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150 YEARS OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN MEXICO

Just a year after the public announcement of its existence, photography arrived in Mexico with the Frenchman Louis Prérier, who brought with him the invention that caused amazement in the world of the 19th century. The French had earlier discovered the daguerrotype, a technique which demanded long expositions of light on a plate of copper covered with silver. This immobile and fixed technique was only suitable for taking photos of architectural views, monuments, still landscapes and portraits of people, whose peaceful attitude hid the metallic supports fixed behind the neck of the person being photographed.

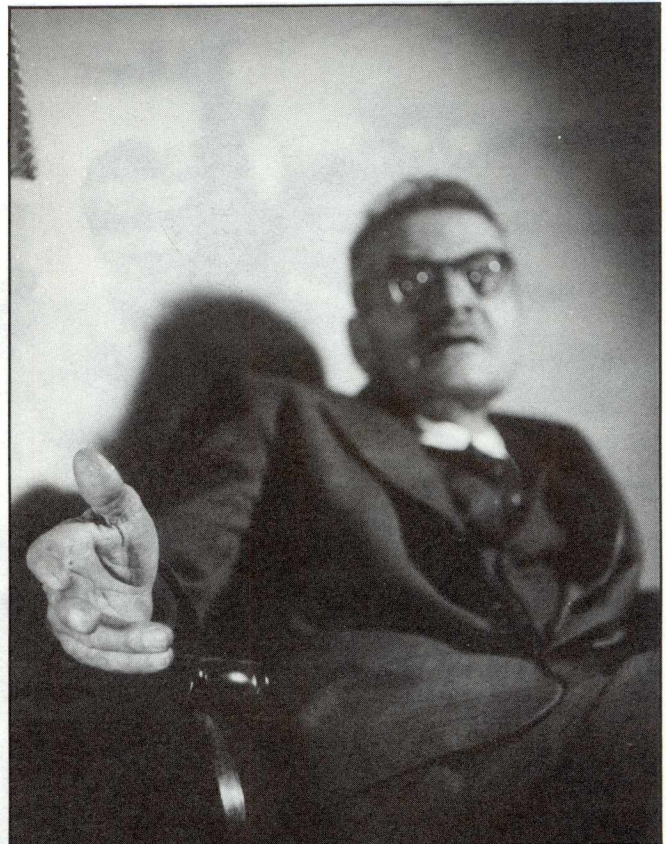
The earliest daguerrotypes preserved in Mexican archives are far removed from being an aristocratic hobby - because at that time the rising bourgeoisie used to take advantage of the immobility of the daguerrotypes to project an image of stability of themselves - and reflected the social reality of the country: *The Tomb of Lieutenant Colonel Henry Clay Junior, during the U.S. invasion* - taken in the cemetery of Saltillo, Coahuila, in 1947 by an unknown author; or *The Execution of Maximilian: the Waiting*, a work signed by François Aubert in 1867. Another daguerrotype by Aubert - *Maximilian's waistcoat with bullet holes* - demonstrates that photography in Mexico, besides being an artistic expression with its own motifs, was an important part of the political culture of the 19th century.



The artist, prisoner: David Alfaro Siqueiros, Mexican muralist. Photo by Héctor García (1960).



Life in High Society. Photo by Héctor García (1943).



The hand of the artist: José Clemente Orozco. Photo by Héctor García (1945)



Judas in Ixtapalapa, Mexico City. Photo by Héctor García (1979).



Mexico City, October 1968. Photo by Héctor García (1968).

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Then followed the development of other techniques - such as the portrait, which reproduced models with an atmosphere which gave them a character of sculptures, the visiting card, post card albums and stereoscopes, which were important fashions in the early days of photography. Later, other elements became evident, such as the use of photography by explorers and scientists who gave the new art an anthropological use: Carl Lumholtz used the camera in his studies of ethnical groups; Teoberto Maler in his register of expeditions to the pre-hispanic ruins of Yucatán and Veracruz, and E. Ybáñez y Sora, with erotic photos of the Chontal Indians.

The last third of the 19th century brought with it the instantaneous photo, with greater precision and sensibil-

ity than the earlier techniques. Thus, photography was able to register important social events of the turn of the century and of the Revolution - crucial moments which led to the development of a new kind of photographer, the reporter, who would document for history nearly 30 years of civil war in Mexico.

The post-revolutionary epoch was characterized by the diversity of modes adopted by photographers - some continued working commercially and attended the demand for portraits, others were faithful to the journalistic tradition begun by the Casasola family and continued later by the Mayo Brothers, while a third generation of photographers began a search for the aesthetic possibilities offered by the new art, braving the dominance of nationalist painting which seemed to obscure the initial attempts of artistic photography.

However, the evolution of photography in Mexico embraced artistic, journalistic and anthropological styles. A new generation of Mexican photographers included Tina Modotti, Manuel Álvarez Bravo, Ignacio López, Héctor García and others, while it

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would be impossible to name the many photographers working today, with great artistic quality and professionalism, for fear of omitting too many names.

On this occasion, *Voices* presents part of the photographic work of Héctor García, of whom the writer Elena Poniatowska was to say: "Héctor García devoured life before life devoured him". This selection is made in representation of the 150th anniversary of photography in Mexico, which was celebrated here with numerous exhibitions all over the country. □