

Nicolás Moreno *by Nicolás Moreno*

A Life Dedicated to Landscape



I've always been a wanderer: by this time, I've already traveled over a third of the world, but mostly in my country, which I love dearly, and which I have dedicated myself, almost obsessively, to portraying in my paintings. I always wanted to paint nature in the countryside, and the only variation that my work could offer was to think that ideas and concepts could also be expressed through landscape painting. Also, I don't believe just in pretty scenery. Some of my paintings depict erosion, the destruction of the earth —not ecology: that's a very recent invention.

THE ARTIST AND HIS MILIEU

There is no such thing as failed artist. If you're part of an artistic milieu. I joined my milieu in the San Carlos Academy, and, as I learned to draw, a whole world began to open up for me that I hadn't known before and that I've always found exciting.

[In the 1950s] there was no market for painting. All there was was a privileged few. A couple of galleries had just opened. Many artists worked in advertising; others colored black-and-white photographs; and others went abroad to try to learn more. It was a tiny world. That was when the Salón de la Plástica Mexicana (Mexican Visual Arts Salon) was born to help painters.

I worked on starting up the School of Design and Crafts at the Ciudadela. There were a lot of us there working to create a kind of Mexican Bauhaus, with elements of folk art and the art of old Mexico.

Luis Nishizawa, Celia Calderón and I were contemporaries in the Mexican Visual Arts Salon. We were among the first to join the ranks of the more established painters. There was one period in which all the important painters belonged to the Salon. Diego [Rivera], [Rufino] Tamayo. Everybody wanted to be there.

HIS RELATIONSHIP TO DR. ATL

I met him by chance, because when they built the University City, a group of young people from San Carlos tried to get an art school established in the university for us. They refused because they said we didn't have a high enough academic level. I asked whether Diego [Rivera] had lots of schooling when he started. In those days, you only needed elementary school to get a degree in art. Dr. Atl really wanted to help us. But they paid no attention to him either. We became friends then. He recommended me for a commission doing some murals in the National Museum of Anthropology.

THE UNAM MURALS

I did a mural for the MUCA [the University Science and Art Museum] at the University City. But it's "sequestered", hidden away. It was exhibited there for a time; it's of the Valley of Mexico, about 20 meters long and 4 meters high. The

idea was to put it in the new museum, the one that's about to be inaugurated, but with all this business of globalization, they think it's out of date.

THE LOST CANVASES

Two of my paintings that were in the Museum of Modern Art were taken out; one is in a room in the President's Offices, but I don't know which. The smaller one just disappeared.

THE TRAVELING EXHIBITS

I paint in cycles. For example, I spent two years in the Tarahumara Mountains and painted 150 canvases. But I hardly have any of them; they were sold. Later, in the Tehuantepec Isthmus, and then in Coahuila. I arrived in those places with projects, because I always had the idea of disseminating. I was the first one to have the idea of doing "traveling exhibits", which they now call "itinerant."

MAKING A LIVING OF PAINTING

I've never liked the wretched business of galleries, even though I was in one for a while. My work is more in private collections. I haven't been near powerful people. I was never interested. I didn't need to be. I've always made a living from my painting. Now it's a little difficult. There's no middle class left. In the past, a university professor, say, could afford to buy a medium-priced painting. Not anymore.

TECHNIQUES AND FORMATS

I've always painted in oils. I've never been comfortable with tempera; I used it for a while. I don't like watercolors; they don't work for me. I work in oils and encaustic painting (a combination of wax, copal resin and pigments). This is, let's say, the opposite of oil painting, which is more refined.

I don't just have large formats. When I'm at my most pretentious is when I do larger canvases; when the topic demands it.

The basic thing you need to be a good landscape painting teacher is to teach the students to see, to pick motifs, plus technique, of course. 