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FREE

THE GRASSHOPPER

Perhaps this attachment to natural forms, something which Toledo splendidly cultivates, is a reflection of the desire among his contemporaries to return to the cultural roots of Mexico.

The following excerpt is taken from the article "Insects in Mexican Art" by Silvia Navarrete

The Florentine Codex lists six species of chapulin or chapolin, the generic Nahuatl word meaning "hillhopper" or "earth locust." It describes one, the yectli chapolin which means "good thing, locust." as an insect of middling size, with red front and feet, which turns radish at harvest time, like the chilli. This is probably the species represented in the red stone sculpture of a grasshopper which has formed part of the collection at a National Museum of Anthropology since the last century. This splendid piece comes from Mexico City, although the precise location of the find remains unknown. We don't fully understand the function of this and other insect sculptures. Perhaps they were considered idols, or perhaps they were merely placed in the vicinity of shrines as part of the ritual furnishings. Whatever the case, this piece, which shows the grasshopper with folded wings and legs tucked beneath it,



Francisco Toledo, Chapulin

certainly testifies to the realism of Mexican art.

There are many examples of grasshoppers in painting. In some codices, such as the Boturini and the Mendoza, it is depicted on top of a hill to indicate the toponym Chapultepec, "place of the grasshopper hill." Although it is not always rendered with great realism, its shape is easily recognized.

The grasshopper is another culinary speciality that survives to this day. Pre-Hispanic peoples were fond of the yectli chapolin mentioned above, which may well be the same kind that is roasted and sold today at the market in the city of Oaxaca. Del Barco (1973:37) states that "the following manner of serving it is the most common at almost every meal. They roast them first, then grind them between two stones to make

a powder which is eaten. In this way neither legs, feet nor scales go to waste."

There is also evidence of locust plagues. Del Barco (1973:36-37) mentions one that took place in the 18th century in Baja California, while Fray Antonio de Ciudad Real (1976:I:247) reports how in 1586 he watched the Indians trying to fend off the clouds of locusts by yelling, blowing trumpets and beating drums. Such a plague plays a key role in a folktale that has come down to us from a Nahuatl speaking region of the Isthmus: an old lady who had nothing to eat appealed to her son for help, which he refused to offer. Soon after, however, the son left the house to fetch corn to give to a friend, When he failed to

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return, his wife went in search of him, only to come across a heap of clean bones: he had been killed and devoured by a marauding band of locusts (Castellon Huerta, 1987:203-205).

A part from the insects we have dealt with so far, several others are seen to crop up in the Pre-Hispanic and the colonial worlds that surely deserve to be mentioned. Of the cockroach, for instance, Francisco Clavijero writes (1945, I:155) that this "kind of domestic beetle" was of the utmost use in homes and buildings, since "it eliminates bed bugs. It is constantly observed that European ships arriving in Veracruz completely infested with bedbugs, enjoy a return voyage free from this insufferable pest. They have all been purged by cockroaches."

Among the Maya, cockroach is *ix kuluch*, which means "the hardened one." It is not regarded as a beetle, the name for which is *ix culc im*, "the wallower", or *mackech*, "the covered one". This beetle, stripped of wings and shell and dried, is a popular trinket among young girls, who tie it as a charm around their necks or wrists (C. Alvarez, 1980:27-271).

But perhaps one of the most fascinating examples of the important role played by insects in pre-Hispanic world is provided by the *Teotlacualli* or "divine food," prepared by the priests according to a recipe recorded by Diego Duran in his 16th century History (1967, I: 53). "This divine nourishment was well in keeping with the god who partook of it. It was wholly composed of poisonous vermin, namely, spiders, scorpions, centipedes, salamanders, vipers, and so forth. These were collected by youths who always kept a rich stock of them in readiness for when the priests might require them." To prepare this divine brew, priests took a number of these creatures and "burned them in the brazier of the god who was in the temple, and once well burned, they threw the ashes into mortars with plenty of ground tobacco (...) and pounded this into a devilish, stinking and deadly ointment. " After this they poured the mixture into pots or gourds which they placed before the god as "divine food."



The priests also anointed their bodies with this paste, causing them, Duran continues, "to lose all semblance of fear. They would slaughter men for sacrifice with the utmost recklessness, and set off alone by night, thus besmeared, into the mountains, with their gloomy caverns and dark, fearsome ravines. Coated with the divine food that would protect them, none ever feared that any harm may come their way..." The *teotlacualli* mixture also served as a medicinal balm that brought rapid relief when applied to the affected part of the body. Duran notes this in the chapter of his History devoted to Tezcatlipoca, the

supreme deity in whose honor the priests painted their bodies black. The mixture the same "as that with which they smothered the idol and with which priests and ministers anointed themselves"

The sacred character of the ingredients used to make the Divine Food is undeniable. But Tezcatlipoca was frequently assigned as sorcerer and poisonous insects were frequently assigned as messengers. This is how Duran describes this aspect in the tale of the quarrel between Huizilopochtli and his sister, the sorceress Malinalxochitl; the god was

CULTURAL EVENTS

- August 3 to 27 "Expotapetes" (rug exhibition) Centro Cultural "Ricardo F. Magon" ISSSTE Macedonio Alcalá #302
 - August 18 - 7:30 P.M. "Entre la piedra y la tinta" (Art exhibition) Taller de "Rufino Tamayo"
 - August 21 & 22 - 8:00 P.M. Popular music "Cantaclaro" ISSSTE Macedonio Alcalá # 302
 - August 22 - 9:00 P.M. Opening Concert Philharmonic Orchestra from Queretaro *
 - August 23 - 9:00 P.M. Concert - Mozart *
 - August 24 - 9:00 P.M. Concert - Classical & Orchestral versions of the "Beatles" *
 - August 25 - 9:00 P.M. Concert - Classical - Philharmonic Orchestra from Queretaro *
 - August 27 - 9:00 P.M. Concert - Classical & music of Oaxaca - Orchestra of Oaxaca *
 - August 29 - 7:00 P.M. - Closing Concert - Philharmonic Orchestra from Queretaro *
 - August 31 - "San Ramon Day" Patio of the Church "La Merced" *
- * Centro Cultural located at:
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with his sister " to see how great was the power she had already obtained over fierce and noxious beasts, and how her spells and charms could kill those who offended her, sending the viper and the scorpion, the centipede or the deadly spider to sting them..."

As a final example of the same phenomenon, we may recall Moctecuhzoma's efforts to halt the Spanish advance. Duran relates the story as if he were the tlatoani Moctecuhzoma himself: " And the best means I can think of is to summon all the chanters and witches and those who dispose of dreams, and command the scorpion and the spider, to catch them and give them dreams and puzzle them with visions and have the insects sting them to death. Thus I have resolved to send for them from Yauhtepec of Oaxtepec and Malinalco and Tepuztlan, that all those dealing and practiced in such offices may gather here and go to kill and destroy the with their sorcery."

When the sorcerers were duly sent on their mission, but returned complaining that the Spaniards were very thick-skinned, that they stayed awake all night, that they hampered the insects in their task, and that they were bitten by so much as a flea, they got up and killed it straight away.

Insects and the Mexican School

Varo and Toledo

The introspective, pictorial universe of Honora Carrington is represented by a megerie that seems to have been extracted from the Middle Ages, or from ancient forms of witchcraft, magic and divination. Among her mythological and imaginary birds, obese quadrupeds with rickety legs and hybrid animals, there is one painting, *Brief and Dana* (1958) which the almost scientific fidelity in the drawing of a grasshopper (indeed, as if it were an anatomical chart) is undercut by the dreamlike atmosphere, resonant with distant echoes secrets and mysteries that fill the canvas. In an analogous fairytale atmosphere, Remedios Varo makes insects into the ghostly protagonists of a fantastic, poetic narrative—their health and silence accentuated by the perfec-



tion of her miniaturist technique.

Francisco Toledo's imagination is directed towards the creation of fantastic—not anthropomorphic—animals. These are the products of his personal experience and an extraordinary vision rooted in his native soil of Oaxaca. Toledo offers a reality sublimated in myth, eroticism and magic, in daily events and in fables. He studies certain groupings from the animal and vegetable kingdom as if he were a zoologist or a specialist in botany. Teresa del Conde notes that this artist doesn't alter the appearance of the beings, only the features that their forms dictate: "At times he organizes friezes with repeated figures of insects or crabs; in others the path of a snake over the sand might be established as an important element of a particular composition; many animal figures or human beings receive certain characteristics that come from organisms which differ greatly in their respective forms." To-

ledo's configurations are basic forms emphasized by the composition. All is organic in his art, like that ghost of a grasshopper across the grain of the lithographic stone. His works are "cantos to fertility steeped in zoology and metaphysics," as Luis Cardoza y Aragón has stated. For Toledo, the animal, the human and the divine are indivisible: while others might illustrate or decorate traditions or beliefs, Toledo not only recreates but actually originates myths, by adding legendary vision to daily perception.

Perhaps this attachment to natural forms, something which Toledo splendidly cultivates, is a reflection of the desire among his contemporaries to return to the cultural roots of Mexico. Modern artists distinguish themselves by establishing an inquiry into their national identity, by turning their introspection to the intimacy of the self and subjecting the reality of Mexico to scrutiny.


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SAN RAMON DAY



Chicken mariachis, dog clowns and cow brides are among the highlights of the feast of San Ramon on August 31, when animal lovers bring their pets or farm animals, in costume, to Nuestra Señora de la Merced Church for the annual blessing. Creatures attired according to the fantasy of their owners fill the streets for this cheerful fiesta. You'll not only see parrots, rats and cats but also pigs, horses and bulls. Of course, no fiesta in Oaxaca is complete without vendors selling sweets, corn on the cob and other treats. The celebration takes place at 5:00 pm, rain or shine, in front of the church located at the corner of Manuel Doblado and Independencia Streets.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

VIVA MEXICO !!! This will be the cry heard all over Mexico on the night of September 15th commemorating Mexican Independence Day on September 16th. In Oaxaca, the Zocalo will be illuminated, many bands will be playing and the food and drink stands will be doing a land office business.

At about 10:00 P.M. "La America", the young lady chosen to sing the National Anthem, will cruise the downtown area in a decorated float. At about 11:00 P.M. The Governor will appear on the balcony of the Municipal Palace, make a short speech, cry "VIVA MEXICO" and ring the bell of freedom. The state Philharmonic Orchestra will play the National Anthem and a brilliant display of fireworks will mark the end of the official festivities. NOW THE PARTY WILL BEGIN !!!

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BEYOND THE CITY

Attractions are listed according to their direction from Oaxaca.

MONTE ALBAN: 10km (6mi) west, on an artificially flattened mountaintop. One of the most important archaeological sites in Mexico. Large ceremonial plaza surrounded by the ruins of religious and public buildings. Small museum, cafeteria, shops. Tues-Sun 8 a.m. - 6 p.m.

SANTA MARIA ATZOMPA: (or Atzompa) about 8km (4mi) northwest, a short distance off Hwy. 190. The village produces a green-glazed pottery and unglazed pottery figures.

NOTE: Here, and at other craft-oriented villages, stop at any home or shop that gives indications that the craft is practiced within, or simply ask the way to artisan's homes.

CHUILAPAN DE GUERRERO: About 14 km (9 mi) southwest on the Zaachila road. Contains what was once the Dominican Monastery of St. James the Apostle, begun in 1555 but never finished. Much of the structure stands roofless. Daily 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.

Zaachila: 5 km (3 mi) beyond Cuilapan. Zaachila was the Zapotec capital when it fell to the Spanish in 1521. Little of the archaeological zone has been explored, but a palace and two tombs can be visited. Daily 8 a.m. - 6 p.m.

SAN BARTOLO COYOTEPEC: (or Coyotepec) About 15 km (9 mi) south on Hwy 175. The village is famous for its pottery. Valente Nieto, the son of Dona Rosa, who is credited with the black pottery, still practices the craft and gives demonstrations for visitors Fri. 9 a.m. - 2 p.m.

SANTO TOMAS JALIEZA: About 10 km (6 mi) beyond Coyotepec, off Hwy 175. A center for the weaving of cotton belts, sashes, table runners, place mats, and other items. The products are sold from a central location across from the village church.

OCOTLAN DE MORELOS: About 17 km (10 mi) beyond Coyotepec on Hwy 175. Market town and the home of the Aguilar Family, producers of clay figures painted in bright colors.

SANTA MARIA DEL TULE: About 14 km (8 mi) east-southeast of Oaxaca on Hwy 190. Its main attraction is a gigantic Ahuehete, or Mexican Cypress, in front of the village church. The tree is estimated to be about 2,000 years old.

TLACOCOAHUAYA: About 23 km east-southeast of Oaxaca off Hwy 190. 16th century Church of San Jeronimo and native artists.

TEOTITLAN DEL VALLE: 2 km (1 mi) from Tlacoahuaya and about 3 km (2 mi) from the highway. Main wool weaving center. Local crafts people produce ponchos and tapestries in traditional and modern designs.

TLACOLULA DE MATAMOROS: (3 mi) beyond Lambiyeco. Principal site of the 16th century Church of Our Lady of the Rosary. Tlacolula.

YAGUL ARCHAEOLOGICAL ZONE: (2 mi) farther along Hwy 190 and about 1 mi off the road. Large archaeological site. Includes a large ball court and the Palace of the Patios. Daily 8 a.m. - 6 p.m.

SAN PABLO VILLA DE MITLA: About 5 km (3 mi) beyond Yagul on Hwy 190. Then 4 km (2 mi) down a turnoff for lightweight woolen and cotton goods which are sold in a large market area near the church. Center for the production of an intoxicating drink distilled from the agave plant.

MITLA ARCHAEOLOGICAL ZONE: Remains of a large Zapotec population that had been influenced by the Maya by the time of the Spanish conquest. One of the groups of ruins, the most interesting is the Group of the Columns. Group of the Columns open daily 8:30 a.m. - 6 p.m.

There are several villages outside the city of Oaxaca which are famous for their crafts. Even if you do not intend to buy anything, going to any of these villages can be a very interesting experience as each village is unique and offers something different to offer.

There are various ways to get to the villages. You can catch a bus at the second classification station, which is located next to the Mercado Abastos. Or, you can take a collective. Collectives are also located at the Mercado Abastos. A minibus service is located at the sixth block of Armenta y Lopez. The minibus goes to Ocotlan, Coyotepec and Miahuatlan and Santo Toma's Jalisco day of the week there is a market in another of the nearby villages.

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