

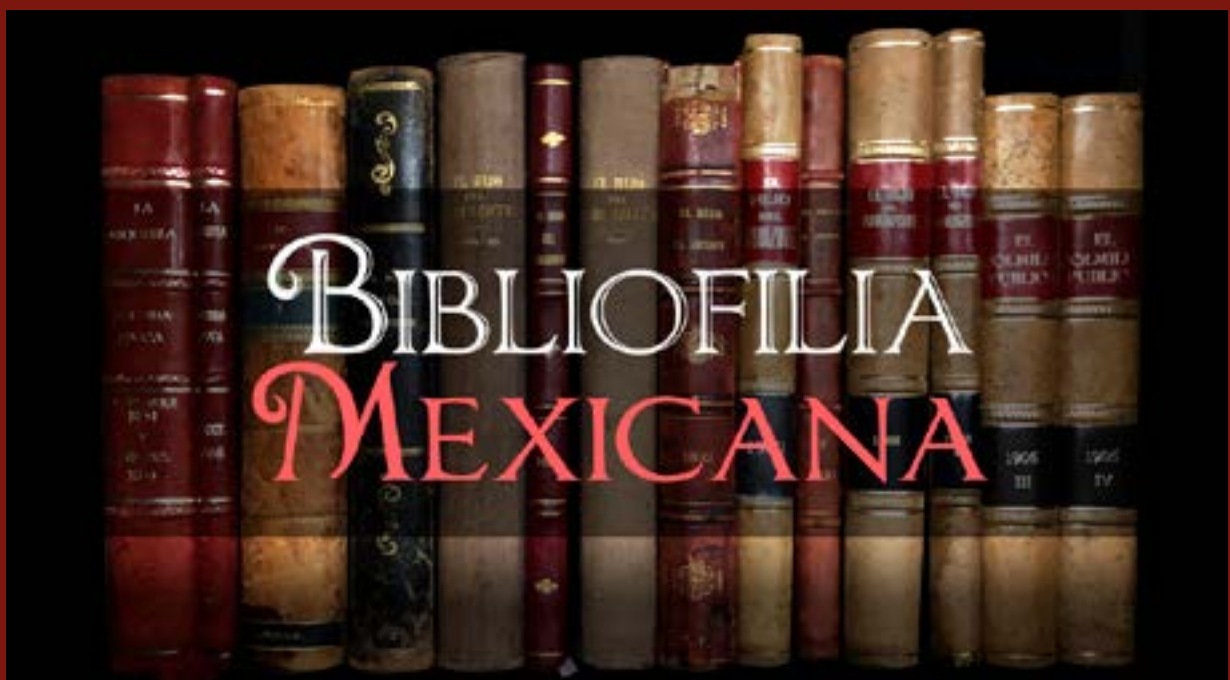
## The book, art and culture

Mexicans have always had a troubled relationship with the act of reading. However, manuscripts and printed texts of great value have been produced in every historic period of our nation's history. The great Mesoamerican civilizations captured their particular world vision in their pictographic codices. During viceroyalty, the first printing press in America was established in Mexico City, and for the next three centuries it produced great books. By the end of the 18th Century, Jesuits expelled from New Spain to Europe, edited key texts in the founding of the modern Mexican nation.

By the 19th century, during the early years of independent Mexico, pamphlets and books that shaped political debates were printed. Also, travelling artists passed through Mexico and etched their visions of our nation. By the middle of the century several high quality Romantic and Costumbrist pieces were produced in the country. As reading became an increased habit, the publishing industry established itself and in the time of Porfirio Diaz's regime several refined books and magazines were printed. After the Mexican Revolution, during the so-called *Mexican Renaissance*, the publishing industry lived through an unprecedented surge. Writers and artists like Alfonso Reyes, Octavio Paz, Rufino Tamayo, Carlos Mérida and Leopoldo Méndez published real bibliographic gems that created an important book culture. During the 1970s and 1980s, a small but very active countercultural movement started creating book-objects.

Despite all that richness, we are still missing an integral vision of the history of Mexican artists and the book; however in Carlos Monsiváis's library we find volumes that can attest to it. In its collection and with help from the writer's friends –Arturo Saucedo and Yanni Pecanins in particular– we have tried to present a vision of the richness of Mexican bibliophilia. This is a first step towards a cultural universe that deserves to be studied again and again.

Rafael Barajas "El Fisgón"



## Codices

The great Mesoamerican civilizations produced many pictographic manuscripts where they captured their world vision, their beliefs and their knowledge. Those codices concentrate an important part of Pre-Columbian culture and are a crucial source in the understanding of Pre-Cortés civilizations.

Unfortunately, the conquistadors considered them pagan and heretic material and systematically destroyed every one they found during the early decades of the viceroyalty. They even organized several *autos da fe* where they burned hundreds of these manuscripts. As of today, less than twenty codices are registered (Mixtec, Maya and Aztec) and most of them are housed in European libraries.



## Books about Mexico's Conquest

Tenochtitlan's capture by Hernán Cortés troops was a decisive fact in Western history. That is why very important books about the Conquest of Mexico were published in the "Old Continent". *Las cartas de relación*, by Hernán Cortés (1522), *La historia de la Conquista de México*, by López de Gomara (1553), *La historia verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España*, by Bernal Díaz del Castillo (1632) and *La historia de la Conquista de México*, by D. Antonio de Solís (1684) stand out among them.



## New Spain's bibliography

### America's first printing press

"Mexico City counts as one of its main glories to have had the first in the New World who saw in its enclosure the marvelous Art of Printing.

[...]

We know, through an authentic document, that Juan Cromberger, famous printer from Seville, sent to Mexico a printing press with all the necessary tools by insistence of the Viceroy D. Antonio de Mendoza and bishop D. Fr. Juan de Zumárraga.

[...]

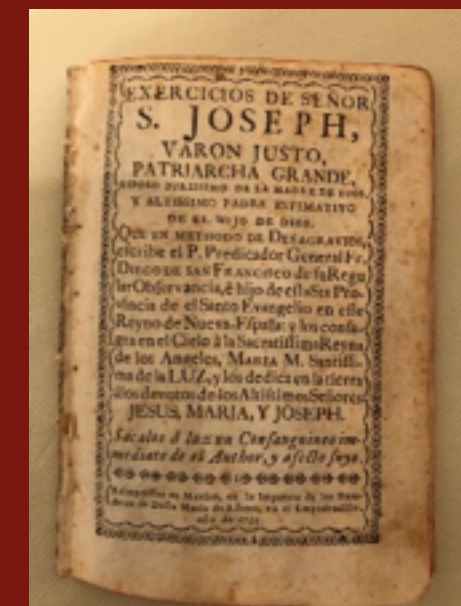
[The first printer in the New World was Juan Pablos], one of Juan Cromberger's officers, who sent to México all the necessary materials to establish the office, and gave him a steady income or part of the revenues [in 1556. Juan Pablos] was Italian, born in Brescia, in Lombardy, as he states in several of his editions [...] he was married to Gerónima Gutiérrez o Núñez [...] and his successor seems to have been Pedro Ocharte, since he used the same block letters."

Joaquín García Icazbalceta

### New Spain's printers

Most of the titles published during the first century of the Viceroyalty were useful for the purposes pursued by the Spanish Crown and the cultural conquest of the New World, and were centered around evangelism (as a strategy of ideological control) and administrative matters.

Little by little, during the 17th and 18th Centuries, local ideas filtered through into the editorial culture, so much so that one can assert that New Spain's bibliography ended up being an important element of the establishment of Mexican identity.





## Sor Juana

“Sor Juana is an organic intellectual in a Gramscian sense, and there is a moment in which, as a true intellectual, she faces of without wanting to (without being able to stop it) against power”.

Octavio Paz

“¿In chasing after me, world, what is your interest?  
¿how do I offend, when I only try  
to focus beauty in my understanding  
and not my understanding in beauty?”  
Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz

“I do not study to write, and less to teach (it would be excessive pride), but only to see if with studying I ignore less. That is how I respond and how I feel. The writer has never been its own ruling, but external force...”

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz



## Clavijero and the birth of a nation

In 1767, King Carlos III ordered the expulsion of members of the Jesuit Order from all of the territories governed by the Spanish crown. The Jesuits from New Spain – which included Francisco Javier Alegre, Francisco Xavier Clavijero, Rafael Landívar and Juan Luis Maneiro– were the intellectual elite of these lands and were exiled in Europe, where they felt a deep nostalgia for their land.

In those times, several European scientists, particularly Buffon and De Pauw, published commentaries that denigrated the Mesoamericans. This led Francisco Xavier Clavijero, born in Veracruz, to publish his *Historia Antigua de México* in 1780, where he defended his countrymen.

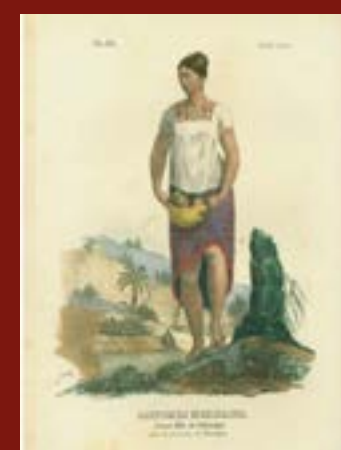
This book is considered by many scholars as one of the founding documents of the Mexican nation.

## Humboldt

Throughout the Viceroyalty, foreigners' access to New Spain was severely limited. As an extraordinary concession, the famous German baron Alexander von Humboldt was allowed to explore these Spanish colonies for two years (from March 1803 to August 1804), and interview local wise men. After the trip, the scientist published his famous *Ensayo político sobre el Reino de la Nueva España*, a crucial source in Mexican bibliography of that time. The first edition, published in Paris in 1812, is adorned with extraordinary engravings that extol New Spain's greatness.

## Travel books

When Mexico became an independent nation, it opened its doors to foreign travellers and many gifted writers and artists visited these exotic lands. Some left written testimony of their visions of the country –landscapes, monuments, dress, traditions and practices– in books and albums of images that today have become unavoidable material for studying those decades. Some of the most important works are: *Seis meses de residencia y viajes en México* (1824) by William Bullock, *México en 1827* (1828) by Henry George Ward, *Trajes civiles, militares y religiosos de México* (1828) by Claudio Linati, *Antigüedades de México* (1832-1848) by Lord Kengsborough, *Viaje escénico y arqueológico a la parte más interesante de México* (1836) by Carl Nebel, *Views of Mexico* (1840) by Thomas Egerton and *Monumentos de México tomados al natural* (1840) by Pedro Gualdi.



## El pensador mexicano

Writer and journalist José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi signed his articles in the press under the pseudonym *El pensador mexicano* (The Mexican thinker). He published a large number of pamphlets and calendars (such as the *Calendario patriótico* and the *Pronóstico político* of 1823, illustrated with engravings by Luis Montes de Oca), and he even published some books, something that wasn't that easy back then. Sold using a subscription model, in other words, selling copies ahead of printing so that he could pay for it, Lizardi published *El periquillo sarniento* (the first Mexican novel) (1816), *Las fábulas del pensador mexicano* (1817), *La Quijotita y su prima* (1818), and *Vida y hechos del famoso caballero don Catrín de la Fachenda* (1820). These titles deserve to be considered to be the first Mexican books.

## 19th Century Mexican bibliographic jewels

### Pamphlets, libels, broadsheets before books

During New Spain's Viceroyalty conditions for the growth of the press and the publishing industry were absent. The Inquisition applied censorship strictly, it did not encourage reading, the book market was restricted and there were very few and very controlled printing presses. One of the desires of citizens who fought for freedom was the free circulation of ideas and they duly promoted freedom of the press as an ideal.

The right to circulate printed materials was opened for the first time in 1812, and pamphlets, libels and broadsheets started circulating as the first Mexican writers were given space. However this period did not last for long and soon censorship was back. It became, however, increasingly difficult to contain criticisms and mockery, and little by little the free and independent press appeared through pamphlets, most of them poorly written. This free space gained strength thanks to the prestige of several writers like Carlos María Bustamante and José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi.

Joaquín García Icazbalceta



### Costumbrist bibliography

The Costumbrist movement, part of Romanticism sought originality and an to cherish an identity of its own; it had important practitioners in Mexico, such as Guillermo Prieto, Vicente Riva Palacio and Juan A. Mateos, as well as illustrators such as Primitivo Miranda, José María Villasana and José Guadalupe Posada. This movement contributed significantly to the construction of national identity. *Los mexicanos pintados por sí mismos* (1855) –which includes writing by Ignacio Ramírez and Pantaleón Tovar, among others, and lithographs by Hesiquio Hiriarte and Andrés Campillo– and the album *México y sus alrededores* (1855) by Casimiro Castro y Campillo are biographical jewels of the Mexican Costumbrist movement.

## Romantic bibliography

A large part of the cultural and political debate during the first decades of independent Mexico took place in the printed press. However, publishing fervor notwithstanding, book production grew very slowly. By the middle of the 19th Century, several printing presses managed to establish themselves, such as Ignacio Cumplido's, Vicente García Torres' and Navarro y Decaen, which published books for the growing Mexican reading public. With a clear political motivation, Cumplido published *El gallo pitagórico*, by Juan Bautista Morales, adorned with lithographs by Plácido Blanco and Joaquín Heredia (1845), and also edited the volume titled *Presente amistoso dedicado a señoritas mexicanas* (1847), by various authors, illustrated with European engravings. Navarro circulated *Antonino y Anita o los nuevos misterios de México*, by Emmanuel Rivière, with lithographs by Rivière and Casimiro Castro.

By the middle of the 19th Century, French romanticism clearly influenced learned sectors in our country, and the books published during this period show Victor Hugo and Lamartine's important influence literary speaking, and Grandville, Daumier and Bertall in the graphic area.



### Positivism

During the second third of the 19th Century, a change in values emerged among Mexican intellectuals and little by little the ardent push of Romanticism left its place to the lack of emotion of positivist reasoning. Gradually, during those years, journalism left behind incendiary rhetoric and strove for objectivity. At the same time, due to an increased interest in science, many pamphlets and scientific magazines were published and they were illustrated with precision and realism.

José María Velasco, an artist with scientific inclination, became Mexican positivism's great illustrator. His impeccable and exact lithographs, almost photographic, illustrated the pages of *La Naturaleza* magazine, the publication of the Mexican Society of Natural History, as well as the pages of the *Anales del Museo de Antropología*.



## Modernism

The Modernist movement of the late 19th and early 20th Century characterized itself by respecting nature's forms and using free and asymmetric shapes aesthetically. In literary terms, it concerned itself with language's sonority and the refinement of expressive tropes.

In Mexico, during Porfirio Díaz's regime, Modernism had important practitioners among the literary and graphic artists who worked in *Azul* and *Revista Moderna* magazines. Justo Sierra's book, *Juárez, su obra y su tiempo*, with portraits of famous Mexican liberal thinkers created by Catalanian artist Ramón Casas is an example of a modernist piece.

After the Revolution, artists like Roberto Montenegro, Ernesto García Cabral and Fernando Bolaños Cacho were illustrating books and magazines with high quality modernist images.



## Dr. Atl's Mexican Volcanos

In Carlos Monsivaís' collection there is a copy of the book, Atl. *Les volcans du Mexique (IV katuns, XX estampes au pochoir)*. It seems that it is the first book that the painter did on the volcanos in Mexico, and it is also the best printed and the best composed aesthetically speaking.

It is a horizontal booklet, 26 pages, adorned with twenty stencils or *pochoirs* (an artisanal printing method that consists of painting directly on a surface blocking with charcoal or with a metal sheet the part not intended to be colored) printed by hand by the artist in Paris, around 1911. It is a jewel that complements the volcanological bibliography of Atl, and it sheds new light onto his early artwork.

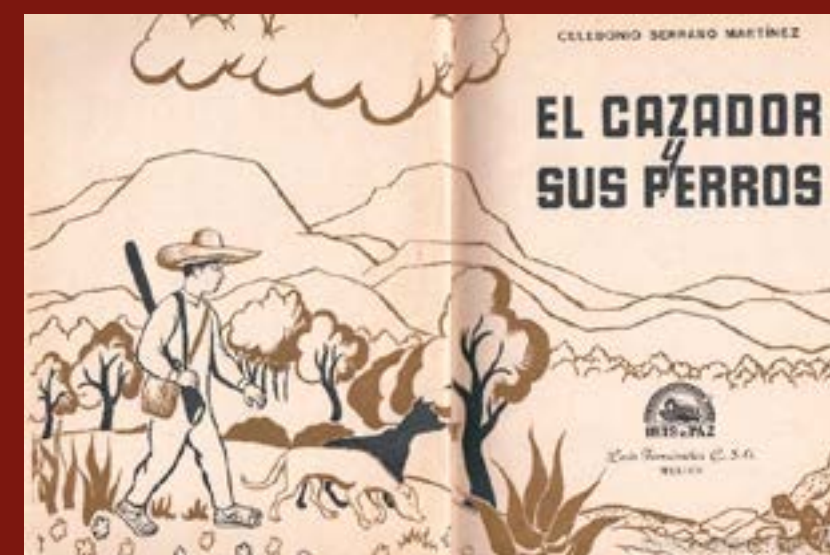
## 20th Century Bibliographic jewels

### The Mexican Renaissance

“Early in the twenties, the post-revolutionary State committed itself to help artistic productions in every genre; it had the clear mandate of educating and putting order in several sectors of Mexican society. We should remember that José Vasconcelos' effort as Education Minister between 1921 and 1924, were focused on the creation of a publishing industry that would contribute to the patient eradication of illiteracy, present in almost 90 percent of Mexico's population at the turn of the century, and enable the emergence of a new Mexican identity, opened up to the world.

In a parallel track to Muralism, the publishing projects had a big push from the post-revolutionary regime. Clear examples of this were the national graphic workshops, created around 1919. These workshops were created as a cooperative with state participation; its members were mostly workers with a strong revolutionary sentiment, a strong conviction of class struggle and its achievements. In this fusion, the State responded to the necessity of having a printing press of its own to publish and announce its achievements. Artists close to the Revolution chose a visual language that wanted to transform society, to project it towards an emancipated future and to encourage a new set of morals elevating collective and nationalist values.”

Dafne Cruz Porchini



### Children's books

A fundamental component of any publishing industry is children's books. In Mexico, however, this sector remained underserved –and even treated with scorn– by a several generations of writers and by the publishing industry in general. During the 19th Century, some important magazines for children were published where illustrators such as José María Villasana and writers like Amado Nervo participated. Editor Vanegas Arroyo published some numbers for children, illustrated by the genius of José Guadalupe Posada, however, apart from these examples, books for children and young readers was very poor.



Undoubtedly, there were efforts made, like the book *Campanitas de plata*, written by Mariano Silva y Aceves, and illustrated by Francisco Díaz de León, or *Aleluyas de rompetacones* by Antoniorrobles (Antonio Joaquín Robles Soler). During the 1940s, the Education ministry (SEP) circulated the book collection Biblioteca del Chapulín, were famous artists such as Fernández Ledesma, Angelina Beloff and José Chavez Morado collaborated. However, that was about it. In fact, several Mexican artists, among them Carlos Mérida and Jean Charlot, illustrated several children's books but for U.S. publishers.

Mexican children literature had its first moment of splendor by the 1980 and 1990s, when the Fondo de Cultura Económica publishing house and others opened divisions dedicated to children's literature.



### Stridentism

The Mexican Revolution shook the whole country and ignited an intense debate of ideas. Its impact in Mexican intellectuals was huge and it generated a great cultural effervescence. In 1921, along with the Muralist movement, writer Manuel Maples Arce, inspired by other avant-garde movements like Dadaism, Futurism and Ultraism, espoused Stridentism, a radical artistic movement that announced the end of old Western culture and the birth of a new aesthetic centered on progress, love of machines, the great cities and speed. Little by little, this movement attracted young writers like Germán List Arzubide, Arqueles Vela and Salvador Gallardon, and artists such as Ramón Alva de la Canal, Jean Charlot, Leopoldo Méndez, Germán Cueto, Fermín Revueltas and Fernando Leal.

The Stidentists propelled their aesthetic revolution through manifestos, public talks, exhibitions, magazines and books. The editorial production by this movement was exemplar in its intention and in its literary and aesthetic proposals. Magazines *Irradiador* and *Horizonte* are classics of Mexican periodicals. Among the biographical jewels of Stridentist movement are *Urbe* (1924) by Maples Arce, illustrated by Charlot; *Viajero en el vértice I* (1926) by List Arzubide, illustrated by Alva de la Canal, and *El café de nadie* (1926), by Arqueles Vela.

### Diego as illustrator

“If Diego Rivera, with the utmost severity, would have scrutinized his own production in the illustration genre, he would have had to accept that his drawings in this area followed a similar route to his work in murals, with no less intense vibrations while striving to represent the fundamental schools of thought, the hopes and utopias of his own historical and cultural time”.

Raquel Tibol



### Fernández Ledesma, Díaz de León, and Moreno Capdevila

In 20th Century Mexican bibliography three artists stand out who were great illustrators: Gabriel Fernández Ledesma, Francisco Díaz de León and Francisco Moreno Capdevila. These three artists had a close relationship with the publishing industry and an important part of their creative work centered on book illustration. *Álbum de animales mexicanos* (1944) and *Viaje alrededor de mi cuarto* (1958) by Fernández Ledesma; *Día de fiesta* (1938) and *El gavilán* (1939) by Díaz de León; *Inventario de cenizas* (1964) by Moreno Capdevila; *Viajes al siglo XIX* (1933) by Díaz de León and Fernández Ledesma and *El coyote* (1951) by Fernández Ledesma and Moreno Capdevila are some of the bibliographic jewels of these engravers. It is important to note that Fernández Ledezma and Díaz de León also dabbled in editorial design and typography.

### Leopoldo Méndez books and the *Taller de Gráfica Popular*

Leopoldo Méndez was one of the great Mexican engravers of the 20th Century, and a first rate cultural activist. He participated in the Stridentist movement, worked in the Misiones Culturales program, co-founded the Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios (LEAR) and founded the *Taller de Gráfica Popular* (TGP) workshop.

Most of Méndez's work is linked to political propaganda, however this artist illustrated a number of magazines and books with original engravings, such as *La corolla invertida* (1930) by María del Mar and *Incidentes melódicos del mundo irracional* (1944), by Juan de la Cabada.

The TGP, created as a collective of political agitation and graphic creation, developed a really important editorial project. Among others, it published a considerable number of pamphlets and books of original art work. *La España de Franco* (1938), with lithographs by Méndez, Raúl Anguiano, Luis Arenal y Xavier Guerrero; *En el nombre de Cristo... han asesinado a más de 200 maestros* (1939), with seven lithographs by Méndez; *El sombrero* (1946) by Bernardo Ortiz Montellano with lithographs by Alfredo Zalce, and *450 años de lucha. Homenaje al pueblo mexicano* (1960), a book in which twenty-five engravers participated, among them Méndez, Zalce and Pablo O'Higgins.



## Inscribed books

Frequently, books have a life of their own; a specific volume can overturn a person's ideas or even unleash their creative potential. Besides, there are copies that hide unique treasures. Some inscriptions might tell important stories, and when a copy has an original image by a relevant artist, like Rufino Tamayo, Dr. Atl, Frida Kahlo or Francisco Toledo, it acquires a different value in the art market.



## Tamayo's books

"...Tamayo could have remained being an illustrators with solutions close to an expressionist realism. He always showed a warm quality; although he preferred, when the texts warranted them, he exchanged covert messages, almost deceptive parables. A subtle reader, if the tale or the poem impressed him, he responded untangling in images the deepest literary substances. In life, there are mysterious zones, and he always wanted to celebrate them in his own terms, without forgetting that sensuality, joy, and humor are part of everyday behavior of human beings."

Raquel Tibol

## Octavio Paz's Books

Octavio Paz, poet and essayist, was a bibliophile. He considered his editions and worked with artists and designers with whom he published several bibliographic jewels. In 1951, Tezontle publishing house published his short story collection *¿Águila o sol?*, illustrated by Tamayo. In 1964, Dutch painter Corneille (Guillaume Cornelis Beverloo), a member of the Cobra group, made three lithographs to illustrate a plaquette by the Mexican poet. The collaboration between Paz and painter and designer Vicente Rojo was long and fruitful; this pairing gave us projects such as *Discos visuales* (1968) and the suitcase-book *Octavio Paz/Marcel Duchamp* (1968).

In 1974, painter Adja Yunkers illustrated several of Paz's texts, among them: *Reversible* (1969), *Poems for Marie Jose* (1969), and *Blanco* (1974). Abstract expressionist Robert Motherwell, and the Mexican poet were great friends, and in 1988, the painter created twenty-seven lithographs for three of Paz's poems. These books are bibliographic jewels of the 20th century.

"[W]hat distinguishes an illustrator from a painter is the way he handles spaces, for the first one it is a frame, an abstract limit; for the second a combination of internal relations, a territory governed by its own laws".

Octavio Paz

## Book-objects

The book has such a vast cultural potential that it can also be the basis for plastic experimentation. Reading can also be a visual act. During the 1970s and 1980s, in several parts of the world, avant-garde artists experimented with books and produced impressive pieces of contemporary art. During those years, in Mexico, several book-artists like Ulises Carrión, Marcos Kurtycz and Felipe Ehrenberg found in artisanal printing techniques (rubber stamps, mimeographs, manuscripts) a fertile ground for experimentation. Also, important editorial enterprises were created, such as Beau Geste Press or La Cocina. Even specialty bookstores, dedicated to art and book-objects, such as Archivero, the bookstore created by Gabriel Macotela, Armando Sáenz and Yanni Pecanins.



## Reading in Mexico

The Encuesta Nacional de Lectura 2012 survey, conducted by the *Fundación Mexicana para el Fomento de la Lectura A.C. (Funlectura)* revealed that 86% of Mexican homes have less than thirty non educational books, while only 2% have more than 100 copies in the family library. 54% of those surveyed said they did not read books. And of the total people surveyed, 35% said that they had never read a book in their life, and 64% declared that they had. (1% did not answer).

(Data taken from the newspaper piece by Lilián Hernández, "El Mexicano lee poco: el 55% de las casas solo tiene 10 libros", *Excélsior*, January 18, 2013.)

Besides, México places last in reading competitions between the thirty member nations of the OCDE, and according to the Encuesta Nacional de Lectura survey, in Mexico, children older than twelve years read around 2.9 books a year (in Spain that number is 7.7 and 12 in Germany), which means that our country has one of the lowest reading rates in the world. That is reflected in the publishing industry, and in book production; in Mexico, there is one bookstore for every seventy one thousand people. The worst is that in the last ten years, México fell ten points in the number of students fifteen years old or older who read for pleasure, a figure that places our country as one of the OCDE member where reading for pleasure has fallen most.

(Data taken from the newspaper piece by Karina Avilés, "México, uno de los países de la OCDE donde más bajó la lectura por placer", *La Jornada*, February 16, 2012.)