



Oaxaca Times

VOLUME XVII No 188 A GLANCE AT LIFE IN OAXACA • AUGUST 2004 www.oaxacatimes.com

**An Interview
with
Francisco
Toledo:
His current
work & hopes
for Oaxaca.**

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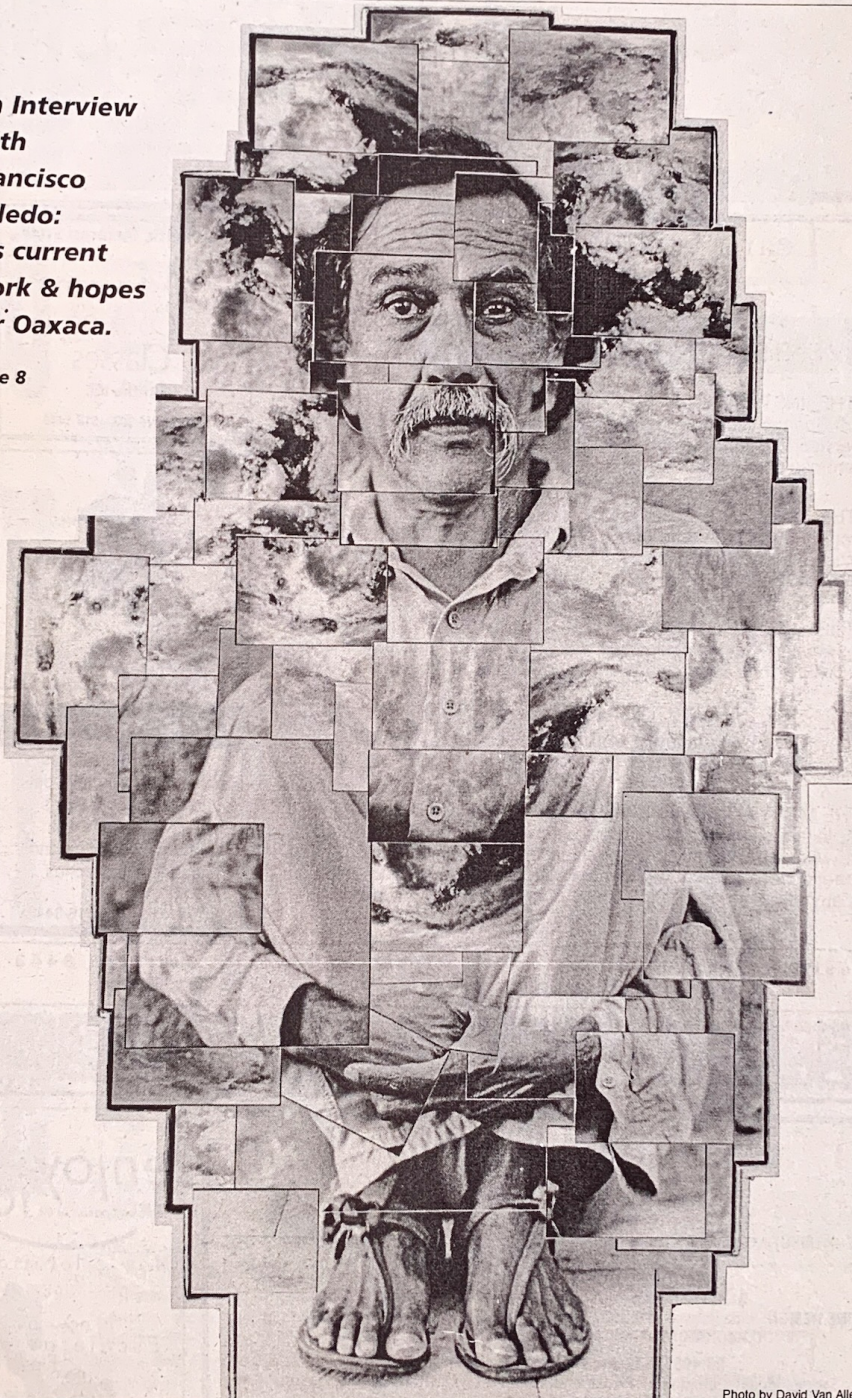


Photo by David Van Allen

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LEARN SPANISH AT THE ICC: OAXACA'S BEST LANGUAGE SCHOOL

What's Up

Life in the City

The New Bridge at Abastos

Local man builds pedestrian bridge

By Jeremy Lange

Through the hustle and bustle that is the Abastos market on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays one can find a place of more calm. If you cross the Periferico on the far west side of the market and follow one of the foot paths down the small hill to the truck road that runs the length of the river, look for the tall yellow flag waving in the breeze on the opposite side of the River Atoyac.

Here you will find Senor David Rodriguez and his puente, or bridge.

Both are of sturdy construction, rough and ready in both body and mind. Senor Rodriguez is a healthy 73 years old and still strong from his 22 years driving buses for the city of Oaxaca. But the stress and headaches of driving a bus in the city got to be too much, so Senor Rodriguez went back to his home in Colonia Lomas de San Javier, a 45 minute to an hour bus ride from the city, and dreamed up his own job, a bridge across the river. He is an inventor of all types, so this plan was not far fetched for a man who had conceived of, and built by hand, an enlarged wheelbarrow to transport heavy objects, such as steel girders and concrete blocks. He jokes of shrimp keeping him young in mind and strong in heart and the powers of "hipnotisma y magica" to bring in clients.

It all started with a drawing about a year ago. Senor Rodriguez saw the need for a bridge near to the market to keep people from having to walk through the heavily polluted water of the River Atoyac. He saw it not pri-

marily as a way to subsidize his income, but as a public service, a sanitary service or in his words "un servicio limpio" because many people get sick from the industrial and sewage pollution in the river. There are two city built foot bridges across the river, but the closest one is a little over a half a kilometer from Senor Rodriguez's, so he thought the added closeness would help people with their heavy loads coming from the market.

After the initial drawing, it took him a few months to get the necessary materials together to actually construct the bridge. The steel braces and foundation supports were bought from La Ferreteria Monte Alban and the wooden pallets that make up the actual surface of the bridge came from La Madera Abastos, right across the street from the new bridge. Once the materials were there, the bridge was built in about three months, mostly by Senor Rodriguez himself, with some excavating help from his son, who lives nearby. Since day one,

business has been brisk at the bridge, with an average of about 50 people crossing per day. Many cross both to and from the market or work, occasionally stopping to talk to Senor Rodriguez for a few moments of rest.

The bridge is open from 7am to 8pm, Monday through Saturday, but only from the months of June-November, since during the dry winter people can walk across the riverbed. Crossing is 1.5 pesos for adults and 1 peso for kids of about 5 years old and up. Although the bridge is officially open

from these hours, the labor involved makes for quite a bit longer of a day for Senor Rodriguez and his son. Due to the somewhat dangerous nature of the area come nightfall and the fact that the wooden pallets were burned earlier this month, the whole bridge is disassembled every evening and the pallets carted to the home of the son for safekeeping. Then every morning at 5am, they must be returned to the site and laid across the steel framework before the first customer arrives.

All this hard work is paying off, or at least keeping Senor Rodriguez busy and happy. He provides a service to the public and can spend his days working, talking to the regulars and making a little money to subsidize the income of an inventor, his true calling. So go to "El paso Texas" as the bridge is joking called, say hello to Senor Rodriguez and spend a few minutes admiring the passion and hard work of one man who has found self-employment and happiness at the River Atoyac.



New Frontiers

An interview with Francisco Toledo, one of Oaxaca's most celebrated artists.

By Askari Mateos

On Friday night Francisco Toledo presented his most recent work at the Quetzalli Gallery. Many people interested in keeping up with Francisco Toledo's work left with the notion that spirit of the creative search never stops and that the revolutionary application of traditional techniques are an inherent part of his work.

Beginning his studies at seventeen Toledo, an indigenous Zapotec was encouraged by established artist Rufino Tamayo, another famous Oaxacan painter. At an age when then Mexican art world was shifting perspectives from the politically conscious to the self-explorative, he was encouraged to travel abroad and study. This took Toledo to Paris where he expanded the horizons of his print making under Stanley William Hayter, a British etcher and engraver.

The time in Europe allowed Toledo to experience cultures outside of the realm he had seen before. Toledo used that to develop into an artist who could use his experience to communicate mythical ideas of the fusion of animal forms and human thought.

In an interview for the Oaxaca Times, he mentioned that this time it would be the people who decide whether what they see is a search or not, but Toledo assured us that he will continue debating with the creative muse and time. "The struggle can be seen in my work and it is impossible to describe".

But not impossible to see, Toledo uses new techniques to emphasize the action that is occurring in these animals, which seem so human underneath the exterior of their physical form. Toledo has brought us new animal characters with these bugs, bats, rabbits and frogs. Transporting you from one piece to another, they all seem to have their own conversation occurring which you are allowed to witness by the intensity of color and bleed of fabric or shaping of clay to stone. But

you cannot be in the world of Toledo's works because the myth that he has established is in a realm of its own, which gains knowledge from ours although we cannot quite enter.

"Toledo is a shaper of visual thoughts," according to critic Dore Ashton, who continues, "not a teller of tales, and those thoughts are evident in the

are apparent in the essences of the materials themselves that are as important to him as the caprices that rise in his imagination as he works. In the most vital way Toledo is a modern artist: one who works with the principle of free association, and in whom the imagery of countless places and epochs resides. His works, as Salvador Elizondo has written, are the record of things and beings at a given moment, outside the laws of nature, and more like 'instant

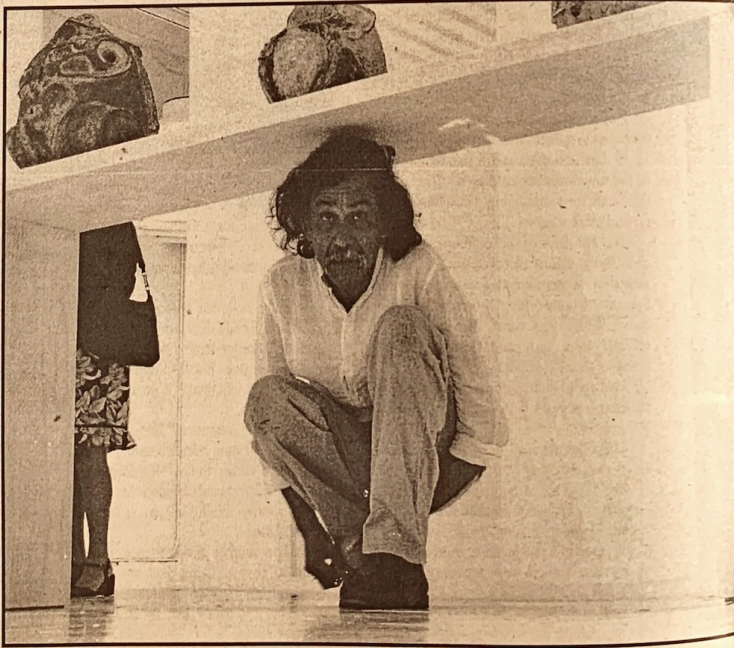


"The struggle can be seen in my work and it is impossible to describe"

dreams' than myths."

The current exhibit was done during the 10 months he spent in Los Angeles using different materials like gouache, paper, cow skin, and mica

work of his hand as it carves, models, incises, washes, floats or flecks. They



(which he uses for the first time after he could obtain a piece of a floor found during an excavation at the Monte Albán Archaeological Center).

He says he became interested in using the mineral because of its fire resistance and the great history that it carries, since Oaxaca was the main provider in the pre-Hispanic world, which is evident in the Teotihuacán ceramics that contain mica ornaments.

At 64 years of age and his birthday on the following day of the opening (July 17th), Toledo said that even though age diminishes some skills, it does not stop the creative process, and that he is always looking for ways to evolve in terms of textures and materials.

"It has been very difficult for me to break from the system... It has been a great struggle to

get rid of certain formulas and it would be pretentious to say this new work will last for future generations."

Not to pretend though to say that Toledo's work has been purchased for high prices

by museums and private collections all over the world. His work is now a staple to what people view as the modern Mexican art world. These sales have allowed him to invest in many community-based projects and establish educational centers around the city.

Many pieces in this exhibit were developed using a technique that involves throwing fresh pigments over the cloth, so that they are absorbed. We can also observe pencil based drawings, water colors, oil based paintings, engravings, some excellent sculptures

developed using high temperature clay, that are without a doubt one of the most interesting components of the exhibit.

A firm believer in the community and arts, Francisco Toledo has made a concerted effort to give as much as he can to the Oaxaca community.

Funding artistic organizations like the Institute of Graphic Arts or the Manuel Alvarez Bravo Center that aid in educating the youth as well as providing free music, movies and research opportunities. Other foundations like Prooax are geared more towards the preservation of Oaxaca's cultural history and its environmental needs.

Toledo says he could not dedicate himself to other philanthropic ventures such as Prooax without the money obtained from the sale of his art, "I need to give myself some time.

to work so that I can give money to the different projects. Although what I would really like to do is to dedicate myself to painting and lock myself up for two or three years in my work".

"If they knew how much that project has cost", he added, and how it has caused a discord with politicians, "because they manage our money". Toledo

completed". This latest venture in St. Agustín is hoping to be the new media and education center for the area, with updated facilities as well as well as a focus on the new realms of technology and art like digital photography.

The current exhibit uses a sort of soft appeal. Taking animals like the bat in one of his largest pieces hanging at the



gallery and blurring the image of it. In his ceramics, he rounds the figures of the frogs, overextending the shape to fill the creature into the object itself. Using an intense deep pink glaze in a clay fountain with black bugs and beetles running up the side, creates the feeling that the everyday nature that surrounds us is just as beautiful as the myth it creates.

At the same time, the pieces are

so varied in color and technique that the viewer sometimes becomes distracted into wondering who the artist is, instead of participating in the idea of what the work itself is trying to say. Is there a separation? Walking from one small gallery room to another, one is struck with the notion that this work was not created in one body of thought, but a series of thoughts that have accumulated themselves over time. The pieces do not reveal any sort of established advancement, but merely a myriad of so-called complex decisions made by a well-known artist. Is the bat that we see struggling not to be eaten, or laughing at the turn that is occurring in its life? The artist leaves us with that decision to make. In the end, we

are left with the feeling of a retrospective of the artist's work, that incorporates techniques he has become interested in, rather than a new body of work, concise in technique, although this is the conundrum that an established artist such as Toledo faces. The exhibit will be up at the Quetzalli gallery until

September 16 so take the time while here to see one of Oaxaca's most venerated artists of this century.



"To give it the last push and that at least the building gets opened, although it would be ideal for all of the project to be

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