

Mexican Modernism: Revolution & Reckoning

K-12 Educator's Guide



Ricardo Martínez de Hoyos, *Paisaje*, 1942

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed as a multidisciplinary companion for K-12 educators viewing *Mexican Modernism: Revolution and Reckoning* at Gilcrease Museum. Our intent is to offer a range of learning objectives, discussion facilitation, and extension suggestions to stimulate the learning process, encourage dialogue, and connect the exhibition to the classroom curriculum. Teachers should glean from this guide what is most relevant and useful for their students.

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ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Artwork in *Mexican Modernism: Revolution & Reckoning* reflects a country during a period of dynamic transformation. Between the end of the Mexican Revolution and the conclusion of World War II, Mexican artists played a central role in the construction of a new national identity rooted in revolutionary narratives, the country's pre-Hispanic past, its indigenous people and progressive social reform.

This selection of paintings, prints and drawings remains inextricably linked to time (1920-1950) and place (Mexico), yet resonates with themes across the Gilcrease collection. Together, these artworks challenge us to reflect on the enduring effects of colonialism in the Americas, the power of artists and imagery to shape public understanding, and the search for cultural roots as a means to define and understand ourselves.

Over the course of one year, works on paper and textiles within the exhibition will rotate every four months. Drawn primarily from the Gilcrease collection, this fully bilingual exhibition also includes a rotation of loaned works from the collection of Burt B. Holmes.



Diego Rivera, *Cabeza de Indio*, 1937

EXHIBITION THEMES

1. Revolutionary Spirit: Art for the People
2. Reclamation of a Pre-Hispanic Past
3. Pride in Indigenous and Regional Cultures
4. Daily Life and the Mexican People
5. Mexico and Transatlantic Modernism

IDEALS OF THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION

1. Labor Reform
2. Economic Rights for the People
3. Universal Public Education
4. National Ownership of Natural Resources
5. Democratic, Representative Government

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. Specific: How did post-revolutionary artists in Mexico shape narratives, promote revolutionary ideals, use art as a platform for social criticism and as an expression of evolving *Mexicanidad* (“Mexicanness”) and engage with global, cosmopolitan culture?
2. General Application: How can images and artists shape a country’s identity, ideals and policies?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After visiting *Mexican Modernism: Revolution & Reckoning*, students will be able to:

- Discuss how artists drew on Mexico’s indigenous and regional cultures and Mesoamerican past to construct a new national identity following the Mexican Revolution.
- Understand that, while these artists may have generally shared a commitment to progressive social ideals, their approaches, beliefs and styles varied widely.
- Identify distinct regional and indigenous cultures within Mexico and appreciate their unique traditions.
- Explain how post-revolutionary Mexican art pushed everyday people back to the forefront of social, cultural and national consciousness in the wake of the Revolution.
- Imagine the lives of everyday people in Mexico between 1920–1950 and empathize with figures in works of art.
- Recognize how Mexican artists from the post-revolutionary period engaged with global and cosmopolitan cultural currents.
- Think critically about the role images and artists play in shaping a country’s identity, ideals and policies.

BEFORE YOU VISIT

Suggested topics and activities to explore prior to your visit

- Research and explore the Mexican Revolution, including important figures, events, and the reasons for revolution. What led to the Mexican Revolution and why did it continue for more almost 10 years? (See Additional Resources)
- Learn about one or more of the suggested artists from the “Additional Resources” section together.
 - Explore the artist(s) as a class, focusing on how they influenced the way that Mexicans saw themselves and understood their history and culture as well as current events.
 - Discuss the influence that these artists had on other artists, especially in the United States.
 - Identify defining features of that artist’s style and work as well as sources of inspiration.
- Learn about the role of two important art forms during this period, muralism and printmaking.
 - What was the role and the motivation of the government in promoting public murals after the Mexican Revolution?
 - Why was printmaking embraced by so many artists, and how is this medium conducive to reaching many people?
 - Explore different forms of printmaking together, especially relief printing and screen printing.

IN THE EXHIBITION

Suggested topics and activities to engage with the exhibition

Room One: Revolutionary Spirit: Art of the People

- **Conversation Starters:**

- This first room shows how artists represented the ideals and stories associated with the Mexican Revolution. Where do you see each revolutionary ideal in these prints? Which prints show what happened during the Revolution?
- Each of these prints tells a story. What’s going on in each image? What do you see that makes you say that?
- What printmaking methods do you recognize?
- Which prints are details from larger murals in Mexico City?
- How might some of these images have influenced the way that people thought about recent or current events or the ideals of the Mexican Revolution?

Room Two

- **Key Works:**

- Guillermo Meza, *Xochiquetzal*, 1947. Oil on canvas.
- José Chávez Morado, *Annunciation of the Nahual*, 1946. Oil on canvas.
- Diego Rivera, *Portrait of an Indigenous Man*, 1937. Oil on board.
- Raúl Anguiano, *The Volcano*, 1943. Oil on canvas.
- Rotating selections from Carlos Mérida's *Trajes Regionales Mexicanos* (Regional Mexican Dress), 1941 and 1945. Serigraphs.
- Rotating selections (3 works at a time): Carlos Mérida's *Estampas del Popol-Vuh* (Prints from the Popol Vuh), 1943.
- Rotating selections (3 garments at a time): regional clothing that corresponds with Mérida's *Trajes Regionales Mexicanos*.

- **Conversation Starters:**

- Many artists from this period looked to Mexico's pre-Hispanic past as a source of inspiration. Where do you see artists referencing Mexico's ancient cultures in this room? What can you learn about the ancient cultures through these modern works of art?
- Mexico is made up of 32 states and each state has its own history, culture, and geography. Locate the display of traditional clothing from different Mexican states. How does each garment reflect something about the culture or environment it comes from? Find the location where each garment was made on the map nearby. Then, find which garments correspond with Carlos Mérida's prints featuring Mexican regional clothing.

Room Three

- **Key Works:**

- Ricardo Martínez de Hoyos, *Countryside*, 1942. Oil on canvas.
- Mariano Paredes, *Figure*, 1943. Oil on board.
- Juan Soriano, *The Dead Girl*, 1944. Oil on masonite.
- José Chávez Morado, *Horses*, 1947. Oil on canvas.
- Gustavo Savin, *The Exodus*, 1943. Oil on canvas.
- Mariano Paredes Limón, *Fair*, 1943. Oil on board.

- **Conversation Starters:**

- Notice how the artists used colors in some of the works in this room. Find a painting with bright colors. Then find one with dark colors. What feelings do the colors in each work give you?
- In the period following the Mexican Revolution (from about 1920-1950), the majority of people in Mexico lived in the countryside. Describe a work of art you see that shows rural life. What's happening in this picture? What do you learn about the people you see and where they live?
- Find a painting or drawing in this section that shows someone working. What are they doing? Why might the artist have chosen to show someone at work in their art?
- Imagine that you can enter one of these artworks. Which do you choose and why? What sounds would you hear? What smells would be in the air? What would you reach out and touch?
- Locate a work of art with one or more figures. With your group, recreate the positions of the people in the art. What do you notice about the art afterward that you may not have noticed before?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Suggested activities to extend learning after your museum visit

- **Suggested Readings**

- Within the "Additional Materials" section, there is a timeline of events for the Mexican Revolution. Encourage students to read this timeline.

- **Think-Pair-Share**

- Have students find an artwork within the exhibition individually, and consider one or more of the following questions:
 - What style is the artwork created in? What medium was used?
 - What does the artwork depict? Why do you believe the artist chose to depict this event or topic?



Mariano Paredes, *Feria*, 1943. Oil on canvas.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **List of Featured Artists:**

- Diego Rivera
- José Clemente Orozco
- Rufino Tamayo
- Carlos Mérida
- Guillermo Meza
- Leopoldo Méndez
- José Chávez Morado

- **Key Figures of the Mexican Revolution**

- Porfirio Díaz Mori
- Francisco Madero
- Pascual Orozco, Jr.
- Emiliano Zapata
- Victoriano Huerta
- Francisco “Pancho” Villa
- Venustiano Carranza
- Álvaro Obregón

- **Timeline of the Mexican Revolution:**

- **December 1, 1884:** Porfirio Díaz Miro is elected as President of Mexico, beginning his 27 year reign known as the Porfiriato.
- **November 20th, 1910:** Francisco Madero pens the Plan de San Luis Potosí, sparking a revolt to oust president Díaz and the beginning of the Mexican Revolution.
- **Late 1910:** Pascual Orozco, Francisco “Pancho” Villa, and Emiliano Zapata join the Revolution as the Generals in the North and South of Mexico.
- **May 25, 1911:** Francisco Madero is elected president.
- **February 22, 1913:** General Victoriano Huerta leads a coup against Francisco Madero. Madero is arrested and assassinated on his way to prison. Huerta declares himself the new president.
- **April 1913:** With the support of the United States, Venustiano Carranza becomes the First Chief in the fight against Huerta. He is further supported by Francisco “Pancho” Villa and Emiliano Zapata.
- **June 15, 1914:** Huerta resigns from his position and a polarizing debate begins regarding a possible successor, Villa or Carranza.
- **October 19, 1915:** The United States recognizes Carranza as president of Mexico.
- **March 9, 1916:** Villa retaliates against the United States’ recognition of Carranza by sacking Columbus, New Mexico.
- **February 5, 1917:** The Mexican Congress approves the new Mexican Constitution promoted by President Carranza.
- **April 10, 1919:** Zapata is killed in an ambush led by the state military after continued conflict between Zapata’s agrarian rebellion and the state.
- **April 20, 1920:** Álvaro Obregón declares a new revolt against President Carranza.
- **May 20, 1920:** Carranza was murdered on his way to escape Mexico and reach Veracruz.
- **November 20, 1920:** Obregón is elected as president.

- **PBS Lesson Plan:**

- The following link will take you to the PBS website, where they offer procedure, educational materials, and a free documentary film related to the Mexican Revolution of 1910.
<https://oeta.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/storm-that-swept-mexico/storm-lesson-plan-leaders>

VOCABULARY

- **Modernism** - a broad term in the fine arts associated with the period between the late 19th to mid-20th century characterized by a radical break from the past and the concurrent search for new forms of expression.
- **Zapatistas** - In the context of the Mexican Revolution, this name refers to an army led by (and named after) the revolutionary hero Emiliano Zapata comprised primarily of poor, indigenous farmers from the south of Mexico who were enraged about the continued classism and racism against their people by wealthy landowners and the Mexican state.
- **Surrealism** - an art movement and style in which representations of both the conscious and realistic and the unconscious and dream-like coexist. This art movement became popular in the 1920s and continued through the 1950s.
- **Cultural Appropriation** - the act of adopting characteristics or ideas from a culture that an individual does not belong to, often without an understanding of the cultural context or consideration of the people to whom the culture belongs.
- **Lithography** - a printing process that uses a stone or metal plate and greasy chemical substances to create a reproduction of an original work of art through a resist process.
- **Relief printing** - refers to a printing method that involves carving designs onto a printing block (known as a plate). The specific types of relief prints in this exhibition are linocuts and woodcuts.
- **Serigraphy** - also known as screen printing or silk-screening, this printmaking technique involves the application of a stencil to a screen in a way that ink only passes through certain parts of the screen to reveal a picture.