

LU' BIAANI

FRANCISCO TOLEDO

Y LA FOTOGRAFÍA

Lu' Biaani is a combination of Zapotec words that translates to "eye of light,". This word unlocks new worlds and our gaze imagines them. In turn, the eye of the artist transforms the sum of both into tangible works, but it sometimes happens that these pieces are created by other artists, who, without being fully aware of it, are part of a chain of transmission of light, of the eye of light that exists only to illuminate our reality with imagination.

Francisco Toledo was a man aware of the powers of his imagination, but also an attentive observer of the flashes of other artists' fantasies, among them Manuel Álvarez Bravo, whose work awakened in an adolescent Toledo the possibility of looking at and imagining the world through the light captured by a photographic camera. His first and fortunate encounter with the work of one of the great classics of Mexican photography, through the catalog published by the Society of Modern Art in 1945 that summarized his canonical images, planted a seed that flourished in the shadow of the brilliant light of his artistic work, growing into a primordial tree where we can recognize the history of photography in Mexico and the world, as well as the creative transitions of the medium in the last two centuries.

This is the idea behind *Lu' Biaani: Francisco Toledo and Photography*, an exhibition that brings to the public, in a singular way, the "eye of light" of the artist who most influenced the transformation of photography in Mexico in the last quarter century: through the promotion of the work of others, the creation of a collection, and the founding of a space that pays tribute to the photographer who moved him as a teenager, where the transfer of the same ethereal experience that made him imagine the world through the camera's "eye of light" takes place, and in which a peculiar mode of education has been forged. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, this model has contributed to forming new gazes: a generation that has participated in the best tradition of Mexican and international photography, while adopting the tools to recreate it.

Alejandro Castellanos

I, Other

Photography was, for Francisco Toledo, both a means and an end. A way of remembering, appropriating his image and looking at himself through the eyes of others, but, above all, a way of assuming the power of the medium to construct images and imaginaries linked to his modern, documentary, and artistic condition. His photographic work, usually of an experimental nature, is complementary to his graphic and pictorial work, just as his own image, captured by various photographers, is complementary to the figure he came to create: the artist immersed in his world, in the representation of himself as the other that others look at.

Time was not a determining factor for the permanent dialogue that Francisco Toledo maintained with other artists through his creations. Whether they were photographs from the past or from recent times, a permanent playful approach led him to establish visual relationships between them and his imagination. These creations by other photographers or artists, known or unidentified, became, thanks to a subtle operation of his memory, motifs for the iconographic paraphrase he developed by intervening them through the application of drawing, sgraffito, or color.

The publication of photographic books, which he promoted at the same time as his interest in the medium grew, resulted in five volumes that are essential for understanding a period of photography in Mexico in which, on the one hand, he discovered photographers such as Sotero Constantino Jiménez, and on the other, promoted the emergence of photographers such as Flor Garduño and Rafael Doníz, as well as two fundamental works by Graciela Iturbide: *Juchitán de las mujeres* [*Juchitán of the Women*] and *En el nombre del padre* [*In the Name of the Father*].

Germinal

It all began in Juchitán, at the beginning of the seventies, when Francisco Toledo, accompanied by artists and intellectuals such as Víctor de la Cruz, Macario Matus, and Elisa Ramírez, among others, updated the rich source of Zapotec culture of the Isthmus with the recovery of its recent history and the projection of the same, in the midst of the political affirmation of autonomy that produced a fundamental change in the history of Mexico: the first city council won by the left, after an unprecedented mobilization guided by the Coalición Obrera Campesina Estudiantil del Istmo [Coalition of Workers, Peasants, and Students of the Isthmus] (COCEI).

The memory of the Juchitán process was presented in *Germinal*, a remarkable exhibition promoted by Francisco Toledo at the Centro Fotográfico Manuel Álvarez Bravo (CFMAB) in 2007. Through the collection generated by this exhibition, today part of the CFMAB's Toledo Collection, it is possible to track the testimonies of an invaluable memory of the way in which Juchitán became a fundamental antecedent of democracy in the country.

Shortly before the presentation of *Germinal*, a large social movement against the arbitrary actions of the state and federal government took place in Oaxaca in 2006. Always attentive to the perennial political struggle that underlies the state, Francisco Toledo promoted the creation of an audio-visual memory of the events through the project "Miradas en el movimiento. Primer Concurso Internacional de Fotografía, Cine y Video, Oaxaca 2007" [Gazes in the Movement. First International Photography, Film and Video Competition, Oaxaca 2007] which brought together numerous photographers, filmmakers, and video artists whose work was presented in exhibitions and screenings in 2008 in Oaxaca. The photographs selected for this exhibition are currently part of the CFMAB's Toledo Collection.

Manuel Álvarez Bravo Photography Center: A Quarter of a Century

2021 marks twenty-five years since the founding of the space that Francisco Toledo created as a tribute to Don Manuel Álvarez Bravo with the help of numerous photographers, artists, curators, and cultural agents. The project has served as a nucleus for the development of photography in Oaxaca through its program of exhibitions and workshops, which have led to the enrichment of the training of two generations of photographers: one that was consolidated in the beginnings of the CFMAB and one that, following the teachings of the great masters, has reimagined the practice of photography in the state, thus motivating the creation of a public interested in the still image.

Following the foundation of other venues promoted or created by Francisco Toledo, such as the Casa de Cultura de Juchitán Lidxi Guendabiaani', the Instituto de Artes Gráficas de Oaxaca, the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Oaxaca, and the Fray Francisco de Burgoa and Jorge Luis Borges Libraries, the creation of the CFMAB contributed decisively to broadening the cultural possibilities of the population with respect to the image, as well as to the renovation of artistic practices in Oaxaca.

Francisco Toledo's interest in creating this infrastructure had in an enthusiastic group of photographers, integrated under the name Luz 96 [Light 96] (including Jorge Acevedo, Juan Carlos Reyes, Cecilia Salcedo, Vittorio D'Onofri, and Domingo Valdivieso, among others), the ideal complement to launching the first activities, exhibitions, and workshops of the CFMAB.

At the same time, the close link in the early years between the CFMAB and the Centro de la Imagen (founded in 1994), led to the organization of notable exhibitions and workshops in Oaxaca, and the city became one of the most active venues of the Fotoseptiembre Festival, promoted by the Centro de la Imagen simultaneously throughout the country. All this contributed to the consolidations of Oaxaca as a hub for the urban network where the promotion of photography diversified in the last years of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first: Guanajuato, Guadalajara, Hermosillo, Mérida, Morelia, Monterrey, Pachuca, Puebla, San Luis Potosí, Tijuana, Veracruz, and Xalapa.

Collecting, Canon, and Media

Over the years, Francisco Toledo assembled one of the most remarkable photographic collections in Mexico and Latin America, not only because of the artists it contains, but also because of the way in which they became part of the collection. A random selection is part of the charm of collections such as this one, but at the same time it is possible to notice certain guidelines that give unity to the collection, such as the fact that it contains photographers representative of the Oaxacan and national imaginary, images resulting from CFMAB programs, and, finally, photographs selected directly by Francisco Toledo.

The CFMAB's Toledo Collection can be thought of in relation to a canon of photographers consecrated by historiography and criticism, and from the media status of photography, which implies the expeditious and indiscriminate use of certain images, without necessarily attending to their authorial character and their circulation, through the domestic sphere as well as through printed and electronic media, with which its subsequent grouping becomes a repository for multiple interpretations of the functions of photography as a social and iconic referent.

For this reason, this Collection contains innumerable possibilities for review and study. It allows us to look at the work of internationally renowned photographers such as Manuel and Lola Álvarez Bravo, Henri Cartier-Bresson, William Klein, Josef Koudelka, Mary Ellen Mark, Sebastián Salgado, and Edward Weston, as well as to question, as Laureana Toledo has done, the strangeness produced by images of all kinds (from magazines, portrait studios, family albums, and vernacular photography, that is, photography that has not been taken for authorial purposes) gathered by Roberto Donis, whose friendship with Francisco Toledo led him to donate to him the largest number of pieces in the collection, around seventy thousand.

Myth and Gaze

It is possible to better comprehend the history of photography in Mexico through the ideas that defined the identity of the nation-state throughout almost the entire twentieth century. In that regard, in the last three decades of that century, studies on the medium highlighted the role of a few photographers whose images contributed to strengthening a powerful myth: the unity of Mexican photography with popular culture.

With this perspective and parallel to the time of its development, the CFMAB's Toledo Collection integrated some of the photographers that make up the historical canon. Thus, Manuel and Lola Álvarez Bravo, Romualdo García, Nacho López, Guillermo Kahlo, Juan Rulfo, and Mariana Yampolsky, among others, have works in the collection, usually images related to Oaxaca. At the same time, local photographers such as Jorge Brena, who was once a member of the Club Fotográfico de Oaxaca—active between the 1950s and 1960s—can be associated with the way photography developed during that period.

Two projects carried out by Graciela Iturbide and Eniac Martínez in the eighties and nineties definitively marked the subsequent development of photography after its dissemination, turning the aforementioned myth upside down. *Las mujeres de Juchitán* and *Mixtecos* imply, for various reasons, a process of change in the Mexican photographic tradition. In particular, the approach that gave cultural and political protagonism to women, typical of Iturbide's photographs, and the updating of the anthropological visual discourse of Eniac Martínez, who pushed aside the timelessness with which the Indigenous world used to be represented, make these series key pieces in the Toledo Collection of the CFMAB.

Commonality

Commonality is the term coined by Zapotec intellectuals, such as Floriberto Díaz Gómez and Jaime Martínez Luna to name a *some*, to refer to the way of life of the Oaxacan peoples, which can be extrapolated to diverse forms of cultural creation, as is the case with the formation and scope of the CFMAB's Toledo Collection, which refers to the way in which the image has served as a support for the individual and collective memory of the work, habits, and relationships of the people within the innumerable communities that form the Oaxacan constellation.

One of the series that gave rise to the CFMAB's Toledo Collection is the selection of portraits taken in Juchitán by Sotero Constantino Jiménez during the first half of the twentieth century. Subsequently, the integration of part of the archive of Ignacio Zanabria, a photographer active in the Mixteca Alta between the 1940s and 1970s, indicates the continuity of one of the routes followed in the shaping of the collection: the revision of local histories, antecedents of the works of contemporary authors.

The exhibition *La mirada interior [The Inner Gaze]*, made by children and adolescents of the Guelatao Photography Workshop coordinated by Mariana Rosenberg in the late 1990s and the beginning of this century, is a great example of a remarkable change in the way communities are represented, largely by foreign photographers. The participants of that workshop can be seen today as precursors (in fact, two of them, Luna Marán and Jorge Santiago, currently work in film and photography) of what has become a common practice of the complex ethnographic and cultural dynamics of Oaxaca, made from that "inner gaze," as exemplified by the images of Citlali Fabián, Eva Lépez, and Octavio López on the Yalaltepec diaspora, the rituals of the Sierra Sur, and daily life in San Andrés Zautla, respectively.

Lane Change

Beginning in the 1970s, photography in Mexico maintained an incessant movement and expanded its relationship with the outside world, which led to changes in the modes of representation and the themes approached by photographers. Coinciding with this process, the various venues founded or promoted by Francisco Toledo, such as the Casa de Cultura de Juchitán Lidxi Guendabiaani', the Instituto de Artes Gráficas de Oaxaca, and the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Oaxaca maintained a constant dialogue with this lane change. The creation of the CFMAB in 1996 was decisive for the renewal of the content and narratives of images in Oaxaca, whose echo is visible in the CFMAB's Toledo Collection and in the artists trained by Francisco Toledo's educational initiatives.

The photographer's relationship with space has led to the creation of important works, such as the series on archaeological sites developed by Javier Hinojosa, as well as the suggestive ambivalence of the works produced with the support of a remarkable technique by Jesús Sánchez Uribe in the seventies and eighties, the construction of minimalist allegories in the *Numeral* series by Estanislao Ortiz, and Alejandro Echeverría's permanent abstraction of urban spaces in Oaxaca.

One of the most significant changes in photography towards the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of this one has to do with language, with the way in which the word relates to the image, creating indeterminate references that provoke the questioning of what is visible and the critique of the limits of photography, as is the case with the work of Gerardo Nigenda and Laureana Toledo.

Travel has been one of the constant catalysts for a photographers' documentation. Their interaction with people and a foreign environment—or, on some occasions, their own—in recent times, has oscillated between distance and intervention in the recorded event, and between testimony and the creation of an atmosphere, which leads us to think about the authors of the images, as is the case with the photographs of Flor Garduño, Alberto Ibáñez "El Negro," Pedro Meyer, and Marcela Taboada.

At Dawn

The first two decades of the twenty-first century have seen the consolidation of the generation of photographers that began their work in the last years of the previous century, as well as the emergence of a new group of photographers trained in the institutions created in parallel to this process. The favorable conditions for the development of photography fostered by the CFMAB and the Centro de las Artes de San Agustín (the last of the institutions founded by Francisco Toledo, where several seminars dedicated to photography have been held), have taken on an unparalleled relevance in the country, since some of the most renowned authors of contemporary photography in Mexico, present in this section, have passed through their formative spaces.

In tune with the current era of violence in Mexican society—and its senselessness—Koral Carballo and Yael Martínez produced two eloquent testimonies of the events in Guerrero and Veracruz that have shaken the entire country, placing their own life experiences as the axis of images that relate to, and at the same time contrast with, visions of intimacy produced by Paola Dávila, Karina Juárez, and Lola Medel. Affective family relationships have also been explored and represented by Javier León Cuevas and Mariela Sancari.

The fantasies of sexuality and gender, or those of memory and space, have been the origin of proposals created by Luis Arturo Aguirre in Acapulco, and Nelson Morales in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, as well as by Regina Mejía, following traveling circuses in the Oaxaca Valley, and by Baldomero Robles, creating ephemeral installations in the Zapotec Sierra Norte.

From a different origin, Fausto Nahúm and María Luisa Santos create images that border on abstraction, taking as a starting point a refined handling of analog photography, in the former, and a persistent use of the pinhole camera, in the latter. A spectrum thus stretches out between photography and its traditional techniques towards offshoots common today, as shown in the work of José Ángel Santiago, who combines it with drawing and sculpture, or that place it within installations, as is the case with the pieces by Julio Barrita and Claudia López Terroso.