

DAVID ALFARO SIQUEIROS

Portrait of Mexico Today, 1932

Retrato del México de hoy, 1932

**A RESOURCE FOR
STUDENTS AND TEACHERS**

SANTA BARBARA
MUSEUM OF
ART



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The objective of this resource is to help students form a connection with the *Portrait of Mexico Today* mural by developing an understanding of key ideas, people, and places that relate to David Alfaro Siqueiros' art and life.

The resource focuses on relating artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding. It aids elementary, junior high, and high school students in applying the following California State Content Standards:

- Chronological and Spatial Thinking
- Historical Interpretation
- Historical and Cultural Context
- Aesthetic Valuing
- Research, Evidence, and Point of View
- Perceiving and Analyzing Artistic Work
- Interpreting Intent and Meaning in Artistic Work

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND SPECIAL THANKS

This educational resource was developed by the Education Department of the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 2021, in consultation with regional educators.

This resource is for educational purposes only. It is distributed freely to schools in the Santa Barbara region and accessible on the Santa Barbara Museum of Art's website.

IMAGE CREDITS

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INTRODUCTION

In 1932, David Alfaro Siqueiros painted *Portrait of Mexico Today* in a private home in Los Angeles, California. The mural is one artist's personal response to the times in which he lived. It is both a historical document and an important work of art. In 2001, the mural was transported to the front steps of the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, where it is on public view today.

To understand Siqueiros' intentions and the mural's meaning, we must first explore the historical circumstances that led to its creation, including the fight for Mexican independence and the Mexican Revolution.



David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Portrait of Mexico Today*, 1932. Fresco on cement. SBMA, Anonymous Gift, 2001.50. © David Alfaro Siqueiros / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SOMAAP, Mexico City.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A REVOLUTION HUNDREDS OF YEARS IN THE MAKING

At the beginning of the 20th century, Mexico was long overdue for social, political, and economic reform. **The Mexican Revolution** (1910–1920) was a response to a system of government and class hierarchies that had been in place for almost four hundred years, since the Spanish conquistador **Hernán Cortés** (1485–1547) invaded Mexico in 1519.

Between 1521 and 1821, Mexico was known as **New Spain** and governed under colonial rule as part of the vast Spanish Empire. During that time, nearly one hundred conspiracies and rebellions against Spain occurred, with **criollos** (Spaniards born in New Spain) fighting to change class hierarchies and establish independence. The most famous uprising was mounted in Dolores, Guanajuato by a parish priest named **Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla** (1753–1811). On September 16, 1810, Hidalgo rallied the rebel forces by ringing the church bells and proclaiming to the assembled crowd, “Long live the **Virgin of Guadalupe!** Death to bad government! Death to the gachupines (Spanish aristocrats!)” Hidalgo’s rebel army fought a bloody civil war against Spain, eventually overthrowing Spanish forces and proclaiming independence of the Mexican empire. Today, Father Hidalgo’s **grito de Dolores** (cry of Dolores) is regarded as Mexico’s declaration of independence and is commemorated every year on the evening of September 15 by the President of Mexico.

HISTORICAL FACT

According to accounts, the Virgin of Guadalupe first appeared to Juan Diego, an indigenous man, at Tepeyac Hill, outside of Mexico City, in 1531. Speaking in his native Nahuatl language, she identified herself as the Virgin Mary and asked that a church be built in her honor. As the patron saint of Mexico, the Virgin of Guadalupe has become one of the most important religious and cultural symbols in Mexico, and was even adopted by rebels in the Mexican Revolution as a symbol of resistance.



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION

In 1821, Mexico officially declared their independence from Spain. Despite this, Mexico struggled to rid the country of colonialist influence, with many factions consistently battling to gain power. In 1877, after leading a coup the year prior, **Porfirio Díaz** (1830–1914) was elected President for the first time, eventually serving seven terms in office. Under his regime, called the **Porfiriato** (1876–1911), there was great prosperity for a chosen few. Foreign investment in Mexico increased, resulting in the exploitation of the country's natural resources, such as timber, oil, and silver. Díaz's new land laws required that any peasant or farmer who wished to own his land had to submit a formal legal title. Because most farmers could not afford to hire the necessary lawyers, they lost their land. By 1910, ninety-five percent of the land in Mexico was owned by a small, wealthy group. Rural Mexicans and **campesinos** (farmers) were disenfranchised by these policies, forced to live and work as peons on the large haciendas. The urban poor also lived and worked in dire conditions.

Many liberal intellectuals such as **Francisco Madero** (1873–1913) protested with words, but two rural Mexicans, **Pascual Orozco** (1882–1915) and **Pancho Villa** (1878–1923), acted by gathering a large army of rebels in the north. South of Mexico City, **Emiliano Zapata** (1879–1919) rallied the indigenous population with the goal of implementing land reform for the campesinos. President Díaz could not control the uprisings that followed, and the Mexican Revolution officially began in 1910. When Orozco, Villa, and Madero took control of Ciudad Juárez, a major northern railway city, the Porfiriato ended. Federal soldiers were forced to surrender, and some even joined the rebel forces. President Díaz was exiled, and Madero became president in 1911.

But upheaval ensued. Madero was betrayed and assassinated by **General Victoriano Huerta** (1850–1916), who was himself eventually overthrown by the united forces of Madero's supporters, including **Venustiano Carranza** (1859–1920), Villa, and Zapata. Villa was defeated by constitutionalist army leader **Álvaro Obregón** (1880–1928), and Carranza ordered Zapata's assassination. Carranza himself was then killed by Obregón's supporters. Finally, in 1920 Obregón was elected president, bringing an end to the Mexican Revolution.

HISTORICAL FACT

During the colonial period, the population of Mexico was overwhelmingly indigenous and lived in rural communities. But with Spanish rule came a strict and unjust racial hierarchy, called the **castas system**. Whites or those with pure Spanish blood were considered on top (españoles), followed by Spaniards born in New Spain (criollos), then mixed-race persons (mestizos), and lastly indigenous peoples (indios). The inequitable castas system affected laws, taxes, social privileges, and much more.



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A REVOLUTIONARY ART MOVEMENT

After a decade of violent civil war, the Revolution officially ended, bringing with it a new constitution, a more progressive government, and the **Mexican Mural Movement**.

In the 1920s, the spirit of the Revolution manifested itself in Mexican art. Visual artists celebrated the history, culture, and indigenous traditions of Mexico, while exalting revolutionary ideals, such as land reform and public education. While there were numerous influential artists during this time, three artists emerged as leaders of the burgeoning mural movement—**Diego Rivera** (1886–1957), **José Clemente Orozco** (1883–1949), and **David Alfaro Siqueiros** (1896–1974).

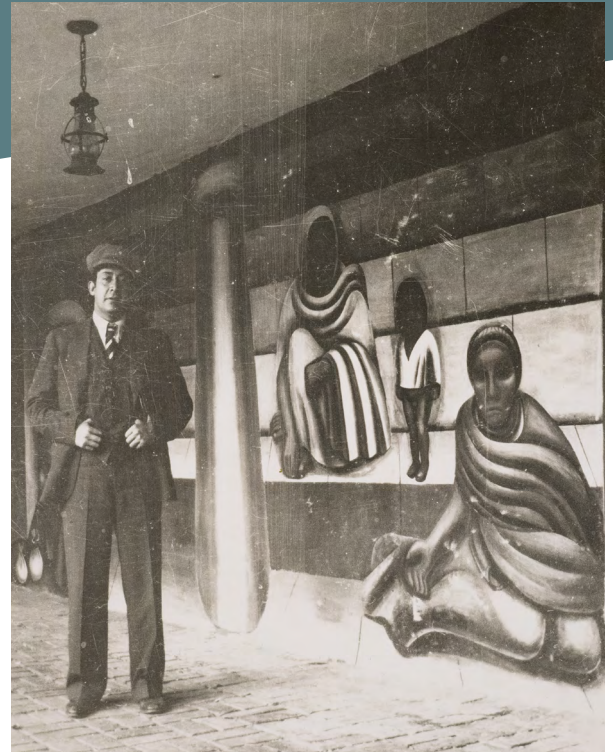
The three, who came to be known as **Los Tres Grandes** (The Big Three), wanted to make art that could be seen by a mass audience. Obregon's new minister of education, **José Vasconcelos** (1882–1959), established an educational reform program that included hiring young artists to paint murals in Mexico's schools and public buildings. The movement was founded in the belief that large-scale murals created in public places could educate the masses, while reviving and rebuilding a modern Mexico. Even the poorest citizens and those who could not read or write could take pride in seeing the stories of Mexico's great history, while recognizing themselves and the issues they cared about on the country's walls. Not only would murals be an accessible way to foster revolutionary ideals, they would revitalize indigenous traditions of wall painting.

HISTORICAL FACT

Before Cortés' invasion, Mexico was populated by several distinct cultures, with known agricultural villages dating as far back as 7000 BC. The **Olmec** were the first Mesoamerican culture to flourish, emerging along the Gulf Coast around 1150 BC. As the mother culture, Olmec cultural traits diffused throughout the vast land area of Mexico, as cultures such as the **Zapotec** (Valley of Oaxaca), **Maya** (Chiapas and Yucatán), **Toltec** (Central Mexico), and **Mixtec** (Oaxaca and Puebla) developed and thrived. By 1300 CE, the Triple Alliance, dominated by the **Mexica**, ruled over central Mexico. The city of **Tenochtitlán** (modern Mexico City) served as the base of the Mexica's political and economic empire.



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND



In 1922, Rivera painted the first government-sponsored mural, *La Creación*, in the Bolívar Amphitheatre at the National Preparatory School (today the Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso) in Mexico City. Whereas Vasconcelos had thought in terms of a classical revival, one where artists rendered traditional interpretations of classical themes or subject matter, the artists had a radically different vision. Many were already committed to a collective type of art that was revolutionary in technique and content, and executed by a team of artists. Although Vasconcelos' intentions and personal taste differed from theirs, to his credit, he not only approved a program of government-subsidized mural art, he also left the subject matter and interpretation up to the artists.

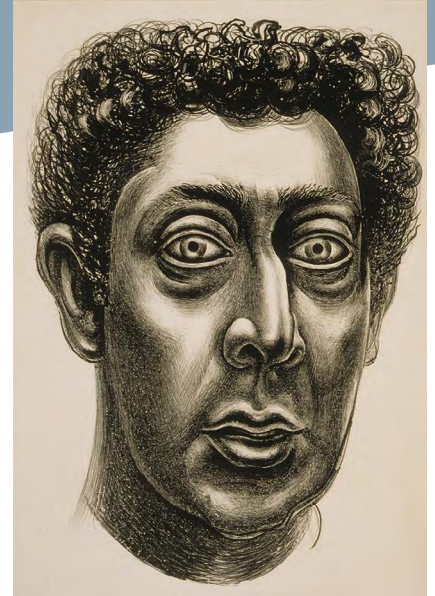
This post-revolutionary period energized a new generation of Mexican artists, inspiring new modes of expression in painters, printmakers, photographers, musicians, composers, dancers, and writers. **Mexicanidad**—a new enthusiasm for and pride in Mexico's indigenous history and culture—became a defining theme. Many artists saw their role as catalysts for social change, hoping to improve the lives of everyday Mexican citizens. Others saw this moment as an opportunity to rewrite the history of Mexico, foregrounding the nation's indigenous roots rather than Spanish rule, and to capture a changing and modern Mexican society. While artists were largely unified in their embrace of Mexicanidad, a vast range of artistic styles, subject matter, and ideologies emerged.

For Siqueiros, who was a classically trained artist, moving away from traditional easel painting and toward public art and printmaking was imperative. The artist served as the Secretary General of the **Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors**—an artist union that declared that its goal was to create art that embodied the ideals of the Revolution. In a 1922 manifesto, Siqueiros wrote:

We repudiate so-called easel painting and every kind of art favored by ultra-intellectual circles, because it is aristocratic, and we praise monumental art in all its forms, because it is public property. We proclaim at this time of social change from a decrepit order to a new one, the creators of beauty must use their best efforts to produce ideological works for the people; art must no longer be the expression of individual satisfaction it is today, but should aim to become a fighting educative art for all.

The Mexican Mural Movement was an enormous success, with hundreds of murals painted across Mexico well into the early 1950s. The movement gained international attention, with Los Tres Grandes receiving commissions in the United States and abroad, and ultimately influencing artists for generations to come.

ABOUT THE ARTIST



DAVID ALFARO SIQUEIROS (1896-1974)

David Alfaro Siqueiros was born in 1896 in the Mexican state of Chihuahua to a well-off family. After his mother died when he was four years old, Siqueiros and his two siblings were sent to live with their paternal grandparents. From an early age, he exhibited a passionate commitment to art and social justice. In 1911, he enrolled in the prestigious **San Carlos Academy** in Mexico City—the first art school in all of the Americas—when he was just fifteen years old. There he was taught the fundamentals of art, receiving a traditional education in painting, sculpture, and architecture in which he spent hours copying classical Greek plaster casts.

San Carlos Academy was the epicenter for art in Mexico, as well as an important site for social and political engagement. In 1911, Siqueiros participated in various student strikes, with students demanding that the Academy focus less on outdated academic models of art, and more on modern styles and techniques. Led by artist **Gerardo Murillo** (1875–1964), known as Dr. Atl, the strikes also fought to focus less on European subject matter and themes, and more on artwork that depicted the people and culture of Mexico.

As the Mexican Revolution progressed, Siqueiros joined the Constitutionalist army led by Venustiano Carranza. For five years, he traveled throughout Mexico fighting in the civil war as an officer, while experiencing the country's diverse cultures and everyday struggles of the working classes and rural poor. In 1919, after Carranza's forces gained control and the end of the civil war was in sight, Siqueiros traveled to Europe to continue his artistic education. In Paris, he met Diego Rivera, as well as other significant artists of the modernist movement.

In 1922, Siqueiros returned to Mexico City at the request of Vasconcelos and began participating in the burgeoning mural movement. Unlike Rivera and Orozco, Siqueiros had fought in the Revolution and he brought that personal perspective to his artwork. The youngest of Los Tres Grandes, Siqueiros became known for his embrace of unconventional materials and industrial techniques, endless experimentation, and visual commentary on the age of modernity.

Along with painting, Siqueiros was an acclaimed printmaker. In his teens he worked as an illustrator at *La Vanguardia*, an antigovernment newspaper, and later on *El Machete*, the newspaper for the **Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors**. In the union's manifesto, Siqueiros denounced easel painting as elitist, overly intellectualized, and insufficiently ideological to instruct the masses.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

In an interview with writer Selden Rodman, Siqueiros had this to say about the muralists:

We were never just artists. We could and did write. We could address meetings. We organized ourselves and others. When I led the strike at the Academy in my teens, our syndicate made two demands: 'Out with the academicians' and 'nationalize the railroads!' It was silly of course, but it indicates our spirit. We could fight. Some of us became generals. I myself am still a reserve captain in the Mexican Army and a Lieutenant Colonel in the army of Republican Spain. In the old days we used to paint with pistols in our belts. They couldn't have stopped us if they had wanted to!

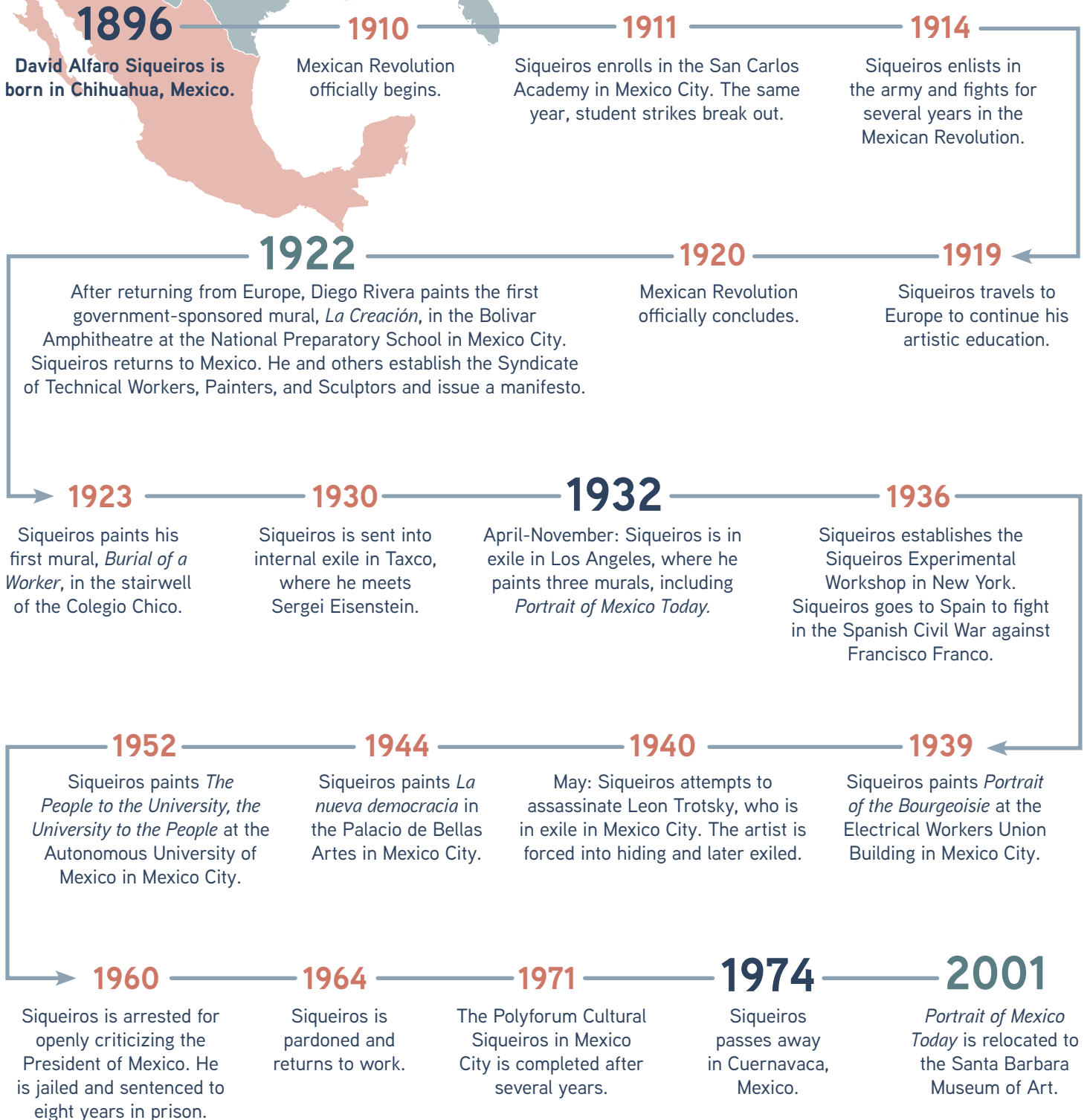
Throughout his life, Siqueiros was committed to political organizing, believing that there was no separation between art and politics. He was heavily involved in the Mexican Communist Party and much of his artwork reflected pro-Marxist ideas and values. There were even periods when he stopped painting and dedicated himself to political causes, such as in 1936, when he went to Spain to fight in the Spanish Civil War against Francisco Franco's fascist regime. In fact, Siqueiros began the 1930s in prison following his participation in a May Day demonstration, and was released into internal exile in the Mexican silver-mining town of Taxco. His lifelong actions as a union organizer frequently found him arrested or imprisoned, and he was forced to leave Mexico many times because of his political activities.

It was during one such exile, in 1932, that Siqueiros came to Los Angeles, California at the invitation of Nelbert Chouinard—the founder of the Chouinard Art School. During this time, he taught fresco painting and painted three murals. The first, *Street Meeting* at Chouinard, caused a public outcry and was destroyed. The second, *América Tropical* on Olvera Street in Downtown Los Angeles, brought similar protests because of its political content and was whitewashed in 1938. (In 2012, The Getty Conservation Institute restored the mural and much of it is now publicly visible.) The third mural, *Portrait of Mexico Today*, now at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, is the only one of the three murals to survive fully intact.

Throughout the next few decades, Siqueiros produced extraordinary works of art and continued to reinvent the medium of mural painting. He led experimental workshops in the United States, in which he created a laboratory for modern techniques in art, as well as traveled and worked throughout South America. Even as new artistic styles emerged and the post-revolutionary period concluded, Siqueiros continued to paint murals in Mexico, producing some of his most extraordinary pieces including *Portrait of the Bourgeoisie* at the Mexican Electricians' Syndicate in Mexico City and *La nueva democracia* in the Palacio de Bellas Artes. His political activism also never waned. In the 1960s, he again became embroiled in political controversy and was sentenced to prison for eight years. In 1964, he was pardoned and returned to work.

Up until his death in 1974, Siqueiros never lost his commitment to making art that was politically engaged as well as experimental in its use of new materials and modes of expression. His life and work continue to inspire generations of younger artists in Mexico, the United States, and around the world.

TIMELINE



ABOUT THE MURAL

THE MURAL'S HISTORY

Portrait of Mexico Today was painted during the eight-month period that Siqueiros was a political refugee in Los Angeles, from April to November 1932. It was painted on the walls of a semi-enclosed garden structure at the home of **Dudley Murphy**, a journalist turned film director. According to Fletcher Martin, an artist who helped with the mural, Murphy asked to meet Siqueiros, saying, "Wouldn't it be great if Siqueiros would do a fresco on the wall in my garden?" Murphy housed the artist while he was in Los Angeles, as well as helped generate sales of his easel paintings.



Martin described the experience of working with the great muralist:

Siqueiros would indicate a section for that night. I would mix the mortar and prepare the section. This would take maybe a couple of hours...Usually Siqueiros painted each section himself, but he occasionally would let me develop an unimportant part. He always contended that public murals should be done as a collective effort, but in practice he couldn't stand to have anybody else paint parts that were of any importance to the composition. He usually painted between midnight and three or four in the morning. There was always a sense of elation and accomplishment after the night's work.

For the next seventy years, the mural remained in the private garden of the Murphy home in the Pacific Palisades. In 2001, it was given as a gift to the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, and the entire structure on which it had been painted was moved to Santa Barbara. Now installed permanently in front of the Museum, *Portrait of Mexico Today* can finally be seen by everyone.

THE MURAL'S SUBJECT

Siqueiros' recollection of the subject of *Portrait of Mexico Today* was published in *La Trácala* in 1962, thirty years after he painted it:

It represents General Plutarco Elías Calles, dressed in a Mexican outfit, armed to the teeth, and with a mask, raised upon a mountain of money. One could represent Calles as the lowest symbol of corruption...Beside the "Highest Chief," appear anguished women in the state of greatest misery, and many, many corpses. Possibly one of them represents José Guadalupe Rodríguez, one of the first communists sacrificed by the ascending oligarchy.

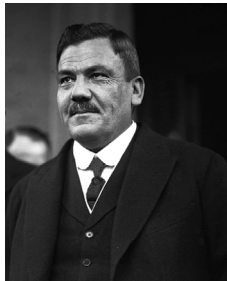
ABOUT THE MURAL

LOOKING: WHAT DO WE SEE?

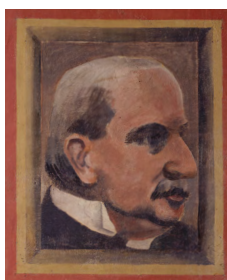
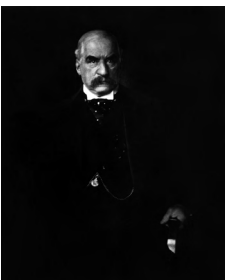
In the center of the long main wall are two indigenous women seated on or near a structure reminiscent of a Mesoamerican pyramid. Beside one of the women stands a half-clothed child. All three figures look out at us. At their left sits **Plutarco Elías Calles**, the revolutionary general who was President of Mexico from 1924 to 1928. On the left side wall, two murdered men seem to float in space. On the small left front wall is a portrait of the U.S. financier, **J. P. Morgan**. On the far-right wall is a kneeling Russian Communist soldier holding a rifle.

INTERPRETING: WHAT IS ITS MEANING?

Portrait of Mexico Today is a very subjective work, with specific, autobiographical significance for Siqueiros. It combines portraits of two real contemporaries, Plutarco Elías Calles and J. P. Morgan, with three groups or types of people.



Plutarco Elías Calles (1877–1945) was involved in the Mexican Revolution, which Siqueiros indicates by the rifle and sombrero. The money bags at his feet and the mask that slips off his face, however, expose Calles as a traitor to the revolution, corrupted by greed. Calles began his political career as a liberal, but became increasingly conservative, and eventually used the army to suppress opposition. As a result, an increasing number of political prisoners filled Mexican jails. Siqueiros himself was under house arrest in Taxco before coming to Los Angeles in 1932.



John P. Morgan (1837–1913) is a symbol of the United States' financial power over Mexico. In 1927, Dwight Morrow, a senior partner in Morgan's firm, was appointed ambassador to Mexico. Siqueiros saw this appointment as one of the most egregious examples of Mexican corruption and collusion in the United States' exploitation of Mexico's natural resources.

HISTORICAL FACT

In 1846, the United States invaded northern Mexico, setting off the Mexican-American War. Mexico eventually ceded the majority of its northern territory after signing the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. This territory included parts of present-day California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Colorado, Nevada, and Utah.



ABOUT THE MURAL

INTERPRETING: WHAT IS ITS MEANING?

The **two women** wear traditional **rebozos** (shawls) that identify them as **campesinas**. They and the half-clothed, hollow-eyed child are symbols of the country's suffering rural poor.

The **murdered men, workers, or revolutionaries**, are also meant to be seen as victims of United States and Mexican corruption. In his 1962 recollection, Siqueiros said that one of the men, presumably the one in the foreground, was a portrait of a martyred revolutionary, José Guadalupe Rodríguez. But he also recalled "many, many corpses." He had not seen the mural in thirty years when he made this statement, so his memory may have been a little shaky.

The **soldier**, identifiable as Russian by the red star, represents the link between the Russian Revolution and the Mexican Revolution. Siqueiros also refers to Mexico's changed relationship with the Soviet Union under Calles. Initially Calles supported his country's developing labor movement. This changed after he broke off diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union to allay U.S. fears about communist activity in Mexico. As a member of the Communist Party in Mexico, Siqueiros opposed Calles' anti-communist actions, including the political persecution to which he, Siqueiros, was personally subjected.



ABOUT THE MURAL

SIQUEIROS' INNOVATIONS: NEW MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUES

Siqueiros was as radical in his use of new materials and techniques as he was in his politics. He believed that revolutionary art required revolutionary techniques. While some artists, he felt, simply (and incorrectly) enlarged easel paintings to the scale of a wall, Siqueiros believed that composing a mural required a different set of tools. Eventually rejecting traditional **fresco** technique—in which tempera pigment is applied to wet plaster—the artist applied new technological and chemical advances to his murals.

In *Portrait of Mexico Today*, Siqueiros painted with oil pigments directly onto cement that had been applied on top of the plaster wall. Unlike traditional fresco where the tempera pigment dries into the wet plaster, here the paint rests on the surface of the wall. This made the process of moving the garden structure from Los Angeles to Santa Barbara particularly challenging. In other works, Siqueiros used industrial enamels like duco, a transparent and quick-drying paint developed for automobiles. He also experimented with airbrushes, blow-torches, and spray guns.

In 1936, the artist established the Siqueiros Experimental Workshop in New York. There he hoped to initiate a new period of art making using modern technology. As Siqueiros's assistant, Harold Lehman, later recalled, the students mostly created large-scale public artworks, including “big banners, floats, and big demonstration pieces and things of that nature for parades, gatherings, conventions, meetings. Not particularly for exhibit.” Jackson Pollock was one of many U.S. artists who studied with Siqueiros and was influenced by the muralist's radical use of modern materials and techniques.

NEW WORKING METHODS: COLLECTIVISM AND TEAM EFFORT

Siqueiros said the revolutionary artist should work within a team so that any work produced became a collective effort. In his opinion, art produced in this way was superior to individual art and could provide the **proletariat** with the support it needed in its daily struggle. This was an idea that sometimes worked better in theory than in practice.

While in Los Angeles, Siqueiros organized a group of artists known as the **Bloc of Mural Painters**, many of whom were graduate art students at the time. The Bloc, which included artists Millard Sheets, Fletcher Martin, and Philip Guston, assisted Siqueiros on the three murals he completed in Los Angeles.

*New social conditions demand corresponding methods of plastic expression...
One cannot play psychologically subversive revolutionary music on a church organ.*

— Siqueiros, 1936 speech, Hollywood, CA



ABOUT THE MURAL



PHOTOGRAPHY AND FILM

Siqueiros used photographs extensively in his work. The portrait of J. P. Morgan is based on a famous photograph by Edward Steichen; the image of Calles may also be based on a photograph. But his experimental approach to representing space owes much to the influence of his friend, the great Russian film director **Sergei Eisenstein** (1898–1948). Eisenstein pioneered the theory and practice of montage. The two met during Siqueiros' internal exile in Taxco, where Eisenstein was working on a film. Siqueiros began incorporating many of Eisenstein's film strategies into his mural compositions, imbuing them with a cinematic quality.

The multiple points of view in *Portrait of Mexico Today*, an **expressive** rather than realistic representation of space, are examples of what Siqueiros called **polyangular perspective**. Standing in front of the mural, viewers make eye contact with the indigenous women and it feels as though the bodies of the murdered men are at one's feet. This perspective changes how we as viewers engage with the meaning and intention of the mural. Furthermore, the people and structures painted on the three walls relate to each other, as well as to the real architecture and garden, across space and time.

SIQUEIROS' STYLE: INVENTING A NEW VISUAL LANGUAGE

Siqueiros, like other Mexican Modernists, sought to invent a new and distinctive visual language that celebrated Mexicanidad. The stepped pyramid and the block-like figures are based on Mesoamerican architecture and sculptures and refer to Mexico's long and grand history before the Spanish invasion. The visual language also incorporates influences from European modernism: lines, forms, colors, and spaces that have been manipulated, abstracted, simplified, exaggerated, or distorted for expressive purposes. Incorporating these influences, along with his revolutionary approach to mural composition, technique, and form, Siqueiros developed a visual language distinctly his own.

"The artist must paint as he would speak. I don't want people to speculate what I mean, I want them to understand."

— Siqueiros



ABOUT THE MURAL

JOURNEY TO SANTA BARBARA

In 2001, *Portrait of Mexico Today* was generously donated to the Santa Barbara Museum of Art after years of consultations, site visits, research, and planning. To preserve the integrity of the work and ensure its future protection, the entire twenty-five ton structure that housed the mural was carefully transported intact to Santa Barbara. Once safely installed at the Museum, it underwent an intensive conservation treatment. John Coplin, SBMA's Director of Facilities and Installations, recalls: "It was a monumental task that involved many talented project managers, engineers, conservators, house movers, and construction experts working together. SBMA staff participated in the stabilization of the mural surface using cyclododecane coating. It was a pleasure to be that involved, a memorable experience."

To learn more about this process, we invite you to watch this [thirty-minute video](#) documenting the mural's transfer, installation, and conservation. To read more about the decision to move the mural to Santa Barbara, read the following publication produced by the Getty Conservation Institute, [The Siqueiros Legacy: Challenges of Conserving the Artist's Monumental Murals](#), 2013.



ABOUT THE MURAL



COMMUNITY VOICES

Portrait of Mexico Today was officially unveiled to the public on October 20, 2002 in a daylong celebration. At least five thousand people came to the Museum that day—with some even waiting an hour in line to view the mural. A new bilingual team of docents made up of UCSB undergraduate students gave tours of the mural in English and Spanish, and classrooms from across the region planned field trips to the Museum. It quickly became an important part of the Santa Barbara arts community, especially for teachers and students. Read the following reflections by educators and docents on the myriad ways the Siqueiros mural has impacted them:

“My favorite memory is when I brought my parents to SBMA to see the Siqueiros mural and served as their bilingual docent. Like many I led through SBMA, it was their first time analyzing and learning about art—but it wouldn’t be their last.” -*Elía Bustamante, Former SBMA Docent and Dual Language Immersion Teacher*



“I have been fortunate to guide visitors and students through *Retrato del México de hoy* by David Alfaro Siqueiros at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. I can read and place the important figures historically and situate the narrative within its political milieu, but it was the eyes of a child that moved me beyond the political to the personal. When asked, ‘What do you see?’ one six-year old girl spoke up and said she saw that ‘the women are strong.’ She emphasized this several times; she could see that the women were widows and that the children were now fatherless. She could read the strength of these women. And through her eyes, I too, could see their strength.

It was a child’s ability to relate to the mural on a personal level that allowed me to see the connection to my family’s history, and in turn, to feel a connection to their strength. My great-grandmother left México with her five children after her husband, Don Melchor Guillermo Gándara died. My grandfather was too young to know how and exactly when his father died—what he remembers is his mother leaving everything behind during the Mexican Revolution and settling in El Paso, Texas. There she became a seamstress and provided for her children as a single-parent. And when I look at the mural now, I see her strength.” -*Melinda Gándara, Professor, Santa Barbara City College*

ABOUT THE MURAL

COMMUNITY VOICES

“The mural was the most thrilling of all the works I would use on my first docent tour in 2002. The inimitable docent Faith Henkin, beloved mentor, said it would put our museum on the map. I followed her every tour. A week after it went on display, she excitedly told a group of 6th graders from Franklin Elementary, ‘This is a shout to the public!’ She went on to tell its story and I couldn’t write notes fast enough. ‘It’s an entire building with a message,’ Karen Howsam announced when I followed her docent tour.

Siqueiros left nothing unsaid, like all the great muralists, it’s of the people, for the people. It’s about capitalism, corruption, and communism, but it was painted for a wealthy filmmaker named Dudley Murphy, Dudley! He made the original Dracula, a film produced by Carl Lamella Jr. whose Family Foundation provided my family with the entry visas to come to America. I was hooked. Siqueiros tells us about J.P. Morgan, Plutarco Elías Calles, the disinherited. He uses flattened imaging and polyangular perspective, the colors of the earth done with industrial paints and it’s not a fresco! The best part? You can see it for free!”

-Josie Martin, SBMA Docent

“I am just really proud to be a Mexican right now. Because Siqueiros is obviously from Mexico and we have the only intact Siqueiros mural in the U.S. right here and I am standing right in front of it in this community. It’s just overwhelming. It’s an empowering experience to be a part of this.”

-Veronica Guerrero, SBMA Docent

“I would bring my adult ESL students from Mexico to visit the mural and they were always so proud to see Santa Barbara celebrating one of their national treasures. The students would discuss the different elements of society being represented in the mural. It was a beautiful moment when I became the student and they became the teacher.”

-Susie Naughton, Educator

“During the 1930s, the seclusion of Dudley Murphy’s home protected ‘Portrait of Mexico Today’ from the kind of political censorship that befell the more open and accessible América Tropical, but decades later, it was the institutionalized museum setting that provided a secure destiny for the mural. The Santa Barbara Museum of Art made ‘Portrait of Mexico Today’ public, so that it could be properly maintained and accessible for all to see.”

—Diana DuPont, Former Curator of Modern & Contemporary Art, SBMA



WHAT IS A MURAL?

"No activist art has had more community support and long-term social impact than murals, a uniquely democratic public art form, highly visible and collaboratively executed." — Lucy R. Lippard, Art Historian

WHAT IS A MURAL?

In its simplest definition, a mural is a painting or work of art created directly on or applied to a wall or ceiling. Its name derives from the Latin word "murus," meaning wall. Murals can be indoors or outdoors. They can be monumental or compact. Most murals are made with paint, but some are composed of ceramic tiles, aerosol spray, textiles, or other types of materials.

WHO CREATES MURALS?

Anyone can create a mural. Some murals are created by trained artists, while others are created by individuals from a community. Many murals are made with a combination of both skilled artists and community members. Old or young, anyone who is willing to pick up a paintbrush can create a mural!

HOW LONG DO MURALS LAST?

The longevity of murals depends on a number of factors. Some famous murals, such as the Sistine Chapel ceiling and many of the murals by Los Tres Grandes, are intended to last forever and are protected by museums or cultural organizations. Other murals are made to be temporary—their meaning is intended for a specific moment in time.

If created outside, murals are also affected by environmental factors, such as sun damage that causes fading or peeling, as well as social factors, such as public opinion. Murals created in public spaces can be vandalized, whitewashed, or painted over with new artistic creations. The length of time they exist often depends on who is caring for the mural and what resources are available to maintain it.

WHY PAINT MURALS TODAY?

As the Mexican Muralists believed and showed, murals are a powerful tool for visual communication. As an art form, they often represent freedom of expression and can be painted for a variety of purposes, including political and social activism, to celebrate or commemorate cultural and local figures, or even just to add color and vibrancy to neighborhood walls. Many murals made today are part of community mural projects, youth programs, or public art initiatives that hold specific meaning to the built environment they are painted on.

WHAT DO MURALS MEAN?

Every mural has its own unique meaning and significance. When you see a mural in your community, ask yourself the following questions:

- Where is the mural painted? What wall is it on?
- What figures, words, or images are painted in the mural? What is its theme?
- When was the mural created?
- Who created the mural?
- Why might they have painted it? Was the mural commissioned?
- What does the mural mean to you? Do you like it or dislike it?
- What does the mural mean for the community?

REFLECTION

What does *Portrait of Mexico Today* mean for the Santa Barbara community?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Portrait of Mexico Today

ELEMENTARY STUDENTS: GRADES 4-6

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS + WRITING ACTIVITIES

1. Why do you think Siqueiros called his painting a portrait of Mexico?

The English word “portrait” comes from the Latin word *protrahere*, which means to draw forth or reveal. The Spanish word “retrato” comes from *retractare*, to portray or represent.

- What do you think Siqueiros intended to **reveal** about the Mexico of his day?
- What does Siqueiros want his portrait of Calles to **reveal**? (Remember, masks were often used to symbolize deceit).
- In what ways has Siqueiros made a new kind of image of Mexico?

2. The Role of the Artist in Society

Siqueiros believed that artists should use their talent to try to make the world a better place, not just make pretty pictures for rich people to buy or decorate their homes with.

- What do you think about this idea?
- The main priorities of many artists are not political. Does this mean that their art has less worth than that of someone like Siqueiros? Why or why not?

3. The Connections Between an Artist and Their Art

Write a summary of Siqueiros’ life and form conclusions about the ways in which the time period and country in which he lived influenced his art.

4. Fact, Opinion, and Bias

Siqueiros’ “portrait” of Mexico could be described as a combination of fact, opinion, and bias. Make a list of the people and places that are based on **fact**, the interpretation that represents Siqueiros’ personal **opinions**, and the point of view that could be called **bias**.

5. Geography and Biography

Although Siqueiros was born and died in Mexico, he lived and worked all over the world. On a world map, locate the key places in Siqueiros’ life from the list of locations below. You can also create a timeline showing where he was in which year.

Chihuahua
Mexico City
Taxco
Los Angeles
Cuernavaca
New York
Chile
Argentina
Paris
Spain

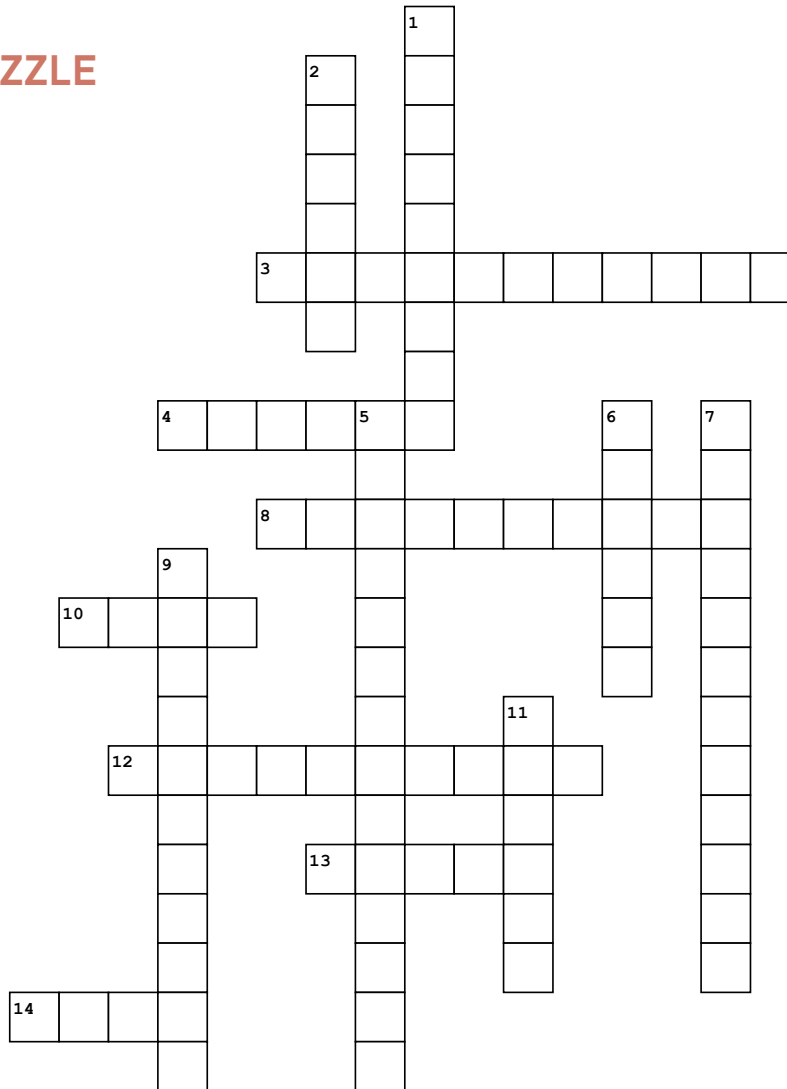


CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Portrait of Mexico Today

ELEMENTARY STUDENTS: GRADES 4-6

CROSSWORD PUZZLE



ACROSS

3. An enthusiasm and pride for Mexico's culture and history
4. Artworks painted or applied directly onto a wall
8. Filmmaker who invented montage
10. President of Mexico at the start of the 1910 Revolution
12. City where *Portrait of Mexico Today* was painted
13. Mexican town where Siqueiros was in internal exile
14. A type of industrial paint often used by Siqueiros

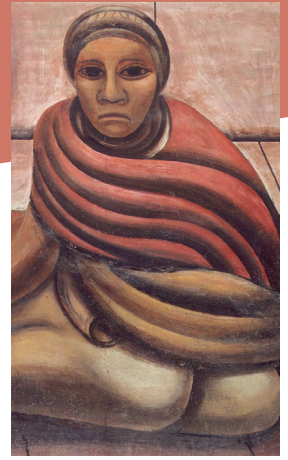
DOWN

1. Artist who created *Portrait of Mexico Today*
2. President of Mexico who Siqueiros thought was corrupted by greed
5. "The three greats"
6. Murals are traditionally made using this technique
7. City in Mexico that flourished between 1325-1521
9. Minister of Education who started the Mural Movement
11. A type of shawl worn by indigenous women in Mexico

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Portrait of Mexico Today

ELEMENTARY STUDENTS: GRADES 4-6



ART ACTIVITY: MAKE A MURAL WITH A MESSAGE

Siqueiros and other muralists wanted to use their art to educate others, and especially to bring causes or inequalities to people's attention. Think of an issue about which you have strong feelings. Some examples could be the environment, animal rights, world hunger, or racial justice. Make a mural that visually communicates your point of view.

CONCEPT: Altering Mood, Changing Meaning

MATERIALS: Printed handouts of *Portrait of Mexico Today*, oil pastels, watercolors, paintbrushes, water containers, glue sticks, and colored paper

PREP: From the printed handout, cut out an assortment of people, settings, and background elements.

LESSON OUTLINE:

- Discuss the people, setting, and mood of Siqueiros' mural. Observe where the people are located within the setting. Why do you think some of the people are grouped together and some are not? What does this tell you about the relationship of the people to each other?
- Using the printed handout of the mural and the assorted elements you cut out earlier, demonstrate to your students how adding or covering elements of the existing composition can alter the mood and relationships of the characters. Show students several possibilities before gluing the added elements onto the printed copy.
- Now the students may cut out elements of their choice from the handout. Encourage them to experiment with different possibilities before they glue down the added elements.
- Using oil pastels, invite students to add color to their altered version of the mural. Explain that the final step will be a watercolor wash over the entire piece, and that it is not necessary to color in all areas completely.
- Finally, have students apply watercolor paint directly over the oil pastels. They may achieve a dynamic effect by selecting paint colors which contrast with the oil pastel colors they used. In other words, orange watercolors over blue oil pastels will be more dramatic than blue watercolors over blue oil pastel.

Note: As a follow-up assignment, students may write about how the ways in which they altered the original images affects the relationships of the characters and the mood of the piece.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Portrait of Mexico Today

JUNIOR HIGH & HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS + WRITING ACTIVITIES

1. A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words

- Do you agree with this old saying?
- Using *Portrait of Mexico Today* as the focus, consider which are more powerful: visual images or words.
- Write an essay about *Portrait of Mexico Today*. Include a detailed description of the people depicted, details of clothing and setting, and a conclusion about what you think Siqueiros' meaning and intentions were.
- Compare your essay with the mural.
- Which method do you think is more dramatic? More persuasive? Which appeals to what kind of audience?

2. The Power of Images to Persuade

- Find an image from a magazine, newspaper, social media campaign, or a movie that you think is particularly effective at getting its message across. Describe what the intention of the image is. Analyze why this image succeeds in its goal.
- Do you agree or disagree with the message it is communicating? How might you change the image to alter its message?

3. Expanding Voices

- Along with Los Tres Grandes, there were other significant artists who participated in the Mexican mural movement. These include muralists such as Fernando Leal, Jean Charlot, Roberto Montenegro, Dr. Atl, Alfredo Ramos Martínez, Pablo O'Higgins, Luis Arenal, and Rufino Tamayo.
- Pick one of these artists to research. Write a short summary of their work. How did their approach or style differ from Siqueiros?
- Pick one of their murals and describe it using descriptive language.

4. Imaging Stories

Murals are a form of visual storytelling. The story Siqueiros tells in *Portrait of Mexico Today* is a dynamic, visual narrative, depicting people, events, and their aftermath.

- Write an original story based on the images in *Portrait of Mexico Today*. Keep in mind setting, character, plot, sequence of events, and climax. Your story should be created from your imagination; it should not correspond with Siqueiros' political message.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Portrait of Mexico Today

JUNIOR HIGH & HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS + WRITING ACTIVITIES

5. *Scientific Experimentation*

Siqueiros was known for experimenting with new materials and techniques. He was fascinated by advances in technology and machines, and often applied these themes to his artistic projects.

- Research some of the materials Siqueiros used in his art. Are they still used today? What were they commonly used in or for?
- How might the incorporation of these materials pose conservation challenges?
- If you were to create a mural today, what materials or techniques would you incorporate into the piece? How might technology be integrated?



6. *U.S.–Mexican Relations: 1910–1932*

Modern Mexican Art, especially mural painting, is closely linked with the Mexican Revolution. At the beginning of the 20th century, the U.S. had large investments in Mexico. U.S. companies owned mines, oil wells, railroads, farms, and many other businesses in Mexico. Labor costs were low, the businesses were for the most part profitable, and the government of Porfirio Díaz was committed to protecting foreign interests.

- Research U.S.–Mexican relations during the period of the Mexican Revolution. Look at archival materials, such as newspaper articles. Use what you have learned to answer the following discussion questions:
- If you were a Mexican citizen, why might you be opposed to foreigners owning businesses in your country?

- If you were a Mexican citizen, why might you want foreign investment in your country?

To Siqueiros, the arch villain during the period 1928–34 was Plutarco Elías Calles. Siqueiros felt that Calles supported the U.S.’s financial imperialism in Mexico. The U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, Dwight Morrow, was a partner in the investment firm of J.P. Morgan.

- How does Siqueiros communicate his editorial opinion about the “unhealthy” relationship he believed existed between Mexico and the U.S.? Between Calles and capitalism?
- Research this period in U.S.–Mexican relations. Do you think Siqueiros was justified in his portrayal? Write an opinion piece arguing why or why not. Support your argument with historical examples.



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Portrait of Mexico Today

JUNIOR HIGH & HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS + WRITING ACTIVITIES

7. Ownership and Censorship

Siqueiros' work provoked strong emotions, including anger for some. One of the murals he painted in Los Angeles, *América Tropical* (1932), was whitewashed so it could no longer be seen. Consider if someone wanted to whitewash *Portrait of Mexico Today*.

- What argument could be made in favor of whitewashing it?
- What argument could be made that it deserves to be seen?
- Write a letter to the editor expressing your point of view. Use historical facts to support your opinion.

Artists are often **commissioned** to paint something for a **patron** who pays them for their work. Siqueiros was commissioned to paint *Portrait of Mexico Today* by Dudley Murphy, the Hollywood director in whose home he was staying at the time. Murphy did not ask for control over the subject matter. In fact, he invited Siqueiros to be as provocative as he wished.

This is not always the case. When Nelson Rockefeller commissioned Diego Rivera to paint a mural for the new Rockefeller Center in New York City in 1933, he was shocked to discover that Rivera had included a portrait of the Russian Communist, Vladimir Lenin. When Rivera refused to remove the figure, Rockefeller locked the artist out of the building and eventually destroyed the mural. The artistic community largely rallied to Rivera's defense. E.B. White wrote a poem, published in *The New Yorker* magazine, about an imaginary argument between Rivera and Rockefeller over who owned the wall on which the mural had been painted.

I Paint What I See

It's no good taste in a man like me,
Said John D's grandson Nelson.
To question an artist's integrity
Or mention a practical thing like a fee,
But I know what I like to a large degree,
Tho art I hate to hamper,
For twenty-one thousand conservative bucks
You painted a radical. I say shucks,
I never could rent the offices.
For this, as you know, is a public hall
And people want doves, or a tree in fall,
And tho your art I dislike to hamper,
I owe a little to God and Gramper.
And afterall,
It's my wall...
We'll see if it is, said Rivera.

E.B. White

- "Gramper" refers to Rockefeller's grandfather John D. Rockefeller. Research who he was. Then, explain why Nelson might feel he owed him something?
- Why would the inclusion of Lenin have upset "Gramper"?
- This brings up the question of public art. Who do you think "owned" the wall? Rivera? Rockefeller? The public? Why?
- Do you think the person who commissions and pays for a work of art has the right to destroy it? Why or why not?
- How does this incident compare to the whitewashing of *América Tropical*?



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Portrait of Mexico Today

JUNIOR HIGH & HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS + WRITING ACTIVITIES

8. Visualizing Poems / Poems as Images

Siqueiros was a great friend of Pablo Neruda, the Nobel Prize-winning poet from Chile. While Siqueiros was imprisoned in Mexico awaiting trial for his role in an attempt to assassinate Leon Trotsky, Neruda was a frequent visitor. At the time in 1940, Neruda was the Chilean Consul General in Mexico City and he arranged for a visa that allowed Siqueiros to leave Mexico safely. When Neruda's epic poem of Latin American history, *Canto General*, was first published in the 1950s, both Siqueiros and Diego Rivera contributed illustrations. In the 1970s, Siqueiros designed a series of lithographs for a new edition of the poem. When Siqueiros learned of Neruda's death from cancer in 1973, he described him as: "The greatest muralist poet singer of the hopes of all the oppressed people in our Latin America and the whole world."

Read the passage on the right from *Canto General*, then use the following questions to **reflect**:

- Why do you think Siqueiros was moved to illustrate this poem?
- What sympathies does he share with Neruda?
- Who was Cuauhtemoc? Moctezuma? What is a Quetzal? Do you think many people would understand this poem if they didn't know the history and myths of Mexico?

Activity:

- Siqueiros turned Neruda's words into images. Turn the images in *Portrait of Mexico Today* into a poem.

CUAUHTEMOC (1520)

Young brother, never at rest,
unconsoled for time on endless time,
youth shaken in Mexico's
metallic darkness. I read your
naked country's gift on your hand.

On it your smile is born and grows
like a line between the light and the gold.

Your lips sealed by death are
the purest entombed silence.

The fountain submerged
beneath all the earth's mouths.

Did you hear, did you hear by chance,
from distant Anahuac,
a waterway, a wind
of shattered springtime?
It was perhaps the cedar's voice.
It was a white wave from Acapulco.

But in the night your heart
fled to the borderlands
like a bewildered deer,
amid the bloody monuments,
beneath the foundering moon.....

The fateful hour has arrived,
and among your people
you're bread and root, spear and star,
The invader has stopped his advance.
Moctezuma is not extinct
like a fallen chalice,
he's armored lightning,
Quetzal plume, flower of the people,
a flaming crest amid the ships.

Pablo Neruda

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Portrait of Mexico Today

JUNIOR HIGH & HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

ART ACTIVITY: DESIGN YOUR OWN MURAL

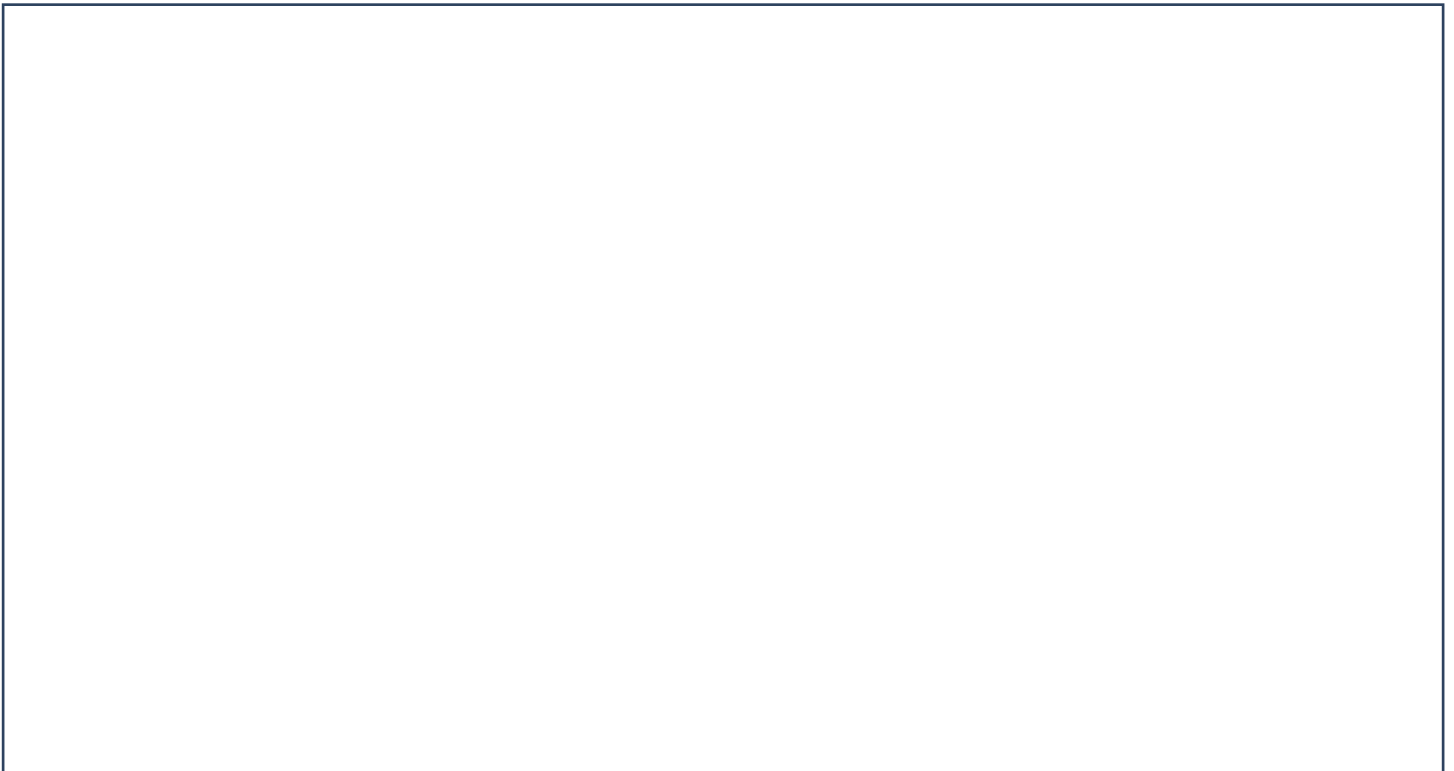
David Alfaro Siqueiros titled his mural *Portrait of Mexico Today*. Think about the community in which you live. What are the issues you care about in your country, state, town, or neighborhood? If you were to create a portrait of the United States today, what people, symbols, words, or images would you include? What would you include in a portrait of California or New York? Where would you paint the mural? What colors or techniques would you use? Now is your chance to be a muralist.

To begin, pick a title for your mural: **Portrait of** _____ **Today**

Then, write out key ideas or words that you want to incorporate into your mural. You could even create a mood board filled with images, photographs, or quotes.

Next, think about the composition of the mural. What will be in the center? Will it be composed of only images or will you incorporate text? What will be the shape of the mural? What materials will you use to create it?

Finally, in the space below, draw a sketch of your mural. You may also decide to write a poem or song about your mural, or create a short video or photographic collage.



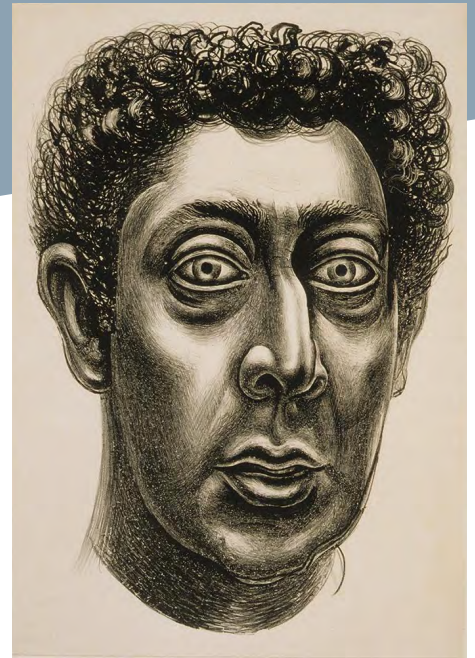
RELATED ARTWORKS

At the Santa Barbara Museum of Art

ELEMENTARY STUDENTS: GRADES 4-6

ARTWORK

David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Autorretrato (Self-Portrait)*, 1936. Lithograph. SBMA, Museum purchase, 00.112. © David Alfaro Siqueiros / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SOMAAP, Mexico City



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Compare Siqueiros' self-portrait lithograph with a photograph of him.

- Has the artist changed or exaggerated anything about himself?
- What has he changed or exaggerated? Why do you think he did this?
- Make a list of adjectives that describe or reveal something about yourself.
- Put the words together to make a self-portrait poem.

ART ACTIVITY

CONCEPT: Making a self-portrait that tells something about you

MATERIALS: soft drawing pencils, gum erasers, scratch paper, drawing paper, and pencil shavings collected from pencil sharpeners.

LESSON OUTLINE:

- Compare the self-portrait Siqueiros created with a photograph of him. Observe the way he uses darks and lights, and expressive lines to exaggerate his features. Ask students to think about how they might use the same techniques to express their own personalities.
- Ask students to sketch their ideas for a Siqueiros-style self-portrait on scratch paper.
- Lay newspapers on the floor to provide a place for students to rub the pencil shavings over their pieces of drawing paper. Using a flat palm, with a few thorough swipes, students should be able to cover the paper with a medium gray tone. Have them gently shake excess shavings onto the newspaper, which then can be bundled up and discarded.
- After washing their hands, students may now transfer their sketch onto the toned paper. Ask them to enlarge their image so that the face fills the page.
- Have students use soft pencils to shade in the dark areas of their faces.
- Add highlights to the dark areas by using the gum erasers to bring back the white tone of the paper. Have students think about how the whites can create the most dramatic effect.

RELATED ARTWORKS

At the Santa Barbara Museum of Art

JUNIOR HIGH & HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

ARTWORK

David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Autorretrato (Self-Portrait)*, 1936. Lithograph. SBMA, Museum purchase, 00.112. © David Alfaro Siqueiros / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SOMAAP, Mexico City

WRITING PROJECT

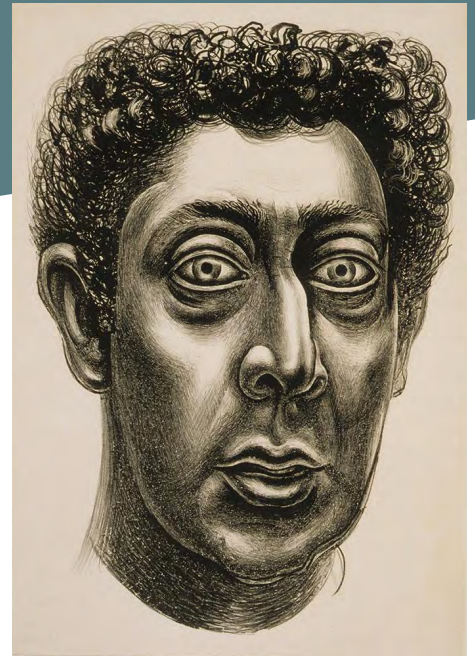
Look at Siqueiros' self-portrait. Keeping in mind that the English word *portrait* comes from the Latin *protrahere* (to draw forth or reveal), and the Spanish word *retrato* comes from *retratar* (to portray), write a self-portrait poem that exaggerates aspects of your own personality. Be sure to reveal something essential about yourself, or portray your image in a way that you would like to be seen.

In the poem on the right by poet Carmen Tafolla, a mother tells her daughter to express herself. Use Tafolla's poem as inspiration for your self-portrait poem. If we make our mark boldly (as Siqueiros did), we will be seen.

MARKED

ABOUT CARMEN TAFOLLA

Carmen Tafolla is a celebrated poet, educator, and author from San Antonio, Texas. She has authored more than 30 books, and was named State Poet Laureate of Texas in 2015. Listen to Tafolla read her poem *Marked* on YouTube [here](#).



Never write with pencil,
m'ija.
It is for those
who would
erase.

Make your mark proud
and open,
Brave,

 beauty folded into
its imperfection,
Like a piece of turquoise
 marked.

Never write
with pencil
m'ija
Write with ink
 or mud,
or berries grown in
gardens never owned,
or, sometimes,
if necessary,
 Blood.

Carmen Tafolla

RELATED ARTWORKS

At the Santa Barbara Museum of Art

ELEMENTARY STUDENTS: GRADES 4-6



ARTWORK

David Alfaro Siqueiros, *La esteta en el drama*, 1944. Duco on board. SBMA, Gift of Gordon and Suzanne Johnston, 2000.63. © David Alfaro Siqueiros / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SOMAAP, Mexico City

DISCUSSION + WRITING ACTIVITY

- There are two figures in this painting. One is very small, the other very large. Can you find the second figure? What is he doing?
- Why do you think Siqueiros made the figure of the painter so tiny in relation to the woman? Describe what the woman is doing. What is Siqueiros telling us about her? Look at her gesture and facial expression.
- Would you say that Siqueiros' presentation is realistic or exaggerated? Why? What do you think is Siqueiros' opinion about artists who paint pretty trees instead of painting people who are suffering?



ART ACTIVITY

CONCEPT: Expressing emotion through lines and shapes, exaggerated proportions, and texture

MATERIALS: drawing paper, pencils, pastels, charcoal

LESSON OUTLINE:

- How does Siqueiros convey emotion? What kind of lines and shapes does he use? Are they bold or delicate? Why do you think he made the hands so big? What does her gesture mean?
- What words would you use to describe the expression on the woman's face?
- Using scratch paper and pencils, have students sketch a figure that exaggerates the size and shape of the figure's features, expression, and gestures to express an emotion.

OPTIONAL: Use chalk pastels to experiment with color. Have each student choose 3 warm colored pastels (reds, oranges, and yellows), and 3 cool colored pastels (blues, greens, and violets). Students may use charcoal to reinforce the lines and shapes of the figure and its gesture.

RELATED ARTWORKS

At the Santa Barbara Museum of Art

JUNIOR HIGH & HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

ARTWORK

Alfredo Ramos Martínez, *La pintora de Uruapan*, ca. 1930. Oil on board. SBMA, Gift of the P.D. McMillan Land Company, 1963.24. © The Alfredo Ramos Martínez Research Project



DISCUSSION + RESEARCH ACTIVITY

Alfredo Ramos Martínez is an important figure in the development of art education in Mexico. In fact, he was David Alfaro Siqueiros' teacher at the San Carlos Academy. He also lived in Santa Barbara briefly in the 1930s, where he painted an important mural that still exists at the Santa Barbara Cemetery.

In *La pintora de Uruapan*, Ramos Martínez captures a young painter from the Mexican state of Uruapan. Look up Uruapan on a map. Where is it? What art is it known for?

- In keeping with Mexicanidad, Ramos Martínez often included indigenous craft and cultural traditions in his artwork. In this painting, he captures an artisan creating a lacquerware bowl with colorful flowers painted atop a black background. This is an example of **arte popular**.
- Research other types of arte popular in Mexico. What crafts or techniques is Oaxaca famous for? What about Chiapas? Puebla? Taxco?
- Pick one type of arte popular and write a one-page magazine article about its origins, techniques, and uses today. Be sure to include images to illustrate your article.

FIELD TRIP ACTIVITY

In 1934, Alfredo Ramos Martínez was invited to paint a mural in the chapel of the Santa Barbara Cemetery. The chapel was designed by famed architect George Washington Smith. Ramos Martínez was commissioned to paint the mural by Smith's wife, as well as Henry Eichheim, a composer and ethnomusicologist. The artist completed the mural in 1935, titling it *Peace Be Unto You*. The mural's main theme is the resurrection of Christ, and includes both Anglo-Saxon and indigenous Mexican figures painted in a traditional fresco technique. A few people did not like the mural and wanted it removed, but the Santa Barbara community rallied behind it and made sure it remained. Today, the mural is one of the few remaining examples of murals by the Mexican Modernists painted in the United States.

- Encourage your students to visit the mural at the Santa Barbara Cemetery. The chapel is open to the public during the cemetery's open hours.
- Have students write down the figures, symbols, and colors they see in the mural. What iconography can be found in the mural? What message does it send? What story does the mural tell?
- How is this mural different than *Portrait of Mexico Today*? Which do you like better?
- Write a one-page essay comparing and contrasting the two murals.

RELATED ARTWORKS

At the Santa Barbara Museum of Art

STUDENTS GRADES 4-8

ARTWORK

Diego Rivera, *Man Loading Donkey with Firewood*, 1938. Graphite and watercolor on paper. SBMA, Gift of Barbara J. and Robert K. Straus, 1991.47. © Diego Rivera / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SOMAAP, Mexico



DISCUSSION + WRITING ACTIVITY

- Who do you think this man is? What are the clues that led you to this conclusion?
- What is he putting on the donkey's back? How heavy do you think that is?
- Look at the donkey's face. Does he look happy or sad? Does this seem realistic to you?
- How do you think the artist feels about this man and his donkey?

Compare Siqueiros' working people in *Portrait of Mexico Today* with Rivera's. What do you think Siqueiros would say about Rivera's interpretation of this working man?

RESEARCH: SOCIAL STUDIES

Between 1910 and 1930, almost one out of every ten Mexicans came to the United States. Many of these immigrants became farm workers. Research what life was like for farm workers in the 1930s through the formation of the United Farm Workers Union (UFW) in 1962.

- Research the UFW and their main initiatives. What was their logo? Look up some of the posters created for the movement.
- How do you think Cesar Chavez would have felt about Rivera's artwork? Would this be the kind of image that could be used in a poster for workers' rights? Why or why not?
- Compare examples of Chicano/a poster art with Rivera's image. How are they different? What do they have in common?

ART PROJECT

CONCEPT: Representing an activity of everyday life

MATERIALS: pencils, scratch paper, watercolor paper, watercolor paint, cup of water, paintbrushes

LESSON OUTLINE:

- Have students note the way Rivera simplifies forms, lines, and colors. Ask the students to make a sketch of a working person with simple forms and lines. (Animal is optional).
- Ask students to draw their sketch onto a piece of watercolor paper. Encourage them to try shading their own drawing with their pencils.
- Using watercolors, have students apply color to their drawing. Ask them to use color sparingly in order to achieve an effect similar to Rivera's.

RELATED ARTWORKS

At the Santa Barbara Museum of Art

JUNIOR HIGH & HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

ARTWORK

Diego Rivera, *Man Loading Donkey with Firewood*, 1938. Graphite and watercolor on paper. SBMA, Gift of Barbara J. and Robert K. Straus, 1991.47. © Diego Rivera / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SOMAAP, Mexico



DISCUSSION + WRITING ACTIVITY

Many farm workers move from place to place to find work harvesting different crops as they ripen. They are called migrant workers. Read the poem below by Judith Ortiz Cofer.

- How has Cofer expressed the feeling of being a migrant worker without a home? What is she saying about identity and culture? Why did they lose the “will to connect”? Have you ever been in a situation that made you feel like this?
- What does the “idea of a home” mean to you? Write a poem about your idea of home.

The Habit of Movement

Nurtured in the lethargy of the tropics,
the nomadic life did not suit us at first.

We felt like red balloons set adrift
over the wide sky of this new land.
Little by little we lost our will to connect,
and stopped collecting anything heavier
to carry than a wish.

We took what we could from books borrowed
from Greek temples, or holes in the city walls,
returning them hardly handled.

We carried the idea of home on our backs
from house to house, never staying long enough to
learn the secret ways of wood and stone, and
always the blank stare of undraped windows behind
us like the eyes of the unmourned dead.
In time we grew rich in dispossession and
Fat with experience.

As we approached but did not touch others,
Our habits of movement kept us safe like
A train in motion, nothing could touch us.

Judith Ortiz Cofer

RELATED ARTWORKS

At the Santa Barbara Museum of Art

JUNIOR HIGH & HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

ARTWORK

Leopoldo Méndez, *Pequeña maestra, que inmensa es tu voluntad* (detail), from the portfolio *Rio Escondido*, 1948. Wood engraving. SBMA, Museum purchase, 1995.42.8. © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SOMAAP, Mexico City



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS + RESEARCH PROJECT

Leopoldo Méndez was one of the leaders of **El Taller de Gráfica Popular** (TGP, The People's Print Workshop). This revolutionary print workshop was founded in 1937 to create art that addressed social injustice. The artists believed that through their prints they could shed light on social causes in Mexico, such as poverty, oppression of the country's indigenous population, the struggles of the working class, and more.

- Research the TGP online and in archival materials. Who were some of its founders? What themes and subject matter were common in their prints?
- Research **Self-Help Graphics** in Los Angeles, California. When was it founded? What did it focus on? How has the organization changed over the years?
- What are the differences and similarities between Self-Help Graphics and the TGP? Why do you think such an organization came into being in the 1960s? What kinds of protests were going on at that time?

ART + WRITING ACTIVITY

Méndez's prints were used as introductory stills for a 1948 movie of the same title (*Rio Escondido*) that was intended to promote literacy in Mexico. By combining graphic arts with film, Méndez hoped to reach a larger audience.

- What medium would you use today for such a campaign? Create a storyboard for a public service message about literacy in the medium of your choice. Or, design a poster for the campaign. Assume that your target audience does not read—the image must carry the message!
- If you were to translate images from your storyboard or poster into a mural format, which ones would you choose? Would they lose or gain power in a larger format? What is the difference in the audience reached by a mural and the one reached through other forms of visual communication?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

HISTORICAL NAMES, TERMS, AND VOCABULARY

PEOPLE:

David Alfaro Siqueiros
Hernán Cortés
Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla
Porfirio Díaz
Francisco Madero
Pascual Orozco
Pancho Villa
Emiliano Zapata
General Victoriano Huerta
Venustiano Carranza
Álvaro Obregón
Diego Rivera
José Clemente Orozco
José Vasconcelos
Gerardo Murillo
Dudley Murphy
Plutarco Elías Calles
John P. Morgan
Sergei Eisenstein

HISTORICAL EVENTS:

Spanish Conquest of Mexico
The Rebellion of 1810
The Porfiriato
The Mexican Revolution
Mexican Mural Movement

PLACES:

Mexico
Tenochtitlán
New Spain
Los Angeles
New York
Taxco
Cuernavaca

VOCABULARY + IDEAS:

Gachupines
Indigenous
Virgin of Guadalupe
Grito de Dolores
Campesinos
Los Tres Grandes
Mexicanidad
Rebozo
Bourgeoise
Proletariat
Fresco
Mural
Duco
Polyangular perspective
Portrait
Self-portrait
Commission
Patron
Icon
Symbol
Style
Realism
Idealism
Abstraction
Exaggerate
Simplify
Expressionism
Subjective
Objective
Fact
Opinion
Bias
Arte popular

INDIGENOUS CULTURES OF MEXICO:

Olmec
Zapotec
Maya
Toltec
Mixtec
Mexica

DATES:

7000 BC
1150 BC
1300 CE
1519
1521
1810
1821
1836
1896
1910
1920
1922
1932
1974
2001

WEBSITES FOR FURTHER STUDY

DAVID ALFARO SIQUEIROS

La Tallera + Sala de Arté Público, Cuernavaca, Mexico

www.saps-latallera.org/

Video of *Portrait of Mexico Today's* Move to Santa Barbara

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ACRmeSkgCaA&ab_channel=ScottM.Haskins

David Alfaro Siqueiros: Arte y Revolución (Spanish)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=u--xtJH3ewc&ab_channel=Canal22

TIMELINE OF MEXICAN HISTORY

www.history.com/topics/mexico/mexico-timeline (English)

unstats.un.org/unsd/wsd/docs/Mexico_wsd_cronologia.pdf (Spanish)

MUSEUMS IN MEXICO

Casa Azul, Museo de Frida Kahlo, Mexico City

www.museofridakahlo.org.mx/es

Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso

www.sanildefonso.org.mx

Museo Nacional del Arte, Mexico City

www.munal.mx/en/visita

Museo Amparo, Puebla

www.museoamparo.com

Museo Nacional de Antropología

www.mna.inah.gob.mx

Museo Nacional de Historia, Chapultepec Castle, Mexico City

mnh.inah.gob.mx

Museo Tamayo, Mexico City

www.museotamayo.org

Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City

mam.inba.gob.mx

Museo Jumex, Mexico City

www.fundacionjumex.org/es

WEBSITES FOR FURTHER STUDY

EXHIBITIONS ON MODERN MEXICAN ART AND HISTORY

National Museum of Mexican Art, Chicago

nationalmuseumofmexicanart.org

Paint the Revolution: Mexican Modernism, 1910–1950

Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, 2016–2017

philamuseum.org/exhibitions/2017/840.html

Vida Americana: Mexican Artist Remake American Art, 1925–1945

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 2020

whitney.org/exhibitions/vida-americana

www.youtube.com/watch?v=nsjxVSc9M08&ab_channel=WhitneyMuseumofAmericanArt

The Mexican Revolution and the United States

The Library of Congress, Washington D.C. (English + Spanish)

www.loc.gov/exhibits/mexican-revolution-and-the-united-states/

A Nation Emerges: 65 Years of Photography in Mexico

Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 2000 (English + Spanish)

www.getty.edu/research/tools/guides_bibliographies/photography_mexico/index.html

Flores Mexicanas: Women in Modern Mexican Art

Dallas Museum of Art, 2020

dma.org/art/exhibitions/flores-mexicanas-women-modern-mexican-art

Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, and Mexican Modernism

Denver Art Museum, 2020

www.denverartmuseum.org/en/exhibitions/frida-kahlo-diego-rivera-and-mexican-modernism

Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art

Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York City, 1940

www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2985

WEBSITES FOR FURTHER STUDY

ONLINE RESOURCES FOR LATIN AMERICAN ART

Association for Latin American Art
associationlatinamericanart.org

Documents of Latin American and Latino Art
icaadocs.mfah.org/s/en/page/home

Museum of Latin American Art, Long Beach, CA
molaa.org

Latin American Network Information Center
lanic.utexas.edu/la/region/art

Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, Texas
blantonmuseum.org/collection/latin-american-art

Latin American Art Visualized – Library and Primary Sources List
latinamericavisualized.wordpress.com/libraries-and-primary-sources

ONLINE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES FOR THE ANCIENT AMERICAS

CyArk – Online models of Ancient Ruins including Chichen Itza, Templo Mayor, and more
www.cyark.org/explore

Art History Teaching Resources – Art of the Americas before 1300
arthistoryteachingresources.org/lessons/art-of-the-americas-before-1300

Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies
www.famsi.org/links.htm

Mesolore
www.mesolore.org

Peabody Art Museum – 3D Models
www.peabody.harvard.edu/node/2546

Ohio State University Libraries - Popol Vuh Digital Resource
library.osu.edu/projects/popolwuj/folios_eng/index.php

Golden Kingdoms: Luxury and Legacy in the Ancient Americas
Getty Museum, Los Angeles, California, 2017
www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/golden_kingdoms/inner.html

WEBSITES FOR FURTHER STUDY

ONLINE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES FOR LOS TRES GRANDES

Art History Teaching Resources: Mexican Muralism

arthistoryteachingresources.org/lessons/mexican-muralism

Smart History: Art in Mexico

smarthistory.org/locations/mexico

José Clemente Orozco at Dartmouth College

hoodmuseum.dartmouth.edu/explore/collection/featured-collections/orozcos-epic

National Gallery of Art: David Alfaro Siqueiros Speaks

www.nga.gov/education/teachers/lessons-activities/self-portraits/siqueiros.html

Khan Academy: Los Tres Grandes

www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-1010/art-between-wars/latin-american-modernism1/a/mexican-muralism-los-tres-grandes-david-alfaro-siqueiros-diego-rivera-and-jos-clemente-orozco

AMÉRICA TROPICAL MURAL, LOS ANGELES

Official Website

theamericatropical.org

Educational Guide

americatropical1.files.wordpress.com/2015/09/learning-about-amrica-tropical-130814-outline.pdf

Video on Conservation, Getty Conservation Institute

www.youtube.com/watch?v=4m8lhg6OBQg&ab_channel=GettyConservationInstitute

www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnHHS3o34Ho&ab_channel=GettyConservationInstitute

Getty Conservation Institute: Murals in Los Angeles

www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/pdf_publications/siqueiros_murals.html

PBS: David Alfaro Siqueiros' mural América Tropical

www.pbs.org/video/david-alfaro-siqueiros-mural-america-tropical-4r7glz

WEBSITES FOR FURTHER STUDY

ONLINE RESOURCES FOR LATINX AND CHICANO/A ART

UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center

www.chicano.ucla.edu

UCSB ImaginArte

cemaweb.library.ucsb.edu/project_description.html

Social and Public Art Resource Center, Los Angeles

sparcinla.org

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Latinx Art

americanart.si.edu/art/highlights/latinx

The Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art, Culture, and Industry

thecheechcenter.org

Latinx Arts Alliance

latinxartsalliance.org

Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A. 1945-1980

pacificstandardtime.org/past/artinla/index.html

SANTA BARBARA MUSEUM OF ART

Official Page

www.sbma.net

Additional Educational Resources

www.sbma.net/learnhome

IMAGE CREDITS

COVER

David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Portrait of Mexico Today* (detail), 1932. Fresco on cement. SBMA, Anonymous Gift, 2001.50. © David Alfaro Siqueiros / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SOMAAP, Mexico City.

David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Autorretrato (Self-Portrait)* (detail), 1936. Lithograph. SBMA, Museum purchase, 00.112. © David Alfaro Siqueiros / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SOMAAP, Mexico City.

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Virgin of Guadalupe

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Chichén Itzá, Mexico

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David Alfaro Siqueiros in front of *Portrait of Mexico Today*, Pacific Palisades, 1932. Photo courtesy of Robert Berdecio, David Alfaro Siqueiros Archive, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute.

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David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Autorretrato (Self-Portrait)*, 1936. Lithograph. SBMA, Museum purchase, 00.112. © David Alfaro Siqueiros / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SOMAAP, Mexico City.

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Portrait of Mexico Today in 1995 in the garden portico of its original Pacific Palisades residence. Photo: © J. Paul Getty Trust; Mural: © David Alfaro Siqueiros / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SOMAAP, Mexico City.

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Plutarco Elías Calles, 1924. Photographer unknown.
J. P. Morgan, 1903. Photo by Edward Steichen.

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Portrait of Mexico Today traveling on the Sunset Boulevard overpass of the 405 Freeway in Los Angeles, in route to Santa Barbara. Photo: Siqueiros Mural Project Team, Courtesy Santa Barbara Museum of Art.

Crane operators and general contracting team members, placing the mural on its new foundation in Santa Barbara. Photo: Siqueiros Mural Project Team, Courtesy Santa Barbara Museum of Art.

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David Alfaro Siqueiros, ca. 1950. Photograph by Leo Matiz. © Estate of Leo Matiz.

IMAGE CREDITS

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Portrait of Mexico Today in Santa Barbara. Photo by Brian Forrest, 2012. Image courtesy Santa Barbara Museum of Art.

David Alfaro Siqueiros, ca. 1950. Photograph by Leo Matiz. © Estate of Leo Matiz.

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Expert consultant Gary McGowen (left) and Perry Huston (right), chief conservator for the Siqueiros Mural Project, on site in Pacific Palisades preparing the cyclododecane to be applied to the mural as a facing. Photo: Siqueiros Mural Project Team, Courtesy Santa Barbara Museum of Art.

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América Tropical shortly after it was completed. An associate of Siqueiros, Roberto Berdecio, is seen in the foreground. Getty Research Institute, 960094. Photo: Getty Research Institute.

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Pablo Neruda, 1967. Photo by Annemarie Heinrich.

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David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Autorretrato (Self-Portrait)*, 1936. Lithograph. SBMA, Museum purchase, 00.112. © David Alfaro Siqueiros / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SOMAAP, Mexico City.

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David Alfaro Siqueiros, *La esteta en el drama*, 1944. Duco on board. SBMA, Gift of Gordon and Suzanne Johnston, 2000.63. © David Alfaro Siqueiros / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SOMAAP, Mexico City.

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Alfredo Ramos Martínez, *La pintora de Uruapan*, ca. 1930. Oil on board. SBMA, Gift of the P.D. McMillan Land Company, 1963.24. © The Alfredo Ramos Martínez Research Project.

Page 31-32

Diego Rivera, *Man Loading Donkey with Firewood*, 1938. Graphite and watercolor on paper. SBMA, Gift of Barbara J. and Robert K. Straus, 1991.47. © Diego Rivera / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SOMAAP, Mexico.

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Leopoldo Méndez, *Pequeña maestra, que inmensa es tu voluntad* (detail), from the portfolio *Río Escondido*, 1948. Wood engraving. SBMA, Museum purchase, 1995.42.8. © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SOMAAP, Mexico City



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