

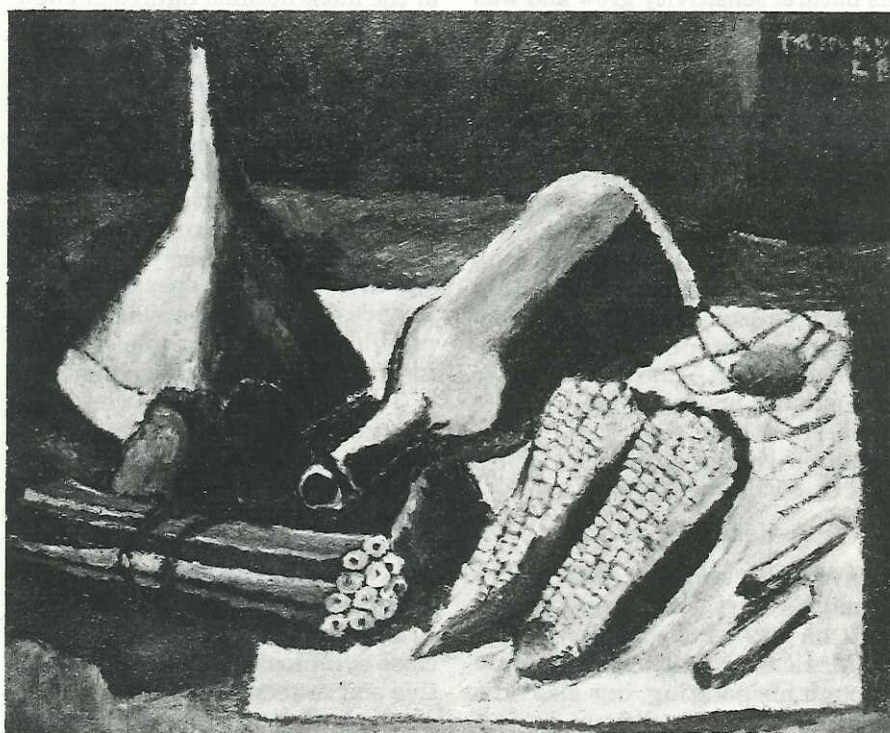
Teresa del Conde

TAMAYO

Artist and Demiurge

Tamayo's creations produce not only tactile sensations for the viewer, but also sensations of the taste and smell

As all truly creative artists, Tamayo's aesthetic actions are expressed by way of a mental and sentient codification captured by the manipulation of material substances. The first thing that one should note is the individual and irreplaceable character that each of his works of art possesses. This character does not prevent that very same work from alluding to another and even constituting one of the links that form a determined chain. Later I will elaborate on this theme, but for the moment it is worth remembering that Tamayo directly "touches" all that he makes. He shows his respect and love for the material of which the product will be made. The physical part of a painting, its constituent material elements, are of great interest to Tamayo. This gives rise to the fact that his works never appear to form a series, although links naturally exist between different works. The pictorial sensuality possessed by his works are also derived from this. His creations produce not only tactile sensations for the view-



er, but also sensations of taste and smell.

A Complex Creative Talent

It is very risky to speak of the complex network of contingencies upon which Tamayo's creative talent is based and of the way that his talent

is expressed. Only extremely general comments can be made. Among them is the highly varied milieu in which he has developed his "vocabulary." He first lived in Oaxaca and then in Mexico City where he was in close contact with pre-Hispanic art, no longer simply as a fascinated, sensitive spectator, but rather as the head of the Ethnography Department at the National Museum of Archaeology. His museum position induced him to

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reproduce, by means of line, a vast quantity of objects from different ancient cultures. At the same time, his natural sensitivity grew and was refined by his contact with the artistic movement initially led by José Vasconcelos.

It is commonplace to consider Tamayo remote from the beginnings of the Mexican School. If anyone contributed to the creation of this concept—although not directly—it was Tamayo, who declined an invitation to join Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros because the concept of “art with a message” went—and continues to go—against his principles, in spite of the fact that all artistic representation entails an implicit or explicit social message.

A Venerator of Art

It is worth clarifying that before Tamayo's first long stay in New York he was wholly involved with the Mexican artistic milieu not only through his painting, but also on a personal basis. He did not have a close rapport with Diego, but he did deal with him, as well as with Orozco, and to a lesser extent, with Siqueiros. Tamayo was a great friend of Carlos Chávez, as well as of the writers who made up the group of *Los Contemporáneos* (The Contemporaries), above all with Carlos Pellicer.

In addition, since the beginning of his career, Tamayo has been intensely involved with the visual poetics of the twentieth century. Apart from his interest in painting, he also appreciated music—in 1934 he married the pianist Olga Flores—

architecture, popular arts and literature. Naturally in matters of painting he has been linked with several of the most notable figures of twentieth century art. Tamayo could not ignore Picasso, Leger, Braque, Juan Gris, Miró and also Americans, such as Gorky and De Kooning. Just as Roberto Matta, he perceived the importance of the non-orthodox vein of surrealism, but in contrast he did not feel attracted to Action Painting, although it was one of his detours. I am not speaking of influences, I am referring to the predilections and appetites for forms and ways of modeling.

Tamayo is part of the very wide mosaic of post-Cubism, initiated through the *Ecole de Paris*. It is undeniable that his national and regional roots are expressed, by way of aesthetic values that pertain to Western painting, as much European as Latin American in origin. I think it can be safely said that the close symbiosis between the primitive and the contemporary—not exclusively, but very much a part of Tamayo—has always qualified his modes of expression. One fancies that instead of rejecting the primitive, archaic and even obsolete aspects of the forms that he has encountered in his career, Tamayo has integrated a multitude of visual elements through logical processes creating something like a magical synthesis in which archaic sources remain preserved by means of new and unexpected configurations, or by means of reprints that are organized to form chains in which each link is different from the other.

Many Artistic Techniques

Despite the large exhibit of Tamayo's work recently on display to celebrate seventy years of his creative labor, little has been said about his graphic work exhibit in the small galleries on the third floor of Mexico City's Palace of Fine Arts. This is the reason for the following brief consideration of this theme. Rufino Tamayo's prints form an artistic contribution with autonomous value which may be viewed separately from his contributions to easel and mural paintings. That is, his incursions into the field of engraving form a sequence, parallel to his career as painter. Engraving's multiple reproduction possibilities have made the wider transmission of the rich Tamayesque universe possible. But this is not the only important factor. Xilography, lithography, etching and above all mixiography, are techniques that tend to present certain types of solutions to the artist. And Tamayo responds to the limitations imposed by certain techniques without losing an iota from his casting plate. By extracting the maximum resources from each technique, he puts into play his ability

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RUFINO TAMAYO: 70 YEARS OF CREATION

On December 9, 1987, the exhibition of easel paintings by Oaxacan artist Rufino Tamayo opened at the museum that bears his name. The exhibition formed part of the events entitled "Rufino Tamayo: 70 Years of Creation" scheduled to celebrate the seven decades of this prolific painter's artistic achievements. Both the Rufino Tamayo Museum and the Palace of Fine Arts were filled with Tamayo's portable murals, paintings, sculptures, drawings and prints. The organizers of the Tamayo retrospective also scheduled a concert and dance performances, mounted exhibitions outside of Mexico City, and published several books on Tamayo's life and work.

This extensive project was organized by museographer and art critic Raquel Tibol, Director of the Tamayo Museum, Cristina Gálvez, and a team selected specifically for this purpose. Raquel Tibol tells us about the process involved in organizing this important event, as well as its importance in the cultural life of Mexico.

The budget to fund these activities came from the National Institute of Fine Arts (INBA) and from numerous other contributions. Among the contributors, Raquel Tibol mentioned the following: the three cities where Tamayo's works were on exhibit, Ciudad Juárez, Culiacan and Oaxaca; the investment house Inverlat which paid for transporting the artist's mural from Smith College and other pieces from the United States; anonymous private donors providing a total of some \$75,000; the Autonomous National University (UNAM), which published



an anthology of texts; the National Council of Resources for Youth which funded the publication of a critical anthology; the Rufino Tamayo Museum which published a chronological resume (compiled by Judith Alanís and Sofía Urrutia); the University of Puerto Rico which paid for the transport costs involved in sending its mural to Mexico; and Christian Dior and Air France which brought the two Tamayo canvases belonging to the George Pompidou Center in Paris. "Outside contributions to the INBA," says Raquel Tibol, "were on the order of four hundred million pesos. I don't know if the INBA's contribution has been calculated."

Raquel Tibol, who among her many activities writes for the art section of the Mexico City weekly magazine *Proceso*, explains that the criteria for exhibiting Tamayo's work was not solely a matter of "selection." Rather, attempts were made to get as many works as could be assembled since, "...you have to see as much as possible; excellent works, good ones, ordinary ones and frustrated ones."

She believes that the importance of this celebration has many facets. In the first place, young people have the opportunity to appreciate a previously unfamiliar artwork old enough to be the young viewer's "grandparent"—the oldest painting, *Capilla de Oaxaca* ("Oaxacan Chapel"), dates to 1920. On Tamayo's reaction to the celebration, Raquel Tibol says, "He has really taken it all with a great deal of satisfaction. We've proven this because he had many reservations of all kinds. Tamayo is very mistrustful of his exhibitions. He has a highly developed sense of self-respect, and in view of this we've come out as well as could be expected." Furthermore, Tamayo was highly satisfied with results throughout the country. For example, in his hometown "...they held a procession with lanterns, orchestras, children and fireworks, and a *mayordomía* (a religious ceremony held in conjunction with a change in government). They held an extraordinary celebration in Oaxaca." In this way, the celebration, "for this 88-year old man has meant a shot of happiness... and a rejuvenation," adds Tibol.

Tibol also felt a great sense of satisfaction. She says, "Whenever you get involved in this type of work, you learn a great deal: you have to work with a maximum of precision and with a minimum of errors." In addition, she has been able to "completely immerse" herself in Tamayo's work, although not for the first time. To her credit, she has carried out other important projects related to the painter's work. In 1984 she was the curator of the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition "Color in Prints." She also organized the Tamayo Hall in the Print Biennial in Puerto Rico. Along with Jorge Bibriesca, she organized a retrospective of prints, tapestries and paintings for the Guadalajara Regional Museum. She considers these experiences a good background: "When I began to work on a large scale, I had already formed a good relationship with Rufino [Tamayo] and with Olga, his wife, and I had his direct participation and, with his agreement, we worked in a very friendly way."

In addition, Tibol's other satisfactions included designing the exhibitions for the Tamayo Museum and the Palace of Fine Arts and commissioning a concert by composer Blas Galindo. She says of this, "It was my idea to request a performance with a Tamayesque aesthetic." At the same time, she considered Guillermina Bravo's work performed by the National Ballet and entitled *Constellation and Dance*, a fusion of Tamayo's conceptions and those of modern dance, as "a magnificent and a major aesthetic step." In turn, she mentioned Jaime Blanc's choreography in *Mujer con personaje* ("Woman with Character") and *Paisaje de figuras* ("Landscape of Figures") and Rosanna Filomarino's work *Personajes* ("Figures"), divided into Tamayo's themes: Chapter I, At dawn the dogs howl, Chapter II, Looking at infinity, Chapter III,



The shout, Chapter IV, Women, and Chapter V, The toast. "At all times," Tibol continues, "a character appears who spins the chapters: *La mujer en blanco* ("The Woman in White"), which unfortunately we didn't get for the exhibitions." An additional satisfaction was "that of publishing new texts by Carlos Monsiváis, Teresa del Conde, Jorge Alberto Manrique, Ramón Fabela (a Chicano art historian) and myself." Another important factor was that "in the middle of the (economic) crisis, all—restoration, publications and exhibitions—has been done with a small team in eight months." "The work was very difficult to carry out, but it was done with much dignity."

With respect to Tamayo's influence and his impact in the United States,

Raquel Tibol mentions, "...he has been a person who works at the same level as other artists of generations close to his own, but I don't find visible influences." This may perhaps be attributed to the fact that Tamayo, "possesses a very personal voice that is difficult to imitate follow." "On the other hand," she tells us, "Tamayo believes that the United States helped him to grow in all senses. It opened his eyes in 1926 when he visited museums where he could see artworks from the Renaissance to the European vanguard." Later, when he settled in Paris, *Doña Raquel* adds, "Tamayo acquired a greater color sense and his prestige became more international."

In the process of locating Tamayo's works, Raquel Tibol traveled to Europe, where she contacted different museums. "They asked for terms that were very extreme and costly for Mexico. This gave us the idea that Tamayo's work is considered as important in the museum in London as in Oslo." At the same time, she verified the existence of a considerable body of work in the United States. She said, "You could fill two museums with the Tamayos that exist in the United States. They have works from different periods, from the earliest to the latest."

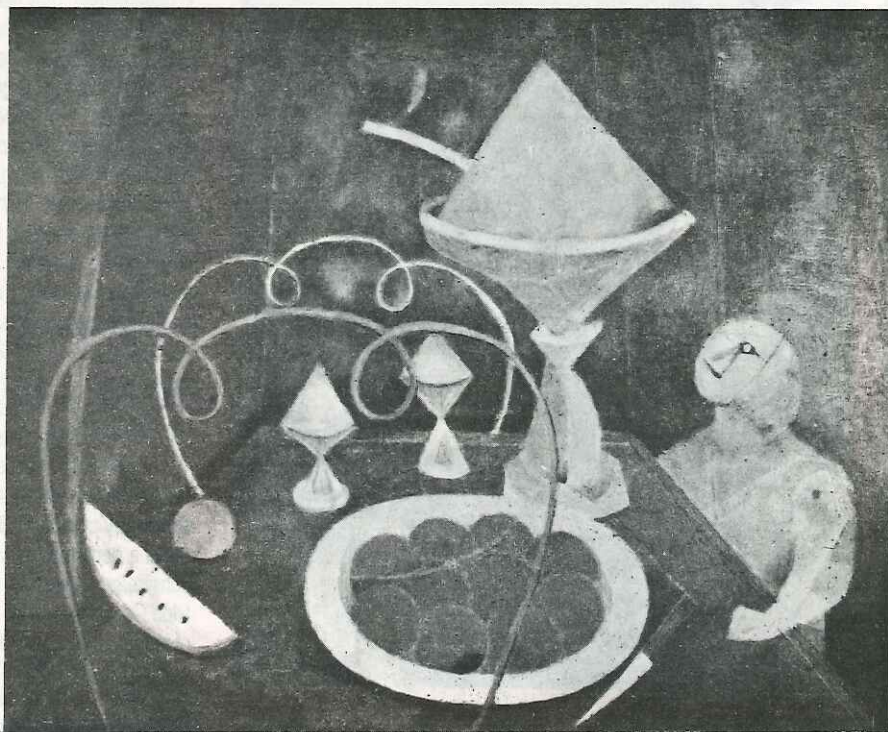
And what opinion does this woman, who has undertaken this cultural project of such renown, have about Tamayo? Her answer leaves no doubts, "Tamayo is a creator of a visual language very distant from narrative aspects and very focused on symbolic factors. His painting is severe, not obvious, hermetic, this last trait recovered by Tamayo from pre-Hispanic art." While the art produced under Christianity "is clear, narrative and with established symbols, Tamayo creates symbols more difficult to read; we stand before the inventor of a visual language."

"In addition," she continues with a tone of profound respect for Tamayo, and his work, "his allegories are important for eras not linked to immediate: anguish, fear which are common feelings of our era. Tamayo lived through the Mexican Revolution, two World Wars... (through) all of this century of so many tragedies and discoveries." And she ends with a remark that summarizes everything: "Emotive and allegorically, Tamayo has left his mark on the 20th century. His work is unmistakably an art of the 20th century."

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to synthesize, his appropriately pictorial aptitude and that extraordinary sensitivity of his to construct a plane with light, color and textures without violating his two-dimensionality and without letting the line, as overwhelming as the outline of rock painters and that of pre-Hispanic artisans in its strict contemporaneity, lose its smooth foundation and elegance.

Of course Tamayo, has been no stranger to the aspects of craftsmanship required by the graphic arts. From the preliminary sketch to the incision with the curved engraving tool to the different states of the inking process, he is aware of



and coaxes out the physical properties of the materials and instruments, while preventing the product from somehow escaping from his control. From here each one of his creations within the field of prints reflects not only his personal system of configuration, but also the steps through which the present model has passed through in his mind, quick to take form with his hand, until converting itself into the final matrix that will give rise to works numbered and organized into series.

According to Tamayo's own words, he "accepts challenges in the workshop," never trying to stereotype production. If he is asked to work on a burned plate, the figure that is born there "is extinguished." It is red in color and the tone is modulated by way of a *sfumato* reminiscent of smoke. The acceptance of what we understand as "burned" is poetically united with a formal structure that preserves the condition of the material that served as initial recep-

tacle. In a similar way, when working on a lead plate which retains oxide and slag, he produces the gray man, whose muted tonalities appear as if illuminated by a silvery moonlight that transmits the idea of something astral and cosmic, or if one prefers, the soul that exists within the lead, visible only for those who, such as Tamayo, are alchemists and demiurges.

Without a doubt, mixography has been a field of continuous experimentation and innovation for Tamayo since 1974. Mixography, as the term indicates, is mixed because it permits the combination of various processes and also because it allows the inclusion of planography, and engraving in negative, relief and texture on the same plate.

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In addition, it results in the achievement of pictorial effects. Among Tamayo's mixiographics. *Dos personajes atacados por perros* ("Two Figures Attacked by Dogs") may be considered a major work in the concert of contemporary world graphics. The dimensions of the mixiographic almost approach mural size and the structure, iconography and extremely subtle treatment of color, admirably sum up certain persistent signs full of significance in this artist's visual language.

The tactile aspect of Tamayo's graphic work as much as the morphological one, carry the viewer to new levels to explore a poetic universe that summarizes the career of this great twentieth century creator. At the same time the viewer of Tamayo's work is transported to distant formations in time and in space that through Tamayo's creative impulse and wisdom are integrated with the compact reality of that simple and at the same time noble material, paper. □

THE WORLD OF TAMAYO IN THE PALACE OF FINE ARTS

Raquel Tibol gave a guided tour of the galleries in Mexico City's Palace of Fine Arts. With enthusiastic eloquence she explained the importance of several of Rufino Tamayo's works exhibited for the celebration of the artist's 70 years of creative activity. The tour, given to a group of nearly 60 viewers, was a refreshing experience that allowed us to appreciate the beauty and delicacy of Tamayo's smallest sketches, the infinite coloring of his lithographs and mixographs, and the magnificence of his murals. Raquel Tibol conveyed in the span of two hours a sketch of Tamayo's dimensions—a panorama in which we could dwell and enjoy.

Posters and Photographs

We first enter the documentation gallery where posters of Tamayo's one-man shows in Europe, Asia,

Australia and the American continent were on display. "The European posters are particularly beautiful, as are the Japanese posters and some of the American ones too," says Raquel Tibol at the beginning of the tour. Later she points out a painting by the late painter Jaime Saldivar who imitated the technique used in *retablos* (small popular paintings on metal) to present a "valuable biographical synthesis of Tamayo."

Another important part of the exhibition are photographs. Tamayo has been sought as a model by well-known photographers, such as Cornel Capa. "Many photographs that have never before left the Tamayo house are on exhibit for the first time." So we see Tamayo at six years of age and later, photographs of him beside Siqueiros, Orozco and Luis Arenal. We see him next to his wife Olga. We see him in a delegation of the anti-Fascist Congress that he attended in 1936.

Tamayo received many medals and diplomas from different countries including the Doctor Honoris Causa when he received Mexico's

