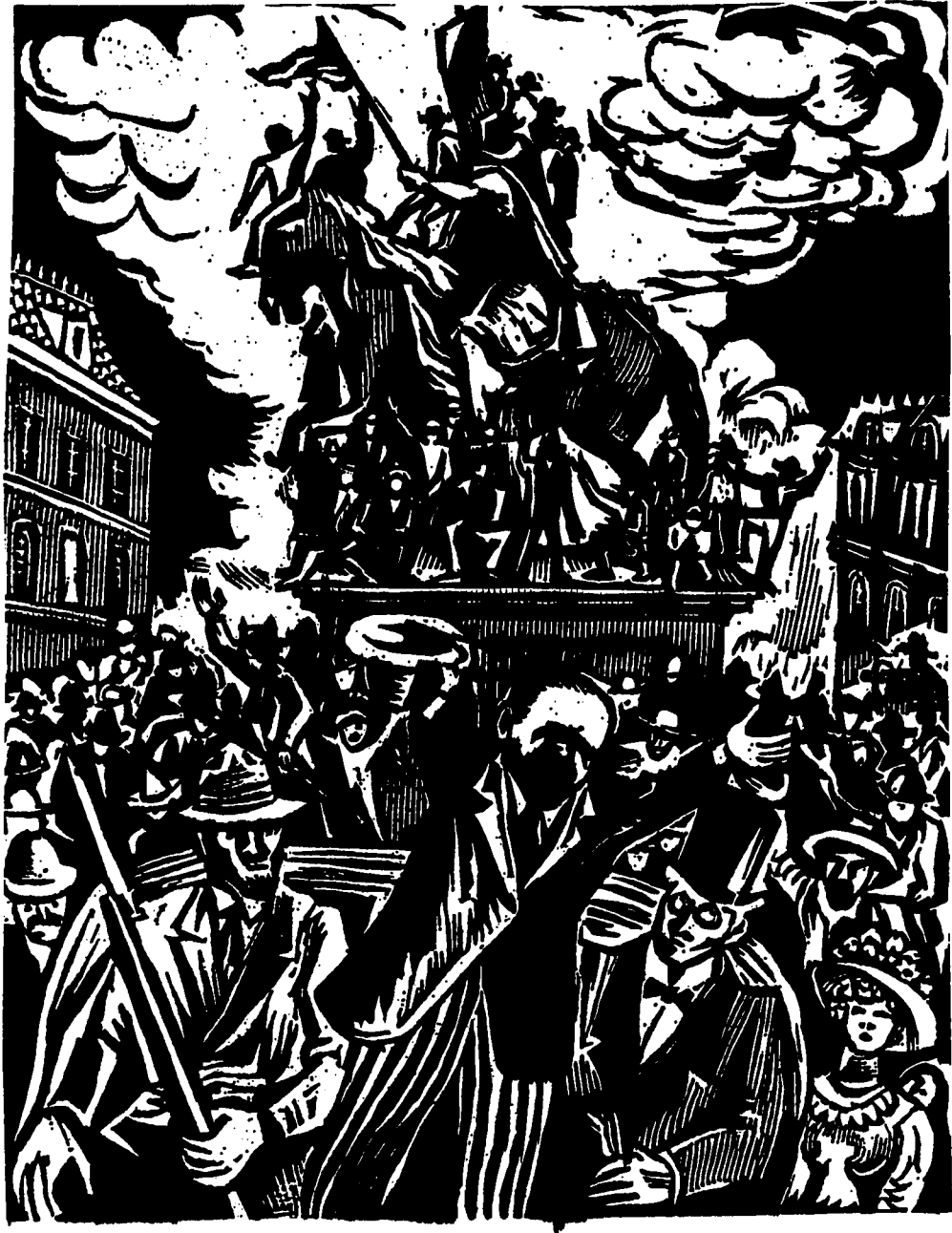


Figure 234. Leopoldo Méndez. *Francisco I. Madero*, 1947, woodcut.



Figure 235. Leopoldo Méndez. *Guardias Blancas* (*White Guards*), 1960, engraving on film.

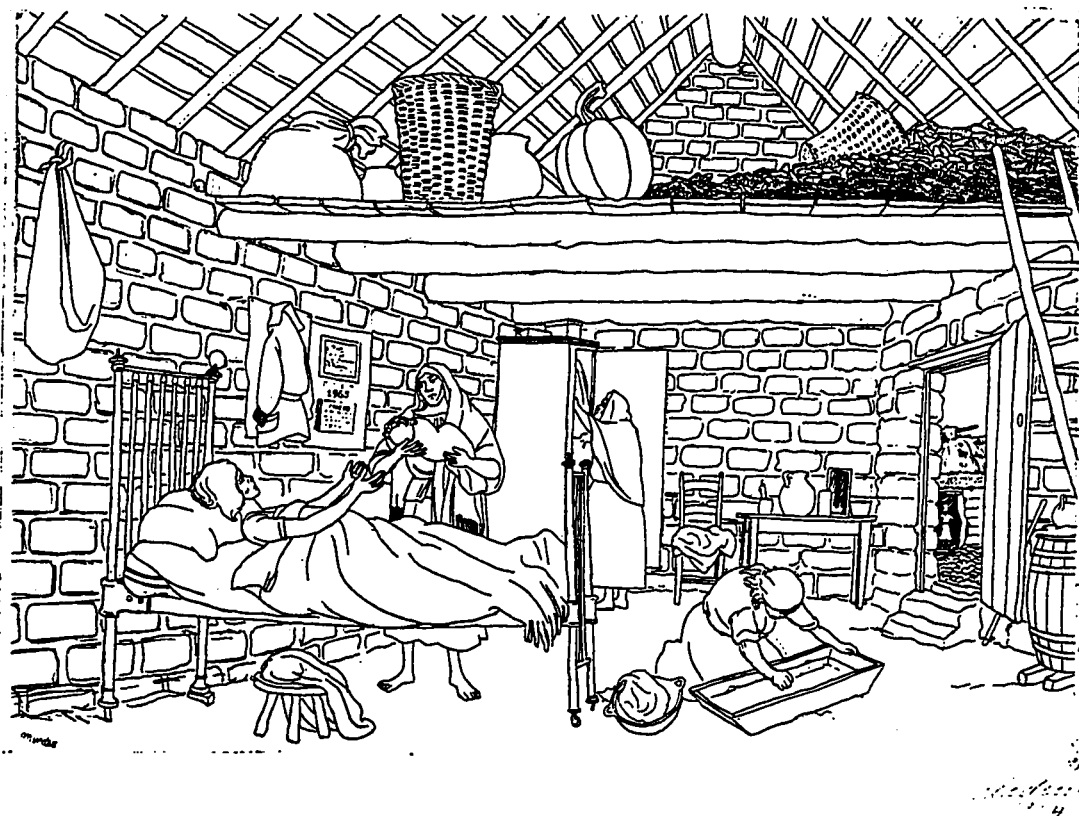


Figure 236. Leopoldo Méndez. *New Year's Card*, 1964, metal engraving.



Figure 237. Leopoldo Méndez. *María Dolores*, 1966, lithograph.



Figure 238. Leopoldo Méndez. *Pancho Villa*, 1966, lithograph.



Figure 239. Leopoldo Méndez. *José Sánchez*, 1968, oil on canvas.

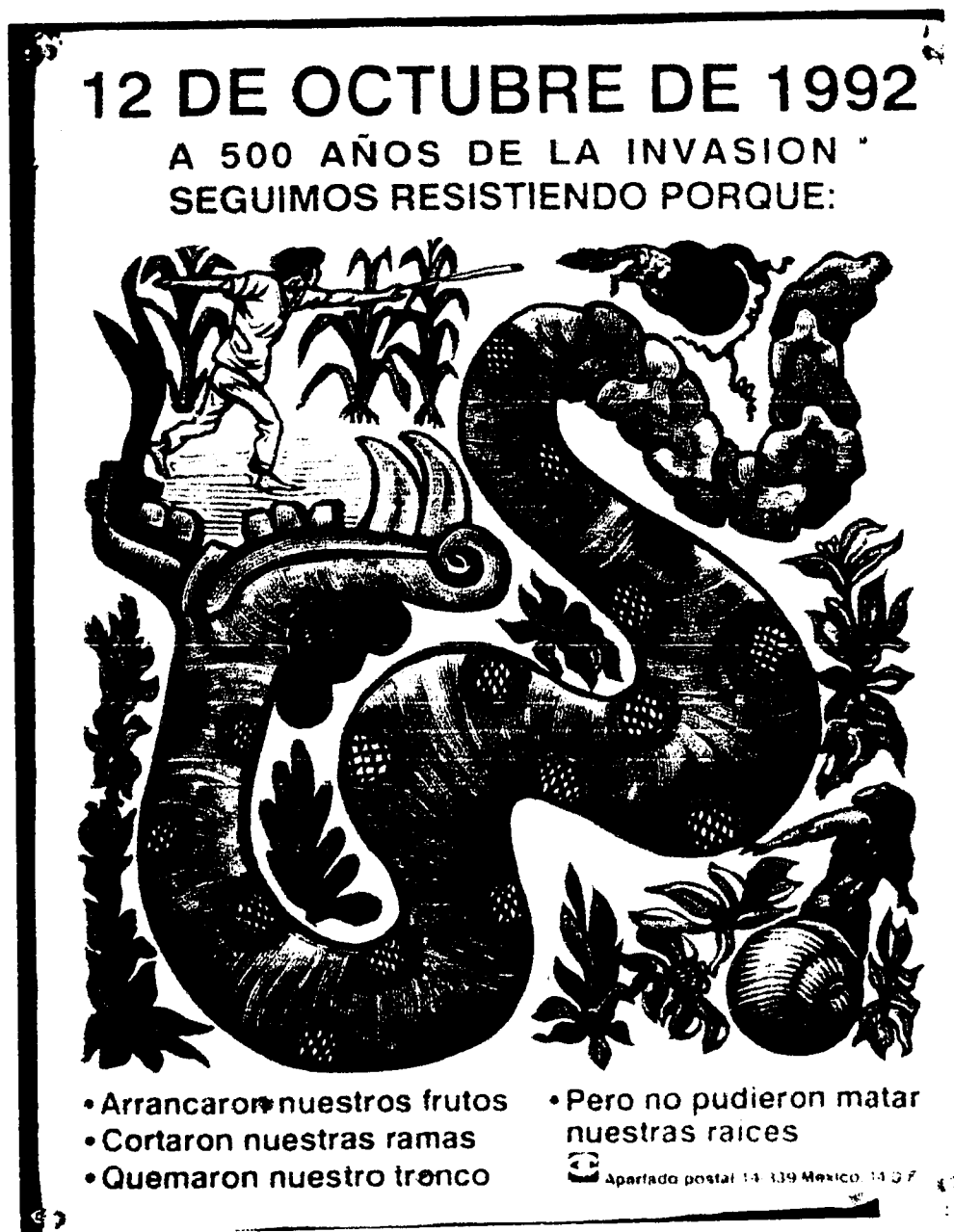


Figure 240. Leopoldo Méndez, and others. *12 de Octubre de 1992*, 1992, poster with Méndez's *Snake*, 1944.

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Domínguez Aragonés, Edmundo, "La hora de cerezo y del alfil."

Figueroa, Gabriel. "Sencillez maravilloso del genio."

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Interviews Conducted by the Author

Alberto Beltrán, Mexico City, March 10, 1996; June 25, 1996, tape recordings.

Gilberto Crespo de la Serna, Mexico City, February 2, 1996.

Mireya Cueto, Mexico City, February 15, 1998.

Gabriel Figueroa, Mexico City, February 10, 1996, tape recording

Arturo García Bustos, Mexico City, December 5, 1995; June 25, 1996, tape recordings.

Jules Heller, Mexico City, March 11, 1996; Phoenix, Arizona, March 20, 1999.

Seymour Kaplan, Phoenix, Arizona, March 20, 1999.

Germán List Arzubide, Mexico City, January 16, 1996, February 20, 1998.

Pablo Méndez, Mexico City, June 5, 1996, July 20, 1996.

María O'Higgins, Mexico City, September 10, 1995.

José Sánchez, Mexico City, March 6, 1996.

Mariana Yampolsky, Mexico City, September 15, 1995; March 11, 1996; July 28, 1996;
July 16, 1999.

Alfredo Zalce, Morelia, Mexico, November 20, 1995; July 12, 1996, tape recordings.

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Education

Ph.D., Art History, University of Washington, Seattle, 1999.
 M.A., Art History, University of Washington, Seattle, 1992.
 M.L.S., University of California, Berkeley, 1975.
 A.B., Art History, Barnard College, Columbia University, New York, 1971.

Academic Experience

Pre-Doctoral Instructor, Division of Art History, University of Washington
 Art History 309YB, Mexican Art of the Twentieth Century, Spring 1999.
 Art History 309YA, Mexican Art of the Twentieth Century, Autumn 1997.
 Art History 400, Mexican Art of the Twentieth Century, Spring 1997.
 Art History 380, Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Art, Spring 1997.
 Art History 203, Survey of Modern Art, Fall 1994, Spring 1995, Summer 1995.

Teaching Assistant, Division of Art History, University of Washington
 Art History 203, Survey of Modern Art, Spring 1991.

Reader, Division of Art History, University of Washington, 1992-1993
 Survey of Nineteenth-Century Art.
 Futurism, Dada and Surrealism.
 Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting.

Guest Lecturer

History of Photography, Division of Art History, University of Washington, 1999.
 Survey of American Art, Division of Art History, University of Washington, 1999.
 Women of Mexico, Department of Romance Languages, University of Washington, 1993.
 Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting, Division of Art History, University of Washington, 1992.
 Survey of Modern Art, Division of Art History, University of Washington, 1991.

Lectures and Presentations

"The Taller de Gráfica Popular," Southern Graphic Council Annual Conference,
 Arizona State University, Phoenix, 1999.

- "Photography and Printmaking in Mexico: A Political History," Colloquium, "Mexico, Neo-Liberalism and Post-Modern Identity," University of Washington, Seattle, 1996.
- "Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting from the Kress Collection," Seattle Art Museum gallery talk, 1994.
- "Graciela Iturbide and Mexican Photography," Seattle Art Museum gallery talk, 1992.
- "Twentieth-Century Mexican Photography," Hispanic Awareness Month, guest lecture, Social Security Administration, Seattle, 1992.
- "Lu Hsun, the Chinese Woodcut Movement and Mexican Printmaking," Art History Colloquium, University of Washington, 1991.

Publications

- "Leopoldo Méndez in the History of Twentieth-Century Mexican Art." Exhibition brochure, for the exhibition *Leopoldo Mendez*, Arizona State University Art Museum, February 1999.
- "Lourdes Grobet," Encyclopedia of North American Women Artists, 1995.
- "Graciela Iturbide and Twentieth-Century Mexican Photography." Catalogue essay for the exhibition *Three Hispanic Photographers*, Seattle Art Museum, 1992.

Academic Awards

- Chester Fritz Grant, University of Washington, 1995.
- University of Washington Dissertation Grant, 1995.
- Research Grant, Division of Art History, University of Washington, 1988.
- University of Washington School of Art Scholarships in 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994.

Research Experience

- Mexico City, August 1995 to August 1996. Interviewed former members of the Taller de Gráfica Popular (Popular Graphic Arts Workshop) and associates, gathered information from archives and libraries. Attended a number of symposia on twentieth-century Mexican art.
- Mexico City, Autumn 1988. Conducted interviews with Mexican photographers and gathered information from archives and libraries for Master's thesis on Mexican photography.

Studio Practice

- "La Virgen de Guadalupe, Icons," exhibition of Polaroid transfer prints on handmade paper, Full Circle Gallery, Seattle, 1996.
- Courses in botanical paper making, Seattle, 1989, 1993, 1994, Mexico, 1996. Courses in wood block printing, Seattle, 1994.

Other Professional Experience

Director of Library Services, Bastyr University Library, Seattle, 1981 to the present

As the director of a specialized medical library I have overseen all aspects of library operations, including acquisitions, purchasing, cataloging, planning, hiring, supervising, grant-writing, fund-raising, publications, reference, data-base searching, and bibliographic instruction. I have worked as a professional librarian throughout my graduate studies in Art History at the University of Washington.

Languages

Fluent in Spanish and French.

Professional Organizations

Member: College Art Association, Medical Library Association, Washington Medical Library Association.