

María Asúnsolo

Patron of the Arts (1916-1999)



Reprinted courtesy of Raúl Anguiano

Raúl Anguiano, *Portrait of María Asúnsolo*, 100 x 80 cm, 1942 (oil on canvas).

In an age when women were relegated to second place, María Asúnsolo —with her startling beauty, exceptional intelligence and warm and open nature— became muse, friend, protectress and confidant of intellectuals, particularly painters. Painted again and again by many, some canvases were masterpieces, like those by David Alfaro Siqueiros (*The Abduction*), Juan Soriano (*Portrait of María Asúnsolo, Woman and Child*) and Raúl Anguiano (*Portrait of María Asúnsolo*).

She was not only of material aid to artists in precarious economic straits, but, more importantly, she imbued young creators with enthusiasm and the conviction that they had substantial talent and abilities and that, if they persevered, they would be successful in their work. Once she took someone under her wing, she dedicated herself completely to promoting him, introducing him to art gallery owners, publishing houses, art and literary critics. She also promoted the sale of his work among her acquaintances and friends; she occupied an important place in the intellectual and political world, and she was a very tenacious promotor of her proteges. In the mid-1930s, she turned her apartment on Reforma Avenue into the María Asúnsolo Art Gallery (GAMA), where she exhibited prestigious artists like painters David Alfaro Siqueiros, María Izquierdo and Manuel Rodríguez Lozano, and sculptor Luis Ortiz Monasterio, as well as newcomers. María hosted script readings and discussions about film projects to attract possible buyers. However, she was not very interested in the commercial side of things and a verbal agreement was enough to seal an agreement between painters and herself. In addition to being a patron of the arts, during the 1930s and 1940s she was an anti-fascist activist and a promoter of anti-racist campaigns.

THE MUSE'S SECRETS

Very little is known about her childhood. She always refused to divulge her age, but it was discovered that she was born in

1916, the same year as her friend, painter Roberto Berdecio. She even forged her birth certificate at the public registrar's office changing her birthplace to the state of Guerrero in order to affirm her Mexican-ness. Actually, she had been born in the United States, the daughter of a French-Canadian mother, Marie Morand, and a Mexican father, Manuel Dolores Asúnsolo, who died in the defense of the Zapatista cause when María Asúnsolo was a child.

She was also always silent about her love affair with Siqueiros, who awoke in her a grand passion for the visual arts, despite the tragedy it caused. After her divorce from the German Auguste Diener, she entered into a relationship with Siqueiros; when her ex-husband discovered it, he obtained custody of her son Agustín and took him away to Germany. Siqueiros' painting *The Abduction* depicts this experience.

She never stopped being a patron of the arts, although she was particularly active between the 1930s and the 1960s. In June 1987, she donated all her paintings to the National Art Museum and went to live in Cuernavaca. Until the end of her days, she continued to enjoy receiving her friends at her table. In recent years, despite illness, she kept abreast of the details of the news from Chiapas and the new Zapatistas. "How is Marcos? Please tell him that when he comes through Cuernavaca, he has a home with me. We will welcome the Zapatistas with rice, chicken and *mole* sauce. Do you think there'll be room for them?" she asked Rosi, her nurse and confidant.

"María Asúnsolo is like the last angel who ascends to heaven, or the last one who comes down to earth.... One day she will vanish like the mist that disappears in the swirl of the wind," said her friend, writer Ermilo Abreu Gómez. María Asúnsolo died February 25. ■■■

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