

Mexican-origin population in the United States. The most preferred label is now Latino, which reflects the increasingly diverse Spanish surnamed community. While poverty, unemployment, low levels of education and other social problems persist, a growing Latino professional and middle class points to a prosperous future, at least for some. Voter registration drives and Latino participation in the political parties are just beginning to bear dividends in some areas.

But, what does the new century hold for Mexican Americans? The intensifying economic integration of the United States and Mexico has opened lucrative opportunities for many businesses in both countries, but its effect on the Mexican origin population is not clear. Obviously, the fortunes of the Mexican American community are crucial for Mexican immigrants, since their arrival in the United States inevitably brings them to a *barrio*. However, the long-term consequences of efforts at all levels of U.S. society to curb immigration, and eliminate social benefits for immigrants' children could cause dislocations throughout the Mexican American and Mexican immigrant community. Essays such as Griswold del Castillo's provide a much needed tool in appreciating the significance of Mexican culture as inspiration for the Mexican-origin population in the United States. ❧

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**Tina Modotti: Photographer and Revolutionary**

*Margaret Hooks*

Harpers Collins Publishers,  
London

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Margaret Hooks has added yet another book to the literature about women in Mexico in the 1920s. Hooks identified the goal of her work in the Preface, stating that she would try to “demythologize Modotti the legend, extricate her from the shadows of her loves and locate the woman and the artist.” She succeeds in telling Tina’s story; however Tina, the woman, is still an enigma, the unanswered questions are still there.

Hooks, a journalist based in Mexico City, presents a smooth story that embellishes on facts gathered by copious research. The documentation from archives, interviews and texts that the author consulted is impressive. She weaves many names and dates into a journalistic approach of describing people and places. The text is well written, although some of her statements are not factual.

Tina Modotti is a fascinating figure of the Mexican Renaissance, the period in Mexican history following the armed phase of the 1910 Revolution, when major intellectuals and artists plunged into the effort of creating a utopian society. It was at this time that Mexico’s best known muralists, Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaró Siqueiros and Jean Charlot, were commissioned by José Vasconcelos to portray the story of the country on the walls of public buildings. The revolutionary fervor attracted many foreigners who wanted to participate.<sup>1</sup> Some, like Bertram Wolfe, needed to get out of the United States because of the persecution of so-called “Bolsheviks,” who were busy unionizing. Others, like Carleton Beals, came because they wanted to contribute to the effort of building a utopian society.

Tina Modotti came to Mexico for the first time in 1922, to bury her first husband Roubaix de l’Abrie Richey, whom everybody called “Robo.” Months later she returned to Mexico with Edward Weston, her lover and teacher, a photographer with whom she lived in that period. Tina remained in Mexico when Weston returned to the United States and stayed until 1929 when she was deported. The doors were closed to Tina in the United States because of her political activity with the Com-

<sup>1</sup> See Henry C. Schmidt, “The American Intellectual Discovery of Mexico in the 1920s,” in *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 77, Summer 1978, pp. 335-51.

munist Party. She could have gone to Italy, but she would have ended up in prison. Tina went to Berlin where she worked briefly before going on to Moscow. As a member of the Soviet espionage group, Tina traveled in Europe and participated in the Spanish Civil War. When members of the Soviet Communist Party were no longer welcome in Spain, Tina returned to Mexico, where she died.

Tina's work as a photographer is outstanding, and Hooks's book includes first rate reproductions on good paper. Unfortunately, the author does not reveal her sources of the images or where anyone interested might find them. She handles quotes and information in the same way.

Other people's words are used out of their original context to support Hooks' point. Elaborate descriptions of situations, people and places who were part of Tina's world are often presented without providing the source of her information. This is unfortunate because it limits the book to the general public. Scholars cannot follow up her work to confirm, refute or correct her statements.

Hooks' book is interesting because Tina was an interesting woman. Also because it identifies published sources and adds the author's interviews with people like Yolanda Modotti, Tina's sister, among many others. However, the information is not new, nor is any effort made to interpret it or draw conclusions. The words "possibly," "apparently" and "it seems that" are also used extensively, countering Hooks' goal of demystification. Modotti was a woman of

her time, involved as an artist and with the Communist Party in working toward a better world. She believed it could be done and dedicated the last part of her life to the cause. The scandals in Tina's life are well documented. The earliest press coverage reports the success of a young Italian immigrant as an actress. The Mexico City press had a field day when one of Tina's lovers, Julio Antonio Mella,<sup>2</sup> was gunned down on a street in Mexico City while walking home with her. Tina's death provoked yet another series of articles inquiring whether she was murdered or died of a heart attack.

The women of the 1920s in Mexico broke with many of the patterns of their mothers and grandmothers. Tina was one of four women who were photographed or depicted in murals in the nude. The others were Anita Brenner, Lupe Marín and Nahuí Olin. Their lives were interesting because they were active in creative fields and produced quality material. Tina's images of Mexico have been justifiably described as sensual and poetic. One of them brought a record price of \$165,000 at a Sotheby's art auction.

Tina's love life is said to contribute to the enigma. She was widowed in her first marriage to Robo and never remarried. She lived with Edward Weston, Xavier Guerrero, Julio Antonio Mella and Víctor Vidalli.

<sup>2</sup> Julio Antonio Mella was a young Communist revolutionary who, because of his fight against the Machado dictatorship in Cuba (1925-1933), was forced to seek refuge in Mexico.

At least five books have already been published about Tina Modotti. Mildred Constantine published *Fragile Life*, the first gorgeous glossy presentation of Tina's work in 1975.<sup>3</sup> Art historian Sylvia Pandolfi produced an excellent catalogue in 1983 for an exhibit featuring Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti that traveled to London.<sup>4</sup> Elena Poniatowska turned all the mysterious data surrounding Tina's scandal-ridden life into a very successful novel.<sup>5</sup> Antonio Saborit published her letters, without editorializing, allowing Tina to speak for herself.<sup>6</sup> Pino Cacucci wrote about her in Italian after "falling in love with her." The book was translated into Spanish in 1992 and published in Mexico a year later.<sup>7</sup>

Books about Tina's art, political life and lovers are on the way to joining the ranks of the writings about Frida Kahlo, who holds the record with 26 books published about every aspect of her life, including her recipes. ❧

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<sup>3</sup> Mildred Constantine, *Tina Modotti; A Fragile Life*, Paddington Press, New York, 1975.

<sup>4</sup> Museo Nacional de Arte, *Frida Kahlo-Tina Modotti*, INBA, Mexico City, 1983.

<sup>5</sup> Elena Poniatowska, *Tinsima*, Ediciones Era, Mexico City, 1992.

<sup>6</sup> Antonio Saborit, *Una mujer sin pats. Las cartas de Tina Modotti a Edward Weston, 1921-1931*, Cal y Arena, Mexico City, 1992.

<sup>7</sup> Pino Cacucci, *Los fuegos, las sombras, el silencio...* Joaquín Mortiz, Mexico City, 1992.