

Monsiváis and his Contemporaries

This exhibition celebrates the Museo del Estanquillo's tenth anniversary and it is a tribute to Carlos Monsiváis and all the people who joined him on his innumerable cultural projects: Sergio Pitol, José Emilio Pacheco, Enrique Florescano, José Luis Cuevas, Vicente Rojo, Iván Restrepo, Elena Poniatowska and Francisco Toledo, to name just a few.

Carlos Monsiváis Aceves (1938-2010), is Mexico City's most famous chronicler, he was an activist of many just causes (and even a few lost ones), an undisputed guide for both the political and cultural worlds. Monsiváis was also a tireless and tenacious promoter of intellectual, literary and artistic works and endeavors.

This exhibition presents Carlos Monsiváis' professional career. It begins with the political, social and cultural context of the country in which he came of age intellectually, his participation in several editorial enterprises and publications as an art critic; he remained passionate about these subjects as he was of cinema, show business, and obviously, his fondness for collecting which eventually gave way to the creation of the Museo del Estanquillo, one of his most cherished projects.

Francisco Vidargas



Carlos before Monsiváis

Carlos Monsiváis found passion in books, poetry, art, music, movies and collecting. Of himself he once said: "I am not a character. I am my library and my video collection... I don't know if this stands for a curriculum, but it is as good as it gets".

From La Merced neighborhood to La Portales, his first years were spent wandering around Calzada de Tlalpan, and his was a particularly ardent Protestant education. He remembers a humdrum childhood, without any daring expeditions and books became his pirate's cave. That turned him into a bookish child who learned to read thanks to the Casidoro de Reyna and Cipriano de Valera's Bible.

At 13 he joins the Communist Youths even though he never self-identified with Stalinism. His political initiation was closer to the cause of Miguel Henríquez Guzmán (1952) and the "Amigos de Guatemala" committee. Along with Luis Prieto Reyes and Sergio Pitol, he was part of the demonstrations against the Guatemalan coup; there he meets Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo and Juan O'Gorman, and he is quite struck by them. Later, in 1961, spurred by José Revueltas, he joins the hunger strike in favor of political prisoners.

Even though he was disappointed by the Communist party, Monsiváis was always thankful for his years spent as a member because it was there he came to know the Taller de Gráfica Popular and Leopoldo Méndez, Pablo O'Higgins and Luis Arenal's work.

His years in academic life were brief. Very early in his life he declared himself an autodidact, and during his time at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, he befriended those with whom he would organize dissident movements and publications: Sergio Pitol, Nancy Cárdenas, José Emilio Pacheco, Carmen and Magdalena Galindo and Luis Prieto Reyes. Together they created multidisciplinary groups that would leave their mark on Mexican culture during the second half of the 20th Century.



The Mafia

There is no consensus as to who came up with the name “The Mafia” for the group of artists, writers and intellectuals that participated in Mexico en la Cultura and La Cultura en México, cultural supplements directed by Fernando Benítez, who started calling himself the “Godfather” when he recognized in them a real critical perspective, one that was then lacking in the cultural landscape.

It was probably Luis Guillermo Piazza, chronicler of the Zona Rosa and author of the novel La Mafia who gave them the name, however Margarita Michelena and Luis Spota have also been proposed as the authors of the nickname, given that they disagreed with the members of the group for what they perceived certain elitism. Monsiváis thought that those who felt excluded were fabricating their own lost paradise or hell. “The Mafia does not exist”, he declared.

The main “godsons” were José Luis Cuevas, José Emilio Pacheco, Carlos Fuentes and Carlos Monsiváis. Others who were associated with them were Octavio Paz, Carlos Pellicer and Juan Rulfo.



Cultural enterprises

Since he was very young Carlos Monsiváis contributed articles to widely circulating periodicals and to publishing houses that set the cultural parameters in Mexico since the 1950s.

Around 1957, Monsiváis met José Emilio Pacheco and Sergio Pitol, with whom he forged a fruitful literary career, first in *Ramas Nuevas*, a literary supplement of the *Estaciones* magazine, directed by Elías Nandino. He participated also in *Medio Siglo*, edited with Carlos Fuentes, Porfirio Muñoz Ledo and Víctor Flores Olea, among others; *Nuevo Cine*, a publication that was crucial to the discussion of Mexican cinema; *Mester*, a product of Juan José Arreola's literary workshop; *Revista de la Universidad*, created under the guidance of Jaime García Terrés; *México en la Cultura* and *La Cultura en México*, both founded by Fernando Benítez and the latter directed by Monsiváis in its second epoch (1972-1987), and where he kept a close eye on certain political movements, the democratic process in México, consumer society and a promotion of blurring the distinction between high and low art. By the end of the 60s, he collaborated in *Guchachi Reza*, an independent publication, sponsored by Francisco Toledo and which was dedicated to Zapoteca culture.

In 1976, with Julio Sherer García's exit as director of *Excelsior* through a coup orchestrated from the President's office during Luis Echeverría's tenure, many of the collaborators quit the newspaper in solidarity and go on to create other outlets: the news agency CISA, *Proceso* magazine by Julio Sherer and Vicente Leñero. Octavio Paz creates *Vuelta* magazine. Manuel Becerra Acosta, former deputy director of *Excelsior*, creates *unomásuno* newspaper. Carlos Monsiváis maintained a close relationship with this group and collaborated in *Proceso* and *Vuelta* magazines, *Sábado* –the culture supplement of *unomásuno* newspaper–, *La Jornada* and *La Jornada Semanal*.

In 1978, Monsiváis became cofounder of *nexos* magazine, directed by Enrique Florescano and later, Héctor Aguilar Camín, which came about in part as a byproduct of the dialogues during the Seminario de Cultura Nacional at the Departamento de Investigaciones Históricas del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.

He was also involved in several other projects like the supplement *Letra S* of *La Jornada*, and the magazines *Debate Feminista*, *Utopías* (1989-1991), *Literatura Mexicana* (1990), among many others.

¡Por mi madre, bohemios!

Who found the Mage of La Portales?

I lost it several years ago, and I have several new things to tell him. Here are some of the things I would like to share with him:

- This melodramatic country has moved to the tragicomic. A first lady turned into a meme; a president that mistakes geography with tongue-twisters; the Left becomes an involuntary parody of the Right; the Right is caught up in scandals of bribes and bigots [moches y mochos], and breath of social hope, all the lies none withstanding.

- From foggy Xalapa, Sergio Pitol is thinking about him, he talks to the wind as if it blew the lost Monsivaian winds, and Elena Poniatowska, his cherished friend, sister in arms, valiant writer, generous woman gives us life lessons in coherence. Like Carlos said: "no matter how hard they try to destroy her, Elena is too much for them".

Who found the Mage of La Portales?

He took his pen, a band-aid for his finger and dozens of notebooks. Surely he is writing an extensive compilation of his ¡Por mi madre, bohemios! columns, reading Novo, Pellicer and Villaurrutia's poems for inspiration. He will invite his friends to watch a new movie. And he will ask, from the great beyond, for some molletes so that he can find out about the news without pausing his rewriting and his revisions of those unfinished essays he still would have given us.

We want to understand his absence and are only left with his presence. I want to feel as if its been only a few years and I can still see him in the street, buying magazines, hailing a cab, wandering through oneiric rooftops, like a cat, arguing after dinner. He was late everywhere he went, but has been on time in our memories, in our daily struggles against infamy.

Jenaro Villamil

¡Por mi madre, bohemios!

For Carlos Monsiváis, Mexico's political life can't be explained without taking into account its parodic dimension. "How can we understand the PRI without the parody, if the PRI is only parody?"

In his newspaper column *¡Por mi madre, bohemios!*, Monsiváis applied the infallible rule for involuntary humor in politics: the best way to parody powerful people is by reproducing their own statements verbatim.

If something exasperated Monsiváis it was the impunity with which powerful people talked and acted. He never forgave them their cynicism and declarative impunity, and to get back at them he used the only justice one can turn to: exhibiting them in their steadfast stupidity, evident in their own words, to which he added mocking comments, full of his usual biting and precise sarcasm. He included statements that were so ridiculous and incredible that some people thought he invented them himself: "my wit is not so ample", he said amused. Senators, state and federal legislators, union leaders, PRI, PAN and PRD leaders, Secretaries, Businessmen, Bishops and Clergymen, Governors and any other powerful person who claimed to represent the nation's ideals; or who, without fearing ridicule, offered excessive praise for the sitting President; or who draped themselves in the flag of their moral superiority to pontificate, condemn and admonish.

Each week, readers of the *¡Por mi madre, bohemios!*, first published in *La Cultura en México*, then in *La Jornada*, and finally in *Proceso*, felt a righteous relief for the reparation that had just taken place.

Alejandro Brito



The Angangueo Atheneum

In 1974, Manuel Buendía asked where I was from. Angangueo, Michoacán, I responded; a mining town that is known today because thousands of monarch butterflies hibernate in its forests. Well then, we come from the same place, Buendía said, I come from a nearby town, Zitácuaro.

We decided then to get together every other week for lunch. Soon, other journalistic personalities joined the group: Fernando Benítez, Carlos Monsiváis, Elena Poniatowska, Sara Moirón, Miguel Ángel Grandos Chapa, Francisco Martínez de la Vega. Héctor Aguilar Camín, Benjamín Wong, Margo Su. And whenever they had the chance, Gabriel García Márquez and Alejandro Gómez Arias.

The Atheneum began to garner fame thanks to the humorous mentions Buendía, Monsiváis and other participants made about public officials in their columns. And to the prizes they gave to the silliest remarks or initiatives.

Also it became famous because on certain dates public officials, political leaders and, once a year, the President, attended the luncheon. These were anything but courtly meetings in which these personalities listened to well-founded and respectful criticism from members of the Atheneum. These meetings ceased at the end of the past century. Manuel Buendía was murdered on May 30, 1984. He was about to reveal in his column, *Red Privada*, the complicity between high-ranking officials with drug trafficking; it all points to a crime orchestrated from within the State.

Iván Restrepo



El cine y la crítica

Monsiváis time at UNAM resulted in very famous projects. For example, biographical notes for Gaceta Universitaria magazine, founded in 1954 by Henrique González Casanova; the children radio show La hora de los niños, which, in Monsiváis own words was “an slightly failed attempt at parody and satire”; being director at the audio library Voz Viva de México, a collection that included recordings of writers such as Cuban Alejo Carpentier; being producer and host, along with Nancy Cárdenas of El cine y la crítica show, which, in José Emilio Pacheco’s opinion, had the “highest audience” in the history of Radio Universidad; and directing the Student Cinema Club at the University during 1956, where the audience was treated to a novel panorama of Mexican cinematography.

Monsiváis’ cinephilia is in evidence in the video showing the ten best scenes in the history of Mexican cinema according to the writer, in his stills collection and in his participation in movies such as Los bienamados, En este pueblo no hay ladrones, Los caifanes, among others.



...And now with you

The XEW radio station, the voice of Latin America, is one of Monsiváis' most significant contemporaries. This veritable star Factory captured the chronicler's attention by offering him the voices of María Luis Landín, Elvira Ríos, Toña la negra, Lucha Reyes, Pedro Vargas, and of course, Agustín Lara.

Ninón Sevilla, Dámaso Pérez Prado "cara de foca", Yolanda Montes Tongolele and José Alfredo Jimenez starred in Mexico City's show business, and it offered the possibility of democratizing the relationship between social classes. Probes (the poor) and el respetable (the rich) attended the same venues following the Damasian call: Aaaaaaargh!

The Great Mexican Family prefigured in those early years of TV in 1950 (an industry that took the place of the State in the task of producing a national culture) engendered Paco Malgesto and Salvador Novo's show where our chronicler participated. He saw José Alfredo Jiménez and Lucha Villa's success, and contemplated the first glimpses of modern Mexico.

Along with Iván Restrepo, Monsiváis becomes an habitué at Salón Margo, the Blanquita theater and La Maraca dance hall. The legendary California Dancing Club dance hall in La Portales neighborhood gave him the Califa de Oro in the same night as Rosa Gloria Chagoyán and María Rubio. In the Guerrero neighborhood he meets Paquita la del Barrio and recommends her to Guillermo Ochoa, a newscaster, to be included in his TV show. He discovers in Juan Gabriel and Gloria Trevi a couple of idols that sidestepped masculine and feminine conventions, in a Mexico where, like Carlos Monsiváis used to say, greed devours everything, resignation sanctifies everything, and commotion [el relajo] knows and doesn't know everything at once.

Aldo Sánchez Ramírez

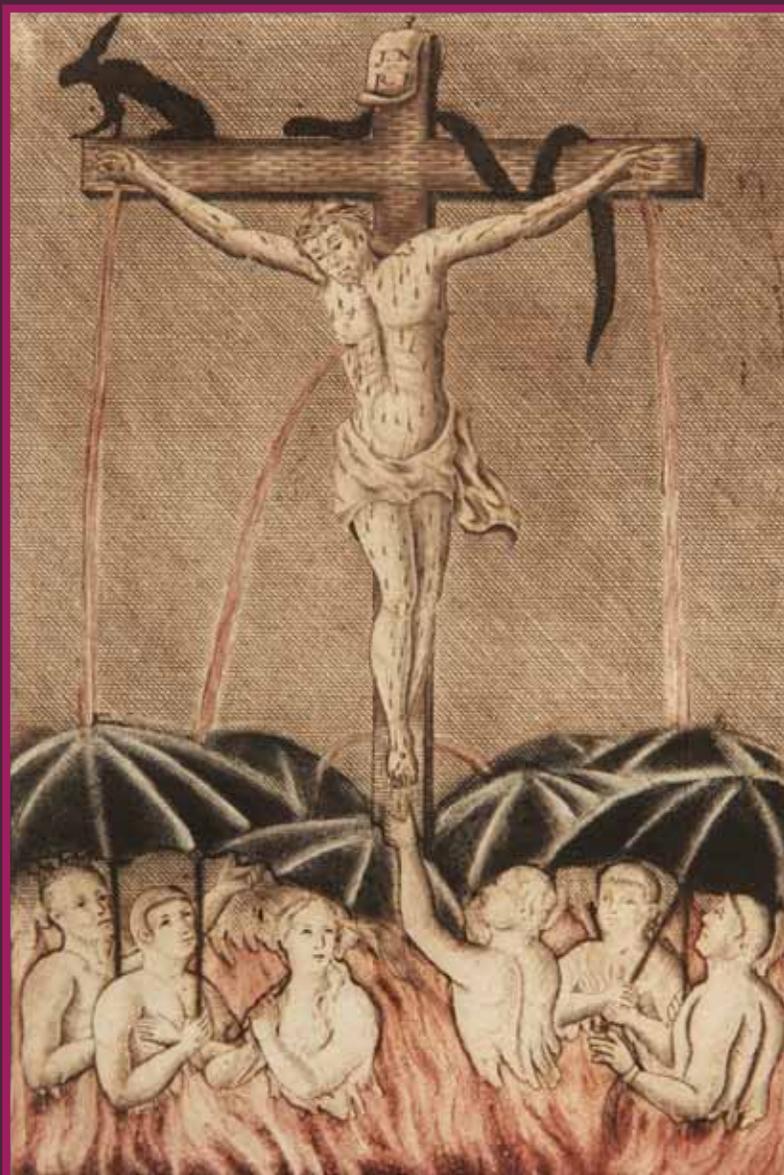


The privileges of gaze

Monsiváis' gaze over art encompassed graphic arts of the 19th century, painters of the 20th century such as Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros and Rufino Tamayo; as well as contemporary artists such as Vicente Rojo, José Luis Cuevas and Francisco Toledo –about whom he wrote extensively– and the work of artists such as Daniel Lezama and Francis Alÿs.

Miguel Covarrubias archive is an important part of the Collection since it was the author who motivated him to collect art; young Monsiváis first piece was a Covarrubias sketch of the Negro Drawings series. It is important to note that Monsiváis recognized in Leopoldo Méndez a magnificent engraver of post revolutionary Mexico, and the Museo del Estanquillo has more than 700 pieces of his. Our chronicler wrote several essays to modern and contemporary photographers, some of them collected in the book *Maravillas que son, sombras que fueron* (ERA, 2012).

In addition to artists and photographers, several cartoonists' works are included. Thanks to their narrative, their ability to represent society and the massive reach of their messages, Monsiváis became fascinated with them, collected and wrote about them.



And the staff takes its leave.

The Museo del Estanquillo opened its doors in 2006 thanks to the support of Mexico City's government, the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, the Asociación Cultural El Estanquillo A. C. and the Fundación del Centro Histórico, to harbor Carlos Monsiváis' collection, created over four decades as a product of his constant trips to galleries, bazars and antique shops in the Zona Rosa, the Lagunilla market, used bookstores and street flea markets along with –as Elena Poniatowska said– “his best pal, el Fis” (Rafael Barajas).

The extensive Mosiváis Collection, made up of 20,000 objects among which are photographs, paintings, engravings, prints, posters, historical documents, comics, is shown in temporary exhibitions that ponder our national history, the country's culture, its daily life and his great fascination: Mexico City.

Under the banner of “everyone is a collector”, and the guiding principle that “we are only lacking the courage to recognize us as walking museums of our own memory”, Carlos Monsiváis created the Museo del Estanquillo: a permanent stimulus to the democratization of Mexican patrimony.

