

ALFREDO ZALCE

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Alfredo Zalce has a place of his own in the history of Mexican art, a place he earned through solid intellectual and artistic training, an unbreakable commitment to social questions and a vast body of work.

Born in Pátzcuaro, Michoacán, January 12, 1908, at a young age Zalce moved to Mexico City with his parents, who were photographers. At 16 he decided to be a painter and enrolled in the San Carlos Academy. His mother opposed his chosen calling, so he promised to work with her in the photographic studio in exchange for being allowed to continue his studies.

"If a young man has no revolutionary leanings, he has no heart," says Zalce, who in his youth combined his personal commitment to art with an interest in supporting workers and community causes. He was a member of the League of Revolutionary Artists and Writers (1933-37), which grouped musicians, painters, writers and scientists working together to try to counter the influence of Naziism and fascist ideology in Mexico in the years prior to World War II. When the league dissolved, with other artists he founded the Popular Graphics Workshop where he learned engraving and began a visual duel with exploitation, poverty and injustice. In 1935 he joined the Cultural Missions—part of the cultural and educational crusade conceived years earlier by then-Minister of Education José Vasconcelos—that aimed

to improve the quality of life in communities all over the country. Working side by side with rural teachers, Zalce traveled for six years through the states of Zacatecas, Veracruz, Hidalgo, Puebla and Colima.

The contemporary of many writers and artists immersed in the cultural and political flowering that followed the Mexican Revolution (among them, the Big Three of Mexican muralism, Rivera, Siqueiros and Orozco), Zalce never lost his individuality nor accepted dogmas or hierarchies.

From the beginning of his career, Zalce alternated painting with teaching, drawing, lithography, engraving and sculpture. He has taught in and been the founder and director of several painting and sculpting schools and workshops. Almost from the very start, he began to receive different national and international awards. He has participated in an infinite number of collective and individual shows in Mexico, the United States, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Innumerable retrospectives and homages have also been dedicated to Zalce, both in his native Michoacán and in the rest of the country. Among them, we can mention "Alfredo Zalce, Retrospective (1930-1980). A Tribute to 50 Years of Artistic Work," organized by Mexico City's Modern Art Museum in 1981.

Others are the traveling exhibition "Alfredo Zalce, Graphics," organized by the Quintana Roo Cultural Institute, which

was shown in Felipe Carrillo Puerto, Isla Mujeres, Bacalar, Cozumel and Cancún; and "A Graphic Space of Alfredo Zalce" (1991), shown at the Royal Force Castle in Havana, Cuba. The Alfredo Zalce Contemporary Art Museum in Michoacán organized "50 Years of Work, A Retrospective" in 1993 and, more recently "Total Zalce" (1996), important because of the diversity of techniques shown.

The wealth of his work as a muralist has been one of the most widely recognized. Among his most outstanding murals are the ones at the National Printing House, the Puebla Normal School, and, in Morelia, Michoacán, at the Government Palace (1955-57), at the Chamber of Deputies (1986), the stairway of the Regional Museum (1950-51) and the Birthplace of Morelos Museum.

Zalce has lived in his home state of Michoacán since 1950. Today, at 90, he is still a painter full of proposals; he paints and engraves at his workshop in Morelia, where the door is always open to anyone interested in art. His life and work are testimony to the infinite possibilities of humanity's creative force, a force that has successfully met head on the decadence often synonymous with our modernity. **MM**

Source: Government of the State of Michoacán, *Alfredo Zalce, artista michoacano* (Mexico City: Gobierno del Estado de Michoacán-SEP-IPN-Instituto Michoacano de Cultura, 1997), pp. 14-21 and 188-192.