



ORGANIZACION DE LOS ESTADOS AMERICANOS
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17th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW Washington, DC 20006

AUDIO-VISUAL PROGRAM

SETS 206, 207, 208 RUFINO TAMAYO, A PAINTER FROM MEXICO

Rufino Tamayo was born in Oaxaca, in northern Mexico in 1899, of Zapotec Indian parentage. All his childhood, until he was 11 years old, was spent in closest contact with this ancient tradition of popular arts of the Zapotec Indians, a tradition strong enough to have absorbed what little artistry the Spaniards brought to Mexico without changing its special style and character.

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Tamayo belonged to the group of artists which returned to easel painting and the exploration of plastic values as an end in itself. Availing himself of the technical discoveries of Paris, he joined them to a personal vision of Mexico to form an individual expression which has never been subordinated either to subject matter or to the fads and fancies that regularly rock the art world. He is a leader not a follower. He assumed the role of leader without actually joining the group of young rebels against muralism which came into existence about 1930. These dissidents pursued aesthetic and decorative goals, preferred easel pictures and graphic art, favored abstractions and stylizations of forms, and adopted elitist attitudes. The only sentiment which they shared with the wall painters was respect for the common heritage of pre-Hispanic culture.

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During the middle years, 1938-1952, Tamayo's technical development, which



swiftly accelerated, was coupled to a new expressiveness. Like Picasso, Orozco, and many other contemporary artists, Tamayo registered the savagery of World War II through pictorial tensions. During the forties, flight in all varieties of wonder and horror became a persistent motif in Tamayo's work. On canvas he remade man, masking, stretching, warping, flaying and even x-raying his victim. Primitive art and Picasso were his stimuli in this restructuring of the human form.

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Loss and/or change of identity becomes more pronounced. Sometimes it is achieved by the obliteration of all the features in the head, leaving it a blank oval. On the other occasions eyes and nose are prolonged vertically into a T-shaped sign that links torso to head. The head as an expression of identity and self is negated; it is replaced by a mask, a sort of pre-Columbian glyph.

One must know Tamayo's relationship to contemporary Mexican culture to understand his iconography. A leitmotif of Mexican literature - one finds it particularly in the novels of Carlos Fuentes - is the idea that the bourgeois world of our time is closed and sterile because it can no longer create myths. Myths are indispensable means to spiritual regeneration. To survive in such a world one must have a recourse to masks, metamorphoses, and different identities. If one is not to be destroyed by society one must

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Aspects of Tamayo's work are difficult to assimilate. His moody colors and simplified semi-abstract forms based on pre-Columbian sculpture sometimes require a major adjustment for the North American mind. Yet the power and monumentality of the work, and the rich plastic values of the subdued yet intense colors form the common denominator that relates his painting to the great art of all times. His recent paintings provide testimony that Rufino Tamayo, even at eighty, continues to grow and develop instead of turning back upon himself.

Rufino Tamayo: Fifty Years of His painting. With introduction, "Tamayo Revisited" by James B. Lynch, Jr. Washington, D.C.: The Phillips Collection, October 7 to November 16, 1978.

Text by Sharon Crockett.

CHRONOLOGY

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AUDIO-VISUAL PROGRAM

SET 208 ENGRAVINGS BY RUFINO TAMAYO

- 208 A Figure in Ochre (Figura en Ocre)
The figure has lost its identity lacking facial features. A T-shaped sign links head and torso. The figure becomes a pre-Columbian glyph. The ribs appear x-rayed.
- 208 B Head in Yellow (Cabeza en Amarillo)
The head and torso have a mask like quality, a return to the pre-Columbian iconography.
- 208 C Character with Two Trees (Personaje con dos Arboles)
The figure dwarfs the trees with a mythological impact. The squared head suggests pre-Columbian carvings. Tamayo has enclosed the figure in a partial rondo of land and sky.
- 208 D Two Figures (Dos Figuras)
The figures are enclosed in space. The Yellow background has a universal feeling. The figures have been distorted to resemble mythological pre-Columbian forms resting on an altar.
- 208 E Seated Character (Personaje Sentado)
Perspective has been abstracted. The background presents a strong horizontal against the vertical figure. The facial features have been flattened and textured.
- 208 F Head in Violet (Cabeza en Violeta)
This monochromatic head has mask like features of pre-Columbian art.
- 208 G Man in Grey (Hombre en Gris)
Tamayo has varied this figure with texture in the head, on the shoulders, and torso. The background "shadow" is a negative white space. The figure has no identity.
- 208 H Blue Woman (Mujer Azul)
The monochromatic picture has a balance of form. Depth is achieved through color. The X form in the left is repeated on the woman's torso.
- 208 I White Character (Personaje Blanco)
Tamayo has balanced his character in white in a field of red, white and green background. The character has great mystery and dignity and power of the frontal pose.



208 J White Tower (Torre Blanca)
Subtlety of shading gives the tower a mystery and monumentality.
Tamayo divides up the picture asymmetrically leaving an
arresting blue negative shape in the background.



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AUDIO-VISUAL PROGRAM

207 RUFINO TAMAYO; A PAINTER FROM MEXICO

- 207 A Still Life with Blue Glass.
This still life combines the volume and form of a modern classical still life and the atmosphere of a surreal scene where the table and objects float.
- 207 B Still life with Watermelons and a Clock.
This still life is modern classical in its approach to volume. The Watermelon motif became Tamayo's signature.
- 207 C Still Life.
The bowls and fruit are painted from a frontal view giving them a monumentality. The strong horizontals are balanced by vertical lines in the background.
- 207 D Artist in his Studio.
Tamayo has flattened the picture plane blending the fruits of the foreground, artist at his easel and the scene from the window onto one plane. The curtains and elliptical composition unify the various objects.
- 207 E Still life with Sundaes.
The picture plane has been flattened. Tamayo frames the picture with curtain like devices. The plates and compote on the table have been reduced to simple shapes. Red accents brighten the earthy tones of the background.
- 207 F Detail of Still "Life with Sundaes.
- 207 G Nude in White.
The figure is in a bold frontal position. Parts seem to be x-rayed. There is a mirrored figure in the background.
- 207 H Corinthian Mother. (Madre Corintia) oil 1950
The analagous colors of the background sear the retina of the viewer. The figure looms monumental. Deep blues at the base of the picture weight down the vertical composition.
- 207 I Bird Attacking Woman. Oil 1947
This scene depicts a myth where time past, present and future are simultaneous. The diagonals of the woman's tilted figure and the attacking bird's wings give the picture a dramatic movement.



207 J Two Faces. Oil 1953

These heads are set in a surreal space. The cubistic style gives the heads a universal feel as they vocalize a primal scream of rage and pain.



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SET 206 RUFINO TAMAYO, A PAINTER FROM MEXICO

- 206 A Trembling Woman (Mujer Tremblorosa) oil 1949 39" X 32"
The emotional quality of Tamayo's color is a marked feature of his work. Rhythms are abrupt and broken space is achieved with linear planes.
- 206 B Detail of Trembling Woman.
- 206 C Two Figures.
The colors are muted and nocturnal. The light radiates from the canvas like moonlight. The setting is sparse and mysterious.
- 206 D Homage to the Race. (Homenaje a la Raza) oil 1952
Tropical colors bounce off this canvas to sear the retina. The human figure is distorted.
- 206 E Woman with Pineapple. oil 1941 40" X 30"
Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Tamayo brightens up the figure and integrates the background by accents of red and blue. Although the woman has been painted in a cubistic manner, she maintains the strength and dignity of a tropical native.
- 206 F Olga.
This expressive portrait of his wife, Olga, is depicted in a modern classical form with expressive use of color. The watermelon motif has been added in the background.
- 206 G Watermelons.
Watermelons became a motif that caused the term "Tamayo pink" to be coined. Tamayo's wife even got presents - aprons, pillow cases, and napkins with watermelons on them! These watermelons were painted using a thin paint surface.
- 206 H Variation of the watermelon theme.
- 206 I Dogs. (Perros) oil 1942 Museum of Modern Art, New York.
The influence of antique Mexican sculpture is reflected in the painting of dogs.
- 206 J Two Figures. Oil 1970
Tamayo has reduced the facial features to a blank oval. Parts of the figure appear x-rayed. Color is applied in a cubistic fashion with the reds and oranges moving across the picture unifying it.

