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Hidden Mexican Treasures: Works by Modern Mexican Artists in Soviet Collections

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Though since 1960s, Mexican art was well known to the audience at large in the Soviet Union, works by Mexican artists from the collections of Soviet museums were never offered for public view either in exhibitions or reproductions. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, the attitude to the Mexican artistic heritage remained unchanged, and most of the works were kept in storage. The article presents an overview of works by Mexican modernist artists in the collections of Russian museums, focusing on their provenance, which is helpful not only for making an inventory of these works, but also for understanding how deeply the history of museum collections reflects the cultural politics of the state as well as broader topics, e.g., the history of cultural diplomacy and its impact on the artistic culture of the countries participating in this exchange.

In the history of the Soviet Union, there was only one Mexican artist – David Álfaro Siqueiros, a devoted communist and Stalinist – whose brilliant reputation remained intact. Siqueiros visited the Soviet Union four times. During his first visit in the spring of 1928, besides Moscow, he travelled around the country on the train of the Red International of Labour Unions (also known as Profintern) together with the other delegates of the 4th congress of this organisation.¹ Siqueiros's political

¹ Лилия Алёшина, Нина Яворская (сост.): *Из историй художественной жизни СССР: Интернациональные связи в области изобразительного искусства, 1917–1940*. Материалы и документы [Lilija Alioshina, Nina Iavorskaja (ed.): *From the History of Artistic Life in the*



David Alfaro Siqueiros. *Portrait of Vladimir Lenin*. 1970. Oil on plywood.
The State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts

activity extended far beyond protests and debates. In 1940, he became the leader of a terrorist group that carried out the first – unsuccessful – attempt on Trotsky's life, machine-gunning his house in Coyacán.² In the autumn of 1955, Siqueiros travelled to the USSR again and became acquainted with many Soviet artists: he visited the studios of Pavel Korin and Alexander Deineka in Moscow and Viktor Melnikov in Leningrad, and spoke at conferences at the Artists' House in Moscow and Leningrad. During the same trip, at a meeting in the Ministry of Culture, he volunteered to organize an exhibition of Mexican art in Moscow, and vice versa. Siqueiros

travelled to Moscow two more times, in 1958 and 1972, and in 1967, he was elected an honorary member of the Academy of Arts of the USSR. After his death in 1974, a street in Leningrad was named after him (there are only four place names in Leningrad related to artists – besides Siqueiros Street, they are Repin Square, Repin Street, and Kustodiev Street).

It seems symbolic that this acclaimed artist did not sell any works to Soviet museums, and the only piece by Siqueiros, currently held in the collection of the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow, a portrait of Lenin, was his gift to the USSR in 1971. Right after its

USSR: International Relations in the Field of Visual Arts, 1917–1940. Materials and Documents], Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1987, 131.

² This group included another famous Mexican artist – Luis Arenal. Trotsky was assassinated by the head of the second terrorist group, Ramón Mercader, on August 20, 1940.

reception, the work was put in the museum's storage and was never displayed until the 2000s, thus continuing the tradition of non-showing of works by Mexican artists from the permanent collections of Soviet and, later, Russian museums.

Perhaps the only Mexican artist who was lucky to have his works displayed while they were already included in the Soviet museum collections was Diego Rivera. Between the 1920s and the 1950s, this tireless propagandist of Mexican art, a communist expelled on multiple occasions from the Communist Party of Mexico,³ built a network of contacts all around the world, and the Soviet Union was one of his main and the most important destinations. Rivera had many ties to Russia: since his studies in Paris in the 1910s, Russians were a constant and important part of his entourage. In Paris he met the writer, poet and, in later years, a prominent Soviet cultural ambassador Ilya Ehrenburg: in 1916, Rivera, who at the time was taken with Cubism, painted his portrait, and in 1916–1919, illustrated three books of his poems.⁴

In the early 1920s, Rivera drew Ehrenburg's wife, Lyubov Kozintsova-Ehrenburg, who donated the drawing to the State Museum of New Western Art in 1927.⁵ Thus, the drawing became one of two earliest

³ The first time, in 1925, he left the party voluntarily, only to rejoin a year later. In 1929, he was expelled from the party for his support for Trotsky, and was not reinstated until 1954 after a great deal of petitioning and public appearances admitting his political transgressions. See Stephanie J. Smith: *The Power and Politics of Art in Postrevolutionary Mexico*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017, 22, 30–31.

⁴ Илья Ehrenburg: *People, Years, Life*, vol. 1. Moscow: Soviety Pizatel, 1990; 197; Катерина Лопаткина: *Бастарды культурных связей. Интернациональные художественные контакты СССР в 1920–1950-е годы* [Katerina Lopatkina: *Bastards of Cultural Relations: International Artistic Contacts in the USSR, 1920s–1950s*]. Moscow: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2019, 135.

⁵ The State Museum of New Western Art was founded in 1923 in Moscow, as a result of the merging of the First Museum of Modern Western Painting and the Second Museum of Modern Western Painting (founded on the basis of the nationalized collections of Sergey Shchukin and Ivan Morozov, respectively). Shchukin and Morozov were known collectors of Western European, mainly French, art of the 1860s–1910s and both owned many outstanding pieces by Manet, Renoir, Degas, Monet, van Gogh, Gauguin, Pissarro, Toulouse-Lautrec, Cézanne, Matisse, Picasso, and Rodin. From the revolution until the early 1940s, the State Museum of New Western Art remained the only institution in the Soviet Union professionally working

works by Rivera to be included in a Soviet collection. He donated the second work, the drawing *Loaders* (1926), to the same museum in person, during his stay in Moscow in 1927–1928.⁶

Rivera found it very important to have live and direct contacts with like-minded people from “the country of the Revolution”. In Mexico, he took various guests from the USSR under his wing – in 1924, he was one of the first to greet the Soviet ambassador to Mexico, Stanislav Pestkovski (Stanisław Pestkowski).⁷ In 1925, when Vladimir Mayakovsky arrived in Mexico, the artist met him at the train station, accompanied him to every interview Mayakovsky gave to the international press, and showed him around Mexico City. In 1927, Rivera visited the Soviet Union for the first time: he was invited as a member of the delegation of Mexican trade unions attending the celebrations of the 10th anniversary of the October Revolution, and stayed in Moscow until May 1928.⁸ That visit, like any other in Rivera’s life, was replete with events and encounters with acquaintances old and new.

The first official event that Rivera attended as a delegate was a meeting with Stalin. It took place on November 5, 1927 and lasted six hours. Representatives from Germany, France, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Latin America, China, Belgium, Finland, Denmark and Estonia attended the meeting. During the final, informal part of the meeting, Rivera made a few sketches of Stalin.⁹ Rivera stood on a podium for guests of honour in Red Square on November 7 and watched the parade. He was also a guest of honour at a lecture on contemporary art in Mexico and Latin

with modern fine art and living artists. In the late 1940s, the museum was closed to the public for ideological reasons, and on March 6, 1948, it was disbanded, and the collection was divided between the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts and the Hermitage.

⁶ Today, both are held in the collection of the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts.

⁷ August 4, 1924 is considered the date when diplomatic relations between the USSR and Mexico were established. Pestkowski worked in Mexico in 1924–1926, and their correspondence continued even after he returned to Moscow.

⁸ Алёшина, Яворская (сост.): *Из историй художественной жизни СССР...*, 129.

⁹ Diego Rivera: *My Art, My Life: An Autobiography* (with Gladys March). New York: Dover Publications, 2017, 91.

America on November 9, and later himself gave several lectures at the Moscow Academy of Arts, in which he criticized easel painting and urged his listeners to turn to the traditions of applied folk art.

Despite numerous meetings and lectures, Rivera still found time to make art: he made studies for frescoes at the Secretariat of Public Education, several oil paintings and watercolours depicting the October festivities and the Red Army, and designed covers for Soviet magazines. One of those covers appeared on the *Krasnaya Niva* (Red Field) magazine in March 1928. The artist also had a contract for a mural painting in the Red Army Club in Moscow. Due to various circumstances, the project was not implemented. Rivera believed that it was because of his intention to destroy the club's palatial interiors instead of decorating them with frescoes.¹⁰

Though the fresco project did not materialize, two drawings were published in the catalogue of the permanent collection of the State Museum of New Western Art and were exhibited in the room of Italian drawings in 1928. Besides, the Narkompros Acquisition Committee later also bought two more works by Rivera – the drawings *The Parade* and *A Red Army Soldier*, which were displayed at the exhibition of *Obshestvo stankovistov – OST* in 1928 and, subsequently, at the Tretyakov Gallery in December 1928. Both *The Parade* and *A Red Army Soldier* were meant for the State Museum of New Western Art, but only one (*A Red Army Soldier*) ended up there – *The Parade* is believed to be missing since the late 1920s.¹¹

In May 1928, Rivera returned to his homeland. In his memoirs he wrote that Anatoly Lunacharsky himself “demanded” that he should leave, citing the artist’s “intransigence” in political matters. Nevertheless, it was assumed that after several months in Mexico City Rivera would return to Moscow. It did not happen.

Despite his hasty departure and vague prospects of returning, Rivera maintained close contacts with Soviet citizens in Mexico. He made friends with the third Soviet ambassador to Mexico, Alexander Makar. Having arrived in Mexico City in March 1928, the diplomat held this office for

¹⁰ Betram D. Wolfe: *The Fabulous Life of Diego Rivera*. London: Scarborough House, 1963, 220.

¹¹ Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (further RGALI – Rossiiskij Gosudarstvennyj Archiv Literatury i Iskusstva), f. 645, op. 1, d. 82, l. 19, 85.

two years. As a token of his genuine affection for the ambassador, Rivera painted a portrait of his wife, Sofya Makar-Batkina. Upon their return to Moscow, the couple took the portrait to their homeland, and later, their heirs later donated it to the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts.

In December 1930, Sergei Eisenstein arrived in Mexico City to shoot the film *¡Qué Viva México!* The director spent more than a year in Latin America, and Rivera helped to organize his trip around the country for location scouting. Eisenstein received photographs of the artist's frescoes and a drawing as souvenirs, and, having returned to Moscow, he worked on an article about Rivera's and Orozco's mural paintings. Thanks to his archives that were brought from Mexico, another graphic work by Rivera – a lithograph portrait of Dolores Olmedo (1930)¹² – was added to the Soviet state collections. What makes it a rare and valuable acquisition is that during his career Rivera made only thirteen lithographs and one linocut. Muralists generally saw no need for printed graphics, as they thought that since their paintings were displayed in public spaces, they were easily accessible.¹³

Between the 1930s and the 1950s, Rivera remained in close contact with his Soviet colleagues through correspondence and participation in the affairs of the Soviet diplomatic mission. However, it was not until 1955 that he visited the Soviet Union for the second and last time to receive cancer treatment from Soviet oncologists. He was hospitalized from September 1955 until January 1956, but he spent practically all this time drawing everything that he saw around him: the hospital staff, nurses and children. Concurrently, Rivera wrote memoirs about Mayakovsky and their encounter in Mexico back in 1925, and drew his portrait from memory. As the works were commissioned by the Vladimir Mayakovsky State Museum, Rivera donated both of them to the museum.¹⁴

¹² RGALI, f. 1923, op. 1, d. 2996, l. 1.

¹³ Milena Oehy: *Mexican Graphic Art*. Zürich: Kunsthau Zürich, 171, 115.

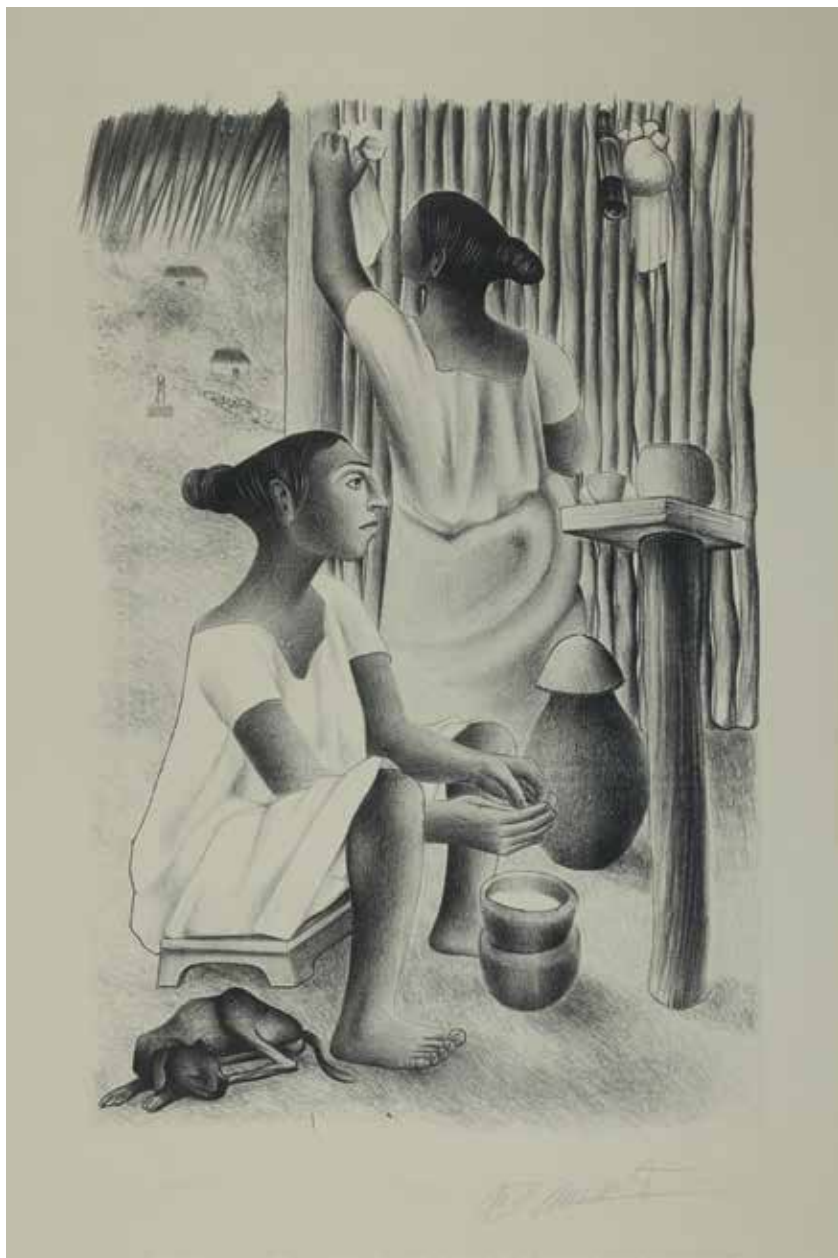
¹⁴ Нина Яворская: *К истории международных связей Государственного музея нового западного искусства (1922–1939)* [Nina Iavorskaja: *Towards a History of the International Relations of the State Museum of New Western Art (1922–1939)*]. Moscow: Sovietyky Khudozhnik, 1978, 361; *Diego Rivera y la experiencia en la URSS*. Mexico, 2017, 224.



Diego Rivera. *Glorious Victory*. 1954. Oil on canvas. The State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts

After his final visit to the Soviet Union, Rivera presented his last gift – a large-format canvas *Glorious Victory* (260 × 450 cm), a political pamphlet depicting American soldiers invading Guatemala. In 1956, it became the only painting gifted by Rivera to a Soviet cultural institution – the Artists' Union of the USSR. The canvas was first sent to Bulgaria for the exhibition of contemporary Mexican art organized by the National Front of Plastic Arts (Frente Nacional de Artes Plásticas, FNAP). A two-year-long exhibition tour was planned for Europe and Asia.¹⁵ Having started in Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw in February 1955, it ended in Beijing in 1956, and the capital of Bulgaria, Sofia, was the second stop. When the gift was announced, Rivera who did not closely follow the exhibition's itinerary through different cities became quite worried. In December 1956, he asked Yuri Paporov, a representative of the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations (VOKS) in Mexico, about “the rumours circulating among the members of the National Front of Plastic Arts that the Union of Soviet Artists had refused to accept his gift of a

¹⁵ Gosudarstvennyi Archiv Rossiskoj Federacii (further GARF), f. 5283, op. 14, d. 659, l. 167.



Francisco Dosamantes. *Interior of a house in Yucatan*. 1945. Lithography on paper.
The State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts

painting depicting a military coup-d'état in Guatemala and the meddling of the United States in Guatemalan politics". "I personally do not believe these rumours", Rivera said, "and if the painting is not in the USSR yet, the leaders of the FNAP are to blame". Paporov reassured Rivera that the painting was currently in China along with the exhibition of Mexican painting. Having travelled around Europe and having been shown in China at an exhibition organized by the Mexican National Front of Plastic Arts in 1955–1956, the painting arrived in the USSR, and in 1958, the Union of Soviet Artists handed it over to the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts.¹⁶ As the work was too large to be displayed in the museum's halls, it was placed in storage and, since it was not exhibited for many years, Mexican art historians strongly believed that it was lost until the museum's registrars reported that it was safe.¹⁷

All the collective gifts of artworks from Mexico were treated in almost the same way. In the late 1940s, a modest but representative collection of contemporary Mexican art was amassed in Moscow: besides the works mentioned above, in January 1948, two graphic series donated to the USSR by the Swiss architect Hannes Meyer were handed over to the State Museum of New Western Art by the Department of Museums of the Main Administration of Institutions of Visual Arts. Hans Emil "Hannes" Meyer was the second director of the Bauhaus who ran the school from 1928 to 1930 and was dismissed because of his Marxist views. Between 1930 and 1936, he lived and worked in the USSR, teaching at the Higher Institute for Architecture and Building (VASI) in Moscow, developing routine projects of educational buildings for the State Institute of Design and Construction of Educational Institutions and participating in urban planning projects for Moscow, Magnitogorsk, Birobidzhan and Perm's satellite towns. In 1939, Meyer was appointed director of the National Institute of Urbanism and Planning in Mexico City, but in 1941, he stepped down for political reasons, and in 1942,

¹⁶ GARE, f. 5283, op.14, d. 662, l. 37.

¹⁷ Helga Prignitz-Poda, Katarina Lopatkina: Frida Kahlo's Lost Painting *The Wounded Table* – a Mystery, *IFAR Journal* December (2017), 57.



Magazine cover *Krasnaya niva* (1928, No. 12) by Diego Rivera

became the director of Estampa Mexicana, the reestablished publishing house of the People's Graphic Workshop, where he was charged with the task of improving the association's financial situation. The Soviet Union received the series that were published with Meyer's direct involvement: *Images of the Mexican Revolution* (No. 28) – a collective publication of

artists of the People's Graphic Workshop of 1947, and Jean Charlot's album *Mexican Mother*, published in 1946–1947.

Right after their arrival, both portfolios were given to the State Museum of New Western Art, which was closed soon afterwards. On March 6, 1948, an order to disband the museum was issued, based on the claim that it was “a hothouse of servility to the decadent bourgeois culture”; its collection of impressionist, postimpressionist and cubist paintings, drawings and prints was divided between the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts and the State Hermitage Museum. All the prints found themselves in the first of the aforementioned institutions.

Another collective gift arrived in Moscow in December 1947.¹⁸ Works by twenty-six artists were collected on the initiative of the Soviet ambassador Konstantin Umansky and sent to Moscow by the Institute of Mexican-Russian Cultural Exchange (alternatively referred to as the Mexican-Russian Institute, or MRI).¹⁹ The donors' names were the following: Ignacio Aguirre, Raúl Anguiano, Luis Arenal, Alberto Beltrán, Ángel Bracho, Arturo García Bustos, Francisco Dosamantes, Frida Kahlo, Joaquín Clausell, Olga Costa, Lola Cueto, Leopoldo Méndez, Francisco Mora, José Chávez Morado, Isidoro Ocampo, Fernando Pacheco, Julio Prieto, José María Guadalupe Posada, Everardo Ramírez, Carlos Orozco Romero, Jesús Escobedo, Pablo O'Higgins, Ramón Sosamontes, Alfredo Zalce, Manuel Álvarez Bravo, and Doris Heyden.²⁰

¹⁸ GARE, f. 5283, op. 22, d. 193, t. 1, l. 45.

¹⁹ The Institute of Mexican-Russian Cultural Exchange was founded on March 14, 1944 by people involved in culture and arts. Its chief mission, as formulated by the Institute's General Secretary, the well-known social activist Víctor Manuel Villaseñor, was “to acquaint the Mexicans with Russian culture and the USSR – with Mexican culture.” In 1955, the Institute was renamed as the Mexico-USSR Institute of Friendship and Cultural Exchange (IDKO). See Татьяна Чекова: *Становление и развитие российско-мексиканских культурных связей (1890–1968)*. Диссертация на соискание уч. ст. канд. ист. наук. [Chekova: *The Building and Development of Russian-Mexican Cultural Connections (1890–1968)*. PhD Dissertation]. Samara, 2007, 140.

²⁰ Katarina Lopatkina: *From Mexican Artists to the Soviet State: The Story of an Unwanted Gift*, *Studia Politica. Romanian Political Science Review* 3/17 (2017), 386.

The Mexicans expected that the only Soviet museum of modern Western art, the State Museum of New Western Art, would be the official recipient of this huge donation. However, as the museum was to be disbanded in three months, all the works were given to the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations (VOKS), the chief institution of Soviet cultural diplomacy from the 1920s until the 1950s.

The Mexican gift package contained neither an inventory of the artworks nor a list of their authors – nothing but the paintings and graphic works themselves. Moreover, the VOKS employees were not prepared for its arrival. At first, they tried to figure out what to do and where to send the received artworks. Preliminary evaluation was not very optimistic: Ivan Khmarsky, the head of the American department, wrote to the VOKS agent in Mexico, I. A. Kumaryan: “...due to the fact that the vast majority of the paintings were created in the spirit of formalist bourgeois art, alien to the principles of Realism, their public display in Moscow is out of the question.”²¹ At the very end of 1949, a meeting of the VOKS Visual Arts Division finally took place. Its chairman, the painter Aleksandr Gerasimov, summarized its conclusions as follows: “The presented Mexican paintings were formalist and surrealist in the method of their execution. Displaying them to the public was deemed impossible, and the VOKS Visual Arts Division proposed that the canvases be removed from their stretchers and sent to the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts for safekeeping. Let’s apologize to Pushkin, comrades!”²²

Given that a national campaign against cosmopolitanism was in full swing, this decision was inevitable: formalism, which Gerasimov and Kemenov berated in the press in the 1930s, by the end of the 1940s had become synonymous with “anti-patriotism”. In May 1949, Gerasimov wrote an article for the magazine *Ogonyok*, commenting on artworks by Henry Moore and Salvador Dalí. A sculpture by Henry Moore and paintings by Roberto Matta and Robert Motherwell were included as

²¹ Ibid., 391.

²² GARF, f. 5283, op. 21, d. 130, l. 2. The speaker was enthusiastically supported by the artist Evgeny Katsman: “Bubnov made an excellent speech at the event of the winners of the Stalin Prize. He said that the art of Europe and America is the art of the insane.”



Frida Kahlo and her painting *The Wounded Table*. Photographer Bernard Silberstein. 1940. Bernard Silberstein Foundation

illustrations to the text.²³ Gerasimov emphasized: “Rejecting a profound understanding of reality makes an artist indifferent to life, to people around him and to nature, gives rise to an abnormally strong sense of self, and leads to pessimism and mysticism. This is the ideological foundation of Impressionism, Cubism, Surrealism and all antisocial, abstract and ‘fashionable’ movements in fine arts, reactionary in content and hideous

²³ Henry Moore’s *Family Group* (1945), Roberto Matta’s *Trembling Man* (1944–1945) and Robert Motherwell’s *Personage, with Yellow Ochre and White* (1947), published in the *Ogonyok* under the title *Woman*.



Ceremony of donating works of Mexican artists to the Soviet Union. On the left: Secretary of the Mexican-Russian Institute Samuel Vasconcelos and the ambassador of the USSR to Mexico Alexander Kapustin. Mexico City, March 1947. From the journal *Cultura Sovietica*, No. 31, May 1947

in form as they are.”²⁴ Referring to his own experience, he left no room for a wider interpretation of the works beyond a surrealist one: “I have been to several Western European countries, visited many museums, salons and galleries, and each time I was at a loss when faced with the output of contemporary bourgeois artists. It is extremely difficult to determine

²⁴ «Отказ от глубокого познания реальной действительности делает художника равнодушным к жизни, к окружающим его людям и природе, порождает в сознании гипертрофию собственного «я», ведет к пессимизму и мистике. В этом идейное начало импрессионизма, кубизма и сюрреализма и вообще всех антинародных, реакционных по содержанию, абстрактных и уродливых по форме «модных» течений в изобразительном искусстве.» (Александр Герасимов: Распад буржуазного искусства [Gerasimov: The Decay of Bourgeois Art], *Огонёк* 21 (1949), 27).

what was created by artists with mental issues and what was authored by impostors pretending to be mentally ill for profit... In any normal person such 'paintings' cannot elicit anything else but repulsion."²⁵

Despite the proposal of the Visual Arts Division to hand over the artworks to the State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts for safekeeping, it was not to be the case. Several years later, in 1955, the museum received only the graphic works: they were given over with the intention to prepare for an exhibition of Mexican graphic art.²⁶ However, none of these donated works was displayed at the exhibition of Mexican graphic art of 1955, or at later exhibitions: each time the organizers simply requested new works from their Mexican partners. After the exhibitions, some of the artworks became part of the collections of Soviet museums. For example, in 1958, an exhibition of Mexican graphic art was held in the Hermitage. When it ended, artists from the People's Graphic Workshop donated 33 engravings to the museum, and a year later, they sent another 93 works.²⁷ Each time newly donated works were kept in the museum's storage.

The fate of the canvases that arrived in Moscow in 1947 remains a mystery until this day, with one exception – *The Wounded Table* by Frida Kahlo. We might assume that among all the artworks sent to Soviet cultural functionaries, *The Wounded Table* caused them the most trouble: this large piece painted on Masonite could not be "removed from its stretchers and sent to the Pushkin Museum for safekeeping." Moreover, unlike the other works, which basically did not interest anyone, Frida Kahlo's painting periodically became an object of official requests and subsequent correspondence. It was first requested for an exhibition of Mexican art in London in 1952. The painting came up for the second

²⁵ «За годы своей жизни я побывал в нескольких западноевропейских странах, посетил там много музеев, салонов, галерей и каждый раз становился в тупик перед продукцией современных буржуазных художников. Чрезвычайно трудно определить, что создано художниками с больной психикой и что принадлежит кисти дельцов от искусства, которые с целью наживы подделываются под психически больных ... У каждого нормального человека такие «картины» не могут вызвать ничего, кроме отвращения.» (Ibid.).

²⁶ GARF, f. 5283, op. 14, d. 567, l. 10.

²⁷ Покровский: Эрмитаж: многообразие форм сотрудничества [Pokrovsky: The Hermitage: The Variety of Forms of Cooperation], *Латинская Америка* 8 (1987), 79.

time in 1953, during the negotiations about Kahlo's potential visit to the USSR. After Kahlo's death, in October 1954, Rivera contacted the Soviet ambassador to Mexico with a request for permission to display *The Wounded Table* at an exhibition in Warsaw in 1955 organized by FNAP in Europe and Asia.²⁸ On 2 December 1954, the canvas was shipped to Poland.²⁹

The exhibition of Mexican art organized by FNAP ran for two years. Having started in Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw in February 1955, the exhibition tour ended in Beijing in 1956. During that time, several curators changed, and the artists and artworks varied from city to city – works were added or removed, sometimes as a result of sales or donations. Kahlo's painting was mentioned and reproduced in the Polish catalogue of the exhibition. As we know from the correspondence between the organizers Ignacio Márquez Rodiles and José Chávez Morado, *The Wounded Table* was shown only in Warsaw, and the steering committee regretted that Kahlo's piece was absent from the exhibition in other cities. *The Wounded Table* has been considered lost ever since.

Relations between Mexican artists and the USSR began with the faith in the unifying power of art and communism. In the second half of the 1950s, reproductions of murals by Rivera, Siqueiros and Orozco, and graphic works from the People's Graphic Workshop became about the only examples of "foreign art" that Soviet people were allowed to know. Beginning in 1955, exhibitions of Mexican artists were frequently brought to the USSR and shown not only in the major museums of Moscow, Leningrad and Kharkiv, but also in such seemingly remote places as Ivanovo, Yaroslavl and Kostroma. However, none of them included any of the donated works mentioned above, implying that the Soviet state aimed to present an entirely different "Mexican art", devoid of ambivalence, doubts and creative explorations, which were safely locked in storerooms along with donated works. Soviet ideologically loyal publications and

²⁸ GARF, f. 5283, op. 14, d. 659, l. 167.

²⁹ *Wystawa sztuki meksykańskiej: Malarstwo współczesne i grafika XVI–XX w.* Katalog wystawy. Luty–marzec 1955 [Exhibition of Mexican Art: Contemporary Painting and Graphic Art of the 16th–20th Centuries. Catalogue]. Warszawa: Zachęta, 1955, 23, 46.

pre-censored exhibitions never showed the live character of Mexican modern art and, in a certain sense, Soviet people never had a chance to get to know the real Mexico.

Today, after many years, we are rediscovering the art of Mexico in all its diversity and idiosyncrasy, as a blend of native traditions and Catholicism, the ideals of social justice and folklore, in which Realism and Surrealism harmoniously coexist, sometimes in a single work.

The first steps in exhibiting works by Mexican artists from post-Soviet museum collections were made in December 2018 – February 2019. For the first time in post-Soviet history, some of the above-mentioned pieces were shown at the exhibition “Viva la vida. Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera” in Moscow, and published in the exhibition catalogue. These were several prints, which could be traced back as a part of Umansky’s initiative, and several works by Diego Rivera. The exhibition (curator Katarina Lopatkina), held in Moscow’s Manezh exhibition hall, included pictures from the Dolores Olmedo Museum (Mexico), which has the world’s largest collection of works by Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, as well as paintings and illustrations from private European and Latin American collections, the collection of Diego Rivera’s grandson Juan Coronel Rivera and the Arvil Gallery (Mexico City and the US), works from the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, and documents from Russian state archives that have not been exhibited before. In the exhibition space, a special room was devoted to the subject of the lost “unwanted gift” of the late 1940s. Rivera’s drawings and prints were intended to demonstrate his art in its entirety, and the works from Russian collections were a valuable contribution. However, much work remains to be done.

Katarina Lopatkina

Paslėpti Meksikos lobiai. Meksikos modernizmo dailininkų kūriniai sovietinėse kolekcijose

Straipsnis nušviečia ilgą laiką nutylėtą Meksikos kairiųjų menininkų bandymą glaudinti santykius su Sovietų Sąjunga, plėtojant kultūrinius ryšius ir siunčiant sovietų muziejams Meksikos dailininkų kūrinius. Aptariamos svarbiausios šio proceso akcijos, identifikuojami sovietų muziejuose nusėdę kūriniai, atskleidžiama dingusių garsių paveikslų ir net ištisių kolekcijų istorija. Analizuojant tarpinstitucinius ryšius, parodoma atskirų asmenybių įtaka ir vaidmuo prieštaringuose kultūros procesuose.