

1999

THE YEAR OF RUFINO TAMAYO



Jesus Sanchez Uribe

Rufino Tamayo, *Man*, 548 x 320 cm, 1953 (vinylite on three masonite panels).
Dallas Museum of Art Collection, Dallas Art Association Commission, Neiman-Marcus Company
Exposition Funds (1953.22), Dallas.

*Between Heaven and Earth is Man
with his yearning for the infinite.*

Rufino Tamayo

On the centennial of his birth, Mexico and the world are paying homage to Oaxacan painter Rufino Tamayo (1899-1991), a visual artist among the most representative of twentieth century art, which is nourished on constant experimentation and speaks a universal language.

Tamayo was born in the city of Oaxaca at the close of the nineteenth century. His mother died when he was seven and he was brought up by his aunt; together they moved to Mexico City a few years later, and Rufino worked in the family fruit business. In 1917 he began formal painting classes, but his disagreement with the traditional conceptions of art led him to explore other paths. One decisive experience was his work as head of the ethnographic sketching department at the National Archeology Museum. Pre-Hispanic art led him to a rediscovery of light, color and form. This, together with his contact with other artistic expressions and languages during his long stays in New York and Paris, transformed his art into an absolutely personal manifestation of a universal way of seeing the world.

In contrast with the nationalist school represented by the three greats of Mexican muralism, Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros and José Clemente Orozco, Tamayo refused to turn his indigenous, Mexican roots into his only source of inspiration. For Tamayo, opening new roads was the only way to create art and his loyalty to this principle is demonstrated in his constant experimentation with color, form and textures for more than seven decades of artistic production.

Tamayo was widely recognized during his lifetime: beginning with his first individual exhibition in 1926 at New York's Weyhe Gallery, the list of his exhibitions and retrospectives at the world's main museums and galleries is interminable. His paintings can be found in important private collections, and his murals grace walls from the commissions room at the

UNESCO's conference hall and the library in the University of Puerto Rico, to the Dallas Museum of Art or Mexico City's National Museum of Anthropology.

Tamayo left the people of Mexico two important legacies. The first is his collection of pre-Hispanic sculptures, on view from 1974 in the Rufino Tamayo Museum of Pre-Hispanic Art in his native Oaxaca. The second is the collection of paintings, sculpture, sketches, engravings and tapestries that he and his wife Olga gathered, including pieces by Picasso, Bacon, Motherwell, Tàpies, Miró and Rothko, in addition to his own work. All these works are the permanent collection of the Rufino Tamayo International Contemporary Art Museum, inaugurated in Mexico City's Chapultepec Park in 1981.

This year, in commemoration of the centennial of his birth, this museum has organized the exhibition "Tamayo, His Idea of Man" from August 28 to October 31. More than 50 paintings, representative of all his periods, show us Man in Tamayo's language: Man in his attempt to understand the mystery of life and his own destiny; his meeting with the universe, with solitude, joy, anxiety, music. We reproduce here one of the works exhibited in this show, the moveable mural *Man*, commissioned by the Dallas Museum of Art. Margarita Nelken wrote about this work, "Man as an objective and a summary. Man in his greatest yearning for infinity. Man divesting himself, in a superhuman effort, of everything that ties him to earthly servitude and, yet, setting his feet firmly on the ground. Man in his most decisive gesture of freedom and, nevertheless, never free of his condition as Man" (*Rufino Tamayo 1899-1991* [Mexico City: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Internacional Rufino Tamayo, 1993] p. 11). **NMM**

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