

## *Carlos Monsiváis and Juan García Ponce: Communicating Vessels in Art and Literature*

This exhibition explores the passions of two of the leading cultural figures of twentieth-century Mexico: Juan García Ponce and Carlos Monsiváis. The four sections show the links between the differing styles of these two intellectuals who both worked as literary journalists and art collectors.

The themes include the 1968 student movement, Ponce and Monsiváis's bonds with fellow Mexican and foreign writers of the "Medio Siglo" (Mid Century) group (Salvador Elizondo, José Emilio Pacheco, Rosario Castellanos, Inés Arredondo, Tomás Segovia, and Juan Vicente Melo), and their connection to members of another generation known as "La Ruptura" (The Rupture) (Arnaldo Coen, Alberto Gironella, Fernando García Ponce, Francisco Corzas, Gabriel Ramírez, Lilia Carrillo, Manuel Felguérez, Roger von Gunten, and Vicente Rojo), artists whose work featured in *Nine Mexican Painters*, an exhibition curated by Juan García Ponce that was held at the Juan Martín Gallery in Mexico City in 1968.

Many other writers and visual artists are also included in this exhibition, giving an idea of the aesthetic tastes of García Ponce and Monsiváis, and also offering a glimpse of some essential cultural and artistic works of the twentieth century in Mexico.

This exhibition was made possible thanks to the all-important support from those who were close to García Ponce and Monsiváis, and specialists in their work, generously lending items from their collections and offering interviews about Carlos and Juan's work: Mercedes Oteyza de Felguérez, Mercedes García Oteyza, Beatriz Sánchez Monsiváis, Elena Poniatowska, Rafael Barajas, *el Fisgón*; Arnaldo Coen, Roger von Gunten, Gerardo Estrada, Adolfo Castañón, José Antonio Lugo, Hernán Lara Zavala, and Daniel Goldin.

Furthermore, the exhibition organizers were granted privileged access to Carlos Monsiváis's personal library at the Biblioteca de México and to the archives of the Fondo de Cultura Económica, the Autonomous University of Mexico City's Vlady Center, and the Lourdes Sosa Gallery. The family collections of Ricardo and Ernesto Guerra de la Peña, Yves von Gunten, and Vicente Rojo Cama were also made available. Rogelio Cuéllar deserves a special mention for not only permitting the display of part of his extraordinary art collection but also for providing us his own photographs of writers and artists who continue to be an essential part of Mexican art and culture, and whose portraits help show the linkages between the life and work of García Ponce and Monsiváis.



## 1968: The Revolution of Ideas

Various student protest movements erupted around the world in 1968 as a revolution of anti-establishment ideas. In Mexico, under the particular influence of events in Paris and Prague, this was an era of cultural effervescence with art exhibitions, conferences, and film screenings that gave continuity to the work of artists and writers such as Xavier Villaurrutia, Jaime Torres Bodet, and Antonieta Rivas Mercado who were linked to the *Contemporáneos* literary magazine and were active in the first half of the twentieth century.

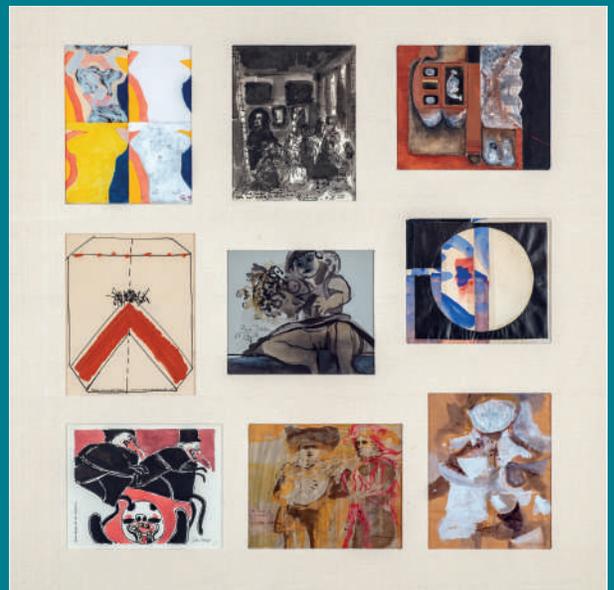
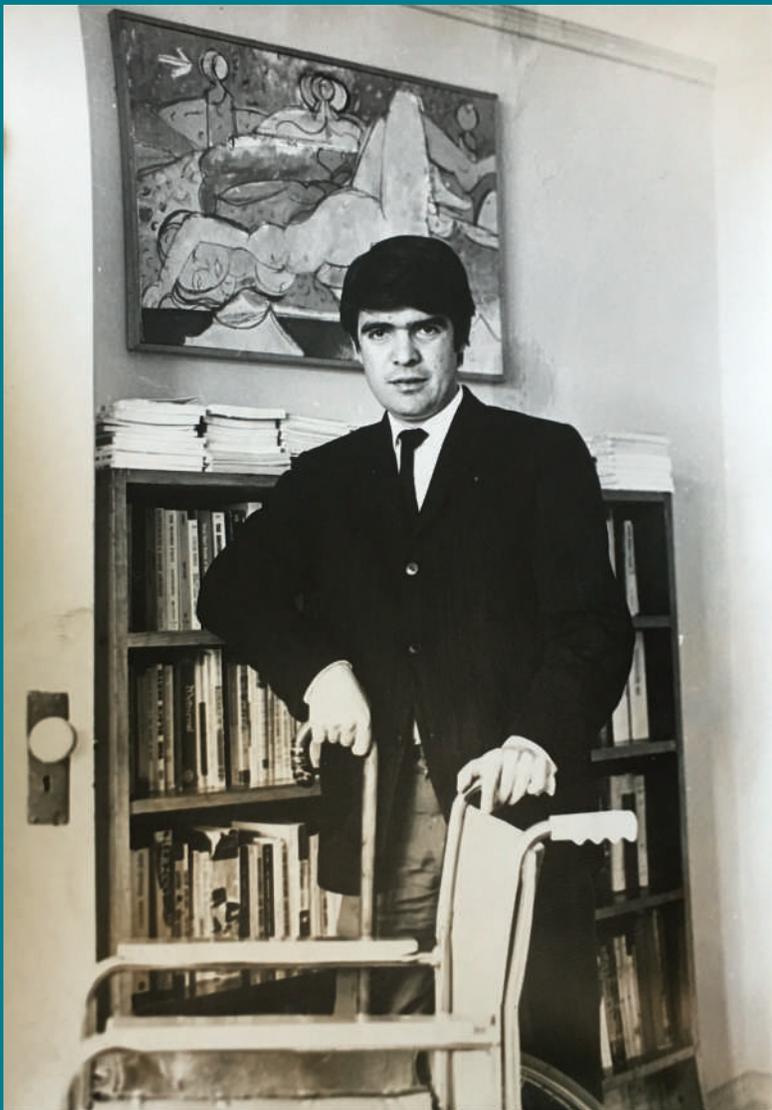
Although Carlos was six years younger than Juan, they both belonged to the “Medio Siglo” generation alongside writers such as José Emilio Pacheco, Salvador Elizondo, Juan Vicente Melo, Inés Arredondo, and Rosario Castellanos. Monsiváis was also a member of “La Mafia,” which included Carlos Fuentes and José Luis Cuevas and was “godfathered” by Fernando Benítez, director of *La Cultura en México* and *México en la Cultura*. Both Monsiváis and García Ponce, along with José Emilio Pacheco, contributed to these two literary supplements. These groups were a touchstone for a broader and more cosmopolitan perspective in the world of art and literature, countering a restrictive government regime that censored the press, radio, and television, only permitting the nationalist discourse of a single hegemonic party with an iron grip on the media.

In 1968, Juan García Ponce and Carlos Monsiváis participated in several political, literary, and artistic movements that criticized the Gustavo Díaz Ordaz government’s repression of the student movement. Carlos Monsiváis wrote a chronicle of this period in *El 68: la tradición de la resistencia* and *Parte de guerra*; the latter was co-authored by Julio Scherer and describes an episode involving Juan García Ponce, who also refers to it in *Crónica de la intervención*. García Ponce also depicted this era in another novel, *La invitación*. Furthermore, his 1968 translation of Herbert Marcuse’s *El hombre unidimensional* helped disseminate this French philosopher’s influential ideas about Marxism and the industrial society.



## Nine Mexican Painters

The social and political shifts of the late 1950s sparked an artistic revolution. In Mexico, a group of artists began setting out in new directions, moving away the nationalist dogma imposed by the state's cultural institutions. For example, David Alfaro Siqueiros and other artists belonging to what historians refer to as the Mexican School of Painting. This generation of visual artists was able to show their work in the art galleries that proliferated at the time. *Nine Mexican Painters*, the 1968 exhibition held in the Juan Martín Gallery and curated by Juan García Ponce, contributed to a paradigm shift in art in Mexico, and the nine works on display here are prime examples of this generation's fresh approach.



## Literary Links

Juan García Ponce and Carlos Monsiváis met in the 1950s and remained friends until Juan's death in 2003. Their paths also crossed at the magazine *Siempre!* and overlapped when they were writing for other publications such as the *Revista de la Universidad de México*, *Revista Mexicana de Literatura*, *Vuelta*, and cultural supplements such as *Confabulario* of *El Universal* newspaper.

Apart from short stories and novels, García Ponce also wrote art criticism on Mexican and foreign painters such as Gustav Klimt, Paul Klee, and Balthus. His translations also introduced to Mexico the work of writers like Robert Musil and Pierre Klossowski. Monsiváis, meanwhile, also translated several texts by European and American writers, including Malcolm Lowry, Michel Foucault, and Tennessee Williams, mainly published in the supplement *La Cultura en México* and in magazines such as *Sábado*. Mostly, however, he specialized in the chronicle and essay format with a focus on Mexican politics, society, and culture, in which he showed a particular interest in film, music, and the visual arts.

*Communicating Vessels in Art and Literature* presents a selection of Monsiváis and García Ponce's vast literary production. Apart from being avid readers, these two intellectuals had personal contact with writers like Gabriel García Márquez and Octavio Paz. This section features some of the books that feature handwritten dedications from the personal collections of Mercedes García Oteyza, Mercedes Oteyza de Felguérez, Rogelio Cuéllar, and Ángel Aurelio González Amozorrutia, as well as from the José Vasconcelos Library and the Estanquillo Museum's reading room.

García Ponce and Monsiváis were seminal authors on Mexico's literary landscape. Their work continues to be the object of exhaustive studies that take different perspectives on the writers' various chosen genres. This part of the exhibition features interviews with Elena Poniatowska, Adolfo Castañón, Hernán Lara Zavala, Daniel Goldin, José Antonio Lugo, and Gerardo Estrada.



## Links Between the Visual Arts and Literature

Juan García Ponce and Carlos Monsiváis shared a particular fascination for the visual arts. On display in this section are some of the art books, magazines, and catalogues of various exhibitions, as well as a brief selection of works from their respective art collections. Their texts and collections show the difference between the writers' gazes, yet they both clearly admired particular artists such as Vicente Rojo. The photographer Rogelio Cuéllar was also very close to Carlos and Juan; he took portraits of them at various points in their lives, for example during their interview with Jorge Luis Borges during the Argentinean writer's visit to Mexico. They returned the compliment by writing texts about his photographic work.

The exhibition includes the work of 34 visual artists: Alberto Castro Leñero, Alberto Gironella, Arnaldo Coen, Brian Nissen, David Harali, Fernando García Ponce, Francisco Corzas, Francisco Toledo, Gabriel Macotela, Graciela Iturbide, Gunther Gerzso, Héctor García, Ilse Gradwohl, Irma Palacios, José Castro Leñero, José Luis Cuevas, Joy Laville, Juan Soriano, Leonora Carrington, Lilia Carrillo, Lucinda Urrusti, Manuel Álvarez Bravo, Manuel Felguérez, Marco Antonio Montes de Oca, Miguel Ángel Alamilla, Miguel Ángel Morales, Miguel Castro Leñero, Miguel Cervantes, Ricardo Martínez, Rodolfo Zanabria, Rogelio Cuéllar, Vicente Rojo, Vlady, and Roger von Gunten, who paid homage to his friend García Ponce by painting *La aventura del más acá* especially for this exhibition. Most of these artists began their careers in the mid-twentieth century, supporting abstract art and marking a turning point in Mexico's visual arts in that era.

Apart from loaning works for display, Roger von Gunten, Arnaldo Coen, and Rogelio Cuéllar also provided their own accounts of Juan García Ponce and Carlos Monsiváis as protagonists and witnesses during the artistic changes referred to in this exhibition.

This section of the exhibition explores the crossovers between Monsiváis and García Ponce while also paying tribute to the late Manuel Felguérez, Francisco Toledo, and Vicente Rojo, all of whom helped redefine the visual arts in Mexico.

