

POESÍA ERÓTICA ESCRITA

ALLA

POESÍA ERÓTICA ESCRITA POR MUJERES EN COLIMA

**BAILANDO  
SIN SOSTÉN**

Office DEP

papel mul

1000

# The feminist street art from the western part of Mexico

## The art of Mónica Barajas

Karolina Rojek

University of Wrocław

### Introduction

The decade of the 1920s in Mexico witnessed the rise of a mural movement which highlighted the need of creating a national art and the obligation of reaching a wider public. Murals were supposed to communicate post-revolutionary ideas and history to the masses. Artists used the figure of a native Indian to symbolize the reborn country. The rich linguistic legacy became an inspiration as many names and words from indigenous languages were applied into the works. The will of the muralists was to express, in a combative way, all the social and essential problems of the nation<sup>1</sup>. Painters were expected to reflect on three themes: extraordinary traditions and their Pre-Columbian roots; socio-political circumstances together with the Mexican Revolution, and the last one, national heroes<sup>2</sup>. In 1921 the artist Carmen Foncerrada pronounced the following statement:

The destiny of a work of art should not be a museum, either small or large, public or private. Museums seem like cemeteries of illustrious men. Works of art should be in contact with the daily life of people<sup>3</sup>.

Tatiana Flores in her *Strategic Modernists: Women Artists in Post-Revolutionary Mexico* observed that although the development of mural painting is mainly attributed to male artists, there were many female painters who employed pedagogy and activism in their work and they quite often had to resist masculine cultural domination and patriarchal values<sup>4</sup>. Fanny Rabel (1922–2008) was the first female muralist engaged in environmental protests<sup>5</sup>. The revolutionary art of Aurora Reyes Flores (1908–1985), who is considered to have

1. *Bailando sin sostén*.  
Photo: M. Barajas



<sup>1</sup> See L. Cardoza y Aragón, *La pintura y la Revolución Mexicana*, [in:] J. F. Edmundo O'Gorman [et al.], *Cuarenta siglos de plástica mexicana. Arte moderno y contemporáneo*, Ciudad de México 1971, p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 92.

<sup>3</sup> C. Foncerrada, *La exposición de la Academia juzgada por una artista que no expuso*, "Revista de Revistas" 1921, No. of 16 October, p. 42.

<sup>4</sup> T. Flores, *Strategic Modernists: Women Artists in Post-Revolutionary Mexico*, "Woman's Art Journal" 2008, No. 2, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> A. Torres Arroyo, *El activismo público de Fanny Rabel*, [in:] *Para participar en lo justo. recuperando la obra de Fanny Rabel*, Comp. D. Comisarenco Mirkin, A. M. Torres, K. Cordero Reiman, Ciudad de México 2013, p. 95.



<sup>6</sup> See D. Comisarenco Mirkin, *Paredes olvidadas. El muralismo femenino (1930–1970)*, [in:] J. L. Trueba Lara [et al.], *Libros pintados. Murales de la Ciudad de México*, Ciudad de México 2015, p. 153.

<sup>7</sup> See M. A. Urbán, *Aurora Reyes. Alma de montaña*, Pref. A. H. Serrano, Chihuahua 2010.

<sup>8</sup> See G. U. Guadarrama Peña, *Pese a todo... Elena Huerta fue muralista*, "Crónicas UNAM" No. 13 <http://docplayer.es/49944003-Pese-a-todo-elena-huerta-fue-muralista.html> (access date: 24.11.2020).

been the first female mural painter in Mexico<sup>6</sup>, depicted violence against women, especially teachers in rural areas, and Pre-Columbian heroes like Cuauhtémoc<sup>7</sup>. Elena Huerta Múzquiz (1908–1997) at the age of 65 painted the most extensive mural (450 m<sup>2</sup>) ever created by a woman in Mexico on national history<sup>8</sup>.

It has been almost 100 years since the mural movement began. The protest is growing stronger and the academies of fine arts have brought many young female artists into light. However, murals are treated as only one part of expression within the street art nowadays. Stencil, often illegal, easy to apply and quick, has proved to be decisive. It has turned into Mónica Barajas' favourite technique to notify and educate the citizens of Colima, a state in the western part of Mexico.

I have been conducting research on feminist street art from Colima for three years. It includes the art of Barajas whom I met in 2013 during my first visit in Mexico. The artist (born in Tamazula, Jalisco in 1977) is employed as a visual arts instructor, a museum custodian and a guide at the Museo Universitario Alejandro Rangel Hidalgo in Nogueras. She graduated from Academy of Fine Arts in Colima (1999–2004). Apart from her dedication to museography, her interests encompass photography, industrial design, feminist literature and, what we will be able to comprehend through her works, the Pre-Hispanic traditions and indigenous women's movements.

In this paper I aim to examine the following questions: what kind of issues does the street artist Mónica Barajas explore? What kind of techniques does she use and why?

### **Mural painting within street art**

Street art in Mexico is seen mostly as a communication device for informing and persuading. Its objective is to raise awareness of social and political situation and both the extensive format (murals) and the accessible and uncomplicated methods (stencils) provide a powerful platform for reaching the public.

Mural painting is probably the most eye-catching form of street art due to its large scale. First a sketch has to be prepared. Only then will it be augmented on the wall. There are different ways of achieving it. The simplest one is by using a projector: the light allows you to trace the lines, but unfortunately, however practical it is, there are times when electricity is unavailable. It also means that in order to see the image you have to work at night, or at least when the sun goes down, which might be dangerous as an artist paints outdoors. In case of female artists operating in Mexico the risk is real. In that country, where community norms allow to ignore violence, 63% of women have suffered abuse. According to the study *Violence and Femicide in Mexico: Characteristics, Trends and New Expressions in the States of Mexico. 1985–2010* conducted for The United Nations Entity for Gen-

der Equality and the Empowerment of Women, in 2010 six women were murdered each day<sup>9</sup>. Currently, there are nine victims<sup>10</sup>. Daily.

Another method to enlarge a sketch is to divide the wall into squares. It will enable the artist to copy her project easily and precisely. But if the artist wishes to experiment a bit, she can use the drawing as a reference without following it literally, adding new fragments or synthesizing her initial design. In order to administer the paint the artist uses a scaffolding, mobile lift platform or a basket crane<sup>11</sup>.

As far as the paint is concerned, the most popular one is acrylic as it provides a perfect covering and is resistant to harsh weather conditions. It is applied with brushes (for lines and details) and rollers set on a telescopic pole (for background). This is Barajas' favourite technique, the acrylic paint is commonly available and affordable in Mexico.

Some artists prefer spray paint which, thanks to fat and skinny caps, gives them the possibility to accomplish even small-scale and complex patterns, although it is costly. Finally, one can use spray guns like the ones in automotive industry<sup>12</sup>.

On 27 September Street in Colima in 2014, Barajas painted a mural entitled *La Niña del maíz* (The Girl of Maize) [Figs. 2–4]. She was hired by Alex Madrigal, the owner of the restaurant La Buena Vida. Barajas' intention was not only to depict the fertility of Mexican soil and the vegetables used in the long-established Mexican cuisine, like the diversity of corn, tomatoes and chili, but also to express her objection to genetically modified maize. Thus she added skull shaped stencils with the caption "Monsanto". Barajas affirms that the Roundup herbicide produced by this company is harmful to human health and that it is the cause of allergies, digestive disorders and cancer. She recalls that in her house, the kitchen was a place where women would gather and **transform** corn. It meant starting the day very early. They would get up at 5 a.m. and collect cobs. First, the leaves were removed and from them dolls for her and her siblings were made. Then, from the soft corn, *tamales* would be prepared and from dry grains – corn flour and tortillas. But the *cuitlacoche* (also spelled *huitlacoche*), which is a fungus that grows on cobs, must not be omitted. Corn smut and Mexican truffle are the aliases of this soft and dark ingredient. It is used in all sorts of dishes from soups to *enchiladas* to sauces. The name *cuitlacoche* comes from Nahuatl, a language still spoken by more than 1 mln people in Central Mexico today. Approximately 300 g of corn is consumed daily in rural and 180 g in urban areas, what makes it the basic nourishment within Mexican diet together with beans, tomato and squash<sup>13</sup>. Maize, the diet basis of the Pre-Hispanic culture, developed in Mesoamerica about 8000 years ago and it was referred to as *tlaolli* or at times *tonacayo*, which means 'our sustenance'. This vegetable was considered a god. The Aztecs called it *Centeotl* and the Mayas – Jun Ye Nal, they thought



<sup>9</sup> T. Incháustegui Romero [et al.], *Violence and Femicide in Mexico: Characteristics, Trends and New Expressions in the States of Mexico*, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2013/2/violence-and-femicide-in-mexico-characteristics-trends-and-new-expressions-in-the-states-of-mexico> (access date: 24.11.2020).

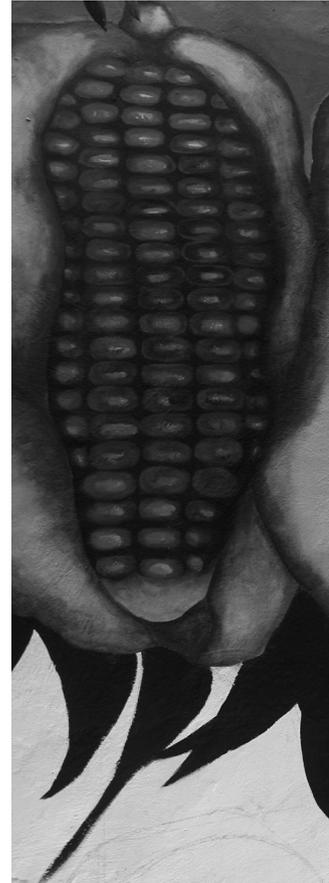
<sup>10</sup> See F. Nava, *Matan en México a 9 mujeres cada día: ONU*, "La Razón de México", 23 November 2018, <https://www.razon.com.mx/mexico/matan-en-mexico-a-9-mujeres-cada-dia-onu>, (access date: 2.02.2020).

<sup>11</sup> See Ciah-ciah, *Manual wandala - rzecz o technikach street artu*, [in:] *Sztuka mojej ulicy. Społeczny wymiar street artu*, Ed. K. Kamińska, Wrocław 2014, p. 21, [https://issuu.com/edukacjakrytyczna/docs/spo\\_eczny\\_wymiar\\_street\\_artu](https://issuu.com/edukacjakrytyczna/docs/spo_eczny_wymiar_street_artu) (access date: 24.11.2020)

<sup>12</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 22.

<sup>13</sup> See H. Bourges R., *El maíz: su importancia en la alimentación de la población mexicana*, [in:] *El maíz en peligro ante los transgénicos. Un análisis integral sobre el caso de México*, Coord. E. R. Álvarez-Buylia, A. Piñeyro Nelson, Ed. C. Carrillo Trueba, Ciudad de México 2013, pp. 233–234.

2. M. Barajas, *La Niña del maíz*, 2014, acrylic paint, 2.5 × 1.8 m, Colima. Photo: K. M. Rojek  
3. M. Barajas, *La Niña del maíz*, detail. Photo: M. Barajas  
4. M. Barajas, *La Niña del maíz*, detail. Photo: K. M. Rojek



<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 234.

<sup>15</sup> See S. Osorio-Mrozek, *Meksyk od kuchni. Od Azteków do Adelity*, Transl. M. Raczekiewicz, M. Jędrusiak, Sz. Jędrusiak, Ed. 3, enl., suppl., Kraków 2014, p. 53.

<sup>16</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 51.

of themselves as “*hombres de maíz* [men of maize]”<sup>14</sup>. According to the Aztecs’ legends, the fate of maize and humanity has always been interwoven, one cannot prosper without the other<sup>15</sup>. Humanity had to be created up to five times. With each creation people got closer to perfection. However, their diet was inappropriate which meant that they would not survive. Finally, people discovered the properties of maize and started to thrive<sup>16</sup>.

Although corn was perceived as a masculine attribute and beans as female, in Barajas’ mural we can observe a smiling face of a girl. Barajas stresses out that this is women’s world. A woman plays a central role in any Mexican household, she represents creativity, strength, compassion, patience and maternity feelings.

### Stencil

Since in Latin America one can behold a strong street culture, where the masses are out in the streets, parks and food markets, immersed in a conversation with their friends or neighbours, no wonder the walls are treated as a place where the ideas of minority can be ex-



pressed, noticed and remembered. If the work is produced under state or private sponsorship, it will last longer and its author's name will be known like it happens with many murals. As far as stencils are concerned, they are more ephemeral, duplicated, created inexpensively and mostly anonymous due to the fear of being counterattacked by the local authorities. If a person marks a property without the approval of the owner in any way, it can be considered a graffiti offense. This includes inscribing, drawing, placing a slogan, whether it is done with paint, an indelible marker or an engraving device. Art. 207 in the Penal Code from the state of Colima from the year 2016 stipulates illegal street art as "property damage". This type of property crime can lead to arrest and it does carry a severe punishment. The artist can be charged with 6 months imprisonment or in some cases, up to 8 years. The fine is the equivalent of 50 to 120 days of minimum wages<sup>17</sup>. But if a stencil appears on a public building, such as, for instance, a library, museum, temple, school or on a monument, then the charges are detailed in the Federal Penal Code. Art. 397, from the year 2018, imposes penalty from 5 to 10 years of imprisonment and a fine of 100 to 5000 Mexican pesos<sup>18</sup>.



<sup>17</sup> See *Código Penal para el estado de Colima*, [http://www.congresocol.gob.mx/web/Sistema/uploads/LegislacionEstatal/Codigos/codigo\\_penal\\_11jun2016.pdf](http://www.congresocol.gob.mx/web/Sistema/uploads/LegislacionEstatal/Codigos/codigo_penal_11jun2016.pdf) (access date: 2.02.2019).

<sup>18</sup> See *Código Penal Federal*, [http://www.paot.org.mx/centro/codigos/federal/pdf/2018/COD\\_PENAL\\_FED\\_21\\_02\\_2018.pdf](http://www.paot.org.mx/centro/codigos/federal/pdf/2018/COD_PENAL_FED_21_02_2018.pdf) (access date: 2.02.2019).



5. M. Barajas, *María de Jesús Patricia Martínez*, 2017, aerosol, 1.4 × 1.7 m, Comala and Colima. Photo: M. Barajas



<sup>19</sup> *Queen of Neighbourhood*, *Revolutionary Women: A Book of Stencils*, Oakland [California] 2010, p. 22.

Queen of the Neighbourhood would like to invite you to cut and paint! Stencils are beautiful and sneaky like an illegal printing press, with an awesome history of being used for disseminating fringe political ideas. One night out stencilling creates a street full of blossoming artwork as the sun comes up, a reclaiming of public space, a splash of humanity in the concrete jungle. Stencils are fast and bold, the anticipation involved in the meticulous cutting process fully satisfied by the sweep of the spray paint<sup>19</sup>.

Stencil in fact could be considered the Queen of the Neighbourhood: as the name of the collective that wrote *Revolutionary Women: A Book of Stencils* suggests. This form of street art transforms the walls of any city into a storybook.

In order to make a stencil a previously prepared design is needed. Then the image is outlined on a thin sheet of material such as

cardboard, X-ray film, wood or metal. The artist decides which elements should be cut out and which ones should be left intact. The pigment is applied through the cut-out holes in the template. The key advantage of a stencil is that it can be reused, however its longevity depends on the material. For example, stencils made out of paper are destroyed quite easily, aerosol paint makes them wet and it becomes impossible to repeat the image; on the other hand, the ones produced from wood or metal can last longer, be washed and the design can be replicated many times.

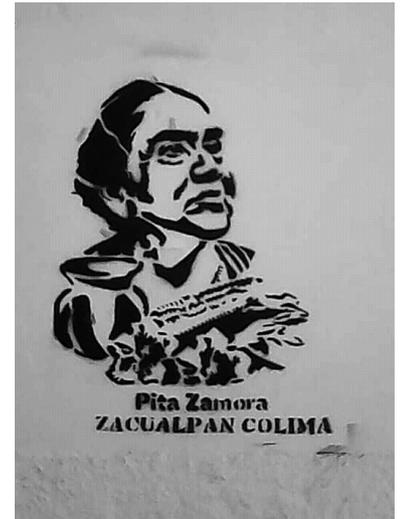
### Portraying indigenous women

Lyman Chaffee, a political science professor at California State University Dominguez Hills, has observed that the use of a proper colour affects visual impact<sup>20</sup>, so it is not only the place or technique that matters in street art. For instance, red and orange generate a feeling of excitement and alert. If you add black, then they will convey emotions of revolution, death and violence.

To illustrate this I will provide an example of a stencil by Barajas which depicts María de Jesús Patricio Martínez, a human rights activist [Fig. 4]. According to Chaffee, nationalistic groups opt for national colours while revolutionary groups adapt combination of reds, blacks and yellows<sup>21</sup>. Barajas added a phrase “*El pueblo manda y el gobierno obedece* [The nation rules and the government obeys]”. Both, the painted words and the portrait of the woman are in black. The red star is the symbol of EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional – The Zapatista Army of National Liberation, a political and militant group based in Chiapas that defends the rights of the indigenous).

The appropriation of this symbolism is significant as the Zapatista movement played a central role in creating opportunities for indigenous women to mobilize and become autonomous political actors at the national level in Mexico,

state the authors of *Indigenous Women’s Movements in Latin America: Gender and Ethnicity in Peru, Mexico, and Bolivia*<sup>22</sup>. Joining the EZLN was regarded as a better option for many women, especially if you compare their social and economic situation within communities or outside them. The advantage was that the division of tasks between men and women was undifferentiated by gender, and that they could occupy positions of authority inside the EZLN, continue their studies, and as a consequence, have a distinctively better life than the one they would have if they had stayed in their communities. Barajas’ stencil leaves no doubt as to her endorsing indigenous movements, and accentuating the fundamental role of the EZLN.



6. M. Barajas, *Pita Zamora*, 2015, aerosol, 1 × 0,65 m, Colima and Comala. Photo: M. Barajas



7. Zacualpan, 2015. On the left, the indigenous activist P. Zamora. M. Barajas is standing on the right. Photo: J. Ochoa



<sup>20</sup> L. G. Chaffee, *Political Protest and Street Art: Popular Tools for Democratization in Hispanic Countries*, Westport [Connecticut] 1993, p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> S. Rousseau, A. Morales Hudon, *Indigenous Women’s Movements in Latin America: Gender and Ethnicity in Peru, Mexico and Bolivia*, New York 2017, p. 111.



8. M. Barajas, *Bailando sin sostén*, 2014, aerosol, 12 × 18 cm, Colima. Photo: M. Barajas

In the stencil we can also note three yellow flowers that stand for food and femininity. The flowers of squash blossom have been used in the Mexican cuisine since Pre-Hispanic times. They are an important ingredient of many dishes such as *quesadillas* and *empanadas*, and are sold by women from Colima and Tuxpan. The leaves underneath represent epazote, a medicinal plant native to southern Mexico. Barajas stresses out the fact that the activist is also a respectable healer and by availing of the plants you become self-sufficient. They are so easily found that you do not need to purchase them. Self-sufficiency is considered a revolutionary act, explained Barajas.

Patricio Martínez, being an indigenous Nahua<sup>23</sup> from Tuxpan, Jalisco, was chosen in 2018 as a spokesperson by National Indigenous Congress, an organisation of communities, towns and tribes of Mexico established in 1996. She is the founder of the *casa de salud* (health house) Calli Tecolhuacateca Tochan and the co-author of the book *Hierberos, remedios y curanderos. Herencia de la medicina tradicional* in which she defends the Mexican natural medicine:

The indigenous communities from our country have had their own forms of treating patients for ages. The thorough understanding of Mother Nature [*madre tierra*] and her gifts support our practice. The insight comes from respect and coexistence with nature as well as from our own world view. Indigenous communities have been able to acquire profound knowledge that, together with the use of plants, fungi, minerals and animal parts, can heal any illness of body and mind. Indigenous traditional wisdom should be denominated medicine, the way the respectable western one is. Indigenous doctors are not witch doctors, they are not mere healers (in a pejorative meaning of the word) nor shamans. Indigenous doctors have preserved traditional knowledge for hundreds of generations. It is priceless for the whole humanity<sup>24</sup>.

An illness is seen not only as physical but spiritual. Patricio Martínez believes that, by being firmly connected to Mother Nature, the principal cause of an illness lies within an ecological imbalance (in illegal logging, pollution, immoderate using of water, processed food)<sup>25</sup>. About 200 plants are applied in the traditional Nahua medicine in the Tuxpan area, however many Nahua doctors are discriminated by the Mexican government to such an extent that if a baby is born with the aid of a Nahua midwife in the premises of UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Sierra de Manantlán (in the states of Colima and Jalisco) the local authorities refuse to issue a birth certificate<sup>26</sup>.

A similar stencil in its design circulated in Comala and Colima. It shows Epitacia Zamora Teodoro, known as Pita Zamora, an activist, a member of the Consejo Indígena por la Defensa del Territorio de Zacualpan (CIDTZ – Indigenous Council of Zacualpan Territory Defence) and La Red Mexicana de Afectados por la Minería (REMA – The Mexican Network of the Mining Industry Victims) [Figs. 6–7]. Zacualpan,



<sup>23</sup> Nahuas are a group of indigenous people of Mexico, including the Aztecs, whose language was Nahuatl.

<sup>24</sup> M. de J. Patricio Martínez, *Medicina indígena tradicional y salud popular en el sur de Jalisco*, [in:] O. Shöndube [et al.], *Hierberos, remedios y curanderos. Herencia de la medicina tradicional*, Ed. Guadalajara 2006, p. 53.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 54.

<sup>26</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 55.



hoyloleo.com

# PRESENTACIÓN DEL LIBRO CARTONERO

## BAILANDO SIN SOSTÉN

POESÍA ERÓTICA ESCRITA POR MUJERES EN COLIMA

BRENDA ALEJANDRA ROSALES PEÑA  
CLAUDIA CECILIA MORENO OLMO  
DANIELA ARTEMISA ARCEO  
EDITH GUADALUPE CAMACHO  
GRACE LICEA JIMÉNEZ  
GEORGINA NAVARRO NUÑEZ  
HILDA PAULINA MELÉNDEZ PADILLA  
MAGDALENA OROZCO RODRÍGUEZ  
ROSARIO OLIVO HERRERA  
SENDY SÁMANO

SELECCIÓN Y PRÓLOGO DE KRISHNA NARANJO

# 29 de enero, 9:00 PM

**LA ARTERÍA, COLIMA CENTRO**  
Andador Constitución #39

**HOY LO LEO**  **LA ARTERÍA**  
GALERÍA ESPACIO CULTURAL

9. M. Barajas, *Bailando sin sostén*, 2015, stencil converted into poster, Colima. Photo: M. Barajas

a community located 25 km from Villa de Álvarez, supplies the town and the capital of the state Colima with drinking water. In the premises of the community a gold mine was going to be opened. The mine had already a permission from the local government to start the construction but the project failed. Having faced the threat of possible and irreversible environmental damage, Pita Zamora gave uplifting speeches on numerous occasions. Barajas remembers that once she said “*Estoy aquí por que soy mujer, y no me deajo pisar* [I am here because I am a woman and I will not let anyone trample on me]”. These words inspired the artist and she included a comment to her work: “*Indígena, no te dejes pisar. Nosotros también tenemos derechos* [Indigenous, do not let others trample on you. We also have rights]”. Below the image of Zamora, Barajas painted a squash blossom, a corn and an earthenware container to carry water. The flowers and the vegetable, as in her previous work, stand for the Pre-Hispanic identity and fertility of the land.



? Dónde  
está  
Kelsey ?

On 23 February 2017, two years after Zamora's death, REMA published an article in order to honour the activist. The organization accuses the Colima's state government together with the delegate of the Agrarian Prosecutor's Office in Colima, María Elena Díaz Rivera and the President of Zacualpan's Communal Property, Carlos Guzmán Teodoro of harassment that led to Zamora's death. Zamora suffered a stroke and was hospitalized. She passed away a few weeks later<sup>27</sup>.

Since Barajas is dedicated to promote the Pre-Hispanic cuisine and medicine, as well as she supports strongly indigenous women's movements, it should come as no surprise that Patricio Martínez and Zamora were selected by the artist as the advocates she admires. The artist admitted she wished to honour the activists for their bravery and modesty, for having shown other Mexican women that the role that was forced onto them, as mothers and housewives, is not the only one. They can choose to become leaders.

### Portraying herself

A totally different character represents Barajas' stencil *Bailando sin sostén* (Dancing without a Bra) [Figs. 8–9]. In 2013, together with a friend, Miguel Valle, Barajas set up an independent publisher Hoy Lo Leo Cartonera (Today I'm Reading It Cartonera). The name Cartonera refers to the social, political and artistic publishing movement that began in Argentina in 2003 because of the devaluation of Argentinian peso and the following economic crisis. The movement later on spread to other Latin American countries. Thanks to the inexpensive method of production, books became affordable. What is more, it provided an opportunity for unknown authors to be published and promoted literacy through organizing literature workshops and book fairs. The covers of Cartonera books are made of cardboard, are hand painted and sold mainly on the streets.

This time the stencil appeared not only on the city walls, but on the book cover. In 2014 the artist organized a literature project for female poets of Colima and *Bailando sin sostén*, a book of erotic poems, came into being. The theme of Barajas work could be perceived as revolutionary and shocking by the Mexican society where the religion and the culture of *el machismo* are highlighted on a daily basis and a female orgasm and masturbation are still a taboo matter. It depicts a woman looking at herself in a mirror. Her eyes are half closed, she tilted her head back and opened her sensual lips. We witness an intimate moment of sexual pleasure where a man is nowhere to find, he is no longer the giver of pleasure. The woman is not submitting her body to his will. She is exploring her own sexuality, she is in control.

Barajas painted her reflection in an oval mirror decorated with an old golden frame, which could be found in a house of any conser-

10. M. Barajas, *¿Dónde está Kelsy?*, 2019, aerosol, 30 × 34 cm, Colima. Photo: M. Barajas



<sup>27</sup> REMA, *Comunicado REMA. Aniversario Pita Zamora*, 23 February 2017, <http://www.remamx.org/2017/02/comunicado-remamx-aniversario-pita-zamora> (access date: 24.11.2020).



<sup>28</sup> R. Montero, *Frida Kahlo: el mundo es una cama*, [in:] *eadem*, *Historias de mujeres*, Madrid 1995, p. 174.

<sup>29</sup> J. Tuñón, *Mujeres. Entre la imagen y la acción*, Ciudad de México 2015.

<sup>30</sup> A. López Austin, *La sexualidad en la tradición mesoamericana*, "Arqueología Mexicana" 2010, No. 104, p. 34.

<sup>31</sup> See F. Mastrogiovanni, *Żywi czy martwi. Porwania ludzi w Meksyku jako narzędzie terroru*, Transl. M. Olejnik, Kraków 2017, p. 11.

<sup>32</sup> See K. Derwich, *Meksyk – między demokracją a dysfunkcyjnością*, Kraków 2017, p. 252.

<sup>33</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 253.

<sup>34</sup> Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, *Situación de los derechos humanos en México*, 31 December 2015, <http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/informes/pdfs/Mexico2016-es.pdf>, p. 98 (access date: 24.11.2020).

vative Mexican family. The mirror is as symbolic as the one given to Frida Kahlo during her long recovery by her mother so that she could start painting. As Kahlo admitted, "I paint myself because I am quite often left to myself and because I am the topic I know most of"<sup>28</sup>.

Julia Tuñón in her book *Mujeres. Entre la imagen y la acción* emphasizes the fact that in Mesoamerican cultures the sexuality of women and eroticism did not carry any negative burden: so called *mujeres bonitas*, ceramic figures representing women during the act of masturbation, can be seen in the Regional Museum of Anthropology Carlos Pellícer Cámara in Villahermosa, Tabasco. However, with the Spanish invasion and the imposition of catholic religion, the situation changed drastically<sup>29</sup>. The Nahuas perceived sexual pleasure as a gift from gods, as important in their daily lives as food, happiness, vital vigour and rest, maintains Alfredo López Austin, a Mexican historian, professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, and an expert on the Aztecs worldview and on Mesoamerican religion<sup>30</sup>.

Hoy Lo Leo Cartonera sold 500 books of erotic poetry and opened a discussion of female sexuality and the role of women in the modern Mexican society during various literature events organized in Colima.

### Human rights violation: perils of being a woman in Mexico

Discrimination and violence against women are infringements of basic human rights. Art. 4 of the Mexican Constitution guarantees equal treatment for men and women, however it seems that the state is unable to guarantee women the basic right: the right to live. The Mexican writer and journalist Jaime Áviles stated that until the year 2014 the number of women murdered because of their gender was over 40,000<sup>31</sup>. The official figures of feminicides are greatly underestimated (14 Mexican states did not publish their reports in 2013)<sup>32</sup>. It is unsettling that in only 4% of the cases the suspects are sentenced<sup>33</sup>. The data published by non-governmental organisations are more credible.

In 1959 Inter-American Commission on Human Rights was founded as a permanent body in charge of promoting and protecting human rights on both American continents. From the report issued by IACHR in 2016 on the situation in Mexico I learnt that in a period of three years (1 January 2012 – 31 January 2015) 15,668 people were considered missing, 3,677 of them were underage. In the group of missing children we can observe that the majority of them are girls (2,365)<sup>34</sup>. A particular case of a missing girl incentivized Barajas to denounce, through her work, the lack of any effective politics of prevention and protection.

On 19 May 2017 a girl, Kelsy Naomi Castañeda Córdoba, was reported missing. She was eight at that time and was living with her

family in Tecomán, a town on the Pacific coast in the state of Colima. It has been three years now since her disappearance. At the end of January 2019 Barajas created a stencil with a face of a girl and a caption saying: “¿Dónde está Kelsy? [Where is Kelsy?]” [Fig. 10]. The portrait is not based on Kelsy’s photo, though. It could belong to any girl of her age. Thus Barajas accentuates the scale of the problem: from January 2014 until 30 April 2018, the state of Colima (which is the fourth smallest of 31 Mexican states, with the population of only 711,235 inhabitants) registered 595 missing people<sup>35</sup>. There is even a phrase used in Spanish in Mexico: “*desaparecer a alguien*” (literally: ‘to disappear someone’) as kidnapping has become a common practice applied by organized crime. People simply **are disappeared**.

Taking into consideration the disrupting situation Mexican women, under and of age, find themselves in, it can be easily predicted that this particular piece of work will be monochromatic. Barajas states:

From black to grey, these are the hues that represent a Mexican woman. A woman that is meant to be an object produced for indulgence of someone else. Unaware of her rights or unable to fight for them, she is a mere animal for carrying loads. Our life is definitely not a rainbow. Colours are used in order to celebrate but there is nothing to celebrate if you think of all those girls who are raped or trafficked<sup>36</sup>.

Trafficking of women into forced and exploitative labour, including sexual exploitation, is one of the greatest human rights violations. It is the second most lucrative organized crime activity after the trafficking of drugs. Women who migrate within countries or across international borders to seek better economic opportunities are more likely to be sexually exploited<sup>37</sup>. Barajas asked herself what had happened to Kelsy and to many other girls that we never heard from again, whether they ended up in one of the cartels’ brothels, whether she was still alive.

Life expectancy in Mexico is approximately 76 years, unless you are a woman and come from Ciudad Juárez, then it decreases to 18, contemplate ironically Denise Dresser and Jorge Volpi in their pamphlet *México. Lo que todo ciudadano quisiera (no) saber de su patria*<sup>38</sup>. The states of Chihuahua, Durango, Guerrero, Sinaloa and Michoacán are regarded as the centres of violence<sup>39</sup>. It takes only one example to illustrate the perils women face regularly in Mexico and the helplessness of the local authorities: the case of the border city of Ciudad Juárez which gained notoriety as 300 women were murdered in the period of 1993 to 2001. Yet the Public Prosecutor’s Office denies to call it feminicide and blames the families and the women themselves for their immoral behaviour as it seems that going out at night and some zones of the city are restricted for men only<sup>40</sup>. Women disappear not only in Chihuahua, but also in Colima and in each



<sup>35</sup> See A. Pérez, *Kelsy Naomi tiene 16 meses desaparecida*, “Meganoticias” 3 October 2018, <http://www.meganoticias.mx/colima/noticia/kelsy-naomi-tiene-16-meses-desaparecida/32705> (access date: 24.11.2020).

<sup>36</sup> From my interview with Mónica Barajas, conducted on 15 February 2019.

<sup>37</sup> See A. K. Acharya, J. Bryson Clark, *Trafficking of Women and Vulnerability to HIV/STI Infection in Urban Mexico*, “Genus” 2014, No. 2/3, p. 87, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/genus.70.2-3.87> (access date: 18.02.2019).

<sup>38</sup> D. Dresser, J. Volpi, *México. Lo que todo ciudadano quisiera (no) saber de su patria*, Ciudad de México 2006, p. 19.

<sup>39</sup> D. Shirk, J. Wallman, *Understanding Mexico’s Drug Violence*, “The Journal of Conflict Resolution” 2015, No. 8, p. 1356, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24546346> (access date: 15.02.2019).

<sup>40</sup> J. Monárrez Fragoso, *Las asesinadas en Ciudad Juárez. Una análisis del feminicidio sexual serial de 1993 a 2001*, [in:] *Miradas feministas sobre las mexicanas del siglo XX*, Coord. M. Lamas, Ciudad de México 2007, p. 246.

and every Mexican state. Moreover, it suggests that life expectancy of a woman will never reach 76 years. Barajas unveils through her art the cynicism of local authorities and the hypocrisy of the patriarchy.

As seen from the examples above, the street art in Mexico is a powerful tool of expression for people otherwise often powerless in a state which does not provide justice and equality for all its citizens. The work of the Mexican artist Mónica Barajas inspires and points to solutions. She has treated the public space as a democratic, open and free of charge canvas. By using mural painting and stencils the streets have developed into a forum where the artist raises her voice against the attempts of silencing the oppressed. The techniques adopted by her have turned into a weapon. She attacks, criticizes and notifies. Barajas' street art is meant to be read as an article or a report we were never supposed to hear of. She has proved to be capable of educating the public and of making the citizens of Colima sensitive to social dispute.

---

#### Słowa kluczowe

sztuka uliczna, murale, szablon, Mónica Barajas, Meksyk, Colima

---

#### Keywords

street art, mural painting, stencil, Mónica Barajas, Mexico, Colima

---

#### References

1. **Acharya Arun Kumar, Bryson Clark Jennifer**, *Trafficking of Women and Vulnerability to HIV/STI Infection in Urban Mexico*, "Genus" 2014, No. 2/3, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/genus.70.2-3.87> (access date: 18.02.2019).
2. **Bourges R. Héctor**, *El maíz: su importancia en la alimentación de la población mexicana*, [in:] *El maíz en peligro ante los transgénicos. Un análisis integral sobre el caso de México*, Coord. E. R. Álvarez-Buylla, A. Piñeyro Nelson, Ed. C. Carrillo Trueba, Ciudad de México 2013.
3. **Chaffee Lyman G.**, *Political Protest and Street Art: Popular Tools for Democratization in Hispanic Countries*, Westport [Connecticut] 1993.
4. **Cardoza y Aragón Luis**, *La pintura y la Revolución Mexicana*, [in:] **J. F. Edmundo O'Gorman [et al.]**, *Cuarenta siglos de plástica mexicana. Arte moderno y contemporáneo*, Ciudad de México 1971.
5. **Ciah-ciah**, *Manual wandalu – rzecz o technikach street artu*, [in:] *Sztuka mojej ulicy. Społeczny wymiar street artu*, Ed. K. Kamińska, Wrocław 2014.
6. **Comisarenko Mirkin Dina**, *Paredes olvidadas. El muralismo femenino (1930–1970)*, [in:] J. L. Trueba Lara [et al.], *Libros pintados. Murales de la Ciudad de México*, Ciudad de México 2015.
7. **Derwich Karol**, *Meksyk. Między demokracją a dysfunkcyjnością*, Kraków 2017.
8. **Flores Tatiana**, *Strategic Modernists: Women Artists in Post-Revolutionary Mexico*, "Woman's Art Journal" 2008, No. 2.
9. **Foncerrada Carmen**, *La exposición de la Academia juzgada por una artista que no expuso*, "Revista de Revistas" 1921, No. of 16 October.
10. **Incháustegui Romero Teresa [et al.]**, *Violence and Femicide in Mexico: Characteristics, Trends and New Expressions in the States of Mexico*,

<http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2013/2/violence-and-femicide-in-mexico-characteristics-trends-and-new-expressions-in-the-states-of-mexico> (access date: 24.11.2020).

11. **López Austin Alfredo**, *La sexualidad en la tradición mesoamericana*, "Arqueología Mexicana" 2010, No. 104.
12. **Patricio Martínez María de Jesús**, *Medicina indígena tradicional y salud popular en el sur de Jalisco*, [in:] O. Shöndube [et al.], *Hierberos, remedios y curanderos. Herencia de la medicina tradicional*, Guadalajara 2006.
13. **Mastrogiovanni Federico**, *Żywi czy martwi. Porwania ludzi w Meksyku jako narzędzie terroru*, Transl. M. Olejnik, Kraków 2017.
14. **Monárrez Fragoso Julia**, *Las asesinadas en Ciudad Juárez. Un análisis del feminicidio sexual serial de 1993 a 2001*, [in:] *Miradas feministas sobre las mexicanas del siglo XX*, Coord. M. Lamas, Ciudad de México 2007.
15. **Pérez Almendrita**, *Kelsy Naomi tiene 16 meses desaparecida*, "Meganoticias", 3 October 2018, <http://www.meganoticias.mx/colima/noticia/kelsy-naomi-tiene-16-meses-desaparecida/32705> (access date: 24.11.2020).
16. **Osorio-Mrożek Susana**, *Meksyk od kuchni. Od Azteków do Adelity*, Transl. M. Raczekiewicz, M. Jędrusiak, Sz. Jędrusiak, Ed. 3, enl., suppl., Kraków 2014.
17. **Queen of Neighbourhood**, *Revolutionary Women: A Book of Stencils*, Oakland [California] 2010.
18. **REMA**, *Comunicado REMA. Aniversario Pita Zamora*, 23 February 2017, <http://www.remamx.org/2017/02/comunicado-rema-aniversario-pita-zamora> (access date: 24.11.2020).
19. **Rousseau Stéphanie**, **Morales Hudon Anahí**, *Indigenous Women's Movements in Latin America. Gender and Ethnicity in Peru, Mexico and Bolivia*, New York 2017.
20. **Shirk David**, **Wallman Joel**, *Understanding Mexico's Drug Violence*, "The Journal of Conflict Resolution" 2015, No. 8, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24546346> (access date: 15.02.2019).

---

**MA Karolina Maria Rojek**, [karolinamariarojek2018@gmail.com](mailto:karolinamariarojek2018@gmail.com), **ORCID: 0000-0003-1825-3906**

Graduate of the Institute of Art History at the University of Wrocław. Under the supervision of Prof. Dr. habil. Anna Kutaj-Markowska she is preparing her doctoral dissertation on women's activism in Latin America. The author has received three grants from the Mexican Government and lived in Mexico (Colima and Guadalajara) for five years. She witnessed the Zacualpan protest in 2014. Research interests: Latin America, street art, activism, photography, herstory.

## Summary

**KAROLINA MARIA ROJEK (University of Wrocław) / The feminist street art from the western part of Mexico. The art of Mónica Barajas**

The aim of the article is to describe and analyse the street art of a Mexican activist and curator, Mónica Barajas. Her work provides an example of how the art is able to inform and educate the public of Colima that otherwise would not learn about current social problems as they are quite often silenced by the local government.