

Mexican Migrations
firstsite, Colchester
15 June – 3 November 2013

Mariana Yampolsky (1925-2002)

Desde que te ausentaste, 1980
Since you left us

Photograph on paper
Donated by Mariana Yampolsky
ESCALA 20-1996

Mariana Yampolsky was born in Chicago to a Russian father and German mother. She moved to Mexico City at the age of 19 to work with the Taller de Gráfica Popular (Workshop for Popular Graphic Art) or TGP, a left-wing organisation of graphic artists founded in 1937 by Leopoldo Méndez and others, some of whom are represented in ESCALA.

Yampolsky left the TGP in 1960 to concentrate on photography, which she had studied under Lola Álvarez Bravo. During her life she travelled throughout Mexico taking images of the country's rural population, its indigenous people and its architecture, eventually building an archive of more than 70,000 images, which she grouped thematically. The photograph held by ESCALA, *Desde que te ausentaste*, belongs to a series of images of traditional funerary practices. It shows two young indigenous girls kneeling by the coffin of a man identified as Señor Gregorio Barrera C.

The eulogy at the foot of his coffin reads:

If pain is a prayer without words, we are praying for you since you left us.

We will see you again since our hope is placed in heaven and our faith in GOD

Iguala, Gro. (Guerrero), 30 January 1980

Graciela Iturbide (1942-)

Graciela Iturbide was born in Mexico City and is considered to be Mexico's foremost living photographer. Following formal training in Mexico City, Iturbide assisted in the studio of Manuel Álvarez Bravo (husband to Lola) from 1970 to 1972 but was influenced too by Josef Koudelka (Czechoslovakia), Henri-Cartier Bresson (France) and Sebastião Salgado (Brazil). Iturbide has in turn influenced a younger generation of photographers in and beyond Latin America, including Milagros de la Torre (Peru), who is also represented in ESCALA.

Iturbide photographs everyday life, mostly in black and white, and is interested in feminist themes and especially Mexico's indigenous populations, although she has also produced series of photographs based on projects in the USA and in India.

El baño de Frida, Coyoacán, Ciudad de México, 2006

Frida's Bathroom, Coyoacán, Mexico City

Silver gelatin photograph on paper

Purchased with the assistance of the PINTA Museums Acquisitions Programme ESCALA 1-2011

This photograph shows the prosthetic right leg and highly decorative tooled leather boot of Mexico's best-known artist, Frida Kahlo (1907-1954), who created many self-portraits. This was one of the very personal objects that her husband, the Mexican muralist Diego Rivera (1886-1957), insisted remained behind closed doors in the bathroom of La Casa Azul (*The Blue House*), their home in Coayacán (Mexico City) until 50 years after her death. The house became a museum in 1958 and when, in 2005, Frida's bathroom was finally reopened, Graciela

Iturbide was invited to photograph the room and objects, which also included Kahlo's back brace. Kahlo suffered poor health for most of her life, following polio in childhood and a serious tram accident as a teenager. She had her leg amputated in 1953, a year before her death. Kahlo's life often captivates audiences as much as her art, as evidenced in this photograph and the global industry that has emerged around her.

Autorretrato en la casa de Trotsky, Coyoacán, México, 2006

Self-portrait at Trotsky's House, Coyoacán, Mexico

Silver gelatin photograph on paper

Purchased with the assistance of the Art Fund and the PINTA

Museums Acquisitions Programme

ESCALA 3-2012

This self-portrait, of Iturbide's shadow, also shows bullet holes in the walls of the house on Vienna Street in Coyoacán where, from 1938 to 1940, Leon Trotsky lived in exile with his wife Natalia Sedova. Having been granted asylum by Mexico's president, at Diego Rivera's request, the couple lived for two years with the muralist and Frida Kahlo at The Blue House but, following an affair between Kahlo and Trotsky, Trotsky and Sedova moved to Vienna Street. In 1940, despite heavy protection, another of the muralists David Álfaro Siqueiros and other Stalinists, all dressed as policemen, entered the courtyard and fired machine gun rounds, injuring Trotsky's grandson. This unsuccessful attempt on Trotsky's life was followed in the same year by his murder with an ice-pick on Stalin's orders by Ramon Mercader, a Spanish-born agent for the Soviet secret police.

Tecali, Puebla, 2011

Silver gelatin photograph on paper

Purchased with the assistance of the Art Fund and the PINTA

Museums Acquisitions Programme

ESCALA 4-2012

Tecali (de Herrera) is the name of a town in Mexico in the state of Puebla where Iturbide has taken a number of photographs. The word is from Nahuatl, the official language of the Aztecs, which is still spoken today by two million Mexicans today. From the Nahuatl, via Spanish, we have the words chocolate (xocolatl) tomato (tomatl) and avocado (from ahucatl). Tecali is derived from teo-calli, meaning 'sacred/god (teo) house (calli)' or temple. This photograph appears to show some kind of water tank, whose opaque water lends Iturbide's reflected self-portrait an even softer quality.

Jardín Botánico, Cactus Naturata, 1996-2004
Botanical Garden, Cactus Naturata

Silver gelatin photograph on paper
Purchased with the assistance of the Art Fund and the PINTA
Museums Acquisitions Programme
ESCALA 5-2012

Iturbide took this photograph in the botanical gardens in Oaxaca, in the south of Mexico. The gardens form part of the Centro Cultural Santo Domingo, which is in a former sixteenth century convent. The gardens were designed by Francisco Toledo, one of Mexico's leading artists, and are linked with art museums throughout the city of Oaxaca where Demián Flores, a younger generation artist in *Mexican Migrations*, lives and works. The state of Oaxaca has the greatest diversity of ethnic groups, indigenous languages, flora and fauna in Mexico and is known for its strong artistic community.

The image recalls the use of tents in photographs by Manuel Álvarez Bravo and further evokes the cactus fences seen in Mexico, including at Kahlo and Rivera's other house in Mexico City, designed by Juan O'Gorman. Conceptually the cactus fence could be said to relate to the *Cortina de Nopal (Prickly Pear Curtain)*, a manifesto written by José Luis Cuevas in 1956 and published in the cultural section of the daily newspaper *Novedades*. The manifesto challenged the dominance of nationalism in art, embodied by Mexican Muralism; a challenge that

was maintained by the Grupo de la Ruptura (*Breakaway Group*) of which Cuevas was a prominent member.

Benarés, India, 1999

Benares, India

Silver gelatin photograph on paper

Purchased with the assistance of the Art Fund and the PINTA

Museums Acquisitions Programme

ESCALA 6-2012

Iturbide has often worked outside of Mexico, including in India, where this photograph was taken on the streets of Benares or Varanasi, a city on the banks of the Ganges in Uttar Pradesh. Here Iturbide's shadow is the smaller of the two. She has turned the photograph on its side, a change in the original orientation that shifts the viewer's perspective and adds to the slightly surreal feel of the image, which shows metal tools and false teeth laid on the canvas cloth of a street dentist. In both subject matter and composition the photograph demonstrates the influence of Manuel Álvarez Bravo's work on Iturbide and, if not for the sign written in Hindi, could easily be a scene from a Mexican street. Benares, known for being the oldest continuously inhabited city in India, is respected for its 'high' culture and religion but, in choosing to focus on a street vendor, Iturbide is able to bring out universal themes that connect this place to her country of origin.

Raúl Piña (1961-)

Doble eclipse de luna, 1998

Double Lunar Eclipse

Oil on canvas

Donated by Raúl Piña

ESCALA 15-1998

Raúl Piña is a Mexican-born artist who has lived and worked in London since 1997, having studied in Mexico City. Originally from Pachuca, his cultural references are drawn from the Toltecs, who were held by the Aztecs to be the master craftsmen and artists of ancient Mexico. In this painting, as in his other work, including performances, Piña draws on the rich myths and symbols of Mexico as a means to reflect on the connections between worlds past and present.

The jaguar, which dominates this painting, is central to Toltec beliefs and iconography and is transformed by Piña into the 'Jaguar Man', a character the artist has invented to symbolise the heart and the connectedness between the people of Mexico and their environment. The 'Jaguar Man' lies in contrast to another recurrent figure: the 'Rabbit Man'. Representing the head, he stands for materialism, born of modern Western Europe and of the USA. In this painting the 'Rabbit Man' appears in the jaguar's moon-like eyes. This may be a reference to the indigenous Mexican belief that one can see the shape of a rabbit in the full moon. This in turn derives from the Aztec creation myth, which tells how the gods at Teotihuacán, the sacred site worshipped by the Toltecs and the Aztecs, dulled the overwhelming light of the sun by throwing a rabbit at it, thereby creating the moon.

Rufino Tamayo (1899-1991)

Rufino Tamayo was born in Oaxaca in the south of Mexico. He trained in Mexico City and was a contemporary of the Mexican Muralists (dominated by José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera and David Álfaro Siqueiros) and, like them, following the Mexican Revolution in 1910-20, he was invited by the minister of culture, José Vasconcelos, to create a truly national art. Before the Revolution, under president Porfirio Díaz, artists were generally expected to follow European artistic traditions, as taught in the Academia de San Carlos in Mexico City. Tamayo's preference for a less overtly political art and a desire to create art of a more universal nature, by merging Mexican cultural symbols with

modern styles such as Cubism, Expressionism and Surrealism. In search of greater artistic freedom Tamayo spent many years in New York (1926-1928 and 1936 to 1950) and Paris (1957-64), where his employment of Mexican themes and colours intensified.

Of indigenous Zapotec ancestry, Tamayo first developed his lifelong interest in Mexico's pre-Columbian artistic traditions when, from 1921, he assisted at and then directed the Department of Ethnographic drawings of the Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Historia y Etnografía in Mexico City. Tamayo later donated his own collection of pre-Columbian sculpture (stone carvings and ceramics) to the Museo Rufino Tamayo in Oaxaca, and his collection of international art to the Museo Tamayo in Mexico City.

The Prehispanic Figures shown here belong to a set of 12 lithographs, with each print in each set finished by hand with a stroke of colour, making them unique. Although better known for his paintings, Tamayo experimented with the whole range print techniques throughout his long career, in the process developing the new technique of mixografía (*mixography*) in order to give greater three-dimensionality to two-dimensional forms. The figures depicted in this series are based on real objects and he is careful to acknowledge the Mexican cultures and places to which they belong. In line with his belief in the need to create a universally meaningful art, however, they are not exact copies of the originals but artistic interpretations.

Figura prehispánica VIII. Vaso zoomorfo, Colima, 1976

Prehispanic Figure VIII. Zoomorphic vase, Colima

ESCALA 61:1-1997

Figura prehispánica IX. Mujer con el cuerpo decorado, Nayarit, 1976

Prehispanic Figure IX. Woman with an Ornamented Body, Nayarit

ESCALA 61:12-1997

Figura prehispánica I. Jorobado, Nayarit, 1976

Prehispanic Figure I. Hunchback, Nayarit

Juan Soriano (1920-2006)

Untitled, 1953

Pencil on paper

Donated by Emma Reyes

ESCALA 13-1994

While Juan Soriano's work often contains specifically Mexican sources, the artist has always aimed to reflect the universal in his imagery. In 1953, the year in which this untitled drawing was executed, Soriano was living in Rome and deeply interested in the early cultures of Greece, most especially in the fertility goddesses of Crete. Soriano's image depicts a mythic scene in which a female with wide hips stands watch over a sleeping male, and the emphasised nudity of both create a strong tone of desire. The figures are surrounded by birds, a fish and a calla lily, and the two volcanoes which loom behind them suggest that this is an inversion of the Nahuatl myth in which two ill-fated lovers were transformed into volcanoes: Popocatepetl (Smoking Warrior) is said to keep eternal vigil over Ixtaccihuatl (Sleeping Woman).

However, the drawing also reflects an ancient Greek inspiration. The calla lily was an attribute of the Minoan goddess Britomartis, later associated with Artemis. According to myth, Artemis fell in love and made nightly visits to the beautiful youth Endymion, doomed by Zeus to an eternal sleep. Soriano would later recall that his time in Rome and visits to Greece put him in touch with an art that seemed closely related to that of the prehispanic world, and his drawing reflects both cultures as synthesised through the artist's sensibility.

Terri Geis, 2008

José Luis Cuevas (1934-)

Quevedo #3, 1969

Screen print on silver paper

Donated by Siron Franco

ESCALA 66-1995

José Luis Cuevas' *Quevedos*, a series of expressive prints relating to works of literature and visual art, began in 1969 and followed the artist's meeting the writer Carlos Fuentes. In this particular element of the series, the friendship between Cuevas and Fuentes is reflected through an earlier relationship between artist and writer. Cuevas takes the role of Jacques Callot, the early 17th century French satirical draughtsman, and Fuentes, by implication, the role of Francisco de Quevedo, the early 17th century Spanish satirical writer. Here many of Cuevas' figures come directly from Callot, and the work also contains the transcription, in Cuevas' hand, of a satirical verse by Quevedo.

As published within 'Poesías sueltas, Burlescas, Sonetos' (c1610) by Quevedo and Villegas Vieja Verde Compuesta y Afeitada, this verse reads: *'Vida fiambre, cuerpo de anascote/ ¿cuando dirás al apetito: 'Tate'/ si cuando el Parce mihi te da mate/ empiezas a mirar por el virote? Tú juntas en tu frente y tu cogote/ moño, y mortaja sobre el seso orate;/ pues siedo ya viviente disparate/ untas la calavera en almodrote. Vieja roñosa, pues te llevan, vete;/ no vistas el gusano de confite/ pues eres ya varilla de cohete. Y pues hueles a cisco y aclrebite/ y la pobre te sirve de pebete/ juega con tu pellejo al escondite.'*

Translating into English as: *'Corpselike life, body like cloth/ how will you tell your appetites: 'stop'/ if whenever cornered by restraint/ you turn to look the other way? You gather in front and chin/ topknot and shroud, over lunatic brain;/ well you have become living nonsense/ polishing your skull with almodrate Itchy old woman, if you have been taken, then go!/ stop feasting on worms as if they were sweets/ You are no good but to be a*

firecracker And so you will smell of ash and sulphur/ serving as a stick of incense for the people/ as they play hide and seek with your skin.'

Quevedo's 'leche'(milk) style (a word used in Spain to refer to mocking humour) ridiculed the *culteranismo* of 16th century Spanish. Cuevas appropriates his words in order to make a similar point about the equally 'cultured' artistic establishment of seventies Mexico. Made in reflective acetate, each *Quevedo* is a literal as well as metaphorical mirror; Carlos Fuentes thus refers to this series as 'engravings in milk and silver.'

Carlos Molina, 2008

Demián Flores (1971-)

Demián Flores was born in Juchitán, a small town in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in the southern state of Oaxaca, whose independent indigenous Zapotec traditions he merges with the US popular culture dominant in Mexico City. Flores grew up and studied in the capital and lives between there and Oaxaca, where he founded the Centro Cultural La Curtiduría (the Tannery Cultural Centre) and the Taller Gráfica Actual (Current Graphic Workshop) or TAGA. In his prints, as well as in his objects, Flores merges pre-Columbian imagery with references from Mexico's popular traditions, including street culture and sport. This mixing or miscegenation is a process that predates the arrival of the Spanish in 1519 and continued when European art, literature and ideas were introduced by the colonial secular and religious administration following the conquest of Mexico in 1521. By continuing this process, Flores explores on-going ideas of struggle and resistance relevant to contemporary Mexico.

De la serie 'Sombras de plata', 2001
From the Series 'Silver Shadows'

In 2001, Flores exhibited all untitled 14 prints from the series 'Silver Shadows' at Art Exchange at the University of Essex's Colchester

Campus as part of a residency that also included the UK's first ever Mexican wrestling (Lucha Libre or 'free fight') matches at the Campus and in Colchester Arts Centre. Lucha Libre is a very popular sport in Mexico, especially in Mexico City, and in Colchester the matches were between two of the best known wrestlers: Blue Panther and el Hijo del Santo (the Son of the Saint), who wears a silver mask. Flores' use of silver in this series perhaps refers to the metal most commonly associated with the moon in pre-Columbian cultures and to one of the precious metals most coveted by the Spanish on conquering Mexico. In some of Flores' other prints and paintings, US comic-book heroes are merged or pitted against the warrior gods of Mexico's pre-Columbian codices or pictorial books.

De la serie 'La Patria II', 2010
From the Series 'Homeland II'

Water-gilded wood
Purchased with the assistance of PINTA Museums Acquisition
Programme and Mrs Ades 2010
ESCALA 4-2010

This panel, also made from cedar wood (which is resistant to termite damage and so long-lasting), was made by the community of Santa Ana Zegache, near to Oaxaca, with whom Flores had worked on a project to restore their colonial church. Through the project, organised by La Curtiduría, Georgina Saldaña Wonchee taught young people the technique of water-gilding (also known as 'gilding on bole') in which wood is covered in red clay (bole) before gold leaf is applied. As well as the restoration of furniture and artworks, the project involved the creation of new artworks for the church and for an exhibition at Casa Lamm in Mexico City, including this untitled panel from the series 'Homeland II'. Again, it merges pre-Columbian imagery, of a parrot, one of the iconic birds of Mexico's painted books, with a figure faced down like a fallen Christ who, wearing jeans and a T-shirt, evokes a contemporary reality.

Chakos 3, 2010
Nunchuks 3

Water-gilded wood

Purchased with the assistance of PINTA Museums Acquisition Programme and Mrs Ades 2010
ESCALA 5-2010

Chakos 3 merges present-day sport and street culture with colonial Mexican motifs. Chakos is Spanish for Nunchaku or Nunchuks, a Japanese weapon from Okinawa comprising two sticks joined together with a short chain or rope. Possession of Nunchuks is illegal in a number of countries but they are not banned in Mexico. Flores' The Chakos are part of an expanded series of objects Flores has made, including other weapons such as knives, machetes and pistols, as well as other sport-weapons (Nunchuks can be used in martial arts) like baseball bats; baseball being the most popular sport in Flores' home town of Juchitán.

In all cases the objects are covered in gold leaf, using the process of water-gilding. The Chakos are made from cedar wood 'turned' to resemble the kind of furniture found in colonial churches. In combining the form of a contemporary weapon with that of a colonial church, Flores is perhaps evoking the struggle of Mexico's indigenous people since the arrival of the Spanish who, following the conquest, instigated an ambitious and far-reaching programme of conversion of whole communities to Catholicism, while Spain's secular authorities appropriated indigenous land and labour.