

# A GALLERY OF MEXICAN ILLUSTRATION

Fabricio Vanden Broeck\*

FABRICIO VANDEN BROECK



▲ *In the Underworld*, 2016.

Considering abstractly and interpreting the essence of ideas and communicating them through visual language is the origin and objective of illustration, an activity that is becoming more and more important in the world of publishing and anywhere that images speak for themselves. But it has not always been that way: at the beginnings of modern illustration in Mexico at the end of the nineteenth century, this activity was a craft carried out by painters and engravers as something that complemented their art, with a few exceptions like José Guadalupe Posada. Illustrations were only conceived of as an adornment for whatever was said with words, as though the only discourse capable of communicating was the written word. Even today there are those who see illustrations as a series of lines and forms that enliven the text. Fortunately, however, fewer and fewer voices defend the hegemony of one discourse over the other. Actually, the two ways of transmitting ideas, sensations, and emotions have no reason to compete with each other; the two discourses move on parallel planes.

Here, the work of important artists gives us a sample of how illustration has been thought about and sketched in Mexico in recent years, the pathways taken until we

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\*Illustrator; vandenbro@yahoo.com.

## CLAUDIA DE TERESA

arrive at what has been called the era of the image; its sources of inspiration, its communicative intent, and the resources available for tracing its artistic universe.

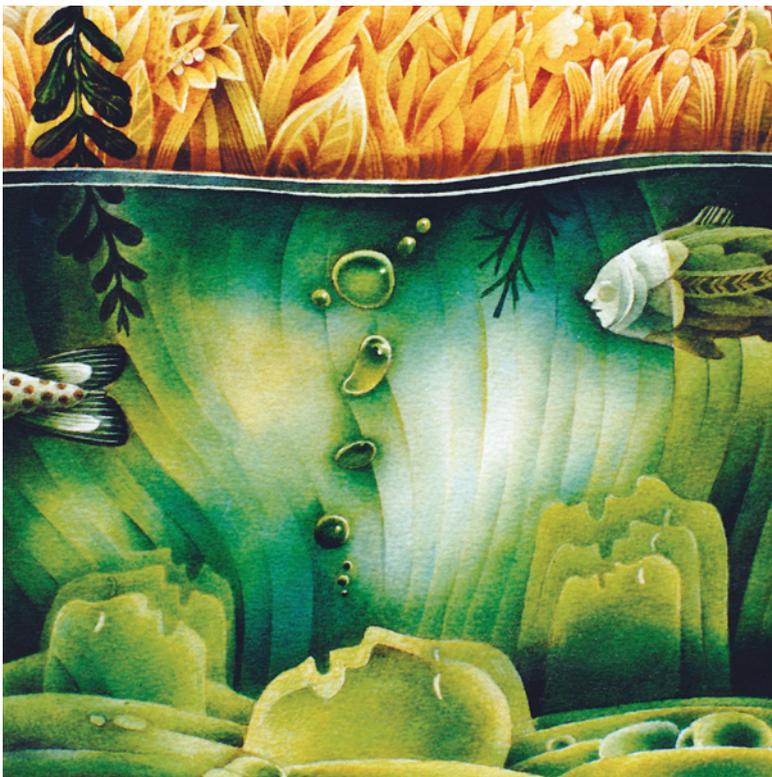
We can situate the first generations of contemporary Mexican illustrators beginning in the second half of the 1970s. In part, this is due to the illustration projects for the Ministry of Education's textbooks and for the magazine *Colibri* (Hummingbird) edited by photographer Mariana Yampolsky. To a greater or lesser extent, these projects dealt with the issue of cultural identity, the leitmotif permeating Mexico's art and thinking after the victory of the 1910 Revolution.

In this context, illustrators searched in their own cultural roots to construct a personality that distinguished them from the one coming into Mexico from Europe and the United States.

From my point of view, of the members of the first contemporary generations, emerging in the 1960s and 1970s, Felipe Dávalos's work displays an aesthetic exploration that contributes a great deal



▲ From the book *Los temblores* (Earthquakes) (Mexico City: SEP-ADN, 1997).



▲ From the book *Apalka* (Mexico City: CIDCU, 1992).

FELIPE DÁVALOS

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## MAURICIO GÓMEZ MORÍN



▲ *La grieta.*

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to the concept of Mexican illustration. It is undoubtedly nourished by his prior work as a sketch artist for *National Geographic* magazine, an experience linked to the visual and symbolic languages of the pre-Colombian cultures and those who admire their visual communications tradition. The ideas of the pre-Colombian peoples endure in Dávalos's illustrations.

Bruno González is another outstanding member of that generation, who managed to establish his own language, but with a mark that owes a great deal to the textural work so typical of Mexico's artists and artisans.

The second generation appeared in the mid-1980s. Here, the work of illustrator Claudia de Teresa reminds us of the decorative colonial art of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with notable Spanish and Moorish influences. Gerardo Suzán's work, for its part, stands out for its colors in all shades, undoubtedly inspired in one of the most important representatives of Mexican art, Rufino Tamayo. The images of Mauricio Gómez Morín also clearly reflect the intention of creating an identity along the lines of the tradition of the Popular Graphics

ALEJANDRO MAGALLANES



▲ From the book *101 Adventures in Reading* (Mexico City: Artes de Mexico, 2009).

## RICARDO PELÁEZ

Workshop, while the work of Fabricio Vanden Broeck —this author— reveals a search for recovering the textures and patinas characteristic of the Mexican visual universe. For that generation, experimentation, structuring a personal language, and the references of the Mexican visual universe have been central concerns in their work.

It is important to mention that, of that generation, not all the artists came on board for the adventure of seeking a national aesthetic repertoire; some, in an attempt at universality, preferred to perfect techniques that allowed them to become part of the mainstream and even rid themselves of any shred of the local culture.

But in general, we can say that that period was marked by the still-vibrant nationalisms, and that the poles of localism versus universalism frequently came under discussion.

Things began to change gradually beginning at the end of the 1980s with the opening of markets and globalization; these two phenomena began to impose unifying criteria not only in consumption and in day-to-day habits, but also in the country's aesthetic.



▲ *Early Morning*, taken from the *Catalogue of Illustrators* (Mexico City: 2004).

## ENRIQUE TORRALBA



▲ From the book *O último conto* (The Last Story) (Belo Horizonte, Brazil: Aletria, 2013).

MARIANA VILLANUEVA



▲ *Woman with Deadpan Expressions.*

Corporate logic and massification took over the planet, often to the detriment of diversity. And the work of the next generations of Mexican illustrators began increasingly to look like the dominant expressions in illustration, particularly those from Europe and the United States.

In this context, a third generation of contemporary Mexican illustrators emerged with very diverse interests, more influenced by work from abroad, and not necessarily concerned with the issue of identity as a source of artistic inspiration.

Less sensitized to the Mexican visual universe, this generation seeks to dialogue with its counterparts from other horizons and become part of the international dynamic.

One example of this is the work of illustrator Manuel Monroy, whose aesthetic is inspired in European proposals from the 1950s; another is the work by Alejandro Magallanes, inspired in the French collective Grapus, with its Dadaist influence, and 1970s Polish graphic art.

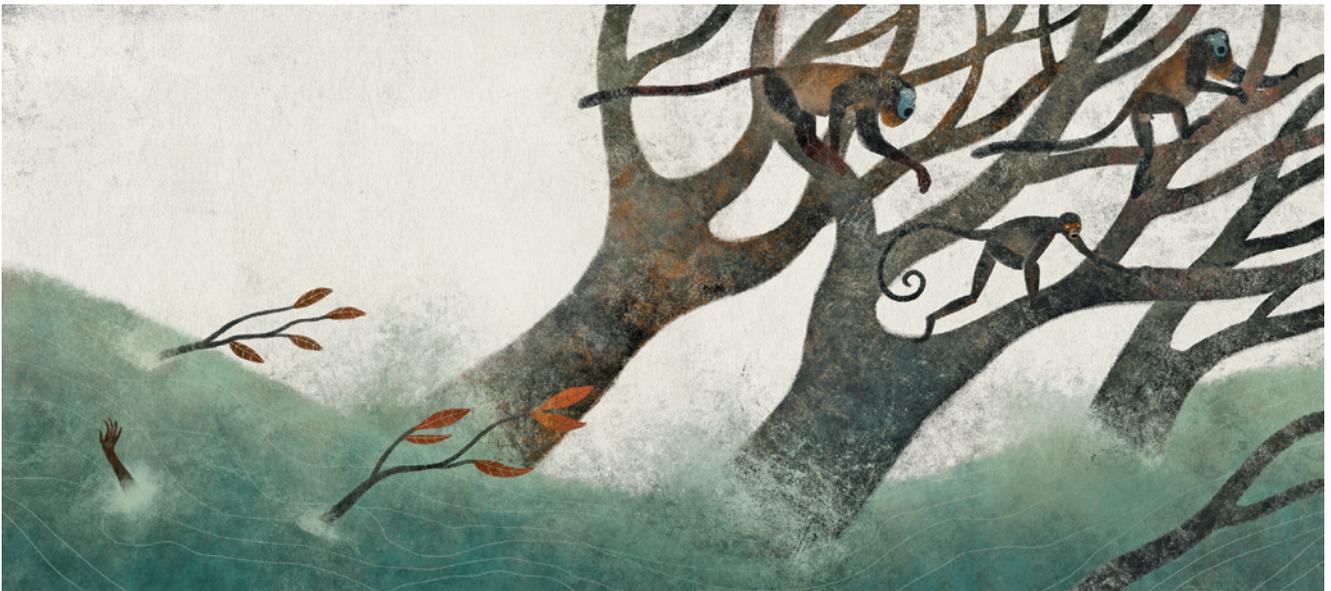
A fourth generation, which emerged during the first decade of the twenty-first century, is characterized above all by greater group awareness and less interest in seeking their roots and their own reference points. Their proposals, diverse from each other, are the result of a decided influence of global trends, with a particular accent of the Asian currents, like mangas, and the use of digital techniques.

LUIS SAN VICENTE



▲ *Monstrous Diversity.*

## JUAN PALOMINO



▲ From the book *Monos, mensajeros del viento* (Monkeys, Messengers of the Wind) (Mexico City: Tecolote, 2015).

In the middle of the XXI century's second decade, a new generation of illustrators emerged, whose main characteristic is the exploration of unconventional supports.

## GABRIEL PACHECO



▲ From the book *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (Mexico City: Nostra Ediciones, 2013).

## MANUEL MONROY



▲ *The Cristero War.*

This generation focuses on personalizing trends created elsewhere, adopting, for example, a color palette unusual in Mexico. The work of this generation includes the use of digital possibilities more or less intensely both in constructing their proposals and in disseminating them on social networks.

Outstanding in this generation, among many others, are Enrique Torralba, Ixchel Estrada, Ricardo Peláez, and Luis San Vicente, with work that is not only very personal, but also radically different from one another.

In the middle of the twentieth-first century's second decade, we are beginning to be able to discern a new generation of illustrators, whose main characteristic is the exploration of non-conventional supports. This is motivated in part by the increasingly meager demand from Mexico's publishing industry, dominated and formatted as it is by globalization and the big publishing corporations, which impose criteria and tastes based more on potential commercial value than on quality.

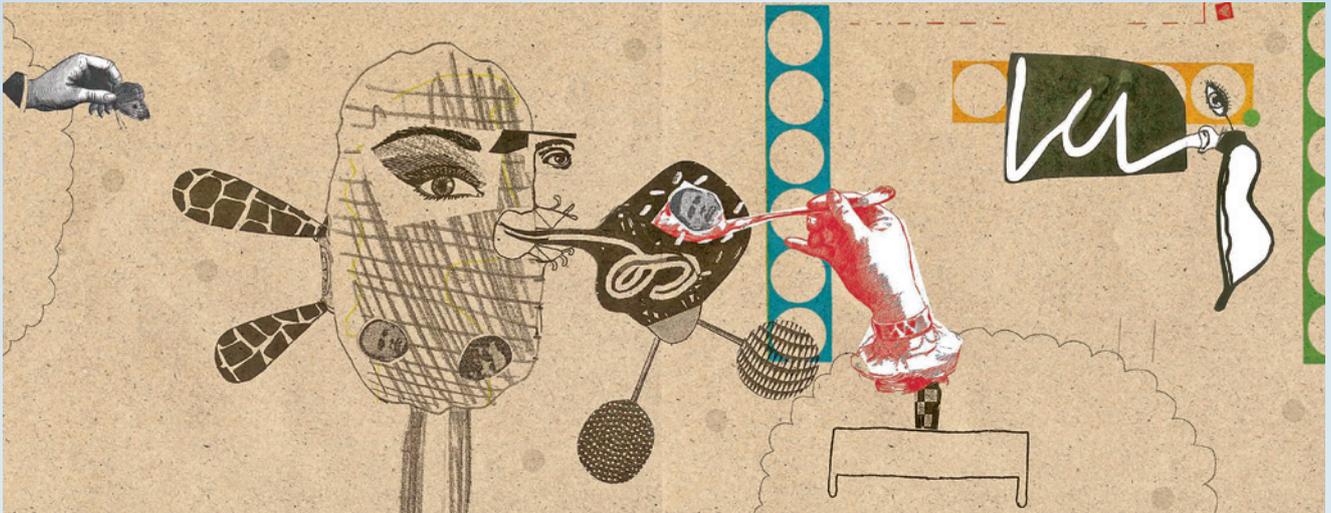
Today, globalization has meant that all illustrators in the world tend to look like each other; wherever they are they make up a supranational tribe that drinks from the waters of the Internet.

ADRIANA QUEZADA



▲ *Social Responsibility.*

## IXCHEL ESTRADA



▲ *Soup for the Fly*, from *Luci's Flight* (school notebook) (Mexico City: FCE, 2012).

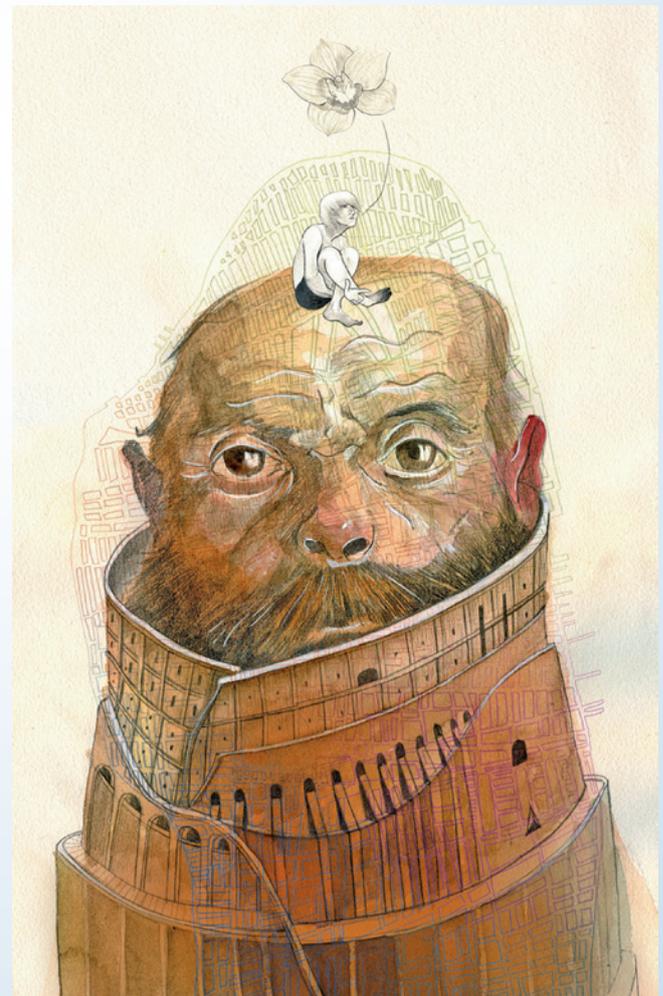
These unconventional supports include, of course, everything the social networks make possible, but, above all, supports previously considered marginal, such as tattooing and graffiti, as well as three-dimensional supports: toys, games, ceramics, etc. Gabriel Pacheco, Juan Palomino, Richard Zela, and Mariana Villanueva are just a few of the many illustrators who belong to this new trend.

Naturally, this brief review of the recent history of Mexican illustration has no pretensions of being exhaustive and only mentions as examples a few of the protagonists of a long and diverse list, as a sort of gallery of Mexican illustration.

Today, globalization has meant that all illustrators in the world tend to look like each other, wherever they are. To start with, their work reflects in general a more or less intensive use of design programs like Photoshop or Illustrator. As a whole, they make up a supranational tribe that drinks from the waters of the Internet —almost exclusively— and disseminates their work through the social networks.

However, in light of recent events, which reflect a profound, generalized questioning of globalization and its paradigms, we should take another look at our professional practices as illustrators and members of a culture rich in diversity, aesthetics, and colors. We should try to preserve that culture and revitalize it based on our own work, since, to paraphrase Mauricio Gómez Morín, “without roots, there are no wings.” **MM**

## RICHARD ZELA



▲ *The Tower of Babel*.