

PASIÓN SOBRE PAPEL

LEOPOLDO

MÉNDEZ

Y EL TALLER DE GRÁFICA POPULAR



"I join my work with the social fight; and my art is my principal weapon in this fight. I take it seriously and I do my best to ennoble it." - Leopoldo Méndez

Leopoldo Méndez López was born in June the 30th 1902 in Mexico City. He studied at the Academia de San Carlos. Attracted by the radical ideas of President Madero towards the Revolution, he and his family adopted that ideology; though Méndez preferred to continue with his artistic education in the Escuela de Pintura al Aire Libre de Chimalistac (Outdoors Painting School of Chimalistac) which educative system –in comparison with the aforementioned Academy, was much more free and accordant with the time. Later on, he became part of the Stridentism movement; He was also founder member of the League of Writers and Artists of the Revolution (LEAR) and the Popular Graphics Workshop (TGP).



Méndez career was joined with artists from several fields, besides literature and education; it is important to mention his participation in the film industry where he worked with figures such as Emilio 'El Indio' Fernandez and Gabriel Figueroa.

As his political interests were very strong, Méndez was involved in social movements that he always embraced and supported. Movements that have to do with the most vulnerable sectors such as workers, farmers and teachers. However, his ideological congruency also took him to separate from these movements. For example, he was affiliated to the Communist Party of Mexico; the Insurgent Group José Carlos Mariátegui, and the Popular Party among others. Due to his social activity, in 1952, *The World Peace Council* gave him in Warsaw, the International Peace Prize.

All of this phases of Leopoldo Méndez, can be found in the exhibition *Passion Over Paper. Leopoldo Méndez and the Popular Graphics Workshop* at the Museo del Estanquillo. A free app can be found under the name of *Leopoldo Méndez*.

Stridentism

For the group of Stridentism, the revolutionary movement, is not only the struggles in the battle fields and the emergency of the outcasted sectors. The revolutionary movement is the recovery of the losses due to the formalism, the Class discrimination, and the neglect of the people; it is also the tremor of the esthetics, facing the tragedy of the communities assembled by the fatalism and need, carried by the social injustice. -Carlos Monsiváis

In 1923 Méndez affiliated to the group of the Stridentists, integrated by Manuel Maples Arce, Fermín Revueltas, Germán Cueto, Arqueles Vela, Ramón Alva de la Canal, Germán List Arzubide and some others. The group became known openly, on December, 31, 1921, Mexico City, after the release of its manifest #1, written by the poet Maples Arce. Its principals were in opposition to the academic structure and conventionalism in art, besides to be on the service of the society. Méndez collaborated with engravings and drawings in many publications of the group, just like in the magazine *Horizonte*, (Horizon) *Irradiador* and *30-30*. Part of their job was done in Veracruz, due to the support given by the general Heriberto Jara.



LEAR

LEAR, an antifascism community and at the same time sectary court; combining the talent, the intolerance, the originality and the brochures repetition. From far, it seemed to be a Stalinist organization; and it actually was; however it also assembled poets, painters, engravers and theater workers, all of them, convinced of the anti-fascism fight. -Carlos Monsiváis

In 1933, at Méndez's house, Juan de la Cabada, Pablo O'Higgins and Luis Arenal, founded the Revolutionary Writers and Artist League (LEAR). Among the integrands, we can find, Xavier Guerrero, Ermilo Abreu Gómez, Alfredo Zalce, Fernando Gamboa, Santos Balmori, Aurora Reyes and Clara Porcet, Julio Bracho. Among their projects, they published the magazine *Frente a Frente* (*Face to Face*). However, not happy with the artistic fluency Méndez got separated from the group.

TGP (Popular Graphics Workshop)

In 1937 Méndez founded the Popular Graphics Workshop (TGP by its initial capital letters in Spanish) along with Pablo O'Higgins, Alfredo Zalce, Luis Arenal, Ignacio Aguirre, Isidoro Ocampo, Everardo Ramírez, Raúl Anguiano, Jesús Escobedo and Ángel Bracho. In Leopoldo's words their goals were:

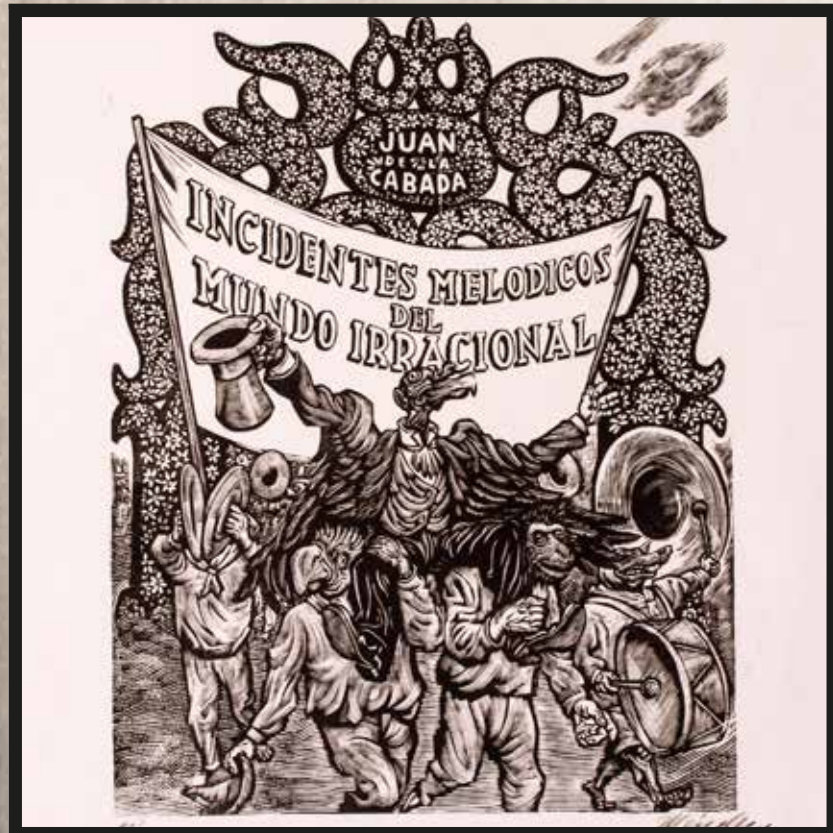
"At the beginning we did not have an specific esthetic plan to change the ways; our goals had the characteristic that the end was the most important thing. The graphics, with the social cause, took us to consider the ways capable to get to the public The people; that is why in our declaration of principles, we emphasize the realism, we also studied information about realism, in order to help us to focus in a better way in our immediate job. We have never work specifically for exhibitions, as many other organizations of artist do; our art has been always link with a situation. Posada is our best example due to the Mexican cotemporaneous engraving, and as such, the art that comes from this exceptional man. We have to keep track on him, because of his capacity of humanism that is worth of imitation; he is still the most clean, strong, Mexican, revolutionary man."

Monsiváis, the most fervent collector of Leopoldo Méndez said:

"the Popular Graphics Workshop is, in a way, the laboratory of a brilliant generation of graphic artists, is the spread radicalization in the streets, is the combination of techniques and movement. Realism and expressionism in a paramount way. Today, its ideological motivation is considered, a mixture of selfless commitment and severe intolerance; they are a non-Trotsky -supporter group, practicing the political language with no differentiation. Most of its work is of first rate, regardless if the public think in politics when looking at it, or do not notice the political elements or think of it in a subversive way."

Melodic Incidents of the Irrational World.

In 1944, Méndez prepared 40 engravings for the book *Incidentes melódicos del mundo irracional* (*Melodic Incidents of the Irrational World*) for *La Estampa Mexicana*, publisher; it was a recreation of Mayan fables, and represents one of the most delicate and fine series of Works of art in Leopoldo's career. A mixture of fine humor and formal complexity.



The fable was written by Juan de la Cabada and illustrated by forty engravings of Leopoldo Méndez and published in 1944. In the tale, there are typical songs in Yucatecan Mayan language, that in the edition are written with the musical notation. This represents the integration of arts in which Méndez participated. It is important to mention that Juan de la Cabada was a pioneer in the studies of Mayan music, due to the period he spend in the southwest of Mexico. (Campeche, Quintana Room, Yucatán and Tabasco) thanks to this, he was able to have a deep understanding of the indigenous culture of that region.

The design of the book, prepared by Hannes Meyer in the TGP was a great challenge for the techniques of the moment, the combination of silkscreen, linoleum, stencil and typography, combining several colors of ink.

Leopoldo in the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema

Never before engravings had been included in films. I wanted for painters to take part on them, show to the world the art of Mexico. I asked Leopoldo Méndez to enrich with his art, the image of the worker, to make an interpretation of the landscape of this territory, and to describe with eloquence of his art, populace fights with his combination of black and white.

-Emilio “el Indio” Fernández

In the period of 1947 to 1966 Méndez participated in films, with engravings as backcloth for the credits of the film makers, the idea was to establish visual precedent to the viewer, about the thematic of the films. Some of this images turned to be scenes in movement as well as key moments in the films. Méndez’s engravings enhanced the celluloid and shared elements with the muralism, such as the unlimited horizons, and the synthetic lines. The screen is gracious with the movement of Muralism.

Somme films Méndez worked in are: *Río Escondido* (1947), *Pueblerina* (1948), *Un día de vida* (1950) y *Un dorado de Pancho Villa* (1959) by the filmmaker Emilio “el Indio” Fernández; *El rebozo de Soledad* (Soledad’s Shawl) (1952), *Macario* (1959) and *Rosablanca* (1961), by Roberto Gavaldón; *Raíces* (Roots) (1953) by Benito Alazraki; and *La rebelión de los colgados* (1954) by Alfredo B. Crevena.

