



Image 1.



Image 2.



Image 3.

Francisco Servín R.\*

## Cannabis in Mexican Culture and Art as Recreated by Artificial Intelligence

Images are strong and influential tools. They're kept in the folds of the subconscious, detonating conversations with the psyche. We may understand the way new artificial intelligences are storing images in a parallel fashion. To do so, we could turn to photographer Boris Kossov's ideas on the socio-cultural filter,<sup>1</sup> that is, that through which the eye sees. In this article, our sociocultural filter consists in our point of view—the eye of cannabis in Mexico—as well as different aesthetic expressions and the newly integrated technologies of artificial intelligence.

In the realm of photography, discussions around whether photography is art still unfold. Yet, we do not discuss whether photographers are artists or artisans. Now that artificial intelligence is here, some believe that it is threatening art, not to mention the egos of photographers, who now perceive their craft as being at risk. Yet, we should view artificial intelligence as a mere amalgamation of tools to create images that can enrich the visual dialogues between us, our psyches, and others. It is through artificial intelligence that we can visualize social imaginaries.

The topic of artificial intelligence may be considered within the paradigm of those machines that once emerged in society and made incursions into the field of art. In my view, when pho-

tography ushered in technology that could reproduce the world through light, the situation was similar. Back then, there must have been painters who perceived a threat to themselves as artists. Yet, artists are still painting portraits, landscapes, and murals today, and the world is being documented through photography—though photography is no longer a mere tool for registration but has also entered the world of art, visual expression, and photonarrative.

We might say that the practice of making art not only consist in deploying a given technique. Behind any work of art, there is also reflection, discourse, and the author's expression, all of which may be expressed thanks to the soul, to borrow Gastón Bachelard's (1884-1962) term.<sup>2</sup> The soul is necessary to creation, the aesthetic manifestation of human expression—and we must bear in mind that art is human.

We are now in a post-photographic world, in artist and critic Joan Fontcuberta's words (1955),<sup>3</sup> and in this new era of the image, new paradigms and discourses are cropping up around the image. On the one hand, we have the immediacy with which the digital image came and changed the world through massive and excessive reproduction.

In my view, studies on the specific history of drugs in Mexico and their relationship to social, political, and economic processes over time remain scarce, which is why this article seeks to make a contribution to this end. At the same time, as artists,

\* Francisco has a master's in creative processes and studies in art and design from the Autonomous University of Ciudad Juárez (UACJ); you can contact him at bfservin@gmail.com.



Image 4.



Image 5.

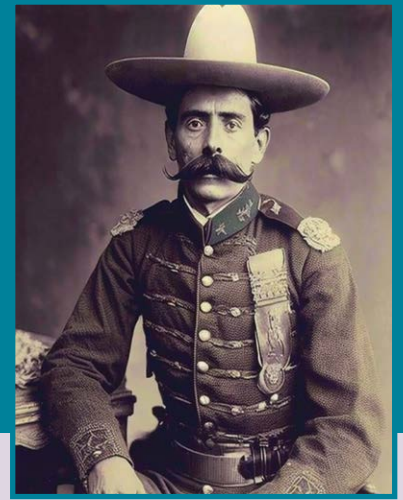


Image 6.

we are playing with artificial intelligence in order to explore a few texts and photographs dealing with cannabis in Mexico. We are experimenting with social imaginaries, with the psyche.

### Stigmas vs. *Santa Rosa*: Cannabis in Art and Indigenous Mexican Cosmogony

The term for social stigma originated in Ancient Greece, where it was used to signal the traits of foreigners, strangers, or those we might call “others” based on the features associated to their religion, race, and bodily deformities. Viewing people in terms of stigma has led societies to perceive the other as a threat. In this sense, in Mexico, a few conservative groups, including the business class and religious groups, see cannabis consumers as a risk to society.

In this country, there is still criminal persecution around cannabis consumption, even though cannabis has been used extensively over time, starting with Indigenous groups such as those in the state of Hidalgo who adopted cannabis and called it *Santa Rosa*. Then, during the colonization period, Indigenous communities and Spaniards saw conflicts around their use of this plant. Later on, cannabis started being introduced in the world of Mexican artists—poets, illustrators, and painters who spearheaded Mexican muralism—and it was Diego Rivera (1886-1957) who promoted consumption during the creative process, alongside David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896-1974), José Clemente Orozco (1883-1949), Fermín Revueltas (1901-1935), and other members of the Union of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors.

The many discourses around marihuana have pushed us image creators to reflection, inviting us to take a dive into the creative process as visual artists. We seek to share some of this

process and experiment around the stigmatized image of the cannabis consumer in Mexico from the perspective of photography and visual art, using artificial intelligence as a supplement.

This piece is based on the stigmatized image of a popular, multifaceted character, one sometimes portrayed as a monster before society: the cannabis consumer often referred to as a *marihuano* (image 1).

It is worth mentioning that the Royal Spanish Academy has categorized the word *marihuano* or *mariguano* within its dictionary of Americanisms, rather than in its general Spanish dictionary. We may perceive a degradation in the prestige of the “other” starting with language itself. *Marihuano* is deemed a synonym of *marihuano* or *mariguano*, defined as a person who is addicted to marihuana. This is telling of the fact that cannabis has been very little studied due to the censorship around it: there is research showing that dependency on this plant is usually far lower than it is with tobacco, alcohol, coffee, or even chocolate.

In this text, we are revisiting the aesthetic image of cannabis as conceptualized through poems and songs—such as during the Mexican Revolution—as well as short narratives told by consumers, allowing us to understand society’s everyday relationship to the plant.

We toy with this image, recreating it in our minds through these brief narratives, which we will also process using the artificial intelligence program Midjourney in order to digitally interpret and generate images to accompany these texts.

Image 2 deals with the ritual use of *Santa Rosa*, the name given to cannabis in places including the state of Hidalgo. We may also find this concept in the work by Lourdes Báez Cúberro on cannabis as a “plant of power” in Mexico.<sup>4</sup>

Through her work, we have come to know that in eastern Hidalgo, from the high plateau to the Serrano region, the



Image 7.

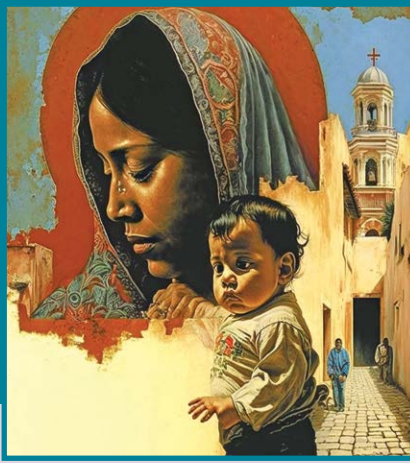


Image 8.



Image 9.

ritualistic use of *Santa Rosa* or “Holy Rose,” denoting cannabis indica as well as jimsonweed, is part of the practice of the *bādi* (which, in the Indigenous Otomí language means “the one who knows”). These *bādi* are able to enter certain states of consciousness by ingesting *medicinita*, or the little medicine, as the Otomí people of Santa Ana Hueytlalpan call marihuana, breaking into song (*zitheni* in Otomí). In this process, an entity uses its strength (*nzahki*) to take shelter in the shaman’s body and “sing,” communicating with the person whose voice is being used as a channel.

This experience turns the body into the focal point of the shamanic praxis, as the receiver of a power that confers divinity when it enters the body of the *bādi*, so that this person can “see” beyond the world of phenomena and travel to various planes of the universe, communicating with all the entities in the “other” world. Thus, the idea of “seeing” is tied to the cognitive abilities of the *bādi*.

“Santa Rosa” is still used by Indigenous people, and its image is portrayed in embroidered pieces known as *tenangos*. Image 3 was created by a group called “Corazón hñähñu,” or “Hñähñu Heart.” In it, we may observe a man with a leaf of cannabis, under which we may read the caption “ts’o paxi,” which means “weed,” a reference to the personal, recreational consumption of marihuana. In image 4, we may see a cannabis plant embroidered in a cushion by the group “Corazón hñähñu”.

## Grifa & Grifo, Baked & Stoned

In Mexican cannabis culture, stoner jargon is constituted by broad, playful, and creative vocabulary that aims to disguise certain topics in conversation in the face of unfamiliar outsiders. For instance, among other words, we may note that “sheep tail” (*colita de borrego*) and “tangle” (*greñuda*) are used for unpressed cannabis flower. “Skunk” (*zorrillo*) refers to its characteristic

aroma; “mustard” (*mostaza*) is a nickname for cannabis; “brown” (*café*) refers to dry cannabis; “kushara” is a variety of cannabis; “redhead” (*pelirroja*) is the seedless cannabis created by the drug lord Rafael Caro Quintero; and “rooster” (*gallo*) is a joint.

One of the expressions that has been used around marihuana consumption the most is to “have the *grifa*.” In The Royal Spanish Academy, “grifo, grifa” is first defined as a person with frizzy hair, but the fourth definition is to be under the effects of marihuana. The seventh definition states that it denotes intoxication, and the tenth notes that “grifo, grifa” is another name for cannabis indica. This word is also associated with popular uprisings and the armies of the Mexican Revolution.

Image 5, taken from the program *Midjourney*, portrays Guadalupe Rivas Cacho (1899–1975), a stage actress who played a homeless woman who was well-known for smoking in excess, which is why she was nicknamed “La Grifa.” One day, when playing this role in the theater, she felt that something was missing, so she decided to light up a joint onstage, just like her character would have done. It was thus that the word *grifa* took root in Mexican stoner jargon, referring to cannabis and the state that it provokes.

Ricardo Pérez Montfort tells the tale of a commander of humble origins who followed Zapata during the Mexican Revolution, fighting against the army of Victoriano Huerta.<sup>5</sup> His name was Antonio Barona, nicknamed “El Grifo” due to his penchant for cannabis. *Midjourney* portrays him as seen in image 6.

## Verses for a Stoner President

Now, we will explore the figure of a stoner president. We are not referring to Vicente Fox, the former president of Mexico (2000–2006) who was part of the conservative PAN party, but to the aforementioned Victoriano Huerta (1913–1914) (image 7), given his habit of smoking marihuana —so much



Image 10.



Image 11.

so that many poems and songs of the Mexican Revolution mention Huerta's love for *juanita* (or marihuana).

We used artificial intelligence to create image 8 and illustrate the following verses, an elegy to Huerta written by one of the most famous composers of "corrido" ballads from the Mexican Revolution, Marciano Silva (1849-1944):

The pueblos of Mexico  
with sincere joy  
salute, everywhere,  
your urgent hiding.

Mournful marihuano,  
aborted from the earth,  
God desired that you not  
come back and tread my Nation.<sup>6</sup>

## My Mother's Marihuana

I came across a group of youths, one of whom was telling another about something he'd experienced the day before. I picked up the words "marihuana" and "mom," and I asked the young man whether he could tell me what had happened—I assumed that his mother had caught him in the act. Image 9, processed by Midjourney, recreates the following story:

"Yesterday, I was hungry, and I went to the kitchen to see what I could find. I rummaged among the drawers, where the spoons are, and all of a sudden, I picked up a little bag, and when I pulled it out, I realized it was my mother's weed . . . [laughter] Ooh! I was caught off guard. Nooo, how can this be? . . . But it was so!"

"How come it baffled you like that? How did you feel?"

"Well, before, whenever she scolded me, I always thought

that she was right, but now that I found that little bag of hers, I feel liberated from all that, you know?

"Does your mom know that you found her weed baggie?"

"No, she doesn't know, but I do plan on saying, 'Hey, mom! I found this little baggie. Is it yours?' But it was shitty weed. I felt like telling her that I could get her better, healthier weed, because the one she had had already gone brown."

To conclude, we may observe how cannabis has permeated Mexican culture. It has been used for everything from the traditional rites of Indigenous groups to the military world of the revolutionaries, with certain politicians also having experience with marihuana consumption, such as Victoriano Huerta—that early-twentieth-century president who consumed marihuana—and another president who calls himself an entrepreneur who is interested in the subject. It has even permeated the worlds of mothers who use marihuana recreationally or due to its therapeutic properties. Yet, consumers are still being criminalized, which is why we are seeking to encourage dialogue so that the rights of cannabis communities may be recognized in our country. This includes public manifestations, as recreated in images 10 and 11. **MM**

## Notes

1 See Boris Kossov, *Lo efímero y lo perpetuo en la imagen fotográfica* (Cátedra: Madrid, 2014).

2 Gastón Bachelard, *La poética de la ensoñación* (Mexico: fce. 1997).

3 On this matter, see "La furia de la imágenes", video from the master's in photography at Universidad Politécnica de Valencia in 2016, in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LVP008ftTTs>.

4 Lourdes Báez Cubero, "El uso ritual de la 'santa Rosa' entre los otomíes orientales de Hidalgo: el caso de Santa Ana Hueytlalpan," *Cuicuilco*, vol. 19, no. 53, pp. 155-174.

5 Ricardo Pérez Montfort, *Tolerancia y prohibición: aproximaciones a la historia social y cultural de las drogas en México. 1840-1940* (México: Debate, 2016), p. 142.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 127.