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From revolution to postwar period, Miradas gazes into Mexico's mosaic past

Miradas uses the Spanish language's two definitions of the title to give a glimpse at an immense collection of Mexican art in a truly captivating way.

By [Mitch Montoya](#)

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"Frida Kahlo in Manuel Alvarez Bravo's Studio", by Manuel Alvarez Bravo. Gelatin silver print. Courtesy of The National Museum of Mexican Art /

Translated words rarely have a singular meaning. In Spanish, the word *mirada* can refer to a quick glimpse of an event or an image, but it can also refer to a deep, captivating gaze. The National Museum of Mexican Art's new exhibit, *Miradas*, uses these two definitions to give viewers a glimpse at the immense collection of Mexican art in a truly captivating way.

Miradas features art that emerged in the creative explosion following the Mexican Revolution. Artists share their experiences either as natives of Mexico or as visitors. While the exhibit only contains a fraction of the thousands of works from the Post-Revolution movement, the exhibit still masterfully displays the splendor of Mexico and artists' liberation.

Curators have divided Miradas into three exquisite sections that take the viewer through Mexican artistic movements of the late 19th and 20th centuries. The first section follows the postwar insurgence of politically and culturally controversial murals, which inspired artists to incorporate more abstracted figures and intricate details into their works. As a response to easel painting, which they considered “bourgeois,” muralists used abstraction and vibrant images to elicit social change.

Famed artist Diego Rivera led the Mexican Mural Renaissance, integrating iconic images of indigenous people with contemporary social issues. Along with works from Rivera, Miradas also features pieces by David Alfaro Siqueiros, the teacher of renowned abstractionist Jackson Pollock. Siqueiros’s painting “Red Earthz” references the conflicts that emerged after parts of Mexico became industrialized. The painting integrates deep hues of red, symbolizing the passion of the Mexican people, and jagged, abstracted figures representing the conflict between land and industry. “Meditation,” another Siqueiros work, takes a subtler and more introspective approach to representing changes that Mexicans experienced. Siqueiros’s rough textures and natural tones embellish the painting and give it a mural-like quality.

While many Mexican artists choose to grapple with modern social issues, some return to Mexico’s indigenous roots for inspiration. The Indigenismo movement emerged from artists’ interest in Mexican identity and how disruptions in a person’s environment change this identity.

Miradas features painters like Jean Charlot who integrate designs from indigenous societies with post-modern abstractions. Charlot takes an anthropological approach to painting the people of Mexico’s Michoacán region, adding historically accurate depictions of the land and religious icons. Her works feature intricate designs and muted earth tones, a return to more realistic representations.

Paintings by Alfredo Ramos Martínez and Gunther Gerszo take a more dramatic approach to the Indigenismo movement by focusing entirely on natural elements. Gerszo’s paintings contain natural textures and realistic depictions of food, people, and the land to convey adoration for ancient civilizations like the Mayan and Aztec.

Miradas’ third section consists of highly politicized images that rely on drama to evoke emotion. Judithe Hernandez’s “Hand of Blood” boldly tackles Mexican immigrants’ identity crises by juxtaposing blood-red hands on a dark canvas. The identical hands represent universal emotions among immigrants, while the varied designs on each hand symbolize the unique struggles of the individual. These bloody hands suggest the death of Mexican heritage in America.

Photography also plays a vital role in the Miradas exhibit. Drawing from ideas in Indigenismo and immigration issues, the photographs capture both Mexico’s gorgeous landscape and its disturbing division of social classes. Although there are a few gems to be found in the photography section, the photos generally seem like an afterthought compared to the rich, fascinating paintings that precede them.

As with language learning, people must be continually exposed to Mexican history to grasp its meanings and implications fully. Miradas is more than just a showcase of acclaimed artists’

works. Rather, the exhibit is a visual journey through Mexico's rich history. Miradas shows that, as with translations, there are many ways to interpret the complex cultural issues Mexico faces.

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