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### Why Have There Been No Rich Women Artists? Examining the Gender Price Discount in the Contemporary Auction Market for Early Twentieth Century Mexican Avant-Garde Art

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**WHY HAVE THERE BEEN NO RICH WOMEN ARTISTS?  
EXAMINING THE GENDER PRICE DISCOUNT IN THE CONTEMPORARY  
AUCTION MARKET FOR EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY MEXICAN AVANT-  
GARDE ART**

by

**LUCY BLOOMSTRAN**

**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

**PROFESSOR VAN HORN  
PROFESSOR ROMERO**

**DECEMBER 5, 2022**

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Makie, you once wrote that of this world, we owe it to history to rebuild. I hope that this paper, at its best, is a small step in the that direction. Even with miles between us, I am so grateful to have you with me. Without your endless love and support, none of this would be possible.

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## **Part 1**

### **Confirming a Gender Price Discount Using Multivariable Linear Regression**

“At auctions new values are assigned and desire is fetishized.” – Jerry Salz

## I. Introduction

In examining the story of western art history, one may look through the notorious names of artists that have become canonized as “great,” and wonder where the women are. A few women artists across genre and medium have been able to defy gender roles and achieve notoriety as a great artist. However, their earnings, both during their lives and posthumously, fall far short of the earnings of top male artists. Despite a recent increase of women in the art industry, this pattern of exclusion still persists on an institutional level. In 1989, the Guerilla Girls, an American feminist artist-activist collective published a list of 67 women and artists of color whose work could be purchased with the \$17.7 million that just one Jasper Johns painting brought at auction (fig. 1). In 2018, the National Museum of Women in the Arts published a study that surveyed 18 major U.S. art museums, finding that 87% of their collections were comprised of art by men. Bocart et al., 2017 found no women in the top 0.03% of the art market, where 41% of the total profit in the industry is concentrated.

Art pricing, far more than the pricing of other goods, is intrinsically subjective. There is no set-in-stone formula that all appraisers or auction houses must abide by when offering an estimate for how much a piece is worth. Ultimately, the price of a work of art turns out to be what the buyer and seller agree it’s worth, oftentimes based on historical valuations of the same or similar works. And, as in any many other professions, women’s production has been and continues to be valued significantly less than that of their male counterparts (Goldin et al., 2017). In the art industry, however, this difference could be tenfold.<sup>1</sup> Being largely barred from becoming artists until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, women artists entered the market from a point of disadvantage purely from a supply standpoint, making it nearly impossible for their net sales to catch up to those of their established and respected male counterparts. There is plenty of evidence of a gender price discount for women’s art in the contemporary art market (Adams et al., 2017), indicating that either buyers, sellers, or both parties are biased towards art by men.

This paper will highlight a group of artists in Mexico in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century who were working on the cutting-edge of new forms of art-making and subject matter. Many of the artists included in the data had ties to either Muralism or Surrealism, two of the dominant movements at the time. Due in part to a government-sponsored exchange between Mexico and America, pieces

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<sup>1</sup> Greg Allen, “The X Factor: Is the Art Market Rational or Biased?” *The New York Times*, 1 May 2005.

by these artists became highly sought-after in the up-and-coming mid-20<sup>th</sup> century American art market. As a result, many of these pieces have appeared for sale at auction in the past twenty years. At first glance, it may appear as if the gender wage gap between men and women working in this particular sector of the art world may be tighter than in the overall art market, given the buzz around Frida Kahlo's *Diego y yo*. The painting sold for a whopping \$34.9 million in a 2021 Sotheby's evening sale, tripling the record for auction price realized by a Latin American artist, a title previously held by Diego Rivera, Kahlo's husband and subject of Kahlo's record-breaking painting. However, this one breakout sale is not enough to trounce the pre-existing evidence of gender bias both within the Mexican Muralism/Surrealism movements and their display, as well as in contemporary auction prices.

Since women artists are traditionally underrepresented in public collections and exhibitions, they miss out on the opportunity to become included in the dominant canon of art history. For example, The Museum of Modern Art's 1940 landmark *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* exhibition was mounted in collaboration with the Mexican Government and sought to generate buzz around Mexican Art, presenting a "holistic" view of the artistic production of the country. Of the 155 items included in the master checklist, only two paintings by women were included: one by Frida Kahlo and one by María Izquierdo, suggesting that there were either no women artists to draw from, or that there were no women artists worthy of inclusion in such a show. As the latter half of this paper will argue, this choice was crucial to the evolution of both Mexican and American art history. By underrepresenting women in these institutionalized spaces, the female perspective is lost to history, and the potential value added to later auction sales is diminished.

Why is it that women are underrepresented in museum collections and ultimately earn so much less at auction? Is it, as German contemporary artist George Baselitz asserts, that "the market doesn't lie," and women simply just "don't paint very well"?<sup>2</sup> Or is there an underlying gender bias on the part of the buyers and/or sellers of art that will ultimately determine its present and future prices? This paper will seek to establish the presence of a gender price discount, locate the source bias, quantify it, and provide possible economic and art historical explanations for its existence.

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<sup>2</sup> Henri Neuendorf, "Georg Baselitz Belittles Women Painters, Again." *Artnet News*, 21 May 2015.

## II. Literature Review

In 1971, art historian Linda Nochlin published an essay in ARTnews entitled *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* that would alter the course of feminist art history. In this essay, she highlights the historical barriers that women have experienced when breaking into the art world and attempting to realize a fair price for their work. She dismisses the idea that there exists an inherent “feminine” quality that links art by one woman artist to another; thus, there is no overarching feminine style. This refutes the claims made by Thornton (2008) that the themes and styles in women’s art are simply less attractive to “big-spending” collectors, most of whom are male.

In recent years, as calls for reform within the institution of the museum and the art world at large have intensified, many studies have examined the confusing and seemingly objective process of art valuation. Within this field, some researchers have sought to establish whether there exists a bias on the side of collectors in favor of art made by men through empirical analysis of pricing in the global primary (galleries) and secondary (auction houses) art markets. While many of these studies succeed in statistically confirming (or sometimes, denying) a bias through economic analysis, they often fail to relay why this bias may exist from an art historical lens, and whether the bias lies on what my paper will refer to as the demand side (collectors) or the supply side (galleries and auction houses).

One of these empirical studies, conducted by Cameron et al. in 2017, proposes two explanations for gender inequality in the secondary art market:

(1) a demand theory, i.e., there exists a bias by collectors and market participants against valuing work by women equally to work by men and (2) a supply theory, i.e., that women face institutional barriers that limit their participation or desire to participate in the professional art market (Cameron et al., 2017).

Cameron et al.’s study focuses on sales by artists who had graduated from Yale University’s prestigious MFA program, and is the only study referenced in my paper that did not find a bias towards male artists. Of the sales of graduates, works by female artists appeared at auction less frequently and, controlling for hedonic characteristics, obtained a higher average price. The authors hypothesize that these findings are in keeping with Hengel’s (2017) theory that female professionals are held to a higher standard than male professionals and must “prove themselves” themselves through degrees, recommendations, or other quantifiable measurements of aptitude.



Adams et al., (2017) furthered research into the question of collectors' biases presented by Thornton, collecting data from a survey in which they asked respondents to guess the gender of the artist by looking at a painting. Their results showed that respondents guessed correctly 50.5% of the time, offering evidence against an intrinsic feminine quality of art linking all female artists. Now, in the wake of women's liberation, the earnings of female artists are still far less those that of their male counterparts. Is there something about women's art that is intrinsically "worse," causing it to realize lower prices at auction? Or is there a quantifiable bias on the part of mediators of primary and secondary art markets that leads female artists to earn less?

Ashenfelter and Graddy (2003) recognize that art, due to its oftentimes personal and subjective subject matter, can be difficult to price using traditional hedonic methods that may be useful in pricing assets such as real estate. Historically, an artist's stature had been considered to be the greatest value factor of an artwork. The two most common methods of quantitative art valuation are "fair market price," or the price the artwork would realize today if sold based on comparable artworks, and "replacement value," or what it would cost to replace the artwork today for insurance purposes (Barham 2015). My study will assume that all paintings have been confirmed to be authentic, and that the name and gender of the artist was common knowledge to both the buyer and seller.

In terms of pricing, my study examines the pre-sale estimates provided by auction houses in relation to the actual price realized when the hammer falls in each auction sale. Ashenfelter (1989) determines that the average of the auctioneer's high and low estimate is generally highly correlated with the final sales price. I will examine the validity of this argument as it pertains to female artists in my study by looking at the percentage above or below the high/low bar estimate that each piece realized, and determine whether a potential bias lies on the side of collectors (a percentage below the low bar estimate) or the auction houses (a percentage above the high bar estimate, indicating that buyers are willing to reject the estimate and pay a higher premium for women's art).

Linda Nochlin examines the long-held claim that women were simply incapable of attaining the same level of "genius" or "stardom" as their male counterparts, arguing that it is not a product of their gender, but the opportunities afforded to them because of their gender that precludes female artists from being included in this "genius" category. Thus, without stature, one

cannot enjoy the effects of relative fame on sale price. Adams et al., (2017) documented a 47.6% discount for art by women in a sample of prices of Western art by artists born after 1850 in the secondary market, and a 28.8% discount when excluding “mega-transactions” (above 1 million real 2017 USD). While 16.9% of the lots examined in this study were by female artists, only 6.9% of the final transactions were by women, indicating that a large percentage of female art offered did not ultimately sell. The study pulled 1.5 million auction transactions across 45 countries, and ultimately found results in support of Cameron et al.’s “supply theory.”

Bocart et al., (2018) controls for this “superstar effect” – where a small number of individuals absorb the majority of industry rewards – by looking at the top 0.1% of sale prices in the secondary market, where art by women is traded at a discount of 9%. In the top 0.03% of all sale prices in the market, where 40% of all sale values are concentrated, 100% of the artists trading are male. Further, the authors find that in the top echelon of the art market – for sales above \$1 million – artworks by male artists sell for 18.4% higher than female artists. In their study, which was comprised of 2.7 million transactions between 2000-2017, the top 40 grossing artists represent 40% of total market share, and no female artist makes the top 40 ranking of artists in terms of total sales value at auction in the period under study. The findings of this study reveal greater difficulty for women’s upward mobility in the art market, making it nearly impossible for them to realize similar prices to their male counterparts, ultimately supporting Cameron et al.’s “demand theory.” Works that make it to auction in the secondary market have already proven to have a resale value, i.e., auction houses are willing to take the time and resources necessary to offer the piece in their auction. This study also concludes that art by women is less likely to make it out of the primary market and into the secondary market, where, ultimately, 96.1% of sales in their study are by men.

If we operate under Adams et al.’s assumption that there is no discernable quality tying all art by women together and making it intrinsically worse, why do women artists earn so much less? In examining the state of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Mexican art, where many women did participate and attain status within the movement, my study will be able to control for extraneous factors such as levels of stature, education, influence, medium, et cetera. Greeley (2000) provides a comprehensive overview of the life and art of María Izquierdo, situating her as an undeniably powerful force within the Mexican Muralism movement. Greeley contextualizes her exclusion from public mural works in Mexico at the hands of David Alfaro Siqueiros and Diego Rivera and

argues that it was not on basis of her talent, but rather her revolutionary gendered content that contributed to her alienation. The latter half of my paper hypothesizes that it was this gender-based discrimination in world of muralism, along with other factors, that limited exposure for female artists working in Mexico, and ultimately impacted their contemporary prices realized at auction. Why did some female artists succeed and some fade into obscurity? My paper will provide an explanation at the intersection of art historical and economic theory for why this may be.

Much of what is missing from current literature is a deeper understanding of the context of the art presented. The economics papers presented above tend to treat each artwork as a piece of data, not examining its creator's motivations or the context in which it was created. My research will combine econometric analysis of art valuation with a full art historical analysis of the works presented to determine why art by male Mexican artists in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century realized higher prices than art by their female counterparts in secondary market sales, offering a glimpse into the gendered reality of the modern art world at large. In the following section, I will attempt to first quantify a bias at large using three multivariable linear regression models and then interpret the results to determine whether a bias lies on the supply side or the demand side of the contemporary art market.

### III. Method and Data

The auction data in my sample was obtained from AskArt, an online database of auction records available to galleries and auction houses. Information provided by AskArt can be used for a variety of purposes, but my study seeks to gather price estimates, hammer prices, and descriptive visual characteristics of the works. For each of the 16 artists (6 male and 10 female) included in my sample, I used the most recent transaction data available.<sup>3</sup> For some high-grossing, popular artists like Diego Rivera, the data collected in my sample only goes back a few years due to the large number of pieces by him (1,358 records) for sale over the past ~30 years (records on AskArt begin in 1987) and difficulty of manually collecting each observation. For artists like these, I used more of their works over a shorter time period, including all available works with sufficient data in order to avoid any selection bias. However, for artists like Maria Izquierdo, nearly all works listed on AskArt were included in my sample, due to the scarcity of work by her for sale (70 records, 39 of which had sufficient data).

Mexican avant-garde art was selected for its relatively high number of female artists working in this time and place. All the artists in my sample received a formal arts education, allowing me to control for factors such as ability and experience. My study restricted artists represented in the data to those affiliated with Mexican Muralism and Surrealism to avoid an apples-to-oranges situation. The market for and collectorship of, for example, Renaissance art, is vastly different than that of Mexican avant-gardism. Because there are very few known female Renaissance artists and collectors are willing to pay enormous sums for Renaissance-era art, I concluded that combining data across movements that were too dissimilar would result in extreme skewing of my data.

Data was gathered manually, as AskArt is password-protected and accessible only through affiliation with a gallery or auction house. Along with the artist's gender, other information gathered includes the medium, high and low pre-sale estimates, the final sale price, the seller, difference above or below the respective side of the estimate when the final sale price was higher/lower than the estimate, whether or not the work was included in an "evening sale,"<sup>4</sup> known provenance, presence of a signature on the recto (front) of the work, whether the work

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<sup>3</sup> See Table 6 for a breakdown of artists included and the frequency of their inclusion in the data.

<sup>4</sup> "Evening sales" are sales with pieces that are all expected to sell for more than a typical sale (i.e., so-called "masterpieces). They are more heavily publicized by the auction house and are attended by serious collectors expecting to spend large amounts of money.

was figurative and/or depicted a woman as the focal point, and whether or not nudity was present. Works that did not sell were not included in the data.

I also originally gathered data on whether a work's provenance was listed in AskArt but did not include this variable in the final regression. Many of the smaller auction houses may not have made this information public for databases like AskArt to gather information from.

Theoretically, any piece up for auction would have been carefully authenticated before being offered to the public, provenance research being a large part of this. Although provenance would have been an fascinating variable, I ultimately decided to drop it from the final regression.

However, it is interesting to note that across the board, the pieces that realized the highest prices (sold by Christie's and Sotheby's) more often than not had their provenance listed on AskArt.

The presence of nudity in a work was also a variable I analyzed. In 1989, the Guerilla Girls published a portfolio of thirty posters critiquing racist and sexist practices in the art world. One of these posters read: "Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum? Less than 5% of artists in the Modern Arts Section are women, but 85% of the nudes are female." I thought this would be an interesting variable to include, as men's voyeuristic portraits of nude women, often from areas of colonization, tend to be met with great acclaim in the art world.<sup>5</sup> This variable was ultimately dropped from the final regression due to an insignificant coefficient in preliminary regressions. However, the topic of nudity and consumption will be discussed below in an art historical analysis of some of the works included in this dataset that represent differences in men's depictions of women versus women's depictions of women.

Another variable I gathered data on was whether or not the female artists in my sample were married to a prominent male artist. Linda Nochlin (1971) argues that over the course of art history, many female artists that were able to achieve relative success did so because of their affiliation with a prominent male artist, whether that man be a father or husband. However, I dropped this variable from the final regressions, as interestingly, all but one of the female artists in my sample were married to contemporary male artists. Maria Izquierdo, the only female artist in our sample who was not married to a male artist, did indeed realize lower prices at auction for her work. This observation will be further discussed in later sections.

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<sup>5</sup> French artist Paul Gauguin's 1892 painting *When Will You Marry?* depicting two idealized Tahitian women sold for \$210 million in a 2014 auction.

This study restricts the 16 artists included in my analysis solely to those affiliated with Mexican Surrealism and Muralism to control for difficult-to-quantify stylistic elements that may differ across artistic movements. My study also limits the media of the observations included to two-dimensional drawn and painted works. Murals, due to their public nature, are unable to be purchased. However, I will later discuss the potential impact of the exposure brought about by large, public mural commissions that could increase later auction prices for that artist.

My dataset contains a total 708 transactions of works of art from auction houses to undisclosed public/private collectors, 351 of which (or 49.6%) are by female artists, and 357 (or 50.4%) are by male artists. Further, even though there were more works available by men than by women, I attempted to keep the number of male/female transactions relatively similar. For most artists in the sample, every transaction with all necessary datum was included in the sample. However, for artists like Diego Rivera and Leonora Carrington, with 1,363 and 417 total lots available, respectively, on AskArt, I limited the sales included to only their most recent 50-100 transactions due to the time-consuming nature of manually collecting the data.

In sum, the transactions by female artists amounted to \$139.3 million. When Frida Kahlo's *Diego y yo*, sold as part of Sotheby's November 16, 2021 *Modern Evening Auction* for a breathtaking \$34.9 million (the second most expensive painting ever sold by a female artist) is excluded from the dataset, this total falls to \$104.4 million, with a mean value at auction of \$297,404.10. My conclusion will discuss the effect of gender on blockbuster sales such as these in the market at large. The sales by male artists in my sample amounted to \$108.5 million with a mean value at auction of \$303,058.

Of the works by female artists, 81 were drawn, 274 were painted, and 160 were works on paper (the extra three observations that come from adding painted and drawn works include some that contained both drawing and painting). Of the works by male artists, 133 were drawn, 232 were painted, and 231 were works on paper. This uptick in drawn works is due to a greater number of studies for murals for sale by male artists, due to a greater number of men working in murals. Historically, painted works, typically done on a surface such as canvas or Masonite, achieve the highest prices at auction due to consumer's perceptions of these works as being more labor intensive, and thus, valuable.

#### IV. Theory and Empirical Models

To understand the following regression analyses, background information on the mechanisms of the contemporary art auction market must be presented. Sales by Christie's and Sotheby's make up a majority of the data in my sample (29.7% and 31.1%, respectively). In the art world at large, the two auction houses share 80% of the world auction market in high-value art.<sup>6</sup> Another 8.9% of the sales were executed by Morton Subastas, a prominent Mexican auction house. The remaining works were sold by smaller auction houses, primarily located in the United States.

Traditionally, major auction houses operate under an "ascending price" model, wherein an auctioneer provides a low price, and bidders raise their offers until eventually a price is "hammered down." This "hammer price" plus an undisclosed "buyer's premium" makes up the final sales price in my data. The "buyer's premium" is an additional percentage of the hammer price paid directly to the auction house as a commission on the transaction. The data in my sample includes fees to buyers as part of the final hammer price.

Before an auction, a catalogue with each "lot" (piece up for sale), along with its provenance (the history of past ownership and exhibition of a work of art), bibliographic information, and low-and-high-bar pre-sale estimates are released to the public. According to Sotheby's, its pre-sale estimates are intended "as a guide for prospective buyers ... any bid between high and low pre-sale estimate would, in [Sotheby's] opinion, offer a chance of success."<sup>7</sup> The low-bar estimate for any auction house is typically set at "60-70 percent of the best auction price achieved by a similar work of the artist, and the high estimate at 80 percent."<sup>8</sup> Any given work will not sell for less than its "reserve price," a number known only to the auction house which is typically 80% of the low estimate. Pre-auction estimated pricing is also determined through hedonic models, wherein specialists appraise the work for sale based on its internal characteristics, such as dimensions, medium, etc. and gain further insight by looking at comparable, previously sold pieces. My models focus primarily on gender and examine the effect of this and other factors in determining what makes a particular piece valuable.

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<sup>6</sup> Donald N. Thompson, *The \$12 Million Stuffed Shark: The Curious Economics of Contemporary Art*, 95.

<sup>7</sup> Sotheby's, *The Now Evening Auction*, 2 March 2022, Conditions of Business Report.

<sup>8</sup> Thompson, 134.

To quantify the potential presence of a price discount in the contemporary market for early avant-garde Mexican art, I estimate three ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models, each using a different dependent variable. To begin, I will estimate the following regression:

$$\text{Log}(\text{HammerPrice}) = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Female} + \beta_2 \text{Signature} + \beta_3 \text{Muralist} + \beta_4 \text{OnPaper} + \beta_5 \text{Painted} + \beta_6 \text{Drawn} + \beta_7 \text{Woman} + \beta_8 \text{Evening} + u$$

Where variables are defined as follows:

- *Log(SalesPrice)* is the natural log of the final sales price, and the dependent variable in this regression. I use natural log so that my coefficients are directly interpretable as approximate proportional differences.<sup>9</sup>
- *Female* is a dummy variable representing whether or not the artist is female. In keeping with the literature, I hypothesize that this coefficient will be negative, signifying the presence of a gender price discount for women's art.
- *Signature* is a dummy variable representing the presence of an artist's signature on the recto side of a work of art. I hypothesize that the presence of an artist's signature will add value to the work, as collectors tend to pay higher premiums for "brand name" artists, and for pieces that they feel are authentic. I also hypothesize that the signature of a male artist will result in a greater price increase than a female artist's signature.
- *Muralist* is a dummy variable representing whether the artist executed public murals during their career or not. Women were often barred from mural work due to male perceptions of women as being unable to complete such a labor-intensive task.<sup>10</sup> I hypothesize that being a muralist will have a positive effect on the price an artist realizes, given the public exposure and infamy that comes along with creating such a large, public work.

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<sup>10</sup> Maria Izquierdo, the first Mexican woman to receive a public mural commission, was ultimately barred from completing the project by Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros, who deemed her too young and inexperienced to complete a project of this magnitude. Rivera, Siqueiros, and Orozco's virtual monopoly over Muralism and its implications will be discussed in the latter half of this paper.



- *OnPaper* is a dummy variable representing whether or not a work was executed on paper. I hypothesize that painted works, executed on canvas or masonite (not on paper) will realize the highest prices, resulting in a negative coefficient for this variable.
- *Painted* is a dummy variable that represents whether or not a work includes painted elements (i.e., oil on canvas, tempera on paper, etc.). Because consumers tend to perceive painted works as more valuable, perhaps due to the cost of inputs, I hypothesize that this variable will have a positive coefficient.
- Similarly, *Drawn* is a dummy for if a work has been drawn (i.e., pencil on paper, charcoal on paper, etc.). I hypothesize that this will have a negative coefficient.
- *Woman* is a dummy for if the work contains a female subject as its focal point. I hypothesize that because of gendered views of women as a muse, and further as something to own and control, works that depict women may be more appealing to a largely male consumer base and thus, realize higher prices at auction.
- *Evening* is a dummy that controls for the effect of a work being included in one of Sotheby's/Christie's coveted "evening" sales. These sales typically add on average 20% more value than the same work auctioned the following day in a less-prestigious "day" sale.<sup>11</sup> I hypothesize that due to the scarcity and perceived value of pieces sold in "evening" sales, this will be a significantly positive coefficient. My conclusion will further discuss this variable from a gender perspective.

This regression will seek to isolate and quantify the factors that contribute to a work's final sale price at auction, testing for a potential bias on the side of consumers.

My second and third models will use the same independent variables, differing only in their dependent variables. My second model uses the logarithmic price of a work's average pre-sale estimate as the dependent variable. This regression will be used to test whether or not potential bias towards men's art lies on the side of the auction houses, as I know that the pre-sale estimates influence consumer behavior. The second model is as follows:

$$\text{Log(AvgEst)} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Female} + \beta_2 \text{Signature} + \beta_3 \text{Muralist} + \beta_4 \text{OnPaper} + \beta_5 \text{Painted} + \beta_6 \text{Drawn} + \beta_7 \text{Woman} + \beta_8 \text{Evening} + u$$

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<sup>11</sup> Thompson, p. 15.

In my third regression, I use the same independent variables again, this time looking at the difference between the price realized above the high or below the low bar estimates. AskArt provides this data as the final hammer price plus buyer's premium as the percent change between the hammer price and the high-bar price, should the selling price exceed its estimate. A negative percentage is given for sales prices that are below the low bar estimate and are calculated in the same manner.<sup>12</sup> This model will be able to test whether the potential bias instead lies on the side of the buyers, as with what Cameron et al., 2017 refer to as a "demand theory." The third model is as follows:

$$\text{Difference} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Female} + \beta_2 \text{Signature} + \beta_3 \text{Muralist} + \beta_4 \text{OnPaper} + \beta_5 \text{Painted} + \beta_6 \text{Drawn} + \beta_7 \text{Woman} + \beta_8 \text{Evening} + u$$

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<sup>12</sup> For example, if the price estimate was [\$60,000-80,000] and the final sales price was \$126,000, the difference was calculated and recorded as  $(126,000-80,000)/80,000 = 0.575$ .

## V. Results

### A. Model 1: Natural Logarithm of Price as the Dependent Variable

The results of Model 1 can be viewed in Table 3. I regress each of the independent variables on final sales price using 697 total observations. Of the original 708 transactions, not all entries contained data for every observable factor, so some were dropped from the final regression. First, with an R-squared value of 0.4046, we see that 40.46% of the variance in my dependent variable, *Sales Price*, can be predicted from the independent variables.

Female, my variable of interest, yielded a negative relationship of -0.3922, significant at the 1% level. When this coefficient is converted using the logarithmic adjustment equation  $[(e^{\beta} - 1) \times 100]$ , it results in a percent change of -32.29%. This indicates that the female artists in this sample earn 32.9% less than their male counterparts when all other factors are held constant; a price discount certainly does exist for the female artists in my sample on the demand (collector) side of the contemporary art market. Interestingly, *Signature*, *Muralist*, *Drawn*, and *Woman* all were statistically insignificant in this model. The slope coefficient for having a woman as the focal point of an art piece was statistically insignificant in my analysis (0.1395 with a p-value of 0.286), but that may have been due to the small sample size in question. Under that scenario, it is possible that a larger sample would have led to a similar slope that was statistically significant. That is a counterfactual, but if that were possible, then my regression hints that having a woman as the focal point raises auction prices. As expected, *OnPaper* resulted in a negative relationship of -1.3727 (percent change -74.59%) while painted works and works included in Evening auctions resulted in positive relationships of 0.7618 (percent change 114.21%) and 2.1760 (percent change 781.10%), respectively, both significant at the 1% level. The percent change figures indicate an increase or decrease in final sale price, ignoring price estimates, that arises from the variable of interest being present.

### B. Model 2: Natural Logarithm of Average Pre-Sale Estimate as the Dependent Variable

The results of Model 2 can be viewed in Table 4. The results of this regression are fairly similar to those of Model 1. In keeping with the literature, we would expect this to be the case, as auctioneers' estimates have been proven to generally be very highly correlated with the final

hammer price. A similar R-squared value (0.4243) was obtained in this model, indicating that a similar amount of the dispersion of the dependent variable can be explained by the independent variables as in Model 1. Interestingly, the gender coefficient was approximately 15% higher in this model, potentially signaling a greater bias on the side of auction houses than collectors. In this model, all else held constant, *Female* resulted in a coefficient of -0.5437, yielding a percent change of -41.94% when adjusted. Other significant variables in this model include *OnPaper* (-1.3614 at the 1% level of significance), *Painted* (0.6354 at the 5% level of significance), *Drawn* (-0.4722 at the 5% level of significance), and, least surprisingly, *Evening* (2.1022 at the 1% level of significance). As in the results of Model 1, the *Woman* variable was statistically insignificant at the 10% level but provided a slope coefficient of 0.1999 with a p-value of 0.128, potentially indicating an even larger increase in pre-sale estimate when a work of art features a female subject. Ultimately, this regression proves itself to be interesting because of the significantly large negative relationship between female artists and pre-sale estimates. The larger magnitude of this percent change in comparison to that calculated in Model 1 indicates that a larger potential bias lies on the side of the auction houses than that of the collectors. These findings are discussed in more detail in the conclusion.

### **C. Model 3: Difference Between High/Low Bar Estimate and Sales Price as the Dependent Variable**

In the third and final regression, I measure the effect of my independent variables on the difference between the pre-sale estimate and the final sales price. If the hammer price is above the high-bar estimate, the difference between the respective estimate and the price is taken, and vice versa for the low-bar estimate. In the second regression, I already established that the price discount for women's art may be perpetuated more by auction houses than by collectors. In this regression, I attempt to quantify that bias. The results of this model can be found in Table 6. Because of the results of Model 2, I would hypothesize that the variable representing gender would be positive, as buyers may tend to be more willing to pay for women's art than the auction houses expect them to be. The results of this regression can be found in Table 6.

With an R-squared value of 0.0312, this model's explanatory power is not as strong as the previous two, with only 3.12% variance in the dependent variable being explained by the independent variables. The only significant variable in this model is, in fact, the gender of the

artist. Despite this model's overall weakness, the significance of the gender variable makes it interesting. With a positive coefficient of 0.3221 at a 1% level of significance, it can be concluded that from my data, work by female artists was undervalued by the auction houses' pre-sale estimates. As no logarithms were used in this model, it was not necessary to adjust this coefficient. From these results, it can be concluded that buyers in this sample were willing to pay 32% above what auction houses were willing to accept for art by women.

## VI. Conclusions

My results establish and quantify a potential gender bias in the contemporary market for early 20<sup>th</sup> century Mexican art. The results of are extremely close to larger samples spanning more diverse genres and time periods. Adams et al. (2017) found a gender price discount of 42.1% in a sample of 1.9 million auction transactions, while Model 1 in our sample found a similar gender price discount of 32.44%.

While Model 1 established the presence of a bias, Models 2 and 3 sourced where that bias was coming from. Ultimately, the significant negative coefficients on the gender of artist variable for the first two models and a positive coefficient for the third locates the bias to come from the auction houses. While Model 3 indicates a potential bias on the side of the auction houses, this can be furthered by taking the average of the differences paid above or below the estimate price for both men and women. Interestingly, the average difference that collectors were willing to pay was 37% above the estimate for men and 74% for women, indicating that on average, collectors were willing to pay 51.28% more above the auction house provided estimates for art by women than for art by men.

But why? With the number of women across all art world professions increasing, one would assume, or at least hope, that so much of the inherent bias rooted in the art world would be rectified by now. At Sotheby's, 43% of executive roles in 2019 were filled by women.<sup>13</sup> However, through many years of prioritizing and promoting and thus institutionalizing men's art over women's, the market still has a long way to go to close the gap. One possible explanation lies in the psychology of auctions. Auction houses may intentionally offer low estimates to pull in a higher number of initial bidders because of the perceived attractive price, and thus create competition, eventually resulting in a price above the far above the estimate, resulting in more money for the auction house.<sup>14</sup> Only 21.57% (men) and 18.62% (women) of the final sales prices in my sample fell within the pre-sale estimates. Within my sample, 48.24% of all art by women in my sample sold for above the high-bar pre-sale estimate, and 39.11% of all art by men sold for above the high-bar pre-sale estimate. It could be possible that auction houses intentionally set low estimates for art by women in an attempt to create a competitive environment that will

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<sup>13</sup> Anny Shaw. "Lifting the Lid on Auction House Salaries." *The Art Newspaper*, 28 September 2021.

<sup>14</sup> "What Sells Well at Auction." *The Auction Collective*, 5 January 2021.

ultimately result in higher prices. Unfortunately, there is no way to know with certainty the origin and reasoning behind the psychology of these low estimates.

It is also possible that the initial prices of the work in the primary market (i.e., galleries) was far lower for art by women in our sample, later impacting the price estimate in the secondary market. Further, museums, with their status as purveyors of knowledge and narratives, have the power to shape public perception of past and present events by choosing what will be exhibited and how it will be interpreted by accompanying wall text and literature. Art historian Griselda Pollock notes that archives and museum collections are not simply innocent repositories of information and objects, but rather have been amassed and organized according to the selective social interests and desires of dominant classes, cultures, and genders since their inception.<sup>15</sup> As a result of a lack of critical work done in scholarship into nonwhite/male artists from the inception of art history as a field, the benchmark at which female artists of color start at when breaking into the world of auctions is even lower than that of white women. Logically, the lack of critical attention and platform given to an artist both during and after their life coupled with the fact that women were largely barred from any sort of artistic profession until the 1870s creates an effect of accumulated advantage. In a broad sense, an initial lack of supply of art by women, and especially women artists of color, due to institutional and familial barriers makes it nearly impossible for their reputation and sales to ever “catch up” to that of their male counterparts. Because of the “head start” that male artists have, much of the gender price discount for women’s art at large could be explained by the initial lack of women in artmaking from the outset of art history.

Regarding further research, it would be interesting to examine the gender price discount in the auction market as it has evolved over time to determine whether the recent influx of women into the art world has closed the gap at all. Founded in 1744 and 1766, respectively, Sotheby’s and Christie’s have dominated the art auction market for hundreds of years. However, hammer price data on AskArt does not precede 1987, and barely precedes 2000 on most auction house websites, if offered at all. It would have also been beneficial to expand the size of my sample to include more artists and earlier auctions for a more holistic view of the gender price discount for early Mexican avant-gardes, but time constrains, and difficulty of data collection limited the sample size. Similarly, measuring the the gender of the collector would also be valuable

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<sup>15</sup> Griselda Pollock and Penny Florence, *Looking Back to the Future*. G+B Arts International, 2001, 31.

information to have in order to examine both the number of female collectors in the market, given that to this day, collecting remains a male-dominated activity.<sup>16</sup> Given this information, would have been interesting to discuss and analyze the implications of a male preference towards art by male artists that depicts women – and particularly nude or indigenous women – over female artists' self-portraits and their depictions of other women. However, as auction houses do not release the names of buyers to the public, this discussion was not possible for the scope of this paper.

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<sup>16</sup> Greg Allen.



## VI. Appendix

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Female</b>	Dummy variable equal to one if the artist is female.
<b>Signature</b>	Dummy variable equal to one if the work is signed on the recto.
<b>Muralist</b>	Dummy variable equal to one if the artist is a muralist.
<b>OnPaper</b>	Dummy variable equal to one if the work was executed on paper.
<b>Painted</b>	Dummy variable equal to one if the medium includes painting materials.
<b>Drawn</b>	Dummy variable equal to one if the medium includes drawing materials.
<b>Woman</b>	Dummy variable equal to one if the painting's focal point is a woman.
<b>Evening</b>	Dummy variable equal to one if the painting was included in an "Evening" sale.
<b>SalesPrice</b>	Final hammer price in USD (nominal) including fees to buyers.
<b>AvgEst</b>	The average of the high and low bar pre-sale estimates provided to buyers.
<b>Difference</b>	The percent difference above or below the high/low bar estimate, included should a work sell for higher/lower than expected.

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Total # of Observations Included</b>	<b>Total # of Observations Containing Variable of Interest</b>	<b>% of Observations Containing Variable of Interest</b>
<b>Female</b>	708	351	49.58%
<b>Signature</b>	702	624	88.89%
<b>Muralist</b>	708	309	43.64%
<b>OnPaper</b>	708	391	55.23%
<b>Painted</b>	706	506	71.67%
<b>Drawn</b>	706	214	30.31%
<b>Woman</b>	703	265	37.70%
<b>Evening</b>	708	41	5.79%

Notes: Summary statistics are reported as a percentage of total observations included in the final regression. Total observations included differs across variables, as some data for variables of interest was unavailable (i.e., image unavailable). This occurred mostly in older transactions, before auction results were routinely published online (2000s and before). These observations were dropped from the final regressions.

<b>Table 3: Regression Analysis Using Price as Dependent Variable</b>				
<b>Variables</b>	<b>Log(SalesPrice)</b>	<b>Adjusted Coefficient</b>	<b>Robust Standard Error</b>	<b>P&gt; t </b>
<b>Female</b>	-0.3922(***)	-0.3244 (-32.44%)	0.1185	0.001
<b>Signature</b>	0.0048	0.0048 (0.48%)	0.2125	0.982
<b>Muralist</b>	0.0302	0.0307 (3.07%)	0.1171	0.797
<b>OnPaper</b>	-1.3727(***)	-0.7466 (-74.66%)	0.1408	0.000
<b>Painted</b>	0.7618(***)	1.1421 (114.21%)	0.2899	0.009
<b>Drawn</b>	-0.3930	-0.3231 (-32.21%)	0.2901	0.176
<b>Woman</b>	0.1306	0.1395 (13.95%)	0.12234	0.286
<b>Evening</b>	2.1760(***)	7.8110 (781.10%)	0.2805	0.000
<b>Constant</b>	11.0241(***)	61333	0.3730	0.000
<b>Observations</b>	697			
<b>R-Squared</b>	0.4046			
<p>Notes: Table shows the results for the OLS estimation of a model, showing the coefficients associated with each variable and robust standard errors. The asterisks, ***, **, * indicate significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively. All decimals have been rounded to the fourth decimal place. Resulting coefficients (<math>\beta</math>) were adjusted using the logarithmic adjustment equation <math>[(e^\beta - 1) \times 100]</math>.</p>				

<b>Table 4: Regression Analysis Using Average Pre-Sale Estimate as Dependent Variable</b>				
<b>Variables</b>	<b>Log(SalesPrice)</b>	<b>Adjusted Coeffieint</b>	<b>Robust Standard Error</b>	<b>P&gt; t </b>
<b>Female</b>	-0.5437(***)	-0.4194 (-41.94%)	0.1162	0.000
<b>Signature</b>	0.0048	0.0048 (0.48%)	0.207	0.869
<b>Muralist</b>	0.0302	0.0307 (3.07%)	0.1118	0.775
<b>OnPaper</b>	-1.3614(***)	-0.7437 (-74.37%)	0.1321	0.000
<b>Painted</b>	0.6354(**)	0.8878 (88.78%)	0.2694	0.019
<b>Drawn</b>	-0.4772(**)	0.6205 (62.05%)	0.2681	0.076
<b>Woman</b>	0.1822	0.1999 (19.99%)	0.1194	0.128
<b>Evening</b>	2.1022(***)	7.1842 (718.42%)	0.27	0.000
<b>Constant</b>	11.0354(***)	62,030	0.3486	0.000
<b>Observations</b>	691			
<b>R-Squared</b>	0.4243			
<p>Notes: Table shows the results for the OLS estiamation of a model, showing the coffecients associated with each variable and robust standard errors. The asterisks, ***, **, * indicate significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectivley. All decimals have been rounded to the fourth decimal place. Resulting coefficients (<math>\beta</math>) were adjusted using the logarithmic adjustment equation, <math>[(e^\beta - 1) \times 100]</math>.</p>				

**Table 5: Regression Analysis Using Difference between Estimate and Sales Price as Dependent Variable**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Log(SalesPrice)</b>	<b>Robust Standard Error</b>	<b>P&gt; t </b>
<b>Female</b>	0.3221(***)	0.1140	0.005
<b>Signature</b>	-0.04558	0.2103	0.829
<b>Muralist</b>	0.04720	0.1195	0.693
<b>OnPaper</b>	-0.1255	0.1314	0.340
<b>Painted</b>	-0.0212	0.14122	0.880
<b>Drawn</b>	-0.0819	0.1580	0.604
<b>Woman</b>	-0.0162	0.1137	0.887
<b>Evening</b>	0.06310	0.2174	0.772
<b>Constant</b>	0.5120(**)	0.2403	0.034
<b>Observations</b>	448		
<b>R-Squared</b>	0.0312		

Notes: Table shows the results for the OLS estimation of a model, showing the coefficients associated with each variable and robust standard errors. The asterisks, \*\*\*, \*\*, \* indicate significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively. All decimals have been rounded to the fourth decimal place.

<b>Table 6: Artists Included in Sample</b>	
<b>Artist</b>	<b>Total # of Observations Included</b>
<b>Agustín Lazo Adalid (M)</b>	9
<b>Alice Rahon (F)</b>	46
<b>Bridget Tichenor (F)</b>	28
<b>Diego Rivera (M)</b>	145
<b>Frida Kahlo (F)</b>	49
<b>Jose Clemente Orozco (M)</b>	53
<b>Leonora Carrington (F)</b>	135
<b>Lucienne Bloch (F)</b>	1
<b>Maria Izquiero (F)</b>	39
<b>Miguel Covarrubias (M)</b>	49
<b>Remedios Varo (F)</b>	39
<b>Rina Lazo (F)</b>	5
<b>Rosa Rolanda (F)</b>	7
<b>Rufino Tamayo (M)</b>	100
<b>Wolfgang Paalen (M)</b>	2
<b>Aurora Reyes (F)</b>	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>708</b>
Notes: Data was gathered from AskArt.com. Numbers vary between artists based upon how many transactions were available for each artist.	

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**Part 2**

**Investigating the History of Mexican Muralism and Surrealism to Explain the  
Contemporary Gender Price Discount**

“I don’t believe in heroes. In heroines, perhaps.” – Hito Steyerl



## I. Creating a Canon: Activating a Lost Art History

Prior to the 1970s, very little scholarship on women's history existed, and especially women's art history. First published in 1962, H.W. Janson's *History of Art* quickly became a canonical text in the field of art history. This widely distributed text contained absolutely no work by women artists, as pointed out by feminist art historians Norma Broude and Mary Garrard.<sup>17</sup> In 1979, Janson defended this omission by stating, "I have not been able to find a woman artist who clearly belongs in a one-volume history of art." With the rise of second-wave feminism and emergence of a distinctly Feminist art, it became imperative to establish a female history of the world. From the beginning of written language, those documenting history and later establishing historiographical practices have been largely male. The history of the world, as we knew it, was a male-centric history. Thus, it became the mission of historians such as Linda Nochlin to begin to establish a view of history from a distinctly female perspective.

The establishment of a female history was a major undertaking, as there were no great canonical texts to look to, nor was there much easily accessible information on female artists and other women of society. In order to go forward, Nochlin first needed to lay the foundation and express exactly why nearly three thousand years of "great art" has been dominated by men in her seminal essay, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" Linda Nochlin was among the first scholars to push the discourse of history away from one dominated entirely by men, and to recognize the urgency and importance of establishing a female art history, so future generations of female artists and (art) historians would have predecessors to look to. Being one of the first contributors to the newfound canon of a female history, Nochlin needed to first lay a broad foundation and cover all her bases. Originally published in a 1971 issue of *Artnews*, this essay coincided with the height of second-wave feminism and the rise of feminist art in America, marking Nochlin as one of the first feminist art historians. Her essay lays out several explanations into the question of why there have been no "great" women artists. The issues she covers are mostly institutional, but she discusses issues of familial responsibilities and power dynamics as well.

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<sup>17</sup> Norma Broude and Mary Garrard, *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s History and Impact*, 16.

Nochlin brings in ideas from John Stuart Mill, a nineteenth-century political theorist whose views have been widely accepted, and applies them to the question of feminist art. She begins her essay with an explanation of his ideas regarding how systems of power are “naturalized” and applies this to how the male viewpoint of art history has become “unconsciously accepted as the viewpoint of the art historian” (146). Through this relation to Mill’s theory and her in-depth analyses of accepted understandings of history, Nochlin successfully refutes centuries of a male-dominated historiography and opens the conversation to explain why women have not been afforded the opportunity to produce “great” art.

Alongside time-consuming familial obligations and institutional barriers to becoming a “great” artist, Nochlin discusses the honorific of the “Great Artist,” available to a select few male artists who become endowed with an unattainable and mysterious air of genius, leading their work to go for insurmountable sums at auction. She writes:

Behind the most sophisticated investigations of great artists – more specifically, the art-historical monograph, which accepts the notion of the great artist as primary, and the social and institutional structures within which he lived and worked as mere secondary “influences” or “background” – lurks the golden-nugget theory of genius and the free-enterprise conception of individual achievement. On this basis, women’s lack of major achievement in art may be formulated as a syllogism: If women had the golden nugget of artistic genius, then it would reveal itself. But it has never revealed itself. Q.E.D. Women do not have the golden nugget of artistic genius.<sup>18</sup>

In this quote, Nochlin picks apart an art world assumption that the artists that today adorn the most prestigious galleries of the most prestigious museums deserve to be there because they are simply the best of the best. She argues that within the discipline of art history, an artist’s background historically came secondary to what they were able to create, thus ignoring any institutional barriers that may have prohibited their contemporaries from becoming artistic geniuses, too. Because of a historically exponentially greater degree of difficulty for a woman to become an artist and a resultingly fewer number of women artists, Nochlin argues that this categorization of great/not great works to elevate art by male “geniuses” and not even extend the honorific to women. On the topic of so-called “greatness,” and its relation to gender, Whitney Chadwick notes, “‘Greatness,’ ‘Hero,’ and ‘Master,’ are terms that return us to notions of originality, internationality and transcendence as defined by male creativity,” and adds that even

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<sup>18</sup> Linda Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays*, Harper & Row, 1989, 156.

today, “the category ‘woman artist’ remains an unstable one, its meanings fixed only in relation to dominant male paradigms of art and femininity.”<sup>19</sup>

The art world has long privileged individual expression and artistic autonomy, while also attempting to “group” artists into categories based on their style and the time period and placed in which they worked/are working. If an artist takes a great risk and produces outside of their “movement,” they can either be heralded as a “genius” for taking that leap, or in the case of a woman or artist of color producing art concerning their lived experiences, be pushed to the periphery of whatever movement of which they are adjacent. To art historian Griselda Pollock, exposing the underlying assumptions of the art world reveals that the subordination and alienation of women artists was vital to the perpetuation of the “myth of masculine creative superiority and social dominance.”<sup>20</sup> In this way, to maintain control of the art world and other spheres of influence, it was vital for the dominant social group to champion art that represented their agendas and best interests.

It is the “great” artists who eventually become institutionalized through research, inclusion in solo and group exhibitions, and offered for sale in coveted auctions, all of which substantially increase the value of their output. The dominant western canon of art allows for just a few breakout stars from groups on the periphery of the art world (i.e., any minority group) to achieve a high level of success, and through exhibiting those artists, can pat themselves on the back for diversifying their collections. Thus, being both nonwhite and a woman significantly lowers an artist’s chance of shattering expectations and achieving notoriety in her lifetime, as well as continued posthumous recognition. In the example of Mexican Muralism and Surrealism, the titles of “great” and “genius” were bestowed upon Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros, known literally as *Los Tres Grandes* or The Big Three.<sup>21</sup> As will be

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<sup>19</sup> Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society*. Thames & Hudson, 2002, 10.

<sup>20</sup> Griselda Pollock, “Women, Art, and Ideology: Questions for Feminist Art Historians.” *Women’s Art Journal*, vol. 4, 1980, 3.

<sup>21</sup> Through the Mexican government’s sponsorship of the expansion of art in post-revolutionary Mexico, resources were allotted to finding the nation’s “best” muralists to represent Mexico on an international stage. Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros rose to the top of the administration’s list, gaining highly visible mural commissions in both Mexico and the United States. The three worked together from 1931-32 at the Secretariat of Public Education at Mexico City’s National Preparatory School to establish and teach a distinctly “Mexican” form of painting. In the early 1930s, periodicals like *Art Digest*, *Creative Art*, and even *Fortune* ran lengthy articles about Rivera and Orozco as champions of Mexican muralism, positioning them at the top of the movement. From 1930-32, an exhibition titled *Mexican Arts* travelled across the United States, pointing New York viewers to Orozco’s mural cycle at the New School. In 1931, the Museum of Modern Art mounted of a solo show of the works on canvas and paper and “portable frescoes” of Diego Rivera, situating him at the top of both the Mexican and American art scenes. As a

discussed later in this paper, the notoriety extended to these three artists ultimately overshadowed the contributions of their female contemporaries.

As history has told, any sort of institutional change is painstakingly slow, and must often be taken one step at a time. Thus, small victories, like the cascade effect into the creation of a feminist art history established by Nochlin must be both celebrated and looked back upon with hindsight. One glaring omission that the modern scholar finds in this preliminary feminist text is that of race. The social reform of the art world arose in tandem with the social movements of the 1960s and 70s. The Women's Liberation movement of the 1970s followed closely on the coattails of the Civil Rights movement of the 60s, but notably pushed for the equality of white women first and foremost. The movement, both at the time and in retrospect, has been criticized for its hierarchical nature and failure to address the equality of women of color in tandem with white women. As pointed out by Margaret A. Simons in *Racism and Feminism: A Schism in the Sisterhood* (1979), "Analyses by white feminists often deemphasize the differences in women's situations in an effort to point out the shared experiences of sexism. But the result is a lack of sensitivity to the situations of minority women and a failure to understand their reluctance to identify with a predominately white organization," (388). Audre Lorde echoes this claim in *Sister Outsider*: "By and large within the women's movement today, white women focus upon their oppression as women and ignore differences of race, sexual preference, class, and age. There is a pretense to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word sisterhood that does not in fact exist," (116).

Despite this initial divide, third and fourth wave feminism have incorporated more diverse voices into the canon and shifted the movement in a more intersectional direction, realizing that an essentialist (i.e., one-size-fits-all) feminism was not a realistic tactic for change. Confining female artists to a homogenous, gender-specific category ignores the factors of class, race, nationality, and patronage that inspire art and subsequently impact its critical reception and

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result of seemingly rotating scandals, between Siqueiros' *America Tropical* mural in Los Angeles (painted over for its condemnation of U.S. imperialism), Rivera's commission for a mural at Rockefeller Center (painted over for its inclusion of a portrait of Lenin), and Orozco's cycle at Dartmouth College (publicly condemned by some as a foreign attack on the U.S.' civilization), one of the three muralists was always either gaining attention in the media for scandal, or being commissioned for another major project, thus suggesting a virtual monopoly over mural production. To this day, the three muralists are grouped together with the honorific "*Los Tres Grandes*," as seen in the Whitney Museum of American Art's 2021 exhibition *Vida Americana: Mexican Muralists Remake American Art, 1925-1945*, with the accompanying exhibition catalogue continuing to reinforce their monopoly on muralism.

value.<sup>22</sup> Later scholars and activists could take the next steps towards the activation of an intersectional art history outside of the white, male, and Eurocentric myopic lens. Audre Lorde in *Sister Outsider* encourages women to work together on the path to meaningful change: “Now we must recognize differences among women who are our equals, neither inferior nor superior, and devise ways to use each other’s difference to enrich our visions and joint struggles,” (122). Later waves of feminists and feminist art historians rallied against an essentialist notion of the existence of some intrinsic gendered quality bringing all women together. The curators of the exhibition *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985* state that their main curatorial mission was to “[dispute] essentialist positions on the feminine and [attempt] to develop situated perspectives that take into account the specific contexts in which the works were formulated and the parameters on the basis of which society has established the cultural markings of male and female genders.”<sup>23</sup>

With the advent of a more intersectional feminism and a more revisionary look at history rapidly coming together in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the question of why there have been no great women artists was extended to examine why there have been no great (female) artists of color. To answer these questions, scholars first needed to delve into the realities of artists working on the “periphery” of the world of “fine” art. The hierarchical nature of the encyclopedic art museum often dedicates its most prestigious spaces to white, American and European artists who have been deemed “great”, relegating smaller, less central galleries to the utilitarian, anonymous outputs of far-away places. One of the many goals of the feminist art movement was to shatter the association of “craft art” as “women’s work” and position media such as ceramics, weaving, and embroidery as worthy of artistic acclaim. As the movement became more intersectional, scholars looked to countries like Mexico to correct these age-old categorizations. In a catalog published by the Museo de Arte Moderno, Fernando Gamboa argues that women’s participation in Mexican art has been recent because they had previously expressed themselves largely in “minor arts” more than in “fine arts”, and that it was this “late development of their sensibility” that had determined their limitations in the dominant canon.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Pollock, 5.

<sup>23</sup> Cecelia Fajardo-Hill and Andrea Giunta, “Introduction.” *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985*, Hammer Museum, University of California, 2017, 18

<sup>24</sup> Andrea Giunta, “Feminist Disruptions in Mexican Art, 1975 - 1987.” *Artelogue*, no. 5, 2013, 7.

In tandem with other institutional barriers laid out by Nochlin, a goal of feminism in Mexico was to move away from this categorization and towards a more holistic artistic representation of the country that was not achieved in the cultural restructuring that occurred in the wake of the Mexican Revolution. Despite various feminist movements in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Mexican women did not gain the right to vote until 1953, highlighting the post-revolutionary restructuring's failure to improve the lives of women. The most significant social justice movement occurred amongst students in Mexico City in 1968, who protested against the country's hosting of the Olympics. However, the movement declined significantly after October 2, 1968, when federal troops opened fire on student organizers. Although the student movement did not directly address feminist issues, it challenged censorship and repression, opening the doors for a feminist movement in Mexico. From the ashes of the student movement rose a series of grassroots organizing efforts, including the *grupos* collective of socially motivated artists who emphasized the importance of collective art in order to downplay the importance of individual authorship in the art world that has worked to exclude non-dominant groups. The feminist art movement in Mexico, like in the United States, merged the political and the personal. Artists and activists like Mónica Mayer and Pola Weiss grappled both with Mexico's Catholic and patriarchal culture, and with the international art world's dismissal of the movement on the grounds of its perceived stereotypes of what constitutes authentically "Mexican" art.<sup>25</sup> In 2001, artist Margali Lara noted that in the 1970s, when the feminist art movement was making waves in the United States, the Mexican art academies still "all but prohibited any discussion of the body that many female art students wanted to explore: sexuality, the body, and quotidian aspects of life." About the Muralists, she added, "[they] only dealt with the body as an idealized and romanticized body, and Frida Kahlo, who did paint about female sexuality and subjectivity was still viewed as a 'tasteless artist' in the 1970s." While opportunities and exposure for women artists in Mexico was severely lacking, attempting to break into the international art world proved even more challenging, with little help from United States feminists. Artist Cara Rippey notes that the rapid "professionalization and globalization of the art world has worked to make local tendencies provincial," perpetuating restrictive hierarchies within the art world.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Edward J. McCaughan, "Navigating the Labyrinth of Silence: Feminist Artists in Mexico." *Social Justice*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2007, 52.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-51.

In the 1980s and 90s, the art world became more self-reflective and critical, allowing for silenced narratives to finally have a space on an institutional level. A lecture delivered by artist and curator Howardena Pindell in 1987 offered statistics on the racial makeup of exhibitions in both the public and private sectors between 1986-87. Notably, she found that the Whitney Biennial and Documeta, shows believed to be on the cutting-edge of artistic expression were 96% and 95% white, respectively. A show entitled *Emerging Artists 1978-1986* mounted at the Guggenheim Museum was 98% white, and a survey text of “great” contemporary art entitled *Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art, 1945-1986* was made up of 98.9% white artists.<sup>27</sup> More recently, and moving into the secondary art market, a 2018 report by Sotheby’s cites just 1.2% of the global auction market transactions included sales by African American artists. The report continues to note that between 2008 and 2018, the total combined auction sales for work by African American artists summed to \$460.8 million, excluding the sale of work by Jean-Michel Basquiat. When the price realized by Basquiat pieces at auction was added to this number, it rose to \$2.2 billion.<sup>28</sup> Thinking back to Frida Kahlo’s *Diego y yo*, it could be concluded that only a select number of artists from a non-dominant art movement can be endowed with the “genius effect” that Nochlin discusses in *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* A few women, such as Frida Kahlo, and a few artists of color, such as Jean Michel-Basquiat, have been accepted into this mysteriously determined ‘genius’ category and exhibited and collected as such. In this way, the art world is able to project an illusion of commitment to equity without actually having to do the critical work of scholarship and diversification of exhibitions and collections.

Art historian Lucy Lippard attempts to explain bias in the art world by stating, “A populist definition of quality in art might be ‘that element that moves the viewer.’ A man probably can’t decide what that is for a woman, nor a white for a person of color, nor an educated for an uneducated person, and so forth, is where ‘taste’ comes in.”<sup>29</sup> While this blanket statement certainly does not incorporate all the minutia and behind-the-scenes decision making, it can help us understand why art depicting distinctly “feminine” subject matter was not

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<sup>27</sup> Howardena Pindell, “Statistics, Testimony and Supporting Documentation.” Agendas for Survival Conference, 28 June 1987, New York City, Hunter College.

<sup>28</sup> Charlotte Burns and Julia Halperin, “For African American Artists, the Market Remains Woefully Unbalanced.” Sotheby’s, 13 Feb. 2019.

<sup>29</sup> Lucy Lippard, “Sweeping Exchanges: The Contribution of Feminism to the Art of the 1970s.” *Art Journal*, Fall/Winter 1980, 363.

immediately met with a high level of acclaim by the male art world. Thus, it then becomes imperative to examine why certain works and artists have become canonized as “great,” and the social, political, and cultural factors that were at play both at the time the artist created a certain piece, and the time in which it was collected.

The establishment of a new art history representative of the world’s artist population is vital to the promotion of equality within the art world for future generations. While there is still much work to be done in the creation of an intersectional, anti-essentialist art history, the fight to rediscover, recognize, and exhibit art by women and people of color has come a long way. Over the past several decades of the creation of a new art historical canon and increasing demands for the diversification of art collections, many possible explanations for the lack of art by women and artists of color have been given. Ultimately, every movement is different, and blanket statements of overt discrimination cannot be applied to all art. It is true that Surrealism in Mexico saw an increase in female success stories, but the same cannot be said for female Mexican muralists. Further, when looked at from a holistic perspective in the data presented above, it is clear that there is some factor, whether it be gender, subject matter, or external characteristics of an individual work of art (i.e., provenance) that is contributing to a preference for art by men. To rectify the gender price discount that is present in the contemporary art market, we must break the cycles of exclusion and ignorance towards the non-dominant canon first in our scholarship, then in exhibition spaces, and finally in the art market.

Ultimately, the 70s and 80s saw a celebration of art by women that was distinctly “feminist,” or politically motivated towards the common cause of female social mobility and artistic legitimization. While an important shift away from the dominant canon of the art world and art history, this work also had the effect of sharpening the divide between the pedagogical definitions of “men’s” and “women’s” art. Art by women that flourished at the time was distinctly “feminist” and used new techniques and artistic methods that would stand out against the traditionally “male” expressions of painting and sculpting. Installation art, video art, and other new, experimental forms were celebrated, while more traditional forms of art-making that had long been dominated by men were largely abandoned. Similar phenomena were taking place in Mexico, as feminist artists sought to reclaim traditionally “female” forms of “low” or “craft” art and used revolutionary art to integrate feminist issues into the docket of social issues being



pushed by activists. But what to the women artists who had been making art about their experience as women in traditionally “male” media before it was “cool”?

This paper takes the traditional myopic view of art history and its impact on the contemporary art market into consideration and seeks to isolate factors, both visual and historical, that might have led to the continued undervaluing of art by women illustrated in the first section of this paper. First, a case study of Mexican painter and muralist María Izquierdo will be presented in relation to her peers, both Mexican and not. I will discuss her exclusion by *Los Tres Grandes*, and the implications of her being passed over by American artists Marion and Grace Greenwood for mural commissions. The following section will examine Mexican muralism and Surrealism in tandem, and the ways in which women within each movement were exhibited and understood, granting future value to some artists, and prohibiting others from achieving a deserved position in the dominant story of art history.

## II. The Exclusion of María Izquierdo

As will be discussed more in-depth in Section III, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century of Mexican art was categorized by the passionate creation of a new visual culture representative of Mexico following the turmoil of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Globally, the traumatic aftermath of the First World War and the crash of the United States stock market in 1929 widened the chasm between left- and right-wing ideologies. Artistic expression during this time became increasingly political and abstract, shifting away from representational forms to reflect a larger disillusionment with dominant power structures and governance. Mexico was a hotbed of revolutionary change and was becoming an exemplar of art's power to enact social change. An increased governmental focus on the arts created opportunities for both male and female artists, attracting the attention of up-and-coming American and European artists. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, German and French expressionists became fascinated with "Primitivism," or highly stylized art representing non-Western, largely indigenous female subjects. Artists like Paul Gauguin were championed for their often highly voyeuristic depictions of tribal women, continuing a tradition of encouraging women to be consumed as subjects of art, but rarely as practitioners. The so-called "Primitivists" used bright colors and sweeping brush strokes to promote an idealized image of faraway lands as uncivilized and wild, heightening imperialist sentiments among viewers of these works back in European and American exhibition spaces.

Emerging contemporaneously, artists in Mexico like Diego Rivera rejected the bourgeois themes of European modernism but used similar dramatic colors and a distinct painterly style in his portraits of Mexican people to convey emotion and urgency in his work to create a method of representation that would soon be immediately recognizable by the art world as being distinctly "Mexican." Instead of romanticizing *indigenismo*<sup>30</sup> and peasant life like Gauguin, Rivera and his contemporaries sought to use an even more expressive and dramatic style to paint the painful realities of marginalized Mexican people, and inspire social change with their art. Rivera's early style, known to art historians as Anahuac Cubism, along with his later, more representational murals, appropriated symbols of pre-Columbian life in Mexico in a reformed style of international figurative abstraction, placing ordinary people at the center of his work instead of allegories of gods and heroes. To Rivera, "The true novelty of Mexican painting which

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<sup>30</sup> *Indigenismo* refers to a political ideology in many Latin American countries that emphasizes the relationship between the modern nation and its indigenous peoples.

I initiated in 1922–23 at the Secretary of Public Education, along with Siqueiros and Orozco in the National Preparatory School, was to make the people the heroes of mural painting; it consisted in representing the poor farmer and the industrial worker fighting to obtain land.”<sup>31</sup> Across the globe, artists sought new styles and materials to represent a rapidly changing world, and the innovations in media and style set forth in Mexican Muralism was leading the charge.

Mexico in the late 19th and early 20th century provides an interesting look into the position of a post-revolutionary nation. Seeking to rebuild and reinvent both culturally and economically in the wake of utter destruction, there was potential for a complete restructuring of dominant pre-revolutionary class, race, and gender roles. Prior to the Revolution, the position of women in Mexico was highly restricted, reinforced by legislation like the 1857 Constitution and the 1860 Reform Laws, which rendered inadmissible any female participation outside the “holy zone” (i.e., the bedroom, the kitchen, household chores, Mass, and the confessional).<sup>32</sup> Regardless of a largely hostile environment, riddled with barriers to education and mobility, women had been fighting for civil rights since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in opposition to the nation’s insistence on the promotion of cult of motherhood.<sup>33</sup>

Women received the right to vote in 1953, but remained largely absent from civil structures, perpetuating an erasure from civic development and modernization. Thus, in allegorical representations of progress, women continuously represent the Mexico that was, perpetuating and glorifying the feminization of indigenous culture. While recent scholarship has exposed a greater degree of involvement in the Revolution than was previously believed, art, literature, and cinema remembered *soldaderas* in the Revolution (women who went to fight for various factions in the Revolution) as “witnesses of male valor, objects of their affections, and nuisances in the march toward modernity.”<sup>34</sup> In this way, Mexican women, as represented by Rivera and other exemplars of culture, were presented as roadblocks in a glorified masculine road to progress: “Just as the novelist Mariano Azuela turned his female characters Camila and La Pintada in to the familiar binary of virgin and whore, Diego Rivera painted the nation in

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<sup>31</sup> Peña Cardona Alfredo, et al., *Conversations with Diego Rivera: the Monster in His Labyrinth*. New Village Press, 2018, 108.

<sup>32</sup> Olcott, Jocelyn, et al., *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico*. Duke University Press, 2006, 2-3.

<sup>33</sup> The “cult of motherhood” refers to a classical insistence upon women bearing children, and that successful motherhood would bring order to the home and to the state.

<sup>34</sup> Olcott, et al., 22.

patriarchal narrative relying on another tired trope: women represented fertility and nature; men were the rational conquerors of nature, the markers of politics, science, technology, and finished goods,”(25). For example, the central panel in Rivera’s murals at the National School of Agriculture features a mural entitled *Liberated Earth with Natural Forces Controlled by Man* (fig. 2), wherein the main figure is a massive idealized nude portrait of the artist's second wife, Guadalupe Marin. Positioned between the earth and the sky and with her left hand raised, she becomes an allegory fertility and the natural world. She is surrounded by smaller panels depicting men performing agricultural work, assisting in nation’s push towards modernization. In depictions like this, women become tied intrinsically to the land, positing them as something to be conquered and exploited for the furthering of the species. In terms of the international art world, these representations of women by dominant male artists working on the so-called “periphery” of the art world work in tandem with those of European artists like Gauguin working within the “center,” adding validity to the positioning of women as inferior, and further working to exclude women from entry to the lofty, ideological position of artist as depicter of truth and change.

María Izquierdo, born in San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco in 1902 is heralded as one of Mexico’s great modern artists. She was born into a lower middle-class family of mestizo heritage, married young, and had three children. In 1923, she moved her family to Mexico City, where she soon after divorced her husband, retained custody of her children, and enrolled in the prestigious Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes. It was in art school where she was “discovered” by Diego Rivera, who had already fashioned a rather successful career for himself. Of Izquierdo’s work, much of which featured the non-idealized female body and her daily struggles, Rivera stated, “... it was the first time in the history of art that a woman expressed with absolutely naked and we might even say calmly ferocious sincerity those general and particular facts particular to women.”<sup>35</sup> This double-edged praise suggests that Rivera saw Izquierdo as a strictly female artist, reinforcing the separation between men’s and women’s art. For several years, he served as a ‘patron’ for her, allowing her to gain the access to exhibition spaces and connections she would otherwise never see as a woman. Izquierdo worked primarily in painting and drawing, reclaiming the traditionally male expressions by painting her personal vision of Mexico: one that

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<sup>35</sup> Racquel Tibol, *Frida Kahlo: An Open Life*. Translated by Elinor Randall, University of New Mexico Press, 1993, p. 96.

featured women, in all their complexity and pain, deemphasized a cult of motherhood, and depicted Mexican landscapes devoid of the presence of the male workers that *Los Tres Grandes* so vehemently championed.

With the medium of mural painting becoming rapidly more popular in the 30s and 40s in Mexico, Izquierdo noticed the potential for visibility intrinsic to the mode of expression and began seeking mural commissions. In 1942, Izquierdo was invited by Jorge Cerdán, governor of Veracruz, to paint several frescoes in the *Palacio del Gobierno del Estado* (Palace of the State Government). The project was never completed, as murals in Mexico at this time had to be completed under the jurisdiction of the official who accepted them. Despite years of preparation, Cerdán's successor had no interest in the frescoes.<sup>36</sup> In 1945, another chance for Izquierdo to prove herself as a competent muralist arose, when the Mexican Federal Government commissioned her to paint the main stairwell of the *Departamento del Distrito Federal* (Department of the Federal District) in the heart of Mexico City, a commission that would heighten her visibility as a skilled artist and likely invite more commissions and exposure. Despite praise by the Chilean writer Pablo Neruda and a clear mastery of the art of revolutionary mural painting as recognized by the government, Izquierdo's commission was vetoed by Rivera and Siqueiros, whose monopoly over Mexico's artistic production afforded them the power to make these decisions. The mural was vetoed on the grounds that she was too young and inexperienced for a project of this magnitude, despite Rivera's previous endorsement of Izquierdo as the only student of worth in the esteemed Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes in 1929, and her myriad international endorsements.<sup>37</sup> In a 1947 article published in Mexico-city based newspaper *El Nacional* entitled *María Izquierdo vs. Los Tres Grandes*, she publicly condemns the triumvirate for their hostile takeover and monopolization of the Muralist movement, stating: "... When [a woman] succeeds in convincing society that she can also create, she meets a great wall of incomprehension caused by the envy or superiority complex of her male colleagues. [...]. Almost never do male artists see a woman who paints as just another colleague who is as

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<sup>36</sup> Nancy Deffenbach, "The Wall of Resistance." *María Izquierdo and Frida Kahlo: Challenging Visions in Mexican Art*, University of Texas Press, 2014, 109.

<sup>37</sup> Robin Adèle Greeley, "Painting Mexican Identities: Nationalism and Gender in the Work of María Izquierdo." *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2000, 55.

dedicated as they are to the same creative labor. No, on the contrary, they see her as an obstacle, an inferior competitor whom they must attack venomously.”<sup>38</sup>

In a preparatory sketch for the 1945 mural, (fig. 3) we can see clear ties to Izquierdo’s former “mentor” Rivera’s *The History of Medicine in Mexico: The People’s Demand for Better Health* mural executed in 1953 for the Hospital de la Raza in Mexico City (fig. 4). Both murals are executed in the typical style of Muralism, with strong figures swirling through busy scenes of buildings, people, and other allegorical objects. Both are executed in a painterly style and emphasize humans and progress, with one side of the mural representing allegories of the past, and another side representing allegories of the modernized present. In Izquierdo’s sketch, the past is represented by a male figure holding up a piece of paper etched with pre-Columbian motifs. This male allegory of a past Mexico is surrounded by a stepped pyramid, a warrior, and other symbols of a past nation. The right side of her mural, radically presents an allegory of the present and future Mexico as a woman, holding up a similar piece of paper with etchings seeming to represent blueprints. The woman is surrounded by a modern budding, an image of a train track, a telescope, modern plumbing, and more. Depicting a woman as a champion of progress and modernization was a bold move for Izquierdo, and certainly challenged the hypermasculine vision of the modernizing Mexico that Rivera and the government at large was trying to portray. While there is no way to know for sure the motivations behind the veto of Izquierdo’s mural, it is more than possible that both her gender and her decision to depict a woman as an allegory of progress instead of as a supporting figure in her mural could have Rivera’s decision to deny her any public wall space. She endured a stroke, which significantly affected the use of her right hand in 1948, rendering the labor-intensive mural process nearly impossible. Although she learned to paint left-handed, the quality of her work suffered, and without a major, public commission, her name largely vanished from the dominant narrative of Mexican Muralism. She did continue to paint smaller-scale works, some of which have made it to the secondary art market and were included in my study.

Just 12 years before Izquierdo’s mural was vetoed, Marion and Grace Greenwood, sisters hailing from Brooklyn, became the first women to create major public works of art in Mexico. The sisters attended the Art Students League in New York, and also studied and worked in Paris and Rome. The pair studied Mexican history and contemporary art, and soon began receiving

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<sup>38</sup> María Izquierdo, “María Izquierdo vs. Los Tres Grandes.” *El Nacional*, 2 Oct. 1947.

commissions to paint in Mexico. While beautiful, the murals are largely devoid of radical political connotation. Upon her arrival in Mexico, Marion championed communism after *Los Tres Grandes*, but eventually returned to a more capitalistic stance, stating that, “There are people made to serve and people born to boss – and if the world is ever under the control of those inferiors then God help us.”<sup>39</sup> Her 1933 mural *Landscape and Economy of a Michoacán* romanticized the surrounding area’s rural economy, and is devoid of any political meaning. In 1933, she wrote:

“ ... I am simply going to paint these people as I feel them in all their sadness, their apathy, their beauty. Hammers and sickles, and historical periods and personalities have been done to death. I have only become class-conscious in the last year; it would be an affectation for me to paint the usual propaganda at this period when I have nothing original to offer, whereas if I paint something I feel it might have much more significance.”<sup>40</sup>

In this statement, the division between Greenwood and Izquierdo’s goals for their art become evident. While Izquierdo was committed to representing and disseminating the shortcomings of the project of modernization in Mexico, the outsider Greenwood sisters worked with the administration to champion it and were thus granted with institutional support. Izquierdo, too, painted what she felt, but the Mexican art world still rejected her. The political ambiguity of the Greenwood sisters – particularly Marion’s – made them more appealing and commissionable artists than Izquierdo, whose commitment to highlighting the female experience did not fit into the themes of a conservative, *machista* Mexico. Border politics come into play here; one is forced to question why this distinctly anti-Communist artist who had become aware of Mexican art just two years before her first commission was championed, while an accomplished and native artist was so actively rejected. There is little evidence that the Greenwood sisters ever faced any discrimination or hardships on a basis of their race while in Mexico. Marion Greenwood even noted that “like in France, you are more appreciated if you are a foreigner.”<sup>41</sup> Art historian James Oles acknowledges that, “Along with talent, energy, and ambition, it may have also been that as *Americans* the Greenwoods expected to be given an opportunity to work.”<sup>42</sup> By accepting these commissions and working in Mexico while still being able to cross

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<sup>39</sup> James Oles, “The Mexican Murals of Marion and Grace Greenwood.” *Out of Context: American Artists Abroad*, edited by Fattal Laura Rachel Felleman and Carol Salus, Greenwood Press, Westport, CT, 2004, 117.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

the border back into the United States with new knowledge of artistic strategies and social conditions, the Greenwood sisters may have inadvertently silenced Mexican voices and contributed to a further divide between the two nations, perpetrating a cross-border misunderstanding of the “Other.”

Marion Greenwood’s famous 1935 mural for El Mercado Abelardo Rodríguez, *La Industrialización del Campo (Industrialization of the Countryside)* (fig. 5) depicts a scene of many Mexican people, completing a variety of tasks, both industrial and agricultural. The mural clearly takes cues from Siqueiros and Rivera in content, color, and composition, as it presents various male figures in different scenes, not separated by distinct walls. The emphasis on labor and the glorification of the worker firmly situates this work within the confines of Social Realism, a style shaped heavily by the Mexican muralists. Several men are hanging up a banner reading “*doreros y campesinos unidos contra el imperialismo,*” reflecting the sentimental championing of the worker over imperialist forces pushed by *Los Tres Grandes* in their murals. We see three distinctly female figures in this image. Two women are seated and wearing rebozos, a shawl traditionally used to aid in the progress of a woman going into labor or for comfort during pregnancy. The most prominent female figure is not working either, but rather holding a small child, reinforcing the interior and domestic role of women at the time. Her rebozo drapes over her and her child, signaling the mother figure as protector of the interior realm. Her strength lies in her motherhood as male figures are depicted heroically laboring in a swirling frenzy all around her. Moreover, the figures are distinctly brown, which presents an interesting issue as they are being painted by a wealthy white woman. The acclaim that the Greenwood sisters gained from their excursions in Mexico resulted in a steady flow of cash and recognition, things that were not afforded to a large majority of Mexican female artists. Thus, as the Greenwood sisters did not seek to make waves in terms of women’s rights or social change, they were desirable choices for the mural commission, especially as the Mexican government sought to display an image of harmony across the border.

Maria Izquierdo, however, frequently depicted women as the main subject in her work and sought to comment on the unfair gender roles in place at the time. For example, in *Viernes de Dolores* (fig. 6), the Virgin Mary, a common allegorical figure in Mexican art, is depicted as a painting within a painting hanging above the centerpiece of an altar. Fruits and other objects are placed on the altar as offerings to the weeping Virgin. She is weeping and appears to be



exhausted and crestfallen, highlighting the plight of the Mexican woman through the exhaustion of the Virgin. Izquierdo thus reclaims Mexican religious history from a distinctly female perspective, giving a voice to women in a way that *Los Tres Grandes* and the Greenwood sisters never did. Ultimately, the feminine in Izquierdo's work is presented in opposition to the machismo intrinsic to the Muralist's presentation of the gender binary. As argued by Robin Adèle Greeley, "Izquierdo uses the fact of her gender not to counter *machismo* directly, but rather tangentially to open up a reassessment of the 'national' as a continual, multilayered process of identity negotiation."<sup>43</sup> The Greenwoods' lack of radical themes, and especially their lack of attention to women's issues worked in tandem with their willingness to conform to artistic confines of the social realism movement issues. By conforming to the rules for muralism established by *Los Tres Grandes*, the sisters were an easy and non-confrontational choice for the Mexican government to promote a façade of harmony between the two nations.

As described by Izquierdo, women already faced a great challenge in attempting to situate themselves as successful artists inside a male-dominated movement, but the selection of the less-radical art of the Greenwood sisters to decorate public buildings in Mexico proves that her nationality and choice in subject matter also played a large role in her exclusion. By fitting in to the mold created by *Los Tres Grandes*, the alien Greenwood sisters were welcomed into the movement with open arms. Moreover, it appears that while the Mexican art world appreciated Izquierdo's work, they largely interpreted it within an exploration of the primitive. In a review of a 1944 show of Izquierdo's watercolors in Lima, Peru, the reviewer praises her work for having a "vital momentum that is sometimes chaotic, sometimes exploring a suggestively visual primitivism."<sup>44</sup> Another review of the same show situates the native themes presented in her work as "merely decorative as opposed to artistic," reinforcing the gendered chasm between "fine" and "craft" art that later Mexican feminist historians sought to close.<sup>45</sup> These reviews suggest Izquierdo was an inexperienced painter, it is that Muralism, as dominated by *Los Tres Grandes*, was simply not ready for a voice that did not completely align with the male-dominated motivations for the movement.

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<sup>43</sup> Greeley, 70.

<sup>44</sup> Tiziano, [s.n], "De arte: La exposición de María Izquierdo." *La Crónica* (Lima, Peru), 28 August 1944.

<sup>45</sup> Raúl María Periera, "La exposición de María Izquierdo." *La Prensa: diario independiente de la mañana* (Lima, Peru), 10 September 1944.

Through this process of exclusion, it is clear that while political radicalism was acceptable within Muralism in Mexico, gendered critique was not. Feminist art historian Lucy Lippard notes, “the best women artists have resisted the treadmill to progress by simply disregarding a history that is not theirs.”<sup>46</sup> María Izquierdo was one of those artists. The docile female Mexican identity that was being painted all over the country and promoted on a large scale, as exemplified in Rivera’s *Liberated Earth with Natural Forces Controlled by Man* mural was not hers, so she took a stand against it. The public humiliation she endured at the hands of Mexico’s so-called greatest artists certainly could have been enough to dissuade like-minded artists from attempting to make a name for themselves. While Izquierdo’s work has survived into the modern era and some even finds itself at auction for sizeable sums, it is nothing in comparison to the notoriety of *Los Tres Grandes*. As has been evidenced throughout art history at large, the dominant canon is simply not big enough for too many “outsiders”, especially when those attempting to break in are not white or male. And when artists from the so-called “periphery” of the art world fail to see beyond their differences and instead attempt to charge towards individual “greatness,” the breadth and depth of visual culture suffers from it. Further, it is possible that the denial of wall space and thus, exposure, impacted the prices Izquierdo realized in later auctions. As murals are public art, they are able to reach a larger audience than pieces created to be hung in galleries and museums. In a way, buying a painting or drawing by a muralist, whether a preparatory sketch or not, is a way to own a piece of public history. Without the exposure that comes alongside creating such a public work of art, her future exposure, and thus future value could have been impacted.

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<sup>46</sup> Lucy Lippard, “Sweeping Exchanges: The Contribution of Feminism to the Art of the 1970s.” *Art Journal*, vol. 40, 1980, pp. 362–365.

### III. Exhibiting Early Mexican Avant-Gardes in the United States

My study brings in data from two distinct, but also overlapping movements in Mexico: Muralism and Surrealism. The story of Muralism in Mexico between 1920-1940, as told by the dominant art historical canon, has long exclusively highlighted the successes of *Los Tres Grandes*, but often fails to recognize the contributions of lesser-known female artists. Muralism arose both out of extreme social and economic turmoil in Mexico and in tandem with similar worldwide artistic shifts away from representational art following the disillusionment with governance in the wake of the First World War.

From roughly 1910 to 1920, Mexico was under constant turmoil due to shifting regimes and bloody regional conflicts, an era now recognized as the Mexican Revolution. The conflict began with a 1911 uprising against President Porfirio Díaz led by revolutionary Emiliano Zapata. Díaz's thirty-year-long administration – known as the *Porfiriato* – was characterized by a prioritization of foreign investment in hopes of rapid modernization, culminating in expansion of the rise of the upper middle class with little room for similar expansion in the lower class. This led to extreme poverty, economic crises, and a growing chasm between social classes in Mexico. The United States' involvement in Mexico largely focused on its own financial gain, pouring hundreds of millions of dollars into oil and railroad opportunities in Mexico, investments which grew exponentially during the Revolution due to deliberate lobbying with multiple sides of the conflict in what can truly best be described as flip-flopping.<sup>47</sup> The Revolution ended in 1920 with the murder of (formerly) U.S.-recognized provincial President Venustiano Carranza followed by the appointment of Álvaro Obregón. U.S. financial involvement in Mexico continued to thrive.

The end of the Mexican Revolution in 1920 brought about a great interest in the construction of a national identity (*Mexicanidad*), which was to be spearheaded by commissions of large, public murals depicting Mexico's pre-Columbian history, as well as its socially radical present, highlighting the great successes and future potential of the country's people. While Porfirian interest in a Mexican art only went so far as to present symbols of conventional, distinctly European "progress" to the world, art under the new regime looked to revolutionize the country's visual culture and inspire social change from its dissemination. The first mural in

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<sup>47</sup> John Skirius, "Railroad, Oil and Other Foreign Interests in the Mexican Revolution, 1911-1914." *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 35, no. , 2003, pp. 25-51.

Mexico, Diego Rivera's Creation appeared in 1922, just two years after the election of President Álvaro Obregón. The appointment of Obregón and the country's commitment to a vast cultural renaissance garnered international attention, especially from American artists seeking influences outside of Europe, many of which were deeply influenced by Mexico's art and culture. In 1931, Jose Clemente Orozco accepted a commission at Pomona College in Claremont California. This mural, titled Prometheus, inspired a young Jackson Pollock to seek new materials and methods of expressing his inner turmoil.<sup>48</sup> Soon, a cross-border exchange was established between Mexico and America, leaving lasting impacts on the trajectory of art history.

The appointment of philosopher José Vasconcelos as Secretary of Public Administration under the Obregón administration is generally regarded as the beginning of the Mexican Muralism movement. Being a nation predicated first on colonization and later on foreign investment, the years following the Revolution emphasized the necessity of focusing initially on regaining economic growth in the wake of catastrophe, and thereafter on establishing a national visual culture. Almost immediately, Orozco, Siqueiros, and Rivera began accepting state-sponsored commissions for public works of art with the goal of continuing to reclaim and present a purely Mexican national identity, a project that had been put on hold during the Revolution. Many of the artists commissioned had fought in the Revolution and were affiliated with the Mexican Communist Party, in turn influencing their later work. By the late 1920s, Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros held a virtual monopoly over mural commissions, leading them to become the main disseminators of information and radical ideas through their art in and beyond Mexico. The main themes of the dominant murals reached back to pre-colonization motifs, while displaying the past and present through a distinctly Marxist lens, championing the contributions of (predominately male) workers for the creation Mexico's national identity.

Despite celebration of the murals by the Mexican and American governments, dissent arose within Mexico. Los Contemporáneos, founders of a magazine by the same name, rejected the quasi-socialist rhetoric being disseminated by *Los Tres Grandes* as it became clear that the social ideals that sparked the revolution were no longer being upheld by the Mexican government. They instead argued that the Muralists' Marxist focus on the working class subverted the issue of Mexican nationalism, and further argued that the Muralists' appropriation of Mexico's indigenous culture was opportunistic, ultimately painting the country in a negative

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<sup>48</sup> Polcari, Steven, "Orozco and Pollock: Epic Transfigurations." *American Art*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1992, 39.

light, hindering its modernization. Further, they criticized the Muralists for perpetrating a hypermasculine vision of Mexico that entrenched the ideas of male virility and heroism as the basis for nationhood.<sup>49</sup> These constructs of hegemonic masculinity, they argued, painted an inaccurate image of the nation, and instead looked to Izquierdo's work, which, on the border between Muralism and Surrealism, largely ignored politics and championed the Mexican landscape and female contributions as a construction of nationhood, the true champion of the fashioning of a true national identity.

Surrealism in Mexico worked in tandem with contemporary international avant-garde movements looking to rebuild in the wake of social and economic catastrophe. In 1924, Andre Breton published the *First Surrealist Manifesto*, laying out basic pillars for the movement: "return to childhood; idealization of madness; non-conformism, the 'abnormal' rejected by a repressed society; Freudian free association and 'stream of consciousness,' anti-clericalism, free love, eroticism, and occultism."<sup>50</sup> Breton and his peers found great inspiration in the artistic hotbed that was Mexico at the time, and many artists like Leonora Carrington eventually relocated from their homes in Europe to take part in the great cultural renaissance in Mexico. However, despite claims to counter-cultural radicality and prioritization of the individual experience, the Surrealist movement, like its predecessors, amplified only male voices. No women signed the Manifesto. As the movement evolved, male Surrealists tended to "project their desires outward, locating moments of rupture between consciousness and unconscious, subject and other, in bodies Other to theirs, and almost exclusively of an otherness assigned to the feminine."<sup>51</sup> In Freudian psychoanalytic theories, the basis of much of Surrealist thought, young men and women believe that the female body is simply a castrated male body, thus producing "castration anxiety" in men and "penis envy" in women. At the same time, women are posited as the ultimate object of male sexual desire and fulfillment, resulting in a paradoxically violent and lustful relationship to the female body.<sup>52</sup> Male surrealists, taking cues from Freud in more ways than simply the dream state, developed imagery of the female body both as a source of terror and one of beauty and desire. This fetishization of desire inherent to is arguably most exemplified in the photography of Hans Bellman, particularly in his series of hand-colored photographs of

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<sup>49</sup> Greeley, 56.

<sup>50</sup> Lucy Lippard, *Surrealists on Art*, Prentice Hall, 1970, 9.

<sup>51</sup> Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, Thames and Hudson, 2002, 4.

<sup>52</sup> Kaplan, Louise J., "Female Castration Anxiety." *American Imago*, vol. 51, no. 4, 1994.

simplistic, dismembered, life-sized dolls. In *The Doll*, 1934-35 (fig. 7) the Surrealist conflation between the degradation of the female form and its inextricable link to eroticism becomes evident. In this image, Bellman portrays the female body as a random assortment of parts with no autonomy, first breaking down and then sexualizing the female figure as portrayed by an inanimate object. Further, because of their relationship with the unconscious, male Surrealists “conceived of woman as man’s mediator with the unconscious, femme-enfant, muse, source and object of man’s desire,” making Surrealism next in a long string of dominant artistic movements reliant on the inspiration of a female muse.<sup>53</sup>

The concept of a female muse has long been prevalent in western art: a woman, beautiful and mysterious, serves as the inspiration for a male artist to create something beautiful and revolutionary. Women, and even women artists, became pigeonholed into the role of divine muse, always the subject of a work of art and never the creator. The muse spans the course of art history, showing up across ideologies and movements: think of Simonetta Vespucci to Sandro Botticelli, Bethe Morisot to Edouard Manet, Dora Maar and a slew of other women to Pablo Picasso, and Frida Kahlo to both herself and Diego Rivera. With a nod to Nochlin, Whitney Chadwick notes that many female Surrealists became involved in the movement as a result of their personal relationships with men in the group.<sup>54</sup> And this is true: Leonora Carrington was tied to Max Ernst, Remedios Varo married both a renowned painter and a Surrealist poet, and Frida Kahlo was famously intertwined with Diego Rivera. Returning to Nochlin, she writes that women artists who did find success “...almost without exception were either the daughters of artist fathers, or, generally later, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, had a close personal connection with a stronger or more dominant male artistic personality.”<sup>55</sup> Despite their connections to male artists, however, female Surrealists were able to fashion a distinctly “feminine” art form. While the art world attempted to pigeonhole them into the status of muse, the female Muralists and Surrealists in my study rebelled, creating a magical and distinctly feminine Surrealist world.

While Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo, and Frida Kahlo are today some of the biggest names tangential to Mexican Surrealism, they defied categorization within a male-

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<sup>53</sup> Gwen Raaberg, “The Problematics of Women and Surrealism.” *Dada/Surrealism*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1990, 2.

<sup>54</sup> Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*. Thames and Hudson, 2002, 292

<sup>55</sup> Nochlin, 168.

dominated movement by reclaiming male surrealist's sexualization of women and representing a distinctly female side of the movement. Kahlo's relationship to Surrealism was contentious, stating, "Some critics have tried to classify me as a surrealist; but I do not consider myself a surrealist ... I detest surrealism. To me it seems a manifestation of bourgeois art. A deviation from the true art that the people hope for from the artist ... I wish to be worthy, with my paintings, of the people to whom I belong and to the ideas which strengthen me."<sup>56</sup> Kahlo, Carrington, Varo, and others portrayed their own experiences with the power of femininity in their art, depicting it not as Other, but reclaiming the position of woman as muse as practitioner of art, in charge of their own reality, rejecting the gendered constraints of allegiance to a Movement. The presence of human-like animals and powerful female or genderless spirits in the work of Leonora Carrington defiantly represented her Surrealist dreamscape: not Freud's, not one that speaks for all women, and not one that represents what her male peers and patrons wanted to see. For centuries, art history has celebrated portraits of women, and often unrealistically sexed depictions. As noted by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, while women concern themselves with their own images, men concern themselves with an inflated self-image provided by their reflection in a woman. Kahlo and Carrington, in their distinctly feminine versions of Surrealism and Magical Realism, flipped the script on this narrative. In Kahlo's *The Broken Column* (fig. 8) and Carrington's *Self-Portrait* (fig. 9), they become both the observer and the observed, the portrayer and the portrayed. While "Surrealism constructed women as magic objects and sites on which to project male erotic desire, [women] recreated themselves as beguiling personalities, poised uneasily between the worlds of artifice (art) and nature or the instinctual life."<sup>57</sup> In these paintings, we see the artists as they see themselves. While not necessarily revolutionary from first glance, these works show not only the exterior of the female body, but a complicated and grotesquely personal concealed self. In *The Broken Column*, Kahlo references the bus accident she suffered at age 18, breaking her spine in three places and significantly hindering her mobility for the rest of her life. In this self-portrait, we are presented both with external and internal views of her body. She decides to leave her breasts exposed but omits any chance for a hypersexualized reading of the image by inserting a fractured

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<sup>56</sup> "Lines of Connection." *Art Gallery NSW*, [www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/artboards/frida-kahlo-diego-rivera/lines-of-connection/item/3ymo6k/](http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/artboards/frida-kahlo-diego-rivera/lines-of-connection/item/3ymo6k/).

<sup>57</sup> Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art and Society*. Thames and Hudson, 2002, 167.

Ionic Greek column in lieu of her spine. Both her exterior self and an allegory of her internal physical strife is on view. In a similar dreamlike state, Carrington's *Self-Portrait* positions the artist at the edge of a Victorian chair in an empty room, save for a white rocking horse floating through the air and a female hyena on the ground. Like many of Kahlo's self-portraits, her facial expression is frozen with fierce intensity, almost as if daring the viewer to continue looking into this private, surreal scene.

Thinking back to María Izquierdo's preparatory sketch for the Departamento del Distrito Federal, we can see clear similarities to Frida Kahlo's 1932 *Self-Portrait on the Borderline Between Mexico and the United States* (fig. 10). In this painting, Frida positions herself as a member of two realities, with one foot firmly rooted in a crumbling Mexican past and one foot rooted in a modernizing United States. On the left, a stepped pyramid crumbles in the background, while dull Mexican flora occupy the foreground, and stone idols lay strewn about the middle ground along with a pile of rocks. Her right foot is situated in America, represented by a Ford factory and several gadgets appearing to grow out of the ground, with wires for roots, directly opposite the flowers on the left. Again, we see the fashioning of woman not an object for looking, but as an allegory for change and progress. Kahlo depicts her body as one in limbo, belonging to two conflicting identities. In a similar state of flux, grappling with her indigenous roots in a rapidly changing Mexico, María Izquierdo explores the concept of her multiple selves in *Sueño y Presentimiento* (fig. 11). Completed in 1947, the same year women were granted the right to vote in provincial elections in Mexico, Izquierdo depicts herself leaning out the window of a pueblo, clutching her own severed head which weeps over a blue cross, while a bright red decapitated body runs off to join other decapitated bodies, presumably hers. In this image, she renders herself as "paradoxical – as both the oppressor and the oppressed – as alive but dead with eyes wide open, as her head appears decapitated but not necessarily lifeless, as if to patch the pieces together into, 'other – never seamless – selves'". Through her depictions of the painful and confusing realities of her womanhood, she both embraces and denies *Mexicanidad*, "by offering images of the artist as she confronts this paradigm by becoming it, submitting to it, yet, at the same time, quite literally emancipating herself from it."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Lashley, Brooke, "Considering Triple Self-Portraiture in the Work of María Izquierdo." *The Quiet Corner Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1, Mar. 2015, 75.



As the Muralists were attempting to fashion a distinct vision of Mexico, Kahlo had no interest in representing Mexican nationalism, defying categorization of herself as a native Mexican woman because of her German heritage. Similarly in flux were the identities of Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo and other European women who left Europe and took up residence in Mexico. Thus, a theme we can see intertwining throughout the stories of female Muralists and Surrealists in this study is a defiance of categorization. While admirable for these artists to reject a reality that was not theirs within distinctly male movements, this rejection of categorization becomes a double-edged sword in the long run. The American and European exhibition space along with discipline of curation was emerging contemporaneously with Muralism and Surrealism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In opposition to the construction of a permanent collection, exhibitions needed to be clear-cut, with messaging that could be easily packaged and disseminated to the public. A major vehicle for foreign understanding of early Mexican avant-gardes – or for any artistic movement being exhibited in a reputable gallery space – had to do with the way in which the movements were exhibited, notably, who/what was included and who/what was excluded.

In 1940, the Museum of Modern Art mounted *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art*, an ambitious show that sought to categorize and display a holistic view of the artistic production of Mexico from ancient to modern times for the first time. The exhibition was preceded by a monumental one-man show of portable murals and works on paper and canvas by Diego Rivera in 1931-32, also mounted by MoMA through collaboration with the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Institute of Anthropology and History of Mexico. The 1940 show was the result of negotiations between Nelson A. Rockefeller, President of MoMA at the time and General Eduardo Hay, Minister of Foreign Affairs in Mexico.<sup>59</sup> Interestingly, the Rockefellers had maintained an interest in Mexico since the 1880s, when John Rockefeller's company, Standard Oil, entered into agreements with the nation in search of petroleum, an agreement which problematically lasted throughout the Revolution.<sup>60</sup> President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's 1933 Good Neighbor Policy was expanded later in the decade when the advent of World War I caused hemispheric relations to take on a new importance to the administrations of both Mexico

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<sup>59</sup> "Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art Being Assembled for the Museum of Modern Art." *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art*, 21 Feb. 1940.

<sup>60</sup> Kenneth J. Greib, "Standard Oil and the Financing of the Mexican Revolution." *California Historical Quarterly*, vol. 50, no. 1, 1971, pp. 59-71.

and America in the fight against fascism. With Europe overrun by the war, it became nearly impossible for American museums to borrow pieces for exhibition, leading them to instead capitalize on the burgeoning vogue for all things Mexican.<sup>61</sup>

The exhibition was divided into four distinct sections: Pre-Columbian art, Colonial art, Folk art, and Modern art (under the direction of artist Miguel Corravibus). The master checklist for this exhibition proves itself to be very interesting. Of the Modern works included, one painting by María Izquierdo, *Mis Sobrinas (My Nieces)* (fig. 12) and three by Frida Kahlo were included: *The Bathtub – What the Water Has Given Me*, *Wounded Table*, and *Las Dos Fridas* (fig. 13). Notably, these paintings are significantly less radical in their depictions of their own personal strife and the struggles of women than Izquierdo and Kahlo's bodies of work were known to be. *Mis Sobrinas* shows a docile scene of a woman, presumably the artist, and her two nieces gazing softly at the viewer, surrounded by traditional Mexican flora. The text reads, "Earthy and vigorous, with a passionate interest in textiles and brilliant color, the work of María Izquierdo is typical of the modern Mexican school of painting." By selecting this piece for the exhibition, the place of women in the fashioning of a new national identity remains largely in the domestic, interior sphere, and not at the forefront of change as Izquierdo sought to display in her proposed mural, thus reinforcing a Mexican cult of motherhood. *Las Dos Fridas* depicts a similarly calm scene, Kahlo's double self-portraits joining hands and gazing outward, largely devoid of political meaning or a representation of her internal struggle with her dual personalities, making the painting more palatable to the largely American audience. Viewing these two portraits of women by women in contrast to other paintings in the exhibition like Agustín Lazo's *Marina*, also known as *Las Pescadoras (The Fisherwomen)* (fig. 14) reinforces the docility of women as a central subject. While the Surrealist notion of multiplicity of figures is illustrated here, the women are presented as homogenized pastoral figures, fishing with their hands and blissfully unaware of the encroaching steamboat, an allegory of modernization. In tandem with the denial of women to depict themselves in this landmark exhibition, the female figure continues to be situated in nature as an emblem of fertility, passively militating against "progress," and operating exclusively as objects of desire. Thus, an opportunity to posit Izquierdo, Kahlo, and other female artists working in and around Mexican Muralism and

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<sup>61</sup> Anna Indyk-López, "Mural Gambits: Mexican Muralism in the United States and the 'Portable' Fresco." *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 89, no. 2, 2007, 298.

Surrealism as equals to their male peers was lost with the mounting of this so-called “landmark” exhibition.

The 1940 MoMA exhibition was intentionally held concurrent with the 1939-1940 World’s Fair, essentially inviting the entire world to the show. The legitimacy of the institution of the Museum makes it a bastion of truth, and the way in which art is displayed and written about by members of the institution is simply accepted by viewers. Located at the centers of the burgeoning art world and art market, MoMA allows collectors to encounter artists for the first time. In the absence of the internet and readily accessible resources like catalogue raisonnés, the institution of the Museum and its publications become the main disseminator of information, informing buyers of what was available on the market. In contemporary art market, the inclusion of an artist in a group show in a major museum may raise a piece’s pre-sale estimate by 10-20 percent, while a single-artist show in a major museum increases that artist’s value by 50-100%.<sup>62</sup> MoMA’s second single-artist exhibition was dedicated to Diego Rivera’s portable murals in 1932. Notably, the show was mounted mid-career for Rivera, and shattered attendance records for MoMA. Founded in 1929, MoMA was already deeply embedded in the art world. Association with the “MoMA brand” ultimately propelled Rivera’s career, inviting in opportunities that would increase his stature within the industry, creating a sense of Nochlin’s “genius” around his work.

The resistance to categorization embodied by the women artists in this sample made it more difficult for them to be included in exhibitions like the 1940 MoMA show. It is overtly clear that at this time in the art world, women artists certainly did not have the luxury of securing a one-man show and taking their place in history and among top-selling lots at auction. And by existing on the periphery of movements already non yet firmly ingrained into the western canon, it became far easier for officials to exclude them from survey shows of Mexican. By failing to exhibit on the same scale in the exhibition space at this time, accumulated advantage in favor of the exhibited artist begins to take form. Even though today, as auction houses and collectors have access to all the world’s resources and the market begins to open for minority groups, the initial exclusion of women illustrated throughout this essay makes it nearly impossible for the gender price discount for art by women to ever be rectified.

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<sup>62</sup> Thompson, 134.

Though the impact on artistic practices and thinking beyond the Mexican border was profound, the trajectory would have been entirely different and far more representative of the “real Mexico” had Mexican women had levels of access and exposure that would have allowed them to create on the same scale as their male counterparts. Further, the ways in which art from the so-called “periphery” was understood represented by artists and institutions at the “center” of the art world requires reevaluation from a contemporary perspective. Now, exhibitions like *Fantastic Women: Surreal Worlds from Meret Oppenheim to Frida Kahlo* (2020) are working to rectify the past’s ignorance towards the female perspective in art history.<sup>63</sup> From a museum perspective, these efforts are vital to the diversification of public collections and de-centering of hegemonic structures of art history. However, in terms of auction pricing, as my study has shown, there is still a long way to go. In the case of women in the arts, to quote political scientist Mary King, “if our story is to be told, we will have to write it and photograph it and disseminate it ourselves.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Ingrid Pfeiffer, *Fantastic Women: Surreal Worlds from Meret Oppenheim to Frida Kahlo*. Hirmer Verlag, 2020.

<sup>64</sup> Leigh Raiford, “‘Come Let Us Build a New World Together’: SNCC and Photograph of the Civil Rights Movement.” *American Quarterly*, Dec. 2007, vol. 59, no. 4, 1130.

#### IV. Conclusions

My data from Part 1 can be further broken down by focusing only on transactions by female artists, and isolating nationality as the dependent variable. Many female artists within Mexican Muralism and Surrealism who gained notoriety were American and European by birth, and later moved to or briefly lived in Mexico. For example, Leonora Carrington, one of the most represented artists in my sample, was born to a wealthy English family, and enjoyed the privilege of financial stability while also attempting to break into the art world. Many hopeful women artists were ultimately discouraged from participation in the art world through familial obligations and for single women, the lack of money in being an up-and-coming artist. However, Carrington's wealthy background and later ties to Surrealist bigwigs allowed her entry to many spaces that would otherwise be off-limits. Notably, all the female artists included in my data (i.e., artists who had lots available on AskArt) except for María Izquierdo and Frida Kahlo were not Mexican born. Taking into account Kahlo's German and mestiza heritage, Izquierdo is the only fully Mexican woman to be included in my data. Of her paintings listed on AskArt, the highest price one of her paintings ever realized at auction was \$196,500 in 2002. Meanwhile, Carrington's most expensive sale clocks in at \$3.26 million in 2022. Bridget Bate Tichenor, another European-born Surrealist who later moved to Mexico, worked in a similar style of Surrealism as Carrington. However, her biggest sale was for \$151,200. This price discrepancy could be chalked up to a discrepancy in exposure between the two artists: Carrington's ties to Ernst indeed allowed her to be exhibited on a larger scale than many of her peers. As the Greenwood sisters largely produced public murals, only a few preparatory sketches of theirs were available on AskArt at small auction houses, but it would have been interesting to compare their sales of work to those of Izquierdo to further examine racial and ethnicity biases.

These findings, in tandem with the results of the regressions presented in Section I of this paper, largely follow Linda Nochlin's answers to the question of why there have been no great women artists. The women who succeeded in Mexican Muralism and Surrealism had public, dramatic careers, and were romantically tied to larger-than-life male figures. Through connections to these men or familial wealth, they were able to attend art school and break into the market as young artists, setting the stage for success in the future. For a woman of color like María Izquierdo, it is clear that the barriers to greatness in the art world were only exponentially greater. Mexico, at the time, was far too eager to promote harmony with the United States in

what could have been a turning point for women's art. In rebuilding of the nation post-Revolution, Mexico pushed the idea of *Mexicanidad* in its artistic expression, reinforcing the nation's prowess as a center of hypermasculine thought and resulting potential for industrialization and modernization, which ultimately worked to silence individual voices of woman artists and a larger female narrative.

Despite arguably more female involvement than ever before in an art movement, the modern art market continues a pattern of undervaluing art by women. In conclusion, we can see that there is no lack of ability that comes along with being a woman. The data presented above could lead one to believe that sexism aside, there is some inherent quality of women's art that is just simply not as good as men's art, leading it to realize lower prices at auction. But when we look back upon the realities of being a woman artist, it is clear to see that the institutions governing the art world have worked, whether intentionally or not, to uphold the notion of "fine" or "high" art as a distinctly male practice.

## V. Image Appendix

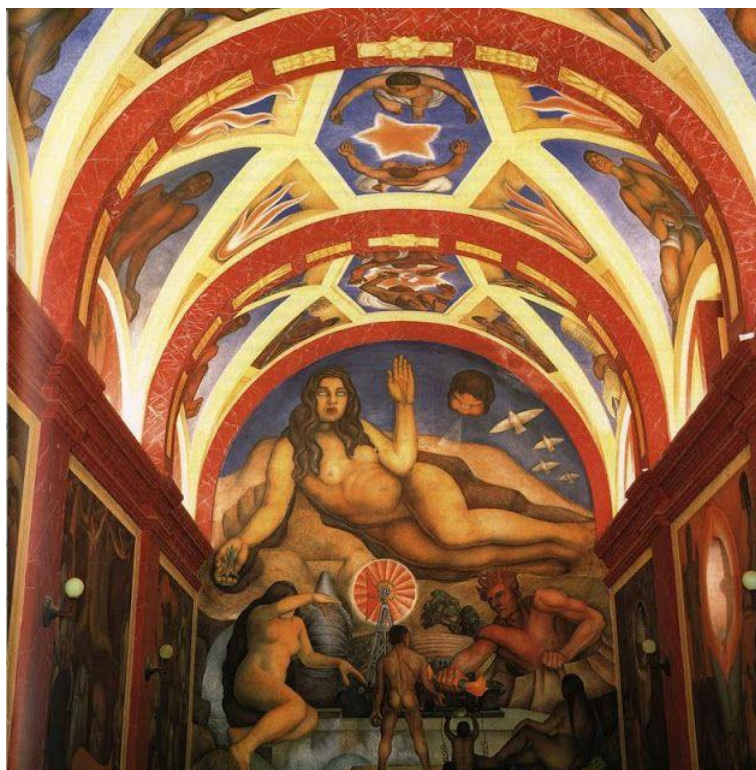
# WHEN RACISM & SEXISM ARE NO LONGER FASHIONABLE, WHAT WILL YOUR ART COLLECTION BE WORTH?

The art market won't bestow mega-buck prices on the work of a few white males forever. For the 17.7 million you just spent on a single Jasper Johns painting, you could have bought at least one work by all of these women and artists of color.

Bernice Abbott	Elaine de Kooning	Dorothea Lange	Sarah Peale
Anni Albers	Lavinia Fontana	Marie Laurencin	Ljubova Popova
Sofonisba Anguisola	Netta Warwick Fuller	Edmonia Lewis	Olga Rosanova
Diane Arbus	Artemisia Gentileschi	Judith Leyster	Nellie Mae Rowe
Vanessa Bell	Marguerite Gérard	Barbara Longhi	Rachel Ruysch
Isabel Bishop	Natalia Goncharova	Dora Maar	Kay Sage
Rosa Bonheur	Kate Greenaway	Lee Miller	Augusta Savage
Elizabeth Bougereau	Barbara Hepworth	Lisette Model	Vavara Stepanova
Margaret Bourke-White	Eva Hesse	Paula Modersohn-Becker	Florine Stettheimer
Romaine Brooks	Hannah Hoch	Tina Modotti	Sophie Taeuber-Arp
Julia Margaret Cameron	Anna Huntington	Berthe Morisot	Alma Thomas
Emily Carr	May Howard Jackson	Grandma Moses	Marietta Robusti Tintoretto
Rosalba Carriera	Frida Kahlo	Gabriele Münter	Suzanne Valadon
Mary Cassatt	Angelica Kauffmann	Alice Neel	Remedios Varo
Constance Marie Charpentier	Hilma of Klimt	Louise Nevelson	Elizabeth Vigée Le Brun
Imogen Cunningham	Kathe Kollwitz	Georgia O'Keeffe	Laura Wheeling Waring
Sonia Delaunay	Lee Krasner	Meret Oppenheim	

Please send \$ and comments to: **GUERRILLA GIRLS** CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD  
Box 1056 Cooper Sta. NY, NY 10276

**Fig. 1.** Guerilla Girls, *When Racism & Sexism Are No Longer Fashionable, What Will Your Art Collection Be Worth?* 1989, screenprint on paper, 43.5 x 57.3 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



**Fig. 2.** Diego Rivera, *Liberated Earth with Natural Forces Controlled by Man*, 1923-24, fresco. National School of Agriculture, Chapingo, Mexico.





**Fig. 3.** María Izquierdo, *sketch for mural project for the Department of Federal District government building*, 1945, gouache on paper, 30 x 41 cm. Private Collection, Mexico City.



**Fig. 4.** Diego Rivera, *The History of Medicine in Mexico: the People's Demand for Better Health*, 1953, fresco, 7.4 x 10.8 m. Hospital de la Raza, Mexico City.





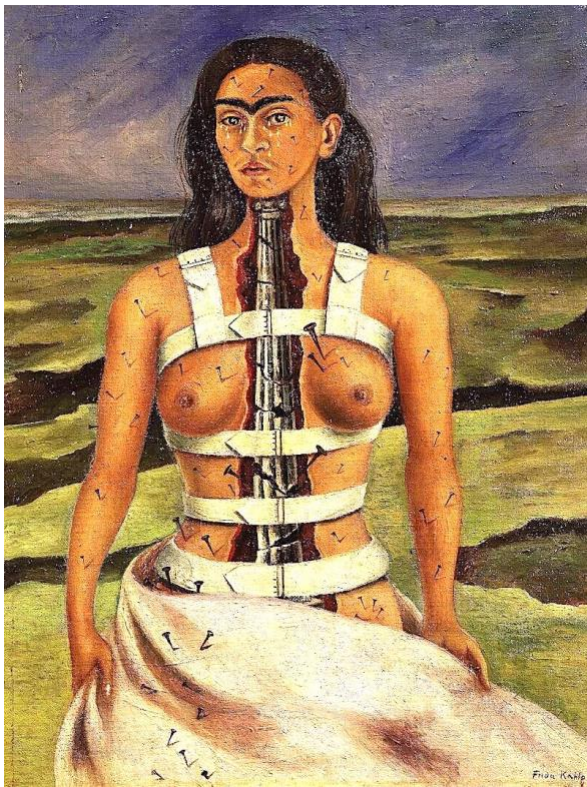
**Fig. 5.** Marion Greenwood, *La Industrialización del Campo (The Industrialization of the Countryside)*, 1935, fresco, 140.58 m<sup>2</sup>, Mercado Abelardo Rodríguez, Mexico City.



**Fig. 6.** María Izquierdo, *Viernes de Dolores (Friday of Sorrows)*, 1944-55, oil on cloth, 76 x 60.5 cm, Blaisten Museum, Mexico City.



**Fig. 7.** Hans Bellmer, *The Doll*, 1934-35, gelatin silver print, 29.5 x 19.4 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



**Fig. 8.** Frida Kahlo, *The Broken Column*, 1944, oil on masonite, 39.8 cm x 30.6 cm. Dolores Almedo Museum, Mexico City.





**Fig. 9.** Leonora Carrington, *Self-Portrait (Inn of the Dawn Horse)*, 1937-38, oil on canvas, 65 × 81.3 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



**Fig. 10.** Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait on the Borderline Between Mexico and the United States*, 1932, oil on sheet metal, 31 x 33.5 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania.



**Fig. 11.** María Izquierdo, *Sueño y Presentimiento* (*Dream and Feeling*), 1947, oil on canvas, 45 x 60 cm. Private Collection.



**Fig. 12.** María Izquierdo, *Mis Sobrinas* (*My Nieces*), 1932, oil on plywood, 139.8 x 99.8 cm. National Museum of Art, Mexico City.





**Fig. 13.** Frida Kahlo, *The Two Fridas*, 1939, oil on canvas, 173.5 x 173 cm. Museum of Modern Art, Mexico City.



**Fig. 14.** Agustín Lazo, *Marina* (also known as *Las Pescadoras*), c. 1937, oil on canvas, 65 x 78.1 cm. Private Collection.

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