

# Latin Art Gets a Big Look-in at Last

EUROPEANS and North Americans are getting an overdue education in the culture of the often-overlooked half of the New World south of the Rio Grande.

All sorts of revelations — inspiring and dispiriting alike — are to be gleaned from an exhibition of 20th Century Latin American art first held in Seville, Spain, and now in New York after stops in Paris and Cologne.

With more than 300 works by 90 artists, this is biggest show of its kind ever assembled. Most countries in south America are represented and Mexico has a strong presence. Despite the virtual absence of Central American artists, curator Waldo Rasmussen has presented a truly comprehensive, almost encyclopedic survey of the region's artistic achievements from 1914 to the present day.

Rasmussen, the director of the international programme at New York's museum of Modern Art, seems determined to compensate, all at once, for the Western art world's long indifference toward Latin work. But the sheer size of the show tends to blunt its impact and blur the distinctions between great and ordinary paintings. Many viewers will experience optical and intellectual exhaustion long before reaching the final room.

It is not clear why the museum waited until now to acquaint audiences with what has been happening in Latin American art for the past 80 years. The museum has had a pan-American outlook since its founding in the 1930s. Some of the finest work in the current show is drawn from its own collection.

One explanation is that the US and European art establishments, although taking pride in being cosmopolitan, have only recently begun to overcome their narcissism and cultural arrogance. Instead of gazing almost exclusively at pieces produced in a few Western cities, critics and curators are at last looking southward and acknowledging the contributions of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Most Third World artists of this century have found it impossible to avoid the pervasive influence of Europe and North America. That is immediately apparent in the Latin show. It

**Kevin J Kelley**  
writes from  
New York

The Western art world has long been indifferent towards Latin work. Even North America has tended to overlook that half of the New World lies south. Now a huge exhibition of 20th century Latin art has come to New York's famed Museum of Modern Art. Its size is liable to cause intellectual exhaustion, reports Gemini News Service, whose correspondent has just paid a visit.

begins with Cubist paintings by Mexican artist Diego Rivera, who was associated with Picasso, Chagall and other early modernists during the years (1914-17) he lived in Paris. Rivera gave Cubism his own stylistic and political interpretation.

*Zapatista Landscape* — The Guerrilla uses a rifle and serape as part of Rivera's semi-abstract homage to the Mexican revolutionary. *Ship of Emigrants* (1923), a large-scale Expressionist painting by Lasar Segall, shows how this German-born artist brought along a European sensibility when he himself emigrated to Brazil. Several other artists in the show were also immigrants from Europe, further reinforcing the Old World's cultural grip on the Americas.

Europe's influence, however, was by no means overwhelming or strictly conservative. In fact, the avant-grade trends coursing through Paris, London and Berlin helped sweep away the stodginess and provincialism of Latin American art academies. And at the same time, painters like Uruguay's Pedro Figari and



Photo: Bruce M. White, NYC

MY AUNT, A LITTLE FRIEND, AND I  
Painting by Maria Izquierdo on show at the Museum of Modern Art, New York exhibition of Latin American artists.

Collection: Private

Venezuela's Armando Reveron developed a distinctively Latin style even as they followed European models.

The innovative quality of Latin American art is dramatically demonstrated in the section devoted to Mexican muralists Jose Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros and the prodigious Rivera. The emotionally charged works by these three activist artists are among the century's most effective examples of social-realist painting.

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while informed with personal

and psychological insights in an accompanying group of portraits painted by Rivera's lover, Frida Kahlo, and her contemporary, Maria Izquierdo.

The ability to integrate indigenous traditions with international art movements is readily evident in the work of Wilfredo Lam. This Cuban painter, part of the Surrealist group in Paris and the Abstract Expressionist school in New York, used elements from both styles in compositions imbued with Afro-Caribbean religious themes.

Similarly, the Uruguayan

and psychological insights in an accompanying group of portraits painted by Rivera's lover, Frida Kahlo, and her contempor-

ary, Maria Izquierdo.

As much was proved once all over again when the film was shown on the national network of Doordarshan one afternoon some time ago. Despite the poor quality of telecasting and the

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modernist Joaquin Torres-Garcia borrowed liberally from European sources but still produced a completely original body of work. The samples of Torres-Garcia's art in this show buttress the claims of those who regard him as at least the equal of any North American painter active during the interwar years.

A number of the modern artists represented in the show are familiar to the New York art scene. Although citizens or natives of Latin American countries, some spend as much time in Manhattan as in Buenos Aires, Rio or Bogota. And their work often closely resembles the overheated offerings displayed in fashionable New York galleries.

Guillermo Kuitca of Argentina, for example, is a celebrity in European as well as North American art circles. This ascending 32-year-old art star is represented in the show by plastic mattresses on which have been painted road maps — not of Argentina, but of Germany.

Here in full view is one negative aspect of the homogeneous world culture that has emerged during the past two decades. Local histories and national traditions are being forgotten as the global village becomes a reality.

But there are still those who doggedly create within a distinctive ethnic and cultural context. A few younger artists in this show have assembled mixed-media constructions that are unmistakably Latin American in their spirit and references. This pieces often hearken back to the political art of Rivera and other Mexican muralists.

Bernardo Salcedo of Colombia has inserted bullet castings over the faces of military officers in a photo taken at a 1942 graduation ceremony.

Electrodes are attached to a pile of potatoes in an installation by Argentina's Victor Grippi, thereby paying homage to the thousands of civilians tortured and killed by dictatorships throughout Latin America.

KEVIN J KELLEY is Editor of *Toward Freedom*.

## The Triumph and Tragedy of Telengana

**Vidyarthi Chatterjee writes from Calcutta**

A veteran Socialist leader, freedom fighter and a hero of the legendary Telengana peasants uprising, Ravi Narayana Reddy, died in Hyderabad some years ago. Mr Reddy, who was 84 at the time of his death, had been one of the major figures in the historic Telengana armed struggle by peasants against the oppression of landlords during the Nizam's rule in the erstwhile state of Hyderabad in present-day Andhra Pradesh.

Born at Bollepalli in Nalgonda district, the hub of socialist activity for decades, Mr Reddy's contribution to the people's movement in general and to the amelioration of peasant problems in particular, is the stuff of which folklore and lullabies are constructed. Such was his popularity among the rural masses that in the country's first general elections in 1952, Mr Reddy won from his Nalgonda parliamentary constituency by a majority that exceeded that of Jawaharlal Nehru.

Perhaps somewhere in that verdict was an element of poetic justice, for the Indian National Congress's largely bourgeois and often Western-educated leadership had espoused the

## A Way of Life in Dhaka

Continued from page 9  
rights of the rickshaw puller. Nothing is said about the maximum share the owner may demand from the puller's income. Only in a limited of cases rickshaw pullers' strikes have had some effect. Some years ago the Government had decided to close the main business centre of Motijheel, for rickshaws. The measure was abandoned when thousands of rickshaws closed off Motijheel from the rest of the city. Another result of the rickshaw organisations activities is that after a lot of pressure the Government has agreed to establish a lending scheme for rickshaw pullers. In practice this programme does not work. The application for the loan is so complicated and bureaucratic, that only very few rickshaw pullers have the courage and patience to apply for it.

Although all rickshaw organisations propagate that the pullers should own their rickshaws, the results of their efforts are limited. The relative

cause of the Telengana peasants only to betray it in course of time. In fact, things came to such a pass after independence that it was difficult to distinguish between the glorious role of the Congress leadership and

the exploitative methods of the Nizam and his coterie.

Being basically a student of cinema, this writer's mind, even as it recounted the events in the life of the departed revolutionary, travelled back to a film

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