



Pintores
Centroamericanos

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An exhibition of
Contemporary Art from
Central America

Museum of Art
University of Kansas
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FOREWORD

This is more than the catalogue of an important art exhibit. It is a milestone in a unique experiment in hemispheric cooperation; it is a symbol of the intense international consciousness which is permeating the plains of Kansas; it is a visible expression of a new and warm spirit of understanding which is abroad in the Americas—North, Central, and South.

Beginning in 1959, The University of Kansas entered into a partnership of equals with the University of Costa Rica. The broad purpose of this union was to achieve cultural understanding in depth—both on the part of the two universities and the people and territories they served. To this end, Kansas and Costa Rica have been fomenting a significant exchange of students, faculty, community leaders, and just plain citizens. More recently, The University of Kansas has served as sponsor and training center for a group of thirty Peace Corps volunteers who will render services in the secondary schools of Costa Rica. As a consequence of these activities, for many Kansans Costa Rica has become a sister territory and has ceased to be simply a name which was often confused with “Puerto Rico.” Similarly, for Costa Ricans Kansas is no longer part of the blurred U.S. hinterland lying between New York and California; it has become a place which is the home of friends and neighbors, a place which some have visited and many hope to visit.

Inevitably, the rich rewards of the Costa Rican partnership whetted the interest of Kansas in establishing relationships with the rest of Central America. The framework of this broader relation has already been set by the beginnings of a program of cooperation with “CSUCA” (the Superior Council of Central American Universities), and additional projects for involvement are already well beyond the planning stage.

Thus, this exhibit of Central American Art at The University of Kansas is both revealing and relevant. It gives evidence of the University’s sustained interest in the Central American region, and it is a subtle but effective instrument for achieving that cultural understanding in both depth and breadth which is the goal of our international effort.

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INTRODUCCIÓN

Debido a que el arte centroamericano jamás ha recibido el estudio crítico que se ha hecho al arte mexicano y sudamericano, no se ha incluido en ninguna exhibición un conjunto de artistas que representasen a cada uno de los cinco países centroamericanos y Panamá, a pesar de que muchos de los pintores individualmente han participado en exhibiciones fuera de su propio país. Los artistas, sabedores de las tendencias en Europa y los Estados Unidos, han mandado sus obras a exhibiciones internacionales, aun cuando no les fuera dado a ellos mismos la oportunidad de viajar. Con la presentación de esta exhibición, "Pintores Centroamericanos," por primera vez, los artistas, críticos y los historiadores de arte pueden estudiar y evaluar la pintura y el dibujo centroamericanos en su conjunto.

Ciertas tendencias caracterizan a la mayoría de los artistas jóvenes de las cinco repúblicas centroamericanas—Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica—y Panamá, tendencias tales como el énfasis en el color rico y vibrante y la vuelta a temas que pueden ser conocidos, después de un largo período de experimentación con el expresionismo abstracto. Consciente o inconscientemente, muchos artistas están buscando una identidad en la herencia indígena o precolombina, la cual deben ellos integrar a la vida del siglo XX. Sin embargo, las características nacionales no son bien definidas, y las diferencias regionales en la pintura parecen ser basadas más, en la influencia de individuos que en estilos nacionales. Sólo en Guatemala y su vecina Honduras es bastante fuerte el arte indígena para proporcionar una base que pueda usar un joven pintor. Guatemala fue un centro de civilización maya y también, capital colonial de la América Central. Como se conocen cada día mejor los sitios de esplendor que tienen lugares como Tikal y Copán, es natural que el arte precolombino se torna, cada vez más, una fuente de inspiración para los artistas de hoy. Además, los indios guatemaltecos han guardado sus artes autóctonas, especialmente el tejido y la cerámica. Por doquiera que mire o busque el artista, encuentra las fuentes indígenas de color, formas y patrones.

Los artistas han existido en Guatemala y Honduras desde que el primer hombre apareció allí. Hay una tradición ininterrumpida desde el período precolombino, que se continúa a través del período colonial con contribución de las culturas indígenas, y hasta, por último, los artistas de hoy. Tal vez sea esta la razón por la que encontramos que el mayor número de artistas

INTRODUCTION

Because Central American art has never received the critical study granted Mexican and South American art, no single exhibition has included artists from each of the five Central American countries and Panama, in spite of the fact that many of the painters have participated in shows outside their own countries. The artists, well aware of trends in Europe and the United States, have sent their paintings to international exhibitions even when they have been unable to travel themselves. For the first time, with the presentation of this exhibition, "Pintores Centroamericanos," artists, critics, and art historians have an opportunity to study and evaluate the paintings and drawings of Central America.

Certain tendencies are characteristic of the majority of young artists in all five Central American countries—Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica—and Panama, tendencies such as the emphasis on a rich, vibrant color and the return to recognizable subject matter after a long period of experimentation with abstract expressionism. Consciously or unconsciously many artists are seeking an identity in an indigenous or pre-Columbian heritage, which they must then relate to life in the twentieth century. Nevertheless, national characteristics are not clearly defined, and regional differences in paintings seem to come from the influence of individual artists rather than from national styles. Only in Guatemala and neighboring Honduras is indigenous art strong enough to have provided a basis on which the young painter may build. Guatemala was the center of Maya culture and later was the Spanish colonial capital in Central America. It is natural that as magnificent sites such as Tikal and Copan become known, pre-Columbian art becomes a source of inspiration for the artists of today. Furthermore, Guatemalan Indians have retained their native handicrafts, especially their magnificent weaving and pottery. Wherever the artist goes or looks, he can find indigenous sources of colors, forms, and patterns.

Artists have been working in Guatemala and Honduras ever since man inhabited the area. There exists an unbroken tradition through the pre-Columbian Indians, Spanish colonial artists, the historical indigenous tribes, and finally, the artists we know today. Perhaps it is for this reason that the largest number of artists of high quality and the strongest schools of art in Central America are to be found in the Guatemalan and Honduran highlands. The artists know the styles of Europe and North and South America;

talentosos y las más fuertes escuelas artísticas en Centro América están ubicados en las tierras altas de Guatemala y Honduras. Los artistas conocen los estilos de Europa y de las Américas, Norte y Sur; sus obras poseen una notable calidad internacional. No obstante, las formas y los colores son a menudo recordativos de las obras indígenas. Esta reminiscencia es más obvia, tal vez, en las obras de Quiroa, Pereyra y Cabrera, pero aparece aún en las pinturas tan altamente sofisticadas y sensitivas como las de Elmar René Rojas.

La pintura de Honduras muestra la dramática influencia de un solo hombre, a saber, el Sr. Arturo López Rodezno, quien ha sido responsable, como artista y administrador, por la continuación y amplificación de la tradición artística de su país. Desafortunadamente, su interés en que estudien en el extranjero ha sido causa de que, al regresar al país, muchos artistas jóvenes han encontrado difícil o imposible el reajuste a las condiciones artísticas de Honduras.

La situación artística de Panamá se parece a la de Guatemala y Honduras. Otra vez encontramos una región que ha recibido una fuerte tradición indígena, además de una influencia del arte colonial de alguna importancia. En adición a esto, el área ha tenido el privilegio de ser un importante camino del comercio mundial. Otra vez encontramos artistas altamente sofisticados, como Sinclair, conscientemente integrando a formas de la pintura y escultura precolombinas y el color y los patrones rememorativos de los indios San Blas, con el expresionismo y la abstracción europeos y americanos. A la vez se encuentran artistas de conciencia social altamente desarrollada, como Alberto Dutary, un Goya contemporáneo, cuya magnífica serie de "santos" gritan contra las injusticias sociales del país.

A Costa Rica, Nicaragua y El Salvador les falta la continuidad de la producción artística de Guatemala, Honduras y Panamá. Los artistas todavía están haciendo esfuerzos por encontrarse a sí mismos, moviéndose del arte europeo de la década transcurrida entre las Guerras, al expresionismo abstracto de Nueva York, San Francisco y París; de vez en cuando encuentran un vehículo personal satisfactorio, pero no crean todavía nada que sea netamente lo suyo. La renovación de la pintura en Costa Rica la está efectuando un nuevo grupo de pintores, a saber, el Grupo Ocho. El Grupo Ocho es una organización no muy homogénea de ocho artistas jóvenes, formada hace un año para estimular el interés en las artes y para elevar la posición del artista. Ningún nuevo estilo coherente ha surgido de su pintura; sus obras varían

their painting has a strong international flavor. Yet, the forms and colors are often reminiscent of indigenous work. This is perhaps most obvious in the work of Quiroa, Pereyra, and Cabrera, but it appears even in such highly sophisticated and sensitive painting as that by Elmar Rene Rojas.

Painting in Honduras shows the dramatic influence of one man, Sr. Arturo López Rodezno, who as an artist and as an administrator has been responsible for the continuation and broadening of the artistic tradition of his country. Unfortunately, his emphasis on foreign study has caused many young artists to leave their country when they find it difficult or impossible to readjust to the artistic conditions of Honduras.

The artistic situation in Panama is similar to that in Guatemala and Honduras. Here again is an area which has a strong indigenous tradition as well as a colonial art of some importance. It has further benefited by being a great cross roads of world trade. Again we find highly sophisticated artists like Sinclair, consciously combining forms from pre-Columbian painting and sculpture and the color and patterns reminiscent of the San Blas Indians with European and American expressionism and abstraction. At the same time one finds artists with highly developed social consciousness, such as Alberto Dutary, a modern Goya, whose magnificent series of "saints" cry out against the social injustice in his country.

Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and El Salvador lack the continuity of artistic production found in Guatemala, Honduras, and Panama. The artists are still struggling to find themselves, turning from European art of the decade between the wars, to the abstract expressionism of New York, San Francisco, and Paris, occasionally finding a suitable personal vehicle but not as yet creating something entirely their own. The revival of painting in Costa Rica is being effected by a new painters' group, *Grupo Ocho*. *Grupo Ocho* is a loose organization of eight young artists, formed just a year ago with the intention of stimulating interest in the arts and enhancing the position of the artist. No coherent new style has emerged from their painting; their work varies from the international abstract expressionism of Rafael García to the intellectualized geometry of Harold Fonseca, the neo-cubism of César Valverde and the sophisticated indigenous internationalism of Lola Fernández.

In Managua, Nicaragua, a group of extremely talented youngsters under the inspired leadership of Rodrigo Peñalba are painting with the richness and sophistication of mature artists. Muted tones interacting subtly and a pervasive, melancholy foreboding characterize the art of Nicaragua, in re-

desde el expresionismo abstracto internacional de Rafael García hasta la geometría intelectualizada de Harold Fonseca, desde el neo-cubismo de César Valverde hasta el internacionalismo indígena sofisticado de Lola Fernández.

En Managua, Nicaragua, un grupo de jóvenes sumamente talentosos bajo el liderazgo inspirado de Rodrigo Peñalba pintan con la riqueza y la sofisticación de artistas ya formados. Mudos matices de colores interactuando sutilmente y un portento melancólico y perversivo caracterizan el arte de Nicaragua, que presenta franco contraste al optimismo y a los colores brillantes del resto de los países centroamericanos.

El Sr. Enrique Aberle, director del Departamento de Bellas Artes, está tratando determinadamente de renovar todas las artes—pintura, escultura, arquitectura, drama, música y ballet—en el pequeño país de El Salvador. No obstante, la pintura todavía sufre de la dominación de los estilos europeos de hace una generación.

En la University of Kansas, el interés en la América Central lo ha estimulado el entusiasmo del Canciller W. Clarke Wescoe, del Decano George Waggoner y del Dr. John Augelli, Director del Programa del Área Latinoamericano. Los funcionarios del Museo de Arte expresan su gratitud a ellos y a muchas otras personas que nos han ayudado en la preparación de esta exhibición: de Costa Rica, al Sr. Carlos Tunnermann-Bernheim, a Harold Fonseca y al Grupo Ocho, al Profesor Jorge y Doña María de Lines; de Guatemala, al Dr. y Mrs. Warren Brown, a Mr. Daniel Primo, a la Sra. Josefina Alonso de Rodríguez, a la Stra. Aida Campo; de Honduras, a Arturo López Rodezno, a Mario Castillo, a Mr. y Mrs. Robert Ades y a Mr. Robert Jordan; de Nicaragua, al Sr. Rodrigo Peñalba; de El Salvador, al Sr. Enrique Aberle y a Mr. John Gallagher; de Panamá, al Sr. Alberto Dutory y a Mr. Charles Meyer; de los Estados Unidos, a la Unión Panamericana y en especial, al Sr. José Gómez Sicre; y también, a nuestra querida amiga y colega, ex-profesora de la Universidad de la Habana y actualmente de la Universidad de Kansas, la Dra. Marta de Castro.

La traducción al español la hicieron Mr. Barry L. Isaac, la Sra. Dolores Marti de Cid y los Profesores Jorge y Doña María de Lines.

markable contrast to the optimism and the brilliancy of color of the rest of the Central American countries.

Sr. Enrique Aberle, director of the Department of Fine Arts, is determinedly trying to revive all the arts—painting, sculpture, architecture, drama, music, and ballet—in the tiny country of El Salvador. Painting, nevertheless, still suffers from the domination of European styles of a generation ago.

Interest in Central America at the University of Kansas has been stimulated by the enthusiasm of Chancellor W. Clarke Wescoe, Dean George Waggoner, and Dr. John Augelli, Director of the Latin American Area Program. The staff of the Museum of Art wishes to thank them and the many others who have assisted in the creation of this exhibition, most notably, in Costa Rica, Sr. Carlos Tunnermann-Bernheim, Harold Fonseca and *Grupo Ocho*. Professor and Mrs. Jorge Lines; in Guatemala, Dr. and Mrs. Warren Brown, Mr. Daniel Primo, Sra. Josefina Alonso de Rodríguez, Stra. Aida Campo; in Honduras, Arturo López Rodezno, Mario Castillo, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Ades, and Mr. Robert Jordan; in Nicaragua, Sr. Rodrigo Peñalba; in El Salvador, Sr. Enrique Aberle and Mr. John Gallagher; in Panama, Sr. Alberto Dutary and Mr. Charles Meyer; in the United States, the Pan American Union, especially Sr. José Gómez Sicre; and finally, our dear friend and colleague, Dra. Marta de Castro, formerly of the University of Havana, now teaching at the University of Kansas.

The Spanish translations are by Mr. Barry L. Isaac, Mrs. Dolores Marti de Cid, and Prof. and Mrs. Jorge Lines.

MARILYN STOKSTAD