

Rolando Arjona Amábilis

Pilgrim of Painting

Luis Mendoza*



Artist Rolando Arjona Amábilis is a great man among his equals. He was born to paint March 21, 1920, in the city of Mérida, Yucatán. When he was barely 11 years old, he already knew that his destiny was to be an artist.

His father, Don Manuel Arjona Correa, and his mother, Doña Neri Amábilis Cámara, were able to finance his education until junior high school. After that, he had to fend for himself, which did not prevent him from entering the Fine Arts School founded by General Salvador Alvarado and later finishing his studies at the Yucatán People's School of Art.

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Note: The names, dates and whereabouts of some paintings illustrating this article are unknown. We include them because of their unquestionable artistic value.



Arjona's art is not artifice.
It contains no incomprehensible metaphors.
It does not speak an impenetrable language.



The Queen, 60 x 80 cm, 2002 (oil on canvas).

This beloved master painter has proudly carried the name of Mexico and Yucatán to the entire world. With firm roots in his homeland, a lover of life and of learning, he has always documented, protected and safeguarded our traditional roots.

Those who admire him call him “the Pilgrim of Painting,” a well earned title backed up by the awards and honors he has been given throughout his career, both in Mexico and abroad. The most recent was the 2003 Grand Order of National Honor for Creative Merit, awarded at a ceremony in the Manuel M. Ponce Room of Mexico City’s Palace of Fine Arts. His name graces streets and public spaces around the country, as well as the wide boulevard where the Culiacán, Sinaloa bus terminal is situated.

Rolando Arjona is a great muralist and his 95 murals confirm his skill. He arrived already a painter in Mexico City in 1939, at a time when communism and socialism were spreading rapidly, and just a year before Siqueiros would head up a group of men to try to kill Leon Trotsky, living as a political exile in the Coyoacán neighborhood at the time, and when Carlos Mérida and Raúl Anguiano were fighting to export the “Carnivals of Mexico” lithographs. These and many other engravers would inspire him.

In that context, Arjona can be considered the genuine heir to the banner of social commitment that great artists like Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, José Clemente Orozco, Fermín Revueltas, Xavier Guerrero and so many others held high. In 1940, when he was only 20, he was already a committed artist who would forge himself like the greats who lived in such a transcendental time for Mexico and the world.



In his work, drawing, color, composition and intention are guided more by feelings than by the intellect.





The First Crossbreeding, 1000 x 400 cm, n.d. (acrylic on metal).



An initiate in monumental art, he would also be influenced by those who were establishing the bases for art's future: Alfredo Zalce, José Luis Cuevas, Fernando Leal, Rufino Tamayo and Francisco Toledo.

Like most muralists, he would also produce small and medium-sized works and contribute illustrations to several popular newspapers. One interesting road he traveled was begun as the artistic director for glass at Mosaicos Italianos, where he would produce more than 4,000 square meters of mosaics. For a time, he was the director of Mérida's State Art Center; and he was one of the founders of Mexico City's Modern Art Museum.

He is generally considered prolific, both in technique and style. He has done figurative, surrealist, expressionist and abstract canvases, as well as landscapes, engravings, mono-types, monumental sculptures, designs in silver and illustrations. He is a sculptor, photographer and heraldist (he designed the crest of the state of Sinaloa and several municipal crests in that state).

His art is not artifice. It contains no incomprehensible metaphors. It does not speak an impenetrable language. In his work, drawing, color, composition and intention are guided more by feelings than by the intellect. And it could almost be said that his personal technique has no defined aim: he paints according to the reaction a topic sparks in him and to the moment in which nature surprises him.

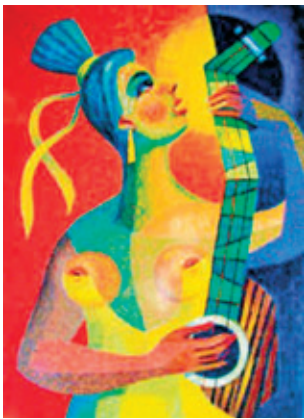


LIFE, WORK AND ART
RETROSPECTIVE, 1931-2009

The most recent homage to the Arjona, celebrating his 89 years, was held in the Cozumel Island Museum. The show sought to summarize—if that were even possible—his life and work with a retrospective collection that begins at the time he started out working as a painter.

Like many painters, whose commitment to their art has not involved merchandizing themselves, Arjona's work is scattered throughout the country, and he himself has little knowledge of where the works are. Nevertheless, based on graphic and visual materials, the show managed to bring together an incredible number of original works, posters, illustrations, graphics and photos of some of his murals. It also includes photographs he has taken at different times in his life, photographs that show a direction, documenting his life and work.

Outstanding among the paintings displayed are *The Body of Christ*, *The Geneoskullogical Tree*, *Homage*, *Off-On Mexico*, *The Hovel*, *Mammees and Mangoes* and an original sketch of the mural called *Codex of the Mex-*



The Hut, 80 x 80 cm, 2005 (acrylic on canvas).

