“A line that birds cannot see”

Mexican / US Art and Artists Crossing Borders in the 20th Century

A symposium held in conjunction with the exhibition Tamayo: The New York Years.

Friday, November 3, 9:30 a.m. - 5 p.m.
McEvoy Auditorium, Smithsonian American Art Museum

The Smithsonian American Art Museum presents a symposium exploring the meaningful interactions between Mexican and US art and artists during the twentieth century. Taking Mexican artist Rufino Tamayo’s story as a point of departure, the program features new scholarship about the role of folk and indigenous art of the Americas in Pan American modernism, sites and agents of intercultural exchange, the dynamics between Mexican and US art during the Cold War, and the fertile relationship between Chicano and Mexican artists.

The title of the symposium is taken from Alberto Ríos’s poem “The Border: A Double Sonnet” (2015) and invokes the notion that art and ideas transcend political boundaries between nations and people.

The Latino Initiatives Pool of the Smithsonian Latino Center provided support for this symposium.

Conference Program

Session One

9:30 a.m.  Welcome
Stephanie Stebich, The Margaret and Terry Stent Director, Smithsonian American Art Museum

9:45 a.m.  Opening Lecture
E. Carmen Ramos
Deputy Chief Curator and Curator of Latino Art, Smithsonian American Art Museum

10:30 a.m.
Changing Paradigms and Politics in Anita Brenner’s Writing and Promotion of Mexican Art in the United States, 1920s-1970s
Karen Cordero Reiman, Independent Scholar and Curator, Mexico City

11:00 a.m.
Between Figuration and Abstraction: The Cultural Cold War and Tamayo’s Art in the 1950s
Fabiola Martínez Rodríguez, Associate Professor, Fine and Performing Arts Department, St. Louis University, Madrid

Session Two

2:00 p.m.
What’s Popular about Modernism? Mexican Arte Popular and US Folk Art in the 1920s
Monica Bravo, Lecturer, History of Art and Ethnicity, Race, and Migration, Yale University

2:30 p.m.
Pan American Palimpsest: US-Mexican Diplomacy and Debate in “Good Neighbor” Mural Art
Breanne Robertson, Independent Scholar

3:00 p.m.
Baca after Siqueiros: Redefining Collaboration and Activating Space
Anna Iindyk López, Associate Professor of Art History, The Graduate Center and The City College of the City University of New York

3:30 p.m.
Radical Changes: Mexico’s Taller de Gráfica Popular in the US
Julia Fernandez, PhD Student, University of California, San Diego

4:00 p.m. Respondent
Josh T. Franco, National Collector, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

4:15 5:00 p.m.
Question and Answer Session
E. Carmen Ramos

E. Carmen Ramos is Deputy Chief Curator and Curator of Latino Art at the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Her exhibition Our America: The Latino Presence in American Art (2013) traveled to eight venues and its catalogue received a co-first-place Award of Excellence by the Association of Art Museum Curators. Recent exhibitions include Chicano/a Artists ofouston: Hispanic Arts Community and Place in Urban Photography (2017) and Tamayo: The New York Years (2017). Ramos is currently writing a monograph on Freddy Rodriguez for the Latinx Diaspora Art Series. Ramos holds an MA in Art History from the University of Chicago. She currently serves on the Board of the Association of Art Museum Curators.

Karen Cordero Reiman

Karen Cordero Reiman is an art historian, curator, and writer. She taught for many years at the Universidad Iberoamericana and the UNAM in Mexico City and is author of numerous publications on modern and contemporary Mexican art, focusing on the relationship between the so-called “fine arts” and “popular arts”; the historiography of Mexican art, as well as body, gender, and sexual identity; and the cultural politics of twentieth-century artistic exchanges between the Americas and Europe has been published in American Art. She holds a PhD in art history from Harvard University, where she worked as Curator of Latino Art at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, where she worked on The Mexican Connection: Shipping American Modernism in New York (1930–1945). She co-organized the seminar Cold Atlantic: Cultural Wars, Dissident Artistic Practices, Networks and Contact Zones at the Time of the Iron Curtain (2016) and is co-editor of Modernidad y Vanguardia: Rutas de intercambios y diálogo entre España y Latinoamérica (2015).

Jennifer Josten


Monica Bravo

Monica Bravo, PhD, is Lecturer in the History of Art Department and Program in Ethnicity, Race, and Migration at Yale University. She specializes in the history of photography and the modern art of the Americas. Her dissertation and current book project examines exchanges between US modernist photographers and modern Mexican artists working in photography, cinema, and photography that resulted in the development of a greater American modernism in the interwar period. Her research has been supported by fellowships from the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (CASVA), the Center for Creative Photography, the Georgia O’Keeffe Research Center, the Harry Ransom Center, the Huntington Library and Art Collections, and the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Breanne Robertson


Anna Inedy-López

Anna Inedy-López is Associate Professor of Art History at The Graduate Center and The City College of the City University of New York. Her research explores Latin American and US modernism and Latin American and United States exchanges, the politics of realism, and public space. Recent publications include Modernism without Walls, Rooms, Oranges, and Squawkins in the United States, 1907–1940 (2019) and Diego Rivera: Murals for The Museum of Modern Art (2017), co-authored with Ida Rodríguez. Her forthcoming book from UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press on Judith F. Baca probes the public artist’s aesthetic strategies to activate the contested sociopolitical, spatial, and racial histories of Los Angeles in the 1970s and 1980s.

Josh T. Franco

Josh T. Franco is National Collector at the Archives of American Art. He holds a PhD in art history from Binghamton University, where his research focused on the depredation of the town of Marfa, Texas, through the aesthetics and attendant cultures of so-called minimalism and rasquachismo. Franco has presented at Marfa Book Co., Stanford University, Dartmouth College, HEMI Graduate Student Initiative (Hemispheric Institute), The Frick Collection, and the National Association of Latino Arts and Culture, among others. Before joining the Smithsonian, he was an artist guide at 501 Spring Street, Judson Foundation.

All symposium attendees are invited to the exhibition’s opening reception at 7 p.m. in the Luce Foundation Center on the museum’s third floor.