

Press release
Zurich, 15 March 2012

Kunsthhaus Zürich presents 'Posada to Alÿs. Mexican Art from 1900 to the Present.'

From 16 March to 20 May 2012, the Kunsthhaus Zürich will be showcasing the politically charged work of Mexican artists. The exhibition begins with graphic plates by José Guadalupe Posada, one of the most important artists and caricaturists in 19th-century Mexico. His motto – 'art against violence' – has lost none of its topicality and continues to guide the work of his present-day successors. Francis Alÿs, Carlos Amorales and Teresa Margolles draw their ideas from social deprivation, the gulf between rich and poor, and the violence that is all too prevalent in many parts of Mexico. Their paintings, slide projections and video works are every bit as impressive as Posada's disturbing images.

Artistic creation in Mexico occupies a unique position in the international art scene of the last 100 years, with artists consistently linking together current events and the issue of cultural identity. Art for art's sake, abstraction and conceptualism are at most peripheral to their production. The exhibition takes a critical, contemporary view of Mexican life, shaped as it is by decades of rebellion and grievance. The depiction of everyday reality is as tangible in the historical, figurative graphic pieces as it is in the 21st-century paintings, slides and videos.

A DENUNCIATION OF SOCIAL EVILS

The starting point and culmination of the exhibition are the graphic plates of José Guadalupe Posada (around 1852–1913). His best-known creations include the 'calaveras' or skeletons, notably the 'Calavera Catrina' from 1913, a caricature of the Mexican upper class before and during the revolution that combines biting sarcasm and black humour. The technical perfection of the black and white woodcuts, linocuts and lithographs that are so typical of Mexican artists is remarkable. The illustrations, which were used in flyers published by the opposition, are regarded as icons of the revolution. They depict disturbing scenes of torture, death and dispossession. In addition to the Posada pieces, the exhibition features graphic works by various 20th-century artists including Fernando Castro Pacheco (*1918), Leopoldo Méndez (1902–1969) and José Clemente Orozco (1883–1949).

CONTEMPORARY ART: POLITICAL AND POETIC

There are also works by contemporary artists such as Francis Alÿs (*1959), Carlos Amorales (*1970) and Teresa Margolles (*1963), which take up the themes that preoccupied their forebears. Deliberately provocative, they expose the precarious conditions in the country where they live. The Belgian Francis Alÿs translates the narrowly circumscribed life prospects of the majority of the population into monotonous, sandy landscapes overlaid with political yet poetic statements. Teresa Margolles follows the trail of violent crime in the form of a tanker at the border between Mexico and the US. The fine mist emerging from it is in fact the water used to wash clothes taken from the corpses of murder victims by the roadside. The damp film that lies on roads steeped in wasted lives immediately evaporates, fading away like the memory of the fresh crimes committed every day. A recurring influence on the work of Carlos Amorales is Mexican symbolism. Drawing on graphic techniques, he works with clichés of Mexico that create a dialogue with Posada's works. A large raven, perched in a tree surrounded by skulls, transfixes the visitor.

MANY WORKS ON PUBLIC DISPLAY FOR THE FIRST TIME

The origins of the Kunsthhaus Zürich's engagement with Mexico date back to 1959, the year which saw an exotic exhibition of Pre-Colombian, colonial and contemporary art and folk art. The new presentation of Mexican graphic prints – a niche area in the Kunsthhaus collection – is designed and arranged by guest curator Milena Oehy, and links in to the earlier event. A large proportion of the 43 works on display are receiving their first public showing in Switzerland. A newspaper in tabloid format contains details of the 22 artists as well as further information on Posada's effective history and the reinterpretation of folk art. It will be supplied to visitors free of charge.

GIFT TO THE KUNSTHAUS COLLECTION

The groundwork for the collection of Mexican graphic pieces from which this selection comes was laid by the Swiss photographer Armin Haab (1919-1991). In the 1980s he donated to the Zürcher Kunstgesellschaft a collection of some 350 Mexican graphic works accumulated over a period of decades. It includes lithographs, etchings, woodcuts and linocuts. The Haab Collection is unique in Europe and offers a valuable overview of the development of figurative graphic art in Mexico between 1847 and 1976.

The exhibition is supported by the artEDU Foundation and the Honorary Consulate of Mexico.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Kunsthaus Zürich, Heimplatz 1, CH-8001 Zurich

Tel. +41 (0)44 253 84 84, www.kunsthhaus.ch

Open: Sat, Sun, Tues 10 a.m. – 6 p.m., Wed, Thurs, Fri 10 a.m. – 8 p.m.

Easter 5-9 April, 1 May, Ascension 16/17 May: 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

Admission incl. collection: CHF 15 / 10 concessions (subject to change). Children and young people up to the age of 16 free of charge.

Public discussion: A public discussion on Mexican art will take place at 6 p.m. on 11 April. Taking part will be Dr. Hans-Michael Herzog (Director and Curator of Daros Latinamerica, Zurich) and Dr. Laura Arici (lecturer at the Zurich University of the Arts, Zurich), with guest curator Milena Oehy in the chair. Admission free.

Public guided tours: Thursdays 22 March and 19 April at 6 p.m. with guest curator Milena Oehy. Private guided tours by arrangement: +41 (0)44 253 84 84 (Mon–Fri 9 a.m. – midday)

Advance sales: SBB RailAway combination ticket, with discount on travel and admission: at stations and by phoning Rail Service: 0900 300 300 (CHF 1.19/min. by ground line), www.sbb.ch.

Magasins Fnac: sales points in Switzerland: Rives, Balexert, Lausanne, Fribourg, Pathé Kino Basel, www.fnac.ch; France: Carrefour, Géant, Magasins U, 0 892 68 36 22 (EUR 0.34/min), www.fnac.com; Belgium: www.fnac.be.

NOTE TO MEDIA

Illustrations are available for download at www.kunsthhaus.ch > Information > Press. Views of the exhibition architecture will be available on request from the opening day.

For further information, contact:

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